

2019-2020 ANNUAL REPORT

FLORIDA REHABILITATION COUNCIL

Building Careers for 100 Years

Florida Department of Education
fldoe.org

Florida Rehabilitation Council

VR

Table of Contents

Florida Rehabilitation Council Message from the Chair 3

Florida Rehabilitation Council Members 4

Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Message from the Director
Public Forums 5

Program Overview 6

Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Overview with
Council Recommendations to the 2020-2024 Unified State Plan 7

Performance Highlights 8

Facts At-a-Glance
Vocational Rehabilitation Offers Job Retention Services
Order of Selection Waiting List Status Summary 10

Ann Siegel, JD, Honored with Stephen R. Wise Award
Vocational Rehabilitation Services for Businesses 11

Success Stories 12

Ombudsman
Customer Satisfaction Survey Results 15

Public Forums

The Florida Rehabilitation Council (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 are not limited to individuals where the meeting is located, but are open to the public statewide by conference call and CART text through the internet. There were four public forums conducted during the 2019-2020 State Fiscal Year (SFY). Areas of comment received included feedback on Self-employment, Certified Business Technical Assistance Centers, the Discovery Program, transition students, the BRICK project, placement and employment issues.

2021 FRC/VR Public Forums

February 16	VR Area 4
May 4-5	VR Area 5
August 10-11	VR Area 6
Oct 26-27	VR Area 3

Call-in Public Forum Number
888-585-9008
Room: 873574258#

For updated information go to RehabWorks.org/rehabcouncil.shtml.

Florida Rehabilitation Council

Message From the Chair



Michael Adamus

On behalf of The Florida Rehabilitation Council (FRC), in partnership with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR), we are pleased to present the *2019-2020 Annual Report: Building Careers for 100 Years*. The report highlights the activities and accomplishments of VR and the FRC over this past year, a challenging one to say the least. We invite you to review the performance data for our programs. However, the best measurement for the effectiveness of the program is by hearing from VR customers—many of whom have become successfully employed in meaningful work of their choosing. 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.fldoe.org.

As we begin a new year, we will have new challenges and also new opportunities to work together to create a safer and more inclusive future. 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 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.

All the Best,
Michael Adamus, Chair
Florida Rehabilitation Council

Florida Rehabilitation Council Mission

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

Florida Rehabilitation Council Vision

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

About Florida Rehabilitation Council

The 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.

Florida Rehabilitation Council

Chair
Michael Adamus

First Vice Chair
Ann Robinson

Second Vice Chair
Patrick Cannon

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
Ann Robinson, Chair

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

Legislative/Public Awareness
Patrick Cannon, Chair

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

Vocational Rehabilitation Staff Supports FRC
Roy Cosgrove, Program Administrator
Kim Thomas, Program Consultant

Florida Rehabilitation Council Members



Michael Adamus
Chair
Orlando

Represents disability groups that include a cross section of individuals



Ann Robinson
First Vice Chair
Tallahassee

Represents the Client Assistance Program, Disability Rights Florida



Patrick Cannon
Second Vice Chair
Lakeland

Represents current or former applicants for, or recipients of, vocational rehabilitation services



Amanda Brown
Gainesville

Represents disability groups that include a cross section of individuals



Molly Hullinger
St. Augustine

Represents disability groups that include a cross section of individuals



Janet Severt and Wyland
Orange City

Represents business, industry and labor



Rebecca Witonsky
Boca Raton

Represents disability groups that include a cross section of individuals



Allison Flanagan
VR Director
Tallahassee

Represents Vocational Rehabilitation

The FRC offers a hearty thank you to previous members who have served during this time:

Victoria Aguilar **Donte Mickens** **Michael Wiseman** **Judy White**

How to Become a Florida Rehabilitation Council Member*

Florida Rehabilitation Council (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, disability groups). These category assignments are made together with the Governor's office in light of applicant's experience and expressed representational preferences.

Note: These are all vacant positions:

- At least one representative of a **parent training and information center**
- At least one representative of **community rehabilitation program service providers**
- At least one representative of the **State Workforce Development Board**
- At least one representative of the **state educational agency responsible for public education of students with disabilities**
- At least one qualified **VR counselor** representative with knowledge of and experience with VR programs
- At least one **Florida Independent Living Council (FILC) representative** who must be the chair or other designee of FILC
- Three representatives of **business, industry and labor**
- Up to eight representatives of **disability groups** that include a cross section of: (A) Individuals with physical, cognitive, sensory and mental disabilities; and (B) Representatives of individuals with disabilities who have difficulty representing themselves or are unable due to their disabilities to represent

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 at www.flgov.com/appointments.

For more information about becoming an FRC member or the expectations of membership, go to www.RehabWorks.org/rehabcouncil.shtml and click on FRC Membership or contact the FRC at 850-245-3397. For an electronic copy of this annual report with a direct link to the Appointments Office, go to www.RehabWorks.org/rehabcouncil.shtml and click on 2019–2020 FRC Annual Report.

*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.).

Division of Vocational Rehabilitation



Allison Flanagan

Message From the Director

Experts will tell you that a great team has certain traits in common—a shared vision, open communications and adaptability. The OneVR team has shown those qualities in abundance during the last year.

As I reflect, the 2019–2020 program year is really a tale of two years, separated by a global pandemic that has had a dramatic impact on VR customers, staff, providers, partners and employers. I must begin by expressing my gratitude to the Department of Education leadership. Their support for VR has been filled with compassion and grace, which has allowed VR to protect the health and safety of our staff and stakeholders.

During the first two-thirds of the program year, VR was working on initiatives to improve services and processes including revamping case management for potentially-eligible students with disabilities; redesigning employment service delivery; replacing outdated software applications; and modernizing electronic communication across the division, to name just a few.

On March 9, 2020, our lives changed dramatically in response to COVID-19. Our ability to continue delivering services effectively is a result of the OneVR team's commitment to our vision, open communication and adaptability.

Commitment to the VR Vision

VR's vision is "To become the first place people with disabilities turn to when seeking employment and a top resource for employers in need of qualified employees." Although the pandemic necessitated major changes in VR operations, I am proud that VR has continued serving our customers without interruption.

Open Communication

VR implemented numerous initiatives to keep staff at all levels informed.

- More frequent leadership meetings to manage VR's COVID-19 response.
- Accelerated implementation of Microsoft Teams to enable secure communication between staff members and stakeholders.
- Implementation of a phone system that allowed staff to access their office phones over their computer.
- Implementation of increased communication with stakeholders to share information and coordinate designing virtual services.

