



FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION
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Are You IN with Inclusive Employment?

2022-2023 Annual Report



Innovating Florida's Workforce with
and for People with Disabilities.

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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 members are appointed by the governor. For more information about becoming an FRC member or the expectations of membership, visit www.RehabWorks.org or contact the FRC at 850-245-3397.

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. The public forums are held, in person and online, at each FRC quarterly meeting or when policy changes may require public input. Areas of comment received in the 2022-2023 State Fiscal Year (SFY) include: Sub-minimum wage employment, self-employment, demographic make up of VR customers and VR staff pay.

FRC 2024 Public Forum Dates

February 27 - VR Area 1 • May 9 - VR Area 6
August 8 - VR Area 6 • October 24 - VR Area 2

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

FRC Members



Brent McNeal, Director of the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation.
Tallahassee



Andrew Houghton, Chair
Represents business, industry and labor.
Hollywood



Tammy Davis, First Vice Chair and Legislative and Public Awareness Committee Chair
Represents business, industry and labor.
Dover



Delaina Parrish, Second Vice Chair
Represents individuals with disabilities.
Titusville



Michael Adamus, Evaluation and Planning Chair
Represents individuals with disabilities.
Orlando



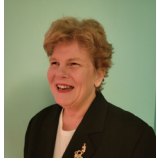
Denny Clark
Represents business, industry and labor.
Tallahassee



Victoria Gaitanis
Represents the Florida Department of Education,
Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services.
Tallahassee



Allison Klein
Represents the Disability Rights Client Assistance
Program.
Tampa



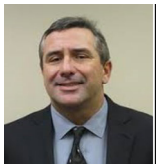
Darlene Laibl-Crowe
Represents individuals with disabilities.
Palatka



Lisa Mason
Represents community rehabilitation providers.
Jupiter



Jose Morales
Represents individuals with disabilities.
Jacksonville



Matt Motko
Represents community rehabilitation providers.
Palm Harbor



Christopher Romero
Represents current or former recipients of VR services.
West Palm Beach



Denis Roy
Represents individuals with disabilities.
Orlando



Matonya "Matti" Wiczorek
Represents current or former recipients of VR Services.

Message from the Chair

On behalf of The Florida Rehabilitation Council (FRC), it is my pleasure to present the 2022-2023 Annual Report Are you IN with Inclusive Employment? Innovating Florida's Workforce with and for People with Disabilities.



Having just completed my first term as Chair, I am very proud of the work of the FRC and VR to promote a closer working relationship with a broad coalition of stakeholders who are dedicated to promoting inclusion and excellence within the VR program. I would also like to thank and recognize Director Brent McNeal for his leadership and support of the Council's role to review, analyze and advise the VR program and provide greater insight into the experiences and voices of VR customers and stakeholders. Some of the FRC accomplishments over this past year include the following:

- The FRC, in partnership with VR, created a new Customer Feedback Survey from which one year's worth of data was received and analyzed. This information will help shape Council recommendations to promote best practices in policies and processes using data-driven recommendations and by sharing each council member's unique perspective from the constituency they represent.
- The FRC promoted VR staff salary increases in the 2020-24 State Plan. This recommendation was realized this last year as the Florida Legislature and Governor Ron DeSantis passed a historic salary increase for front-line VR staff in the 2022-23 legislative session.

- The FRC sought out opportunities to promote and connect VR's business relations unit to Florida businesses who are seeking qualified job candidates as well as to improve employment and training opportunities for people with disabilities.
- The FRC held four quarterly meetings and encouraged partner information sharing and coordination to strengthen connections and maximize alignment of services.

As I begin my second term as Florida Rehabilitation Council Chair, I am confident that the FRC will continue the progress we have made to engage the VR community and together, make Florida's Vocational Rehabilitation Program the recognized leader in helping people with disabilities to find and maintain meaningful employment.

Respectfully,
Andrew Houghton, Chair
Florida Rehabilitation Council

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

The FRC is pleased to be a strategic partner with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation. 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.

In 2022, the FRC issued updated recommendations to be included in the 2022-2024 WIOA Unified State Plan, Two Year Modification. Below are the 2022 recommendations, along with the Agency's response and updates on implementation of those recommendations.

VR is working with their state and federal partners to prepare for the upcoming Combined State Plan. In response, the council is drafting new and updated recommendations.

