

Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor
Retention & Recruitment
“Crisis”

Milwaukee Magazine
(August, 1997)

“There are so many staff changes inside DVR field offices – resignations, retirements, requests for transfers – that from the client's perspective, counselor turnover exceeded 40 percent in 1996. The number one complaint clients keep telling us is counselor turnover. They say, 'I had five counselors in 10 months,' acknowledges analyst Hall.”

“When DVR asked successful clients what was the most important in helping them reach their goal, the leading response was 'the relationship I had with my counselor', says Hall. Yet many clients in the south-eastern Wisconsin study had so many counselors, says the report's author, DVR program specialist William Sather, they had to almost start over at square one again and again.”

“Consumer Comments”*

- Q: What problems have you experienced?
A: “I have (had) 7 - 8 (different) Counselors in the last 3 years”
- Q: What is working well?
A: “I've had the same good counselor for two years.”

*Focus Group 10/97; Phase I of the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation “Reengineering”

Impact

- ▶ Disruption and lack of continuity of services for our consumers.
- ▶ Trust is broken, the agencies' reputation is tarnished, and people are less likely to receive services as required by Federal Law.

Statewide Survey of
Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors
Spring 1998

Entry-level Counselors Leaving

(Those reporting that they have been with DVR less than 3 years)

- ▶ Over 2/3 plan on leaving within 2 years citing "poor pay" as the reason.

Senior Counselors Leaving

- ▶ 33 PLAN TO **RETIRE** WITHIN THE NEXT 5 YEARS
- ▶ 18 OF THOSE 33 PLAN TO **RETIRE** WITHIN THE NEXT 2 YEARS.
- ▶ 91% OF THE "SOON TO BE RETIREES", REPORT A **WILLINGNESS TO STAY LONGER IF THERE WERE AN INCREASE IN PAY.**

100% of all Counselors who responded to the survey reported that if & when they were to leave DVR, they would leave because of "Poor Pay".

**Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor
"Voluntary Turnover"***

- ▶ As a percentage, **DVR has twice as many counselors age 20 - 30 yrs.**¹ as compared to their counterparts in DWD. -
- ▶ As a percentage, **DVR has 3 1/2 times more counselors with seniority of 5 years or less**² as compared to their counterparts in DWD.
- ▶ As a percentage, **DVR has twice as many counselors with 5 - 10 years of seniority**³ as compared to their counterparts in DWD.

¹ This first group is "**fresh out of graduate school**". All they need is 2 years of "supervised clinical experience" and to pass the State Professional Counselor License examination. They are then ready to **leave DVR** and accept jobs that pay a **professional wage**.

² This second group (0 - 5 years), are ready (or just about ready) to take the State's Professional Counselor License examination. They have, or are about to have, the required 2 years of "clinically supervised experience" (thanks to the state of Wisconsin). As they report, they are **anxious to move on** to a job outside of state service that pays a **professional wage**.

³ The third group (5 - 10 years), are "**looking**". They do not have enough "vested" interest in DVR to feel compelled to stay for what they are being paid. Also, with the Rehabilitation Services Administration encouraging the Division to "up-grade" all counselors to a Master's degree (again, thanks to the state of Wisconsin), those employees who were "grand fathered" will then be in a position to "**move on**". (Notice those with seniority of 7 - 12 years in "Cases In Point").

*Department of Workforce Development, Bureau of Human Resource Services; "*Turnover Data 7/1/96 Through 6/30/98*"

Impact Around the State*

▶ City of Waupan:

Some consumers have had "6 different Counselors in the last 2 years".

▶ Superior:

60% of the staff resigned within the past year for better pay.

The Superior office had 2 vacancies recently. One vacancy was filled by a transferring counselor from the Rhinelander office. There were only 5 people certified to interview for the remaining position. Of the 5, only 2 showed up for an interview.

The Rehabilitation Teacher position had been vacant for 2 1/2 years before it was finally filled. The "new hire" stayed for only one month before getting a job paying \$6,000/yr. more with \$1/hr. pay increase after 6 months.

▶ Racine:

29% of the staff are reported to be ready to leave and are looking for other jobs.

