Presidential Pondering by Marjorie Millner--Submitted by Marjorie Millner, VRA President

As we close out 2017, I want to express to you how much of an honor and pleasure it has been to serve as President of the Virginia Rehabilitation Association over the past year. A heartfelt thank you goes to all of the board members and community partners that have been so supportive. I would like to recognize the board members whose terms ended in 2017: Shawn Zimmerman, Chuck McElroy, and Lisa Biler. Special thank you also goes to our Treasurer – Eleanor Williams and Secretary – Ericka Neville. Another huge expression of appreciation goes to Dawn Scott for her dedication to Newsnotes, Communications and Membership in 2017.

Congratulations to our new President, Adair Jensen-Smith!

This association has so much to offer to its members. If you are not a member, I encourage you to join and become active in this organization that fosters so much awareness and collaboration in the field of rehabilitation.

In wrapping up 2017, let me reflect on the many positive accomplishments of the board. The VRA Gives Back Special Projects was implemented through the oversight of Lisa Biler! The annual Golf Tournament was another success this year and special thanks goes to Kim Shepard for taking on this enormous task. Sue Collins ensures that the VRA website is current with the times!

Collaborations Conference was held in October of 2017 with great speakers and comradery! The networking and shared vision for the future of rehabilitation was a great experience for all. VRA gave out special awards to those deserving across the state. Thank you to Tiffany Jenkins and Sue Collins for spearheading the collection and nomination of the award presentations for 2017.

It is you, the professionals in the field of rehabilitation that make a difference each day in someone’s life. Thank you for all that you do!

I have truly enjoyed serving as your President for 2017 and am so honored to have served in this capacity. Let’s keep up the great work in 2018 and continue to make a difference together!

VRA Division and Committee News

VRA Foundation Scholarship – Submitted by Dale Batten

Are you a member of the Virginia Rehabilitation Association?
Are you or a family member attending college?
Are you aware of the VRA Foundation Scholarship?
Each year the Virginia Rehabilitation Association Education Foundation requests applications from interested and eligible members or family members in consideration for the VRA Education Foundation Scholarship.
On behalf of the Virginia Rehabilitation Counselor and Educators Association, it is my pleasure to report on our Division and our progress this past year. I would like to begin by thanking the Board of Directors and their support towards making this a successful year.

Program and Training:
VRCEA’s Annual Rehabilitation Counselors and Educators Day, was held in May. This year’s Rehab Counselor Day was VRCEA’s first state-wide tele-conference. Over 40 rehabilitation professionals gathered together in DARS offices in Abingdon, Charlottesville, Danville, Lynchburg, and Manassas – Successful Job Coaching Strategies for Persons with Disabilities, Living in Rural Areas. Teresa Mullins, a 25-plus year veteran in employment services, was the presenter. The training was based on her first book, published this year, Job Coaching in Rural Areas: Tips for Success.

In collaboration with VARL, VRCEA co-sponsored an all-day Ethics training, October 19 in Richmond. Featured speakers were Dr. Amy Armstrong and Dr. Chris Reid from VCU, and Robin Metcalf, President- The Choice Group. All presenters are nationally recognized. Together, they shared a wealth of experience from each of their 30- year careers in Rehabilitation Counseling.

Recognition and Awards:
This year’s “Spirit” Award was presented to Traci Branch, DARS Central Regional Counselor for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. She was given this award in recognition of her Exemplary Service to people with disabilities. Traci’s name was announced at our annual membership meeting at the 2017 Collaborations Conference in September. Although she wasn’t able to attend the conference, Traci was presented the award to Traci at a staff meeting in October.

Treasurer’s Report: Please refer to the attached report

Critical Issues:
We remain concerned about growing membership and attracting new potential leaders. Many of our most active members have, or are close to, reaching retirement. Unfortunately we are not attracting fresh, committed members at the same rate. Additional sub-division membership fees continue to be the reason cited by younger rehabilitation professionals. We would like to continue working together with VRA to address this concern, and may result in increased membership for both organizations.

