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DVR News & Views

Maine Department of Labor,
Bureau of Rehabilitation Services
Division of Vocational Rehabilitation
Volume 2, Number 3 August, 2011



DVR Director's Message

Hello and welcome to the August 2011 edition of the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) quarterly newsletter. This newsletter originated as a mechanism to help maintain clear communication throughout DVR during a time of significant change as we implemented our waitlist elimination project. Our belief at the time, and still today, is that it is better to have more communication to help deal with feelings of stress and upset that are natural companions during times of change. While we have completed our initial mission of eliminating the wait list, DVR continues to feel the positive and challenging ramifications of our work on the project. We are hearing from staff that while on one hand, it is very helpful to be able to serve individuals in all three categories who are ready to participate in our program immediately, it also means there has been an increase in the number of people entering the program. The word is out that people no longer have to wait for six months to a year before receiving services.

Additionally, we will very soon be switching over to a new **and greatly improved** Case Management software program. People react to change in a variety of ways and I have continued to be impressed and thankful for the professional, respectful way DVR staff have adjusted to these changes and challenges as we move further into uncharted territory. Providing services with no wait list is an adjustment to how we do business. In Central Office we will continue to provide the supports to front line staff as we are able, including making the very strong cases to fill vacancies as they occur, so that the regional offices can continue to provide seamless employment services to individuals with disabilities. In this newsletter, you will find data that we all need to be monitoring on a regular basis to ensure that we get the best possible results from our limited resources. Additionally, I hope you will join me in welcoming Carolyn Lockwood, our new Bureau of Rehabilitation Services Director. Thanks for all you continue to do on behalf of Maine's individuals with disabilities as they seek to continue to work and live in their communities.

Betsy Hopkins

BRS Director's Note

As I end my third week as Director of BRS, I am overwhelmed by the commitment of the staff to the mission of this Bureau. I look forward to meeting all of you and am planning to travel throughout the state in the next few weeks to witness your efforts in the field firsthand.

The initiative at the Tambrands Facility in Auburn (which you'll read more about in this newsletter) is a model of collaboration which we expect will provide opportunities for our consumers for years to come and be used as an example of the benefits of inclusivity and diversity in the workplace. In a letter from Procter & Gamble describing the project it is apparent that the company truly understands our goals. "Our objective is to ensure a productive organization, while enhancing our inclusive environment with an increased workforce made up of people with disabilities. This truly represents a sustainable business model—an inclusive workplace where people with and without disabilities work side by side, earning the same pay, doing the same jobs and held to the same productivity and workplace standards."

Thank you for what you do and keep up the good work.