Recommendation 1. Deaf and Hard of Hearing

FRC sees a continued focus and improvement in delivery of services and infrastructure to support customers who are deaf and hard of hearing. FRC would like to receive continued updates on progress and track progress over the next two years.

Agency Update: In SFY 2022-2023 the Deaf, Hard of Hearing and Deafblind Unit created both a communication intake

tool and training videos for Employment Specialists. The communication intake tool is for use when counselors are in the initial information gathering stages with their customers. The tool encourages client self-reflection on methods of communication that have been effective in the past and enables the counselor to plan for communication access during service provision and on the job.

The Employment Services videos provide an introduction to common communication methods and practices when working with a person who has hearing loss. These videos were posted to VR's YouTube channel.

Recommendation 2. Counselor Recruitment, Retention

The FRC strongly recommends consideration of additional, immediate pay increases/incentives and non-pay incentives to meet or exceed the national average for Certified Rehabilitation Counselors currently hired or working to attain the credential and upon recruitment of Certified Rehabilitation Counselors. The FRC believes this is a critical need to stabilize the VR workforce.

Agency Update: Governor DeSantis signed into law a historic salary increase for VR staff in the technician, counselor, consultant and unit supervisor job classes. Since this pay increase, vacancies have declined by seven percent.

Recommendation 3. Transition

- Continue to promote early contact and assistance to all students with disabilities under an Individual Educational Program (IEP) or a 504 Plan.
- Continue to expand and offer career paths to include vocational exploration, technical training, apprenticeships and post-secondary options for transition students.
- Continue to emphasize peer mentoring in Florida, especially to individuals who are deaf and/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.
- FRC encourages VR to create collaborative partnerships with state and community colleges to share resources that create access points to help potential and current customers to find and access resources.

Agency Update: VR's Employment Programs Unit redesigned several services and streamlined the delivery of others in order to give customers access to more comprehensive assistance with fewer barriers. Counseling on enrollment opportunities, Work-Based Learning Experiences (WBLEs) and Workplace Readiness Training were all redesigned to include additional components such as job shadowing, travel training and informational interviewing to provide targeted support.

Additionally, the delivery of Career Camp, Instruction in Self-Advocacy and Youth Peer mentoring were revised to update the service delivery models and fee structure specific to each service. These changes were made to increase access to these services for all students with disabilities in the state of Florida, and to allow service providers greater flexibility when delivering

each service.

Recommendation 3 Agency Update Continued

Job Exploration Counseling

359 students participated in this service in SFY 2022-2023. The Division hopes to see this number increase after service revision.

Work-Based Learning Experiences (WBLE)

4,410 students participated in this service in SFY 2022-2023. A three percent increase from the previous SFY.

Workplace Readiness Training

1,087 students participated in this service in SFY 2022-2023. A twenty-five percent increase from the previous SFY.

Instruction in Self-Advocacy

646 students participated in this service in SFY 2022-2023. The Division hopes to see this number increase after service revision.

Recommendation 4. Job Placement Strategies

- Continue to analyze and identify any trends in services provided under the rehabilitation engineering service category by service type and VR area.
- Continue strengthening efforts with business leaders to improve employment opportunities and meaningful careers, including increasing partnerships with local Chambers of Commerce.
- Remain focused on customer strengths and develop tools

to communicate effectively and succinctly to potential employers.

- Continue to evaluate the effectiveness of the Abilities Work Help Desk and provide regular reports to the FRC.
- Further build capacity for job customization and Innovation and Expansion projects to include unserved and underserved populations.
- 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.
- Monitor and support the new partnership between the Able Trust and Small Business Development Centers to enhance engagement with individuals with disabilities.

Agency Update: VR's Business Relations Unit has made great strides in connecting with city and county governments in Florida. Many of these agencies have worked with VR to develop internship and On-the-Job training programs to employ VR customers. Additionally, partnerships with local chambers of commerce provide invaluable information about labor market needs and placement opportunities for VR customers.

Recommendation 5. Rights and Conflict Resolution

- Continue to promote advocacy and a disability rights curriculum for clients, staff and providers as a core principle. Collaborative discussions enhance informed choices.
- Continue to implement strategies to improve satisfaction survey results on client knowledge of all levels of rights to resolve any difficulties with VR.

