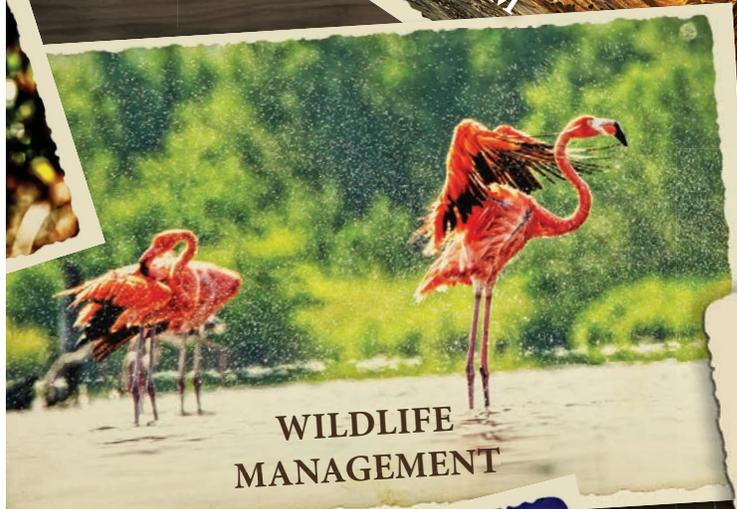




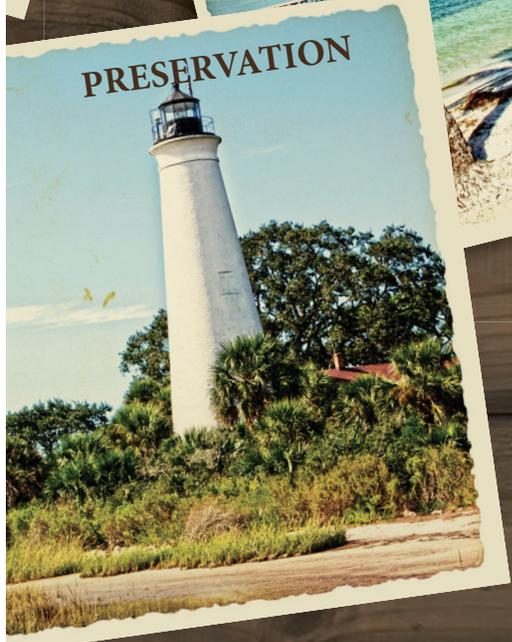
ENVIRONMENTALISM



WILDLIFE
MANAGEMENT



HOSPITALITY



PRESERVATION



PARTNERING TO CREATE
opportunities TO EMPLOY
ALL PEOPLE WITH *disabilities*.

FLORIDA
Rehabilitation
COUNCIL
2013-2014
ANNUAL REPORT

State Rehabilitation Council (SRCs)

After World War I, the Smith-Fess Act in 1920 established Vocational Rehabilitation programs. The Smith-Fess Act is now commonly referred to as the Rehabilitation Act. The original intent of the federal legislation was the belief that investing in appropriate vocational counseling and training, VR agencies would promote self-sufficiency for people with disabilities helping individuals to become less reliant on government - paid benefits and, therefore, increasing economic benefits to society. Originally, eligibility was limited to serving individuals with physical disabilities other than the blind.

In 1943 amendments to the Rehabilitation Act allowed for the inclusion of individuals with mental illness. The 1973 Rehabilitation Act required, for each customer served, an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) and that it be approved by the customer and prohibited discrimination based on “handicapping conditions”. Many consider Section 504 to be the first significant federal civil rights bill protecting people with disabilities and a precursor of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.

Reauthorization in 1993 created State Rehabilitation Councils (under Title 1, Section 105) to support people and advocate to shape service delivery



On the cover are postcards that capture the prevailing industries in the State of Florida. Partnering is the vision of the Council. Customer comments are included at the bottom of each page. If you are interested in further information contact FRCcustomers@vr.fldoe.org

The Florida Rehabilitation Council (FRC)

Florida's State Rehabilitation Council advocates for consumer-directed effective vocational rehabilitation services with appropriate resources and services that will result in equal opportunities for Floridians living with disabilities.

Under its mandate in the Rehabilitation Act, the Council shall review, analyze, and advise VR regarding the performance, scope, and effectiveness relating to eligibility (including order of selection); functions and services provided that affect or that potentially affect the ability of individuals with disabilities in achieving rehabilitation goals.

To achieve its mission, the Council meets four times a year to build strong partnerships with emphasis on common goals, missions, and visions that encourage independence through employment. As directed by federal law, the FRC prepares and

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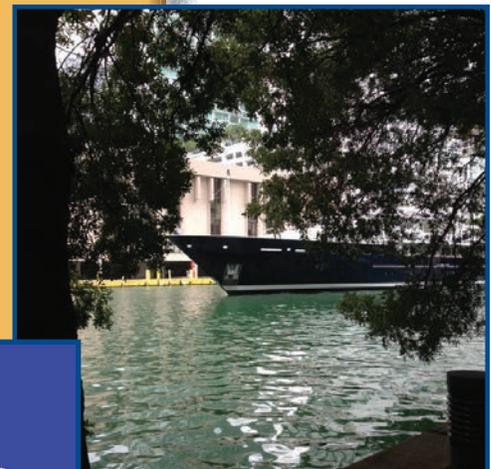
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submits an annual report at the end of the calendar year to State of Florida representatives, such as the Governor, the Senate President, the Speaker of the House, and the Commissioner of Education, as well as federal agencies, including the U.S. Secretary of Education and the Rehabilitation Services Administration. It is also a priority for the Council 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.

It is critical that we continue to understand the changing needs of VR customers and never cease in our quest to serve them more effectively. We look forward to the next year as we begin to understand and implement provisions of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act (WIOA). This landmark legislation was enacted on July 22, 2014. It is a privilege to be part of this most exciting endeavor.



Ships on the Miami canal.



You may request this report in alternative formats. Contact us at FRCcustomers@vr.fldoe.org



Florida Rehabilitation Council (FRC)

Mission

To increase employment, enhance independence and improve 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.

