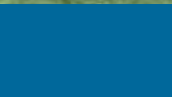




2018-2019 Annual Report



Breaking Barriers | Building Careers

Table of Contents

Florida Rehabilitation Council Message from the Chair 3

Florida Rehabilitation Council Members 4

Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Message from the Director
Public Forums 5

Program Overview 6

Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Overview with
Council Recommendations to the 2016-2020 Unified State Plan 7

Performance Highlights 8

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

Becki Forsell Honored with Stephen R. Wise Award
Vocational Rehabilitation Services for Businesses 11

Success Stories 12

Ombudsman
Customer Satisfaction Survey Results 15

How to Become a Florida Rehabilitation Council Member*

Florida Rehabilitation Council (FRC) members are appointed by the governor. FRC members and VR advocates work in strategic partnership to increase the employment of people with disabilities in competitive, integrated jobs of their choice, and in keeping with their skills and abilities.

Federal law governing membership requires that certain categories be represented on the council (e.g., businesses, community rehabilitation providers, disability groups), and these category assignments are made by the Governor’s office in light of applicant experience and expressed representational preferences.

The process for appointment to the FRC is to complete the governor’s appointment application and identifying your wish to serve on the FRC. You can find an application at www.flgov.com/appointments or call 850-488-7146.

For more information about becoming an FRC member or the expectations of membership, contact FRC staff at 850-245-3397.



Cover (shown left to right, top to bottom): Nolan Vance, Jessica Fernandez, James River, Becki Forsell and Andre Lewis. Their stories are featured on pages 11 through 13. To request this annual report in alternative formats contact FRCCustomers@vr.fldoe.org.

* Statutory Authority and Governing Guidelines may be found in 34 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), Chapter III, Part 361.17 and Chapter 413, Part II, Florida Statutes (F.S.)

Florida Rehabilitation Council



Michael Wiseman

Message from the Chair

The Florida Rehabilitation Council (FRC) and the Florida Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) are pleased to present the *2018-2019 Annual Report: Breaking Barriers—Building Careers*. This past year, the FRC continued to partner with VR to promote full employment for persons with disabilities in integrated and meaningful jobs of their choosing. As VR worked to adopt and integrate the new Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) standards and processes in this effort, so too, the FRC has worked and continues to work to meet the new challenges and opportunities presented. To accomplish this, the FRC emphasizes open communication with our customers and stakeholders. The FRC, in collaboration with VR, conducted a robust customer satisfaction survey and two focus groups. Additionally, the FRC held four public forums and partnered with VR to hold a rule development workshop. This feedback is important because the FRC and VR promote continual improvement, best practices and innovative processes based on this communication and in this way, represents you. By becoming involved and sharing your ideas, thoughts and recommendations, we can together, help make VR the recognized leader to help people with disabilities find and maintain employment and enhance their independence. On behalf of the members of the FRC, we proudly present the FRC and VR annual report for 2018-2019.

FRC Mission

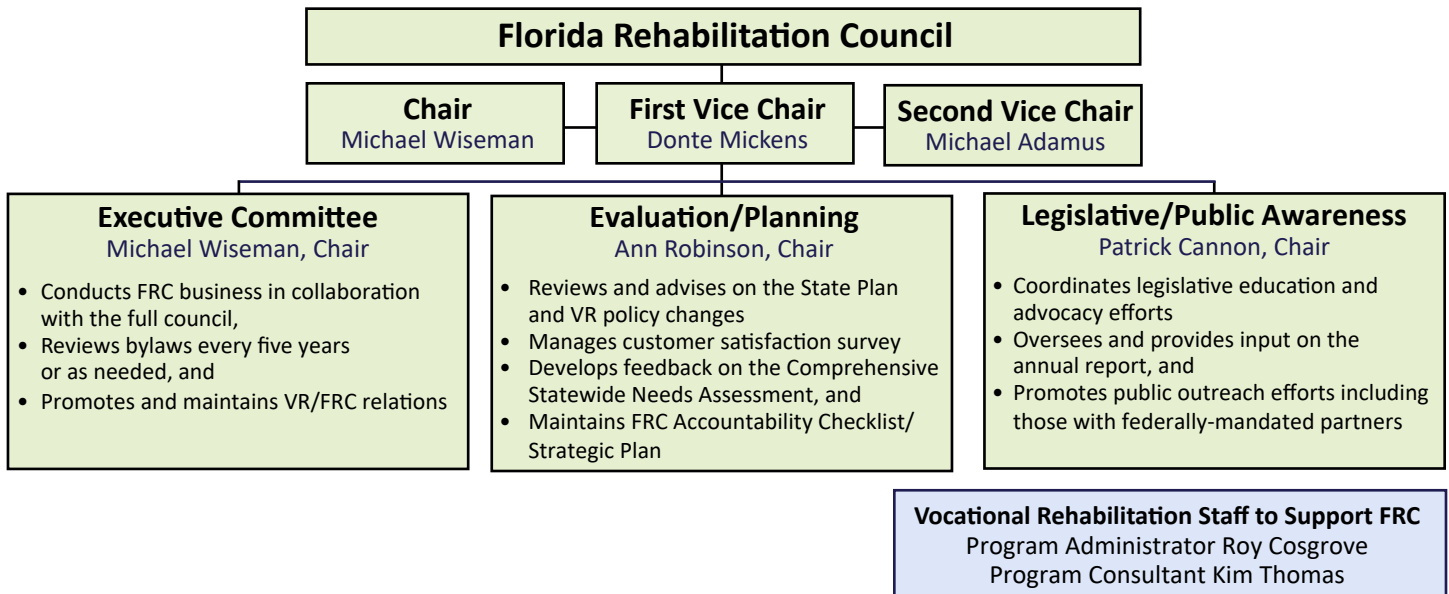
The Florida Rehabilitation Council is committed to increasing employment, enhancing independence and improving the quality of life for Floridians with disabilities.

FRC Vision

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

About FRC

The Florida Rehabilitation Council (FRC) is part of a network of state rehabilitation councils created by the 1992 Amendments to the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. The FRC was established to help Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) in planning and developing statewide rehabilitation programs and services, and recommending improvements to programs and services.



