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Bureau of Rehabilitation Services



2005 – 2006

Highlights

Maine Department of Labor

Mission

The Maine Department of Labor is committed to promoting the economic well-being of people in the labor force and employers by attracting and retaining a wide range of employment opportunities, promoting independence and lifelong learning, by fostering economic stability and by ensuring the safe and fair treatment of all people on the job.

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## **Bureau of Rehabilitation Services**

### **Mission**

*The Bureau of Rehabilitation Services works to bring about full access to employment, independence and community integration for people with disabilities.*

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STATE OF MAINE
DEPARTMENT OF LABOR
19 UNION STREET, P.O. BOX 259
AUGUSTA, MAINE
04332-0259

JOHN ELIAS BALDACCI
GOVERNOR

LAURA A. FORTMAN
COMMISSIONER

January 29, 2007

The Honorable Ethan Strimling, Senate Chair
The Honorable John Tuttle, Jr., House Chair
Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Labor
123rd Maine State Legislature
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

Dear Senator Strimling, Representative Tuttle, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Labor:

As part of the Maine Department of Labor, the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services offers a wide range of services to people with disabilities throughout the state. This document highlights those services, and we hope that you will find it informative.

The economic and community involvement of all Maine citizens, including those with disabilities, is critical to the well being of Maine, and we are proud of the work that we do.

Sincerely,

Laura A. Fortman
Commissioner

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Enclosure

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Bureau Director's Message

"The successful employment of people with disabilities as members of the state's workforce is important to Maine and it is important to Maine State Government."

John E. Baldacci, Governor

With these words, Maine Governor John E. Baldacci set an expectation that Maine take tangible steps to recognize the contribution that people with disabilities have and will continue to make to the Maine economy and our future.



Jill Duson, Director
Bureau of Rehabilitation Services

The vigor of Maine's future economy depends in large part on our ability to tap the talents, skills and energies of all Mainers, including those of us who live with a disability. The core mission of the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS), through its direct service and advocacy programs, is to help Mainers with the most significant disabilities to find and retain competitive employment.

The BRS offers employment and independent living services to individuals with disabilities as part of the Department of Labor One-Stop CareerCenters located throughout the state. This colocation helps to assure full access to the array of employment services offered through the Maine Department of Labor.

As a public service provider in state government, BRS is challenged to husband the resources we have been entrusted to administer and to continuously evaluate the quality and value of publicly funded vocational rehabilitation services. In so doing, the Bureau has taken a collaborative approach to service delivery that encompasses strong partnerships on the national, regional, state and local levels.

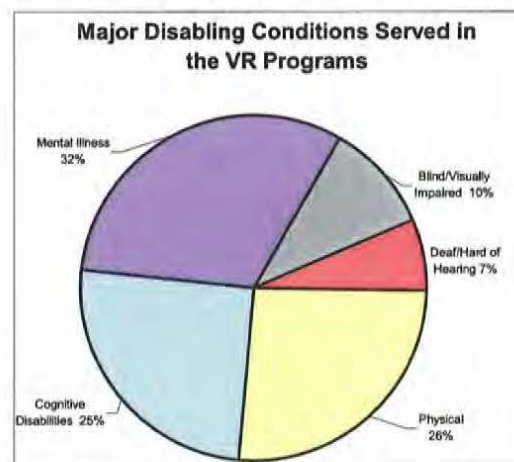
This publication is intended to provide a snapshot of the current state of public vocational rehabilitation services in Maine and to share the accomplishments and challenges of administering that system.

We trust that you will find this helpful in understanding all that is BRS. Let's take the time to celebrate all that has been accomplished and push ourselves to achieve more.

Introduction

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION (VR) SERVICES: The Rehabilitation Act, as amended in 1998, establishes program eligibility and the scope of VR services provided through the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) and the Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired (DBVI). Included are vocational counseling and guidance, physical restoration services, education and vocational skills training, and job placement services.

- In 2005, BRS assisted over 11,500 Mainers with disabilities.
- 5,134 clients received services under an employment plan that was developed with a vocational rehabilitation counselor.
- Clients receiving services under an employment plan average 38.5 months from application to closure.
- In 2005, 858 individual cases were closed successfully, with an average wage of \$267 per week.



