

ANNUAL REPORT 2023-2024



EXPANDING ACCESS TO EMPLOYMENT

Opening Opportunities for
Jobseekers 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 Vocational Rehabilitation (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 2024 Public Forum Dates

For updated information please visit the FRC Calendar and Events page: <https://www.rehabworks.org/frc/frc-events.html>.

FRC Members



Kelly Rogers - VR Director



Andy Houghton - Council Chair



Tammy Davis - 1st Vice Chair and Legislative Public Awareness Committee Chair



Delaina Parrish - 2nd Vice Chair



Lisa Mason - Represents community rehabilitation providers



Jose Morales - Represents individuals with disabilities



Allison Klein - Represents the Disability Rights Client Assistance Program



Darlene Laibl-Crowe - Represents individuals with disabilities



Matt Motko - Represents community rehabilitation providers



Christopher Romero - Evaluation and Planning Committee Chair



Matti Wiczorek - Represents current or former applicants/recipients of VR services



Denis Roy - Represents individuals with disabilities

Message from the FRC Chair

On behalf of the Florida Rehabilitation Council, it is my pleasure to present the 2023-2024 Annual Report – Expanding Access to Employment-Opening Opportunities for Jobseekers with Disabilities.

Having just completed my final term as Chair, I am very proud of the work of the Florida Rehabilitation Council (FRC) and Vocational Rehabilitation (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 VR leadership for supporting 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 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 developed a comprehensive list of recommendations to the VR services portion of Florida's 2024-28 Combined State Plan.
- The FRC prioritized increasing knowledge of the VR program by working with VR to promote outreach opportunities and the creation of numerous marketing materials.
- The FRC held four quarterly meetings and encouraged partner information sharing and coordination to strengthen connections and maximize alignment of services.

As we welcome Tammy Davis as incoming 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. If you would like to learn more about the FRC or about applying to become a member, please visit our website at <https://www.rehabworks.org//frc/frc-about.html> or contact us at FRCCustomers@vr.fldoe.org.

Respectfully,
Andrew Houghton, Chair
Florida Rehabilitation Council

Becoming a Council Member

Federal law governing membership requires that certain categories of stakeholders be represented on the council (e.g., businesses, community rehabilitation providers and disability groups). These appointments are made by the Executive Office of the Governor. Individuals who serve on the FRC represent the following stakeholder groups and contribute perspectives and insights into the opportunities and challenges facing individuals with disabilities and of the stakeholder groups they represent.

- Business, Industry and Labor
- Community Rehabilitation Program Service Provider
- Disability Groups and Individuals
- Parent Training Information Center
- Statewide Workforce Investment Board
- Current or former applicants of VR services
- VR Counselor
- Florida Independent Living Council (FILC)

FRC members work in strategic partnership with VR to increase the employment of people with disabilities in competitive, integrated jobs of their choice and in keeping with their skills and abilities. If you wish to apply to serve on the FRC, please send a letter of interest and resume to FRCCustomers@vr.fl DOE.org.

Summary of Council Recommendations to the 2024-2028 Combined State Plan

The Florida Rehabilitation Council (FRC) provided the following feedback and recommendations to the VR services portion of Florida's 2024-28 Combined State Plan consistent with requirements in state and federal law.

The FRC applauds the Fiscal Year (FY) 2023 budgetary increase in compensation for Florida Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (FDVR) staff and hopes it will result in improved recruiting, hiring and retaining staff. To identify the impact of this increase, the FRC recommends that VR conduct ongoing correlative monitoring related to the recruiting, hiring and retaining of staff. FRC views the compensation increase as a positive step and encourages VR to continue to explore additional pay and non-pay increases for all staff.

The FRC recommends that VR continues its efforts at outreach with partners and reinstitute quarterly or semi-annual partner meetings throughout the state to increase and improve communication and the working relationship between VR and community rehabilitation providers (CRPs) including the synchronization of provisional services and billing processes.

Additionally, the FRC emphasizes the need for VR to increase the quality of employment outcomes for VR participants and for VR to continue to engage in efforts to reduce placements primarily occurring in low-pay and unskilled jobs that have historically high turnover rates.

