



FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF  
**EDUCATION**  
fldoe.org



# Success Through Inclusion

2021-2022 Annual Report



Fostering Dynamic Partnerships between People with Disabilities and Florida Businesses.

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# The Florida Rehabilitation Council

## About the FRC

The Florida Rehabilitation Council (FRC) is part of a network of state rehabilitation councils created by the 1992 Amendments to the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. The FRC was established to help VR in planning and developing statewide rehabilitation programs and services and recommending improvements to programs and services.

## FRC Mission

The FRC is committed to increasing employment, enhancing independence and improving the quality of life for Floridians with disabilities.

## FRC Vision

Partnering to create opportunities to employ all people with disabilities in competitive jobs of their choice.

## FRC 2023 Public Forums

The FRC and Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) partner together to hold public forums that promote and maintain open lines of communication with VR customers, stakeholders and

interested parties. This collaborative effort to reach customers, vendors, businesses and other stakeholders is a continued focus. The public forums are held at each FRC quarterly meeting or when policy changes may require public input. Access to these forums is not limited to individuals where the meeting is located, but are open to the public statewide virtually by TEAMS meetings and also in person at the meeting venue. There were four public forums conducted during the 2021 -2022 State Fiscal Year (SFY). Areas of comment received included feedback on: Vendor Capacity, Staff Retention, Self-Employment, Transition Services, VR Marketing and Outreach, Self-Advocacy Training and VR Ombudsman's Process.

## **2023 FRC/VR Public Forums**

February 7 - VR Area 1 • May 9 - VR Area 3 • August 8 - VR Area 6  
• October 24 - VR Area 2

For updated information please visit <https://www.rehabworks.org/frc/frc-events.html>.

## Message from the Chair

On behalf of the FRC and in partnership with VR, it is my pleasure to present the 2021-2022 Annual Report-Success Through Inclusion: Fostering Dynamic Partnerships between People with Disabilities and Florida Businesses. The report highlights the activities and accomplishments of VR and the FRC over this past year. After a year of being back following the pandemic, I am pleased to say that the Council is stronger and more active. I also believe that our relationship with VR and the Florida Department of Education has never been better. This is thanks to VR Director Brent McNeal and Senior Chancellor Henry Mack.



While the report contains many statistics, we know that the best measurement of the effectiveness of the program is by hearing from VR customers, many of whom have become successfully employed in meaningful work of their choosing. Once again, several of these stories have been included in this year's annual report. We congratulate their successes, but know that there are many more out there. The FRC would like to encourage individuals to share their stories with us at

[FRCCustomers@vr.fl DOE.org](mailto:FRCCustomers@vr.fl DOE.org).

On a personal note, as I step down as Chair for nearly the past two years, I am pleased with how much our current members have grown and the leaders that have emerged. I also congratulate Andy Houghton who will take over as Chair for 2022-2023. I look forward to seeing even more growth from his leadership. I will be remaining

on the Council, and offer my experience in whatever capacity is needed. We will continue our commitment to serve Floridians with disabilities by adhering to the mission and vision of our Council and will make sure that all voices are heard and valued.

Lastly, if you or someone you know would like to make a valued addition to the Council, consider applying to become a member. We are always looking for individuals willing to work to support and improve VR services in Florida. Information on applying for a position on the Council and an application can be found at the end of this report and on the FRC website.

Sincerely,

Michael Adamus, Chair

Florida Rehabilitation Council

# About the Cover

Born and raised in Philadelphia, Margaret Zabor moved to Tampa, Florida in 1989 and now considers herself a Floridian. She found a lot to love about this state: the marvelous opportunities for photography, the friendly people, and the connection to artists and art classes. She started with the Saturday morning open studio at Hillsborough Community College (Ybor) and moved on to the Life Enrichment Center drawing and painting classes. VSA Florida, now Arts4All Florida, has supported her for many years with invitations to show and sell her work. Through them, she received training from the ArtThread Foundation in using Splash!, the computer-based artmaking program. She loved it so much that she made hundreds of images. Margaret also received support from Vocational Rehabilitation and was able to attend a two-year certificate program in Commercial Art at Tampa Bay Technical High School. She has studied drawing and painting with the ArtTutor program and is now learning from the Draw Awesome online course.