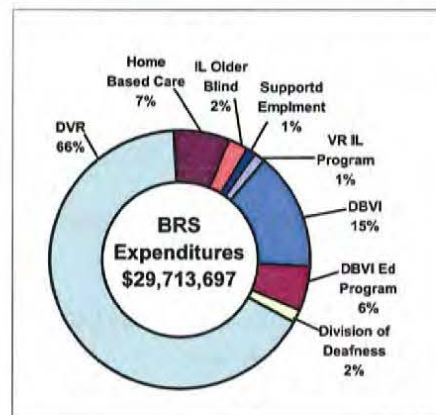
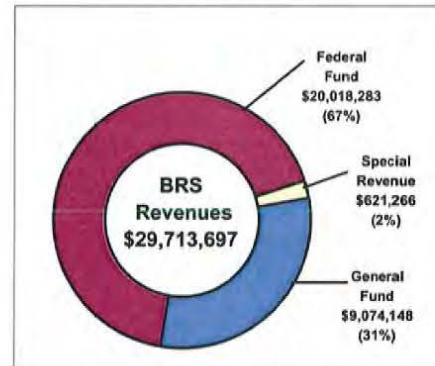
- Since 2002, the demand for services, particularly for the DVR program, has surpassed the available resources and resulted in a waiting list for services.

Revenues and Expenditures

The largest share of federal funding comes from the Title I grant, which is matched with State funds (about 80% Federal to 20% State). The VR programs account for the greatest share of expenditures. As a result of factors in the formula, including population growth and state average per capita earnings, in FFY 2006, the federal allocation to both DVR and DBVI was reduced by 0.6%.

Other federal grants are: State Independent Living Services, Independent Living-Older Blind, Supported Employment, Client Assistance Program, In-Service Training, and the Able Me Grant. The expenditures for the Federal grants are legally restricted to purposes specified in the grant award agreements.

The Special Revenue fund is funded by resources other than the State or Federal Funds, such as the cafeteria and vending machine facilities managed by DBVI, and from telecommunications and other local grants for the Division of Deafness. The Special Revenue fund income is restricted to specific purposes.



Division of Vocational Rehabilitation



"I don't believe I could have succeeded without Vocational Rehabilitation. Everyone needs someone to believe in them and my VR counselor, Sheryl Smith, was that person for me."

-Bonnie Parsons

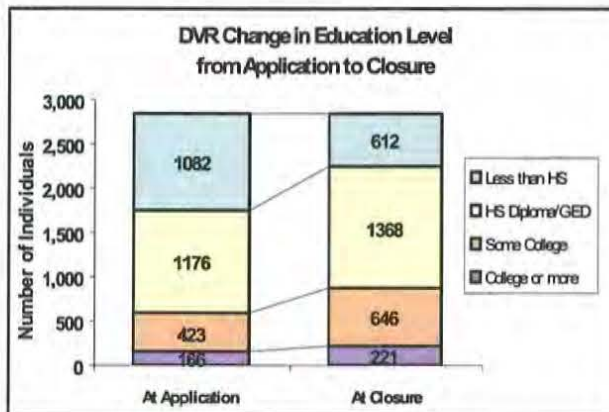
Bonnie Parsons is a great example of how Maine Vocational Rehabilitation can help people with disabilities who want to own their own business. Bonnie attempted work and school with Vocational Rehabilitation support but found related work too overwhelming. She experienced severe panic attacks, anxiety and her depression worsened.

She mentioned one day to her Vocational Rehabilitation counselor (VRC) that she was helping her husband out with his small engine repair business, and what she would really like to do is have her own business next to his where she would sell parts and supplies likely to be purchased by the customers of his business. They owned land in a prime location that they were able to use as collateral and secured a loan to build a new building large enough for both businesses. Vocational Rehabilitation connected her to Coastal Enterprises Inc. for business guidance and her VRC provided her with guidance and support.

Today, Parsons Small Engine in Unity, Maine is growing every day, and Bonnie is extremely happy with her business. It accommodates her disabilities because it is next door to her house so that she can go home if she feels overwhelmed; she has many natural supports, and the building is light and airy and spacious.

Bonnie says, "I don't believe I could have succeeded without Vocational Rehabilitation. Everyone needs someone to believe in them, and my VR counselor, Sheryl Smith, was that person for me."

