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trc today

An Employee Newsletter for Texas Rehabilitation Commission



Sine die...
the meeting is
adjourned

The 75th
“DIAMOND” Legislature

Defying the medical odds ...

Sharon Pignolet's body lay lifeless. Her pastor prayed while friends and family blinked away the tears. It was time to say goodbye. Or was it? Sharon defied the medical odds. "I'm a very lucky girl to be alive, I'm real grateful for that," said Sharon.

Sharon was alive — but she wasn't the same.

A horse riding accident similar to Christopher Reeves' left her body and mind extremely different from before. With the help of her husband, she began to relearn the basics — walking, cleaning, and grocery shopping. In the middle of her recovery she suffered another blow. Her husband died of lung cancer.

Eventually, Sharon returned to work as a personnel recruiter, but she struggled because of her short-term memory loss. And then, Sharon found a friend — TRC.

With the agency's help, Sharon attended school and set up her own practice as a chiropractor. "I credit Texas Rehab with getting me through school," said Sharon, "not only financially, but emotionally as well."



Sharon Pignolet works with a patient.

Talesia Beasley, Sharon's counselor, knew her client was determined but never imagined her where she is today. "It's definitely a success for me to see that she has come this far," said Beasley. "Just to know that I helped her accomplish that goal is a great feeling."

Chiropractic treatment is nothing new to Sharon. She credits it with almost curing her injuries from the accident. It's never far from her mind. "I measure my success by the fact that I'm still here alive to talk about it and still able to function. It makes me feel really great that I can help some patient, and if they can leave and feel better, that makes me feel successful."

DDS Gearing up for 21st Century!

You've heard the expression, "If you don't like the weather in Texas, wait and it will change." That's a good philosophy to follow if you work at DDS these days.

The move to the new building in January 1996 was just the first wave of changes to come. Last year brought changes in leadership, changes in the Social Security program, and a shift to a fully-automated system. But, hang on to your hats, because that's nothing compared to what has happened this year and what is on the horizon.

Here are some of the issues facing DDS right now and in the future.

Welfare reform has taken its toll on DDS with an additional 2,500 drug and alcohol abuse cases, 14,000 childhood redetermination cases and expansion to the CDRs. Each case is unique and requires painstaking review. There are so many exceptions to the rules DEs now find exceptions to be the norm. "The Social Security program just naturally has a lot changes," says Commissioner Arrell, "but welfare reform has had a significant impact on DDS workloads."

Heavier workloads spell more staff. With FTE targets in Texas, hiring more staff to take on the extra caseloads meant going to the Texas Legislature and requesting a waiver. The FTE cap was waived, and we got the go ahead to add 116 new positions.

Additional staff means more space, more computers, and more training. "One change impacts the whole organization," said Dave Ward, deputy commissioner. "And coordination of all the components is a critical part of absorbing all the changes. We had to figure out how to absorb the changes, move people around to add more positions and still maintain focus on processing the never-ending flow of cases arriving daily from Social Security." Three directorates moved next door to DDS-East in March 1997, and plans are under-



In an informal staff meeting, Dave Ward responds to questions and concerns of staff while Esther Diaz captures it on a flip chart. "I believe that we now have an organization built to accommodate, absorb and implement all the changes that are coming at us both at the state and federal levels," says Ward. "DDS folks should be commended. They have done a good job and they're still humming."

way to add a wing (Project 1999) to the present building to keep everyone under one roof.

Reorganization. To better process the demands of change, DDS was reorganized into three major areas: Program Operations, Administrative Services and a new area composed of policy, budget, human resources and inquiries — four front-line components with concerns that arch the entire DDS. "The reorganization allows us to better coordinate changes coming down the pike," said Ward. "The infrastructure of DDS had to change to accommodate that."

Visibility. As DDS caseload populations grew, others realized the impact of determinations on other service programs in Texas. Suddenly, case determinations and the \$3 billion in benefits paid to Texans from Social Security had a major impact on the state's economy. "This federal program - that no one knew much about - now had an impact on TRC, MH/MR, DHS and Health Department client populations," said Ward. "We have done a good job keeping legislators and other agencies informed through the Commissioner's Office and Office of External Affairs."

Employees who received 12

MAXIMIZERS

From DDS
Lizz Bobb

From Region 4
Jennie Ferrell
Felesita Barnes
Teresa Bolden
Lee Lenor
Nico Castillo
Vera Castro
Elsa Coronel
Gloria Dominguez
Yolanda Douglas
Becky Frausto
Loraine Gomez
Doris Hickerson
Vern Hickerson
Diana Houston
Carlynn Huffer
Bill Moseley
Maria Murphey
Pankie Ned

Trang Ngo
Sandra Olison
Carmen Pfitzner
Queen Phillips
Juana Pineda
Charlene Potts
Cheryl Reed
Elizabeth Rhodes
Linda Robinson
Laura Rone
Kelly Shupak
Michelle Robinson
Larry Smith
Vanessa Watkins
Tina Wheeler
Wanda Williams
Judy Zwahr
Jim Newman
Nell Crawford



Automation. With 257,800 cases to process in FY97, automation plays a key role in the internal determination process and is crucial to gearing up for the future. A key concern is compatibility between a new automated Social Security system and TRC's reengineered fiscal and personnel system. As the second largest DDS in the nation, TRC representatives are participating on national project teams to redesign the Social Security system. "From the national level to local staff, we must keep communication lines open and share the information rapidly so that everyone can be on the same page and keep up," said Ward. Automation and cc:Mail have played a key role in that communication.

