

*Division of
Vocational
Rehabilitation*



Transforming lives

Division of Vocational Rehabilitation

2023
Annual Report

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Photo Credits:

All photos in this publication were submitted by employees and customers.

Cover Photo Description:

Jeremy poses for a photo outside his workplace. His Bioness L300 system, a functional electrical stimulation device, allows him to work without pain and move about freely.

Director's Letter

Dana Phelps

Department of Social and Health Services
Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, Director



Dear Employees and Partners,

The Washington State Department of Social and Health Services' Division of Vocational Rehabilitation provides individualized and innovative services to people with disabilities in Washington state. Our mission is transforming lives by assisting individuals with disabilities to fully participate in their communities through meaningful employment. We strive to provide the best services and resources possible to our customers helping them find and maintain employment.

When asking staff to reflect on this past year, we heard stories that show determination, optimism and an unwavering commitment to the mission of DVR.

This year has not been without challenges. There have been leadership changes, new technology, new expectations and norms, as well as some unforeseen obstacles. Through it all, you have stood strong together, finding innovative ways to continue our mission of empowering people with disabilities to achieve their fullest potential.

Remarkable outcomes were also achieved. There are so many success stories across the state. The people we serve have acquired new skills and redefined their futures. These achievements demonstrate the impact of the collective efforts of customers, DVR employees and partners.

Over the last year, we updated our state plan, which is mandated by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, and we aligned it with our strategic plan. These plans will move us toward our key goals.

This year we also unveiled a powerful new vision that encapsulates DVR's unwavering commitment:

"Students, youth and adults with disabilities are empowered to dream big and achieve their employment goals."

This vision recognizes the potential of every person. We envision a world where disability does not limit the dreams and aspirations of those we serve. We are committed to ensuring that every person with a disability, from students and youth

to adults, is not just given the opportunity to dream big but is empowered to achieve their employment goals. This vision is not just a statement, but our commitment to transform lives.

At the October all-staff in-service, DVR employees and partners engaged in workshops and discussions focused on artificial intelligence, assistive technology and other innovative technologies, rapid engagement, tribal partnerships and the implementation of DVR's new case management system. This event allowed us to re-connect with colleagues and build stronger partnerships.

In 2023, DVR also implemented a new case management system. While the implementation process challenged us and was difficult, the new system creates a foundation for streamlining customer intake, communication, plan development and ultimately job placement.

Furthermore, the training team dedicated their efforts to increasing the amount of training provided to staff. They achieved success by delivering a total of 9,285 hours of training, in addition to the mandatory DSHS annual training.

This year demanded flexibility and creativity, and the DVR team and partners rose to the occasion. Let's celebrate our successes and use the lessons we have learned to build a future where everyone can thrive and succeed.

None of this would have been possible without the dedicated work of DVR employees and the unwavering support of our partners. Your trust, collaboration and commitment are instrumental in our achievements.

We all look forward to where the journey takes us next.

Regards,

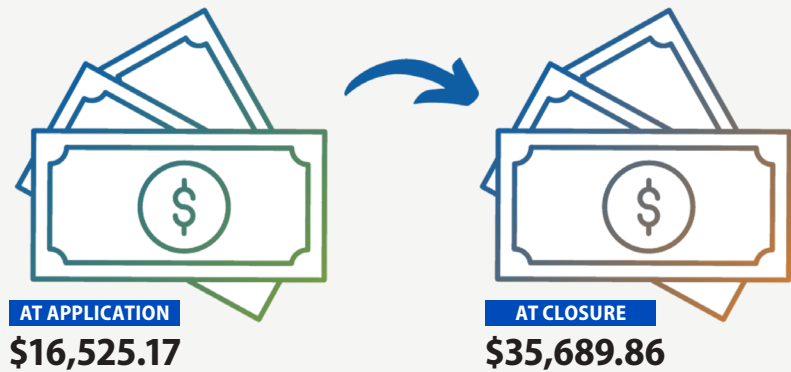
Dana Phelps

Department of Social and Health Services
Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, Director

DSHS DVR Statistics

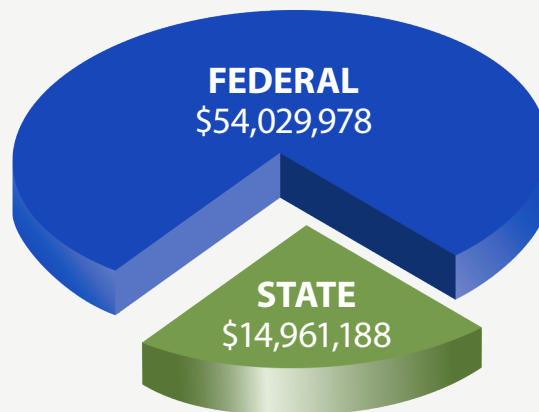
In FY2023, there were a lot of positive outcomes that resulted in successful placements of customers who have disabilities.

