



**VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT FOR AGING
AND REHABILITATIVE SERVICES**

Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services

**2013 Vocational Rehabilitation and Supported Employment Plan
Public Comments**

The following are the comments received from the public during the Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS) 2013 public comment period. These comments were collected at the public hearings held around the Commonwealth and by phone and email. These comments have been shared with DARS management and with the members of the State Rehabilitation Council for consideration into the development of the 2014 State Plan for Vocational Rehabilitation and Supported Employment and other agency planning efforts.

Many thanks to all those who took the time to attend the one of the public hearings or to submit comments in writing or by phone.

Public Comment 1: I am a vocational rehabilitation consumer and I have a bi-polar disorder and have suffered with depression for years. I worked for 14 years and then was laid off. I decided that I wanted to enroll in massage therapy training and began working with the staff in the Abingdon Office on my vocational rehabilitation program. The staff have been incredible in providing support and encouragement to me, including purchasing a massage table for me.

Agency Response: Thank you for these kind words about the assistance provided to you by the staff in the Abingdon Office. Your compliment has been shared with them. Much success in your training program and eventual employment!

Public Comment 2: I have a daughter who is 25 years old with a serious disability. I am surprised by the few number of training hours provided to for her. She needs more support than that to be successful in an employment setting.

Agency Response: Many youth who graduate from Fairfax County schools are referred to DARS for vocational rehabilitation services. Typically, DARS would pay for a situational assessment to assist in determining an appropriate job. If the job is in an integrated setting, then DARS would pay for the training necessary to achieve successful employment. But, by law, DARS cannot

support a consumer who chooses to work in a non-integrated setting (sheltered workshop). In that event, the consumer might look to Medicaid waiver funding to support the on-going training.

Public Comment 3: My son has an Autism Spectrum Disorder and I am having trouble navigating the system to determine what services are available to him. I have reached out to other parents of children with disabilities for assistance because the school system can't seem to help and the wait list is too long. The process needs to be simplified and more open so that parents understand the available options.

Agency Response: The system can be very confusing and daunting for parents of children with disabilities. Many public school websites contain information about available services and options. In addition, the Parent Educational Advocacy Training Center (PEATC) is a helpful resource. DARS was pleased that a representative of the local public school district was present at the public hearing to provide further information on resources available through the school for this parent and other parents who were present.

Public Comment 4: Some providers are only accepting DD Waiver cases and the DD Waiver has no supplemental funding like the ID Waiver. A lot of advocacy work need to be done to provide better and more equitable Waiver services for youth with disabilities.

Agency Response: DARS does not administer Waiver services, but is connected to those who do. The DARS vocational rehabilitation counselors are available to our vocational rehabilitation consumers and their parents to help assess the issues and provide assistance as needed.

Public Comment 5: There is a need for more parent education of the service delivery system for youth with disabilities. There should be more outreach in the community and with local businesses to identify good jobs for youth with disabilities. In addition, more needs to occur to inform businesses of the availability of people with disabilities to meet their employment needs.

Agency Response: DARS has Business Development Managers and Placement Counselors throughout the Commonwealth who work in the community with local businesses to assess their employment needs and inform them of the vocational rehabilitation program and our consumers. But, our resources are limited and we look to our partners (i.e. Employment Services Organizations) to assist us.

Public Comment 6: I have a 12 year old daughter with an intellectual disability. I thought that there would be path for her to help her achieve independence as she reaches maturity. I am not familiar with Waiver services and have been to three IEP meetings with no mention of Waiver services. What are we doing to reach out to parents to better understand the systems and to businesses to education them on the value of hiring people with disabilities?

Agency Response: A representative of the local public school district was in attendance at this public hearing and was able to provide information on IEP meetings. Generally, parents should receive a handout on Waiver services at the IEP meeting. If this is not happening, the school

needs to know. In addition, parents may receive more information by contacting PEATC or the ARC of Northern Virginia.

Public Comment 7: I am a job developer at an Employment Services Organization in Northern Virginia. When I conduct an assessment of a youth regarding their employment skills, I often discover that the child can perform at a higher level than the training he/she received in the public school.

Agency Response: Thank you for your comment and the great work that you do with youth with disabilities to ensure that they get the job training they need that is compatible with their knowledge, skills, abilities, and capabilities. In the DARS vocational rehabilitation program, we look at our clients individually to determine their vocational goal and the services needed to reach that goal. The goal and services are individualized and based solely on the consumer's knowledge, skills, abilities, capabilities, interest, and informed choice.

Public Comment 8: It might be helpful for the service providers to get together with the schools to help structure a better system that will identify issues and barriers to effective services and ensuring that students receive the appropriate training leading to good jobs.

Agency Comment 9: This sounds like a proactive concept that should be discussed between the public schools and the providers.

Public Comment 10: I'm hearing about the Employment Services Organization (ESO) Report Card. Will it be published on the DARS website for public use and how will it be used?

Agency Response: DARS does not plan on publishing the ESO Vendor Outcome Report on our website. The Report contains a lot of data that will be shared with our managers and counselors to assist our consumers in selecting an appropriate service vendor. It is a tool to foster informed consumer choice. It also will be used by counselors and managers to open up a dialogue with the ESOs on their services and the successes that they have achieved in serving our consumers.

Public Comment 11: This is in support of continued funding for the provision of hearing aid services by the Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services. The Virginia Commonwealth University Health System serves the highest proportion of uninsured, underinsured and Medicaid patients in the state of Virginia. The audiology department supports both hearing testing and rehabilitation for those patients. Hearing aid services are usually not covered by commercial insurance, and what coverage there is varies greatly by payer. Medicaid reimburses only for children under age 18; Medicare not at all. This means that the majority of hearing aid patients are in fact self-paying to some degree, and retail cost for hearing aids starts at a minimum of \$600 per ear (this cost includes all programming and hearing aid follow-up services during the warranty period). If the patient needs an earmold for each ear (as many patients with severe/profound losses do), that adds over \$100 per ear to the cost. Ideally a person with hearing loss in both ears should have two hearing aids. However, the reality is that finances often limit the person with hearing loss to one hearing aid – or none at all. Patients with hearing loss who do not have insurance and do not have the financial resources to purchase hearing aids are able to

apply to charitable programs like the Lions' Club -- however, there have traditionally been very long waiting lists for these programs, and in the meanwhile these patients have communication difficulties related to their hearing loss.

Patients who are able to work have been very grateful for the opportunity to apply to DARS, both for the vocational services and for the possibility of obtaining hearing aids. We all appreciate the hard work of the local DHH Rehabilitation Counselors. The difference a properly-fitted hearing aid can make in a person's ability to communicate can be astounding -- and can be the difference between a person being employable, and having to rely on other government services for sustenance. Please continue to provide these important rehabilitative services for our patients.

Agency Response: DARS appreciates your comments about the importance of working with individuals with hearing loss and ensuring that communication access is addressed by hearing aid amplification, when recommended by a licensed audiologist. Susan Hansborough is our staff Audiologist at our rehabilitation facility (Woodrow Wilson Rehabilitation Center) and oversees the purchases of hearing aids in her role as the Consulting Audiologist for our field program. She has created a statewide network of hearing aid providers that are willing to work with us within our fee schedule. We have a long standing history of working with your program at VCU and look forward to continuing that relationship.