

# MASSACHUSETTS REHABILITATION COMMISSION

*Celebrating 50 Years*



**2006 Annual Report**



**MITT ROMNEY**  
Governor

**KERRY HEALEY**  
Lieutenant Governor

**TIMOTHY MURPHY**  
Secretary  
Executive Office of Health and Human Services

**ELMER C. BARTELS**  
Commissioner of Rehabilitation

**THE MASSACHUSETTS REHABILITATION COMMISSION**

**Administrative Offices**

Fort Point Place • 27 Wormwood Street, Suite 600 • Boston, MA 02210-1616

617-204-3600 (voice) • 617-204-3868 (TDD) • 1-800-245-6543 (toll free) • 617-727-1354 (fax)

[www.mass.gov/mrc](http://www.mass.gov/mrc)

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## Mission Statement

The vision of the MRC is to promote equality, empowerment and productive independence of individuals with disabilities. These goals are achieved through organizational innovation committed to creating options that enhance and encourage personal choice and risk taking toward independence and employment.

The purpose of the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission is to provide comprehensive services to people with disabilities that will maximize their quality of life and economic self-sufficiency in the community.

This is accomplished through multiple programs in the MRC: the Vocational Rehabilitation Services Program, the Community Services Program and the Disability Determination Services Program.

## Executive Management Team

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ELMER C. BARTELS  
Commissioner of Rehabilitation

JOHN A. CHAPPELL, JR.  
Deputy Commissioner, Community Services

KASPER M. GOSHGARIAN  
Deputy Commissioner, Vocational Rehabilitation Services and Disability Determination Services

JANNA ZWERNER  
Chief of Staff



ANTONIO R. HARRIS, Photographer



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It is with great pleasure and pride that I present this Annual Report for 2006, a year that marks a major milestone for the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission. It was 50 years ago, in June of 1956, when the MRC was first created to promote equality, empowerment and productive independence for individuals with disabilities. Since then, hundreds of thousands of people have been helped by our services.

The MRC began as a single program, serving a relatively small number of people. We are now a full-service agency with a wide variety of programs including vocational rehabilitation services, independent living services and disability determination services. These services range from providing assistive technology devices and training to loans for adaptive housing; from independent living services to supporting consumers as they start their own businesses; from helping students obtain the skills they need to compete in today's job market to arranging for home care services for people to retain their independence at home; from traumatic brain injury services to protective services for adults with disabilities who are abused by their caregiver; from disability determination claims to obtain cash benefits to turning 22 services for young adults with disabilities entering the adult service delivery system. In addition, the MRC's Disability Determination Service (DDS) is one of the most award-winning DDSs in the nation, top in its class for quality and productivity.

In the past state fiscal year, the MRC, in partnership with consumers and providers, assisted 3,602 individuals with disabilities to reach their employment goals. The individuals employed earned

an average of \$11.50 per hour and worked 30 hours per week. The combined annual earnings of consumers who went to work with the help of the MRC are more than \$60 million. For every dollar spent in vocational rehabilitation, \$5 are returned to the federal and state tax treasuries and \$14 - \$18 is added to the general economy, benefiting society as a whole.

We have witnessed up close the cost benefit of every service we provide assisting people to live independently in the community and go to work, if possible. By supporting individuals with disabilities to leave institutions such as nursing homes, there is a definitive savings to the state in assisting people to use fewer Medicaid dollars; instead of spending \$70,000 per year to live in a nursing home, half that is spent living in the community at a much higher standard of living.

As you will see from the stories featured in this report, one of the MRC's greatest strengths is its connection to the larger community. Our relationships with employers, government agencies at all levels, community based organizations as well as individuals with disabilities, enables the MRC to provide the highest level of service and the best chance for success.

Thank you for taking the time to learn more about the important work of the MRC. I look forward to the start of our next 50 years of making a difference in the lives of the people with disabilities whom we serve.

The Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission was established on August 6, 1956, with the passage of Chapter 602 of the Acts of 1956, amending Chapter 6 of the Massachusetts General Laws, to operate the national Public Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program. Prior to that, the Massachusetts VR program was operated as a division of the State Department of Education.

The national VR program originated in 1920 when thousands of civilians injured on the job found themselves with little or no access to retraining so they could return to work. In order to address those needs, Congress passed the Smith-Fess Act in 1920 and authorized funding for a federal VR program to be operated by the states.

In 1935, Congress enacted the first permanent funding for the state-federal partnership to carry out the mission of VR in all states. In 1943, the Rehabilitation Act amendments expanded the VR program to include individuals with psychiatric disabilities and mental retardation, authorizing physical restoration services to enable persons with physical disabilities to go to work.

When the Social Security Disability Insurance program was initiated by the Congress in the late 1950's, each state was authorized to create a Disability Determination Service to determine eligibility for the SSDI program. In Massachusetts, the DDS was situated within the MRC in order to take advantage of its existing relationships with the medical profession, as well as the special skills of staff in making judgments about a claimant's functional capacity to work. Additionally, applicants who had

rehabilitation potential could be referred to the VR program for additional assistance in returning to work.

From the MRC's inception, there has been a statutory advisory council whose purpose was to advise the Commissioner on matters related to the delivery of rehabilitation services. Over the years, the council has evolved from an advisory board comprised of the various commissioners of nine state human service

Commissioners of the MRC	
Francis Harding	1956 — 1966
John Levis	1967 — 1972
Russell O'Connell	1973 — 1976
Elmer C. Bartels	1977 — present

agencies to a rehabilitation council composed primarily of consumers and advocates. The changes in the role and composition of the Statewide Rehabilitation Council, reflecting the growth of a VR program encouraging active consumer participation in the

rehabilitation process through the exercise of informed choice, were codified in the 1992 Rehabilitation Act amendments.

In the early 1970's, the VR program began receiving federal monies which were used to augment services and establish new Independent Living Centers (ILC) throughout the Commonwealth. The MRC supported the development of the Boston Center for Independent Living, the first Independent Living Center in Massachusetts, and only the second ILC in the nation. Shortly thereafter, the MRC assisted in the creation of the Stavros ILC in Amherst and the ILC in Worcester.

In the late 70's, when the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1978 funded ILCs with federal monies, the Centers in the northeast and southeast part of the state were added. Over the years since, ILCs were created in Berkshire County, the North Shore, the Cape,



Fall River, MetroWest, and most recently, the Multicultural IL Center in Dorchester. Today, funding for the IL Centers consists of \$1.4 million in federal Rehabilitation Act monies and \$4.2 million in state appropriated monies.

In 1974, Congress created the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program for people with disabilities, including children. The disability determination function was again assigned to the MRC-DDS and the agency began adjudicating more than 42,000 claims per year.

In 1974, the Legislature created the Extended Employment Program (EEP) as part of the MRC to fund sheltered employment for people with significant disabilities who were unable to work in the competitive labor market. Since then, this program has been significantly modified and expanded in an effort to move as many consumers as possible out of workshops and into the community. Today, EEP is providing supervised supported employment services in a community setting, opening up job opportunities and increasing wages for people who are not able to work completely independently.

As the need for additional IL services continued to grow in the mid 1980's, along with increasing constituency demands, the MRC set out to create a more comprehensive approach to serving the disability community. To begin with, in 1985, the Statewide Head Injury Program (SHIP) for persons who sustained a traumatic brain injury was funded by the Legislature. The Home Care Assistance Program (HCAP) for people with disabilities was transferred from the Department of Social Services in 1986. Protective Services for vulnerable individuals with disabilities

who are being abused by a caregiver became the newest program in 1988. A Work Personal Care Assistance Program had also been initiated with state monies and later, in the early 90's, was superseded by the state CommonHealth Program.

At just about the same time, the Boston DDS started expanding its efforts to assist new and growing disability populations. In 1983, the HIV Outreach Project began in order to help individuals receive the benefits for which they were eligible, particularly those who were hospitalized or homebound. Their now well-known Homeless Unit was founded in 1985, the first and only such initiative in the nation. The many years of outstanding work of the DDS Homeless staff was recognized nationally in 2004 with the Solutions Through Alternative Remedies (STAR) Award from the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty.

In 1984, the passage of the special education law, Chapter 688, brought an expanded role to the agency. This role was a natural fit since many students with disabilities would eventually need assistance with obtaining further education, seeking employment and living independently after high school. The MRC is now responsible for determining eligibility for Ch. 688 for all agency consumers of the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) and has been receiving transitional assigned cases from the EOHHS Bureau of Transitional Planning since 1992. In fact, the agency now receives the most Ch. 688 referrals, serving 1,067 youth with disabilities in FY '06.

When the Turning 22 Program was authorized, the planning and provision of IL services for youth with disabilities was assigned to the MRC. Supported Living services were invented in

the mid 90's by the MRC to divert people with disabilities from being institutionalized and for the purpose of helping consumers permanently leave institutions and nursing homes. Supported Living and Turning 22 funds, as well as Rolland and SHIP monies, are still being utilized toward this end.

In 1993, a Head Injury Treatment Services Trust Fund was established by the Massachusetts Legislature. In order to fund this initiative, a \$125 fine was levied against those convicted of Driving Under the Influence (DUI) and monies were collected and turned over to the MRC in 1997. In 2000, collection of a \$25 Speeding Surcharge was added to the Trust Fund coffers as well. By 2003, the Legislature increased the base speeding ticket surcharge to \$50 and the DUI fine was increased to \$250. By fiscal year '05, the Head Injury Trust Fund was bringing in approximately \$5.5 million per year to help support the services needed by this expanding population.

In 1994, a state Housing Bond Bill established the MRC Adaptive Housing Loan Program. The passage of the Assistive Technology Act of 1998 provided additional federal dollars. The MRC's expertise in assistive technology (AT) had continued to grow with what is now \$800,000 in state AT assessment and purchase monies for people with disabilities. In 2005, the Assistive Technology Loan Program, funded with both federal and state monies, was founded. Moreover, the MRC was designated by the Governor in 2006 to be the lead state agency under the federal Assistive Technology Act.

Finally in 1998, the Rehabilitation Act was again amended and reauthorized as Title IV of the Workforce Investment Act

(WIA). The inclusion of the reauthorization of the Rehabilitation Act in WIA served to further emphasize the fundamental purpose of the Rehabilitation Act to assist individuals with disabilities to go to work, underscoring the VR program as part of the nation's workforce development system.

Under the present "order of selection," the MRC VR program serves only eligible individuals who have been determined to be the most significantly disabled. Each of the more than 3,600 people who go to work every year pay state and federal taxes, depend less on government benefits and contribute to the economic and social vitality of their communities.

In the early 2000's, the MRC confronted housing and transportation issues that have been persistent barriers to employment and independence for people with disabilities. A Housing Registry had already been established and was now made available on the Internet. Grant money was secured to establish a new Travel Training program, followed shortly by the Transportation Options Project. In 2003, the Good News Garage partnership began to distribute donated and refurbished vehicles to consumers who were ready to work but could not otherwise overcome their transportation barriers.

Together, the various programs of the MRC provide a comprehensive array of services for individuals with disabilities in the Commonwealth, helping consumers achieve a secure future, including living independently in the community and being successful in the working world.







Jamie Glier — Greenfield

If you have ever had the courage to sit at a potter's wheel you know it takes concentration, coordination and skill to create even the most rudimentary object and it's unlikely it will be judged a work of art. Consider then the amazing success of Jamie Glier, a 21 year old artist/potter diagnosed with autism.

Jamie comes from a creative family so perhaps his artistic talents should not be a surprise. But, consider these facts; Jamie's autism makes it very difficult for him to communicate and he must have an aide with him at all times. He is very sensitive to touch, walks with difficulty and often appears to be detached or disinterested in what's happening around him. Jamie, however, found a way, with the help of many people, to communicate through his pottery and make a living in the process.

