

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

**2020
ANNUAL
REPORT**



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

The Mission of the Rhode Island Office of Rehabilitation Services is

“To empower individuals with disabilities to choose, prepare for, obtain, advance in, and maintain employment, economic self-sufficiency, independence and integration into society”



ORS Values

We value the worth, dignity, rights, responsibilities, and empowerment of all persons with disabilities in achieving their individualized goals.

We value staff who reflect pride and commitment to excellence in achieving our mission.

We value a management style that fosters responsibility and accountability while encouraging creativity, initiative, and leadership throughout the organization.

We value community support in achieving the agency’s mission.

We value leadership which promotes clarity of purpose.

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Message from the Director,

Rhode Island Department of Human Services (DHS) is an organization of opportunity, providing a full continuum of services to the people who need us. We are dedicated to creating an environment where staff and customers have the tools, resources, and supports they need to thrive. Recognizing the tremendous effects of COVID-19 on vulnerable Rhode Islanders, over the past year DHS further stepped up to do our part and be part of the solution.

Our Office of Rehabilitation Services (ORS) is an integral part of our mission, and our response to COVID-19. It is my pleasure to provide you with its Annual Report for Federal Fiscal Year 2020. ORS is charged with empowering Rhode Islanders with disabilities who voluntarily wish to obtain and maintain employment, economic self-sufficiency, independence, and full integration into society. Vocational Rehabilitation Services; Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired (SBVI); and Disability Determination Services (DDS) provide a myriad of resources and services which enhance the quality of life for Rhode Islanders with disabilities.

Even with our lobbies closed, the ORS staff led by Associate Director Ron Racine continued to help and make an impact – so much so that Providence Business News recently gave them a well-deserved Diversity and Inclusion Award. They adapted and were able to continue to provide many of the services remotely and safely. In addition, they were able to increase their work with Transition Age Youth in secondary education by providing more opportunities for work experiences and work exploration, which is so important for these students' future education and career milestones.

Additional accomplishments for ORS include:

- Collaborating with the University of RI Disability Services for Students to launch S.T.A.R.T., a program that works to support and maximize the academic and social skills of URI students diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)
- Establishing an Integrated Resource Team pilot with other State agencies to address diversified systems with the ability to coordinate services and leverage funding in order to meet the needs of an individual job seeker with a disability.

I cannot be prouder of the ORS division!



Courtney Hawkins

Message from the Associate Director,

As much as 2020 has been about adapting to the rapid changes incurred because of COVID-19, ORS has remained steadfast with our focus on executing our strategies to meet the needs of Rhode Islanders with disabilities. At ORS, we have always embraced person-centered planning and have been ready to meet people where they are, however they prefer, and with whatever restrictions they may have.

The flexibility, creativeness, and resiliency of the ORS staff has never been more evident than it was this year. The ORS staff were able to create numerous virtual service-delivery models across all our programs, which ensured the momentum was not lost as we safely helped our customers move towards their work and independent living goals. I cannot overstate how impressed I am with their perseverance in these efforts.

I also want to thank our employers, community partners, and other state agencies; collaboration has been critical, and in 2020 no one would have been able to do this work alone.

One of our most important accomplishments was the elimination of our waitlist for our most vulnerable population, which ensure timely services at such a critical juncture in their lives. ORS also received national and local recognition for our efforts in Diversity, Equity & Inclusion, Transition Services, and our Business Enterprises Program.

Inside you will read several individual success stories, and I am sure you will be impressed at the accomplishments of some of these amazing individuals. It is these stories, and many more like them that give hope and inspiration to all of us during these challenging times.



Ronald Racine

Vocational Rehabilitation

The Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Program is the public state and federally-funded program that assists individuals with disabilities to choose, prepare for, obtain, advance in, and maintain competitive integrated employment. Employment being the successful outcome of services provided through the public vocational rehabilitation program. It is expected that individuals with disabilities who apply for services are interested in becoming employed and understand that this is the focus of the VR program.

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

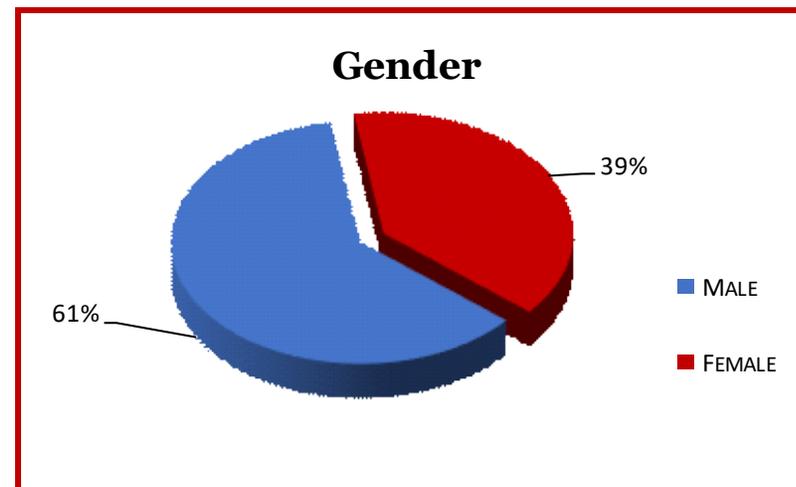
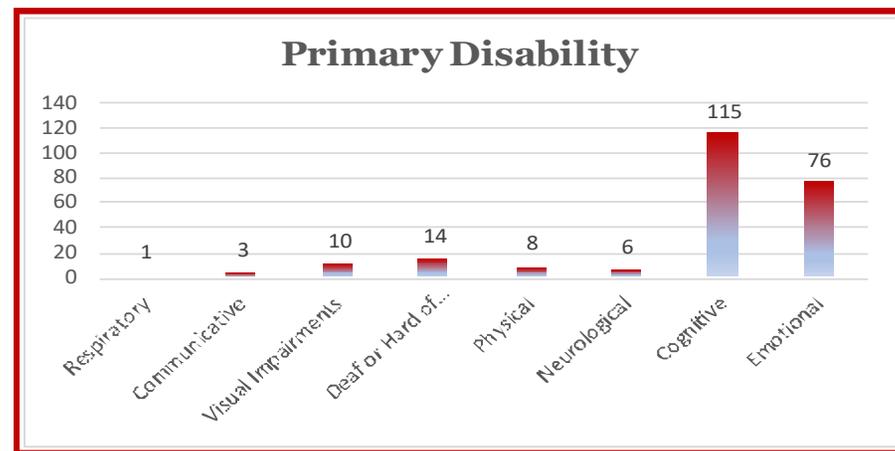
Vocational Rehabilitation services that may be incorporated in an Individualized Plan for Employment include: College or Vocational Training; Job Training and Job Supports; Other Goods and Services; Counseling and Guidance; Post-Employment Services; Diagnostic Evaluations; Rehabilitation Technology Services; Housing Modifications; Vehicle Modifications; Job Development & Job Placement Services; and/or Transition & Pre-ETS Services.

In 2020, due to the COVID-19 virus, contactless service programs were developed which will be highlighted throughout this report.

Who Are Our Customers?

Program Year (PY) 2019 (7/1/19–6/30/20)

233 Successfully Employed Individuals with a Disability



Program Year (PY) 2019 (7/1/19 - 6/30/20) Statistics
233 Successfully Employed Individuals with Disabilities

Vocational Rehabilitation Statistics

- 106** individuals applied for VR services.
- 2,095** individuals received services purchased from vendors, including evaluations, therapies, personal assistant services, job placement and training.
- 26** individuals received rehabilitation technology services to assist them to prepare for and to enter employment.
- 1,228** students are actively in Pre-ETS services, **719** are potentially eligible students and **509** are eligible students receiving these services.
- 1,268** authorizations were issued for individual Pre-Employment Transition Services to take place. These services include Pre-ETS Job Exploration, Community Based Work Experiences, Tri-Employment, Project Search, Travel Training, and Transition Academies as well as our Virtual Pre-ETS services of Virtual Job Exploration, Virtual Summer Work, Virtual Summer Work Alliance, Virtual Travel Training and Virtual College Summer Work.
- 61** Pre-ETS students applied for VR services.

