

STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL

2020 ANNUAL REPORT ON VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SERVICES

The Virginia Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired

397 Azalea Avenue

Richmond, Virginia 23227-3623

Toll Free within Virginia 1-800-622-2155 (Voice/TTY)

(804) 371-3140 (Voice/TTY)

<https://www.vdbvi.org/>

State Rehabilitation Council Chair
Christine Appert

Commissioner
Raymond E. Hopkins

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Message from the State Rehabilitation Council Chair



On behalf of the Virginia Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired State Rehabilitation Council (DBVI SRC), I am pleased to present the FY-2020 Annual Report.

The “Flatten Inaccessibility” study ([Flatten Inaccessibility Study | American Foundation for the Blind \(afb.org\)](#)) surveyed adults with vision impairment in the United States to examine the impact of COVID-19. Individuals indicated concerns in the areas of accessibility in employment; transportation; healthcare; access to food, meals, and needed supplies; social experience; and education. Findings from this investigation underscore the complexity of consumer needs that confronted DBVI staff during the pandemic. This Annual Report illuminates the synergy extended in providing critical services.

In an unprecedented year, DBVI personnel responded with professionalism and a commitment to maintaining services for consumers throughout the Commonwealth. Teamwork met challenge and change with innovation and persistence. Perusing the sections of this report, you will note the organizational and individual accomplishments made possible by these efforts. The Career Pathways for Individuals (CPID) program that just completed its grant cycle demonstrated significant success both in participation and outcomes. In each region, local VR providers reached out to consumers to provide continuity, reassurance, and resources during unpredictable times. Without missing a beat as they pivoted to a virtual platform, the Business Relations Unit continued to offer training, job fairs, and support career-seekers. It is likely that you will find the sampling of consumer success stories most compelling. They represent just a handful of individuals who achieved their career or employment goals bolstered by services that addressed their strengths, needs, and abilities.

The work of the SRC was uninterrupted during the year. Meeting in person last fall and winter, the Council worked with DBVI staff to develop recommendations for the State Plan Goals. Mid year, the meetings became virtual but maintained an effective format. Under the guidance and diligent work of DBVI's research specialist, the SRC considered and finalized updates to the *Consumer Satisfaction Survey*. This reconfigured and improved instrument will be introduced in the coming year to obtain consumer feedback

Several SRC members completed their terms on September 30, 2020: Wanda Council, Justin Graves, Raymond Kenney, Jenny McKenzie, Megan O'Toole, and Shelesha Taylor. We appreciate their contribution and service. In the coming year, the SRC anticipates welcoming and orienting a cadre of new members. We look forward to continued partnership with DBVI personnel in the mission of service delivery to Virginians.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Christine L. Appert". The script is cursive and fluid.

Christine L. Appert, Ed.D. - FFY 2020 SRC Chairperson

Message from the DBVI Commissioner



Annually, the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) for the Blind compiles and submits a report on the Vocational Rehabilitation program of the Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired (DBVI). While there is a statutory requirement for such a report, you will find that this document goes beyond a mere response to a required task and tells the story of many Virginians who have significant vision disabilities and a program that supports them. The report describes their challenges, accomplishments and perceptions of the services provided by DBVI. This annual report also reflects the efforts of the team of vocational rehabilitation professionals who strive to make a difference in the lives of the individuals they serve.

Thank you to Christine Appert, the SRC Chairperson and primary author/editor of this report, as well as to the other Council members and agency personnel who contributed to its production. We are grateful for each volunteer member of the SRC who partners with DBVI to assure that residents of the Commonwealth who have vision impairments are well served through the DBVI vocational rehabilitation program.

Nationally, the vocational rehabilitation program reached its 100th anniversary in 2020. In many ways, this year may have been the most unique and challenging in that century of service. We are appreciative of the hard work and creativity displayed by the personnel of DBVI who found ways to deliver meaningful services in the midst of a pandemic. Thanks to all of the dedicated women and men who selflessly serve the Department presently and who have done so in the past. The success of our clientele is indicative of the effectiveness of their efforts.

Thank you for taking the time to read this assessment of Virginia's vocational rehabilitation program for individuals who are blind, deafblind, and otherwise vision disabled. We believe you will be both informed and impressed by the outcomes achieved by Virginians served through this program.

With warm regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Raymond E. Hopkins". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Raymond E. Hopkins, Commissioner
Virginia Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired

Vocational Rehabilitation Program

Overview

The Virginia Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired (DBVI) Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program provides necessary vocational and rehabilitative services to empower individuals who are blind, deafblind or vision impaired and want to achieve successful employment, education, and independence. Eligible Virginians receive assistance preparing for, securing, retaining, advancing in, or regaining competitive integrated employment. Field-based services reach consumers in their homes, at their jobs, and in their schools. A plan is developed that considers an individual's unique strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, interests, and informed choice. Teams of VR experts assist consumers in reaching gainful employment in accordance with their abilities; loss of vision; vocational and adjustment counseling; post-secondary school or vocational training; eye surgery and/or eye treatment; adaptive equipment for training and/or employment; rehabilitation engineering services to modify training and/or job sites; and customized and supported employment services. Major emphasis is given in the provision of job placement and follow-up services. A core goal of the VR program is helping persons with vision loss to successfully work in the community.

