



**FFY 2020**  
**ANNUAL REPORT**



Indiana  
**VOCATIONAL  
REHABILITATION**  
Empowering People. Changing Lives.



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# GREETINGS FROM THE CHAIRPERSON



## GREETINGS FROM THE CHAIRPERSON

These are challenging times. 2020 has been a year of great change for all of us. From political upheaval, to protests in the streets, to a crisis of public health, we have all been affected in some way. The Commission and Indiana's Vocation Rehabilitation Program have also been affected. As is so common now, Commission meetings and other group gatherings are done virtually.

Conferences and symposia have been cancelled. And

Vocational Rehabilitation programming has had to make adjustments to allow services to be delivered in a way that is safe for everyone.

But many things remain unchanged, including the Commission's commitment to its purpose of representing the disability community in matters pertaining to the quality and effectiveness of Indiana's Vocational Rehabilitation Services.

The Commission is composed of dedicated and tireless individuals, the majority of which themselves have a disability. They have accomplished a lot this year, including finalizing and adopting the Employment First Plan, implementing legislation designed to help Hoosiers with disabilities attain competitive integrated employment with equal opportunity, full participation, and leading to economic self-sufficiency. I would like to thank the Commission, and specifically the Employment First Subcommittee and their collaborators, for their hard work on this plan. Please feel free to review the plan at:

<https://www.in.gov/fssa/ddrs/files/Employment-First-Plan-Adopted-Sept.11-2020.pdf>

And the Commission continues to wrangle with ongoing issues of concern, like moving Vocational Rehabilitation away from "Order of Selection" and working toward receiving all available funding to be able to provide vocational programming to everyone in Indiana who is eligible to receive it.

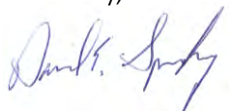
# GREETINGS FROM THE CHAIRPERSON

The Commission takes these tasks very seriously. They are a passionate and caring group of people representing the diverse disability community in Indiana. It is my honor to be associated with them.

I would also like to thank the staff of Vocational Rehabilitation for the good and valuable work that they do assisting individuals with disabilities. We recently had a (virtual) awards ceremony where the Commission recognized the work of Vocational Rehabilitation employees, and in the process, I was able to read the nominations submitted by other VR staff members. It was heartening and encouraging to read the descriptions of the selfless work that the VR staff does every day.

And finally, I would like to invite your input in the process developing vocational services in Indiana. Our Commission meetings are open to the public and we take public comments at each meeting. Comments, concerns, suggestions, or questions may also be sent to the Commission via email at: [VRCommission@fssa.IN.gov](mailto:VRCommission@fssa.IN.gov)

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "David E. Spradley".

David E. Spradley

Chair, Indiana Commission on Rehabilitation Services

# MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

## MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

The Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program started the year on a high note, with a positive outlook for 2020. We had accomplished two major milestones in 2019, including implementation of a new case management and claims payment system, and VR Counselor salary adjustments that helped improve staff retention.



At the start of 2020, in partnership with the Division of Mental Health and Addiction (DMHA), we received the positive news that our application to the U.S. Department of Labor, Visionary Opportunities to Increase Competitive Employment (VOICE) project was awarded, including 300 hours of technical assistance to work toward improving employment for Hoosiers with mental health diagnoses. In February, we released 200 individuals from delayed status under order of selection. In partnership with Indiana Workforce programs, we completed Indiana's Combined State Plan after a series of collaborative meetings and identification of strategies to advance the education and employment of Hoosiers, including those with disabilities.

When the COVID-19 pandemic began in March 2020, priorities shifted. I am extremely proud of our team who jumped in with both feet and quickly implemented several action steps to ensure that services continued in a safe manner during the pandemic. VR services remained available throughout the entire year, though we saw a significant increase in the delivery of services remotely. To say that this was a challenging time would be an understatement, however, with challenge also comes opportunity. Like many organizations, VR is reviewing the future of service delivery and the possibility of preserving some of the best practices that have been developed over the last several months, including actions that supported better VR participant engagement and added flexibilities for service delivery.

While the public health emergency has remained a significant focus area throughout 2020, I am happy to share that VR continued forward progress on several important initiatives, including continued support of Establishment projects with VR employment service providers to improve staff skills and capacity for assisting eligible VR participants with achieving employment, particularly those with the most significant disabilities. 2020 also marked the

# MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

adoption of the [Employment First Plan](#) by the Commission on Rehabilitation Services! More information about 2020 accomplishments and activities can be viewed throughout this report.

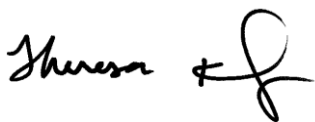
As we look ahead to 2021, emerging focus areas will include:

- Revisiting Discovery services and identifying new best practices that align with virtual service delivery, VR participant needs, and shifts in the job market.
- Further enhancement of Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS).
- Launching online content and a video series, in partnership with DMHA, to increase awareness of the importance of employment for individuals with mental health diagnoses.
- Enhancing VR's role in facilitating requirements for youth seeking subminimum wage employment, to ensure individuals can obtain the necessary information and experiences to make an informed choice about their employment pathway.
- Continued collaboration with the Commission on Rehabilitation Services to advance efforts toward Employment First.

