

Alaska State Vocational Rehabilitation Committee

2016 Annual Report

Empowerment for Employment



Committee Members

Mary Elam

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Eagle River
Parent Training and Info.
Center Representative

Gail Sorensen

Dillingham
Tribal Vocational
Rehabilitation

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Anchorage
Client Assistance
Program

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Juneau
Alaska Dept. of Education
& Early Development

Dan Elstad

Juneau
Consumer Advocate

Travis Noah

Anchorage
Consumer Advocate

David Berube

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Business Representative

Lindsay Davison

Chugiak
State Independent Living
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Bob Purvis

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John Cannon

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Mary Ann Pruitt

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Bonnie Lucas

Anchorage
Consumer Advocate

Mae Marsh

Fairbanks
Business Representative

The Alaska State Vocational Rehabilitation Committee (SVRC) is composed of volunteers from around the state who are appointed by the Governor to both advise and partner with the Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development's Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR). Members help shape policy by participating in strategic planning, needs assessments, consumer satisfaction surveys and ongoing program evaluation.

Members include people with disabilities, community rehabilitation program employees, representatives from independent living, special education and Tribal Vocational Rehabilitation (TVR) programs, advocates, VR participants and business leaders.

Each year the SVRC submits this report on the status of the DVR program to the Governor and to the Rehabilitation Services Administration.

Prior SVRC members who served during this reporting period, but have completed their term of service or resigned include: Barrie Brent and Teresa Sarabia.

DVR Strategic Plan



Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Mission

To assist individuals with disabilities to obtain and maintain employment.

The SVRC and DVR continuously work to improve the delivery of vocational rehabilitation (VR) services to Alaskans with disabilities. A keystone of this work is an ongoing, three year cyclical strategic planning process, which is the responsibility of DVR and SVRC leadership. The strategic planning process utilizes data captured from the triennial Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA) report. The CSNA asked the questions: what are the vocational rehabilitation (VR) needs of individuals with disabilities with the most significant disabilities, who are minorities or who are in unserved or underserved populations, and who are served through other components of the statewide workforce investment system. The CSNA also addressed the need to establish, develop or improve community rehabilitation providers (CRPs) within the state.

The strategic planning team includes the DVR management and leadership teams, SVRC members, the Client Assistance Program, and Tribal VR programs. The four goals listed below were identified for the 2017-2019 planning cycle and provide organizational direction and focus for DVR. Specific teams are tasked with duties that will ensure these goals are met. These assigned tasks are reviewed and updated quarterly.

Goal 1: Provide High Quality Services

DVR will deliver high-quality vocational rehabilitation services to people with disabilities and assist them with obtaining employment that is consistent with their career goals. This goal reflects DVR's continued focus on improving the VR service delivery system with the objectives and strategies identified by the triennial Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA). The CSNA can be found at: www.labor.state.ak.us/dvr/about_us/Comprehensive-Statewide-Needs-Assessment-2016-2018-final.pdf

Goal 2: Provide Highly Skilled Staff

DVR will recruit, employ, retain and train the most qualified and highly skilled rehabilitation staff. This goal reflects the value DVR places on well-trained staff and the need for succession planning to ensure adequate ongoing staffing levels.

Goal 3: Improve Organizational Systems

DVR will continuously evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of organizational systems and identify opportunities to develop innovative solutions for necessary changes. This will include implementing advancements in technology as resources allow, analyzing current business practices to improve our service delivery system and ensuring critical applications/systems are current.

Goal 4: Provide Leadership in the Workforce System

This goal is to strengthen our connection to other programs that serve individuals with disabilities. DVR will maintain a leadership role in expanding vocational opportunities for Alaskans with disabilities. DVR will continue to collaborate with other agencies to improve the delivery of VR services.

Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment, SVRC Expenditures and Resource Plan

Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, requires each state vocational rehabilitation agency to triennially conduct a Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA) jointly with the Statewide Vocational Rehabilitation Committee (SVRC). The results of the CSNA are used to develop goals, priorities, strategies, and actions for both DVR's Strategic and Combined State Plans.