State Plan Goals

DBVI, with assistance from the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC), developed six goals and priorities for the VR and Supported Employment programs for this state plan cycle. The six goals are listed below:

1. Expanding and enhancing workforce development activities to develop and maintain effective working relationships with Virginia business and industry at the local, regional, and state level to develop partnerships that facilitate industry recognized credential attainment, skill development, and entry into career pathways for eligible individuals who are blind, vision impaired, or deafblind leading to competitive integrated employment.
2. Increasing and improving competitive integrated employment outcomes, with wages above the state average, for all blind, vision impaired, or deafblind individuals receiving services from DBVI.
3. Achieving agency annual performance goals and establishing base lines for the performance accountability measures based on primary indicators of performance in section 116(b)(2)(A) of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014.
4. Providing rehabilitation technology to blind, vision impaired, or deafblind individuals, including youth and students, to facilitate their success in training and competitive integrated employment settings.
5. Expanding transition services for youth and students seeking employment and/or post-secondary training; including pre-employment transition services for secondary school students.

6. Expanding the utilization of Supported Employment services for adults and youth to increase competitive integrated employment outcomes for individuals with the most significant disabilities.

Business Relations Unit

The DBVI Business Relations Unit continued to make significant progress in establishing partnerships and networking with businesses and organizations throughout the state. Whether in-person or virtually, the Business Relations team represented the agency in meetings, conferences, and events with government, industry, rehabilitation, education, and workforce partners. Business Relations specialists collaborated with the “Virginia Career Works” system and served on Business Solution Teams at the local and state level.

At the onset of the pandemic restrictions, the Business Relations Unit propelled into action and established a statewide virtual platform. The team brought in federal partners, business leaders, past successful job seekers, and lent their own expertise to offer professional career readiness training in the new climate. The formation of Sector Chats invited those with similar interests to glean and gather information from guest speakers as well as each other.

Throughout the year, the Business Relations Unit promoted the benefits of the DBVI On-the-Job Training to Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) counselors across the state. Various partnerships and potential hiring assignments were negotiated during the late fall and winter of 2020. Recently, two On-the-Job Training situations were arranged with business partners. While training, the individual is considered a paid employee. The business was reimbursed for fifty percent of the employee’s wages by DBVI during the period.

Although this program benefited VDBVI career seekers, business partners, and the agency, it was under-utilized in 2020.

In the spirit of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), DBVI staff worked closely with the Department of Aging and Rehabilitation Services (DARS) Business Development Managers and the Deputy Director of Workforce Services. They provided diversity training across the state and jointly developed a pipeline of talent for federal and business partners. The Business Relations Unit offered virtual training to human resource staff within the Virginia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services.

Last winter, the DBVI Paid Work-Based Learning Program placed thirteen career seekers and college students involved in work-based learning experiences. In March, the COVID-19 restrictions abruptly terminated their participation. Later in the summer, with the reopening of some areas of the state, the Business Relations Unit started to set up work-based learning sites. For example, individuals worked with the United Way in Lynchburg and Hampton Roads, Richmond Library System, Fairfield Mediation Center, Family Preservation Services, Good Samaritan Shelter, and the *Suffolk News Herald*.

Federal contactors continue to support their business plans for hiring individuals with disabilities and veterans by tapping the resources of the Business Relations Unit. Successful placements included Marvin Window, CVS Health, Securitas, Parsons, XLE Inc., Conduent and VIB Contract Management.

Future relationships are anticipated with S&P Global, Starbucks, Reuters, and Elizabeth River Tunnel Customer Care Center.

Going forward, the Business Relations Unit will maintain Career Connections as a best practice model for career seekers. The Sector Chats initiated this year, will expand to meet additional needs and continue the popular “Social Work Chat” and “Massage Therapy Chat.” Also, the virtual platform will provide a medium to outreach diversity training to the community, state agencies, and business partners.

DBVI Success Story



Kandace Haney

When Kandace experienced vision loss, she applied to DBVI for services. At that time, her vision had deteriorated to light perception only. She had four children with vision impairment under her care. With a high-school education and limited work experience. Kandace’s primary goal was to find employment to support her family.

An Individualized Vocational Program was developed which included a customized comprehensive personal adjustment-training plan. Home and center-based training was initiated. As she gained independence and confidence, Kandace received career development services. Finding suitable employment was challenging due to limited public transportation and few opportunities in her area. The DBVI Business Relations Specialist and VR counselor helped place Kandace in a paid work experience. Arrangements were made for her to attend the Workforce Center and gain customer service, data entry, and basic office skills. Kandace’s acquisition of skills and professional manner contributed to her success in job-related volunteer experiences.

Kandace continued her job search during the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite some setbacks, her persistence and self-determination were rewarded. Kandace was offered a full-time position as a Contact Tracer. Her DBVI team celebrated her achievement while assisting her as she acclimated to the new job. Extensive counseling, assistive technology support, job coaching, and training were provided throughout the process. The outcomes from Kandace’s job search were positive. The counseling and training empowered her to reach her goals and the employer has given good reviews of her performance.

Career Pathways for Individuals with Disabilities

The Career Pathways for Individuals with Disabilities (CPID) program surpassed all five-year goals set at the beginning of the five-year grant cycle. As of September 30, 2020, the project served 1303 participants which was significantly more than the 470 originally projected. Of these individuals 376 achieved integrated employment and an aggregate of 360 earned credentials.

Almost 200 participants attended the IT Credential Fair held in December 2019 at Service Source in Oakton. Training and resources were offered by sponsors including Intellectual Point, Northern Virginia Community College, Global Connections to Employment, and Wilson Workforce and Rehabilitation Center. The Virginia Career Works Center also had a table to highlight the many resources, trainings, and programs. Registrants who visited all resource tables turned in a completed “Passport to Success” card and entered a door prize drawing. The door prizes were provided by sponsors and all attendees were treated to lunch provided by Intellectual Point.