The FRC also encourages initiatives to reduce the length of time it currently takes for VR participants to move through the plan development and eligibility determination process of VR applicant to Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE).

The FRC looks forward to continuing to fulfill its statutory requirements, consistent with section 413.405, Florida Statutes, in reviewing, analyzing and advising VR as it plans, develops and improves its programs.

RECOMMENDATION1 - Counselor Recruitment And Retention

- Work toward increasing pay and non-pay incentives for all staff.
- Create more in-person training opportunities.
- Build a stronger connection between administration and field staff to help improve the capacity of staff and address the recruitment and ongoing retention concerns.
- Report on the efficacy of these initiatives during quarterly FRC meetings.

RECOMMENDATION 2 – Transition

- Continue to promote early contact and assistance to all students with disabilities under an Individualized Educational Program (IEP) or 504 Plan.
- Continue to expand and increase offerings of career paths to include vocational exploration, technical training, registered apprenticeships and pre-apprenticeships, encouraging

transition students to consider early identification of post-secondary options.

- Evaluate and report on policies and practices that could potentially create barriers when transitioning from education to employment.
- Reestablish peer mentoring projects throughout the state for youth and students with disabilities and identify service providers to help implement the projects statewide.
- Identify the opportunities to develop marketing strategies to better target all students, Exceptional Student Education directors, teachers, school counselors and parents, including digital and other materials.
- Explore the expansion of Project Search sites across the state as resources allow.

RECOMMENDATION 3 - Business Outreach

Strategies

- Evaluate the existing system for FDVR to strengthen efforts with business leaders to improve median earning jobs and retention in career-oriented employment, including increasing partnerships.
- Remain focused on participants' strengths and develop tools to communicate effectively and succinctly to potential employers.
- Consider including registered pre-apprenticeships as well as registered apprenticeships.

RECOMMENDATION 4 - Rights And Conflict Resolution

- Ensure all FDVR staff and participants are aware of and provided the options of the services of Disability Rights Florida Client Assistance Program (CAP) and the FDVR Ombudsman's Office. This information should be provided through increased collaboration and additional engagement, including FDVR staff collaborating with CAP and providing decision letters with appeal rights and policies.

RECOMMENDATION 5 - Public Awareness And Outreach

- Prior to release of marketing materials, engage FDVR marketing staff to review for person-first language and authentic representation of persons with disabilities.
- Explore collaboration with the Florida Department of Education's Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services to better reach students with disabilities and their parents.
- Explore collaboration with healthcare entities to expand awareness of FDVR.

RECOMMENDATION 6 – Individuals With The Most Significant Disabilities

- Examine creative ways to address transportation barriers statewide to better support employment outcomes for VR participants.

RECOMMENDATION 7 - Overall Agency Performance

- Explore improvements in the reporting of data on FDVR performance in targeted areas including rapid engagement and unserved and underserved participants.
- Increase the quality of employment outcomes for VR participants such as reducing low pay and unskilled jobs that have historically high turnover rates and increasing higher median-earning jobs and retention in career-oriented employment.
- Increase coordination with federal and state agencies, including creating a system that integrates information and services.
- Ensure benefits planning services are provided to VR participants as well as youth and students with disabilities prior to exiting secondary school so they can have the requisite knowledge to make informed decisions related to pursuing self-sustaining employment.
- Reinstigate quarterly or semi-annual partner meetings throughout the state to increase and improve communication and the working relationship between FDVR and CRPs.
- Track, monitor and review the demand versus the capacity

of fulfilling the referral for rehabilitation engineering services categories by service type and geographical area.

- Increase or enhance synchronization of provisional services and billing processes with FDVR-authorized employment services providers and vendors.

RECOMMENDATION 8 – Self-Employment And Job Customization

- Evaluate and compare current self-employment services with other entrepreneurship-centered programs in Florida to better meet VR participants' employment goals. Consider ways to streamline and expedite the provision of self-employment services.
- Further build capacity for job customization and innovation and expansion projects to include unserved and underserved populations.
- Ensure benefits planning services are provided to VR participants so they have the requisite knowledge to make informed decisions related to pursuing self-employment and entrepreneurship.