Multiple data sources were used to obtain the information, including a review of local and statewide studies focusing on services and barriers to employment for individuals with disabilities, the Department of Labor and Workforce Development's Research and Analysis Division, the DVR management information system and 958 surveys sent to DVR participants, employers, DVR staff, and Community Rehabilitation Providers.

DVR's Pre-Employment Transition Services have been an effective way for DVR to get a snap-shot view of the students' available resources and supports, network with agencies and community partners, and learn more about how students see their own life in the future. Each Pre-Employment Transition Services student was surveyed about their experience. DVR will continue these efforts to capture the needs of transition age youth and identify gaps in services.

The data collected will be used to improve DVR services and inform DVR's ongoing strategic planning process.

SVRC 2016 Expenditures

The SVRC 2016 funds were used for expenses related to a face-to-face meeting in Sitka, Alaska and included sign language interpreters during public testimony, a court reporter, airfare and hotel accommodations, and conference room fee. Three of the SVRC quarterly meetings were switched to video conferences with minimal associated costs to help reduce expenses in light of Alaska's significant budget constraints.

The committee also funded two members to travel to the National Coalition of State Rehabilitation Council Conference.

2017 Resource Plan

In addition to the regular expenses detailed above for the face-to-face meeting, the SVRC long-term plan also includes funds to support our Business Recognition Awards, which will include purchasing framed certificates, or similar type awards, for the three winning Alaskan businesses.

In partnership with DVR, the SVRC engaged in a broad range of activities during federal fiscal year 2016 from October 1, 2015 to September 30, 2016 to help ensure the quality of DVR’s services.

SVRC Activities Federal Fiscal Year 2016

- Collected public testimony from every region of the state via email, phone, written letter and in-person at quarterly meetings. Each meeting focused on a different region. In-person testimony was heard in Anchorage, Juneau, Sitka and Fairbanks.
- Collaborated with DVR on the triennial Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment analysis.
- Collaborated with DVR on updating the three-year strategic plan for 2016 - 2018, including member participation at the face-to-face strategic planning meeting, which occurred on September 21, 2016.
- Held a two-day, face-to-face meeting in Sitka, focusing on rural Alaska. Guest speakers included: Sitka Mayor McConnell, two Southeast mental health service agencies, Southeast Independent Living Center representatives from Haines and Sitka, and DVR’s Sitka-based counselor, who also serves other Southeastern, rural communities.
- Held a two-day, in-person meeting in Anchorage, which focused on the Anchorage region. Guest speakers included the DVR Chief of Rehabilitation Services, DVR Anchorage and Wasilla regional managers, DVR planning and evaluation lead, a Pre-Employment Training provider and members of the Governor’s Council on Disabilities and Special Education. The SVRC met with, and toured, the Disability Law Center.
- Held two video conference meetings focusing on the Northern and Southern regions. The meetings lasted eight hours spread over two days. Guest speakers included State Senator Giessel, the DVR Southern regional manager and both the DVR Transition Coordinator and CRP Specialist.
- Convened a one-day meeting focusing on Assistive Technology (AT). Participants included AT providers, the AT Subcommittee, individuals who use AT and others. Activities included a tour of the AT Act implementing agency Assistive Technologies of Alaska (ATLA) and hands-on demonstrations of frequently used AT.
- Both the SVRC Chair and a consumer representative attended the CSAVR / NCSRC conference and found it highly valuable. They reported on what they learned at the SVRC Anchorage meeting.
- Conducted outreach efforts to recruit new members to the SVRC.

SVRC Subcommittee Activities

The State Vocational Rehabilitation Committee (SVRC) has five standing subcommittees: Executive; Program Evaluation; Assistive Technology; Planning; and Policy, Public Relations and Resources. Below is a summary of each subcommittee's activities.

Executive

Chair: Mary Elam

The Executive subcommittee is comprised of the chairs of all the subcommittees. The DVR Director also attends as an ex-officio member. The subcommittee held monthly teleconferences where it reviewed the work of, and assigned work to, the other subcommittees and planned the SVRC's quarterly meetings.

The subcommittee devoted time to changing the SVRC meeting format

from in-person to video/teleconference. Considerable attention was given to meeting the unique needs of the SVRC, ensuring each member could fully and actively participate remotely and to ensure the SVRC still heard from all regions of the state, including rural areas.

