

Kentucky Statewide Council
for Vocational Rehabilitation

Annual Report

Celebrating 100 Years of
Vocational Rehabilitation

2020

 **Kentucky
Career Center**
Vocational Rehabilitation

Celebrating the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation

The role of the Kentucky Office of Vocation Rehabilitation (OVR) executive director includes providing direct oversight to the deputy executive director, Program Policy and Support Branch, Training Coordination and support services that keep the agency operating efficiently and effectively. There are 371 classified and unclassified positions, two Federally Funded Time Limited (FFTL) positions and 58 contracted positions for a total of 431 staff.

Letter from the Executive Director, Cora McNabb



This year marks the historical 100th year anniversary of the public vocational rehabilitation program. Happy Anniversary! President Woodrow Wilson signed the Smith - Fess Act of 1920, also known as the Industrial Rehabilitation Act and referred to as "The National Civilian Vocational Rehabilitation Act," into law June 2, 1920.

The Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) in Kentucky is making history as we work with our state partners to address the needs of individuals with disabilities through difficult circumstances brought on by the pandemic. As the year began, we were preparing to celebrate the 100-year anniversary and taking pride in the work of the VR program. As spring approached, it was clear that in the months to come a new challenge rose before us. That challenge caused us to reflect on our current practices and think about our mission, vision and values as we entered a historical 2020 celebratory year.

In spite of everything, OVR remains committed to serving individuals with disabilities through innovative practices and service delivery. OVR is making sure we are following the guidance of our state and federal partners putting the health and safety of our consumers, providers and staff above everything else. This means that staff have implemented new and innovative service strategies ensuring OVR is committed to individuals with disabilities in the Commonwealth.

The State Council of Vocational Rehabilitation (SCVR) for OVR has provided ongoing support during the past several months. Thank you SCVR members for your words of encouragement and guidance through the pandemic. As the OVR executive director, I have the honor to work alongside the SCVR and a talented group of staff across the state that provide opportunities for individuals to reach their full potential. True to the spirit of the 100-year anniversary of OVR, staff have shown strength and resilience in finding alternative methods to provide employment services and supports. Amid all the changes and uncertainty of 2020 one thing is certain. OVR will continue to be influential in the lives of individuals empowering them to achieve their employment goals.

Deputy Executive Director Collaborations



In Kentucky, OVR is continuing efforts to engage employers to maximize the talent they can gain by hiring individuals with autism spectrum disorders. Innovative Supports for Autistic Workers (ISAW) is a collaboration with OVR, the University of Kentucky Human Development Institute and the Kentucky Advisory Council on Autism with the ultimate goal of increasing the number of autistic individuals employed across the state. In previous years, ISAW reached out to state Business Service Teams and employers by developing technical assistance as well as in person and online training modules that focused on autistic youth transitioning into the workplace. The project also developed a website that houses resources and training materials. This year the project has expanded to train OVR staff and community rehabilitation service providers to support employers in their recruitment and retention needs for employees. To learn more about this project, resources and training materials can be found at <http://isaw.hdiuk.org/>.

Program Policy and Support Branch

The Program Policy and Support Branch has an array of responsibilities. They are liaisons to the SCVR, develop and monitor the agency's strategic plan, provide program evaluation, and support the case

management system and other technology functions for the agency at large. In addition, this branch oversees other services and provides staff support for the Kentucky Assistive Technology Loan Corporation, Kentucky Assistive Technology Services Network and Project CARAT (Coordinating and Assisting the Reuse of Assistive Technology). For additional information on this branch, visit the following website link: <https://kcc.ky.gov/Vocational-Rehabilitation/programservices/Pages/Program%20Policy%20and%20Support%20Branch.aspx>

Statewide Council for Vocational Rehabilitation



Chairperson - David Allgood

It has been a most unusual 2020 to say the least for everyone in our state and country. Almost all of us have faced unprecedented challenges in our personal and professional lives and this has been no different for the Statewide Council for Vocational Rehabilitation (SCVR) and even more so for the staff at the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR). Field staff and central office staff had to switch to a whole new way of interacting with clients and many of the OVR staff were transferred temporarily to dealing with unemployment claims which added a whole new realm to their job experiences and precluded them from working with their clients for a considerable time.

Given these unusual and unique experiences, the SCVR strongly believes that the OVR staff stepped up tremendously to fulfill their mission to assist Kentuckians

with disabilities to find competitive gainful employment throughout the Commonwealth. Personal interaction, which is so crucial to their duties, had to be suspended and new and different paths were created to interact with existing and potential new clients. OVR staff have made

terrific strides to inform clients, government agencies and the public in general on how they are carrying out their job duties. SCVR will continue its strong partnership with OVR to create employment opportunities for all Kentuckians with disabilities.

Employer Awards

Each year the SCVR recognizes employers who work closely with the state vocational rehabilitation agency and make the hiring of persons with disabilities a priority. This year the following employers received awards with presentations made online.

Bluegrass Council of the Blind

This non-profit agency not only hires individuals with disabilities, but has a great partnership with the OVR Division of Blind Services. Bluegrass Council for the Blind (BCB) expanded its employed staff to seven people to help meet the demands of its members and provide quality services and programs. Two employees referred to BCB from OVR were hired. Two other employees who were already hired at BCB received OVR services to successfully complete their job duties and maintain employment. Also, two other employees who had previously received OVR services and then secured employment at BCB, are using their new VR skills on the job. The partnership between OVR and BCB is very beneficial for consumers because both have the same goal - to help individuals achieve independence.



Accepting the award is Theresa Thomas

Boyd County School System

Boyd County Public Schools has exhibited a willingness to open the doors of employment to individuals with disabilities. Most recently, they agreed to a special provision to allow Community Rehabilitation Program Employment Specialist Joy Combs to be present during a job interview process to provide support to an OVR consumer who did not have an employment history. Custodial Supervisor Chris Barrett and Director Bob Higginbotham recognized this individual's potential acquired through his training from Carl D. Perkins Vocational Training Center (CDPVTC) and felt he could be a valuable member of the custodial team even though he had no paid work experience. Chris was present for James' first day of training on the job and even worked an additional shift to support him. James wanted a 40-hour-a-week job and he was successful in landing a Monday thru Friday from 3 - 11 p.m. position. Chris has had nothing but high praise for the skills, work ethic and devotion James has displayed. The employer is very open to work with other potential employees. They think highly of James and his work ethic and value his skills.

Computer Surgeons

Michael Griebe has hired numerous OVR clients over the years through on-the-job training (OJT) and direct employment. In addition, he has hired other individuals with disabilities who were not receiving VR services. Computer Surgeons has been utilized as a Pace site for even more OVR clients. He works to serve as a Pace site in different capacities dependent upon client needs and vocational goal. Mike is always willing to work with clients hands-on and one-on-one to improve their transferable skills and employability. He helps with building their resumes and meaningfully collaborates with OVR staff on meeting both client and business needs. He is also a supporter of Kentucky Job Placement & Development, a division of the Kentucky Rehabilitation Association, which specifically focuses on improving employment opportunities for Kentuckians with disabilities.



Accepting the award is Michael Griebe

CVS Health



Accepting the award is Duane Rohr

CVS Health is a progressive company that has several training sites across the nation, including one at the CDPVTC, to train people with disabilities to work in pharmacy and retail jobs. CVS has provided all of the materials, curriculum and support necessary to create the program at the Perkins Center. They also guarantee interviews to students who complete the Perkins program and have hired several students. CVS

is supportive of students completing the program and getting a job, even if the student goes to work at another pharmacy or retail operation. CVS is definitely doing its part to promote a diverse, well-trained workforce.

Rural King

Rural King opened a new location in Glasgow, Kentucky, in the fall of 2019. Since that time, they've hired at least four of OVR's consumers, three of whom are still employed there. They are a very understanding and accommodating employer. One consumer, in particular, requires intensive on-the-job supports, so the team at Rural King has assigned him a work partner. He was trained by staff and OVR employment specialist. They allowed him to try different positions until he found the right fit for him. He is now very familiar with the store and able to complete work tasks independently with his partner checking on him from time to time. The consumer's motivation, desire to work and employment specialist, along with the staff at Rural King have been a huge part of his integrated employment success.