Adaptability

- Almost 100 percent of VR staff were teleworking at least part time.
- An online orientation video was launched to ensure that new customers could access information safely.
- New virtual options of Pre-Employment Transition Services and Employment Services were implemented.
- Virtual job fairs for employers were conducted across the state.

These are just a few of the ways that the OneVR team and our partners have risen to the challenges of the last several months. Although there have been hardships along the way, VR has consistently communicated and adapted in order to achieve our vision of helping individuals with disabilities achieve their career goals.

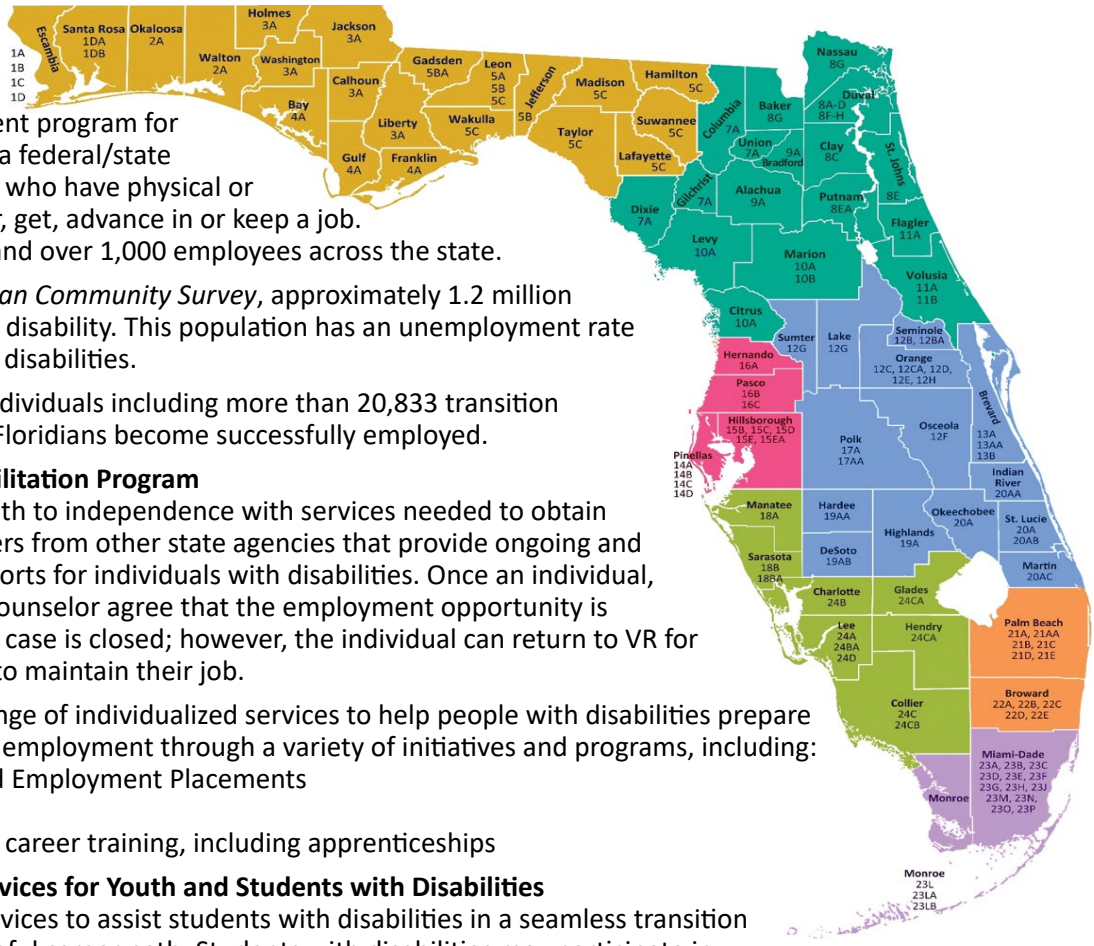
Vocational Rehabilitation Mission

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

Vocational Rehabilitation 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.

Program Overview



The Florida Department of Education, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) is Florida's premier employment program for people with disabilities. VR is a federal/state partnership that helps people who have physical or mental disabilities prepare for, get, advance in or keep a job. The division has seven areas and over 1,000 employees across the state.

According to the *2018 American Community Survey*, approximately 1.2 million working-age Floridians have a disability. This population has an unemployment rate twice that of persons without disabilities.

Last year, VR served 40,655 individuals including more than 20,833 transition age youth. VR assisted 5,389 Floridians become successfully employed.

Traditional Vocational Rehabilitation Program

VR supports an individual's path to independence with services needed to obtain lasting employment. This differs from other state agencies that provide ongoing and 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.

Generally, VR offers a wide range of individualized services to help people with disabilities prepare for, find, advance in, or retain employment through a variety of initiatives and programs, including:

- Supported and Customized Employment Placements
- Job Retention Services
- Postsecondary college and career training, including apprenticeships

Vocational Rehabilitation Services for Youth and Students with Disabilities

VR provides individualized services to assist students with disabilities 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).

VR's Pandemic Response—The Rise of Telework and Virtual Services

The arrival of a global pandemic made it necessary for VR to work with service providers and other stakeholders to create a new virtual approach to employment and other services.

- VR's offices were closed to the public from mid-March through August of 2020. VR staff members continued to work, with more than 95 percent of staff transitioning to telework. VR launched a statewide effort to equip staff with laptops and phone services. System capacity was expanded so that staff could access VR's network from home without interruption. VR accelerated a planned move to Microsoft Teams as the approved, secure application for video conference calling with staff, customers, providers and other stakeholders.
- New Counselor Training was moved from a combination of in-person and virtual training to 100 percent virtual, so that new staff are able to continue to receive the information they needed.
- Since in-person and group orientation sessions were no longer an option, VR developed an online customer orientation video that individuals considering applying for services can access safely from home.
- Digital signatures and paperless authorizations were implemented to prevent delays in services.
- The Bureau of Vendor and Contracted Services increased the frequency of its monthly email communication to weekly distribution to provide continual communication. They also conducted a survey to assess providers' COVID-19 related needs and worked with providers to address concerns. Additionally, they now hold bi-monthly Provider Engagement webinars.
- Providers were given approval to deliver specific services virtually. Guidance was developed and shared for Project SEARCH, Discovery and Pre-ETS virtual service delivery.
- Guidance on both remote psychological and vocational evaluations was shared with VR staff.

Although the pandemic created the need for change, VR made a great effort to continue providing services to Floridians with disabilities safely and effectively.