Artmaking allows her to express herself as a person with bipolar disorder and to help manage confusing emotions. When she is drawing, painting, making photos, or writing, she can be totally immersed in creating. She cannot imagine life without it.

# About ArtThread

The ArtThread Foundation makes art and creative expression more available to everyone, especially those impacted by social circumstances and physical limitations. ArtThread uses the universal reach of technology to inspire the creative process and enhance life and learning while using the spirit of social entrepreneurship to help other organizations fulfill their mission.

The Foundation's work with schools focuses on students with disabilities, providing them with customized online art-making tools accompanied by ArtThread's training curriculum for teachers. These creative activities lead to student empowerment and a sense of accomplishment.

ArtThread's programming includes education and training, with customized curriculum and mentoring programs for pARTners, including creative, entrepreneurial, and life skills. The Foundation offers the ArtThread Interactive Online Galleries and Splash!, the ground-breaking, no-fail, art-making application. ArtThread facilitates research with online tracking and assessments that support outcomes-based research on learning disabilities, as well as art, physical, and occupational therapies.

The ArtThread Foundation evolved from a US Department of Commerce and NIH/NCI-funded, arts-based research and patient service program at the University of Florida. The Foundation forged a partnership with Carnegie Mellon University in order to develop online art-tools that bring the possibility of creative expression to people with limited access to traditional art-making tools.

# Disability & Employment in Florida

- 13.7% of Floridians have a disability
- 20.4% of Floridians with a disability are employed as opposed to 63% of Floridians without a disability. Employment percentages based on disability status.
- 500k+ Floridians with a disability could enter the workforce with the right education, training and support

## Data provided by the Able Trust

The Able Trust, also known as the Florida Endowment Foundation for Vocational Rehabilitation, is a 501(c)(3) public charity established by the Florida Legislature in 1990 as a direct support organization for the Florida Division of Vocational Rehabilitation. Its mission is to be a key leader in providing Floridians with disabilities opportunities for successful employment.

# Summary of Council Recommendations to the 2020-2024 Unified State Plan

The Florida Rehabilitation Council (FRC) is pleased to be a strategic partner with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR). The FRC promotes high standards and expectations for every area of service delivery by recommending best practices in policies using data driven recommendations and by sharing each council member's unique perspective from the constituency they represent.

The FRC is equally concerned with staff retention and turnover. The current high level of turnover has serious and significant impacts on the clients being served as well as staff. For Florida to have an impactful program of services for individuals with disabilities, actions should be taken to, at minimum, achieve pay more commensurate with experience and educational requirements, which would bring Florida closer to the national average. Action is needed by policy makers who can approve budgetary authority so that VR can be competitive in recruiting, hiring and retaining staff. The FRC appreciates the vision that VR leadership continues to bring to the agency and supports VR's 2023-2024 legislative budget request to increase pay for VR Technicians, Counselors, Consultants and Supervisors. The FRC applauds these efforts and will continue to monitor the Division's progress. The FRC is ready to meet the challenges with VR as a partner.

## **Recommendation 1 - Deaf and Hard of Hearing Service**

1.1 Focus on retention and recruitment of qualified American Sign Language interpreters, to the VR workforce, in order to meet the ongoing needs of customers who are deaf or hard of hearing.

## **Recommendation 2 - Counselor Retention and Recruitment**

2.1 The FRC strongly recommends VR request additional funding for pay increases and other incentives to address ongoing concerns related to recruitment, retention and pay disparity of the VR workforce, including incentives for Certified Rehabilitation Counselors that align with national occupation norms. The FRC believes this is critical to stabilizing VR staff levels.

## **Recommendation 3 - Transition Services**

3.1 Continue to promote early contact and assistance to all students with disabilities under an Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) or a 504 Plan.

3.2 Continue to expand and offer career paths to include vocational exploration, technical training, apprenticeships and post-secondary options for transition students.

3.3 Continue to emphasize peer mentoring in Florida, especially to underserved groups who are deaf or hard of hearing. Assure that there is a network of proficient providers and supports for those providers, including those working with individuals who are Deaf.

