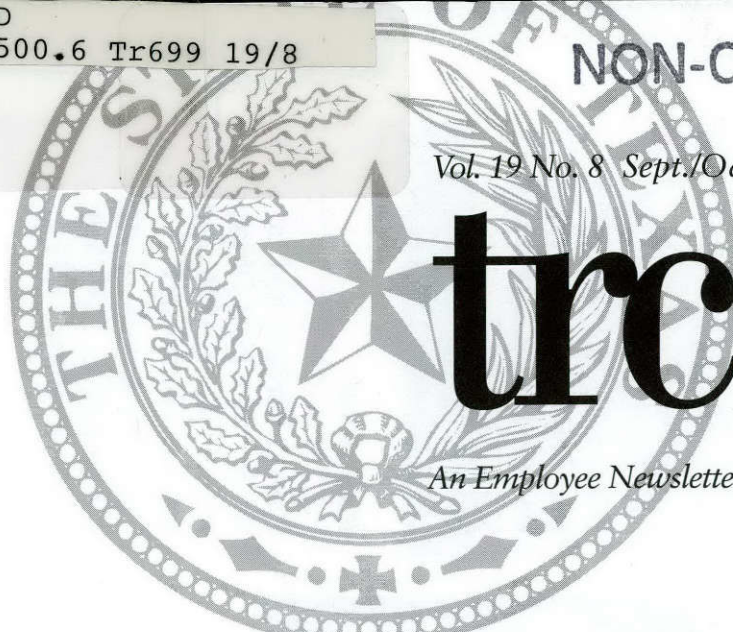


Vol. 19 No. 8 Sept./Oct. 1996

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trc

today

An Employee Newsletter for Texas Rehabilitation Commission

**Reauthorization
of the
Rehabilitation Act**

*It's the future of vocational
rehabilitation. Find out what
it means and what you
can do to help* ★

trc today

An Employee Newsletter for Texas Rehabilitation Commission

Texas Rehabilitation
Commission
4900 N. Lamar Blvd.
Austin, Texas 78751-2399
Vol. 19 No. 8 Sept./Oct. 1996

*In its long history, the Rehabilitation Act has been reauthorized numerous times.
Almost every time, vocational rehabilitation enjoyed bi-partisan support and approval . . . until now.*

Reauthorization of the Rehabilitation Act

This is *not* just another five-year review and automatic extension of a program that has enjoyed long term support across the board. There are those who want the VR Program gone, over and over and over again — in the very next session of Congress.

This article will educate you on exactly what reauthorization means and what issues surround it. It will also outline ways you can help support public vocational rehabilitation and TRC.

The Process

Basically, what Reauthorization comes down to is funding. Before Congress spends money on a program, it first *authorizes* appropriations for the program for a certain number of years, and then *appropriates* each year for the program. In the case of VR, Congress authorizes and reauthorizes funding for the Rehabilitation Act.

Congress also takes an opportunity to reexamine and make adjustments by “amending” the program. We have seen eight amendments through the years, most notably in the addition of the Independent Living program in the 1970s and recently, the emphasis of informed client choice in 1992. We might be in store for more.

The Issues

If job consolidation bills, which were hotly debated last

year, die in this Congress (which is likely), new bills probably will be introduced in both houses of Congress at the same time programs under the Rehabilitation Act are reauthorized.

“Basically, it comes down to this: Are we going to have the resources to fund our programs?”

— Commissioner Arrell

Virtually everyone on Capitol Hill wants to consolidate job training programs but there is little agreement on how to do it. So, issues surrounding job consolidation are expected to continue and slip over into dialogue regarding reauthorization. These issues may include:

- *The establishment of “local” VR agencies.* The House supports pushing money and control down to local boards while the Senate favors giving money and control to the governors.

- *A requirement to use vouchers in the VR and IL programs.* Those who favor vouchers believe they will enhance informed choice. Those opposed believe that clients already have informed choice and that since only certain vendors would accept vouchers, they may actually reduce informed client choice. The amount of the vouchers is an important, related issue. Whoever determines the amount of the voucher also determines who is going to be accountable for the

funds — the VR agency or the individual client.

- *An attempt to block grant VR funds with other funds.*
- *Governors being allowed to use funds for other purposes.*

Another issue that might come up during reauthorization is a move from an Order of Selection to a system of a “first come, first served” basis. Those in favor hope it will simplify the program and level the playing field. The role of Rehabilitation Advisory Councils might also be looked at and strengthened to give more authority to the councils.

“The Act itself is solid. But there must be changes to the process. That's the reason behind the Aspen paper and our own reengineering effort.”