DBVI offered the Ace Academy to upper-class high school students and first- and second-year college students in January 2020. Executive Coaches David DeNotaris and Eileen Ley provided training that focused on Collaboration, Advocacy, Resiliency, and Soft (CARS) skills. Attendees engaged in several interactive activities that reinforced the concepts introduced. Emphasis was placed on work-based learning experiences such as internships and job shadowing. Community work or involvement in school or group programming was also advised. Strong group and cohort components were established and a playlist of motivational songs and TED talks were shared. An individual previously served by DBVI and currently employed as an accountant served as a volunteer mentor for students and shared his journey from college and academics to successful employment.

The Robotics Academy, a hands-on career experience, was offered to high-school-age youngsters through the CPID program each June for three years. This popular program was recognized nationally and across the Commonwealth for a well-developed curriculum and successful student outcomes. CPID team members received numerous invitations to share details of the Robotics Academy, including presentations at the Virginia Workforce Practitioners Conference, Vocational Evaluation Conference, Pre-ETS Blindness Community of Practice Conference, and the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR). The combined DBVI and DARS student follow-up data for the three years indicated that 58 of 63 participants entered or plan to enter a career pathway through college (2 or 4 year), credential training or apprenticeship, or pursue employment immediately after high school. These statistics translate into a success rate of 92%. Specifically, for the 38 participants served by DBVI, the success rate was 97%. A new academy was proposed for the last summer of the CPID grant but postponed due to COVID-19. To continue this project, curriculum expert Dr. Chuck wrote a planning grant with the National Science Foundation for the *Leap into Linux* program scheduled for June 2021.

Originally, the CPID work plans for Year 5 focused on dissemination and included expansive travel to present findings and best practices with colleagues at national and state conferences. Pandemic restrictions precluded travel and in-person meetings. CPID staff adapted to the new online format and prepared several new options. Weekly Lunch and Learn programs were offered to VDBVI staff and workforce partners. A variety of topics included Using Labor Market Information, Sector Strategies, WIOA Overview and Business in Virginia, Apprenticeship, Occupational Therapy Overview, and Vocational Evaluation. These popular sessions attracted more than 75 participants representing VDBVI and DARS.

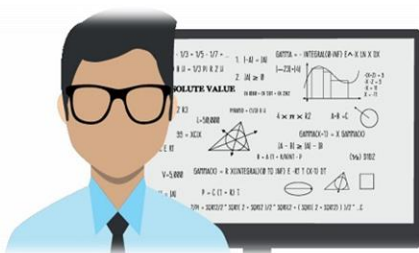
Blue Ridge Community College partnered with CPID in planning training in Microsoft Office Suite and Customer Sales and Service with multiple stackable credentials. Weekly classes were delivered in a hybrid format via Zoom and homework. DBVI had three individuals receive Microsoft Certificates and four students receive Customer Sales and Service Certificates. These certificates will assist individuals in moving forward with retail, call center, or customer service-centered career pathways.

Also, CPID recruited a cohort for Bridge training, a program created in collaboration with Adult Education in several areas. Using a virtual platform, VR consumers across the state access Bridge to work on basic skills including math, English or technology. The program was particularly attractive to adults interested in refreshing skills prior to credential training or employment tests.

The Virginia Rehabilitation Center for the Blind and Vision Impaired (VRCBVI) collaborated with CPID and industry in offering IT credential training for both consumers and staff. An IT instructor and an individual attending VRCBVI piloted an initiative to try the IT credential training for accessibility and practicality of use. Intellectual Point, a training vendor, adjusted the curriculum and training to address accessibility. This initial step was a successful pilot. The instructors learned how to request credential test accommodations, became familiar with the platform-based training, and reinforced skills to begin training.

The CPID grant was scheduled to end on September 30, 2020; however, staff was given a no-cost, one-quarter extension. The additional time will target wrapping-up project activities, disseminating information, and piloting cohort-style trainings throughout the state.

DBVI Success Story



I.S.

Mr. S's long association with DBVI began twenty years ago in upper elementary school. Due to vision loss resulting from a diagnosis of Rod/Cone Macular Retinal

Dystrophy, he was referred to DBVI Education Services. Mr. S worked with a Teacher of the Visually Impaired (TVI) who introduced him to Braille and provided accommodations as he prepared for college. After graduating from high school, Mr. S attended several institutions before earning an undergraduate degree in mathematics in 2016. During postsecondary school, Mr. S received Orientation & Mobility (O & M) services, a low vision evaluation, and an assistive technology assessment and equipment. In 2018, Mr. S enrolled in a dual graduate degree program at George Mason University (GMU) in mathematics and statistics. While studying at GMU, Mr. S worked with a DBVI Business Relations Specialist to explore internships and career opportunities. The Business Relations Specialist submitted Mr. S's resume for participation in the National Geospatial Intelligence Agency's (NGA) Disability Employment Showcase. At the showcase he had the chance to meet individually with department hiring managers which culminated in a conditional job offer as a data scientist. Since this option was not finalized, Mr. S elected to accept a position with Parsons offering him a starting salary of \$100,000 a year. Before closing his case, DBVI provided additional assistive technology, such as a long-arm magnifier, to support Mr. S in his new job.

Pre-Employment Transition Services

WIOA requires Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) agencies to set aside 15% of their federal funds to provide Pre-Employment Transition Services to students with disabilities who are eligible or potentially eligible for VR services. Five required services are designed to assist students in attaining the education, skills, and credentials that will facilitate their transition into competitive integrated employment.

WIOA Required Pre-Transition Employment Services

1. job exploration counseling
2. counselling on opportunities for enrollment in comprehensive transition or post-secondary programs at institutions of higher education
3. workplace readiness training
4. work-based learning experiences
5. instruction in self-advocacy

Some individuals receive pre-employment services through DBVI; however, most consumers also benefit from the VR Program. Services encompass counseling, training, and support for eligible students age 14 and older. VR programming offers assistive technology, transportation, tuition, books, supplies, and room and board, which cannot be provided through pre-employment transition services (Pre-ETS).

