

**Rhode Island Department of Human Services  
Office of Rehabilitation Services  
and  
Rhode Island State Rehabilitation Council**

**2019  
ANNUAL  
REPORT**



**Gina M. Raimondo - Governor  
Courtney E. Hawkins - Director**

## **The Mission of the Rhode Island Office of Rehabilitation Services is**

*“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.*



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## Message from the Director,

Rhode Island Department of Human Services is an organization of opportunity providing a full continuum of services to the people who need us. We are dedicated to creating an environment where staff and customers have the tools, resources, and supports they need to thrive.

Our Office of Rehabilitation Services (ORS) is an integral part of our mission. It is my pleasure to provide you with its Annual Report for Federal Fiscal Year 2019.

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

Younger individuals with disabilities and their families work with Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors to make that important transition from school to post-secondary education and/or careers. The business and labor community depend on ORS for trained, job-ready applicants. Rhode Islanders applying for Social Security disability benefits get accurate and timely decisions; Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired provide services for individuals who have a visual impairment. Personalized services are provided when needed.

In FFY2019, 2,565 persons with disabilities were provided vocational rehabilitation services including training, and employment services provided by ORS-approved vendors. The Disability Determination Services adjudicated 13,804 claims for Social Security disability benefits.

We are proud of the partnerships that our staff has developed with our citizen advisory councils, community partners, and customers, which has improved the quality of life for all Rhode Islanders.



**Courtney Hawkins**

## Message from the Associate Director,

The Office of Rehabilitation Services (ORS) had an eventful year in 2019. The ORS leadership team remained invested and passionate about our work and strived to ensure the individual success of our staff, and ultimately the customers we serve.

ORS provided services to 2,565 individuals this year. Additionally, we worked to transform our business approach, develop new business models, and increase our collaboration with our community partners. This enabled us to significantly reduce wait list time for new applicants under our Order of Selection, who were able to access our services.

In 2019 ORS expanded our Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) throughout the State, and actively sought to engage students early by developing additional programs for middle school students starting at 14 years old. Additionally, ORS collaborated with partners to deliver valuable skills and services to students in the five core areas of Job Exploration Counseling, Work-Based Learning, Counseling to Enrollment in Comprehensive Transition or Post-Secondary Educational Programs at Institution of Higher Education, Workplace Readiness Training, and Self Advocacy. We also continued all our Project Search sites and are in the process of developing new sites. 1,500 students have received Pre-ETS services this year.

I hope you enjoy seeing the difference our dedicated counselors and social workers are making every day to assist Rhode Islanders with disabilities to become employed and live independently. I also want to take this opportunity to thank the State Rehabilitation Council for their commitment and support over the past year. They have been an instrumental partner as we have implemented the Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act (WIOA) and developed new programs and services for transitioning students.

I would also like to acknowledge the commitment, adaptability, and dedication, of the ORS team who provided amazing individualized support to the disabled individuals we serve. Thank you for your hard work, creative approaches to service delivery, and most of all your perseverance, which has made a tremendous difference in the lives of those we serve.



**Ronald Racine**

# 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. Employment being the successful outcome of services provided through the public vocational rehabilitation program. 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.

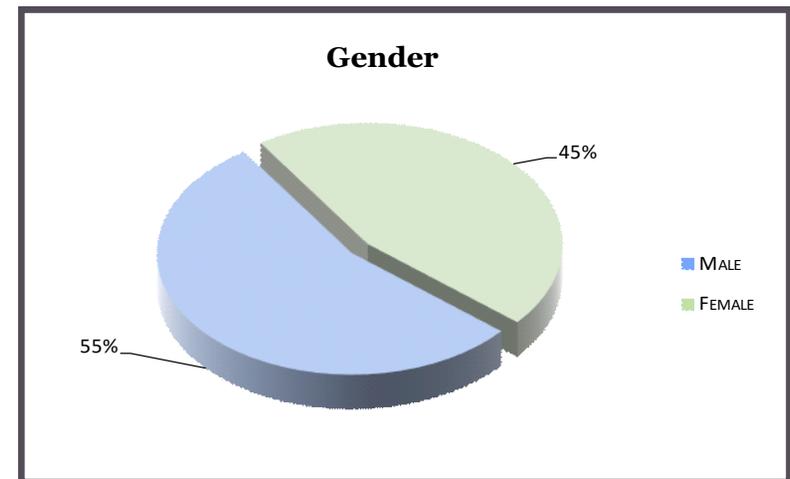
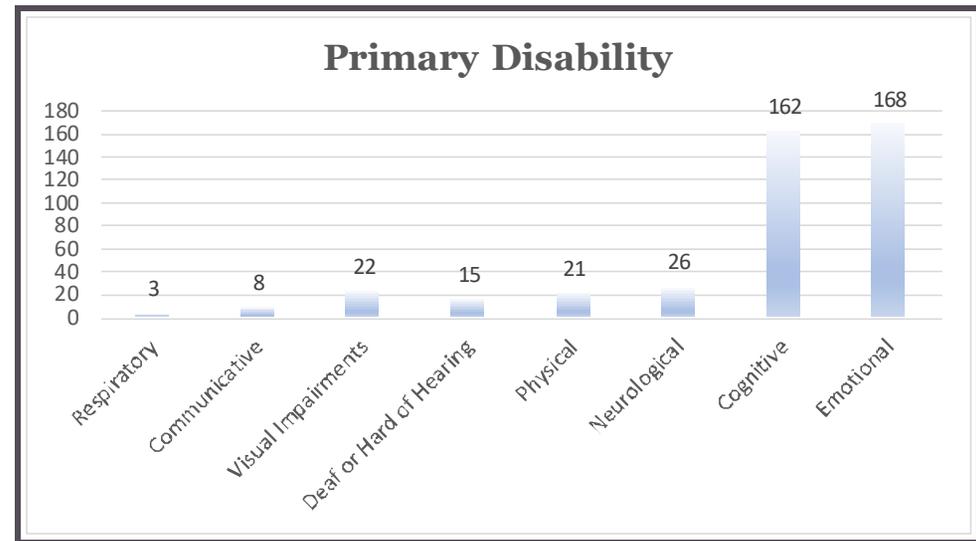
A Masters level Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor works with the individual to develop an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) that includes an employment goal. The time expected for the individual to reach the goal, the services that the individual chooses necessary to reach the employment goal, and how the services will be provided are all individualized.

Vocational Rehabilitation services that may be incorporated in an Individualized Plan for Employment include:

College or Vocational Training; Job Training and Job Supports; Other Goods and Services; Counseling and Guidance; Post-Employment Services; Diagnostic Evaluations; Rehabilitation Technology Services; Housing Modifications; Vehicle Modifications; Job Development & Job Placement Services; and/or Transition & Pre-ETS Services.

