# FLORIDA
## REHABILITATION COUNCIL

## 2012-13 ANNUAL REPORT

A Cross-Disability Advocate affiliated with The Florida Department of Education, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation

### VISION

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

## Partnership with a Purpose

The Florida Rehabilitation Council (FRC) and the Department of Education, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) continue to build a strong partnership with emphasis on our common goals, missions and visions that encourage independence through employment. The FRC and VR share these two goals:

I. To encourage and maintain employment opportunities for Floridians living with disabilities; and

II. To adopt best practices when providing efficient and effective rehabilitation services.

The FRC is responsible for reviewing, analyzing and evaluating the effectiveness of VR programs. As directed by federal law, the FRC prepares and submits an annual report at the end of the calendar year to State of Florida representatives, such as the Governor, the Senate President, the Speaker of the House, and the Commissioner of Education, as well as federal agencies such as the U.S. Secretary of Education and the Rehabilitation Services Administration. It is also a priority for the Council and FRC staff to provide this report to other stakeholders and states while encouraging best practices and the employment of people living with disabilities in jobs of their choice.

## Advocacy and Outreach

VR and FRC want to recognize some outstanding employers across the state:

- The Miami Zoo
- Bonefish Grill
- Baptist Health South Florida
- HomeGoods Store
- Department of Corrections
- Suncoast Textile Recycling
- TJX Companies
- McDonalds
- Contemporary Services Company

The FRC and VR have worked with national representatives, including Guam, to increase best practices, strengthen service delivery and increase outreach efforts. VR participated on the Governor's Commission on Employment for People with Disabilities. In response to recommendations in the Commission's latest report, VR is collaborating with the Department of Economic Opportunity (DEO) on the design and support of a DEO web portal that would serve as a single point of access for employers seeking to hire individuals with disabilities looking for work. The web portal will provide a broad scope of relevant information, and VR hopes to administer the associated help-desk function because of its expertise in this field. VR also participated in collaborative workgroups with Certified Business Technical Assistance Consultants (CBTACs) to enhance employment and self-employment services.

Vocational Rehabilitation

**VR is a federal/state partnership**

Florida Rehabilitation Council

**78.7% of funds for VR program expenditures come from federal sources and 21.3% from State of Florida General Revenue.**

**This equates to an approximate ratio of 4:1 funding, federal to state.**

**For every $1 invested in rehabilitating the customer, an estimated $9.15 was returned to economy.**

# Florida Rehabilitation Council (FRC)

## Mission

To increase employment, enhance independence and improve the quality of life for Floridians with disabilities.

# Vocational Rehabilitation (VR)

## Mission

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

## Hello

During my second term as FRC Chairperson, I am proud of the accomplishments we were able to achieve with VR in the midst of high case loads, increasing customer service needs, limited resources, delays in filling Council Member vacancies, and a government "shutdown."

FRC's active committees have also done great work. The FRC Legislative Committee set a record "first" by meeting with all Florida Representatives or their staff in Tallahassee and in Washington, D.C. to educate and advocate for employment of people with disabilities. The Planning Committee is working to build relationships, strengthen partnerships and increase stakeholder input into the yearly State Plan. The Evaluation Committee is monitoring the FRC-sponsored Customer Satisfaction Surveys, which indicates an overall high degree of satisfaction with the services. Survey responses also identified areas of concern, such as "promptness of service" and high counselor turnover, which are being addressed for continuous improvement, along with increasing information exchange.

This upcoming year, the FRC will continue to advocate with VR to seek all opportunities to responsibly reduce the number of people on the wait list. The Council has advised VR to review and discuss the effectiveness of the referral processes offered to individuals, especially with increased management early in the 2013-2014 state fiscal year. As a Council, we want all people living with disabilities to be served and to find employment. In strategic partnership, we will help to facilitate and encourage the voice of the people to be heard through surveys and forums and now through Facebook and Twitter. It has been an honor and a privilege to serve as the Chairperson for the FRC for a second term. I am thankful for the close working relationship that exists between the Council members, Council staff, and VR.

To the Future...

