

**DIVISION OF VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION UPDATE REPORT**  
**(February – August 2020)**  
**TO THE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL MEETING**  
Thursday, August 13, 2020

Please summarize the overall impact that the COVID pandemic has had on the overall operations of the statewide vocational rehabilitation program and services.

Hawaii DVR has sustained essential services for Hawaii's residents with disabilities seeking vocational rehabilitation and/or independent living supports. 100% of our offices remain accessible, primarily with appointments, however signage on the outside doors allows for walk-ins to call office staff to access the indoor office when needed. Since March 20, 2020, DVR has been working with individuals to schedule remote appointments by phone and internet platforms when possible, however, walk-ins may also meet with staff who are working in DVR offices to schedule face-to-face appointments with counselors and/or file applications for services. Most of the office operations are conducted through a hybrid model of remote and office schedules by staff assignments. Signage, as well as staff screenings for walk-ins and scheduled appointments include best practices to determine risk for COVID-19 exposure for individuals accessing DVR offices. Visitor logs are maintained along with staff office schedules in the event contact tracing is needed for anyone testing positive for COVID-19 after accessing DVR offices.

During the period of March 20, 2020 through August 7, 2020, DVR supported 219 participants (individuals with disabilities) to obtain employment, with an average of 34 hours of work weekly per placement, at an hourly average rate of \$16.14. DVR staff have tracked over 1,500 encounters of employer engagement activities during this same period.

DVR has also resolved the Order of Selection (OOS) Category 1 (Most Significant Disability) waitlist since July 2019 with activation of 770+ individuals for receipt of VR services. An additional 401 eligible individuals with disabilities remain on the OOS deferred list broken out as 380 Category 2 (Significant Disability) and 21 Category 3 (Non-Significant Disability) awaiting VR services. DVR is evaluating the costs associated with Individualized Plans for Employment (IPE) of all the resolved Category 1 deferred list clients now receiving services before determining dates for the opening of Categories 2 and 3 on the deferred/waitlist.

Please explain how services are being delivered to eligible persons with disabilities at DVR locations. What is the staffing level, hours of operation, accommodations made for COVID?

Remote and face-to-face services are available to all applicants as needed during regularly scheduled office hours (Monday – Friday, excluding holidays, 7:45 am to 4:30 pm), with most services provided remotely. DVR continues to serve over 4,000 eligible residents with disabilities statewide. Over 295 applications have been received during the period of March 20, 2020 through August 7, 2020, in addition to completing 212 eligibility determinations. DVR anticipates there will be an increase in applications as the federal unemployment insurance funding impacts Hawaii's unemployed residents with disabilities who may be eligible for VR services. Outreach continues to be conducted with the DOE to support students with disabilities career exploration goals.

With Governor's EM 20-01, DVR has 30 vacancies out of 161 positions awaiting Governor approval for hiring. DVR has enough funding (federal and required State match) to fill these vacancies without risk of Maintenance of Effort penalty or federal reductions in funding at this time.

## WIOA core partners must co-locate in the American Job Centers and/or provide real-time assistance through technology. What is the status of DVR services at the AJCs?

DVR initiated a staff survey with WINTAC, the DOE Rehabilitation Services Administration's federal technical assistance center for VR agencies, to assess DVR's service alignment and integration with AJC partners statewide, and identify opportunities for improvements to more effectively serve VR participants. Survey results reflect DVR's staff have identified a need for improving VR communications with AJC partners to align services, increase employment outcomes, and improve staff's understanding of partner roles and resources to support community needs as well as co-enrolled customers.

Pre-pandemic, DVR staff integration with AJC's was occurring weekly statewide, however, the staff's understanding of partner roles and resources to support community needs as well as co-enrolled customers appears to also have needed improvements based on eligible individuals served by DVR at AJC, and/or referred to DVR. DVR integrated employer engagement collaborative strategies into the WIOA Unified State Plan as other improvements to more effectively and seamlessly serve VR participants. DVR continues to be engaged in stakeholder/cross program meetings and collaborations.

DVR staff are in communication with AJC partners post-pandemic remotely. AJC partners participated in March/April/May Friday community resource sharing networking and provided points of contact statewide to support individuals with disabilities seeking resources from various agencies/partners.

DVR continues to work on finalization of AJC MOU's and IFA's for Maui, Kauai, and Honolulu Counties. The Hawaii County AJC MOU and IFA in place are effective through June 30, 2021.

DVR's Ho`oponono Services for the Blind Branch (SBB) staff remain available to AJC partners in support of service delivery and consultations for individuals with blindness related needs. DVR's SBB staff have provided presentations pre-pandemic to AJC partners in quarterly meetings about best practices for service delivery and community resources for serving these individuals accessing the Honolulu AJC.

DVR's Oahu Branch staff continue to be available to Honolulu AJC partners as a resource and referral point for residents with disabilities who may be eligible for VR services. DVR staff continue to partner remotely, primarily through information sharing on job leads, training opportunities, and leveraging community resources.

DVR staff are in communication with the AJC partners on Kauai and in Hilo. Both AJC's are physically closed, with public access provided remotely. Both accept any referrals and contact the participant and/or DVR counselor for follow up remotely via phone, email and other technology options. The AJC in Hilo is currently in the process of coordinating a partner meeting for either 8/26 or 8/27.

