

**RHODE ISLAND DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
OFFICE OF REHABILITATION SERVICES
AND
RHODE ISLAND STATE REHABILITATION SERVICES**

**2023 ANNUAL
REPORT**

DANIEL J. MCKEE - GOVERNOR



KIMBERLY BRITO - DIRECTOR

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05 State Rehabilitation
Council

Mission Statement

“To empower individuals with disabilities to choose, prepare for, obtain, advance in, and maintain employment, economic self-sufficiency, independence and integration into society.”

ORS Values

- * We value the worth, dignity, rights, responsibilities, and empowerment of all persons with disabilities in achieving their individualized goals.*
- * We value staff who reflect pride and commitment to excellence in achieving our mission.*
- * We value a management style that fosters responsibility and accountability while encouraging creativity, initiative, and leadership throughout the organization.*
- * We value community support in achieving the agency’s mission.*
- * We value leadership which promotes clarity of purpose.*

Message from the Director

The Rhode Island Department of Human Services (DHS) is an organization of opportunity, providing an array of services to the people who need important support and resources. The agency is dedicated to creating an environment where staff and customers have the tools, resources, and support needed to thrive at home, work, and in the community.

DHS is working to increase access through an enhanced customer portal and mobile app, while also implementing remote customer service and telephone interviews. We have opened new document scanning centers to help meet the needs of Rhode Islanders, and we have opened a new customer-facing office in Providence. The Office of Rehabilitation Services (ORS), a division of DHS, is an integral part of our mission. It is my pleasure to provide you with this annual report for federal fiscal year 2023.

ORS is charged with empowering Rhode Islanders who have disabilities and voluntarily wish to obtain and maintain employment, economic self-sufficiency, independence, and full integration into society. Vocational Rehabilitation, Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired (SBVI), and Disability Determination Services (DDS) provide resources which enhance the quality of life for Rhode Island residents with disabilities.

The work of the ORS team represents an important dedication to community service driven by the desire to support our community members in a variety of ways. I am proud of their work and the impact it is making throughout our state.



Kimberly Merolla-Brito
Director, RI DHS

Message from the Associate Director

On behalf of the Office of Rehabilitation Services, I am pleased to present to you the 2023 Annual Report. The mission of the Office of Rehabilitation Services has always been and continues to be to provide customized and comprehensive services to individuals with disabilities to maximize their quality of life, self-reliance, and economic independence in the community. We have included success stories that reflect the diversity of our customers and their needs. We want to illustrate the partnership between our staff and our customer that makes rehabilitation work. The Vocational Rehabilitation Program increases revenue at all levels of government and decreases the burden of income maintenance programs.

The accomplishments outlined in this annual report reflect favorably on the efforts of our staff who, by hard work and commitment, have continued a long tradition of serving Rhode Islanders with disabilities. We are also indebted to the Rhode Island State Rehabilitation Council, Governor's Advisory Council for the Blind & Visually Impaired, State Committee of Blind Vendors, and Rhode Island Council on Assistive Technology for their partnership and help in maximizing the potential of persons with disabilities. I also extend my appreciation to our hard-working and capable staff along with our many public and private partners, who have displayed tremendous resiliency as we emerge into a post-pandemic period in continuing to provide high quality services despite many challenges. It truly reflects the passion, desire, and commitment to help those we serve.

Inside you will read several individual success stories, and I am sure you will be impressed at the accomplishments of these amazing individuals. It is these stories, and many more like them, that give hope and inspiration to all of us during these challenging times and underscores why we do what we do here.

Joseph F. Murphy
Associate Director DHS/ORS



January 2024

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
31	1 New Year's Day	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15 Birthday of Martin Luther King, Jr. State Offices Closed	16	17	18	19	20
21	22 SRC Meeting 4:00 - 6:00 p.m.	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31	1	2	3

Vocational Rehabilitation

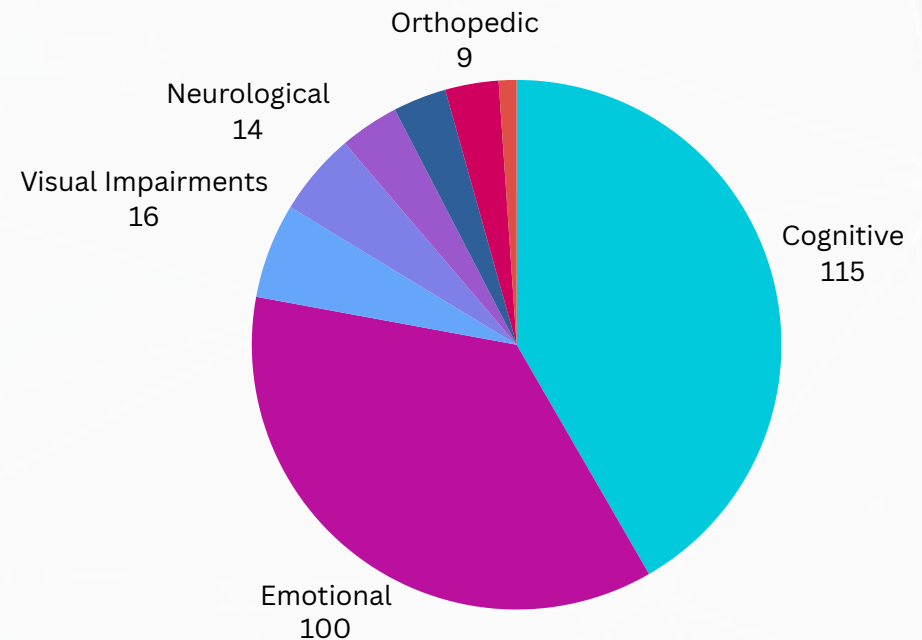
The Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Program is the public state and federally funded program that assists individuals with disabilities to choose, prepare for, obtain, advance in, and maintain competitive integrated employment with employment being the successful outcome of services provided. It is expected that individuals with disabilities who apply for services are interested in becoming employed and understand that this is the focus of the VR program.

A master's level Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor (VRC) works with the individual to develop an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) that includes an employment goal. The time expected for the individual to reach the goal, the services that the individual chooses necessary to reach the employment goal, and how the services will be provided are all tailored to suit the needs of the particular individual.

Who Are Our Customers? Program Year (PY) 2022 (7/1/22–6/30/23)

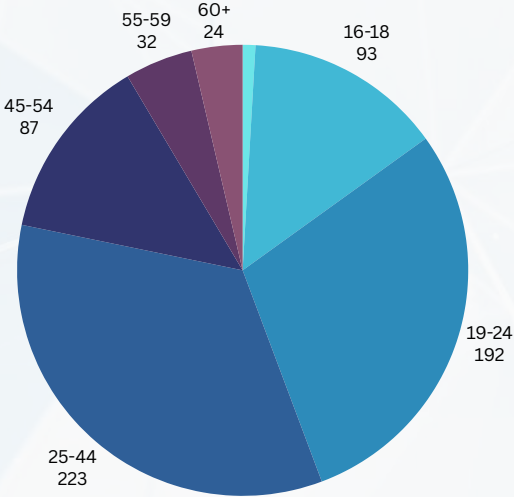
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Primary Disability of 276 Successfully Employed Individuals with a Disability

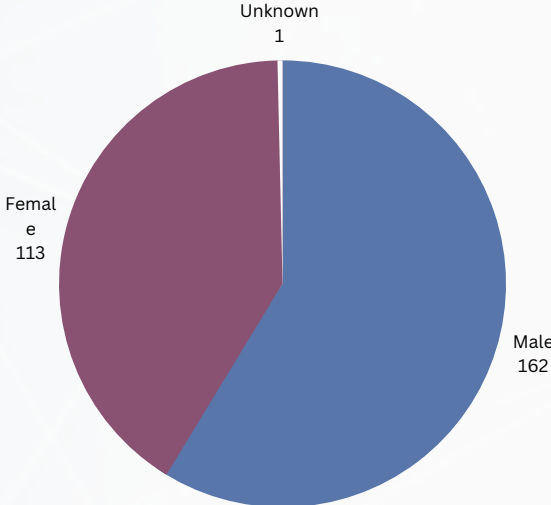


VR Statistics

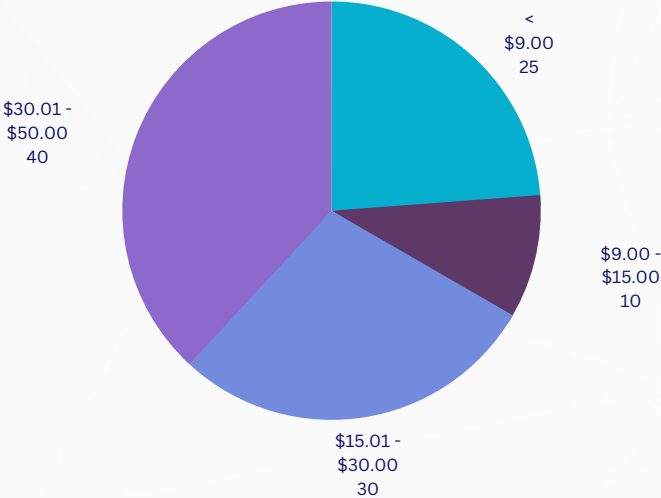
Age of 276 Successfully Employed Individuals with a Disability



