

Profiles in Success

Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services

Rehabilitation Services *in* Arlington
Blind Services *in* Houston



The Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services (DARS) works in partnership with Texans who have disabilities to improve their quality of life and to enable their full participation in society. DARS provides vocational rehabilitation for Texans with disabilities through the Division for Blind Services (DBS) and the Division for Rehabilitation Services (DRS). Both DBS and DRS have multiple workforce system programs designed to assist disabled Texans achieve their goals for employment and independent living.

DBS assists blind or visually impaired people of all ages and their families. It provides consumers with customized services including assessment, counseling, instruction for independent living skills, travel and communication skills, vocational training for job skills, and job search and placement services. Division programs include Vocational Rehabilitation (VR), Independent Living and Business Enterprises of Texas.

DRS assists Texas consumers who have physical or mental disabilities through the following five programs: VR, Comprehensive Rehabilitation Services, Independent Living Services, Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services, and Independent Living Centers.

The VR programs in both divisions help people with disabilities prepare for, find, and keep jobs. The programs have highly specialized counselors and many services that are tailored to each individual's needs. These services include medical, physiological and vocational evaluations to define the nature and degree of disability in relation to each person's job capabilities. Eligible consumers may obtain training in job skills at school, on the job, or at home. The program also helps high school students with disabilities as they transition from secondary school to work or higher education. Other services, namely sign language interpreters and rehabilitation technology, are available to assist in accessing or retaining work.

To be eligible for VR services, an individual must reside in Texas, have a mental or physical disability that affects his or her ability to work, need DARS services to help find and keep a job, and be able to obtain and retain employment after receiving these services. To begin the process of determining eligibility, applicants meet with a vocational rehabilitative counselor for an initial assessment of their disability and the scope of their objectives. The VR counselor then makes a determination about the individual's eligibility, and together, the consumer and counselor define specific employment goals and a program of vocational rehabilitation services for meeting those goals.

In addition to the services listed previously, other services available to help consumers at this stage are surgery, counseling, transportation, artificial arms and legs, and for those with hearing impairments, hearing aids and interpreter services. After the consumer has found a job

and has worked for several months, and both the consumer and counselor agree that things are going smoothly, the case is closed. Consumers may always contact the VR counselor and always have access to appeals procedures.

For every dollar spent on vocational rehabilitation, consumers generate more than nine dollars in personal taxable income through the remainder of their work lives. By retirement, the average rehabilitated consumer will have repaid the cost of services at least four times through taxes paid. —DARS Annual Report

DARS has partnered with a number of large and small employers across the state to recruit disabled Texans. In particular, DARS can help businesses find qualified employees by matching individuals with the appropriate knowledge and skills to particular employer needs. Texas employers can save time and money in the recruitment process with DARS' pre-screening and training services and they may also take advantage of the Work

Opportunity Tax Credit and other tax incentives. To ensure employer satisfaction, DARS conducts follow up interviews and telephone calls after job placement. Some of DARS' partners include Wal-Mart, United Supermarkets, Hyatt Hotels, Convergys, Medtronics, Pilgrim's Pride, Marriott Hotels, Yellow Cab of Austin, American Airlines, Safeway, Inc., HDI Solutions, Lowe's, CVS Pharmacies, and Home Depot. To date, over 11,000 loyal, work-ready and enthusiastic workers have been employed through this DARS program.

In 2009, DARS and its Arlington Field Office initiated a pilot partnership with Cowboys Stadium to assist the new stadium in finding workers. So far, the program has employed over 32 individuals with Legends Hospitality Management, its concessions operator. Some of these employees have been further promoted within just a few months. DARS awarded the Arlington team a Certificate of Recognition for its efforts in Business Development in November of 2009. ★

DARS Arlington: Profiles in Success



Margaret Hanson and her family returned to Texas after having lived in Chicago for many years. Once her children were grown, Margaret decided it was time to enter the working world. Margaret has a hearing disability, so she contacted the DARS office in Arlington for assistance with her job search and soon learned of the opportunities at Cowboys Stadium.