Unifirst

This company has hired three individuals through the Supported Employment program at Employment Opportunities. The company, managers and coworkers have welcomed the consumers, provided necessary accommodations, assisted with teaching job skills, and assisted with developing additional adaptive processes so the consumer could complete the job tasks independently.

Geek Squad



Accepting the award is Abigail Graves

From the beginning of the Project CASE grant, over three years ago, Abigail Graves and her team at Geek Squad have worked with OVR to secure positions for OVR consumers looking for employment in the information technology sector. She is always welcoming and professional to all OVR consumers, and is aware of the need to provide accommodations to make tours and the hiring process accessible. Abigail seems to have an innate ability to understand, communicate and use proper disability etiquette while working with our grant participants. Geek Squad has been very supportive of OVR efforts to give the untapped workforce of people with disabilities the opportunity to explore careers with the company, and has offered multiple group and individual tours to OVR consumers. Three OVR consumers are now employed with Geek Squad.

Project CARAT - Celebrating Community Collaboration

The goal of Project Coordinating and Assisting the Reuse of Assistive Technology (CARAT) is to make assistive technology and durable medical equipment more accessible to people in underserved areas of Kentucky. To make this happen, Project CARAT is partnering with agencies across the state to clean, repair and redistribute donated equipment to people who need it. To date, Project CARAT has provided **3,107** assistive technology/durable medical equipment items valued at over **\$689,059** to **1,235** individuals with disabilities.

One of those budding partnerships is with JustServe, which connects volunteers with organizations that need help in communities all over the world. During the year, the statewide



Kenny Flowers and a team of volunteers from JustServe; Joe McCombs and Peter O'Connor of enTECH (Project CARAT's Louisville refurbish site) receiving new power chair.

CARAT coordinator reached out to JustServe to recruit volunteers to transport a donated new power wheelchair from Shelbyville to Louisville. Kenny Flowers of Shelbyville had graciously donated the top-of-the-line, never-used power chair to Project CARAT. Kenny was thankful he was able to donate the power chair to Project CARAT and knew that it would find a new home and be a blessing to someone. JustServe found volunteers to move the power chair to its new home in Louisville.

Project CARAT is grateful for its growing partnership with JustServe and looks forward to expanding the partnership statewide to better accommodate donors, move donations to refurbishing centers, and deliver medical equipment to those in need. To learn more about this organization, go to <http://www.justserve.org>.

Kentucky Assistive Technology System (KATS) Network

OVR's Kentucky Assistive Technology System (KATS) Network and the McDowell Center in Louisville collaborated with Kentucky's Department of Corrections, Office of Adult Institutions, to donate older assistive technology to the adult corrections system.

In an effort to better utilize space and give outdated technology and equipment to an adult group that could still use it to meet education and employment goals, the McDowell Center staff reviewed the facility and gathered items to donate. The center contacted KATS Network, its sister OVR agency, to identify a group and distribute the items.

The McDowell Center and the KATS Network contribution a variety of items to the Luther Lockett Correctional Center, including:

- hearing aid batteries,
- hand-held and screen magnifiers,
- student classroom supplies,
- adaptive games,
- materials for resumes,
- TTYs to allow users to read phone conversation,
- computer keyboards,
- CCTVs for low vision magnification, and
- 12+ Captel phones for use by those in the deaf and hard of hearing community.



Luther Lockett Correctional Center staff (from left), Procedures Development Specialist Sherri Grissinger, Deputy Warden Laura Plappert, and Corrections Education Specialist Melissa Thompson received items from OVR's McDowell Center and KATS Network.



Jimmy Brown with the KATS Network



Luther Lockett Correctional Center's James Conley transported the donated items from McDowell Center staff, from left, Mary Harrod, Heidi Kesterson and Pam Minton.



James Conley, Luther Lockett Correctional Center, and Helga Gilbert, the McDowell Center Blind Field Services director, got the donated items ready to send to the correctional center.

Agency Statistics

Purchased Consumer Services FFY 2020 (not including MOA contracts)

Pre-ETS	\$4,554,662.18
Assessment	\$1,655,538.57
Diagnosis & Treatment	\$1,154,813.47
Training	\$5,893,598.78
Job Placement	\$4,706,119.53
Rehabilitation Technology	\$3,878,370.51
Maintenance	\$187,395.34
Transportation	\$83,967.59
Self-Employment	\$168,026.83
Assistive Services	\$118,372.13
Other Services	\$529,567.74
Sum	\$22,930,432.66

Demographics of Individuals Served

Gender (as reported at application)

Female	50.8%
Male	49.1%
Unspecified	0.1%

Race/Ethnicity (as reported at application)

White/Caucasian	86.6%
African-American	11.2%
All other ethnicities/unspecified	2.2%

Current Age (including potentially eligible)

14-18	32.7%
19-24	37.4%
25-34	9.4%
35-44	6.3%
45-54	5.9%
55-64	5.2%
65 & older	3.1%

Disability (as reported at application)

Sensory Impairments	20.4%
Neuro/Orthopedic Impairments	12.3%
Cognitive Impairments	26.0%
Mental Health Impairments	31.4%
Other Health Impairments	9.9%

The Financial Impact

of the Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation



Positive Employment Outcomes

3,024 individuals with disabilities obtained or maintained employment after receiving services from the Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation in federal fiscal year (FFY) 2020.

Facts about these individuals

- As a group, the 3,024 individuals increased their tax payments by an estimated \$11.97 million.
- Federal income tax payments increased by about \$4.45 million
- State income tax payment increased by about \$1.85 million
- Social Security/Medicare tax payments increased by about \$5.67 million (including employer contributions).

Personal Income and Insurance Benefits

- When they applied for OVR services, 1,392 (46 percent) consumers reported that their primary source of support was their personal income with the rest depending upon family or government benefits. At closure, 2,691 (89 percent) individuals listed personal income as their primary source of

support. This is an increase of 1,299 (43 percent) persons supported by their own income.

- The average consumer's weekly income increased by 82 percent. Their average weekly earnings were \$286.03 at application. After employment when their cases were closed, they averaged \$521.74 in earnings per week. This represents an average increase of \$235.71 in weekly income or \$12,256.92 per year.
- At case closure, 1,664 consumers (55 percent) were receiving, or eligible to receive, private or employer-sponsored health insurance benefits.

Community Engagement

In FFY 2020, the OVR purchased \$22,930,432.66 in services for its consumers. These expenditures went to more than 13,785 individuals, businesses, agencies and organizations in communities all across the commonwealth.

Social Security

For FFY 2020, 446 Social Security recipients obtained employment after receiving services from the OVR. Social Security reimbursed OVR for 208 claims totaling \$2,582,781.78.

2020 Customer Satisfaction at a Glance

(from customers closed in FFY 2019)



The University of Kentucky Survey Research Center contacted consumers by telephone between Dec. 20, 2019 - March 2, 2020 to participate in the survey. A total of 1,011 people completed the telephone survey. The response rate for eligible participants was 70.6 percent. Below are the survey results.