Gender of 276 Successfully Employed Individuals with a Disability

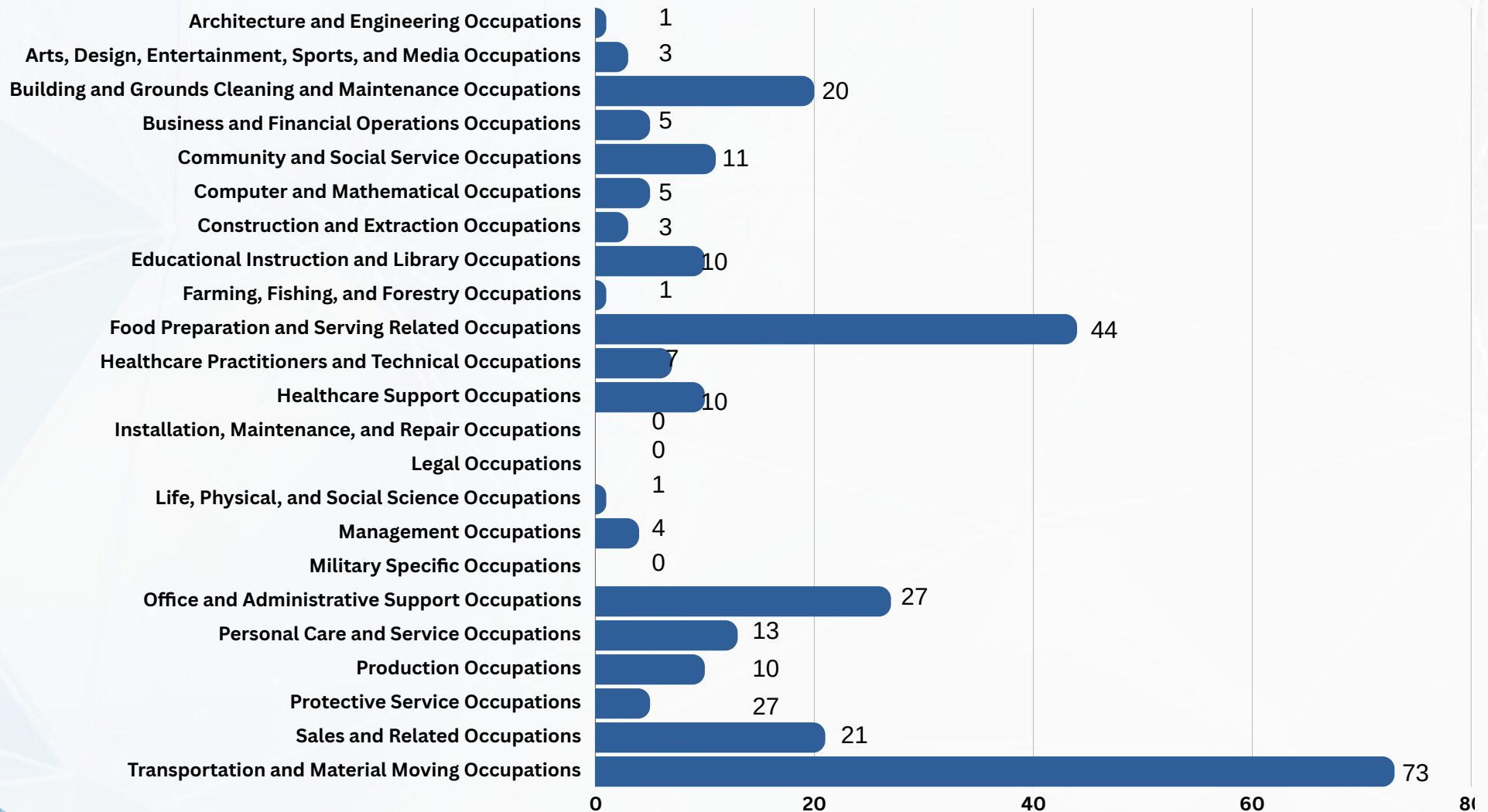


Hourly Wage of 276 Successfully Employed Individuals with a Disability



VR Statistics (cont.)

Primary Occupation of 276 Successfully Employed Individuals with Disabilities



February 2024

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
8	29	30	31	1	2	3
	5	6	7	8	9	10
1	12	13	14 Valentine's Day Ash Wednesday	15	16	17
8	19 Washington's Birthday (Presidents' Day)	20	21	22	23	24
5	26	27	28	29	1	2

Supported Employment

The ORS Supported Employment (SE) Services Program assists individuals with the most significant disabilities to acquire the skills and experience, along with the appropriate supports, to obtain and maintain competitive, integrated employment. ORS continues to work with Department of Behavioral Healthcare, Developmental Disabilities and Hospitals (BHDDH), Department of Labor and Training and Department of Education (RIDE) to develop services to meet the employment needs of individuals of all ages and abilities. This was a result of the Consent Decree between the Department of Justice (DOJ) and the State of Rhode Island which created an atmosphere of stronger interagency partnerships.

Since the end of the pandemic, ORS has moved back to an in-person delivery system but has maintained the capacity to provide a hybrid model to those who might benefit from it. ORS has identified virtual services as an alternative method of communication and employment service delivery for individuals who may benefit from in person virtual services.

ORS and BHDDH have been working together with respective technical support providers to identify how best to meet the demand and attempt to overcome staffing shortages. ORS continues to explore the development of an Integrated Resource Team (IRT) model, which utilizes a full array of available resources in the State. Services are centered around what an individual with multiple needs requires: housing, employment, and mental health services.

ORS continues to work with supported employment fidelity models to support individuals supported by behavioral health programs and developmental disability funded programs. The specific fidelity models ORS has utilized is Individualized Placement and Support (IPS) for individuals with behavioral diagnoses, customized employment, and Project Search programs.

Supported Employment (cont.)

Additionally, work continues to be a collaborative effort with ORS, Department of Labor and Training (DLT), BHDDH, RIDE, and Department of Human Services (DHS) to help individuals with disabilities obtain employment. This is essential interagency partnership supports the Rhode Island Employment First Initiative brought to the attention of the Governor's Office. Work is being done across several State agencies to highlight the needs of individuals with disabilities. ORS and BHDDH are working with the DLT to ensure that anyone with a disability is provided the same access to any State sponsored employment programs as those without disabilities. ORS believes that the collaboration with State Agencies and the Governor's Office will help increase employment opportunities for any individual with a disability and especially for those who need supported employment services.

Virtual Supported Employment and Non-Supported Employment Services

ORS has returned to in-person meetings but has retained the ability to provide virtual services for those who may still be hesitant about meeting in person. ORS will also offer virtual assistance to individuals who may not have a service provider in their local area but want to seek employment.

- **Vocational Evaluation (Virtual):** Approved for adult vocational evaluations. This is a virtual/remote service that can consist of but is not limited to exploration, interest inventory testing, and virtual job shadowing.
- **Virtual Job Preparation:** Consists of 9 hours per week for 4 weeks; scheduling of classes is up to the provider at a minimum of 9 hours per week. All other services similar to non-virtual job prep should include a resume and interviewing skills as part of reporting.
- **Job Retention:** Service can be provided virtually and would include at least weekly phone calls to check in with the employer (if necessary) and the client.
- **Job Coaching Services:** Provided virtually and telephonically.

Transition/Pre-employment Transition Services

The Office of Rehabilitation Services provides transition services to students with disabilities to prepare them for adult life. ORS Counselors are working with all school districts, students and families to prepare for career development, job training, and employment opportunities before and after high school. Transition and Pre-Employment Transitions services (Pre-ETS) are activities and supports designed to help the students identify their interests and strengths so that they can work on skills needed to be successful in employment and their future.

