

Commissioner Robinson Announces New VR Director

Commissioner Robinson recently announced the appointment of Aleisa McKinlay (right) as DOE's new Director of the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, effective Nov. 1, 2011. Aleisa has served the Division for nearly three years as the Chief of the Bureau of Partnerships and



Communication where she has done an outstanding job overseeing the Ombudsman Program, Centers for Independent Living, Division communication, legislative affairs, and many other responsibilities. Prior to joining the Department, she was Bureau Chief for Adult Community Mental Health at the Florida Department of Children and Families, as well as a Program Director at the Advocacy Center for Persons with Disabilities. In addition to holding her law degree, Aleisa has significant experience in the mental health field and will be a tremendous advocate for the needs of our VR customers. You can read more about Aleisa on the home page of the VR I-net.

New VR PowerPoint Styles!

Vocational Rehabilitation now has its own PowerPoint styles or themes for employees to use in their presentations. You can find them on the Communications page of the VR I-net under "VR PowerPoint Styles." There are three styles/themes to choose from: blue background with white font, white background with black font, or white background with blue font.



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VR SUCCESS STORIES

A New Office Nameplate Template is now available on the Communications page of the VR I-net under "Office Nameplate." It's a word document and should be printed on card stock paper.

Disability Employment Awareness Month Celebrations

Statewide Celebration

Thursday, Oct. 27, 2011

8:30 - 11:00 a.m.

Tallahassee City Commission Chambers
300 S. Adams St.

Vocational Rehabilitation (VR), the Division of Blind Services, and the Agency for Persons with Disabilities will recognize businesses that are committed to hiring people with disabilities. This event is in recognition of October as National Disability Employment Awareness Month.

The Disability Employment Awareness Celebration is a free event and open to the public. We will honor Great Explorations Children's Museum in St. Petersburg, Hyatt Hotels and Resorts of Florida, Sacred Heart Health System, Five Guys Burgers, Citrus Memorial Health Care, Loew's Miami Beach Hotel, Florida Department of Revenue, Marriott Worldwide Call Center, and My Best Friend's Kitchen in Panama City.

Disability Mentoring Day

Florida Disability Mentoring Day (DMD) is a unique, one day job-shadowing opportunity that gives mentees the opportunity to learn hands-on skills, observe day-to-day job responsibilities, and get a better understanding of the workplace environment. This is also a chance for participants to meet and greet in the business world while employers share their experience and advice. Disability Mentoring Day is Wednesday, October 19; however, events and mentoring of students with disabilities will be going on throughout the month. If you are interested in becoming a mentor, contact your local liaison through The Able Trust at (850) 224-4493 or visit www.floridadmd.org.

Area 4 Celebration

Tuesday, Oct. 25, 2011

8:30 - 10:00 a.m.

Park Station
5851 Park Blvd.,
Pinellas Park

VR will honor outstanding employers from Pinellas and surrounding counties for being leaders in the employment of people with disabilities. The event is free, and the public is also invited to view informational displays. We will honor Chick-fil-A, Ward's Seafood Market, Postcard Inn on the Beach and the Brentwood Senior Living Community.



Area 5 Celebration

Thursday, Nov. 10, 2011

8:30 - 10:00 a.m.

The Faculty Club at Florida Atlantic University

VR will honor outstanding employers from Broward and Palm Beach Counties for being leaders in the employment of people with disabilities. The event is free, and the public is also invited to view informational displays. We will honor the Palm Beach Kennel Club, City of Riviera Beach, A.R.E. Utility Construction, Canada House Beach Club, and Publix Super Markets in Broward and Palm Beach Counties.

VR Mission

To provide services to eligible individuals with physical and/or mental impairments that will enable an individual to achieve an employment goal and/or enhance their independence.

What's The Buzz?

