Determination Over Adversity: Striving for Sensible Programming During Difficult Times

Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission

Annual Report
Federal Fiscal Year 2009

DEVAL L. PATRICK
Governor

TIMOTHY P. MURRAY
Lieutenant Governor

JUDYANN BIGBY, M.D.
Secretary of the Executive Office of Health & Human Services

CHARLES CARR
Commissioner of the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission

Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission

Mission & Vision
The Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC) promotes equality, empowerment and productive independence for individuals with disabilities. We achieve these goals by enhancing and encouraging personal choice in the pursuit of independence and employment in the community.

The MRC provides comprehensive services to people with disabilities in order to maximize their quality of life and economic self-sufficiency in the community.

Multiple programs in the MRC complement each other to assist individuals with disabilities, including: Community Living, Vocational Rehabilitation and Disability Determination Services.

Senior Management Team

Charles Carr
Commissioner

Mitchell Zahn
Assistant Commissioner of Community Living

Joan Phillips
Assistant Commissioner of Vocational Rehabilitation

Barbara Kinney
Assistant Commissioner of Disability Determination

Kasper Goshgarian
Deputy Commissioner

Richard Arcangeli
General Counsel

Ruth Paulson
Chief Financial Officer

Kevin Collins
Chief Information Officer

Table of Contents

- Message from the Commissioner 3
- Message from the Assistant Commissioner of Community Living 5
- Community Living Testimony 6
- Message from the Assistant Commissioner of Vocational Rehabilitation 7
- Vocational Rehabilitation Testimony 9
- Message from the Assistant Commissioner of Disability Determination 10
- Disability Determination Services Testimony 12
- Consumer Liaison 13
- State Rehabilitation Council 14
- MRC Financials 15

Commissioner Carr's Senior Management Team

Back Row: Bill Noone, Albert Jones, Barbara Kinney, Ruth Paulson, Joan Phillips, and Kevin Collins.
Front Row: Kasper Goshgarian, Charles Carr, and Richard Arcangeli.

Message from the Commissioner

I am pleased to present the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission's (MRC) Annual Report for federal fiscal year 2009, which focuses on our commitment to continuing to provide our consumers sensible programs during challenging fiscal times that have required agencies across state government to make very difficult budget reductions.

We know our consumers want to learn, work and be able to live independently in the community, so we focused this past year on thoughtfully providing sensible programs within the constraints of today's economy.

The pursuit of independence and employment in the community for people with disabilities is as second nature as other human differences, *i.e., gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, etc.* The Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission supports this goal by providing cross-divisional resources and partnerships within our own agency.

Throughout the year, we have strived to uphold our commitment to providing core services to our consumers. In both our Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) and Disability Determination Services (DDS) Divisions, our counselors and examiners faced increasing caseloads but continued to provide optimal services and professional support throughout. I thank all the staff for their hard work, as well as my Assistant Commissioners and Managers who constantly kept employee morale positive.

One way we demonstrated to our consumers that the MRC is committed to their needs was our continued work in the Commonwealth as a Model Employer. On June 25th, Governor Patrick unveiled the state's plan to recruit, train and retain workers with disabilities across state government. The MRC played a major role in the development of this plan and will use it

as an additional tool to assist people with disabilities in securing competitive employment.

We continue to support and follow the Commonwealth's Olmstead Plan, which is a blueprint for the state to follow in its implementation of the federal Olmstead decision that guarantees people with disabilities the right to live in the least restrictive environment. The MRC used this plan to leverage community resources for our consumers to live independently in the community.

As part of the federal stimulus, the MRC was awarded $6 million in vocational rehabilitation funding and $1.3 million in independent living funding by the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) to strengthen our ability to preserve and enhance community living and employment for people with disabilities.

One way the MRC continues to preserve the Community Living Division is to advocate and respond to the needs and requirements of the Acquired Brain Injury Waivers, which will provide community living options to people with brain injuries residing in nursing homes. Equally, while dedicating our time to these matters, I made my Community Living Division stronger by hiring a new Assistant Commissioner.

