

Empower. Employ. Enlighten.

“Working Together to Remove Barriers to Employment”

Annual Report 2016-2017

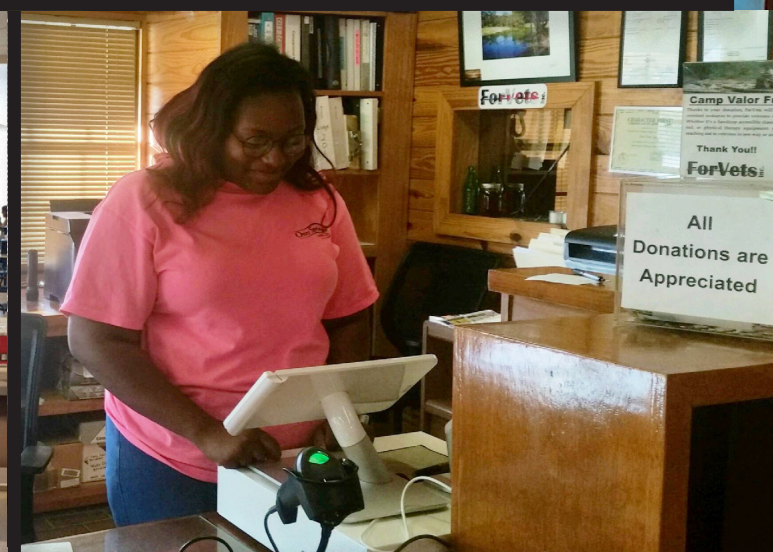


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Statutory authority and governing guidelines may be found in 34 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), Chapter III, Part 361 and Chapter 413, Part II, Florida Statutes (FS).

Cover photos (left to right): Aron Drenzek, Emil Rodriguez, Ella Zsembik, Trey Hall, Chloe Montanari, and Nikita Timmons

To request this report in alternative formats, contact FRCCustomers@vr.fldoe.org.

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.

Vision

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

About Us

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 in planning and developing statewide rehabilitation programs and services, and recommending improvements to programs and services.

Council Members are appointed by the Governor and must represent a majority of individuals with disabilities. Appointments are for three years and a member may serve two consecutive terms. Florida State law sets a maximum number of members at 25.

The organizational structure is made up of three committees:

Executive Committee conducts FRC business in collaboration with the full FRC, reviews By-laws every five years or as

needed, and promotes and maintains VR/FRC relations.

Evaluation/Planning Committee reviews and advises on State Plan and VR policy changes, manages customer satisfaction survey, develops feedback on the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment, and maintains FRC Accountability Checklist/Strategic Plan.

Legislative/Public Awareness Committee coordinates legislative education and advocacy efforts, oversees and provides input on the Annual Report, and promotes public outreach efforts including those with federally mandated partners.

Two staff members provide support for the FRC, Roy Cosgrove, Program Administrator, and Kim Thomas, Program Consultant.

Message from the Chairman



*Michael
Wiseman*

I appreciate the opportunity to be selected by my peers to serve as the Chair of the Florida Rehabilitation Council (FRC) for 2017-18. This year's focus will be on collaboration and service. FRC members are committed to serving individuals with disabilities to become successfully employed by creating a model advisory council that all Floridians will look to as an example of cooperation, collaboration and effective practices. We stand ready to build on these traditions to serve you and we will strive to create and model the best practices and ideals of our Council

to accomplish our mission and vision. Florida's workforce needs you and we need you! We will continue to engage all stakeholders to work with us nationally and on the state levels to achieve our shared goals. Through becoming involved and sharing your ideas, thoughts and recommendations, together, we can help make Vocational Rehabilitation the recognized leader to help people with disabilities find and maintain employment and enhance their independence. We are proud to share our Annual Report as an overview of the activities undertaken by the FRC and VR during the past year. On behalf of the members of the FRC, we proudly present you with this 2016-17 Annual Report.

Respectfully, *Michael Wiseman*



Jonier (JB) Burgos, who has a learning disability, is an important member of the Publix team, and he loves his job.

Florida Rehabilitation Council Members



Michael Wiseman

Chair
Hialeah

Represents disability groups that include representatives of individuals with disabilities who have difficulty representing themselves or unable to represent themselves



Patrick Cannon

Past Chair
Tallahassee

Represents current or former applicants for, or recipients of, VR services



Don Chester

West Palm Beach
Represents Business
Industry and Labor



John-Henry Douglas

Lake City

Represents groups and persons with physical, cognitive, sensory, and mental disabilities



Allison Flanagan

VR Director
Tallahassee
Represents VR



Donte Mickens

1st Vice Chair
Delray Beach

Represents disability groups that include representatives of individuals with disabilities who have difficulty representing themselves or unable to represent themselves



Beth Moore

2nd Vice Chair
Tallahassee

Represents Individuals with Disabilities Education Act



Ann Robinson

Evaluation/Planning Chair
Tallahassee

Represents Client Assistance Program–Disability Rights FL



Janet Severt & Wyland

Orange City
Represents Business,
Industry and Labor



Rebecca Witonsky

Boca Raton
Represents groups and persons with physical, cognitive, sensory, and mental disabilities

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

- Carol Christopherson
- Christine Goulbourne
- John Pribanic
- Vincent Cosentino
- Lori Kijanka
- Kara Tucker
- Sara Gaver
- Aleisa McKinlay

Division of Vocational Rehabilitation

Mission

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

Vision

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

Message from the Director



Allison Flanagan

It is with excitement that I share with you the Florida Division of Vocational Rehabilitation's (VR) 2017 Annual Report in collaboration with the Florida Rehabilitation Council. As you review this report, you will see how we Empower. Employ. Enlighten, as we are "Working Together to Remove Barriers to Employment."

In State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2016-17, 5,975 Floridians with disabilities successfully obtained or maintained employment in a competitive, integrative setting. This success is a direct reflection of the partnerships between VR and our community partners, businesses, and, most importantly, the individual with a disability.

