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Chief's Corner

Can you believe that it's already time for our second edition of The Benchmark? This past quarter has flown by! The Bureau of Vendor & Contracted Services (BVCS) has been busy with lots of exciting new projects, including holding our very first VR Open House and Provider Resource Fair. Area Wide Group Provider Training sessions will also soon be in full swing. HQ staff will be attending these sessions, along with their local counterparts. You'll find more information on both of these exciting initiatives later on in this issue.

We are also working on the first revision of the VR Employment Service Provider Manual, as well as exploring changes to our current rate structure. We continue to further our efforts to serve students with disabilities through a variety of Pre-Employment Transition Services.

It's an exciting time in the VR world and we couldn't do what we do without your partnership. As we continue to expand our communications and training efforts, we invite you to provide feedback. If you have ideas for a future newsletter, a training request, or any other suggestion you can send them via email at VRProviderFeedback@vr.fldoe.org or by contacting any member of the BVCS team (listed in the handy staff directory provided in this and every issue of The Benchmark). Thank you for all you do for our shared customers and us! Happy reading!



Governor Approves Workers' Compensation Bill for Persons with Disabilities

by: Lucy Mohs, VR Public Affairs Director

On March 21, 2018, Governor Rick Scott approved HB 1437 (Ch. 2018-72, L.O.F.) relating to "Employment Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities." The bill takes effect July 1, 2018, and requires that participants in an adult or youth work experience activity under either the Department of Education Divisions of Blind Services (DBS) or Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) be deemed employees of the state for the purpose of Workers' Compensation coverage. Simply put, VR and DBS will be responsible for paying claims for these individuals, should they occur, rather than the employer.

Currently, DBS and VR customers who are participants in an adult or youth work experience activity must rely upon the employer to pay for their workers' compensation (WC) coverage. This is often a deterrent to employment, since there is a perception that individuals with disabilities are more likely to have a work-related accident that will drive an increase in the employer's WC premium. Additionally, youth, with or without disabilities, are perceived to create risk for on-the-job injuries.

The availability of work experiences is currently diminished for VR and DBS, though One-Stops have little difficulty achieving them.



Their ability to handle liability concerns through similar provisions in section 445.009(11), Florida Statutes, accounts for their success in securing work experiences. Making this available to DBS and VR for similarly situated customers will greatly enhance our customers' ability to obtain gainful employment and live successful, independent lives.

"The passage of HB 1437 is important legislation for individuals with disabilities in Florida who want to expand their resume and skills through work experience and on-the-job training and ultimately obtain employment. While Workers' Compensation rates are not based on demographics of the employee, having this safety net should encourage more employers to provide very qualified candidates a chance to grow and increase their job skills. Representative Joe Abruzzo (D-Boca Raton) and Senator Dennis Baxley (R-Lady Lake), who sponsored the bills, are to be commended." said Vocational Rehabilitation Director, Allison Flanagan.

In the next few weeks, instructions will be sent to VR employment providers for their customers and employers to report on the job injury or illness, pursuant to the new law.

Area Wide Group Provider Training Opportunities and Schedule

by: Jose Rivera, Area 3 Provider Liaison, FLPR

The Bureau of Vendor and Contracted Services (BVCS) is excited to present training and growth opportunities to our provider partners. We are happy to announce our first Area Wide Group Provider Training for all Employment and Pre-ETS Providers.

We at BVCS want to assist all of you as much as we can. One of the ways we believe we can do this is by offering opportunities for training and personal growth. We know by experience that working with Florida Vocational Rehabilitation and the BVCS comes with a certain amount of expectations and rules surrounding our processes.

There will be presentations on our VR Works customer process, Pre-ETS Services, and information presented by the Business Relations team.

Attendance at one of the sessions below is mandatory. The topics presented will be the same at each location and session. In some areas there will be a morning and afternoon session offered. Due to available space, providers will only need to attend one session in their area.

This will be an opportunity to ask questions, build relationships, and provide feedback. We hope to see you there!

