



STATE OF NEW JERSEY
DEPARTMENT OF LABOR AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

New Jersey Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services

STATE
REHABILITATION
COUNCIL

Annual Report for FY 2021

The SRC/DVRS Partnership Celebrates Accomplishments
October 1, 2020 through September 30, 2021

New Jersey Department of Labor

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Rehabilitation Council Members

Council Membership is in accordance with Section 105 of the 1998 Amendments to the Rehabilitation Act and New Jersey Executive Order 110 and reflects a diverse range of disability groups, geographical areas, racial, ethnic and gender groups. Each member is appointed by the Governor of New Jersey. The Council represents a broad spectrum of individuals who are concerned with the vocational needs of people with disabilities and who support the objectives of the public rehabilitation program in New Jersey. As of 2021 representation on the Council is as follows:

Member	Representation
Rebecca Shulman	Advocate 4 (SRC Chair)
Karen J. Alexander	Disabled Rep 2 (SRC Vice Chair)
Wayne L. Roorda	Disabled Rep 3 (SRC Treasurer)
Gary Altman	State Workforce Investment Board Representative
Mohsen T. Badran	Community Rehabilitation Program Service Provider
Enza Balestrieri	NH Division of Mental Health & Addiction Services
Karen Carroll	Director of the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation
Tatsiana DaGrosa	Parent Advocate (pending appointment)
Charles Dodge	Disabled Rep. 1
William Freeman	Office of Special Education Representative
Margaret T. Gilbride	Advocate 1
Stephen Gruzlovic	Disabled Rep. 4 (pending appointment)
Carolyn D. Hayer	Parent Training and Information Center Rep. (SPAN)
Thomas G. Jennings	Business, Industry and Labor Representative 1
Jennifer Joyce	NJ Division of Developmental Disabilities
Nantanee Koppstein	Independent Living Council
Lori Margolin	Business, Industry and Labor Rep 3 (pending appointment)
Janet Mills	NJ Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired
JoAnn Norflet	Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services Recipient
Dr. Janice Oursler	Voc. Rehab. Counselor 1
Kathleen Redpath-Perez	Client Assistance Program
Cyndi Walsh Rintzler	Advocate 2 (pending appointment)
Lorna F.M. Runkle	Business, Industry and Labor Representative 2
James E. Seath	Advocate 3
Patricia Tomlinson	Advocate 5

Message from the Chair

On behalf of the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) of New Jersey, it is my privilege to present the 2021 Annual Report to our stakeholders. This program year again presented us with significant challenges as NJDVRs offices were closed to the public for the entire year with all referrals, intakes, plan development and vocational counseling services provided virtually.

New Jersey was hit very hard by the Covid pandemic with many of our State's most vulnerable residents being negatively impacted. In addition, residents of New Jersey experienced changes in their daily routines due to pandemic restrictions and in many cases, the services and supports they were accustomed to receiving were either not available or provided in a different manner.

For individuals who have disabilities achieving their employment goals in any given year can sometimes be challenging but in this year of Covid it has become all the more difficult. It is a credit to the staff of the New Jersey Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services that despite service disruptions and the many challenges of providing virtual services, 1,948 individuals still reached their employment goals and a combined total of 12,420 individuals were served in application, eligibility and/or employment plan status.

The mission of the New Jersey Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (NJDVRs) is to help individuals with significant disabilities choose and achieve success in competitive-integrated employment aligned with their abilities, strengths, and needs. During these difficult times, it is inspiring to see that the valuable work of the Division continues and that individuals who have significant disabilities have still been able to reach their career goals.

I want to thank Council members for all their hard work and want to acknowledge the efforts made by the NJDVRs Director, Assistant Directors, Chiefs, Counselors, Support Staff, Supervisors, Managers and Central Office Staff. Their dedication and the contributions they make every day to ensure that individuals who have disabilities are able to reach their career goals is truly noteworthy and greatly appreciated.

On a personal note, I specifically want to thank Peggy Englebert for her many years of service to the SRC and to the Vocational Rehabilitation community and profession. Peggy announced that she will be retiring in early 2022 and her term on the SRC ended in June 2021. Peggy was an SRC chair, committee chair and very active member, always available for advice and consultation. Thank you, Peggy, for all of your contributions and hard work on behalf of the SRC in New Jersey and for assisting individuals who have disabilities achieve their career goals.

Respectfully submitted,

Rebecca Shulman

Rebecca Shulman, M.A., C.R.C, L.R.C.

Chair, New Jersey Rehabilitation Council

Beliefs, Mission, Function

SRC Beliefs

- As members of the New Jersey State Rehabilitation Council (SRC), we believe:
- That people with disabilities, like all people, have diverse strengths that must be defined and identified along many dimensions.
- That each person with a disability has value.
- In a public system of vocational rehabilitation that is responsible and accountable to those it serves and to those who fund it.
- In partnerships, affiliations and linkages.
- That optimal results in rehabilitation depend on an equal partnership between consumers and the professional (service provider).
- That all consumers should be given enough information to make informed choices.
- That all people with disabilities are ultimately responsible and accountable for the choices they make.
- That all people with disabilities should have the opportunity to maximize their potential.
- That respect for all is critical to this process.
- That it is necessary to support, advance and exemplify diversity and multiculturalism within the disability community and the community at large.
- That the rights of people with disabilities should be advanced and protected.

SRC Mission

The SRC is a partnership of persons with disabilities, advocates and other interested persons. It is committed to ensuring through policy development, implementation and advocacy that New Jersey has a rehabilitation program that is not only comprehensive and consumer- responsive but also effective, efficient and significantly funded. The SRC is dedicated to ensuring that persons with disabilities receive rehabilitation services that result in employment.

SRC Mandated Function

The SRC, on behalf of the community it represents, reviews, analyzes and advises the New Jersey State Vocational Rehabilitation Program (DVRS) regarding the performance of its responsibilities. Council goals and activities are set annually and are in response to both National and State issues, as mandated by Section 105 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended. The focus of Council goals and activities includes but is not limited to Consumer Satisfaction, Statewide Needs Assessment, State Plan and Amendments, Policy, Extent/Scope/Effectiveness of Services, Interagency Agreements and New Jersey's Employment programs.

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), signed into law July 22, 2014, reauthorized the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 under title IV. It is important to note that most provisions under title IV went into effect upon enactment of WIOA. The SRC is committed to ensuring appropriate support to the DVRS in its implementation of WIOA.

DVRS Consumer Messages from the Field...