SFY 2016-17 brings a year of innovation and growth as the agency continues to implement the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). The WIOA emphasizes services to students with disabilities through Pre-Employment Transition Services, services to businesses to increase their workforce diversity and expanding the talent pool through career pathways. The expanded horizons WIOA has created through workforce and education partners has also created greater employment possibilities for individuals with disabilities.

The Annual Report highlights some of our specific initiatives and accomplishments we have celebrated throughout the year. Additional highlights include:

- Elimination of the waiting list for individuals with the most significant disability (category 1) and significant disability (category 2) within the Order of Selection; reducing the wait time for other disabilities (category 3) to less than 60 days through ongoing, regular releases
- Collaboration with local schools to implement the federal WIOA requirement for Pre-Employment Transition Services to potentially eligible students with disabilities
- Strengthening the relationship with CareerSource Florida and VR's Business Relations program to meet the needs of Florida's employers and provide qualified individuals with disabilities to the Florida talent pipeline
- Enhancements to our management information system to meet the data requirements created by WIOA as well as the integrity of our data through quality assurance measures
- Continued assessment of our performance outcomes and quality improvement through management and organizational restructuring
- Continued collaboration with Florida's Agency for Persons with Disabilities in preparation for WIOA-driven changes to participation in sub-minimum wage settings
- Greater emphasis on staff development and training to improve service delivery and succession planning

The 5,975 Floridians with disabilities who are now gainfully employed through the efforts of VR and community partners are contributing to their local communities and the state through taxes and purchasing goods and services. The success of VR benefits more than just the individual with a disability and their family. Their success is the success of the state of Florida.

Sincerely, *Allison Flanagan*

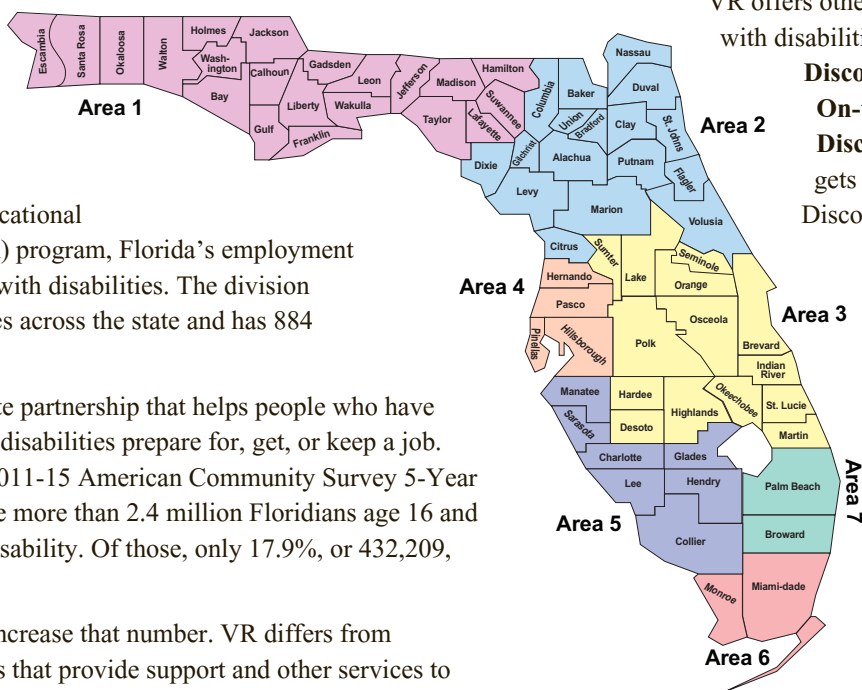
Program Overview

The Florida Department of Education's Division of Vocational Rehabilitation administers the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program, Florida's employment service for people with disabilities. The division maintains 96 offices across the state and has 884 employees.

VR is a federal/state partnership that helps people who have physical or mental disabilities prepare for, get, or keep a job. According to the 2011-15 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, there are more than 2.4 million Floridians age 16 and over who have a disability. Of those, only 17.9%, or 432,209, are employed.

Our mission is to increase that number. VR differs from other state agencies that provide support and other services to individuals living with a disability in that we do not maintain long-term caseloads or ongoing responsibility for the health and welfare of vulnerable individuals. Once an individual has been successfully employed and is stable in that position for a designated period of time (a minimum of 90 or 150 days), the VR case is closed.

Another focus of VR is transitioning students with disabilities from school to postsecondary training, education, and employment. The **Transition Youth program** helps students with disabilities identify a career path, train for a job, continue their education, and find a job after high school. Students who apply for services while in high school are served by 417 public and private counseling staff. Last year, VR helped 1,050 youths become successfully employed.



VR offers other programs to help people with disabilities find employment including **Discovery**, **Project SEARCH**, and **On-the-Job Training**. With the **Discovery program** a VR customer gets one on one attention from their Discovery Provider, figuring out what their interests are and what barriers are keeping them from getting a job. With **Project SEARCH**, students have the chance to participate in targeted internships hosted at job sites across the state of Florida. **On-the-Job Training** gives the employer and trainee a chance to try out the job, at no cost to the business owner, and see if it is a good fit.

These three additional programs receive funding through VR.

The **Independent Living Program** provides services through a statewide network of private non-profit, non-residential, locally-based, and customer-controlled Centers for Independent Living. Their mission is to maximize the leadership, empowerment, independence, and productivity of individuals with disabilities. Services are intended to lead to the integration and full inclusion of individuals with disabilities in their communities of choice.

The **Florida Alliance for Assistive Services and Technology (FAAST)** provides assistive technology products and services.

The Able Trust partners with VR on '**High School-High Tech**' programs for high school students with disabilities.