The hiring of Mitchell Zahn concluded my plan to restructure my leadership team, further advancing my goal of prioritizing community living for people with disabilities.

We faced challenges in 2009, but my goal was to provide our consumers with the most sensible programs and policies possible within our budget and to stay true to our mission to increase the quality of life for people with disabilities through community living and economic self-sufficiency.

Sincerely,

Charles Carr, Commissioner

Assistant Commissioner

As the most recent addition to the MRC's Community Living (CL) Division, my time has been spent in acclimating to the agency, its programs, and organizational culture. The CL Division includes a wide array of services to support people living with disabilities to participate in the community. These include Independent Living Services, Brain Injury Programs, Assistive Technology, Home Care, Turning 22, Protective Services, Supported Living, and a Housing Registry. Additionally, the MRC, working with partners, can facilitate the acquisition of funds for home and vehicle modification. Last year, over 13,000 consumers were served by one or more programs in the CL Division.

In addition to these services, MRC staff were working in partnership with the Office of Medicaid, others in the Executive Office of Health and Human Services and UMass to provide community living options to people with Acquired Brain Injury who currently reside in nursing homes. Through a waiver from the federal government, an additional 105 people living in nursing homes will be identified for community placement next year. They will be provided alternative arrangements to live in the community and receive necessary supports to live there successfully. Over the course of three years, we anticipate serving 300 people through this waiver program.

Despite some challenges, the MRC has among its employ some of the best staff I've ever been lucky enough to work with, who are passionate about independent living and consumer-driven services. Our challenge is to work as closely as we can with each other and our counterparts in other MRC Divisions to minimize the impact of budget reductions and figure out new and cost-effective ways to best serve our consumers.

I look forward to the opportunities and challenges ahead.

Mitchell Zahn, Assistant Commissioner
Community Living Division | MRC

Consumer Testimony

To whom it may concern at MRC Protective Services:

... I am a wife, a mother, and a grandmother of two. I never dreamed that at 45 my life would have to begin again... I was recovering from surgery, when at the door stood a gentleman with the kindest face I have ever seen. The MRC staffer explained he was there to help... I was nervous and scared all at the same time, finally someone was on my side. I felt completely comfortable with the MRC staff. He let me talk and let me cry, all these things that I had not been doing. If it wasn't for this staffer [and the MRC Protective Services] I would still be at home tolerating, enduring, acting, and slowly dying inside. Your staffer gave me the strength and courage to stand up for me for once and for that I will always be forever grateful!

Sincerely,
J.P. (City withheld)

If you or someone you know is a person with a disability and feel you are being abused, neglected or exploited by family members, caregivers or others across Massachusetts, please contact the **Disabled Persons Protection Commission (DPPC)** at (617) 727-6465; or (888) 822-0350 V/TTY; or by visiting them at www.mass.dppc.

To report abuse, call DPPC's 24-Hour Hotline at (800) 426-9009.

Assistant Commissioner of Vocational Rehabilitation

The end of Federal Fiscal Year 2009 holds special significance for me, as it represents the end of my first Federal Fiscal Year as Assistant Commissioner of the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Division. I am humbled and proud to be the first person of color to hold this position in the over 50-year history of the organization.

I believe my appointment as Assistant Commissioner is symbolic of the larger vision and strategy that must be embraced in order to allow forward movement and progress of the organization. It is indicative of a time when the organization and, in particular, the Vocational Rehabilitation Division, can no longer continue with business as usual if the changing needs and the changing demographics of our consumers are to be addressed effectively. It speaks volumes of Commissioner Carr and his commitment to ensuring the MRC continues to move forward in its efforts to establish a diverse workforce poised to meet the diverse needs of the consumers served.

This past year was exciting for the Vocational Rehabilitation Division. Despite the downturn in the economy and more people with disabilities turning to the VR Division for services than ever before, as a division we served 15,235 consumers this year. Equally significant is the fact that our counselors and placement specialists assisted 3,202 in obtaining and maintaining employment this year alone. This is no minor feat, as every day we hear of the many companies that are downsizing. And yes, though VR consumers were affected by the downturn in the economy, the creativeness and determination of our staff shines through and is evident in the strategies used to help consumers realize their dream of economic self-sufficiency.