FRC Council Chair, Kara Tucker

## Greetings

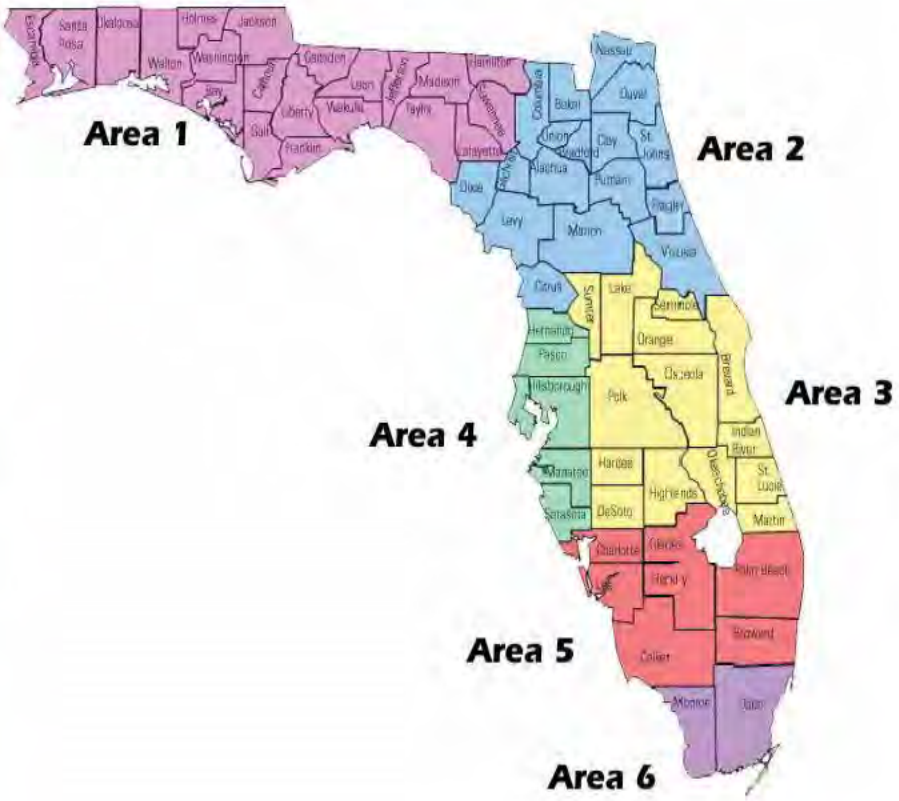
VR has enjoyed another successful year, helping 6,523 Floridians with significant disabilities get or keep a job! The FRC continues to be a valuable partner in our efforts and a strong and effective voice in advocating for Floridians with disabilities. The division has operated under an Order of Selection since 2008, which means that because we cannot serve every eligible individual who comes to the door, we must follow a federal mandate to prioritize services to people whose disabilities pose the greatest barriers to employment. In each year since, the number of customers receiving service from VR has grown. On any given day, there are over 57,000 people in some phase of service with the division, and the complexity of their needs has also increased significantly. Our employees have risen to the challenge, which resulted in a 7% increase in successful job placements over the previous state fiscal year. We are proud of this result because we know that the lives of the people we serve are changed for the better in ways we can only begin to imagine. Though VR maintains a waiting list for customers whose disabilities do not present significant barriers to employment, the number of those waiting on October 15, 2013, was 914, and we have released 913 individuals from that waitlist into service since October 2012. Florida VR has seen other changes this year, as well. We have reorganized our administrative structures to better support our business needs, placing particular emphasis on our contracting processes, our Information Technology infrastructure, and on strategic planning and performance management. We recognize that we must stay on the path of continuous improvement and look forward to having the FRC by our side every step of the way! On behalf of Florida VR, THANK YOU, FRC for your support, dedication and accomplishments.

Regards,

Director Aleisa C. McKinlay

## VR Overview

The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) has been providing employment opportunities for people living with disabilities since 1920. The VR Division has 931 employees that work across the state in six different areas. Each area has multiple offices so that customers are able to access the available services. There are 467 field staff counselors who carry customer caseloads. Given the current number of those served, the median caseload is 127 cases per counselor per month.




## VR Services Include:

- School-to-Work Transition
- Deaf, Hard of Hearing Services
- Employment Assistance
- Supported Employment Assistance
- Physical and Mental Restoration
- Ticket to Work
- Migrant and Seasonal Farm Worker Outreach
- Native American Outreach
- Assistive Services and Rehabilitation Technology

## VR Pass-through Programs:

- Adults with Disabilities
- Independent Living - 16 Centers (CILs) and the Florida Independent Living Council (FILC), which is a mandated member of the FRC.
- Florida Alliance for Assistive Services and Technology (FAAST)
- Able Trust

# State Plan

The FRC and VR continue to collaborate in strategic partnership to strengthen outreach, service and support systems. FRC members representing all standing committees formed a State Plan Task Force to study the draft 2014 VR State Plan in May 2013. FRC members used a variety of sources, including public meeting comments, the comprehensive needs assessment and customer and employee survey results to help formulate their review and comments for the State Plan. The result was unanimous Council approval to accept the Florida 2014 State Plan as presented with recommendations.

Council recommendations included:

**Recommendation 1: Transition** - Improve transition services to students by developing a systematic statewide process to ensure that evaluations are integrated into the Summary of Performance document. Address current third party agreements that are ending and the future direction of transition services. VR must provide clear communication of this change to service providers and customers. Consider and develop additional Innovation and Expansion Grants to address the need for transition services.

**Recommendation 2: Customer Services** - Increase staff training in the areas of facilitation, communication, advocacy and collaboration with and for customers to promote efficient and effective services delivery. Improve VR timing when working with universities so as to avoid loss of coursework and improve the quality of service to our customers. Establish clear communication policies and standards for leadership and staff regarding counselor turnover or reassignments in order to avoid any lapse in services.

**Recommendation 3: Order of Selection** - Seek all opportunities to expand access to individuals on the Category 3 wait list, contingent upon the continued open access to services for individuals in Categories 1 and 2. Review and discuss with the Council the effectiveness of the Information and Referral process offered to individuals on the wait list.

**Recommendation 4: Supported Employment** - Establish a statewide registration and vendor process for job coaches to support the needs of customers from a variety of agencies that serve people living with disabilities Develop standardized statewide qualification requirements for job coaches to ensure quality service provision.

**Recommendation 5: Public Comment** - Collaborate with VR to strengthen systematic approaches for collecting public comments and participation in New Counselor Training to inform employees of the FRC role and how it can assist.

**Recommendation 6: VR Communication and Collaboration with FRC and stakeholders** - Establish a timeline with VR for the FRC to receive and review draft state plan documents to increase the opportunities for consumer and stakeholder input and understanding of the state plan while strengthening collaborative efforts.