January 2021

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
					1 New Year's Day	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18 MLK Jr. Day	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31						

Virtual Supported Employment and Non-Supported Employment Services

VOCATIONAL EVALUATION (VIRTUAL): Approved for adult vocational evaluations. This is a virtual/remote service that can consist of but is not limited to exploration, interest inventory testing and virtual job shadowing.*

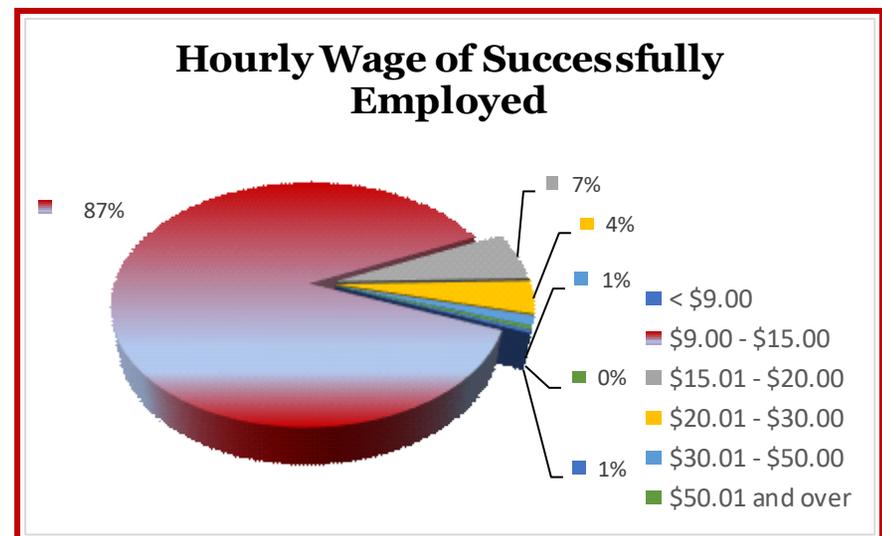
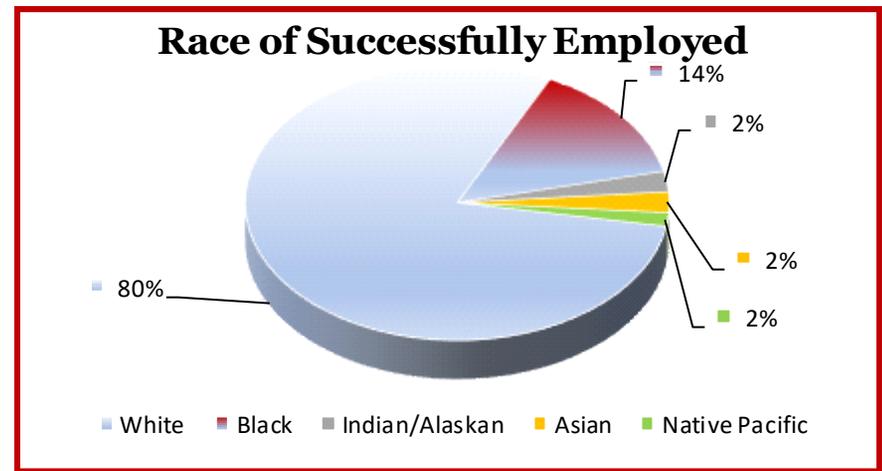
VIRTUAL JOB PREPARATION: Consists of 9 hours per week for 4 weeks; scheduling of classes is up to the Provider at a minimum of 9 hours per week. All other services similar to non-virtual job prep and should include a resume and interviewing skills as part of reporting. *

JOB RETENTION: Service can be provided virtually and would include at least weekly phone calls to check in with the employer (if necessary) and the client. *

JOB COACHING SERVICES: Provided virtually and telephonically.*

VIRTUAL TRAVEL TRAINING: Review travel safety, how to read a bus schedule, YouTube videos on public transportation, social distancing, and Covid-19 Safety precautions.

*** Care should be taken to include social distancing and Covid-19 Safety precautions.**



February 2021

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14 	15 Presidents' Day	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28						

New Initiatives

BEST - Business Engagement Specialist Team

In the fall of 2019, a group comprised of Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors (VRC's) with guidance from Regional Supervisors, Assistant Administrator for Vendor Affairs & Workforce Development and the Administrator of Vocational Rehabilitation began to meet regularly with the intention of formally establishing a Business Engagement Specialist Team (BEST). Part of this was driven by the VRC's recognition that there is a critical lack of awareness of the agency and the services in the business community. Many VRC's found out in reaching out to businesses there was no organized procedure in place to do so. Additionally, WIOA federal regulations mandate that state vocational rehabilitation agencies engage with the business community to enable the development of work-based learning for students and youth with disabilities and employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities, including those with the most significant disabilities. For these reasons, the need was apparent, and this group charged enthusiastically on.

The BEST unit is a specialized unit that markets ORS's services to the business community by educating businesses about the role of ORS. The team also supports businesses' staffing needs, including screening and identifying qualified job applicants, dispelling myths around employing individuals with disabilities through education, and educating Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors and job seekers about labor market demand. In the late winter of 2020 when the reality of working in the middle of a global pandemic set in, this group saw an opportunity to formally establish themselves within the agency. Meeting regularly and working diligently with technical assistance from WINTAC, the BEST unit was created.

Some of the consulting services the BEST team offers include the following:

- * Talent acquisition
- * Customized comprehensive task analysis
- * ADA Training
- * Disability etiquette
- * Diversity in the workplace training
- * Support in marketing and advertising for talent
- * Customized employee training strategies
- * Assistive Technology
- * Job Accommodations Training
- * Referral services for current employees
- * Information on Federal Tax Credit Incentives
- * Worksite ergonomic evaluations

(Trainings in any of these areas could be tailored to one's specific business needs.)

Some highlights of what this team has already accomplished include forming working partnerships with larger companies like Sodexo, IGT, Blue Cross/Blue Shield, and CVS to help diversify and support their workforce; and engaging regularly with other State agencies (i.e. DLT, BHDDH) to work together, collaboratively, with the business community and the consumers we serve. The BEST unit was recently honored by the Providence Business News (PBN) with a Diversity and Inclusion Award. ORS/BEST was one of 9 organizations recognized for their commitment to promoting and enhancing diversity and inclusion in the workplace.

Moving forward, BEST is actively pursuing increasing our online and social media presence by looking at other platforms (i.e. Linked In, Instagram, and YouTube) to reach consumers and businesses alike; and exploring other innovative ways to reach out to Employers. What this team has accomplished in the short amount of time they have been together, amidst the hurdles and complications of working remotely during this pandemic, is a true testament to the dedication and resiliency of this agency.

March 2021

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
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7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17 St. Patrick's Day	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

PBN PROVIDENCE BUSINESS NEWS SUMMIT & AWARDS DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

DECEMBER 10

On December 10th, PBN recognized RI companies and leaders who have made strides in leveraging Diversity & Inclusion to bring workplace excellence to their organizations.



Vocational Rehabilitation Program New Initiatives

Transition

ORS has long sought to develop programming that will allow us to best support students with Behavioral Health Needs while they are in school as they prepare to transition out of High School. It has been a top priority in RI. The transition counselor covering Central Falls High School raised this concern with the Assistant Administrator for Transition. Out of that discussion, it was determined that services to these students could be expanded using a similar link that exists with students with developmental disabilities. In that methodology, Pre-ETS services are offered by DD agencies that provide long-term adult services and supported employment. This allows the provider to learn about the student and create a seamless plan for adult services prior to exiting school. A Community Mental Health Center could do the same, which would necessitate a change in how the CMHC takes in new clients. For years, students with behavioral health needs would have to enter the BH system as adults.

Partnering with a Community Mental Health Center would bring an extra level of expertise into the equation -- working with students around emotion regulation, Mental Health and school districts in the East Bay.

Virtual Services

2020 has been a year of instability and unforeseen circumstances brought about by the COVID-19 virus. The Office of Rehabilitation Services (ORS) is committed to providing quality services to Rhode Islanders with Disabilities. During this unprecedented time, the health and safety of ORS customers, staff, and community partners remained our top priority. Staff was not able to provide services in their usual way; clients were not allowed in the office for appointments; and all new precautions were put in place to prevent the spread of this virus. None of the changes stopped ORS. Individuals who never heard of Zoom, FaceTime, and/or other video-conferencing platforms were now using it on a daily basis.

Discussions of social distancing, personal protection, and the severity of COVID-19 were held with clients to help reinforce the individual's understanding of the severity of this virus. New procedures were developed to allow clients to receive services, yet keep both staff and clients safe. These included the following "Virtual Services".

April 2021

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
				1	2	3
4  Happy Easter	5	6	7	8	9	10
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25	26	27	28	29	30	

Innovation in The Face of Adversity

The 2019-2020 school year started off like every other year: the excitement over the possibilities the year brings, first week of classes, scheduling of annual Intro to State Services, IEP meetings, new referrals and identifying the individualized services to meet the needs of each of our students.

Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) has afforded the Office of Rehabilitation Services (ORS) the ability to expand the scope of our transition services; reaching more students with disabilities by serving all students with disabilities that are potentially eligible and eligible as well as creatively collaborating with LEA's and our Community Rehabilitation Provider's (CRP's) to provide diverse programs meeting students individual needs.

In addition to our more traditional Pre-ETS Transition Services of Job Exploration, Community-Based Work Experiences, Travel Training, and Summer Work Experiences, ORS provides more specialized and grouped services such as Tri-Employment, Project Search and funding toward Transition Academies. These latter programs combine work-readiness training and integrated community work experiences. We have also continued our collaboration with statewide Middle Schools and CRP's to provide programming that initiates the conversation around Career Interests and Pathways focusing on identifying natural skills, strengths, abilities, communication skills and self-advocacy for our middle school-aged youth.