The VR Division has turned up the intensity of its efforts to improve on its service delivery. Due to the availability of federal stimulus funds, we’ve taken steps to revise our waitlist policy and reduce the wait time for services. We’ve devised strategies to increase and improve our marketing to potential employers and, as such, are in the process of

designing a new employer brochure. In addition, we are hiring a group of Employment Service Specialists who will focus their attention on identifying and securing sector-based and emerging-growth-industry employment opportunities for our consumers. In addition, these Employment Service Specialists will develop on-the-job training opportunities for our consumers and devise employer-based training and employment models that can be replicated across industries over time.

This past year we've spent much time on succession planning to address the VR Division's aging workforce. A significant number of managers, supervisors and counselors are eligible to retire and, as such, we are focusing our attention on maintaining today's workforce while building and planning for the future. Thanks again to federal stimulus funds, we were able to expand our internship program and offer paid internships to graduate students enrolled in rehabilitation counseling programs in the hope these interns will move into positions as current staff retire.

In closing, I want to extend my sincere thanks to the staff of the VR Division for a job well done in Federal Fiscal Year 2009. I am excited to have all of you on my team.

Joan Phillips, Assistant Commissioner
Vocational Rehabilitation Division | MRC

Consumer Testimony

Dear MRC Boston Downtown Area Office:

I am writing you because I [was] asked to reflect on someone who inspired me. Although I have not known Bob W. for very long and we just met my junior year of high school, I just wanted to let you know that he has made a difference in my life. To see someone like him with the challenges he faces through life, I realize that he is a gifted person with a lot of potential to help others achieve their goals in life. I am thanking him for inspiring me to become comfortable with my disability and helping me achieve my goal.

I have grown to develop into a better positive person, work hard and take my education very seriously. As I look forward to my future I will be attending Dean College for 4 years, and continuing dancing to work with kids who have disabilities.

I would like to thank [MRC] and send my best wishes in life to Bob W.

Sincerely,
Karen C., Boston, MA
Dance Major

Dear MRC Brockton Area Office:

Just a Note of Thanks for helping with getting me back to school and expediting the payment process. I start school on September 8, and I am looking forward to going back to work after such a long absence.

Thank you so much and God Bless,
Lisa A., RN, Brockton

Assistant Commissioner of Disability Determination

The MRC DDS faced record-high workloads this past year, a result of a national economic crisis that led to job losses for people with disabilities, as well as others. In turn, it directly generated an increase in the number of applications for Social Security Disability claims.

Despite these challenges, we achieved several significant accomplishments:

1) Approximately 59,000 initial claims were received for Social Security Disability benefits. All these claims were assigned to staff, and over 53,000 claims were adjudicated. Almost half, 46%, of these claims were allowed, which enabled claimants to receive cash and health care benefits.

2) We received approximately 14,400 reconsideration claims requesting a review and reconsideration of a previous denial of claimants' initial disability claims. The DDS adjudicated over 11,500 of these reconsideration claims, of which approximately 30% were granted disability, many due to worsening or additional impairments. We are working to reduce backlogs that developed with these claims.

3) The DDS also processed and adjudicated over 7,000 continuing disability reviews (CDR). Well over 90% of these claims were continued, which allowed these claimants to maintain the benefits they are already receiving.

4) The DDS adjudicated 1,500 disability claims for the Office of Disability Adjudication and Review. This office handles the third level of appeal if the DDS denied the claim at the initial and reconsideration levels. These cases were sent from the Atlanta Region. Our performance assisted the Social Security Administration in reducing hearing backlogs across the country.

Processing times for initial claims is currently 17 days. Reconsideration claims were delayed by an average of 25 days. However, since May 2009, we have hired additional examiners and medical review consultants, which we expect will reduce or eliminate delays in the early part of next year.