Customer Feedback Survey

The FRC is required to review and analyze the effectiveness of, and customer satisfaction with, FDVR agency functions, rehabilitation services and employment outcomes achieved by eligible individuals including the availability of health and other employment benefits. The Customer Feedback Survey data is utilized by the FRC and FDVR to focus on specific areas of excellence for recognition as well as specific opportunities for improvement.

More than 70% of respondents indicated that:

- They were overall satisfied with FDVR assistance (75.9%).
- The assistance would help them reach long-term career goals (73.3%) and financial security (70.1%).
- Their counselor understood their needs (78.6%) and provided helpful information in support of selecting a job goal (71.1%).

More than 80% of respondents surveyed stated that their counselor:

- Listened to them (81.2%).
- Treated them with dignity and respect (86.7%).

When asked if they would recommend FDVR to others 80.5% of survey respondents indicated they would.

Steven R. Wise Award

About the Wise Award

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

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



Award Recipient: Diana Adams

Diana Adams is proactively involved in government and community initiatives that empower and improve the lives of people with disabilities. She has the distinction of becoming her city's youngest elected City Council member. Diana uses her position to advocate for policy change at both local and state levels to improve the quality of life for individuals with disabilities. Last year, Diana organized a collaborative effort between the City of West Melbourne and Brevard County to install an audio crosswalk at a major intersection near an affordable independent living facility for 125 adults with disabilities. She frequently speaks with businesses, organizations and civic clubs about the importance of fostering an environment that doesn't just include people with disabilities, but actively seeks to support and empower them.

Diana also serves on the board of the Space Coast Field of Dreams nonprofit as Secretary and Treasurer. She has demonstrated a strategic vision for long-term, systemic improvements in these positions, most notably in her support for the creation and hiring of a Special Populations Coordinator. She continues to advance the mission of the organization, making recreational opportunities more accessible by promoting physical well-being and social networking for children and adults.

Diana's efforts contribute to a supportive environment that encourages ongoing empowerment and community engagement for people with disabilities.



Award Recipient: Kathy Davis

Kathy Davis has over 15 years of experience providing valuable services for individuals with disabilities. As a former VR Counselor with substantial experience in strategic planning, program design, change management and project implementation, Kathy has demonstrated a tremendous passion for helping people in her community. She served several years as the Business Relations manager and is currently an Assistant Bureau Chief in the Bureau of Field Services. Both roles afforded Kathy the opportunity to continue being actively involved in promoting independence for people with disabilities.

Even before working with VR, Kathy was determined to be a productive member in her community. She served as the Employment Specialist for the North Carolina Division of Services for the Blind, where she was responsible for business engagement, training of staff and industry partners, research and knowledge translation, legislative and regulatory tracking and Social Security reimbursement.

Past Winners

2023 Lori Fahey (Founder, The Family Café)
Jessica Dollard (VR Unit Supervisor)

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)

becoming a VR Customer

If you are a person with a disability looking to find, maintain or advance in a career, VR may be able to help you. 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.

Who is eligible for VR services?

Eligibility is determined on a person-by-person basis by a VR Counselor. To be eligible for VR services, you must have a physical and/or mental disability which causes a significant barrier to employment and need VR services to get, keep or advance in a job or career. If you receive Social Security Disability Insurance or Supplemental Security Income for your disability and plan to become employed, you are presumed eligible for VR services.

What services does VR have for youth?

Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) offer students with disabilities an early start at career exploration and preparation for adult life. Every student ages 14-21 with a disability has the opportunity to participate in:

- Job-exploration counseling;
- Postsecondary educational counseling;
- Self-advocacy training and peer mentoring;
- Work readiness training; and
- Work-based learning experience.

How can I apply?

Contact your local VR office to submit a referral form. You can find your local office at RehabWorks.org.

VR Director's Message

As VR's new director, I'm grateful for the work my predecessors undertook to advance the division. Today's VR is more fiscally stable and accountable with an increase in Floridians with disabilities coming to VR for assistance. We can attribute these improvements to the hard work put forth by field staff and the support of division and state leadership in a number of key initiatives.