Commission members once again showed their dedication to improving employment outcomes for Hoosiers with disabilities this past year as they reviewed more than 200 public comments on the draft Employment First Plan. The commission made numerous revisions based on public feedback and adopted an updated plan in September 2020. I want to thank commission members for all of their efforts on this important initiative.

I hope you take time to review the success stories featured in this annual report. There is no better way to educate about the VR program than to share personal stories of success. I also feel there is no better way to increase awareness about the importance of employment than to share stories of Hoosiers who have been successful in achieving their goals. Thank you to those who shared your experiences and allowed us to be part of your journey toward employment success! I also want to thank our staff, Division of Disability and Rehabilitative Services (DDRS) and Family and Social Services Administration (FSSA) leadership, and numerous stakeholders for your ongoing partnership and passion in improving outcomes for Hoosiers with disabilities.

Happy New Year!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Theresa Koleszar", followed by a stylized flourish.

Theresa Koleszar, Director  
Bureau of Rehabilitation Services

# BRS VISION, MISSION, & VALUES

## BRS VISION, MISSION, & VALUES

The Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS) includes Blind & Visually Impaired Services (BVIS), Deaf & Hard of Hearing Services (DHHS), Centers for Independent Living, and Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VR).

### BRS VISION STATEMENT

All Hoosiers are encouraged and empowered to pursue opportunities that promote their independence.

### VR VISION STATEMENT

To partner with individuals with disabilities to explore career pathways to achieve their employment success.

### VALUES STATEMENT

#### VR Values:

1. **Quality** – To support an effective, skilled and engaged team as the most valuable asset in achieving person-centered services that produce quality outcomes.
2. **Purposeful** – To engage in thoughtful, intentional actions that drive progress toward each individual's employment success.
3. **Empowerment** – To entrust staff to think and act creatively, foster hope, and empower individuals to take ownership of their path to employment success.
4. **Strengths-Based** – To focus on each individual's unique abilities and interest as the foundation for employment success.
5. **Inclusion** – To uphold the belief that each individual's contributions have value, and with access to a broad range of opportunities and appropriate supports, all Hoosiers can achieve employment success.



# 100 YEARS OF VR SERVICES



On June 2, 1920, President Woodrow Wilson signed into law the Smith-Fess Act, known as the National Civilian Rehabilitation Act. Two earlier congressional Acts had established vocational rehabilitation programs targeted to helping disabled World War I veterans transition to civilian life. The Civilian Rehabilitation Act of 1920 took those models and created a program for all Americans with disabilities. Prior to the act passing vocational rehabilitation services were provided by charitable organizations.



Over the past 100 years the program has reinvented itself numerous times to meet the ever-changing needs and challenges faced by individuals with disabilities and the demands of public policy. While the basic purpose of the program has remained constant since its inception, the program has adapted itself to make use of new and effective modalities to empower individuals with disabilities, particularly those with significant disabilities, to achieve the high quality employment outcomes to which they aspire and choose. This year we celebrated the 100th anniversary of that action.



## IN THE SPOTLIGHT



Each year, the Annual Report spotlights outstanding individuals who were able to achieve their employment goals with the assistance of VR and other local partners.

*Special thanks to:*

Alphonso Brown

Destinee Smith

Dallas Richmond

Merlie (Nikki) Robinson

*for allowing us to share their success!*

## ALPHONSO BROWN



**You can still become whatever you want to be...**

**By Kristal Peacock and Bobbie Milliken**

Alphonzo Brown came to VR in Fall of 2018 due to challenges with employment resulting from his low vision and other health conditions. He expressed an interest in owning a small business during his first appointment with his VR Counselor, Kristal Peacock. Alphonzo had dreamed of opening a gourmet popcorn shop. Alphonzo was referred to Portals LLC for small business consultation services. Partnering with Portals, he completed a feasibility study of his business idea and later received extensive business consultative services to assist him in writing a business plan to open a gourmet popcorn shop.

After his business plan was approved, he began receiving support from VR to help him cover some of his start up business costs, included expenses for his shop, advertising costs and insurance and additional consultation provided by Commonwealth Business Development. VR assisted with purchasing tools, equipment and stocks and supplies to ensure a successful startup. In addition, VR provided assistive technology such as adaptive computer equipment and special lighting in his shop to accommodate his vision loss and enable him to operate his business successfully.

We are so happy to see him on the road to success!

The next page features segments from an article written by Brook McAfee with the News and Tribune of Jeffersonville, Indiana. The full article is available [here](#).

