



TN

Department of
Human Services

State Rehabilitation Council

2019 Annual Report

State Rehabilitation Council of Tennessee | December 2019



Letter from the State Rehabilitation Council

To the Honorable Governor Bill Lee and RSA Commissioner Mark Schultz,

On behalf of the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) of Tennessee, I am privileged to present the 2019 SRC Annual Report to provide an update on the Tennessee Vocational Rehabilitation Program and to highlight the work of the SRC during the past year. We address the key accomplishments of the VR program during 2019 and look to the future to improve services provided to individuals with disabilities in Tennessee. The report also reviews the responsibilities of the SRC and its achievements during the past year as we serve as the voice of the consumer to review, analyze and advise the VR program.

A highlight of the annual report is the inclusion of customer success stories to convey a picture of the VR program in a way which pure data cannot. These stories reflect individuals at different stages in life and with a variety of backgrounds, experiences, abilities and interests who all share a desire to obtain competitive integrated employment and who required the support of the VR program in order to achieve that goal. We received 30 success stories from Master's Rehabilitation Counselors and selected 13 stories to represent VR services statewide. Members of the Outreach, Public Relations & Awareness Committee reviewed the stories and identified at least one story from each of the nine geographic regions and the two sensory services regions. Multiple members noted the personal value of reviewing these stories not only to witness the employment successes of the individuals but also as a means to more fully understand and appreciate the work of the VR staff and the services which they provide.

In a major undertaking during 2019, the SRC and VR jointly conducted the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment, the recommendations from which are shared in this report. I want to express my appreciation to the members of our Consumer Satisfaction and Needs Assessment Committee who expended numerous hours to review prior assessments from Tennessee and other states and to work with the VR team to develop the current assessment. The full SRC received feedback regarding the results during a quarterly meeting and contributed to the development of key priorities to be addressed by the VR program.

The SRC is comprised of a diverse group of individuals from a variety of backgrounds, perspectives and experiences; however, we all share a common goal in working with the VR program to enhance employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities. The SRC's ability to perform our numerous functions was enhanced by the appointment or re-appointment of

seven members by Governor Bill Lee during the past year, and we are grateful to his office for the responsiveness to the needs of the SRC. I am thankful for the returning members who are always willing to support the new members and to the new members for their insights, creativity and probing questions which help to keep us all invigorated in our work!

Sincerely,

Becky Allen

Becky Allen
2019 SRC Chair



Message from the Assistant Commissioner

It's an exciting time for the Division of Rehabilitation Services, particularly the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program as we look introspectively at who we serve, how we serve, and just as important, why we serve. Over two years ago when I became Assistant Commissioner, I set a course to help answer these questions with a focus on the customer experience. The Division, along with the entire Tennessee Department of Human Services (DHS) agency is in a period of transformation, moving toward a more integrated service delivery model referred to as "One DHS" that is focused on modernization efforts agency-wide that will dramatically impact the way that human services are delivered and received by Tennesseans. Across the agency, DHS is striving to improve customer interaction, making it less bureaucratic and more customer friendly, efficient, and effective. While these modernization efforts come with enhanced technology to help create a more efficient service delivery model overall, the driving force behind the initiatives taking place is to ensure that the customer we are serving is at the center of any and all improvements being made.

Taking a similar approach, the Division of Rehabilitation Services and its VR Program is also striving to enhance and better integrate the services that we provide. Over the last two years, the VR program has made significant changes to the way it operates and delivers services with a focus towards transformation.

What Transformation in Vocational Rehabilitation Looks Like:

- VR is responsive, welcoming, informative, and encouraging showing individuals and businesses what is possible.
- Businesses seek out VR services to transform their operations and meet their workforce needs and ultimately improve their bottom line.
- Community Tennessee Rehabilitation Centers (CTRCs) are transformed into community-based resource centers offering community-based employment training and connecting VR and non-VR customers to education, training and employment resources.
- Pre-ETS are coordinated, collaborative, connected services that prepare students with disabilities for a seamless transition to life after high school.

In collaboration with the State Rehabilitation Council, the report herein highlights some of the key accomplishments achieved by the VR program during the last federal fiscal year (October 1,

2018 through September 30, 2019) and our plans for the coming years. Through these changes the VR program is transforming lives, transforming businesses, and transforming communities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mandy Johnson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Mandy" and last name "Johnson" clearly legible.

Mandy Johnson, Assistant Commissioner
Division of Rehabilitation Services
Tennessee Department of Human Services



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Vocational Rehabilitation Program Overview

Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) is a joint federal and state program that assists people with disabilities to prepare for, secure, retain, advance in or regain employment. The VR program provides a variety of individualized services to persons with disabilities in preparation for their employment in the competitive labor market. VR advocates employment outcomes for clients that are consistent with their individual strengths, resources, abilities, capabilities and informed choice. In Tennessee, the VR program is administered by the Tennessee Department of Human Services (DHS), Division of Rehabilitation Services.

Services Include:

- Information and Referral
- Counseling and Guidance
- Training
- Maintenance and Transportation
- Transition Services from School to Work
- Rehabilitation Technology Services
- Job Placement
- Post-Employment Services
- Supported Employment Services
- Independent Living Services

Specialized VR Services:

In addition to the broad array of VR services available to eligible individuals, VR also provides specialized services to target populations.

Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) are available to students with disabilities ages 14-22. Pre-Employment Transition services are focused on preparing students for life after high school. Pre-ETS services include the following services:

- Job exploration counseling,
- Work-based learning experiences,
- Counseling on opportunities for postsecondary educational programs,
- Workplace readiness training to develop social skills and independent living, and
- Instruction in self-advocacy.

Region 1 Success Story

George Rodriquez began working with Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) in February 2018. Before beginning VR services, he actively participated with Frontier Health's programs at the Victory Center in Greeneville, TN. George decided that he was ready for community employment and wanted to participate in the Individual Placement and Support (IPS) supported employment program through VR. He has a mental health diagnosis and cognitive disabilities.

George is a sincere, friendly, and optimistic individual. He is always very positive and polite in all interactions. In October 2018, he expressed interest in working, and his support team completed a job development contact with Wendy's in Greeneville. Shortly after this contact, Wendy's offered George a job and he began as part-time grill cook in October 2018. George's manager recommended that he move to a cashier position due to his great customer service skills. George agreed and started working in this capacity.

George quickly learned the job and was asked to fill-in at other locations. He did so well that he received awards for his great customer service skills. He told the Frontier Health staff that he loves his job and now feels like he has a purpose in life. George also disclosed that he knows every regular customer personally and calls them by their name. Each time Frontier Health followed-up with Wendy's on George's performance, they received excellent reviews. George's team members and managers love working with him, and his customers do too.

Business Services provided by the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program works with employers to promote competitive integrated work opportunities and career exploration for customers through job search and placement services, combined service provision with Workforce Innovation & Opportunities Act (WIOA) core partners and stakeholders, and facilitation of work-based learning opportunities and employer-based training and employment programming. Vocational Rehabilitation program consumers can work with a Business Employment Consultant from the Business Service Unit to explore career opportunities aligning with their occupational goals and desired geographical location of residence. Together, the Business Employment Consultant and Vocational Rehabilitation customer can search for local employment opportunities of interest, apply for opportunities, conduct interview preparation, and execute final placement into opportunities. The success of Business Employment Consultants is measured by their successful service delivery to enhance competitive integrated employment outcomes for customers.

Vocational Rehabilitation's Business Service Unit works with partners from state agencies such as the Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Department of Economic and Community Development, and Department of Corrections to align efforts in serving business customers and agency customers. Through participation in the Department of Labor and Workforce Development's local Business Service Teams, the Vocational Rehabilitation Business Service Unit's Business Employment Consultant provides education and outreach services to employers offering competitive integrated work environments, enabling Vocational Rehabilitation customers to have an expanded horizon of opportunity with Tennessee employers. Last, the Business Service Unit of Vocational Rehabilitation is leveraged for developing work-based learning sites across the state to promote career exploration for individuals with disabilities receiving services through the Division of Rehabilitation Services. Employer-based training and employment programs across the state enable customers to engage meaningful work in a variety of industries in an integrated setting where compensation and benefits eligibility for full-time employees is competitive with the local labor market and equally available for Vocational Rehabilitation customers.

Tennessee Rehabilitation Center (TRC-Smyrna) at Smyrna is a state operated comprehensive vocational rehabilitation training center that offers person-centered, comprehensive services in a supportive learning environment to individuals with disabilities to help increase independent living skills and employment training. Services are provided on a campus setting that also includes residential living for those students who choose to live on

campus while receiving services. In addition to traditional classroom instruction, students participate in community-based work-based learning opportunities and internships as part of their course of study.