From the Ombudsman's Section



The Ombudsman's office has completed our first fiscal year with a new database, which has proven to be very effective in helping us process the complaints or inquiries that

we receive. There were a total of 2,463 phone calls, letters or emails received during the 2010-11 fiscal year, of which only 1,290 of the inquiries were actual service complaints. In reviewing these complaints, it is noted that only 328 were coded as being valid complaints. We can safely conclude that we are doing a very good job of providing quality customer service, when we consider that during the 2010-11 fiscal year, 85,951 customers were served by VR staff from status 02 through closure.

The Ombudsman Annual Report is located on the VR I-net in the Partnerships and Communications section. We have made the report user friendly so you can identify

the inquiries per area, as well as the type of complaints and the validity by area. We encourage you to review the report, and if you have any questions or suggestions for the Ombudsman's Office, we encourage you to contact us.

The Ombudsman staff: Ginny Ellsworth, LaRae Jemison, Tameka Russ, Gayle Westley-Barth, and Linda Larsen want to thank the VR/ BRRS field staff who worked so patiently with us toward resolution of our customer complaints. We would like to formally recognize the following VR staff for their diligence in working through customer complaints; and will make this a quarterly feature in the newsletter.

Pamela Ascanio, Unit Supervisor and Traci Griffin, Senior VR Counselor from Area 3, Unit 13A worked together as a team on very difficult cases. They demonstrated the three Ps: professionalism, proficiency, and patience. These, together with their caring attitudes about their work and the customers they serve, make for a winning combination. Thanks to Pam and Traci for providing great customer service!

In addition, we want to recognize George Barthalow, VR Area Supervisor, and Lori Kennison, VR Unit Supervisor from Area 4, for the phenomenal guidance and counseling they continually demonstrate. Their fine work is shown in their commitment to the VR customers we serve.



Follow up Counselor Training: August 2011

Left to Right, (seated): Maria Capella-Miller, David Barnes, Kara Jeffs, Christine Kemp, Michelle Nelson; second row: Tomeka Bright, Jim Davis, Mia Heikkila, Start Benton, Angela Brown, Rosalyn Tripp and Lucas Halverson.

Florida Rehabilitation Association Annual Conference

The Florida Rehabilitation Association (FRA) held its annual conference at the Hyatt Regency Clearwater Beach from Aug. 31 through Sept. 3. VR Counselors from around the state attended, as well as other rehabilitation professionals in Florida. Our own state director, Bill Palmer, attended and presented updates within our agency at the conference. Other presenters included Dr. Joan Reid from the University of South Florida who shared information about Ethical Dilemmas While Working with Ex-offenders and Dr. Marshall Knudson who spoke about Suicidology. Next year, the Florida Rehabilitation Association will host the Southeastern Regional National Rehabilitation Association conference (SERNRA) at the Safety Harbor Resort and Spa from May 6–9. More information about this conference will be coming soon.



Left to Right: Christina McFarland, Dorca Raimundi, Carrie Shelton, and Donna Farrell enjoy a break during the Florida Rehabilitation Association Annual Conference.



In recognition of Commissioner Robinson's College Colors Day Promotion to get everyone geared up for the football season, Area 4 displayed their 'College Colors' on Friday, Sept. 3.

Working with Ex-Offenders with Disabilities

The Guidelines for Serving Ex-Offenders with Disabilities has been added to the VR I-net under the Field Services Main Page (Operational Policies and Procedures Related Documents) and on www.rehabworks.org. This document highlights tips for helping VR customers who also have an arrest record or, "Ex-Offender status," so they can find competitive employment.

We're looking for more VR After Hours stories. If you volunteer or have a fun extra job, please send your story to Rachel. Smith@vr.fldoe.org. You can also send in suggestions about your co-workers.

Edit Your Photos in Office!

You may not realize this, but the Microsoft Office suite on your computer includes a very nice photo editing program. Go to the Start button and click on All Programs, then go to the Microsoft Office folder and click on Microsoft Office Tools. In the Tools folder is the Microsoft Picture Manager where you can edit your photos. Click Edit Pictures in the right-hand column and then you can adjust the color, brightness and contrast, crop, rotate, resize and remove red eyes.