# News and Tribune

Community Focused. Community Minded. (812) 283-6636 / [newsandtribune.com](http://newsandtribune.com)

BROOKE MCAFEE [brook.mcafee@newsandtribune.com](mailto:brook.mcafee@newsandtribune.com)

## Jeffersonville shop offers varieties of flavored popcorn

*[content printed below represents segments from the full article]*



Poppin' Flavors Gourmet Popcorn, located at 1703 Charlestown New Albany Pike, celebrated its ribbon cutting Monday with One Southern Indiana and local officials. The popcorn shop opened in May.

Poppin' Flavors is owned by Jeffersonville couple Tracy and Alphonzo "Al" Brown. Their kids, Torrie and Bryson, help out at the

shop. The shop started with 15 flavors when it first opened, but it now features about 30 varieties with flavors such as Garlic Parmesan, Rainbow Candy Corn, Caramel Bourbon Peanut and Dill Pickle.

"You're not just tasting popcorn — you're tasting whatever that flavor is, so if it's cookies and cream, the popcorn kernel tastes like cookies and cream, so it's not just laid upon the popcorn — it's in the popcorn," Al said. "There's a difference."

Al is blind in his right eye — he has gone through 20 surgeries since he woke up blind about five years ago because of diabetic retinopathy.

# ALPHONSO BROWN



“I have a disease which is not going to go away — I just have to change my lifestyle, which I have done,” he said.

Al said the business is a “new chapter” in his life.



Previously, he had a long career in the IT field, but with his disability, he had to make some adjustments to lower his stress levels, he said. He also received vocational rehab support in opening the popcorn business.

For Al, making popcorn is relaxing, he said, and the business was a new opportunity for him.



“For me, it means that I now have freedom, I have control of not only who I am, but who I could be and who my kids could be,” he said. “It also gives me an opportunity to show the community that it doesn’t matter if you have a disability — you can still become whatever you want to be.”

## DESTINEE SMITH

### Teamwork to Make the Dream Work

Michelle Novak – Community Liaison for Tradewinds



The relationship between the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor, Employment Specialist and the job seeker are important when it comes to finding successful employment. The support and encouragement on the road to a successful employment placement can make a positive impact for everyone involved. In this case, an Employment Specialist shares her perspective on the VR job seeker and her determination to succeed.

I can easily say Destinee is at the top of my “favorite client” list! I wanted to share some feedback with all of you because I truly feel we have found the perfect fit for her after a long 5 years of having an open case with VR!

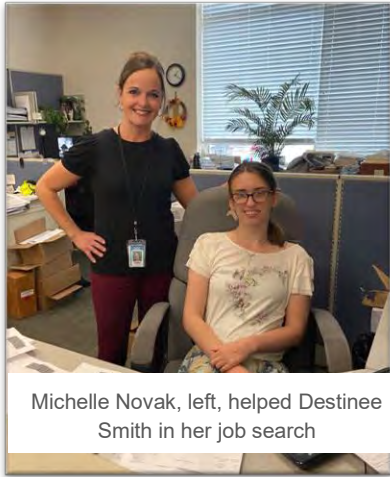
Ever since Destinee was assigned to work with me, it was important for me to get to know her personally, understand her goals and barriers and ultimately, earn her trust. In speaking with her VR Counselor, I knew her case had been open for a long time and I was determined to help. I was really motivated to work with her and find something where she can thrive. Destinee told me she wants an opportunity to show people that she’s smart, valuable, and deserving of an opportunity. After meeting with management at HG Global, I took Destinee in on two different days so she could try working in different areas. She did amazing and they wanted her on board as an employee. I wish I could have had a camera those first couple days. It’s wonderful to see her utilizing her skills, talent and most importantly, her persistence to show her value.

I’m blown away at her ability to adapt to change so quickly and I don’t think she realizes the positive impact she’s made on so many people in such a short time. I’m excited to see her grow and be successful there. Thank you to everyone for the persistence, flexibility, patience, and overall teamwork!

The next page features segments from an article written by Deborah Laverty, Times Correspondent. The full article is available [here](#).



# DESTINEE SMITH



Michelle Novak, left, helped Destinee Smith in her job search



HG Global, TradeWinds partner in job search  
Deborah Laverty Times Correspondent

***[content printed below represents segments from the full article]***

Destinee Smith has been trying to find her dream job since graduating from Hobart High School in 2015. The 24-year-old landed a job she loves...at HG Global in Portage with the help of TradeWinds employment services.

"It's been the best job I have ever had... My disability won't stop me. They gave me a chance and all you need is a chance," Smith said. Smith, who has mild/moderate cerebral palsy and is deaf, was hired as an order input specialist by HG Global.

Tracy Smith, Destinee Smith's mother, also speaks glowingly of the opportunities both TradeWinds and HG Global have given her daughter. "It has been life-changing for my daughter. The job has meant so much for her self-esteem. You can tell by looking at my daughter that she has challenges, but she can shine if you just give her a shot. These people have given her a shot."

HG Global is a third-generation, family-owned company from Northwest Indiana and a leading provider of candles, aromatherapy, and home decor under the Hosley's brands, according to a company spokeswoman.