For the 2022-2023 school year, the Office of Rehabilitation authorized 1,410 Pre-Employment Transition services to take place during school year 2022-23. These include a wide range of services from Job Explorations - 509, Summer Work Experiences - 210, Community-Based Work Experiences - 155, Project Search - 15 participants, Tri-Employment - 160 participants, STARTURI - 11 participants, Work Readiness with 132 participants, Transition Academies had 34 participants, and 50 students were travel trained. With Counselors assigned to all public high schools as well as private and alternative schools, ORS strives to meet the needs of each program and the students they are working with.

March 2024

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
25	26	27	28	29	1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10 Daylight Saving Starts	11	12	13	14	15	16
17 Saint Patrick's Day	18 SRC Meeting 4:00 - 6:00 p.m.	19	20	21	22	23
24 Palm Sunday	25	26	27	28	29 Good Friday	30
31 Easter	1 April Fool's Day	2	3	4	5	6

Services for the Blind & Visually Impaired (SBVI)

Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired (SBVI) offers a wide array of services to eligible individuals who are blind or visually impaired through its Vocational Rehabilitation Unit, Business Enterprises Program, and Social Services Program. The various services offered by these programs are designed to help individuals of all ages achieve independence at home, in the community, and in the workplace.

Vocational Rehabilitation Program... A Federal/State Program created to assist people who are blind or visually impaired to obtain or maintain employment. Services provided include evaluation, orientation, mobility training, rehabilitation technology, guidance and counseling, career assessment, educational planning, vocational training, provision of adaptive equipment, job development, job placement, and follow-up services.

Business Enterprises Program... Is the Federal/State Randolph-Sheppard Program which provides entrepreneurial employment opportunities for persons who are legally blind. Business Enterprises establishes vending facilities in state and federal buildings which are operated by licensed vendors supervised by SBVI. Presently there are 12 locations throughout the state. Types of facilities include vending machines, micro markets, small coffee shops, larger food service sites serving hot and cold entrees prepared on-site. All operate under the name of “Coffee Plus”.

Assistive Technology Access Partnership (ATAP)...The Office of Rehabilitation Services is the lead agency for the Rhode Island Assistive Technology Access Partnership (ATAP). ATAP is a statewide program funded under the Assistive Technology Act of 1998. ATAP is designed as a statewide partnership of organizations, each with a targeted assistive technology focus, working together to improve access to and acquisition of assistive technology for individuals.

Services for the Blind & Visually Impaired (SBVI)

ATAP's main initiatives include: Device Demonstration, Device Loan, Device Re-Use, and Training, Public Awareness, Collaboration, Information and Referral. In total Statewide, 138 individuals were provided AT devices. ATAP Partners include Adaptive Telephone Equipment Loan Program (ATEL), East Bay Educational Collaborative (EBEC), Ocean State Center for Independent Living (OSCIL), and TechACCESS of RI.

Social Services Program... Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired coordinates a federal comprehensive service program which focuses primarily on children from age 3 - 14, elderly individuals, and individuals for whom a vocational goal is not feasible.

- **Children's Case Management Services** include family casework, coordination with early intervention programs, educational guidance, summer camp for youths, arrangement of ophthalmologist and low vision evaluations, and information and referral to appropriate community programs.
- **Independent Living for Older Blind Program** provides case management services, along with ancillary services for mobility and orientation, rehabilitation teaching for skills training in activities of daily living, management of low vision, provisions of adaptive equipment, and information and referral to support groups and appropriate community services.

Adaptive Telephone Equipment Loan Program (ATEL)... The ATEL Program loans telephone equipment to residents of the State of Rhode Island who have hearing, speech, or neuro-muscular (unable to dial or hold a receiver) impairments and have a signed certificate of disability. Equipment is issued on a first-come, first-served basis.

Business Enterprises Program

- **12** Vending facilities were supported by the Randolph-Sheppard Business Enterprises Program (BEP) at Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired. These 12 facilities collectively also provided employment for numerous individuals around the state. Multiple operators have a second location they managed with operations continuing to adjust to the changing market and post-pandemic environment.

Independent Living Services for Older Individuals Who Are Blind (OIB)

- **342** older individuals who are blind or visually impaired (over age 55) received services from the Independent Living for Older Blind Program. Annual statistics show that:
- **95%** of individuals served over age 55, reported feeling that they are in greater control and are more confident in their ability to maintain their current living situation as a result of services they received.
- **100 % (249 people)** of individuals receiving assistive technology (AT) services and training maintained or improved functional abilities that were previously lost or diminished as a result of vision.

Social Services for the Blind

- SBVI staff continued to provide quality critical services in 2022 supplementing in-person service delivery with virtual, telephonic, or remote instruction to adults focusing on independent living.
- Outreach and awareness efforts (post pandemic) have resumed to include numerous resource fairs, disability aging and health conferences, deaf-blind services, senior expo's, community and health centers, and senior programs.
- Rhode Island again recognized its annual White Cane Awareness Day celebration on October 15, 2023.

April 2024

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
31	1 April Fool's Day	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	1	2	3	4

SBVI/ATAP Statistics

Children's Services

RISBVI continues its role of supporting parents through advocacy and service coordination for children with severe visual impairments.

Newsline

- No. of individuals who are registered for this newspaper reading service provided by the National Federation of the Blind (NFB), and funded by SBVI: 549 with 11 new subscribers

Assistive Technology Access Partnership (ATAP)

- No. of individuals that received information from Assistive Technology Access Partnership (ATAP) Resource Centers about assistive technology (AT) and funding options: **1,720**
- No. of individuals that received Demonstrations: **99**
- No. of participants that received Training: **980**
- No. of individuals that received Device Loan: **206**
- No. of individuals that received Reused Devices: **42**

Adaptive Telephone Equipment Loan Program (ATEL)

- No. of individuals provided with specialized equipment through the ATEL (Adaptive Telephone Equipment Loan) Program: **175**

Disability Determination Services (DDS)

The Rhode Island Disability Determination Services (RI DDS) is a unit within the Office of Rehabilitation Services, which operates under a “state-federal” partnership. The function of the RI DDS is to make determinations as to the medical eligibility of adults and children with physical and/or mental impairments who have applied for Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) and/or Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits.

The RI DDS is assigned a budgeted workload under a regulatory agreement with the Social Security Administration (SSA). The RI DDS is 100 percent financed by SSA to adjudicate initial disability applications, appeals of cases initially denied, and continuing disability reviews. The RI DDS also performs disability hearings on cases in which benefits have been terminated.

In total, the RI DDS processed 12,632 disability cases this year. Based on increased staffing and an expected increase in intake, RI DDS anticipates processing approximately 13,000 cases in FFY2024. RI DDS has completed the transition to the new computer system that SSA developed. The system is referred to as Disability Case Processing System (DCPS). The roll out began in March of 2017. Currently 100% of the staff are using the system. SSA is constantly improving the software and tools that the examiners use in their daily functions to enhance timely and accurate decisions and make the system more functional for users. Rhode Island was one of the first states to switch over to DCPS, and now all states in the country are working in this case processing system.

In FFY 2023, RIDDS onboarded four disability examiners. This increase in staffing has helped us increase productivity while decreasing processing time in FFY23.

In FFY2023 RI DDS processed 12,632 disability claims. The RI DDS has been able to maintain excellent accuracy ratings of 97.5%. FFY23 ended with an overall processing time of 122 which is below the national threshold of 220 days.

Rhode Island continues to operate a Cooperative Disability Investigations (CDI) unit to help combat fraud in the program. This unit investigates fraud at initial and reconsideration applications, prior to claimants being put in pay status. Recently, they have been able to work fraud cases for individuals already in pay status. The referrals come from the field offices, DDS, and the public. The CDI unit consists of a DDS examiner, a field office representative, two investigators from the Attorney General's office, and a special agent. SSA continues to put a high emphasis on combatting fraud in the program.