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

Agency Update: To gather additional feedback from customers, VR is now conducting the customer feedback survey quarterly. The feedback received will go to the newly formed Bureau of Compliance and Quality Assurance for implementation. The Division believes this additional layer of oversight will enable us to improve service delivery and customer satisfaction.

Recommendation 6. Public Awareness of VR

- 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.
- Implement an online application system.
- Continue to engage businesses and mandated partners.

Agency Update: In partnership with the Division of Career and Adult Education, the Division of Blind Services and Florida Commerce, VR renewed an outreach contract that targeted businesses in Florida. As a part of that campaign, VR remodeled its online presence, to include a new intake page for businesses interested in utilizing VR's services. In SFY 2022-2023, the campaign generated over 1,000 leads and over six million new

search impressions.

VR is currently participating in the FL WINS project that will create an online portal for customers to begin service application. The project is slated to take five years to complete.

Steven R. Wise Advocacy Award

About the Wise Award

Every year, the FRC presents the Stephen R. Wise Advocacy Award to a person whose passion and professional accomplishments through public service make a significant difference in the quality of life for persons with disabilities.

The award recognizes dedicated leaders and champions in the cause of helping persons with disabilities achieve independence and dignity through meaningful employment.

Award Recipient: Lori Fahey

Lori Fahey had a dream of what could be and then she dedicated her life's work to realizing that dream. Lori founded The Family Café, which hosts the largest cross-disability event in the nation. The Annual Family Café brings together Floridians with all types of disabilities for three days of information, training, and networking.



The 25th Anniversary Family Café event occurred in June

of 2023. Lori and The Family Café continue to provide unprecedented access to policymaking officials for persons with disabilities and their families at no cost and a chance to network with leading state agency leadership, companies and employers. The Family Café has also worked to extend its model of collaboration, advocacy, friendship and empowerment to youth with disabilities in Florida through the Florida Youth Council (FYC). The FYC is a group of emerging leaders with disabilities who model leadership and advocacy among their transition-age peers across Florida. Through Lori's devotion to serving others, the lives of literally thousands of persons with disabilities have been improved.

Award Recipient: Jessica Dollard

Jessica Dollard found her calling working with Florida's Division of Vocational Rehabilitation. She began her career at VR as a technician and then became a VR counselor in 2015. Her dedication to serving others, work habits, accountability and focus on understanding the needs of her customers has led to many persons with disabilities



achieving high quality employment outcomes, greater financial independence and integration in their communities. In her work as a VR counselor and consultant, Jessica was always willing to collaborate to promote successful outcomes. Now as a unit supervisor, Jessica shares that same skill set, guidance and encouragement with her team with great results. Jessica routinely volunteers to go out into the community to provide community partners with information about the VR program. She conducts orientation sessions with individuals and groups

that are not familiar with the division, and actively seeks opportunities on her own to market the benefits of VR services. Jessica is a dedicated advocate for hiring VR customers in the area and she continues to serve her community and promote the highest values and traits of a rehabilitation professional.

Past Winners

2022 James “Chip” Byers (Owner, Rita’s Italian Ice)

Isabel Garcia (President/CEO, Parent to Parent of Miami)

2021 Lileana de Moya (de Moya Foundation Founder)

Representative Allison Tant (Florida House of Representatives, District 9)

2020 Ann Siegel, JD (Legal Director, Disability Rights Florida)

2019 Becki Forsell (Founder, YES! of America United)

2018 Senator Dennis Baxley (Florida Senate, District 12)

Why The FRC Is Important to Me

“My son has multiple learning disabilities and grew up the first 15 years of his life in foster care. He is now in college and has a great relationship with his VR Counselor as he navigates graduating college and entering the workforce, while dealing with his learning disabilities and advocating for himself, both

in college and at work. VR is opening doors that otherwise may not have been open for my son, and we are greatly appreciative.”

- Tammy Davis
FRC First Vice Chair

“It is a humbling experience to serve on the Florida Rehabilitation Council as an appointee of Governor DeSantis. My involvement in the council is driven by my personal and professional experiences as both a person living with a spinal cord injury for the past 36 years and as a small business owner focused on creating more inclusive workplaces. Being part of the council allows me to play an active role in the formulation of a state plan for the vocational rehabilitation program in partnership with other council members, staff, VR partners, senior leadership at VR and the Department of Education in our state.”