43% of the staff have left within the past 2 years as a result of: a) transfer back to job service because, "this place (DVR) is too damn much work", b) transfer to other state employment, and c) one retirement.

▶ Milwaukee Northwest:

25% of the staff have recently left for better paying jobs. There are CONSTANT VACANCIES.

▶ Waukesha:

11% of the staff have recently left for better paying jobs.

▶ Wausau:

50% of the Counseling staff have left for better paying jobs.

▶ Wisconsin Rapids:

16% of the staff have recently left for better paying jobs.

43% have SECOND JOBS.

▶ Milwaukee Southwest:

22% left for better paying jobs.

▶ Oshkosh:

23% left for better paying jobs.

▶ Rhineland:

Vacancy due to the Counselor transferring to Superior.

*This list is by no means comprehensive. The list merely represents concerns *recently reported*.

Cases in Point*

- A **case aide** considered going back to school to get her degree in Rehab. Counseling now that "the kids have grown". She has decided not to. Reasons given; 1) Cost = \$18,000, 2) starting counselor wage would mean a pay cut for her, 3) current position allows for greater flexibility.
- One Counselor reports, "**Our pay is awful** - it does not make any sense to pay Entry Level Counselors a fraction more than **beginning case aides**."
- Counselors report "**living from paycheck to paycheck**".
- A counselor with 2 years of experience recently wrote in his/her exit interview, "**DVR is a good 'stepping stone'** for experience in order to move on to higher paying positions. **Salary is a direct reason for my resignation.**"
- Counselor's children qualify for the **subsidized school lunch program** because of the Counselor's low income level.
- Counselors "**barely able to repay the student loans**" they have incurred as a result of acquiring a **Master's degree which is required** for this position.
- Educational grants are given to Graduate Students with the understanding that they will work for a non-profit agency for at least 2 years. With 2 years of experience working for DVR and passage of the Professional Counselor licence examination, they "**must leave**" for better paying jobs in order to pay back the remainder of their student loans.
- "I like my job, but I cannot LIVE on what I make. Truthfully, **I had a better standard of living as a college student.**"
- A Counselor with **12 years seniority** reports looking into renewing his/her teaching certificate in order to get into the education field where s/he fully expects to earn \$40,000/yr. for a 9 months contract.
- A Counselor with **4 years experience** regrets working for DVR because s/he **would have been making \$45,000/yr.** if s/he had decided to accept employment at the University that s/he graduated from not that long ago.
- A Counselor with **10 years of experience** who was "grand fathered" is currently completing his/her Masters Degree at which time s/he **plans to obtain employment** as a "Career Counselor - Academic Advisor" at a University/Technical college, **paying \$10,000 - \$12,000/yr. more to start.**
- Counselor with **1 year of experience** who plans to leave soon and expects to be able to earn **\$42,000/yr.** as a Rehabilitation Consultant working with private Workers Compensation cases.
- An **LTE** who had been a student working for DVR over the past 14 months reported, "**(I) declined this position for a counseling job paying \$8,000/yr (more)**".
- Another **LTE** who has been working for DVR for the past 7 months reported, "I was very hesitant to interview due to **LOW PAY**".
- A Counselor with **7 years of experience** left for a position with a neighboring VR agency because that state has a **higher pay scale.**
- A Counselor with **12 years of experience** will soon be leaving for a job with a County Mental Health/Social Services Agency in which s/he expects to earn **\$42,000 immediately.**
- A Counselor with **11 years of experience** who is currently earning \$34,000/yr. With DVR is **making efforts to obtain** a position with a University/Technical college where s/he expects to earn **\$42,000 immediately.**

*Again, this list is by no means comprehensive. This merely represents concerns *recently reported*.

DWD / DVR
Administration

DVR Bureau of Client Services Meeting
-June 16, 1997-

"The certification list for counselors is very low. Last lists received for Milwaukee vacancies (4) had only two names on it. **DER won't raise salaries** until it can be proved the action is necessary to obtain applicants. Data should be gathered and presented as soon as possible. LC reported that **three persons offered a counselor position turned it down because of the low wages.** We need to reiterate the annual salary in the letter we send setting up the interview so we don't waste our time interviewing people wh don't want the job."