- 90 percent were satisfied with services provided by Kentucky's OVR program
- 93 percent stated they would return to OVR for services again in the future, if needed
- 98 percent exiting OVR services with successful employment were satisfied with OVR
- 96 percent felt they were treated courteously by all staff
- 92 percent agreed the OVR counselor helped them to understand their rights
- 92 percent felt their OVR counselor understood their disability
- 82 percent of consumers exiting with successful employment were still employed during follow-up (up to one year after exiting OVR services)
- 84 percent of those receiving Community Rehabilitation Program (CRP) services were satisfied with those services
- 88 percent receiving CRP services would recommend that CRP to others
- 93 percent of visually-impaired or blind customers who received orientation and mobility services were satisfied with those services

2020 Positive Employment Outcomes (PEO) for Kentucky by County

Adair	45	Graves	18	Meade	4
Allen	13	Grayson	11	Mercer	12
Anderson	10	Green	31	Metcalfe	12
Ballard	1	Greenup	24	Monroe	13
Barren	68	Hancock	8	Montgomery	28
Bath	18	Hardin	53	Morgan	4
Bell	28	Harlan	37	Muhlenberg	13
Boone	53	Harrison	17	Nelson	27
Bourbon	14	Hart	13	Nicholas	5
Boyd	31	Henderson	28	Ohio	17
Boyle	24	Henry	5	Oldham	11
Bracken	9	Hickman	1	Owen	9
Breathitt	5	Hopkins	15	Owsley	2
Breckinridge	12	Jackson	4	Pendleton	5
Bullitt	30	Jefferson	350	Perry	41
Butler	9	Jessamine	30	Pike	67
Caldwell	1	Johnson	35	Powell	24
Calloway	11	Kenton	85	Pulaski	24
Campbell	48	Knott	20	Robertson	2
Carlisle	2	Knox	19	Rockcastle	6
Carroll	8	Larue	8	Rowan	32
Carter	29	Laurel	15	Russell	18
Casey	8	Lawrence	8	Scott	45
Christian	23	Lee	1	Shelby	16
Clark	57	Leslie	11	Simpson	9
Clay	5	Letcher	74	Spencer	7
Clinton	1	Lewis	11	Taylor	56
Cumberland	1	Lincoln	20	Todd	4
Daviess	121	Livingston	4	Trigg	6
Edmonson	5	Logan	12	Trimble	4
Elliott	5	Lyon	3	Union	7
Estill	5	Madison	52	Warren	58
Fayette	338	Marion	9	Washington	15
Fleming	28	Marshall	9	Wayne	4
Floyd	78	Martin	12	Webster	1
Franklin	64	Mason	19	Whitley	14
Gallatin	7	Mccracken	36	Wolfe	2
Garrard	14	Mccreary	1	Woodford	27
Grant	12	Mclean	4	Out Of State	19

3024



Training

In FFY 2020, OVR reached milestones in training and embraced a greater focus on online opportunities. The year kicked off with Common Measures Training offered throughout the state with a focus on Workforce Innovative Opportunities Act reporting requirements, performance evaluations, data entry with definitions, caseload and time management. In November, the agency hosted an extremely successful statewide Deaf-Blind Conference. As 2020 approached, plans began for celebrations for the 100th anniversary of vocational rehabilitation, participation in multiple conferences through professional associations began, and internally developed in-person training opportunities were in planning stages, but these activities stopped when the state initiated work from home

measures due to COVID-19. Fortunately, the agency began some online training and meetings several years prior to the shutdown and quickly put measures into place to continue providing staff training and development. Opportunities abounded with participation in grant programs stocked with online training, professional conferences moved to online formats and internally developed programs moved to online and on demand. For 100 years, the VR profession met challenges boldly and came out on the other side as a better, stronger program and once again that proved to be true. The agency has hired and trained employees, supported consumers and each other. Even under these stressful times, we can see the positives and celebrate the successes.

Celebrating Unique Training Opportunities

In February 2020, the George Washington University Center for Rehabilitation Counseling Research and Education, in partnership with San Diego State University and the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation, introduced a newly created Center for Innovative Training in Vocational Rehabilitation (CIT-VR).

The center's focus is on developing innovative methods to train VR personnel to support state vocational rehabilitation agencies' work in delivering high-quality rehabilitation services and improving employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities.

Kentucky was one of 10 states selected for the CIT-VR project. The project is funded through a five-year grant from the U.S. Department of Education, Rehabilitation Services Administration under the Innovative Rehabilitation Training Program (CFDA 84.263C).

In addition to the courses offered below, the center will offer several webinars for grant applicants and other state agencies not participating in the grant. Webinar topic selection is based on training needs assessments of state VR agencies. The center also will offer participation in virtual Communities of Practice.

For Year 1 of the project, CIT-VR offered 10 states access to online training modules for personnel that focus on core components of the rehabilitation process, including:

- Basics of VR: Overview of the State-Federal Program,
- Eligibility Determination,
- Conducting a comprehensive assessment,
- Developing an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE),
- Job development and placement, and
- Case closure.

Celebrating the Division of Kentucky Business Enterprise

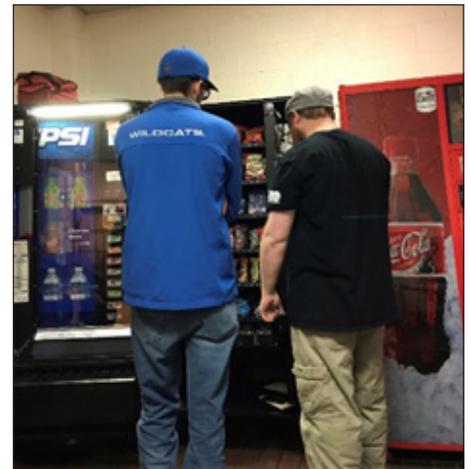
The Kentucky Blind Enterprise Division supervises the vendor program. The division director, assistant director, program coordinators, technicians and administrative support staff work with the vendors in the program to set, reach and achieve successful self-employment goals.

Success Even Under Stress

Like most other small business owners across the country, COVID-19 had an adverse impact on the blind vendors of Kentucky Business Enterprise (KBE). Only 13 percent of Kentucky's active blind vendor businesses did not close or have their sales greatly diminished during the year because of the pandemic.

KBE vendors have been hit especially hard because they almost exclusively work in federal and state buildings. Since the spring, many government buildings have been closed to the public and most government staff are working from home. As buildings slowly reopen and staff start to re-enter buildings, people may continue to work from home so the legacy of remote working on business is unknown.

KBE, the state agency that administers the Randolph Sheppard Act in Kentucky, has explored new and innovative ways to support the vendors during the pandemic. The agency trains and helps place blind entrepreneurs into their own food services businesses through vending, transitional counter or cafeteria operations. It also provides the equipment, location, beginning inventory and oversight to allow vendors to work and build their businesses by means of sweat equity. Many vendors have lost their inventories during the pandemic because they have spoiled or expired. To help vendors reopen, the Rehabilitation Services Administration



Shelby Glisson, right, with KBE, assists vendor Michael Lewis, left, install a new machine.



Stuart Boggs, KBE staff person, removes a door to install a machine at a Louisville post office.

(RSA) is allowing funds to be used to replace spoiled or expired inventory.

In addition, KBE has used the last several months to update and buy equipment and plan future improvements that will make operations more efficient. For example, KBE's newest vending machines self-report sales to the vendor. This advancement in technology lets the vendor know what products are needed for machines before leaving their home or warehouse, saving the vendor time, staff labor checking machines and keeping the machines stocked properly.

KBE will continue to work daily as coaches and business consultants with its vendors on reopening plans. Each of KBE's statewide locations are as different as the vendors who operate them, so no one reopening plan will work for all. This includes supplying the plastic barriers and floor markers for locations where vendors physically serve customers to keep everyone safe. The KBE's role in supporting vendors has been different during this year of uncertainty and change and will be the difference in helping KBE businesses reopen and return to normal.

Celebrating the Division of Blind Services

Providing Individualized Programs and Services to Kentuckians Who Have Visual Impairments

The Division of Blind Services is made up of 33 specialized staff who, in addition to OVR's vocational rehabilitation counselors, provide programs and services to individuals who have visual disabilities and who are blind. These programs include: McDowell Center for the Blind (training in low vision and blindness skills), Independent Living and Older Blind Program, Orientation and Mobility Services, Deaf Blind Program, and Bioptic Driving Program.

Bioptic Driving Consumer Success

Story by Chris

As a child I was told that I would never secure a driver's license. The driving was something that my vision will not allow me to do. I accepted the fact that I would never drive. The bioptic driving program opened a door that I thought could never be crossed through.

My disability is defined as cone dystrophy. This restricts my ability to see color the same as most people do. When approaching a stop light, I cannot see the red light when it is illuminated. After meeting with Brenda and spending many hours of looking at UV shields, we found the right combination of shields to allow me to safely distinguish the stop light and see tail lights on vehicles. The Bioptic (Program) in conjunction with the UV shields have allowed me to be a safe and effective driver who once was bound to depending on others to get me from place to place. Now I find myself having the ability to travel when I feel like it.