**Recommendation 7: Outreach** - Expand outreach and rural access to services while encouraging self-advocacy, including service to the migrant worker and Native American populations in the state, as well as improving services for transition-aged individuals and students from school-to-work.

**Recommendation 8: Counselor Recruitment and Staff Development** - FRC encourages VR and the Rehabilitation Services Administration to seek opportunities to fund additional training options and address the national issue of qualified counselors. In addition, the Council encourages the development of a Rehabilitation Baccalaureate program within the Florida system of higher education to strengthen employee retention efforts. The FRC encourages further strategic planning in partnership with VR on alternative recruitment and retention efforts.

**Recommendation 9: National Involvement** - Continue to support networking and collaboration with other state rehabilitation agencies and councils on the national level to share processes that can enhance VR services.

**Recommendation 10: FRC Membership** - Focus to meet membership regulations as set forth in Section 105 of the Rehabilitation Act and 34 Code of Federal Regulations 361.17 by increasing the number of stakeholders officially represented on the Council.

VR will provide periodic updates to the Council to ensure progress in all areas of recommendation. The Rehabilitative Services Administration (RSA) commended the agency and FRC in strategically developing and implementing various strategies to ensure that the voice of the consumer guides the direction of the VR program.

# VR and the Customer Profile

VR Customer, Tariq Hamin

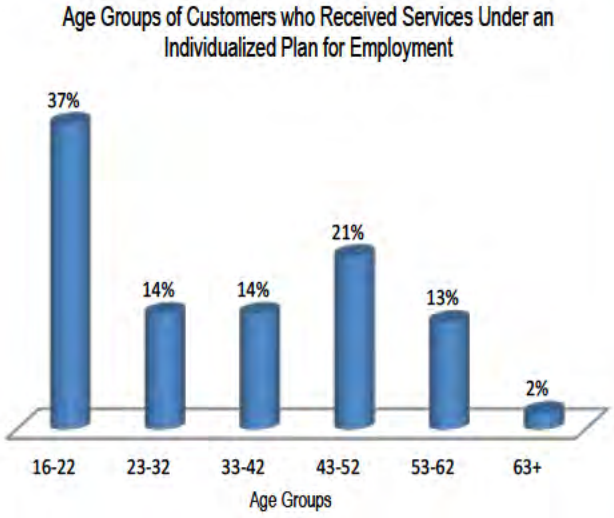
In existence for nearly 90 years, VR is a federally mandated program that provides vocational and other rehabilitation services to individuals with all types of disabilities. For the State of Florida, the Vocational Rehabilitation Program is a Division located within the Florida Department of Education. The following customer profile highlights the broad spectrum of disability types and individuals that the agency serves to achieve tax payer status.

| VR Figures at a Glance | 2011-2012 | 2012-2013 |
|---|---|---|
| Persons with disabilities who entered gainful employment | 6,071 | 6,523 |
| Projected average annual earnings | $17,286 | $17,242 |
| Average monthly caseload | 55,035 | 55,457 |
| Average monthly caseload per counselor | 132 | 127 |
| Average hours worked per week | 31.99 | 30.20 |
| Average hourly earnings | $ 10.86 | $10.98 |
| Number of Individual Plan for Employment (IPEs) written | 16,959 | 16,831 |
| Rehabilitation rate | 48.9% | 43.4% |
| Customers self-supporting at acceptance | 19.3% | 17.0% |
| Customers self-supporting at closure | 70.2% | 74.0% |

## State Profile of Employment

- According to the 2011 American Community Survey one year estimates, approximately 2,414,821 individuals in Florida report having one or more disabilities.
- Per the 2012 American Community Survey, the employment rate in Florida for people living with a disability is 28.9 percent versus 71.4 percent of civilians ages 18 to 64 who are working and have no disability.
- The National unemployment average for State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2013 is 7.6 percent. However, the Florida annual average unemployment rate is running 7.1 percent, according to the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity. Yet the unemployment rate for persons living with a disability in the State of Florida is estimated to be 23.5 percent, as reported by the U.S. Census Bureau 2012 American Community Survey 3-year estimates.

- The age groups who received services from VR during SFY 2012-2013 vary. Customers between the ages of 16 and 22 years are referred to as transition customers, which is an important group as these are our leaders of tomorrow. The average age of customers served through VR services is approximately 33 years. These individuals still have many years to contribute to their community, to be self-sufficient and to be productive citizens of the state.

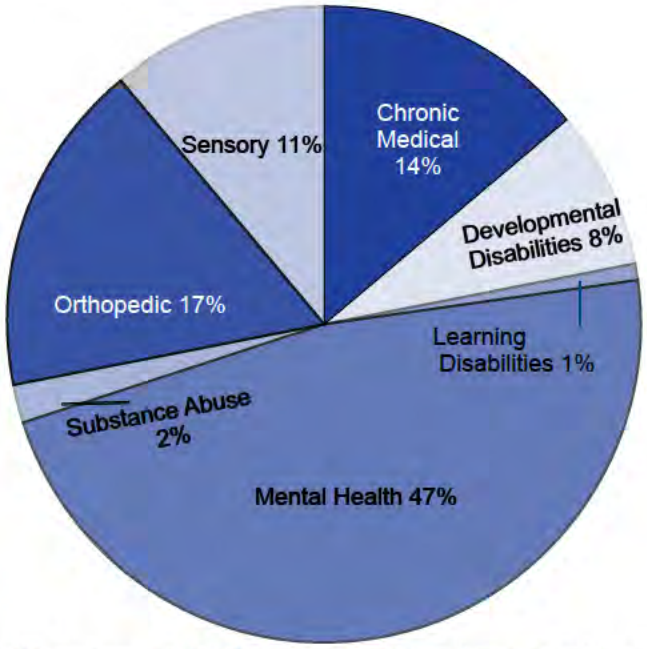



- As tax users are employed, they become tax payers, and the investment of both the state and federal government is returned across the economy of the entire state. Collective projected customer earnings based upon employment job placement for the first year are estimated to be $112,467,902. For the previous state fiscal year, it was an estimate of $104,944,723. This is an increase of approximately $8 million dollars from last year.