Patience Okotie-Isekenegbe: Bridgeton Office

I feel pleased that my counselor and I are united to build a foundation for future employment. That starts with getting a bachelor's degree which can open opportunities for employment once I graduate. Patience has molded me into an independent individual who is capable of seeking "in the moment" opportunities within my grasp that can increase my career experience. ~Consumer

Risa Shah: Neptune Office

This morning we had a team meeting addressing a consumer that we all felt isn't ready for Supported Employment at this time. Those conversations are always difficult. However, as always, Risa was realistic, supportive and knowledgeable in discussing appropriate alternatives for this family. Your consumers and their families are lucky to have her on their team and we are as well! We look forward to continue to assist them in meeting their career goals. ~

(Director- DVRS Provider)

Membership, Committees and Resources

Membership Development

The full Council participates in identification of potential members appropriate to the beliefs and mission of the SRC. Member attendance, vacancies, and upcoming term expirations are reviewed during the February and June meetings with recommendations made to fill vacancies according to the category the vacancies represent. The SRC is fully compliant with the requirements under Section 105 in the law; members have been appointed by the Governor and at least half of the SRC membership is comprised of persons with disabilities who are not employed by the DVRS. A wide range of disability representation has been achieved.

Officer Elections

Officers are elected bi-annually for a two-year term. The following officers were elected in June 2020: Rebecca Shulman, Chair; Karen Alexander, Vice-Chair and Wayne Roorda, Treasurer. No election was conducted this year. Peggy Englebert, Past Chairperson continued to serve on the executive committee through her appointment term. The officers were elected for a two-year term through June 2022.

Committees

The SRC Chair, in conjunction with the Executive Committee, appoints committees annually to meet federally mandated activities and SRC priority areas. Each SRC member is expected to participate on a committee. The DVRS supports each committee by assigning a DVRS staff member to provide information as requested. Standing committees include:

- **Executive Committee**– Comprised of the SRC Chair, Vice-Chair, Treasure, and the DVRS Directors ex-officio.
- **Evaluation Committee**– Activities include, but are not limited to, program evaluation activities and consumer satisfaction studies.
- **Legislative and Policy Committee** – Activities include, but are not limited to, advocacy and education, policy and State Plan review, Administrative Code review, State Plan Public Hearings, Statewide Comprehensive Needs Assessment, pending and current legislation, particularly with respect to impact on funding.
- **Transition Services for Students and Youth to Work** – Responsible for initiatives relating to providing pre-employment transition services, transition services, and services to youth with disabilities as outlined in WIOA.

- **Ad Hoc Committees, Task Forces, and Study Groups** – Are created on an as needed basis by the SRC Chair. Non-Council members may serve on these groups, but the Chair of the group must be a SRC member. Ad Hoc Committees include:
 - **By-Laws Review Committee** – Is appointed by the SRC Chair on even-numbered years to review and make recommendations to the full Council for needed revision.
 - **Membership Committee** – Is charged with developing plans to bring membership into compliance with RSA mandates.

Resource Plan

The following DVRS staff provides support, attends and participates in the activities of the Rehabilitation Council:

- DVRS Director attends all meetings and provides staff support to the executive committee.
- Assistant Directors provide staff support to the legislative/policy and transition services committees; the executive assistant to the DVRS director provides staff support to the evaluation committee and day-to-day requests that come from SRC members.
- Executive secretary to the director provides minutes for every meeting and prepares handouts for all SRC meetings.
- Other DVRS staff members are assigned as needed to support the Council and as appropriate to their area of expertise.

For the period of 10/1/20 – 9/30/21, a \$46,500 budget was established for SRC operating expenses. The budget covered: quarterly and special meeting costs, annual planning summit, member expenses to attend and participate in meetings and training, accommodations, training, printing costs, fiscal agent budget administration and miscellaneous funds needed to support Council activities as appropriate. Council expenses and activities were conducted within the allocated budgeted amounts.

Meetings, Trainings and Forums

The Council promotes inclusion at all sponsored meetings for members and other participants by providing, as needed, personal care attendant services, transportation services, interpreter services, computer assisted real-time transcription (CART) and assistive listening devices. Teleconferencing is made available to accommodate persons who have difficulty traveling, or who reside in rural or remote areas. In addition, all documents are sent out prior to each SRC meeting via email.

Regular New Jersey SRC Meetings

The SRC conducts quarterly meetings. Meetings were held on November 18, 2020, February 10, 2021, May 18, 2021 and September 22, 2021. Full Council activities are scheduled first in the morning, with committees meeting mid-morning. Committee meetings are also held in the interim months, on an as-needed basis. Based on the health emergency ZOOM or other on-line platforms were used for meetings after March 2020. Regular meetings are open to the public and interested stakeholders are encouraged to attend. An annual planning meeting was held on August 11, 2021.

SRC Members participate in the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) and the National Coalition of State Rehabilitation Councils (NCSRC).

Council representatives regularly attend the CSAVR spring and fall meetings. The NCSRC has a special track for SRC leadership nationally that meets for two days prior to the general CSAVR meeting. The New Jersey SRC is a member of the NCSRC. New Jersey SRC representatives attend these meetings and bring back current and critical information to the full Council.

Two NJSRC members are active on the NCSRC Board and assist with training sessions at the spring and fall meetings. They have developed an orientation/training package for state SRCs to use individually. It includes two power point presentations with instructions for use and includes supporting handout materials.

2021 Public Forums

Two public forums were conducted via ZOOM during FY 2021. Without the need to travel to attend, there was greater participation in the forum by members of the public and increased presence of SRC Members.

Dates	Venue	Attendance	Interpreters Provided	#SRC/DVRS Attendees	Written Testimony Provided
June 4, 2021	ZOOM	60	Y (CART)	13	Yes
June 10, 2021	ZOOM	50	Y	12	Yes

At both forums Karen Carroll, the Director of NJDVRS offered introductory remarks with a brief update addressing the ongoing challenges of providing services safely during the public health emergency created by the pandemic. She affirmed that DVRS continues to be open and moving toward seeing consumers and others in person. Through FY 2021, she explained that DVRS staff have been engaging in a hybrid schedule (office and remotely from home), as well as efforts to collaborate with partners including schools, on outreach. By midyear there was an increase in referrals and successful employment outcomes.

She also explained that DVRS is now under a newly established office was follow up discussion in both forums in response to questions raised in testimonies one individual submitted written testimony following the June 4th meeting, and three individuals submitted written comments following their verbal presentations on June 10th.