What Margaret likes most about her job as a Concessions Cart Attendant is that it offers an opportunity for her to participate in a meaningful service position where she is able to help the public

at large and in particular, respond to members of the deaf community. Margaret is a Team Lead and enjoys interacting with other cart attendants and her supervisor at Cowboys Stadium.

Margaret also likes her job at Cowboys Stadium because it represents opportunity for her. She knows that if she performs well she can advance within the department and that prospect adds to her enthusiasm for the work. ★

James Ray Parker moved from Austin to the Arlington area and began looking for work.



James, who is hearing impaired, contacted his local DARS field office for assistance in his job search. While working closely with his VR Counselor, James explained that he had held a variety of service jobs in the past ranging from positions in company mail rooms to building maintenance. When his DARS counselor informed him of the possibility of working at Cowboys Stadium, James did not hesitate to explore the opportunity. He attended an on-the-job training session for the position of Concession Cart Attendant and quickly became a Team Leader in this area at Cowboys Stadium, serving as a liaison between concession attendants and their supervisor.

There are many aspects of the job that appeal to James. He enjoys helping people in general, so serving the public at Cowboys Stadium is satisfying. James has always been a Cowboys fan and promoting the Cowboys' image is important to him. However, most important to James, is the positive impact he has on other deaf people as he responds to their inquiries. Since beginning his job at Cowboys Stadium, James has been approached many times by members of the deaf community who are delighted to see him there and who view his highly visible position with pride. These individuals tell him that they are happy to see him enjoying his work and that they are inspired by his example. Not only is this job personally satisfying to James, but it also gives him the opportunity to serve as a role model in the deaf community. ★

Kyle McNiece was looking for a new position after a recent layoff, and contacted the DARS field office for assistance in his job search. Kyle has Asperger Syndrome, an autism spectrum



disorder that can sometimes make communication and interaction with others challenging. Working together, Kyle and his VR Counselor developed an Individual Employment Plan for him and a schedule of role play sessions in order to practice and facilitate the interview process. With several years of work experience in food service, Kyle felt well-equipped to pursue the opportunity of working in concessions at Cowboys Stadium. In addition, Kyle was particularly motivated to pursue this job because he has had a strong interest in sports since childhood and is an avid Cowboys fan.

Kyle, an alternate Team Lead in concessions, works an area spanning three floors at Cowboys Stadium. He appreciates the part-time nature of this position and the fact that he can work as many functions as he wants. Currently, he is scheduled for each Cowboys game. So far as the future is concerned, Kyle sees Cowboys Stadium as a place he'd like to stay because there is plenty of opportunity for different kinds of jobs and for advancement. Right now Kyle is interested in advancing to a position in the club area of the facility, but as a self-styled "office nerd," he is interested in office work or administration at Cowboys Stadium as well. ★

Arturo Gonzalez is 22 years old and currently enrolled in classes at the University of Texas (UT) at Arlington as a psychology major. Arturo



sustained a very serious head injury while playing football during his junior year of high school. After numerous surgeries and extensive rehabilitation, he has regained the ability to speak

and to read, recovered his sight and recaptured his cognitive abilities. With the bountiful help of loyal family and friends, Arturo graduated on time with his class in 2006, but to his great disappointment, he lost his football scholarship to Texas Tech University.

Arturo began his higher education at Weatherford Community College, studying around recurring complications and subsequent major surgeries related to his 2006 injury. Well enough to continue his coursework but faced with medical bills and tuition, Arturo knew he needed regular part-time employment while he worked toward completing his degree. Referred to DARS by UT Arlington and with DARS' assistance, Arturo applied at Cowboys Stadium and started as a Concessions Cart Attendant at the stadium's first event, the George Strait concert on June 6, 2009. He has since been promoted to banquet concessions and works a variety of events in various capacities, from waiter to manager. Arturo loves this job because it affords him ample opportunity to meet people and network, and inspires him to continue his pursuit of higher education. Arturo plans to graduate with a major in behavioral psychology and a minor in Spanish, and hopes to use his education and his own experiences to help others who have suffered traumatic injuries. While it is not how he first envisioned it, his work at Cowboys Stadium keeps him close to his high school dream of a professional football career, which in turn, inspires him to pursue other, newer dreams of helping others. ★

DARS Houston: Profile in Success

Randal S. Farber is a transactional attorney, specializing in real estate and business law in Houston. His work ranges from the purchase and sale of office buildings to the representation of landlords and real estate developers to advising small businesses with their day-to-day legal issues. Randy does not litigate, and his practice is very document oriented, consisting of the review and drafting of contracts and other legal documents.