- At the state fiscal year end, the calculated Return on Investment (ROI) indicates that $9.15 is returned to the state economy for every $1 spent in providing services to customers.

- VR recovers funds for some medical expenditures from third party payers, which include private insurance companies, Medicare and Medicaid. For SFY 2012-2013, the amount recovered was $2,904,888. The amount recovered by VR for state fiscal year July 1, 2011 to June 30, 2012 totaled $3,321,525. This amount varies each year. The money originally spent in VR goes further with the additional dollars recaptured or deferred to another paying source.

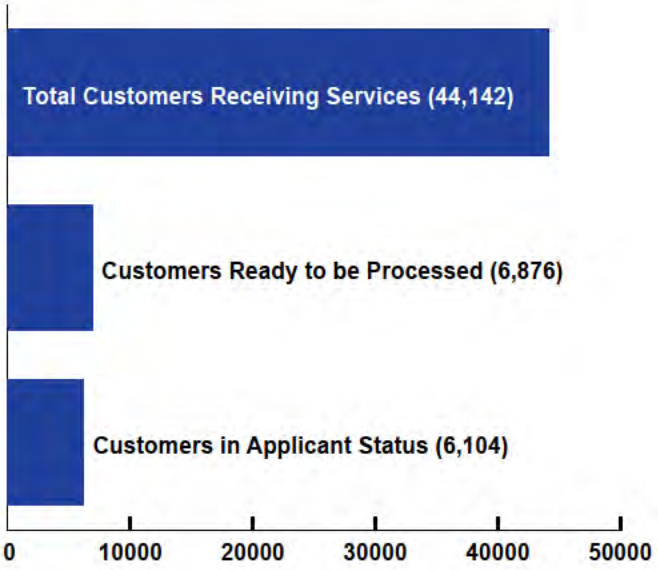
- Federal VR program regulations establish standards and indicators by which the RSA (U.S. Department of Education) measures the performance of the state VR agencies. These indicators are a way to compare across multiple states. These indicators include the number gainfully employed, whether the employment is competitive, the severity of disability if competitively employed, a comparison to hourly wages in the state, and the percentage of individuals who became self-sufficient because of VR assistance. Nationally, these standards are often difficult for states in Order of Selection status to attain. Florida is very close to the performance expectations, but, with Order of Selection in effect, did not meet all of the levels. As such, the Florida Division of VR has developed a plan for performance improvement. Areas of focus for Florida to improve include increasing the percentage of individuals who acquire employment, increasing the average hourly wage obtained and increasing the percentage of individuals who are self-supporting at closure.




- VR serves individuals with a broad range of disabilities. VR customers gainfully employed in SFY 2012-2013 by primary disability group are broken down by percentage of customers served. RSA defines primary disability as the individual's primary physical or mental impairment that causes or results in a substantial impediment to employment. Disability groups gainfully employed follow past trends with minor variances.

# Order of Selection Wait-List Status Summary

Order of Selection: as of
State Fiscal Year End (SFY) June 30, 2013



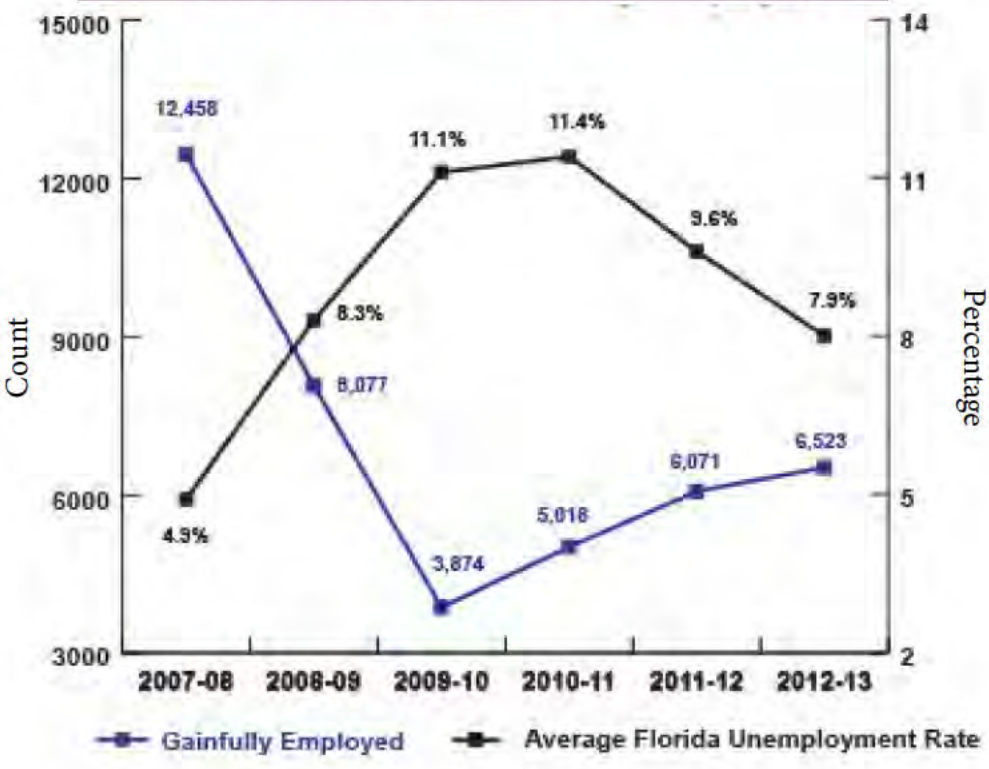

**Category 1 - Most Significant Disabilities (0)**
**Category 2 - Significant Disabilities (0)**
**Category 3 - Other disabilities (914)**
Categories 1 and 2 are open - no waiting