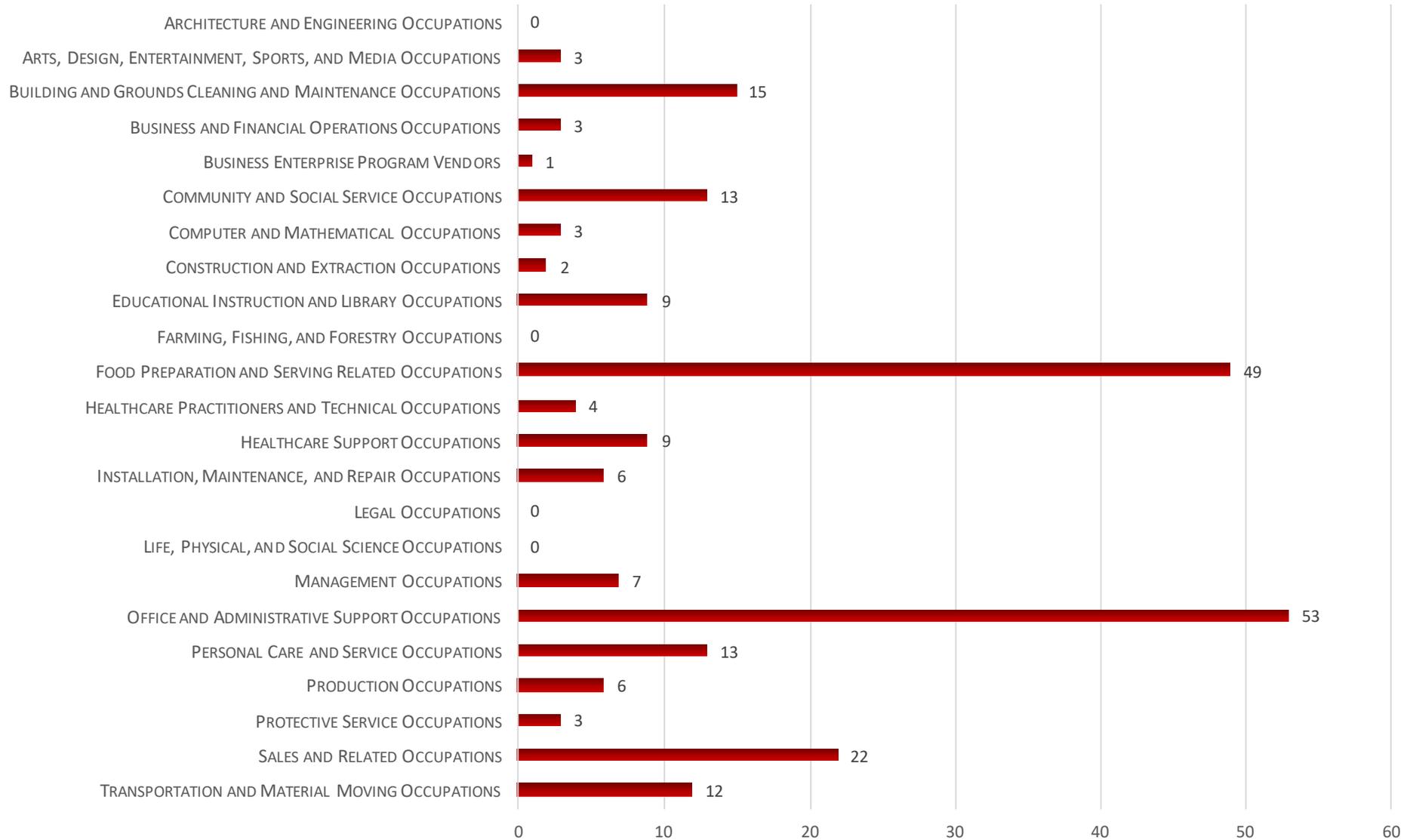
These services were well underway when on March 13th the State and schools moved towards shutdowns and distance learning due to COVID-19. What did this mean for our students, services and partnerships? This is where innovation in the face of adversity took over. ORS quickly formulated plans on what it would take to continue providing our valuable transition services to students in this new "virtual" world. We made a menu of services that our CRPs could still provide virtually. We met with vendors, as a group and individually, to elicit feedback around capacity and to discuss creative ideas around what this new service-delivery could and would look like. We provided communication and direction to LEA's, Special Education Directors, and CRPs statewide, which included our plan to move forward with an array of services that could be provided virtually. These services included Job Explorations, Summer Work Experiences, Travel Training, Tri-Employment and Project Search.

We did not get sidelined by the adversity we were facing but became stronger because of it. It is through the true collaboration and creativeness of our Counselor's and Community Rehabilitation Providers that in this current school year 2020-2021, as we continue to fight to stay healthy during the pandemic, we have new "virtual" services that will meet the needs of the LEA's and students as they continue along their Career Pathways and transition to adulthood. These new services that can be provided virtually or in person include a work readiness program for our 9th and 10th grade students, Career Chats where students are virtually interfacing with employers asking questions and learning more about these specific career paths, and Interviewing Skill Builder seminar that will prepare them for that point in time when they are interviewing for a job.

May 2021

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
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2	3	4	5 	6	7	8
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16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31 Memorial Day					

Primary Occupation of 233 Successfully Employed Individuals with Disabilities



June 2021

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20  First Day of Summer	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30			

Supported Employment

The ORS Supported Employment (SE) Services Program assists individuals with the most significant disabilities to acquire the skills and experience, along with the appropriate supports, to obtain and maintain competitive, integrated employment. As a result of the Consent Decree between the Department of Justice (DOJ) and the State of Rhode Island, ORS continues to work with the Department of Behavioral Healthcare, Developmental Disabilities and Hospitals (BHDDH), and Department of Education (RIDE) to develop services to meet the employment needs of individuals of all ages and differing abilities.

The current COVID-19 pandemic has created a multitude of challenges with providing in-person services to all consumers that receive employment services. Within two weeks of ORS having to move to working remotely, in-person vocational services were redesigned so that the Developmental Disability organizations would be able to provide virtual services with the goal of keeping individuals engaged and focused on employment. The Provider Agencies that remained open provided virtual employment services and those that later reopened have also embraced the provision of virtual services.

For those individuals who have recently expressed a strong desire to work at an in-person position in the community, COVID risk discussions and waivers take place and are reviewed and signed by ORS, the Provider Agency staff, the client/guardian, and/or the support team.

ORS and BHDDH have been working together with respective technical support providers to identify how best to meet demand and overcome obstacles due to COVID. ORS explored the development of an Integrated Resource Team (IRT) model, which utilizes a full array of available resources in the State. Services are centered around what an individual with multiple needs requires: housing, employment, and mental health. Also, several members of the ORS SE staff participated in fidelity training for the Person-Centered Supported Employment Program (PCSEP) being offered by BHDDH. Additionally, the *Let's Get to Work Program* -- a collaborative effort with ORS, Department of Labor and Training (DLT), BHDDH, and Department of Human Services (DHS) to centralize a specialized unit to help individuals with disabilities obtain employment – has been an essential piece of a refreshed Employment First Initiative brought to the attention of the Governor's office. Work is being done across several State agencies to highlight the needs of individuals with disabilities. ORS and BHDDH are working with the DLT to ensure that anyone with a disability is provided the same access to any State-sponsored employment programs as those without disabilities.

ORS believes that the collaboration with State Agencies and the Governor's office will help increase employment opportunities for any individual with a disability and especially for those who need supported employment services.

July 2021

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
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Services for the Blind & Visually Impaired (SBVI)

Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired (SBVI) offers a wide array of services to eligible individuals who are blind or visually impaired through its Vocational Rehabilitation Unit, Business Enterprises Program, and Social Services Program. The various services offered by these programs are designed to help individuals of all ages achieve independence at home, in the community, and in the workplace.

Vocational Rehabilitation Program... A Federal/State Program created to assist people who are blind or visually impaired to obtain or maintain employment. Services provided include: evaluation, orientation, mobility training, rehabilitation technology, guidance and counseling, career assessment, educational planning, vocational training, provision of adaptive equipment, job development, job placement, and follow-up services.

Business Enterprises Program... A Federal/State Program which establishes vending facilities in state, federal, or private buildings for operation by persons who are legally blind. Licensed blind vendors operate vending facilities at 12 locations throughout the state and are assigned to these locations on the basis of their seniority within the program. Types of facilities range from small snack bars serving light snacks and beverages to larger food-service sites serving hot and cold entrees prepared on-site. All operate under the name of "Coffee Plus".

Assistive Technology Access Partnership (ATAP)...The Office of Rehabilitation Services is the lead Agency for the Rhode Island Assistive Technology Access Partnership (ATAP). ATAP is a statewide program funded under the Assistive Technology Act of 1998, which works to

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

Social Services Program... Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired coordinates a federal comprehensive service program which focuses primarily on children from birth through age 14, elderly individuals, and individuals for whom a vocational goal is not feasible.

Children's Case Management Services include family case-work, coordination with Early Intervention Programs, educational guidance, summer camp for youths, arrangement of ophthalmologist and low vision evaluations, and information and referral to appropriate community programs.

Independent Living for Older Blind Program provides case management services, along with ancillary services for mobility and orientation, rehabilitation teaching for skills training in activities of daily living, management of low vision, provisions of adaptive equipment, and information and referral to support groups and appropriate community services.

Adaptive Telephone Equipment Loan Program (ATEL)... The ATEL Program loans telephone equipment to residents of the State of Rhode Island who have hearing, speech, or neuro-muscular (unable to dial or hold a receiver) impairments and have a signed certificate of disability. Equipment is issued on a first-come, first-serve basis.

August 2021

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
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15	16	17	18	19	20	21
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29	30	31				

SBVI Statistics

Business Enterprises Program

- **12** Vending facilities were supported by the Randolph-Sheppard Business Enterprises Program (BEP) at Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired. These 12 facilities collectively also provide employment for numerous individuals around the state. Multiple operators have a second location they manage.
- Average reported net earnings by a vendor: **\$22,069**
- Highest reported net earnings by a vendor: **\$40,022**
- Permanent counter shields were installed in facilities that serve meals and coffee. Those facilities were also provided with POS systems and operators were provided POS, assisted by BEP Staff with setting up web sites and trained for online ordering and cashless sales.