The salary increases for VR staff provided were supported by both the Florida legislature and Governor DeSantis. The increase enabled the division to retain talent and hire new counselors and supervisors. Overall, VR reduced its vacancy rate for field staff from 23% to 14.13% in the last program year.

Our investment in staff training increased significantly to include targeted professional learning for leaders at all levels within the division. The Statewide Supervisor Training conducted in April 2024 set the stage for stronger collaboration with our department partners and prepared staff for intensive training on federal regulations for administering the VR grant.

The division has also taken concrete steps to improve communication and relationships with our providers and the disability community at-large. Routine informational sessions, advisory committees and rule making to clarify requirements and expectations all serve to advance our business practices for better employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities.

I look forward to realizing my vision for improving employment and training outcomes for Floridians with disabilities moving forward.

Program Overview

VR assesses, plans, develops and provides services for individuals with disabilities, consistent with their unique strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, interests and informed choice so that they may prepare for and engage in competitive integrated employment and achieve economic self-sufficiency (34 CFR 361.76).

To accomplish this, the division offers a number of programs and services, including Pre-ETS, General and Supported Employment Services, Self-Employment and Supported Self-Employment, Ticket to Work (Social Security Administration), Deaf, Hard of Hearing and DeafBlind Services, Independent Living Program and Business Relations.

Our services and programs emphasize a dual customer approach. We want to become the first place people with disabilities turn when seeking employment and a top resource for employers in need of qualified employees.

Any individual, regardless of disability type, may be referred to VR and for VR services. If a person is found eligible, our agency:

- Provides guidance and counseling related to employment and disability.
- Helps customers identify career goals and the training and services necessary to reach that goal.
- Connects customers to jobs and careers that meet their strengths, interests, abilities and informed choice.

VR's Business Relations program builds and sustains partnerships with business and industry through effective services that are driven by the needs of employers. Business Relations Representatives customize employer services to assist employers with recruiting, hiring, promoting and retaining qualified individuals with disabilities.

Our program has far-reaching positive effects on both VR customers and the Florida economy.

Success Story: William Espinoza



During the FY 2022-23 school year, 6% of the total number of Florida's students with disabilities had some type of intellectual disability¹. William Espinoza was one of those students with an employment goal in mind for his future.

William, a 21-year old student at Schoolhouse Preparatory School in Miami, applied for and received transition services with VR in 2021. After graduating from high school in May 2023, he received guidance and counseling, pre-employment transition training and supported employment services with the help of his counselor, Rositania Sanchez. William was consistent in following her guidance along with being extremely motivated to find a job.

His persistence paid off when the Baptist Hospital hired him on as an Environmental Technician, with the help of his placement provider at DMF Employment Opportunities. William is now working 15 hours a week.

"Mr. Espinoza is an amazing person, quiet, but he can do his job," says his job coach from DMF Employment Opportunities. "He is here every day at work, shows up early, never late, and always on time. Mr. Espinoza always has a smile on his face."

¹ COE - Students with Disabilities. (n.d.). <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/cgg/students-with-disabilities>

VR Data At A Glance 2023-2024

General Metrics

- 3920 Customers achieved competitive integrated employment
- Over 2000 Customers received VR sponsorship for higher education related to their job goal.
- 40074 Customers receives services
- 256 Jobs were saved through Job Retention Services
- 2928 Customers participated in at least 1 On-the-Job Training Experience.