3.4 FRC encourages VR to create collaborative partnerships with state and community colleges to share resources and create access points to help potential and current customers to find and access resources.

## **Recommendation 4 - Job Placement Strategies**

- 4.1 Continue to analyze and identify any trends in services provided under the rehabilitation engineering service category by service type and VR area.
- 4.2 Continue strengthening efforts with business leaders to improve employment opportunities and meaningful careers, including increasing partnerships with local Chambers of Commerce.
- 4.3 Remain focused on customer strengths and develop tools to communicate effectively and succinctly to potential employers.
- 4.4 Continue to evaluate the effectiveness of the Abilities Work Help Desk and provide regular reports to the FRC.
- 4.5 Further build capacity for job customization and innovation and expansion projects to include unserved and underserved populations.
- 4.6 Evaluate self-employment services across the board to include the evaluation of the Certified Business Technical Assistance Consultant model. Consider ways to streamline and expedite the provision of self-employment services.
- 4.7 Monitor and support the new partnership between the Able Trust and Small Business Development Centers to enhance engagement with individuals with disabilities.

## **Recommendation 5 - Rights and Conflict Resolution**

5.1 Continue to promote advocacy and a Disability Rights curriculum for clients, staff and providers as a core principle. Collaborative discussions enhance informed choices.

5.2 Continue to implement strategies to improve satisfaction survey results on client knowledge of all levels of rights to resolve any difficulties with VR.

5.3 Create an award to empower VR staff by recognizing their innovative use of conflict resolution.

5.4 Make sure all VR staff and clients are aware of their options and of the services of Disability Rights Florida, the Client Assistance Program and the VR Ombudsman's Office provided through increased collaboration and additional engagement.

## **Recommendation 6 - Public Awareness of VR**

6.1 In collaboration with the Florida Department of Education, develop and implement rebranding and messaging targeted to businesses and potential customers to promote public awareness of VR.

6.2 Implement an online application system.

6.3 Continue to engage businesses and mandated partners.

# Steven R. Wise Advocacy Award

The annual Stephen R. Wise Advocacy Award recognizes dedicated leaders and champions in the cause of helping persons with disabilities to achieve independence and dignity through meaningful employment.

## Award Recipient: James “Chip” Byers

James “Chip” Byers is an autistic entrepreneur, community leader and disability advocate. Chip has experienced a great deal of employment discrimination due to his disability. After years of being turned down for and not advancing in jobs he was qualified for, he chose to open his own Italian Ice business. His goal was to proactively recruit and hire people with disabilities to join his integrated workforce.



Chip’s training program was featured on national television (CBS’s Undercover Boss) and as a result, his program will now be used to inform a disability inclusion program for the entire Rita’s Italian Ice brand. He not only employs persons with disabilities but he also trains his all-abilities staff to move into management roles because he employs many Discovery Program trainees. He is currently assisting the Florida Small Business Development Centers (SBDC) in developing a training program for small business owners and employers that want to hire, retain and promote persons with disabilities.

Chip also empowers and improves the lives of persons with disabilities by being an example and role model for others. He constantly advocates for inclusion with other business leaders. He is a regular speaker to companies, publications and media around the state advocating for disability workforce inclusion. He serves as a resource to employers and an advocate for employees to ensure all are successful.

## **Award Recipient: Isabel Garcia**

Isabel Garcia is an example of someone who has tirelessly given of herself for the benefit of others. Her sensitive, empathetic character and her fierce dedication to improving the lives of children and adults with disabilities is known throughout her community. Her passion stems from her own experience as a mother of a child with a disability. As the parent movement grew in the 1980s, Parent to Parent of Miami was founded. The organization's mission was to "empower and support a network of parents who have children with disabilities." Isabel joined the board of Parent to Parent of Miami in 1990. Her role as a board of trustee member was just the beginning. She became the Board President and then transitioned to the Executive Director of the newly funded parent center in 1997.



Isabel spearheaded an important partnership with Florida International University and Miami Dade County Public Schools to launch the first transition program for students with intellectual disabilities in Miami Dade. The program provided the support young

adults with disabilities needed to grow and learn in a university setting. More recently, Isabel secured grant funding to establish financial planning for children with intellectual disabilities and complex medical needs and continues to connect young adults with critical services in the community.