**Critical Issues:**
A number of attempts were made this year to increase the education side of our membership. Marketing to High School Transition staff, Special Ed Teachers, Intensive Community and In-Home Support Service providers, along with Community College staff was conducted. Our return was minimal. Those that did respond said they were already involved in other organizations, and could not afford additional memberships. At the expressed interest of 3 school systems in an under-served area of the state, training on Career Pathways and Assistive Technology was coordinated in February and March. Schedule conflicts developed. Many interested school and community college staff were unable to obtain permission, or acquire class coverage, to attend. As a result, the training was canceled. This fall, efforts were made to host training in an area of the state with one of the lowest number of resources: Southside/South Central Virginia. In collaboration with two local community services boards (CSB) VRCEA planned a workshop on Virginia’s ABLE-NOW program. An annual up-date on similar programs nation-wide was to take place as well. Yet due to changes in funding and insurance plans; effective January 1, 2018 the CSBs requested to postpone the training.

**Elections:** Virginia Rehabilitation Counselors and Educators Association announce their Officers and Board of Directors for 2018:

**President:** Rhonda Beavers-Chandler, DARS-Danville Office

**Past President:** Kelly Desclos, Danville-Pittsylvania CSB

**President Elect:** Vacant

**Secretary:** Dawn Mosley, DARS-Richmond Office

**Treasurer:** Kathleen Shifflett, DARS-Leesburg Office

**Board Members at Large:**
Loretta Harris, DARS-Fairfax Office
Tyler Schreffler, DARS- Fairfax Office
Tuajuana Smoot-Hairston, DARS-Danville Office
Vacant

VRCEA looks forward to continuing on as an active Division of VRA.
Respectfully Submitted,
Kelly Desclos, VRCEA President

**Other News & Notes**

**Virginia’s Center for Independent Living – Submitted by Karen Michalski**
The Justice Department has recently announced a new initiative to combat sexual harassment in housing. The initiative specifically seeks to increase the Department’s efforts to protect women from harassment by landlords, property managers, maintenance workers, security guards, and other employees and representatives of rental property owners. As part of the initiative, the Department will work to identify barriers to reporting sexual harassment to the Department and other enforcement agencies, and will collaborate with local law enforcement, legal services providers, and public health housing authorities to leverage their expertise.

The Justice Department’s Civil Rights Division enforces the Fair Housing Act, which prohibits discrimination in housing on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, and familial status, national origin, and disability. Sexual harassment is a form of sex discrimination prohibited under this law. The Civil Rights Division plans to launch a pilot of the initiative in two jurisdictions – Washington, D.C., and western Virginia – where it is working with legal service providers and local law enforcement to raise awareness about this issue. The Blue Ridge Independently Living Center (BRILC), Roanoke and Valley Associates for Independently Living (VAIL), Harrisonburg will participate in local roundtable discussing as part of this pilot. The Department hopes to expand the effort to other areas of the county in the near future.

The announcement comes on the heels of the Department’s successful resolution of two sexual harassment cases in Kansas City, Kansas, and Grand Rapids, Michigan. Since January of this year, the Civil Rights Division has filed or settled five cases and recovered over $1 million for victims of sexual harassment in housing. In the Kansas City case, the Justice Department recovered $360,000 for 14 female residents and applicants of housing authority who were subjected to unwanted sexual conduct. The Department’s complaint alleged in part that an employee of the housing authority subjected women to unwanted sexual conduct as a condition for favorable hearing decisions, including asking them sexual questions, showing pornographic pictures and videos, making explicit sexual comments and exposing himself.

“No woman should be made to feel unsafe in her own home,” said Acting Attorney General John M. Gore of the Justice Department’s Civil Rights Division in announcing the initiative. “The Justice Department is committed to vigorously enforcing the Fair Housing Act’s ban on sexual harassment and is looking forward to working closely with state and local partners to combat this problem.”

More information about the Civil Rights Division and the civil rights laws it enforces is available at www.usdoj.gov/crt. Individuals who believe that they may have been victims of housing discrimination should call the department at 1-844-380-6178, or send an e-mail to fairhousing@usdoj.gov, or contact HUD at 1-800-669-9777. Individuals interested in learning more about BRILC should call 540-342-1231 of Virginia Relay 7-1-1. Individuals interested in learning more about VAIL should call 540-433-6513.
Congratulations!!