Students can obtain nationally recognized credentials and/or certificates of completion in the following areas of study:

- Automotive Detailing Technician
- Automotive Maintenance & Lubrication Technician
- Business Education Technology
- Certified Logistics Associate/Technician
- Certified Production Technician
- Customer Care (Retail)
- Food Service
- Pharmacy Technician
- Power Equipment
- Certified Nursing Assistant

In addition to the technical and vocational training, TRC-Smyrna provides an array of rehabilitation support services based on the unique needs and circumstances of each student. Rehabilitation Services offered include:

- Student Advisors: assist students in selecting courses in their Area of Study and preparing schedules each quarter.
- Community Training: assist in the development and assignment of internship opportunities with employers during the student's last quarter prior to graduation.
- Employment and Placement: assist students in identifying employment opportunities and applying for jobs in their home communities.
- Disability Services: assist students in obtaining needed accommodations for classroom instruction and employment, provides Orientation and Mobility Services, and prepares students for enrollment in the Tennessee Business Enterprise (TBE) program.
- Health Services: provides urgent medical care as needed through a Wellness Center staffed by nurses and offers physician and psychology services on a limited basis; offers health maintenance courses and behavior education for students and provides work conditioning and work hardening courses for students to prepare them for employment.
- Vocational Evaluation: assist students in identifying their interests, skills, and abilities through a series of educational, hands-on, and work-based tests.

Region 2 Success Story

Travis Turner applied for Vocational Rehabilitation Services in November 2018. He met with his VR Counselor to develop a plan for employment that would meet his needs and desires. Travis enrolled in Adult Education classes to work towards his high school equivalency. He also worked with the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Employment and Training Program to receive transportation assistance and received Career Development and Placement services through one of VR's Community Rehabilitation Providers (CRPs).



Travis was hired by the Marriott Courtyard in April 2019 to work in the housekeeping unit. He was the model employee, working hard to prove he could become a contributing citizen to the community. Unexpectedly, Travis was told he needed surgery and became concerned he would lose his job. Marriott assured him that they would hold his position for him because he was an excellent employee. He returned to work after a short absence, and Marriott offered him a team lead position with a raise. Travis stated that his employer would even allow him to work overtime as his schedule allowed. He was excited about this opportunity and quickly accepted.

Travis followed the advice of the VR Counselor to create a circle of support by utilizing partners at the American Job Center (AJC). He is a fine example of believing in oneself and not letting your past define you. Travis is now paying for his own one-bedroom apartment and car.

Community Tennessee Rehabilitation Centers (CTRCs) are a part of the Tennessee Facility Network of Vocational Rehabilitation Services. There are seventeen Community Tennessee Rehabilitation Centers strategically located throughout the state. The CTRCs provide rehabilitation services for individuals and employers in their surrounding areas including comprehensive vocational evaluation services, employee development services, job readiness training and placement services. The CTRC's are funded with federal and local dollars. As part of its transformation, the Division of Rehabilitation Services is currently assessing how the 17 CTRCs across the state should be structured to best meet the needs of the individuals we serve and their communities.

Sensory Services is a specialized unit within VR that addresses the unique needs of individuals who are blind and visually impaired or deaf and hard of hearing.

Tennessee Business Enterprises (TBE), a program within Sensory Services, offers vocational training and employment opportunities for individuals who are legally blind. The mission of this program is to provide high quality products and customer service while maximizing employment and economic opportunities for legally blind individuals. Federal and State laws grant TBE a priority to operate vending and food service in Federal, State and local government buildings. Tennessee Business Enterprises trains, licenses and places blind individuals in a facility where they function much like an independent business owner. Assistance is provided to these managers by TBE Consultants.

Tennessee Business Enterprises currently operates 143 facilities across the State. These facilities generate over \$20 million in sales annually. The type of facilities managed and operated by the licensed blind vendor include:

- Fully Automated Vending Locations
- Snack Bars
- Cafeterias
- Inmate Commissaries
- Over-the-Counter sales
- Micro Markets



Region 3 Success Story

Jasper Clark began his partnership with Vocational Rehabilitation in September 2015. Through a vocational evaluation, VR learned that he had good social and interpersonal skills, but also had some physical barriers to employment. Jasper attended a work adjustment training program and then later applied to TRC Smyrna. Once accepted, he participated in a diet regimen with scheduled physical and occupational therapy and lost over 100 pounds. Jasper was elected as student council president and was even chosen to give the graduation speech. While at TRC, he completed training in the Business Education program. Through the program, Jasper developed strengths in performing basic clerical and customer service tasks and duties.

Jasper also learned about diversity in the workplace, business etiquette, and gained keyboarding skills. He learned to operate multiple office machines, scan documents, basic telephone skills, customer service skills, emailing, and filing procedures. Jasper also learned Microsoft Office Applications software including Word, Excel, and PowerPoint and practiced typing letters, memorandums, and reports. Jasper passed several certification tests with Office Proficiency Assessment & Certification (OPAC) and completed the Business Education certification in 2017.

In 2019, Jasper worked with a Business Employment Consultant and was able to obtain a job with J.Lodge as a Quality Analyst (customer service). The Vocational Rehabilitation program was able to purchase the necessary electronic equipment such as a webcam and headset to help him with his specific job duties. Jasper has done very well and enjoys his current employment.

Key Accomplishments 2019



There were several notable accomplishments achieved by the Vocational Rehabilitation Program in 2019. A few of these accomplishments are highlighted in the sections below.

Updates from 2018

As noted in last year's report, three strategic initiatives to strengthen and modernize operation of Vocational Rehabilitation services were identified. First, as part of a larger division reorganization, four new leadership positions were created to lead and direct VR program operations in the field. Three Area Director positions (DHS Program Director 2) were added to serve each grand division of the state (east, middle, and west) and a fourth Area Director to lead the division's sensory services. Hiring for all four of these positions was completed in early 2019. Second, the VR program piloted a centralized intake and inquiry process with staff in the Davidson County DHS office. The pilot allowed VR to develop and test a centralized process for receiving referrals and inquiries. Upon completion of the pilot, the recommendation was made to postpone the potential expansion of the processes to allow for the implementation of the new case management system that kicked off in June 2019. The division has made significant progress on the implementation and is 23% complete toward the June 2021 "go-live" date. Finally, the VR program completed realignment of its regions to match the new local workforce development areas established by the Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development. The realignment was completed in July 2019.

Region 4 Success Story

Clay Sherrell is a very driven, reliable, and hardworking gentleman who came to VR for assistance with job placement. He had a career previously that consisted of mostly physical labor but he experienced a pontine hemorrhage that caused a permanent mobility deficit and left-side weakness. This forced him to consider a different career field. He was determined to get back to work and become independent, something that was extremely important to him. After meeting with his VR Counselor, Clay decided Customer Service was a field that interested him and he wanted to pursue.

Clay was referred for job readiness and employment services to help him prepare for work. During that time he worked with a provider on his interview skills and filling out job applications. The provider had nothing but positive things to say about Clay, including how organized he was and what a good employee he would make. This helped to boost his confidence and after searching for the right role, he found employment at the Rescue Mission as an Overnight Intake Staff person in November of 2018. This was the ideal job for him not only because he could assist customers but he could alternate sitting and standing throughout his shift. Clay continues to enjoy his job with the Rescue Mission and is very happy with the work he does.

2019 Innovations

Tennessee Rehabilitation Center - Smyrna

On July 22, 2019, the **Tennessee Rehabilitation Center - Smyrna** transitioned from a program-based model to a new Career and Technical Education (CTE) design to enhance the overall service delivery process and better align the Center with the WIOA Primary Indicators of Performance in the areas of Credentialing and Skills Gains. As a result of the TRC-Smyrna's transformation, students are no longer required to participate in a specific program with designated beginning and end dates. Students now choose an Area of Study with classes offered based on an individualized schedule. On a quarterly basis, students attend day and/or evening classes and can enroll in prerequisite, required, or elective classes based on their interests, skill development needs, and Area of Study requirements. All curriculums have also been enriched to have a greater emphasis on work-based learning and community integration through required volunteer, practicum, and internship opportunities with business and industry. Upon completion of all courses, students receive a certificate of completion and have the option to take an exam to receive a national credential in their Area of Study.

One of the Areas of Study included in the new model is an innovative partnership with CVS Health. The program features a mock CVS Pharmacy on the TRC-Smyrna Campus and complimentary training programs. The program includes two tracts of study: Customer Care only or Customer Care and Pharmacy Technician. In order to enter the Pharmacy Technician tract of the program, students are required to go through and successfully complete the Customer Care tract. After either tract, students can begin their job search. All students who complete the program can apply and interview for a position with CVS Pharmacy in retail operations or, if certified, as a Pharmacy Technician following the completion of the training program. A grand opening of the CVS Pharmacy Technician Area of Study was celebrated on May 8, 2019. TRC-Smyrna was honored to have Governor Bill Lee serve as guest speaker for the special event. Governor Lee recognized the graduating students for their work and participation in the first CVS Customer Care classes held at TRC-Smyrna.