Barbara Kinney, Assistant Commissioner
Disability Determination Division | MRC

Consumer Testimony

Dear [MRC DDS Worcester]:

I am writing to you to let you know how grateful I am that I had Karen M. as my Vocational Disability Examiner. I was depressed and discouraged about getting a disability in the first place, especially since [my doctor] would not cooperate, but Karen was so nice to me and made me relax. She said I could call her anytime with questions I had, etc. I was so afraid that I was going to get someone mean and grouchy that would not communicate with me. I thank God that you have Karen in your office who does her job with such caring and compassionate qualities and does her work to her utmost ability. This is truly her line of work.

God Bless,
Christine M., Spencer, MA

Dear [MRC DDS Boston]:

I wanted to thank you for being incredibly helpful as I was recovering from my two hip replacements. Nothing is more intimidating than going into a system where it often is hard to reach people, to get clear answers, and to deal with a bureaucracy at the very time that one is dealing with financial crisis and the trauma of surgery. You were so clear in your explanations and so willing to help that it turned what could have been a horrible experience into something that approached being pleasant, at least in my interactions with you. I've worked in mental health and I've worked as a hospice chaplain so I am pretty sensitive to interpersonal dynamics. You were always supportive and you even returned my phone calls! For all this I'm extremely grateful and I really wish you the best as you continue with your wok.

Sincerely,
Rev. Timothy K., Somerville, MA

Consumer Liaison

The MRC has a staff member working within the Commissioner's Office as an Ombudsperson who serves as a consumer liaison, primarily to address concerns regarding delivery of services and to answer a variety of disability-related questions. People who typically contact the Ombudsperson include consumers, family members, advocates, legislators and their aides, other state government personnel and MRC staff members.

The Ombudsperson provides information and referral services and assists callers to better understand the services offered by the MRC. If a complaint is brought forward, the Ombudsperson promptly reviews the matter and works with consumers and MRC staff to find a solution. If this type of intervention does not bring about resolution, there is a formal appeal process. Mediation services are also available to MRC-VR consumers.

The Ombudsperson assists consumers across all service programs and may be contacted by telephone at (617) 204-3603 or (800) 245-6543 (voice and TTY), through the agency website at www.mass.gov/mrc or by writing to the MRC Administrative Office in Boston.

"The goal of our services is to promote dignity through employment and community living, one person at a time. All people with disabilities in Massachusetts must have opportunities to contribute as productive members of their communities and families as a result of services provided by the MRC."
~ Charles Carr, Commissioner ~

State Rehabilitation Council

The purpose of the MRC State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) is to advise the MRC about the delivery of effective rehabilitation services to promote employment and independence of people with disabilities (except those with blindness) in Massachusetts.

Council members are appointed by and serve at the pleasure of the Governor. The membership reflects a diverse representation of people with disabilities and disability advocacy groups; current and former consumers of vocational rehabilitation and independent living services; people in business and industry; the medical profession; education; and community rehabilitation programs. Members of the MRC State Rehabilitation Council are volunteers who donate their time to fulfill the mission of the SRC.

SRC Mission

Our mission is to function as the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission's Vocational Rehabilitation Advisory Council focused on supporting and advising the agency in the provision of high-quality, value-based training and services that lead to meaningful and sustainable competitive employment.

SRC Vision

Our vision is to provide a dynamic pathway to economic self-sufficiency for all people with disabilities to break the historic bonds of poverty.