Florida Abilities Work Help Desk

Employers now have two additional tools to help them in their search for potential employees – the Abilities Work Web Portal and the Help Desk. The Abilities Work Help Desk can help employers find a job candidate who has the skills needed to do the job and answer any questions about hiring individuals with disabilities. Last year, the Help Desk was contacted approximately 250 times on behalf of more than 100 different businesses. It has also seen success with 42 contacts from employers for positions available and nine placements.

Since the Abilities Work Help Desk began operations in 2014, it has been contacted more than 550 times on behalf of approximately 200 different businesses. It has also seen success with about 120 contacts from employers for positions available and 21 placements.

Employers can call the Help Desk at 844-245-3405 or visit the Department of Economic Opportunities' Employ Marketplace website at abilitieswork.employflorida.com to look for your next hire.



WIOA Overview with FRC Recommendations to the 2017-2020 Unified State Plan

WIOA Overview

In 2014, the federal government passed the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). WIOA is designed to give job seekers easier access to employment, education, training and support services needed to succeed in the labor market and to match employers with the skilled workers they need to compete in the global economy. You can find Florida's Unified State Plan at careersourceflorida.com/wioa/.

FRC Recommendations

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

The FRC applauds VR's effort to reduce the wait list under Order of Selection for individuals with the most significant (Category 1) and significant disabilities (Category 2). Although there is a current small wait list for individuals with disabilities (Category 3), we note that some of these individuals will be served through job retention if they are working and need services to maintain their employment. Although the FRC will continue to monitor the flow of individuals into the VR program as well as those exiting with successful employment and career outcomes, we congratulate VR for reducing wait times of customers as well as initiating employment related information and referral resources for those on the wait list.

We appreciate VR's enthusiasm to commit resources to web based communication platforms so that the VR Director's report and other FRC presentations can be offered to the public throughout the state rather than just to those who can only attend the FRC quarterly meetings in person. Advances in meeting technology are opening up a rich resource for the sharing of information and communication. VR has embraced this opportunity

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

Recommendation 1: Transition

- Promote early contact and the provision of Information and Referral (I&R) guidance for transition students.
- Expand and offer additional opportunities for pre-vocational and/or technical training for students.
- Increase communication and collaboration by VR representatives with school districts and increase participation in the education of options available to students.

- Continue to emphasize peer mentoring in Florida.
- Increase the capacity of transition service providers while encouraging self-employment and entrepreneurial options.

Recommendation 2: Job Placement Strategies

- 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.
- Develop a deeper understanding of customer strengths and develop tools to communicate succinctly to potential employers.
- FRC fully supports the VR initiative to obtain Worker's Compensation coverage to mirror current coverage of CareerSource Florida customers. This will remove a substantial barrier to employment and allow for increased On-the-Job (OJT) opportunities for VR and Division of Blind Services (DBS) customers.
- FRC applauds VR efforts to increase capacity of the number of providers using the Discovery Model. Self-employment Certified Business Technical Assistance Consultant (CBTAC) initiatives should continue to be emphasized.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of the Abilities Work Help Desk.
- Further build capacity for job customization and Innovation and Expansion projects to include unserved and underserved populations.

Recommendation 3: Mediation and Conflict Resolution

- Promote Rights education for customers and VR staff as a core principle. Collaborative discussions enhance informed choices.

Recommendation 4: Public Awareness of VR

- Develop a media campaign to share the history of VR, Florida specific services, successes and accomplishments.
- Provide an accessible online application system.
- Engage businesses as mandated partners.

Recommendation 5: Counselor Recruitment and Retention

- Actively promote advocacy curriculum that's been developed.
- Identify new ways to recruit employees while implementing long-term retention strategies.
- Continue to promote supervisor succession training.
- Identify new ways to recruit employees while implementing long-term retention strategies.

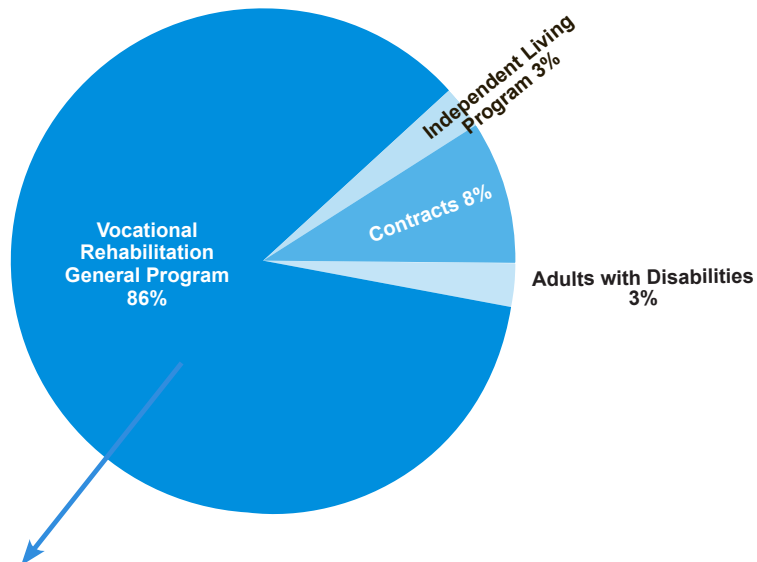
Performance Highlights

VR is a federal/state partnership – 78.7% of funds for VR program expenditures come from federal sources and a required match of 21.3% come from state general revenue.

For every \$1 invested in rehabilitating the customer, an estimated \$8.62 was returned to the Florida economy in state fiscal year 2016-17.