Also new in 2019, the Certified Production Technician (CPT) Area of Study is being offered at TRC-Smyrna through a



partnership with the Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Tennessee College of Applied Technology (TCAT) Murfreesboro, and the Rutherford County Chamber of Commerce Manufacturing Council. The CPT Area of Study has been expanded to include a new Certified Logistics Associate/Technician Area of Study. Both programs offer students the opportunity to obtain nationally recognized credentials.

Community Tennessee Rehabilitation Centers (CTRCs)

Earlier this year, the Division of Rehabilitation Services began the process of reviewing the seventeen (17) **Community Tennessee Rehabilitation Centers (CTRCs)** and exploring ways to expand and improve our vocational rehabilitation services to better serve citizens with disabilities. Through this process, it became apparent that there are opportunities within each of the local communities where the CTRCs are located to enhance these services¹. To that end, over the next several months, the Division of Rehabilitation Services will be developing an individualized transformation plan for each of the seventeen CTRCs. The goal is to increase the impact of our statewide vocational rehabilitation services and to modernize the CTRCs, which were established in the 1960's. To ensure that these plans are comprehensive and in full compliance with the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, the Division of Rehabilitation Services will work with staff at all levels of the division, as well as our external partners and local community stakeholders – including the State Rehabilitation Council.

Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS)

The Vocational Rehabilitation Program continues to make significant progress in the delivery of **pre-employment transition services (Pre-ETS)** to students with disabilities ages 14-22 across Tennessee. Pre-ETS services include counseling in post-secondary education, career exploration, self-advocacy, workplace readiness, and work-based learning. In partnership and coordination with the Department of Education and local education agencies, VR has increased the delivery of Pre-ETS services by over 300%. During the 2018-2019 school year, VR's contracted Community Rehabilitation Providers (CRPs) delivered over 42,000 pre-employment transition services to students with disabilities.

¹ A summary of this review and its recommendations can be found in the appendices of this report.

Region 5 Success Story

John Smith² was introduced to VR in May 2019 shortly after being released from prison. He had already begun his path to employment by receiving certifications in drywalling and masonry. John lives with Bipolar Disorder and often struggled in getting along with others and accepting constructive criticism.

The VR Counselor strongly recommended John improve his interpersonal skills through job readiness training because he had been out of the workforce for decades. However, he was very eager to establish services and had a job prospect. He needed help from VR with transportation, uniforms, and tools. John located employment at a small privately-owned construction company as a general laborer. Unfortunately, he only worked there for about 2 weeks, before quitting due to not getting enough hours.

The VR Counselor proceeded to coordinate services with a Community Rehabilitation Provider to complete job readiness training with the client. Shortly after, John obtained another job with a construction company. He was successful for a short while, but unfortunately, the outcome was still the same. The VR Counselor began to notice a pattern which involved finding a job on his own, but he could not keep the job based on his behavior. When asked about medication, John admitted he was out of medicine that helped him manage his disability, and he could not afford a refill. The VR Counselor immediately got on the phone with a Mental Health Cooperative to get assistance with medication. About a month later, John found another job working in construction. He was hired as a drywaller, in which he was certified. With the assistance of the medication, John has been successfully working for over 4 months, full time with benefits and earning \$25 per hour. He enjoys the work very much and greatly appreciates the independence having an income provides him.

² Individual name withheld at request of the customer.

In addition to the Pre-ETS services provided by CRPs, VR works directly with local school districts through the Transition School to Work program. The Transition School to Work (TSW) program focuses on the provision of Pre-ETS services to eligible and potentially eligible high school students with disabilities who are interested in employment after leaving high school. The goal is a smooth, seamless transition from high school to post-high school career development and/or employment. During the 2018-2019 school year, VR operated 47 Transition School to Work programs across the state.

In June 2019, the Vocational Rehabilitation program launched a new website to expand the state's capacity to provide high-quality, evidence-based pre-employment transition services that lead to successful post-secondary and employment outcomes for students with disabilities. Working with experts from Vanderbilt University-Kennedy Center, Transition Tennessee's Pre-ETS Blueprint is the online hub for professional development and resources on Pre-Employment Transition Services. This "blueprint" offers guidance on the components of Pre-ETS to assist providers in delivering high quality services to students with disabilities transitioning to higher education and employment. This new portal includes two courses on the foundations of Pre-ETS: (1) the Power of Early Work Experiences, and (2) an Overview of WIOA and Pre-ETS. Each course features free video modules, downloadable resources, webcasts, and information about upcoming conferences and trainings. Additional courses will be added in the future that focus on Interagency Collaboration, Connecting with Employers and Families, the Student-Centered Approach to Transition Instruction, and each of the five pre-employment transition services. Anyone can register for the website by visiting www.transitiontn.org and clicking "Register Here" on the homepage.

Individual Placement and Support (IPS)

Finally, the VR program continues to provide quality supported employment services delivered in an effective, efficient and timely manner. The Division of Rehabilitation Services, in collaboration with the Departments of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (DIDD) and Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (DMHSAS) and the Division of TennCare (TN's Medicaid program), maintains an excellent supported employment program through ongoing training and support activities. New in 2019, the Division implemented a pilot program utilizing the **Individual Placement and Support (IPS)** model of supported employment services for individuals with mental illness who are receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), a workforce development program focused on supporting individuals in gaining self-sufficiency through employment. The pilot provides funding for one Employment Specialist to support up to 20 TANF recipients in Madison County.

Region 6 Success Story

Robert Somnitz applied for VR services in March 2016 and was very happy and optimistic about what he wanted to accomplish. He had several years of experience as a long-haul truck driver and enjoyed this career. However, he had issues with his knees. Robert received job retention services from VR to assist and support him in completing Department of Transportation physicals to continue his career as a truck driver.

The VR Counselor did extensive research and found a surgeon in Winchester, TN. Robert began his evaluation with the doctor, but he had a fall related to his joint issues. His injury delayed the process, but this did not discourage Robert from doing what he needed to do to get back on the road.

Preparation continued, and his first knee replacement surgery was completed in March 2017. With regular medical care, Robert became healthier following his surgery. He lost weight and became more active as he recovered. He asked to delay the second surgery in order to recover some financially and work when he could. The second knee replacement was completed in March 2018.

With the support of his recovery team and plan, Robert was ready to be back at work in November 2018. He did not remain with his initial employer, but soon began driving for the trucking company he works for currently. He enjoys his job and is glad to be able to continue his career in the field he loves. Robert is excited about his future.

Region 7 Success Story

Johnny Taylor participated in the 2018-19 Project SEARCH® program through Vocational Rehabilitation and graduated in May 2019. During his internship, he made an impression with the supervisors by asking to learn new tasks in the department. Johnny was hired by the department before he could graduate from the program. Johnny's ambitions did not stop with learning new work skills; he was motivated to learn to drive and hoped to someday buy a car of his own.

The Project SEARCH® program helped Johnny study and prepare for his driver's permit. This was a challenge for Johnny, but he never gave up. He continued to actively participate in the training until he passed the test. Within two months of driving under his father's supervision, Johnny passed the behind the wheel driving test and earned his driver's license. After saving money he earned from his job, he was able to buy the car he always wanted. Johnny told his Project SEARCH® teacher, "I look out the window at my car every day because I can't believe it is mine."



Vocational Rehabilitation Program Outcomes

In addition to the success stories shared throughout this report, the tables and figures included below offer additional information regarding the performance of the VR program for the 2019 federal fiscal year (October 1, 2018 through September 30, 2019).

VR Program Statistics

Program Participation	FY2015	FY2016	FY2017	FY2018	FY2019
New Applications	6,782	6,002	5,892	5,532	5,990
Total number of people with disabilities served	19,656	17,815	15,505	14,273	13,434
Number of persons obtaining employment/closed successfully	2,358	2,130	1,859	1,620	1,606

Return on Investment	FY2018	FY2019
Average Hours Worked	28 hours per week	30 hours per week
Average Hourly Wage	\$10.30 per hour	\$11.13 per hour
Total SSA Reimbursements	\$2.2 million	\$1.6 million

VR Customer Satisfaction

Every three years, the SRC collaborates with the Tennessee Department of Human Services, Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS) to determine the vocational rehabilitation needs of Tennesseans with disabilities. The Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA) is required as part of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 as amended by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act.