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

The FRC is pleased to be a strategic partner with 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 emphasizes the need to improve deaf and hard of hearing services by the creation of a Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services Bureau by VR and the Florida Department of Education (FDOE). Over the past year, the council has reviewed presentations and received additional information, that when combined with survey results, leads the council to believe that a Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services Bureau should be created to better serve this underrepresented and underserved population.

The FRC is equally concerned, as is the agency, with staff retention and turnover. The FRC encourages the on-going analysis of the impact of turnover on the clients being served, as well as staff. For Florida to have a state-of-the-art program of services for individuals with disabilities, actions should be taken to, at a minimum, identify, prevent and mitigate the impact of turnover. Action is needed by policymakers so that VR can be competitive in recruiting, hiring and retaining staff.

The FRC is ready to meet the challenges with VR as a partner.

State Rehabilitation Council Recommendations
The FRC offers the following robust recommendations to enhance service delivery and career achievement by individuals with disabilities.

Recommendation 1. Deaf and Hard of Hearing
- Although VR has a specific unit dedicated to serving people who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing and DeafBlind, the FRC recommends the creation of a Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services Bureau be considered by VR and FDOE.

Recommendation 2. Counselor Recruitment, Retention
- Build on the success of the Learning Management System and other training opportunities that will increase staff confidence and skillsets.
- The FRC strongly recommends consideration of additional, immediate 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.
- Provide supervisors with opportunities for the training they need in an environment where they can be productive.
- Ensure that staff is equipped with state-of-the-art resources to do their job duties.

Recommendation 3. Transition
- Continue to promote early contact and assistance to all students with disabilities under an Individualized Educational Plan (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 underserved groups 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.

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.
- FRC applauds VR efforts to increase capacity of the number of providers using the Discovery model.
- 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.

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.

Recommendation 6. Public Awareness of VR
- Develop a media campaign to share the history of VR, Florida-specific services, successes and accomplishments.
- Implement an online application system.
- Continue to engage businesses and mandated partners.

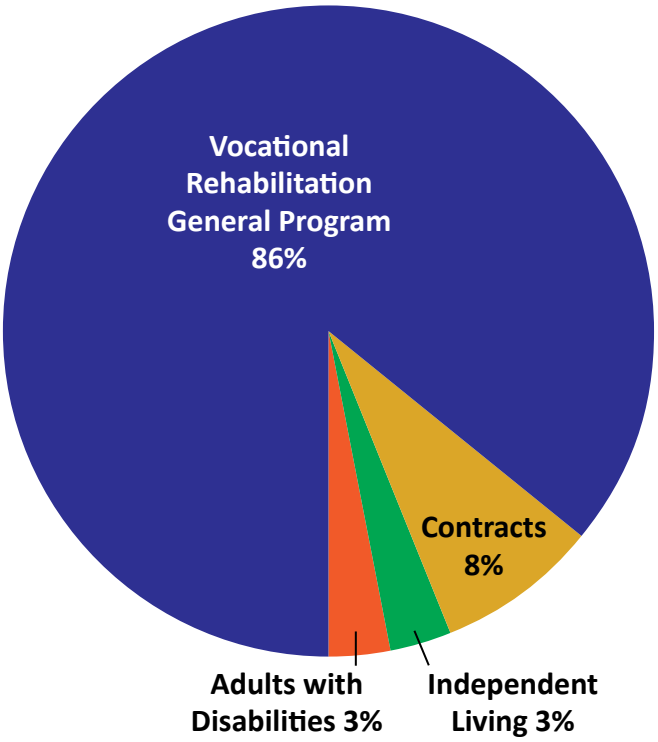
* The *Unified State Plan* is found at https://wioaplans.ed.gov/node/31.

Vocational Rehabilitation Performance Highlights

For every **$1** invested in rehabilitating a customer, an estimated **$7.88** was returned to the Florida economy in 2019–2020 state fiscal year.

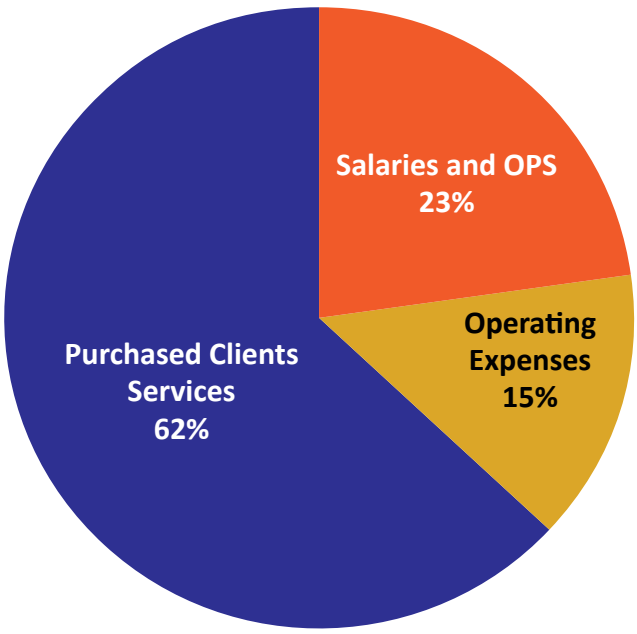
2019–2020 Division Programs

Total Division Expenditures $218,525,350



2019-2020 General Program Expenditures

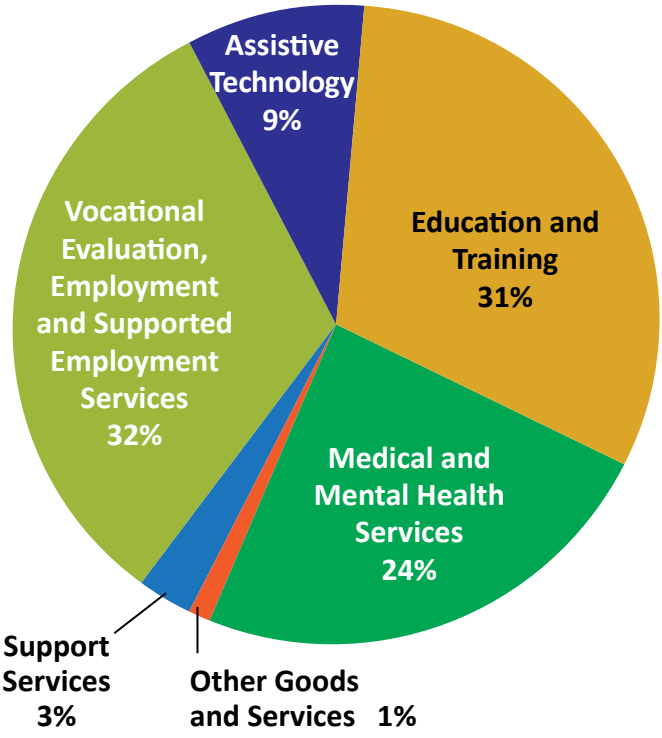
Total Vocational Rehabilitation Expenditures $203,524,723*