Program Evaluation

Chair: David Berube

The majority of the Program Evaluation subcommittee's work this past year has been reviewing, editing, clarifying and approving the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA).

The subcommittee also suggested DVR survey employers and assess their knowledge of DVR services and how DVR could benefit them. DVR discovered that the Governor's Council on Disabilities and

Special Education had already collected data from employers and was willing to share the results. With subcommittee agreement, it was decided to use that data instead of creating a new survey.

Assistive Technology

Chair: Bob Purvis

The AT subcommittee provides consumer input and feedback on how the Federal Assistive Technology (AT) Act funds are being used in the State of



From left to right: SVRC members Mae Marsh and Chair Mary Elam listen as ATLA staff helps AT Subcommittee member Rick Webb with hands-on demonstration of AT.

“It had been over three years since I had a job that paid much above minimum wage. DVR helped me get a good job with good benefits and decent pay as a telephone operator with the Air Force in Alaska. ”

- DVR Participant



Alaska. The AT subcommittee brings formal recommendations to the State Vocational Rehabilitation Committee (SVRC) for further actions.

AT Act funds are currently administered by the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) and passed through to the implementing agency, Assistive Technology of Alaska (ATLA). ATLA is a non-profit agency based in Anchorage that provides services statewide.

The AT subcommittee holds monthly teleconferences. ATLA Director, Mystie Rail and the DVR

AT Coordinator, Jason Caputo, also attend. The DVR AT Coordinator tracks grant progress, provides informal input to DVR and ATLA, and also brings issues to the full SVRC, as needed.

The AT subcommittee also plans an annual one-day meeting with the full SVRC. This year, it was held in Anchorage. It focuses on assistive technology issues within the state and provides SVRC members an overview of AT Act activities and progress.

Planning

Chair: Mary Elam

The Planning subcommittee worked with DVR staff to revise the survey questions for the CSNA in order to get more

meaningful data for future planning. The subcommittee also provided feedback to staff on the draft plan before it was submitted.

The subcommittee participated in the DVR strategic planning session held in September, 2016. The session addressed goals for 2017 - 2019, including Pre-Employment Transition Services, rural services and new Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act regulations. The committee also worked with DVR staff to draft meeting agendas and identify appropriate speakers from each region of the state to provide updates that address local

disability and economic related projects, successes and challenges.

Policy, Public Relations and Resources

Chair: Ken Schoenlein

The Policy, Public Relations and Resource subcommittee reviews both policy changes (when submitted for review by DVR) and notices on quarterly meetings to communities and manages the Sunshine Fund. The subcommittee held meetings, as needed, to accomplish the goals outlined in the SVRC Tasks and Timelines document.

The subcommittee developed the theme and artwork for the SVRC 2016 Annual Report and expanded the distribution list to include key recipients who had not received the report in previous years. The subcommittee also helped promote the quarterly meetings in the communities in which they were held.

“My experience with my local DVR office was beyond my expectations. The state can be proud of having such staff on the front line helping Alaskans.”

- DVR participant, Military Veteran

The individuals served by DVR are of all ages and from all walks of life. Although each person has his or her own unique story, looking at aggregate numbers provides an understanding of the overall scope of the vocational rehabilitation program in Alaska.

Vocational Rehabilitation Outcomes for State Fiscal Year 2016

- 3,679 individuals received services from the VR program.
- \$4,372,766 was spent on direct client services.
- 1,635 new individuals applied for services.
- 1,585 individuals received information and referral services.
- 569 individuals exited the program employed with an average wage of \$14.38/hr.
The State of Alaska’s minimum wage is currently \$9.75 and will be \$9.80 effective 1/1/2017.

Of the 569 individuals that exited the program:

- 479 were employed in the private sector.
- 70 were employed in federal, state or local government.
- 20 were self-employed.