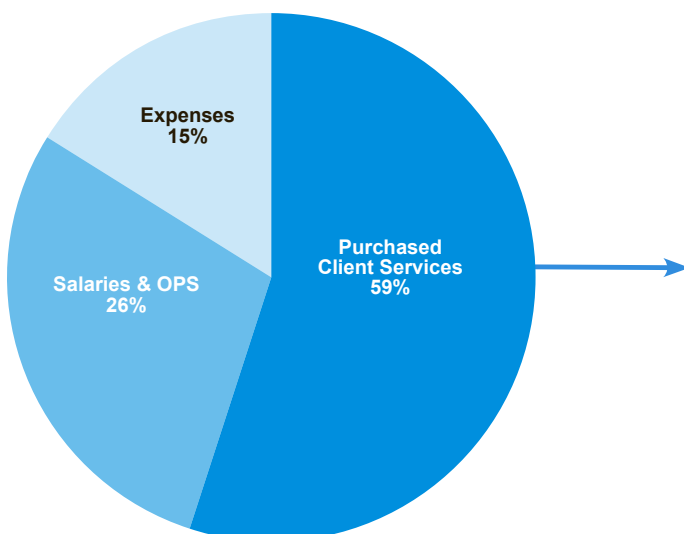
2016-17 Division Programs

Total Division Expenditures \$192,512,076



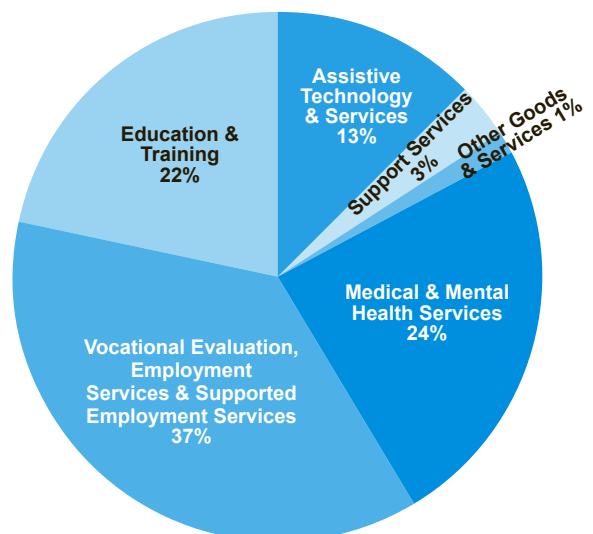
2016-17 VR General Program Expenditures

Total VR Expenditures \$179,463,149*



VR Purchased Client Services (PCS) Expenditures by Category

Total PCS Expenditures \$105,651,929



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

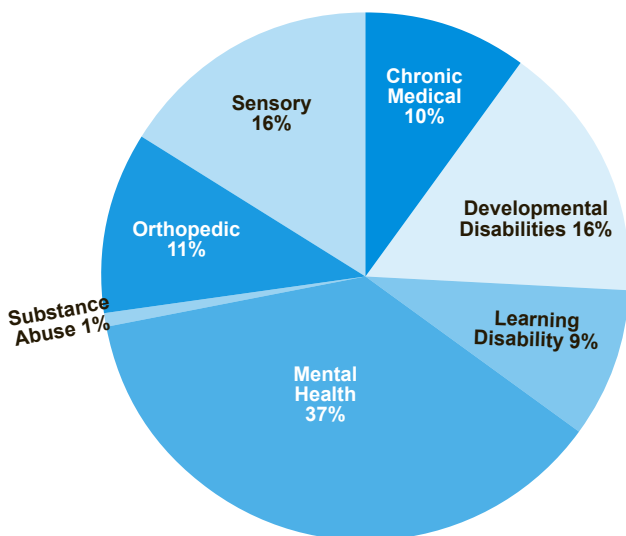
VR Facts at a Glance

SFY 2016-17

Persons with disabilities who got or kept jobs.....	5,975
Average hours worked per week.....	28
Average hourly earnings	\$11.91
Projected average annual earnings.....	\$17,888
Total projected earnings in the first year	\$106,880,800
Median monthly caseload per counselor.....	97
Number of Individual Plans for Employment created	16,712
Number of Transition Student Cases	15,626
Number of Customers with the Most Significant Disabilities	27,994

VR Customers Gainfully Employed* by Primary Disability Category

* Gainful employment occurs when a customer has job stability for at least 90 days and employment that is competitive, integrated into the community, and for which they receive at least minimum wage.



The Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) defines primary disability as the individual's primary physical or mental impairment that causes or results in a substantial impediment to employment.

Order of Selection Waiting List Status Summary

as of September 30, 2017

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.

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.