Hello:

I am honored to begin my term as the newly elected Chair of the FRC. This last year, Council members were successful in championing additional state funding for VR. The Florida legislature and Governor Scott approved additional funding which will allow increased access to services for individuals with disabilities seeking employment. Thank you to all of our delegates. This upcoming year we look forward to seeing the impact this additional funding will have on the Order of Selection and the wait list. We hope many Floridians who have been on the wait list will be able to move into service and that the invigorated funding will promote employment for those eager to join the workforce.



In partnership with VR, FRC will soon be unveiling a redesigned customer satisfaction survey that will allow the FRC and VR to have more robust information to use in improving services and recognizing outstanding practices and areas of the state. This is yet another example of the collaboration between the FRC

and VR bearing fruit in a common mission – improving services and employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities.

Looking to the coming year, we hope to make a positive difference by focusing on:

- Maximizing outreach and services to transition age students with disabilities to provide a more successful bridge from school to work
- Customized employment approaches including supported employment and self-employment options
- Promoting innovative strategies to improve access to consistent quality of VR services
- Improving our partnership and collaboration efforts
- Decreasing the wait list and time spent on the list
- Recommending better access to mediation for individuals seeking to appeal decisions
- Improving VR's Rehabilitation Rate

Lastly, the Council values and appreciates the continued efforts to increase the dialogue and open communication between VR and FRC. A review of our recent state plan comments provides an overview of the manner in which the Council makes recommendations to VR. This is the special voice of advocacy for effective and efficient VR systems and services. It is with great energy that the FRC moves forward with VR to make a positive difference in significant areas for its customers.

Respectfully,

Ann Robinson, FRC Chair

Greetings:

The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) has enjoyed another successful year, helping 7,214 Floridians with significant disabilities get or keep a job! The Florida Rehabilitation Council (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 during State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2013-14, there were over 55,000 people in some phase of service with the division. The complexity of their needs has also increased significantly. Our employees have risen to the challenge, which resulted in an 11% 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.

VR currently maintains waiting lists for customers in all service categories. We began a waiting list for eligible applicants with significant disabilities (service Category 2) in November 2013 and for eligible applicants with most significant disabilities (Category 1) in February 2014. Service Category 3 (eligible applicants with other disabilities) has been closed since 2008, although we released approximately 1000 individuals from Cat 3 into service between October 2012 - October 2013.



Vocational Rehabilitation (VR)



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.

During the 2014 session, the Florida legislature appropriated funding sufficient to allow VR to match Florida's federal VR grant allotment, providing additional revenue with which to serve our ever-increasing client base. Because of this wonderful status, we have been releasing individuals from Category 1 into service since June 1, 2014, and anticipate that the category will be open and flowing again by February 2015. When this occurs, we will begin serving people from the Category 2 waiting list.

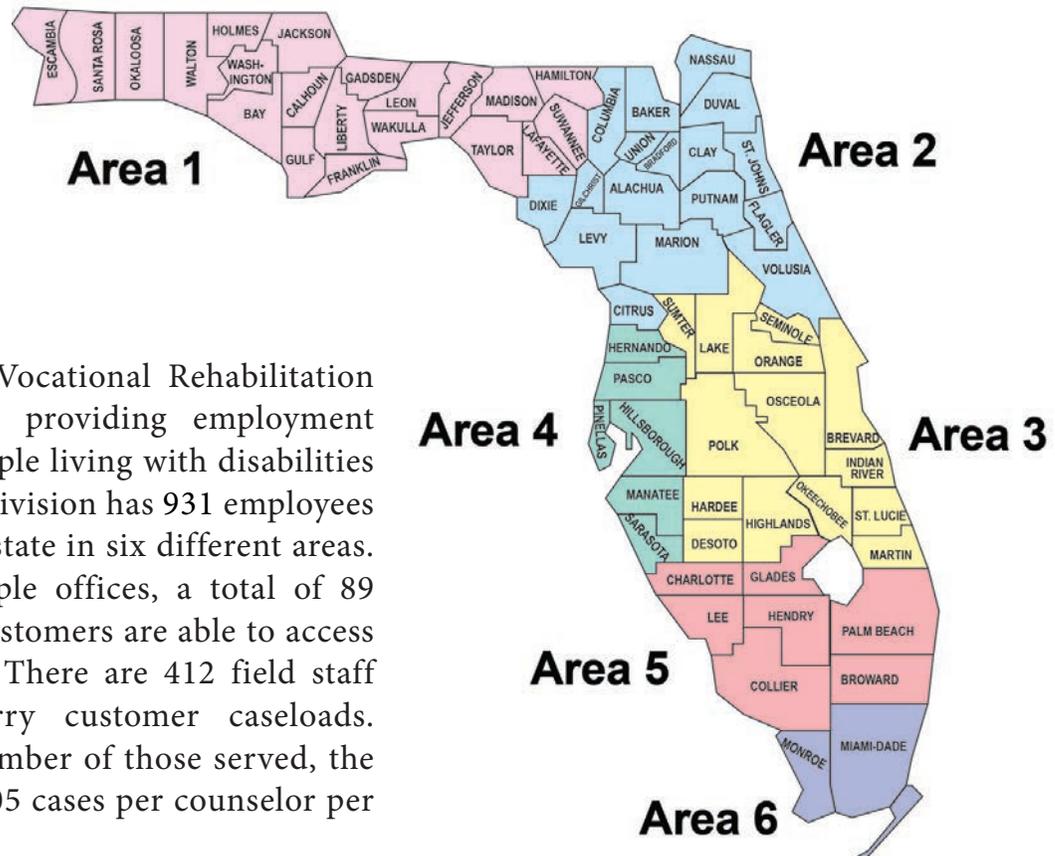
We are extremely grateful to the legislature and to the many internal and external partners who supported us in this initiative. We continue our efforts to improve our internal administrative processes, as well as our interface with customers, schools, businesses and other community partners, recognizing that the challenges are many, but the opportunities to help our customers live more independent, productive lives, far greater. We look forward to having the Florida Rehabilitation Council 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, a total of 89 across the state, so customers are able to access the needed services. There are 412 field staff counselors who carry customer caseloads. Given the current number of those served, the median caseload is 105 cases per counselor per month.