"When we learned about the amazing work TradeWinds was doing with special needs adults in Northwest Indiana, we welcomed the opportunity to see if their clients could be a fit for our employment needs," said HG Global Chairman Piush Kumar.

"We have since had the distinct pleasure of not only adding two talented employees to our ranks, but also watching Destinee and [another individual] bloom in our company's environment, spreading their joy to be working, along with their 'can-do' attitudes, with every member of the HG Global family."



## DALLAS RICHMOND



Story by Carla Fausnaugh,  
Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor

Dallas Richmond is excelling at his job as a Collection Center Attendant at a local Goodwill store in Washington Indiana due to a thriving support system from his family and his positive experience with his Employment Specialist, Kara Dougherty with Evansville Goodwill Industries, Inc., and Carla Fausnaugh, his VR Counselor with the Vincennes Area Office.

When Dallas first came to VR in September 2019, he was very shy and anxious about working in the community but was at the same time eager to begin the process with VR. He participated in the discovery process with Goodwill, and based on previous work experience and personal preferences, an employment goal of Laborer and Freight, Stock, and Material Movers was set. Dallas and Kara worked hard to find opportunities, and Dallas accepted the job offer at the Goodwill store in November 2019. VR provided Dallas with additional services such as work uniforms and assistance with transportation until he began receiving income from his new job. With the encouragement of his parents and the support of Kara, Carla and his supervisor and peers at Goodwill, Dallas worked hard to learn his new role, and was able to work independently on the job after one month.

Dallas is continuing to meet and exceed his employer's expectations and has even grown to become a peer leader and mentor to new employees, helping them to acclimate to their new jobs. Dallas also transitioned very well from a smaller store to a new larger building with added work responsibilities and duties. Dallas' success has increased his confidence both on the job, in the community and at home with his family, and he is more talkative and outgoing. Dallas' support team alongside his parents are very proud of him and know his future is very bright! Special thanks to Kara Dougherty and Carla Fausnaugh for their support of Dallas as he achieved his employment goal!



# MERLIE (NIKKI) ROBINSON



## MERLIE (NIKKI) ROBINSON



**A segment from a story by Jennifer Olson, ADEC Employment Consultant**

Nikki was my very first client as an Employment Consultant, from intake through supported employment. The first day I met Nikki in November 2018, she informed me that her mother had passed away the week before our meeting. She said her mother was her rock, her advocate, and her source for emotional support.

The woman I saw in front of me was timid and withdrawn. I learned Nikki has a learning disability, depression, and anxiety. She shared with me that she does everything for her family, including going without her medication to ensure her family is taken care of.

Nikki volunteers in the community with emergency services and at a haunted house, where she entertains others. Her character in the haunted house is called "Tiny". Nikki really thrived in that area because she hid behind the costume. However, in real life she lacked confidence in herself. Nikki told me she had completed a program called, Soup of Success, a program that teaches women to take control of their futures and empowers women to reach their full potential. During our discussion I learned she had an interest in the food service industry.

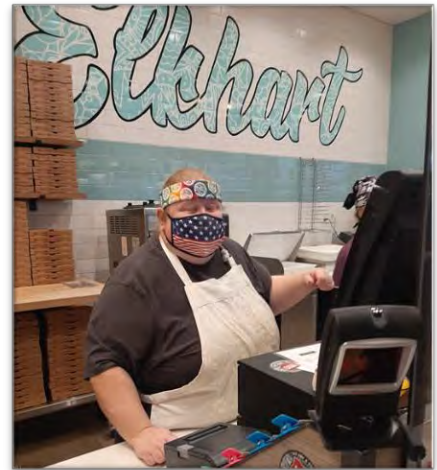
We completed several Discovery activities that included food service in a long-term care facility, a local grocery store bakery as well as a local restaurant assisting with preparing food items. She indicated she enjoyed all but the long-term care facility, as it was not an ideal fit for her. We submitted several applications and sent her resume to various businesses. One business was MOD Pizza that had just opened in Elkhart, Indiana. When Nikki walked into the restaurant for her interview, her face lit up, and she told me she liked the environment.



## MERLIE (NIKKI) ROBINSON

The interview went very well, Nikki disclosed her disability to the interim manager and explained what part I played in her employment. She was hired immediately and told the manager she did not want to run the cash register, because she did not think she was good with handling money. Imagine her first day, she was immediately trained on the cash register! Once she became familiar with that, she was taught food prep and dough pressing, which she enjoyed. After Nikki got her first paycheck, she was excited to tell me she had gotten her nails done and bought herself a new purse. She was so excited she cried!

Through the next six months, Nikki faced many challenges both on and off the job. Nikki's hours were cut several times and a couple of the managers treated her with little regard. I advocated with the District Manager on several occasions when they finally hired a respectful manager and cleaned up the "squad" (team members). During this time Nikki was struggling to keep health insurance and thought she was going to lose her apartment. I would often remind Nikki to take care of herself and would encourage her to advocate for herself both on and off the job. Slowly she began to stand up for herself by asking the manager for more hours. She sat down with her family to tell them how she feels and that she is going to be taking care of herself first. She sought assistance for her medication and became medication compliant. She began scheduling her own transportation through the community Access service. We had even discussed looking



toward stabilization, when COVID-19 hit. Nikki was off work for a week as the company decided how they were going to handle the mandatory restaurant dine in restrictions.