Who DVR Serves

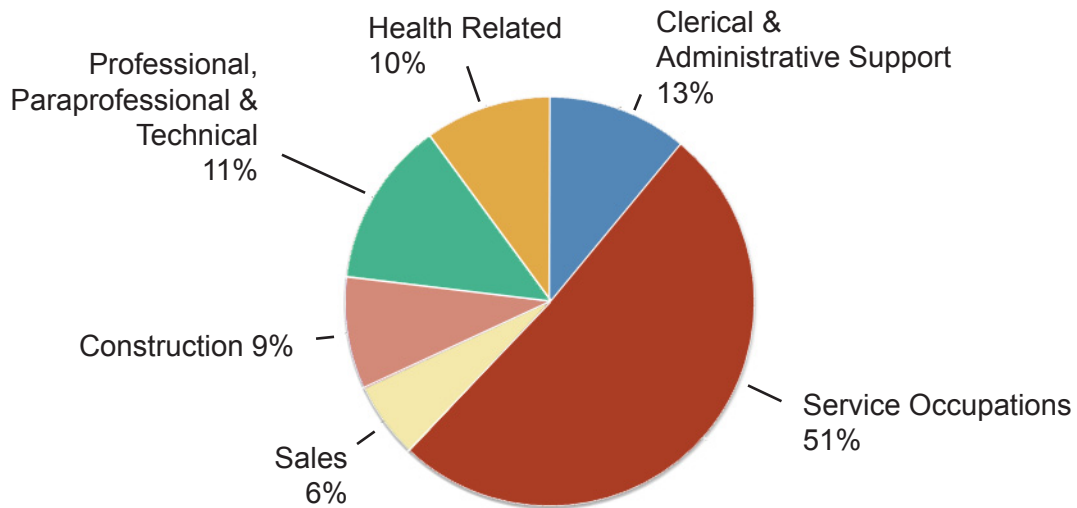
- 95% of the individuals receiving services were significantly disabled with multiple barriers to employment.
- 246 were student pre-applicants (age 16-22) receiving Pre-Employment Transition Services.
- 59% were Caucasian; 18% were Alaska Native; 7% were black; 13% were multi-racial; 2% were Asian and 1% were Pacific Islander or Native Hawaiian (participants may identify as one or more racial groups).

For a more complete picture of DVR’s participants, please see “The 2016 Comprehensive Needs Assessment” at: www.labor.state.ak.us/dvr/about_us/Comprehensive-Statewide-Needs-Assessment-2016-2018-final.pdf.

“Without DVR I would have probably ended up back in prison. I came to DVR after being incarcerated for 12 years and finding it was very difficult to get a job with that background. We made a business plan and now I run my own business selling Inupiat Art.”