## Who Are Our Customers? Program Year (PY) 2018 (7/1/18–6/30/19)

### 425 Successfully Employed Individuals with a Disability



# JANUARY 2020

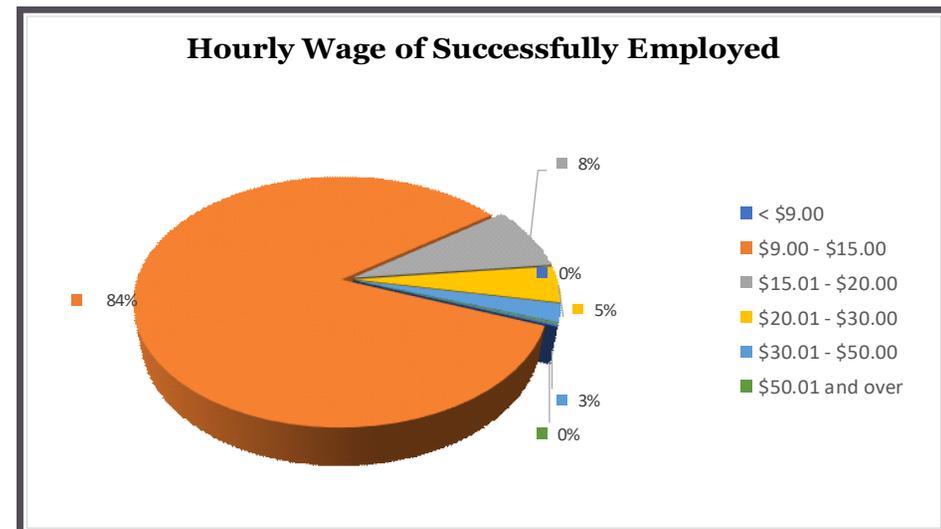
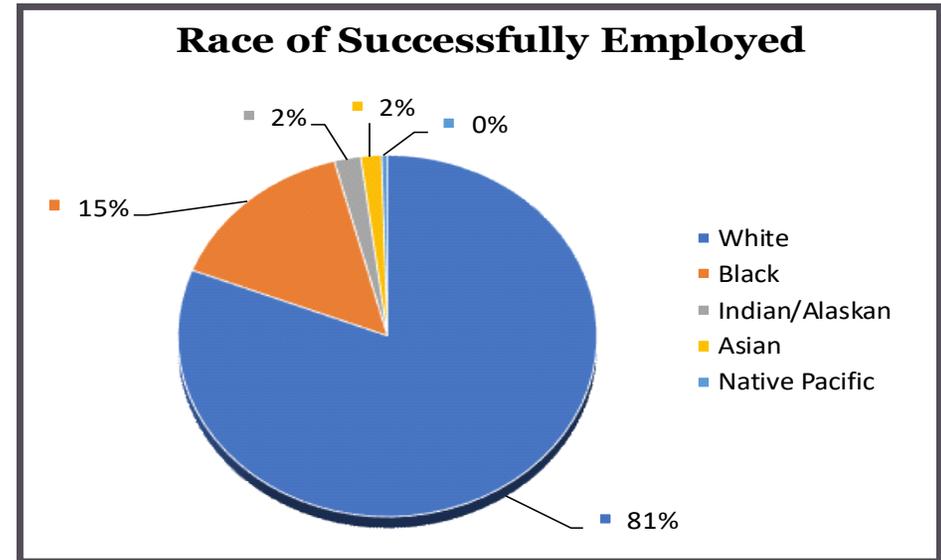
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
			<b>1 New Year's Day</b> <b>State Offices Closed</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>12</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>19</b>	<b>20 Martin Luther King Day</b> <b>State Offices Closed</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>26</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>31</b>	

# Vocational Rehabilitation Program

## Program Year (PY) 2018 (7/1/18 - 6/30/19) Statistics

### 425 Successfully Employed Individuals with Disabilities

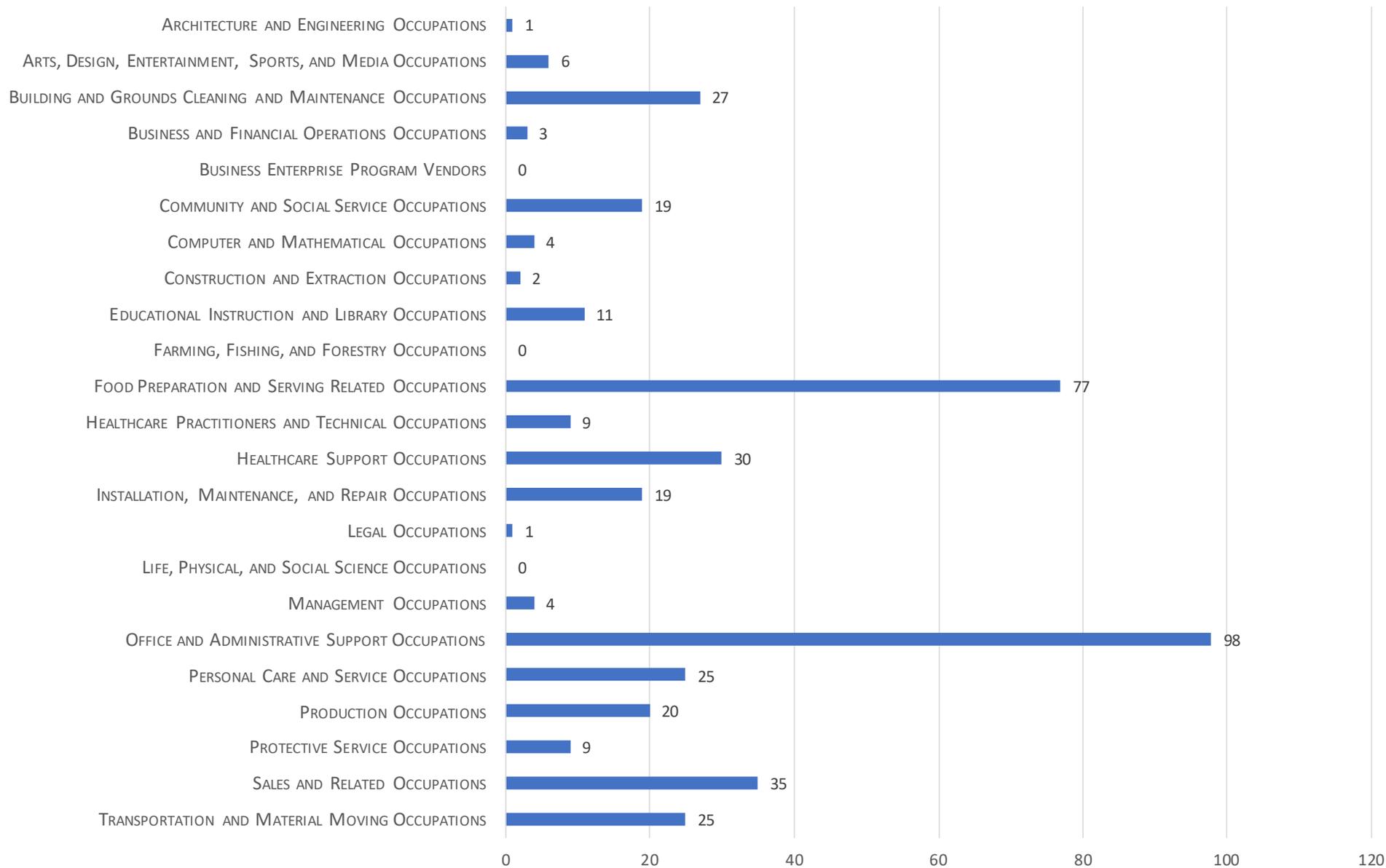
- 606** individuals applied for vocational rehabilitation services.
- 2,565** individuals received services purchased from vendors. Services ranged from evaluations, medical and psychological therapies, personal assistant services, job placement and training.
- 114** individuals received rehabilitation technology services to assist them to prepare for and to enter employment.
- 1,500** youth with disabilities received Pre-Employment Transition Services which included their participation in the middle school pilot, Dare to Dream Conference and other student events.
- 61** applied for vocational rehabilitation services.
- 1,045** individuals were placed on the Order of Selection Wait List prior to the end of PY2018. During PY2018, **191** were removed from list.