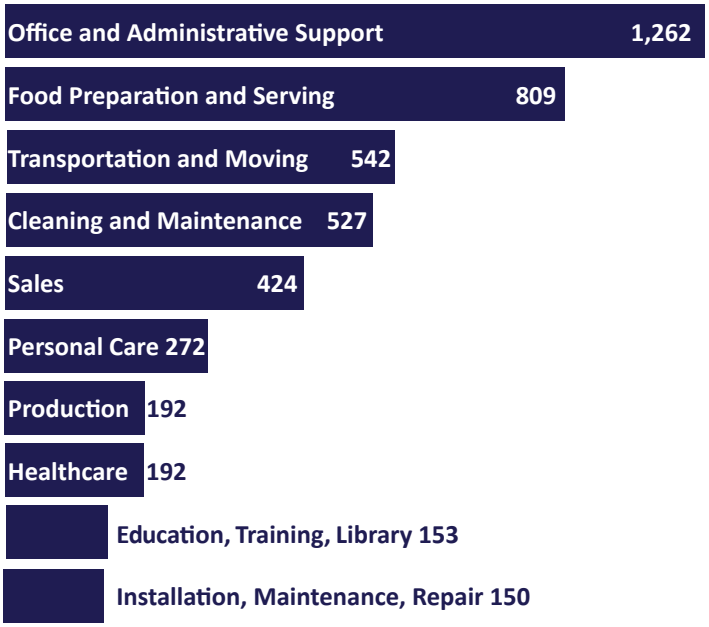
* This total is a combination of VR General Expenditures plus 93% of contracts expenditures also related to the VR General Program.

Client Services Expenditures by Category

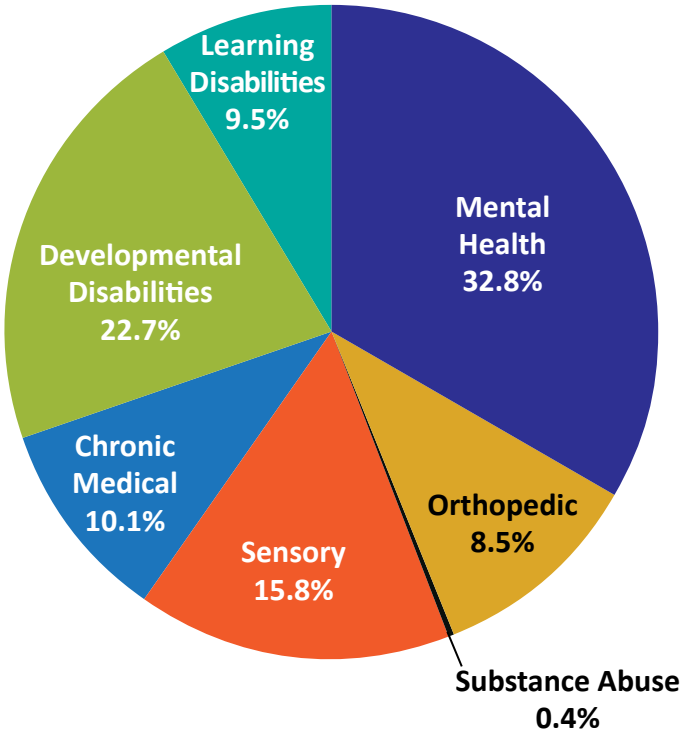
Total Purchased Client Services Expenditures $125,889,479



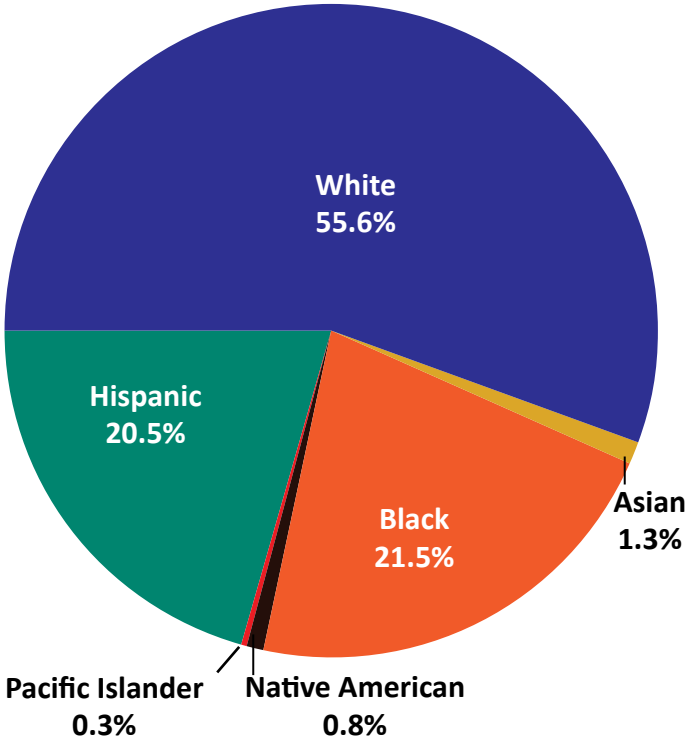
Top 10 Occupations of Vocational Rehabilitation Customers



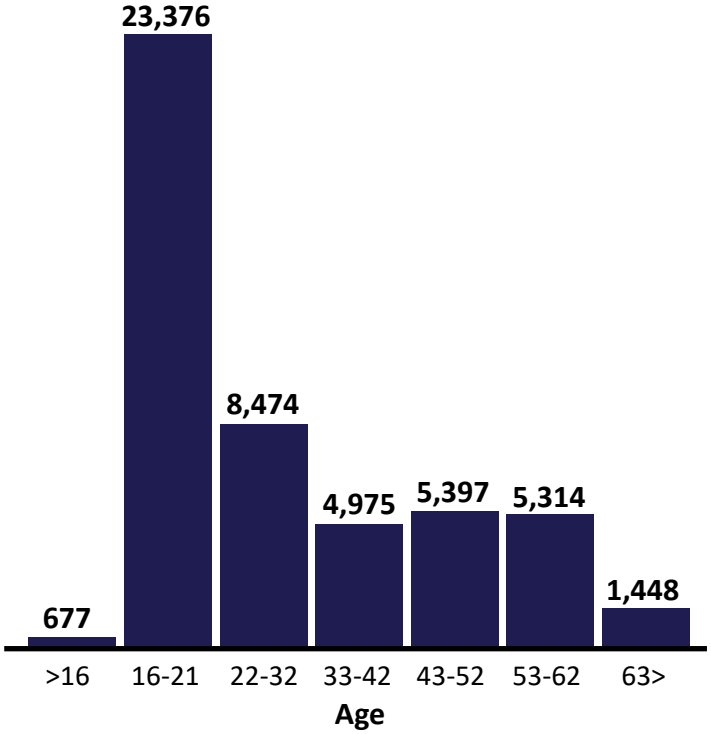
VR Customers Gainfully Employed by Primary Disability Category