Activities and Accomplishments

Eligible Consumers Served in 2021

In FFY' 2021, DVRS served all categories of eligible consumers. The agency currently has the financial resources to serve all categories; DVRS continues to monitor the continuing realignment of federal funds emphasizing Pre-Employment Transition Services for students and youth. In addition, the Department of Human Services has implemented policy changes that now require all individuals with intellectual/developmental disabilities (ID/DD) who seek support through the Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD) to seek employment services first with DVRS.

Successful Employment Outcomes

In FFY'21, there were 1,948 Rehabilitation closures, compared to 2,170 Rehabilitation closures in FFY' 2020, and there were 3,163 Rehabilitation closures in FFY' 2019.

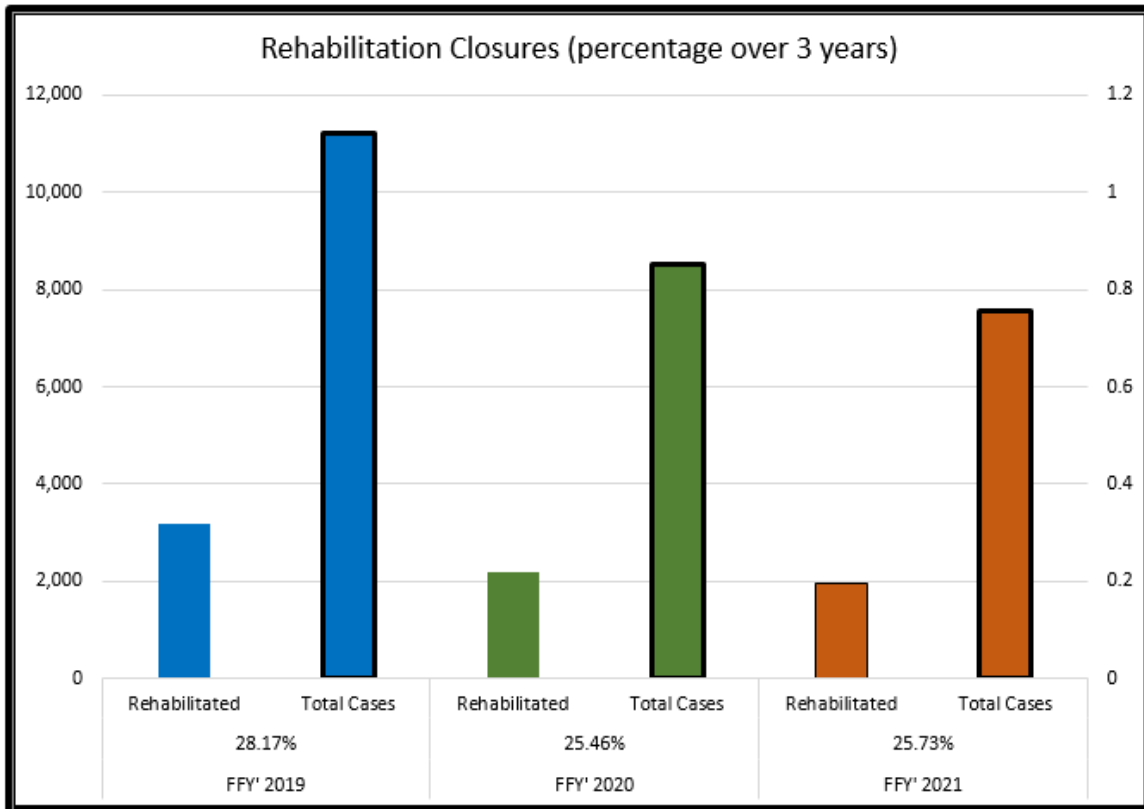
In FFY'21, the percentage of Rehabilitation closures relative to all closures was 25.73%, on par with the FFY'20 results of 25.46%, but less than the 28.17% achieved in FFY'19.

In FFY'19 DVRS closed 11,227 cases, in FFY'20 DVRS closed 8,522 cases, and in FFY' 2021, there were 7,572 closed cases. While the percentage of cases closed with Rehabilitation remains above 25% in FFY'21, the total number of cases has decreased by 24% since FFY'19; likely due to health and safety measures initiated in New Jersey in March 2020 in response to the Covid pandemic and continuing through FFY'21.

Rehabilitated Closures / Total Cases

Rehabilitation Closures (percentage over 3 years)

FFY' 2019		FFY' 2020		FFY' 2021	
28.17%		25.46%		25.73%	
Rehabilitated	Total Cases	Rehabilitated	Total Cases	Rehabilitated	Total Cases
3,163	11,227	2,170	8,522	1,948	7,572



FFY'21 Minority Closures/Rehabilitation Closures - Minority Identification

There were 9,069** closed cases in FFY'21. DVRS served all these individuals and closed their cases for other reasons or were successful rehabilitations. The table below summarizes FFY 2021 outcomes by total cases and identifier group.

FFY'21 Total Closures vs. Rehab Closures, Percentage by Identifier Group

Ethnicity	# Closed Other	% by Identifier Closed Other	# Closed Rehab	% by Identifier Closed Rehab	# Total Closed
White	3,336	70.7%	1,380	29.3%	4716
Black / American	1,963	81.2%	455	18.8%	2418
Hispanic / Latino	946	71.8%	371	28.2%	1317
Asian	188	70.9%	77	29.1%	265
American Indian / Alaskan Native	150	72.5%	57	27.5%	207
Pacific Islander / Native Hawaiian	29	67.4%	14	32.6%	43
Does Not Wish to Self Identify	93	90.3%	10	9.7%	103
Total	6,705	73.9%	2,364	26.1%	9,069

**Please note: Consumers can choose 2 or more minority identifiers on their applications or wish to not identify.

Referral Sources

The DVRS received a total of 7,096 referrals during FFY'21. The following referral sources were the highest: Self Referrals, Elementary/High School, Other Individuals and Other. Some of the "Other" referral sources include CRPs, medical professionals, One-Stop Career Centers, Social Security Administration, employers, family and friends, welfare, etc.