When I resumed services, Nikki indicated she was nervous about the restaurant reopening the dining room, and the feelings overwhelmed her. Well, when the dining room reopened, Nikki shined. At one point after she had learned the cash register, she said she didn't want to learn the food line because it intimidated her. Imagine my surprise walking in for a site visit and seeing Nikki running the food line. Each time I visit MOD Pizza, she has a smile from ear to ear and is glowing. She is proficient in almost every task at MOD Pizza.

Nikki has grown so much in the past two years, that she feels part of a team and has confidence in herself, and she is not afraid to advocate for herself.

# 2020 ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Employment First

Pre-Employment Transition Services

Business & Community Engagement

VR Staff Awards

Additional Highlights



# THE INDIANA EMPLOYMENT FIRST PLAN



## THE INDIANA EMPLOYMENT FIRST PLAN

### ***A letter from David Spradley, Chair of the Indiana Rehabilitation Commission, and Christine Dahlberg, Employment First Chair***

After more than two years of research, deliberation, and debate the Rehabilitation Commission and its members are pleased to announce the approval of Indiana's Employment first Plan on September 11, 2020. The Commission is proud to embrace and support the principles and values of the national Employment First Movement which simply put,

means real jobs and real wages for people with disabilities.

With the passage of Indiana's Employment First Act in 2017, The Indiana Rehabilitation Commission was charged with the responsibility for developing a plan for advancing competitive, integrated employment as the first and preferred option regardless of the level of disability.

The Employment First Act pertains to all state agencies that provide services and support to individuals with disabilities. It requires those agencies to effectively implement an employment first policy to advance competitive, integrated employment outcomes.

As the plan was being developed, the Commission considered data and information collected through the Employment First committee, input from 400 advocates who attended 11 community town halls, and 211 public comments on an initial draft of the plan. Many hours were spent in committee and Commission meetings synthesizing information and crafting and editing language.

We are excited for the future of Employment First in Indiana and look forward to working with Indiana's Work to INclude Coalition, state agencies, advocacy organizations and individual advocates over the next several years to implement and refine the plan.

We hope members of the Disability Community will read the plan <https://www.in.gov/fssa/ddrs/files/Employment-First-Plan-Adopted-Sept.11-2020.pdf> and then join us in supporting or encouraging the development of local and statewide initiatives for competitive integrated employment for people with disabilities.

# PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES



## Pre-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES

Pre-employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) are available to students with disabilities age 14 through age 22 who are eligible or potentially eligible for VR services. Pre-ETS activities include job exploration counseling; work-based learning

experiences; counseling on enrollment in post-secondary training opportunities; workplace readiness training to develop social skills and independent living; and instruction in self-advocacy, including peer mentoring. Pre-ETS are available in all 92 counties statewide.

An updated listing of providers, counties and schools can be found [here](#)



This year, our Pre-ETS providers (like so many others) faced some unique challenges. When the state ‘hunkered down’ in March, providers had to come up with some innovative ways to reach out to students and parents to continue their Pre-ETS learning. They stepped up in many different ways to ensure that Pre-ETS students were able to receive these valuable services, such as:

- Easterseals ARC Northeast teamed with a local restaurant to deliver food to families in need along with packets of Pre-ETS information to be reviewed with career coaches later.
- Bona Vista and the North Central Collaborative set up a system in which they communicated weekly with teachers of record to ensure a smooth transition to virtual Pre-ETS and assist with getting in touch with parents and students.

# PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES

- Stone Belt created innovative programming including teacher support through regular meetings, parent support through creation of a parent liaison, as well as daily Zoom Rooms with different themes (career exploration, mock interviews, etc.).

The Department of Education (DOE) also presented on “Best Practices for Continuous Learning” to aid in this effort.



This information and more was shared during a statewide [webinar](#) in April.

Pre-ETS providers, VR, and DOE also participated in an [online discussion](#) this fall to help everyone prepare for the new school year. This “Pre-ETS Back to School Special” included discussion on a number of topics including advocating for Pre-ETS as an essential service, school plans for reopening (including contingency plans), school guidelines, managing schedules, etc.

A special thanks to Michelle Oja with DOE, who collaborated with VR and Pre-ETS providers on new guidance documents as a result of this unique year.

[Considerations for  
Transition Planning  
as Part of School  
Re-entry](#)



[Effective Strategies for  
Transition Planning](#)

# PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES



VR Youth Counselors continue to do excellent work throughout the state. They have forged great connections with Pre-ETS providers, school systems, and local VR offices to assist in streamlining the referral process, get more schools on board with Pre-ETS activities, and provide technical assistance.