- Florida entered into Order of Selection (OOS) in August 2008 based on the use of funds in the preceding years, projected funding, projected number and types of referrals, number of eligible individuals and counselor case loads. An OOS system is required by RSA when the division is unable to provide rehabilitation services to all eligible individuals in the state who apply for the services. It should be noted that the wait-list peaked in September of 2009 to 11,145 individuals. Category (CAT) 1 represents individuals determined to have a most significant disability and job limitations; CAT 2 represents persons who have a significant disability and CAT 3 represents all other eligible individuals determined to have a disability with job limitations. The numbers on the wait-list vary throughout the month and year.

Update: A public forum was held on November 14th, 2013, in which VR informed the public that due to limited financial and human resources, it must establish a waiting list for individuals in Category 2. There is already a waiting list for Category 3. Therefore, customers in these two categories will have a longer waiting time before receiving services.

# VR Customers Gainfully Employed

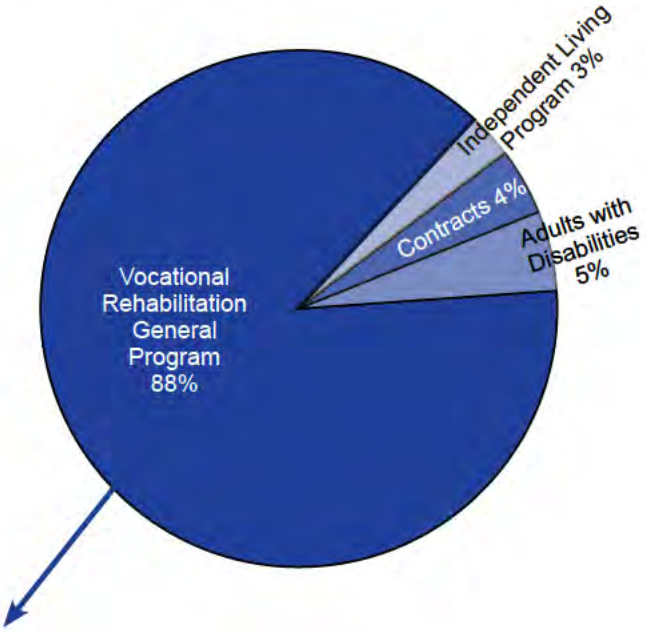
- Gainful employment occurs when a customer has job stability for at least 90 days and is placed in employment that is competitive, integrated into the community and for which he or she receives at least minimum wage. There is an inverse relationship between the unemployment rate as it decreases and the number of gainfully employed VR customers. As the unemployment rate decreases, the number of gainfully employed customers is likely to increase.



- These charts represent Division Expenditures for the SFY 2012-2013. The total Division expenditures were $195,244,146. Those Division expenditures include contracts and program funds for the Adults with Disabilities and Independent Living Programs. In addition to these programs, 88 percent of the expenditures are VR general program expenses. The VR program assists people living with disabilities to prepare for, gain or retain employment. Of the total VR expenditures of $178,286,676 - 12 percent is for general expenses and 26 percent for salaries. The major expense item for VR is Purchased Client Services (PCS), which equates to expenditures of 62 percent or $111,055,749. These purchased client service expenditures include assistive technology, support services, education and training, evaluations and employment services, as well as medical and mental health services, which is the largest expense category at this time.