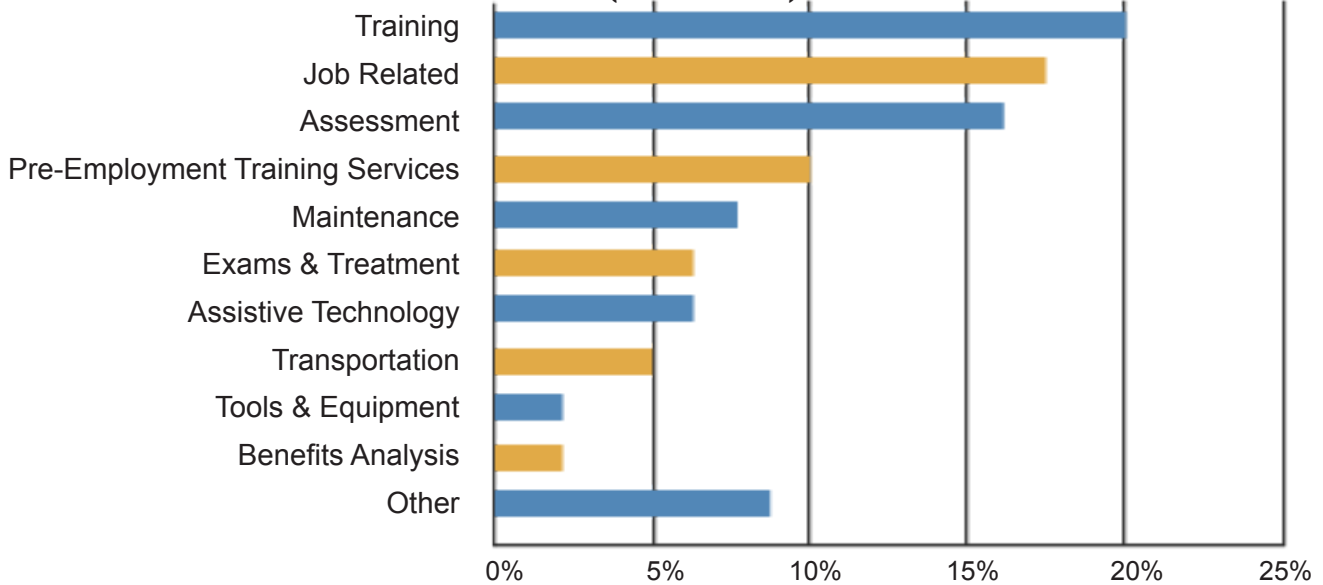
- DVR Participant

Occupations of DVR Participants SFY 2016

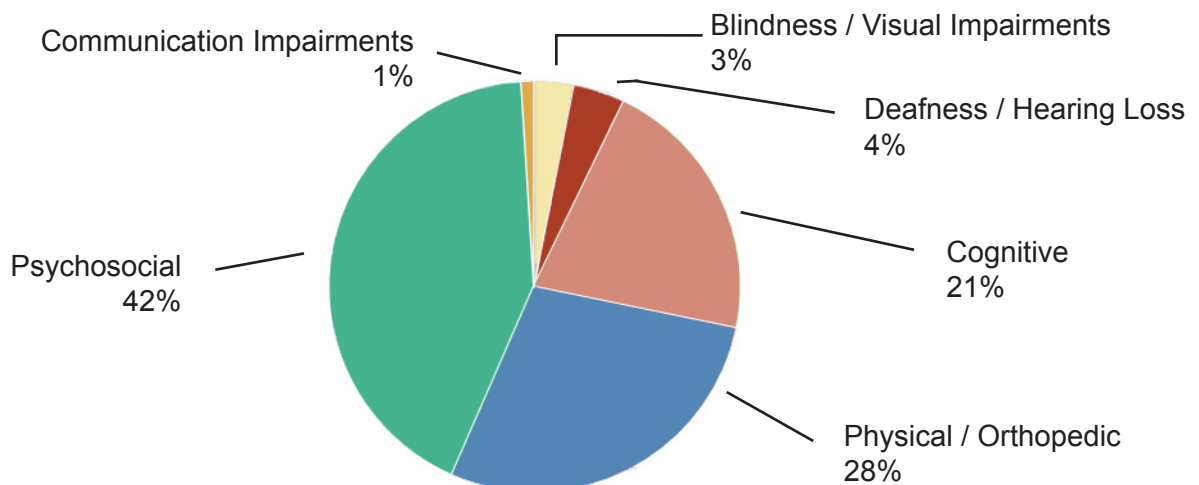


Purchased VR Services SFY 2016

(\$4.3 million)



DVR Participants by Disability SFY 2016



Pre-Employment Transition Services

DVR is tasked under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) to provide Pre-Employment Transition Services to every student with a disability in Alaska. Through partnerships with the Alaska Mental Health Trust, the Department of Labor and Workforce Development's Disability Employment Initiative, the Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) and the Division of Juvenile Justice, DVR has instituted a variety of projects to accomplish these goals. Through these projects, and combined with DVR counselor's efforts at the local level, DVR anticipates that they will serve over 500 students in state fiscal year 2017.



JOBZ Club: JOBZ

Clubs occur after school and use engaging activities to introduce students to “work readiness skills.” Last year, over 45 students participated in eight different JOBZ Clubs across the state. DVR pays teachers to facilitate clubs in their schools. Currently, 25 students participate in JOBZ Club activities, with another group of 10 teachers registered to host clubs in the spring. DVR anticipates

reaching over 100, predominately rural, youth through JOBZ Club activities this school year. JOBZ Club is proving to be both an effective way for teachers to prepare students for transition, and a way for teachers to better connect with DVR.

Transition Camps: DVR partners with the

DEED to fund Transition Camps, using a team of highly qualified special education professionals through the Southeast Regional Resource Center. The Transition Camp team travels across the state holding three to five-day camps with school districts and juvenile justice facilities. At each camp, Pre-Employment Transition Services are provided through community exploration, as well as presentations by businesses and

postsecondary education and training providers. These camps are designed to help youth develop a vision for their future. Last year, over 100 students participated. DVR's goal for this state fiscal year is to reach over 200 students.