# FEBRUARY 2020

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14 	15
16	17 <b>President's Day</b> <b>State Offices Open</b>	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29

## Primary Occupation of 425 Successfully Employed Individuals with Disabilities



# MARCH 2020

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17 St. Patrick's Day	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

# 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...** A Federal/State Program which establishes vending facilities in state, federal, or private buildings for operation by persons who are legally blind. Licensed blind vendors operate vending facilities at 13 locations throughout the state and are assigned to these locations on the basis of their seniority within the program. Types of facilities range from small snack bars serving light snacks and beverages to 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, which works to

reduce or eliminate barriers that impede access to, and funding for, assistive technology devices and services for individuals with disabilities of all ages.

**Social Services Program...** Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired coordinates a federal comprehensive service program which focuses primarily on children from birth through age 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-serve basis.

# APRIL 2020

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
			1 April Fools Day	2	3	4
5 Palm Sunday	6	7	8	9 	10 Good Friday	11
12 	13	14	15 Tax Day	16	17	18
19	20	21	22 Administrative Professionals Day	23	24 Ramadan Starts	25
26	27	28	29	30		

# SBVI Statistics

## Business Enterprises Program

**13** Vending facilities were supported by the Randolph- Shepard Business Enterprises Program (BEP) at Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired. These 13 facilities collectively also provide employment for numerous individuals around the state. Multiple operators have a second location they manage .

**1** site was renovated.

**\$23,939** Average net earnings (profit to vendor after expenses) across all sites

**\$47,131** Highest reported net earnings by a vendor

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

**378** 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:

- ◆ **87%** of individuals who engaged with the program and received assistive technology services and training reported improvement in their abilities in this area.
- ◆ **79%** of individuals receiving services from the Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist reported functional gains and increase independence in their ability to safely travel and navigate their homes and communities.

## Social Services for the Blind

SBVI staff partnered with the RI Governor's Advisory Council for the Blind, the RI Historical Society and the RI NFB to provide technical assistance and identify accessibility solutions for their museums throughout the state.

## Children's Services

RISBVI staff partnered with Lifespan Hospital's Pediatric Ophthalmology Unit for pediatric low vision symposium in September at which over 100 local eyecare, low vision rehabilitation professionals and teachers of the visually impaired attended for professional development and networking to improve services to children.

## NEWSLINE

**515** individuals are registered for, a newspaper reading service provided by the National Federation of the Blind (NFB), and funded by SBVI.

## Assistive Technology Access Partnership (ATAP)

**1,939** individuals received information from Assistive Technology Access Partnership (ATAP) Resource Centers about assistive technology (AT) and funding options.

**1,338** individuals received Demonstrations.

**200** individuals received Device Loan.

**48** individuals received Reused Devices.

**195** individuals were provided specialized equipment through the ATEL (Adaptive Telephone Equipment Loan) Program.

# MAY 2020

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
					1	2
3	4	5 	6	7	8	9
10 Mother's Day	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25 Memorial Day - State Offices Closed	26	27	28	29	30
31						

# Disability Determination Services

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 13,804 disability cases this year. We anticipate processing about the same number in FFY20.

RI DDS has completed the roll-out of the new computer system that SSA is developing. The system is referred to as DCPS (Disability Case Processing System). We started the roll out in March of 2017. We currently have 100% of the staff 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. Users are currently working in dual environments, which does present some challenges. We hope to turn off the Legacy system by June of 2020 when the contract is up. Not all case types are supported in the new system at this time.

SSA became current in Continuing Disability Reviews (CDR). The nation, as well as RI, has reached currency. This resulted in a decrease in the number we needed to process in FFY19. We processed 3,175 CDR’s. In FFY20, we have a goal of 3,365 CDR claims. We reduced the hearing backlog from 41 to 23. At the end of FFY17, the backlog was 140.

Despite all the changes in the method, that claims are processed and the federal hiring freeze that has been ongoing since FFY16, the RI DDS processed 13,804 disability claims. The RI DDS has been able to maintain excellent accuracy ratings of 97.4%. We have faced some challenges keeping pace with this workload, due to staff vacancies, medical leaves, and the learning curve for the new processing system. We received limited help from other states with our medical reviews. We are finding aged cases are increasing slightly which results in an uptick in our processing time. We ended FFY19 with an overall processing time of 111.5, which is below the national threshold of 113 days.

Rhode Island continues to operate a CDI Unit (Cooperative Disability Investigations) 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.

# JUNE 2020

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20  <b>First Day of Summer</b>
21 Father's Day	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30				

## 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

6<sup>th</sup> floor

Providence, RI 02903

1-877-402-0808

## Disability Determination Services

### Statistics

<b>14,145</b>	Total cases were received by the Disability Determination Services (DDS).
<b>13,804</b>	Claims were processed by the DDS
<b>8,338</b>	Initial claims were filed
<b>7,725</b>	Initial claims were processed
<b>3,231</b>	Continuing Disability Review cases were completed
<b>290</b>	Pre-Hearing Cases were processed, resulting in <b>401</b> Disability Hearing decisions
<b>3,886</b>	Consultative Exams were purchased
<b>11,873</b>	Medical Evidence Records were purchased
<b>\$1,356,572</b>	Total Medical Costs with Total DDS Budget of <b>\$9,773,622</b>
<b>\$752.65</b>	Cost per case

# JULY 2020

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
			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
26	27	28	29	30	31	

# Success Stories

Rose-May Eveillard-Bazin spent many years helping others as a counselor fluent in American Sign Language (Rose-May's fourth language). Rose-May valued working with other deaf individuals, but after orthopedic injuries involving the knees, spine, and wrist, Rose-May found herself unable to return to the profession she so long enjoyed.