— Commissioner Arrell

The Players

It is likely that the very strongest VR naysayers during last year's job training consolidation will be major players in the upcoming reauthorization of the Rehabilitation Act.

Rep. Howard “Buck” McKeon, R-CA, is expected to chair the subcommittee in the House which will consider reauthorization and Rep. William “Big Deal” Goodling, R-PA, most likely will chair the full committee in the House. Many of you might remember their faces from C-Span footage during discussion on the Green Amendment and recall their vehement negativity towards vocational rehabilitation and its “bureaucrats”.

In the Senate, several senators who are knowledgeable friends of VR, are leaving. As well, key members of the Senate who will consider reauthorization are unknown.

What You Can Do

The only effective way to educate congressmen/women is through their constituents. That is you. You live the mission of serving people with disabilities. You, as a voice, can help protect their rights and interests. But that takes keeping in touch with the issues. And making your voice heard. Take time now to build relationships in your district — not as a concerned bureaucrat, but as a knowledgeable citizen. The future of VR depends on it.

One step closer

That's right. We're taking one BIG step closer to Reengineering implementation. Or should we say two Currently, TRC is conducting two trial runs of the new system. In the first trial run, counselors, RSTs, regional program specialists and others came to Austin Regional Office to test the automation in action from the beginning to the end of a case. The group also took a look at features such as dial-in capabilities.

The verdict ... so far, the new reengineered system has gotten great reviews. Even those new to computers have found it's easy to learn and easy to use. Of course, the main purpose of a trial run is to find the "bugs" in the system. So far, the "bug" is that more data needs to be input into the databases, which will be taken care of this fall.

The next trial run started in the East Austin Field Office. It was a test in the day-to-day life of a field office — clients walking in, phones ringing in the busy work world of a counselor and RST. "In this trial run, it comes down to our clients," says Tony Lawrence, area manager in the East Austin Field Office. "Our test will be to make sure this system benefits our clients because that is who the system is for."

In October, training begins. This time participants can go back and practice what they learned. No worrying about the impact of a mistake. There will be about two months to learn and become comfortable with the tools available before the Jan. 1 cut-over to the new system.

Here's what core members of the first trial run had to say about what they experienced:

The system works. We can use the system to get a case from the beginning to the end. It's there. Anyone who can click can use this program.
— Bertha Hinojosa, team leader

It's going to be very exciting when it goes to the field. It's very user friendly. It's going to help us speed up our work and cut down on our paperwork.
— Sue Holloway and Pat Green, medical service coordinators, Tyler and Metroplex

It's totally different from anything we've thought before about the VR process. Within a year of

getting this system, we're going to wonder why we ever did it the way before. And the more you use it, the quicker it gets to use. It's our same philosophy, it's just an easier way to do it.
— Bill Davis, area manager, Arlington

People shouldn't be afraid of it. Once you learn the steps, it flows smoothly.
— Ramiro Ramirez, counselor, Laredo

It's now easy to do purchase orders and make payments. It's for the clients because it makes everything run more smoothly. Since it takes less time to do this stuff, it'll give us more time with our clients.

— Mick Mickler, counselor, Austin

It's really very easy to learn everything. It takes you step by step and won't take long for someone to train on it.

— Anita Herrera, RST, Dallas

Once we get everything loaded into the databases, it'll be great. I can see where the rural counselor and the area manager can both be looking at the case file simultaneously and see the same things. It'll cut down on questions.

— Larry Moore, AST, Texarkana

The best thing about it is we won't have to carry cases around with us anymore, shifting them from one place to another. When you sit at your computer, it's all right there in front of you

— Johnnie Weddington, Region 5 program specialist

I see having to use paper and automation for a while because I travel to areas without phone lines. But, it's so easy and quick to use that I don't see this as a problem.

— Francisco Lujan, counselor, Fort Stockton

We have to realize that we need to scratch what we had and start with this. That helped us a lot in adjusting to it. At first, we started out with a lot of questions, but those questions relied on the old way. This is a whole new way and it's marvelous.

— Sherry Brewer, RST, Amarillo

Building Bridges



Recently, Texas Goodwill leadership paid TRC a visit to repave paths of communication after last year's debate over job consolidation legislation. "Our position on H.R. 1617 was overstated and clearly a mistake," said Goodwill president and CEO Fred Gandy. "We want to build positive relationships with vocational rehabilitation programs."

The meeting ended with a renewed sense of partnership between TRC and local Goodwills across Texas. "Our service delivery system is changing," said Commissioner Arrell. "I see more accountability and responsibility going to the counselor level. And I see more flexibility in working with organizations like Goodwill."