VR transition counselors and VR counselors with combined transition/adult caseloads work with the Regional Workforce Specialists, Education Coordinators, Orientation and Mobility Instructors, and other professionals to coordinate the services cited above.

During the fall and winter of 2019, regional office staff worked with the CPID program and the DBVI Business Relations Unit team in presenting a variety of hands-on workplace experiences, industrial tours, certification programs, and STEM-based academies. As the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the Commonwealth in March 2020, teams responded by coordinating a plethora of activities on a virtual platform. Although some in-person activities, such as the Leap Into Linux Academy were canceled, it was possible to offer summer programs in virtual format.

Two summer programs were available for Pre-ETS high schoolers through the Vocational Rehabilitation Center for the Blind and Vision Impaired (VRCBVI).

Twelve students participated in Learning Independence, Feeling Empowered (LIFE). This five-week program for teenagers in high school typically incorporates three components: blindness skills classes, confidence-building activities, and an integrated community-based work experience. This July the program was offered virtually.

The STEPS to Success was a two-week collaborative program with VRCBVI and the University of Richmond's School of Professional & Continuing Studies. Targeted for rising high school juniors and seniors and recent secondary school graduates, this experience focused on college and career readiness. Six participants were introduced to valuable skills, techniques, and strategies to help maximize their

success in preparing for college or careers. Specialized classes were taught by highly experienced and enthusiastic instructors in subjects such as essay writing, public speaking, interviewing, leadership, assistive technology, and time management.

Education Services for Children and Youth

Overview

DBVI provides services for children, birth through twenty-two years, who are blind, deafblind, and vision impaired. Education Coordinators are assigned to the six regional offices.

Services Provided by DBVI Educational Coordinators

- support parents and professionals who are involved in homeschooling children and students
- provide functional vision assessments for children who do not attend public school
- attend Individualized Education Program (IEP)/Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP)/Special Education Eligibility meetings upon request

School-Age Services

This year, COVID-19 restrictions impacted children's in-person participation at school and the planning of the Pre-Employment Transition Program (Pre-ETS) events typically organized during the spring and summer months. In some areas, education coordinators used FaceTime and videos to complete assessments and provide information to families. This report highlights some activities that occurred during the 2019-2020 school year and summer.

The Virginia School for the Deaf and Blind (VSDB) collaborated with VDBVI's Pre-ETS unit to offer an outreach event at the Baxter Theater in Abingdon in December 2019. In addition to attending a production of *Twas the Night Before Christmas*, students toured the theater and interacted with theater staff, the playwright, and the cast. This experience offered opportunities to practice social skills by asking questions and engaging in a discussion related to careers, work readiness skills, and provided insight into the types of skills required for theater work.

Goal ball is a favorite perennial sport and the tradition was maintained in the fall/winter 2019 season. Education Services and the Virginia Rehabilitation Center for the Blind and Vision Impaired (VRCBVI) hosted goal ball competitions for youngsters 14-22 years old. After ten weeks of regional competition, a winter tournament was held at the VRCBVI campus. Following the games, activities and discussion emphasized Pre-ETS topics. Groups focused on job exploration counseling, work-based learning, support enrollment in comprehensive transition or post-secondary education programs, workplace readiness training, and instruction in self-advocacy.

Each year, VDBVI hosts a residential “Super Summer Camp” at Camp Easter Seals UCP in New Castle. As with many 2020 events, Super Summer Camp was virtual this year with three Zoom sessions. Students had opportunities for structured topic-based discussion and informal interaction. This configuration presented topics of interest to transition-aged students, including work readiness issues, job-related experiences, expanded core curriculum, independent living skills, social skills, and self-advocacy. Two former campers, who are now college students and para-Olympic athletes, discussed their experiences. Optional activities were posted for participants such as YouTube videos with cooking demos, arts and crafts activities, and orientation and mobility tips.

DBVI Success Story



Johnny Simonton

Johnny started to experience vision loss at the age of 19 due to Stargardt’s Disease. Although he was unable to drive and he dealt with vision-related challenges, Johnny worked in the carpentry field for almost thirty years. At 48 years of age, his vision had deteriorated so much that he could no longer continue his long-time work. Johnny was not sure what to do or how to find employment.

After referral, a DBVI VR counselor worked closely with Johnny to explore job options and address barriers such as transportation and written communication. VR services included guidance and counseling, job placement, job coaching, training, and the provision of low vision aides.

In January 2020, Johnny was hired by Food Lion to perform general stocking and cleaning duties. Later in the winter, as the COVID-19 pandemic impacted grocery retail management, Johnny became an indispensable member of the store’s customer service team. He was dedicated to keeping a safe, well-stocked store environment during a chaotic time. At work, Johnny was commended for his positive attitude, hard work, and dependability. Johnny’s success convinced Food Lion to recruit other DBVI job seekers for employment. Concomitantly, Johnny achieved his goals of independence and satisfying work.

Regional Offices

Overview

DBVI has six regional offices strategically situated throughout the Commonwealth. The Bristol, Fairfax, Norfolk, Richmond, Roanoke, and Staunton locations are staffed by qualified professionals who provide vocational rehabilitation, education, independent living, orientation and mobility, low vision, rehabilitation technology, and deafblind services. In preparation for the 2020 Annual Report, the

Regional Office Managers summarized key program activities and accomplishments in response to the following questions:

1. Describe one or two of your regional office's greatest accomplishments for this year. Why were they outstanding?
2. What innovative activities or practices did you try that had a positive impact on staff or clients?
3. Anything else that you would like to share?