Rose-May reached out to the Rhode Island Office of Rehabilitation Services/Deaf and Hard of Hearing unit for help. She wanted to return to work, but was unsure how she might overcome the communication challenges that too many Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals face.

Rose-May worked closely with her VR Counselor who then referred her to Goodwill Industries where Rose-May participated in a complete Vocational Assessment. Rose-May then embarked on a Situational Assessment at a local Market Basket Food Store through Workplace Opportunities Unlimited.

Rose-May began her assessment in the Deli at Market Basket where she instantly impressed the manager with her determination and positive energy. Communication barriers were overcome with the assistance of American Sign Language Interpreters, and

before the assessment process was complete, Rose-May was asked to interview for a part-time position!

Again Rose-May's enthusiasm and positive energy paid off. With the assistance of an American Sign Language Interpreter, Rose-May interviewed for the position and was hired on the spot.



***Client:*** Rose-May Eveillard-Bazin

***Counselor:*** Paul Hughett

***Occupation:*** Produce Clerk

***Employer:*** Market Basket Food Store

# AUGUST 2020

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10 Victory Day - State Offices Closed	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31					

When James first came to ORS, he was a 36-year-old male in a residential program for homelessness and addiction. James has diagnoses of ADHD, anxiety, depression, high blood pressure, PTSD, and a history of substance abuse. James has been clean and sober since November 14, 2014, and was released from prison in May 2016.

Stanley Brajer at Project Connect and Amos House assisted him with the referral to ORS in August 2016, where he was assigned to work with Valerie Williams, his vocational rehabilitation counselor. James mentioned to his counselor during the initial intake that he had attended Rob Roy, and that he also had the tools to provide barbering services to friends and people at Amos House. They determined that an employment goal of owning his own barbershop or obtaining a welding certificate would be developed. A vocational evaluation through Goodwill Industries was completed to determine his strengths and abilities, where it was noted that he was a quick learner and great with his hands.

An employment plan was developed to help James regain his license for barbering, however, before he could enroll back at Rob Roy, he had to pay off his student loan. His ORS counselor aided him in getting the appropriate documentation to satisfy the federal student loan so that he could apply for FAFSA and get back to school. As part of his IPE, James was provided with RIPTA bus tickets, tuition assistance/training at Rob Roy, and a barber kit. Once James finished his schooling, he applied to

various salons and obtained a job at Atomic Salon, in Cranston, RI, where he works sixty (60) hours a week as a Barber.

James now has an apartment, lives in Providence, and has reunified with his two daughters. James uses RIPTA for his transportation.

James is very thankful for the assistance ORS has provided to him, and he is a great example of how -- ***“with the right help and services -- all things are possible”***.



<b>Client:</b>	<b>James</b>
<b>Counselor:</b>	<b>Valerie Williams</b>
<b>Occupation:</b>	<b>Barber</b>
<b>Employer:</b>	<b>Atomic Salon</b>

# SEPTEMBER 2020

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7 Labor Day - State Offices Closed	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22 	23	24	25	26
27	28 Yom Kippur	29	30			

Christian Cayard was hired at Price Rite as a part-time front end clerk in January 2019. Christian graduated from Cranston High School East and then attended the Cranston Transition Program for two years. During this time Christian was receiving vocational services through both ORS and the Cranston School Department. For his final year of school, Christian attended Project SEARCH at Blue Cross Blue Shield.

Project Search is a program collaborated on by ORS, Department of Behavioral Healthcare, Developmental Disabilities, and Hospitals (BHDDH), Cranston School District, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Rhode Island, and a supporting ORS vendor that is unique, business-led, 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 instruction, career exploration, and relevant job-skills training through three strategically designed internships.

During these three transitional years, Christian was able to identify a



vocational goal, build his resume, network, and improve his soft skills.

Upon graduation from Project SEARCH in June 2018, Christian received services from ORS and BHDDH that allowed him to continue submitting job applications, complete work trials, and go on supported interviews. Christian recently obtained employment in a field of his identified interest.

Christian receives support through ORS, BHDDH, and Perspectives to maintain employment and informed ORS that he is very happy at his new job.



**Client:** Christian Cayard  
**Counselor:** Laura Allbee  
**Occupation:** Front End Clerk  
**Employer:** Price Rite

# OCTOBER 2020

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12 Columbus Day State Offices Closed	13	14	15 White Cane Safety Day	16 Boss's Day	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31 

Ryan was referred to ORS services by the netWORKri in September of 2017. He needed assistance with career exploration, determining transferable skills, and finding employment. Ryan was trained and last worked as an auto technician; however, due to injuries he sustained after a motorcycle accident in 2016, he was not able to return to his current job. He wanted to stay in the auto industry but was not sure if it was possible. To best identify Ryan's vocational tolerances and skills, he participated in a Community-Based Work Experience. Findings supported that Ryan could successfully return to working full-time in the auto industry in a less physical position. With the guidance & counseling that he received from his ORS Counselor, Kathleen, and his Community Rehabilitation Provider, Career Construction, Ryan decided he would like to work towards a career goal of an Auto Part/Service Sales Person.

In November of 2017, Ryan was referred to Job Development and Placement Services where he worked with a Community Rehabilitation Provider to develop his professional resume, references, and cover letters. Ryan also received assistance with his job search and interview skills.

In February 2018, Ryan accepted a position at Pick-n-Pull Self-Service Used Auto Parts as a Customer Service Advisor. He worked forty hours a week and was offered a benefits package. Additional vocational supports ORS provided to Ryan included a clothing voucher to assist him in obtaining professional work attire.

In the fall of 2018, Ryan utilized the skills he was taught by his ORS VR Counselor and Community Rehabilitation Provider to look for a position that would allow him to advance his career.

In October of 2018, he obtained a full-time position with

Balise Toyota as a Service Advisor. Ryan reported that he is grateful for all the services and support he received and is happy with his career.



**Client:** Ryan Adams  
**Counselor:** Kathleen (Neun) Jones  
**Occupation:** Service Advisor  
**Employer:** Balise Toyota

# NOVEMBER 2020

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1 Daylight Savings Time Ends	2	3 Election Day - State Offices Closed	4	5	6	7
8	9 Veterans' Day - State Offices Closed	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26 	27	28
29	30					

After moving to Rhode Island, Kevin contacted ORS/Services for the Blind for assistance with finding employment in his field of study. Kevin was diagnosed legally blind while obtaining his Bachelor's degree in Technology Design. Despite his disability he has since obtained a Master's degree in Art Administration. He wished to pursue employment where he could utilize his professional skills.

ORS assisted Kevin by providing vocational counseling and guidance, assistance with job search and information and referral to connect him to community resources. He also required orientation and mobility to explore various transportation options, as well as acclimate himself with traveling around the state.