New Challenges, New Opportunities for Virtual Services during COVID-19 Pandemic

Just as the Division of Blind Services (DBS) challenges the individuals they serve to adapt to their vision loss by learning new skills and a new way of doing things, the pandemic has challenged DBS staff to learn new ways to teach, assess, provide resources and equipment, perform outreach, and remain a cohesive team. Staff members have had to pivot to all virtual services, set up home offices that could support their work, and expand their computer skills to learn programs like Zoom. They formed new work groups and committees, and devoted some extra time to professional development opportunities, including joining other blind services agencies from across the nation to share and discuss how to provide services during the pandemic.

Virtual PATH Camp through the McDowell Center

One of DBS's earliest accomplishments this summer was hosting PATH, a pre-employment transition camp, for seven high school students. Taking a residential summer camp and putting it all online took a lot of creativity, planning and teamwork between McDowell Center instructors and University of Kentucky's Visual Impairment Program faculty and staff. The program ran for three weeks in July, with morning and afternoon classes. Prior to the kick-off, McDowell staff dropped off supply packages to each student, including kitchen materials for home management, a braille writer, assistive technology devices such as digital recorders and Amazon Echo dot, students and family members.



PATH Loading Student Supplies



PATH Student Receiving Camp Supplies

Student, caretaker and instructor surveys were performed at the end of the camp. Even though participants had concerns about doing the camp in a virtual setting, one PATH camp instructor wrote, "Despite the pandemic and not being able to do (the camp) in person, I like that we did it anyway. Students needed it! This camp shows students that we care

about them, their future, their learning.”
The survey asked PATH students: How do you feel that this program has prepared you for transition after graduating high school?

- Response 1: “It has helped me learn how to cook new foods even with an impairment and it helped me learn how to Braille games and adapt them to where it’s easier for me to access them. It also helped me gain experience for what a job interview will be like in the real world.”
- Response 2: “Path helped me by letting me know about all the technology and resources available to me to get a job after I graduate. It helped me with job interviews and what companies are looking for in employees.”
- Response 3: “I have learned that even though I have a visual impairment I can still follow my dreams even if I have to adapt and accept the fact I am losing vision. Yes this program helped me realize that.”

Developing New Resources

Some of the staff have taken time while telecommuting to create new curriculum for the Job Readiness Program at the McDowell Center, as well as, adapt all classes to virtual delivery. The center is actively serving 30 consumers, and doing assessments and vocational evaluations for several more. The Orientation and Mobility, Bioptic Driving, and Independent Living staff have created new resources and materials for their programs, including: Exercise Tips and Resources for Individuals with a Visual Impairment; Guide Techniques; Using a White Cane; Guide Dog

FAQs; Safety Tips; and Travel Safety Tips. These and other resources are now available on OVR/Blind Services website.

Independent Living Services: Forty Years Providing Rehabilitation Services

Independent Living (IL) services assist

persons with low vision/blindness achieve greater levels of independence within their homes, communities and workplaces. For persons age 55

years and older, IL services are available through the Older Individuals Who Are Blind (OIB) program. With opportunities to learn adaptive skills in areas such as daily living and communications, persons of all ages can enhance their abilities to live independently in an environment of their choice.

In September 2020, the IL program celebrated the 40th anniversary of providing rehabilitation services to Kentuckians with vision impairments and total blindness. This special anniversary marked a time for not only reflecting on past accomplishments but also planning expanded opportunities for service delivery methods going forward.

Although the IL program was greatly impacted by the health pandemic of 2020, the small but dedicated staff of nine served more than 400 people residing in 102 Kentucky counties. Due to the pandemic, counselors have developed alternate ways of completing assessments, providing skills instruction, and making connections to other blindness resources. As a result of adapting to



changes, IL services continue to be available in every county of the commonwealth.

Independent Living Consumer Spotlight



Katie Griffin, a Rowan County resident, participated in the IL services to learn how to do daily activities. Katie lost her vision suddenly due to diabetic retinopathy

and moved to her sister's home after becoming totally blind. Katie's goal was to independently maintain and manage her own activities of daily living even though she was living with her sister.

IL Counselor Samantha Oldiges met with Katie to discuss her IL goals and developed a plan of services to maximize her activities of daily living skills. While several training areas were identified, Katie initially focused on the two primary activities of independently identifying labels on household items and preparing her own meals. These actions were closely related because she needed a way of reading food labels to select items to cook. A PENfriend labeling device was provided and Samantha taught Katie how to access the voice directions to record information on the labels. Initially, Samantha assisted Katie with labeling frozen meals, but once Katie learned how to do this task, Katie devised a system with her sister so she could do the chore without assistance.

When eating alone, Katie had difficulty preparing frozen meals because she had difficulty operating the microwave

independently. Samantha placed tactile markings on the microwave, and on Katie's other favorite small appliance, the coffee maker. Now Katie has mastered safely using the microwave and coffee maker without help. Katie also learned skills to help her sister prepare larger meals and states she enjoys doing tasks such as peeling eggs and cutting vegetables.

In addition, Katie has elevated her labeling and organizational skills with adaptive methods of identifying clothing articles and CDs received from her church. Katie is appreciative of her family's support, but she did not want to be dependent on them when doing basic tasks. The skills she learned through the IL program have helped her achieve her goal of increased safety and independence within her home.

Project Case

Project CASE, a federal grant awarded to OVR, has completed the fifth and final year of providing



career pathways activities and services to VR staff, consumers, employers, and educational and workforce partners. For the life of the grant, Project CASE has used six dedicated Career Pathways Coordinators (CPCs) in two workforce areas, and VR consumers have received sector-based guidance and counseling, business tours, postsecondary facility tours, employability skills training, work experiences, and job placement services as a result of their efforts.

The CPC role has provided connectivity and integration between the OVR and the larger workforce system through co-enrollment and collaborative events. It has helped OVR engage more employers and expanded the agency's capacity to offer career pathways opportunities to consumers. The grant has increased VR counselor knowledge of industry-recognized credentialing, and impacted employability skills training, work experiences, and career pathways services for high school age students at the Carl Perkins Vocational Rehabilitation Training Center and the Charles McDowell Center for the Blind.

The grant outcome highlights include the following:

- 311 participants were successfully closed in competitive integrated employment, with an additional 92 in employed status at grant end
- 387 recognized postsecondary credentials were earned by participants
- 583 services provided for adult participants including employer and workforce partner/educational partner tours and events
- 841 high school students provided day-long, hands-on experiences at college campuses and healthcare employers
- 74 percent of individuals that began jobs in FFY 2020 received employer-provided health insurance

A Project CASE toolkit was created in collaboration with the American Institutes of Research to train OVR staff on implementing

career pathways in the delivery of rehabilitation counseling services in FY2021. The toolkit consists of five printed strategy guides, and 16 short (3-5 minute) animated videos to accompany and expand on the content in the guides with narration from individuals who played integral roles in grant activities including CPC coordinators, VR counselors and administrators, and workforce partners. The toolkit will be available at the National Clearinghouse for Rehabilitation Training Materials and will be hosted at both the AIR and Kentucky OVR websites.

Future site for Project CASE Career Pathways Toolkit at AIR

<https://www.air.org/project/creating-access-successful-employment-kentucky>

Future site for Project CASE Career Pathways Toolkit at Kentucky OVR

<https://kcc.ky.gov/Vocational-Rehabilitation/projectcase/Pages/default.aspx>

Celebrating the 2019 Deaf-Blind Conference

From Nov. 19-21, 2019, about 120 staff members attended the Kentucky OVR Deaf-Blind Training Conference designed for staff who are working or likely will work with this dual-sensory loss population. Currently, Kentucky has just over 49,000 individuals on the Helen Keller National Center's (HKNC) National Registry of Persons Who are Deaf-Blind.