"Jamie's pottery has become his voice in the world," says Jennifer McNary, a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor (VRC) at the MRC's Greenfield VR office. She is one of more than 210 VRC's who visit local high schools, helping students with disabilities transition into the world of adults. Jennifer is delighted to tell the story of how she and others worked together to make Jamie's occupational talents blossom.

Jennifer began working with Jamie as he was transitioning from the Department of Education's student services to the Department of Mental Retardation's adult services. She learned that, while a student at Mohawk Regional High School in Shelburne Falls, Massachusetts, Jamie began working with clay and a potter's wheel as a form of sensory therapy. At first, he was so stiff he could barely lean over the potter's wheel. Eventually he became relaxed and able to easily work at the wheel producing amazing plates and vessels.

Jennifer watched Jamie work with Steve Earp and Pam Pieropan Adorno, master potters who guided and trained him. She quickly realized the designs were the result of Jamie's own energy and imagination. When the Glier's approached Jennifer about self-employment for Jamie she enthusiastically agreed and immediately began exploring the possibility of turning Jamie's hobby into his career.

There was just one problem: Jamie needed a studio he could use all year long to create inventory to support sales of his pottery, but his current worksite was not heated. Jennifer knew changing locations wasn't a viable option because his studio was accessible and had most of the equipment he needed to design and create his pottery. She and his instructor examined the situation and agreed a wood burning stove would solve the problem. The MRC purchased a stove which burns "pellets" of compressed wood. Safe,



"Working with Jamie Glier provided some interesting challenges in that he and I were unable to communicate in traditional ways. However, Jamie has clearly developed very strong relationships with his family and others around him. He is able to let people know when he is happy, enthusiastic, interested or has just had enough of something. It is really thrilling that pottery offered Jamie a vehicle to interact with this community on a whole new level. I was honored that the MRC could play a part in making this business fly."

Jennifer McNary  
Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor  
MRC Greenfield VR Office • 4 years of service

efficient and effective, Jamie now has a heated studio where he can work all year long. The MRC also purchased a supply of pellets and some equipment for pottery-making to support his work during the first year.

The next step for any new artist is to be "launched" into the community, so the team working with Jamie agreed to organize an art gallery opening and reception. Enter Lynn Shulda, a smart businesswoman who operates the highly successful Salmon Falls Artisans Showroom in Shelburne Falls. Lynn showcases the work of local artisans and knows talent when she sees it. When asked to host an opening for Jamie, Lynn eagerly agreed.

Jennifer and Lynn knew they needed to do more than just display his work; it would be critical to tell Jamie's story since he was unable to do so himself. His brother, Seth, began working on that story creating a DVD set to music of his own composition. Jennifer arranged for the MRC to purchase a portable DVD player to showcase his story during the opening. She also knew the DVD player would be

important in the future whenever his family was introducing him and his work to a potential exhibitor.

The opening was a big success and Salmon Falls Artisans Showroom continues to carry Jamie's work, known as Bird Babe Pottery. His work is also exhibited at other local galleries. Jamie continues to produce art in his (heated!) studio and is evolving as a potter and a person. He claps when he is happy and tosses clay to the ground when he is dissatisfied with his work...not really that different from many other artists.

If you ask the MRC's Jennifer McNary about her role in Jamie's story she will tell you she feels honored to be part of the collaboration that helped Jamie accomplish his goals. His mother will tell you, "Jennifer was always so excited about Jamie's work and used that enthusiasm to build the momentum needed to establish Jamie as an artist. She was a great resource for all of us and helped put all the 'puzzle pieces' together that resulted in Jamie's success."



Noel Rivera— Somerville

Imagine beginning your day with your bed shaking! Well, Noel Rivera, who is profoundly deaf, uses a bed shaker to wake himself each day. Noel is grateful for this assistive technology device and several others he has received through the MRC over the years. Most of all he is thankful the MRC has never given up on him. That commitment has meant that, today, Noel is living independently, has a great job and drives his own car.

The road to independence, however, was quite rocky. Noel's family is from Puerto Rico. They speak Spanish and never learned American Sign Language. Despite challenges in communicating with his family, Noel has a strong network of family support, especially from his sister Wanda. His English is limited and his communication issues frequently stand in his way. Noel graduated from the Horace Mann School for the Deaf at age 22, but had trouble finding the type of job he wanted so he could live on his own.

Over the years, Noel received services from the MRC several times. He received services from the Brockton MRC VR office but eventually moved and began working with Sheryl Spera, a Rehabilitation Counselor for the Deaf at the Somerville VR office. Sheryl is also Deaf and uses American Sign Language, so she and Noel usually have no problems communicating with one another.

Each time Noel worked with the MRC, the goal was for him to attain the marketable skills he would need for competitive employment and while he demonstrated some improvement every time, it was not enough to be considered fully rehabilitated.

Sheryl strongly encouraged Noel to attend classes at Deaf, Inc. to improve his English as well as his social and independent living skills. Because of his continuing work there, he is communicating better and his reading is steadily improving.

Sheryl's vocational counseling with Noel included resume writing and developing references as well as a referral to Triangle, Inc. for vocational evaluation in 2004. Noel had held several different kinds of jobs, from cooking to cleaning cars, and she wanted more specific information about his skill set. Triangle, Inc., located in Malden, works to support people with disabilities to live independent and self-sufficient lives. They had established a new unit working with deaf and hard-of-hearing consumers and Sheryl thought it would be a good match for Noel. The staff at Triangle agreed and provided him with some additional work adjustment training to further develop his skills before finding him a job. He learned carpentry, how to install sheetrock and drywall and painting while at Triangle. Then an interesting thing happened...the trainee became an employee. After only six months, the staff at Triangle contacted Sheryl and said they wanted to hire Noel!



"As a Deaf person, I can relate to the frustrations and experiences so often associated with trying to communicate with hearing people. My first-hand experience is critical to the counseling and guidance I provide to the deaf and hard of hearing consumers with whom I work. My goal is to assist them to figure out what they're passionate about and what motivates them so that they can achieve their goals."

Sheryl Spera  
Rehabilitation Counselor for the Deaf  
MRC Somerville VR Office • 13 years of service

Bob Berard, the Facility Manager at Triangle explained, "It was apparent that Noel was a quick and willing learner and a very capable worker. It is unusual for anyone to make the conversion from a consumer to an employee but Noel has the personality to do the job." So in 2005 Noel was hired as a Team Leader directing maintenance crews. The MRC continued to support him until he was confident in his position. His efforts so impressed the staff that in less than a year he received Triangle's Worker of the Year Award in recognition of his dedication and hard work.

Today, Noel supervises a team of Triangle consumers, most of whom are not Deaf or Hard of Hearing. He has been known to use some pretty creative ways to communicate with his team using gestures, body language and facial expressions. The staff at Triangle also helped create a communication chart for him. Noel teaches his crew how to perform janitorial tasks while working off-site at 10 residential units and some satellite offices. He is a self-motivated leader known for his patience and enthusiasm. Bob Berard already has big plans for Noel, recognizing his capabilities are well beyond general maintenance work.

Sheryl was delighted but not entirely surprised by Noel's success. "I knew he was an excellent worker but his problems communicating stood in his way and he hadn't yet found a good match for his skills," Sheryl explained. "The job at Triangle helped Noel turn an important corner in his life. There is an energy about Noel today that wasn't there before," she said. "His communication skills have improved tremendously and he has developed a circle of friends he didn't have before. Many of them are also Deaf. He loves living on his own and is thankful he no longer relies on SSI benefits," Sheryl added.

Sheryl is noticeably proud of Noel's independence and confirms his involvement with the MRC is closed; he is "rehabilitated" by any definition of that term. But for Noel, the pride comes from knowing he is on his own after working so hard. That independence is priceless.





Mary Hobson — Roxbury

Many people go through life with invisible disabilities. They are often misunderstood and struggle with unrealistic expectations of their abilities. While they do not want to be defined by their disability they may still need simple accommodations like additional time completing a task or patience and understanding. Mary Hobson understands only too well what this struggle is like. She also understands how valuable a partner can be in

dealing with these challenges. For Mary that partner is Brynell Francis-Smikle, a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor at the MRC's Roxbury VR office. Their partnership began in 1998 when Mary was 26 and her psychiatrist referred her to the MRC.

Mary grew up in DSS custody because her parents had physically and emotionally abused her. She has grande mal seizures that cannot be effectively controlled by medication. The seizures, often brought on by stress, have caused short-term memory and cognitive problems for Mary. These issues resulted in Mary dropping out of high school. Mary is also a single parent of two daughters she adores and has repeatedly been forced to fight for their custody because of her troubled past.

"When I first met Mary in March 2000 I immediately recognized her intelligence and determination," says Brynell. She learned that

while on welfare and struggling to raise her daughters, Mary obtained her GED, held several volunteer positions and worked at a few jobs which she had to leave due to her seizure episodes. This work had given Mary the chance to develop her interest in art and technology. After extensive vocational counseling Mary decided to become a self-employed graphic designer. Her personal goal was to get off of welfare.

Brynell recognized that Mary needed academic credentials and training to pursue her vocational goals. She also realized Mary's learning style and seizures would make it difficult. They decided to enroll Mary at Bunker Hill Community College and the MRC purchased a tape recorder to help her with class work. Regrettably, Mary suffered numerous seizures causing her to fall behind and again drop out of school.

September 2002, was a very difficult time for Mary and she temporarily gave up her work with the MRC, but she did not give up on herself. She continued to learn new graphic design computer programs and began reading, at her own pace, all the books she could find on starting your own business.

In July 2003, Mary reconnected with Brynell. "Here was a determined young woman. She had some academic failures which have compounded the damage of her abuse and yet, she just picks herself up again and tries another approach," observed Brynell. Mary wanted to provide her children with what she



"I always focused on Mary's assets and dedication instead of what she can't do or the negative events in her past. I realized early in my work with her that it was important to be positive and future-oriented as well as realistic. I have always tried to be a constant in her life, often helping Mary pick herself back up and move forward. It is gratifying to see what a difference that relationship has made in Mary's success."

Brynell Francis-Smikle  
Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor  
MRC Roxbury VR Office • 18 years of service

hadn't had; an education, financial stability and a parent with a successful career. Mary and Brynell agreed that more formal education was out of the question. Fortunately, Mary had taught herself the skills necessary to become a talented graphic designer even if she didn't have the formal credentials.

Years of experience taught Brynell that self-employment would be an excellent option for Mary. It would give her the chance to work on her own without the pressure of a 9-to-5 office environment. Most importantly, Brynell knew Mary's chances of success would be better if she was doing something she wanted to do. In the summer of 2003, Brynell talked with Mary about taking the *Entrepreneurship for Artists* training offered by Jewish Vocational Services. It met for two months, once a week. The format and content were just what Mary needed and, in September, 2003, she finished the program. Mary and Brynell then developed a comprehensive list of all the services and items needed to establish a home-based business. In June of 2004, Mary received a \$3,000 grant from the MRC to purchase necessary supplies and equipment.

Today Mary is the sole proprietor of *TECNĒK Graphic Design*. Her business cards indicate she "designs graphics and technical documentation to enhance business owners' current marketing pieces including desktop publishing, layout, typesetting and drawings and renderings." She rightly considers herself a success even while she struggles to build up her clientele. Brynell continued providing post employment services, allowing Mary to purchase a new computer and digital camera for her business.

Mary is the first to acknowledge the value of her partnership with Brynell. "Other agencies or places with whom I've worked will 'move you up and out' when you achieve their objectives. Brynell never did that. I knew I was always more to her than just a name on a checklist to be crossed off. Her positive feedback kept me going more than once," says Mary. Although Mary's case was closed in May 2006, she continues to keep in touch with Brynell and gives her regular updates on her business and her life.