VR Pass-through Programs Include:

- 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

VR Services Include:

- School-to-Work Transition
- Deaf, Hard of Hearing and Deaf-Blind Services
- Employment and Business Relations
- Supported Employment Assistance
- Physical and Mental Restoration and Other Special Programs.
- Self-Employment Supports
- Ticket to Work
- Migrant and Seasonal Farm Worker Outreach
- Native American Outreach
- Assistive Services and Rehabilitation Technology

National and state employment picture

- Key findings indicate that the federal government hired people with disabilities at a higher rate than at any time in the past 33 years. Specifically, in Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2013, eighteen percent of new federal hires were people with disabilities, representing a 1.9 percent increase over FFY 2012.
- According to the 2012 American Community Survey Year Estimate, there are 2.3 million Floridians age 16 and over who have a disability. Of those, only 17.3 percent, or 402,665, are employed
- Nationally in 2013 - 33.9 percent of US civilians with disabilities ages 18-64 living in the community were employed, compared to 74.2 percent for people without disabilities. Nationally, employment rates vary by type of disability. Employment rates are highest for people with hearing disabilities (50.2%) and vision disabilities (39.6%).
- According to 2013 data, the national median earnings of US civilians with disabilities ages 16 and over was \$20,785, about two-thirds of the median earnings of people with disabilities (\$30,728).



Focusing on Employers



Thanks to the legislature and the Governor's Commission on Jobs for Floridians with Disabilities, employers in our state will now have a team of professionals to go to if they want to hire a person with a disability or if they want information that will make hiring employees with disabilities easier.

When an employer calls the Abilities Work Help Desk, staff will place a call or send an email to the proper VR unit supervisor. The supervisor will then work with the unit's counselors to identify candidates who are job ready and match the employer's requirements. If the supervisor is out or Help Desk staff receive no reply, the area supervisor

w i l l receive the referral.

When the Help Desk staff calls or sends an email, the unit supervisor needs to

respond within 24 hours that he or she received it. Follow up will be based on the employer's request; however, as a standard practice, the unit supervisor needs to reply to the employer within five business days. (This could be adjusted by the employer's requirements.) VR will do its best to meet the employer's expectations. Employers can reach the Help Desk at 1-844-245-3405 or AbilitiesWorkHD@vr.fldoe.org.

This is the time to let Florida's employers know about this untapped resource and match customers to the right job. If VR can



(L to R) Abilities Work Help Desk crew Jeffrey Michels, Paul Martell, Travis Vance, and Braxton.

A National Perspective



Breaking News.....

The White House Blog recently highlighted a Public-Private Partnership that works and was started in Florida! The Hands on Hyatt is a state-funded training program that prepares individuals with disabilities for employment in the hospitality industry. This program began in 1998 at the Grand Hyatt in Tampa Bay. sixteen years later the Hands on @



Hyatt is operating in 32 Hyatt Hotels in states all across the country. All students in this program are paid employees of Hyatt and to date, the partnership has trained over 1,500 individuals with disabilities and has observed above average post-training employment outcomes. Thank you to the founder and program director John Ficca who was honored as a Disability Employment Champion of Change by the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR).

make a good first impression on employers and find them the best employee for the job, then hopefully they will come back when they have other positions to fill. This can lead to a beautiful partnership.

The collaborative efforts with the Department of Economic Opportunity and other interested parties to develop the Abilities Work Jobs Portal for businesses and individuals living with disabilities to access employment is impressive and in line with state and federal initiatives. The web address for the portal is abilitieswork.employflorida.com.

Disability Employment Awareness Month (DEAM)

The month of October is recognized and celebrated as DEAM in which Florida joins the rest of the Nation in recognizing the contributions of the 5.7 million Floridians with disabilities. VR commends the following businesses for being recognized as leaders within their communities in support of hiring those individuals best suited for the job - a person who lives with a disability!

DEAM Recipients

VR recognized the following local corporations with the Outstanding Employer Awards

2014 Miami employers:

- Brightstar Corporation
- City of Hialeah
- Designs by Camilas
- University of Miami Newman Alumni Center

2014 St. Petersburg employers:

- College Hunks Hauling Junk
- Hilton at Carillon Park
- Ken Burke, Clerk of Court
- Lowe's
- Morgan & Morgan

VR and other stakeholder agencies serving individuals with disabilities recognized employers throughout the state at the Tallahassee DEAM celebration.

The 2014 statewide recipients include:

- 2-1-1 Broward
- Bay Pines VA Healthcare System
- Citigroup
- Dunkin' Donuts
- Gulf Coast Enterprises
- Lee & Marie's Cakery Company
- SeaWorld Orlando



The St Petersburg DEAM celebration with Representative Larry Ahern at the Hilton Bayfront



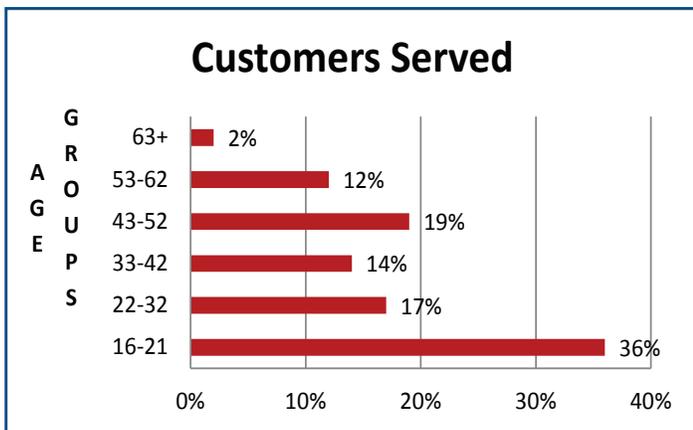
Mission Focus: Employing our Customers



VR Facts at a Glance	2012-2013	2013-2014
Persons with disabilities who entered gainful employment	6,523	7,214
Customers with a significant or most significant disability	6,450	7,019
Customers with a disability	73	195
Average hours worked per week for closed cases	30.2	30.2
Average hourly earnings for closed cases	\$10.98	\$11.15
Average annual earnings for closed cases	\$17,242	\$17,536
Total earnings in the first year	\$112,467,902	\$126,503,044
Average number of active customers	55,457	44,014
Median monthly caseload per field staff carrying a caseload	127	105
Number of Individual Plans for Employment created during the year	16,831	9,143
Rehabilitation rate	43.4%	29.8%
Average cost of case life for customers with a significant or most significant disability	\$3,612	\$4,318
Customers self-supporting at acceptance	17.0%	15.6%
Customers self-supporting at closure	74.0%	80.1%
Third Party Payers	\$2,904,888	\$4,435,928

For every \$1 invested in rehabilitating a customer, an estimated \$10.73 was returned to the economy in state fiscal year 2013-2014.