Date and Time	Location
Thursday May 17, 2018 8:00am - 12:00pm	Vocational Rehabilitation Area Office Conference Room 2050 Art Museum Drive, 2nd Floor Conference Room Jacksonville, FL 32210
Thursday May 24, 2018 8:00am - 12:00pm	Vocational Rehabilitation Office 210 North Palmetto Avenue, Training Rm 148 Daytona Beach, FL 32114
Friday June 1, 2018 9:00am - 1:00pm	Pensacola State College 1000 College Blvd, Building 2, Room 250 Pensacola, FL 32504
Wednesday June 6, 2018 9:00am - 1:00pm	Betty Easley Conference Center 4075 Esplanade Way, Room 171 Tallahassee, FL 32399
Wednesday June 6, 2018 Morning Session: 8:00am-12:00pm Afternoon Session: 1:00pm – 5:00pm	Vocational Rehabilitation Area Office Conference Room 3191 Maguire Blvd Orlando, FL 32808
Tuesday June 12, 2018 Morning Session: 8:00am – 12:00pm Afternoon Session: 1:00pm – 5:00pm	Vocational Rehabilitation Office 5835 Blue Lagoon Drive, Suite 1010 Miami, FL 33126
Wednesday June 13, 2018 Morning Session: 8:00am – 12:00pm Afternoon Session: 1:00pm – 5:00pm	Children's Services Council of Broward 6600 West Commercial Blvd Lauderhill, FL 33319
Tuesday June 19, 2018 1:00pm – 5:00pm	Children's Board of Hillsborough County 1002 East Palm Avenue Tampa, FL 33605
Thursday June 21, 2018 9:00am – 1:00pm	CareerSource of Southwest Florida 4150 Ford Street Ext. Ft. Myers, FL 33916

Staff Profile: Jason Gallub

Jason Gallub is a Provider Manager in the Monitoring and Employment Contracting Unit based at VR Headquarters in Tallahassee. Jason has been with Vocational Rehabilitation since 2012 and has served in many capacities including as a technician, administrative assistant, and provider manager. here are some facts to get to know Jason

- I was born and raised in Albuquerque, New Mexico.
- My first career was working as an interior designer.
- I do not have a favorite sports team, but I do love tennis! I could watch tennis matches all day long.
- In my spare time you will often find me out searching for new pieces to upcycle and put in my home, working in the yard, or sitting on a beach. Quiet, off the beaten path beaches are my favorite escape.
- My favorite holiday is Christmas.
- My favorite TV Show is Fixer Upper. Joanna Gaines is my design inspiration.
- My favorite foods are sushi and quiche.
- Favorite quote- "The most important things in life aren't things."



WIOA, STAR, Pre-ETS...what does it all mean?

by: Maggie Munsey, Unit Manager, MECU

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) became law in July, 2014. WIOA mandates that VR set aside 15 percent of its federal funding allotment to serve students with disabilities. Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) assist students to develop the skills needed to find and maintain employment after leaving school.

A student with a disability is defined as an individual with a disability in a secondary, postsecondary, or other recognized program, between the ages of 14-21, receiving services under an Individual Education Plan (IEP), 504 Plan, or receiving services under IDEA or for purpose of Section 504.

There are Pre-ETS which VR is required to offer. These services include:

- **Job Exploration Counseling** – as a Provider, you are eligible to provide these services, subject to completion of any necessary training and/or registration requirements.
- **Work Readiness Training** – for you as a Provider, this service classifies under the Manual as Pre-Placement Training when delivered to an adult.
- **Self-Advocacy/Peer Mentoring** – as a Provider, you are eligible to provide these services subject to completion of any necessary training and/or registration requirements.
- **Postsecondary Educational Counseling** - currently is offered by the VR Counselor.
- **Work-Based Learning Experience** – for you as a Provider, this services falls under the Manual as On-the-Job Training when delivered to an adult.If you are interested in providing either one of these services, please reach out to your Provider Manager or Liaison. They can direct you down the right path.



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Any time you receive a referral with a "Y" service fee code for Pre-Placement Training or On-the-Job Training it means you are assisting a student with a disability.

WIOA also mandates that VR offer services to potentially eligible students who meet the WIOA definition of a student with a disability without requiring them to apply or be found eligible for VR.