The main purpose of the conference was to help staff be better prepared to work with this population since changes were implemented with the merger of the Office for the Blind with the Office of Vocational

Rehabilitation. These changes included eliminating duplication of services, better preparing job placement specialists to work with blind, deaf, and deaf-blind individuals, and increasing the number of support staff who can work with dual-sensory loss. Topics included eye and ear anatomy, deaf-blindness culture, services available through the HKNC, and introduction to Independent Living, Orientation and Mobility, Assistive Technology, KY Deaf-Blind Project, Haptics Touch Communication, and Mental Health Considerations with Deaf-Blindness.

Staff members have not had a training like this for about 15 years. According to the keynote speaker and HKNC Regional Representative Marilyn Trader, Kentucky is the only state that has organized this type of training conference for its vocational rehabilitation staff.



L-R: Corinne Miller, Marilyn Trader from the Helen Keller National Center and OVR employees Jonathan White, Chad Hunt, Heidi Kesterson and Helga Gilbert.

Blind Services Consumer Spotlight

Michael “Chuck” Winstead-Nash began services at the McDowell Center for the Blind in September 2019. Like most of the center’s students, he came eager to learn and motivated to enter the workforce. Although he put in applications at several businesses, Chuck was most interested in working for Chewy, a successful online pet supply company with over 15,000 employees and 6.1 million square feet of warehouse fulfillment space. Chuck was also determined to permanently relocate from Owensboro to Louisville, get an apartment, and live independently for the first time. The training and services he received from the McDowell Center helped him achieve both these goals. Chuck worked with Sandra Williams and participated in the IL program while also working with the Work Experience Coordinator Leora Jackson and Assistive Technology Instructor Tonia Gatton.

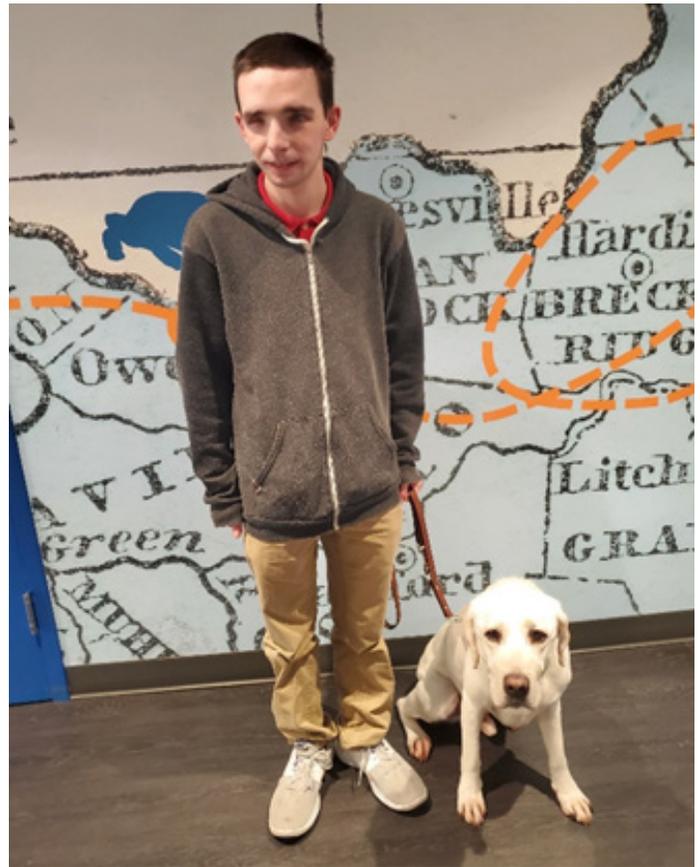
The McDowell Center staff began a conversation with Chewy’s IT department months before Chuck had his first interview to assess how well screen access programs would work with the software applications used in its call center. This national company was interested in increasing the diversity of its teams, but they had never hired an individual who was blind and they were not aware of all the possibilities of making their positions accessible. Throughout the process, Tonia provided support to the company, including information and hands-on technical assistance.

Chuck worked with Leora to prepare for the hiring process. Together, they carefully reviewed and discussed information from Chewy’s website to learn everything they

could about the company and practiced customer service scenarios. In addition, they updated his resume, completed mock interviews and discussed financial considerations regarding banking, budgeting, and the impact of work on his Social Security Insurance benefits. Chuck worked with the Center for Accessible Living to get outfitted for an interview and work clothes. Community Resources Coordinator Jason Cole worked with Chuck to locate apartments and complete applications.

Finally, by February, the interview day had arrived, and Chuck headed out the door with his guide dog, Puck, as the McDowell team shouted last words of encouragement. Within days, Chuck was offered a full-time customer service job, and quickly advanced to the position of pharmacy technician. The McDowell team provided ongoing support to Chewy during the onboarding process. Chuck's VR counseling team, Darlena Smith and Theresa Murphy, provided for the purchase of the JAWS software program and a braille note device so that Chuck could perform his essential job tasks. Tonia sat in on new employee training with him a few times, and she also met with his trainer and IT staff on several other occasions to assist with troubleshooting whenever accessibility issues arose. Now with a job offer in hand, Chuck was able to sign the lease on his first apartment.

This great outcome for Chuck came with challenges along the way: securing housing and relocating to Louisville, transportation, and orientation to a new living and work environment, all in the middle of a pandemic. The McDowell Center dorm was closed due to COVID-19 concerns, just weeks before his apartment was ready, but Chuck and his



team were adamant that nothing was going to prevent him from staying in Louisville and getting to work.

Darlena and Theresa worked with center staff to find temporary housing in a hotel, and provided assistance with transportation costs to and from work. The McDowell team assisted with getting him set up at the hotel, and provided emergency food supplies so he could prepare simple lunches and dinners at the hotel.

Chuck reports that he's very happy working at Chewy, and in fact has already received two awards in his first eight months - Employee of the Month, and Top Performer. Chuck continues to improve his skills and is now working to earn IT certificates including Google Cloud platform associate engineer, Amazon Web Services associate architect, and Comptia A Plus. Chuck's determination

and persistence, along with amazing OVR teamwork and a great employer partner, has launched him on a secure career path, financial freedom and independence. Chuck and Puck - "I'm very thankful for what they've done for me. I'm a very capable

person, and they all expanded my horizons. Each counselor and staff member brought things to me I may have already known, and expanded on them. They also taught me things I didn't know. I was able to get my foot in the door, and learn more skills."

Celebrating the Carl D. Perkins Vocational Training Center Division

The Division of Carl D. Perkins Vocational Training Center is a residential facility that provides educational opportunities away from home and coordinates services as needed with consumers in the area that do not need residential services. There are 100 employees in this division in classified, Federal Funded Time Limited (FFTL), unclassified or contracted.

Assisted Living Branch

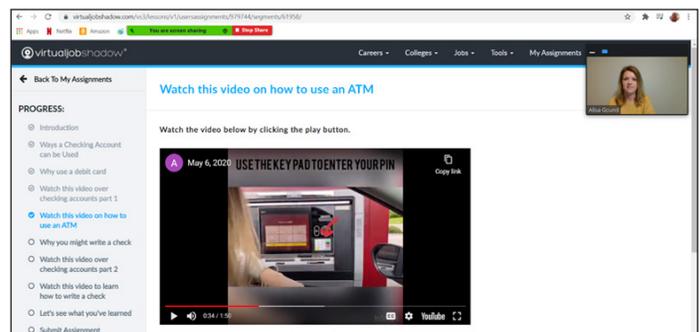
The Physical Medicine Unit at CDPVTC has put together an on-line training program for incoming LifeSkills Enhancement Program candidates. This virtual eight-week program offers services for individuals with a range of disabilities including autism spectrum disorder, intellectual disabilities, leaning disabilities and traumatic brain injury. The program has job-related soft skills instruction needed to achieve independence and prepare the consumer for a successful transition to a vocational training program, higher education and/or employment. It consists of 10 educational classes listed below, and meets four days a week.

- Grooming and Hygiene
- Community Management Group
- TALK - Taking Apart Language Knots is a class designed to provide discussion and practice. The goal of this class is to help students better

relate to co-workers and supervisors in a job setting, and with people in their personal lives.