Isabel has dedicated the last 32 years to ensuring that children and all individuals with disabilities have a voice. In choosing to become an advocate, Isabel has positively impacted the lives of thousands of individuals with disabilities, many who are now thriving adults living meaningful lives to their fullest potential. Isabel's selfless work has led to positive changes to a community who dares to dream big for persons with disabilities.

## **Past Award Recipients**

- 2013 Steve L. Howells (Executive Director, Florida Alliance for Assistive Services and Technology)
- 2014 Carol Borden (CEO, Guardian Angels Medical Service Dogs)
- 2015 David C. Jones (Founder, Florida Disabled Outdoors Association)
- 2016 John Ficca (Founder/CEO, Hands on Education)
- 2017 Rhonda Beckman (Executive Director, The Arc, Ridge Area)
- 2018 Senator Dennis Baxley (Florida State Senate, District 12)
- 2019 Becki Forsell (Founder, YES! of America United)
- 2020 Ann Siegel, JD (Legal Director, Disability Rights Florida)
- 2021 Lileana de Moya (de Moya Foundation Founder) & Representative Allison Tant (Florida House of Representatives, District 9)

# Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Director's Message

The Florida Department of Education, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) is pleased to join the Florida Rehabilitation Council (FRC) in presenting its 2022 Annual Report. The accomplishments shared herein reflect the support and partnership between VR and the FRC throughout the program year of July 1, 2021 – June 30, 2022.



The successes shared in this report reflect Florida's resilience. VR is proud of Florida's economy and the communities that continue to blossom under difficult circumstances. The future of Florida's employment landscape provides opportunities for a renewed commitment to the people and businesses VR serves.

We continue to support individuals with disabilities in obtaining and maintaining competitive, integrated employment. VR customers continue to exceed the expected level of Measurable Skills Gains, an important federal performance measure. Our efforts in identifying, recruiting and retaining qualified candidates has enabled more than 800 businesses to secure the talent they need, despite the labor shortage. VR has worked diligently throughout the year to prepare for the move to the AWARE case management system, which will automate RSA-mandated reporting and streamline a number of processes for staff.

Our accomplishments are a direct reflection of the commitment by staff and stakeholders; and the tremendous work that continues

to happen in schools, communities and all levels of government. Outcomes that improve the lives of Floridians with disabilities and the prospective economy mean a brighter future for us all.

## **Program Overview**

VR is a division of Florida's Department of Education whose mission is to assist people with disabilities, ages 14 and older, in securing competitive, integrated employment. Each year we support over 5,000 Floridians in finding gainful employment leading to better outcomes for families, communities and the Florida economy.

VR supports an individual's path to independence with services needed to obtain lasting employment. This differs from other state agencies that provide ongoing maintenance services or supports for individuals with disabilities. Once an individual, their employer and their VR counselor agree that the employment opportunity is successful, the individual's VR case is closed; however, the individual can return to VR for additional services if needed to maintain their job.

## **VR Mission**

To help people with disabilities find and maintain employment and enhance their independence.

## **VR Vision**

To become the first place people with disabilities turn to when seeking employment and a top resource for employers in need of qualified employees.

## **Division Highlight: Subminimum Wage to Competitive Integrated Employment (SWTCIE) Grant Recipient**

Florida's Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) has been awarded \$13.1 million to realize the Florida Arts to Competitive Integrated Employment (ArtCIE) initiative. The initiative will create an innovative model that assists individuals with disabilities currently employed in, or contemplating, subminimum wage employment to move toward competitive integrated employment (CIE) outcomes in the field of Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation.

ArtCIE will offer opportunities to at least 1,000 individuals with disabilities; create a dual customer career exploration model with innovations in peer mentoring, work experience, virtual reality modules, and business engagement; and provide training for sheltered workshops and other subminimum wage providers, individuals, families, school personnel and employers. The award is part of the U.S. Department of Education's Rehabilitation Services

Administration (RSA) Subminimum Wage to Competitive Integrated Employment (SWTCIE) demonstration project with fourteen state vocational rehabilitation agencies.