"**We need to pay our counselors a professional wage** if we expect them to make the effort and do the work required to become more professional. At a recent conference phone call with Doug Burleigh (Federal Rehabilitation Services Administration), Bobbie reported that when Mr. Burleigh reported what WI paid counselors, everyone was shocked."

May 11, 1998

Marty Beil, Executive Director of WSEU, reported after meeting with DWD Secretary Stewart.....

"Met with Linda. She told me quite clearly that **she was committed to this (pay increase for DVR Counselors)** whether the money is there or not. She stated that she found it unacceptable for past welfare recipients to earn \$9 per hour while we expect master degreed, credentialed DVR counselors to work for \$12 per hour. **She sees this as a quality and performance issue.** She also stated that she would be meeting with the administration of DVR and reinforce her position so that there can be no mistake. I believe that Linda was being very forthright with me. **The meeting was very positive.**"

July 31, 1998

Marty Beil, Executive Director of WSEU, wrote to Secretary Stewart after meeting with DWD/DVR Management on July 23rd

"I am writing you out of deep concern.we were quite dismayed to hear from your representatives that they did not feel that there was a recruitment or retention problem...

(DVR) also stated that, 'Vocational Rehabilitation (is) concerned about future problems.....'

.....Linda, something is wrong here.I believe we are in a critical phase as to the future of this agency....."

Pay Comparisons

Entry Level Salaries

	<u>Average</u>	<u>Range</u>
Public	\$35,505/yr.	\$29,578/yr.- \$52,686/yr.
Private	\$36,213/yr.	\$30,992/yr.- \$44,990/yr.
DVR	\$24,469/yr.	\$22,965/yr.- \$32,088/yr.

Career Salaries

Public	\$56,618/yr.	\$41,600/yr.- \$76,024/yr.
Private	\$53,789/yr.	\$48,984/yr.- \$64,397/yr.
DVR	\$36,420/yr.	\$28,696/yr.- \$45,872/yr.

The Public/Private data represents the results of a survey conducted during the **Spring of 1998**. The DVR figures are from VR Counselor Payroll Data as of **July 1998**

UW Madison & UW Stout

(Both Universities have Master Degree Programs in Vocational Rehabilitation)

This Spring, VR from **Idaho and Ohio** were on the campus of UW Stout recruiting graduate students by offering a **starting salary of \$35,000/yr.** with the opportunity to earn **\$40,000/yr.** within 2 yrs.

Graduate Students are **starting** at an average salary of **\$30,000/yr.**

Educational/Pay Comparisons to Other States

Only 20% of the states require a person to have a **Masters degree.**

63% of the states pay their VR counselors an average of **9.8%*** more than Wisconsin, regardless of whether or not they require a **masters degree.** For those states that do require a masters degree, the pay is **12.6% higher.***

*As calculated by The International Salary Calculator - <http://www2.homefair.com/calc/salcalc.html>

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CONFERENCE ROOM 414-229-0181
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Low Rent Public Housing

Revised March 24, 1998

What is it?

The City of Madison's COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY (CDA) owns and operates safe, comfortable, and well-maintained apartment buildings, townhouses, duplex apartments, and houses for low- and moderate-income families and eligible individuals.

These apartments are federally funded through the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and are managed here in Madison by the CDA's Housing Operations Unit.

Who is eligible?

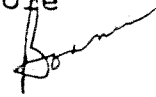
- Must be a U.S. citizen or non-citizen with eligible status
 - A family of 2 or more persons where the head of household is 18 years of age or older.
- OR
- A family of two or more persons, at least one of whom is elderly or permanently handicapped/disabled.
- OR
- A single person who is over the age of 18.

NOTE: A live-in attendant is not considered a member of a family for income eligibility, but is considered when determining bedroom size. If you require a live-in attendant, a doctor's statement will be needed.

What are the maximum annual family income limits?