Region 8 Success Story

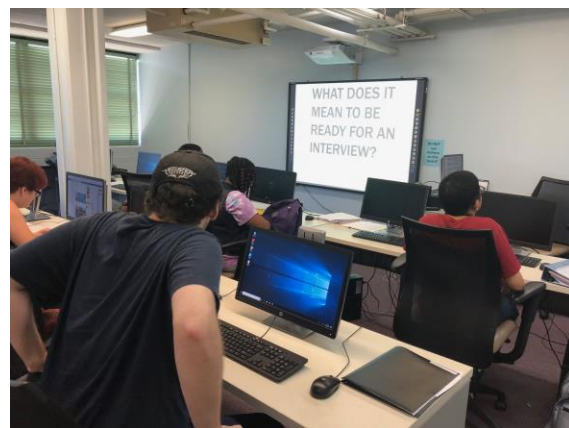
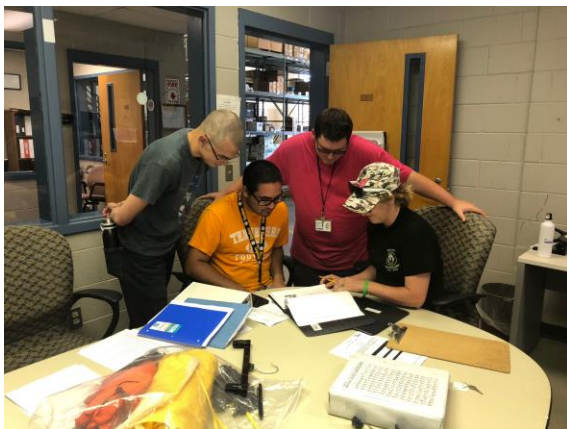
When Codie Fant began services with VR, he was attending Jackson State Community College. He had very strong math skills and took all of the math classes he could; however, he found the other coursework to be difficult and frustrating. Codie and his family learned about the Union EDGE Program. Union EDGE is a comprehensive and inclusive post-secondary educational program that helps young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities make a successful transition from high school to adult life. Union EDGE students take life-skills classes, audit college courses, and participate in on-campus and off-campus internships during the two-year program. After learning more about Union EDGE, Codie felt hope and purpose. He was accepted into the Union EDGE program and lived in campus housing during the program. Codie loved Union, his classmates, and teachers. His self-confidence soared and he even participated in a driver's education class with the Star Center. The Union Edge program placed Codie at Lowe's in the garden department for his internship. He loved it, and Lowe's loved him. So, when he graduated from the Union Edge program in May 2019, Codie stayed with Lowe's. He is still employed with them today and loves his job. He continues to work in the garden department but also works in many other departments at Lowe's.



While the CSNA serves as the basis for state plan goals, objectives, and strategies and is used as a tool for informing the public and enhancing community awareness about the VR program, it also provides for a means to assess consumer satisfaction with VR services during that particular year. The Customer and Caregiver section of the CSNA included 24 items and was completed by 648 respondents during a four-week period in the summer of 2019³. Current customers and those whose cases had recently closed received the survey via an email link, from their VR Counselors, from community rehabilitation providers with whom they were working or from other stakeholders. The results have already been utilized in developing the SRC Input to the VR Portion of the Combined State Plan and are incorporated into the VR goals and priorities that are discussed in the section titled “Plans for the Future.”

Trends

VR Customers and Caregivers were somewhat dissatisfied with the timeliness, responsiveness, and knowledge of VR staff as well as with the services that were provided. When asked what VR does well, they stated that VR had knowledgeable, professional, and supportive staff and convenient office locations. In addition, they stated that training such as interviewing skills, job training, and college were helpful as well as financial assistance for adaptive aids and technology. These trends are addressed in the priority recommendations offered by the SRC and discussed in the section below.



³ The complete VR Customer and Caregiver Survey can be found in the appendices of this report.

Region 9 Success Story

While working with Vocational Rehabilitation, Kenderrica Smith was selected for the Project SEARCH® internship program at Le Bonheur Children's Hospital. As she began the program, she presented herself in a professional manner, advocated for herself appropriately, and demonstrated a willingness to learn. Throughout her three internship rotations, she received great reviews. Her supervisors said she stayed on task and completed her duties. Kenderrica never complained about her work and always accepted constructive criticism. During her last internship rotation, she worked in the position as a sitter. She loved this experience and reported it was a passion of hers due to caring for her grandmother at home. Kenderrica demonstrated her commitment to this position by doing the requirements needed to be considered for employment. She registered for a CPR class with the assistance of the skills trainers and passed. Once she received her CPR certification, Kenderrica applied for the position with the assistance of her skills trainer. She was hired and remains employed with Le Bonheur. She was even awarded a pay increase due to saving an infant's life via CPR. Kenderrica and her father continue to call and send emails to her VR counselor to give updates on her progress.

Plans for the Future

In 2019, in collaboration with the State Rehabilitation Council and Transition TN, the Vocational Rehabilitation Program conducted a comprehensive statewide needs assessment to capture a complete picture of the state's needs. VR customers and their caregivers, Community Rehabilitation Providers (CRPs), VR staff, stakeholders, WIOA partners, Pre-ETS providers, educators and parents of students with disabilities all provided valuable feedback on the strengths and opportunities for vocational rehabilitation in Tennessee.

Trends that Tennessee are experiencing closely follow national trends related to assisting individuals with disabilities find employment opportunities in a competitive and integrated setting.

Overall, information collected in the 2019 needs assessment reveals that individuals who interact with the VR program believe that VR provides beneficial and much-needed services to Tennesseans who need it. However, that same information also illustrates that the program has opportunities to improve and strengthen service delivery, internal and external communication, and efforts to train and retain VR's most important asset – the staff that work day in and day out to help connect Tennesseans with disabilities to competitive and integrated employment opportunities.

Members of the SRC extensively reviewed all recommendations received through the VR Needs Assessment to determine what VR leadership and staff should prioritize for program improvement over the next three to four years.

#1 – Talent Management – hiring, training, retention, and fair compensation

Across almost all the respondents to the VR Needs Assessment, staff turnover was identified as a major issue affecting VR service delivery. Not only is turnover seen as a disruption in provision of service, but it affects the relationship and trust that customers have in the VR program. It was recommended that VR try its best to maintain seasoned staff to help ensure continuity of services.

Region 10 Success Story

Lucas Johnson⁴ was referred to VR in September 2009 while still in high school with a goal to attend college. After providing counseling and guidance, VR was able to support him while attending Middle Tennessee State University with services to assist with tuition, books, equipment, orientation and mobility, and an assistive technology evaluation.

Lucas was always very diligent in getting his VR Counselor necessary paperwork every semester. His VR Counselor provided significant guidance and counseling during Lucas's time at Middle Tennessee State University, and he successfully graduated in December 2016. Lucas was initially referred for job placement services through VR's Business Employment Consultant (BEC) which included ongoing guidance and counseling, resume development, job search assistance (including assistance with identifying job leads), assistance with applications, and an introduction to the University of Tennessee's Center for Literacy, Education and Employment (CLEE), who provided extensive outreach assistance.

The BEC diligently worked with Lucas to provide job placement services. A referral was made to Amerigroup/Anthem for Mentoring Day 2018 in Nashville. At Mentoring Day, Lucas was able to make great connections. Lucas found job openings with Anthem, to which he quickly applied and moved through the interview process. He was able to use some of the connections from Mentoring Day in the process. Lucas began a new job in December 2018 as a Customer Service Representative taking inbound calls in a call center. Lucas had an assistive technology evaluation that was able to identify what he needed in order to be successful in his job. Lucas's employer was open and willing to work with Lucas and his needed accommodations. Lucas's case was closed as successfully rehabilitated in March 2019. He stated that many times he could have given up on his job search, but he continued to persevere until he reached success.

⁴ Individual name withheld at request of the customer.

#2 – Communication and Responsiveness

Across the board, improvements in communication and responsiveness were cited as areas that VR needed to improve upon. Survey responses noted communication, both internal and external, are critical to fostering trust and credibility with internal and external stakeholders. Recommendations for reliable, accurate, transparent, and timely two-way communication were consistent throughout the surveys.

#3 – Timeliness of Services

According to the VR survey, while CRPs were overall satisfied with timeliness and responsiveness of the VR staff that they coordinated service delivery with, Customers and caregivers were not. This is a significant difference that must be explored fully. Customers and caregivers specifically recommended that VR ought to look at improving the length of time it takes to obtain assistive technology, improve response time, and improve upon follow-up time.

#4 – Customer Engagement

Active participation of customers throughout their VR case enabling them to practice informed choice through the process, including development of the Individualized Plan for Employment was a common theme identified in all surveys. Rooted in the Vocational Rehabilitation program's emphasis on INDIVIDUALIZED services – the VR customer must be an active and engaged participant. VR customers must be included in the decisions that are affecting their lives. This includes the selection of services and service providers that best meet the needs of each customer.