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

- **338** older individuals who are blind or visually impaired (over age 55) received services from the Independent Living for Older Blind Program.

Annual statistics show that:

- **79%** of individuals over age 55, served reported feeling that they are in greater control and are more confident in their ability to maintain their current living situation as a result of services they received.
- **91%** of individuals receiving AT (assistive technology) services and training maintained or improved functional abilities that were previously lost or diminished as a result of vision.

The ATAP and ATEL Programs reached out to various agencies to provide technical assistance and information and guidance to assist with tele-support and Assistive Technology plans for the individuals that they provide supports too.

Social Services for the Blind

SBVI staff continued to provide critical services in 2020 through remote, virtual, telephonic and socially distant mechanisms to assure the safety of all due to COVID-19.

Children's Services

RISBVI staff collaborated with the RIC Sherlock Center Vision Education Services specialist to continue to advocate for them and assist parents to address the educational the needs of visually impaired children. In school/educational settings- RISBVI staff endeavored to support the specialized needs of remote learners during the pandemic which rely heavily on technology and one to one support.

Newsline

- No. of individuals that are registered for this newspaper reading service provided by the National Federation of the Blind (NFB), and funded by SBVI: **522**

Assistive Technology Access Partnership (ATAP)

- No. of individuals that received information from Assistive Technology Access Partnership (ATAP) Resource Centers about assistive technology (AT) and funding options: **11,113**
- No. of individuals that received Demonstrations: **507**
- No. of individuals that received Device Loan: **148**
- No. of individuals that received Reused Devices: **23**

Adaptive Telephone Equipment Loan Program (ATEL)

- No. of individuals provided with specialized equipment through the ATEL (Adaptive Telephone Equipment Loan) Program: **135**

September 2021

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7 Labor Day	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22 	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30		

Disability Determination Services

The Rhode Island Disability Determination Services (RI DDS) is a unit within the Office of Rehabilitation Services, which operates under a “state-federal” partnership. The function of the RI DDS is to make determinations as to the medical eligibility of adults and children with physical and/or mental impairments who have applied for Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) and/or Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits. The RI DDS is assigned a budgeted workload under a regulatory agreement with the Social Security Administration (SSA). The RI DDS is 100 percent financed by SSA to adjudicate initial disability applications, appeals of cases initially denied, and continuing disability reviews. The RI DDS also performs disability hearings on cases in which benefits have been terminated. In total, the RI DDS processed 12,819 disability cases this year. Based on increased staffing and an expected increase in intake RI DDS anticipates processing approximately 14,000 cases in FFY21. COVID-19 detrimentally impacted case clearances and most all aspects of case processing during FY2020.

RI DDS has completed the roll-out of the new computer system that SSA is developing. The system is referred to as DCPS (Disability Case Processing System). We started the roll out in March of 2017. We currently have 100% of the staff using the system SSA is constantly improving the software and tools that the examiners use in their daily functions to enhance timely and accurate decisions and make the system more functional for users. Users are no longer working in dual environments. We turned off the Legacy system in June of 2020 when the contract was up. Not all case types are supported in the new system at this time. However, DCPS has

monthly enhancement releases which are improving functionality and striving to meet the required software tools of the DDS.

In late 2020 the federal hiring freeze that had been in place since 2016 came to an end. RI DDS was able to post and fill all vacancies as well as 7 newly created, 100 percent federally-funded full-time positions. These new hires began onboarding in September 2020 with the final 4 positions coming onboard in January 2021. This increase in staffing will help us increase productivity while decreasing processing time in FY21. COVID-19 caused disruption in our case processing because in-person medical appointments were halted and face-to-face consultative examinations were suspended. Work on Continuing Disability Reviews (CDRS), prehearings, and hearings were suspended per SSA directives from April 2020 – August 2020. COVID-19 related policies precluded any claims from being denied for failure to cooperate or insufficient evidence during this same timeframe. This resulted in a slower processing time. Despite all the changes in the method, claims were processed. Despite the federal hiring freeze that had been ongoing since FFY16 and COVID-19, the RI DDS processed 12,819 disability claims. The RI DDS has been able to maintain excellent accuracy ratings of 97.2%. Yet we have faced some challenges keeping pace with this workload due to staff vacancies, medical leaves, and the learning curve for the new processing system. We received limited help from other States with our medical reviews. We are finding that aged cases are increasing slightly which results in an uptick in our processing time. We ended FFY19 with an overall processing time of 105.8, which is below the national threshold of 113 days.

October 2021

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11 Columbus Day	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31 						

Rhode Island continues to operate a CDI Unit (Cooperative Disability Investigations) to help combat fraud in the program. This unit investigates fraud at initial and reconsideration applications, prior to claimants being put in pay status. Recently, they have been able to work fraud cases for individuals already in pay status. The referrals come from the field offices, DDS, and the public. The CDI unit consists of a DDS examiner, a field office representative, two investigators from the Attorney General's office, and a Special Agent. SSA continues to put a high emphasis on combatting fraud in the program.

Local Social Security Field Offices

30 Quaker Lane, 1st Floor
Warwick, RI 02886-0111
1-866-964-2038

4 Pleasant Street
Pawtucket, RI 02860
1-866-931-7079

Pavilion Plaza
2168 Diamond Hill Road
Woonsocket, RI 02895
1-877-229-3542

130 Bellevue Avenue
Newport, RI 02840
1-866-253-5607

1 Empire Plaza, 6th floor
Providence, RI 02903
1-877-402-0808

Disability Determination Services

Statistics

11,810	Total cases were received by the Disability Determination Services (DDS).
12,819	Claims were processed by the DDS
7,067	Initial claims were filed
7,496	Initial claims were processed
3,772	Continuing Disability Review cases were completed
181	Pre-Hearing Cases were processed, resulting in 79 Disability Hearing decisions
3,083	Consultative Exams were purchased
11,421	Medical Evidence Records were purchased
\$982,558	Total Medical Costs with Total DDS Budget of \$9,816,375
\$686.22	Cost per case

November 2021

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11 Veterans Day	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25 	26	27
28	29	30				

Success Stories

Client: Nicole Lautieri
Counselor: Glenn Lanoue
Occupation: Insurance Customer Service Representative
Employer: Warren E. Nichols Insurance

Nicole Lautieri is a 43-year old individual who was provided services from the Rhode Island Office of Rehabilitation Services, Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired unit. Nicole had been coded as Permanently Legally Blind due to Optic Atrophy.

Initially Nicole met with VR Counselor Glenn Lanoue for vocational counseling and guidance to discuss services and create an employment plan. An updated resume was created, and Nicole utilized it to obtain her current employment. In 2019, Nicole obtained employment at Warren E. Nichols Insurance in East Greenwich, Rhode Island.

The services provided by SBVI assisted Nicole in completing her job functions as an Insurance Customer Service Representative.

Some of her job duties include replying to customer inquiries via phone and email; she also utilizes a computer for contact information and case notes.

A worksite assessment was conducted by Silver Lining Technologies and various devices were recommended and purchased by ORS/SBVI to assist with her job duties. Nicole was provided with and received training with the low vision equipment at her workplace including a video magnification CCTV, a large print keyboard, and a Dell Pro Series 24-inch monitor.

Nicole stated that the technology and training that was provided to her by ORS has assisted her greatly in her job performance and also to maintain employment. Nicole is also the President of the Parent Teacher Organization for Winman Middle School in Warwick. Nicole's case was closed successfully in 2020, and she is still currently employed.



December 2021

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21 	22	23	24	25 Christmas Day 
26	27	28	29	30	31 	

Client: Adam H.
Counselor: Sheila Moffat
Occupation: Food Service Worker
Employer: Sodexo & Global Connections to Employment (GCE)

Earlier this year, Adam H. returned to ORS for services. Adam had been previously closed successfully to services in 2014. At that time, he had successfully acquired training and a ServSafe certificate and maintained full-time employment as a Food Service Worker with Global Connections to Employment (GCE.) With nearly five years of employment at GCE under his belt, Adam wished to explore options to further his career in a position that might offer advancement and higher earnings. He reapplied for ORS services with this goal in mind.

Once he clarified his goals with his VR Counselor and his employment plan was developed, Adam was referred to vendors who he had previously success working with. Adam began participating in job development activities around his current full-time work schedule. He required assistance with academic tasks, specifically development of marketing tools and completing digital profiles and applications. Adam also networked with his VR counselor to connect with other potential resources. His persistence and commitment to the process helped manifest interviews and job offers, however, these did not afford the opportunity he wished to secure. Adam remained committed to the process. After five months of job search, Adam identified an opportunity with Sodexo at Salve Regina University. He received assistance setting up his digital profile with Sodexo and processing the application. Adam was offered an interview, and given his relevant

experience and interview skills, he was promptly offered employment which met his desired requirements of potential advancement and higher earnings. Unfortunately, the position was set on an academic school year schedule and Adam required year-round work. Adam worked with his vocational supports to devise a proposal to his current employer that he would continue part-time with GCE and be available for full-time status when on Summer and Winter school breaks. He presented his proposal and worked closely with managers at both employment sites to develop a schedule that could work for each employer. Since he was well regarded at GCE, Adam was granted his request to move to part-time during the school year and now works across two jobs culminating in over 40 hours each week with comprehensive benefits, including health, dental, vision, retirement and paid time off.