Anne Hanson — Lowell

In March of 2005, when Anne Hanson arrived for her appointment with Rachel Chapman, a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor at the MRC's Lowell VR office, she was, quite frankly, scared. While she was gradually recovering from a stroke she had a year earlier, she was facing the likely prospect of having to give up her career (and passion) as a jewelry designer. Anne had learned to walk and talk again and she had regained some of the use of her right hand but it was unlikely she would be able to

use the tools she needed to transform silver and gold into the works of art she had created in the past. For an artist this can be a devastating adjustment.

Enter Rachel Chapman, who uses a wheelchair. Anne's immediate response was, "Here is a person who really understands what I am going through. I felt immediately more comfortable." What Anne was also about to learn was that Rachel was as creative in her work as Anne was in hers. Their ability to "think outside the box," in combination with the talents of others, was going to pay off for all concerned.

At first Rachel worked with Anne on driving again. She knew this would allow Anne to be more independent and feel some success. Rachel immediately referred her to an Adaptive Driving

Program which did an evaluation of Anne's driving skills. At first Anne was nervous but with the help of a spinner knob attached to the car's steering wheel her driving skills returned. After a few lessons, she took her road test and received her new driver's license.

At the same time, they began exploring the possibility of Anne returning to her career as a professional metal jewelry-making artisan. Rachel was determined to thoroughly consider all the possible adaptations that might enable Anne to work as a jewelry designer again before she would dismiss this as a career option. Rachel contacted the MRC's Independent Living and Assistive Technology Department (ILATD) to see if they knew of any viable adaptations which could help Anne.

Research revealed that many artisans with disabilities focus solely on design and then send their designs to factories for mass production. Few do both design and make the jewelry themselves, which was Anne's goal. Sue Lin, a Rehabilitation Engineer at the MRC, did a thorough survey of Anne's workspace, tools, machinery and work process. With Anne's determination, Rachel's support and Sue's creativity, they began discussing potential solutions to the obstacles Anne faced. While they identified many opportunities for assistive technology, Sue realized that very few facilities existed to fabricate customized items for the jewelry-making trade.



"I have always felt creative exploration is an essential part of the work I do. I fully understood Anne's commitment to her art. Jewelry design was her strength and what she knew. I did not want her to give up on that dream without exploring all available options. I guess you could say that keeping peoples' dreams alive is an important part of my work too."

Rachel Chapman  
Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor  
MRC Lowell VR Office • 6 years of service

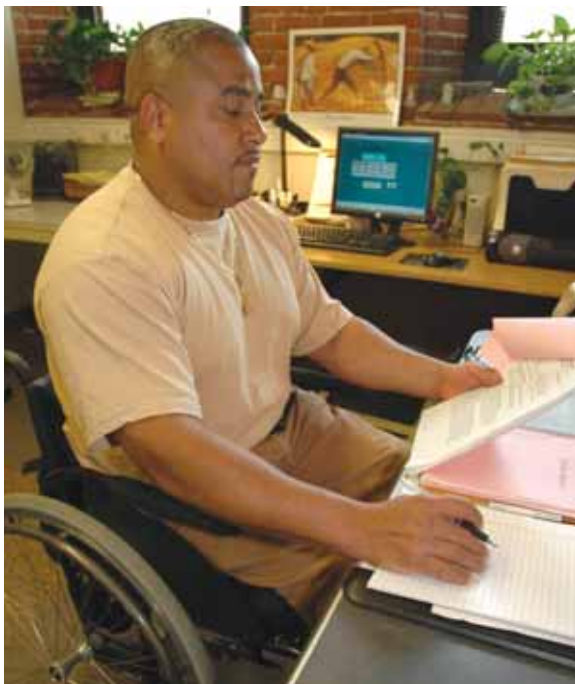
During this process, Sue turned to a colleague at the Department of Mental Retardation, Tom Mercier, who is also a Rehabilitation Engineer. Tom works at the Kelley Assistive Technology Center (ATC) which houses an extensive fabrication facility. Sue proposed they consider creating a partnership with ATC to fabricate the items Anne needed. After extensive discussions with Anne and Rachel, they agreed to a collaboration between the two agencies. Anne would be the first consumer for this pilot.

Of course, the DMR and the MRC have a long history of working together, and each has their own specialties and skills when it comes to helping their consumers. The DMR has extensive experience with fabricating or constructing new items and the MRC has specialized in adaptations or modifications to existing items. This new pilot project would serve consumers from both agencies with adaptive technology needs by taking advantage of the two different service models. Down the road, DMR consumers will participate in the collaboration as well.

They began working together in October of 2005 when the rehabilitation engineers started fabricating various tools and devices. Each adaptation was created with Anne's functional strength in mind.

Among Anne's strengths were the fine motor control in her left-hand (she had been right-handed), gross lateral movement in her right arm, head control and foot control. Two adapted devices made for Anne include a modified head pointer used for soldering and an adapted foot-control lever for cutting metal. Heavy magnets were also utilized to keep metal pieces from moving during the design process. As you might expect, during this time Anne was developing her own adaptations to accommodate her jewelry-making. After six months and some trial and error, Anne began creating her jewelry again.

Behind all this effort, of course, was Rachel's consistent counseling and guidance. While Anne was diligent in her rehabilitation efforts and dedicated to resuming her work, Rachel's encouragement was equally important. In addition to monitoring the progress of the collaboration, Rachel was able to build Anne's confidence and deal with her concerns as an artist. For Anne the question remained, would she be able to replicate her past designs? Over time she has become more comfortable and skilled at working with her new equipment. She will tell you the way she does her work has changed a lot and her jewelry looks different but as one fellow artist admits, it's even better. This creative collaboration made one artist's life better too.



Ramon Maldonado — Springfield

Maria Neris is definitely someone you want on your side. This is especially true when it comes to advocating for consumers as a Senior Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor at the MRC's Springfield VR office. Maria is skilled at her job, tenacious and able to work with a former tough guy like Ramon Maldonado.

Ramon's life had been pretty rough. Beaten, shot and left to die in 1979, Ramon's injuries had left him paralyzed and using a wheelchair. He had a history of drug use and an extensive criminal record. With no recent work history, little education and limited English skills, Ramon faced many obstacles to finding a job. Maria knew all this and committed herself to helping him if he was prepared to help himself — and he was.

In 2003 Ramon was a man with a new attitude, determined to turn his life around. When asked why the change, Ramon reveals that, while in prison, he saw a picture of his only son in a Puerto Rican newspaper. The 19 year old had been shot 14 times. Ramon could neither go to bury his boy nor console the family because he was wasting his life away in prison...he still carries that picture.

Ramon left prison in 2003 and moved into the Addiction Recovery Program at a residential facility run by the Gandara

Center. Although he had been drug free for many years, he welcomed the opportunity to participate in this recovery program when he left prison.

First, Maria and Ramon tried to identify possible career goals, but he was unsure of which direction to take and they both knew he faced numerous obstacles. Maria was determined to help, and Ramon could not ask for a better advocate. He recently said, "Maria never gave up on me and never stopped looking for solutions when obstacles arose. She was always willing to put her head on the line for me and that meant a lot." Maria also encouraged Ramon to continue getting medically-related rehabilitation services and supported his participation in Narcotics Anonymous.

During this time, Ramon began volunteering at Gandara, speaking publicly about his own recovery. He liked the work and decided to pursue counseling as a career. With some funding from the MRC, Ramon began a one year certificate program to become an Addictions Counselor. Two days a week he attended classes offered by the Hispanic Office of Planning and Evaluation. At the same time, the MRC helped arranged for him to take classes to improve his English skills.

After Ramon moved out of the Gandara facility he discussed with Maria the possibility of working for the group. Together they approached Gandara staff. The clients and staff liked Ramon but had some concerns. After all, many of the former clients they had hired



"During the months I worked with Ramon Maldonado, I pushed him to keep moving forward. That approach succeeded because I also helped him deal with some of the anger that 'paralyzed' him in other ways. I acknowledged his feelings as a person with a disability who faced discrimination every day of his life. I think that recognition and my ongoing support set Ramon free to move forward with his life. Sometimes, just knowing you have someone in your corner can spur a person to take action."

Maria Neris

Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor  
MRC Springfield VR Office • 16 years of service

returned to drugs. Ramon and Maria knew he would have to show them everyday his commitment to living a drug-free life. In the end, Gandara agreed to work with Maria and Ramon on dealing with their concerns.

The MRC arranged a five month On-The-Job Evaluation opportunity for Ramon and agreed to pay some of his salary. The facility has a large Spanish-speaking population, so Gandara was happy to consider someone with Ramon's language skills. This win-win situation would also give them a chance to see how well-suited Ramon would be for a job at the residential house and, Ramon and the MRC could see if it was a good career choice for him.

One concern remained, however. How would Ramon deal with an emergency on the second floor of the house? Would he be able to confirm that all the clients had left the building if there was a fire? Eventually Maria convinced them that this very muscular man (he does 500 push-ups a day!!) could easily haul himself out of his chair and up the stairs to reach and help any trapped clients. Impressed by Ramon's strength and Maria's persistence, Gandara moved forward with the job offer.

But after Ramon began the job they ran into yet another obstacle. He needed to access a locked closet to obtain medications for the residents; however, his chair could not fit in the closet. Armed with a tape measure and note pad, Maria went to the facility to see what kind of accommodations needed to be made. She was pleasantly surprised to see that Ramon's co-workers and clients had reorganized the closet and solved the problem. As it turns out, Maria wasn't the only one who wanted to see Ramon succeed and stay at Gandara.

All during this time, Ramon received On-The-Job training from the MRC so he could continue to succeed and learn. Maria also helped Ramon make the transition from client to staff person. Today, Ramon has been a Substance Abuse Counselor at Gandara for a year and has already received a raise. He runs groups and counsels individuals on issues relating to their health, their addictions and their families. He is also opening the door for other MRC consumers at Gandara facilities. Ramon is exactly the kind of role model you would want for someone in recovery!





Katie Lombardi with Bonnie Brace — Pittsfield

Sometimes you have to make a long-term commitment to reach your goals. For Bonnie Brace and her MRC counselor, Kate Angelini, that commitment was essential.

When Kate, the Unit Supervisor in the MRC's Pittsfield VR office, met Bonnie in 1992 she had

just lost her job because of recurring medical problems. Bonnie has a chronic gastrointestinal condition which causes mobility issues, reduced stamina and poor circulation. She has required several hospitalizations and surgeries. What it hasn't done, however, is lessen Bonnie's determination to be employed.

Bonnie's vocational testing confirmed what her resume revealed; she was a woman intent on helping others. Working with Kate, Bonnie refined her vocational goals and decided she wanted to be a counselor. First, Bonnie needed to overcome two major obstacles; she had to address her fear that future hospitalizations would prevent her from achieving her goals and she needed a college education. Fortunately for Bonnie, Kate and the MRC were able to help with both.

Kate worked with Bonnie on building a stable environment for herself. She showed her how to avoid becoming overwhelmed and taught her ways to break tasks down into smaller, manageable

pieces. Kate encouraged Bonnie to go to college and helped her make plans in a focused but flexible fashion, reminding her that one day she would receive a diploma.

The MRC also provided some of the financial support necessary for Bonnie to go to school. In September, 1992 Bonnie began her studies at Berkshire Community College. Despite hospitalizations, a divorce and her responsibilities as a single mom, Bonnie graduated from BCC with her Associate's degree in May 1997. "Any one of her hospitalizations could have defeated her, but Bonnie just wouldn't let that happen," says Kate.