Youcef "Joe" Bellil **Chairperson**	Serena Powell **Vice Chairperson**	Warren McGee **Secretary**	Patricia Sheely **Member at Large**	Stephen Reynolds **Member at Large**
Youcef "Joe" Bellil *Director, EasterSeals*	Jay O'Conner *Manager, UPS Hub*	Francis Barresi *Advocate*	Warren McGee *Advocate*	Lusa Lo *Provider*
Mary Margaret Moore *Director, ILCNSCA*	Toby Fisher *Advocate*	Patricia Sheely *Advocate*	Owen Doonan *Advocate*	Serena Powell *Exec. Dir., CWS*
Stephen Reynolds *Reynolds Resources*	Terry McLaughlin *Advocate*	Barbara Lybarger *General Counsel, MOD*	Charles Vernon *MRC, Unit Super.*	Mark Bornemann *LoJack Corp.*
		Charles Carr *Commissioner, MRC*		

MRC Finances: Community Living Programs 7/1/08 - 6/30/09

CL: Consumers Served

Independent Living Centers:	8,000
Home Care Services:	1,900
Brain Injury Services:	1,690
Assistive Technology:	904
Turning 22 Services:	415
Protective Services:	272
Housing Registry:	219
Supported Living Services:	144

CL: Services Purchased

Home Care Services:	$5,764,460
Independent Living Centers:	$4,487,557
Brain Injury Services:	$2,006,000
Supported Living Services:	$1,514,116
IL Turning 22 Services:	$1,349,953
Assistive Technology:	$ 934,859
Protective Services:	$ 644,455
Housing Registry:	$ 88,888

CL: Facts at a Glance

Consumers Actively Receiving Services:	13,544
Total Funds Expended:	$16,790,288
Cost per Consumer Served:	$1,240

VR: Competitive Employment in Massachusetts

The MRC successfully placed 3,202 people with disabilities into employment based on their choices, interests, needs and skills in FY09.

These rehabilitated employees earned $56.1 million in their first year of employment.

Estimated public benefits savings from people assisted by the MRC in MA were $26.9 million.

The returns to society based on increases in lifetime earnings range from $14 to $18 for each $1 invested in the MRC Vocational Rehabilitation program.

$5 is returned to the government through income taxes and reduced public assistance payments for every $1 invested in the MRC Vocational Rehabilitation program.

Average Hourly Wage:	$12.43
Average Weekly Hours Worked:	28.4

Who Are Our VR Consumers?

Psychiatric Disabilities:	37.6%
Learning Disabilities:	15.7%
Substance Abuse:	10.7%
Orthopedic Disabilities:	10.3%
Deaf and Hard of Hearing:	5.8%
Mental Retardation:	2.9%
Neurological Disabilities:	2.3%
Traumatic Brain Injury:	2.1%
Other Disabilities:	12.6%

Average Age:	35
Female:	45.8%
Male:	54.2%
White:	73.6%
Black:	15.0%
Hispanic:	7.8%
Asian/Pacific Islander:	2.8%
Native American:	0.8%

VR: Facts at a Glance

Consumers Actively Receiving Services:	15,235
Consumers Enrolled in Training/Education Programs:	11,543
Consumers with Significant Disabilities Employed:	3,202
Consumers Employed with Medical Insurance:	93.8%
Consumers Satisfied with Services:	84%

MRC Finances: VR Services to Youth 7/1/08 - 6/30/09

Historically, the agency has just looked at the financial information for the three divisions within the MRC; however, this year Commissioner Carr wanted to look at the number of youth ***served***, not simply referred. In alignment with his commitment to transition efforts and placing youth with disabilities within the community, he is making this a priority.

VR: Youth Served (Ages 16-22)*

The Vocational Rehabilitation Program served 5,546 youth ages 16 to 22 during FY09.

636 young consumers were placed in employment, with an average hourly wage of $10.92.

Employed young consumers worked an average of 27.6 hours per week.

226 High School Students were served by the *Transition Works* Grant program which is in its second year. *Transition Works* is a 5-year, $500,000 demonstration grant funded by the U.S. Department of Education to develop best practices for transitioning youth with disabilities from school to work.

* Age at application for MRC services.

VR: Who Are Our Young Consumers?