- The age groups who received services from VR during SFY 2013-2014 vary. One major focus of VR is transitioning students from school to work. This group is an important cohort as they are our leaders of tomorrow. The number of transition age youth served by VR during the SFY is 19,188 persons out of 53,141 total individuals or 36% of all customers. The number of youth employed following VR services has increased in each of the last four years.

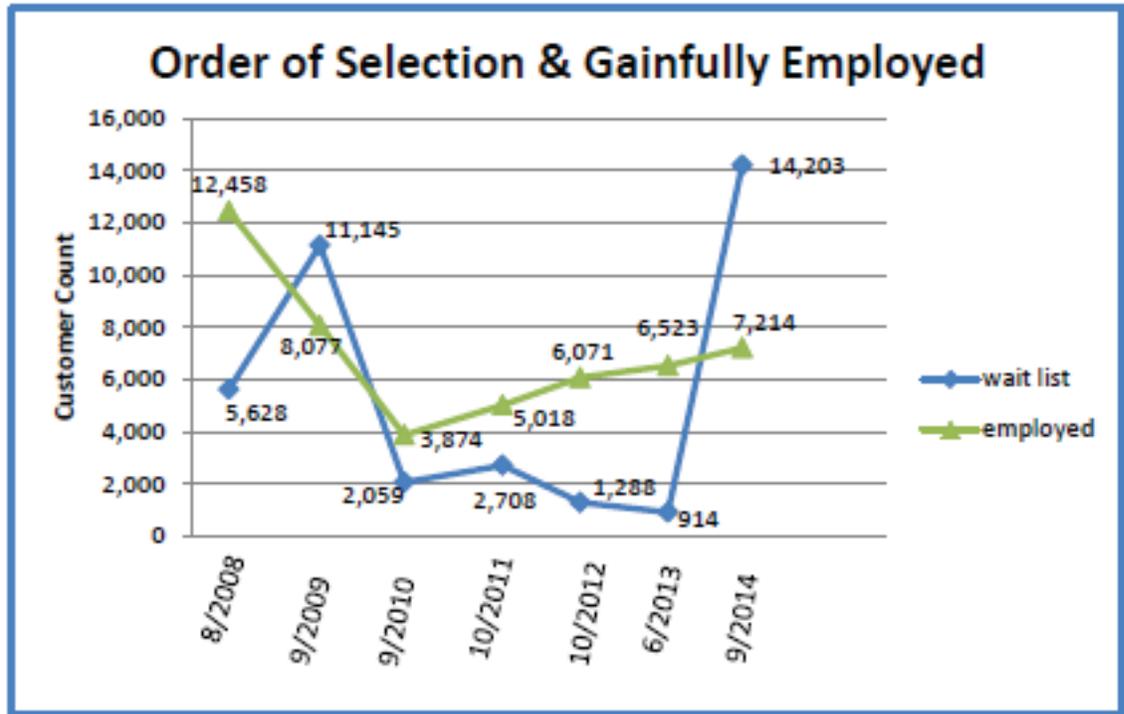


- As individuals with disabilities are employed, they become tax payers, and the investment of both the state and federal government is returned across the economy of the entire state. Collective customer earnings in the first year of employment are estimated to be \$126,503,044 for SFY 2013-2014. This is an increase from previous years of approximately \$14 million dollars back into the Florida economy. In past state fiscal years, VR customers employed earned an estimated \$112,467,902 for 2012-2013 and \$104,944,723 for SFY 2011-2012.
- Federal VR program regulations establish standards and indicators by which the Rehabilitation Services Administration

(RSA) (U.S. Department of Education) measures the performance of the state VR agencies. These federal indicators are a way to compare services across multiple states. These federal performance measures include the number of individuals gainfully employed, whether their employment is competitive, the severity of their 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 was very close to the performance expectations, but did not meet all benchmarks. As such, VR has developed a plan for performance improvement. Although progress is being made, areas of focus for Florida to improve the outcomes of federal performance measures include the earnings ratio and the rehabilitation rate. The rehabilitation rate is the total number of successful placements divided by the number of unsuccessful customers. This rate of efficiency measures the resources required whether or not the customer enters employment.

Federal Performance Measures, FFY October 2013 - September 2014			
Indicator	Measure	Expectation	Outcome
1.1	Increase in number employed	≥ 0 from previous year	437 Good
1.2	% of Employment Outcome (Rehab Rate)	≥ 55.8%	29.82% Below
1.3	Competitive Employment	≥ 72.6%	99.67% Good
1.4	Customers served with a significant disability	≥ 62.4%	97.53% Good
1.5	Earnings Ratio	≥ .52	.5167 Below
1.6	Self-Supporting at Closure	≥ 53.0%	66.20% Good

• The chart below displays the of Order of Selection (OOS) Florida entered in August 2008. OOS is a prioritization system when VR is unable to provide rehabilitation services to all eligible individuals in the state who apply for the services. OOS causes VR to operate with a wait list for services for its 3 categories. Category 3 has been on a wait list since 2008; Category 2 wait list began in November 2013, and Category 1 wait list began in February 2014. During the 2014 Legislative session, appropriated funds to VR have resulted



in individuals being released into service since June 1,

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.

2014. It is anticipated that by early 2015 Category 1 will no longer have a wait list. At that time, VR may be able to start serving some people from the Category 2 wait list. The numbers on the wait list will vary throughout the month and year. Also provided on this chart is the number of customers that are gainfully employed. In 2008 when VR first went into OOS the

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.