An important element of a VR plan is the change in education level among individuals who are served. The Chart below compares the education level of all closures from FY 2005 at the time they applied for services to their education level at closure. Nearly 500 individuals who did not have a high school education at application achieved a high school diploma or equivalency or more during participation in a VR program. More than 220 people increased their education level to some college courses or postsecondary certification, and 55 achieved a college degree.



Employment Outcomes:

\$74.98 – Average Weekly Wage at Application
\$273.54 – Average Weekly Wage at Closure
\$198.56 – Increase in Weekly Earnings
264.8% – Increased Earning Capacity



DVR (continued)

General Vocational Rehabilitation Services

•Individual counseling and guidance, vocational assessment, independent living, supported employment and more.

Consumer-Directed Personal Assistance Services

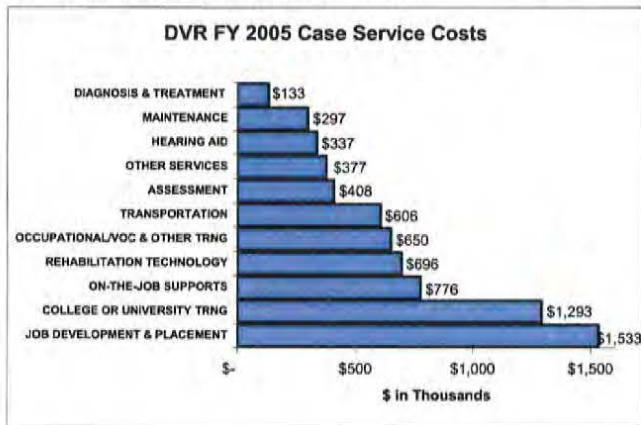
•For the purpose of avoiding or delaying institutionalization

Independent Living Services

•Training for adaptive skills to provide alternatives to accomplishing daily tasks.

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The Chart below shows DVR's FY 2005 Case Service Expenditures by the type of service provided. Job Development & Placement, College or University Training, and On-the-Job Supports were the top three service groups in terms of case costs, representing over 50% of all case service expenditures.



- 2,743 New Applicants
- 2,555 Found Eligible for Services
- 4,400 Receive Services through Employment Plans
- 655 Individuals Placed in Employment
- 10,620 Individuals Served

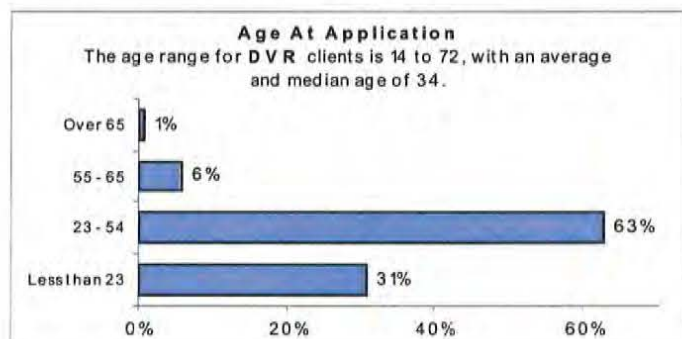


**Maine's Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR)** assists eligible individuals with disabilities to prepare for, achieve and retain employment in integrated community settings.

The journey of an applicant for publicly funded vocational rehabilitation services takes the application through eligibility, comprehensive assessment of rehabilitation needs, individual employment plan development and provision of appropriate services to employment. This is mandated by federal statute. Any individual with a disability and an interest in employment may apply.

Each individual who applies for services has a determination of eligibility and works with a qualified VR counselor and others to determine goals, services, job search, and job placement among other things. Every applicant coming to DVR has different abilities, goals, expectations and barriers for employment; therefore, each plan is individualized for each eligible consumer. The successful conclusion of the VR process is an individual working in a job consistent with their capabilities for 90 days with the expectation of continued employment. No consumer's journey is the same, and the process is flexible enough to attend to new barriers as they arise.

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Division for the Blind & Visually Impaired



Ruza Avramovic is proud of her Yugoslavian heritage and her bachelor's degree in business from Croatia, but the civil war in her country forced her to leave in 1992 with her husband and children. In addition to the stress of leaving her homeland, extended family and successful career, Ruza faced a progressive loss of vision as she learned a new culture and language and built a new life.