Males:	57.5%
Females:	42.5%

Age Profile (% served)

16	2.9%
17	15.2%
18	29.9%
19	23.8%
20	11.9%
21	8.7%
22	7.5%

Referral Source

688 Referral:	20.1%
Lead Education Agency:	6.7%
TAC-Assigned:	<.1%
Other Referral Source:	73.2%

Disability Profile

Sensory/Communicative:	8.4%
Physical/Mobility:	12.8%
Cognitive/Psychological:	78.8%

Youth: Facts at a Glance

Youth Actively Receiving Services:	5,546
Youth Enrolled in Training/Education Programs:	1,757
Average Hourly Wage for Employed Youth:	$10.92

MRC Finances: Disability Determination 10/1/08 - 9/30/09

DDS: SSI/DI Claims Processed

Total Receipt of Cases:	87,611
Total Disposition of Cases:	74,062
Initial Claims Filed:	58,385
% Allowed:	46.2%
CDR Receipts:	8,500
CDR Dispositions:	7,376

DDS: Purchased Services

Consultative Examinations Purchased:	18,862
Consultative Examination Rate:	25.3%
Medical Evidence of Record Purchased:	63,831
Medical Evidence of Record Rate:	85.7%

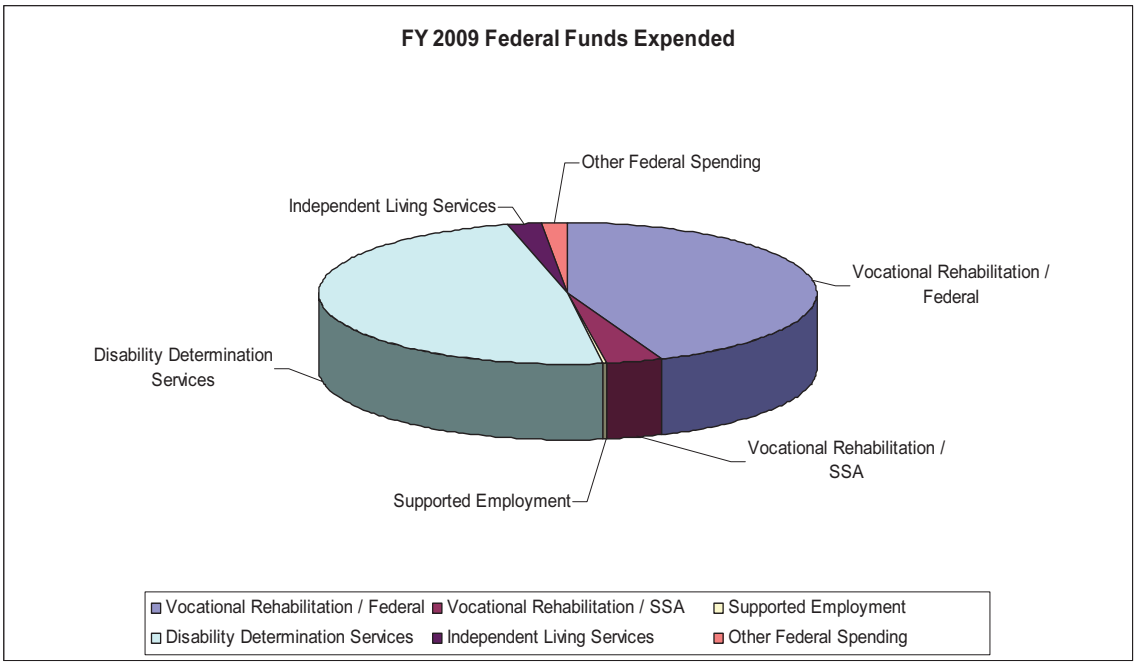
Total Medical Costs:	$7,424,962
Total Budget:	$41,008,905
Cost Per Case:	$550.59

DDS: Facts at a Glance

Total Disposition of SSI/DI Cases:	74,062
Accuracy of Decisions:	92%
Federal Accuracy of Decision Standard:	90%