In the early 80s, he was diagnosed with Retinitis Pigmentosa, which causes gradual vision loss and frequently, blindness. In the mid-90s, Randy began to notice significant changes in his peripheral vision, but his sight remained functional and he was able to maintain his routine until the early 2000s. By 2005, Randy had lost so much peripheral vision that he realized he could not drive safely. Faced with daunting questions, Randy was concerned about his ability to support his family and see his children through college.

Randy contacted DARS in 2005 and underwent extensive evaluation and training. Training was initially two to three days a week and covered assistive technology for the visually impaired such as talking computers and note takers. The training included life skills where keeping clothes sorted, cooking, identifying money, and even sewing, were taught. Mobility training and using a cane were also part of life skills taught by DARS, as was learning Braille. Randy could read through a 12-point font document, but only with great time and effort. DARS helped Randy evaluate different types of equipment that would help him at work, and in March of 2006, DARS provided him with a closed circuit TV and a computer with customizable software to magnify and read documents. His DARS case was closed in 2006, but reopened in 2007 when he decided that the computer software he was using was no longer adequate for his work. Randy now works with JAWS (Job Access With Speech), a software program that reads computer screens and makes personal computers accessible to blind and visually impaired users.

With progressive blindness a reality, Randy still considered how best to approach his daily work. His options were relying on screen reading software only, adding voice command computer software, or integrating Braille. From his prior knowledge of computer technology (he is also a Certified Systems Professional), Randy knew that voice recognition software would not be precise enough for the level of detail his work required. He decided that becoming proficient in Braille was essential to a transactional law practice and he became one of the first participants in a Houston DARS pilot program for teaching Braille.

DARS considers 50 Braille words per minute desirable, and 25 to 30 to be functional. Randy's current rate is 10 to 20 words a minute, and to put that in perspective, he explained that it took him a full year of reading almost an hour a night to complete his first Harry Potter novel. Randy's current goal is to become proficient enough at Braille to use a refreshable Braille display and embosser effectively. A refreshable Braille display reproduces Braille from text on the screen, allowing him to read with his hands as well as listen to the computer. An embosser produces Braille documents from a computer. Randy's case has been closed since 2008, and when he achieves Braille proficiency, he will contact DARS for re-evaluation in order to obtain this equipment.

Randy is very satisfied with the training he received from DARS. Many of his teachers have coped with blindness from birth, and in this regard, they served as inspiration. The most important thing he learned from DARS was that losing his sight

“simply did not equate with NOT being able to do things.” Randy has come to understand that aside from a few activities (he suggests perhaps race car driving!) a visually impaired person can essentially do whatever he or she wants to do. Randy believes the public does not understand that losing one's sight, or living with drastically diminished eyesight, is not such a life-changing event after all.

As he has for his entire career, Randy continues to perform well in a highly demanding profession. In 2004, the year before he called DARS, he was named a “Texas Super Lawyer” by Texas Monthly. And, despite the worsening of his visual impairment and the time devoted to rehabilitative training, he received this same award in 2005, 2006, and 2007. Now, at age 51, Randy's professional resume is growing. A member of the National Association of Blind Lawyers, a division of the National Federation of the Blind, Randy has been invited to speak at a disability law symposium in Baltimore this year. ★

The DARS Inquiries Line answers information and referral calls for all of DARS, including programs for the blind and visually impaired, the deaf and hard of hearing, vocational rehabilitation, and other programs for adults with disabilities.

The Inquiries Line is answered Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., and voice mail is in operation during evenings and on weekends.

***DARS Inquiries Line: 1-800-628-5115
DARS TDD/TTY: 1-866-581-9328
email: DARS.inquiries@dars.state.tx.us***

The Texas Workforce Investment Council promotes the development of a well-educated, highly skilled workforce for Texas and advocates a workforce system that provides quality workforce education and training opportunities.

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