Top 3 Job Types:

- 35.1% Office and Administrative Support Occupations
- 16.2% Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations
- 11.9% Transportation and Material Moving Occupations

Customer Demographics

Age Groups

- 18 and under: 4.8%
- 19-24: 39.2%
- 25-44: 32.8%
- 45-54: 9.7%
- 55-59: 5.3%
- Over 60: 8.2%

Race of Customers Served

- White: 68%
- Black/African American: 25.8%
- Asian: 2.2%
- More than one race: 1.7%
- American Indian/Alaska Native: 1%
- Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander: 0.5%

Primary Disability Category of Customers Served

- Psychological or Psychosocial: 46.8%
- Cognitive: 27.5%
- Physical: 16.8%
- Auditory or Communicative: 7.8%
- Visual: 1.2%

WIOA Performance Measures

- 54.5% Employment rate 2nd quarter after exit
- 53.3% Employment rate 4th quarter after exit
- \$4920 Median earnings after 2nd quarter after exit
- 37.9% Credential Attainment
- 41.7% Measurable Skill Gains

Success Story: YourTEK Professionals



Several years ago, September and Joshua Dye started a business called YourTEK Professionals to create a one-stop shop for all things technology. However, they had a limited budget and were concerned about finding qualified employees to join their team. That's when the

Dyes were introduced to VR and their local Business Relations Representative. They learned about the services VR has to offer specifically for employers looking to hire and knew it could be the help YourTEK needed. By partnering with VR, September and Joshua developed a pipeline that has kept their company fully staffed, even as employees advance in their careers. The Dyes are still in touch with VR and make sure to reach out anytime they need another qualified candidate.

Promising Practices in Mental Health

Individual Placement and Support (IPS) is an evidence-based practice of supported employment for helping people with mental health disabilities gain competitive integrated employment. IPS also encourages mainstream education and technical training as ways to advance career paths.

IPS benefits for participants

- Assistance to attain competitive employment aligned with preferences
- Rapid engagement
- Integration of clinical and employment services
- Benefits planning
- Time unlimited supports

IPS benefits for providers

- Ongoing training and technical assistance from an IPS Trainer
- Annual fidelity reviews
- Support and collaboration from VR Counselors

In Florida, IPS is provided through a collaboration between the Department of Children and Families' Office of Substance Abuse and Mental Health (SAMH), VR, behavioral health managing entities and a growing network of community providers. VR partners with community providers who utilize the IPS approach to provide supported employment services for individuals with serious mental health conditions.

VR's most recent IPS pilots include collaboration with Citrus Health Network (Miami- Dade County), Helping People Succeed (Martin County) and Carrfour (Brevard County).

VR and SAMH continue to explore IPS implementation and intend to pilot IPS at additional sites as capacity and interest grow. To learn more about IPS, visit www.ipsworks.org.

Pre-Employment Transition Services

What are Pre-Employment Transition Services?

Pre-ETS offer students with disabilities an early start at career exploration and preparation for adult life. The focus is to explore careers, develop work skills, practice social skills and acquire a network of community supports while the student is still in high school.

Who is eligible to receive Pre-ETS?

Students, ages 14-21, who are currently enrolled in school and have a documented disability can participate in Pre-ETS.

What is the definition of a student with a disability?

Section 413.301, Florida Statutes, defines a Pre-ETS eligible student by having a documented disability (e.g. IEP, 504 plan or other documentation).

What is the difference between potentially eligible and eligible?

Most VR services require applicants to receive an eligibility determination before participating. However, Pre-ETS only requires that students meet the definition of a student with a disability in order to receive services. This means that any student with a disability, referred to VR, may participate in Pre-ETS without having to apply or be determined eligible for VR services.

What are the five required Pre-ETS?

VR is required by 34 CFR 361.48(a)(2) to provide the following Pre-Employment Transition Services:

- Job Exploration Counseling: Explores career path options that are best suited to the student's skills, abilities, aptitudes and interests.

- **Work Readiness Training:** Focuses on employability and related skills that prepare students to work. This includes resume writing, mock interviews and searching and applying for jobs.
- **Work-Based Learning Experiences:** Provides practical exposure to different careers and hands-on training for employability skills.
- **Self-Advocacy Training:** Teaches students how to talk about their needs and make decisions to become more independent. This includes peer mentoring.
- **Postsecondary Educational Counseling:** Provides information about continuing education options, school choice, accessing financial aid, etc.

How are Pre-ETS different from services available at school?

While there is some overlap between Pre-ETS and school services, the difference lands in the “end goal.” Services provided by the school are often academically centered, whereas Pre-ETS are generally focused on the student’s long term employment goals. Both services are valuable and useful to the student.

