



News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Dec. 17, 2013

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DARS HONORED FOR PROGRAM THAT PROVIDES DISABILITY BENEFICIARIES WITH GUIDANCE TO EMPLOYMENT

(RICHMOND, Va.) — An innovative program by the Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services that increases the likelihood of employment for Virginians who receive disability benefits has won an award for excellence.

The National Council on Rehabilitation Education presented DARS Commissioner Jim Rothrock and the agency with its 2013 President's Award for Excellence in Vocational Rehabilitation. The award, which was presented Nov. 5 during the organization's conference in Arlington, recognizes DARS's Work Incentives Specialist Advocate program.

This DARS initiative, created through a Medicaid infrastructure grant, has evolved into a program to help address concerns that many people with disabilities and their families may have regarding Social Security benefits when applying for competitive employment. The WISA program boosts the likelihood of a successful employment outcome for DARS clients who receive Social Security benefits.

“Of the DARS clients who enter the Work Incentives Specialist Advocate program, 73 percent have their cases closed, meaning that they successfully find work as well as greater independence and fuller integration into our society,” said DARS Commissioner Jim Rothrock. The average rate of similar clients who find work without assistance from the WISA program is 41 percent.

Social Security beneficiaries with disabilities whose desire to work is tempered by concern about the potential impact of employment are guided by one of 37 work incentive advisors across the Commonwealth to help prevent the loss of critical benefits that allow them to consider entering the workforce. Clients, for example, may earn a salary that could be significantly affected by the loss of benefits such as transportation or critical health care.

The NCRE President's Award honorees must demonstrate an innovative service program and offer a special emphasis on partnering with a rehabilitation educational program to enhance

services to individuals with disabilities. DARS' partners in the program include Cornell University and Virginia Commonwealth University, which assist in providing training, case study and evaluation for the work incentive advisors.

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The Virginia Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services, in collaboration with community partners, provides and advocates for resources and services to improve the employment, quality of life, security, and independence of older Virginians, Virginians with disabilities, and their families. For more information, visit www.vadars.org.