A Slip in the Rain Changed His Life

Dunnellon, FL – A simple slip in the rain sent William Garnaflo down an unexpected path to Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) and Counselor Patricia Harrison. That slip broke his elbow, and in an instant, took away his ability to use his hand and arm freely. He couldn't comb his hair, he couldn't put on a jacket, and he went into a depression for two years. "It's just the small things that you take for granted," says William. "It's amazing how not having stable footing can change your life in an instant."

Fortunately for William, a friend of the family knew about VR and sent him searching for help. "As someone who had all of my abilities up until five years ago, I hadn't heard about VR." But after a few phone calls, he was assigned to VR Counselor Patricia Harrison, who immediately saw that William could benefit from the VR program. "When William came to us, there were a lot of things he couldn't do," says Patricia. "But he told me that if you'll just get my elbow straight, I'll do whatever you ask me to do because I really, really want to work. And the great thing about William is that's exactly what he did. Whatever I asked him to do, he did it, and he worked hard on his rehabilitation."

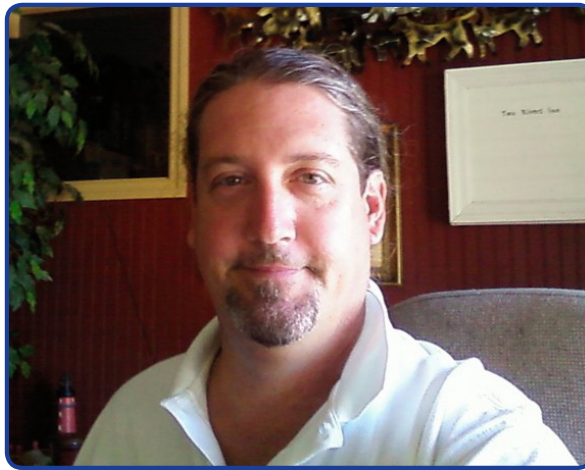
William returns the compliment saying, "Patricia was a dream counselor. She went above and beyond in dealing with the doctors and the paperwork and making sure everything went smoothly for me. She was perfect, and she made it possible. She really went to bat for me."

It wasn't easy for William to find a job once his rehabilitation was complete, given today's economy. He moved home to Orlando, thinking the opportunities would be better in a larger city, but what he found were more people applying for the same few jobs. He moved back to Dunnellon, determined not to stop looking until he found a job, walked into the Two Rivers Inn and, literally, was hired on the spot.

He is now the Resident Manager of the small, restored hotel where he lives on the property, and his job is to

make sure his customers have an exemplary stay. William likes to think of himself as an ambassador for Dunnellon each time he gives visitors suggestions for what to do and where to go while in town. He has turned the hotel around and helped make it the number one-rated hotel in Dunnellon.

When asked how VR changed his life, William is quick to respond, "It gave it [my life] back. I sat for two years without a purpose, but now I make a difference every day. To have something that you take for granted every single day taken away and then to get it back, it's priceless. It was my privilege to have the opportunity to do these things for myself. It changed my life."



William Garnaflo works as the Resident Manager of the Two Rivers Inn in Dunnellon.

William's goal is to move up in the hotel business, and his five-year plan is to one day own the Two Rivers Hotel. He says that there is nothing set in stone just yet, but he and the current owners have been discussing it. "There's something to be said for living the American Dream and having the opportunity," he says.

In that vein, William would also like to give back to VR and help spread the word about the great work it does for people with disabilities. "I take each day as an opportunity, and when you have the go-get-it approach, the outcome is what you make of it."

William also wants to convince more business owners to give people with disabilities a chance. He plans to participate in VR's On-the-Job Training program, a program where VR reimburses employers for the trainee's salary, training costs, and any accommodations needed. It's a win-win situation for both the business owner and the employee. He would like to give someone else the same opportunity he was given, when he has the chance.

Throughout her career, Patricia has worked in jobs that involve helping people, and she has worked for VR for five years. She says that it is very gratifying to have someone like William come up to you and say, "Thank you for what you did for me." It makes coming to work every day very satisfying, and she feels that she has a purpose.