That fall, Bonnie began at the Mass College of Liberal Arts (formerly North Adams State) and graduated on schedule in 1999 with her Bachelor's degree. All during this time, Kate provided her with critical vocational guidance and moral support while the MRC helped with the cost of books and transportation. Two months later, and financially on her own, Bonnie began a Master's degree program at Springfield College. In May 2002, she was awarded her Master's in Social Work. Weeks later she began Job Placement Services with the MRC's Cindy Bucier. Cindy immediately recognized Bonnie's strengths and was determined to help her find a job that would utilize her education and gifts.

Bonnie started attending a weekly Job Club that



"I provide the personal coaching that allows our consumers to determine what has to happen to achieve their career goals, and then give them the support, accountability and strategy they need to execute their plan. Sometimes that means offering alternatives they might not have otherwise identified. For Bonnie, I was able to help her get a spot on NAMI's Board, which eventually led to her employment. Placement Specialists are continually challenged with making in-roads for our consumers and they are not always the traditional pathways for locating a job."

Cindy Bucier  
Job Placement Specialist

MRC Pittsfield and North Adams VR Offices • 9 years of service

Cindy runs for MRC consumers looking for employment. Sharing experiences and tips with other job seekers helped her keep moving forward in her own search. Cindy worked with Bonnie on her resume and cover letters while also helping her hone her interviewing skills. At one point, Cindy enlisted Kate and took Bonnie with them when they made outreach visits to local social service agencies. These meetings provided Bonnie with introductions to potential employers.

It was during this process that Cindy introduced Bonnie to the National Alliance on Mental Illness of Berkshire County (NAMI-BC). NAMI is a grassroots, self-help organization for families and friends of people with mental illness. Bonnie has a long-standing interest in mental health issues which made Cindy think NAMI might be a good match for her. In the fall of 2004, Cindy and Kate both encouraged Bonnie to volunteer at NAMI-BC. By December of that year, NAMI-BC recognized her talents and offered Bonnie a job as a part-time family advocate. After almost a dozen years, Bonnie Brace was finally doing the work she had always wanted.

But Bonnie's story doesn't end there. In January of 2005 Bonnie was in a horrible automobile accident that almost killed her. Again

her grit and determination kicked in and she began a slow recovery. During this difficult time, Cindy and Kate kept in close contact with Bonnie and encouraged her to "keep her eyes on the prize." Today Bonnie is the part-time director of the NAMI-BC office.

Bonnie is also pleased to note that she has hired three other MRC consumers to work with her, including Katie Lombardi, whose severe hearing loss resulted in communication problems and job losses. The MRC helped her obtain a hearing aid and other adaptive devices allowing her to live and work independently. The MRC also worked with Katie in evaluating her skills, writing a resume and researching job opportunities. Cindy introduced Katie to Bonnie and now she is the part-time office manager and family advocate at NAMI-BC.

Bonnie is quick to acknowledge how essential the MRC's long-term commitment to her was. "It is because of the MRC I realized what I wanted to do and how to go about reaching that goal. Kate was there with me every step of the way, encouraging me and letting me know that it was possible to have a vision and obtain it, even if it took a long time," said Bonnie.





Robert Webber — Malden

In his mid-50s, Rob Webber has an impressive resume - an MBA from Babson, an excellent job history, including 15 years at Boston Edison as a Budget Analyst for the Comptroller, and a list of community groups where he volunteers his time. He is well-liked, known to be a very smart man and can get references from some pretty important people. Finding a job

should be a snap, right? Not necessarily!

Rob has one other attribute not found on his resume; he uses a motorized wheelchair. When Rob was 17 he broke his neck in an accident and is quadriplegic. Unable to walk, he has good motion in his arms and functional use of his hands which allow him to type on a computer keyboard and maneuver his wheelchair almost anywhere.

Rob left Boston Edison in 1999 when the company merged with Commonwealth Gas and Electric. After a brief time off he went to work in 2000 for a friend and former manager from Boston Edison at a small privately-owned Australian software company. They hired Rob to help them establish their US operation. On his birthday in 2004, he was laid off when the firm was sold. It had been a long time since Rob had been involved in an active job search. Although he devoted a lot of time and energy to looking for

work, he was having trouble successfully finding employers who would hire him.

In working with the MRC, Rob found them to be one of the best agencies he's encountered since breaking his neck. In addition to providing him with long-term counseling supporting his efforts to return to school, the MRC also paid for Rob's tuition at UMASS/Boston, the cost of his books and transportation to college. Over the years, they converted two vans for Rob so he could travel independently, so, it was natural Rob would turn to the MRC for help making the connections he needed to find a job.

When Rob returned to the MRC for assistance in September 2004, he met with Lisa Lucas, a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor at the Malden VR office. "It was obvious Rob was an independent guy who would have preferred to find a job on his own, but he is also a very smart person who knows the value of connecting with as many potential employers as possible. Part of my job was to keep him motivated and get him out on interviews quickly," says Lisa.

But Rob also needed assistance breaking down the barriers he felt as a person with a disability. When asked why he didn't just go to a headhunter in light of his strong resume, Rob responds that he did, but nothing happened. He wasn't being sent on interviews. While he is kind enough to add that the market wasn't so great for someone with his skills at



"I find my involvement in the MRC's Greater Boston Employer Advisory Board gratifying especially when we make the kind of connections that result in a job like Rob Webber's at Blue Cross Blue Shield. One of the lesser known pieces of the Board's work is helping companies better understand the "etiquette" of working with employees with disabilities. We have developed a video, The Ten Commandments, which helps to eliminate misunderstandings in this area and showing it to employers and their workforce always engenders a lively discussion. For the most part, people really do want to do the right thing, but sometimes they just don't know how."

Greg Ames  
Employment Specialist  
MRC Malden VR Office • 7 years of service

the time, there is a part of him that knows better. Rob needed support finding those employers who were more interested in his qualifications than his wheelchair.

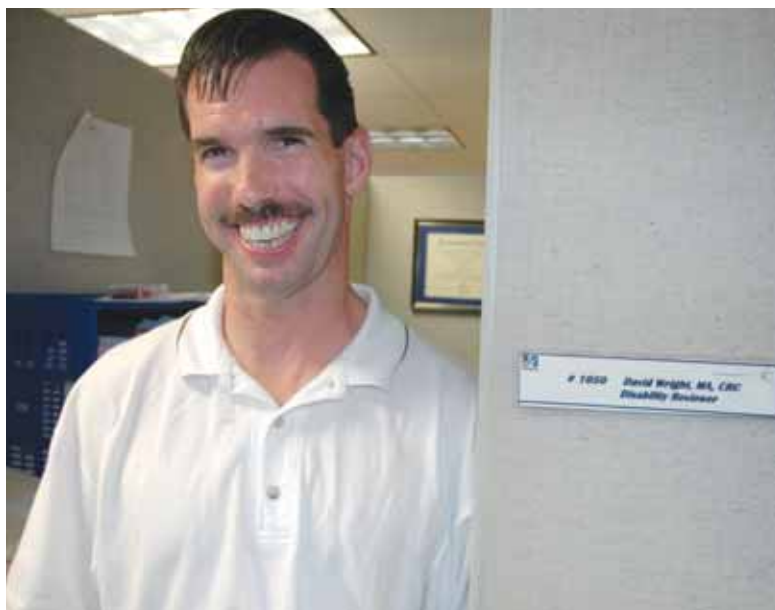
Lisa realized Rob was ready to work so she quickly referred him to colleague Greg Ames, an MRC Job Placement Specialist who focuses on finding professional positions at Rob's level. Greg works with several groups when looking for opportunities for MRC's consumers. In this case, they include the Career Place, the local career center that helps people find current job openings and enter training programs, the Resource Partnership and the MRC's own Greater Boston Employer Advisory Board (GBEAB). Rob quickly started connecting with employers who were eager to meet with him. At one point he made a five minute presentation at a GBEAB semi-monthly meeting, providing him with additional input on his resume.

One of the members of the GBEAB is Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts. In October 2004, BCBSMA hosted a Disability

Mentoring Day which Rob attended. Like any good job seeker he visited the company's web site the night before. He found a position listed for an analyst and applied that night online. The next day he made contacts that resulted in an interview and a job. He began work at BCBSMA on Valentine's Day 2005. He would have started sooner but he was on his honeymoon.

Now Rob is a Budget Analyst at BCBSMA making more than \$60,000 annually. His efforts support the 1,500+ employees who work in the Sales and Marketing and Service Divisions. The company has been very supportive in accommodating his individual needs and the building was already perfectly accessible.

No one questions Rob got the job on his own because of his tremendous experience and skills. Nor does anyone argue the MRC helped him find those companies that are all about hiring people with the best qualifications for a job. As in this case, sometimes it happens to be a person with a disability.



David Wright — Worcester

There once was a time in David Wright's life when he needed assistance just to roll over in bed. Now, inspired by his VR Counselors and dozens of others who helped him, David devotes his time, in and out of work, to helping others.

In 1994 David was 25 years old when he was in a devastating car accident that killed his friend and left him badly injured. He suffered multiple fractures and a traumatic brain injury. In a coma for a month and hospitalized for many more months, David endured several years of surgeries, relearning how to walk, talk and function. While his gait and speech remain affected, David's persistence and years of physical, occupational and cognitive therapy paid off, enabling him to live independently once again.

His first VR Counselor from the Worcester office, Vinnie Bosco, said, "David has a great deal of motivation and appreciation for the people who helped him regain his independence." Initially, David was provided with information and applied to the MRC's Statewide Head Injury Program (SHIP). SHIP is a part of the Community Services Program, which identifies, cultivates and develops resources and services for people who have sustained a traumatic

brain injury. Ultimately, though, David opted for a different path to reach his goals, setting his sights on going back to school.

David was given vocational testing by the MRC which confirmed his interest in working with people. With the MRC's encouragement, David overcame many challenges and returned to college. He eventually earned a Bachelor's degree from Worcester State College in 2000. The MRC helped pay some of his tuition as well as the cost of books and transportation to school.

David knew, firsthand, the value of rehabilitation services in rebuilding a person's life. With vocational guidance from his VR Counselor and with the MRC's financial help, he enrolled in the Master's degree program at the Institute for Social and Rehabilitation Services at Assumption College in Worcester. In 2003 David received his Master's degree in Rehabilitation Counseling.

Beverly Lajoie, his current MRC Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor, says of David, "He is confident, reliable and hard-working." David also earned a reputation for helping others. He has volunteered at UMass Memorial Health Center for years and speaks frequently at Massachusetts Brain Injury Association groups. But, despite his strong work ethic and self-confidence, David had a difficult time finding a job after receiving his Master's degree.



"As one of the people who worked with David, I found his success very gratifying. All of us at the MRC believed in him and supported his persistence. Our work with David is a great example of what the MRC does best - coordinating multiple services over a long period of time."

Beverly Lajoie  
Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor  
MRC Worcester VR Office • 29 years of service

Once again, the MRC stepped in to work with David. Beverly referred him to Ellen Spencer, a Job Placement Specialist in the Worcester VR office. Ellen had immediate respect for David and his accomplishments and was determined to help him get a job where his training and gifts would be put to good use.

Ellen arranged dozens of interviews for David around New England and each time he interviewed he got better, but he didn't get hired. She kept helping him focus, prepare for interviews, expanding his network of contacts and encouraging him to stay in the search despite 16 months of looking for work.

David learned about a vacancy as a Vocational Reviewer at the University of Massachusetts Medical School (UMMS) from a former professor. At the same time, Ellen was pursuing the folks from UMMS who participate in the Greater Worcester Employment Resource Collaboration. She sang David's praises to UMMS' Marlene Tucker, who passed the "good word" along to the hiring manager, Katherine Edwards. "Katherine is just the kind of open-minded employer who is able to look beyond disabilities to see David's capabilities and potential," said Ellen. She adds, "it was a perfect match for both

UMMS and David." UMMS agreed to hire David in September, 2004. For the first time since his accident 10 years earlier, David Wright had a job.