When Kevin was initially hired for his current position, he felt that he would be able to complete the work tasks without accommodations or assistive technology and declined services offered to him. However, once he tried to complete the required job tasks, he found himself struggling to access the computer screen and assorted paperwork which made him feel that he was not being efficient and productive like his coworkers. He contacted his vocational rehabilitation counselor and discussed his issues. ORS funded a worksite assessment and identified appropriate accommodations and magnification devices to enable him to perform the essential functions of the job.

ORS services provided Kevin with the necessary tools, confidence, and support to find and maintain employment in his field of choice.

Kevin stated that the assistive technology provided by ORS was invaluable and continues to assist him with maintaining his present position

at the Narrows Center for the Arts.



**Client:** Kevin Semagin  
**Counselor:** Graciela Pires  
**Occupation:** Business Patron and Administrative Relations  
**Employer:** Narrows Center for the Arts

# DECEMBER 2020

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
		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 	26
27	28	29	30	31 		

“Sandra” is a 32-year old single woman who stated at her intake that she had educational limitations/learning deficits. She applied for ORS services because she wanted to obtain a steady full-time job with benefits. A Learning Disability and Vocational Evaluation were completed to assess her vocational interests, strengths, limitations and support needs. The results supported vocational goals in the clerical field, activities assistant, or a home health aide. Because of her difficulties in reading/writing and learning new tasks, she would need accommodations.

A full-time position with benefits in a first shift position was her preference, which limited job opportunities. She also preferred working in a structured environment completing routine and repetitive tasks. Career Construction of RI provided Job Preparation to address her barriers to employment, particularly regarding reading/writing; and the ORS VR Counselor and Job Developer provided job placement services.

“Sandra” learned through a former co-worker that a local Rhode Island hospital was hiring. It was through a Job Fair being held at that hospital that a recruiter found her a full-time position as a Dishwasher. She initially declined this job, and the recruiter offered her a part-time Dietary Aide position with benefits with additional hours as a Guest Services Representative. “Sandra” accepted the initial offer of the Dishwasher job because the schedule provided full-time day shifts.

Career Construction provided job retention services to support her, as “Sandra” was initially anxious, and expressed frustration about learning her job.

In the end, “Sandra” adjusted well to her work environment, and established rapport with her supervisors and co-workers.



Although “Sandra” initially felt like she would not be able to find such a position because of her limitations and barriers, she never gave up.

**Client:** “Sandra”  
**Counselor:** Karen Russell  
**Occupation:** Dishwasher  
**Employer:** A Local RI Hospital

Bobby is an 83-year old gentlemen living most of his life with POAG (glaucoma). More recently Bobby lost all vision in his right eye. Not having much in the way of family to support him, he moved in to a nursing home in the northern RI area.

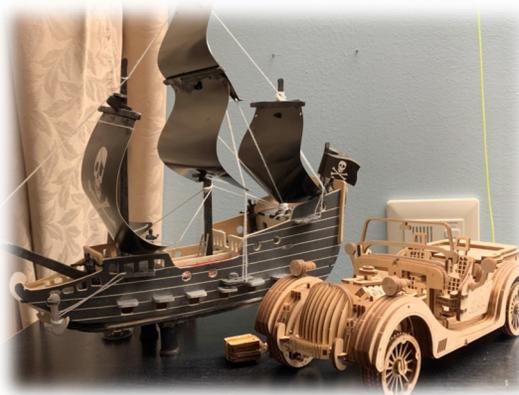
Without much to do to pass the time, Bobby explained to me how he began working out in the gym and building models, which was a childhood pastime: Model airplanes, ships, and race cars as well as the antique type. Both plastic as well as wooden pieces, all requiring a detailed paint job at the end. He explained how much of a struggle this was becoming as the instructions were quite small and difficult to read.

When we first encountered him, he was able to use a hand-held magnifier to complete his tasks. His room in the nursing home was filled with models, on the tables, the bookshelf and hanging from the ceiling. He relayed that he spends all of his monthly allowance at the hobby shop, buying bigger and better models. And that sometimes he sold them at the nursing home, for upwards of \$30 each, mostly to support his buying some more.

When he called to report that magnifiers were no longer working for him, he was obviously quite upset about it. He asked if we had “some sort of magic” that we could bring him because he could not imagine a day without building his models.

A visit was planned to demonstrate to him the best magnification devices (AT) that we had to offer. He was given an electronic magnifier called a ‘Candy’ and taught how to use it. He quickly took

to learning how to use it and demonstrated how it was making everything better for him; (improving his quality of life). This service allowed him to continue to independently perform a task that provides him with a great deal of personal satisfaction and self-worth.



Bobby’s room continues to be filled with all kinds of models. He relays in an elated fashion, in his sort of gruff manner, that he is more grateful than he can possibly explain.

## ***Success!***

***Client:*** Bobby  
***Counselor:*** Christine Hammond  
***Occupation:*** Retired

On Wednesday evening, June 25, 2019, friends and family of six Project SEARCH interns gathered together at the Blue Cross & Blue Shield building in Providence for a special ceremony along with many honored guests which included Lauren Cotnoir, Citizens Bank mentor; BCBSRI President and CEO Kim Keck; Kelly Starliper-Morris, special educator Project SEARCH; Cranston Superintendent Jeannine Nota-Masse; and Michele Simpson, Cranston Public Schools Executive Director.

The six young adults – Nicauris Canelo, Gabby Warren, Tom Marcello, Joel Suarez, Nikolas Simijis and Keenan McNeely – had worked hard as part of a one-year, school-to-work program that pools resources from the Office of Rehabilitation Services, Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Rhode Island, Cranston Public Schools, Perspectives Corporation, the Rhode Island Department of Human Services (DHS) and the Department of Behavioral Health Developmental Disabilities and Hospitals (BHDDH). This program is designed for participants who have significant intellectual and developmental disabilities and are looking to transition into competitive employment. They began this journey after their high school graduation from the Cranston School System, continued through the summer months and throughout the following school year, concluding with the Project SEARCH graduation in June.

Each graduate took to the podium to receive their diploma from Superintendent Nota-Masse and to share what they had learned throughout the year, sharing both successes and challenges they have overcome, as well as what they would be doing for work after



graduation. Some were already employed currently, and others would be starting work in the near future. Their employment included jobs such as housekeeping, food service, and security.

The students celebrated as they graduated from the program, each of them utilizing the skills they learned over the past year prior to moving on to their new jobs. Training included a series of several short internships at BCBSRI, combined with classroom time focused on goal setting, independent living skills such as personal financial management, and job skills such as resume writing, interviewing and interpersonal communication.

Past Project SEARCH graduate Garen Megrđichian shared how he has used the skills and lessons learned in Project SEARCH in his current job, and how he will continue to use them going forward as he pursues future opportunities.

## Raymond A. Carroll Award

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 forty-two 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.