#5 – Transportation

Transportation was identified as a major barrier impeding individuals with disabilities from obtaining employment in the community. Specifically, it was noted as a major impediment to those individuals who were identified as chronically unserved or underserved and as a major impediment in rural areas. This is a barrier that VR is not facing alone. Transportation is continually cited as one of the largest barriers affecting individuals with disabilities, seniors, low-income individuals, and those in rural areas. It will be critical for VR staff to continue to work with their partners on identifying creative solutions and looking for opportunities to collaborate with new and existing partners across the state to address this barrier.

Region 10 Success Story

Peyton Short's case was opened by VR in January 2018. He has a diagnosis of advanced glaucoma with hand motion in his left eye and no light perception in the right. Peyton came to VR with a bachelor's degree in History. He wanted to find a job utilizing his degree, and his job goal was a Museum Technician. Peyton received job readiness training from New Visions where he worked on his resume and interviewing skills. While working to find employment, Peyton started to volunteer at Andrew Jackson's Hermitage in Nashville. Shortly after starting his volunteer work, a position opened for him as a Museum Interpreter. Peyton works with visitors of the Hermitage explaining artifacts and allowing them to touch artifacts and ask questions. Peyton is now working 24 hours a week at The Hermitage using his degree in History and enjoys his job very much.



#6 – Community Partners and Resources

Each of the surveys identified opportunities for VR to create community resources that make it easier for the public to understand services available to them. Additionally, while WIOA partners who took the survey reported that they understand what role their organization plays in meeting the requirements of WIOA and that the WIOA State Combined Plan serves as a guiding document for their organization; they don't necessarily understand the role that all other TN WIOA partners play. In addition to community resources, creating cross-agency resources that allow sharing of relevant data, reporting measures, and the ability to jointly monitor progress toward outcome-based results were all cited as recommendations.

#7 – Pre-Employment Transition Services

As was referenced earlier, Pre-ETS providers, educators, and parents all feel that youth with disabilities do and could greatly benefit from Pre-ETS services. The disconnect revealed in the Pre-ETS Needs Assessment is ensuring that those who need the services know about the services. Communicating and informing the public, schools, youth, parents, and stakeholders about Pre-ETS services is an aspect the division has been and will continue to address.

Building on these recommendations, the Division of Rehabilitation Services is embarking on a 4-year strategic plan (2020-2024) to transform the Vocational Rehabilitation Program and revolutionize the customer experience. Focusing on the customer and the customer experience, the goal of the transformation is to create an environment where individuals and businesses served, along with VR staff and partners feel welcome, informed, and encouraged.

To achieve this transformation, the division has identified 5 strategic priorities as outlined below.

1. **Communication** - Foster trust and credibility with internal and external stakeholders through reliable, accurate, transparent, and timely two-way communication.
 - a. Create and tell a clear story of the Division's work, priorities, and successes
 - b. Encourage safe and respectful workplace communication with mechanisms for staff to know priorities and express concerns
 - c. Enhance transparency and responsiveness by encouraging open dialogue with stakeholders

- d. Guarantee staff at all levels embrace stakeholder input and feel responsibility and ownership for partnerships and collaboration
- 2. **Leadership and Talent Management** - Support a professional workforce that is organized and structured to deliver high quality vocational rehabilitation services through effective teams.
 - a. Advance a culture of high performance through professional development and accountability
 - b. Recruit, develop, retain and recognize quality employees and equip them to deliver high quality service through continuous coaching and training
 - c. Sustain efforts through staff retention and thoughtful succession planning
- 3. **Modernization of Systems and Processes** - Implement integrated systems and business processes that promote operational efficiency and programmatic effectiveness focused on the customer experience.
 - a. Draft division business model that supports the department's mission, vision, and core values
 - b. Implement a case management system that empowers staff, customers, and providers with access to information
 - c. Confirm division policies reflect a strengths-based and person-centered philosophy
- 4. **Revolutionize Service Delivery** - Build innovative and effective service delivery models to better support businesses and individuals with disabilities in driving the achievement of their employment goals.
 - a. Identify and implement evidenced-based models that lead to increased employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities
 - b. Support Tennessee businesses in meeting their workforce needs with job ready workers
 - c. Prepare students with disabilities for successful transition from high school to adulthood
 - d. Foster understanding with our partners about common goals, shared responsibilities and desired outcomes
- 5. **Data Driven Services and Outcomes** - Achieve improved employment outcomes for people with disabilities through data driven rehabilitation services and employment initiatives.
 - a. Enhance capacity of staff to use and analyze data to inform and improve practice and outcomes
 - b. Advance the integration of data systems with other resources as appropriate to facilitate innovative service delivery and collaboration

- c. Share program data and outcomes with stakeholders to create an environment that promotes continuous quality improvement

Each of the strategic priorities listed above can be linked to one or more of the recommendations made by the SRC. Strategic plans to improve communication will incorporate recommendations 2 and 6. The division's focus on talent management will target key action steps to address recommendation 1. And the strategic plans to modernize systems and processes, revolutionize service delivery, and provide data driven services and outcomes will be built around recommendations 3, 4, 5, and 7. The Division of Rehabilitation Services and the Vocational Rehabilitation Program look forward to continuing to work with the SRC to design the 4-year strategic plan.

Specific actions that VR will be taking over the next four years:

- Continued implementation of the new case management system, Aware (target implementation date June/July 2021).
- Review revision of VR policies and procedures to ensure alignment with the division's mission, vision, and values – included a renewed emphasis on person-centered practices.
- Statewide implementation of person-centered training for all staff.
- Design and development of the plan to transform the 17 Community Tennessee Rehabilitation Centers based on the findings and recommendations of Synergy Consulting partners.
- Assess and evaluate the division's approach to professional development including an update and re-design of new counselor training, general staff on-boarding and other professional development opportunities for staff on an ongoing basis.
- Assess and evaluate the division's staffing to include a review of position classification and compensation for alignment with the roles and responsibilities of a modernized, community-based vocational rehabilitation program.
- Improve and expand opportunities for customer engagement throughout the vocational rehabilitation process, gathering feedback and input from VR customers at various points throughout their employment journey.

Region 11 Success Story

Emily Dukes has been a VR client since 2012 with a dream to work in the fashion industry. In order to receive the training and technology required to work in the industry, she needed the assistance of VR. Emily's family struggled financially, and she was concerned that she would not be able to continue her education without the assistance of VR.

Emily applied for services and discovered that VR "was willing to take a chance on me to help me realize my dream and I am so grateful." She received diagnostic and vocational evaluations, post-secondary training assistance, assistive technology (new hearing aids), counseling and guidance through the Vocational Rehabilitation program. In July 2018, Emily obtained employment as a Marketing Strategist for SVP Worldwide. The company is the world's largest consumer sewing machine company and source of the SINGER, HUSQVARNA VIKING, and PFAFF sewing machine brands. She is thrilled with her new position and often travels to trade shows where she visits new cities and uses her knowledge of fashion design. She recounts that some of her fondest memories are of sewing with her grandmother using an old Singer machine. Emily considers this job a dream come true.

State Rehabilitation Council

Mission

Serving all citizens of Tennessee, the mission of the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) of Tennessee is to advise, evaluate and partner with the public vocational rehabilitation program in support of improving access to employment and promoting a diverse workforce statewide.

Vision

The SRC of Tennessee envisions a statewide workforce that values disability and diversity and is committed to full participation of its citizens.

As a result of the 1992 amendments to the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, each state VR agency was required to establish a State Rehabilitation Advisory Committee. The role of the committee was strengthened in the 1998 amendments to the Act when each state was mandated to establish a State Rehabilitation Council.

The mandate for the SRC and the definitions of its composition and functions are delineated in Section 105 within Title I of the Rehabilitation Act, as amended, and in Title 34 Parts 361.16 and 361.17 of the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR).

Responsibilities and Functions

The SRC of Tennessee works in partnership with the Tennessee Department of Human Services (DHS) Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS) to maximize employment and independent living for Tennesseans with disabilities. The SRC advocates for the Vocational Rehabilitation program as well as advises the division on issues facing consumers of the VR program. The SRC acts as the voice of the consumer and other stakeholders in the VR program.

The SRC's responsibilities and functions, as outlined in the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, include:

- Review, analyze, and advise DHS/DRS regarding responsibilities related to:
 - eligibility, including order of selection;
 - effectiveness of services provided; and

- functions performed by state agencies that affect the employment of individuals with disabilities.
- Partner with DRS to:
 - develop, agree to, and review VR goals and priorities;
 - evaluate the effectiveness of the VR program and submit reports of progress to the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) commissioner.
- Assist in preparation of the VR services portion of the combined state plan and amendments to the plan, applications, reports, needs assessments, and evaluations.
- Conduct a review and analysis of the effectiveness and consumer satisfaction with:
 - functions performed by the DRS;
 - VR services provided; and
 - the employment outcomes achieved by eligible individuals.
- Prepare and submit an annual report to the Governor and the RSA commissioner on the status of VR programs in Tennessee.
- Coordinate activities with other councils to avoid duplication of efforts and enhance the number of individuals served.
- Coordinate and establish working relationships between DRS and the Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC) and centers for independent living within Tennessee.
- Perform other functions consistent with VR services deemed appropriate by the SRC.