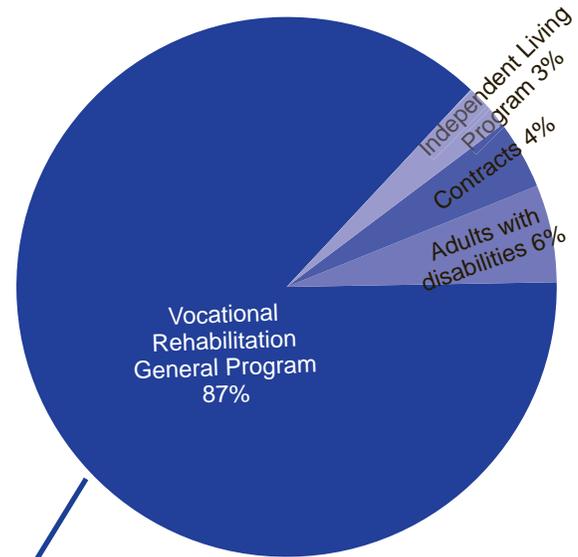
unemployment rate was 4.9 percent; thus VR was able to place over twelve thousand customers into competitive jobs of their choice. As the unemployment rate increased fewer VR customers were placed into employment. VR is working to responsibly reduce the wait list so the number of individuals employed will continue to rise during the next fiscal year.

For a complete description of VR categories and employment criterion please contact the VR Ombudsman office at (toll free) 866-515-3692.

• The charts on this page represent Division Expenditures for the SFY 2013-2014. The total Division expenditures were \$190,174,782. Those Division expenditures include contracts and program funds for the Adults with Disabilities and Independent Living Programs. In addition to these programs, 87 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 \$172,618,544, 11 percent is for general expenses and 28 percent for salaries. The major expense item for VR is Purchased Client Services (PCS), which equates to expenditures of 61 percent or \$105,590,220. 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.

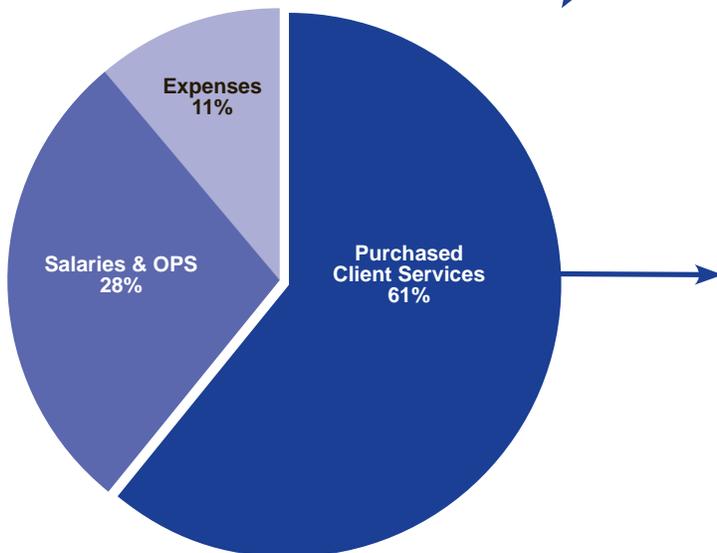
2013-2014 Division Programs

Total Division Expenditures \$190,174,782



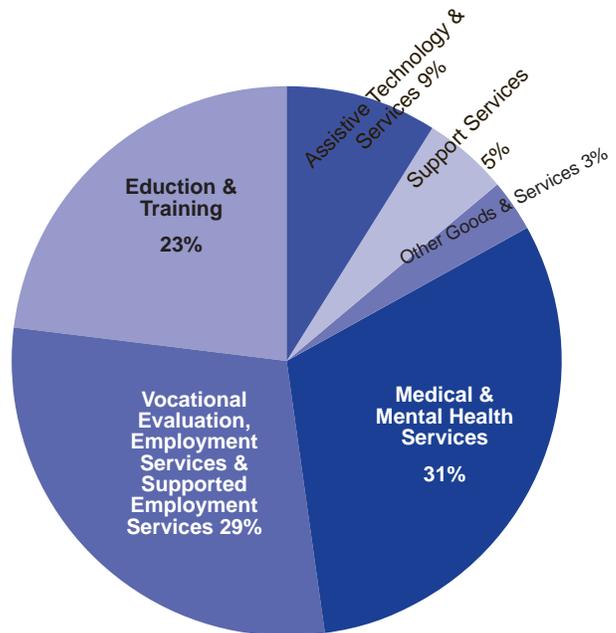
2013-2014 VR General Program Expenditures

Total VR Expenditures \$172,618,544



VR Purchased Client Services (PCS) Expenditures by Category

Total PCS Expenditures \$105,590,220



Very thankful for VR; for I would not have been able to make this change without their aid.



2015 State Plan

The Council reviewed feedback from public forums, customer satisfaction surveys, the needs assessment, the employee climate survey, updates, reports from the director and partners, discussions and performance reports to develop and include the following recommendations into the 2015 VR State Plan. The full 2015 state plan may be found at rehabworks.org.

Recommendation 1: Order of Selection

Efforts to establish accurate budget forecasting are strongly encouraged to eliminate the wait list and limit delays in service delivery.

Recommendation 2: VR Communication and Collaboration with FRC, customers, and stakeholders

VR needs to increase communication efforts to notify and solicit public input before substantial policy changes are made.

Recommendation 3: Budget

FRC and VR are pleased with the appropriated funding boost that will reopen categories for service and encourage establishing sound protocol and sharing of all fiscal concerns with FRC.

Recommendation 4: Customer Services

FRC recommends that VR consider innovative job placement approaches to increase the rehabilitation rate, formally notifying customers of counselor change or reassignment, and

increasing employee training on the benefits of encouraging customers' self-advocacy and development of their own Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE.)

Recommendation 5: Public Comment

There needs to be continued collaborative efforts in capturing public comment and meetings when proposed changes to the agency's procedures may impact customers.