Highlights of their work includes researching top employers in their areas to share with providers, providing training to school staff on VR and Pre-ETS, assisting with planning resource and transition fairs, and working on pilot projects on college campuses.

## BUSINESS & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The Indiana Business & Community Engagement team assists employers with their disability inclusion efforts in communities across the state. Most of this work requires the team to be responsive to employer needs. The work is made up of in-person meetings, presentations, employer worksite tours and networking events. As with every aspect of daily life, the impact of COVID-19 caused employers to pause and rethink how they operate in everyday business activities. It was no different for the Business & Community Engagement team. In March, there was a dramatic pause and then a shift in how we do the work we do. Now, in the 'new normal,' days are filled with virtual activities including meetings, presentations, employer worksite tours and networking events in the communities around Indiana. We continue to work and adapt to the current circumstances and support employers across the state.

The Business & Community Engagement [website](#) was launched in 2020. The site includes a variety of resources specifically for employers interested in learning more about inclusive hiring.

Facebook and Twitter accounts continue to grow with followers and have been useful tools to communicate changes to business operations because of COVID-19. Social media also played a big role in sharing information for **Disability Awareness Month** in March, and **National Disability Employment Awareness Month** in October.

The Business & Community Engagement Team were key collaborators with the Employment First Advisory Committee. They collaborated on the **Employment First Employer Toolkit** that

### Business and Community Engagement



Business engagement is the cornerstone for transitioning job seekers, including individuals with disabilities into today's competitive workforce, promoting long-term economic stability, competitiveness, and growth.

Interaction between employers, Vocational Rehabilitation, and other workforce development and education organizations results in measurable improvement in desired outcomes for all parties. Engaging businesses is a key component in improving and increasing employment outcomes for people with disabilities.



# BUSINESS & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

was launched in October and produced the presentation on the Employment First Initiative to Indiana State Personnel.

The first virtual employer training on Disability Etiquette launched in 2020. The management staff at The Barrington of Carmel participated in an interactive training that covered topics to raise awareness around hiring individuals with disabilities, develop basic etiquette skills, and gain an understanding on how hiring people with disabilities strengthens diversity.



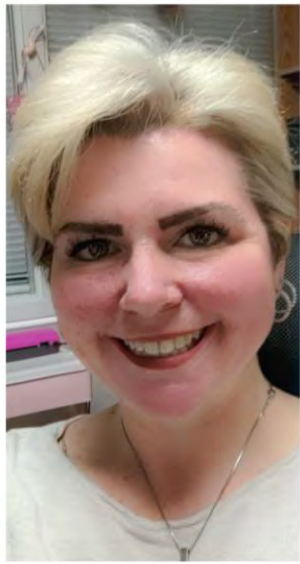
This past summer, VR partnered with James Emmett and Company and Indiana Beach for their summer employment hiring initiative. It had great success resulting in over 50 hires of persons with disabilities. VR continued collaboration with Advance Auto Parts Distribution Center in Remington, Drug Plastics, and Jordan Manufacturing.

The team also provides continued support of the Indiana Commission on Rehabilitation Services and 1102 Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Task Force meetings.

# VR STAFF AWARDS

## VR STAFF AWARDS

*And the winners are...*



Support Staff of the Year  
Lindsay Martinez  
Marion County – Area 10



Counselor of the Year  
Robert Johnston  
South Bend – Area 1

*Congratulations Lindsay, Robert,  
Christy and Theresa!*



Rising Star  
Christy Skie  
Evansville – Area 20



Leadership Award  
Theresa Kaplon  
South Bend – Area 4

# VR STAFF AWARDS

Congratulations to all 2019 VR Staff Award Nominees & Winners!

## Support Staff of the Year

Marcia Acord  
Jerry Brockman  
Rita Bruner  
JoAnn Bryant  
Jackie Burris  
Teresa Chambers  
Mary Cline  
Brittany Cors  
Brandi Cottey  
Katherine Cox  
Cherith Eggers  
Christine Faust  
Ashley Fletcher-Shirley  
Rachele Guzman  
Laura Harper  
Connie Heyer  
Jennifer Hunter  
Dawn Hurns  
Lucinda Hurst  
Sharie Kincaid  
DeMeen Knox  
Lindsay Martinez  
Sara Panagopoulos  
Dianne Patchett  
Jessica Patton  
Amy Pringle  
Jessica Siscel  
Bobbi Smith  
Theresa Speer  
Cayce Stewart  
Marilyn Truax

## Counselor

Jenny Austin  
Shelly Beatty  
Mary Binz  
Nicole Campbell  
Mary Carrol  
Cheryl Conner  
Hannah Cook  
Valerie Crespo  
Patricia Guillaume  
Renee Jewell  
Brandi Jittjumnongk  
Robert Johnston  
Christina Kelso  
Aimee Killey  
Tina Lambert  
Nancy Miller  
Amanda Ormstedt  
Carol Phelps  
Frances Robinson  
Angela Shelton  
Amanda Shumate  
Tim Taylor  
Treasure Trueblood  
Erin Wadsworth  
Jamie Walter  
Stephanie Whelchel  
Lori Wilkerson  
Holly Worrick