DVR CUSTOMERS' ANNUAL MEDIAN EARNINGS INCREASED



DVR SOURCES OF REVENUE:

State and Federal Grants
TOTAL: \$68,991,165



NUMBER OF CUSTOMERS SUCCESSFULLY EMPLOYED



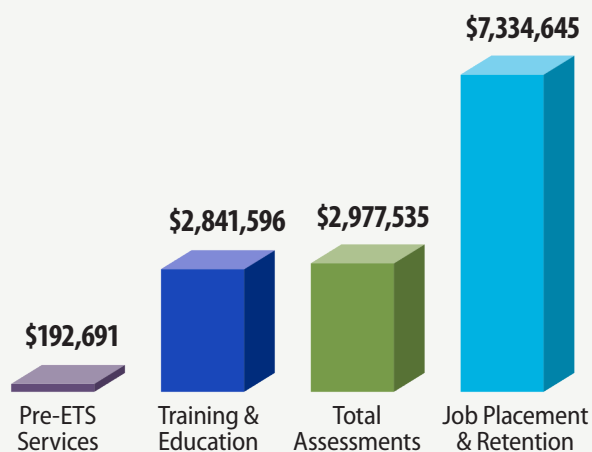
CASE SERVICE EXPENDITURES:

Funds Spent Per Program

Total Caseload Expenditures:
 \$18,283,131

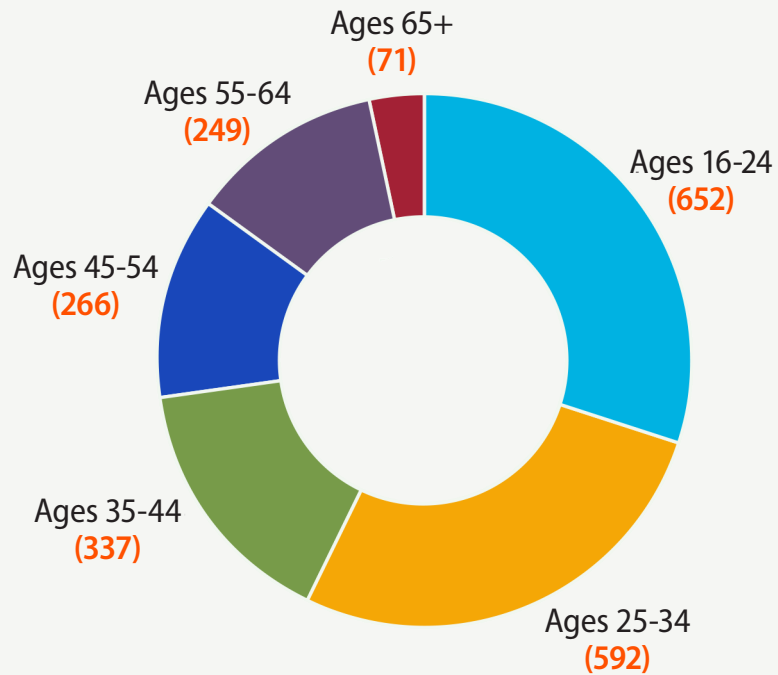
*Pre-ETS Contracted Services:
 \$4,812,913

*this excludes operational Pre-ETS costs like staff salaries.