Recommendation 6: Job Placement Strategies

VR needs to strengthen engagement efforts with business leaders to develop long-range employment options for its customers and ways to maximize the employers return on investment.

Recommendation 7: Transition

FRC encourages developing Innovation and Expansion grant opportunities for community colleges to assist transition age youth while remaining aware of the new Florida diploma standards; and any potential policy implementation that may require customer financial participation. FRC requests that VR plans for future third party cooperative arrangements be offered to all 67 school districts.

Recommendation 8: Federal Performance Indicators

The Council is still concerned that VR is on a performance improvement plan based on the two failing federal indicators and, thus, recommends efforts towards data integrity and accuracy to enhance effective and efficient service delivery.

Recommendation 9: Counselor Recruitment, Retention, and Employee Development

Encourage personnel development and training. The concern with high employee turnover and pay parity the Council encourages further strategic planning to address this issue.

Recommendation 10: Outreach

FRC encourages making the IPE available in Spanish, expanding rural access to services, encouraging self-advocacy, and increasing the focus on serving under and un-served

populations. Engaging public school district guidance counselors to assist students in adapting to an employment environment as well as recruiting, and recognize business leaders to promote employment efforts are also areas of recommendation.

Recommendation 11: FRC Membership

Continue to focus on meeting FRC membership regulations. Discussions and meetings with the State of Florida Governor's Appointment Office are an ongoing top priority in partnership.

Recommendation 12: National Involvement

The FRC recognizes the need for networking and collaboration with other State Rehabilitation Councils on a national level to share processes that can enhance VR services.

Perseverance and Persistence

Pay off for Kember

Sunrise, FL – “I didn't hire him because he had a disability. I hired him because he was able to do a specific job that I needed done.” Brian Botting, President of WETTAPS, Inc., is talking about Harry Kember, who has quadriplegia and uses a wheelchair. Harry is the part time estimator at WETTAPS. He got his job through perseverance and persistence and a little help from Vocational Rehabilitation (VR).



Harry found out about VR while he was working for the Center for Independent Living in Broward County. He had always ridden the bus to get wherever he needed to go, but, on this occasion, the bus was late, so he was late for his appointment. His co-worker mentioned that VR might be able to help him with transportation, and Harry decided to give VR a try.

His VR counselor, Lucia Mavrakis, talked to Harry about what services he needed, and together they developed a plan for employment. After guidance and counseling,

VR paid for modifications to Harry's van so he could drive himself around town. VR also paid for driving lessons. “It was totally different,” Harry said. “I could now get around without depending on anyone.”

When he was laid off from his job in 2011, Harry went back to VR for help with job placement. Lucia paired him up with Ana Davis, a job coach with Jewish Community Services, and she began working with him to update his resume. “Harry was very active in his job search,” she said. “When he sent his resume to a company, he would let me know so I could follow up with them, explain the benefits and tax breaks they could get, and see if they would be willing to hire him.”

Even though Harry had reached retirement age, he still wanted to work. “I can't keep still; I just want to do something,” he said. “If I can't work, volunteer.” He went on a number of interviews, but things weren't looking good. He began contacting former clients to see if anyone needed a part-time employee, and it turned out that Brian did. Harry works three days a week, and because his job is mainly on the computer, he splits his time at the office and at home. “They were willing to work with me.”

Brian said that he doesn't see Harry as having a disability. “He's great and a fun guy. I've known him awhile, and the reality is I don't really consider him disabled. He's just a normal guy to me.”

Harry is glad he found out about VR. “VR is one of the best things,” he said. “I didn't know about VR, and I wish I had known about it before because Lucia was very good.”

Lucia enjoys her work and enjoyed working with Harry. “My experience with Mr. Kember has been an inspiration for me personally,” she said. “Many doors closed on him because of assumptions about his disability and age, but he just keeps going and contributing to our society. I respect his work ethic.”



Customer Satisfaction

In 2013-2014, the Council monitored customer satisfaction by contracting with Florida State University to conduct two independent surveys. The surveys measured customer satisfaction on multiple scales at the time individuals began 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. Council actions and advisement to VR are derived from some survey responses such as these from closed cases N= 2,688.

Survey Item - Accessibility of VR offices: Rehabilitated = 92% satisfaction versus Unsuccessful placement = 64% satisfaction.

Survey Item - Treated with courtesy and respect: Rehabilitated = 97% satisfaction versus Unsuccessful placement = 83% satisfaction.

Survey Item – Understand needs and feelings: Rehabilitated = 89% satisfaction versus Unsuccessful placement = 57% satisfaction.

Survey Item – Appropriateness of services received: Rehabilitated = 92% felt appropriate versus Unsuccessful placement = 58% appropriate.

Survey Item – Other service needs but have

not received: Rehabilitated = 67% no other service needs versus Unsuccessful placements = 46% indicated no other service needs.

Survey Item – Informed of choices in providers and goals: Rehabilitated = 84% indicated informed versus Unsuccessful placement = 60%.

Survey Item - Ability to make choices in providers and goals: Rehabilitated = 93% satisfaction versus Unsuccessful placement = 78%.

Survey Item – Services provided promptly: Rehabilitated = 72% considered prompt versus Unsuccessful placement = 44% reported prompt service delivery.

Survey Item – Services made life better: Rehabilitated = 91% believe VR helped versus Unsuccessful placement = 48% indicating services made life better.

Survey Item – Overall satisfaction with services received from VR: Rehabilitated = 89% satisfied versus Unsuccessful placement = 47% indicating satisfaction.

Approximately 84% of survey respondents were satisfied with the job obtained.

FRC is appreciative of the work accomplished by the Florida State University (FSU) Survey Research Lab in the College of Social Sciences and Public Policy these past many years. The services rendered by Dr. Mary Stutzman and Dr Minna Jia are a credit to the university and a strong legacy for FRC and VR to build upon.