- Andy Houghton
FRC Chair

“Serving on the Florida Rehabilitation Council is an incredible opportunity to make a difference in the lives of Floridians with disabilities. Each member brings their unique knowledge, skills and experience to bear in helping the division solve problems and improve programs and services. Together, we proudly provide recommendations to state leaders each year to ensure that Florida is at the forefront of employment for individuals with disabilities.”

- Brent McNeal
VR Director

Notable Observances

In Memoriam

During the 2022-2023 SFY, the Council lost one of its members unexpectedly. Denny Clark, a member of the Legislative and Public Awareness Committee passed away. He was an invaluable member of the FRC with a passion for improving both the Council and its many stakeholder relationships. The FRC is grateful for his service and wishes all the best for his friends and family.



Leadership Transition

Brent McNeal accepted a new position with the state of Florida and exited his position as VR's Director in November 2023. The Council is grateful for the strides we were able to make under his leadership and wish him all the best. We look forward to working with Acting Director Victoria Gaitanis.



VR 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 2023 Annual Report. The accomplishments shared herein reflect the support and partnership between VR and the FRC throughout the program year of July 1, 2022 – June 30, 2023.



They illustrate Florida’s commitment to building a strong economy—one where individuals can share their talents in the workplace and Florida businesses can thrive. VR is uniquely positioned to prepare people with disabilities for employment and connect employers to that talent.

Each year we introduce thousands of youth to career options and help them navigate life after graduation. We support our adult customers in changing careers, entering the workforce or keeping a job they love. Helping businesses fill their vacancies with qualified talent is something we take particular pride in. We’ve expanded our efforts to connect growing industries to the right candidates for the job. Our relationships in aerospace and manufacturing mean more opportunities for Floridians with disabilities.

I’m proud of what the Division has been able to achieve through the commitments of staff, stakeholders and all levels of government. Equal access to employment means 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 VR supports 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.

SFY 2021-2022 Facts At-A-Glance

Customer Demographics

- 0.39% Pacific Islander
- 0.74% Native American
- 1.57% Asian
- 21.06% Black
- 22.34% Hispanic
- 53.89% White

WIOA Performance Measures

- 56% Employment rate 2nd quarter after exit
- 54.7% Employment rate 4th quarter after exit
- \$4,708 Median wages
- 36.6% Measurable Skill Gains
- 27% Credential Attainment

Other Facts

- 5,166 successful closures
- 15,450 applications
- 34,800 referrals
- 48.61% of all customers were between ages 14-21
- 51.39% of all customers were aged 22+
- Primary disabilities of customers gainfully employed in SFY 2021-2022.
 - 32.60% Mental Health
 - 28.33% Developmental Disability
 - 15.99% Sensory
 - 7.92% Chronic Medical
 - 7.31% Learning Disability
 - 6.71% Orthopedic
 - 1.04% Substance Abuse

More Support for Higher Education

In the 2022-2023 State Fiscal Year (SFY), VR expanded its efforts to connect more customers to Postsecondary Educational Counseling. Postsecondary Educational Counseling increases the participant's awareness of the wide range of career pathways, the demand for careers in their local labor market and potential growth of jobs in that field.

This service is designed to assist individuals with disabilities in exploring enrollment options in comprehensive transition programs as well as postsecondary educational programs, such as college/university, career and technical education, registered apprenticeships and more. The hands-on support this service offers will inform the decisions of both parents and students about their options after high school.

Success Story: Pamela Miller

Pamela Miller moved to Florida from Chicago over twenty years ago. She had been employed as a childcare worker at a Montessori School in Chicago and, because of her years of experience, quickly obtained the same position at Montessori School in Fort Myers. She was thrilled that she was able to work with children again. However, Pamela started to run into barriers at work and risked losing her dream job.



In Florida, the Department of Children and Families (DCF) requires childcare personnel to complete a minimum of 50 hours of training and pass a competency exam. Pamela was able to complete the trainings but could not pass the competency exam after eight attempts. She decided to seek help and applied for VR services.

She met with Senior VR Counselor April Lionett. Together, they discovered Pamela had several undiagnosed learning disabilities. With April's help, Pamela requested the necessary accommodations to take and pass the exam. Pamela was thrilled to finally meet all the requirements and maintain her job. April describes this

successful venture as “a perfect combination of various entities coming together to support the customer and her vocational goals.”