In photos, Gandy and Arrell looking at Goodwill statistics and Arrell with Goodwill leadership.

Focus On Quality

Quality ... what does it mean to our clients and how do we instill it into our everyday work? One of the ways we find out is to go to those who walk the talk. On August 28 - 29, counselors, RSTs and area managers from each region who have consistently achieved high satisfaction ratings attended a Focus On Quality Seminar in Austin.

Part of the seminar was for the attendees to receive recognition for their efforts. During a special recognition dinner, attendees received awards for their quality work. Afterwards, keynote speaker Sam Zigrossi, education client executive with IBM, shared his viewpoints on customer service and how the organization's culture contributes to quality outcomes.

"These counselors and RSTs had 16 and, some as many as 26, completed client surveys," said Terry Smith, chair of the Quality Committee at the conference. "And each has a 3.9 or 4.0 rating. That means that for every one with a 4.0, each



L to R - Row 1: Wanda Connaway, Rebecca Boyce, Hope Black, Shirley Rainey, Joellen F. Simmons, Henry Etta Collier - Row 2: Roberto Garcia, Patricia Sumpter, Donald Jones, Reuben Taniguchi - Row 3: John Stowe, Boyd Henry, Lawrence Bradley, Javier Leal and Kenneth Vogel.

client was very satisfied with services. And for 3.9, nine out of 10 clients were also very satisfied. That is remarkable."

"I think of these employees as pathfinders — they are a select but representative group who do the complex work it takes for quality rehabilitation. The reason we do the forum every year is because the agency wants to

recognize the value of these people and respect them," adds Smith. And it generates new ideas that we can share."

In the concluding portion of the forum, attendants broke into focus groups to answer questions relating to quality employment for clients, involvement in client choice and work habits that add quality to services.

Across the State Sept 1996

Welcome Aboard!

Stuart McPhail, ad tech
Irma Clark, counselor
Lisa Carrol, RST
Kimberley Fletcher, RST
Valerie Roberson, counselor
Maureen Urban, RST
Diddy Benevidez, RST
Lorraine Hernandez, RST
Ricardo Pompa, ad tech
Tracy Klein, RST
Deobrah Maisel, RST
Ester Anguiano, ad tech

Retirements

Carolyn Clepper, RST in the Baytown Field Office, retired July 31, 1996 after 29 years of state service.

Mary Ann Rodriguez, DE, retired July 31, 1996 with nearly 22 years of state service.

Deaths

Beth Palmer passed away August 25, 1996. Beth had been a counselor in the Irving Field Office and retired August 31, 1995 after more than 12 years of TRC service.

Region I Conference



At the Region I Conference, Speaker of the House Pete Laney was keynote speaker. During the address, he was very complimentary of Region I for being responsive to his constituents and also had good words to say about TRC as an agency. In a time of maximizing resources and doing more with less, Laney's advice is to focus on what we *can* do as state employees, not what we can't do. (In the photo: Speaker Laney, Mary Valentini, Region I director and Commissioner Arrell)

Letters

Here's an excerpt from a letter that Counselor Carole Barnes and RST Shjuania Harris of the Tyler FO received from a client:

"Mere thanks is and never will be enough to let you both know how much I appreciate all that you and TRC have done for me. You have been here for me all the times I needed you; financially as well (and most importantly) emotionally. You backed me up while pursuing my education and also now as I take that knowledge into my career. You believed in me when I doubted myself, encouraged me when I was scared. Thank you for your unending love and support."

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Address Correction Requested

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TRC Today is published by the Texas Rehabilitation Commission for distribution to its employees and retirees throughout the state. We welcome submissions for publication, but reserve the right to edit or screen materials according to newsletter policy. Address submissions or inquires to Shayla Fleshman, Public Information Office, Texas Rehabilitation Commission, 4900 N. Lamar Blvd., Austin, Texas 78751-2399; or telephone (512) 483-4043.

*Shayla Fleshman, Editor
Susan Antoniewicz, Design*

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State Service Awards - September 1996

10 Years

Stacey Veazey
Rose Williams

15 Years

Larry Thompson
Gloria Lopez
Patsy Ann Scruggs
Travis Cameron, Jr.
Marla Gard
Joan Roberts-Scott
Elizabeth Romero
Susan Heinze
Janice Smith

20 Years

Joan Johnson
Nancy Dreier

25 Years

Donna Hobbs
Ruby Werchan
Patricia Zombola
Gary Gill
Bettie Rozell
Merry Straube
Wenceslado Huerta

30 Years

John Stowe

Tammy Huie of Sulphur Springs reached her 10-year anniversary and was overlooked in the newsletter. Congratulations!