Regional Managers unanimously expressed admiration for staff ingenuity and commitment in responding to the overwhelming demands and issues related to the pandemic. Collaboration continued with agency staff such as the Business Relations specialists and Pre-Educational Transition Services team who contributed to planning virtual programs and support for individual consumers. Throughout the state, staff continued to foster partnerships with local businesses and agencies.

Accomplishments and Innovative Activities

Flexibility and teamwork were mottos for the office this year. With multiple staff changes and COVID-19 considerations, the staff worked together to develop a comprehensive approach for service delivery. The Staunton office model offers an excellent description of similar practices adopted by other regions. Education services used FaceTime and videos to complete assessments and provide recommendations to families. Rehabilitation Teachers (RT) conducted lessons over the phone and helped individuals connect with other community resources. One RT utilized a team approach and coordinated lessons with an on-site Occupational Therapist. The Orientation and Mobility (O&M) specialist provided virtual lessons and formed a support group. The Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) counselors conducted most business virtually and collaborated with the Business Relations Unit team for a virtual job club. In addition, consumers were referred and supported in their participation with other programs.

The Bristol office collaborated with the Virginia Highlands Business Solutions Unit for the New River Mount Rogers Workforce Development Board to take advantage of several virtual events. For example, two virtual Work Career fairs were offered with workshops to help participants prepare for the fairs. Workshop topics included resume writing, virtual interviewing, and formulating an "elevator speech." Also, DBVI staff met with business partners to ensure their needs were met during the events.

As the Roanoke office grappled with vacancies along with pandemic restrictions, the staff pulled together and continued to address consumer needs as a priority. The DBVI Business Relations Unit specialists worked closely with the regional office team in communicating and managing consumer issues with Marvin Windows, a community-based business partner.

During the 2019-2020 school year, the Fairfax office continued to partner with the Fairfax County Schools work experience volunteer program. Transition-age students volunteered at the regional office site to gain on-the-job skills. Beginning in March, the Fairfax office utilized a variety of strategies to maintain contact with consumers during the pandemic. Virtual meetings, electronic signatures for documents, and phone calls contributed to keeping VR consumers active and moving forward. In addition, consumers were supported in their efforts to retain independence with referrals and career assistance. For example, individuals were referred to ServiceSource to receive discounted Uber

transportation. The VR counselors made an effort to build and expand on existing partnerships and establish additional connections and options for job seekers.

The Norfolk Office used phone and e-mail to provide continuity of service delivery during the pandemic. A successful weekly group called "Connect the Dots" was introduced. The group, comprised of local DBVI consumers, dealt with topics such as relationship building, adjustment to difficult circumstances, maintaining a positive perspective, resource development, support systems, communication, requesting help, and confronting fears. Group members indicated that participation was helpful, informative, and supportive. The field staff group leaders commented on the growth of participants' discussion skills, improvements in relationships, and their better understanding of the concerns expressed by individuals with vision challenges. In addition, the Norfolk office staff took advantage of professional development opportunities through various web-based trainings and offerings from the Virginia Rehabilitation Center for the Blind and Vision Impaired (VRCBVI). Notably, some individuals found that the mindfulness component of the training helped them see things from different perspectives and acquire deeper self-knowledge.

The Richmond office's proximity to the main DBVI campus and VRCBVI facilitated their consumers taking advantage of many of the department's programs. Pre-employment transition students participated in various workplace training experiences available in the area. Individuals received support from the Business Relations team, which resulted in successful employment outcomes.

DBVI Success Story



James Nester

As a successful Senior Industrial Electronic Controls Technician with a family, James' deteriorating vision eroded his work, independence, and home life. He experienced increasing difficulty with travel, and completing job-related tasks. Although he had a hereditary eye condition, it was

hard for family members to understand the challenges posed by his vision loss.

After applying to DBVI for VR services, he participated in a full course of personal adjustment training at the Virginia Rehabilitation Center for the Blind and Vision Impaired (VRCVBI) for five months. During his program, James received orientation and mobility (O&M) instruction, Braille introduction, personal and home management, and computer and assistive technology tools. At home, the DBVI regional office provided additional VR services and support. Within three months of graduating from the VRCVBI program, James independently found employment in food preparation and dishwashing. With additional VR counseling and guidance, James continued to develop his skills and explore potential career options. He advanced to a position of a first-line supervisor. In this role, he uses his adaptive skills, work ethic, professional, and leadership to manage staff and the day-to-day operations of a busy kitchen. DBVI successfully closed James' case in August 2020.

Virginia Enterprises for the Blind – The Randolph Sheppard Program

Due to the pandemic restrictions the Virginia Enterprise for the Blind Program, (VEB) was forced to close 42 of 67 locations for a period. Also, diminished sales were reported by highway vendors with lower traffic volumes. In late summer 2020 the VEB program started to rebound with 37 locations open.

New business opportunities for 2020 yielded \$478,340 and included the State Department Building Micro-Market in Arlington, the Alexandria Courthouse Micro-Market, and the USDA Micro Market. Currently, there are 30-35 active vendors participating in the program and continuing education. Consistent with other organizations, the annual meeting was rescheduled as a virtual event.

Looking ahead, the goal for VEB in 2021 is to re-open all facilities with all vendors back to work. Four new vendors completed training in 2020. New business opportunities are under consideration, such as cleaning services, and expanding the VEB's Safety Inspection Equipment Services (SEIS).