## Rising Star

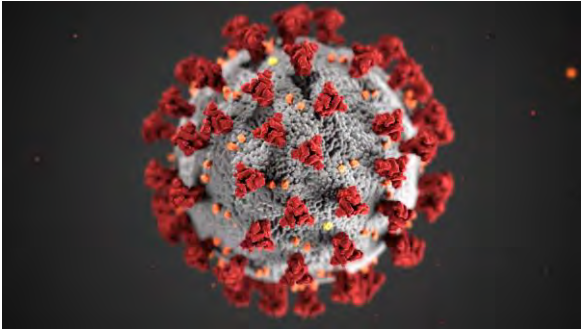
Shugunna Alexander  
Tabea Belding  
Kate Boller  
Kellee Braniff  
Sharon Brown  
Hannah Cook  
Ollie Cornelius  
Sierra Cox  
Katherine Gilchrist  
Jana Humphreys  
Brenda Jankowski  
Tammy Johnson  
Luke Knoke  
Catherine Scott  
Christy Skie  
Jennifer Spencer  
LaVelda Turner

## Leadership

Ima Abbott  
Jamen Bales  
Virginia Bates  
Sheri Burnett  
Jan Desroches  
Brittney Downing  
Majdi El-Alami  
Shelby Jennett  
Theresa Kaplon  
Melissa Kirby  
Tina Miller  
Bobbie Milliken  
Ann Sattley  
Beth Schaffter  
Rheonna Snedigar  
Shelly Stearns  
Martina Tovar  
Bryan Zimmerman



# ADDITIONAL HIGHLIGHTS



VR shifted priorities in March 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The ability to continue to deliver services to VR participants while implementing safety measures became top priority.

Highlights of VR's rapid response included the following:

- Distributed letters to all current VR participants to increase awareness that VR services continued to be available, and shared helpful COVID-19 related resources and information.
- Communicated specific ways that VR can be helpful during these unprecedented times including helping individuals with disabilities whose employment may have been negatively impacted by the pandemic.
- Encouraged VR staff to increase the frequency of communication with VR participants to help with engagement, and to check in regularly to provide support and revisit participant employment goals as necessary.
- Through a questionnaire, obtained information regarding the impact of the pandemic on the employment status of VR participants, and identified VR service needs to assist them in returning to their places of employment or pursuing new employment efforts.
- Development of remote service delivery guidance to VR employment providers.
- Development of virtual service delivery guidance to VR staff including flexibilities for obtaining signatures, training on virtual platforms, and best practice recommendations for keeping participants engaged in their VR process.
- Provided training and best practices to Pre-ETS providers to continue service delivery to students with disabilities.
- Troubleshooting of accessibility challenges with virtual service delivery.
- Deep cleaning of all VR offices.
- Obtained Plexiglas, masks, cleaning supplies, and markings for physical distancing for all VR offices.

## ADDITIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

VR continued with forward progress on several additional initiatives during 2020. A few highlights include:

- Continued enhancement of Pre-ETS.
- Continued implementation of a Memorandum of Understanding with Department of Workforce Development (DWD) to provide Pre-ETS through increasing the number of students with disabilities participating in the Jobs for America's Program (JAG) program.
- Continuation of Establishment projects with approximately 40 VR employment service providers to improve staff skills and staff capacity for assisting eligible VR participants with achieving employment, particularly those with the most significant disabilities.
- Continued collaboration and resource sharing through the Transition Advisory Council.
- Adoption of the [Employment First Plan](#) by the Commission on Rehabilitation Services.
- Improved performance on federal performance measures, including an increase in the number of VR participants achieving measurable skill gains.
- Additional improvements in VR staff retention with staff turnover at less than 10%.

During this very unprecedented year, several important new areas of focus emerged, including:

- Development of a VR Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) workgroup to provide a place for conversation, awareness, and identification of action steps to reduce bias in the delivery of VR services to individuals.
- Further enhancing our partnership with DMHA to increase awareness of employment as a health intervention for individuals with mental health diagnoses, including co-leading a taskforce of key stakeholders and jointly leading the VOICE (Visionary Opportunities to Increase Competitive Employment) project.
- Increased training to VR staff regarding services to individuals with mental health diagnoses, including enhanced guidance on eligibility and disability priority determination, harm reduction training, and updated guidance on serving participants using substances.