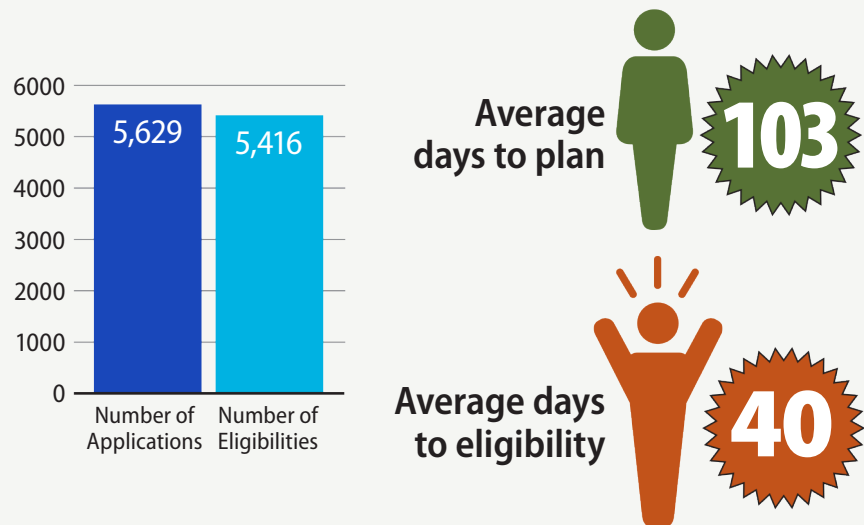


DSHS DVR Statistics

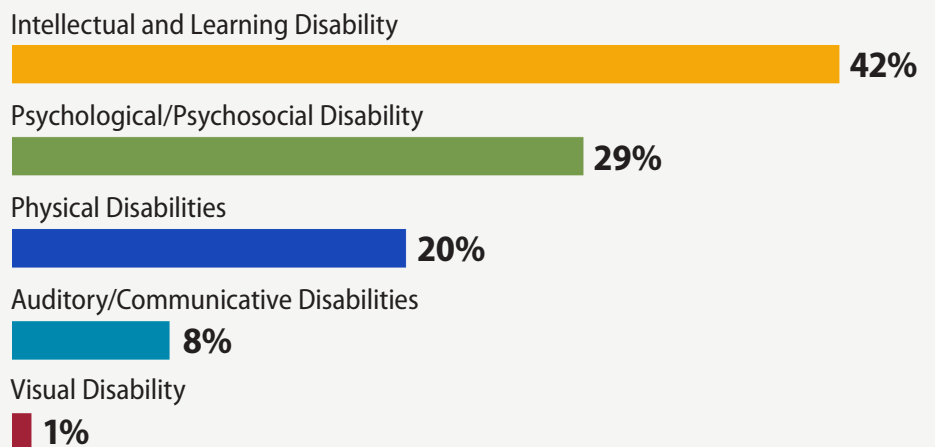
AGE GROUPS OF CUSTOMERS SUCCESSFULLY EMPLOYED



DVR APPLICATION BREAKDOWN



TYPES OF DISABILITIES DVR CUSTOMERS HAVE



Customer Stories

FIRST A CUSTOMER. NOW DVR STAFF.

Written by: **Evelyn Burnett** | **Assistive Technology Assessment Practitioner**



My name is Evelyn Burnett. I applied for DVR in 2017 after moving to Washington from Alaska. I was 17 years old, Deaf, terrified of my job prospects and anxious for help.

My goal was to go to school to become an audiologist. My wonderful counselor, Joy Armstrong, helped me get enrolled with DVR. I received help paying for my bachelor's degree at the University of Washington. I earned my BA in Speech and Hearing Sciences – Communication Disorders. It was challenging, but I learned an incredible amount. I also experienced having accommodations for the very first time, including having a person with me in every class live-captioning my professors and everything said.

By the time I finished my bachelor's degree

in 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic hit. The University of Washington was no longer offering an audiology program, so I would have had to move again to change schools if I wanted to become an audiologist. I also had second thoughts about getting a doctorate. I considered speech-language pathology and was even accepted at the Deaf University (Gallaudet University) on the East coast. However, with the pandemic happening I had lost all my jobs, and like many others I was devastatingly broke. I decided to stay in the greater Seattle area.

Eventually, I was working as a behavior technician

in the applied behavior analysis field at the suggestion of a friend. One of my employers pushed me to go to graduate school online for a master's degree in applied behavior analysis, so I finished that degree as well. However, it was not a good fit so I decided that I needed to find something else entirely, even if that meant potentially starting over.

I reached out to Joy again, and she completely understood. I was in a very difficult spot. I was highly motivated to work and at that point had plenty of education but would not be utilizing my master's degree for its intended

Customer Stories

purpose. I emphasized that I wanted to keep working with people who have disabilities, in a field where collaboration is encouraged, and I wanted to use my lived experience with a disability to help and empower others. I mentioned that I would even be interested in working at DVR, if anything is available.

Lo and behold, we both came across the job listing for Assistive Technology and Assessment Practitioner. I had not applied because I did not think I was qualified. Joy counseled me and explained that I am absolutely qualified and encouraged me to apply. So, I did. And I got the job!

This role utilizes all my education and lived experience with a disability. It also allows me to utilize my innate tech savviness, for which I give credit to my dad. He works in IT, and growing up I was supplied with a plethora of electronics and was able to witness computer building, troubleshooting, programming and many other things in my home. Ever since starting my job as an ATAP I have been extremely happy, and I always tell everyone that I never plan to leave. I feel very lucky to have this unique role.

I could not have done this without my counselor, Joy Armstrong and DSHS DVR!

Customer Stories

WORKING PAIN FREE WITH ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

Written by: **Carolyn Nease | VRC Lead at Yakima DVR**



Jeremy at his workplace, Price Cold Storage & Packing Co. He is seen using his Bioness L300 system which allows him to move freely without pain.