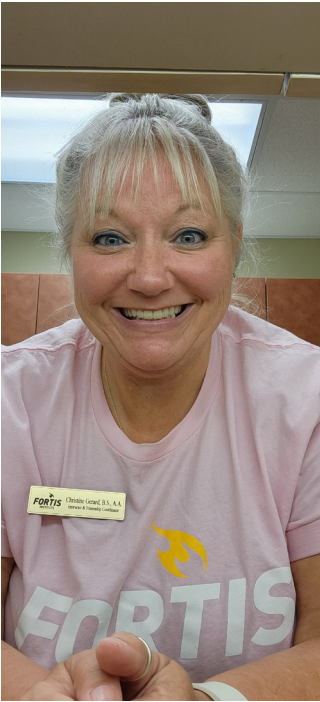
What are the benefits of Pre-ETS?

By participating in Pre-ETS, students develop valuable skills and experiences that will last a lifetime. These include social skills, employability skills, such as resume writing and problem solving, hands-on training, peer mentoring and more.

Key Pre-ETS Data

- \$34,212,952 Spent on serving Florida’s students in SFY 2023-2024.
- 4,243 Referrals were received from schools for Pre-ETS in SFY 2023-2024.
- 19,311 Students received services during SFY 2023-2024.

Success Story: Christine Gerard



While coping with generalized anxiety disorder and cardiovascular issues, Christine Gerard found it difficult to get a job earning wages similar to salaries she'd had in the past, but she wasn't discouraged. She was determined to acquire the relevant skills and experience necessary to secure employment. Christine became acquainted with VR through a former VR customer who helped reignite her drive for financial independence. Through the guidance from her VR Counselor, Christine was able to identify her transferable skills and open the door to a number of career options. Christine now develops coursework and teaches medical and dental courses. She says her "dream job" was actualized by VR, and that the division "was a life-changer."

Success Story: Austin Henson



Austin Henson has always loved being a student. At the end of his high school education, he knew that college was the next step for him. As an individual with autism, Austin says he felt anxious about communicating with others and was worried about how that would impact his ability to attend college. However, after he graduated from high school, a VR consultant reached out to Austin in support of his educational and career goals. She connected Austin with a program called Eagle Connections at Tallahassee State College that helps individuals with disabilities earn college credit and gain independence. With VR's help, Austin was able to graduate from Eagle Connections with a Ready 4 Work certificate and a renewed excitement to find his forever job. Austin and his family are very appreciative of the role VR has played in his journey to adulthood.

Career Camps

VR Career Camps are a set of services that prepare a participant for the transition from high school to postsecondary education, training or employment. VR vendors have the flexibility to create a unique, fun Career Camp experience by delivering any combination of Pre-ETS identified in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and 34 CFR 361.48(a)(2) in a bundled format. The five services are:

- Postsecondary Educational Counseling
- Job Exploration Counseling
- Self-Advocacy Training
- Work-Based Learning
- Work Readiness Training

Career Camps are available when school is out for at least three consecutive scheduled school days, such as during Spring, Summer, Fall and Winter breaks.

In SFY 2023-2024, more than 4,000 students participated in at least one Career Camp experience.

Success Story: Hyatt Place at Pensacola Airport Illness



Hyatt Place at Pensacola Airport has been an On-the-Job Training (OJT) provider since 2019. Through their partnership with Vocational Rehabilitation’s Business Relations team, Hyatt Place gained access to a qualified talent pool of individuals with disabilities eager to work in hospitality. One of the OJT groups served in SFY 2023-2024 resulted in full-time offers

of employment for five of the six VR customers. Leadership at Hyatt Place continues to play a huge role in the success of their OJT participants. Every day, Hyatt leaders work with trainees to develop the knowledge and abilities necessary to meet business expectations. Hyatt Place staff at all levels agree that their partnership with VR has also deepened their connection with the communities they serve.

Rewarding Student Progress: Measurable Skill Gains

What is a measurable skill gain (MSG)?

A measurable skill gain is the documented academic, technical, occupational or other form of progress, toward such a credential or employment¹.