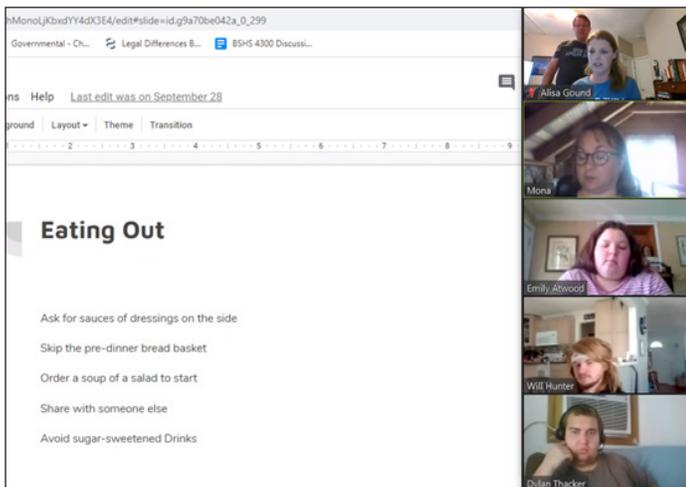
- Medication Administration Education
- Healthy Choices
- Stress/Anger Management
- Skills for Work Related Interpersonal Management (SWIM)
- Healthy Social Interactions
- Ready for Work
- Functional Skills

Below - Alisa Gound, instructor, teaching students how to using an ATM during the online LifeSkills class.

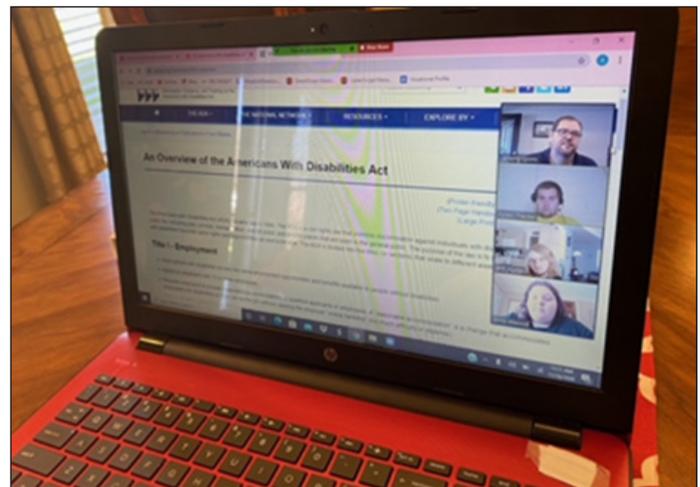




The "TALK" class had an online session with instructor Sherry Prater.



Staff instructor Alisa Gound helps students understand the importance of making healthy choices even when eating out.



Jeremy Lyons instructs students during Functional Skills class. Class on a computer screen became normal in 2020.

Celebrating Independence - Occupational Therapy Driver's Program

Driver permit classes online....who would have thought this a possibility? In 2020, the Perkins Center developed and began offering online permit class to consumers who lack a Kentucky learner's permit and are referred by their VR counselor for this program. Lack of transportation can be an enormous barrier to employment, and this class allows consumers from across the Commonwealth to take that first step to transportation independence. Prior to admission into the program,

consumers must pass a remote eligibility screen administered by the driving department staff. Class prerequisites include a Full Scale Intelligence Quotient (FSIQ) of 55 or greater and access to reliable internet connection. The curriculum is based on the official Kentucky Driver's Manual and supplemented with a variety of additional driver's education resources. All aspects of Kentucky road rules and regulations are extensively reviewed. Accommodations are made to meet the needs of visual, auditory and kinesthetic learners.

Worksheets and tests are regularly assigned to measure student progress and comprehension of the material. Students must obtain a score of equal to or above 80 percent on all assignments. If students get a score less than 80 percent, they have multiple opportunities to improve performance via class review and individual tutoring. Class generally meets four times a week, for one-hour sessions, but is flexible, depending on the needs of the students enrolled. The online version of this class typically lasts six to seven weeks. Upon completion, students have to demonstrate the knowledge needed to pass the Kentucky Learner's Permit Test administered at their local courthouse and successfully obtain their instructional permit.

Positive Reaction to New Normal

The world of vocational rehabilitation is a resilient one. When a crisis occurs the first and foremost thought on the minds of our staff is "how do we continue to serve our consumers". One of the ways that CDPVTC tackled that question is by using virtual learning. A few examples of the excellent work of staff to keep consumers on track to reach their goals during the pandemic, include sessions on speech therapy, money management, and individual health awareness.

Vocational Services Branch

The comprehensive vocational evaluation unit has converted its processes into a vocational profile that provides information for clients to place them in the appropriate services based on their IPE. This assessment is performed virtually and the information gathered is compiled into a comprehensive report for the counselor, Perkins Center staff,

and all persons who give clients services.

Aside from a couple of processes that must be completed in person, the vocational profile job readiness training (JRT) is currently being offered virtually via Google Classroom. All of the soft skills that are regularly taught in this class have been converted to virtual assignments and lectures/group discussions via the instructor. This program runs about eight weeks and includes instruction and preparatory materials for the students to take the exam for the Workplace Essential Skills Certificate via the WIN learning courseware. Using this format helps instructors continue to prepare students to formally enter their skilled training area.

JRT, as well as, all of the skilled vocational training areas have converted various classes to virtual learning, and are continuing to convert more of the instruction to an online format. Listed below are some of the topics students have been taking online:

- CVS Health includes pharmacy math, customer service and retail based content.
- Grounds keeping classes cover topics such as mowing and weed eating techniques, and proper tool maintenance.
- ALPHA Center/adult education include academic remediation via Khan Academy and Google classroom.
- Materials management uses Google classroom and packets on safety topics and warehouse logistics.
- Forklift classes cover pre-inspection and best safety practices.

- Child care courses utilizing Google classroom.
- Food service courses entail exercises on Google classroom and packets. They are working on ServSafe preparation and sanitation procedures.
- Office tech classes are working on typing skills and soft skill review.
- Auto lube courses prepare them for detailing certification.
- Custodial courses prepare them for the custodial certification.
- Cosmetology students plan to use an online program to gain cosmetology hours.

Applause for Carl D. Perkins Vocational Training Center graduates

Celebrating their accomplishments and the fact that all of them are now employed.

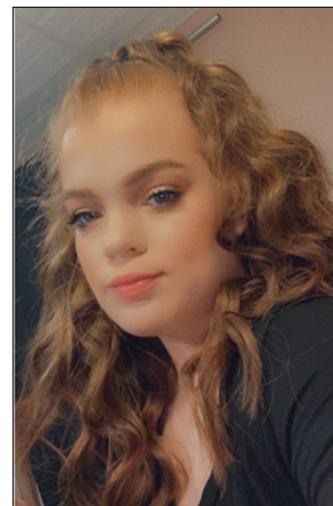
Ceanna completed her custodial/building maintenance training program during the pandemic. Shortly after completing her program, she found employment as a custodian at Lebanon Elementary School (LES). Her comments say it best:



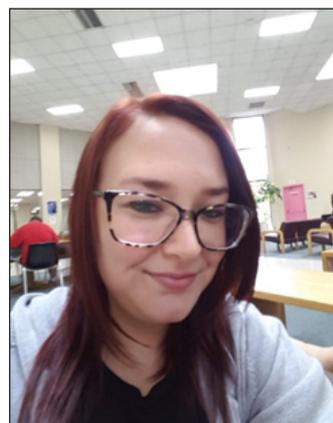
"I'm beyond thankful for CDPVTC and all the amazing memories with such great people. I'm so thankful for all of my friends that I made there. I've made more friends there within a year than I have all through 13 years of school because just think of it

as a puzzle for a minute when you have the wrong puzzle piece the puzzle isn't complete so....at CDPVTC we are all just one big puzzle that goes together and there are no other regular puzzle pieces and well I just like it better I guess. Anyways I am so thankful for getting to go there and learning things in the custodial program because now I am a custodian at LES!!!"