- 1 person \$31,700
- 2 people \$36,250
- 3 people \$40,750
- 4 people \$45,300
- 5 people \$48,900
- 6 people \$52,550
- 7 people \$56,150

MEMORANDUM

DATE: January 6, 1998
TO: Carol Spain Cole
FROM: Bonnie Norman 
SUBJECT: Federal Guidelines for Elderly/Disabled Subsidized Housing Eligibility and DVR Entry Level Pay

Per your request, attached is a copy of the 1997 Federal Income Guidelines for Subsidized Housing for elderly and mobility impaired persons. This information was found in the Senior Resources, 1997-98 Senior Housing Options for Milwaukee, Ozaukee, Washington and Waukesha Counties booklet. This booklet was obtained at the Milwaukee Public Library.

You requested this information in response to the resignation of yet another new DVR counselor after only several months of employment. I understand this counselor accepted a different job outside of State service because he was offered a higher salary.

To support the point that DVR entry and objective wages are low it is interesting to compare the Federal Income Guidelines for Subsidized Housing as outlined in the above-referenced booklet. A single person can qualify as having a Low Income if they make less than \$28,400/yr. A single person can qualify as having a Very Low Income if they make less than \$17,750/yr. At the current Vocational Counselor starting pay of approximately \$22,000/yr, this means all new Entry Level DVR counselors would qualify as a Low Income person under the federal guidelines for subsidized housing. A person coming in at the Objective Level would also qualify as a Low Income person since they make approximately \$26,000. Neither the entry nor objective level employee would generate an income in excess of the Low Income guideline for at least 1-3 years.

In my case, after obtaining 16 years of State service seniority, my entry level annual pay = \$27,800 which still falls within the Federal Income Guidelines for Low Income Subsidized Housing.

I assume these guidelines were created for individuals living on retirement, pension, social security and disability-related income rather than full-time employment income. If the State of Wisconsin continues to compensate highly educated professionals at Low Income starting wages for full-time jobs, the DVR counselor retention and recruitment problem will surely continue. A good benefit package will not attract or keep professionals who expect and need a hourly wage which places them above the Federal Low Income levels. Counselors go into this professional knowing they will not make alot of money, but most expect to

receive more money than the State of Wisconsin is willing to pay. Increased sick leave benefits and other nice benefits does not pay the rent, utilities or buy food. But it appears it does qualify us for Low Income housing.

Federally subsidized senior rental apartment communities offer a quality lifestyle at affordable rents to qualified lower income senior citizens and mobility impaired persons. Financial assistance is available through a number of federal programs. In most communities, residents pay approximately 30% of their adjusted income for rent and utilities (Adjustments are made for continuing medical bills).

Included in this section are separate listings for private and publically-managed housing in Milwaukee, Ozaukee, Washington, and Waukesha counties.

There are certain criteria which must be met to be eligible for subsidized housing, including income and age factors. The maximum allowable income is determined by federally-mandated eligibility income limits. These are determined and revised annually by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Most apartment communities are designated as having low income (LI) or very low income (VLI) limits. Eligibility income limits are noted for each listing.

Most of the listed apartment communities require applicants to be at least 62 years old or a person with a mobility impair-

SUBSIDIZED HOUSING

ment, including sight and hearing impairments. Persons with these impairments do not have to reach the age of 62. There are some "senior citizen" apartment communities that allow a limited "near elderly" population of 50 years of age or older. Some listings presented in the publication allow a wide range of age groups, but are included in this section because of the large number of senior citizens or mobility impaired person living in the apartment community. Please check the specific community to determine entrance requirements.

Fortunately, many subsidized apartment communities do not have long waiting lists. Planning ahead is advisable and placing your name on several waiting lists is legal and certainly advisable.

As an applicant you have the right to refuse any offer, so you should not be fearful to apply on several waiting lists.

The following list of apartment communities have rent assistance assigned by the federal government.

Income Guidelines for 1997

Low Income (LI)	
1 person	\$28,400
2 persons	\$32,450

Very Low Income (VLI)	
1 person	\$17,750
2 persons	\$20,300

Article provided by:
Scott Reithel, NAHP
Senior V.P. Metropolitan Assoc.

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1997-98 Senior Housing Options

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- Community Based Residential Facilities
- Independent Senior Living
- Subsidized Housing

Complimentary



Senior Housing Options, Inc.
P.O. Box 1000, Germantown, WI 53032

December 15, 1968*

*The last time DVR Counselors in the State of Wisconsin received a reallocation