Congratulations to Rick Sizemore, Director of Wilson Workforce and Rehabilitation Center. Rick was the recipient of the 2017 National Rehabilitation Association’s Belle Greve Memorial Award. He received this award on October 27 at the 2017 National Rehabilitation Association’s annual training conference in Corpus Christi, Texas. The Belle Greve Memorial award is presented to a person who has shown unusual initiative or creativity in developing and/or administering a service program for people with disabilities. The award is named for Belle Greve, founder of the Cleveland Rehabilitation Center.

Wilson Workforce Rehabilitation Center News and Updates! -- Submitted by Jackie M. Davis, WWRC Representative

WWRC Received Award at VCCS Hire Ed Conference

On Thursday, December 7, the Wilson Workforce and Rehabilitation Center (WWRC) participated in the Virginia Community College Systems Hire Education Conference’s Workforce Industry Credentials Showcase at the Homestead Resort. The focus of the showcase is to demonstrate how an educational institution has expertly applied their skills and knowledge to improve the workforce development system in Virginia and/or have provided remarkable services to their students that goes above and beyond the normal call of duty leading to industry credentials. The significance of WWRC participating in this showcase was immeasurable because they were the first non-community college to be invited to this event.

WWRC not only participated, but won the Best Showcase Award of Excellence for their display of their Manufacturing Technology Training Program funded by the Career Pathways for Individuals with Disabilities grant. The criteria for this award was the following: alignment with the need of employers to build Virginia’s economy and to triple the number of credential earned by 2021, prepare workers for regional and statewide high demand jobs within high skilled occupations, attainment of industry recognized credentials, strong outcomes and sustainability, demonstration of innovation to lead workforce development efforts, enhance individual prosperity, formulate success, and to spur economic vitality.
Rick Sizemore, WWRC Director, along with Steve Sweeney, Manufacturing Technology Training (MTT) instructor, and two students from the WWRC MTT program presented at the conference, along with Dr. Joe Ashley, DARS, Director of Grants and Special Programs. The highlight of the presentation, based on audience feedback, was the student presentations and their reflections on the specialized teaching methods used in the WWRC MTT Program. One student who disclosed that he has autism reflected that the teaching style is different than any setting he has participated in and that it is highly effective. He further discussed how it has empowered and motivated him to be more interactive socially, and that he now feels comfortable seeking accommodations when, and if they are needed. Both students have earned their Manufacturing Specialist and Manufacturing Technician One certification. Their MS and MT1 certificates were presented as a “surprise” during the presentation/session in front of the attendees. Both students now move into employment.

Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) Fall Conference

Rick Sizemore, Wilson Workforce and Rehabilitation Center (WWRC) Director, attended the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation’s (CSAVR) fall conference in Greenville, South Carolina, November 12-15, 2017, along with other Agency staff. Rick hosted a session on the Career Pathways for Disabilities Grant. Dr. Joe Ashley, Virginia Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services, leads a multistate Rehabilitation Services Administration CPID Grant which has supported numerous initiatives across the state, including the Manufacturing Technology Training program at WWRC. Grantees from Nebraska, Kentucky, and Georgia also presented cases and their unique approaches and strategies supported by Career Pathways for Individuals with Disabilities. The WWRC Foundation’s podcast, which is hosted by Rick Sizemore and the Foundation Director, Anne Hudlow, was used to present the material in a “talk show” style format which was recorded, edited, and published the day of the presentation. The session was attended by approximately 140 conference attendees from across the country. In addition to the grantee panel participants, the RSA Acting Commissioner, Carol Dobak, and the CEO of CSAVR, Steve Wooderson, were integrated into the podcast presentation. Pre-recorded testimonials from business owners and managers, consumers, and partners involved in the grant were also part of the presentation.
District Champions Event

On Thursday, October 12, the Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS) Blue Ridge District Business Development Manager, Nate Mahanes, held the District Champions Event at the Wilson Workforce and Rehabilitation Center (WWRC). The Champions Event purpose is to recognize companies and employers who have made a very significant impact in the lives of consumers in vocational rehabilitation in the past calendar year. This was the first time this event was held at WWRC, and it was a major success. In conjunction with James Hall, the WWRC Director of the Career and Workforce Development Division, Nate was able to present awards to the following companies: CVS Health (Duane Rohr), Provides US (Tom Coplai), A Bowl of Good (Katrina Didot), RoadTek Traffic Solutions (Robey Minton), Dulles Glass and Mirror (Brice Biggins), AmeriCare Plus (Jackie Hostetter), and the Wilson Workforce and Rehabilitation Center Foundation (Anne Hudlow). In addition to the awards presentation, Emmett Toms, Virginia Dominion Energy, gave remarks on the positive impact of vocational rehabilitation to his company and Vanessa Rastberger, Director of Workforce Solutions for the Virginia Manufacturers Association, gave the keynote address. After the presentation, a tour of the WWRC campus was given to multiple attendees.