Holly Click found employment at a day care quickly after graduating from the childcare development training program at the Perkins Center. Only months after being hired she was given the position of lead teacher in the three-year-old classroom. With the kids in her charge, she works on the alphabet, numbers and subjects that require her to teach from a curriculum.



Jessica Mink was a model student while at the Perkins Center. She graduated from the childcare development training program receiving multiple industry credentials and also served on the student government at the center. She currently works at the First Baptist Church Learning Center as a full-time substitute. She finished her training program and found employment during the pandemic.



Joe Bowman graduated from the CVS Retail Pharmacy Collaborative during the pandemic, receiving his sales fundamentals and customer service certification from the National Retail Federation. He completed his program in October 2020 and was hired at a HomeGoods store as a custodian. He has already moved up to stocking shelves and working the register part-time.

Darius Dreux is a graduate from the ALPHA program at the CDPVTC. As an ALPHA student he attended Big Sandy Community and Technical College for several semesters and graduated with numerous certificates in diesel mechanics. He currently works at Fleet Service Inc. in Georgetown where he performs various duties including electrical, brake, shocks, and panel and roof work, and performs service calls.

Celebrating the Division of Field Services

The Division of Field Services supervises all functions that occur within field offices including specialized counseling services for the deaf and hard of hearing, and blind and visual disabilities. In addition, this division houses the ancillary supports services. This includes the Employer Services Branch, Community Rehabilitation Program Branch, Assistive Technology Branch, Community Work Transition Services, Pre-Employment Transition Services and Social Security Reimbursement Services. There are 266 classified, unclassified and FFTL employees in this division making it the largest in the agency.

2020 Review of Division of Field Services

The Division of Field Services welcomed the 100th year of VR services with making a move to virtual service delivery in mid-March. As the country began to feel the grips of the COVID-19 pandemic, OVR staff were instructed to provide services from home. In spite of many staff being assigned to responsibilities outside of the agency, services continued with remaining staff and management assuming additional responsibilities.

As a result of suspending face-to-face services, policy changes were implemented that simplified the requirements for consumer

signatures on agency forms and allowed electronic signatures. This also began the process of moving towards all electronic case files to begin in FFY 2021. Agency staff continued to coordinate with various service providers across the state while ensuring that safe-at-work protocols were followed.

Timely eligibility determinations and plan developments continued with a very low percentage of cases requiring extensions. While working from home has had its challenges for OVR staff and consumers, it has been a great learning opportunity.

In the words of one counselor, "I'm glad to see that at 58, 28 years of which have been with OVR, I can flex still, I can adjust, that it

took tears and cursing and more than a few bowls of ice cream but that I'm going to be OK. I am producing and our work, as it always has been, is meaningful and life changing. I'm relieved to find out that I can change with these frightening times, learn with the rest of everyone, make it count and...work from home."

Prior to the work-from-home requirement, all field services staff participated in Common Measures training. Staff members were trained on the Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act (WIOA) performance measures as well as various regulation and policy requirements. Skill Enhancement Training was provided virtually to all new counselors, as well as countless opportunities for online skill development for all agency staff. Virtual training on the eligibility process and the development of the IPE was also provided to all field services staff in September. The director of the Division of Field Services participated in the National Rehabilitation Leadership Institute, which provides invaluable leadership skills training specific to the area of public vocational rehabilitation services.

Division of Field Services Consumer Success Stories

Celebrating
Success, Sobriety
and Life Goals
Achievement

Rick Skeens was working as a phlebotomist at a local hospital when he started losing his vision due to glaucoma.



As a result, he could not continue working and qualified for Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) in 2005. Rick applied for services as a legally blind individual with the Kentucky Office for the Blind in 2017. At that time, he was receiving SSDI and was living in public housing.

Rick was working at a local recovery treatment program in the Ashland area while he was pursuing his degree at the time of his application for VR services. He began college at Ashland Community and Technical College and transferred to Morehead State University to finish his associates degree while continuing to work on his bachelor's degree. Along with his full-time student status at Morehead, he has attained a new job as a prevention specialist in the University of Kentucky's Substance Use Priority Research program. He is also in the trial work period for his SSDI. After a few more months of making what is considered substantial gainful activity, he will have effectively worked himself off SSDI.

Some of the services that have been provided by the Kentucky OVR for Rick include guidance and counseling, rehabilitation technology equipment and training, tuition and fees, orientation and mobility training, and benefits counseling. On a personal note, he is now married and moved into a private home. He is very proud to say he is a recovering addict that has been clean for 11 years. He is also very proud of being an elder in his church.

Rick said, "I have a wonderful wife and an amazing mother and a bunch of friends and family that support me in everything I do. My strength is in my faith, and the Department for the Blind and Office of Vocational

Rehabilitation have helped me pursue a life that I didn't think was possible." (Note: In 2018, Kentucky Office for the Blind and Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation merged into one agency.)

A Letter of Gratitude from Lee Martin Long

I stumbled upon the Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) following the loss of a 15-year career at a local healthcare organization. The department that I worked in had closed due to changes in reimbursements that pushed the diagnostic services offered to a home market. There were opportunities to continue in the same sector I had been working in with competitive pay; yet, they did not offer comparable health insurance to meet the needs of my family.



I initially hoped to locate educational and placement services for displaced workers. Much to my dismay, the person I spoke to informed me that the Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) serves individuals with disabilities and helps them to obtain and maintain employment. Interestingly, I replied that I did not have a disability; yet, jokingly I stated: "I most likely developed a deficit after 27 years of being in the workforce." The receptionist explained how they help individuals who have physical and mental impairments.

Essentially, my typical attempt of humor during an awkward moment of convoluted

conversation consisting of atypical content may have led the counselor to ask me if I knew anything about Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). My response was "ADHD was not a diagnosis when I was a child, so I just grew out of it and learned to compensate as I matured." My unique ability to compete with unemployed comedians uncovered the adults who have persistent symptoms of ADHD could be effectively treated.

I was referred to the OVR to determine if I actually had the learning difference I suspected. Regina Bates sent me for several tests to confirm my learning difference and to determine what kind of assistance was available to help me. From start to finish, Regina found tools and discussed techniques to give me the assistance needed to accommodate my learning style.

The resources provided were the differential factors needed to obtain my educational goal. Thanks to the unrelenting encouragement and support from Regina, I graduate with an associate degree in registered nursing in 2016 and a bachelor of science degree in nursing in 2018.

Transition Services

During FFY 2020, the Kentucky OVR continued to provide outstanding transition and pre-employment transition services (Pre-ETS) to more than 8,000 Kentucky students with disabilities. Through partnerships with nine educational cooperatives, the Kentucky Community and Technical College System (KCTCS), Jobs for American Graduates, and local Community Rehabilitation Programs, students explored a wide variety of career opportunities and learned skills to help ensure success after high school. Over 100

high schools across the commonwealth participated in the Community Work Transition Program to provide Pre-ETS and transition services to ensure students with the most significant disabilities achieved employment before exiting high school. The global pandemic provided an opportunity for staff and providers to implement creative approaches to service delivery by incorporating virtual services through the use of online platforms.

Perhaps the biggest news from FFY 2020 is the creation of the Kentucky Transition Services Branch. Kentucky OVR created the branch during the summer of 2020 and is currently in the process of hiring a branch manager to oversee all transition and Pre-ETS. Once in place, this branch manager will hire six VR specialists to facilitate the referral process for potentially eligible students across the commonwealth. These specialists will process authorizations and invoices and help determine when students should apply for VR services. We are hopeful that the creation of this branch will help restore balance to the workloads of field staff and ensure that all students with disabilities have access to Pre-ETS.

Employer Services

The Employer Services Branch consists of 13 VR specialists who provide direct job placement services to consumers of the Kentucky OVR. During FFY 2020, these services were provided to over 400 consumers, and helped 148 consumers to achieve competitive integrated employment. Staff served 93 of Kentucky's 120 counties during 2020.