The Council and VR conducted a competitive search for a vendor to continue the survey of our customers into the future. A variety of methods to collect customer responses were considered. Many of these include paper surveys, electronic access via the internet, as well as the possibility of in-office immediate feedback kiosks. Market Decisions based in Maine was hired to conduct, summarize, and present satisfaction survey responses to

Council and VR. Some initial findings based on 213 surveys collected in October 2014 indicate 82% of customers were satisfied with their involvement with VR. Another item identified that 78% of our customer survey respondents reported that the VR services helped them become more financially independent. A total of 81% of 213 respondents indicated that they were satisfied with their VR experience. We look forward to future reports and comparisons.

Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment

Other ways the Council and VR work to hear our customer's voice is through the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA). The purpose of the needs assessment is to gather information about factors that affect VR customers' ability to get and keep jobs, as well as to identify any barriers or limitations they may experience. Federal regulations require public VR programs to conduct needs assessments every three years and use the information in developing the goals and priorities in their state plans. The needs assessment project, conducted in-house, used qualitative and quantitative methods and consisted of five major parts: a review of state demographics, a customer survey, a VR field staff survey, and stakeholder interviews.

Information gathered was included in the 2012-2013 State Plan and has been used to inform the strategic plan. The next Needs Assessment is to be conducted for inclusion into the 2016 State Plan.

National Evaluation Efforts

VR employees Steve Collins, Josh Durden, Michael Karris, and FRC employee Andrea Schwendinger attended the August Nation VR Evaluation Summit in Louisville, KY. VR staff presented "Assessing Contracted Service Providers" and the FRC presented on "Working in Partnership with State Rehabilitation Councils". The feedback received from national

representatives is very positive and has spurred further research and discussions about the presentation topics. All presentations can be viewed at vocalional-rehab.com/training/summit-2014-presentations/.

Stephen R. Wise Award

Guardian Angels Medical Service Dogs, Inc., was honored with the FRC Stephen R. Wise Advocacy Award. Founder Carol Borden (left) accepted the award on behalf of the organization from FRC Chair Kara Tucker (right) at the FRC quarterly Council meeting held in Orlando. The room was filled with people who were the recipients of service dogs that Guardian Angels trained and rehomed to individuals. As she was speaking, they were nodding their heads in agreement about how their dogs have changed their lives. More than a few tears were shed. You can find more information about Guardian Angels medical Service Dogs at www.medicalservicedogs.com.



Other 2014 Stephen R. Wise Award nominees included:

- ☛ Becki Forsell
- ☛ David Jones
- ☛ David Lindsay
- ☛ Don Corwin
- ☛ Jim Giblin
- ☛ Lori Fahey
- ☛ William Kennedy
- ☛ Lyn Picolo
- ☛ Paul Durand
- ☛ Sheila Gritz-Swift
- ☛ Teri Poucher
- ☛ Virginia Jacko
- ☛ Warren Jernigan

Congratulations to all awardees and award nominees. Your work in the community precedes you!

Hopefully in the future I can give you guys support to help more people like me - Thank you so much!!!

Cooking Up a Dream

Miami, FL – “Success is synonymous with Vocational Rehabilitation (VR),” says VR customer Liliana “Lili” Ferri. When Lili first came to VR and met her counselor, Olga Ramos, she was unemployed and raising her three daughters on her own. Lili, who emigrated from her native country of Venezuela, cried during the initial counselor interview due to depression and a stress disorder.

From the beginning, Lili talked about her dream of becoming a chef. Her daughters loved her cooking and had always encouraged her to open a restaurant. With Olga guiding her through the process, Lili began working on her culinary arts degree at San Ignacio College. VR paid for tuition, books, and transportation to class, as well as offered guidance and counseling.

She worked hard on her studies, staying long hours at school to work on extra credit and help fellow students with subjects that were giving them trouble. “Suddenly I was in college, and it was really hard at first and went really fast,” said Lili. “I kept reminding myself that I was doing this for my daughters.” She also volunteered at college events. All that hard work paid off and, in September 2012, Lili graduated at the top of her class as valedictorian.

Because of her academic success and volunteer work, the college decided to hire her as their operations and purchasing coordinator. Lili bought supplies and helped the faculty prepare the food for their classes. She also taught the



cooking class offered to the public twice a week.

Elsa Stadthagen, Lili’s supervisor, was happy to have her on staff. “Liliana earned a special place in our hearts and a lot of respect from everyone. She’s a great worker,” said Elsa. “I like to use her success as an example for our students to follow, including the ones that are currently working with VR.”

When asked what it has been like working with someone who has a disability, Elsa said, “It’s been a very good experience. She worked well on our team. I definitely recommend working with VR to find employees.”

Lili recently started a new job as the pantry chef at a Cheesecake Factory. There, she makes appetizers, cold salads, and more: various types of food that do not need to be cooked. She is a chef and proud to be working in her chosen field.

“It’s good to be on the other side,” Lili said. “Now I can buy a car or buy books if I want. Everything has changed, both personally and professionally.” She has reached her goal and, in the process, demonstrated her abilities and perseverance, not only to herself, but to her family and friends.

Lili expresses her gratitude to VR and Olga, who trusted in her dreams and ultimate success. “Olga always encouraged me and asked how I was doing,” she said. Olga was a little concerned that Lili may have some difficulty at the beginning because of her limitations with the English language, but she made it through. “Lili’s very persistent. When she makes a goal, she goes all the way.”

Olga is a great role model for her customers. She began working at VR in 1979 as a secretary. After her children grew older, she went back school to earn her master’s degree and rehabilitation counseling certification. She became a counselor in 2008. Olga also showed her kids that they can do anything they want to do. “No matter how old you are, you can meet your goals.”

Additional Contributions to the Mission, Advocacy, and Outreach

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 2013-14, 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. FRC members also met with Florida Legislators and others to seek feedback and to provide education and advocacy regarding VR services and the needs of its customers. The FRC distributed 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 VR on holding public forums and developing the goals and priorities for the 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 their 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 issues affecting individuals with disabilities employment needs.

The **Evaluation Committee** has as its primary function the evaluation of the services provided by VR. One method is the management, in partnership with VR, of the customer 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. This Committee also develops, produces, and distributes the Council's 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.

Public Forums

Council Recruitment

The Council consists of Governor-appointed individuals. As a Council Member and VR Advocate, we work in strategic partnership to increase the employment of all people living with disabilities in competitive jobs of their choice. Representative groups are determined by assignment by the Governor, your experience, and the interest group you want to represent, (i.e., labor, community rehab providers, disability groups, etc.)