## “WHY I SERVE ON THE COMMISSION”

## “WHY I SERVE ON THE COMMISSION”

**Marc Ruiz - Commission Member**  
**Team Leader, Oak Partners, Inc.**

*I believe strongly in the nobility and fulfillment of work for an individual's spirit and whole person. Work provides all of us the opportunity to serve others in a productive manner, creating value for employers and customers, and creating satisfaction and compensation for ourselves. Individuals with disabilities have the ability and desire to serve our society in this way and deserve the opportunity to do so.*



**Sarah Chestnut— Commission Member**  
**Director, Public Policy and Technical Assistance, INARF**

*I recognize the importance of employment in people's lives and want to assure that individuals with disabilities have employment opportunities and choices. I am passionate about ensuring that Individuals with disabilities can pursue their employment-related goals and dreams regardless of any challenges or barriers they may face, and Vocational Rehabilitation plays a pivotal role in supporting and empowering individuals to achieve employment success.*

**Shawn Fulton – Commission Member**  
**Indiana Arc, President Self Advocates of Indiana**

*“People with disabilities want all the opportunities that everyone else has. I tell them, never give up on your dream. I didn't and I have a great job now.”*



## COMMISSION OUTREACH

The Commission on Rehabilitation Services recognizes the importance of outreach activities throughout the state, which have included networking with governor-appointed boards, councils, and commissions, as well as other agencies and organizations, and Commission member representation at local and national conferences.

The Commission on Rehabilitation Services welcomes your opinion about how VR is meeting your needs and employment goals. The information collected will help the Commission and VR to improve services and expand employment opportunities for eligible Hoosiers with disabilities.

- Contact information for the Commission on Rehabilitation Services is located at the end of this report. Please contact us if you would like to:
  - Learn more about the Commission
  - Share your ideas
  - Attend a Commission meeting
  - Be considered for appointment to the Commission

For more information, including how to join upcoming Commission meetings, check out the Commission [webpage](#).



# COMMISSION MEMBERS

## COMMISSION MEMBERS

The Rehabilitation Act requires the State VR Agency to establish a State Rehabilitation Council. Council members are appointed by the governor and serve no more than two consecutive full terms. No terms can exceed three years. Indiana's Commission on Rehabilitation Services is comprised of the following individuals representing specific categories outlined in the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Section 361.17. The following individuals served during federal fiscal year 2020 (there are several additional pending membership appointments).

Scott Beauchamp, Yellow Cab  
Greg Bedan, Office of Disability Affairs  
Joel Boehner, INSOURCE  
Sarah Chestnut, INARF  
Christine Dahlberg, Indiana Governor's Council for People with Disabilities  
Donna Elbrecht, Easterseals Arc of Northeast Indiana  
Shawn Fulton, The Arc of Indiana  
Melissa Keyes, Indiana Disability Rights  
Theresa Koleszar, Vocational Rehabilitation Services  
Rebecca McCuaig, Governor's Workforce Cabinet  
PJ McGrew, Governor's Workforce Cabinet  
James Michaels, Bosma Enterprises  
Danie'l Mize, Self-Advocates of Indiana  
Amber O'Haver, Indiana Statewide Independent Living Council (INSILC)  
Michelle Oja, Department of Education  
Richard Propes, Bureau of Developmental Disability Services  
Mark Ruiz, Oak Partners, Inc.  
David Spradley, National Alliance on Mental Illness  
Willaine St. Pierre Sandy, Vocational Rehabilitation Services  
Traci Taylor, Independent living Center of Eastern Indiana  
Frederick Vaiana, State Independent Living Council



# Indiana's Commission on Rehabilitation Services

## About the Commission

Appointed by the Governor, members of Indiana's Commission on Rehabilitation Services are knowledgeable of and have concern for rehabilitation and disability issues. A majority of the members are people with disabilities.

Commission members represent the disability community in matters pertaining to the quality and effectiveness of Indiana's Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VR). Serving in an advisory capacity, the Commission provides oversight of VR programs, policies and procedures by:

- Partnering with VR to develop goals and priorities,
- Making recommendations on program policies,
- Reviewing and providing comments on the State Plan for VR,
- Collaborating with other Governor appointed councils,
- Increasing public awareness of disability issues such as employment, education, and independent living in the community,
- Assisting VR staff in the administration of a consumer satisfaction survey,
- Monitoring and evaluating the VR program,
- Producing an annual report that addresses the effectiveness of VR services.

## Get Involved

- Attend Commission meetings and share your views.
- Ask a member to contact you so that you can share your views.
- Tell a member that you would like to join the Commission.
- Share information about the Commission with others.

## Commission Meetings

The Commission has at least four business meetings each year. We invite you to share your comments about VR services during the open forum which is scheduled during each meeting. If you would like information about the meeting dates, times, and locations, please contact us or visit our website.

You may also request that a Commission member contact you. Your name and contact information will be forwarded to a Commission member in your area upon your request.



**Indiana**  
**VOCATIONAL**  
**REHABILITATION**  
Empowering People. Changing Lives.

## Contact us

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Rehabilitation Services  
c/o Vocational Rehabilitation Services  
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PO Box 7083  
Indianapolis, IN 46207-7083
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[VRCommission.VR@fssa.IN.gov](mailto:VRCommission.VR@fssa.IN.gov)
- **Telephone:**  
Toll free: 800-545-7763  
VP to VP: 317-542-3449 or 317-542-3324
- **Online:**  
<https://www.VRS.IN.gov>