Florida Rehabilitation Council Members



Michael Wiseman
Chair
Hialeah

Represents disability groups that include individuals who have difficulty representing themselves or unable to represent themselves



Donte Mickens
First Vice Chair
Delray Beach

Represents disability groups that include individuals with physical, cognitive, sensory or mental disabilities



Michael Adamus
Second Vice Chair
Orlando

Represents disability groups that include individuals who have difficulty representing themselves or unable to represent themselves



Victoria Aguilar
Naples

Represents Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors



Amanda Brown
Gainesville

Represents disability groups that include individuals with physical, cognitive, sensory or mental disabilities



Judy White
Tallahassee

Represents the state educational agency responsible for the public education of students with disabilities under Disabilities Education Act



Patrick Cannon
Past Chair
Tallahassee

Represents current or former applicants for, or recipients of, Vocational Rehabilitation services



Molly Hullinger
St. Augustine

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



Allison Flanagan
VR Director
Tallahassee

Represents Vocational Rehabilitation



Ann Robinson
Tallahassee

Represents Client Assistance Program—Disability Rights Florida



Janet Severt and Wyland
Orange City

Represents business, industry and labor



Rebecca Witonsky
Boca Raton

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

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

Stephen Hardy Bob Campbell Ana Laura dos Santos Lara

Division of Vocational Rehabilitation

Message from the Director

On behalf of the Florida Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, I am excited to share the *2018-2019 Annual Report: Breaking Barriers—Building Careers*. Breaking barriers takes collaborative planning and problem solving to provide educational, social and emotional support of Florida's individuals with disabilities to build a career. It is not just finding a job but helping our customers find a career that aligns with their individual strengths, interests, abilities, perspectives, aptitude and priorities.



Allison
Flanagan

In an era when historically-low unemployment is creating a demand for skilled talent, the division offers access to services and hands-on experience for our customers to attain these desired job skills. VR also creates connections for businesses to be inclusive of individuals with disabilities. The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation embraces tools such as job boards, career fairs, work-based learning experiences, on the job training, and many additional individualized services in order to make it easier than ever before for Florida's businesses to diversify their workforce through employment of individuals with disabilities in high-demand jobs.

Through our collaboration with providers, stakeholders and businesses, we increased our competitive, integrated employment outcomes by almost 25 percent. Working together, 5,924 individuals successfully obtained or maintained employment. This is compared to 4,752 last year. Not only are there more individuals with disabilities in the workforce, the average hours worked increased from 28 to 29 hours per week, which increased average weekly salary from \$340 to \$370.

I am proud of the accomplishments of the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation this last year and applaud the staff and our partners for a successful year. This annual report is a reflection of our past year, which highlights the improvements but also assists the agency in future enhancements to better assist individuals with disabilities in achieving their vocational goals.

The division celebrates in being a part of a collaborative group that makes it possible for individuals with disabilities to pursue meaningful life experiences through employment, support and community connections. Moreover, we will continue to make small and large changes to break barriers to create opportunities for our customers that add significant value and talent to Florida's workforce and economy.

VR Mission

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

VR Vision

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

Public Forums

The FRC and VR partner together to hold public forums that promote and maintain open lines of communication with VR customers, stakeholders and interested parties. This collaborative effort to reach customers, vendors, businesses and other stakeholders is a continued focus. The public forums are held at each FRC quarterly meeting or when policy changes may require public input. Access to these forums are not limited to individuals where the meeting is located, but they are open to the public statewide by conference call and CART text through the internet. There were four public forums conducted during 2018-2019 State Fiscal Year (SFY). Areas of comment received have included feedback on: High School High Tech Program, Project SEARCH, issues affecting individuals who are deaf/blind, transition services and coordination with school systems, vendor benchmarks and referral issues, success stories, customer concerns, VR policy changes, customer choice, peer mentoring and other topics.

2020 FRC/VR Public Forums

February 4-5	VR Area 1
May TBD	VR Area 5
August TBD	VR Area 6
November TBD	VR Area 3

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

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

Program Overview

The Florida Department of Education, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) is Florida's premier employment program for people with disabilities. VR is a federal/state partnership that helps people who have physical or mental disabilities prepare for, get, advance in or keep a job.

According to the *2017 American Community Survey*, approximately 2.5 million working age Floridians have a disability. This population has an unemployment rate twice that of persons without disabilities.

Last year, VR served 48,439 individuals including more than 22,866 transition age youth. VR helped 5,924 Floridians become successfully employed. The division has seven areas, 96 field offices and over 1,000 employees across the state. Individuals who apply for services are served by one of the 471 public and private counseling staff (including supervisors) located throughout the state.

Traditional Vocational Rehabilitation Program

VR supports an individual's path to independence with services needed to obtain lasting employment. This differs from other state agencies that provide ongoing and maintenance services or supports for individuals with disabilities. Once an individual, their employer and their VR counselor agree that the employment opportunity is successful, the individual's VR case is closed; however, the individual can return to VR for additional services if needed to maintain their job.