Any one of the changes DDS is experiencing is major. "We now have an atmosphere that is commensurate with what we ought to have," says Commissioner Arrell. "Getting into a more livable and workable environment and going to total automation certainly enhances the process. We are ready to go into the 21st century."

TRC earns safety award



Deputy Commissioner Leon Holland (left) and Commissioner Max Arrell congratulate TRC Risk Manager Wally Balzac (center). TRC earned the Texas State Risk Management Bronze Safety Award for FY96, and Balzac, who started working at TRC in January 1993 as a safety specialist, accepted the award.

The TRC Planning Process— It's Back to the Basics

It's a hot, lazy summer day in mid-July. With the legislative session behind us, you sit back to relax, sipping on a cool glass of iced tea. Not! — at least not for TRC managers. You will likely see managers rolling up their sleeves and getting on with the planning process. Commission Letter 97-5, dated May 12, requires selected managers to have an approved written plan before the beginning of FY 1998.

"This is not a new initiative," said Jeff Kaufmann, director of TRC's Planning Office. "Planning is one of the basic functions of management. For years TRC managers have been highly respected in government circles for their success in this area. What we are focusing on this year is outcomes." The reason to have a plan is to improve your ability to get results. An outcome-driven plan also means we have to find ways to measure what we say we are going to do.

Plan ~ v ~ To work out and arrange the parts or details of
Plan ~ n ~ A method for accomplishing something or ~ a systematic arrangement or design

The key to measuring what you do is having a good clear objective. "If you know what you are going to do, then you can measure whether you have done it or not," continued Kaufmann. "What you measure is what you get."

"I see FY 1998 as a year for implementation," says Commissioner Arrell. "A time for us to get better at what we already do. What I need is accountability, and managers will be responsible for the results of actions based on their plans."

Planning is essential to create a budget, and the budget drives your day-to-day operations. If you work in VR, it could mean money to help a client get a hearing aid. At DDS it may affect the number of determinations you make. In administration it's less concrete. Maybe it helps you respond more quickly to a customer's needs, or develop a form that others can use. What it all boils down to is making sure we are serving our customers.

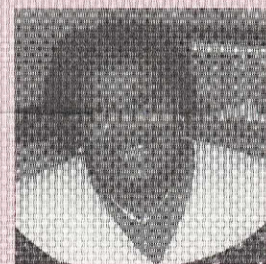
Managers may opt to use any number of processes to create a plan, and they are encouraged to involve stakeholders. All plans must include a mission statement, goals, objectives and ways to measure achieving the goals and objectives. The TRC Planning Office developed a "cookbook" of guidelines. If you have questions, call the planning office (512-424-4820) — they are there to help.

Across the State

Welcome Aboard

Michael Keim, data base administrator
Sherry Pouncey, admin tech
Lucy Ross, admin tech
Kimberly Smith, research assistant
Rita Tillinghast, admin tech
Martha Lechuga, RST
Rebecca Petronella, RST
Carol Edward, RST
John Mackenzie, counselor
Vernon Harper Newman, counselor
Belinda Pascoe, RST
Sandra Hogue, RST
Margarita Silos, RST
Diane Cordova, RST
Dora Ontiveros, RST
Christopher Sanchez, secretary
Sandra Ayer, DST
Lisa Navejas, clerk
Sandra Pickering, clerk

Retirements



Jean Martin retired from DDS on June 30. Martin served as a disability examiner, case consultant, unit supervisor, supervisory hearing officer and program specialist over the past 25 years.

In addition to her professional contributions, Martin's most notable personal contribution was the origination of the annual Black History Celebration, now a multi-agency event. Her legacy will live on thanks to the many people she has inspired to carry on this fine tradition.



Sarah Hallum, administrative assistant to the Commissioner and secretary to the TRC Board retired on June 30 with almost 32 years of service.

Hallum began working as a steno in VR under TEA in San Antonio in 1963 at a whopping salary of \$245.50 a month. Demonstrating proof of her abilities, she quickly received a promotion and an \$11 a month raise.

Hallum transferred from San Antonio to Austin where she worked in Program Development then became secretary to VR Programs Deputy Commissioner Doyle Wheeler. When Wheeler retired 14 years later, Hallum offered continuity to the Commissioner's Office, working with Deputy Commissioner for Programs and Administrative Services and, more recently, as secretary to Executive Deputy Commissioner James Jackson. In August 1995, Hallum was promoted to the Commissioner's administrative assistant and secretary to the TRC Board.

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*Shayla Fleshman, Editor
Prissy Pense, Writing & Photography
Susan Antoniewicz, Design*

State Service Awards July 1997

10 years

Carolyn Glatz
Mary Wasson
Cheryl Jones
Michael Custy
Clemente Rodriguez

15 years

Roseann Roberts
Lorretta Brown
Susie Gonzales
Maria Aranda
Anna Lara

20 years

Fay Palacios
Grace Valentine
Debra Danforth
Mary Berry
Eileen Danaher
Carol Richardson

25 years

Laanna Johnson
Zephyr Skinner
William Nash
Laverne Caldwell
Larry Key
Janie Resendez
Mary Jasso

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