Students who do not wish to apply to VR may be served through the Student Transition Activities Record (STAR) portal created to track and provide services to students with disabilities. Students who have chosen to receive Pre-ETS

without applying may choose to apply to VR at any time. When they do, they will receive Pre-ETS and may receive additional services and supports if they are found eligible. It is important to note that STAR is not a separate program or set of services nor do you need additional certification to serve individuals who are referred for Pre-ETS through the STAR portal. As an ES Provider, you may provide services to students with disabilities.

We hope this sheds some light on Pre-ETS offered by VR. Be sure to attend the forthcoming Provider training coming to your area find a time/date or timeframe where both will be discussed in further detail.

Disability Achievement Center Launches Unique Hotel Training Program in Pinellas County

by: Marilyn Figueroa, Area 4 Provider Liaison, FLPR

Disability Achievement Center has launched an innovative new training program which specializes in training and preparing individuals with disabilities for careers in the growing hotel and hospitality industry. This self-paced training program incorporates pre-employment skills training, self-advocacy, occupational skills and life skills training. Some of the occupational skills taught include room cleaning, making beds, turning mattresses, replenishing supplies, cleaning, laundry service and time management. Although the timeframe varies, the typical duration of the training program is 8 – 10 weeks. Disability Achievement Center created an onsite hotel simulation environment, which allows students to learn skills in a realistic environment. Additionally, during the last two weeks of the program, participants have the opportunity to participate in a two week internship at a local hotel, where they are able to practice and apply the skills they learned with a community employer.

In speaking with Disability Achievement Center Executive Director, Joe DiDomenico, he shared that his inspiration for the program arose from a similar training program he coordinated



in Tennessee. Participants in the Tennessee training program had an amazing 86 -88 % placement rate following graduation. Joe completed a great deal of research prior to establishing this program and learned that the Tampa Bay area has a booming hotel industry with an additional 5,000 rooms expected to be added within the next three years.

Joe went on to share that Disability Achievement Center's goal is to "help people with disabilities gain confidence and move forward in life, and grow whether it be in employment or just in life in general." The Disability Achievement Center specializes in

removing barriers to both life and employment and enhancing the lives of those they serve. The hotel training program is another wonderful example of how Disability Achievement Center enhances the lives of those they serve while also meeting the needs of community employers.

The Disability Achievement Center Hotel Housekeeping Training program is currently accepting client referrals for anyone with a disability who is at least 17 years-old. They are eager to launch their very first training class.

Business Relations Team Update

by: Kathy Davis, Manager of the Business Relations Team, Bureau of Field Services

Hello from VR's Business Relations (BR) Team! In the last issue, I stated that Business Relations can be a great partner in achieving placements that fulfill WIOA's emphasis on earnings and careers. We wanted to highlight a few recent outcomes to illustrate the benefits of working together.

Business Relations Representative, Savika Junor, recently worked with a Provider to place a VR participant in an OJT position that resulted from her relationship with the Greater Fort Lauderdale Chamber. The Provider described the position as being tailor made for the individual, which undoubtedly

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increases the likelihood of a successful placement outcome. Business Relations Representative Nicole Lamar, has excellent relationships with several state agencies. Nicole has worked in unison with VR Counselor Wendy Dunn and Providers to facilitate referrals of VR participants to employment opportunities with the Departments of Revenue, Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles, and Juvenile Justice in Tallahassee. Our state agency partners are eager to work with us throughout other areas of the state as well.

Business Relations Representative Aleks Bologna, has been diligently working to facilitate 80 Pre-ETS work-based learning experiences in Brevard County. These opportunities for students are the result of Aleks' partnerships with a business association, the economic development council and the exceptional efforts of VR staff, local schools, and two Providers serving as the employers of record.

As a reminder, we have business customers across all industries who are recruiting for entry through experienced positions with a full range of knowledge, skills, and abilities

requirements. Additionally, if customers are referred to BR employer positions, they count for placement as long as the MPRs have documented the additional supports and services provided.

Finally, Business Relations recognizes and appreciates your work with employers, it contributes substantially to the indicators of effectiveness in serving employers.