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

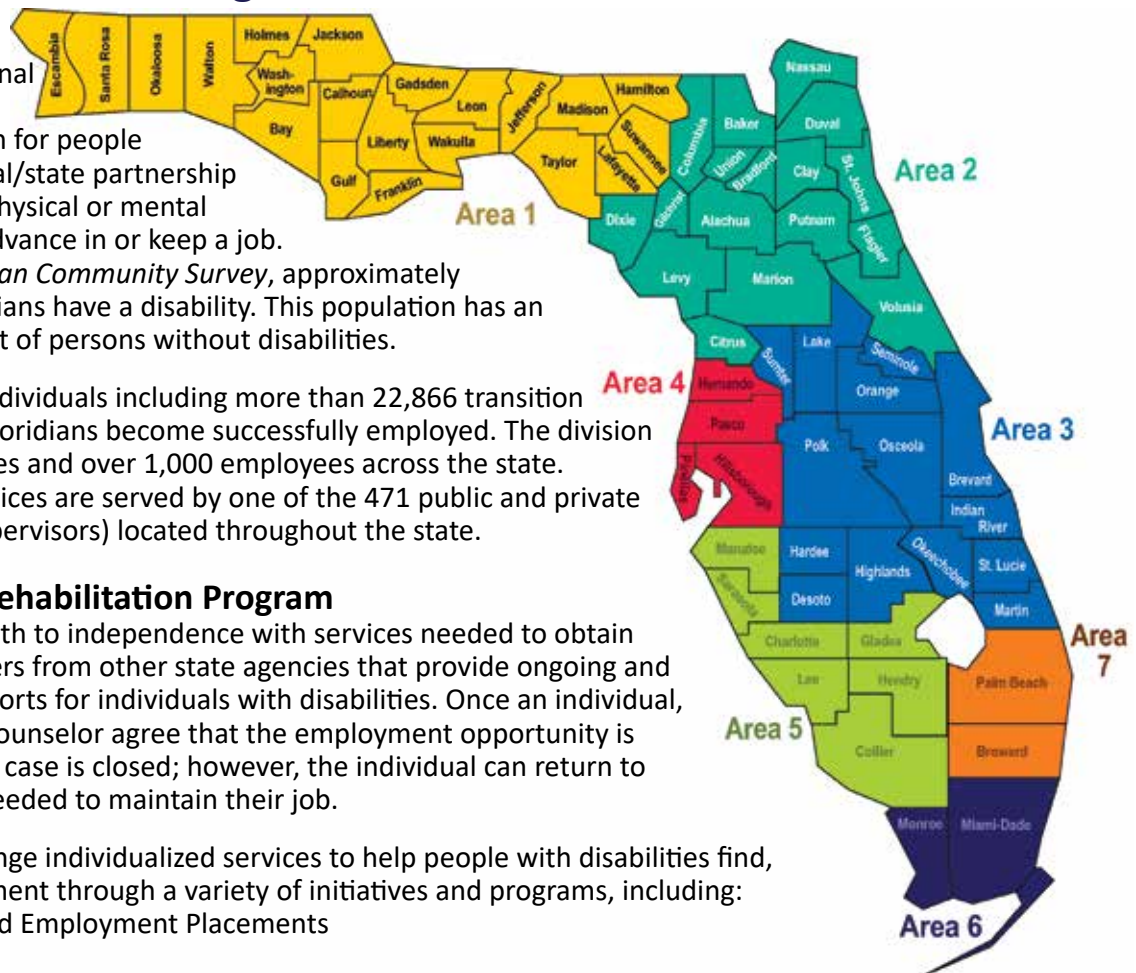
- Supported and Customized Employment Placements
- Job Retention Services
- Postsecondary college and career training, including apprenticeships

Vocational Rehabilitation Services for Youth and Students with Disabilities

VR provides individualized services to assist students with disabilities in a seamless transition from high school to a meaningful career path. Students with disabilities may participate in Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) without having to apply to VR, or be determined eligible for services. Under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act (WIOA), every student with a disability has the opportunity to participate in Pre-ETS through VR, including sponsored job exploration counseling, work readiness training, work-based learning experiences, postsecondary educational counseling and self-advocacy training (includes training delivered by peer mentors).

VR supports students in a variety of evidence-based programs including:

- 17 recognized Inclusive Postsecondary Education (IPSE): IPSE programs allow students with intellectual disabilities enroll in college courses with their degree-seeking peers and experience internships and gainful employment.
- 41 Project SEARCH sites: Project SEARCH is a nationally-recognized internship program built on a collaborative partnership with the local school district, a host business and VR. It is a business-driven model designed to provide students 18-21 years old with multiple work experiences and the social skills necessary to secure a meaningful career. Florida is the highest in the nation for the number of sites. This program has historically boasted impressive employment rates for participants.
- 43 High School High Tech (HS/HT) sites: HS/HT is designed to provide high school students with all types of disabilities the opportunity to explore jobs or postsecondary education leading to technology-related careers.
- VR Career Camps offer students the opportunity to participate in a variety of Pre-ETS to explore careers and learn about the many choices they can make after high school. VR partners with approved VR Career Camp providers to deliver any combination of Pre-ETS to create a unique career camp experience. This service is available any time students are out of school for three consecutive days (e.g., summer break, winter recess, spring break).



Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Overview with Council Recommendations to the 2016-2020 Unified State Plan

Overview

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

Council Recommendations

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

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

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

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

Recommendation 1: Transition

- Promote early contact and the provision of Information and Referral (I&R) guidance for transition students.
- Expand and offer additional opportunities for pre-vocational and/or technical training for students.

- Increase communications and collaboration by VR representatives with school districts and increase participation in the education of options available to students.
- Continue to emphasize peer mentoring in Florida.
- Increase the capacity of transition service providers while encouraging self-employment and entrepreneurial options.

Recommendation 2: Job Placement Strategies

- Analyze and identify any trends in services provided under the rehabilitation engineering service category by service type and VR area.
- Continue strengthening efforts with business leaders to improve employment opportunities and meaningful careers.
- Develop a deeper understanding of customer strengths and develop tools to communicate succinctly to potential employers.
- FRC applauds VR efforts to increase capacity of the number of providers using the Discovery Model.
- Self-employment Certified Business Technical Assistance Consultant (CBTAC) initiatives should continue to be emphasized.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of the Abilities Work Help Desk.
- Further build capacity for job customization and Innovation and Expansion projects to include unserved and under served populations.

Recommendation 3:

Mediation and Conflict Resolution

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

Recommendation 4: Public Awareness of VR

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

Recommendation 5:

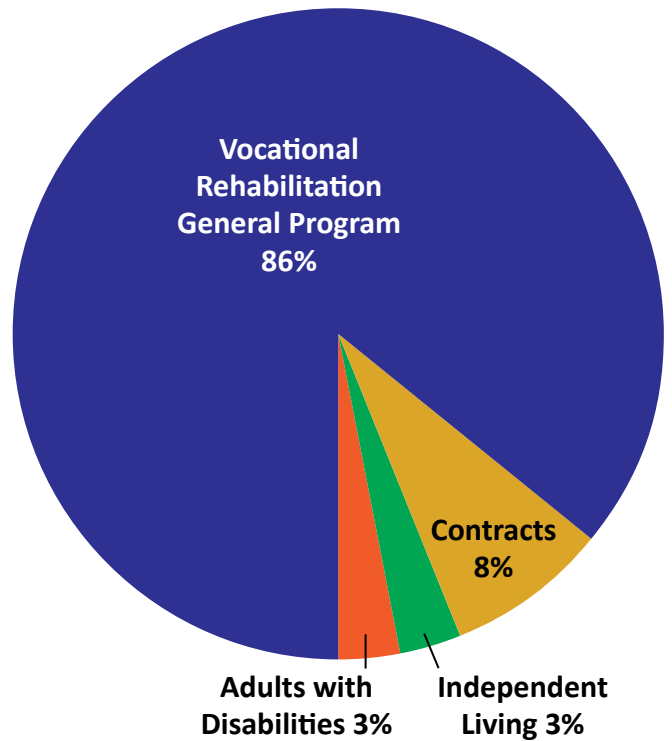
Counselor Recruitment and Retention

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

Vocational Rehabilitation

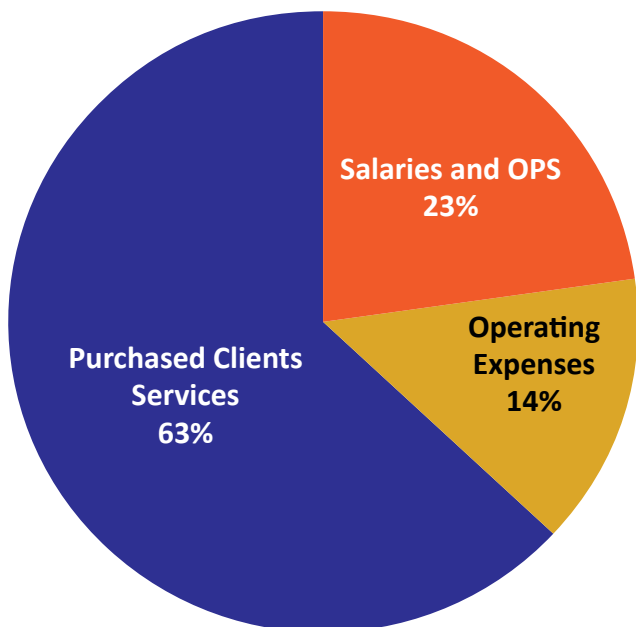
The Florida Vocational Rehabilitation program receives 78.7 percent of its funding through a grant from the U.S. Department of Labor. Total expenditures were \$161,156,579. The remaining 21.3 percent of the costs (\$43,616,711) were funded by Florida State Appropriation.

2018–2019 Division Programs
Total Division Expenditures \$224,110,012

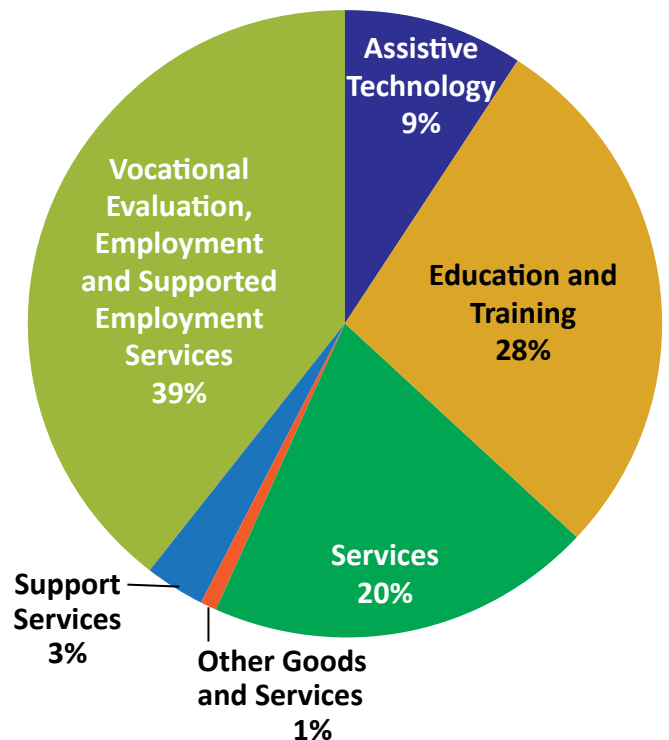


For every **\$1** invested in rehabilitating a customer, an estimated **\$8.34** was returned to the Florida economy in 2018–2019 state fiscal year.

2018-2019 General Program Expenditures
Total Vocational Rehabilitation Expenditures \$209,780,165*



Client Services Expenditures by Category
Total Purchased Client Services Expenditures \$132,509,630

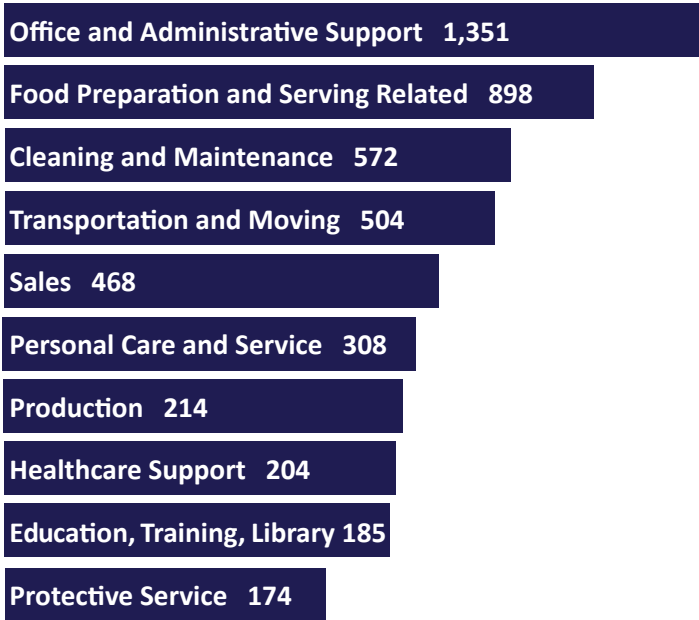


* This total is a combination of VR General Expenditures plus 94% of contracts expenditures also related to the VR General Program.