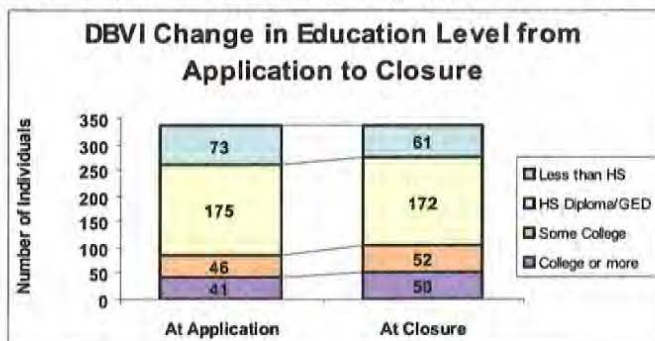
She quickly accepted services from the Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired (DBVI). With her Rehabilitation Counselor, Bill Anderson, Ruza decided initially that Homemaker would be her vocational goal, but as her skills developed and her self-confidence increased, she decided that she would like to explore a vocational career. She participated in a Rehabilitation Program, followed by more intense computer training. Through a work experience, Ruza continued to build confidence, improve English skills, and to feel more comfortable with herself as a person with blindness.

"I have a good experience [with DBVI]. I have SO good experience. They helped me a lot. It's some kind of my life. How I can say? They made me proud of what I am doing. They help me to work - to take computer courses and everything. They helped me to learn. They explained to me what was possible and I took everything. DBVI helped me because they pushed me to Iris, to Gouzie... they found me this job."
- Ruza Avramovic

Bill identified that Seafax and Ruza, with her business background and work ethic, were a match, so he contacted Seafax, a highly regarded Portland company and they hired Ruza for a part-time position with company benefits. DBVI provided some coaching from computer access specialists for the initial days of her employment as well as orientation and mobility instruction. Ruza was quickly on her own with customary supports from her company.

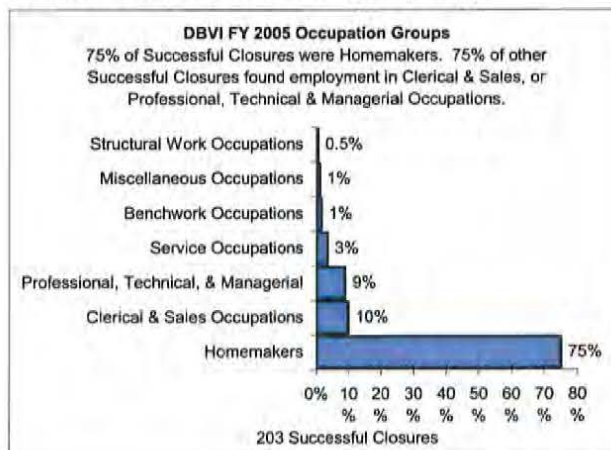
Ruza demonstrated high performance from the beginning of her job. She earned a performance bonus in her second week of work and has continued to do so. Two years ago she became a fulltime employee and continued to demonstrate high performance and quality work. Her supervisors state that Ruza is a highly valued Seafax employee who always exceeds company goals.

An important element of a VR plan is the change in education level among individuals who are served. The Chart below compares the education level of all closures from FY 2005 at the time they applied for services to their education level at closure. Twelve individuals who did not have a high school education at application achieved a high school diploma or equivalency or more during participation in a VR program. Six people increased their education level to some college courses or postsecondary certification, and nine achieved a college degree.



Employment Outcomes:

\$56.44 – Average Weekly Wage at Application
 \$89.40 – Average Weekly Wage at Closure
 \$32.96 – Increase in Weekly Earnings
 58.4% – Increased Earning Capacity



DBVI (continued)

Blind Vocational Rehabilitation Services

•Individual counseling and guidance, vocational assessment, mobility instruction, independent living and more.

Business Enterprise Program

•Training and support to manage snack bars, cafeterias, and vending machine facilities on state, federal and municipal properties.