Division Highlight VR’s New Case Management System: Aware

After three years of planning and preparation, Florida VR made the transition from a homegrown case management system to an industry standard system, Aware. Aware is being used by more than forty VR agencies across the country, including the Florida Division of Blind Services (DBS).

VR made the decision to transition to Aware in order to:

- Reduce administrative burdens for Division staff and stakeholders. Several legacy systems were retired and the information was consolidated into Aware upon launch.
- Improve outcomes for customers by removing barriers to service provision. Aware scaled back the number of paper processes required in routine casework and provided an option for electronic signatures among other improvements.
- Standardize our performance reporting and metrics for state and federal reporting. Using Aware to manage casework and payments allows for better data reporting to the Rehabilitation Services Administration and required partners.

Aware launched August 2023 and the Division looks forward to the positive impact it will have on the lives of the people we serve.

Partnerships in Aerospace

VR is happy to have secured an agreement with defense contractor Raytheon for an on-the-job (OJT) program. The pilot program started with thirteen VR customers, six of whom Raytheon subcontractor, Collins, hired after the training was over. The remaining participants secured jobs in other Aerospace professions. The model Florida VR is using is set to grow to seventeen sites in the state before expanding nationwide.

Supports for Social Security Beneficiaries

Ticket to Work (TTW) is a Social Security Administration (SSA) program available to Floridians who qualify for social security disability benefits and want to work. The SSA issues tickets that may be used at any Employment Network (EN) participant, such as VR. EN participants offer employment and rehabilitation services for VR customers so they can work and:

- Maintain cash benefits.
- Maintain Medicaid or Medicare.
- Track out-of-pocket expenses related to their disability.

VR's Ticket to Work Office is responsible for maintaining relationships with the ENs that serve division customers. The office also files for reimbursement from the Social Security Administration for every customer served by the TTW program. These reclaimed funds go back into VR's budget to help other individuals seeking employment—whether or not they are a Ticket to Work participant. For the 2022-2023 SFY, VR saw a record claim reimbursement of \$20,578,941.76.

Success Story: Delaina Parrish

Delaina Parrish is a Florida native and a business school graduate in Marketing from the University of Florida, with double minors in retailing and entrepreneurship. As a multi-dimensional influencer with Cerebral Palsy, Delaina leverages her voice on statewide, national, and global platforms to break down barriers for individuals with disabilities. She is a current FRC member and a member of the Executive committee, serving in her second term, as well as a VR customer.



Delaina began receiving VR services her senior year of high school. An excelling student and a Bright Futures Scholar, higher education was a necessity to achieve her vocational goal for a career in Marketing within the business industry. VR provided financial support to cover costs that other academic scholarships would not cover. While still in college, Delaina co-founded and incorporated Fearless Independence, LLC. The company has three employees and leverages the representation and voices of those with disabilities with a mission to assist businesses, brands and organizations develop marketing strategies that capitalize on the future of inclusion.

Division Highlight Historic Legislation in VR's Favor: The Salary Project

The Florida Legislature passed and Governor Ron DeSantis signed

a historic salary increase for VR staff in the 2022-2023 legislative session. Salary increases for frontline staff was a recommendation of the FRC in response to the 2020-2024 State Plan. The Division began the work to increase staff pay shortly after the recommendation was made.

With the support of Department of Education leadership, VR was able to submit a robust salary package as a part of the Division's budget proposal. The package was accepted, signifying an important moment for VR's dedicated staff. VR Technicians, Counselors, Senior Counselors, Consultants and Unit Supervisors were the targeted job classes for the increase. These efforts resulted in a seven percent decrease in vacancies.

The Division continues to analyze opportunities for increases for positions that were unaffected by the initial salary package proposal.

Employment and Serious Mental Illness

Individuals diagnosed with serious mental illness face unique challenges when obtaining and maintaining employment. The Individual Placement and Support (IPS) model is a type of supported employment that helps people with mental health conditions find and retain competitive integrated employment.

Florida VR is an early adopter of this model because of the shared common values:

- Emphasis on the benefits of employment.
- Focus on competitive integrated employment.

- Attention to individualization of services and integrating client preferences through informed choice.

VR customers participating in the IPS model have access to a comprehensive range of support when IPS specialists and VR counselors work together. The collaboration on ideas and resources and access to additional funding combine to positively impact customer outcomes. In SFY 2022-2023, VR expanded its IPS sites to include the cities of Lakeland, Hialeah, Jensen Beach and Melbourne. The Lakeland and Hialeah sites focus on serving young adults who have experienced severe mental health problems.