Why are MSGs important?

MSGs are a valuable way for students, families, counselors and employers to keep track of the student's progress and identify the most beneficial next steps for them to take. Whether participants are seeking to continue their education, secure competitive integrated employment or advance their personal skillsets, measurable skill gain can equip students with the information and abilities necessary to find success after high school.

How are MSGs calculated?

The MSG indicator is calculated by determining the percentage of participants who, during a program year, are in an education or training program that leads to a recognized postsecondary credential or employment during a program year. The performance indicator for measurable skill gains is calculated by dividing the total number of participants in the numerator by the total number of participants in the denominator.

What are the 5 types of MSGs?

- Educational Functioning Level: Documented achievement of at least one educational functioning level of a participant who is receiving instruction below the postsecondary level.

- Secondary School Diploma or Equivalent: The documented attainment of a secondary-school diploma or its recognized equivalent.
- Secondary Transcript/Report Card or Postsecondary Transcript/Report Card: A report card or transcript shows that a participant is receiving academic standards.
- Training Milestone: Report from an employer or training provider documenting the participant's achievement of established milestones, such as completion of OJT, completion of one year of an apprenticeship program, or similar milestones.
- Skills Progression: Documented passage of an exam required for an occupation or progress attaining technical/occupational skills as evidenced by trade-related benchmarks.

How does VR support students in achieving MSGs?

To fulfill VR's mission of helping people with disabilities find and maintain employment and enhance their independence, VR offers numerous educational and training opportunities for students who wish to achieve measurable skill gains. These include Work Based Learning Experiences, Project SEARCH and Inclusive Post-Secondary Education opportunities.

Percentage of Participants with an MSG for 2023-2024

¹ 34 CFR 361.155 -- What are the primary indicators of performance under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act? (n.d.). <https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-34/subtitle-B/chapter-III/part-361/subpart-E/section-361.155>

Retaining Quality Staff: Positive Changes in VR's Vacancy Rate

The Florida Legislature passed, and Governor Ron DeSantis signed, a historic salary increase for VR staff during the 2022-2023 legislative session. The FDVR began the work to increase staff pay several years before the recommendation was made by the FRC in response to the 2020-2024 State Plan.

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. The staff providing direct services to customers were the targeted job classes for the increase, including VR Technicians, Counselors, Senior Counselors, Consultants and Unit Supervisors.

Since the completion of this project, VR has experienced long-lasting positive effects and continues to analyze opportunities for increases for positions that were unaffected by the initial salary package proposal. Notably, the Division saw a seven percent decrease in vacancies. The Vacancy Rate for VR counseling classes is currently 14.13%, down from the previous 23%, and VR's Vacancy Rate as a whole is currently 14.59%, down from the previous 22%.

Changes in Vacancy Rate by Class Title

Vocational Rehabilitation Technician

June 2023- 24%

September 2024- 11%

Senior Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor

June 2023- 29%

September 2024- 18%

Vocational Rehabilitation Consultant

June 2023- 14%

September 2024- 1%

Vocational Rehabilitation Supervisor

June 2023- 5%

September 2024- 3%

Success Story: Zachary Hoaglund



For individuals with autism, getting through high school can be challenging, but with hard work and determination, Zachary Hoaglund graduated with honors. It was around that time that he met his first VR counselor who saw his determination and encouraged him to continue his education. With VR's help, Zack obtained his associate degree and went on to earn his bachelor, with honors, in film production.

Through interning at the Miami PBS station, Zack further advanced his film-making skills and charted his path to creating, producing and being featured in two films featured at international film festivals. He was then offered the lead role in a film that received an award at the Los Angeles Short Film Festival.

Since then, Zack has founded his own storytelling media production company, Pageturner Entertainment, which focuses on creating films focused on the needs of individuals with disabilities as well as environmental issues. He also established a visual storytelling medium, Pageturner Adventures with Zack, where he reads children's books with added music and visual effects.

ArtCIE: Creativity knows no boundaries

ArtCIE (pronounced Artsy) is Florida VR's exciting solution for individuals with disabilities working in or considering subminimum wage employment to access careers in the arts, entertainment and recreation industries

Through a dual-customer approach, ArtCIE focuses on the needs of the individual job-seeker and the employer's demands by building participants' skills to meet the needs of the business.