On March 31, 2019 Rosemarie Aponte was extremely surprised when she was presented with the 8th Annual Raymond A. Carroll Award. Rosemarie has worked as a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor in the Providence Region since 2015.

Rosemarie came here from Puerto Rico as a limited-English speaker and within a months' time made a very smooth

transition into the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor position. Within a year of being here, she had to switch case-loads and did that seamlessly. She covered RIWORKS and did a great job as well as being the Liaison for HITEP. She is

excellent with case management and very organized when completing tasks. She advocates for all her clients so that they can become successfully employed, and does extremely well with her Spanish-speaking clients. She is an overall great person who is always willing to better herself and willing to learn new things and asks for help when needed.

Congratulations Rosemarie!

### 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

# Message from the State Rehabilitation Council Chair

## Highlights 2019

Dear Consumers, Families, Friends, Partners and Stakeholders:

As the Chair of the Rhode Island State Rehabilitation Council, I am pleased to report that the Council has had a very successful year meeting its goals and energizing the membership to fully meet its mandated responsibilities. In this report, you will be provided with an overview of our accomplishments of the past year along with the projects we will advance in 2020. In addition, detailed reports from the subcommittees that do the work of the Council, and a list of Council members with brief biographies of those members and the constituency each member represents are included.

It is my hope that this report will energize the Council membership, and our community, as we reflect on the work we have done in the past year. We are looking forward to 2020 and our continued partnership with ORS to provide consultation and advice to help them achieve their goals. We hope that this report will inspire other community partners to join the Council and help improve our work together with ORS.

Major initiatives regarding employment for people with disabilities such as “Let’s Get to Work” are occurring in R.I. and across the country over the next year. It will be an exciting time to support these projects and create community connections to improve employment outcomes. We invite you to be part of helping all Rhode Islanders with disabilities find meaningful work. We hope to see you at our next Council meeting!

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

### Goals of the Council

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

Review, analyze, and advise 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;



*Dr. Judith Drew, SRC Chair*

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.

### **Our 2019 Accomplishments**

A significant responsibility of the Council is to work collaboratively with ORS in the design and implementation of the Consumer Needs Assessment, the Customer Satisfaction Survey and to assist in suggesting revisions to the State Policy Plan.

In 2019 the Council provided feedback to ORS relative to the Combined State Plan Revisions required by the Work Opportunities and Innovation Act. Our feedback included encouraging ORS to increase outreach to people with disabilities from underserved, and diverse backgrounds, who are seeking employment. Also, the Council strongly recommended that ORS expand the range of demonstration projects beyond replicating only those already developed.

The goal is to have more diverse employment options for individuals with disabilities that reflects their choice and the principles of person-centered planning. The development of the range of demonstration projects coincides with the passage of the Supported Decision-Making law this July, which provides that the Supported Decision-Making model be utilized in all intake and transition meetings. It is important for students' voices to be heard from early on in the education and transition processes and systems.

Another key SRC activity was providing support and feedback to ORS in the development of the Customer Satisfaction Survey. The Survey was implemented early in 2019 and was ongoing through December 2019. Hundreds of customers have received the survey in the mail, which asked them about their impression of the quality, responsiveness and accessibility of ORS services. The Council collaborated with ORS in designing the process for distribution. We monitored the response rate of the surveys while regularly receiving updates on initial responses, as well. ORS will provide a detailed summary of the results at the first in-person SRC meeting in 2020.

In addition to achieving these goals, the Council continued to monitor ORS' Order of Selection (OOS) and Waitlist to determine how quickly individuals were being moved off the Waitlist and into employment services. Our major concern was the impact on customers who were delayed in receiving services when they were ready for employment. The Council regularly monitored the status of the Waitlist to ensure that ORS was reducing the number of people on the List in a timely fashion and as additional funding was received. Although the delays

were significant for some individuals, we found that ORS was quickly moving people off the Waitlist as openings became available. In the fall ORS notified the Council that additional funding was received from the federal government that enabled ORS to reduce the Waitlist numbers and provide more employment services.

## **Acknowledgments**

Every year the Council acknowledges the work of outstanding individuals or organizations in providing or advocating for services to those with disabilities within the State of Rhode Island. This year the Council decided to recognize the following members for their service to all Rhode Islanders and their unwavering commitment to the Mission of the State Rehabilitation Council.

Rocco Bruno served on the Council from 2008-2018. During this time, he co-chaired the Nomination and Leadership Development Committee, the ad-hoc Communication Committee with the National Coalition of Rehabilitation Councils and served on the Membership Training Committee. Rocco's ability to find and recruit talented people to the Council was greatly appreciated.

Cynthia Cote served on the Council from 2008 – 2018. She co-chaired the Nomination and Leadership Development Committee and served on the Membership Training Committee. Not only did she and Rocco make a great recruiting team, but her contributions to training new members was very much appreciated.

During her tenure, Margaret "Peggy" Benz served as Vice-chair for the Council, served on the State Plan, Policy and Quality Assurance Committee, and on the Transportation Committee. From 2013-2018 Peggy worked countless hours on the various committees providing important insights into the impact of state policies on the lives of people with disabilities in R.I. Her work was greatly appreciated by all. From 2012-2018 Maryellen T. Hagerty co-chaired the Membership Training Committee, and served on the State Plan, Policy and Quality Assurance Committee, and Transition Committee. Her advocacy for transition services was greatly appreciated and was conveyed regularly to new members, along with her perspective on the importance of good state policies and the need for quality assurance protocols.

We want to publicly thank all of you for your contributions and to let you know your voices and enthusiasm still rings in our ears!

## **Membership**

Again, this year we were happy to welcome a new member. Barbara Fernandez, a legal rights advocate from Disability Rights RI (DRRI), joined the Council this fall. She will bring valuable expertise to us as she shares her knowledge of the law and its impact on people with disabilities.

We had one new member this year, but we are not done yet! Our ongoing goal is to continually increase the diversity of our membership.

We welcome new members in 2020 who are committed to the rights of all people with disabilities, who will share their perspectives on the state of disability rights and needs for employment in R.I. and be advocates for employment based on choice. If you are reading this, please consider joining the Council!

### **Looking Ahead to What's Next**

As we approach our new program year, we look forward to continuing to provide advice to ORS as it finalizes and implements the Combined State Plan.

As with the previous years, the Council will continue to monitor the progress the State of Rhode Island and ORS are making in fulfilling its responsibilities under the Rhode Island Supported Employment and Integrated Day Service Consent Decree. The Consent Decree continues to be enforced in RI. Even with the Order of Selection, ORS continued making strides in increasing supported employment opportunities for individuals with significant disabilities. We look forward to supporting them in this work.

The Council will continue to request updates on the status of individuals covered under the Consent Decree. In addition, the Council will continue to monitor those served by the Pre-ETS program to ensure they receive the services needed to successfully transition into employment services. Also, the Council will be monitoring the use of the Supported Decision-Making model with students in transition as required by the Act.