2017 Virginia Industry Forum of the Virginia Manufacturers Association

On November 2, students from the Wilson Workforce and Rehabilitation Center (WWRC) were invited to be part of the opening ceremony at the 2017 Virginia Industry Forum of the Virginia Manufacturers Association. The new video on WWRC’s Manufacturing Technology Training (MTT) program was shown during the opening ceremony. Following the ceremony, Rose Hilderbrand and Spencer Clark, both MTT students, provided comments on the program, their Workforce and Innovation Opportunities Act recognized workforce credentials, and the excitement about moving into the workforce. The MTT cohort staffed a table in the lobby along with displays to highlight various aspect of the program. Several student in WWRC’s MTT cohort discussed employment with the numerous plant managers and employers attending the conference. Dr. Joe Ashley, Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services Assistant Commissioner, and Career Pathways for Individuals with Disabilities staff supported these efforts and facilitated employer introductions to showcase WWRC’s students. While the latest official data is still being finalized, twenty-two students have graduated from the program, thirteen are employed, one is attending college for further instruction, with the remainder still in the job search process. Over 80% of the students have obtained all of the program’s credentials. Graduates are working for the Hershey Company, Federal Mogul, Eastman Chemical, Provides U.S., CDA USA and other well-known manufacturers throughout Virginia.

Skills for Leadership Training
Congratulations to WWRC staff, Candice Simmons, Jeff Knight, Brian Bruce and Kim Tomas, for successfully completing the 2017 Skills for Leadership Training. Thirty Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS) employees completed the six-month program which started in July 2017 and culminated with a team project presentation that was given to DARS management in December. The program focused on the following:
- Clarifying beliefs, values and attitudes regarding team leadership
- Effective critical thinking
- Personal and Team development
- Ethics of Leadership
- Specific ways to motivate team members
- Effective decision making
- Team-based problem solving

**Assistive Technology Training Hosted by WWRC**

On December 5, WWRC welcomed 20 DRS Rehabilitation and Placement Counselors, as well as Employment Resource Service Specialists, for the Agency Assistive Technology (AT) Training. Participating staff represented the Chesterfield, Christiansburg, Culpeper, Fairfax, Fredericksburg, Hampton, Henrico, Manassas, Martinsville, Petersburg, Portsmouth, Pounding Mill, Roanoke, and Williamsburg DRS Offices, as well as one staff member from the DARS Central Office. The Opening Session featured Courtney Small, successfully employed working from home processing phone calls for over 90 different companies. Introduced by her DRS Counselor, Cindy Bassett, Harrisonburg Office, Courtney shared her journey of rehabilitation and recovery from multiple disabling conditions, including services received from DRS and WWRC and the role/function of AT in the workplace and in her daily life.
AT Training sessions included general information, awareness activities, case studies, and hands-on, interactive experiences. Feedback was very positive. WWRC will conduct its next AT workshop for Agency counselors on April 3-4, 2018.

**Community Events**

![Image of AT training session]

**Independent Living Expo 2018**
Saturday, April 14, from 9 a.m. until 3 p.m.
Salem Civic Center

A FREE day of seeing, touching, trying and learning about the different types of assistive technology (AT) that can be used to help a person with a disability be independent. All people use some sort of technology but for people with disabilities AT provides equal access and helps them to perform functions that can be difficult or impossible. Types of AT include augmentative communication devices, Bluetooth, phone apps, screen readers, wearable AT, environmental and vehicle modifications, computer software, self-care items and more. Our hope is to bring information about services and devices together under one roof for people with disabilities, their families, caregivers, service providers and others to see, feel, try and learn how AT can support independent living. Independent Living Expo 2018 is being organized by the Blue Ridge Independent Living Center. For more information, email acalloway@brilc.org, call 540-341-1231 or visit www.brilc.org