Membership

Council members are appointed by the Governor to serve a term of three years and may not serve more than two consecutive terms. When making appointments, the Governor must consider participants representing a broad range of individuals with disabilities and organizations interested in individuals with disabilities. The Governor, to the extent possible, must consider that minority populations are represented on the Council. Most members must

The council must be comprised of at least 15 members from the following groups/organizations: Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC); Parent Training and Information Center; Client Assistance Program (CAP); VR counselor (ex officio, non-voting member if Tennessee Department of Human Services (TDHS) employee); community program service providers; business, industry, and labor representatives (at least 4); disability groups; current or former VR recipient; State educational agency, State workforce investment board; and the Director of the DRS (ex-officio, non-voting).

be individuals with disabilities not employed by the Tennessee Department of Human Services, Division of Rehabilitation Services.

Officers for FY2019

Chair

Becky Allen

Client Assistance Program

From: Knoxville

VR Region: 2

Secretary

Christina Clift

Representative of Disability Groups

From: Millington

VR Region: 9

Vice Chair

Allison Shipp

Rehabilitation Counselor

From: Jackson

VR Region: 7

Immediate Past Chair

Lee Brown

Community Rehabilitation Program

From: Pulaski

VR Region: 6

CFR Title 34 Part 361.17 contains details on membership, appointments, terms, and electing of a chairperson.

Members for FY2019

David Cole

Business, Industry and Labor

From: Oakland

VR Region: 9

Rebecca Bordenet-French

Business, Industry, and Labor

From: Manchester

VR Region: 5

Lou Conley

Representative of Disability Groups

From: Memphis

VR Region: 9

Greyson Jennings

Current/Former VR Applicant/Recipient

From: Johnson City

VR Region: 1

Joey Ellis

Parent Training and Information Center

From: Nashville

VR Region: 5

Susan Johnson

Business, Industry and Labor

From: Maryville

VR Region: 2

Tom Kakac
Business, Industry & Labor
From: Columbia
VR Region: 6

Jim Sharp
Business, Industry, and Labor
From: Corryton
VR Region: 2

Paula Knisley
Director of VR Program
From: Nashville
VR Region: 5

Blake Shearer
State Education Agency
From: Cookeville
VR Region: 4

Laura Payne
Current/Former VR Applicant/Recipient
From: Knoxville
VR Region: 2

Denise Wardle
Disability Advocacy Group
From: Puryear
VR Region: 8

Burns Phillips
Workforce Investment Board
From: Nashville
VR Region: 5

Wanda Willis
Representative of Disability Group
From: Nashville
VR Region: 5

Accomplishments for FY2019

- Held four SRC quarterly meetings to conduct SRC business.
- Held multiple conference calls to conduct SRC committee business and to prepare for quarterly meetings.
- Held Fall 2018 SRC member training sessions for all SRC members to include information regarding VR services as well as training regarding the role and responsibilities of the SRC.
- Prepared FY2018 Annual Report with the DHS Division of Rehabilitation Services.
- Partnered with VR to conduct the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment, which was submitted to RSA at the close of FY2019. This process involved multiple meetings and phone calls for the Consumer Satisfaction and Needs Assessment Committee as well as the involvement of the full SRC in the final review of items to be included in the assessment surveys. The full SRC received feedback from the surveys. The committee, along with the SRC officers, identified the key priorities to be addressed by VR.
- SRC Vice Chair Allison Shipp served as a presenter at training sessions for new VR Counselors and provided information regarding the role and responsibilities of the SRC.
- Made contact with the office of the newly elected Governor via DHS to monitor the appointment of two previously nominated SRC membership positions which were subsequently appointed.

- Recruited and submitted nominations for the appointment or re-appointment of five additional SRC positions with all positions being appointed by the Governor's Office during FY2019.
- The SRC participated in components of the assessment process conducted by a consulting firm with the Community Tennessee Rehabilitation Centers (CTRCs). SRC Chair Becky Allen participated in an initial phone interview with the consultants, all SRC members were involved in a conference call with the consulting team and the chair participated in site visits with the consulting team at two of the seventeen CTRCs.
- Held a training session for SRC members regarding the Employment and Community First (ECF) CHOICES program, which was jointly conducted by the VR Supported Employment Program Supervisor and the Statewide Employment Manager with one of the three managed care organizations participating in the ECF CHOICES program.
- The SRC held a quarterly meeting at the Tennessee Rehabilitation Center Smyrna (TRC-Smyrna) and members participated in a guided tour of the campus and programs to learn about the training programs and services available to VR consumers at this facility. SRC members also learned about the planned changes for training programs.
- Continued participation in the National Coalition of State Rehabilitation Councils (NCSRC) via national quarterly conference calls.
- SRC Vice Chair and Rehabilitation Counselor Representative Allison Shipp attended the NCSRC Fall Training Conference held in Long Beach, California in October 2018.
- Participated in call with Rehabilitation Services Administration staff and multiple states' SRC representatives to identify ways for RSA to better support grantees and improve program performance, particularly that of the VR program. Additionally, the SRC of Tennessee submitted written feedback via information provided to the NCSRC.

FY2020 SRC Quarterly Meeting Schedule

The SRC holds quarterly meetings and the dates, times and locations are posted on the State of Tennessee Public Meetings Calendar at <http://www.tn.gov/meetings> at least 30 days in advance of the meeting.

- November 7, 2019
- February 13, 2020
- May 14, 2020
- August 13, 2020

Join the SRC

If you are a person with a disability or someone interested in having input regarding employment services to individuals with disabilities, the State Rehabilitation Council of Tennessee may be for you. If you are interested in learning more about this unique opportunity to serve, please visit the SRC website at <https://www.tn.gov/humanservices/ds/councils-and-committees/state-rehabilitation-council.html> for further information regarding the application process. You may also contact the SRC directly at srctennessee@gmail.com.



Region 11 Success Story

Markeese Hamilton began his VR journey in February 2015 when he applied for VR services as a senior in high school. He is deaf and uses American Sign Language (ASL) as a mode of communication.

Initially, Markeese wanted to enroll at Gallaudet University to study Physical Education. His goal was to become a Physical Education Teacher for elementary, middle or high school. After gathering the necessary documentation, VR supported Markeese in attending Gallaudet University.

As many students do, Markeese realized his initial employment plan was not a good fit as his long-term career goal. Through counseling and guidance, it was determined that he had an interest in automotive technology. He returned home to attend a local college, Tennessee College of Applied Technology (TCAT) in Murfreesboro to study Automotive Technology. Markeese graduated from the Automotive Technology Program in August 2018 with a certification. He obtained employment at Toyota of Murfreesboro as a Lube and Used Cars Technician shortly after graduation.

Recently, the VR Counselor followed up with Markeese. He reported that he has a new job at Nissan in Smyrna, Tennessee working as a Chassis Technician. The new opportunity offers a higher wage, benefits, and 401k. He reported that he loves his new job.

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Recommendations from the Comprehensive Assessment of the Community Tennessee Rehabilitation Centers (CTRC)

Synergy Consulting Partners conducted a comprehensive assessment of the seventeen (17) Community Tennessee Rehabilitation Centers (CTRCs) from the period of November 2018 through February 2019. The comprehensive assessment examined both internal and external factors of each CTRC, as well as all CTRCs collectively. The internal factors assessed included the CTRCs' fiscal stability, facilities and operations, organizational structure, staffing, and services and products. The external factors assessed included the CTRCs' stakeholders, community integration, marketing and public relations, community need, competitive analysis, and resources. The methodology used to conduct the assessment consisted of a review of documents and data; on-site visits to each of the CTRCs; one-on-one interviews with staff and stakeholders; focus groups with community stakeholders, funders, providers, and vendors; and an online confidential questionnaire. Below are the recommendations based on this review:

RECOMMENDATION #1 - Create a dedicated financial unit within the Division of Rehabilitation Services/VR Program to ensure that the federal VR grant for Tennessee is being fully utilized to the level of available "match", including the CTRC local funds; and that these funds are being spent to serve as many Tennesseans with disabilities as possible.

RECOMMENDATION #2 - Develop a 2-Year Strategic Direction for the VR Program that aligns with the Governor's initiatives, the state plan, and the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA).

RECOMMENDATION #3 - Develop a customized transformation plan for each CTRC that is consistent with the VR Program 2-year strategic direction and is based upon the unique needs and market demand of each CTRC's local community.

RECOMMENDATION #4 - Develop and implement a VR Program/CTRC marketing and public relations campaign, based on the VR Program 2-year strategic direction and targeted to the general public, potential partners, and businesses.