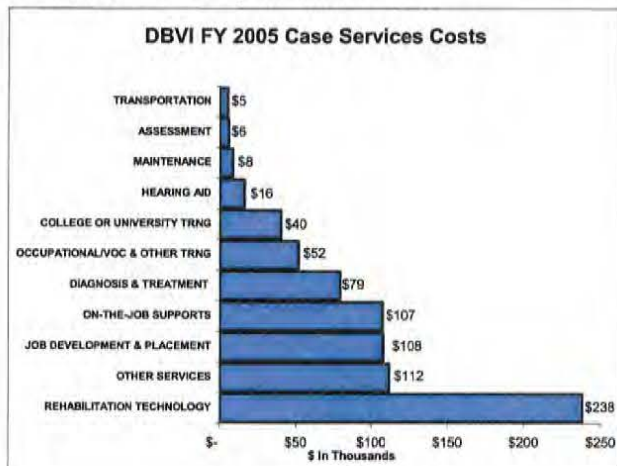
Independent Living Services for Older Blind Individuals

•Training in adaptive skills to provide alternative techniques for accomplishing daily tasks.

Education Services for Children

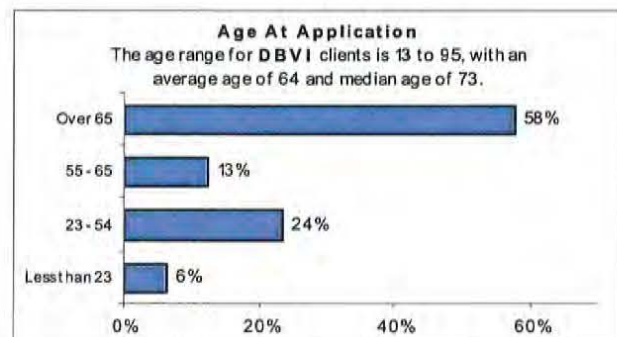
•Adaptive instruction services to students in local schools.

The Chart below shows DBVI's FY 2005 Case Service Expenditures by the type of service provided. Rehabilitation Technology, Job Development & Placement, and On-the-Job Supports were top service groups in terms of case costs, representing over 50% of all case service expenditures.



There is help for individuals with vision problems that might prevent them from carrying out the activities of daily living, getting an education or a job. The **Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired** can provide many services to persons with severe visual impairments.

- For adults, individual counseling and guidance toward achievement of a vocational or independent living goal.
- For children, direct instructional services and technical assistance to local schools in providing an effective, appropriate public education.
- Adaptive skill-training to learn alternative methods of accomplishing common activities of daily living.
- Orientation and mobility instruction to develop independent travel skills.
- Training, assistive devices, and placement to enable you to succeed in a job, including self-employment.



- 267 New Applicants
- 237 Found Eligible for Services
- 734 Services Provided through Employment Plans
- 203 Successful Outcomes
- 926 Individuals Served

Division of Deafness



The Division of Deafness (DoD) differs from the other two Divisions of BRS in that we don't often provide direct services to individuals. Instead we work on a systemic education and advocacy basis collaborating with other state and private agencies. Our focus is on independent living and information and referral.

One of the greatest problems related to deafness is access to information, which impacts individuals on a daily basis in many facets of their lives. Information is especially crucial during emergencies. The DoD collaborated with the Maine Emergency Management Agency, the National Weather Service, the Maine Turnpike Authority, Bureau of Health and the Departments of Public Safety and Transportation to establish the nation's first Emergency Notification System for people with hearing loss. Using weather radios and one and two-way text pagers, Deaf, hard-of-hearing and late-deafened people can get emergency information for one or all Maine counties, before, during and after an emergency, just like a hearing person gets information from a radio.

-Jan DeVinney
Director, BRS Division of Deafness

Created by State statute in 1982, the Division of Deafness (DoD) provides a variety of services for Deaf, hard-of-hearing and late-deafened citizens of Maine, including:

- Information, referral and advocacy
- Providing [Deaf Identification Cards](#)
- Providing [Vehicle Placards for Deaf Identification](#)
- Certifying applicants for the [Intra-State Toll Call Discount](#) (discount for landline TTY calls), and the Emergency Alert Equipment and Service Charge Discount
- Paying for [legal interpreting services](#) in certain situations
- Maintaining a [directory of Qualified Legal Interpreters](#)
- Promoting policies and legislation designed to increase and improve services for the Deaf, hard-of-hearing and late-deafened
- Training for State employees regarding hearing loss and available assistive technology

The Division of Deafness also manages contracts that provide a variety of services to Maine's Deaf, hard-of-hearing and late-deafened communities:

- [Telecommunications Equipment Program](#)
- Emergency Alert System Equipment
- Individual and Systemic Advocacy
- Training for Legal Interpreters
- Training for Criminal Justice Academy Cadets on Deafness
- Promote and Sponsor Community Awareness of Hearing Loss Issues



PUBLICATIONS

DoD has authored and distributed several documents for and about Maine's Deaf, hard-of-hearing and late-deafened communities:

- ["Resources: A Guide to Services for People who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing"](#)
- "Maine-Lines" newsletter
- ["Using your TTY Comfortably"](#)
- [Interpreting Licensure Brochure](#)
- "Do you REALLY Hear Me Now? Brochure for hard-of-hearing/late-deafened people"

Other Programs and Services

- **Services for people who are Blind and Visually Impaired** include adaptive technology, low vision services, adaptive skill training in communication, mobility, and daily living skills to enable over 350 older blind individuals to remain independent in their homes and communities. In addition, 325 blind children receive specialized services in their local schools as part of their Individual Education Program.
 - **Services for people who are Deaf, hard of hearing and late-deafened** include information and referral, as well as individual and systemic advocacy. Training for service providers on the issues and effects of hearing loss are conducted by staff. The Division publishes the statewide "Resources: A Guide to Services for People who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing," has a quarterly newsletter, and has developed other informational materials on deafness and hearing loss. It is estimated that there are well over 100,000 people in Maine with some degree of hearing loss.
 - **Independent Living Services:** In addition to the federal VR programs, BRS administers independent living services programs that support self-determination and community participation of Maine citizens with disabilities.
 - **Consumer-Directed Personal Assistance Services** are provided to approximately 135 eligible individuals each year for the purpose of avoiding or delaying institutionalization. Services include, but are not limited to, assistance to dress; feed; meal preparation, bathing; being turned frequently to prevent skin break down; transfer assistance; driving; and other needs commonly associated with living in the community.
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Challenges Before Us

Availability of Services

In the current fiscal climate, workforce development resources have become extremely limited and state Vocational Rehabilitation agencies have been experiencing flat or reduced funding for several years. Since April 2002, the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) has operated under an Order of Selection in accordance with Section 101 of the federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, because it has not had sufficient financial resources to fully serve all eligible individuals. As a result, DVR established an order of selection for services whereby individuals with the most significant disabilities are categorized by priority to receive vocational rehabilitation services. Accordingly, other individuals must wait to receive cost-related services. This is an increasing trend for VR agencies where nationally more than half the States currently have a wait list for services.



This chart reflects the actual and anticipated wait for services through April 2007; the DVR wait period grew to over twelve months at one point in 2005. By regulation, VR agencies cannot expend resources to individuals on a wait list, except to provide information and referral, and secure certain medical evaluations with the intent that when cost services become available an Individualized Written Employment Plan can be developed and entered into without further delay.

DVR is greatly concerned about the negative effect that waiting for services has on individuals with disabilities who are ready for vocational rehabilitation. At the onset of instituting the Order of Selection, immediate steps were taken to minimize the impact of the wait by creating several self-help tools to encourage individuals to pursue their preparation for employment until cost services become available. These include a *While You Are Waiting* guide, job readiness inventory, GED/other Adult Education resources and other Maine DOL CareerCenter activities (i.e. job bank resources, career exploration tools, and small business workshops).

Additionally in 2005, DVR embarked on an aggressive effort to reduce the wait for services through system-wide improvement efforts. These include a reallocation of resources, the focus on recruitment and retention of fully qualified rehabilitation counselors, and better coordination with other state, federal and community-based organizations to leverage additional resources that could increase the likelihood of more initial successful employment outcomes for consumers and reduce recidivism.

Going forward

Historical evidence indicates that a reduction of wait time for services is critically important to the overall positive experience that an individual has with BRS. To that end, efforts must continue to streamline the system and movement of individuals through their vocational rehabilitation. However, it is also important to recognize that steps in the process, such as eligibility determination and obtaining relevant medical information, may delay the receipt of cost services by an individual, but are essential to achieving successful employment outcomes and ensuring that our limited resources are reaching the target population of people with the most significant disabilities.

Unmet Needs, Goals and Priorities

Given the unlikelihood of increased federal or state funding, BRS must continue to do business in ways that more effectively manage individualized approaches and enhance successful outcomes for people in need of vocational rehabilitation and independent living services. All three Divisions develop annual plans that incorporate assessments of unmet needs into goals and priorities for the upcoming year.