FFY'21 Referral Source	# of Referrals	% of Referrals
Elementary / High School	1,252	18%
Self-Referrals	2,310	33%
Other Individuals / Family and Friends	1,210	17%
Other	2,324	33%
TOTAL REFERRALS	7,096	100%

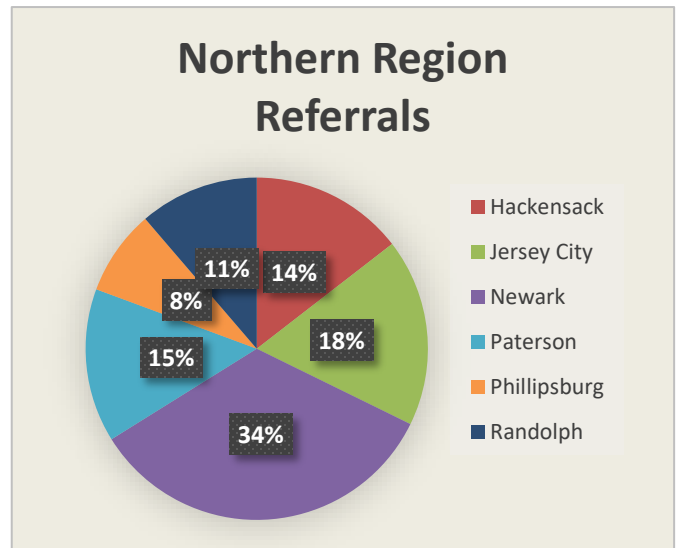
Referrals by Region

*(PE) Potentially Eligible Case
*(VR) Vocational Rehabilitation Case

Northern Region

Caseloads			
Office	PE	VR	Referrals
Hackensack	9	12	445
Jersey City	11	11	346
Newark	21	28	869
Paterson	9	10	390
Phillipsburg	5	5	331
Randolph	7	7	363

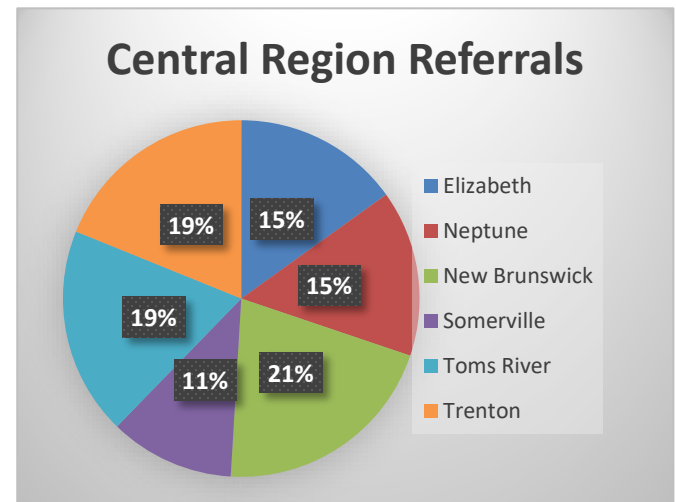
2,744



Central Region

Caseloads			
Office	PE	VR	Referrals
Elizabeth	8	11	682
Neptune	8	12	382
New Brunswick	11	11	831
Somerville	6	6	333
Toms River	10	11	636
Trenton	10	11	382

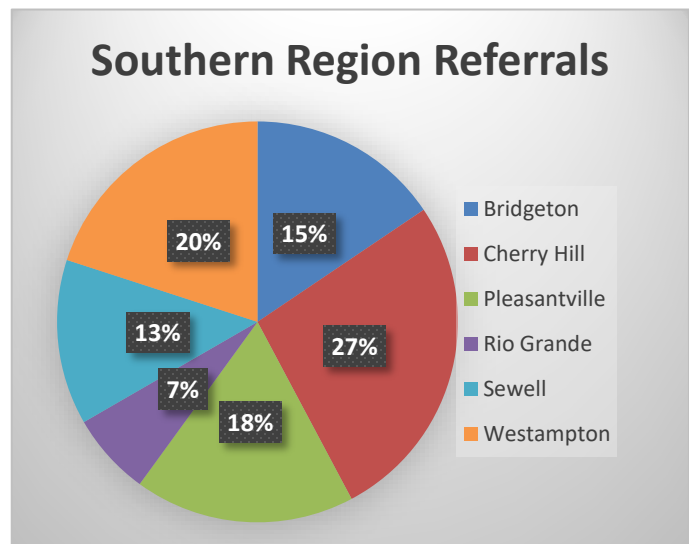
3,246



Southern Region

Caseloads			
Office	PE	VR	Referrals
Bridgeton	7	7	426
Cherry Hill	12	13	624
Pleasantville	8	8	405
Rio Grande	3	4	133
Sewell	6	7	496
Westampton	9	8	538

2,622



Supported Employment Assists Consumers with Significant Disabilities

The DVRS successfully rehabilitated 663 individuals who received Supported Employment services in FFY'21. The following represent the most significant disabilities:

- Cognitive Impairment
- Psychosocial Impairments

In each of these disability groups the division worked with Community Rehabilitation Programs with specific expertise in the provision of services.

WIOA and DOL/SETC Combined State Plan

Title IV of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) amended the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. WIOA was created to provide state and local areas the flexibility to collaborate across systems in an effort to better address the employment and skills needs of current employees, jobseekers, and employers. WIOA requires a single, unified state plan that includes all of the core programs under it. It established core measures for all four titles that are designed to measure the effectiveness and continuous improvement of the One-Stop and Youth service delivery systems.

Title IV of WIOA included many key changes for the vocational rehabilitation program to include an enhanced focus on Employer engagement. WIOA identified that businesses and employers that hire individuals with disabilities are a dual customer of the public VR program. In order to meet the needs of the business community in New Jersey, DVRS continues to operate a Business Outreach Team (BOT). The BOT has program planning development specialists who are assigned regionally. These BOT staff work with employers and the local DVRS offices to identify competitive integrated employment and career exploration opportunities for DVRS consumers.

The Act also included an emphasis for services to students with disabilities. Pre-employment transition services are another new requirement in the Act, and DVRS has identified 21 dedicated counselors to take the role of providing pre-employment transition services throughout the New Jersey. Since FFY2017 DVRS has continued to provide pre-employment transition services through a fee-for-service model as well as contracts for summer internship programs.

The WIOA amendments added section 511 to the Act that pertains to individuals working under a special wage certificate issued to an employer under section 14(c) of the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 (FLSA) that authorizes payment of subminimum wages under certain conditions. Section 511 applies to all entities holding a certificate under section 14(c) and employ individuals with disabilities at a subminimum wage.