Race and Ethnicity of Customers who Received Services Under an Individualized Plan for Employment



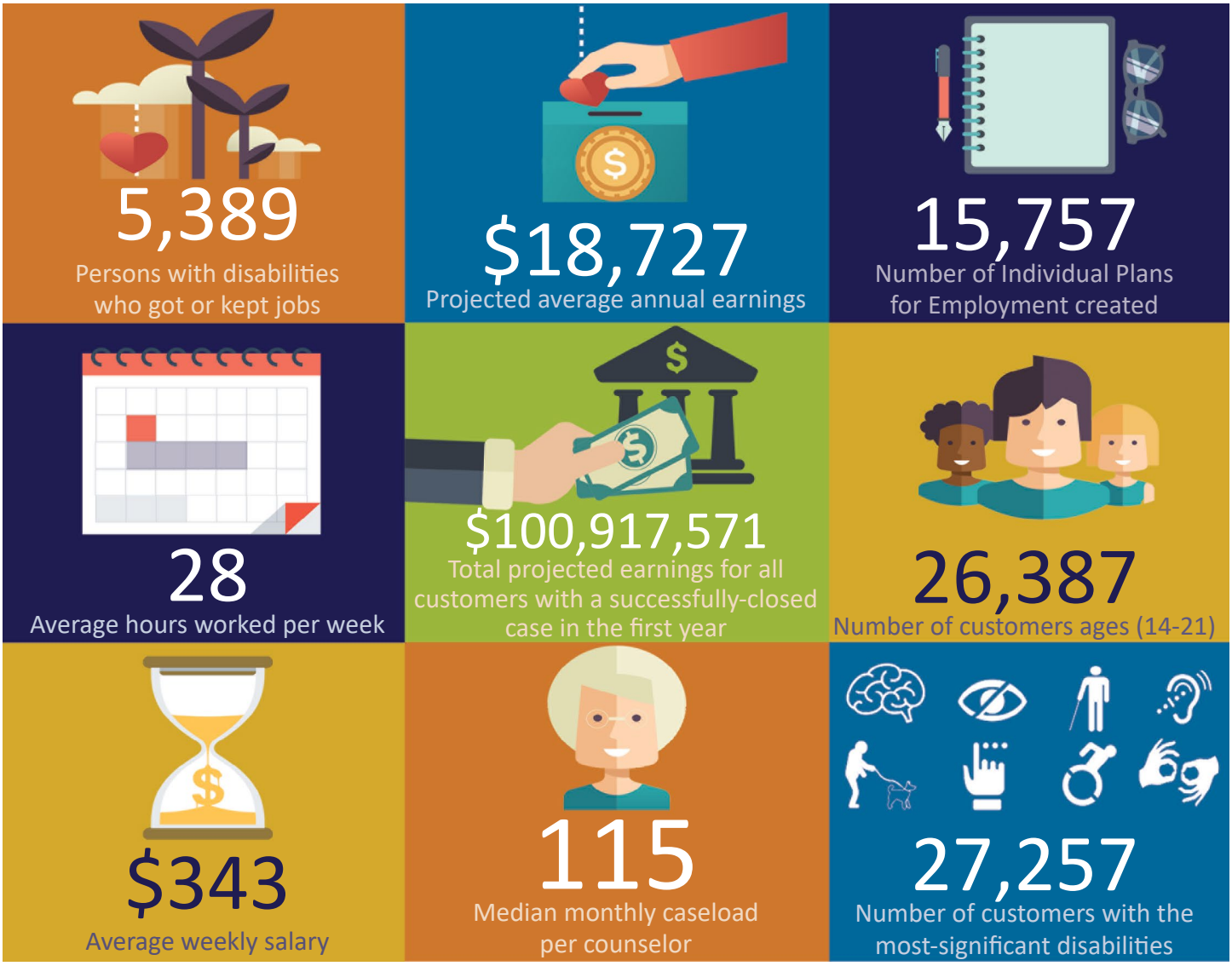
Age Groups of Customers who Received Services Under an Individualized Plan for Employment



The Florida Vocational Rehabilitation program receives 78.7 percent of its funding through a grant from the U.S. Department of Education. For the 2020 Federal fiscal year, the total amount of federal grant funds awarded were $153,000,001. The remaining 21.3 percent of the costs ($41,409,148) were funded by Florida State Appropriations.

Facts At-a-Glance

2019-2020 SFY



Vocational Rehabilitation Offers Job Retention Services

VR provides job-retention services (JRS) to eligible individuals who require specific services or equipment to keep their job, regardless of Order of Selection. This new option was created by WIOA. Since JRS began, VR has helped 1,815 customers at risk of losing their jobs.

Order of Selection Waiting List Status Summary

As of June 30, 2020

Under Order of Selection, all eligible individuals are placed on a prioritized waiting list based on the significance of their disability. Significance is assessed by the number of barriers created in getting or keeping a job and the nature of VR services needed. Federal law requires that individuals with the most significant disabilities be served first. Category 1 and 2 customers are currently being immediately released from the waiting list. Listed below are by category, title, number on the wait list and definition of each category:

Category 1 – Most Significant Disabilities (0): Limits three or more functional capacities in terms of work; requires three or more primary services; lasts at least 12 months.

Category 2 – Significant Disabilities (0): Limits one or two functional capacities in terms of work; requires two or more primary services; lasts at least six months.

Category 3 – Other Disabilities (454): Does not seriously limit functional capacity in terms of work; lasts less then six months.

Ann Siegel, JD, Honored with Stephen R. Wise Advocacy Award

The annual Stephen R. Wise Advocacy Award recognizes dedicated leaders and champions in the cause of helping persons with disabilities achieve independence and dignity through meaningful employment. The FRC considered many outstanding nominees for this year's award and selected Ann Siegel for her outstanding leadership and personal commitment to serving individuals with disabilities. Ann is a longtime advocate and attorney. She worked at Broward Legal Services and the Advocacy Center for Persons with Disabilities. She currently serves as the Legal Director for the Advocacy, Education and Outreach Team at Disability Rights Florida, where she manages a team of attorneys, advocates and investigators.