With the beginning of the new initiative “Let’s Get to Work” in 2020, the Council is pleased to be able to partner with ORS in providing support and guidance as it is implemented.

In 2020, the Council will continue to focus on membership recruitment. Several individuals who have provided significant service to the Council will be leaving the Council at the conclusion of this program year. Our goal will be to recruit more community providers and individuals representing constituencies we have yet to reach. Specifically, we will be actively recruiting from programs that provide services to populations who are underrepresented in ORS’s client pool and on the Council.

As a final note, I look forward to another active year as we continue to advocate for the needs of all people with disabilities to have the opportunity to fully participate in the community through community- based employment and independent living.

Respectfully Submitted,

Judith L. Drew, PhD  
SRC Chairperson

# State Rehabilitation Council

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 SRC is an independent body of diverse members that works together to insure continuous improvement in ORS employment outcomes;

Enhances communication among all people and groups committed to increase opportunity for people with disabilities;

Increases employer awareness of people with disabilities as a productive human resource pool; and

Has the respect of decision-makers in the allocation of resources.

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.

**How to Become a RISRC Member:** The Governor appoints members. As SRC members and VR advocates, we 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. If you are interested or want more information about the RISRC, please contact us at [risrc@cox.net](mailto:risrc@cox.net).

## Membership Training Sub-Committee

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 ORS. A mentoring program is available to new members for their first year on the Council. The committee maintains four core goals:

Maintaining an annual training event - Ensure that all new and existing members have participated in the annual training seminar.

Disseminate a membership package - All members are offered a binder that clearly states 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.

*Respectfully Submitted,*

*Melissa Brusso & Lea Colardo, Co-chairs*

*Membership Training Committee*

Implement a mentoring program - The committee 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 Committee developed and presented a training for newer members and returning members who wished to participate. New members received a binder that includes bylaws, the role of the SRC and our duties as members, WIOA mandates in relation to the SRC's responsibility to state policies and finally, procedures for ORS. The presentation by the Training Committee reviewed the history of disability, vocational rehabilitation and the role of the SRC. The PowerPoints and videos can be viewed independent of the training. Please contact us at [risrc@cox.net](mailto:risrc@cox.net) for provided materials.

The application to the SRC was reviewed with minor changes made.

The mentoring program is available to all new members.

The responsibility of current SRC members and especially the training Committee is to recruit new members.

The SRC has secured one new member, Barbara Fernandez a Legal Advocate from Disability Rights of Rhode Island.

## State Plan, Policy, and Quality Assurance Committee

The State Plan, Policy and Quality Assurance Committee of the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) is responsible for helping the entire SRC membership to provide feedback to ORS about its plans and policies in accordance with the Rehabilitation Act. The committee also participates in reviewing the quality of services delivery to ORS customers and continuous quality improvement.

This year, the committee reviewed worked with ORS to produce a Monthly survey to consumers. Although ORS had been using surveys for quite some time, they had not been updated in many years. The SRC suggested breaking down the survey to be conducted to two groups. The first group of consumers that the survey would be sent to are those in Status 18 (a person who has an IPE in place) and the other group of consumers that the survey would be sent to are those in Status 22 (a person who has successfully completed VR services and is employed).

The surveys began to be disseminated to consumers in April 2019. The SRC made several suggestions about the process of survey dissemination, format, questions, and follow up intervals. ORS agreed to send out the survey monthly to consumers whose last names begin with certain letters. This is so that each consumer does not receive a survey more than once a year. The SRC worked with ORS to develop surveys that were not asking for multiple responses in order to streamline collection of the data, and the SRC will receive quarterly updates on the survey responses. The survey was developed in Spanish in addition to English to ensure the participation of underserved and unserved consumers.

The SRC will to continue to review data ORS collects from these surveys and next year will make further recommendations to ORS.

*Respectfully Submitted,*

*Catherine Sansonetti, Chair*

*State Plan, Policy, and Quality Assurance Committee*

## Rhode Island State Rehabilitation Council Annual Meeting - May, 2019



**Back Row:** Nancy Baker, Linda Deschenes, Christine Yankee, Joe Murphy, John Valentine

**Middle Row:** Christine Botts, Ron Racine, Christine Batista, Vin Rossi, Joan Fino, Natalia Montoya, Melissa Brusso

**Front Row:** Jack Ringland, Judi Drew (SRC Chair), Catherine Sansonetti, Peggy Benz

# State Rehabilitation Council Members

**Judith L. Drew, Ph.D., CRC**, is the Chairperson of the Council. Dr. Drew is the president of VocWorks in Cumberland, RI. She has been in private practice for over twenty-five years and focuses on career and rehabilitation counseling, school to work transition assessments, vocational expert testimony, vocational assessment, and staff development and training for-profit and non-profit settings.

Dr. Drew obtained her Ph.D. from The Ohio State University. She has been teaching Rehabilitation Counseling courses in higher education institutions for over twenty years. Currently, she is an Assistant Professor at Salve Regina University where she is the Program Director for the MA degrees and CAGS in Rehabilitation Counseling and Clinical Rehabilitation and Mental Health Counseling.

In addition, she frequently has been a speaker for regional, national and international conferences on vocational assessment practice and transition issues for youth. Dr. Drew's research and writing interests include evidence-based practice models for vocational assessment, career counseling with underserved populations, and the intersection between governmental disability employment policies and the real world implementation and application of those policies.

**Catherine Sansonetti** 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 representing the Client Assistance Program established under section 732 of this title under 43 CFR part 370. Catherine is a Staff Attorney at the Disability Rights Rhode Island and has been on Council for four terms. During her tenor, she 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. Catherine actively works on the Consumer Satisfaction Surveys and the Comprehensive Needs Assessments.

**Jack Ringland** is the Secretary of the Council and a member of the Membership Training Committee, State Plan, Policy and

Quality Assurance Committee, and is the Chair of the SRC Awards ad-hoc Committee. He sits on the Council representing individuals with physical disabilities. Jack has been disabled since 2008. He assists in coordinating the Cross Disability Coalition meetings as part of the Developmental Disabilities Council and he sits on the Policy Advisory Committee of that council. Jack is also a Commissioner on the Governor's Commission on Disabilities, and sits on the Legislative Committee for GCD and is the Chairperson of the Accessibility Committee.

**Melissa D. Brusso** is the Co-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 twelve 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 throughout Rhode Island.

**Lea Colardo** is the Co-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 has been an Educational Advocate for twelve years at The Paul V. Sherlock Center on Disabilities at Rhode Island College where she is also a member of the Leadership Team and the Transition to Life ad hoc Team Leader. She is appointed by the Rhode Island Department of Education to make educational decisions on behalf of students that are in the care of the Rhode Island Department of Youth, Children and Families.