RECOMMENDATION #5 - Develop an effective primary implementation team who can fully direct and execute the VR Program 2-year strategic direction/plan and the individual, customized CTRC transformation plans.

2019 Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA) Results – Customer and Caregiver

The Customer and Caregiver section of the CSNA included 24 items and was completed by 648 respondents during a four-week period in the summer of 2019. Current customers and those whose cases had recently closed received the survey via an email link, from their VR Counselors, from community rehabilitation providers with whom they were working or from other stakeholders.

1. Please identify whether you are a VR customer of the Caregiver of a VR customer.

VR Customer = 71.61% Caregiver of a Customer = 28.4%

2. The services offered by VR meet/met my needs.

Strongly Agree and Agree = 65% Strongly Disagree and Disagree = 35%

3. I am happy with how soon I was able to meet with my VR counselor and apply for VR services.

Strongly Agree and Agree = 72% Strongly Disagree and Disagree = 28%

4. My VR counselor helped me to understand my abilities so I could choose a job that matched my strengths, interests, and needs.

Strongly Agree and Agree = 64% Strongly Disagree and Disagree = 36%

5. My VR counselor informed me of my choices and helped me to pick services and training when we were developing my employment plan.

Strongly Agree and Agree = 66% Strongly Disagree and Disagree = 34%

6. My VR counselor helped me understand what job openings were available where I live or where I wanted to live.

Strongly Agree and Agree = 57.3% Strongly Disagree and Disagree = 42.7%

7. My VR counselor understands my needs and advocates for me to get the help I need.

Strongly Agree and Agree = 63.7% Strongly Disagree and Disagree = 36.3%

8. My VR counselor is/was sensitive to my cultural background.

Strongly Agree and Agree = 82.4% Strongly Disagree and Disagree = 17.6%

9. I believe that VR staff are professionals who are informed, trained, and prepared to help VR customers match their abilities, strengths, needs, and interests with a successful employment outcome.

Strongly Agree and Agree = 67% Strongly Disagree and Disagree = 33%

10. VR staff or my service rehabilitation provider informed me of available jobs I am interested in and which match my skills.

Strongly Agree and Agree = 56.6% Strongly Disagree and Disagree = 43.4%

11. The job training I received (or am still receiving) prepares me for employment.

Strongly Agree and Agree = 50.6%

Strong Disagree and Disagree = 18.9%

Not Applicable = 30.5%

12. I had a job when my VR case closed.

Yes = 30.4%

No = 23.8%

Not Applicable = 45.8% - case still open

If answer to question 12 is "Yes":

Yes No I worked with a service provider agency outside of VR to get a job

Yes No I worked with VR staff to get a job

Yes No I found a job on my own

The highest category identified for yes and no are below:

Yes: I found a job on my own

No: I worked with a service provider agency outside of VR to get a job

13. As a VR customer, please check all the services you received.

Top 2: Job placement assistance and Job readiness training (Examples: Project Search, TRCs, etc.)

14. From the list below, what were the top 4 services you received that best helped you prepare for employment?

The highest two categories identified for each are below:

Top 1 Choice: Job readiness training and 4-year college

Top 2 Choice: Job placement assistance and Other (Examples: Transportation assistance, Personal care assistance, etc.)

Top 3 Choice: Other (Examples: Transportation assistance, Personal care assistance, etc.) and On the job training

Top 4 Choice: Other (Examples: Transportation assistance, Personal care assistance, etc.) and with the same number of respondents for each: Job readiness training (Examples: Project Search, TRCs etc.) and Supported employment

15. Using the list above, what is a service(s) not currently provided by VR that would have helped you get a job?

On the job training

Transportation assistance/reimbursement

Better communication and assistance from VR

Job network to include list of jobs and state and private agencies

Job placement assistance

Doctorate degree

Job readiness

Supported employment

- Assistance to obtain driver's license
Purchase of adaptive aids and technology
16. I am currently employed.
Yes = 44.2% No = 55.8%
17. I am satisfied with my current job.
Very Satisfied and Satisfied = 69% Very Dissatisfied and Dissatisfied = 31%
18. I think my job is a good match for my interests, skills, and abilities.
Yes = 64.1% No = 35.9%
19. If employed, for how long?
Less than 1 year = 55.3%
1-2 years = 17.1%
2 or more years = 27.6%
20. After participating in the VR program, I feel more confident in my ability to work in the community.
Strongly Agree and Agree = 60% Strongly Disagree and Disagree = 40%
21. To what extent have you experienced the following barriers to obtaining employment in the community?
The highest two categories identified for each barrier are below:
Major Barriers: The overall opportunities for employment in the community where I live or want to live and the willingness of employers to hire people with disabilities
Moderate Barriers: The severity of my disability and my employment skills
Minor Barriers: The severity of my disability and the expectation of employers
No Barriers: The expectations of my family or caregiver and No longer receiving benefits (Ex: SSI, SSDI, Medicare, TennCare, etc.)
22. Did VR services you received assist in eliminating barriers?
The two highest categories identified for yes and no are below:
Yes: My employment skills and my personal motivation to work/pursue employment
No: The availability of accessible transportation and No longer receiving benefits (Ex: SSI, SSDI, Medicare, TennCare, etc.)
23. Please provide any additional comments on what VR is doing well and that we should continue doing.
Nice and supportive staff
Interviewing skills
Knowledgeable and professional staff
Convenient office locations
Financial assistance for adaptive aids and technology
Job training; college
24. Please provide any additional comments on what VR could improve upon.
Improve length of time it takes to obtain assistive technology
Improve VR communication, responsiveness, and response time

Maintain seasoned staff and reduce staff turnover (higher pay)
Address transportation barriers
Provide earlier notice of Job Fairs
Address the needs of people with specific disabilities
Redefine successful closures (part time substandard jobs should not count)
End the order of selection
Ensure that all cases are closed in employment
Improve application form
Improve sensitivity to customer needs and disability
Ensure continuity of services when staff leave
Establish employment relationships with other state and private agencies
Improve follow up

2019 Staff Updates

Meghann Galland, Middle TN Area Director, Division of Rehabilitation Services



Meghann assumed this new role within the Division in March 2019. In this role, Meghann provides leadership over all VR Regions in Middle TN. Meghann began her professional career in the Long-Term Services and Support team within the Division of TennCare. While at TennCare, Meghann served as a Director, with direct oversight of the Project Management team, HR functions, professional development, and strategic planning. In that role, Meghann provided broad support, guidance, and leadership on behalf, and at times in place of, the Chief of LTSS. She aided all LTSS Leadership, including assistant deputies, directors, and managers to ensure projects and deadlines were tracked, tasks were completed, and goals were met.

Meghann's focus on quality and accuracy extended LTSS's ability to provide guidance and data to other state entities as well as publish responses to CMS and other national organizations. Meghann acted as a liaison both for internal units within TennCare and external stakeholders and partners and was often identified as a "go-to" resource when issues arose, and process improvement was needed. Meghann managed all data and information requests and worked with TennCare Information teams, ensuring there was an understanding of program requirements while also translating technical specifications to program leads. Meghann was a vital part of major implementations and program enhancements during her time at TennCare, including the implementation of the Employment and Community First CHOICES program, value-based purchasing, and Group 7 and 8 for I/DD services.

Meghann has her bachelor's degree in History, with a license in Secondary Education, and recently graduated from the Tennessee Leadership Academy for Excellence in Disability Services. She is married with three kids, 17, 10, and 4 and enjoys spending time with her family. Meghann is passionate about serving with a specific focus on the I/DD population, not just professionally but personally, as she has three nephews with Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy.

Tiffany Kelley, Sensory Area Director, Division of Rehabilitation Services

Tiffany assumed this new role within the Division in February 2019. In her role, Tiffany provides leadership to programs related to Deaf and Blind Services, which consists of Independent Living, TN Business Enterprise Program, Tennessee Council for the Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing and oversight to the field staff serving individuals who are Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing in all 95 counties in Tennessee.

Tiffany began her journey with the State of Tennessee, Department of Human Services (DHS), in 2013, as a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor serving individuals who are Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing. After serving as a Counselor, she promoted to Field Supervisor for Deaf and Blind units in East Tennessee. Prior to her current role, Tiffany held the Director of Deaf Services Field Operations position covering all 95 counties in Tennessee. Prior to her time with DHS, Tiffany served as an Educational Consultant for the Tennessee DeafBlind Youth Project working with individuals who have combined hearing and vision loss from birth to age twenty-two. Tiffany earned her Bachelor of Science in American Sign Language and Deaf Studies with a minor in Psychology from the Maryville College and her Master of Science in Counseling with a concentration in Rehabilitation Counseling and Deafness from the University of Tennessee in Knoxville.