Working together, with the support of ATAP, I guided Jeremy through the DVR process and in April 2023, he obtained his Bioness L300 system. When he visited the Yakima DVR office, the

transformation was astounding – he walked in without any assistive devices, moving with ease and free from pain. Jeremy acknowledged that while there’s no recovery for HSP, the Bioness devices, coupled with ongoing physical therapy, allowed him to navigate a regular workday and alleviated most of his lower back pain.

Jeremy recognizes the inevitability of needing more walking aids, possibly even a wheelchair in the future, but remains optimistic. Grateful for DVR’s assistance in his journey to maintain employment despite his disability, he expresses profound appreciation for the newfound DVR support that enables him to persevere through the challenges of HSP.

Jeremy, a full-time IT Manager grappling with Hereditary Spastic Paraplegia, faced daily challenges due to decreased muscle tone and weakness in his legs. With only 80 cases of this rare condition in the United States, Jeremy struggled with walking, frequent falls, and chronic pain. Despite his dedication to his job, the prescribed pain medication left him drowsy and affected his stamina, impacting both work and family life.

A turning point came in 2021 when Jeremy tried the Bioness L300 system, a functional electrical stimulation device that significantly improved his gait and walking. Unfortunately, its cost was prohibitive for a private purchase, and insurance didn’t cover it. Lisa Villar, a Bioness clinical specialist, referred Jeremy to DVR.

Customer Stories

AN ADVOCATE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Written by: **Haley Gross (VR Counselor) | Amanda Kipfer (Deputy Administrator)**



Noelle, a former DVR customer, now works as a prosecuting attorney and advocate for individuals with disabilities.

During her time in the college dorms, she passionately advocated for accessible living corridors, ensuring that she and others with similar needs could navigate campus life seamlessly. Her persistence in

requesting reasonable accommodations allowed her to fully participate in the college experience alongside her peers.

Notably, during her graduation events, Noelle encountered an obstacle when she discovered that the stage at the auditorium was not wheelchair accessible. Undeterred, she once again championed for her needs, successfully securing a necessary ramp. This determined effort ensured she could proudly accept her diploma and cross the stage with her peers, showcasing her resilience and commitment to inclusivity.

Facing these challenges inspired Noelle to seek out ways she could assist others. "If it didn't happen for me, maybe it will happen for the next person," she said. With law school on the horizon, she kept pushing toward her goals and completed her J.D. from Gonzaga University. Since graduation, Noelle passed the Bar certification and is now a prosecuting attorney. She works diligently to help others every day, often acting as an advocate for human rights when others are unable to speak up for themselves. "I know I can articulate what I have to say and what accommodations are appropriate," Noelle said. "But the person who can't, shouldn't have to suffer."

American disability rights activist Judith Heumann said, "Disability only becomes a tragedy when society fails to provide the things we need to lead our lives." Noelle Green, a former DVR customer, seems to hold this same sentiment. Noelle first applied for DVR services in 2015 with a goal of working in the criminal justice field. Through her participation with vocational counseling and guidance from her counselor, Haley Gross, she began to identify appropriate DVR services. DVR ultimately assisted Noelle with training costs, transportation services, benefits planning and assistive technology.

After earning her Bachelor of Arts in Sociology from Pacific Lutheran University, Noelle delved into the field of juvenile rehabilitation and interned with the Office of Diversity and Inclusion and the Department of Children, Youth and Families. While her impressive work experience reflects her dedication, it's essential to recognize her achievements beyond the academic realm.

2023 DSHS DVR In-Service

In October, hundreds of DVR staff, partners, and invited guests celebrated the Department of Social and Health Services' Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and the proud work being done to help customers achieve meaningful employment. The conference was held in Tacoma. The theme for 2023 was, "What's Your Why?"

Costume Contest Winners: A group of DVR staff pose as costume contest winners during an evening social event at the In-Service.



Over a two-day period, staff were delighted to interact with their colleagues, listen to keynote speakers and view breakout sessions covering a wide range of topics including EDAl, Artificial Intelligence, Assistive Technology, State Planning, Motivational Interviewing, and much more.

Keynote Speakers

Elder **Connie McCloud**, culture director of and member of the Puyallup Tribe of Indians, opened the conference on day one, telling her people's story and the importance of Native land, business and community partnerships, and the incredible value of Tribal voices.

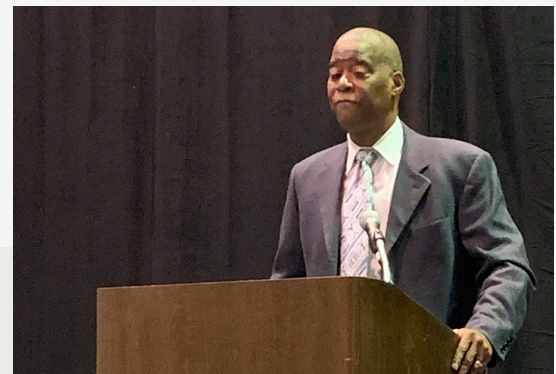
Elder Connie McCloud, culture director of the Puyallup Tribe of Indians, presents the invocation at the In-Service.