To meet the requirements under section 511, DVRS needed to re-develop a strategy to work with the providers who employ individuals with disabilities in subminimum wages who are known to the division. DVRS Counselors from local offices continue to provide career counseling services to individuals in all of the extended employment facilities funded by DOL, and also provide

counseling services to other providers as requested. In total, approximately 2,400 counseling sessions were conducted by DVRS. Due to the continued pandemic, counseling sessions conducted over the course of FY 2021 were done in a virtual format. This required an enhanced level of coordination, communication and flexibility on the part of the local DVRS offices and the extended employment providers.

Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS)

The implementation of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act in 2014, as amended by the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, made significant changes to the DVRS responsibility for transition services. Specifically, the law requires that the public (Vocational Rehabilitation) VR program provide pre-employment transition services (Pre-ETS) to all students with disabilities. DVRS identified strategies to ensure that all transition students with disabilities have the opportunity to receive these services. DVRS has allowed for students seeking Pre-Employment Transition Services to obtain these services without undue delay by allowing an “expedited” method of service delivery for Pre-Employment Transition Services. DVRS awarded 14 contracts to vendors to provide Pre-ETS services. In addition, there are 37 Fee for Service vendors who provide Pre-ETS covering all counties. Pre-Employment Transition Services offer students with disabilities an early start at career exploration and preparation for adult life. Beginning at age 14, students with disabilities can connect with DVRS for Pre-ETS. DVRS works with students, their families, their schools and community partners to enrich transition planning and support students with gaining knowledge and experiences necessary so they may make informed decisions about their future. Topics covered through Pre-ETS include career exploration; work-based learning experiences; exploration of education and training programs for after high school; workplace readiness training to develop social and independent living skills; and self-advocacy.

The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services will be temporarily extending the maximum age for students with disabilities to 24 years of age for the purposes of receiving pre-employment transition services, consistent with New Jersey law (S3434/A5366), signed by Governor Murphy on June 16, 2021. This law provides a temporary one-year extension of special education and related services to students with disabilities, who exceed or will exceed the current age of eligibility for such services in the 2020-2021, 2021-2022, or 2022-2023 school year following a determination by the student’s IEP team that such education and/or services are necessary. This temporary extension is for a maximum of one year from the date the student with a disability would have otherwise aged out in the 2020-2021, 2021-2022, or 2022-2023 academic years.

DVRS provided another year of paid summer internship experience, to in-school youth. The Notice of Contract opportunity process was completed and 15 vendors were approved to deliver the services.

DVRS has dedicated Pre-Employment Transition Counselors in each of the 18 DVRS Offices. Counselors have planned and organized Transition Fairs and Career events throughout the state. These transition events allow stakeholders to collaborate with each other and provide information to the public on DVRS services.

DVRS Counselors work alongside state education representatives to initiate and organize the most appropriate services for students with disabilities in order that the students' transition from secondary to post-secondary life is centered around choice and the ability to engage in meaningful competitive-integrated employment.

WIOA requires state Vocational Rehabilitation Agencies and state education agency to enter into a formal interagency agreement to facilitate and coordinate services needed by students with disabilities to successfully transition to employment or other post-secondary activities leading to employment. These services include: Pre-Employment Transition Services, Vocational Rehabilitation Services, and VR Transition Services. The Interagency Agreement is between the Department of Education and the State's two Vocational Rehabilitation agencies, Division of Vocational and Rehabilitation Services and Commission for Blind and Visually Impaired.

Out of School Youth Employment Services (OYES)

Out of School Youth Employment Services are youth services to assist 16 to 24-year old's who are out-of-school and at-risk. OYES recognizes that, when a youth or young adult is both not in school and not employed, a dangerous disconnection can develop. These services focus on ensuring out-of-school youth get back on the path to self-sufficiency, the development of job skills and career pathway planning. Topics covered through OYES include: career exploration; work-based learning experiences; exploration of education and training programs for after high school; workplace readiness training to develop social and independent living skills; and self-advocacy. There are currently seven vendors providing OYES and ongoing vetting of additional vendors.

Master's Degree Programs Collaborate with the DVRS

The School of Health-Related Professions at Rutgers University has a Master's degree program in Rehabilitation Counseling, and DVRS reports the following collaborative activities:

- The DVRS regularly provides practicum and internship placements in all local offices.
- The DVRS and the SRC members have provided letters of support for grant applications for rehabilitation education program students at both the graduate and undergraduate level. The school has an excellent record for receiving these grants.
- The DVRS staff and the SRC members provide classroom lectures, mentor students, assist with case conferences and provide knowledge of current practices in the field.
- The SRC members take part in focus group activities of this program that helps forge new initiatives for the program. Several members of the DSU and the SRC are active members of the Rutgers University, School of Health-Related Professions Rehabilitation Counseling Program Advisory Council.

Staff Development and Training

Although DVRS no longer has specific training funding dollars, staff continues to pursue professional development and CRC credits. Staff attended virtual rehabilitation specific presentations, virtual conferences, trainings and webinars. Continued training of specialized services including but not limited to Trial Work Experience, Competitive Integrated Employment and Supported Employment continued to be offered. CRC credits are given for each. All counseling staff was required to attend a free overview on Benefits Counseling through Virginia Commonwealth University. A total of 20 CRC credits were offered for completion of the 6 modules. DVRS professional staff were mandated to attend a virtual in-house Benefits Counseling Overview to familiarize themselves with the new fee for service program being offered in New Jersey. Individuals who requested information regarding Ethics courses were directed to various webinars and sites that offered Ethics training and CRC credits, which count toward the ten-hour Ethics requirement to maintain Certified Rehabilitation Counselor status. A three-day New Counselor Orientation was held for new VRCs starting their careers with DVRS.

Project SEARCH and NJDVRS – Making a Difference in New Jersey

The Project SEARCH High School Transition Program is a unique, business led, One-year school-to-work program that takes place entirely at the workplace. Total workplace immersion facilitates a seamless combination of classroom instruction, career exploration, and hands-on training through worksite rotations.

History – Project SEARCH

Program began in 1996 at Cincinnati, Ohio Children's Hospital Developed as a means to:

- meet entry level employment needs at CCHMC
- Support a Diversity Hiring Initiative, and
- Partner with schools and community services agencies

Project SEARCH has grown from one original program site at Cincinnati Children's Hospital to over 500 across 45 states and 10 countries.

Program Philosophy

"People with disabilities have the right to choose a path toward education and employment. However, while freedom of choice is given, the right to work is earned. Earning the right to work is dependent upon the student's preparation."

- Stephen Simon, ADA Quarterly, Fall 1998

Key Points – Project SEARCH

- The High School Transition Program is a one-year internship program for students with disabilities, in their last year of high school.
- It is targeted for students whose goal is competitive employment.