During the course of this year, Adam was challenged with situations outside of employment which could very well have derailed his vocational success. He was transparent about these challenges and worked with his VR counselor to access the appropriate resources which are currently aiding him in addressing concerns. His perseverance and commitment to meeting his challenges mirrored his apparent strong work ethic in many ways. Adam's evident hard work has been key in the recipe for his most recent success.



Client: Donnie Castle
Counselor: Karen Russell
Occupation: Team Associate
Employer: Walmart

Donnie Castle is a 63-year old man who applied for ORS services because he had not worked for several years and wanted full-time employment. A vocational evaluation was completed to assess his vocational interest, strengths, limitations and support needs. He completed his worksite assessment at Burlington Coat Factory, where he was hired part-time. He completed a Job Preparation Program provided by Career Construction of RI to assist with developing his resume, cover/thank you letters, completing online job applications, interviewing skills techniques, and acquiring part-time employment. This was a pre-cursor to full-time employment and led to Donnie to getting his driver's license and a Tracfone.

This first job led to Donnie getting a second part-time CAP 2 Team Associate position at Walmart, while still working part-time at Burlington Coat Factory. The Job Developer provided job retention services because there were initial concerns of performance that was impacted by his disability (vision problems.) The solution was for the employers to provide him tasks that utilized his strengths.

He also had health issues that caused him to lose time from work and his Job Developer assisted him with strategies as to how to approach his employer, which resulted in him maintaining his job. Currently, he is working full-time with overtime hours.

Seven years before being referred to ORS, he was homeless and collecting SSDI benefits. His work earnings now exceed

his benefits. He has since left Burlington and has been working consistently over 40 hours weekly at Walmart. Additionally, he recently obtained his driver's permit, is planning to take the road test, and has purchased a car.

Donnie said that he is so thankful for the assistance provided to him from ORS and Career Construction of RI. He also said that he was very pleased and honored to be selected for a success story.



Client: Desiree
Counselor: Kristen Livesey
Occupation: Funeral Director/Embalmer
Apprentice, Crematory Operator
Employer: Gillooly Funeral

Desiree was referred to ORS in 2014 by her Counselor at Comprehensive Community Action Program (CCAP). She had recently graduated from Cranston High School East and had a six-month old baby. She had an IEP in school and with limited work experience and the pressures of being a young single mother, it was felt that she would benefit from Vocational Rehabilitation services.

Desiree stated some initial vocational goals of Forensic Medicine, Funeral Services, or becoming a Coroner.

From the very first meeting, Desiree was motivated and determined to achieve her goals. With the support from ORS, Desiree enrolled in Bristol Community College (BCC) and obtained her certification in Thanatology and Funeral Services Preparation. After BCC, she transferred to Mt. Ida College in Newton, Massachusetts where she was enrolled in the Funeral Services program. Desiree was able to maintain a 3.0 GPA all while raising her son and taking the NFDA Certified Crematory Operator course.

In 2018, Desiree received an e-mail stating that Mt. Ida College was bought by UMASS Dartmouth and the Funeral Service program was going to be dissolved. While this was very upsetting, it did not stop Desiree. She quickly researched other programs and applied to FINE Mortuary College (FMC) in Norwood, Massachusetts. ORS worked diligently to make FMC a vendor of the State to ensure there was no break in her education. In October 2019, Desiree graduated with a B.S. in Funeral Services and certification in Cremation and Sea Burials. She obtained an apprenticeship at Service Corp. International (SCI), a company that owns over 2,000 funeral homes, cemeteries, and crematoriums throughout the U.S. She was considered a full-time employee during her apprenticeship and

continued to work for SCI after the internship was complete. She also picks up extra hours as an Evening Transfer Specialist. Desiree is the epitome of hard work and dedication. She has demonstrated resilience and motivation during her time with ORS.

The ORS counselor was lucky to be her counselor throughout her entire vocational journey and is very proud to highlight her as a **SUCCESS!**



Client: Richard
Counselor: Amanda Marcaccio
Occupation: Central Service Technician
Employer: Newport Hospital

Richard “Ricky” started working with ORS during his senior year of high school. After completing his senior year, Ricky went on to the Project Search Transition program at Newport Hospital. Project Search at Newport Hospital is a collaboration between ORS, Newport County Regional School District, and Newport Hospital.

Ricky settled into Project Search very easily and was instantly loved by all the hospital staff. Ricky completed his first 10-week internship in the Environmental Services Department. In this department he was responsible for cleaning various areas of the hospital.

For his second 10-week rotation Ricky was assigned to the Surgical Services Department. Here Ricky was responsible for stocking the OR Supply Room. Ricky had to identify which inventory needed to be replenished, go to the storeroom to collect the needed supplies, and then stock the supply room. During his time in this department, Ricky was able to be exposed to other jobs such as sanitation and stocking case carts. During his second rotation, The Project Search teacher connected

with the Department Supervisor and identified a need within the Surgical Services Department, this resulted in the Department developing a position for Ricky. Ricky completed his second rotation and was then hired within the Surgical Services Department as Central Service Technician.

Ricky’s main responsibilities are to read case cart orders, pick the medical supplies needed and stock the OR case carts. The OR case carts are filled with necessary medical equipment and supplies that surgeons need to perform surgeries and procedures. Ricky started at this position May 2019 and continues to work part time.



Ricky accessed several vocational services during his time with ORS, including Project Search, Supported Employment Job Development/Placement and Supported Employment Job Retention and Job Coaching. His time working with ORS helped him prepare for his life after

high school. Ricky is employed in a job he loves, he drives, and has his own car!

Client: Jaelynn
Counselor: Valerie Williams
Occupation: Certified Nursing Assistant
Employer: Hattie Ide Chaffee House

Jaelynn was a 17-year-old female 10th grader at The Met referred by her case manager, Lynne Damiano to ORS. The VR Counselor met Jaelynn September, 2017 to help her with her VR application. At the MET, she had an individual education plan (IEP) with accommodations for a Learning Disability, ADHD, and depression. She stated at application that her career interests were Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA), Nurse, and Pediatrician. She was found eligible for services in three areas: self-direction, work skills, and communication. She had a part-time position at Burger King.

Unfortunately, at the time that she applied, ORS went on a stricter Order of Selection; and in December of 2017 all new applicants for ORS services were put on an indefinite wait list. Jaelynn's case was removed from the wait list in July, 2019. Her VR Counselor met with her to find out what she had been doing, and what were her career goals. Jaelynn was attending CCRI, but she really wanted to work in the medical field. An employment plan with a vocational goal of Certified Nursing Assistant was developed.

In August 2019, the VR counselor authorized testing. After receiving test results, contact was established again with Jaelynn, and a meeting was made in January 2020. Jaelynn met with her VR Counselor to discuss the results and to go over her options and training programs. The team started calling places that offered

medical and/or certified nurse assistant programs: MTTI, HITEP and ACE Home Health, and Jaelynn decided on HITEP. Her IPE was amended to reflect her choice, and she started the HITEP program in February 2020. It was close to where she was living, and she would be able to take RIPTA or walk to the training.

The counselor received notice from the school that Jaelynn had graduated and successfully passed the training in April 2020 just as the COVID-19 pandemic was in full swing. Despite that fact, Jaelynn told her counselor that she would like to work, and the counselor provided Jaelynn with a contact at HITEP (Marissa) to help her begin her job search. Jaelynn met with Marissa in July 2020 and started her job search. Her temporary Certified Nursing Assistant license was renewed July 2020, and Jaelynn was hired on at Hattie Ide Chaffee House, East Providence, RI.

Jaelynn received her Certified Nursing Assistant license in September 2020, and she was so excited when she met with her counselor to talk about her experience with her employment. She was in a great nursing home that had no COVID-19 cases, and the company loved her enthusiasm, motivation, empathy, compassion and work skills. Her employer stated that they were willing to pay for nursing school for her since she is working full time with them, over 40 hours per week. The counselor worked closely together with Jaelynn to help her succeed and supported her to obtain, maintain and achieve employment in her dream job. From the first meeting with ORS, Jaelynn stated that all she wanted to be was a nurse and work in the medical field. Jaelynn is a great example of how ORS services can help a person achieve their dream job.

Raymond A. Carroll Award

The Raymond A. Carroll Award is given to an individual who exemplifies the same dedication in serving individuals with disabilities as Mr. Carroll had during his forty-two years of state service.

Raymond Carroll began his career at the Office of Rehabilitation Services in 1966 and retired in 2008. During that time, he demonstrated his awareness of the needs of individuals with disabilities and was a dedicated and effective advocate for improving the standards set for programs providing services for those individuals with disabilities.



On July 7, 2020, Karen Davis was extremely surprised when she was “virtually” presented with the 9th Annual Raymond A. Carroll Award. Karen Davis began her career at the Office of Rehabilitation Services in November 2004 as a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor. Ms. Davis received a Bachelor's Degree in Psychology from Rhode Island College and a Master's Degree in Rehabilitation Counseling from Rhode Island College. She moved up the ladder to become a VR Supervisor in September 2007. She has been described as a knowledgeable, caring, supportive

person of both clients and ORS staff. Staff who nominated her for this award said she always had an open-door policy. She treats everyone fairly without any favoritism, and is a very diligent, hardworking, and caring individual. In April 2019 Karen was promoted to Assistant Administrator - Supported Employment.