Local Social Security Field Offices

30 Quaker Lane, 1st Floor
Warwick, RI 02886-0111
1-866-964-2038

4 Pleasant Street
Pawtucket, RI 02860
1-866-931-7079

Pavilion Plaza
2168 Diamond Hill Road
Woonsocket, RI 02895
1-877-229-3542

130 Bellevue Avenue
Newport, RI 02840
1-866-253-5607

1 Empire Plaza, 6th floor
Providence, RI 02903
1-877-402-0808

DDS Statistics

- 12,415** Total cases were received by the Disability Determination Services (DDS)
- 12,632** Claims were processed by the DDS
- 7,358** Initial claims were filed
- 7,292** Initial claims were processed
- 2,950** Continuing Disability Review cases were completed
- 217** Pre-Hearing Cases were processed, resulting in 149 Disability Hearing decisions
- 3,317** Consultative Exams were purchased
- 11,216** Medical Evidence Records were purchased
- \$1,171,570** Total Medical Costs with Total DDS Budget of **\$ 10,534,690**

Business Engagement Specialist Team (BEST)

Since 2019, a group comprised of Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors (VRC's) with guidance from regional supervisors, assistant administrator for vendor affairs & workforce development, and the administrator of vocational rehabilitation began to meet regularly with the intention of formally establishing a Business Engagement Specialist Team (BEST). Part of this was driven by the VRC's recognition that there is a critical lack of awareness of the agency and the services in the business community. Many VRCs found out in reaching out to businesses there was no organized procedure in place to do so. Additionally, WIOA federal regulations mandate that state Vocational Rehabilitation agencies consider businesses as a secondary VR customer. The need to engage with the business community is a critical piece of WIOA to develop work-based learning for students and youth with disabilities and employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities, including those with the most significant disabilities.

The BEST unit is a specialized unit that markets ORS's services to the business community by educating businesses about the role of ORS. The team also supports business' staffing needs, including screening and identifying qualified job applicants, dispelling myths around employing individuals with disabilities through education, and educating Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors and job seekers about labor market demand. This group saw an opportunity to formally establish themselves within the agency and began meeting regularly to work diligently with technical assistance from Workforce Innovation Technical Assistance Center (WINTAC) - now Vocational Rehabilitation Technical Assistance Center (VRTAC.) As a result of the BEST Team's efforts and the number of requests from the business community to partner, ORS decided to expand BEST by assigning additional counselors to the team to ensure that ORS can deliver the same level of support and services to current and future community business partners. Each region of ORS is now represented by at least one counselor, with most having two representatives.

BEST (cont)

The BEST Team continue to meet on a weekly basis to discuss job openings, new partnerships, training ideas, job fairs, and any other business-related information. The information discussed is then presented to each region by their respective representative, so that it is reaching the entire agency.

Additionally, BEST has collaborated with BHDDH and the Governor's Workforce Board to align practices and ensure first point of contact process is in place. Some of the consulting services the BEST team offers include the following: talent acquisition, customized employee training strategies, customized comprehensive task analysis, assistive technology, job accommodations training, disability etiquette, referral services for current employees, diversity in the workplace training, Information on federal tax credit Incentives, support in marketing and advertising for talent, and Worksite ergonomic evaluations - trainings in any of these areas could be tailored to one's specific business needs.

Some highlights of what this team has already accomplished include forming working partnerships with larger companies like Sodexo, IGT, Blue Cross/Blue Shield, and CVS to help diversify and support their workforce; engaging regularly with other State agencies (e.g. DLT, BHDDH) to work together, collaboratively, with the business community and the consumers we serve; actively pursuing and increased their online and social media presence by creating platforms such as Linked-In and Facebook to reach consumers and businesses alike; and moving forward will continue to explore other innovative ways to reach out to employers. What this team has accomplished in the short amount of time they have been together, amidst the hurdles and complications of working remotely during this pandemic, is a true testament to the dedication and resiliency of this agency.

The secret to success
is to treat every job
as an opportunity to explore,
rather than something that
is a boring chore...

May 2024

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
28	29	30	1	2	3	4
5 Cinco de Mayo	6	7	8	9	10	11
12 Mother's Day	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20 SRC Meeting 8:30 - 10:30 a.m.	21	22	23	24	25
26	27 Memorial Day States Offices Closed	28	29	30	31	1

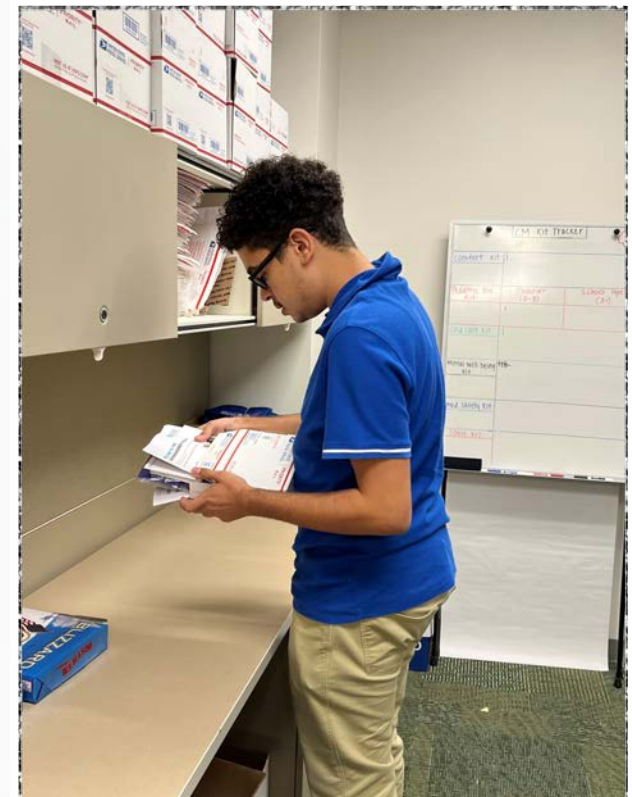
Angel Mendez

ORS Counselor: Laura Allbee

This is Angel. Angel attended Cranston High School West and then the Cranston Transition Program. When Angel and his team felt that he was almost ready for the world of work, Angel applied for the Project Search Program held at Blue Cross Blue Shield of Rhode Island. Project Search is a program which is a collaboration between ORS, Department of Behavioral Healthcare, Developmental Disabilities & Hospitals (BHDDH), Cranston School Department, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Rhode Island, and a supporting ORS vendor - Perspectives. Project Search is a unique business/education one-year school-to-work program that takes place entirely at the workplace. Students are called interns and are completely immersed in the workplace. The program allows for a combination of classroom instructions, career exploration, and relevant jobs-skills training through three strategically designed internships.

Through Project Search Angel was further able to build his vocational skills and find employment. During his time there, Angel demonstrated skills such as attention to detail, professionalism, and networking. Angel was offered a part-time position at Blue Cross Blue Shield of Rhode Island.

Angel has been employed at Blue Cross Blue Shield Rhode Island in their utilization unit as an assistant support specialist since May 2023. Angel receives long-term supports from ORS and BHDDH and remains happily employed.



June 2024

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
26	27	28	29	30	31	1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14 Flag Day	15
16 Father's Day	17	18	19 Juneteenth	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	1	2	3	4 Independence Day	5	6

Tina Guenette

ORS Counselor: Tara Buckler

Tina sought out ORS services at the beginning of 2023 in need of reliable transportation to successfully do the work that she does best. Tina is the CEO of Real Access Motivates Progress (R.A.M.P.), which is a non-profit that focuses on accessibility throughout the state of Rhode Island with the goal of expanding throughout the country.

Tina was appointed through the Biden Administration to be on the Architectural and Transportation Barriers Compliance Access Board due to her efforts and accomplishments in the disability community. At that time, she did not have reliable transportation to assist her with getting to Washington, D.C. or anywhere in the state to provide her free services.

ORS was able to assist her with purchasing a new accessible van, which has been able to take her to Washington, D.C., airports to travel throughout the country, and many businesses throughout the state to promote disability awareness and ensure accessibility for all Rhode Islanders!



July 2024

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
30	1	2	3	4 Independence Day States Offices Closed	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31	1	2	3

Shannon Carmo

ORS Counselor: Paul Hughett

Shannon Carmo has always been someone willing to help others. In her professional life, Shannon works as a job coach at Looking Upwards in Middletown, Rhode Island. Shannon's fluency in American Sign Language is also vital to her own success, as Shannon is essentially deaf, maintaining only a small amount of residual hearing in one ear.

Shannon excels at her work, but sometimes is unable to respond to auditory cues, such as fire alarms and other alerts. Though Shannon is deaf and fluent in ASL, she is also able to communicate with hearing co-workers verbally. This verbal communication is sometimes difficult as Shannon is unable to hear her own voice, making it difficult to regulate speech volume in certain settings.