Ann's advocacy and legal expertise have received national recognition through her presentations to the National Council on Disabilities, Assistive Technology Industry Association and the National Disability Rights Network. Ann is a key leader in Florida who provides individual advocacy and necessary litigation so that youth and adults with disabilities obtain the services they need to prepare for and obtain meaningful careers. Ann's advocacy is the basis for this strong nomination for the Wise Award.

Ann is a consummate leader and is a passionate advocate to improve services for children, youth and adults with disabilities. She has served on the FDOE State Advisory Council, and since 2009, Ann has been a presenter and facilitator at the Family Café. Her outreach efforts have also been with pro bono assistance through the Florida Bar to parents of students with disabilities. Since 2004, Ann has been a member of the Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates, lending her expertise to this vital Council.



2020 Recipient Ann Siegel, JD
Disability Rights Florida

Stephen R. Wise 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
2019 Becki Forsett (Founder, YES! of America United)

Ann has successfully assisted thousands of Florida's students and young adults with disabilities in preparing for their future. She promotes high expectations for agency service delivery and has been a champion for securing assistive technology for students to increase their access to educational services in the least restrictive environment. For her lifetime of dedication and accomplishments in serving individuals with disabilities the Florida Rehabilitation Council is proud to present the 2020 Stephen R. Wise Advocacy Award to Ann Siegel.

Vocational Rehabilitation Services for Businesses

The Business Relations Unit consists of 12 consultants and the Abilities Work Help Desk. Driven by the needs of employers, the unit provides an array of services, resources and solutions to increase disability inclusion in the workplace. Outcomes for 2019-2020 were 572 businesses served and 377 outreach events attended. Services to employers include recruitment support, technical assistance on disability-related matters, disability awareness training, tax-credit assistance and work-based training. Outreach includes networking with workforce partners and industry associations, collaboration with VR employment services providers, participation with Chamber organizations, and partnerships with other stakeholders to improve business services and customers' career outcomes.

Business Relations conducts targeted outreach to employers in in-demand industries to build relationships that expand career opportunities for VR participants. A partnership with Collins Aerospace resulted in 8 on-the-job trainings and two hires to date, with more successful outcomes anticipated from this ongoing partnership. An Aerospace Career Networking Event, in cooperation with the University of West Florida, engaged 41 VR participants with industry-related job goals and seven employers that provided information on internship and career opportunities in high-skill high wage occupations. This successful event included a presentation to employers from an Assistant District Director of the Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs. Brevard Internships in Construction Knowledge (BRICK) continued for its third year. The success of BRICK led to similar programs with homebuilders' associations in Volusia and Duval and with advanced manufacturing employers in Brevard County. Networking, collaboration and partnerships with targeted high-skill high wage industries are expanding in-demand career opportunities for VR participants.



Chef and Chaplain Michelle Jones

"I am very enthusiastic and eager to learn and teach others," says Michelle Jones. Also known as Chef Jones in the City of Tamarac, Michelle educates the community about mindful living and healthy eating habits. Michelle was born with a learning and cognitive disorder that affects her ability to process auditory information. Before coming to VR, Michelle felt trapped inside her own mind, but she knew anything was possible because or her relationship with God. It took time, perseverance and practice to become a strong advocate for herself, but VR made all of that possible.

With the help of VR Counselor Valorie Cunningham, Michelle was able to gain the confidence needed to not only continue her education but also achieve her career goals. VR helped Michelle see her identity beyond the disability, which has given her the courage to pursue what others thought might not be possible. She earned a bachelor's in Culinary Management and a master's in Psychology. She is a certified National Chaplain, an instructor for ServeSafe and vendor for VR. She also serves on the Broward County Public School Board and Keiser University's School of Psychology Advisory Board. Michelle was inducted into the Tamarac Historical Association Hall of Fame and honored by VR with the Heart of Learning Award.

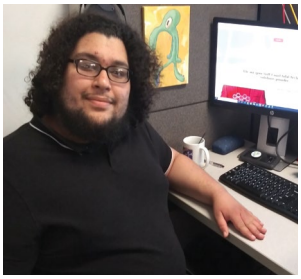
Michelle intends to advocate for the educational and mental health needs for those with disabilities to improve student achievement in inclusive classrooms. Michelle would also like to establish and implement economic development and social welfare to assist seniors living in her community as well as build trust with community leaders and the police department. Despite her learning disabilities, Michelle encourages others with disabilities to never give up – your success and happiness lies in you. Embrace your disability and focus on the things you are capable of doing. "Never be ashamed of who you are," she said.



Chemical Engineer Charles Peaden, Jr.

Charles Peaden, Jr. is an aspiring chemical engineer who graduated Cum laude with a Bachelor of Science from the University of Florida. Charles has always enjoyed science and math, and has a strong background in academia and research. While attending UF, he placed fourth in a design competition that incorporated biology and engineering to entertain children awaiting treatment at Shands Children's Hospital. He also received the Best Engineer Award in a program designed for freshman to excel in industry and research. Charles is autistic and has attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. Although his symptoms have presented some challenges with communication, he does not let it get in his way. He continues to work hard to overcome this and has been very successful without the need of any accommodations.

Charles does not recall the first time he learned about VR, but began working with VR in high school. VR has helped Charles succeed in many aspects of his life, especially the confidence he gained in his ability to overcome any obstacles that may come his way. In 2019, Charles moved to Jacksonville on his own where he started part-time as a laboratory assistant at Isel. He is able to utilize his chemical engineering degree by being in charge of the quality control specimens and is part of the developing process for new formulations. He now works there full time and really enjoys the research and development aspect of his job. Charles says, "This is my dream job. I hope to continue to grow within the company."



Webmaster Miguel Navarro

At a young age Miguel Navarro was very interested in computer programming and the process of designing programs. At the age of 15, he helped design a program and made modifications to digital games. This was just the beginning of Miguel's journey in the world of technology. In 2016, he graduated with a degree in Computer Programming and Analysis from Penn State. With the support of VR and his counselor, Miguel was able to obtain the accommodations needed to help him be successful on his path to graduation. As a person with high-functioning Asperger's Syndrome, Miguel has difficulty with communication as well as staying on track. With the help of a consistent schedule along with assistive technology, Miguel is able to be successful in his job.