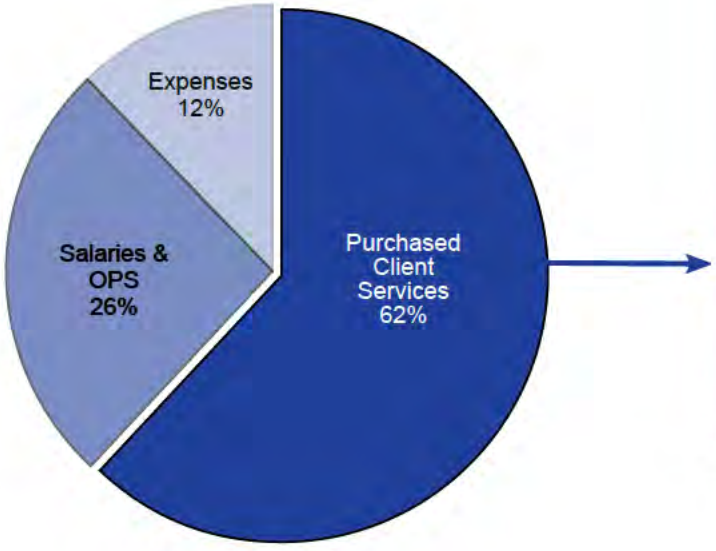
## 2012-2013 Division Programs

Total Division Expenditures $195,244,146



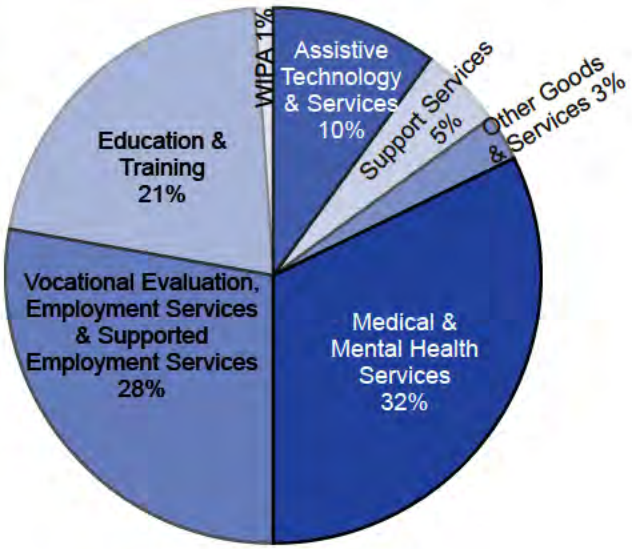

## 2012-2013 VR General Program Expenditures

Total VR Expenditures $178,286,676




## VR Purchased Client Services (PCS) Expenditures by Category

Total PCS Expenditures $111,055,749



# Program Focus: VR Transition

State vocational rehabilitation agencies play a critical role in helping transition-age youth with disabilities attain their vocational goals. The VR School-to-Work Transition Program provides individualized services to assist eligible students with disabilities in a seamless transition from high school to an identified career path. The focus is to develop work skills, practice social skills and acquire a network of community supports needed to achieve employment while the student is still in high school. Youth who apply for VR services while in high school are served by 163 VR Transition Counselors.

VR provides Transition brochures for the schools to share with students beginning at age 14 and their families. VR supports both secondary and postsecondary evidence-based models that have proven effective in serving individuals with the most significant disabilities. These efforts are increasing VR's capacity to provide services while sustaining programs that result in employment. The VR transition programs include:

- Postsecondary Education (PSE) Programs provide students with disabilities age-appropriate opportunities for learning, employment preparation, recreational activities, social interactions, and the development of natural supports. Programs like STING RAY at the University of South Florida, St. Petersburg, and the On-Campus Transition Program at the University of North Florida offer an authentic college experience. The VERTICAL Training Program at Florida State College in Jacksonville delivers career and technical training.
- Project SEARCH is a nationally recognized internship program that delivers employment training and education to students with the most significant disabilities. This is a true collaboration between VR, a host business, and the local school district.
- Discovery is an alternative to traditional assessments that are often ineffective for students with the most significant disabilities. Observations of the student in real life help evaluators identify where the student is at his or her best. That information is then used to match the student and employer so that everyone's needs are met.
- High School High Tech (HSHT) is designed to provide high school students with all types of disabilities the opportunity to explore jobs or postsecondary education leading to careers in science, technology, engineering and math.

VR School-to-Work Transition Program collaborations and early engagement have advanced the agency's mission by helping students with disabilities prepare for and obtain employment, thereby enhancing their independence. VR outcomes have improved as a result. Youth employed following VR services has increased in each of the last four years. VR remains committed to continuously improving the transition of eligible students from high school to postsecondary education and careers.

# VR Transition Students Facts SFY 2012-2013

- Number of all Florida VR customers served: 57,004
- Number of Florida transition students served: 15,879 (28%)
- Florida Transition students with a most significant disability (CAT 1): 11,265
- Transition students with a significant disability in the State of Florida (CAT 2): 4,491
- Transition students with a disability (Florida Category 3): 122
- Florida Transition students who entered gainful employment: 1,191
- Average hours worked per week: 28
- Average hourly earnings: $9.81
- A national employment rate of only 33.2% was reported for those living with a disability ages 20-24 compared to those with no disability Who are employed at a rate of 64.6% (U.S. Census Bureau.)

**Service Types and Life of Case Expenditures**
Total: $72,514,406

# Positive Attitude Secures Stephanie Lewis a Job with Innisbrook Resort

St. Petersburg, FL – Stephanie Lewis, who has Down syndrome, wakes up each day excited about her job at Innisbrook Golf Resort and Spa. She looks forward to keeping the cafeteria up to the high standards set forth by resort owners. "They treat me good," Stephanie says. "It makes me smile."

She began her career at Innisbrook as part of the Extended Transition program. Innisbrook has partnered with a local high school to offer job skill training at the resort to students with disabilities. When Stephanie completed the program, the owners were so impressed with her work ethic and positive attitude that they hired her as a permanent member of the staff. "She really is a wonderful worker," says Julie Soltes, Director of Human Resources at Innisbrook. "She's loved by everyone, just a little ray of sunshine." "I've heard from everyone she works with that she's a wonderful worker," says Zoe Sieber, Stephanie's Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) counselor. Zoe said she was blown away by the progress Stephanie has already made at the resort. "She is now even training other students at the resort," says Zoe.

VR provided counseling and guidance, as well as supported employment services, to help Stephanie maintain her position. "She always has a great attitude and is very dependable," says Zoe. "She's an exemplary employee."

Zoe says working with Stephanie is just one of the many highlights of her job. "I love being a counselor because I get to help people actualize their potential and increase their independence," she says. "It's a fun job because it always challenges me and forces me to see each customer as a unique individual, and I love a challenge." She will never forget how great a fit Innisbrook was for Stephanie.