Today, David reviews the medical records and other documents of people applying for a disability determination for Transitional Assistance and/or Mass Health. "We use various criteria in making these determinations but there is always more to a person's story than just the documents," says David. Few would know that better than David.

David has had a pretty amazing two years. He had gotten his job, obtained a driver's license and purchased a car. He had also just found out he was pre-approved for a mortgage. David was now going to fulfill an important dream; he could purchase his own home and move out of public housing. Proving once again, persistence does pay off.





Paula Murphy-Gordon — Quincy

As Paula Murphy-Gordon told Meryl Sommer when she first met her at the MRC's Quincy VR office, she'd been recuperating long enough and she wanted a job. All her life she coped with a severe cardiac disability which prevented her from doing many of the things she wanted, and often needed, to do. When she was pregnant with her

third child in 2002, her heart condition deteriorated and she underwent surgery. While her heart problems would forever limit her energy, the surgery had improved her stamina and she wanted to get back to work.

Meryl, a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor in Quincy, knew right away that Paula was motivated. Despite health issues, she had graduated from high school and acquired a great deal of experience working at various jobs over the years. Her talents as a Customer Service professional were obvious during their initial meeting in 2004. Paula's goal from the beginning was to return to work in that field in a part-time position in order to accommodate her health and her family. Two of her three children were in school, and her youngest was only two at the time.

After some initial vocational counseling and rewriting her

resume, Meryl referred Paula to her colleague Mary Mahon-McCauley, a supervisor and Job Placement Specialist in the Quincy VR office. Mary was immediately impressed with Paula's people skills and her abilities as a problem-solver. She talked with Meryl and Paula about an opportunity she thought would be a great match with Paula's experience and skills. Citizens Bank had a Community Job Partnership program that would train Paula as a teller and they offered part-time employment.

At first, Paula wasn't interested in pursuing this kind of work. She had some concerns about her ability to do the job. Meryl and Mary did not share those concerns; they knew she had the math skills and experience dealing with customers to succeed. Both assured Paula the training program was excellent and would provide her with the information she needed to do the job. They encouraged her to apply. Paula was one of several MRC consumers who were referred for the program but one of the very few they accepted for training. She was nervous but thrilled to have this opportunity and grateful that Mary and Meryl kept urging her to try.

But a hurdle stood in her way. The Citizen's training program was full-time for four weeks. She felt she could physically handle the schedule but knew her childcare needs would prevent her from participating. Her husband worked all day and he couldn't help out so she went back to the MRC for assistance. First, they



"Sometimes we have to be creative in the kind of support we provide our consumers. I was not about to let a gap in childcare stand in the way of Paula getting the training she needed to get a better job. As long as we were able to find an affordable accredited provider, I knew we could help Paula. In fact, childcare is often an obstacle for many of our consumers when seeking or getting services. I'm just glad we could remove that roadblock for Paula in a timely fashion."

Meryl Sommer

Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor  
MRC Quincy VR Office • 29 years of service

researched community-based, low cost childcare options. Her child's name was put on several waiting lists but no openings were found. Finally, they found a private, accredited day care provider in the area with room for her child. Meryl did not hesitate for a moment and immediately let Paula know the MRC would pay for childcare costs during the training. Paula was on her way.

As Meryl and Mary predicted, Paula completed training and was immediately hired by the bank. The training had given her the skills needed to do the job. Taking the initiative and doing so well also made her proud. She wasn't, however, the only one who was proud; Neil McNeil, the Quincy VR Area Office Director was in attendance on graduation day. Collaboration within the office had helped Paula accomplish her goals and everyone wanted to be part of the celebration.

Since beginning the job in July, 2005, Paula received follow-up services to make sure her placement was successful. For Meryl, this has meant challenging Paula to limit her work to part-time. She encouraged her to get regular medical check-ups to confirm with her doctor that she has the strength to maintain her schedule. Paula's

enthusiasm for her work often found her taking on extra hours. She is now better able to manage her own condition and advocate for herself with her doctor and her employer.

Her childcare worries are under control too; her youngest attends an affordable Head Start program near the branch where she works. Paula loves her job and has been able to purchase a new home since beginning to work for Citizens Bank. All in all, it has been a pretty amazing year for Paula and her family.





Melinda Bercume — Spencer

Melinda Bercume is a 50+ year old woman with a new job. Though shy and reserved, she readily shares photos of her family and stories of their latest accomplishments. Yet, it is the story of Melinda's latest victory that has her family smiling with pride.

Melinda has worked most of her adult life despite some developmental disabilities

and an organically-based personality disorder. Over the years she has held jobs at various work sites, many affiliated with Seven Hills Foundation in Worcester. She's done packaging, collating and assembling on-site at a Seven Hills facility. For several years she performed kitchen work, and because of her attention to detail, Melinda was often selected to participate with a job coach on a janitorial crew at an integrated community work site.

Seven Hills is one of many community rehabilitation facilities providing additional services to the MRC's consumers. In Melinda's case, MRC's Statewide Employment Services (SES) program funds provide her with ongoing services. The SES helps MRC consumers exercise their right to choose, obtain and keep meaningful community-based employment with long term supports, as needed. Jay Erhard, the SES Program Specialist who worked with Melinda, says, "No one state agency can provide all services for all people." The MRC has learned to pay 'experts' for certain services that are

individualized to meet the specific needs of a consumer over a longer period of time. This has proven to be an effective and efficient use of resources.

Melinda received ongoing vocational services funded by the MRC's Extended Employment Program for several years, but opportunities in the community that could accommodate her were few and far between. Although, according to Lucy Hubbard, Senior Job Coach at Seven Hills, peoples' attitudes about hiring individuals with disabilities are changing. "The focus is more and more on how someone's abilities match an employer's needs and not just on what their disabilities might prevent them from doing," adds Lucy.

During the time Seven Hills worked with Melinda, she frequently expressed interest in working in the community in a competitive job. After many unsuccessful attempts, Lucy and her colleagues at Seven Hills were able to develop a part-time job at a HESS Express station in Spencer. For almost three years Melinda performed general cleaning, food prep and checked the inventory at the station with the daily support of job coaches. Eventually she realized the demands of this position were not the best match with her strengths and personality and she left HESS, reluctantly returning to facility-based employment.

But Melinda had "tasted" working in the community, depositing a paycheck and enjoying some new found independence. As she said, she wanted a



"I am very proud of Melinda's success! The support she has gotten from Seven Hills because of funding from SES's Community Based Employment Services program made all the difference in Melinda being able to achieve her vocational goal. These partnerships are key to making success stories like this happen around the state. Personally, it's exciting to see so many people formerly denied a place in the work force, now actively employed in the community."

Jay Erhard

Program Specialist, Central Regional Liaison

MRC Statewide Employment Services Department • 18 years of service

"real job" in the community. The folks at Seven Hills were determined to help her get one that better matched her skills. What happened next can only be described as karma.

One evening in September 2005, Dr. Lisa Giarrusso was listening to a radio talk show. Lisa and her husband own and operate Central Massachusetts Orthodontic Associates (CMOA) in Spencer and Worcester. That evening's guest, Seven Hills Career Source Program Director, Jeff Roberge, was talking about their programs and some of their job-ready consumers with disabilities. A few weeks earlier, Jay and Jeff were talking about strategies to increase the visibility of their job placement programs with employers. Jay suggested using public service announcements. Jeff contacted the station and soon received an invitation to be a guest on the show.

Lisa was impressed by what she heard. She realized the two positions CMOA was having difficulty filling might be a good fit for someone at the Career Source program. Historically CMOA had filled the positions with an endless succession of undependable high school students. The next morning Lisa called Jeff to learn more about their employment program. She told him there were two openings at her

orthodontic office and she wanted to interview candidates from the program. Jeff relayed this message to Lucy, who set up the interviews for the next day. Melinda was offered a job on the spot.

Today Melinda is an Assistant to the Dental Assistants, a job that takes advantage of her attention to detail. Her work involves sterilizing instruments, restocking work areas with fresh trays and clean instruments, as well as wiping down dental chairs and patient trays with alcohol. Melinda moves easily through her work, never needing to be prompted, saving the Dental Assistants critical time that can be spent with patients.

Melinda and CMOA receive ongoing support from the job coaches at Seven Hills, funded by SES. They helped during her training and regularly stop by the office. Because Melinda is dependable and good at her job, CMOA no longer spends its time and money recruiting and retraining new employees. Melinda is fully integrated into the office network and has become a vital part of their team. As far as the folks at CMOA are concerned Melinda is absolutely the right employee at the right place and could not have come at a better time.



Abdul Taufiq — Brookline

Perhaps you've seen Abdul Taufiq's smiling face on television. He appears with his "little brother" in a Big Brother Big Sister ad encouraging others to become mentors. Abdul has been a mentor for years, providing help he never received. As a child growing up in India he always had trouble learning and endured years of ridicule. Concentrating was difficult and his reading comprehension was never very good, but no one ever took the time to find out why.

In 1978, at 18, Abdul arrived in the United States. He immediately began working on two goals; getting a job and passing his GED exam. Eventually he did both, but passing the GED proved to be especially difficult. By this time in his life he took his struggle to learn for granted. He is a clever person and mastered tasks by doing them rather than reading about them.

He began taking courses in computer electronics in 1982 and has been enrolled in one computer class or another ever since. Despite his personal struggle, Abdul demonstrated remarkable diligence and maintained some highly skilled and well-paying jobs in the computer field. Over time, however, it grew harder and harder for him to learn the myriad of changes occurring in computer technology.

In 2001 he lost his job, like many others in the computer industry. At that time, he went to a neurologist to determine why

he had such a difficult time concentrating and learning. His doctor administered extensive testing. The diagnosis was clear; Abdul had Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder as well as other learning disabilities. His neurologist suggested he contact the MRC for help dealing with these issues and to get support for his job search.

When he arrived at the MRC VR office in Brookline in 2001, he did not know how he should address his learning deficits and was unclear about his vocational goals. He began working with Kevin Beaulieu, a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor who specializes in learning disabilities. Kevin notes, "Abdul was pretty down when he came to the MRC for help but we were finally able to convince him that having a correct diagnosis was the first step in a successful rehabilitation. For the first time in Abdul's life, there was an explanation for the obstacles that had plagued his life. His neuropsychological report gave us a lot of information about how we could help him 'relearn' how he learns."

Kevin arranged for Abdul to receive macro-management training which would improve his ability to concentrate, set priorities and stay focused. These skills helped Abdul manage his time and organize the resources needed to get a task completed. This, in turn, improved his efficiency and reduced his stress. At the same time, Abdul began working with a speech and language therapist to help with cognitive linguistic



“One of the biggest rewards of my job is seeing people like Abdul who struggled for so long, not even knowing they have a disability, suddenly turn their lives around and succeed. Abdul finally received the right diagnosis, the correct treatment and a job that better suited him because he asked for help and the MRC was able to provide it to him. Today he regularly sends me job leads and asks what he can do to help other MRC consumers — now that’s a great feeling!”

Karen Beth Mael  
Employment Specialist  
MRC Brookline VR Office • 20 years of service

strategies. Over time, Abdul’s reading and comprehension skills got better and his executive function improved markedly.

Kevin also recognized that many of the tasks at Abdul’s previous job emphasized his cognitive weaknesses. With some additional counseling, they were able to find work in the computer field that played to Abdul’s strengths and he began attending classes at Boston University toward a Microsoft Systems certification. The help the MRC arranged for him was critical in changing how he approached his studies and his career goals. In addition, Kevin helped Abdul apply to BU for a tuition waiver while he remained unemployed.