Congratulations Karen!

Past Recipients

2011 - Sharon DiPinto

Sr. Human Services Policy & Systems Specialist

2012 - Kathy McCabe

Sr. Rehabilitation Counselor

2013 - Sherry Olink

Jr. Resource Specialist

2014 - Teresa Scaramuzzo-DiMattia

Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor II

2015 - Rosemary Feeney

Sr. Human Services Business Officer

2016 - Paula Stachelek

Word Processing Typist

2017 - Sheridan Lomax

Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor

2018 - Rosemarie Aponte

Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor

Message from the State Rehabilitation Council Chair

Highlights 2019-2020



Dr. Judith Drew, SRC Chair

Dear Consumers, Families, Friends, Partners and Stakeholders:

The Rhode Island State Rehabilitation Council had a successful year meeting our goals of supporting ORS in its work on behalf of people with disabilities in R.I. In this report, you will be provided with an overview of our activities of the past year along with future goals for 2021. Detailed reports from the subcommittees that do the work of the Council, and a list of Council members with brief biographies of those members and the constituency each member represents are included, as well.

We have an engaged and energized Council membership, who actively participated in our work on behalf of our community. COVID-19 created challenges for us as we went from in-person meetings to virtual sessions. However, we continued our work, adjusted, and are finding that virtual meetings have created increased access for those who have difficulty traveling to in-person meetings.

Major initiatives regarding employment for people with disabilities such as “Let’s Get to Work” are continuing in R.I. Although, it has been a challenging time, this project is seeing some success in spite of COVID-19 challenges. The ORS counselors and staff have continued to promote and encourage person-centered planning and have created virtual service delivery models with their community partners. The SRC and ORS’ community partners continue to be thankful for their creativity and drive to keep their partnerships strong and successful for the benefit of our consumers

Our Partners

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

Goals of the Council

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

- Review, analyze, and advise ORS regarding the performance of their responsibilities in planning, developing and implementing services to persons with disabilities in order to affect competitive employment outcomes,

- Advise and assist in the application of the State Plan, strategic plans, reports, needs assessments, and evaluations required under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended,
- Conduct a review and analysis of the effectiveness of consumer satisfaction with the functions and activities of the State Agency as they relate to employment outcomes,
- Advise the State Agency and provide for working relationships between the State Agency and the Statewide Independent Living Council,
- Perform such other functions as the Council deems appropriate and that are comparable to the other functions performed by the Council, and
- Prepare and submit an Annual Report to the Governor and the Rehabilitation Services Administration.

Our 2020 Major Accomplishment

In 2020, the Council's major activity was to assist ORS in the development, implementation and data analysis of the results of the Comprehensive Needs Assessment (CNA). The ORS vendor list was updated for this survey, and 63 providers were invited to participate in the assessment. The response rate of 37 percent was slightly higher than last year largely due to the extra effort of the SRC Facilitator and ORS's staff. We were pleased with the responses and the outcomes since many providers and their leadership were furloughed during this time. More information about the CNA results will be forth coming in 2021.

ORS continues to encourage and support more diverse employment options for individuals with disabilities that reflect their choice and the principles of person-centered planning. During each Council meeting they updated the Council on their work and any new initiatives they undertook, giving members the opportunity to ask questions and make suggestions for additional approaches and activities.

In addition to achieving these goals, the Council continued to monitor ORS' Order of Selection (OOS) and Waitlist to determine how quickly individuals were being moved off the Waitlist and into employment services. This year saw a reduction in the numbers in the OOS for the first time in many years. ORS is now able to move people off the Waitlist as openings become available. It is our hope that individuals who apply for services will no longer have to wait to receive them in 2021.

Acknowledgments

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

After 25 years of service, Carol Mattson retired from her position as the Chief Human Services Business Officer for ORS. Carol was recognized for many accomplishments during her time with ORS. She developed a succession plan for her position, which had never been done before, and facilitated the transition for her replacement. Additionally, her assistance with the financial management of the Waitlist enabled ORS to quickly move clients off the list and into services. Also, RSA recognized Carol's work publicly during the last site review because of her creation of a form to streamline a time-consuming administrative process. As a result, they decided to encourage national adoption of the form by other states.

Tracey Cunningham-Martins M. A., Associate Director of Employment, Department of Behavioral Healthcare, Developmental Disabilities and Hospitals (BHDDH) was recognized for her commitment to individuals with ID/DD throughout her career in the field of human services. She worked in NY, MA and RI with human service agencies to focus on customized employment practices. Over the last four years she has helped RI agencies improve their employment services. Tracey has facilitated increased communication and partnerships between BHDDH, ORS, and other state agencies to increase employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities.

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

Membership

Again, this year we were happy to welcome new members who joined the Council. They are Allison Robinson, who is the Interim Program Director at the Office of Disability Services at CCRI, and Jennifer Doucette, who is the Regional Transition Coordinator at Northern RI. She is the Director of Regional Transition for the West Bay Collaborative, as well.

The Membership Committee continues to be very engaged in recruiting new members. They have created a mentorship program for new members that will go into effect this year. We will be using this program to acquaint new members with the work of the SRC and to assist them in becoming fully engaged in our committee work through advocacy and support of ORS' initiatives.

Our ongoing commitment is to continually increase the diversity of our membership to be more representative of the people we support, and who ORS serves. We will welcome several new members in 2021 who are committed to the rights of all people with disabilities, who will share their perspectives on the state of disability rights, needs for employment in R.I., and be vocal advocates for employment based on choice.

Looking Ahead to What's Next

As with the previous years, the Council will continue to monitor the progress the State of Rhode Island and ORS are making in fulfilling its responsibilities under the Rhode Island Supported Employment and Integrated Day Service Consent Decree. The Consent Decree continues

to be enforced in RI and without the Order of Selection ORS has made strides in increasing supported employment opportunities for individuals with significant disabilities. We look forward to supporting them in this work in 2021.

The Council will continue to receive updates regularly on the status of individuals covered under the Consent Decree. In addition, the Council monitor those served by the Pre-ETS program to ensure they receive the services needed to successfully transition into employment services, especially since the program has been hard hit by the COVID-19 pandemic. Also, the Council will continue to monitor the use of the Supported Decision-Making model with students in transition as required by the Act.

With the beginning of the new initiative “Let’s Get to Work” in 2020, the Council was pleased to provide support and guidance as it was implemented and look forward to increased employment outcomes in 2021.

Finally, the final report of the Comprehensive Needs Assessment will be available in 2021 for review by the SRC and the public. We look forward to supporting ORS as it creates new opportunities to meet the needs of Rhode Islanders with disabilities. Also, we will be engaging in collaboration with ORS as they create new opportunities for collaboration with their providers to increase employment outcomes.

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

Respectfully Submitted,

Judith L. Drew, PhD
SRC Chairperson

What Are The State Rehabilitation Councils?

The State Rehabilitation Councils (SRCs) are the consumer voice for the VR program. Federally mandated membership requirements include a broad range of stakeholders to ensure that various constituencies have a voice in the conduct of the VR agency. This consumer voice is absolutely necessary for the VR program to partner with individuals with disabilities to jointly facilitate the accomplishment of their dreams of independence, full community integration, and employment.

SRC members represent the state agency to a broad array of partners such as employers, parents, educators, community rehabilitation programs, and other stakeholders in the VR program. They reinforce the value that individuals with disabilities are able to achieve quality employment outcomes and become contributing members of society.

Though mandated by federal law, the partnership between SRCs and VR extends beyond the shared accomplishment of mandated tasks. Specifically, the partnership is a call to action to advocate for and to hear the voices of the people served by VR. The partnership must be a commitment and priority for the partners in order to make the VR system a change agent whose goal is to assist people with disabilities to become employed in integrated, competitive employment!

(McGuire-Kuletz, M., Tomlinson, P., & Hurley, K.B. 2019). McGuire-Kuletz, M., Tomlinson, P., & Hurley, K.B. page 1 (2019).

The State Rehabilitation Council – vocational rehabilitation partnership under WIOA - Washington, DC: The George Washington University, Center for Rehabilitation Counseling Research and Education.

The Council's Mission

To work with ORS assuring that all Rhode Islanders with disabilities are able to obtain and keep meaningful and satisfying employment.

Our Vision

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

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

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

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

- *Conduct a review and analysis of the effectiveness of consumer satisfaction with the functions and activities of the State Agency as they relate to employment outcomes.

How to Become a RISRC Member: The Governor appoints members. As SRC members and VR advocates, we work in strategic partnership to increase the employment of people with disabilities in competitive, integrated jobs of their choice and in keeping with their skills and abilities. Federal law governing membership requires that certain categories be represented on the council (e.g., businesses, community rehabilitation providers, disability groups), and these category assignments are made by the Governor's office, in light of applicant experience and expressed representational preferences. If you are interested or want more information about the RISRC, please contact us at risc@cox.net.

Membership Training Sub-Committee

The Membership Training Sub-Committee is charged with the interviewing, orientation, and training of new members including disseminating new materials and providing an annual training event in partnership with ORS. A mentoring program is available to new members for their first year on the Council.