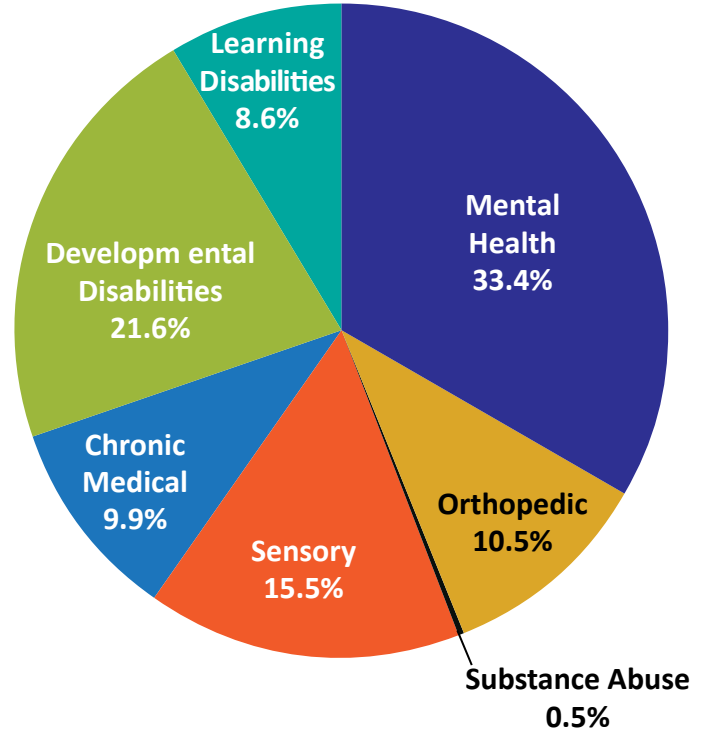
Performance Highlights

Department of Education. For the 2019 Federal fiscal year, the total amount of federal grant funds awarded was \$1.5 billion.

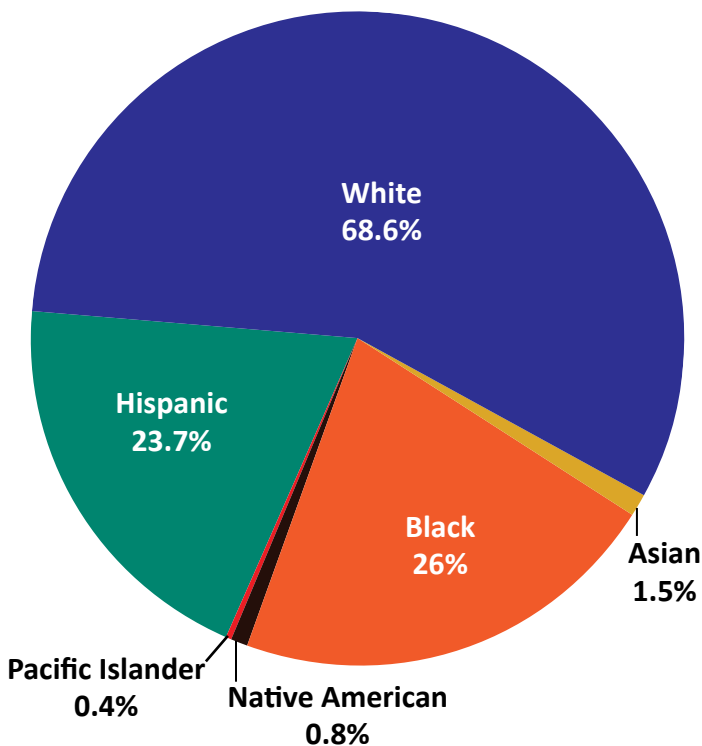
Top 10 Occupations of Vocational Rehabilitation Customers



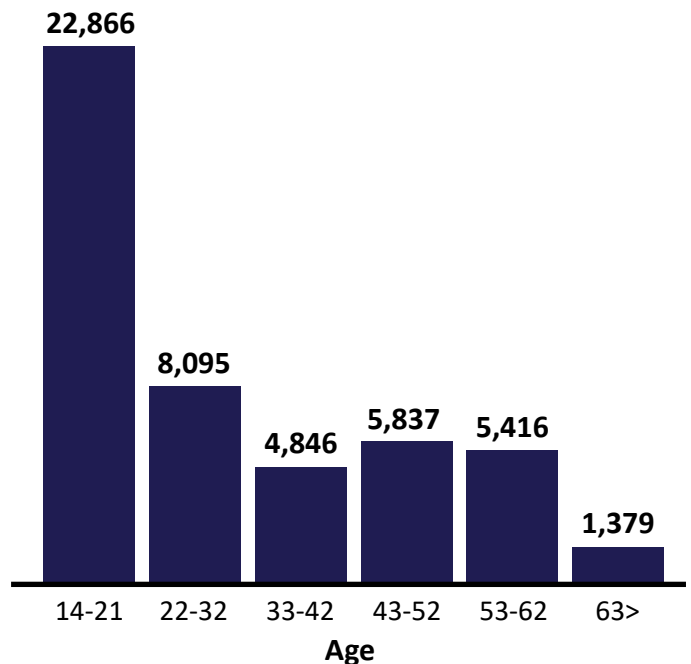
VR Customers Gainfully Employed by Primary Disability Category