Megan Blunk, an American wheelchair basketball player for the United States women's national wheelchair basketball team, delivered an emotional telling of her life story of obstacles and eventual success on her way to winning a gold medal with Team USA in the 2016 Olympics. DVR helped her achieve her goals after a devastating car accident in her early life.

Gary E. Horton, an American businessman with more than 40 years of experience in the technology space, delivered a powerful message about his life. He told his story- one of business success and eventual total loss of

Gary E. Horton delivers a powerful address about his life.



2023 DSHS DVR In-Service

vision. Gary used vocational rehabilitation services and started the Lean In! Program, which endeavors to encourage blind and low vision individuals to “Dream Big!” and offers private sector employers insight into the efficacy of a valuable and untapped resource.

A New Vision for DVR

DVR’s services extend from pre-employment students and youth to adults. As the division seeks to reach every potential customer, the previous vision statement was updated to align with current goals more closely. The new vision statement was announced at the In-Service. It is: “Students, youth, and adults with disabilities are empowered to dream big and achieve their employment goals.” As a collective, DVR is dedicated to bringing this vision to life in every interaction it has with current and future customers.

DVR Says Goodbye after a half-century of Service

It’s not uncommon for DVR to retain an employee for 30-plus years. The mission, vision and value of this work has been said to “feed” the soul and be very rewarding. However, when a member of the DVR team sticks around for more than 50 years, it’s worth noting. Patricia Emsley is one such person, and she

was celebrated by Jilma Meneses, Secretary of DSHS, and her fellow DVR colleagues at the In-Service. She was one of the very first female counselors at DVR and left an indelible mark on the division and the many customers and staff she served. She retired at the end of October.

Jilma Meneses, Secretary of Washington State’s Department of Social and Health Services presents a service award to DVR’s Patricia Emsley, who retired after 51.5 years.



Equity, Diversity, Access and Inclusion Valued

DSHS Division of Vocational Rehabilitation values and [is committed to Equity, Diversity, Access and Inclusion in all forms](#). This includes commitment and dedication to truth, social justice and dismantling racism. DVR recognizes that we are stronger when we are a diverse organization serving diverse customers, centering lived experiences, and collaborating with customers and the community to produce results.

COLLABORATION AND OUTREACH IS KEY TO EDAI EFFORTS

Collaboration and outreach in 2023 by DVR included:

- Participation in the DSHS statewide survey for the Governor's Equity Summit.
- Collaborated in the development of the DSHS Equity Summit Employee Survey.
- Implemented DVR employee listening sessions about Belonging.

TO EMPOWER OTHERS, WE MUST COLLABORATE WITH OTHER PARTNERS

EDAI Projects scheduled for the coming year include:

- Developing EDAI vision across the department.
- Statewide DVR and Tribal Vocational Rehabilitation Program Meet & Greet (in collaboration with DVR's Tribal Relations Administrator).

We also have ongoing projects and activities that we plan to continue in 2024:

- DVR's More than a Moment Conversations.
- Facilitated monthly Community of Practice meetings.
- Continued work with statewide BRGs and Office of Equity partners to utilize their expertise in equity work and increasing accessibility.

DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING EMPLOYEE RESOURCE GROUP

Accomplished in 2023

- On Demand Virtual Relay interpreter pilot program was finalized.
- Video Phone Provider choices permitted by Executive Leadership and IT.
- Streamlined the invoices process for ASL interpreting services.
- Hearing Aids Cost Estimate Worksheet is in the final stage and will be released to vendors in 2024.