Tiffany enjoys quality time with her husband, two children and two dogs. She also loves traveling and trying new food.

Selina Kirkland, CTRC Network Director, Division of Rehabilitation Services



Selina assumed this new role within the Division in June 2019. In this role, Selina will provide leadership, guidance and direction for all CTRC Network operations, functions, and activities. Selina holds a Bachelor of Business Administration from The University of Georgia and a Master's in Business Education from Middle Tennessee State University. She has previous professional experience in education and in the private sector working for a large consumer products company.

Selina has worked for the Division of Rehabilitation Services for over 5 years. She started as a Business Employment Consultant, and most recently served as the TRC Manager in Franklin where she collaborated with other programs within the agency to ensure services were coordinated for our individuals and families. Selina excels at networking and engaging with businesses to provide opportunities for job driven training for people with disabilities. She has a passionate commitment to high quality services that lead to positive outcomes for the people we serve. She has established strong and trusting relationships with state partners including the Department of Labor and Workforce Development, American Job Centers, and Department of Education to develop and implement innovative plans that lead to competitive integrated employment.

Selina is a graduate of Commissioner's Mission Possible Leadership Academy as well as the inaugural Mission Possible Emerging Leaders Academy. She is a participant of the Tennessee

Government Leadership Black Belt Program and is working towards her orange belt. She is also a Tennessee Promise mentor.

Selina and her family have called middle Tennessee “home” for the past nine years. Selina and her husband are avid college sports fans, and they enjoy gardening, hiking and traveling. They have a son who is a senior at The University of Tennessee, Knoxville and girl-boy twins who are attending East Tennessee State University and Tennessee College of Applied Technology-Murfreesboro respectively.

A’ndrea Leavy, West TN Area Director, Division of Rehabilitation Services



A’ndrea joined the Division in March 2019. In her role, A’ndrea provides leadership to the West TN team inclusive of Regions 7, 8, and 9 along with building and maintaining community partnerships.

A’ndrea comes to Vocational Rehabilitation from the Department of Children’s Services where she served as the Deputy Regional Administrator for Southwest TN. During this period, she was responsible for overall regional operations, including monitoring regional outcomes, data, and overseeing service delivery areas including: child protective assessment services (CPSA), foster care, adoption, relative caregiver, resource parent support (RPS), and placement services. Prior to working with the State of Tennessee, A’ndrea earned a Master of Science Degree in Education and served in leadership roles within the Public, Private, and Higher Education sector.

A’ndrea is a native of West TN and influential in various community settings. She enjoys mentoring, traveling and reading in her free time.

Kim Maltempo, Director of Strategic Business Solutions, Division of Rehabilitation Services



Kim joined the Division in April 2019. In her role, Kim will provide leadership on the implementation of the Vocational Rehabilitation program's new case management system and identifying other business process improvements.

Most recently, Kim served as a Senior Policy Advisor for the Greater Nashville Regional Council (GNRC), Middle Tennessee's designated Development District, Metropolitan Planning District (MPO), and Area Agency on Aging and Disability (AAAD). During her time at GNRC, Kim managed a strategic planning process for the City of Gallatin, while also working with AAAD staff on internal process improvement efforts. Prior to that, Kim served as a Program Business Analyst in the Division of TennCare's Long-Term Services and Supports (LTSS), where she served as a liaison between LTSS program staff and IT staff to ensure that technical solutions were meeting program requirements and needs. Kim is originally from Pittsburgh, PA, where she earned her Bachelor of Science in Psychology from the University of Pittsburgh and her Master of Public Policy and Management from the Graduate School of Public and International Affairs, also located at the University of Pittsburgh. While living in Pittsburgh, Kim gained experience working for a Pennsylvania State Representative, as well as for a regional policy research center, where she was responsible for managing committees of diverse stakeholders toward consensus on policy-related issues.

Kim has called Nashville "home" for the past three years, and has become active in the community, serving as an ambassador for Greenways for Nashville, a member of the NES Toastmasters group, and a mentor for Tennessee Promise students. Kim enjoys sitting by the

fire pit at her home with her husband, John, and their three dogs. In her free time, Kim is a long-distance trail runner and enjoys competing in and supporting ultra-marathon races.

Katie Powell, Director of Quality and Compliance, Division of Rehabilitation Services



Katie joined the Division in April 2019. In her role, Katie will provide leadership and guidance to the Policy Unit, Contracts Unit, and Data and Systems Unit in coordinating all State and Federal reporting, corrective action plan development and monitoring, quality assurance, contractor monitoring, policy development and data analysis.

Katie is a Nashville native, but spent several years living in Knoxville where she completed her Bachelor of Arts in Political Science and her Master of Public Administration at the University of Tennessee. She has worked in State Government for almost 10 years in positions at the University of Tennessee Institute for Public Service, the Office of Criminal Justice Programs, and the Division of TennCare. Katie has served on the Board of Examiners for the Tennessee Center for Performance Excellence and recently participated in the Tennessee Leadership Academy for Excellence in Disability Services.

Most recently, Katie served as the Director of Quality and Compliance for the Division of TennCare, Long Term Services and Supports. During her time with TennCare, Katie was responsible for developing and implementing the LTSS Quality Assessment and Performance Improvement Strategy, providing management and oversight of the Critical Incident Management and Quality Monitoring processes for the CHOICES and Employment and Community First CHOICES programs, as well as other quality initiatives. Additionally, Katie was responsible for management and oversight of the implementation of Tennessee's Statewide

Transition Plan for achieving compliance with the federal Home and Community-Based Services Settings Rule. Over a period of three years Katie led the coordinated effort between TennCare staff, DIDD, TennCare Managed Care Organizations, and in partnership with advocacy organizations across the state to successfully implement the plan making Tennessee the first state in the country to achieve full compliance with the rule. This work transformed the service delivery system to ensure Medicaid funded home and community-based services are person-centered and provide individuals with full access to their communities and opportunities to participate in integrated, competitive employment.

Tiffany Ramsey, East TN Area Director, Division of Rehabilitation Services



Tiffany assumed this new role within the Division in February 2019. In this role, Tiffany provides leadership and oversight for the 34 counties in VR Regions 1, 2, and 3 in East Tennessee.

Tiffany began her journey with the State of Tennessee, Department of Human Services (DHS), Division of Rehabilitation Services in August of 2010. Over the years, Tiffany has held various positions within DHS's VR program. She started out working with the Transition School to Work program in McMinn County. Then, she transitioned to the community Tennessee Rehabilitation Center (CTRC) in Cleveland, Tennessee, as an Employment Counselor. From there, she received a promotion to a Field Supervisor position in Knoxville, Tennessee. Prior to her current role, Tiffany held the Regional Supervisor position for the 13 VR counties in Region 3. Tiffany is originally from West Tennessee. However, she relocated to Knoxville, Tennessee while pursuing her postsecondary education and decided to call East Tennessee home. Tiffany received both her Bachelor of Arts in philosophy and Master of Science in Counseling Degrees from the

University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Tiffany's Master of Science Degree in Counseling is with a concentration in Rehabilitation Counseling. Also, she is a Certified Rehabilitation Counselor (CRC) since 2010.

Tiffany resides in Athens, Tennessee, with her husband, Josh. She is pursuing her doctorate in learning and leadership from the University of Tennessee, Chattanooga. In her free time, Tiffany enjoys spending time with family, bowling, and recently started playing disc golf.

Blake Shearer, Transition Director, Division of Rehabilitation Services



Blake joined the Division in August 2019. In his leadership role, Blake is responsible for leading the department's transition programs for students with disabilities to promote the successful transition to life after high school – including employment and post-secondary educational opportunities.

Blake comes to the Tennessee Department of Human Services' Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS) after serving for the past five years at the Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE). In his role at the TDOE, he worked relentlessly to establish partnerships with school districts, state agencies, and other community stakeholders who are all striving to improve postsecondary outcomes for students and people with all different abilities. Blake recognizes that meaningful impact is achieved when we work together and that is evident by his active role on the Employment Roundtable, Governor's Employment First Task Force, TennesseeWorks partnership, State Rehabilitation Council, and Community Tennessee Rehabilitation Center's Advisory Board.

Prior to joining the TDOE, he worked in the Putnam County School System for twelve years mostly within the special education department. His first classroom experience was as a paraprofessional in a high school classroom. He then taught at the middle school level through various models of co-teaching and direct instruction for students with disabilities. His most recent role in Putnam County was as a special education consulting teacher working with teachers and administrators by providing supports for instructional programming, training in crisis management, the development of instructionally appropriate individualized educational programs, and the creation of functional behavior assessments.

Blake resides in Cookeville, TN with his wife and two children. He has a B.S. in Child Development and Family Relations, an M.A. in Special Education, and an Ed.S in Instructional Leadership all from Tennessee Technological University.