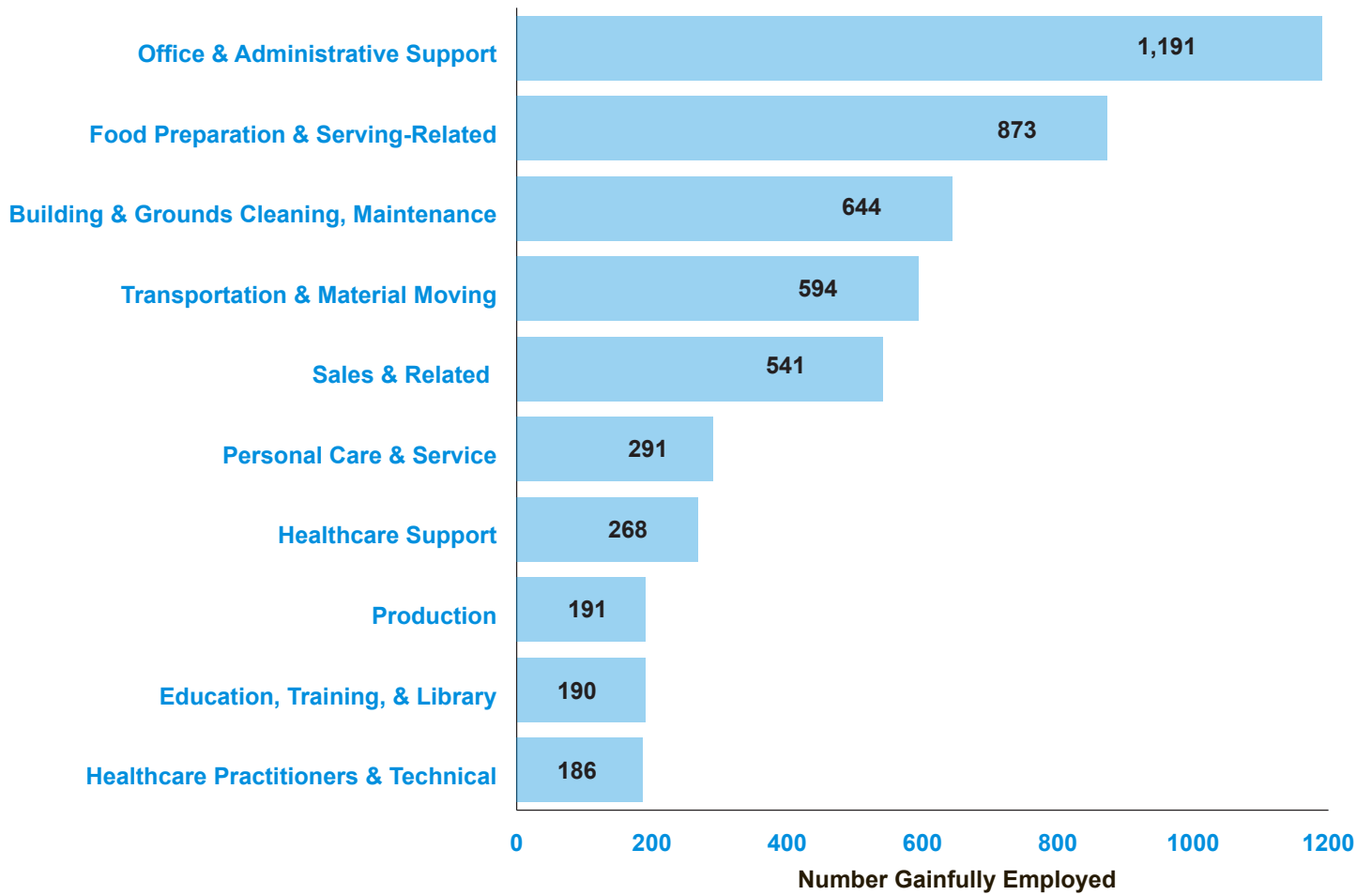
Category 3 – Other Disabilities (37)

Does not seriously limit functional capacity in terms of work; lasts less than six months.

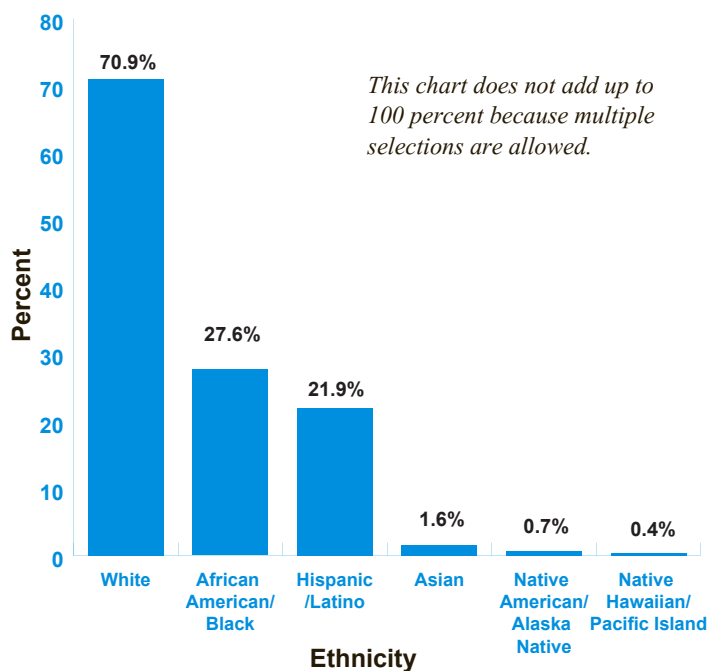
VR now offering Job Retention Services

VR provides job retention services to eligible individuals who require specific services or equipment to keep their job, regardless of order of selection. This new option was created by the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). VR discussed this service option with the FRC and public input was received.

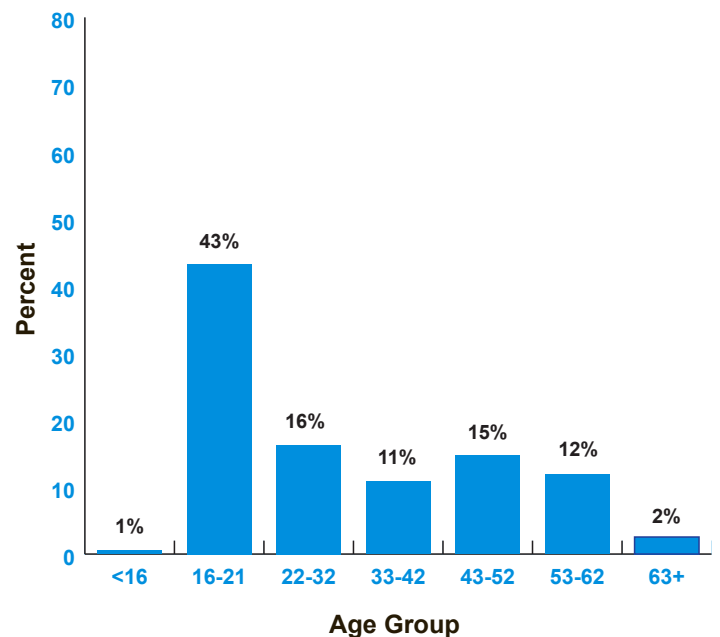
Top 10 Occupations of VR Customers for 2016-17



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



Learning Disabilities Don't Stop Woman from Playing a Leading Role at Telemundo

Miami – Watching television can be a great stress reliever after a long day. But how do the programs get from production to the audience? That's where people like Ingrid Cupeiro play a leading role. As a member of the programming department at Telemundo Network, Ingrid schedules and coordinates programs and she loves every minute of it. She also works on strategy and brainstorming how to compete with other networks.