**Christina Battista** is a member of the Membership Training Committee. She sits on the Council, representing current or former applicants for, or recipients of Vocational Rehabilitation Services; and representative of the Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC) established under Section 796(d) of this Title, which representative may be Chairperson or other designee of the

Council. Christina is graduate of Salve Regina University in the Vocational Rehabilitation Counseling program. Christine is a motivational speaker educating on what it is like to live with a rare physical disability to help breakdown any preconceived notions of those living with a physical disability.

**Christine Botts** is a member of the State Plan, Policy and Quality Assurance Committee. She sits on the Council representing a Community Rehabilitation Service Provider and individuals who have difficulty representing themselves. Christine has over ten years' experience as an Administrator for the State of Rhode Island, specializing in employment programs for individuals with developmental disabilities and behavioral health issues. Most recently, she has served on the State Committee for the Consent Decree. This committee is responsible for developing employment policies and procedures for individuals with developmental disabilities and ensuring they are employed in the most integrated setting making at least minimum wage.

**Anne Fartura** is on the State Plan, Policy, and Quality Assurance Committee. She sit on the Council representing the Parent Training and Information Center established pursuant to Section 1431(e)(1) of Title 20. Anne joined the RI Parent Information Network (RIPIN) team in 2010, and serves as a program supervisor. Much of her work is in the area of students with disabilities transitioning from school to adulthood. Her committee work includes representing RIPIN at Rhode Island's Regional Transition Coordinators meetings, State Transition Council, RI College Special Education Advisory Committee, and the State Rehabilitation Council.

**Barbara Fernandez** is a new member on the Council and will sit 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. As a new member of the SRC, Barbara will be joining the State Plan, Policy and Quality Assurance committee. Providence native, Barbara has a strong connection to the community and aims to educate and provide assistance to the underserved through advocacy.

**Nina Fiasconaro** is on the State Plan, Policy, and Quality Assurance Committee. She sits on the Council representing a parent of a highly involved child with disabilities. She started advocating for the disabled and sitting on various committees at Jawanio, which was the UCP of Rockland NY & CPW which was the UCP for Westchester NY. From 2010 to 2016, she sat 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 sat 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.

Professionally she is the Director of Social Media & Public Relations for Wind & Fire Jewelry her family business. Part of her responsibilities is working with our charity partners developing jewelry representing the different agencies working with their development teams and donating a portion of the profits from the sales to the various agencies. Currently she is the founder of 401 A

League of Our Own an adaptive Buddy Ball League in Rhode Island.

**Joan Fino** sits on the State Plan, Policy, and Quality Assurance Committee. She sits on the Council representing a Parent Training and Information Center established pursuant to Section 1431(e)(1) of Title 20. Ms. Fino has been a family leader for twenty years advocating for her own children's needs and navigating many systems, which include Special Education, Mental Health, Child Welfare, Office of Rehabilitation, and social service systems. Professionally, Joan has been in the behavioral health field and working one-on-one with families.

**Elizabeth Graves** is a member of the State Plan, Policy and Quality Assurance Committee. She sits on the Council representing a Disability Advocacy Group representing individuals with physical, cognitive, sensory, or mental disabilities. "Liz" is a retired Special Education Teacher. She is a member of the Governor's Advisory Council for the Blind and Visually Impaired, and a former member of the Statewide Independence Living Council. She has been an advocate for the elderly and blind for many years, focusing on independent living and ADA rights.

**Paul Harden** is a member of the State Plan, Policy and Quality Assurance Committee. He sits on the Council as a representative of Business, Industry, and Labor. Paul is the Growth Hub Director for the RI Small Business Development Center at the University of RI.

**Gail M. Lawson, PhD** is the former Chair of the Council and prior to that, she served as Co-Chair for one year and Secretary

for two years. Professionally Dr. Lawson has held a variety of positions in the mental health and education fields during her professional career. Prior to her retirement in 2014, she served as the chief executive officer of a community mental health agency for nine years and as director of Administrative services for public school districts for thirteen years. Prior to those positions, she served as faculty at Rhode Island College, a program administrator at Community College of Rhode Island and adjunct faculty at University of Rhode Island. Dr. Lawson is a certified school psychologist. .

**Daniel C. Pieroni** is a member of the State Plan, Policy and Quality Assurance Committee. He sits on the Council representing a Current or former applicants for, or recipients of, Vocational Rehabilitation Services. Dan currently works as a substitute teacher for the Smithfield School Department and previously served the Scituate School Department in the same capacity. He is very active in serving youth in transition as a member of the Southern Rhode Island Transition Center's traveling student panel. In the past, he has lent his time and talent to worthy causes like the Rhode Island Youth Leadership Forum, and the Rhode Island Committee for Assistive Technology (RICAT).

**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 new 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.

**Vincent Rossi** is a member of the Membership Training Committee. He sits on the Council as a representative of Disability Advocacy Group representing parents, family, guardians, advocates or authorized representatives of individuals with disabilities who have difficulty in representing themselves or are unable due to their disabilities to representing themselves. Vincent is a Statewide Coordinator of Employment and Training Programs at the Department of Labor and Training. Vincent is dedicated to educating, advocating and raising awareness of the abilities and challenges of the disability population on a local and State level. Vincent participates in several local organizations helping to spread disability awareness and create change within the community.

**Sergio Lopez-Ruiz** is a member of the State Plan, Policy and Quality Assurance Committee. He sits on the Council representing a Community Rehabilitation Service Provider. Sergio is a current graduate student at Salve Regina University studying Clinical Rehabilitation and Mental Health Counseling. Sergio is also a Family Clinician and Behavior Specialist at the North American Family Institute.

**Jane Slade, MA, CRC**, is a member of the State Plan, Policy and Quality Assurance Committee. She sits on the Council as a representative of the State Educational Agency responsible for the public education of students with disabilities who are eligible to

receive services under this subchapter and part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. [20 U.S.C. 1411 et seq.] 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 & 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 of responsibilities include Secondary Transition; Secondary Reform/PBGR; Post-secondary Outcomes; Inter-agency/Adult Services and she is the Chair of the Rhode Island Transition Council. She is also a Certified Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor.

**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 twenty-three years' 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, RI Department of Adult Education Learning Disability Advisory, and is the Board President of Rhode Island Rehabilitation Association (RIRA).

## ***Vocational Rehabilitation Services***

**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 as a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor with knowledge of and experience with Vocational Programs and community services for ORS participants. Natalia is a VRC I and has been working for the Office of Rehabilitation Services since 2014 serving the mental health population and youth in transition. In addition to her work with the Council, she is also the liaison to Gateway Mental Health Services of Johnston/Cranston, and Johnston High School.

Ex-officio **Ronald Racine**, Associate Director

Ex-officio **Joseph Murphy**, Administrator, Vocational Rehabilitation (VR)

**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 Facilitator/Contact



## RISRC Partnership with National Coalition of State Rehabilitation Councils

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.

*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.



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