Pre-VR, he was employed with Dollar General and was seeking growth. VR was able to help Miguel gain employment with YourTEK Professionals in Pensacola. He started as a receptionist, moved into a technician position and promoted as head web designer. Miguel attributes his academic and career success to VR and his counselors Denise Horton and Lorrie Herrington. He encourages future VR clients to stick with the program even if you feel uncomfortable with the process. Miguel says, "Be patient and stay on track. You will be successful."

Actor Zack Gottsagen



Since the age of three, it was Zack Gottsagen's dream to become an actor. With the help of family, friends and VR, he was able to find acting prospects that would allow him the opportunity to pursue his passion as an actor with Down syndrome. Zack learned about VR from his mother, Shelly Gottsagen, who was an active member of the Florida Independent Living Council. This exposure provided the opportunities Zack needed to further his venture in acting.

VR Counselor Shanqua Sims-Brown helped Zack attain on-the-job training (OJT) at the Alco Theater in Boynton Beach. He recalls his manager always providing support and being proud of his work. Zack frequently asked to take on more responsibility that led to opportunities such as coordinating events and dressing up in costume for functions that took place at the theater.

Throughout his life, Zack had several opportunities to learn how to become an actor. At the age of 18, Zack performed in the play Artie. Although the director admitted he had reservations about Zack's ability to perform in the play, Zack showed him that he not only memorized his lines, he also memorized the lines of the other performers. The director said "Meeting Zack not only changed my mind about the abilities of people with disabilities, but it also changed my life." Zack also attended an inclusion acting camp called Zeno Mountain Farms in Venice, California. At this camp, Zack starred in a movie called Bullet Proof Jackson where he played the villain. He fondly remembers making the film with his friends, Tyler and Mike, and their conversations about their dreams and aspirations. Zack spoke about his dream of becoming an actor and they told him, "There really isn't a desire for actors with Down syndrome in Hollywood." "Well, then we need to make our own movie," said Zack.



The Peanut Butter Falcon stars Zack who runs away from his care home to make his dream come true. This Indie sleeper ranked #1 in 2019 with grossing $23M at the box office and rated 96% by Rotten Tomatoes.

Zack developed the title and concept of the film The Peanut Butter Falcon. It took two years but was eventually picked up by Roadside Attractions. The movie is described as a Mark Twain-style story of an unlikely friendship between the character that Zack played and Tyler, an outlaw on the run played by Shia LaBeouf. There have been premieres for the film from Los Angeles to London with box office success. Zack's advice to future actors, "Stay in school. Study a lot. Perform in plays. Do not be afraid of auditions," and to "Dream Big."

BRICK: Building a Talent Pipeline



The current skills gaps that exist in the market exchange between labor and employers is a well-known fact across in-demand industries statewide. Programs that introduce youth into work experiences with employers facing talent supply shortages resulting from skills gaps can address employers' talent needs by building a talent pipeline. Using demand-driven strategy, VR partnered with a trades industry organization in Brevard County to offer a talent supply solution to member businesses. By connecting youth to work experiences with these employers, youth have the opportunity to learn about the employer's worksite and gain both hard (technical) and soft (foundational) skills.

During the summer of 2018, several partners came together to provide paid OJT for Brevard County's youth aged 16-21. Each student was paid $11/hour and learned all about working in the construction industry. The initial pilot, Brevard Internships in Construction Knowledge (BRICK), included the Home Builders Construction Association, Brevard County Schools, Coastal Mechanical, Richard's Paint, ProSource, Habitat for Humanity, Boys Electrical and provider employU who all partnered with VR to make this amazing experience happen for the students. The project was so successful, that it expanded into other areas around the state and to the manufacturing industry.

Watch real-life work experiences
BRICK pilot project: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QvRTu6byxgY
Jacksonville construction pilot project: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ts7MWHYtVaY
Brevard manufacturing pilot project: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=31-Psd0r58A&t=92s
Space Coast manufacturing pilot project: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=31-Psd0r58A

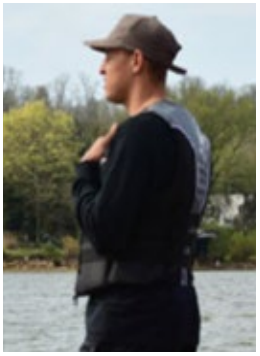


Left to Right: Supervisor Donna Cornellier, State Attorney Melissa Nelson, James Thompson and Jan Ward.

State Attorney Office Worker James Thompson

James Thompson had been enjoying working in janitorial services but the commute was challenging. He began to dream about other possibilities. In 2019, James met with Francis Dollinger at VR who referred him to Job Developer Jan Ward at Hope Haven. During an interview, Jan learned that he wanted to work in an office environment.

As luck would have it, there was a possible job opening at the State Attorney's Office in Jacksonville. Jan contacted Recruitment and Community Development Director Lisa Page who immediately set up an appointment to meet James. He started as an OJT trainee. On his second day, he was welcomed by State Attorney Melissa Nelson who spent time to get to know him. For the first eight weeks, he filed legal documents alphabetically, by year with a color-coded system. He was a little worried about doing the job quickly. His supervisor Donna Cornellier's motto is, "Accuracy before speed," which put James at ease so he could focus on paying attention to the details. After his OJT ended, James was officially hired. James now has his own desk, computer and phone. He has never been late or missed a day of work. James achieved his goal of working in an office, making this a true success story.



Hydraulic Designer Heriberto Serrano

At an early age, Heriberto Serrano was diagnosed with a learning disability. He recalls meeting with speech pathologists and how he felt different from his friends because he was placed in special education classes. As a senior in high school, he and his family learned about VR and applied for the program. He pursued a post-secondary education and discovered strengths in math and science. In 2012, he graduated from Miami-Dade College with an Associates of Arts degree in mechanical engineering. Serrano received tutoring services, classroom and testing accommodations through the Disability Services Department as well as continued support from VR. He graduated from Florida International University with a degree in civil engineering and attributes his success to VR for the guidance and motivation to stay disciplined.

At the age of 27, Serrano is the youngest hydraulic designer at the engineering firm HDR Inc. He also leads the firm's Young Professional Engineers Group, which brings young engineers together to provide community service and networking opportunities. He is looking forward to begin working on his own projects and obtaining his professional engineer license.



VR Technician Elinor Peloza

In 1994, Elinor Peloza was driving home and the unexpected happened. She was rear-ended, fish-tailed, then her driver's side door was struck by a passing truck. She was pushed into a guard rail. Taken to the hospital in a hypothermic state, she did not realize the severity of her injuries. Elinor later learned that she sustained a traumatic brain injury.