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

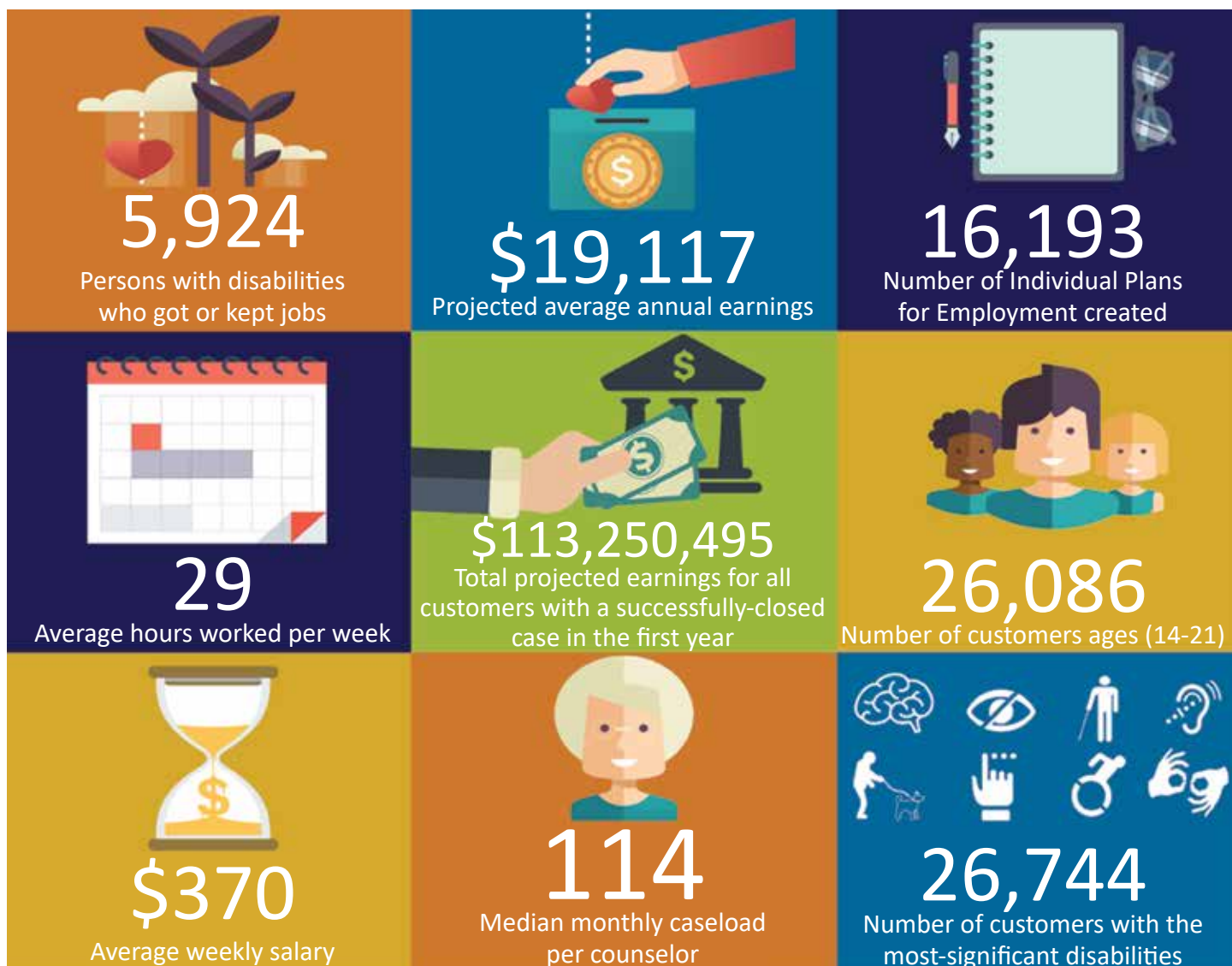


Age Groups of Customers who Received Services Under an Individualized Plan for Employment



Facts At-a-Glance

2018-2019 SFY



Vocational Rehabilitation Offers Job Retention Services

VR provides job-retention services (JRS) to eligible individuals who require specific services or equipment to keep their job, regardless of Order of Selection. This new option was created by WIOA. Since JRS began, VR has helped 702 customers at risk of losing their jobs.

Order of Selection Waiting List Status Summary

As of June 30, 2019

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

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

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

Category 3 – Other Disabilities (300): Does not seriously limit functional capacity in terms of work; lasts less than six months.

Becki Forsell Honored with Stephen R. Wise Advocacy Award

The annual Stephen R. Wise Advocacy Award recognizes dedicated leaders and champions in the cause of helping persons with disabilities achieve independence and dignity through meaningful employment. The council considered many outstanding nominees for this year's award, and selected posthumously, Becki Forsell (1949–2019) for her outstanding leadership and personal commitment to serving individuals with disabilities.

Becki Forsell was dedicated and served on the Florida Independent Living Council, Florida Volunteer Inclusion Council, FRC for the Blind, Mayor's and Hillsborough's Alliance for Citizens with Disabilities, Florida Commission for the Transportation Disadvantaged and the Hillsborough County Transportation Disadvantaged Coordinating Board. Becki's passion to serve others was recognized by earning her awards with the Federal Points of Light, State Points of Light, the Sertoma Service to Mankind Award and the 2005 Tampa Bay United Way Volunteer of the Year. Becki was the founder of YES! Of America United, an organization created to enrich the lives of persons with disabilities and to encourage them to live engaged, independent lives as members of their communities.

Becki exemplified VR's mission to help people with disabilities find and maintain employment and enhance their independence. She also raised the awareness of many politicians, community representatives and people from all walks of life on a wide range of issues including the White Cane Laws, Transportation Disadvantaged and the need for access and inclusion. FRC has many advocates, but we will miss the strong voice of Becki Forsell.

About Stephen R. Wise

Stephen R. Wise is a former Republican member of the Florida House of Representatives (1988–2000) and Florida Senate (2002–2012). Wise earned his bachelor's degree from Florida Southern College, master's degree from Middle Tennessee State University and doctorate in education from the University of Alabama. His professional experience includes working as a teacher in Polk and Brevard Counties and Vice President of College Development at the Florida Community College. Throughout his career, he focused on the employment of people with developmental disabilities. His legacy includes the creation of the Florida Endowment Foundation for Vocational Rehabilitation (now known as The Able Trust).

About the Award

Since 2013, FRC created the Stephen R. Wise Advocacy Award to be given annually to recognize a dedicated Florida leader and champion who promotes independence through work and community activities for individuals with disabilities.



2019 Recipient Becki Forsell
Founder of YES! of America United

Stephen R. Wise Award Recipients

- 2013 Steve L. Howells (Executive Director, Florida Alliance for Assistive Services and Technology)
- 2014 Carol Borden (CEO, Guardian Angels Medical Service Dogs)
- 2015 David C. Jones (Founder/President, Florida Disabled Outdoors Association)
- 2016 John Ficca (Founder/CEO, Hands on Education)
- 2017 Rhonda Beckman (Executive Director, The Arc, Ridge Area)
- 2018 Senator Dennis Baxley

Vocational Rehabilitation Services for Businesses

The Business Relations Unit consists of 12 consultants and the Abilities Work Help Desk. 2018-2019 outcomes were 888 employers served at 1,014 locations with a 21.6 percent increase in the repeat business customer rate (as compared to previous plan year). Services to employers include recruitment support, technical assistance on disability-related matters, disability awareness training, tax credit assistance and work-based training.