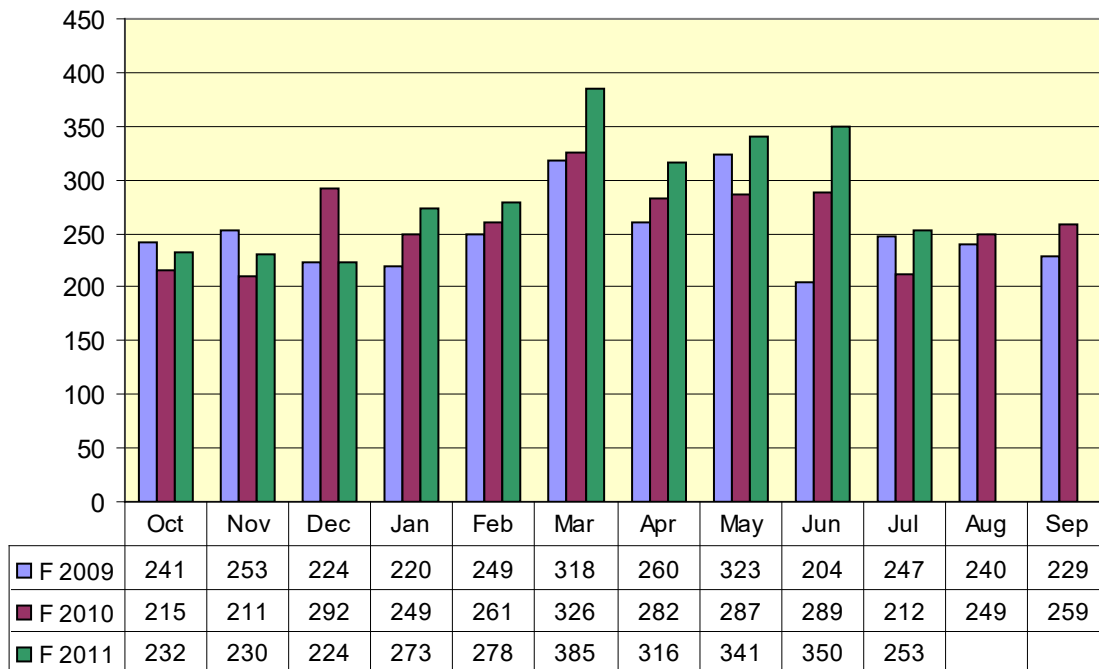
Carolyn Lockwood

VR Data

Below is a graph that details and tracks the numbers of applications for VR services we have seen over the past three years through the month of July, 2011. It is evident that there has been an increase in the numbers of people we currently have applying for services which is most likely reflective of being able to serve people when they apply (with no wait list) as well as being able to serve individuals in all three categories. This is an area that we will continue to monitor closely.

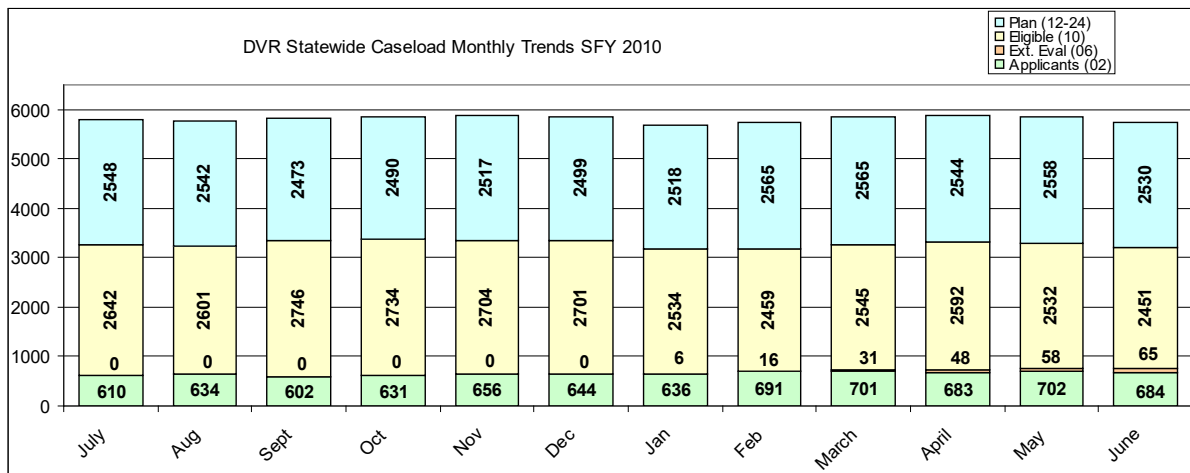
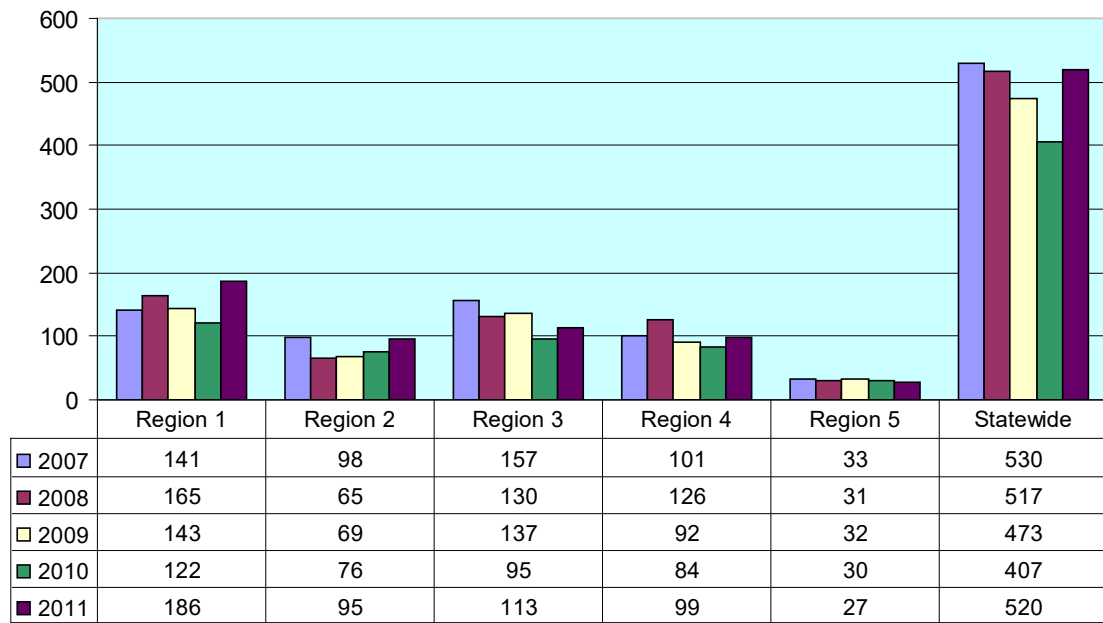
Monthly Applications Statewide