The Committee maintains four core goals:

- * Maintaining an annual training event - Ensure that all new and existing members have participated in the annual training seminar.
- * Disseminate a membership package - All members are offered a binder that clearly states the SRC mission, vision, responsibilities and contact information along with other relevant materials.
- * Sustaining ongoing efforts toward active recruitment of qualified individuals to its membership. Candidates must represent the interests of the stakeholders and represent a

diverse composition that reflects the needs of the populations served, while meeting the federal requirements. SRC members represent people with disabilities, advocates and family members, employers, and rehabilitation and education professionals. Recruitment of new members is an ongoing, shared responsibility of ALL council members.

- * Implement a mentoring program - The committee will pair new members with experienced members to answer any questions and clarify responsibilities and expectations of the council for at least one year.

Committee accomplishments:

- * Due to Covid-19 restrictions, the Committee did not hold a large training event this year.
- * The mentoring program is available to all new members.
- * The responsibility of current SRC members and especially the training Committee is to recruit new members.

Respectfully Submitted,

*Melissa Brusso, Chair
Membership Training Committee*

State Plan, Policy, and Quality Assurance Committee

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

Last year as well as the year prior, the committee's focus was working with ORS to produce a monthly survey to consumers. ORS's survey had not been updated in quite some time, and was not reflective of the current data collection needs of the agency. The SRC updated the survey using suggestions that the committee made. It resulted in an English and Spanish survey to ensure the participation of underserved and un-served consumers.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the committee moved to continue working on the surveys remotely through a series of

meetings on the Zoom platform. Earlier this year, ORS coordinated with the committee after finishing up a year's worth of the new surveys to revise and update the surveys so that ORS could make adjustments necessary. This was done to help obtain data to better help consumers. The efforts of ORS and the committee resulted in a survey that had a 16% better response rate over last year's survey. However, ORS reported that as the survey continued, responses decreased, so the committee continued to work with ORS to make improvements by revising the survey questions and the order of questions to increase response rates. As a result, the response rate to surveys was 38%, which ORS reported to be a very strong response rate to surveys and would likely produce good data.

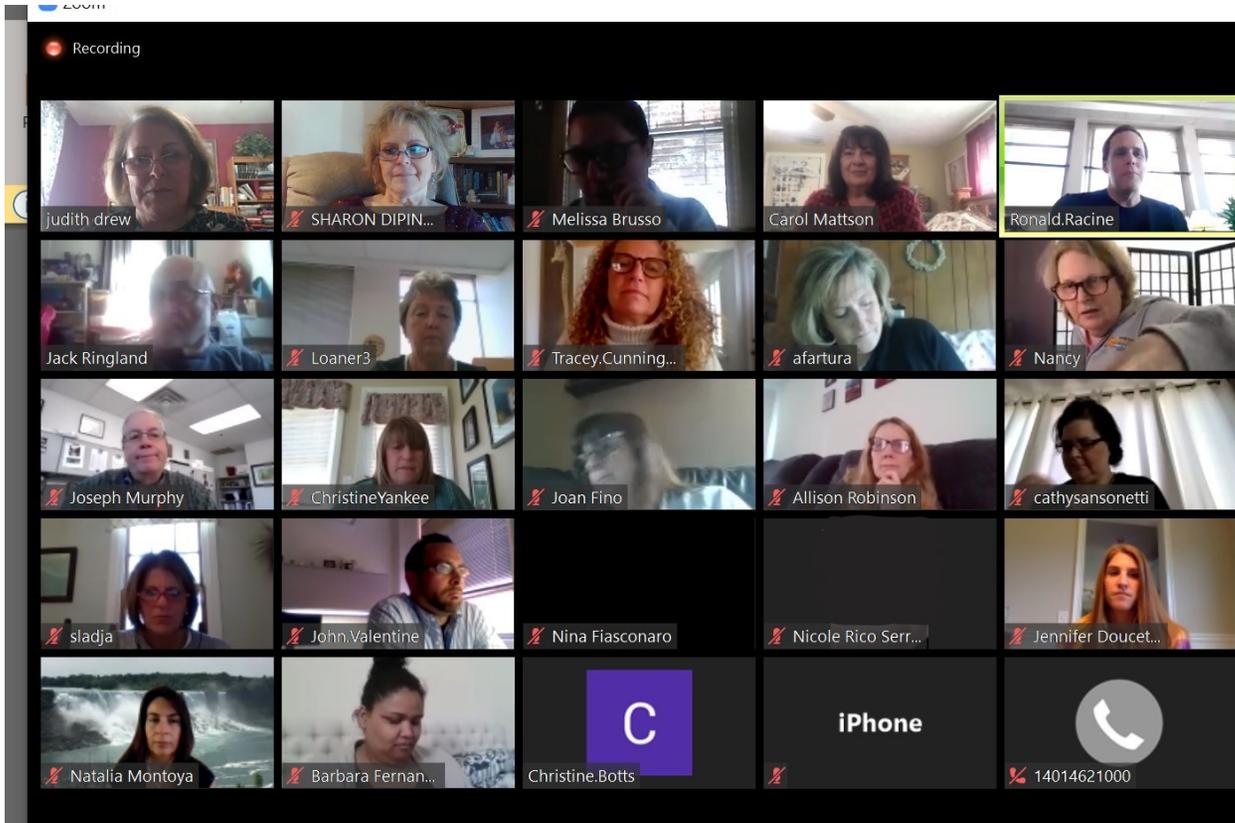
The SRC will to continue to review data ORS collects from these surveys and will make further recommendations to ORS as needed about the quality of service delivery.

Respectfully Submitted,

Catherine Sansonetti, Chair

State Plan, Policy, and Quality Assurance Committee

Rhode Island State Rehabilitation Council Annual Meeting - May, 2020



The following SRC Members and Guests attended the virtual 2020 Annual Meeting via Zoom.

SRC Members: Christina Battista, Christine Botts, Melissa Brusso, Dr. Judith Drew (Chair), Anne Fartura, Barbara Fernandez, Nina Fiasconaro, Joan Fino, Paul Harden, Jack Ringland, Catherine Sansonetti, Nicole Rico Serrano, Jane Slade, Christine Yankee, and Nancy Baker (Facilitator)

ORS: Linda Deschenes, Ronald Racine (ORS Associate Director), Natalia Montoya (VRC), Joseph Murphy, John Valentine (Strategic Planning Supervisor)

Guests: Tracy Cunningham-Martins, Carol Mattson, Jennifer Doucette (West Bay Collaborative), Sharon DiPinto, Allison Hitte Robinson.

Rhode Island State Rehabilitation Council Outstanding Service Award 2020



Tracey Cunningham-Martins M. A., Associate Director of Employment, Department of Behavioral Healthcare, Developmental Disabilities and Hospitals (BHDDH)

was honored for her work in NY, Massachusetts and RI. Her long career in the field has focused on working with individuals with ID/DD and agencies that serve them to customize employment practices. Tracey spoke briefly about her career before coming to RI. She has been working at BHDDH for the past four years with agencies who are providing customized employment practices for people with ID/DD.

Carol Mattson, Retired Chief Human Services Business Officer for the Office of Rehabilitation Services was also honored with this award.



Ron Racine praised Carol by saying Carol's contribution was crucial to the work of ORS since the finance system is the engine that helps the agency do its work. Without her skills and collaboration, ORS could not have navigated all the changes over the past few years.

State Rehabilitation Council Members

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

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

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

Catherine Sansonetti, Esq., is the Chair of the Council and the Chair of the State Plan, Policy and Quality Assurance Committee. She sits on the Council as the current designee for Morna Murray, Executive Director of Disability Rights Rhode Island, representing the Client Assistance Program established under section 732 of this title under 43 CFR part 370. Catherine is an Attorney and the Director of Intake Advocacy at Disability Rights Rhode Island and has been on Council for four terms. She brings over twenty years of experience as an advocate for people with disabilities to her work on the Council. During her tenor, she also served as Secretary of the Council, and was on the Transportation ad hoc Committee. She has been the driving force behind the State Plan, Policy and Quality Assurance Committee for all the years of her service on the Council. Catherine actively works on the Consumer Satisfaction Surveys and the Comprehensive Needs Assessments.

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

Melissa D. Brusso is the Chair of the Membership Training Committee. She sits on the Council as a representative of a Disability Advocacy Group representing individuals with physical, cognitive, sensory, or mental disabilities who have difficulty in representing themselves or are unable due to their disabilities to represent themselves. She is an Educational Advocate at the Paul V. Sherlock Center on Disabilities at Rhode Island College. She has worked in educational advocacy for a total of twelve years, first with the Office of the Child Advocate and the Paul V. Sherlock Center on Disabilities, and later with Justice Resource Institute in Massachusetts. She has worked in adult education and ESL at Dorcas International Institute of RI, helping recently resettled refugee students and other newcomers through the process of beginning their English education. She is appointed by the RI Department of Education to make educational decisions for children and youth throughout Rhode Island.

Christina Battista is a member of the Membership Training Committee. She sits on the Council, representing current or former applicants for, or recipients of Vocational Rehabilitation Services; and representative of the Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC) established under Section 796(d) of this Title, which representative may be Chairperson or other designee of the Council. Christina is a graduate of Salve Regina University in the Vocational Rehabilitation Counseling program. Christine is a motivational speaker educating on what it is like to live with a rare physical disability to help breakdown any preconceived notions of those living with a physical disability.