This past fiscal year, VR increased its outreach effort with over 500 employer events, which resulted in an increase from 700 to over 1,000 partnerships with businesses. Driven by the needs of employers, the Business Relations Unit provides a wide array of products, services, resources and solutions to disability issues in the workplace. One solution is a VR Job Board with real-time labor market information about employment opportunities with our business partners posted in VR office lobbies. Another pilot project started in January 2019 in the West Palm Beach office with a VR Career Fair. This generated such promising outcomes that other events were scheduled in Boca Raton and Fort Lauderdale, followed soon after by Greenacres and a second career fair in West Palm Beach. The five VR Career Fairs had 27 employers and more than 300 VR participants. Outcomes included interviews, hires and on-the-job trainings across a wide range of high-demand jobs in the hospitality, transportation, health care, government and manufacturing industries. Not only has the goal of steadily-increasing referrals been realized, but teamwork has increased between the counselors, providers and business relations staff. The following pages are six success stories of ready-to-work, qualified candidates.

Jessica Fernandez: Medical Doctor

In May 2018, Jessica Fernandez walked across the stage to accept her diploma from the University of Central Florida (UCF) College of Medicine. Supporting her along the journey to becoming a medical doctor was VR.

At three years old, Jessica was diagnosed with spondyloepiphyseal dysplasia, a rare genetic disorder that affects bone growth and results in short stature. She is 4 feet 2 inches tall. Jessica also experiences hip and back pain. She said, “I once met someone who told me that the only true disability is having a bad attitude,” and that made her think that, “If you have a good attitude about everything, then you can conquer whatever you set your mind to,” and she had set her sights on becoming a medical doctor. Not only did she graduate but other medical students voted her to receive the UCF’s College of Medicine Humanitarian Award.

In medical school, other students navigate the hospital and clinics without ever giving it much thought. However, Jessica’s hip and back pain can make walking difficult and working with her VR counselor and rehab engineers, she was able to identify accommodations to help her overcome this barrier. VR was able to provide her with an electric wheelchair, vehicle modifications to transport her mobility device and pedal extenders to make driving her vehicle much easier. She now utilizes the electric wheelchair to help navigate hospitals and clinics. Before entering a facility, Jessica researches the layout and routes that she will need to utilize.

She has said that her life experiences bring a unique perspective. Jessica did her medical residency at Nemours/Alfred I. DuPont Hospital for Children, where, having once been a patient there herself, she brought a special sense of understanding to its work with children with movement disorders. At the Coalition for Disability Access in Health Science and Medical Education Symposium, in front of an audience of scholars, national advocates and medical educators, Jessica shared a message of ability, not disability. “Being able-bodied doesn’t necessarily make you a better doctor,” she said. “Empathy and compassion are just as important as science.”



Dean Deborah German presents Fernandez with her white coat.
Photo by Suht Wong.

Andre Lewis: Entrepreneur

When Andre Lewis was 19 years old, he was injured by a gunshot from a neighborhood child. He was paralyzed from the shoulders down. He does not have the use of his upper and lower extremities. He is a C4-quadruplegic and needs total care.

Andre uses a motorized wheelchair with a sip-n-puff system that gives him limited mobility. He has an accessible vehicle that has a power ramp and locking system for his wheelchair, although he still needs someone to drive him. He requires help with daily life functions (e.g., getting dressed, bathing, eating and meal preparation). Andre did not have a degree or any technical skills to get a job.

Then, Andre met Jeffrey Daniels who told him about VR services. He decided to apply for services. Andre went to high school on his own, and VR enrolled him into the Lindsey Hopkins Technical Education Center where he studied accounting and microcomputers for two years. During this time, VR paid for transportation, his wheelchair, tuition, activity fees and educational materials. After graduation, he worked four-and-a-half years in downtown Miami as an editor and outreach coordinator. For two more years Andre worked from home for Willow CSN. Then, he decided to go into business for himself.

Serving others is what made Andre reassess his job goal and get into the home health care business. He has been receiving home health services since 1989. He saw the operations of home health care from a patient’s point of view and felt that he could do a better job. When agencies sent caregivers into his home, he felt they did not fully understand how to provide services for someone needing total care. Andre and his mother, Lorna Ferguson-Facey, decided to open their own agency, ATL Home Health Corp. VR was instrumental in getting his business off the ground by funding start-up costs and hiring a business consultant. VR had previously paid for home setup when he worked with Willow. He had a telephone for outbound calls, materials, a home stick and a page holder among other accessibility features that allowed him to be as self-sufficient as possible while working. Other accommodations included a power desk, stick holder and mouse, and an automatic door opener.

Andre’s ultimate goal is to open an assisted living facility for individuals with spinal cord injuries. “The key to success is understanding VR services and getting the right VR counselor who supports and believes in what the outcome of your life can be,” said Andre.



Kaymen Jagger: Horticulture

Kaymen Jagger, a young man on the autism spectrum, has felt that his disability has affected him in a number of ways, especially when interacting with others. Before receiving VR services, he dealt with a lot of frustration, anger issues, trouble concentrating and an inability to stay focused. His father, Matthew Jagger, was already aware about VR services so when Kaymen was ready to get a job, they began researching local VR offices to begin the process of becoming a customer.

Before VR, he had a lot of meltdowns due to his anger issues and was unemployed. VR helped him with not only finding work, but also discovering new interests, such as providing customer service and a passion for working with plants. Kaymen says VR services are indispensable including counseling services through vendors. VR helped him gain self-esteem and showed him that he had what it takes to get a job.

Through these services, he was able to interview for Lowe's Hardware in Ocala and was hired on the spot. A year ago, he said that he "could not have imagined working even one day, and now he has held a job for four months and loves it." Everyone at Lowe's, customers and coworkers, speak so highly of him and tell him how much he brightens up their day.

Kaymen says that VR changed his outlook on what was possible for him. He said, "My counselor always returned my calls and believed in my abilities. Through her encouragement, she helped me recognize my potential." Kaymen's professional ambition includes utilizing VR services to go back to school to learn more about horticulture. His goal is to become independent enough to be self-sufficient and no longer need financial assistance.

During his free time, Kaymen likes to play video games and really enjoys interacting with animals. He and his father also do a lot of volunteer work. Both his father and he agreed that self-advocacy was key when it came to seeking employment. In Kaymen's words: "VR can help you, but you have to put in your own work," and that you need to "be your own advocate," and to quote Yoda, "Do or do not, there is no try." This iconic movie quote has inspired both to never stop moving forward.