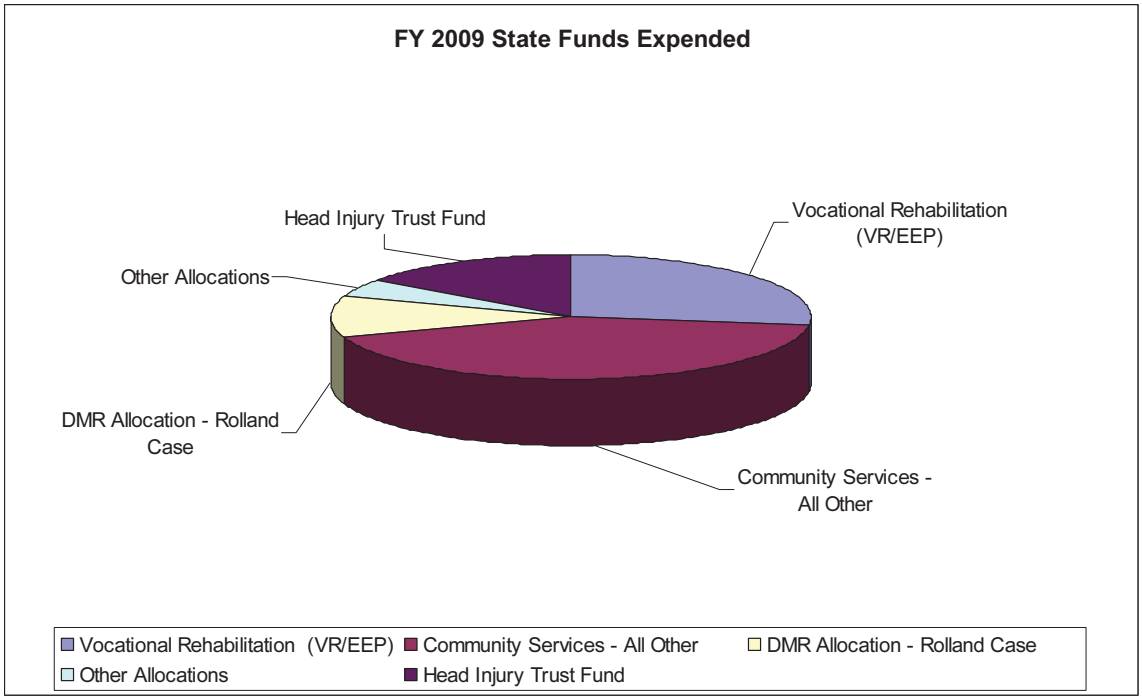
MRC Finances: In Sum for Federal FY 10/1/08 - 9/30/09

Federal Funds Expended	FY2009
Vocational Rehabilitation / Federal	34,799,984
Vocational Rehabilitation / SSA	2,798,863
Supported Employment	299,299
Disability Determination Services	41,008,905
Independent Living Services	1,617,008
Other Federal Spending	1,374,226
Total	**$81,898,285**



MRC Finances: In Sum for State FY 7/1/08 - 6/30/09

State Funds Expended	FY2009
Vocational Rehabilitation (VR/EEP)	17,944,832
Community Services - All Other	28,422,107
DMR Allocation - Rolland Case	6,977,735
Other Allocations	3,299,075
Head Injury Trust Fund	9,887,631
Total	**$66,531,380**



In Remembrance

The Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission would like to remember and honor the life of our dear colleague and friend, George Brocke, Jr., South District Director and 17-year employee of the agency who passed away June 8, 2009.

George, you are greatly missed by your colleagues and friends at the MRC.

George was a passionate Manager who referred to his team as VR Champions, but to many at the MRC he was more than a Manager. He reached out to his colleagues during difficult times, times of sickness and grief, but he also rejoiced with them during happy times, like the birth of a child, marriages, and promotions.

George's hearty laughter echoed through the halls and reminded us that the MRC is more than work, it's a family, and that no matter how challenging the work gets, "we are all blessed."

The MRC Looking Forward

As FY2009 comes to a close, the MRC looks forward to celebrating the **20th Anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)** throughout 2010.

"People come to you and expect to be told what to do. It's your job to place that power back into their hands. You are there to help them find out what they want to do, not to decide what you think is best for them."

Ed Roberts (1939-1995)
Disability Activist and
Co-Founder of the World Institute on Disability

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