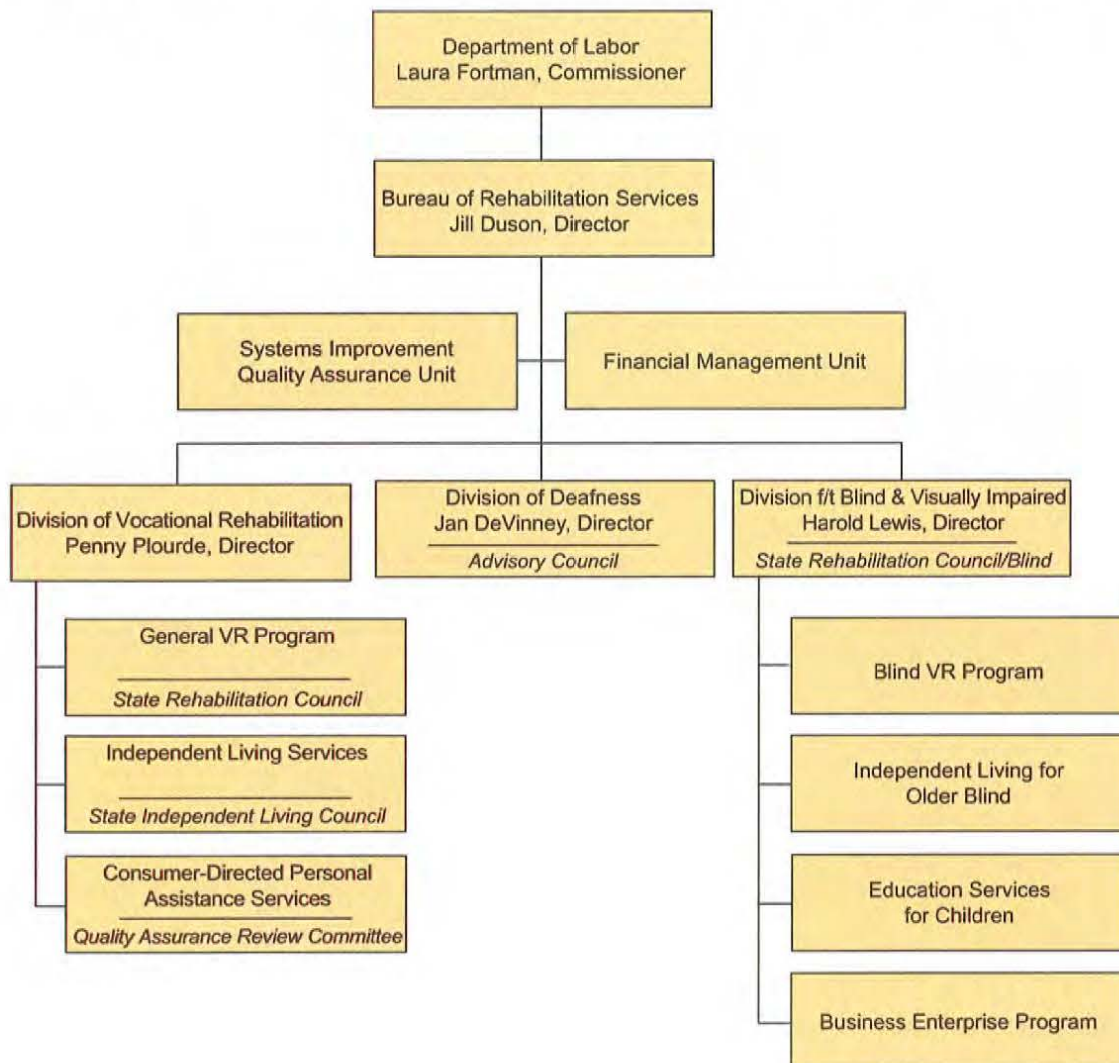
Division of Vocational Rehabilitation: The most recent **DVR** comprehensive needs assessment suggested that the division should clarify its purpose, better target resources, streamline services, develop a broader systems-approach to vocational rehabilitation with other state and community partners, and pursue additional funding sources. To that end, goals set include the improvement of staff retention and recruitment of qualified staff, exploring cost effective ways to serve the increasing numbers of students in transition to adulthood, increasing the number of successful employment outcomes, evaluating the effectiveness of post-secondary services, improving the message clarity and consistency of DVR's purpose, and increasing the number of Social Security recipients who are able to enter full-time employment.

Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired: The **DBVI** comprehensive assessment identified a number of unmet needs for individuals who are blind or visually impaired, which included information, resources and training in assistive technology, transportation, increased awareness of community programs and services, and increased competitive employment outcomes. **DBVI** has established these as goals and, additionally, has included as priorities the need to improve its administrative structure and continue measuring consumer satisfaction as a primary strategy in improving service delivery.

Division of Deafness: Members of the Inter-agency Ad Hoc committee of the **DoD** Advisory Council identified a range of unmet needs for individuals who are deaf and/or hard of hearing that include outreach and education to hard-of-hearing and late-deafened individuals, families and service providers, adult literacy education for those whose first language is American Sign Language, better access to emergency information and services, funding for hearing aids and assistive listening devices, job training, and insufficient **DoD** personnel to meet service demands. In relation to these, goals set by the division are stabilizing and strengthening Maine's Deaf Community Center, fostering collaboration with other service agencies, continuing to pursue deaf and hard-of-hearing access to 911 services, fostering leadership by deaf individuals through **DoD** Advisory Council activities, and providing information to the Legislature regarding the needs and concerns of deaf and hard-of-hearing citizens of Maine.

Organizational Structure

150+ Staff deliver statewide public vocational rehabilitation services and independent living services through three primary divisions.



Office Locations & Phone #'s

BRS Office Directory

PLEASE NOTE

DVR = Division of Vocational Rehabilitation
DBVI = Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired

Augusta

2 Anthony Avenue
Augusta, ME 04333-0073
624-5120 or 1-800-760-1573 (Voice)
1-800-633-0770 (TTY)
624-5133 (Fax)

Ellsworth (DBVI only)

248 State Street, Suite 3A
Ellsworth, ME 04605-1850
664-2300 or 1-800-371-7543 (Voice)
1-888-697-2892 (TTY)
667-4789 (Fax)

Lewiston

5 Mollison Way
Lewiston, ME 04240-5805
753-9000 or 1-800-741-2991 (Voice)
1-877-796-9833 (TTY)
753-9051 (Fax)

Portland

185 Lancaster Street
Portland, ME 04101-2453
822-0400 or 1-800-315-1192 (Voice)
1-888-817-7113 (TTY)
879-7553 (Fax)

Rockland

91 Camden Street, Suite 202
Rockland, ME 04841-2421
596-2600 or 1-877-421-7916 (Voice)
1-888-212-6229 (TTY)
594-1858 (Fax)

Skowhegan (DVR only)

98 North Avenue, Suite 16
Skowhegan, ME 04976-1923
474-4958 or 1-800-760-1572 (Voice)
1-888-697-2912 (TTY)
474-4914 (Fax)

Bangor

45 Oak Street, Suite 1
Bangor, ME 04401-6589
561-4000 or 1-888-545-8811 (Voice)
1-800-498-6711 (TTY)
561-4027 (Fax)

Houlton (DVR only)

91 Military Street, Suite 3
Houlton, ME 04730-2421
532-5300 or 1-800-691-0033 (Voice)
1-888-697-2897 (TTY)
532-5309 (Fax)

Machias (DVR only)

15 Prescott Drive, Suite 2
Machias, ME 04654-9751
255-1900 or 1-800-770-7774 (Voice)
1-800-381-9932 (TTY)
255-3091 (Fax)

Presque Isle

66 Spruce Street, Suite 3
Presque Isle, ME 04769-3222
760-6300 or 1-800-635-0357 (Voice)
1-888-697-2877 (TTY)
760-6316 (Fax)

Saco (DVR only)

110 Main Street, Suite 1515
Saco, ME 04072-3504
286-2600 or 1-800-521-5871 (Voice)
1-800-492-0670 (TTY)
286-2608 (Fax)

Bureau of Rehabilitation Services Central Office

150 State House Station
Augusta 04333-0150
(207) 624-5950 or 1-800-698-4440 (Voice)
1-800-749-5356 (TTY)
(207) 624-5980 (Fax)