Shannon decided she needed assistance in obtaining a hearing aid. She turned to the Office of Rehabilitation Services in Rhode Island.

After meeting with her vocational rehabilitation counselor, Shannon underwent a battery of assessments with the aid of a licensed audiologist. The audiologist determined that Shannon would benefit from amplification and recommended a specific hearing aid which was programmed specifically to meet Shannon's needs.



August 2024

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
28	29	30	31	1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12 Victory Day State Offices Closed	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

Janice Wray

ORS Counselor: Kathleen Jones

Janice started working with ORS in April 2013 after sustaining a spinal cord injury from a car accident. At the time of her accident, she was a third-year nursing student at the University of Rhode Island. She wanted ORS to guide her in identifying assistive technology and modifications that would allow her to complete the nursing degree she was working towards and eventually start a career in the medical field.

In order to return to school in the fall of 2013, Janice, URI Disability Services, the Nursing Department, and ORS worked collaboratively so Janice could continue accessing her postsecondary education. The group worked to get her priority registration, electronic books, a digital recorder, Dragon Dictation, a peer note taker, digital syllabi, teacher slides before class, extra time on tests and assignments, telecommunication if needed, and an educational personal care attendant.

To support Janice's self-sufficiency, ORS assisted her by modifying her home in the fall of 2014. Her bedroom, bathroom, and kitchen were designed and reconstructed to address Janice's unique accessibility and self-care needs.

Janice earned her BSN in December 2014. She passed the NCLEX Exam and became a registered nurse in March 2015. After graduation, Janice began giving educational presentations on spinal cord injuries and the recovery process to students at URI and occupational therapy students at



New England Tech. Janice joined the college student panel through the West Bay Collaborative speaking to local high school students about accessing accommodations in a post-secondary environment. Through her experience presenting, Janice determined she wanted to continue her education and advocacy efforts. As a result of these experiences and the services provided by ORS (guidance and counseling, information and referral, and transferrable skill analysis), Janice decided to pursue a master's in nursing education in 2015. While working toward her degree, she worked as a graduate teacher assistant and research assistant.

Janice earned her master's in nursing education in May of 2018. Soon after, she was referred to job development services, where she received assistance with her CV, cover letter, and a better understanding of the labor market. She also received guidance on disability disclosure and accommodations. To gain an understanding of her future income, she was referred for benefits counseling.

Janice was accepted into URI's Nursing Doctorate Program in the Spring of 2018. After completing a few of her classes, she was able to apply for a part-time faculty position. Janice taught her first college class at URI in the fall of 2020 and has continued teaching Social Determinants of Health, a seven-week BSN elective course, once a semester. She also continues to strongly advocate for people with disabilities by sharing her story and experiences throughout RI.

"The services and involvement of my ORS Counselor benefited me greatly in retaining my sense of independence and allowing me to realize my educational and career goals."

Janice Wray

Jordan Andrews

ORS Counselor: Emilee O'Connor

Jordan applied for ORS services in September of 2018 and was initially placed on a waitlist for services. While on the waitlist, Spurwink RI assisted him in obtaining employment at Fitzwater Engineering, while also working one shift per week at Wright Trailers.

Once Jordan was off the waitlist, ORS was able to fund retention services. However, Jordan's employer at Fitzwater Engineering decided to retire and close the business, and Jordan was once again interested in obtaining additional employment.

Then COVID happened, and after some time, Jordan and his team re-engaged in job development activities.

Jordan was persistent and engaged in the process, touring employers, participating in job trials, and exploring options. After touring Feast and Fettle, Jordan expressed an interest in working there.

Typically, this company only hires full-time employees but agreed to have Jordan come in for a Community-Based Work Experience (CBWE) for 10 hours per week. Jordan started his CBWE on 2/6/23, and on 3/20/23 he was offered a permanent position as a dishwasher, that was customized to part-time.

Feast and Fettle have been open and willing to collaborate with Jordan's employment team at Spurwink. Jordan has gone from 1:1 job coaching support during his CBWE to periodic in-person check-ins by his job coach.

Jordan has developed a strong network of natural supports at Feast and Fettle, and his co-workers are willing to offer help any time he needs it. He has been recognized by the entire team for the positivity he brings to the workplace. and recently received employee of the month.³³ Great job Jordan!



Nathan Troncoso

Counselor: Paula Cardi Berard

Nathan, 22, attended the Providence Public School system as part of the Exceptional Child Services (ECS) program at Hope High School. Nathan graduated from Hope High School in 2022. With his VR counselor, Paula Cardi Berard, Nathan and his family had made the decision that he would apply for and attend Project Search at The Miriam Hospital.

Project Search is a transition-to-work program involving skills training and career exploration through actual work-based rotations.

Three hospital rotations on which Nathan worked included PCP, where he cleaned patient equipment, the Cafeteria, where he stocked and rotated food products and prepared some food items, and the kitchen where he prepared some food items and cleaned the environment and worked on the dishwasher.

Nathan found out he likes to work, he likes a variety of job tasks, and he likes to stay busy. He learned how to plan ahead while at home so he could be ready for work. Nathan rode RIPTA independently to and from the hospital, and he learned the importance of soft skills in the workplace as well as learning the job tasks. This soft-spoken former Project Search student also learned to advocate for himself, exercise his voice, ask questions on the job for clarification, and to take initiative. He became a valuable addition to all the departments in which he worked.



Nathan (cont)

Recently, a Miriam Hospital supervisor called and offered him a job working in the kitchen, where he will be working 20 hours per week as part of a team in Sanitation, keeping the environment clean, and working on the dishwasher.

Also, knowing that Nathan loves dogs, his VR counselor found an opportunity for him to work at a local dog grooming business, where he will be brushing out and washing the clients. Quite possibly, Nathan will be employed in not only one, but two jobs.

The Office of Rehabilitation Services was instrumental in this young man's success by providing Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) to assist him to transition out of high school, funding of programs, and identifying necessary supports for his job.

With the support of his family, the ORS, his school, and Miriam Hospital, Nathan is a successful young man who has made the most of his abilities and choices.

September 2024

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	2 Labor Day States Offices Closed	3	4	5	6	7
	9	10	11	12	13	14
5	16	17	18	19	20	21
2	23	24	25	26	27	28
9	30	1	2	3	4	5

SBVI – Independent Living/Older Blind

Mrs. C. is an 88-year-old married female, who lives with her husband in a home they built together along the Wood River. She is a former English professor and also an artist who enjoyed painting as a hobby until she lost her vision.

Her main concern was that she was unable to travel independently outside of her home and was becoming housebound. She lives in a wonderful area, and she would enjoy taking walks around her yard and neighborhood. As her vision was decreasing, she struggled with her balance while in her yard. She was tripping and fell twice. After her falls, she would no longer go outside out of fear.

She was provided with two support canes and sunglasses for glare. Through the engagement with the orientation and mobility specialist, she was taught how to use her canes to ambulate safely indoors and outdoors.

As a result of this intervention, she reports that she is more independent and confident using her support canes. She is back to walking outdoors and enjoying herself. Mrs. C. also takes her canes when she goes on errands with friends and family members.

In addition to local travel, recently she noted that she needed to go out of town to address some legal family matters in nearby Worcester, Mass., and she expressed that she wasn't worried when traveling to the different locations because she had her support canes. This allowed her to manage the family matters confidently and independently.

Mrs. C. is very grateful for SBVI and the services that she received.

2022 Raymond A. Carroll Award Patricia Robert, Clerk Secretary



*Former Associate Director - Ron Racine
Former Administrator - Ray Carroll
Clerk Secretary - Patricia Robert
Current Associate Director - Joe Murphy*

The Raymond A. Carroll Award is given to an individual who exemplifies the same dedication in serving individuals with disabilities as Mr. Carroll had during his 42 years of state service. Raymond Carroll began his career at the Office of Rehabilitation Services in 1966 and retired in 2008. During that time, he demonstrated his awareness of the needs of individuals with disabilities and was a dedicated and effective advocate for improving the standards set for programs providing services for those individuals with disabilities.

Pat has worked at ORS since January 2014 where she was hired as a Data Entry Operator, and she was later promoted to a Clerk Secretary in 2016. One of Pat's co-workers stated, "I believe the Ray Carroll Award signifies a person who is diligent, conscientious, hardworking and compassionate, and in my opinion Pat Robert is the perfect example of all these qualities." She is always there to lend a hand no matter the situation. Pat is professional and goes above and beyond on a daily basis. Pat is the go-to person whether it is something business related or if you just need a sounding board.