Program Evaluation: Consumer Satisfaction Survey FFY 2019

Program Evaluation Overview

Each year, DBVI's Policy, Planning, and Evaluation Unit conducts a Consumer Satisfaction Survey (CSS) among individuals who were eligible to receive Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) services through the agency at the time of case closure. The survey provides a systematic method of obtaining critical consumer feedback and is one of a number of measures of program effectiveness and a quality of service indicator. The evaluation program is designed to include individual consumer surveys that each eligible participant can complete on their own. Survey items inquire about consumers' satisfaction with the VR program, services, and service providers. All individuals with an eligible VR case closure are provided an opportunity to complete an on-line survey. Reports of survey results are generated annually and upon request. Additionally, quarterly data is provided to the SRC and the DBVI-VR Team.

Over the last three years, DBVI observed a decline in the response rate for the VR consumer satisfaction evaluation program. Several steps were taken in FFY 20 (Oct 1, 2019, to Sept 30, 2020) to review the evaluation program and implement methods to increase the response rate. Three main areas of focus were addressed: communication, utilization of agency resources, and updating and editing the survey platform and questions. To enhance communication, DBVI revised the letter sent to consumers at case closure to include information about the VR consumer satisfaction evaluation. Additionally, VR staff was provided with training to engage their involvement in the process and emphasize the importance of communication about the evaluation. In considering utilization of agency resources, DBVI explored options for additional assistance with outreach and follow-up strategies, such as text messaging.

DBVI staff partnered with the SRC to accomplish the third focus area of updating and editing the survey platform and questions. Questions were edited to simplify the wording. The length of the instrument was reduced from nineteen items to nine. These measures contributed to the expected completion time of less than five minutes. The new survey will be implemented for the FFY 21 evaluation program.

Due to the recent decreased annual response rates, DBVI elected to combine the results for the 2019 and 2020 federal fiscal years in this summary report. The data includes responses from FFY 19-FFY 20 and includes October 1, 2018 - September 30, 2020. During this period, 459 consumers were eligible to receive the VR consumer satisfaction survey. During FFY 19-FFY 20 individuals were contacted exclusively by email invitation to participate in the online evaluation. Some individuals chose not to provide an e-mail address and others could not be reached. The overall response rate was 8% (n=33) for the 437 contactable individuals. Remarkably, this is significantly lower than the FFY 17 VR CSS overall response rate of 31.8%.

The completion rate during the FFY 19-FFY 20 period remained at 100% for survey respondents. This meant that once all participants who began the survey completed it. The e-mail message “click-through” rate was also tracked. During this period, there was a 17% engagement with the message. In the future, this data may be converted to an actual response rate with enhanced follow- up activities.

A detailed summary of all evaluation questions and responses for the FFY 19-FFY 20 CSS is available for review and comment by request.

Overall Satisfaction Results for FFY 2019 and FFY 2020

- Individuals with employment outcomes continue to report high overall satisfaction with the VR program with a weighted score of 87.3 (out of 100). In contrast, individuals without employment outcomes are reporting the lowest satisfaction in the last seven years with a weighted score of 45.5.
- The majority of respondents, 61% (n=20), reported being “Very Satisfied” or “Satisfied” with the VR services received from DBVI.
- The overall satisfaction score for FFY 19-FFY 20 is 73.33. Results for overall satisfaction with the VR program from FFY 2013 through FFY 2020 are included in the table below.

Table 1 - Overall Satisfaction scores FFY 2013 Through FFY 2020

Satisfaction with VR Staff and Service Delivery for FFY 2019

Year		All	Rehabilitated	Not Rehabilitated
FFY 13		82.22	86.06	74.00
FFY 14		78.61	86.84	69.41
FFY 15		86.67	90.02	80.03
FFY 16		73.66	82.75	63.33
FFY 17		79.65	85.57	69.79
FFY 18		78.60	94.70	58.50
FFY 19 and FFY 20		73.33	87.32	45.54

When compared to FFY 2018, scores in FFY 2019 and FFY 2020 remained consistent for individual perception of VR staff being respectful and sensitive to needs. In FFY 2019 and FFY 2020 survey highlights are provided below:

- 79% (n=26) of individuals agreed their VR counselor was respectful, resulting in a weighted score of 84.38.
- 75% (n=23) of individuals agreed their VR counselor responded to questions and concerns in a timely manner resulting in a score of 75.63.
- Survey results indicated that 67% (n=22) believed that their VR counselor was sensitive to their needs, yielding a weighted core of 80.
- 76% (n=25) of individuals agreed their counselor was knowledgeable about their disability giving a weighted score of 83.75.
- 61% (n=20) agreed their VR counselor partnered with them in choosing services, yielding a weighted score of 77.50.
- Results for satisfaction scores with VR staff from FFY 2013 through FFY 2020 are included in the table below.

Table 2 – Satisfaction with VR Staff FFY 2013 through FFY 2020

		Respectful	Knowledgeable about your disability	Sensitive to your needs
FFY 13		87.65	87.88	86.87
FFY 14		86.20	85.43	82.00
FFY 15		91.73	90.26	90.40
FFY 16		83.71	78.59	77.96
FFY 17		86.61	85.96	83.93
FFY 18		92.86	81.43	85.71
FFY 19 and FFY 20		84.38	83.74	80.00

Program Evaluation Open-Ended Responses

Written comments on FFY 19 and FFY 20 survey forms were limited. Most respondents remarked on communication with counselors or employment. Notes seemed to focus on persistent concerns or suggestions for improvement.

Conclusion

Given the small number of evaluation responses submitted in FFY 2018, it is difficult to determine how well the summary statistics represent the entire group of eligible individuals served. This report should be viewed as informative, in providing general guidance, rather than as definitive statements regarding the consumer satisfaction results of any specific subset of VR cases or individuals being served.

With this understanding, the data and information will be considered by DBVI decision makers and the SRC in the continued development and implementation of the 2020 Combined Virginia State Plan and WIOA implementation. The feedback and insights gleaned from survey participants can contribute to recommendations for enhancement of VR services.