When mandatory telecommuting was implemented as a result of COVID-19, staff adapted quickly to begin providing services remotely via online platforms. Once staff could effectively provide job placement services in the virtual world, employees realized that they had an opportunity to expand services to counties that they were previously unable to reach due to distance.

Throughout 2020, the Employer Services Branch has been using the Sales Force program to track employer engagement. In addition to Kentucky Career Center partners, staff have also been working with outside agencies and companies like United Health Care and ABLE 503 to increase awareness of how individuals with disabilities contribute to a productive workplace. These partnerships also serve to create more opportunities for Kentuckians with disabilities.

Community Rehabilitation Program/ Supported Employment Services

During FFY 2020, the Kentucky OVR Community Rehabilitation Program Branch made significant efforts to build provider capacity by partnering with new Community Rehabilitation Programs (CRP). During this fiscal year, the branch developed vendor agreements with a total of 11 new CRPs. There are a total of 10 CRPs that are considering or have expanded their coverage area to assist in meeting identified needs.

Given the impact of COVID-19, there have been significant concerns about the sustainability of CRPs throughout the state. After numerous problem-solving meetings to explore current CRP-related policies the agency determined that there have been long-

standing policies that may have negatively impacted sustainability efforts among CRPs. Additionally, discussions regarding current service fees were explored. As a result, the agency decided to implement strategic changes in FFY 2021 to eliminate barriers specific to provider capacity and sustainability.

Although efforts to expand have been successful, the impact of COVID-9 on CRPs has been significant. As a result, there have been at least 12 CRPs that have closed their business, laid off all staff, or greatly reduced their coverage area.

During FFY 2020, there were 589 individuals who obtained employment. In addition, 606 individuals achieved 30 days of stable employment; 583 achieved 60 days of stable employment; and 540 achieved 90 days of stable employment. Additionally, there were 376 supported employment recipients that achieved 180 days of stable employment and achieved a positive employment outcome through VR. The average hourly pay rate was \$10.13 and consumers worked an average of 22.53 hours per week.

In March 2020, CRP Branch consultants began conducting weekly meetings virtually with CRPs to share creative and effective virtual service strategies. Additionally, this platform has been used to continually assess ongoing challenges specific to COVID-19. It has allowed CRPs to join in a collaborative effort to address issues such as sustainability and virtual service delivery. CRP Branch has conducted 48 trainings for CRP partners and VR staff. The branch also set up four statewide training opportunities for CRPs and VR staff, and conducted statewide CRP quarterly meetings attended by more than 150 employment support staff around the state.

Customized employment continues to be a major focal point as illustrated through the continuation of four contracts with CRPs for the ongoing implementation of customized supported employment services. This endeavor continues to be supported through a partnership with the University of Kentucky's Human Development Institute, which provides specialized training opportunities through their affiliation with Marc Gold & Associates.

Rehabilitation Technology Services

The Assistive Technology Branch continues to assist consumers to reach their vocational goal by assessing, recommending and providing appropriate assistive technology solutions and training. More than 800 consumers received equipment and services that assisted them to prepare for, gain, or maintain employment. Of that number, 235 received assistance with becoming independent drivers, eliminating transportation as a barrier to employment. The agency provided modifications to 90 personal vehicles at a total cost of over \$900,000; 122 individuals received driver evaluations and 149 received driver's training. An additional \$982,500 was spent on other types of assistive technology for a total of about \$2,254,000 spent on assistive technology equipment and services for OVR consumers.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Assistive Technology Branch developed tools to enable the agency to provide remote assistive technology services to consumers. The branch implemented an online pre-assessment form and interactive video conference assessment for students with disabilities who are preparing for college. This interactive process allows staff to streamline services and reach students

from more remote areas of the state quickly and effectively. The agency also developed a touchless delivery and remote training model that provides technology needed by consumers in a safe and effective manner.

In order to accomplish these goals, the agency developed online resources for consumers to learn to use some of the technology most often recommended. The branch posted You Tube training videos for Microsoft Office Lens, Google Docs Voice Typing, Windows Ease of Access, Live Transcribe, and Microsoft Math. In addition, videos were developed about attending Zoom Skype-based meetings to ease the transition for consumers to remote services. The branch focused on free, readily available technology that consumers can access from computers, Chromebooks, iOS devices, and smartphones, and developed a resource guide that includes the most often recommended free resources to assist consumers with school and daily life tasks.

The Assistive Technology Branch continues to partner with the Kentucky Assistive Technology Services (KATS) Network. During this time, the branch aided the KATS Network in the writing of a successful Christopher Reeves grant proposal to loan smart home equipment to individuals with paralysis. Once awarded, we also assisted in the identification of appropriate equipment for loaner kits and the development of a training site to aid individuals in setting up their new equipment.

The Assistive Technology Branch coordinated with the KATS Network, Kentucky AgrAbility, and the Center for Independent Living to put on the 16th Annual "Summer AT Workshop" this year.

For the first time ever, the event was held virtually over three days. CRC and RESNA continuing education credits were made available to attendees. In addition to developing the learning system and hosting the event, several staff members provided trainings to the attendees, covering various areas, including: Smart Home Technology, 3D Printing, ChromeVox, and Parenting with a Disability.

Assistive Technology Branch Consumer Spotlights

Ricky Barrow

Ricky Barrow is the owner of Poppy's Meat Shop, a full-service meat counter and catering service in Ledbetter, Kentucky. After his vision declined due to optic atrophy, Ricky left his job as the manager of a large retail business in Paducah and purchased his dream business near his home. His goal was to be a place where someone can purchase everything he needs to make a meal, including meats, breads, and side items. He also has several large smokers in back, where he prepares custom orders of freshly smoked meats.

When doing his tasks as a butcher, Ricky is a master. However, he really began to struggle with the office side of his business. He could not see the small print on receipts or clearly mark order forms for supplies. When checking out customers, he really struggled with the small print on his cash register and with his credit card machine. His distance vision is also impaired, so he would become unnerved when someone entered his store that he could not identify. OVR provided Ricky with multiple assistive technology devices to meet his needs, including a simple stand magnifying glass,

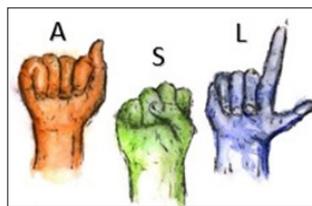
computer enlargement software, a desktop video magnifier, and a pair of distance-vision glasses equipped with a loupe so that he could see his customers' faces.

Janie

Janie owns and runs a small grocery store and gas station. She has low vision with best-corrected visual acuities of 20/50 in each eye and is also hard of hearing. She was having difficulty managing the business on her computer, reading and completing paperwork, and operating credit card machines as well as the cash register. OVR provided Janie with a portable video magnifier that allowed her to access printed materials such as receipts, driver's licenses, and other paperwork vital to running her business. OVR also provided Max TV and Max Detail clips to attach to her glasses to give her the ability to quickly view items from both far away and up close.

Due to Janie's hearing loss, she had difficulty understanding customers on the telephone. OVR assisted her in obtaining a phone with 40 dB amplification and can caption voicemails and phone conversations. The assistive technologist also taught Janie how to utilize low-vision accessibility features on her computer, which allowed her to effectively manage her business. Lastly, OVR improved the lighting environment where it was too dim. Janie was very appreciative for all of these accommodations and has been successfully running her small business ever since.

Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services



The Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services (DHHS) Branch lost two rehabilitation counselors for the

deaf this year and have a total of four counselor positions to fill, but remaining staff are doing an excellent job of ensuring the needs of all consumers are being met across the commonwealth. The agency had seven sign language interpreters available to provide services to consumers and staff this year. In addition to ensuring the accessibility of services, OVR interpreters partnered with the Helen Keller National Center to provide webinars focused on issues related to the deaf-blind population.

The DHHS Branch provided several trainings to Community Rehabilitation Programs as well as various service providers and OVR staff about job placement services to individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing. Branch staff are also proud to be continuing their relationship with the Southeast Region Institute on Deafness (SERID) and coordinating a virtual conference which brings valuable resources and information to service providers as well as consumers who are specific to the deaf, deaf-blind and hard of hearing communities.