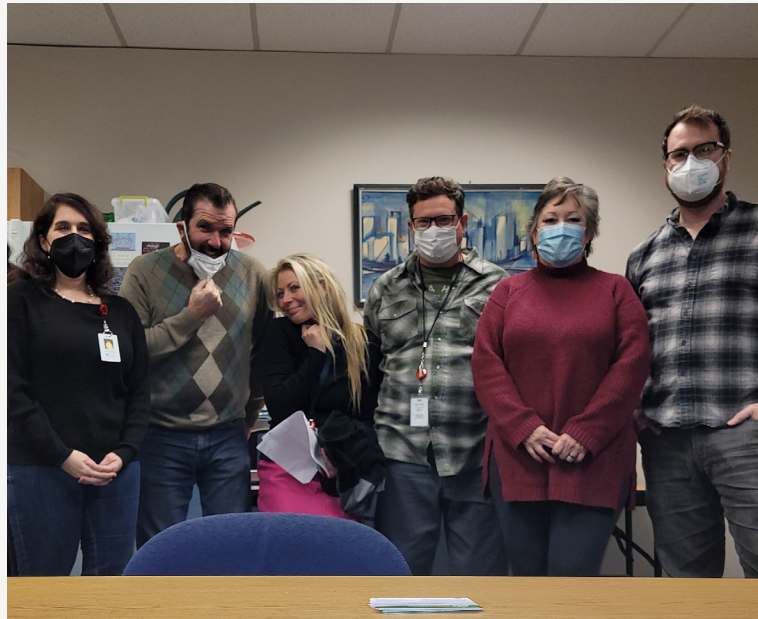
Goals for 2024

- On Demand Virtual Relay interpreter pilot program started in January 2024.
- Form Cochlear Implant Committee.
- Finalize best practices for Deaf/HH students in college.
- Create Deaf/HH 101 Training.

Equity, Diversity, Access and Inclusion Valued

Meet and Greet with EDAI Administrator

In January of 2023, several in-person sessions were held with the EDAI Administrator to listen and learn from staff about what it means to belong at DVR. Following introductions and time to feel comfortable, staff were encouraged to anonymously express their thoughts on a poster board. A summary of staff expressions and their ideas to elevate belonging were shared with DVR leadership. The included picture is from a meet and greet that took place in January of 2023 at the Bellingham DVR office.



2024 KEY INITIATIVE FOCUS

What Does Belonging at Work Mean?

In 2024 and beyond, DVR aims to expand EDAI and anti-racism efforts to empower staff and enhance services for customers. A key focus for the upcoming year is fostering a sense of Belonging at work. The DSHS Office of Equity, Diversity, Access and Inclusion defines universal access and belonging as removing barriers, honoring self-determination, and building inclusive systems. DVR is committed to supporting employees by cultivating a Belonging environment aligned with Washington state's values of inclusion for all state workers.

Members of the Bellingham DVR team meet with the EDAI Administrator. From left to right: Amanda Gates-Portillo, Patrick Feuer, Sara Billington, Sean Brannen, Christelle Arnett and Ben Cram.

Pro-Equity Anti-Racism

Pro-Equity Anti Racism

Pro-Equity Anti-Racism, or PEAR, is an innovative approach that goes beyond traditional diversity, equity and inclusion efforts to drive systemic change, aiming to dismantle oppressive systems and promote equity in all facets of society. This approach recognizes that systems of oppression are the upstream sources of all our inequities, and therefore, addressing these systems is crucial to creating a more equitable world. Oppressive systems such as racism, sexism, classism, ableism and heterosexism cause inequities and hurt all people.

Implementing Washington's Pro-Equity Anti-Racism Ecosystem Plan & Playbook ([Executive Order 22-04](#)) is a critical dimension of the state's pursuit of bridging opportunity gaps and reducing disparities, including racial and ethnic disparities, statewide and across state government, to keep Washington a great place to live, learn, work, play and stay.

PEAR was implemented in 2023.

PEAR's Goals

- Reduce disparities in public contracting, public education, public employment and public services.
- Improve outcomes that benefit all tribes, communities and employees of Washington's PEAR ecosystem.

Accomplished in the first year of PEAR

- DVR leaders established PEAR Teams to create agency PEAR Strategic Action Plans.
- Office of Equity held PEAR Team Orientation sessions and provided technical assistance to agency leaders and their PEAR Teams.
- DVR completed the PEAR Readiness Checklist.
- DVR completed a Baseline Equity Impact Assessment of key business lines to identify where the needs are greatest and root causes of disparities.
- Based on the results of the EIA, DVR completed a PEAR Strategic Action Plan Template.
- Office of Equity helped establish a statewide PEAR Team and PEAR Team Advisory Group to create the Statewide Universal Access & Belonging Plan.

Tribal Relations

DVR VALUES ITS TRIBAL PARTNERSHIPS

DVR acknowledges Tribal Sovereignty and Tribal Consultation by implementing government-to-government activities on a regular basis with tribes, tribal citizens, and Indian organizations. DVR has staff assigned to provide direct services and liaison functions with all federally recognized Tribes in Washington state, including a statewide Tribal Relations Administrator.

GOVERNMENT-TO-GOVERNMENT RELATIONS

Cooperative Agreement

DVR maintains a statewide cooperative agreement with the Department of Services for the Blind and American Indian Vocational Rehabilitation Services programs to work collaboratively in providing vocational rehabilitation services to American Indians/Alaska Natives with disabilities. In 2023 pre-employment training services to tribal member students and director-to-director communication were discussed with a recommendation to schedule regular meetings between TVR directors and DVR and DSB directors.