- The program takes place in a healthcare, government or business setting where total immersion in the workplace facilitates the teaching and learning process as well as the acquisition of employability and marketable work skills.
- Students participate in three internships to explore a variety of career paths.
- The students work with a team that includes their family, a special education teacher and Rehabilitation Services Administration to create an employment goal and support the student during this important transition from school to work.

Project SEARCH – Partners

- Education: Local School District, Career Technical School, Educational Service Center, Several School Districts, etc.
- NJ Vocational Rehabilitation.
- Community Rehabilitation Partner (provider of job coaching and job development).
- Developmental Disabilities Agency or Mental Health Provider (for follow along services).
- Host Program – Business or Hospital.
- Social Security Administration (SSA).
- NJTIP @ Rutgers – Travel Training.
- Other Partners as recommended by the Steering Committee

New Jersey Project SEARCH – Overview

There are thirteen (13) ongoing Project SEARCH Programs in different areas of New Jersey.

- Overlook (AHS) Medical Center Project SEARCH (High School Program) - Summit, Union County – 2016
- Bergen County Project SEARCH (Adult Program) – Hackensack, Bergen County Plaza – 2019.
- Holy Name Medical Center Project SEARCH (**High School Program**) - Teaneck, Bergen County – 2016.
- New Bridge Medical Center Project SEARCH, Paramus – Bergen County -2021
- Jefferson Health Project SEARCH (**High School Program**) – Cherry Hill, Camden County – 2016.
- Jefferson Health Project SEARCH – Stratford, Camden County - 2021
- TD Bank Project SEARCH (**High School Program**) – Mount Laurel, Burlington County – 2017.
- Jersey City Medical Center Project SEARCH (**High School Program**) – Jersey City, Hudson County - 2018

- Double Tree By Hilton Hotel & Suites Jersey City (**High School Program**) – Hudson County – 2018.
- Hudson County Project SEARCH (**Adult Program**) Jersey City - 2020
- Newton Medical Center Project SEARCH (**Hybrid/Blended Program**) Newton, Sussex County – 2019.
- Monmouth Medical Center Project SEARCH (**Hybrid/Blended Program**) Long Branch, Monmouth County – 2019.
- Chilton Medical Center Project SEARCH, Pompton Plains – Passaic County- 2021

Below are the newest Project SEARCH sites added in FFY'21:

- Jefferson Health "High School" Project SEARCH in Stratford started – September 2021
- County of Bergen Administration "Adult" Project SEARCH in Hackensack started - September 2021

Benefits to the Students:

- Gain increased independence, confidence, and self-esteem.
- Obtain work based individualized coaching, instruction and feedbacks.
- Develop linkages to Vocational Rehabilitation and other adult service agencies.
- Participate in a variety of internships within the host hospital/business.
- Acquire competitive, transferable and marketable job skills.

Benefits to the Business:

- Access to a new, diverse, talent stream with skills that match labor needs.
- Experience increased regional and national recognition through marketing of this unique program.
- Access to a demographic of the economy with intense buying power: people with disabilities represent one of the fastest growing market segments in the United States.
- Gain interns/employees with disabilities who serve as a role model for customers.
- Performance and retention in some high-turnover, entry-level positions increase dramatically.

Business Outreach Team (BOT)

Since the beginning of FY'20, the Business Outreach Team (BOT) services have been virtual due to the COVID pandemic. The virtual platform has become the way of conducting information sessions, targeted hiring events and job fairs in 2020 and 2021.

Employer Engagement

The unit has continued to keep the field apprised of employment opportunities and resources. They are continually updating DVRS field offices with current job openings, Labor Market Information, and resources to assist with employment initiatives. Access to **America's**

One-Stop Operating System (AOSOS) allows NJDVRs to provide the most current and up to date job information to its consumers.

The Business Outreach Team had celebrated its 4.5-year anniversary on September 30th 2021 and since its inception, the unit has made great strides in linking the DVRs field offices to the employment/business community.

The list below provides a sampling of employers contacted statewide representing a number of different business sectors. Members of the BOT have been very helpful to DVRs local offices by assisting with making needed connections to facilitate employment for individuals serviced by NJDVRs local offices. Connections have been made with the following businesses and various services have been offered or provided to each of them:

Firmenich, Precious Angels Learning Center, Johnson & Johnson, Pride Industries, Liscios Bakery, Supreme Staffing, Global Industrial | Systemax, South Jersey Bakery, End Point, Tri County Security Agency, E & L Associates, Pica's Lawn Service LLC, Optimized Scribes, Advanced Auto, Royal Farms, Sodexo, Habitat For Humanity, Children's Home Society, Royal Farms, Home Instead®, DAALD Senior Care LLC, TransDev, MSE Group, LLC, HD Supply, Rite Aid, Amazon, American Water, Michaels, Zena's Shoes, CBS Facility Services, DHL Supply Chain, A Better Home Care, Family Resource Network, Proving Ground, Independent Record Pressing, CVS Warehouse, SAFRAN AEROSYSTEMS, PAE, OTG, Count Basie Center for the Arts, HD Supply, Aramark, Pitney Bowes, Dadz Bar & Grill; Premiere Response, Book Savior, Unilever, Redemption Road Foods, Batteries Plus, Maingear, Rangam, Peapack Gladstone Bank, Global Aerospace, Brooklake Country Club, Omega Financial Services, HR Landscaping, The Austin Agency, MC Hotel, Sodexo, Olek Restorations, Foremost Mfg. Co, Two Fields Bakeshop, PORTCO, Inc, Tiffany & Co., Superpedestrian, Bowery Farming, Graybar, Lunablu Creates, Aloft Hotel, L&R Distributors, Sheelen's Fish Market, Hertz, CBS Facility Services, ABM Industries, RR Donnelly, Bottle King, Tie Hub, Aramark.

DVRs Newark Success Story:

As of September 10, 2021, this consumer was successfully employed as a substitute teacher. She has maintained employment while managing her diagnosis of Cervical Radiculopathy and Sciatica. Camille showed initiative, followed up with me often, and was able to apply independently to the employment links I sent her during her job searching period. The consumer is highly motivated, passionate and enjoys assisting the teachers and working with students.

BOT members have been attending Workforce Development Board and Disability Committee meetings throughout the state. BOT members are active in planning and facilitating disability related events. They have taken an active role in the Project Search program and they continue to be a part of Steering Committees.