"My favorite part of the job is the competitive side," Ingrid says. "I like to see how they function against each other and see how they compete against each other."

While Ingrid may have found a job she enjoys, at one point she wasn't sure if she would graduate high school – let alone college. This is because Ingrid was diagnosed with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and math learning disabilities at a young age, which caused her to struggle in school. According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, approximately 11 percent of children ages 4-17 have received an ADHD diagnosis.

Her school counselor recommended Vocational Rehabilitation (VR), a federal-state agency that helps people with disabilities get or keep a job, to help her transition from high school to the workforce. Ingrid began meeting with VR counselor Fabiana Puliti to plan her future.

After Ingrid graduated high school she set her sights on earning a college degree, and VR provided financial assistance to make her dream a reality. "Ingrid was a hard worker," Fabiana says. "She was a very independent young lady who would contact me when she needed help paying for something."



Ingrid excelled in college, earning her Associate in Arts degree from Miami-Dade College and a Bachelor's in Communication Arts from Florida International University. "VR helped me tremendously," Ingrid says. "Without them I wouldn't have been able to graduate. It was a bumpy road because I lost my mom at a young age. My VR counselor helped me get through that."

When Ingrid isn't working she enjoys spending time with her family. And although math was never her favorite

subject in school, she does enjoy reading. "Whenever I have the opportunity I will have a book in my hand," she says.

Ingrid has found the perfect job at Telemundo. She is glad her employer didn't judge her based on her disability during the hiring process. "Everyone has a difficulty in something," she says. "I think employers should just see past that and give someone a chance. They will be surprised."

Local Business Sees Productivity Increase After Hiring Young Man with Autism

St. Petersburg – Flavored syrup manufacturer, Monin, took six months to develop a specific job just for Andrew White, who has autism. No one at the company foresaw just how beneficial their decision would be – not just because they hired someone with a disability, but also because it resulted in increasing the company's productivity, making Andrew a favorite among his coworkers.

It took a group effort for Andrew to find his dream job but he is thrilled that things have finally worked out. Andrew hadn't had much luck in his past job searches; each time he landed a new job, he wouldn't last very long because it just wasn't the right fit. That's when he came to VR for help finding that elusive job.

He met VR Counselor Zoe Sieber, who connected him with Job Coach Mona Andrews with PlacementWorks. Mona and Zoe had toured the Monin manufacturing plant and knew it would be the perfect place for Andrew to work.

They met with Mike Brewster of Monin and talked about Andrew's skills and abilities. Mona and Zoe explained that Andrew had a talent for assembly. They also discussed Andrew's limitations, but the Monin team wasn't concerned. "They smiled and understood who Andrew is," Mona recalls. "They accepted his autism."

Monin worked carefully to develop a specialized position that would make the most of Andrew's talent for assembly – production worker



helper. He would be responsible for building the pumps for the syrup bottles and placing them in plastic bags.

"We thought this out very carefully as we wanted Andrew to feel comfortable and set him up for true success with us," says Mike. "We want him to feel he has a home here and is truly a part of our Monin family."

Getting back to how this job created to hire someone with a disability has also helped the company, it turns out there was often a sudden need

for pumps to accommodate last minute orders. When this happened, supervisors would ask employees on the production line to stop doing their regular jobs and build pumps. "Now that they have Andrew, they don't have to pull people off the line to fill last minute orders," Mona explains. "The staff loves him."

Since taking the position, Andrew's confidence has soared; he is now more comfortable socializing and beginning conversations. He has become one of the team, and their next goal is to help Andrew get a promotion.

Rhonda Beckman Honored with Stephen R. Wise Advocacy Award



The FRC created the Stephen R. Wise Advocacy Award to recognize a dedicated Florida leader and champion who promotes independence for individuals with disabilities through work and community activities. The FRC selected Ms. Rhonda Beckman, Executive Director of The Arc, Ridge Area, as the 2017 Stephen R. Wise Advocacy Award winner. A longtime advocate for persons with disabilities, Rhonda is also a visionary who inspires and motivates consumers and members of her community. Her agency offers Adult Day Training, Group Homes, Community Services, and Supported Employment opportunities to individuals with disabilities, serving 200 individuals at any given time.

Her organization has opened a nursery as well as community resale stores, all of which serve as a beneficial resource to community members while at the same time providing options for added consumer activities and revenue-generating sources. As a result of her leadership her organization won The Agency for Persons with Disabilities (APD) "Community Life Award." Rhonda also serves on the Executive Committee, Youth Council, the board of directors for CareerSource Heartland, the local workforce development board, the board

of directors for the Arc of Florida, and has been nominated to Chair the Florida Council of Executives for The Arcs of Florida. Additional information about Rhonda and The Arc, Ridge Area is available at www.ridgeareaarc.org.

Public Forums

The FRC has spearheaded a number of technological improvements to the forums, which are held quarterly in conjunction with the FRC meetings around the state and whenever substantive policy changes may require public input. There were 4 public forums held during State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2016-17. General areas of comment have included:

- Transportation concerns
- Customer orientation information
- Customer expectations
- Transition
- Agency hiring persons with disabilities
- Outreach to individuals who speak Spanish or Creole
- Communication with VR staff
- Veterans applying for VR services
- Small business development
- Certified Business Technical Assistance Consultants (CBTAC's)
- Vender referrals

We continue to support public access via telephone and have offered web based communication platforms for meeting access. In addition to these, we continue to encourage in-person attendance in varying locations throughout the state.

Upcoming FRC/VR Public Forums

January 17, 2018 – Jacksonville, FL

May 15, 2018 – TBD in VR Area 5

August 7, 2018 – TBD in VR Area 3

October 23, 2018 – TBD in VR Area 1

Forum Call-in number is:

1-888-670-3525; Passcode: 7513637441#

Please check for updated information at:
rehabworks.org/rehabcouncil.shtml.