Learn more at artcieFL.com or by scanning the QR code.

Becoming a VR Vendor

What is a Vendor?

A vendor is a person or business that provides services to VR customers that will lead to a goal of employment. These services may include, but are not limited to, medical services, training opportunities and/or specialized equipment.

Vocational Rehabilitation Services

- Assistive Technology and Devices
- Career Counseling and Guidance
- Job Coaching and Placement
- Job-Site Assessment and Accommodations
- Medical and Psychological Assessment
- On-the-Job Training
- Pre-Employment Transition Services
- Supported and Customized Employment Services
- Time-Limited Medical and/or Psychological Treatment
- Training and Education After High School and
- Vocational Evaluation and Planning

To learn more about becoming a vendor for the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, please contact us at VRVendors@VR.Fldoe.org

Data Definitions & Acronyms

In the order that they appear

Customer Feedback Survey Measures

Survey items measure the percentage of respondents who select 'strongly agree' or 'somewhat agree' to each statement. The percentage is calculated by dividing the total number of 'agree' responses by the total number of responses.

Vacancy Rate

Vacancies are any time a position is vacated, voluntarily or involuntarily. They include retirement, promotion, lateral, dismissal and voluntary separation. The vacancy rate is calculated by dividing the number of vacant positions occurring throughout the year by the total number of positions.

VR Participant

An individual who has applied for and been determined eligible for VR services, has an approved and signed Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) and has begun to receive VR services.

Competitive Integrated Employment

For VR participants, Competitive Integrated Employment is achieved when an individual is employed for 90 consecutive days in a workplace where people with disabilities are paid fairly, work with others without disabilities and have the same opportunities for advancement as their coworkers.

Received Services

The number of VR customers who have an approved Individualized Plan for Employment and have received employment, education or other services during the reporting period.

On-the-Job Training

On-the-Job Training provides VR participants with the opportunity to receive training on specific job skills by a prospective employer. Generally, the participant is paid during their training and has the potential to become employed after successful completion of their training.

Occupation Fields (Placements)

Occupation Fields are based on the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Standard Occupation Classification system.

Employment Rate 2nd/4th Quarter after Exit

Percentage of program participants who are in competitive, integrated employment during the 2nd / 4th quarter after program exit.

Median Earnings 2nd Quarter after Exit

Percentage of program participants who are in competitive, integrated employment during the 2nd quarter after program exit.

Credential Attainment Rate

Percentage of participants who either:

- Attain a recognized postsecondary credential before program exit or up to 1 year after program exit; or
- Attain a secondary school diploma or equivalent and, enroll in postsecondary education or become employed within 1 year after program exit.

Measurable Skill Gains Rate (MSG)

The percentage of participants who are in an education or training program that leads to a recognized secondary or postsecondary credential or employment and are achieving MSGs based on attainment of at least one type of gain.

Job Retention Services

A discretionary service that allows VR to provide specific services/equipment to individuals who are at risk of losing their employment.

Acronyms

- VR- Division of Vocational Rehabilitation
- FRC- Florida Rehabilitation Council
- CRP- Community Rehabilitation Provider
- Pre-ETS- Pre-Employment Transition Services
- OJT- On-the-Job Training
- SFY- State Fiscal Year
- MSG- Measurable Skill Gains

The Florida Department of Education, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR), is an equal opportunity employer. It is against the law for VR as a recipient of Federal financial assistance to discriminate against any individual in the United States on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, political affiliation or belief. The application process used by VR to determine eligibility for services, any subsequent services and the entire VR process are subject to these non-discrimination requirements. Auxiliary aids and services are available upon request to individuals with disabilities. VR program receives 78.7 percent of its funding through a grant from the U.S. Department of Education. For the 2024 Federal fiscal year, the total amount of grant funds awarded were \$184,931,573. The remaining 21.3 percent of the costs (\$50,051,366) were funded by Florida State Appropriations. Revised October 2024.