## **SFY 2021-2022 Facts At-A-Glance**

### **Customer Demographics**

- 0.3% Pacific Islander
- 0.7% Native American
- 1.5% Asian
- 21% Black
- 22% Hispanic
- 55% White
- 49% of our customers are ages 14 to 21
- 51% of our customers are 22 and older

### **WIOA Performance Measures**

- 53.5% Employment rate 2nd quarter after exit
- 50.3% Employment rate 4th quarter after exit
- \$4,454 Median earnings after 2nd quarter
- 20.8% Credential Attainment
- 40.6% Measurable Skill Gains

### **Other Facts**

- 5,669 successful closures
- 32,130 referrals
- 24% of referrals are made by elementary or secondary schools
- 39% of referrals are self-referrals or customers being referred by friends or family
- 15,917 applications
- 244 jobs saved through job retention services

- \$10.50 was returned to the Florida economy for every dollar spent
- Total Division expenditures were \$222,710,608.00. Of that amount \$132,910,238.26 was Purchased Client Services.
- 448 Counselors, Technician & Supervisors
- 25% of VR staff members are Certified Rehabilitation Counselors
- 34% Of customers gainfully employed in SFY 2021-2022 were in the Mental Health Primary Disability Category.
  - o 25% Developmental Disability
  - o 15% Sensory
  - o 09% Learning Disability
  - o 09% Chronic Medical
  - o 07% Orthopedic
  - o 01% Substance Abuse

## **Introducing Students to Careers**

VR provides individualized services to assist youth with disabilities, ages 14-21, in a seamless transition from high school to a meaningful career path. Students with disabilities may participate in Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) without having to apply to VR, or be determined eligible for services. Under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act (WIOA), every student with a disability has the opportunity to participate in Pre-ETS through VR, including sponsored job exploration counseling, work readiness training, work-based learning experiences, postsecondary educational counseling and self-advocacy training (includes training delivered by peer mentors).

In the 2021-2022 SFY, over 10,000 youth with disabilities received Pre-Employment Transition Services.

# Project SEARCH

The Project SEARCH Transition-to-Work Program is a unique, business-led, one-year employment preparation program that takes place entirely at the workplace. Total workplace immersion facilitates a seamless combination of classroom instruction, career exploration, and hands-on training through worksite rotations. The program culminates in individualized job development.

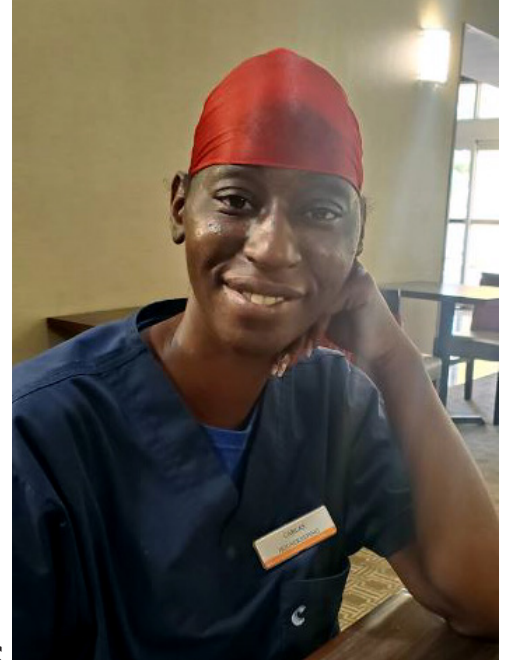
## The program:

- Is a partnership between the school system, a host business, VR and providers.
- Serves students with the most significant disabilities between the ages of 18 and 21 years old.
- Offers students 3 targeted job rotations with an employer, working 16 hours a week or more with competitive wages in an integrated setting.

Florida leads the nation with 35 Project SEARCH sites.

# VR's Impact: Carlas's Story

Carlas Pinkney's confidence began to grow the day she visited CareerSource. She was diagnosed with an intellectual disability and was looking for a job. CareerSource referred her to VR, where she began her journey towards a career that would allow her to better care for herself and her son.



Carlas met her counselor, Sarah Hendricks, and together they settled on a job goal of housekeeping. Carlas remembers that experience well: "I love the service I received, as there was no judgment, only help. [My counselor] was very welcoming to me, and made me feel comfortable."