On November 18th 2020 a Virtual Resources Showcase took place to share information and showcase services in Mercer County. A series of virtual speaker sessions were offered, featuring

various stakeholders from Mercer County that provide services to people with disabilities. BOT team member Cheryl Casciano co-produced this event.

Cheryl Casciano and Marc Schweitzer spoke on a panel at the virtual event: Hiring People with Disabilities: What Employers Need to Know, September 24th, 2021. This was sponsored by the NJBIA.

Regional Career Centers for Individuals who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing

DVRS funds three Regional Career Centers who serve individuals who are Deaf, hard of hearing, late deafened, or have cochlear implants. The purpose of the Regional Career Centers (RCC) for Individuals who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing grant is to provide comprehensive vocational rehabilitation services to consumers of the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (DVRS). Each center offers a variety of services which are listed below:

- Vocational Assessments to identify career options and goals based on the consumer's interests, capabilities and abilities as well as the job market trends.
- Job Readiness Services to prepare the consumers for employment by providing such things as resume assistance, mock job interviews as well as training in self-advocacy, communication needs and work place general rules and culture.
- Job Placement Assistance that will offer help in finding job openings and securing job placement.
- Job Coaching Assistance that will offer training on the job.
- Assistive Technology Center houses various assistive technology devices for individuals with hearing loss on display and to be demonstrated by staff. This will provide awareness that may benefit the individual in the workplace.
- Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) provides students age 14-21 with five services in the areas of job exploration, post-secondary guidance and counseling, self-advocacy training, work readiness skills, and work-based learning experiences.
- Out of School Youth Employment Services (OSYES) provides youth 16-24 who are not in school and not employed with job exploration, post-secondary guidance and counseling, self-advocacy training, work readiness skills, and work-based learning experiences.

All of these services are provided statewide. Each RCC covers 7 counties.

- Career Pathway Connections (operated by Easterseals NJ (Northern New Jersey))

- Career Development Center (operated by Alternatives Inc. Bridges to Employment (Central New Jersey)
- Career Pathway Connections (operated by Easterseals NJ (Southern New Jersey)

All staff are knowledgeable as to the needs of people who are Deaf and hard of hearing and are fluent in American Sign Language (ASL). In addition, DVRS introduced a new American Sign Language (ASL) Supported Employment Skills Building Group in FFY'21.

This group, led by the NJ DVRS State Coordinator for the Deaf (SCD), was established in March 2021. The purpose of this capacity group is to provide all NJ DVRS approved ASL Employment Specialists from various CRP agencies, the opportunity to learn, share ideas, and support one another. The skills building group meets bimonthly. The SCD coordinates presenters to provide relevant information. In addition, the group discovers common challenges and needs of DVRS deaf and hard of hearing consumers and discusses ways to resolve them.

DVRS Success Story:

Jonathan applied to the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (DVRS) in Fall 2019 after being referred from Magee Rehabilitation in Philadelphia. In mid-summer 2019, he wasn't feeling well; he was nauseous and his legs were weak. He went to the hospital and underwent several tests and exams. Within 48 hours his feet began going numb. The doctors could not determine the cause and were discussing discharging him. Jonathan, already a strong advocate for his needs, insisted on being transferred. Three days later they found extensive amounts of swelling throughout his entire chest, ultimately resulting in paralysis. Jonathan was diagnosed with Transverse Myelitis, which is inflammation of the spinal cord, the part of the nervous system which sends messages from the brain to the nerves and also the sensory information back to the brain. Transverse Myelitis is very rare, with fewer than 20,000 cases per year in the United States. There is limited information known about this diagnosis.

Jonathan's entire world had changed. He was now paralyzed from the chest down and required to utilize a power wheelchair for mobility. Jonathan was connected with the VR case manager at Magee Rehabilitation who referred him to NJ DVRS.

He has been employed as a Professor of English and History at Rowan College of Burlington County (RCBC) for over 20 years. How could he return to work and what would this even look like? With Jonathan wanting to return for the Spring 2020 semester we had to quickly determine his vocational rehabilitation needs, most importantly independent mobility.

The goal was vehicle modifications and adaptations to allow Jonathan to ambulate from his home to work as independently as possible. Typically, a lengthy and expensive process. Jonathan was referred to Moss Rehab Driving School for pre-driver's evaluations. Once these were determined Jonathan received driver's training, which is extensive training to teach him how to use these adaptations. Concurrently, DVRS funded a work-site evaluation with Advancing Opportunities at RCBC. Jonathan's employer, RCBC, agreed to all recommendations. During this time the COVID pandemic began and everything was put on hold. Jonathan waited over a year to finally receive his vehicle modifications. In June 2021, Jonathan drove off the dealership lot and into his independent future maintaining employment with RCBC.

Significant Issues

Appointments

The DVRS and the SRC continue to work with the Governor's Appointment office to ensure that there is a full and diverse membership on the SRC. There have been no new members who joined the SRC during the course of this past year, there are four members pending appointment - there continues to be a need to fill some vacancies.

Continued Impact of COVID-19

DVRS staff worked in a hybrid model over the course of this past year, working part-time in the office and part-time from their homes. Staff became increasingly acclimated to the use of virtual platforms for appointments, meetings and trainings. The amount of time spent working in the office was based on operational need and consideration of staff's assigned work duties based on their title.

DVRS offices remained closed to the public. Local Field offices continued to accept referrals and served consumers in a virtual capacity. DVRS service providers continued to serve consumers both virtually and in person.

Significant Issues have included:

- Identifying methods to increase referrals to local DVRS offices and provide effective outreach to the community
- Staff succession, applications for job vacancies for key entry level and promotional opportunities had been lower than expected
- Preparing DVRS staff to return to their offices full-time with target date of 10/18/21.

Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA)

DVRS has been preparing for the next cycle of the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment.

The most recent CSNA report garnered valuable information regarding current functioning of DVRS and ways to improve services for the most vulnerable populations. Despite the limitations present due to Covid, DVRS was able to address specific identified needs.

A statewide benefits counseling program was developed in conjunction with Ticket to Work and Partnership Plus to help address the impact of work on social security benefits. Fear of loss of benefits was cited as an impediment to employment. The statewide program has a multi-touch point process to ensure continued support and smooth handoff to an employment network upon case closure.

Project SEARCH has expanded to include more sites, offering additional opportunities for high school students.

The DVRS website has been updated with additional information and links to offer a more user-friendly experience. Specific point of contact email addresses has been created to ensure timely responses to inquiries.