FY 2009, 2010, 2011



As was mentioned in a communication to all staff at the end of last month, our successful closure rate is rising, and DVR is on track to exceed this state standard for this federal fiscal year. Below is a graph with the updated closure information by region through July, 2011.

Statewide Employment Closures Oct 1 - Jul 31 2007 - 2011

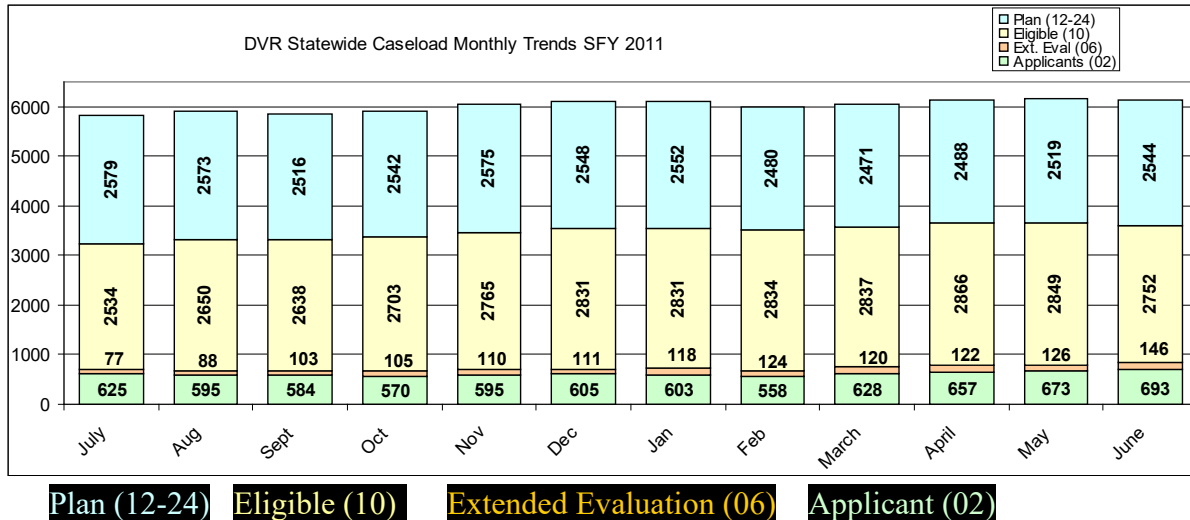


Plan (12-24)

Eligible (10)

Extended Evaluation (06)

Applicant (02)



Above are two comparison graphs (2010 – 2011) which give a snapshot view of where the individuals we serve are falling in our program. The application numbers indicated on these graphs are the numbers of people who are currently in status 2 at the end of the month, as opposed to the other graph that is tracking the comparison of the numbers of people applying for VR services and newly coming in to our system each month.

Transition from School to Work

Anne Marie Riley and Libby Stone-Sterling will be presenting at the MADSEC Special Education Directors fall conference on September 30th in South Portland. They will be sharing information with attendees on best practices for collaboration with DVR.

Hold the Date! On the afternoon of September 20th, MaineCITE will be offering a webinar on Assistive Technology for Transition VR Counselors. This will be the first in a series of webinars with MaineCITE on AT.