Working with Sara for over a year, Carlas reached her goal. She is employed as a housekeeper and thanks to her new found confidence, she trains new employees as well. Carlas is looking forward to growing in her current job but has her eye on the future. She feels VR could help her pursue a career in nursing. When asked what advice she would share, she quips, "Every setback is a come up. If someone tells you that you cannot do something, use that as motivation to succeed."

# VR's Impact: William's Story

As a mechanic and driver, William Lockwood's job requires a certain degree of mobility and can be physically demanding at times. The prosthetic leg he used after his amputation was preventing him from carrying out his tasks without aggravating his disability. Unsure if he would be able to keep the job he enjoyed, he came to VR. William's counselor Bonnie Burgess started with evaluations to determine the best course of action after William was found eligible. With help from prosthetic specialists and guidance and counseling provided by Bonnie, William was able to find the right prosthetic and accommodations to retain his job. Bonnie remembers William's commitment to employment during the case process: "One of a counselor's first objectives when meeting with a new consumer is to build some form of trust/rapport. If clients don't have confidence in their relationship with their counselor, they are less likely to open up about the challenges that they're facing, much less be open to discussing these challenges with their counselor. From the very beginning of our client-centered case, Mr. Lockwood has openly expressed enthusiasm. Regardless of where we were in his journey, his participation in the VR process was one of full cooperation."



# VR's Impact: Brian's Story

Bryan Portillo describes his disability as feeling “challenged in fast-paced learning environments.” During his first case with VR, Bryan enrolled in a culinary arts program through a technical college but struggled to meet the requirements of the course. He dropped out but returned to VR, determined to succeed, and opened a new case. With the help of his counselor, Marissa Hawkins, he discovered options such as the VR career camp, and a collaborative education program with Hyatt Hotel entitled, “Hands on Hyatt.” Services in career guidance and counseling were also a factor in helping him decide which option to choose. Bryan was thrilled to hear one of the programs offered at the Hyatt was in the culinary field. He was still very interested in training to be a cook or chef.



Bryan enrolled in the Hyatt's two-week program and successfully graduated from the program on July 8th. He was offered a part-time position that will eventually lead to a full-time position as a prep cook. Bryan remembers the experience of receiving praise from the Executive Chef at his graduation fondly: “I have gained confidence by participating in VR, as it has helped me start the career I have always wanted in becoming a chef, and now I am a certified prep cook.” He encourages others, “Not to give up and keep moving on from past failures, as VR can help with future career opportunities to get you back on the right track.”

# VR's Impact: Paul's Story

If you enjoy going to Florida festivals, you may have seen Paul Yates sitting on his Handy Cart, selling Amish furniture at one of the booths. Paul, who has cerebral palsy, is one of the latest entrepreneurs to come out of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR).



"I met him at the local blueberry festival," VR Counselor Linda Daffner says. "He was working for an elderly gentleman selling furniture for him, but the man was going to retire so Paul needed to find another job. I could just visualize his success selling furniture on his own at these festivals and said he could stop by VR to see if he qualified for services."

Upon acceptance into VR, it was apparent Paul would need to freely access his community in order to be successful in his business. He utilized an electric wheelchair but transporting it was a challenge. His counselor, Linda, arranged for a rehabilitation technology assessment to determine which solutions would work best. Ultimately, VR purchased a lift for the back of Paul's truck so he could carry his chair with him to festivals, on supply runs and to meet customers. Next, Linda paired Paul with self-employment specialist Monica Doyle, who took him through all the steps needed to start a successful business. "We look at a person's skills and abilities to see what kind of self-employment they should do," explains Monica. "Paul's good with people, likes to be outdoors, and likes to sell, so this business is great for him."

For Paul, owning his own business has been a perfect solution. “Self-employment really helps people like me because there might be some days when I can’t work...I can’t go steady all the time; I have to go and then stop, so self-employment and setting my own hours is the best answer for me.”