Matthew and Kaymen Jagger meeting VR Director Flanagan at the Family Cafe.

James Rivers: Welder

James Rivers has been successfully employed as a welder at MC Ventures Truck Bodies in LaBelle since March 2016. His success began when James was in high school and worked with Employment Specialist Diane Johnson under the Third-Party Cooperative Arrangement. Diane recalled that James was her first customer and he knew what he wanted to do for his vocational goal. "Working with him was well worth the effort because he is successful and is an example for others who may believe they cannot achieve their goals in life," said Diane.

While James has processing problems and specific learning disabilities, he never allowed this to discourage him from following his dream. He worked hard to pass the Test for Adult Basic Education (TABE), and entered Immokalee Technical College in 2014.

Although there were challenges he had to face, he never gave up on trying to complete his goal. His family could not be prouder, and he is the first person in his family to attend and graduate from college. James earned his Auto Tech certificate, and parlayed that education into the field of welding, where he has found nothing short of success. He is the perfect example of the hard work and dedication it can take for our customers to face the challenges that may arise in their pursuit of employment and independence.

Former VR Counselor Victoria Aguilar shared her praise for him by saying, "James was a perfect VR customer. With the help of his family, who was always there to support him, James followed up with everything he needed to do to support reaching his goal." MC Ventures owner Michael Cox said, "James is a great, dedicated worker who I am happy to have on my team."

In March 2018, with a team of strong supporters by his side, James accepted the Commissioner's Leadership Award presented by FDOE Commissioner Pam Stewart and the State Board of Education at the same high school from which he graduated years earlier. The Leadership Award is for students K-12, adults and technical school students who have overcome hardships in order to succeed. The individuals receiving these awards have excelled despite the hurdles, hardships and circumstances beyond their control. James has truly proven that hard work and determination make dreams come true.



Sara Lundy: First Valedictorian

Sara Lundy is the first valedictorian with autism to graduate from the Pepin Academies Riverview in Tampa. The word valedictorian is derived from the Latin *vale dice re* which means “to say goodbye.” As valedictorian she was tasked to deliver the final speech at the graduation ceremony, but Sara has a fear of public speaking. With her VR counselor and mother's help, she delivered an empowering speech where her personality shined.



Embarking on her next chapter, she has been accepted into several college programs and says that VR really helped her to “tackle trying to go to college.” She heard about VR through her brother, who received services for his Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Eventually, she decided to also become a customer.

Sara feels that VR has helped her learn how to socialize more, communicate easier with others, gain more confidence and realize her strengths. She knows she has the potential to do anything and everything, and welcomes her future with humility.

Sara plans to study to become a vocational rehabilitation case manager so that she can inspire others with her real-life insight on what it is like to be a person with a disability, what it takes to transition, and progress through life.

She is currently on hiatus from looking for employment as she is focusing on going to college. However, she had previously worked at Sweeties Cat House, a cat sitting and hotel business. She was a member of their cleaning staff and feels it was a very rewarding experience. In her free time, she enjoys reading and crocheting. Sara is a truly motivated young woman and believes that, “As long as you have the proper support and the will to do it—you can do anything.”

Nolan Vance: Discovers His Potential

Nolan Vance learned about Discover Your Potential (DYP) program through a referral from Florida Atlantic University's Center for Autism Related Disabilities (CARD). He suffered from bouts of depression and anxiety, and did not socialize with his peers. Nolan hoped that DYP would help him obtain a busy working schedule, get out of the house, be around his peers, and earn a steady income. Nolan's largest barrier was his self-defeating attitude. While Nolan wanted to lead a more fulfilling life and be independent, he did not believe it was possible to achieve his goals. The DYP team saw Nolan's potential and understood the importance of addressing his defeatist attitude.



The DYP team worked with Nolan to instill positive thought in his daily life. Nolan attended SUCCESS classes and learned about basic work skills (e.g., dependability, job retention, self-presentation, motivation and attitude). Nolan also attended social activities where he began to find a community of peers and friends.

Nolan expressed that he wanted to work with his hands. He was interested in the agricultural industry, and he was not afraid of a hard day's work. Through DYP, Nolan received an opportunity to participate in a 12 week On-the-Job Training (OJT) experience at Brown Family Farm in Ft. Pierce, which is an organic produce farm with a small market. Once Nolan started working, he really hit the ground running. Nolan's work ethic astounded the DYP team. Job Coach Kimberly Halhober worked closely with Nolan during his OJT training. She visited him at work often and ensured that communications between him and his supervisor were running smoothly. Every time she visited, Nolan was asked to say one positive thing about himself or his life. She noticed that his smile would shine as bright as the sun when he spoke positively about himself.

Once the OJT experience ended, the DYP team spoke with Nolan about job placement. They set him up with an interview for a full-time position at the CVS Distribution Center. After a successful interview, Nolan accepted the job. Nolan works full-time and has developed connections with his coworkers. He also has formed friendships with a few of his peers from the DYP program. They have gone out to dinner, bowling and the movies. Nolan continues to blossom and looks towards the future in a more positive light. Nolan says, “I was impressed on how fast I was placed for employment. I was taken to different small businesses to get a feel for how different companies work. My case manager and job coach would often check up on me at my job. I am very grateful for the DYP program.” Nolan is currently studying to obtain his driver's license and is saving money for a car.

Ombudsman

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

During the 2018-2019 SFY, the Ombudsman's Office responded to 2,185 complaints or requests for information. Of the total, 991 (45.4 percent) were complaint requests. Complaints involved issues such as quality of counseling and delivery of services, as well as plan development and service cost concerns. Customers expressed satisfaction with the resolutions to their concerns in nearly 93.6 percent of the requests.

The Ombudsman's Office continues working with staff from around the state in the implementation of VR's latest initiatives. For more information, contact the Ombudsman's Office at Ombudsman@vr.fldoe.org or 866-515-3692.

Customer Satisfaction Survey Results

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

Vocational Rehabilitation Customers 2018-2019 SFY



**Florida Rehabilitation Council
Florida Department of Education
Division of Vocational Rehabilitation**

4070 Esplanade Way, 2nd Floor

Tallahassee, FL 32399-7016

Local: 850-245-3397

Toll Free: 800-451-4327

Fax: 850-245-3362

FRCCustomers@vr.fldoe.org

www.RehabWorks.org



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