At the same time, Abdul was attending weekly meetings with Karen Beth Mael, an MRC Employment Specialist in Brookline. He had already been unemployed for almost a year and was eager to be working and providing for his family. “I was immediately impressed with how important it was to Abdul to participate fully in the entire job search process. He was tireless in his efforts to find a job despite the tough market for people in the computer industry. Through it all he kept his sense of humor. I don’t know how he did it sometimes,” said Karen.

After reviewing his resume and cover letters, she started contacting employers on his behalf. As Abdul notes, “Karen was like ‘a dog with a bone.’ She never gave up on finding work for me. What a network that woman has!” Abdul went to the September, 2002 Greater Boston Employer Advisory Board meeting Karen holds six times a year. These meetings give job-ready VR consumers a chance to meet potential employers. Abdul left the meeting with lots of valuable feedback, some great contacts but no job.

The persistence, networking and training finally paid off in August of 2003. Abdul landed a job as a Systems Administrator at CB Richard Ellis in Boston making more than \$40,000 per year. Employing hundreds of people, CB Richard Ellis is the largest commercial real estate company in New England. Abdul solves a wide variety of employee computer problems each day. He loves his work and is optimistic about his chances for promotion. “The organizational skills training the MRC provided was critical for me. Kevin and Karen really helped me focus on finding a job better suited to my strengths and personality. At CB Richard Ellis I get more hands-on experience which makes it easier for me when I take a computer class,” adds Abdul.





Disability Determination Services — Boston

Did you ever wonder what happens when someone applies to the Social Security Administration (SSA) for Social Security Disability or Supplemental Security Income benefits? Well, these applications are sent to real live human beings whose job is making disability determinations

and performing vocational evaluations based on a myriad of precise factors and information. Their job title is Vocational Disability Examiner (VDE). In Massachusetts, all 150 examiners are MRC employees whose positions are 100% funded by SSA. Their work is part Solomon, part Mother Teresa and part detective. The rule of thumb most examiners apply to their cases is, in the absence of evidence to the contrary, accept what the claimant and the doctor say are true. They are looking to avoid fraud, not deny claims.

Imagine for moment the amount of information these people review before making a recommendation about eligibility. There are hospital records and patient case files, documents verifying years of work history and income. They have records of conversations with claimants and those who have provided treatment to claimants. They are looking for contradictions in the information submitted and missing documentation. They must have a thorough knowledge of SSA regulations and medical terminology, treatments and conditions. Imagine too, the size of each claimant's file by the end of their 50 to 60 day evaluation.

Under the watchful eye of Bob Sullivan, Director of Training for the Massachusetts DDS, the people who do this work are given some of the best and most intense training in the country. Classes last all day for three months, and are offered once a year. Two trainers work with each class full time and include lectures by doctors and other expert staff. The last month is spent on caseload management. Finally, each trainee must pass a federal exam before being accepted as a VDE.

The classes Bob and his staff run turn out examiners who consistently receive awards from the SSA. In 2005, to acknowledge the high quality of work performed by MRC examiners - efficient, accurate and on average 20 days faster than their counterparts in other states - SSA selected the New England region to pilot a project which would convert their recordkeeping to a totally electronic process — read, no paper files!

The new process has some obvious benefits, but transitioning to the new system would take time. The SSA wanted to move forward quickly so Bob and his staff immediately began the process of retraining in the new system. While the criteria for making a determination was not altered, the training program now needed to reflect the new folderless system. Ginny Cutting was the supervisory trainer who designed most of the changes and, working with Sheila Buckley, they substantially redesigned their training manuals.





"Our examiners are faced with mounting challenges as we finish implementing the electronic folder process and move toward the new Disability Improvement Service. As trainers we try to provide policy, computer and technical support. I am always impressed by the examiners' ability to focus on the purpose of their job - helping each claimant - in the face of these enormous challenges."

Sheila Buckley  
Trainer

DDS Boston Office • 14 years of service

As further proof of the MRC's commitment to this process, Eneida Espino, a unit supervisor in the Worcester DDS office was cited by the SSA in 2005 for "outstanding performance in the achievement of the mastery of the electronic process and continued delivery of excellent service to the public." Not only did Ms. Espino quickly learn the new process, she took a leadership role in retraining her own unit.

Enter a group of talented and committed individuals hired in September, 2005 to become new Disability Examiners. Each had a strong background in the field (social work, nursing, vocational rehabilitation, etc.) but it was also important that they had strong computer skills. Gone would be the heavy file folders containing every piece of paper submitted by claimants, physicians and hospitals. This class was taught how to acquire, retain and utilize all the same documentation but to store it electronically.

It helped that their prior work experience had already familiarized them with DDS terminology and its application. While they waited for Bob's staff to be retrained, they got a "head start" serving as "validators" reviewing and comparing all paper folders with the new electronic ones for any missing pieces.

The fact that MRC's trainers are some of the best in the country also facilitated the process. One member of this initial class, Pam Sullivan said, "Our trainers really knew what they were talking about. They knew the SSA systems and responded to our questions with clear, informative answers." Michael Taylor, another class member, said, "I was already very comfortable looking for information on the web but this training really focused my efforts and took my skills to a new level. These trainers didn't miss a beat," he added.

When asked "off the record" how much of the information they review online did they actually print out, the answer was "practically none!" This first class is comfortable with the new electronic system and seem happy not to have to keep track of mounds of paperwork. "Everything we need is totally at our fingertips" was the response of the MRC's newest DDS examiners. Now they are fully integrated into the DDS offices maintaining the Commission's excellent reputation with their overseers at the SSA. In February, 2006, the MRC DDS was certified by the SSA and, with a few exceptions, no longer has to keep paper files.



Edith and Bob Keller — Brockton

**E**dith and Bob Keller are both MRC consumers. While it is not common for a husband and wife to receive services from the Commission it is very often the case that all family members benefit from these services. Certainly this is true for the Kellers.

Bob and Edith married in 1984 and currently live in their own home in Easton. They are in their mid-fifties and both have disabilities impacting their ability to work and perform certain everyday tasks. Over the years Edith has struggled with osteoarthritis which increasingly limits her mobility and now she is unable to work outside their home. Bob has a bipolar disorder and diabetes which limit his activities. Others, in similar situations, may be forced to live in a group setting or nursing home but not the Kellers. The variety of services they receive from the MRC has assured them their dignity and independence.

Both Bob and Edith benefit from the ongoing services provided by the MRC's Home Care Assistance Program (HCAP). They have received homemaker services under this program since 1998. Twice a week a cheerful hardworking homemaker comes to their house to provide direct assistance with meal preparation, laundry, light housekeeping and grocery shopping. Services are provided by homemakers trained by agencies that contract with and are managed by HCAP Case Managers like Katherine Chesebro.

Katherine feels especially good about the support this program provides the Kellers. "You can really see how these services have helped Bob and Edith. Both of them thrive on routine and having the regularly scheduled homemaker visits supports that need. HCAP helps them maintain their independence," says Katherine. HCAP prevents institutionalization by keeping them independent and connected to their community.

Katherine's regular contact also helps her detect when additional services are needed. During a phone conversation last year, Edith asked Katherine for more help with her personal care. Katherine visited Edith and soon realized what she really needed was help with stairs. Katherine suggested she look into getting a stair glide and provided information on the MRC's Home Modification Loan Program. This low or no-interest loan program is designed to help people with disabilities stay in their homes by loaning them funds to pay for access modifications. The loans can be paid off when the house is sold.

Edith tracked down a lender, picked out a stair glide and arranged for the installation. When Katherine checked in a few months after their conversation, Edith proudly announced the chair glide was already installed. She can now access the whole house and manage her own personal care needs. Edith said, "Without the loan that allowed us to install the stair glide I would have been forced to move out of our home."



“What the MRC is doing for people like the Kellers is every bit as important in a consumer’s recovery as any medicine or therapy. All of us who have worked with Bob and Edith over the years can tell you we have helped them maintain their independence and a sense of hope.”

Katherine Chesebro  
Case Manager

MRC Home Care Assistance Program • 7 years of service

Now I can continue to enjoy my independence as well as the pride of owning my own home.”

Bob became an MRC consumer in 1989 after several hospitalizations for bipolar disorder. He tried to hold down several low skill jobs but none lasted very long. The staff at the Brookline MRC VR office arranged for Bob to receive psychotherapy and provided him with vocational counseling, which led to him enrolling in accounting classes at Boston University. He also took classes in tax preparation with the financial support of the MRC.

At that point, Bob began working with Rand Picknarcik, a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor at the MRC’s Brockton VR office. Even though Rand retired last year, he remains a source of support for Bob. When they first met, Rand quickly realized that Bob had plenty of skills and interests. He has helped him sort through a variety of career options and arranged testing to determine his vocational aptitudes. Bob eventually realized he wanted to return to his first love - carpentry.

Bob had previously worked installing shelves and decided he wanted to start his own business as a shelving installer. Rand connected

him to the folks at SCORE, Senior Corps of Retired Executives. They worked with Bob on developing a business plan and helped him focus on the market for his services, the supplies he would need and the financial investment required. He continues to work on designing a web site, building a client base and creating graphics for signage with his new Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor, Erica Schmidt.

Rand also recognized Bob’s need to stay busy in order to stay focused. Together they still attend monthly meetings of professionals and consumers called Friends in Recovery and Rehabilitation. Bob explains how essential his time with the MRC is for him. “Working is the hallmark of a mentally healthy person and in my case that means talking and planning for work. The time and effort I put into this with the MRC is the third leg on a stool that keeps me stable.” Everyone agrees, however, that Bob’s biggest asset is his wife Edith, his “silent partner.” She helps organize his appointments and keeps him focused on his business plan.

Bob and Edith are two very appreciative MRC consumers. They are grateful for the support and the services that have kept them living on their own and part of their community.



Doug MacLean — New Bedford

Some people just seem destined to do things the hard way. Doug MacLean is a classic example of one of those people — or at least he was. Born into a well-respected family in New Bedford, Doug's dad was a State Senator for 30 years, owned several commercial fishing

boats and operated an insurance business. While Doug was not a great student, he certainly could have enjoyed a pretty good life in this community where his Dad's reputation would open a lot of doors.

But that would be too easy. Because Doug had dyslexia, he had problems with reading and writing and soon lost interest in academics. He was held back in school and began to feel stupid and worthless. He started using marijuana at 13 and steadily moved onto hard drugs and alcohol. At 16 he dropped out of school and left home, and by 18 he had been arrested several times. After an arrest that year, he agreed to enlist in the Navy rather than go to jail. Doug returned to New Bedford when he got out of the Navy three years later and signed onto a commercial fishing boat. Unfortunately, over the next fourteen years Doug's drug habit so intensified that eventually no boat owner would hire him. His entire life revolved around getting and using drugs.

Many people tried to help Doug but he'll be the first to tell you that you can't help someone with an addiction unless they are really ready to be helped. After almost 25 years spinning in the cycle of addiction, he was ready. Now, 37 years old, he was homeless and destitute. It was April, 1994, when he began serving a five month sentence in jail and decided to turn his life around. While in prison, he weaned himself off heroin — the hard way — without any medical treatment. When he left jail he went to Harmony House, a halfway house in New Bedford, to continue his rehabilitation.

At that time, Doug applied for services from the MRC VR office in New Bedford. There he met Janice Mello, a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor who was about to make life a lot easier for him. "I knew exactly who he was when I first interviewed him because of all the publicity his arrests had gotten over the years. The media had covered every one of his mishaps because he was 'the State Senator's son' but, you know something, Doug never once mentioned it and never asked for any special treatment," said Janice. While going through the initial VR process, Doug worked diligently on his sobriety and attaining his GED.