Phlight Clubs: DVR partners with Brightways Learning to conduct Phlight Clubs in school districts across the state. Phlight

“Three years ago, at age 31, a brain injury changed my life and greatly reduced my sight. DVR helped me finish my university degree and in the spring I will be a certified teacher in Alaska. Thank you DVR staff, counselors and committee for your endless hard work.”

- DVR participant

Pre-Employment Transition Services continued...

Clubs are three-day events, designed to engage youth and their families for cultivating caring and connected schools and communities. Phlight Club incorporates Pre-Employment Transition Services self-advocacy and work readiness skills training activities designed to help youth develop their self-esteem and leadership skills. This is a new project, and DVR anticipates engaging over 50 students with disabilities in Phlight Clubs this school year.

PATHWAYS School

to Career: DVR partners with the Northwestern Alaska Career and Technical Center, EXCEL AK and Voyage to Excellence Career and Technical Education Program to offer an intensive array of courses that combine Pre-Employment Transition Services with “hands-on learning” in specific career fields such as culinary arts, carpentry and welding. DVR funding enhances the effectiveness of the courses by increasing the staff-to-students ratio and available disability supports. Through these courses, students can get the credentials they need to be competitive candidates for postsecondary education or apprenticeships. So far this state fiscal year, 29 students have participated in PATHWAYS activities.

“I like looking at what we did and feeling proud that we’ve built this. We’ve built this bridge. We can all say that now.”

- Student Participant

Pre-Employment Transition Services

Projects: DVR funds nine agencies in rural and urban areas to provide an intensive array of Pre-Employment Transition Services. Each youth receives instruction in job exploration and work readiness training with 40 hours of paid work experience to practice those skills. In 2016, over 150 youth participated in Pre-Employment Transition Service Projects.

Summer Work Programs: DVR, in partnership with the Disability Employment Initiative, has just released an Invitation for Proposals to provide summer work experiences to students with disabilities. The summer work experience program is DVR’s biggest effort to engage students in Pre-Employment Transition Services activities and the opportunity to have a six-

week paid, employment opportunity in the summer of 2017. The project is designed to fund 15 programs statewide to serve 150 students.



Consumer Satisfaction

Survey of Participants Who Exit DVR Services

The SVRC oversees the ongoing consumer satisfaction survey to 100% of DVR participants closed from an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE).

Survey Highlights

DVR is a consumer-driven organization where a participant's self-involvement in the vocational rehabilitation process and informed choice are the foundation for success. The consumer satisfaction surveys focus on four points: Consumer and Staff Interaction, Consumer Involvement, Program Information, and Program Satisfaction.

Surveys are sent to the participants' email address via the online survey tool, SurveyMonkey. Currently, 77% of DVR participants have a valid email address. The average monthly response rate is 11.2%.

Treating the Consumer Participant with Respect

Ninety percent of DVR participants who responded, agree that staff were polite and helpful throughout the time their case was open. A similar percentage of respondents felt questions and requests to staff were replied to promptly.

Informed Choice and Involvement in the DVR Process

Seventy six percent of respondents were pleased with their involvement in the decision making process that led to their plan for employment. Additionally, 97% knew the goal of DVR was to help them find employment or stay employed.

Referral of Others

Overall, 84% of participants would recommend Alaska DVR to others.

"Employed for 26 years driving tour buses and giving historical tours to cruise ship passengers, ferry guests and those who fly in. My hearing caused a lot of problems interacting with people and hearing important traffic noises. DVR provided me hearing aids. Now, at 66, I plan to continue working as long as I am able."

- DVR Participant

“DVR case managers are aware of other programs and how they should work. They helped my daughter, who went from not being able to speak, to holding a competitive wage job. I cannot express the joy I feel as I tell her that she is a taxpayer, too. Her abilities and self-esteem continue to rise.”