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

Jennifer Doucette sits on the Council representing a Community Rehabilitation Provider. She is the Regional Transition Coordinator for the Northern Region of Rhode Island and her Center of Excellence is the transition to employment for youth in transition. Additionally, Jennifer is the Director of Regional Transition at West Bay Collaborative, overseeing transition and vocational programming for the Northern region. Prior to her role as Regional Transition Coordinator, she was the Vocational Services Coordinator and Vocational Evaluator at West Bay Collaborative where she provided a variety of ORS-funded services to youth in transition and young adults including Pre-Employment Transition Services. Jennifer has a Master's degree in Rehabilitation Counseling from Salve Regina University.

Anne Fartura is on the State Plan, Policy, and Quality Assurance Committee. She sits on the Council representing the Parent Training and Information Center established pursuant to Section 1431(e)(1) of Title 20. Anne joined the RI Parent Information Network (RIPIN) team in 2010, and serves as a program supervisor. Much of her work is in the area of students with disabilities transitioning from school to

adulthood. Her committee work includes representing RIPIN at Rhode Island's Regional Transition Coordinators meetings, State Transition Council, and the State Rehabilitation Council.

Barbara Fernandez is a new member on the Council and will sit on the State Plan, Policy and Quality Assurance Committee. She is a bilingual legal advocate at Disability Rights Rhode Island. She works primarily on the Client Assistance Program (CAP) and on Protection and Advocacy for Voting Access (PAVA). Barbara also assists in the Rep Payee Review program and is PABSS program trained. Before joining DRRI, Barbara worked as a paralegal in consumer litigation and as a residential manager for individuals with developmental disabilities. As a new member of the SRC, Barbara will be joining the State Plan, Policy and Quality Assurance committee. A Providence native, Barbara has a strong connection to the community and aims to educate and provide assistance to the underserved through advocacy.

Nina Fiasconaro is on the State Plan, Policy, and Quality Assurance Committee. She sits on the Council representing a parent of a highly involved child with disabilities. She started advocating for the disabled and sitting on various committees at Jawanio, which was the UCP of Rockland NY and CPW, which was the UCP for Westchester NY. From 2010 to 2016, she sat on the Board of Directors and was the Director of Development for The Miracle League of Westchester helping develop and run after school programs for children with disabilities. Also, during that period, she sat on the Family Support Services Advisory Council of Westchester NY and was instrumental in overseeing a \$6 million dollar budget for respite programs in Westchester NY.

Professionally she is the Director of Social Media & Public Relations for Wind & Fire Jewelry her family business. Part of her responsibilities is working with our charity partners developing jewelry representing the different agencies working with their development teams and donating a portion of the profits from the sales to the various agencies. Currently she is the founder of **401 A** League of Our Own, an adaptive Buddy Ball League in Rhode Island.

Joan Fino sits on the State Plan, Policy, and Quality Assurance Committee. She has been a family leader for twenty years advocating for children and families, navigating many systems, which include Special Education, Mental Health, Child Welfare, Office of Rehabilitation, and social service systems. Professionally, Joan now works as a Social Work Liaison at **RIPCPC** in the behavioral Health Department.

Paul Harden is a member of the State Plan, Policy and Quality Assurance Committee. He sits on the Council as a representative of Business, Industry, and Labor. Paul is the he Director for the Greater Newport Region for the Small Business Development Center of RI.

Natalia Montoya, M.A., CRC, is a member of the State Plan, Policy and Quality Assurance Committee. She sits on the Council as Liaison for the Office of Rehabilitation Services as a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor with knowledge of and experience with Vocational Programs and community services for ORS participants. Natalia is a VRC I and has been working for the Office of Rehabilitation Services since 2014 serving the mental health population and youth in transition. In addition to her work with the Council, she is also the liaison to Gateway Mental Health Services of Johnston/Cranston, and Johnston High School.

Nicole Rico Serrano is a member of the State Plan, Policy and Quality Assurance Committee. She sits on the Council representing American Indian VR program. She is the new Project Director for the Mashantucket Tribal Nation Rehabilitation Program in Mashantucket, CT. She has worked in the tribal communities of RI and CT for the past eleven years as a vocational rehabilitation counselor for Mashantucket. Nicole is a Narragansett tribal member and is committed to advocating on behalf of the tribal communities to bring cultural awareness and indigenous representation to both RI and CT. She has a bachelor's degree in International Relations and Spanish and a Master's degree in Elementary Education.

Allison Robinson, MS, C.A.G.S. is a new member of the Committee. She sits on the Council as a representative of the higher education field in Rhode Island. She is currently the Interim Director of the Disability Services department at the Community College of Rhode Island (CCRI) and has been with the college for four years as a Coordinator of Disability Services. She has over fifteen years of experience in various positions working with individuals with disabilities including Pre-K-12, Adult Education, and Higher Education. A native Rhode Islander, she is a graduate of the University of Rhode Island (URI) for both her Bachelor's in Human Science and Services and her Master's in Psychology.

Jane Slade, MA, CRC, is a member of the State Plan, Policy and Quality Assurance Committee. She sits on the Council as a representative of the State Educational Agency responsible for the public education of students with disabilities who are eligible to receive services under this subchapter and part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. [20 U.S.C. 1411 et seq.] Jane has been employed as the State Transition Coordinator with the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE), Office of Student, Community and Academic Supports (OSCAS) since June 2011.

Core functions of this office include Special Education policy/ program development & oversight; IDEA State Performance Plan Indicators; Liaison to School Support System visits; State Councils and RIDE statewide developmental work. Ms. Slade's additional focus area of responsibilities include Secondary Transition; Secondary Reform/PBGR; Post-secondary Outcomes; Inter-agency/Adult Services, and she is the Chair of the Rhode Island Transition Council. She is also a Certified Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor.

Christine Yankee is a member of the State Plan, Policy and Quality Assurance Committee. She sits on the Council representing a Community Rehabilitation Program Service Provider and individuals with barriers to employment. Christine is the Vice President of Program Services at Goodwill of Southern New England. She brings over twenty-five years' experience in the areas of workforce development, adult education, and transition services for youth and adults with and without disabilities. Her committee work includes representing (Goodwill) at the RI Workforce Alliance Meeting, and as a Rhode Island Rehabilitation Association (RIRA) board member.

Vocational Rehabilitation Services

Natalia Montoya, M.A., CRC, is a member of the State Plan, Policy and Quality Assurance Committee. She sits on the Council as Liaison for the Office of Rehabilitation Services as a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor with knowledge of and experience with Vocational Programs and community services for ORS participants. Natalia is a VRC I and has been working for the Office of Rehabilitation Services since 2014 serving the mental health population and youth in transition. In addition to her work with the Council, she is also the liaison to Gateway Mental Health Services of Johnston/Cranston, and Johnston High School.

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

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

Laurie DiOrio, Administrator of Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired

Linda Deschenes, Assistant Administrator of Operations

John Valentine, Strategic Planning Supervisor

Nancy Baker, SRC Facilitator/Contact



RISRC Partnership with National Coalition of State Rehabilitation Councils

The State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) is an active long-time member of the National Coalition of State Rehabilitation Councils (NCSRC). The NCSRC strives to

cultivate the strengths and necessary expertise of local SRCs, increase the capacity of SRCs through education & training to become effective partners in the vocational rehabilitation (VR) program. As each SRC maintains their respective individuality, the NCSRC provides a national resource to those Councils who may need to connect with a peer state on issues along with providing a mechanism for training with subject matter experts.

NCSRC Mission

On behalf of people with disabilities, our national membership coalition will advocate for and work in partnership with the national public vocational rehabilitation system's continual quest for excellence.

NCSRC Vision

NCSRC will be the premiere national organization of the consumer voice to enhance the employment opportunities of persons with disabilities through the public vocational rehabilitation system.

NCSRC Core Values

Integrity - We are honest and straightforward in all that we do. We treat everyone with dignity and respect. We act responsibly with resources entrusted to us. We are accountable and act in accordance with these values.

Commitment - We support the full implementation and enforcement of disability non-discrimination laws, particularly the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended and the American with Disabilities Act of 1990.

Excellence - We trust that customers of public vocational rehabilitation will be empowered to make choices which lead to ultimate independence.

Advocacy - We will work to educate and inform the public and government policy makers regarding issues affecting people with disabilities

Diversity - We will uphold a broad definition of diversity that honors and appreciates disability alongside race, ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation, and religion as an integral part of the human experience.

Leadership - We will foster leadership among people with disabilities that upholds excellence, quality and inclusive opportunities.

Partnership - We will promote a positive collaboration with state and non-governmental agencies to enhance meaningful and sustainable employment for people with disabilities.

Teamwork - We are committed to a partnership based on a spirit of trust and cooperation with Vocational Rehabilitation Administrators and staff so that collaborative efforts will benefit from the NCSRC customer voice.

Culture - We support a public vocational rehabilitation service system that is structured in a manner that reflects the social, political, historic, and economic experience of disability.

Communication - We value effective communication through appropriate formats.

The NCSRC currently consists of 53 SRCs of states and territories that provide public VR services. In addition to conference calls every two months, the NCSRC hosts two training conferences each year that coincide with the national meetings of the Council of State Administrators for Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) in collaboration with the Rehabilitation Services.



DHS does not discriminate against any person on the basis of race, color, national origin, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, age, religion or sex in acceptance for or provision of services, employment or treatment in its educational and other programs and activities.



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