Another co-worker added, "She has done a great job filling in those gaps where things need to be done or covered. She has a great demeanor and sense of humor, and it is obvious that staff all feel comfortable coming to her for guidance and advice and is a deserving nomination for the Ray Carroll award."

Past Recipients

2011 - Sharon DiPinto

Sr. Human Services Policy & Systems Specialist

2012 - Kathy McCabe

Sr. Rehabilitation Counselor

2013 - Sherry Olink

Jr. Resource Specialist

2014 - Teresa Scaramuzzo-DiMattia

Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor II

2015 - Rosemary Feeney

Sr. Human Services Business Officer

2016 - Paula Stachelek

Word Processing Typist

2017 - Sheridan Lomax

Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor

2018 - Rosemarie Aponte

Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor

2019 - Karen Davis

Asst. Administrator - Supported Employment

2020 - Michelle DeVita

Sr. Word Processing Typist

2021 - Daniel Moitoso

Desktop Support Specialist

The State Rehabilitation Councils (SRCs) are the consumer voice for the VR program. Federally mandated membership requirements include a broad range of stakeholders to ensure that various constituencies have a voice in the conduct of the VR agency. This consumer voice is absolutely necessary for the VR program to partner with individuals with disabilities to jointly facilitate the accomplishment of their dreams of independence, full community integration, and employment.

SRC members represent the state agency to a broad array of partners such as employers, parents, educators, community rehabilitation programs, and other stakeholders in the VR program. They reinforce the value that individuals with disabilities are able to achieve quality employment outcomes and become contributing members of society.

Though mandated by federal law, the partnership between SRCs and VR extends beyond the shared accomplishment of mandated tasks. Specifically, the partnership is a call to action to advocate for and to hear the voices of the people served by VR. The partnership must be a commitment and priority for the partners in order to make the VR system a change agent whose goal is to assist people with disabilities to become employed in integrated, competitive employment!

(McGuire-Kuletz, M., Tomlinson, P., & Hurley, K.B. 2019). McGuire-Kuletz, M., Tomlinson, P., & Hurley, K.B. page 1 (2019). The State Rehabilitation Council – vocational rehabilitation partnership under WIOA - Washington, DC: The George Washington University, Center for Rehabilitation Counseling Research and Education.

The Council's Mission

“To work with ORS assuring that all Rhode Islanders with disabilities are able to obtain and keep meaningful and satisfying employment. “

Our Vision

- The State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) is an independent body of diverse members that works together to insure continuous improvement in ORS employment outcomes.
- Through enhancing communication among all people and groups committed to increasing opportunity for people with disabilities.
- By increasing employer awareness of people with disabilities as a productive human resource pool.
- And conducting a review and analysis of the effectiveness of consumer satisfaction with the functions and activities of the State Agency as they relate to employment outcomes.

State Rehabilitation Council Message from the Co-Chairs

Dear Consumers, Families, Friends, Partners, and Stakeholders:

It is a great honor to present the FY2023 Rhode Island State Rehabilitation Council Annual Report. The SRC enacted a positive and major change; we elected to use co-chairs to help with time constraints of member volunteers, and this change was successful. We plan to utilize this officer set-up moving forward. Our Council comprises people with disabilities, family members, employers, and those interested in ensuring that people with disabilities have access to support and services that help create career opportunities. This collaboration is necessary as we advise ORS and work to improve the systems that support individuals with disabilities.

The Rhode Island State Rehabilitation Council had a successful year supporting ORS in its work on behalf of people with disabilities. This is an overview of our activities of the past year along with goals for 2023. Reports from the committees that support the work of the Council, and a list of Council members with their biographies and representing constituency are included.

The Council continues to learn, adapt, and be creative in how it functions during the post-pandemic era. We continually adjusted the format to find the right balance of moving our work forward, but COVID-19 lingers and is making it difficult for us to retain new membership due to the state's requirement that all members meet in person. This is a continuing challenge for us and has diminished our numbers. The SRC includes members who have themselves, or whose family members have compromised health and unfortunately, are unable to meet in person. The SRC is working to address this barrier, so that all may participate in meetings.

We applaud the ORS Counselors and their vendors for keeping the momentum going with transition activities, career exploration, and virtual career events that were created due to the pandemic. Now that ORS has returned to in-person work, they have kept these innovative practices moving forward.

State Rehabilitation Council Message from the Co-Chairs

Our Partners: the Office of Rehabilitation Services (ORS); the Rhode Island State Independent Living Council; the Governor's Workforce Board; and the Governor's Commission on Disabilities.

Goals of the Council:

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act charges the State Rehabilitation Council with meeting the following goals:

- Review, analyze, and advise the ORS regarding the performance of their responsibilities in planning, developing, and implementing, services to persons with disabilities in order to affect competitive employment outcomes;
- Advise and assist in the application of the State Plan, strategic plans, reports, needs assessments, and evaluations required under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended;
- Conduct a review and analysis of the effectiveness of consumer satisfaction with the functions and activities of the State Agency as they relate to employment outcomes;
- Advise the State Agency and provide for working relationships between the State Agency and the Statewide Independent Living Council;
- Perform such other functions as the Council deems appropriate and that are comparable to the other functions performed by the Council; and
- Prepare and submit an Annual Report to the Governor and the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA).

State Rehabilitation Council Message from the Chair (cont.)

Our 2023 Activities:

In 2023, members of the Council assisted the Office of Rehabilitation Services (ORS) with:

- * Order of Selection (OOS) - The Council continued its ongoing mission to monitor the ORS's Order of Selection and Waitlist to determine how quickly individuals were removed from the Waitlist and into employment services. This year saw no consumers on the list, and we applaud ORS's efforts to eliminate the Waitlist.
- * The Council reviewed the ORS portion of the State Plan updates (Noted in the State Plan Committee report).
- * Re-engaged with follow-up on position letter to the Governor's Commission on Disabilities to support changes to the Open Meetings regulations so that virtual meetings could once again be available. This initiative is stalled at the State House, but we are hopeful that with the combined efforts of many committees and councils, there may be some movement this year to allow virtual meetings once again.

We continue to promote the diversity, content expertise, and experiences that Council members have and to foster each member to advocate and share their voice as representatives for supporting persons with disabilities.

Acknowledgments:

We want to thank the ORS and their vendors publicly for their contributions to the growth of our consumers and to let you know your voices and enthusiasm continue to exemplify the best of vocational rehabilitation work in R.I.

State Rehabilitation Council Message from the Co-Chairs

Looking Ahead to What's Next

The Council will continue to fulfill its role by staying abreast and supporting the progress that the State of Rhode Island and the ORS are making in fulfilling its responsibilities under the 2014 Rhode Island vs. US DOJ Consent Decree.

We continue to support the ORS as it works to assist with the employment needs of Rhode Islanders with disabilities. We are honored to serve as the Co-chairs of the SRC, and excited about the work in the year ahead. It is important to recognize the countless volunteer hours Rhode Island SRC members complete throughout the year to achieve the Council's goals.

Thank you to each member for your valued contributions!

Respectfully Submitted,

Melissa Brusso
Jane Slade
SRC Co-Chairs

2023 - 2024 Schedule

11.6. 2023	4:00 PM – 6:00 PM @ The Paul V. Sherlock Center on Disabilities (ROOM 105)
1.22.2024	4:00 PM – 6:00 PM @ The Paul V. Sherlock Center on Disabilities (ROOM 105)
3.18.2024	4:00 PM – 6:00 PM @ The Paul V. Sherlock Center on Disabilities (ROOM 105)
5.20.2024	8:30 AM – 10:30 AM @ The Paul V. Sherlock Center on Disabilities (ROOM 105)

October 2024

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
29	30	1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14 Columbus Day States Offices Closed	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31 Halloween	1	2

Membership Training Sub- committee

The Membership Training Committee is still recovering from the past few difficult years due to Covid-19 and is now developing a mentorship program for new members. We will use this program to acquaint new members with the work of the SRC and to assist them in becoming fully engaged in our committee work through advocacy in their communities and support of the ORS' initiatives. A training event is also in the works to refresh the work of Council members.

The Membership Training Sub-Committee is charged with the interviewing, orientation, and training of new members including disseminating new materials and providing an annual training event in partnership with the ORS. A mentoring program is available to new members for their first year on the Council.