Technology Updates

BRS continues to work closely with OIT to replace its aging electronic case management system with AwareVR, an Alliance Enterprises software product used by 25 state Vocational Rehabilitation agencies across the county, and known here as MaineAware. This project is on a fast-track and targeted for a September 2011 implementation. Intensive efforts are currently underway to migrate existing case data, train staff and approve the system for use in the State of Maine's technical environment. The BRS OIT project team and MDOL leadership were provided a briefing on July 28th by Alliance CEO, Chris Pieper, and Gary Penley, Director of Sales.

During August, DVR field staff will be engaged in a series of training opportunities with MaineAware across the state. Over the two and a half day sessions, staff will learn about the software in a hands-on environment. Staff who will serve as local experts and peer mentors will also receive additional training to assist them in supporting staff in their offices. Beginning in September, bi-monthly Polycom sessions will be held for staff to learn more about specific aspects of MaineAware and to respond to any issues that arise.

Stay tuned for more information in the coming weeks!

Other VR Updates

Tambrands Ribbon Cutting!

On August 2nd, Tambrands held a ribbon-cutting for a new FlexiCenter Customization Operation at their Auburn manufacturing center. This was an exciting opportunity to showcase the employer-BRS partnership that not only is bringing additional jobs to Maine but also has resulted in a significant commitment from Tambrands to hire people with disabilities. Commissioner Winglass and other MDOL staff attended along with representatives of the economic and workforce development communities, as well as DHHS - which has been a key partner. Tambrands staff and managers were joined by executives from Proctor and Gamble, Tambrands parent company. Proctor and Gamble has made a corporate commitment across their subsidiaries to promoting diversity of its workforce through inclusive hiring practices. To see some of the media coverage of the event, please go to:

- <http://www.wmtw.com/slideshow/news/28739339/detail.html>
- <http://www.sunjournal.com/city/story/1068254>
- <http://www.pressherald.com/news/PG-hiring-people-with-disabilities-at-Auburn-plant-.html>

The **Tambrands Hiring Initiative** is designed to:

- ★ Result in employment opportunities for several job seekers with disabilities in the greater Lewiston/Auburn area
- ★ Allow BRS & Tambrands to demonstrate the value of a workforce that includes people with disabilities
- ★ Tailor the Walgreens model to a Maine-based business, and encourage business to business promotion of the model to open up employment opportunities in other areas of the state.
- ★ Implement revised business relations practices that can lead to lower costs for BRS employment services as well as lower turnover and

increased production for Tambrands.

- ★ Improve the ability of employers, workforce systems, and human service agencies to leverage access to technical assistance, funds and services to increase employment outcomes for Maine residents with disabilities who want to work.

Technical Writing Training Launches Joint Training Initiative

Cecilia Gandolfo and Neil McNeil from the New England Technical and Continuing Education Center (TACE) offered two sessions of a very informative and interactive writing workshop in June. The training was well attended with DVR staff, DBVI staff, Wabanaki VR staff, the IRIS network, Orientation and Mobility specialists and many Community Rehabilitation Providers (CRPs) from around the state participating. The goals of the training were to learn techniques for writing concise and factual case notes, reports and correspondence; to complete provider referrals with more clarity and direction; and to hear from providers about what they need to provide targeted, effective services to VR clients. Participant evaluations were very positive and included many requests for additional joint training opportunities with providers. In addition, Betsy Hopkins and Valerie Oswald joined the training participants at the end of the day to start the discussion of how VR and CRPs can work more efficiently together with the goal of creating more employment outcomes for the people we all serve. The plan is to form a work group starting in late September to try to address this issue. More information will be coming out as we form the work group.

Rehabilitation Services Administration Identifies Emerging Practices

During RSA's monitoring visits with DVR this summer, they identified a number of "emerging practices". RSA considers emerging practices to be operational activities or initiatives that contribute to successful outcomes or enhance VR agency performance capabilities. Emerging practices are those that have been successfully implemented and demonstrate the potential for replication by other VR agencies. In particular, RSA is interested in collecting more information on:

- DVR's **successful partnerships** with other state agencies and organizations that have led to improved efficiency and services to clients
- The **Transition Career Exploration Workshop** as a tool for improved outcomes for transition-age students
- The role that the **Division of Quality Assurance** has played in improving data analysis, project management and elimination of the waitlist and
- The new **hearing aid protocol** that represents Maine's multi-state contract and procurement agreement that is resulting in significantly reduced costs for hearing aid purchases for clients.