Indian Policy Advisory Committee DVR Subcommittee

Starting in 2023, the IPAC DVR Subcommittee merged with the IPAC AL TSA/BHA/DDA Subcommittee to improve collaboration between administrations that work with the same customers frequently. During the year, the subcommittee worked together to recommend the following improvements:

- Tribal participation in the development or revision of DVR policies and procedures that affects the unique status of Tribes and/or American Indians and Alaska Natives.
- Tribal and treaty payments as excluded income on DVR Financial Statement.
- Inclusion of tribal TANF and tribal General Assistance recipients as exemptions to financial participation.

EQUITABLE SERVICE DELIVERY

Commitment to Equity, Diversity, Access and Inclusion in all of its forms to achieve excellence is a DVR value demonstrated in equitable allocation of vocational rehabilitation resources to historically unserved and underserved populations, including AI/AN customers with disabilities who want to work. Equitable service delivery to Native Americans also acknowledges the unique legal and political status that tribal citizens have with their tribe and with the federal government.

Tribal Relations

Collaboration with Tribal Vocational Rehabilitation Programs

In February, DVR formed a multi-disciplinary Tribal Relations Program Core Advisory Team to assess current processes related to collaborative work with TVRs and to identify service delivery improvements for Native American customers. CAT members used the Multi-Dimensional Equity Analysis approach in its assessment, focusing on maximizing benefits and reducing burdens for underserved populations. The team recommended new procedures for referrals and shared cases, to clarify the coordination of services when DVR and a TVR are working with the same customer. Recommendations made by the CAT were vetted and will be available to staff in 2024.

Financial Participation

To honor the unique status of AI/AN customers and treaty rights, a procedural guidance document, *Tribal & Treaty Payments Guidance*, was implemented at DVR to assist staff in knowing what income must be excluded when a customer includes tribal or treaty income, distributions, or payments.

Monitoring AI/AN Service Delivery

In 2023, data reports on referral rates and the status of AI/AN customers were refined to offer more meaningful and useful information to DVR and TVR staff. Referrals that result in a shared case between DVR and TVRs will be monitored during 2024.

ENGAGEMENT AND COLLABORATION

Meet-and-Greet

The DVR Tribal Relations Administrator completed several in person meet-and-greets with tribal partners and DVR field office staff throughout the state to re-establish relationships and assess the current state of Tribal Relations at DVR.

Transition Services

Collaboration between the Pre-ETS Program Manager, School-to-Work/Transition Program Manager and the Tribal Relations Administrator was initiated during 2023 with the purpose of increasing services to Native American students attending public and tribal schools.

Urban Indian Organizations

Connections were re-established with the Chief Seattle Club and Seattle Indian Health Board to increase awareness of DVR services and to discuss opportunities for collaboration.

Tribal Relations

Conferences

“Being recognized by tribes as partners, not just state representatives, is the most rewarding part for me.”

– Mercedes Bekke, DVR Regional Tribal Liaison



DVR collaborated with TVR partners throughout the year to showcase the work happening between the state and tribes. Region 1 staff assisted the Yakama Nation TVR with planning and facilitating of the “Honor Our Presence” Disability Conference in June and several DVR staff were invited to present. Many state employees also attended the conference. In October, TVR staff were invited to present at DVR’s In-Service and tribal VR program staff also attended.

Region 3 Quarterly Meeting
state and tribal participants,
Port Angeles, April 2023.

Tribal Relations

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

State-Tribal Relations Orientation

DVR, DSB and TVRs worked collaboratively to create an outline for an all-staff orientation focusing on the foundation of state-tribal relations in Washington and best practices for working with TVRs and AI/AN people. The orientation will be offered in 2024.

Monthly Talking Circle

The Tribal Relations Program began offering a monthly virtual space for DVR staff to network and to learn about tribal culture and protocol.

Native American Heritage Month

The Tribal Relations Program hosted several guest speakers during Native American Heritage Month on a variety of topics related to tribal experiences and best practices for working with Native American DVR customers.

CANAR

In June, six tribal liaison VRCs and the Tribal Relations Administrator attended the Consortium of Native American Rehabilitation Conference in Niagara Falls, New York and four tribal liaison VRCs and the Tribal Relations Administrator attended the CANAR Conference in Costa Mesa, California in December.

December 2023 CANAR Conference, Costa Mesa, California.

Left to Right: William Marchant, Squaxin Island TVR Director, Chad Wisehart, DVR Tribal Liaison, Kyle Rogers, SPIPA Interim Executive Director, Jeremiah Szepanski, SPIPA.