The Committee's Goals:

- Maintain an annual event to ensure that all new and existing members can participate in updated training.
- Disseminate a membership package to all members, offering materials that clearly state the SRC mission, vision, responsibilities, and contact information along with other relevant materials.
- Sustaining ongoing efforts toward active recruitment of qualified individuals to its membership. Candidates must represent the interests of the stakeholders and represent a diverse composition that reflects the needs of the populations served, while meeting the federal requirements. SRC members represent people with disabilities, advocates and family members, employers, and rehabilitation and education professionals. Recruitment of new members is an ongoing, shared responsibility of ALL council members.
- Implement a Mentoring Program that will pair new members with experienced members to answer any questions and clarify responsibilities and expectations of the council for at least one year.

Committee Accomplishments:

- The Mentoring Program will be available to all new members.
- The responsibility of current SRC members and especially the Training Committee is to recruit new members.

November 2024

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
27	28	29	30	31	1	2
3 Daylight Saving Ends	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11 Veterans Day States Offices Closed	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28 Thanksgiving Day States Offices Closed	29	30

State Plan, Policy, and Quality Assurance Committee

The State Plan, Policy, and Quality Assurance Committee of the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) leads the SRC to provide meaningful comments and feedback to the ORS. The committee leads the review of the quality of the ORS service delivery to the ORS customers by engaging in comment on plans and policies, the Comprehensive Needs Assessment, and the vocational rehabilitation portion of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Combined State Plan.

This year, the Committee's work took place in-person. The committee helped to formulate a position letter to the Governor's Commission on Disabilities to support changes to the Open Meetings regulations so that virtual meetings would continue to be available. Although the committee did not meet in person, we enjoyed being able to meet with the full Council at the May 2023 breakfast meeting.

During the last few years, the committee's focus was working with the ORS to produce a monthly survey of consumers. This data is used as part of the ORS's Comprehensive Needs Assessment and was incorporated into the State Plan update.

In the later part of this year, the SRC received the ORS State Plan updates. We initially began to plan the work. This process resulted in engaging more Council members to participate in the work of the State Plan to capture the diverse voices that could bring different perspectives and provide meaningful feedback to the ORS. The initial stages of planning consisted of receipt of the updates to the state plan from the ORS. We then requested that the ORS meet with the members of our Council to explain the changes in each section. The ORS did meet with us virtually and provided a helpful framework and highlighted important issues. The Council found this to be immensely helpful. Our work continued through the process until we submitted our comments to the Office of Rehabilitation Services..

The committee looks forward to continued updates.

December 2024

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25 Christmas States Offices Closed	26	27	28
29	30	31 New Year's Eve	1 New Year's Day	2	3	4

SRC Members

Melissa D. Brusso is a Co-Chair of the Council and the Chair of the Membership Training Committee. She sits on the Council as a representative of a Disability Advocacy Group representing individuals with physical, cognitive, sensory, or mental disabilities who have difficulty in representing themselves or are unable due to their disabilities to represent themselves. She is an Educational Advocate at the Paul V. Sherlock Center on Disabilities at Rhode Island College. She has worked in educational advocacy for a total of seventeen years, first with the Office of the Child Advocate and the Paul V. Sherlock Center on Disabilities, and later with Justice Resource Institute in Massachusetts. She has worked in adult education and ESL at Dorcas International Institute of RI, helping recently resettled refugee students and other newcomers through the process of beginning their English education. She is appointed by the RI Department of Education to make educational decisions for children and youth in foster care throughout Rhode Island. She holds a Bachelor of Arts degree from Providence College, and a Master's Degree from Rhode Island College.

Jane Slade is a Co-Chair of the Council. Jane has been employed as the State Transition Coordinator with the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE), Office of Student, Community and Academic Supports (OSCAS) since June 2011. Core functions of this office include Special Education policy/program development and oversight; IDEA State Performance Plan Indicators; Liaison to School Support System visits; State Councils and RIDE statewide developmental work. Ms. Slade's additional focus area responsibilities include Secondary Transition; Secondary Reform/Proficiency-Based Graduation Requirements (PBGR); Post-secondary Outcomes; Interagency/Adult Services, and is the Chair of the RI Transition Council. Prior to coming to the State Department of Education, she served as the Northern RI Regional Transition Coordinator, serving youth, parents, and professionals in secondary Transition. She holds a Bachelor of Science degree from the University of Rhode Island and a Master's Degree from Assumption College. She is also a Certified Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor. She has been a member of the State Rehabilitation Council for six years and is currently a Co-chair.

Catherine Sansonetti, Esq., is the Vice-Chair of the Council and the Chair of the State Plan, Policy, and Quality Assurance Committee. She sits on the Council as the current designee for Morna Murray, Executive Director of Disability Rights Rhode Island, representing the Client Assistance Program established under section 732 of this title under 43 CFR part 370. Catherine is a Managing Attorney at Disability Rights Rhode Island and has been on the Council for four terms. She brings more than twenty years of experience as an advocate for people with disabilities to her work on the Council. During her tenure, she also served as Secretary of the Council, and was on the Transportation ad hoc Committee. She has been the driving force behind the State Plan, Policy, and Quality Assurance Committee for all the years of her service on the Council. She was recognized twice for her work on the Council and received the First Outstanding Service Award from the Council in 2018. Catherine actively works on the Consumer Satisfaction Surveys and the Comprehensive Needs Assessments, and on the State Plan and other policy matters.

SRC Members (cont)

Kate McCarthy-Barnett is on the State Plan, Policy and Quality Assurance Committee. She brings over 25 years of strategic leadership and advocacy across local, national, and global disability and civil rights initiatives. Professionally, she works for the US Department of Homeland Security Federal Emergency Management Agency where she leads the transformation to integrate the needs of people with disabilities into all aspects of emergency management throughout New England. She has led disability response operations for over 40 federally-declared natural disasters and man-made disasters. Dr. McCarthy-Barnett is active on numerous committees and initiatives at the state and national level focused on setting policy for individuals with disabilities.

Regina Connor worked for more than 30 years in the field of rehabilitation. She began as a rehabilitation teacher for the Blind, providing instruction in activities of daily living. Later, upon earning a Master of Arts Degree in Rehabilitation Counseling from Rhode Island College, she began working as a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor. Throughout the years, she was promoted to Senior VR Counselor, Supervisor, State Coordinator for the Deaf, and Program Director for the state's Assistive Technology Act program. Upon retirement, she still remains active in the disability community as the Chairperson of the Governor's Advisory Council for the Blind and Visually Impaired. Regina has worked to pass legislation to benefit people with disabilities in the areas of employment and education.

Jennifer Doucette sits on the Council representing a Community Rehabilitation Provider. She is the Regional Transition Coordinator for the Northern Region of Rhode Island, and her Center of Excellence is Career and Technical Education for students with disabilities. Additionally, Jennifer is the Director of Regional Transition at West Bay Collaborative, overseeing transition and vocational programming for the Northern region. Prior to her role as Regional Transition Coordinator, she was the Vocational Services Coordinator and Vocational Evaluator at West Bay Collaborative where she provided a variety of Office of Rehabilitation funded services to youth in transition and young adults including Pre-Employment Transition Services. Jennifer has a Master's Degree in Rehabilitation Counseling from Salve Regina University.

Barbara Fernandez is the Secretary of the Council and sits on the State Plan, Policy, and Quality Assurance Committee. She is a bilingual legal advocate at Disability Rights Rhode Island. She works primarily on the Client Assistance Program (CAP) and on Protection and Advocacy for Voting Access (PAVA). Barbara also assists in the Rep Payee Review program and is PABSS program trained. Before joining DRRI, Barbara worked as a paralegal in consumer litigation and as a residential manager for individuals with developmental disabilities. A Providence native, Barbara has a strong connection to the community and aims to educate and assist the underserved through advocacy.

SRC Members (cont)

Nina Fiasconaro is on the State Plan, Policy, and Quality Assurance Committee. She is part of the Council representing a parent of a highly involved son with disabilities. She started advocating for the disabled and participating on various committees at Jawanio, which was the UCP of Rockland NY and CPW, which was the UCP for Westchester NY. From 2010 to 2016, she was on the Board of Directors and was the Director of Development for The Miracle League of Westchester helping develop and run after-school programs for children with disabilities. Also, during that period, she participated on the Family Support Services Advisory Council of Westchester NY and was instrumental in overseeing a \$6 million dollar budget for respite programs in Westchester NY. After moving to Rhode Island, she became a Realtor with RE/MAX FLAGSHIP and is a Children's Miracle Network Hospital Agent. She is also heavily involved with Meeting Street School and participates on diverse levels and contributes to the Parent Advisory Board. She was part of BHDDH's Barriers Workgroup on restructuring the consent decree. Currently she is the founder and director of 401 A League of Our Own, an adaptive Buddy Ball League in Rhode Island.