While her friendly nature is just one of the qualities that make Stephanie a great employee, employers will find that employees with a disability exhibit several positive traits, such as a strong work ethic and pride in their work.

# Public Forums

Every quarter, FRC and VR set aside time to hear the voices of the community. This is an opportunity for customers and other stakeholders to share success stories or concerns. The Council represents the interests and unique needs of individuals with disabilities seeking and maintaining employment. The forums serve as an opportunity to encourage community involvement to strengthen employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities. Previous participants have included past and current customers, stakeholders, vendors and Ombudsman Office representatives. Issues that have been discussed during this year's public forum include forum access; timing; schedules; announcement; partnership engagement and communication; the VR State Plan; needed notification to vendors of ending contractual agreements; job training opportunities; supported employment concerns; transportation issues; and access for veterans. Stakeholder and customer participation at public forums encourage diverse opinions and input on how best to serve individuals with disabilities.

The FRC, along with VR, wants your help in providing quality services. In an effort to increase participation, public forums are accessible in a variety of ways:

- by toll-free conference calls
- in person on site at various locations throughout the state
- by email FRCcustomers@vr.fldoe.org
- online at www.rehabworks.org

If accommodations are needed, please contact FRC staff directly at (850) 245 3397.

# Upcoming FRC/VR Public Forums

Tallahassee: January 28, 2014

Sarasota: May 13, 2014

Orlando: May 13, 2014

Ft. Lauderdale: October 28, 2014

# Customer Satisfaction

The Council monitors customer satisfaction by contracting with Florida State University to conduct two independent surveys. The surveys measure customer satisfaction on multiple scales at the time individuals begin working on their Individualized Plans for Employment and then at case closure. Customer survey responses have been collected since 2002 and help to track programmatic changes. The results of the FRC customer satisfaction surveys help Council and VR to formulate methods to strengthen and improve service delivery. For fiscal year 2012-2013, the rate of overall satisfaction for surveys on both open and closed cases, was approximately 75 percent.

Council actions and advisement to VR are derived from some survey responses, such as these from closed cases.

**Survey Item - Accessibility of VR offices**: Rehabilitated = 92% satisfaction versus Unsuccessful placement = 68% satisfaction.

**Survey Item - Treated with courtesy and respect**: Rehabilitated = 97% satisfaction versus Unsuccessful placement = 82% satisfaction.

**Survey Item – Understand needs and feelings**: Rehabilitated = 88% satisfaction versus Unsuccessful placement = 61% satisfaction.

**Survey Item – Appropriateness of services received**: Rehabilitated = 90% felt appropriate versus Unsuccessful placement = 61% appropriate.

**Survey Item – Other service needs but have not received**: Rehabilitated = 65% no other service needs versus Unsuccessful placements = 47% indicated no other service needs.

**Survey Item – Informed of choices in providers and goals**: Rehabilitated = 81% indicated informed versus Unsuccessful placement = 63%.

**Survey Item - Ability to make choices in providers and goals**: Rehabilitated = 93% satisfaction versus Unsuccessful placement = 77%.

**Survey Item – Services provided promptly**: Rehabilitated = 72% considered prompt versus Unsuccessful placement = 47% reported prompt service delivery.

**Survey Item – Services made life better**: Rehabilitated = 89% believe VR helped versus Unsuccessful placement = 47% indicating services made life better.

**Survey Item – Overall satisfaction with services received from VR**: Rehabilitated = 87% satisfied versus Unsuccessful placement = 51% indicating satisfaction.

VR Customer, Andrea Decrescenzo at graduation from Flagler College

Approximately 80-85% of survey respondents would recommend VR to a friend and were satisfied with the job obtained.

FRC is currently working with VR on a competitive procurement to continue the survey of our customers into the future. A variety of methods to collect customer responses are either in place now or in development. Many of these include paper surveys, electronic access via the internet, direct access to email input, as well as the possibility of in-office immediate feedback kiosks. Staff, as well as the Division and FRC, are interested in how services can be improved or enhanced.

# The VR Employee

The average length of employment with the VR agency for employees is 4 or more years, with over 336 individuals dedicating more than 8 years to the mission of VR and our customers. VR employees indicate that they are satisfied with VR as a place to work and that they are "proud of what VR does to help people." Employees were most satisfied with meeting the expectations of customers and the familial atmosphere of VR. It was also identified in the employee climate study that they feel their job is important and that they feel they have a voice in identifying needed improvements. VR employees also feel that their coworkers are committed to doing quality work and that they are encouraged to think of better ways to meet the needs of our customers. Some of the customer comments received about staff include: "continue to hire empathetic staff, for they certainly help make everything nicer," and, "Please continue what you do to improve opportunities for the community."

# FRC Working Committees

The FRC works in strategic partnership with VR to facilitate policy and procedures consistent with federal and state law and to promote economic independence for persons with disabilities. In SFY 2012-13, FRC members evaluated VR performance and met with VR staff to understand, monitor and provide feedback regarding the quality and ongoing impact of VR services, policy changes, financial participation and order of selection. FRC members also met with Florida legislators and others to seek feedback, provide education and advocacy regarding VR services and the needs of its customers. The FRC disseminated packets that included information about the cost of services, return on investment, the number of individuals successfully employed, and average wages. Interested parties were able to see the positive, direct impact and contributions of VR's customers not only in their home districts, but statewide as well.