## **VR’s Impact: Mick’s Story**

Mick Nealy is a native Floridian who has been in love with the water for as long as he can remember. He was an avid fisherman as a child and contracted Polio as a young man. The disease affected Mick’s mobility: “Polio has made it more difficult to walk, or keep up with everyone else, but [I] realized there are other ways to keep up.” He set his sights on becoming the owner of a small charter fishing business.



Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) helped Mick navigate the self-employment process, from writing a business plan and providing accounting support to making adaptive modifications to his boat. The lifts, ramps and other accommodations allow Mick and his passengers to fully enjoy every moment of their fishing trip. His charters create a unique experience catered to the needs of the individual, whether or not they have a disability. Mick is now a successful captain and has plans to expand his business further so he can share his passion with other hobbyists ready to embrace the outdoors on Florida’s waterways.

# Serving Those Who Hire: VR's Business Relations Unit

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act requires VR to serve employers. VR's Business Relations unit provides services to businesses that enable them to recruit, hire, promote, and retain qualified individuals with disabilities. The most frequently provided services are disability awareness information and training, recruitment assistance, support for implementing work-based learning for students and on-the-job training. Business Relations works with the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation's National Employment Team, the Division of Blind Services, CareerSource, and Florida's Employment First Collaborative to align and coordinate business services. Business Relations served 646 businesses in SFY 2021–2022.

Available positions with business partners are shared with VR counselors through the Abilities Work Help Desk. The Help Desk sent 174 open position announcements to VR staff this year. Business engagement is accomplished through outreach and networking with employers, industry stakeholders, and other workforce partners at business and community events. Business Relations attended over 350 outreach events in SFY 2021–2022.

Business Relations engages employers in industries with high-skill, high-wage occupations to facilitate participants' access to in-demand career opportunities, which has resulted in exciting career opportunities for participants, such as the Building Readiness in Construction Knowledge (BRICK) program. BRICK offers work-based learning experiences for students in construction and trades and is in its fifth year in multiple locations throughout the state.

## **Business Relations: Impact in Numbers**

- 646 Businesses served by the Business Relations Unit in SFY 2021-2022
- 350+ Outreach events attended.
- 150+ Open position announcements shared by the Abilities Work Helpdesk.
- 849 Employers hired 2 or more VR customers in SFY 2021-2022

## **The REACH Act**

The Reimagining Education and Career Help Act was created to address the evolving needs of Florida's economy by increasing the level of collaboration and cooperation among state businesses and education communities while improving training within and equity and access to a more integrated workforce and education system for all Floridians.

The Act creates the Office of Reimagining Education and Career Help and authorizes the development of an online portal that assists job seekers in:

- Exploring and identifying career opportunities.
- Identifying in-demand jobs and associated earning potential.
- Identifying the skills and credentials needed for specific jobs.
- Accessing a broad array of federal, state and local workforce related programs.
- Determining the quality of workforce related programs.
- Identifying opportunities and resources that provide support along a career pathway.

As the disability employment experts, VR is a key stakeholder in realizing the goals of the REACH Act. The Division stands ready to expand its services to thousands of additional Floridians who want to work.

## **Serious Mental Illness and Employment: The Individual Placement and Support Model**

Individual Placement and Support (IPS) is an internationally recognized model of supported employment for people with serious mental illness. The focus is on helping people living with behavioral health conditions to work at regular jobs of their choosing. Mainstream education and technical training are also included as ways to advance career paths.

The model emphasizes a collaborative approach between the mental health system and Vocational Rehabilitation system. VR Counselors and employment specialists are integrated with the individual's mental health treatment team to promote success with the individual's employment goals.

IPS is recognized by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) as an evidenced-based practice and began in Florida as a partnership between Broward Behavioral Health Coalition and VR Area 7 in 2016. With assistance from the IPS Employment Center, three sites began implementing IPS. Presently, there are now 6 sites in that area.

VR and Department of Children and Families Office of Substance Abuse and Mental Health (SAMH) took an interest in expanding the IPS model at the state level. In 2021, Florida applied for and was selected to participate in an initiative under the U.S. Department of Labor called ASPIRE (Advancing State Policy Integration for Recovery and Employment). The purpose of the initiative is to assist states in aligning their policies and practices in support of competitive integrated employment for people with mental health conditions. The key state agencies in the initiative are SAMH, VR, Medicaid, and Career Source.