How to Become an FRC Member

FRC members are appointed by the Governor. As FRC members and VR advocates we 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), and these category assignments are made by the Governor's office in light of applicant experience and expressed representational preferences.

The process for appointment to the FRC is to complete the Governor's appointment application, and identifying your wish to serve on the FRC. You can find an application at www.flgov.com/appointments or by calling (850) 488-7146.

For more information about becoming an FRC member or the expectations of membership, please contact FRC Program Administrator Roy Cosgrove at (850) 245-3317.

Explorations Program Gives High School Students with Disabilities a Glimpse of Possible Careers

Old Town – A new program is helping high school students with disabilities check out different career paths before graduation. The Explorations program, a spinoff of the Hands On Education program, sets up internships for high school students so they can try out different career fields to see what kind of job would best suit them.

Four students are currently enrolled in the program, which recruits through VR. The students participate in multiple internships while in high school and get paid minimum wage.

The facilitator of the program, Amy Brugger, teaches the students how to create a resume, apply for jobs, dress for an interview, and interview for a job. The students share the different career areas they are interested in trying and Amy finds a local business who is willing to offer the internship, at no cost to the business.

Trey Hall is a senior in high school this year and has autism, but he has always wanted to be a paleontologist. That was a tough career goal for Amy, but fortunately the Florida Museum of Natural History was looking for volunteers to help at a paleontology dig in Levy county. She called up the museum and talked to the lead professor, who said Trey could come on as a paid intern at the dig. He was thrilled!



“I am loving it! It is so much fun, and I’m learning so many new things,” says Trey. When asked what is the best thing about the new Explorations program, he says “Getting to explore something in real life that I’ve only thought about doing for so long.”

At another program site, Nikita Timmons, who has a learning disability, wanted to work in an office, so she has spent the last nine weekends helping in the Otter Springs front office. She rings up people’s purchases on the cash register, works on the computer using Microsoft Office, helps with special events, and she even taught the adults how to send a photo from their phone directly to the printer for printing.

Two other students are also interning at Otter Springs, where Bill Smith taught them basic carpentry, measuring, welding, the correct way to paint, and how to re-screen a door and windows. They’ve gotten to experience the full extent of the job, including that it’s an outdoor job, and that means having to deal with the weather.

When the students complete the Explorations program, after 20 hours of pre-employment training and 80 hours of paid employment, they stay in the VR program so their VR counselor, Kasandra Knopp, can make sure they receive the services they need to reach their career goals. That could mean college, training, technical school, or other services. With this great head start, they should have a definite idea of the type of career they want to pursue.

Students with Disabilities Get a Taste of College Life with Project SAINT

Gainesville – Kelsey Burley, who has cerebral palsy, wants to be an elementary school or day care teacher. She’s taking classes at Santa Fe Community College and interning at the college preschool and B’nai Israel Day Care as she works toward a certificate in childcare.

Kelsey is part of a new program at Santa Fe Community College that gives students with intellectual disabilities the chance to experience college life first hand. Called Project SAINT (Student Access and Inclusion Together), the program works to increase the students’ independence so they can work and live on their own. Santa Fe College is collaborating with VR to offer the program.

Each student builds a career plan around their personal goals with the main goal of earning an industry-level certification when they graduate. The students take classes in adult education and audit other appropriate college courses.

The students have mentors – Santa Fe students hired to help them achieve these goals. “I have four or five mentors,” Kelsey explains. “I’ve got a mentor who is doing childcare like me, early childcare for kids with disabilities or special needs. She wants to teach kids too.”



Emily Nino mentors Ella, who has an intellectual disability and is interning with the women’s basketball team. She goes with Ella to team practice twice a week to help guide her as needed. “Sometimes Ella joins in with practice – helping with free throws – and other times, she works in the office creating excel spreadsheets to organize their meal tickets,” Emily says.

Linda Mussillo, Project SAINT Administrator, has seen a fascinating change in both sets of students. “The students become their buddies, and it’s so fun to see. They’re texting each other, hanging out, it’s fantastic. It’s a win-win for the Santa Fe students who want to go into these types of professions – nursing, social work, etc. – as well as the students participating in the program, who benefit by interacting with other students.”

The students also attend workshops once a week. Kelsey explains, “We have health and nutrition class, where we learn how to cook on our own. We are learning how to count money. We do chores. We read books from the library and do math too, with our mentors.”

For Emily, becoming a mentor with Project SAINT has made a real difference in her life. “I’ve always wanted to do something that involved working with someone with disabilities,” she says. “They’re people just like us, not really any different.”

Project SAINT is picking up steam with five students currently in the two-year program and five already graduated and finding jobs.

Career Counseling Information and Referral Service Program

Section 511 of WIOA requires that individuals engaged in or seeking to engage in subminimum wage employment receive Career Counseling Information and Referral (CCIR) services. VR is identified in the law as the agency responsible for administering the delivery of CCIR services and assuring such services are available to employers approved to offer subminimum wage employment.

A key component of CCIR services is to inspire individuals to think about, pursue, and obtain competitive integrated employment. CCIR uses a variety of strategies to assist individuals in recognizing their own skills and strengths, including their potential contributions to employers. During CCIR services, individuals should also come to understand that there are competitive integrated employment opportunities available throughout their community. In the last six months of State Fiscal Year 2016-2017, CCIR services were delivered to an impressive 4,780 individuals. CCIR services are ongoing and available throughout Florida. Individuals employed in subminimum wage must receive CCIR services two times during their first year and at least annually thereafter.



Customer Satisfaction at a Glance

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 including 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.