Common Performance Measures

Overview

DBVI is in the process of transitioning to the WIOA Common Performance Measures (CPM). These new data collection procedures replace the Standards and Indicators report. The six core WIOA programs are all required to report CPM. The six core partners in WIOA include:

- Adult Formula Program (WIOA Title I)
- Youth Formula Program (WIOA Title I)
- Dislocated Worker Formula Program (WIOA Title I)
- Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (WIOA Title II)
- Wagner-Peyser Act Employment Service (WIOA Title III)
- Vocational Rehabilitation Program (WIOA Title IV)

Review of the WIOA Common Performance Measures

1. Employment Rate - 2nd Quarter After Exit
The percentage of participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the second quarter after exit from the program. For Title I Youth, the indicator is the percentage of participants in education or training activities or in unsubsidized employment during the second quarter after exit.
2. Employment Rate - 4th Quarter After Exit
The percentage of participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the fourth quarter after exit from the program.
3. Median Earnings - 2nd Quarter After Exit

The median earnings of participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the second quarter after exit from the program.

4. Credential Attainment

The percentage of participants enrolled in an education or training program (exclusions; those in on-the-job training, OJT, or customized training) who attain a recognized postsecondary credential or a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent. During program participation in or within one year after exit from the program. A participant who has attained a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent is included in the percentage of participants who have attained a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent only if the participant is employed or is enrolled in an education or training program leading to a recognized postsecondary credential within one year after exit from the program

5. Measurable Skill Gains

The percentage of program participants who, during a program year, are in an education or training program that leads to a recognized postsecondary credential or employment and who are achieving measurable skill gains, defined as documented academic, technical, occupational, or other forms of progress, towards such a credential or employment. Depending on the type of education or training program, documented progress is defined as one of the following:

- Documented achievement of at least one educational functioning level of a participant who is receiving instruction below the postsecondary education level;
- Documented attainment of a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent;
- Secondary or postsecondary transcript or report card for a sufficient number of credit hours that shows a participant is meeting the State unit's academic standards;
- Satisfactory or better progress report, towards established milestones, such as completion of on-the-job-training or completion of one year of an apprenticeship program or similar milestones, from an employer or training provider who is providing training; or
- Successful passage of an exam that is required for a particular occupation or progress in attaining technical or occupational skills as evidenced by trade-related benchmarks such as knowledge-based exams.

6. Effectiveness in Serving Employers (States select two of three measures) – Virginia has selected employer retention and employer penetration as described below:

- Retention with the same employer – addresses the program's efforts to provide employers with skilled workers; and
- Employer Penetration Rate - addresses the program's efforts to provide quality engagement and services to all employers and sectors within a State and local economy.

Since this indicator is a new approach for measuring performance under WIOA’s six core programs, DOE and RSA have implemented a pilot program during which States must select two of the three approaches. DOE and RSA will evaluate State experiences with the various approaches and plan to identify a standardized indicator in the future.

Preview of WIOA Reporting and Common Performance Measures

Nationally, all state VR agencies are working with RSA on reporting of Common Performance Measures and utilizing 911 data along with new performance data dashboards developed by RSA. Based on current information from RSA, DBVI is able to report on the Measurable Skill Gains measure as shown in the table below.

Table 3 - Common Performance Measures

	PY 17	PY 18	PY 19
Employment rate 2 nd Q after exit	51.5%	54.4%	Not yet available
Employment rate 4 th Q after exit	52.2%	Not yet available	Not yet available
Median Earnings 2 nd Q after exit	\$3011	\$3127	Not yet available
Credential Attainment	In progress	In progress	Not yet available
Measurable Skill Gains Indicator	40.2 %	45.0%	86%
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Reported as a statewide measure with WIOA partners		
Employer Retention *	Not available	Not available	Not yet available
Employer Penetration	187 services 109 businesses	256 services 129 businesses	266 services 132 businesses

*This combined data reported for the Commonwealth of Virginia includes Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS) VR data combined with DBVI VR data.

The Measurable Skill Gain (MSG) indicator is the first of the new WIOA CPMs that will have negotiated targets set by RSA for VR agencies. The proposed or expected target MSG percentage for Virginia and DBVI is estimated at 45% in PY 2020.

RSA has developed a set of five dashboards or graphics that illustrate key data elements. These tools are intended to assist state VR agencies with determining how the RSA 911 data elements are used and how the CPM are calculated. One of the dashboards outlines Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE) outcomes. In PY 19 Q4, 17 CIE outcomes were achieved. The top ten careers by Standard Occupation Classification (SOC) categories, median weekly hours, and median hourly wages are listed in the table below

Table 4 - Competitive Integrated Employment Outcomes by Standard Occupational Classification PY19 Q4

Standard Occupational Classification	Individuals	Median Hours	Median Wages
Construction Laborers	2	33	\$16
Therapists, All Other	1	40	\$45
Teachers and Instructors, All Other	1	21	\$18
Purchasing Agents, Except Wholesale, Retail, and Farm Products	1	40	\$20
Personal Care Aides	1	40	\$39
Office and Admin Support Workers, All Other	1	38	\$19
Mathematical Science Occupations, All Other	1	40	\$48
Management Analysts	1	40	\$49
Electrical Engineers	1	40	\$32
Computer Occupations, All Other	1	40	\$20