Tribal Relations

“I learned valuable information at the breakout group sessions and learned a great number of differences and similarities between state and tribal VR services. With this information, I will be able to assist the tribes that I work with more effectively.”

– Chad Wisheart, DVR Tribal Liaison – Shelton office

HIGHLIGHT: PARTNERSHIPS WITH TRIBAL VR PROGRAMS THAT PRODUCE RESULTS

DVR’s working relationship with the Cowlitz TVR Program stalled for some time, so efforts were made in 2023 to reconnect with the program. At first, TVR program staff resisted collaborations based on previous concerns that were explained and acknowledged by DVR.



“Collaboration is at the heart of our journey.”

– Heather Kraft, Cowlitz TVR Case Manager

Bonnie Hillman (left) and Heather Kraft (right) making beaded hats at the Cowlitz TVR Vancouver office.

Tribal Relations

As a newly appointed Tribal Liaison, Bonnie Hillman, Lead VRC at the Vancouver office, was introduced to Cowlitz TVR Case Manager, Heather Kraft. Bonnie was invited and took time to learn more about the tribe by participating in cultural activities and collaborating closely with Heather and shared customers to supplement services not offered by the TVR program. Soon, roadblocks that participants and staff previously experienced with DVR turned into transformative outcomes for AI/AN individuals and shared successes for DVR and Cowlitz TVR staff.

Below is an example of a customer who benefited from Heather and Bonnie's collaborations:

CASE STUDY:

AI (*not his real name*)

AI was referred to TVR from DVR. He appeared to be disconnected from his culture and community. AI is two classes shy of earning his BA in Computer Science, but he is unwilling to complete the degree due to negative experiences. Through his interactions with TVR, he has gained confidence. We are working with TVR and DVR's Business Specialist to help AI locate an entry level IT/Tech support position.

TVR provided cultural and community supports that AI needed before he could take advantage of DVR services.

In October, Bonnie and Heather were invited to present their achievements at the 2023 DVR All Staff In-service in Tacoma. They were also asked to

showcase their partnership during Native American Heritage Month as guest speakers for DVR's Tribal Talk Series. Other agencies began to recognize Heather and Bonnie's successful partnership and expressed interest in joining forces to enhance services for AI/AN people with disabilities who want to work.



Heather Kraft (left) and Bonnie Hillman (right) present at the DVR In-Service in October.

Tribal Relations

As a result, a meeting was held in January 2024 between DVR, Cowlitz TVR, and the Developmental Disabilities Administration in Clark County to explore opportunities for collaboration.

Bonnie has felt the personal benefit of their collaboration. “It has also impacted me personally to see the cultural connections of the Tribe and the open hearted inclusion of me in some of their traditions,” she says. “It has truly been humbling and rewarding to work with Cowlitz TVR.”

About DSHS and DVR

The Washington State **Department of Social and Health Services** and the **Division of Vocational Rehabilitation** are tied together by a single mission which is to transform lives. Each administration within DSHS has a refined focus on this mission.

DSHS and DVR Mission, Vision and Values Statements

DSHS Mission:

To transform lives.

DSHS Vision:

People are healthy,
People are safe,
People are supported.

DSHS Values:

Honesty and Integrity – leadership and service require a clear moral compass.

Pursuit of Excellence – it is not enough to get the job done, we must always challenge ourselves to do it better.

Open Communication – excellence requires teamwork and a strong team is seen, heard and feels free to contribute.

Diversity and Inclusion – only by including all perspectives are we at our best and only through cultural competency can we optimally serve our clients.

Commitment to Service – our challenges will always exceed our financial resources, our commitment to service must see us through.

DVR Mission:

Transforming lives by assisting individuals with disabilities to fully participate in their communities through meaningful employment.

DVR Vision:

Students, youth, and adults with disabilities are empowered to dream big and achieve their employment goals.

DVR Values:

Transparency through clear, honest communication with customers, staff and partners.

Acting with **Integrity**, upholding the ethics and values of our profession.

Promoting a culture of **Empowerment** for customers and staff.

Advancing rehabilitation practices through **Innovation**.

Collaboration with customers, staff, and partners that produces results.

Commitment to **Equity, Diversity, Access** and **Inclusion** in all its forms to achieve excellence.



**Washington State Department of Social and Health Services
Division of Vocational Rehabilitation**

PO Box 45340, Olympia, Washington 98504-5340

Phone Number: 800-637-5627

Website: www.dshs.wa.gov/dvr

DVR Financial Statement:

State and federal funds are used to deliver DVR Services. The VR program receives approximately 78 percent in federal funds and 22 percent in state funds. For detailed information on the dollar amount of federal funds for the program, please visit:

<https://rsa.ed.gov/fiscal/grant-awards>