State Fiscal Year 2016-17

VR customers satisfied with Florida's VR program	82%
VR customers satisfied with the services provided by VR	80%
VR customers satisfied with their involvement in their VR experience	83%
VR customers who say VR staff treated them with dignity and respect.....	95%
VR customers satisfied with their choice of vocational goal	82%
VR customers who say VR staff were helpful in achieving their job goal	88%
VR customers who say VR services received helped them become more independent ..	84%
VR customers who say VR services they received helped them become more financially independent	80%
VR customers satisfied with what they're doing at their current job.....	76%
VR customers who would tell their friends with disabilities to go to VR	90%

Stand-Up Wheelchair Lets Chef with Disabilities Continue His Career

Winter Haven - Watching Othodus (Theo) Harvin at work in the kitchen at Sonny's BBQ is like watching a graceful ballet. He moves from the grill to the refrigerator to the slicer and back again in one seamless motion. He pulls a lever to stand up so he can use the slicing machine or reach into the refrigerator, and he lowers the lever to sit down at the grill and get supplies. His movements are smooth and fluid as he maneuvers his wheelchair around the kitchen.

You see, Theo is paralyzed from the waist down. Surgery to remove a tumor on his spine left him with a spinal injury, but that doesn't stop him now. He uses a stand-up wheelchair to get around. "I'm all over that kitchen. Man it's easy," he says. "I stand up to slice the meat and stuff. I can stand up the whole shift, if I need to. I'm used to standing in the chair now."

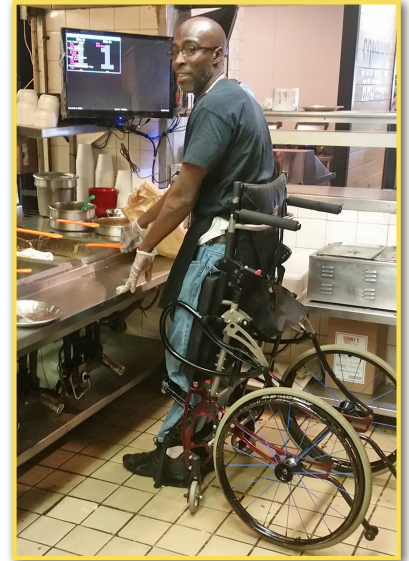
Before the tumor and surgery Theo had worked for Sonny's for 13 years. But becoming paralyzed took a toll, and he stopped working. Then in 2008 he came to VR and met Counselor Katie Kummer. Katie and Theo talked about what kind of job he wanted to do, but Theo had always been a chef and wanted to continue as a chef, so they decided that would be the way to go.

Theo attended the Hands On Education program, a two-week culinary program at the Grand Hyatt Regency in Tampa, Fla. He graduated with flying colors and began applying for jobs.

He worked at Outback Steakhouse for a year, but it didn't work out, so he decided to call up his old boss at Sonny's. "I went to talk to him and started the next day," says Theo. "I just had to prove to him that

I could still do my work in the wheelchair." He's been back in the kitchen at Sonny's ever since.

Katie is thrilled that Theo is once again doing what he loves to do. "He is so happy in the kitchen! He recently came back to VR for a new stand-up wheelchair because the old one wasn't working anymore. VR also modified his vehicle so that he could drive to and from work independently. I'm glad we could get it for him so he could continue working and providing for his family."



Theo is grateful for VR and Katie. "I appreciate VR. They really helped me out a lot. At one point, I thought I was just going to sit around and not do all the things I do now." The new wheelchair is working well for Theo and Sonny's. He can move around the kitchen much easier now, standing or sitting whenever he needs to. He's back where he belongs, and that's just fine with him.

Jeffrey Laverty, who is Deaf, is Enthusiastic about His New Career

Tallahassee – Jeffrey Laverty was born profoundly deaf. He didn't say his first words until he was almost three years old, when he got his first hearing aids. He learned American Sign Language but then he stopped speaking again. His parents kept looking for ways to help and when he was 11 years old he got his first cochlear implant. "I started hearing a lot of new sounds, and it changed my life!" Jeffrey says. He now has cochlear implants in both ears, and his life has changed again.

Fast forward a few years and Jeffrey is married with a family and starting a new career thanks to the assistance of VR. Jeffrey worked with Counselor Jennifer McCarroll to decide on his career path and which services he needed to reach his goal.

First, VR paid for his tuition and books so he could train in HVAC – heating, ventilation and air conditioning. "I went to Lively Technical School for the training, and I fell in love with the job doing duct work," Jeffrey says. VR also bought waterproof processors for his cochlear implants because of the nature of the job, working outside in the heat and humidity of north Florida.

Jeffrey now works for Benson's Heating & Air Conditioning Inc. as an air duct crew member specializing in cleaning duct work in established buildings and designing the duct layout for new construction. He's enthusiastic about his job. "My job is to do the duct work; the duct cleaning and duct change out. I have a lot of

experience doing the job, and I'm still learning a lot. I love my job. Everything's great!"

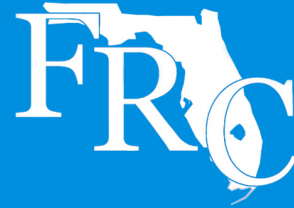
Sherry Culpepper Barner, Jeffrey's supervisor at Benson's, says that working with someone who has a disability has been a good experience for them. They had never hired someone who was deaf before, so it was a new situation for them. "I think we've overcome any challenges that have arisen," she says. "Jeffrey's a great worker. We enjoy having him here."



When asked about accommodations for Jeffrey, Sherry explains, "As far as accommodations go, we just talk and text. He had an interpreter for three months who went with him to all of the jobs and that helped. He also has an interpreter come when we have company meetings because it's difficult to hear with all of the people here. That way he doesn't miss anything that's being said."

This was the first time Benson's had worked with VR to hire someone with a disability.

"I would say it's a positive thing to do within the company if you have the capabilities to do it and depending on the disability," says Daniel Boyette, General Manager at Benson's Heating and Air Conditioning. "We're limited with who we can hire because of the amount of physical activity it takes to do our job. But Jeffrey's just a great guy; we don't see him as someone with a disability."



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