Glossary of Abbreviations

Table 6 - Abbreviations and Terms

ACB	American Council of the Blind
ADA	Americans with Disabilities Act
AER	Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired
AFB	American Foundation for the Blind
AT	Assistive Technology
BEP	Business Enterprise Program
BOB	Business Opportunities for the Blind
BVA	Blinded Veterans Association
CAP	Client Assistance Program
CIL	Center for Independent Living
CRC	Certified Rehabilitation Counselor
CRP	Community Rehabilitation Program
CSAVR	Council of State Administrators for Vocational Rehabilitation
CSPD	Comprehensive System for Personnel Development
DBVI	Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired
DDS	Disability Determination Services
DOE	Department of Education
DOL	Department of Labor
DRS	Department of Rehabilitative Services
EEOC	Equal Employment Opportunity Commission
EN	Employer Network
IDEA	Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
IEP	Individualized Education Plan
IL	Independent Living
SILC	State Independent Living Council
IPE	Individualized Plan for Employment

JWOD	Javits-Wagner-O'Day Act
LEA	Local Education Agency
LRC	Library and Resource Center
LWIB	Local Workforce Investment Board
NCSAB	National Council of State Agencies for the Blind
NFB	National Federation of the Blind
NIB	National Industries for the Blind
ODEP	Office for Disability Employment Policy
OJT	On-the-Job-Training
OSERS	Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services
O&M	Orientation & Mobility
RSA	Rehabilitation Services Administration
RT	Rehabilitation Teaching
RT/IL	Rehabilitation Teaching/Independent Living
SGA	Substantial Gainful Activity
SRC	State Rehabilitation Council
SPIL	State Plan for Independent Living
SSA	Social Security Administration
SSDI	Social Security Disability Income Insurance
SSI	Supplemental Security Income
SWIB	State Workforce Investment Board
VATS	Virginia Assistive Technology System
VEC	Virginia Employment Commission
VIB	Virginia Industries for the Blind
VOPA	Virginia Office for Protection and Advocacy
VR	Vocational Rehabilitation
VRCBVI	Virginia Rehabilitation Center for the Blind and Vision Impaired
VSDB	Virginia School for the Deaf and Blind
WWRC	Woodrow Wilson Rehabilitation Center
WIA	Workforce Investment Act

About DBVI and the SRC

Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired (DBVI)

DBVI is committed to providing quality services to assist Virginia's citizens who are blind, deafblind, or vision impaired in achieving their maximum level of employment, education, and personal independence. The department provides an array of specialized services to eligible individuals of all ages to assist them in attaining the skills, confidence, and positive outlook that are critical to independence.

State Rehabilitation Council (SRC)

The purpose of the federally mandated SRC is to work in partnership with DBVI to review, analyze and advise the agency on its vocational rehabilitation program, policies and practices. Further collaborations include development of the agency State Plan, federally required needs assessment, consumer satisfaction surveys, training, and employment opportunities for individuals who are blind, visually impaired, and deafblind.

Members, all of whom are appointed by the Governor, represent current or former recipients of VR services, and representatives of parent groups, the Client Assistance Program VR, disability advocacy groups, the Department of Education, Community Rehabilitation Providers, a vocational rehabilitation counselor, the Commissioner of DBVI, and members of business, industry, and labor. The Council meets quarterly, on Fridays, at the Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired in Richmond. Citizens are welcome to attend Council meetings and offer their comments.

To learn more about the work of the SRC or Council membership, please contact the Council liaison, Pamela Cato at Pam.Cato@dbvi.virginia.gov

Table 5 – SRC Membership Roster

Name	Location	Seat Requirements
Julie Akers	Radford, VA	Representative of Business, Industry, and Labor 34 CFR §361.17 (b)(1)(vi)
<u>Chair</u> Christine Appert	Charlottesville, VA	Former or Current Recipient of Vocational Rehabilitation Services 34 CFR §361.17 (b)(1)(B)(viii)
Tammy Burns	Midlothian, VA	Representative of a Parent Training and Information Center 34 CFR §361.17 (b)(1)(ii)
Irene M. Conlin	Virginia Beach, VA	Representative of an Individual who is blind, has multiple disabilities, and has difficulty representing him or herself or is unable due to disabilities to represent him or herself. 34 CFR §361.17 (b)(3)(ii)(B)
Wanda Council	Newport News, VA	Representative of Department of Education 34 CFR §361.17 (b)(1)(B)(x)
Justin Graves	Fairfax, VA	Representative of Business, Industry, and Labor 34 CFR §361.17 (b)(1)(vi)
Megan O'Toole Hall	Montpelier, VA	Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor 34 CFR §361.17 (b)(1)(iv)
Raymond Hopkins	Richmond, VA	The Director of the designated Statue Unit DBVI as an ex-officio, non-voting member
Ken Jessup	Virginia Beach, VA	Representative of Disability Advocacy Group 34 CFR §361.17 (b)(3)(ii)(A)
Larysa Kautz	Alexandria, VA	Representative of Community Rehabilitation Services Program Provider 34 CFR §361.17 (b)(1)(v)
Raymond Kenney	Richmond, VA	Representative of the Statewide Independent Living Council 34 CFR §361.17 (b)(1)(i)
Gina Koke	Richmond, VA	Representative of Disability Advocacy Group 34 CFR §361.17 (b)(3)(ii)(A)
Jenny McKenzie	Roanoke, VA	Representative of Business, Industry, and Labor 34 CFR §361.17 (b)(1)(vi)
Jill Nerby	Charlottesville, VA	Former or Current Recipient of Vocational Rehabilitation Services 34 CFR §361.17 (b)(1)(B)(viii)
<u>Vice Chair</u> Mark W. Roane	Richmond, VA	Former or Current Recipient of Vocational Rehabilitation Services 34 CFR §361.17 (b)(1)(B)(viii)
Shelesha Taylor	Richmond, VA	Representative of Client Assistance Program 34 CFR §361.17 (b)(1)(iii)