DVR services continue to be provided through the Maui County AJC remotely. Co-enrolled customers choosing to meet in person have the option to do so with a DVR counselor within the AJC facility, using PPE (Personal Protection Equipment-masks, face shields, etc.) and social distancing as mandated for safety purposes. DVR is currently collaborating with WIOA core partners such as the Adult and Dislocated Worker

program, Wagner-Peyser program, Ku'ina Youth Services Program, and McKinley Community School for Adults to braid and leverage partner resources.

## What actions have been and/or being planned to overcome the challenges/barriers as a result of COVID?

DVR continues to sustain essential services and is working with contract providers to adjust service delivery for referrals to accommodate participant's needs. Additional supports for remote access are being addressed for participants who need computers and internet resources with linkages to community partners or purchases associated with VR participant's IPE.

DVR is developing an internal work-plan to be reviewed with WINTAC and AJC partners on improving alignment and integration of service delivery for Hawaii's residents with disabilities.

## Please share accomplishments/success stories from your organization.

DVR's Summer Youth Program continued this summer with contracted services provided remotely and in person by Abilities Unlimited: <https://www.hawaiinewsnow.com/2020/06/30/prepare-students-with-disabilities-workforce-nonprofit-turns-online-learning/>

DVR's Hilo counseling staff met with participant #7691 and employer, Puna Kamali'i on 1/30/2020 to complete an on-the-job training (OJT) agreement. DVR's participant agreed with the job description provided. This participant is also co-enrolled with the Department of Health's Developmental Disability Division's (DDD) Waiver program services, and the employer inquired about supported employment through DDD. This inquiry and alignment of services delayed the OJT start date until employer consulted with DDD. Employer contacted DVR's staff on 2/10/2020 with a confirmed start date of 2/18/2020.

The participant successfully completed the OJT first period 2/18/2020 to 3/17/2020 of work placement and the employer invoiced DVR for services rendered. DVR staff met with participant on 3/13/2020 and answered questions related to the OJT assignments.

Employer and participant coordinated with VRS establishing registration for the participant to reimburse participant for travel costs (taxi voucher reimbursements).

Participant continued to work and due to the Emergency Proclamation by Governor Ige requiring cessation of work, Puna Kamali'i closed and furloughed employees on March 21, 2020 with a plan to return on 4/30/2020.

VRS maintained contact with employer through email. Due to continued proclamations, Puna Kamali'i was not able to return to work until 5/11/2020, with management staff making arrangements to bring back workers.

DVR's staff continued to coordinate with employer and obtained a restart date of 5/18/2020 for the OJT participant. VRS explained the need to update OJT to reflect new performance period dates due to the delay related to the pandemic. VRS completed paperwork (new OJT document and addendum), amended authorizations, and sent OJT to employer for new signatures on 5/19/2020. The participant is still currently employed at Puna Kamali'i Flowers under the updated OJT agreement. It is anticipated this participant will be employed after the OJT agreement is completed before the end of the year.

DVR's Ho`opono SSB staff have continued to provide services to the community amidst the pandemic, with job placements for individuals with the most significant disabilities in positions with wages that surpass the state average for non-disabled individuals. In addition, we continue to provide support to blind business owners, independent living services to kupuna, and blindness skills training remotely. The following represents a recent success story about one of the participants served:

One day you are going about your daily routine, getting up at 6:00am and preparing for your day at work when all of a sudden, COVID-19 forever changes our lives. For Alejandro, he too was affected like many of us by the pandemic. He was working part time at a large nationwide restaurant chain as a busser/wait staff when he was laid off due to the restaurant closing down. While he was working, Alejandro was also going to school to get a certificate in Computer Science.

Alejandro contacted his VR Counselor, Josie Damo-Agcaoili, who worked with him to find another part-time job. Josie collaborated with Ho`opono's Employment Service Specialist, Maylene Galicinao, who was able to identify a perfect opportunity for Alejandro. Maylene was working with VersAbility Resources on a recruitment initiative for multiple positions. VersAbility Resources is a national organization whose mission is to supports individuals with disabilities in leading productive and fulfilling lives. One of the ways they do this in Hawaii is by providing employment opportunities through their government contracts. Both Josie and Maylene felt that Alejandro would be an excellent match for a laborer position.

Alejandro worked with Maylene and was eventually hired along with five other Division of Vocational Rehabilitation clients during this recruitment. He started employment with VersAbility Resources on March 30, 2020.

According to his supervisor, Steven Pipes, "in this short time, he has proven himself as an asset to the company. Alejandro shows great intuition, is social, and is a hard worker. Despite his disability, he can take any assigned position as long as verbal communication is used. Alejandro has also taken little time to connect with his fellow workers become a strong member of the team. He has also taken advantage of his schedule to continue is education in the IT field. As the Senior Ship Provisioning Manager for VersAbility Resources in Hawaii, I do count Alejandro as a well-rounded employee that cares for his performance, job, and his coworkers. He is an asset for the company."



picture of Alejandro (2<sup>nd</sup> from the left) along with his co-workers at VersAbility Resources.