Janice did a thorough vocational evaluation and conducted an inventory of his interests to determine what direction his studies should take him. When he had obtained his GED they worked together on getting him started at Bristol Community College (BCC).





"One of the important things I bring to this job is my knowledge of the community. I was born and raised in New Bedford. I taught in the schools and know the environment, the economy and the local resources. A lot of that experience was put to good use when working with Doug. For me, he is a long-term success story and a role model in our community helping others achieve their own dreams."

Janice Mello  
Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor  
MRC New Bedford VR Office • 25 years of service

"Janice's help was critical for me. I had no idea how to apply to school or get financial aid. She walked me through the process," said Doug. Janice made sure the school accommodated his learning disabilities whenever necessary. She also helped him apply for financial aid and obtain a tuition waiver, covering the cost of books and fees.

All this time Janice supported his participation in Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous. "Once I started achieving things, it started snowballing. I realized if I wanted to get a life, I had to get off my duff and do something," said Doug. And "do something" he did. Despite a reading-based learning disability, Doug graduated with a G.P.A. that earned him a transfer scholarship to UMass/Dartmouth. He also graduated with a host of honors including an award for leadership, character and integrity.

At UMass/Dartmouth, Doug was well on his way to earning a BA in sociology and criminal justice when he ran into an obstacle that could have changed all that. The school's foreign language requirement was making for a very difficult and unsuccessful semester. When Doug talked to Janice about his problems learning Spanish she had an idea. From her years of experience, Janice knew the college would

waive the requirement if they had recent proof of his dyslexia. Janice immediately made arrangements for retesting, which clearly pointed to Doug's reading-based learning disabilities. The school dropped the foreign language requirement and Doug continued his studies, graduating in 2000.

All the time Doug was in school, he was also working. At one point he was a Substance Abuse Specialist for the Bristol County District Attorney's office. He also served as the Liaison with the Third District Drug Court in New Bedford. He continued working for the District Attorney after graduation and in 2004 went to work for the Probate and Family Court in Fall River as a Probation Officer where he still works, making over \$45,000 a year.

Now Doug doesn't waste time any more doing things the hard way. In fact, he spends his spare time helping make other people's lives easier. He is on the boards of the New Bedford Council on Alcoholism and Highpoint, a treatment center in Plymouth. Until recently, he was on the Fairhaven School Committee. These days, he spends his time giving back to the community the kind of help he once so sorely needed.



Nathan Nilsson — Fitchburg

The 34 year old man whose firm handshake and confident smile greet you on Main Street in Fitchburg is a far cry from the depressed, disengaged person who slouched into the MRC office a year ago. But a lot has changed in Nathan Nilsson's life that accounts for his growing self-confidence.

Simone Coble, a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor in the MRC's Fitchburg VR office, will tell you that when she first interviewed Nathan in February, 2005 she found a man who was clinically depressed and anxious. He had lived on his own since he was 15 and had a long background of drug abuse. Nathan had been in prison for six years and had a work history riddled with jobs that ended abruptly. Simone learned that, despite his background and little formal education, Nathan was a terrific worker. With extensive experience as a factory worker, day laborer and valuable carpentry skills gained in the prison woodshop, Nathan's biggest obstacle to long-term employment was his inability to deal with conflict or anxiety. At the time, he could not even talk with employers.

Nathan and Simone spent a lot of time addressing his workplace behavior, developing ways for him to handle situations that made him become anxious and quit. Nathan learned how to better

manage relationships in a work environment and received counseling for some of the long-term issues that affected his interactions. Simone helped Nathan with practical skills such as how to approach a potential employer and confidently handle job interviews, even purchasing clothes for his interviews. Nathan praises her efforts - "Simone's help really motivated me and made me more positive about my job search and working."

When Simone felt Nathan was ready to begin the job hunt she introduced him to her colleague, Job Placement Specialist Bill Allen. They agreed that finding an employer who would look beyond Nathan's history and see his talent would be a challenge, as would be finding a work environment where Nathan felt comfortable.

Fortunately, Nathan was working with a team of creative problem-solvers. Bill and Simone regularly collaborate on finding consumers jobs, but this search would be quite different. During their discussions, Bill learned Nathan lived in a dilapidated unheated historic building on Main Street. The landlord had been letting an otherwise homeless Nathan live there for free, but the building had recently been sold.

Chris Bujold and Mathew Babineau were the new owners. They operated a business next to the building where Nathan lived. At one time the building housed the Boulder Café, a thriving pub and restaurant. This



Bill Allen and Simone Coble, VR Counselor

"I learned a long time ago you don't always find the best job matches in the want ads. Sometimes you need to create the job or, more specifically, carve the job out of the circumstances in which a consumer finds himself, as we did with Nathan Nilsson. Equally important is being prepared to answer a potential employer's questions about a candidate's qualifications and other issues. I never use labels when talking about our consumers. I just talk about abilities and how they match up with the needs of the employer."

Bill Allen

Job Placement Specialist

MRC Fitchburg VR Office • 14 years of service

local landmark had operated in Fitchburg for 70 years and they had plans to reopen it, but the building needed a total rehab. Coincidentally, its sole occupant had the experience to do the work and sorely needed a job. There was just one problem...Chris and Mat were unaware they even had a "tenant." Bill suggested he speak to the owners and explain the situation. They knew Nathan could lose his home and remain unemployed, but agreed to take the risk.

When Bill spoke with a surprised Chris and Mat he advised them their new occupant had many of the skills they needed to do the renovations. They listened as Bill outlined this as an opportunity to get the repairs done and give someone a fresh start. Bill was honest about the issues Nathan was dealing with but assured them the MRC was committed to supporting him throughout the whole process. Slowly Bill, Chris, Mat and Nathan carved out a job as a general laborer and maintenance worker.

Simone and Bill then arranged for an On-the-Job Evaluation and training agreement with Chris and Mat. One of the owners, who also had been a contractor, worked with Nathan to renovate his own apartment, showing him how to do the work. The MRC agreed to

reimburse the employer for the evaluation and training wages. This trial employment gave both Nathan and his new employers the chance to see if it was a good job match. It proved to be a perfect transition into work for Nathan.

Chris and Mat have grown to depend on Nathan in significant ways. They are already planning on his long term participation in the project and anticipate him playing a managerial role in the reopened café. These exceptional employers took the time to understand Nathan, providing him daily reassurance.

Bill and Simone are regular visitors to the building renovation. Nathan knows they will always be in his corner and is proud to finally have a job allowing him to meet his financial obligation to his child, pay off his fines and get a driver's license again. When asked if he could have achieved all of this on his own, Nathan says "yes," but adds sheepishly, "I would have been an old man by the time I figured out my problems and became a better worker. One thing's for sure, Bill and Simone helped me put all the pieces together sooner rather than later."



Luis Colon — Holyoke

When you first meet Luis Colon you notice he sports all the usual gear of a twenty-four year old young man — he clutches a cell phone at all times and wears a shirt with a well-known logo on it. He is quick to shake your hand and beams with pride when asked about his job.

You might also notice he uses a wheelchair. Luis was born with spina bifida and has endured several surgeries because of it. In addition, Luis has some cognitive difficulties which impact his communication skills. But when Adelaida Fortier, a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor at the MRC's Holyoke VR office first met him in 2001, she saw a very determined young man who doesn't let much stand in his way. Adelaida says "Luis always sets high goals for himself and pushes until he accomplishes them."

Luis was referred to Adelaida by the Department of Mental Retardation (DMR) for vocational services. "When I began working with Luis," Adelaida said, "he was determined to go to college. Despite his cognitive impairments, I felt it was important to let Luis act on his own decisions and try school." At the same time, Adelaida made sure Luis was realistic about his expectations.

With some financial support from the MRC, Luis began attending Holyoke Community College (HCC) taking ESL classes to

improve his English skills. He then took computer classes which he loved. Luis also challenged himself to take a theatre class which significantly helped with his verbal presentations. While his grades were low, his enthusiasm to learn was not. Eventually he decided to leave HCC and pursue his goals via another path.

Luis has a very supportive family. Working in collaboration with the New England Business Association (NEBA), they were able to arrange private tutoring for Luis and he became quite proficient in keyboarding. NEBA also provided him with an internship, giving Luis an opportunity to work in competitive employment.

At the same time, Adelaida and Luis began a job search. Luis attended an MRC Job Seeking Workshop and clearly identified office work as his job goal. As fate would have it, while combing through the small print of the help wanted ads, Adelaida found a listing for a job at the nearby Multi-Cultural Service Center (MCSC). They were looking for a bilingual receptionist who could perform basic office tasks. Luis immediately came to mind and she quickly called MCSC to confirm the opening and the qualifications. Adelaida called Luis and discussed this opportunity with him. That day an enthusiastic Luis and his father drove to the Center and filled out an application.

When the agency called Luis in for an interview they were impressed with his abilities and cheerful attitude.





"Luis is the kind of consumer with whom I love to work. He has a great attitude and I was just as determined to help him find a job as he was. Now that he is working, he has a new sense of self-esteem. I am glad I was able to help open up a whole new door in his life."

Adelaida Zayas Fortier  
Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor  
MRC Holyoke VR Office • 8 years of service

Weeks later, Luis was offered the job! "It was really a perfect match between their needs and Luis' bilingual skills as well as his commitment to working in an office environment," said Adelaida. "I am delighted I was able to make this connection for Luis."

Luis has been working at the Multi-Cultural Service Center for a year. He answers the phones, faxes documents, orders supplies, and performs data-entry, all while welcoming visitors to the office. His supervisors at MCSC were so impressed with his work ethic, they asked him to take responsibility for opening the office each day.

Luis still receives services from the DMR. In March, the DMR's Holyoke Chicopee Citizen Advisory Board recognized Luis and other consumers for "their accomplishments in using their unique gifts to achieve more confident and fulfilled lives." If the look on Luis' face when asked about that recognition is any indication, this truly is a confident young man.

Aurelio Colon, Luis' father, speaks about his son with obvious pride. He is also very clear about his high regard for the MRC's efforts which extend beyond helping Luis find a job. At one point, Adelaida

learned the family used a transfer board to get Luis in and out of their car. The board was dangerous and Luis came perilously close to falling off several times. She immediately referred the family to Eugene Blumkin, Principle Engineer at the MRC's Rehabilitation Technology Department. Each year Eugene and his co-workers help 55 to 60 consumers get vans modified so they can live more independent and productive lives.

After the Colons purchased a suitable van, the MRC provided a quick assessment of what modifications would be needed to improve access for Luis. They agreed on a chair lift and passenger tie down as well as lowering the floor on the passenger side by 10 inches.

The MRC managed the process of finding a vendor to do the work and paid for these critical improvements. Now Luis can easily and safely get in and out of the van. His dad, Aurelio said, "This is a dream come true. These modifications have made such a difference in helping our family deal with the special challenges Luis faces. This van has given him the independence we thought he'd never have."