The process for appointment to the FRC is to complete the Governor's appointment application, identifying your wish to serve on this Council. The application can be obtained by going to: www.flgov.com/appointments or by calling 850-488-7146.

For further information about becoming an FRC Member or the expectations of membership, please contact Council Program Administrator Roy Cosgrove or Council Analyst, Andrea Schwendinger at 850-245-3397. Additional information about FRC and VR may be found at www.rehabworks.org.



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.

Along with VR, the FRC wants your feedback to improve our 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 from 11 a.m. to 12 noon.
- 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: February 3, 2015

West Palm Beach: May 19, 2015

Jacksonville: August 11, 2015

Naples: October 27, 2015

Meet the FRC Staff



Roy Cosgrove (center), Program Administrator. Responsibilities include managing all FRC programs, staffing Business, Evaluation and Executive committees. Roy.Cosgrove@vr.fldoe.org.

Andrea Schwendinger (Right), 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 (Left), 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.

Special Recognition

- The Council offers a special thanks to the following members for their meritorious service as they moved on to other advocacy roles during the 2013-2014 fiscal year: Steve Collins, Shawn Peters and Afzal Choudhry.

Special Recognition continued

- Council members who served in executive roles during 2013-2014: Kara Tucker as Council Chair, Becki Forsell as Council 1st Vice-Chair, Yolanda Herrera as Council 2nd Vice-Chair, Ann Robinson as Evaluation Committee Chair, and Janet Severt as Public Awareness Chair
- On behalf of the Florida Rehabilitation Council (FRC) and the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR), we want to thank the Governor and legislative delegates for their continued support of persons with disabilities who stand ready to actualize their employment goals and become independent, productive citizens. Your support for an increase of \$18.4 million in General Revenue in the VR budget is greatly appreciated. It is estimated that the appropriation of extra state funds in the 2014-2015 SFY VR budget will draw down approximately \$68.2 million in additional federal funds the same year.
- Thanks to Senate President Bill Galvano and speaker of the House Eric Fresen for their leadership and support of VR, which has greatly contributed to expanding employment opportunities and increasing independence for Floridians with disabilities. We look forward to working with the new Senate President Gardiner and Speaker of the House Crisafulli during the next fiscal year.
- The Council appreciates the extra work and investment by the following VR employees: Elizabeth Moody, Amy Lyne, Lucy Mohs, Cheryl Farner, Steve Collins, Rachel Smith, and Allen D. Goodrum.
- The Council wishes to thank Andrea Schwendinger for creating our Annual Report.

Dear Friends:

It has been an honor and a privilege to serve as the Chairperson of the FRC for the greater portion of 2014. Because of the extraordinary teamwork exhibited by our dedicated Council members, Council staff, and the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation; we were able to accomplish many of our critical goals.

I would again like to thank Governor Rick Scott and Legislators in Tallahassee and Washington, D.C. for their unwavering support and funding. Their awareness and actions allowed numerous people with disabilities to be given the opportunity to be gainfully employed.

I give my sincere congratulations to Ann Robinson, who was elected the new FRC Chairperson, and wish the entire team continued success in their quest to provide employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

Sincerely,
Kara Wade Tucker,
Florida Rehabilitation
Council, Past-Chair



It takes the collective cooperation and meaningful investment of many to advocate for people living with disabilities in the State of Florida and nationally. The investment of time and effort is found in private industry, the Federal Government, State Legislation, VR families, and other interested parties. Without these entities and persons, advocacy efforts of the Florida Rehabilitation 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, 2013 to June 30, 2014:

2013-2014 Florida Rehabilitation Council Members



- **Ann Robinson**, Council Chair
- Hometown: Tallahassee, Fl.
- Represents Client Assistance Program - Disability Rights of FL



- **Yolanda Herrera**, Council 1st Vice-Chair and Planning/Coordination Committee Chair
- Hometown: Miami, Fl.
- Represents Groups and persons with physical, cognitive, sensory and mental disabilities



- **Lori Kijanka**, Council 2nd Vice-Chair and Evaluation Committee Chair
- Hometown: Pembroke Pines, Fl.
- Represents Community Rehabilitation Providers



- **Cathy Bishop**, Planning / Coordination Committee Member
- Hometown: Tallahassee, Fl.
- Represents Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Department of Education (DOE)



- **Patrick Cannon**, Public Awareness Committee Chair
- Hometown: Tallahassee, Fl.
- Represents Current or former applicants for, or recipients of, vocational rehabilitation services.



- **Don Chester**, Legislative Committee Member
- Hometown: West Palm Beach, FL.
- Represents Business, Industry and Labor



- and his companion Polly Anna



- **Afzal Choudhry**, Legislative Committee Member
- Hometown: Leesburg, FL.
- Represents Business, Industry and Labor



- **Steve Collins**, Planning/Coordination Committee Member and Evaluation Committee Member,
- Hometown: Tallahassee, FL.
- Represents Groups and persons with physical, cognitive, sensory and mental disabilities



- **John Henry Douglas**, Planning/Coordination Committee Member
- Hometown: Lake City, FL.
- Represents Florida Independent Living Council (FILC)r



- **Ruth Esser**, Legislative Committee Member
- Hometown: Gulfbreeze, FL.
- Represents of disability groups representing individuals with physical, cognitive, sensory or mental disabilities.



- **Becki Forsell**, Legislative Committee Chair
- Hometown: Tampa, FL.
- Represents Business, Industry and Labor



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



- **Shawn Peters**, Public Awareness Committee Member
- Hometown: Royal Palm Beach, FL.
- Represents VR Counselor



- **Janet Severt**, Evaluation Committee Member
- Hometown: Orange City, FL.
- Represents Business, Industry and Labor



- and her companion Wylan



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



- **Rebecca Witonsky**, Legislative Committee Member
- Hometown: Boca Raton, FL.
- Represents Groups and persons with physical, cognitive, sensory and mental disabilities

FLORIDA *Rehabilitation* COUNCIL

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