**Editor’s Note –Submitted by Dawn Scott and Kate Gariepy, NewsNotes Editors**

VRA wants to thank you for your continued support and advertisement in this quarterly membership newsletter. It is made available to all VRA members, occasionally legislators, and is posted on the website at www.vra.org with exposure to the public. The rates remain the same and are as follows:

¼ a page is $15 per issue or $50 for the full year and ½ a page is $24 per issue or $90 for the full year

A full page is $50 per issue or $175 for the entire year A billing form is available for completion and should be submitted with payment to VRA. Ads may be purchased throughout the year and should be submitted as a Word document. Article submissions are also appreciated to be in the Word format and pictures are welcome
as separate attachments. If you have any questions or wish to discuss this further, please contact me at dawn.scott@vra.org or phone at 434-326-2185.

**Connect with other members of VRA!**

Do you have a story to share? Go to the VRA member LinkedIn discussion board. This is a secure, professional networking site devoted to issues and interests of our members. VARL also has a site for leadership topics.

VRA LinkedIn Network: [http://www.linkedin.com/groups?mostPopular=&gid=2114298](http://www.linkedin.com/groups?mostPopular=&gid=2114298)

VARL LinkedIn Network: [http://www.linkedin.com/groups?mostPopular=&gid=2613703](http://www.linkedin.com/groups?mostPopular=&gid=2613703)

Network with other members of VRA by joining the VRA Facebook group! Members can discuss VRA issues and upcoming events on this social networking website:

[https://www.facebook.com/?ref=home#!/groups/258928867454860](https://www.facebook.com/?ref=home#!/groups/258928867454860)
The Choice Group

- Independent Living Skills
- Life Skills Training
- Job Seeking Skills Training
- Vocational Assessments
- Situational Assessments
- Job Development
- Job Placement and Training
- Long Term Follow Along
- Job Coach Training Services
- Support Employment
- Placement
- Educational Services
- Individual and Group Counseling
- Therapeutic Consultation
- Career Counseling

We Help People With Disabilities Live Up To Their Abilities

The Choice Group
4807 Radford Avenue, Suite 106 • Richmond, VA 23230
(804) 278-9151 • Toll-free 877-374-5312
E-mail: info@thechoicegroup.com • www.thechoicegroup.com
At the Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services, most of our employees can say this at the end of each day. We hire individuals with a variety of occupational skills: vocational rehabilitation counselors, vocational evaluators, disability determination analysts, program specialists and more. Join us in our mission to secure independence, inclusion and integration of individuals with disabilities into our communities. Our employees truly make a difference in the lives of Virginians. Visit www.vadsa.org/jobs/default.asp to learn more about careers at DARS.
VRA Events Calendar
Mark your calendars for these important dates for your state and national associations

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Deadline for next issue’s NewsNotes articles is April 1st, 2018
Send to newsnotes@vra.org

VRA would like to hear from YOU! What would you like to see included in the NewsNotes? How do you use the NewsNotes and the information provided? What would be useful to you?
Thank you for your time in assisting us!
MEMBERSHIP

Virginia Rehabilitation Association

Training opportunities for professional development at little to no cost

Network and build connections across the state with various providers and specialists/mentors/leaders

Connect and become involved in projects that develop the mission of vocational rehabilitation

Join today! https://www.vra.org/membership/index.html


Like us on Facebook and become part of our public group to receive articles and info on upcoming events and trainings!

https://www.facebook.com/Virginia-Rehabilitation-Association-221447861231371/?ref=page_internal
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President-Elect: Adair Jensen-Smith
Past President: Dale Batten
Treasurer: Eleanor Williams
Secretary: Ericka Neville
Board Members: Dawn Scott, Tiffany Jenkins, Susan Gaillard, Vera Hensley, Sue Collins, Susan Collins, Tiffany Jenkins

VRCEA President: Kelly Desclos-Estes
VARL President: Roxanne Slaughter
NewsNotes Editor: Dawn Scott, Kate Gariepy

Next Deadline for NewsNotes: April 1st, 2018
Please Submit NewsNotes articles to Dawn Scott by Email at: newsnotes@vra.org or dawn.scott@vra.org