Success Story: Uriel Gomez

VR Consultant Lisa Oleary met Uriel Lora-Gomez while he was in his senior year at Naples High School. Uriel was diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder and referred to Vocational Rehabilitation to help him determine a career goal and the services that would be necessary to reach his goal. Lisa consulted with Uriel's mother, explored his vocational interests and capabilities, and supported Pre-Employment Transition Services to help him determine his job goal: food preparation worker.



Lisa and Uriel brainstormed together and concluded that the culinary program through Hands On at Hyatt Hotels would be the best direction for him. He completed his 80-hour Work-Based Learning Experience (WBLE) and was offered a permanent position. When asked how he would describe Vocational Rehabilitation to a

friend with a disability Uriel says, "Vocational Rehabilitation will help you find a job that you can keep and continue to grow!"

Division Highlight

ArtCIE: Competitive Integrated Employment in the Arts

In 2022, Florida VR was awarded \$13.1 million dollars under the RSA's Subminimum Wage to Competitive Integrated Employment (SWTCIE) grant. Florida's implementation of the project is known as ArtCIE: Arts to Competitive Integrated Employment. The project aims to increase the participation of adults with the most significant disabilities in careers in the arts, recreation and entertainment. The project includes four stages: Design (Year 1), Pilot (Year 2), Implementation (Year 3) and Expansion (Years 4-5).

ArtCIE's objectives are to:

- Increase the number of adults who transition from subminimum wage to competitive integrated employment.
- Increase the percentage of students or youth contemplating subminimum wage who enter competitive integrated employment.
- Build system capacity to sustain the model over time through increased competencies, partnerships and renewed business models.
- Design and implement a coordinated model of support and wrap-around services for participants and their families.

Florida is collaborating with several key partners to increase participation of individuals with the most significant disabilities in

the arts. Looking forward to year two, Florida VR will begin training and outreach in the Hillsborough, Duval and Washington pilot counties.

Success Story: Thomas Qualls

Thomas Qualls became a VR customer as he worked to obtain his GED. Having been employed before, Thomas was looking for support in finding a job that would fit his skills and abilities. With the help of his counselor and job coach, Thomas was able to find employment with a retail store after obtaining his GED. He looks forward to his newfound financial independence as he evaluates long-term career opportunities.



Success Story: Roger Graves

Roger Graves moved to Florida after retirement to be close to his son. He became interested in part-time work but knew he would need an ASL interpreter to effectively communicate with colleagues. With VR's help, Roger found a custodian job at a local high school with hours and holidays that matched his needs. VR and his job coach arranged for interpreting services, purchased work clothing quickly and supported Roger as he coordinated with the school board while interviewing for and performing his job. He is now successfully employed and enjoying his new career.



Customer Feedback Survey

The Florida Vocational Rehabilitation Customer Feedback Survey is an opportunity for customers to tell the Division about their experiences. Survey invitations are sent, at random, four times a year to current and former customers. The survey asks questions about the services customers received and their interactions with VR staff.

Customer Quotes from the 2022-2023 Feedback

Survey prompt "What do you like best about working with VR?"

- "They are willing to keep working with me to achieve my goals of financial freedom."
- "They never give up on you, for example. I've been looking for a job for a year and haven't yet found one that interests me, but with the help of VR, I may be able to find one. They never stop looking for a job for me. This is why working with VR is the best thing ever. You have people who really want to help others reach their goals in life. That shows the caring, kindness, and support in VR that you will never find anywhere else."
- "I am valued despite my limitations. They make me feel as if I belong! Their inspiration and continued support has motivated me to proceed with my head up high!!! I am forever appreciative to the team I have been provided with."
- "The VR Program is an incredible program providing youth with vital career and life skills training that is so desperately needed for these middle-school and high-school youth."

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. When Margaret decided to pursue additional education, she received support from VR and was able to attend a two-year certificate program in Commercial Art at Tampa Bay Technical High School.



VSA Florida, now Arts4All Florida, has supported her for many years with invitations to show and sell her work. 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. She has also 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 evolved from a U.S. Department of Commerce and NIH/NCI-funded arts-based research and patient service program at the University of Florida. 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.