	Outcome		Competitive Employment
Vocational Rehabilitation Program			
# of consumers in active participation	23,174		
# of new consumers with an IPE	9,217		
# of consumers successfully employed for 90 days or more			3,602
\$ Expended	\$52,000,000		
Integrated Independent Employment			Competitive Employment
Community Based Employment Programs	Goal Total		
# of consumers served	550	525	
# of consumers who were placed in employment	172	175	
# of consumers who successfully maintained employment	160	190	190
# of consumers in extended services	35	36	
\$ Expended	\$ 1,903,000		
Integrated Employment with Support			Competitive Employment
Supported Employment Program	Goal Total		
# of consumers served	250	250	
# of consumers who completed program	53	53	53
\$ Expended	\$457,000		
Facility Based Employment			Competitive Employment
Extended Employment Program	Goal Total		
# of consumers who received services	786	786	
# of consumers who were placed in employment	35	36	36
\$ Expended	\$4,958,453		
Total Consumers Placed/Retained in Employment – State Fiscal Year July '05-June '06			3,881

IL Center Services	Total
# of consumers who received services	11,568
# of information and referral calls	14,743
\$ Expended (State/Federal)	\$4,789,554

Turning 22 Services	
# of consumers who received services	150
# of consumers in Supported Living	50
# of new Individual Transition Plans	17
# of new referrals	14
\$ Expended	\$2,883,436

Assistive Technology	
# of consumers who received services	126
# of consumers on the waiting list	30
\$ Expended	\$573,100

Housing Registry	
# of vacancies	267
# of vacancies filled	254
# of visits to website	26,554
\$ Expended	\$83,000

Supported Living Services	Total
# of consumers who received services	100
# of consumers on waiting list	30
# of new applications	43
\$ Expended	\$908,904

Protective Services	
# of consumers who received services	263
# of new service plans	72
# of consumers provided paid services	72
# of investigations	263
\$ Expended	\$608,791

Home Care Services	
# of consumers served	1,930
# of new cases opened	384
# of hours of services provided	201,238
\$ Expended	\$5,351,401

Head Injury Services	
# of consumers who received services	1,274
# of new applicants	316
# of services purchased for consumers	1,166
\$ Expended	\$15,163,106

The mission of the MRC State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) is to advise the Public Vocational Rehabilitation Services agency in the delivery of effective rehabilitation services which lead to employment and to advance the use of resources necessary to promote the independence of people with disabilities (except those with blindness) in Massachusetts. Official members are appointed by and serve at the pleasure of the Governor. The membership reflects a representation of persons 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.

## Appointees

Francis Barresi, Halifax  
John Beach, Hyannis  
Janet Dale, Milford  
William Doherty, N. Andover  
Owen Doonan, Duxbury  
Mr. Toby Fisher, Woburn  
Brooke Heraty, Belmont  
Sandra Houghton, Quincy  
Lusa Lo, Braintree  
Barbara Lybarger, Boston  
Warren Magee, Dorchester  
Lisa Matrundola, Boston  
William McCarriston, Avon  
Mary M. Moore, Salem  
Mark Murphy, Dartmouth  
Serena Powell, Boston  
Stephen Reynolds, Gloucester  
Patricia Sheely, Pittsfield  
Antonia J. Torres, Holyoke  
Karin Williams, Boston

## Ex-Officio Members

Suzanne Doswell, Pittsfield  
Kevin Goodwin, Wayland  
Anne P. Guterma, W. Newton  
Inta Hall, Hingham  
Keith Jones, Somerville  
Jenna Knight, Worcester  
Hang Lee, Milton  
Kathy Mooney, Salem  
David Mortimer, Sudbury  
Ann Marie Paulson, Lakeville  
Ventura Pereira, N. Dartmouth  
Carol Perlino, Lynn  
Katherine Piccard, Charlestown  
Doris Richardson, Mattapan  
Maria Rosa, Holyoke  
Angelica Sawyer, Cambridge  
Barry Sumner, Onset  
Hartmut Teuber, Arlington Heights  
Francis Verville, Fall River  
Dwight Woodworth, Worcester



## DDS Facts & Figures FY'06 (October 1, 2005 – September 1, 2006)

Total Receipt of Cases:	73,932
Total Dispositions of Cases:	72,342
Initial Claims Filed:	50,944
Percentage Allowed:	40%
CDR Receipts:	8,030*
CDR Dispositions:	3,834 *
Consultative Examinations Purchased:	21,021
Consultative Examination Rate:	29%
Medical Evidence of Record Purchased:	58,461
Medical Evidence of Record Rate:	80.8%
Total Medical Costs:	\$5,810,645
Total Budget:	\$36,258,238
Cost Per Case:	\$501
Accuracy of Decisions:	96%
Total MA Population:	6.3M

\* Lower for FY'06 due to implementation of Electronic Folder and SSA's "Disability Service Initiatives"

### DDS Advisory Council Members

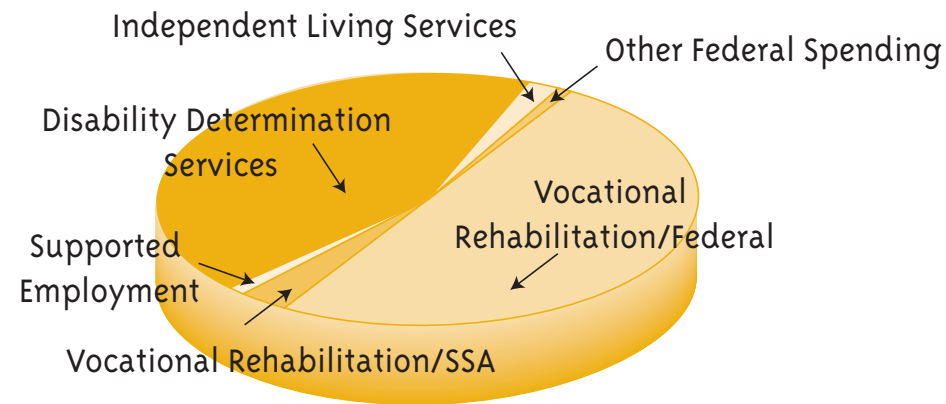
The Disability Determination Services Advisory Committee was formally established in the early 1980's. It functions as a communication bridge between the DDS staff and consumers of its services, the community of persons with disabilities and their advocates.

### DDS Advisory Council Members

Sarah Anderson, *Boston*  
 Inta Hall, *Hingham*  
 Chris Czernik, *Lynn*  
 Linda Landry, *Boston*  
 Shirley Dopson, *Jamaica Plain*  
 Gail Havelick, *Boston*  
 Barbara Seigel, *Boston*  
 Joanne Shulman, *Framingham (Chairperson)*

Appropriation Name	FY2006 Expended
Vocational Rehabilitation/Federal	\$42,279,571
Vocational Rehabilitation/SSA	\$2,591,117
Supported Employment	\$667,921
Disability Determination Services	\$36,491,006
Independent Living Services	\$1,622,579
Other Federal Spending	\$1,000,664
<b>Total Federal Funds Expended</b>	<b>\$84,652,858</b>

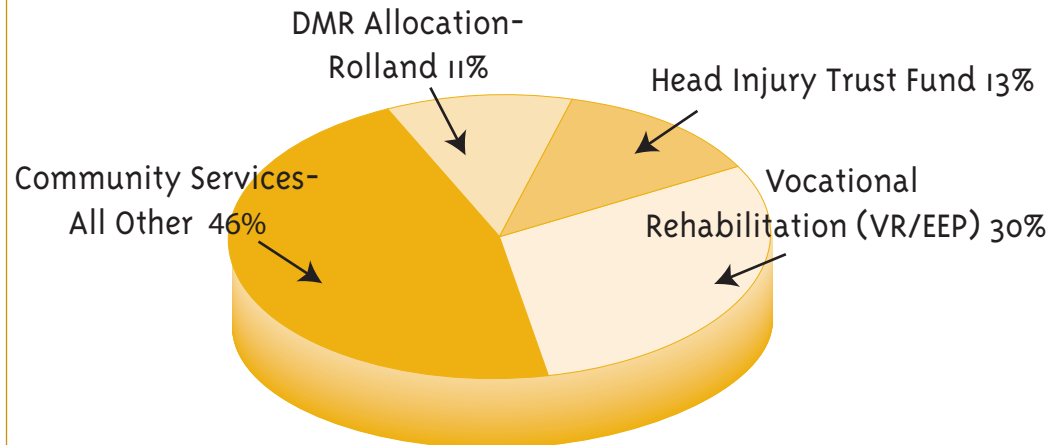
## Federal Funds Expended



Approp	Approp Name	CATEGORY	FY2005 Authorized	FY2005 Expended	FY2006 Authorized	FY2006 Expended
41201000	ADMINISTRATION for STATE PROGRAMS		\$409,264	\$403,122	\$573,716	\$521,406
41202000	VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION		\$7,459,207	\$7,363,266	\$7,476,987	\$7,101,264
	Allocated Out					\$255,000
41203000	EMPLOYMENT ASSISTANCE SERVICES		\$7,886,816		\$7,984,952	
	Personnel Costs			\$515,183		\$565,570
	Extended Employment Program			\$5,060,156		\$5,046,505
	Supported Work (CBES)			\$1,809,000		\$1,903,448
	Allocated Out			\$405,000		\$405,000
	Other Costs			\$48,818		\$51,637
41204000	INDEPENDENT LIVING SERVICES		\$7,520,512		\$8,067,733	
	Personnel Costs			\$578,854		\$667,552
	Independent Living Centers			\$3,396,329		\$3,619,748
	Turning 22 Services			\$1,786,112		\$1,876,149
	Assistive Technology			\$607,100		\$618,847
	Supported Living			\$770,403		\$856,147
	Protective Services			\$62,602		\$66,095
	Social/Recreational Program					\$25,000
	Allocated Out			\$0		\$8,531
	Other Costs			\$75,268		\$142,719
41204001	HOUSING REGISTRY		\$83,754	\$83,754	\$83,754	\$83,754
41204010	TURNING 22 SERVICES		\$1,106,000	\$959,937	\$712,550	\$583,455
41204051	ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY LOAN PROGRAM		\$565,000	\$565,000	\$0	\$0
41205000	HOME CARE SERVICES		\$4,339,768		\$4,446,945	
	Personnel Costs			\$690,509		\$774,129
	Direct Services			\$3,379,527		\$3,464,883
	Other Costs			\$94,945		\$115,559
41205050	MEDICAID RETAINED REVENUE		\$2,000,000	\$1,665,683	\$1,900,000	\$1,642,491

Approp	Approp Name	CATEGORY	FY2005 Authorized	FY2005 Expended	FY2006 Authorized	FY2006 Expended
41206000	HEAD INJURED SERVICES		\$6,000,568		\$8,139,160	
	Personnel Costs			\$792,608		\$863,845
	Direct Services			\$5,016,871		\$6,983,629
	Allocated Out			\$85,710		\$60,000
	Other Costs			\$77,902		\$100,752
41206002	HEAD INJURED TRUST FUND		\$6,644,794	\$6,644,794	\$6,725,395	\$6,725,395
Allocations	DMR ALLOCATION - ROLLAND		\$4,592,943	\$4,592,943	\$5,728,190	\$5,728,190
TOTAL			\$48,567,626	\$47,531,396	\$51,839,382	\$50,856,700

## FY 2006 State Funds



Division Name	FY2006
Vocational Rehabilitation (VR/EEP)	15,328,424
Community Services - All Other	23,074,691
DMR Allocation - Rolland	5,728,190
Head Injury Trust Fund	6,725,395
<b>Total State Funds Expended</b>	<b>50,856,700</b>



The MRC has two staff members working within the Commissioner's Office in the agency's Customer Relations Department who report directly to the MRC Chief of Staff. One of these staff members is a full-time Ombudsperson who serves as a customer liaison, primarily to address consumer concerns regarding the delivery of services, as well as 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 frequently 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 and mediation also available to MRC-VR consumers, both handled by the agency's Appeals Coordinator.

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](http://www.mass.gov/mrc) or by writing the MRC Administrative Office in Boston. The Appeals Coordinator may be contacted by telephone at (617) 204-3602 or (800) 245-6543 (voice and TTY) or by writing the MRC Administrative Office in Boston.

## In Memoriam Robert J. Donahue

For the past 14 years, Mr. Donahue was the Ombudsperson for the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission where he was always available as a customer liaison addressing consumer concerns. Bob dedicated his life to helping people overcome adversity, spending the past 30 years attending meetings, lobbying at the State House and fighting for the rights of people with disabilities. He will be greatly missed by his MRC family and the consumers we serve.