The **Executive Committee** addresses major issues facing the Council and can make preliminary decisions to be considered by the Council as a whole. The Executive Committee also works through the Council's Standing Committees to review, analyze, advise and partner with VR and complete other Council functions. The Executive Committee is composed of the FRC Chair, 1st and 2nd Vice Chairs, immediate Past Chair, the Chairs of Standing Committees, and the Director of VR.

The **Planning & Coordination Committee** works as a strategic partner with the Division on holding public forums and developing the goals and priorities for the Division's State Plan. The Council is federally mandated to dialogue with other statewide Councils, such as the Independent Living Council, the Developmental Disabilities Planning Council, the State Mental Health Council, and others to increase communication, identify outreach avenues, and collaborate to prevent duplication of efforts.

The **Legislative Committee** visits every state legislator and/or staff at the Capitol during each legislative session. Educating legislators is the top priority. A great deal of communication with Senate and House Leadership allows the FRC to keep them up-to-date on VRs accomplishments and budget needs. Through strategic partnership, the Division also keeps FRC informed of legislative activities.

The **Evaluation Committee** has as its primary function the evaluation of the services provided by VR. One method is the management of the customer satisfaction survey, which collects information on open and closed case satisfaction. The analysis of findings is shared with the Council so appropriate recommendations or commendations may be forwarded to VR.

The **Public Awareness Committee** develops and distributes marketing materials for generating interest in advocacy efforts and the employment of persons with disabilities. The Committee also develops, produces and distributes the Council Annual Report, which is mandated by federal law to be sent to Florida's Governor and others.

# Florida Rehabilitation Council (FRC) Statutory Authority:

Governing guidelines may be found within the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 34 CFR, Part 361, contained in the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended. The 1998 amendments strengthen the State Rehabilitation Councils by requiring the Council and VR agencies to work together as strategic partners. Further statutory authority is provided in section 413.405, and 413.273, Florida Statutes (F.S.) specific to the FRC.

# Special Recognition

The Council wishes to recognize Steven L. Howells on being chosen as the first recipient of the FRC Stephen R. Wise Award. This award is given annually to a person whose passion and professional accomplishments through public service make a significant difference in the quality of life for persons with disabilities and who is recognized as a dedicated leader and champion in the cause of helping persons with disabilities achieve independence and dignity through meaningful employment.

The Council wishes to thank Andrea Schwendinger and others who assisted to create our report.

The Council offers a special thanks to the following Council members for their meritorious services as they moved on to oth -er advocacy roles during the 2012-2013 fiscal year:

Rusty Van Sickle and Ben Grzesik

It takes the collective cooperation and meaningful investment of many to advocate for people living with disabilities in the State of Florida. The investment of time and effort is found in private industry, the Federal government, State legislators, the Florida Department of Education, the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, families and other interested parties. Without these entities and persons, advocacy efforts of the FRC council members and staff would be limited.

Following are the FRC Members, as appointed by the Governor of Florida, for the period of July 1, 2012 to June 30, 2013:

# 2012-2013 Florida Rehabilitation Council Members

- **Kara Tucker**, Council Chair
- Hometown: Neptune Beach, FL
- Represents: Persons with physical, cognitive, sensory and mental disabilities

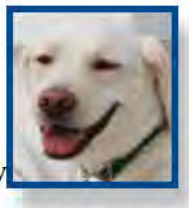
- **Becki Forsell**, 1st Vice
- Hometown: Tampa, FL
- Represents: Business, Industry and labor

- **Yolanda Herrera**, 2nd Vice
- Hometown: Miami, FL
- Represents: Groups and persons with physical, cognitive, sensory, and mental disabilities

- **Cathy Bishop**
- Hometown: Tallahassee, FL
- Represents: Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Department of Education (DOE)

- **Afzal Choudhry**
- Hometown: Leesburg, FL
- Represents: Business, Industry and Labor

- **Don Chester**
- Hometown: West Palm Beach, FL
- Represents: Business, Industry
- and his companion Polly Anna



- **Steve Collins**
- Hometown: Tallahassee, FL
- Represents: Groups and persons with physical, cognitive, sensory, and mental disabilities

- **John Henry Douglas "The Ugly Man"**
- Hometown: Lake City, FL
- Represents: Florida Independent Living Council (FILC)

- **Lori Kijanka**
- Hometown: Pembrook Pines, FL
- Represents: Community Rehabilitation Providers

- **Aleisa McKinlay**
- Hometown: Tallahassee, FL
- Represents: VR Director

- **Shawn Peters**
- Hometown: Royal Palm Beach, FL
- Represents: VR Counselor

- **Ann Robinson**
- Hometown: Tallahassee, FL
- Represents: Client Assistance Program - Disability Rights of Florida

- **Janet Severt**
- Hometown: Orange City, FL
- Represents: Business, Industry and Labor
- and her companion Wylan

## Meet the FRC Staff

(L to R): Nia Young, Roy Cosgrove and Andrea Schwendinger

Roy Cosgrove, Program Administrator Responsibilities include: Managing all FRC programs, staffing Business and Executive committees. Roy.Cosgrove@vr.fldoe.org

Andrea Schwendinger, Analyst Responsibilities include: the Annual Report, Strategic Planning, reviewing the State Plan and staffing the Legislative, Public Awareness and Planning committees. Andrea.Schwendinger@vr.fldoe.org

Nia Young, Government Operations Consultant Responsibilities include: managing and tracking fiscally related activities (purchasing and contract payments), council travel and program support. Nia.Young@vr.fldoe.org

Vocational Rehabilitation

Florida Rehabilitation Council

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