## **Order of Selection**

Order of Selection is how VR prioritizes services for our customers. Customers are placed into a category of service at eligibility determination which assigns them a priority based on the impact of their disability. The categories of service are 1) Individuals with Most Significant Disabilities 2) Individuals with Significant Disabilities 3) Individuals with a Disability. The Division is required by federal law to serve those with the most significant disabilities, category 1, first when there are not sufficient resources to serve all eligible customers. Customers in categories 2 and 3 are placed on a wait list until more resources become available.

As of June 30, 2022, category 1 and 2 customers are not being placed on a waitlist. Customers in category 3 spent an average of 71 days on the waitlist before being released.

# Supported Employment

People with the most significant disabilities have strengths, talents and skills that can lead to successful employment but traditional assessments, job searches, placement and training often overlook these abilities. The belief that every person is capable of working in a competitive, integrated setting when the right job and working environment have been identified is the philosophy of Supported Employment.

Supported Employment is a specialized approach to vocational rehabilitation. It introduces the supports an individual with the most significant disabilities needs at the beginning of the process. From non-traditional skills assessments like Discovery, to on the job supports, Supported Employment connects hundreds of people to the workforce every year by placing them in a suitable work environment and training them for a successful outcome.

In the 2021-2022 SFY, Florida VR helped 1,228 individuals with the most significant disabilities find gainful employment through the Supported Employment model.

# FRC Members



Michael Adamus, Chair  
Represents individuals with disabilities.



Andrew Houghton, 1st Vice Chair  
Represents business, industry and labor.



Tammy Davis, 2nd Vice Chair and Legislative and Public Awareness Committee Chair  
Represents business, industry and labor.



Denny Clark, Evaluation and Planning Committee Chair  
Represents business, industry and labor.



Victoria Gaitanis  
Represents the Florida Department of Education, Bureau of Exceptional Student Education



Allison Klein  
Represents the Disability Rights Client Assistance Program.



Brent McNeal,  
Director of the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation.



Lisa Mason  
Represents community rehabilitation providers.



Jose Morales  
Represents individuals with disabilities.



Delaina Parrish  
Represents individuals with disabilities.



Sandra Rancano  
Represents parent information and training centers.

# How to Become an FRC Member

FRC members are appointed by the governor. FRC members and VR work in strategic partnership to increase the employment of people with disabilities in competitive, integrated jobs of their choice and in keeping with their skills and abilities.

Federal law governing membership requires that certain categories be represented on the council (e.g., businesses, community rehabilitation providers and disability groups). These category assignments are made together with the Executive Office of the Governor in light of the applicant's experience and expressed representational preferences. The process for appointment to the FRC is to complete the governor's appointment application or to speak with the Appointments Office at

850-488-7146. The application is available at [www.flgov.com/appointments](http://www.flgov.com/appointments).

For more information about becoming an FRC member or the expectations of membership, visit [www.RehabWorks.org](http://www.RehabWorks.org) or contact the FRC at 850-245-3397.

\*Statutory Authority and Governing Guidelines may be found in 34 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), Chapter III, Part 361.17 and Chapter 413, Part II, Florida Statutes (F.S.).

# **FRC Structure**

## **Florida Rehabilitation Council**

### **Chair**

Michael Adamus

### **1st Vice Chair**

Andrew Houghton

### **2nd Vice Chair**

Tammy Davis

## **Executive Committee**

Michael Adamus, Chair

- Conducts FRC business in collaboration with the full council
- Reviews bylaws every five years or as needed
- Promotes and maintains VR/FRC relations

## **Evaluation/Planning**

Denny Clark, Chair

- Reviews and advises on the State Plan and VR policy changes
- Develops feedback on the customer satisfaction survey
- Develops feedback on the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment
- Maintains FRC Accountability Checklist/Strategic Plan

## **Legislative/Public Awareness**

Tammy Davis, Chair

- Coordinates legislative education and advocacy efforts
- Oversees and provides input on the annual report
- Promotes public outreach efforts including those with federally-mandated reports

## **VR Staff supporting the FRC:**

Roy Cosgrove, Program Administrator / Kim Thomas, Program Consultant