Tracey Cunningham-Martins has spent 30-plus years in the field of day and supported employment for individuals served by multiple state departments including The Division of Developmental Disabilities, The Department of Veterans Affairs, The Department of Transitional Services, various state Vocational Rehabilitation agencies, and Ticket to Work. She has been successful in assisting organizations in transformation projects and building successful leadership teams, in multiple states until settling in Rhode Island where she served as the Associate Director of Employment at Behavioral Health Developmental Disabilities and Hospitals before becoming the CEO/ President at Accesspoint Rhode Island. She is also an active member of multiple committees including the Institute of Community Inclusion Advisory Board in Boston, the RI Governor's Commission on Disabilities- employment committee, and the Governors Workforce Board Career Pathways Advisory Committee. She is also a recent graduate of Salve Regina University's Dual Master's Program in Rehabilitation Counseling and Innovation and Strategic Management which has fueled her enthusiasm for promoting system change in Rhode Island.

Nicole Rico Serrano is a member of the State Plan, Policy, and Quality Assurance Committee. She sits on the Council representing American Indian VR program. She is the Project Director for the Mashantucket Tribal Nation Rehabilitation Program in Mashantucket, CT. She has worked in the tribal communities of RI and CT for the past eleven years as a vocational rehabilitation counselor for Mashantucket. Nicole is a Narragansett tribal member and is committed to advocating on behalf of the tribal communities to bring cultural awareness and Indigenous representation to both RI and CT. She has a bachelor's degree in International Relations and Spanish and a Master's Degree in Elementary Education.

SRC Members (cont)

Christine Yankee is a member of the State Plan, Policy, and Quality Assurance Committee. She sits on the Council representing a Community Rehabilitation Program Service Provider and individuals with barriers to employment. Christine is the Vice President of Program Services at Goodwill of Southern New England. She brings over 25 years of experience in the areas of workforce development, adult education, and transition services for youth and adults with and without disabilities. Her committee work includes representing Goodwill at the RI Workforce Alliance Meeting, and as a Providence/Cranston Workforce Development board member.

Vocational Rehabilitation Services

Ex-officio Joseph Murphy, Associate Director, Vocational Rehabilitation (VR), Joe has been employed by the Office of Rehabilitation Services (ORS) for 21 years and was recently named Associate Director of the ORS in April 2022. He has worked as a VR Counselor, Transition Counselor, Regional Supervisor, Assistant Administrator and Administrator. Joe has a Master's Degree in Rehabilitation Counseling from Assumption College and has been a Certified Rehabilitation Counselor since 2000 and a Certified Employment Support Professional since 2015. Before coming to the ORS, Joe worked in the Vocational Rehabilitation field at a community mental health center for four years and then at a school for students with disabilities for another four years.

Natalia Montoya, M.A., CRC, is a member of the State Plan, Policy, and Quality Assurance Committee. She sits on the Council as Liaison for the Office of Rehabilitation Services (ORS) as a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor with knowledge of and experience with Vocational Programs and community services for the ORS participants. Natalia is a VRC II in the South County Region and has been working for the Office of Rehabilitation Services since 2014 serving the adult population and youth in transition. In addition to her work with the Council, is also the liaison to North Kingstown High School, South Kingstown High School, Bradley School South County, South County Chamber of Commerce, Galilee Mission Liaison, College Unbound Liaison, South Shore Mental Health, and she is a member of the BEST (Business Engagement Specialist Team) at the ORS.

Karen Davis, Administrator, has been employed by the Office of Rehabilitation Services (ORS) for 18 years. While at the ORS, she has worked as a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor I, Supervisor, and Assistant Administrator for the Supported Employment Program. She has a Master's Degree in Rehabilitation Counseling and is a Certified Rehabilitation Counselor. Before coming to the ORS, she worked in Private Rehabilitation for 16 years, working with individuals who have been injured at work.

SRC Members (cont)

Vocational Rehabilitation Services (cont)

Laurie DiOrio, Administrator of Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired

Linda Deschenes, Assistant Administrator of Operations

John Valentine, Strategic Planning Supervisor

Nancy Baker, SRC Staff/Contact



Members who have completed their terms
on the SRC included:

*Paul Harden
Judith Drew
Jack Ringland
Christina Battista
Anne Fartura
Joan Fino*



National Coalition of State Rehabilitation Councils

RISRC Partnership with National Coalition of State Rehabilitation Councils (NCSRC)

The State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) is an active long-time member of the National Coalition of State Rehabilitation Councils (NCSRC). The NCSRC strives to cultivate the strengths and necessary expertise of local SRCs, increase the capacity of SRCs through education & training to become effective partners in the vocational rehabilitation (VR) program. As each SRC maintains their respective individuality, the NCSRC provides a national resource to those Councils who may need to connect with a peer state on issues along with providing a mechanism for training with subject matter experts.

NCSRC Mission: On behalf of people with disabilities, our national membership coalition will advocate for and work in partnership with the national public vocational rehabilitation system's continual quest for excellence.

NCSRC Vision: NCSRC will be the premiere national organization of the consumer voice to enhance the employment opportunities of persons with disabilities through the public vocational rehabilitation system.

NCSRC Core Values:

Integrity - We are honest and straightforward in all that we do. We treat everyone with dignity and respect. We act responsibly with resources entrusted to us. We are accountable and act in accordance with these values.

Commitment - We support the full implementation and enforcement of disability non-discrimination laws, particularly the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended and the American with Disabilities Act of 1990.

Excellence - We trust that customers of public vocational rehabilitation will be empowered to make choices which lead to ultimate independence.

NCSRC (cont)

Advocacy - We will work to educate and inform the public and government policy makers regarding issues affecting people with disabilities.

Diversity - We will uphold a broad definition of diversity that honors and appreciates disability alongside race, ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation, and religion as an integral part of the human experience.

Leadership - We will foster leadership among people with disabilities that upholds excellence, quality and inclusive opportunities.

Partnership - We will promote a positive collaboration with state and non-governmental agencies to enhance meaningful and sustainable employment for people with disabilities.

Teamwork - We are committed to a partnership based on a spirit of trust and cooperation with Vocational Rehabilitation Administrators and staff so that collaborative efforts will benefit from the NCSRC customer voice.

Culture - We support a public vocational rehabilitation service system that is structured in a manner that reflects the social, political, historic, and economic experience of disability.

Communication - We value effective communication through appropriate formats.

The NCSRC currently consists of 53 SRCs of states and territories that provide public VR services. In addition to conference calls every two months, the NCSRC hosts two training conferences each year that coincide with the national meetings of the Council of State Administrators for Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) in collaboration with the Rehabilitation Services.

Statement of Partnership and Common Purpose

The Rhode Island State Rehabilitation Council leads an active, constructive, and enduring partnership with the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation Services. We share a common commitment to cultivating credibility and trust in our partnership by sharing information, program and performance data, experience, and expertise. Together we ensure that eligible Rhode Islanders seeking vocational rehabilitation services can be confident that vocational counseling and guidance will be individualized and effective.

The Council strengthens the vocational rehabilitation program and the state of the environment the program operates in, by asking strategic questions; examining internal and external pressures which influence service delivery and the program's capacity to recruit, support, promote and retain knowledgeable, skilled professionals to administer operations and provide direct services; and, make recommendations to improve policy and practice. The desired outcome of our partnership is to enable each participant in the VR program to identify a specific employment goal and then empower him or her to develop and implement a plan for achieving it.

We are seeking talented and committed individuals who can share their insight with the Council; with our partner, the Office of Rehabilitation Services; and with the diverse population of Rhode Islanders with disabilities whose needs we acknowledge and serve.

If you are interested or want more information about the RISRC, please contact Nancy Baker at (401) 462-7811.

You can also visit our webpage <http://www.ors.ri.gov/SRC.html>

DHS does not discriminate against any person on the basis of race, color, national origin, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, age, religion or sex in acceptance for or provision of services, employment or treatment in its educational and other programs and activities.



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