Starting over was tough, but Elinor was determined to re-learn the basic skills that were lost due to this traumatic event. Before her accident, Elinor was a third-year student majoring in psychology, a student ambassador, on the Dean's Advisory Committee, and a university legal-services volunteer. Elinor heard about VR through friends and previous customers.

Working with VR Counselor Gunjan Bhatnager, Elinor obtained an OJT as an administrative assistant at VR Headquarters. She developed clerical and organizational skills and improved customer service and communication skills. When asked how her VR counselor has made a difference in her life Elinor said, "My VR counselor helped me see my potential. She was very understanding and patient. She acknowledged my goals and interests."

As a previous customer and current employee of VR, Elinor praises her experience working with VR. "It is amazing how many opportunities there are for people with disabilities. It is awesome to work with people who have caring hearts and a passion for helping people with disabilities succeed," says Elinor.

In April, Elinor was promoted to a VR Technician. Her passion to help others with disabilities find, get and keep a job makes her an ideal VR employee. She advises others with disabilities to "believe in yourself. You never know if you can do something until you try." She also recommends having realistic expectations about what you are able to achieve. But ultimately, she says "Have a positive attitude, have faith and always smile."

VR Ombudsman

Florida VR is unique in that it offers a service to its customers to resolve concerns or complaints prior to accessing the appeal process. The VR Ombudsman Office receives, investigates and assists individuals in resolving customer-service issues. It is an impartial service available to any VR customer with questions or concerns, or who feel they may have been treated unfairly.

During the 2019-2020 SFY, the Ombudsman Office responded to 3,643 complaints or requests for information. Of the total, 1,231 (33.8 percent) were complaint requests. Complaints involved issues such as quality of counseling and delivery of services, as well as plan development and service cost concerns.

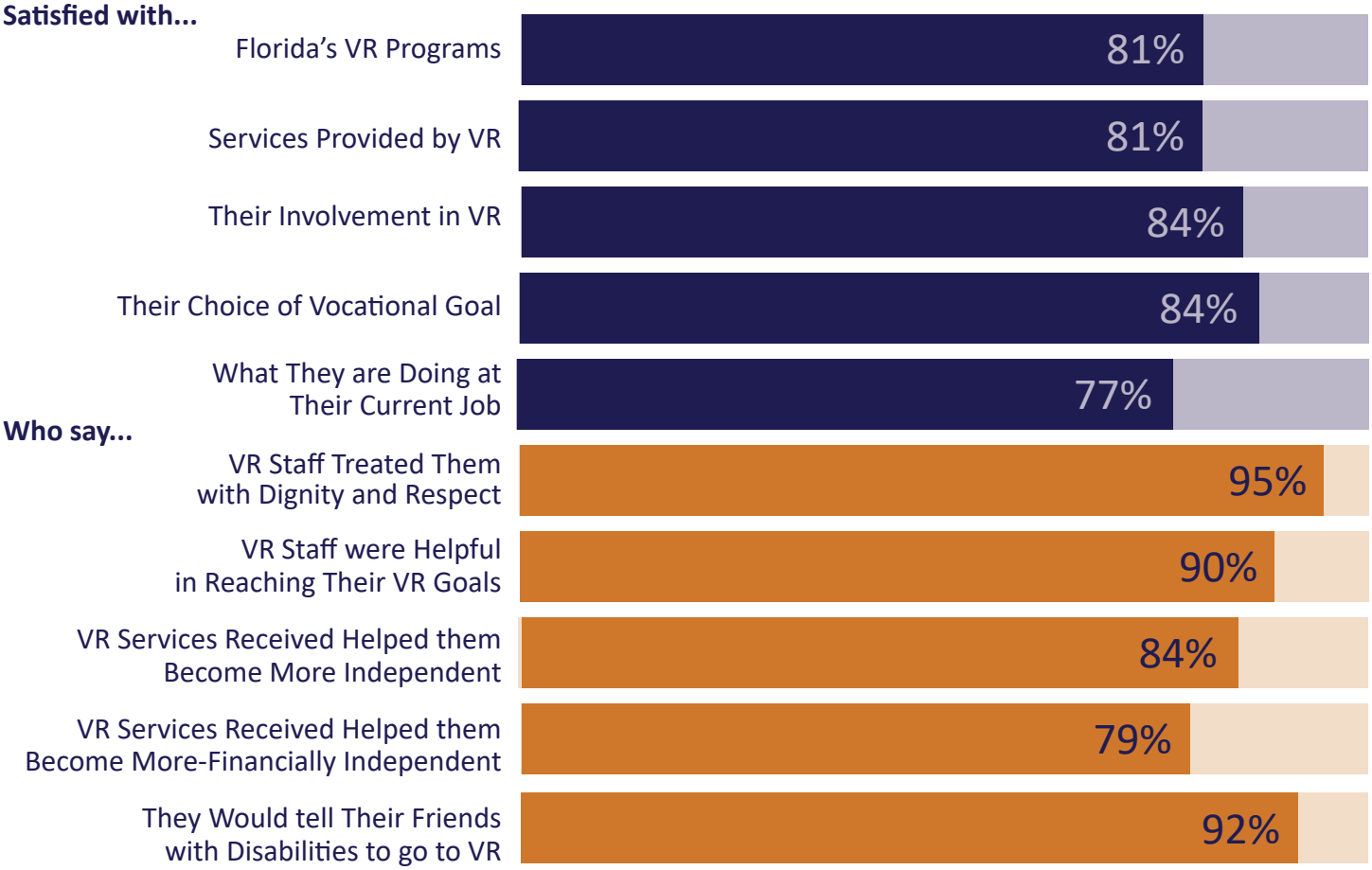
You may contact the VR Ombudsman Office at Ombudsman@vr.fldoe.org or 866-515-3692.

Customer Satisfaction Survey Results

The FRC is required to review and analyze the effectiveness of and consumer satisfaction with VR agency functions, rehabilitation services and employment outcomes achieved by eligible individuals. This includes the availability of health and other employment benefits. The FRC and VR contract with Market Decisions to obtain this information. The wealth of data is being used effectively by the FRC and VR to focus on specific areas of excellence for recognition, as well as specific opportunities for improvement.

Vocational Rehabilitation Customers

2019-2020 SFY



With today's signing of the landmark Americans for Disabilities Act, every man, woman, and child with a disability can now pass through once-closed doors into a bright new era of equality, independence, and freedom.

PRESIDENT GEORGE H. W. BUSH

FLORIDA REHABILITATION COUNCIL
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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 2020 Federal fiscal year, the total amount of grant funds awarded were $153,000,001. The remaining 21.3 percent of the costs ($41,409,148) were funded by Florida State Appropriations. Revised October 2020.