Pre-Employment and Out of School Youth Employment Services has developed additional fee for service vendors statewide offering more services to youth. The Pre-Transition Employment Services Summer Internship 2021 was held and 15 vendors were awarded contracts. Contracts are still in the completion stage and many have reported meeting deliverables.

Project SEARCH trainings have been offered to the partners statewide for feedback, questions and overview of the milestone payment system. Sessions have been well received.

Conclusion

The WIOA 2014 mandate to provide Pre-Employment Transition Services to youth with disabilities age 14 to 21 is a relatively new area that the NJ DVRS continues to cultivate additions of service providers and program development. Summer internships, and Project SEARCH offer youth with disabilities an opportunity to experience the workplace and develop skills in supportive environments. DVRS recognizes Pre-ETS continues to expand and will evolve its services and policies to best serve the youth throughout their transition from school to post-secondary education programs and employment in competitive integrated settings.

Both survey respondents and key Informants agreed that NJ DVRS needs to continue to improve the methods it uses to publicize transition services to families, guardians and advocates of students and youth with disabilities age 14 to 21, to expand awareness, service utilization, and add transition service providers.

Key informants and the NJ DVRS survey respondents also identified a need to improve communication with secondary school personnel and provide training about the NJ DVRS' transition services and guidelines. Furthermore, they noted the importance of outreach and memoranda of understandings with agencies to provide services to at-risk youth who are not enrolled in secondary schools.

Centers for Independent Living

Centers for Independent Living (CIL's) are community-based, cross-disability, non-profit organizations that are designed and operated by people with disabilities. CILs are unique in that they operate according to a strict philosophy of consumer control, wherein people with all types of disabilities directly govern and staff the organization.

The CIL centers help their clients to lead fulfilling lives, make decisions that lead to self-determination and integrate into mainstream American society.

Each of New Jersey's CIL's for Independent Living provides the following five core services:

- Peer Support
- Transition Services
- Information and Referral
- individual and Systems Advocacy
- Independent Living Skills Training

NJDVRS continues to be the designated state entity (DSE) for the centers for independent living and assigns a Planning Program Development Specialist (PPDS) as the official liaison for the program.

DVRS collaborated with the CIL Centers to increase their ability to provide services under a fee-for-service opportunity. DVRS also worked with the CIL Centers to develop opportunities for Pre-ETS services.

The CIL Centers and DVRS have worked collaboratively and partners in the following:

- Interested CIL's Centers were awarded Pre-ETS Grants to address issues in underserved schools.
- Providing Technical Assistance to CIL's Centers in operational advancement and self-sustaining of their programs.
- Conducted and completed Center for Independent Living of South Jersey audit.
- Worked in completing the annual 704 Report.
- Participated in drafting SILC Policy Manual.
- DVRS presence and active participation in the SILC Monthly Meeting.
- Will continue to monitor SPIL (State Plan for Independent Living)

Planned Activities for FY 2022

Meetings

- Continue quarterly Council meetings with a one-day annual planning summit;
- Conduct public forums to facilitate broad participation and input from constituents Statewide regarding specific topics identified by the SRC;
- Support the agency's efforts to meet on a regularly scheduled basis with service providers and/or other agencies for planning, problem solving, grant development and other purposes as needed; and.
- Keep abreast of the goals in the New Jersey combined state plan and support the outcomes identified in the new comprehensive statewide needs assessment.

Committees

- Enhance and support the sub-committee structure;
- Enhance and support the recommendations of the sub-committees by full disclosure of sub-committee recommendations in advance of meetings where possible and follow-up by the full SRC;
- Review and enhance consumer satisfaction and evaluation activities; strengthen analysis to ensure the DVRS is meeting the changing needs of its consumers.
- In collaboration with DVRS, use Survey Monkey for electronic delivery of consumer survey in FFY'22, to consistently gather feedback and improve analysis and utilization;
- Collaborate with DVRS staff to explore dissemination strategies for the updated Client Handbook; and
- Assist DVRS staff in completing the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment.

SRC Membership

- Develop screening guidelines for recruitment and membership and review membership activities/status at each Executive Committee meeting, including resignations/expiration of appointments;
- Pursue appointments to seat a full complement of SRC appointees, representative of all categories of members;
 - Provide guidance re: issues relating to recruitment and approval of members;
 - Disseminate SRC member Handbooks to all members; and
 - Conduct new SRC member orientation/training, including consideration of joint efforts with the CBVI.

Educational Effort

- Continue leadership in providing training, support and access to the One-Stop systems regarding persons with disabilities and the workforce; and
- Develop educational information regarding the services provided to, successes and outcomes of the DVRS constituents, including legislative district break down; and send the information to New Jersey representatives.

Advocacy

- Continue to advocate for funding which will provide support to the DVRS for staffing, programs, staff development and vocational rehabilitation services as mandated by the RSA and the demands of NJ's population;
- Advocate for funding to support the DVRS' efforts to expand services through grants and other means as appropriate to support a full range of services to individuals, including those in transition;
- Advocate for funding to support the RSA's requirements for state match, including third-party cooperative agreements; and
- Provide support to the DVRS in applying for grants that enhance successful employment outcomes for persons with disabilities.

Collaboration

- Support the DVRS' effort to develop opportunities for paid internships;
- Participate in development of goals and work plan to enhance services to consumers who are the most significantly disabled;
- Continue active involvement with the CSAVR National Employment Network (The NET) and partner with the DVRS in the development of new goals.

Communication

- Continue to look at opportunities and encourage the use of technology including, but not limited to conference calling, long distance learning, and/or a dedicated web site for purposes of information sharing, receiving input, training of members (including staff), emergency and routine notifications;
- Continue use of Zoom, WebEx, and other videoconferencing technology to enhance access for SRC Members and members of the public to engage in SRC public activities, such as meetings and forums.

Summary

During FFY'21, the Rehabilitation Council continued to work cohesively and productively, partially as a result of renewed emphasis on the tools at hand, utilizing an updated committee structure, staff and member dedication and focus on staffing to achieve maximum employment outcomes. Members worked closely with each other, the DVRS, Department of Labor and Workforce Development personnel, other state agency directors, and most importantly with the constituency it is mandated to serve. It made recommendations on topics of importance to the Federal and State governments and supported the participation of the DVRS in local initiatives.

The Rehabilitation Council has benefited from the support and cooperation of the New Jersey Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services. The Council looks forward to another year of challenges and successful outcomes for persons with disabilities who seek employment and other services through the New Jersey DVRS.

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