Those indicators are:

1. Retention with the same employer in the 2nd and 4th quarters after exit
2. Employer Penetration Rate
3. Repeat Business Customer Rate

If you would like to connect with your local Business Rep or have ideas for how we can work together to better serve our business customers, please feel free to contact me at Kathy.Davis@vr.fldoe.org. Thanks, and I look forward to hearing from you!

Provider Fair: Area 6

Area 6 held its first VR Open House and Provider Resource Fair on Saturday, March 17th, 2018 at JRE Lee Educational Center (ESE Service Center South). The VR Open House showcased STAR presentations, VR orientations, and VR one-on-one sessions with students, their families and VR counselors. The Provider Resource Fair allowed Area 6 service providers and community partners the opportunity to share valuable information and resources to students with disabilities and their families. The Area 6 team held a second Open House and Provider Resource Fair in Area 6 on April 7th, 2018 at Robert Renick Educational Center, again, the event was a great success.



Left to right: Brenda Lampon (23A), Rositania Sanchez (23D), Kirenia Pintado (23A), Caridad Nieblas (23E), Catherina Rozario (23A) and Carlos Puentes (23A)



Left to right: Perla Garcia (23D), Ketha Otis (23D), Carlos Puentes (23A)



Left to right: Judith Toussaint (23A), Brenda Lampon (23A), Perla Garcia (23D), Kirsten Fornoni (23P), Ketha Otis (23B), Randy Nieves (23K), Carlos Puentes (23A), Joanna Hernandez (23K), Kirenia Pintado (23A), Tanya Acevedo (23F), Rositania Sanchez (23D), Ileana Milian (23K) and Catherina Rozario (23A)

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Front left to right: Robin Morrison (MDCPS), Marie Castor, (MDCPS) and Lourdes Figerais (MDCSPS)
 Back left to right: Joanna Hernandez (23K), Catherina Rozario (23A), Tanya Acevedo (23F), Kirenia Pintado (23A), Ileana Milian (23K), Benjamin Okoh (23M), Keisha Sparks (MDCPS), Ketha Otis (23B) and Brenda Lampon (23A)

Wakulla County Adults with Disability Program

by: Renae Williams, Contract Manger, MECU

Students from the Wakulla County School District’s Adult with Disabilities class have teamed up with the Wakulla High School Exceptional Student Education Post Graduates class to run the Legacy Café and Boutique adjacent to the Wakulla County District Office. Student-run “Legacy Café and Boutique” is a win-win for its employees and the community in Wakulla County.

Students prepare meals, take customer orders, total customer receipts and serve café guests two days a week from a wide array of lunch options including salads, soups, sandwiches, and a variety of baked potatoes and desserts.

When students are not serving in the Café, they are busy creating handcrafted items for sale in the boutique portion of the café, also open to the public. Items for sale include handmade soaps, sugar scrub, jewelry, stamped spoons, wooden pallet items, soap dishes, tea towels, scarves and a variety of other items.

Each week students practice job performance tasks such as filling out time-sheets, totaling hours worked, counting money, operating a cash register, cleaning up materials, getting along as a team, being responsible for café job duties, and honing social interaction skills.



The café and boutique give students a venue to practice and improve these skills on a weekly basis.

Students use the café and boutique as an “on the job” training facility to transition into the outside workforce. Several students are in transition to a job outside of the school setting.

Michael Gibson is an example of one such student. He has an excellent work ethic. Michael has a cognitive and visual disability. He certainly does not allow this to hinder his abilities nor his enthusiasm. Each day he comes to work with a “can-do” attitude, ready to sign in and get busy. His job in the café is to fill ice glasses. In the Boutique classroom he makes silverware holders for Café guests. In addition to Michael’s job in the Café and Boutique, he also volunteers at

the Wakulla Public Library. Recently, he was hired to work one day a week at a local thrift store.

Michael and his Legacy Café & Boutique co-workers are currently busy preparing for the second craft bazaar of the year. Attendees were able to complete much of their holiday shopping at the last bazaar prior to Thanksgiving break. The second bazaar is scheduled for the Spring and will be advertised on the district website!

BVCS Headquarters Staff Directory

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