- Mother of DVR Participant



All Respondents - Survey Categories

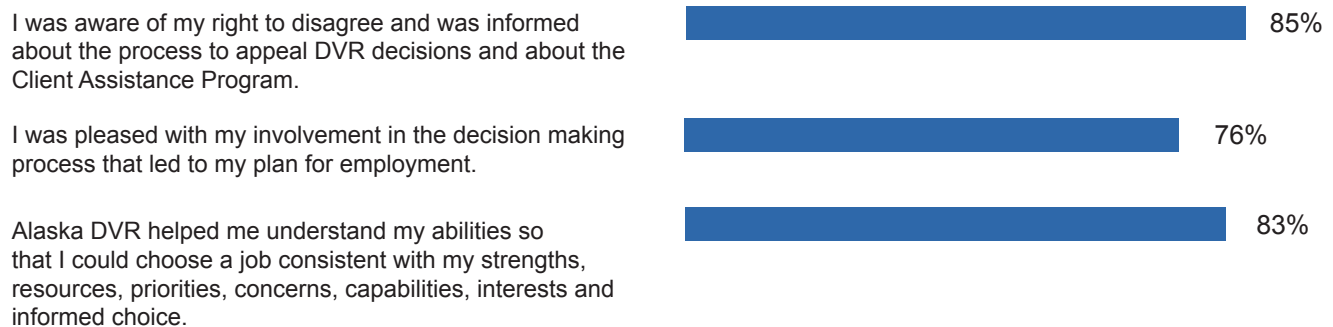
1. Program Satisfaction



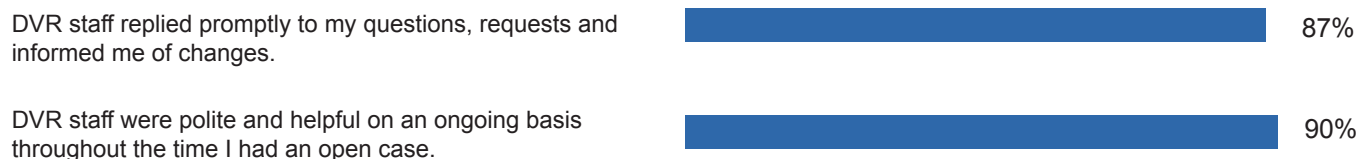
2. Program Information



3. Consumer Involvement



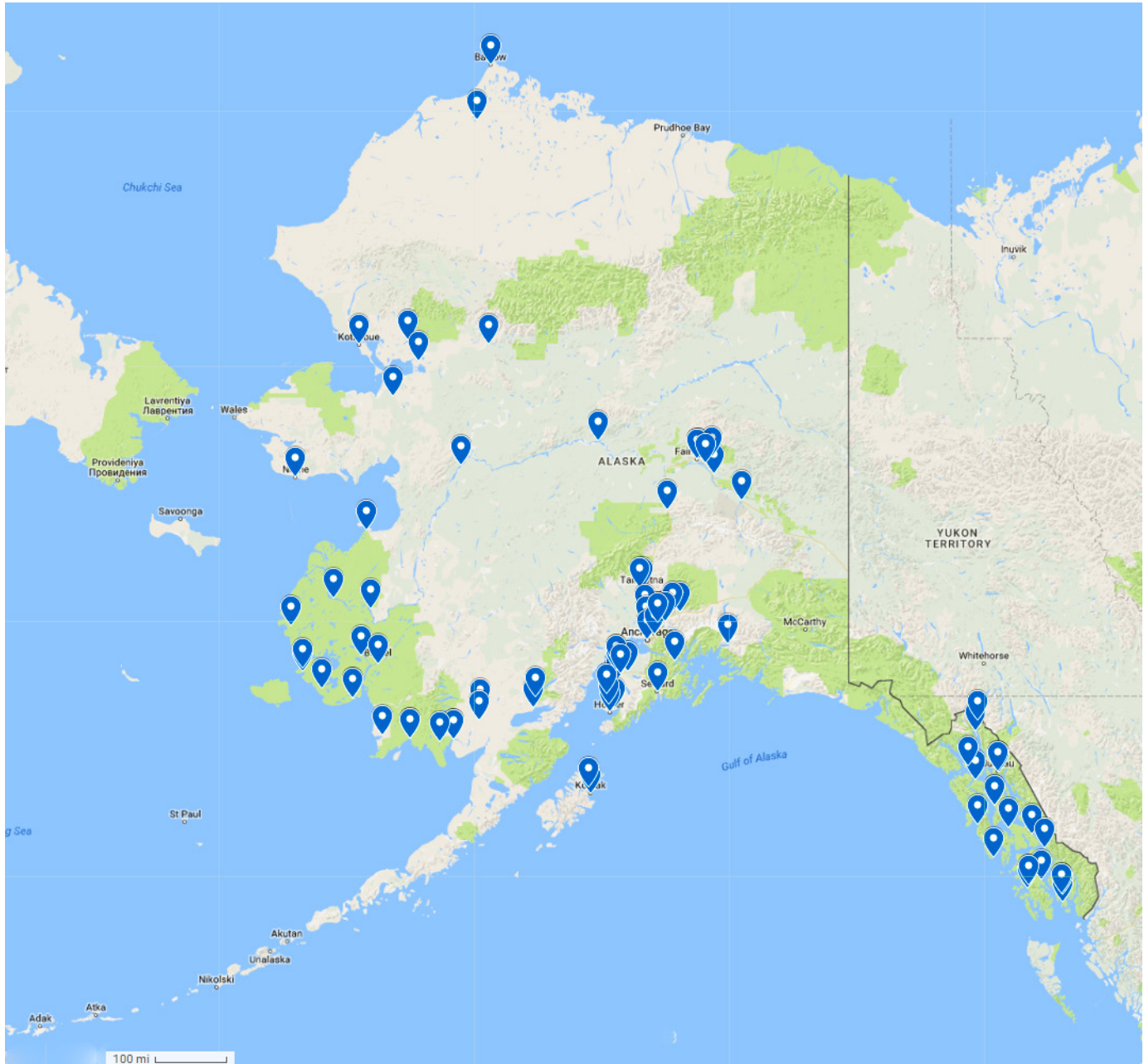
4. Consumer and Staff Interaction



DVR Participants

Geographic Location of Alaskans Served by DVR

Source: DVR Management Information System



The map above shows where DVR services, including Pre-Employment Transition Services, were delivered throughout Alaska in state fiscal year 2016, from July 1, 2015 through June 30, 2016. DVR has offices in Anchorage, Eagle River, Fairbanks, Juneau, Kenai, Ketchikan, Kodiak, Sitka, Wasilla, and serves rural Alaska with traveling counselors.

The Committee Seeks Your Input

The State Vocational Rehabilitation Committee invites you to:

Apply for Membership

If you care about issues pertaining to disability and employment, the SVRC encourages you to apply for a seat on this committee.

You may apply at: gov.alaska.gov/services/boards-and-commissions/apply-for-a-board-appointment/.

You may also apply by sending a completed Boards and Commissions application, resume and a brief letter explaining your desire to serve the State of Alaska, to:

Office of the Governor

Attention: Director of Boards and Commissions

P.O. Box 110001, Juneau, AK, 99811-0001

Contact the Boards and Commissions office:

Call: 907-269-7450

Fax: 907-269-7461

E-mail: Boards@Alaska.Gov

Attend a Meeting or Public Forum

All State Vocational Rehabilitation Committee meetings and forums are open to the public. Meeting dates are available at labor.alaska.gov/svrc/calendar.htm. Notification of meeting times and agenda are posted 30 days prior to meetings at aws.state.ak.us/OnlinePublicNotices/.

More information about the SVRC is available at labor.alaska.gov/svrc, including minutes from previous meetings, and DVR participant and stakeholder public testimony.

Share Your Thoughts and Ideas with SVRC

Call: Voice/TDD 907-465-2814 or 1-800-478-2815

Write: Chair, State Vocational Rehabilitation Committee
Division of Vocational Rehabilitation
PO Box 115516
Juneau, AK 99811-5516

Fax: 907-465-2856

E-mail: Jason.Caputo@Alaska.Gov (Committee Staff)

Alaska State Vocational Rehabilitation Committee

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Bill Walker, Governor

Heidi Drygas, Commissioner of Labor and Workforce Development

Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development

Division of Vocational Rehabilitation

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