

Oregon State Rehabilitation Council Annual Report

Federal Fiscal Year 2025

October 1, 2024 - September 30, 2025



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SRC Chair's Message

Dear Governor Kotek,



This year, Oregon's Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Program has faced significant budgetary challenges, resulting in the enactment of an Order of Selection. Unfortunately, the needs of Oregonians with disabilities seeking competitive

integrated employment far exceed the resources currently available. A waitlist has been established to prioritize those with the most significant disabilities, while others are left to seek alternative supports—in the midst of a national budget crisis and federal efforts to reduce funding for agencies that serve our most vulnerable populations.

To say this has been a difficult time for both staff and clients is an understatement.

As part of our responsibility, the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) has conducted three listening sessions in 2025. Each session was so well-attended that we extended timeframes to allow as many voices as possible to be heard. In addition, our quarterly meetings have seen the highest volume of public comment in over a decade. What we have heard has been sobering: Oregonians who are on the brink of losing housing or transportation, parents of youth who transitioned out of school-based services only to find no continued support, and individuals who followed the application process only to be placed on a waitlist with referrals to resources that do not adequately meet their needs. The desperation expressed by individuals who are eager to work and eager to contribute their skills and talents to Oregon while facing mounting barriers, has

been heartbreaking.

Despite these challenges, VR staff and leadership have remained committed, developing new training tools, maximizing available resources, and working closely with federal partners to secure additional funding. While the program requested \$25 million in federal re-allotment funds, it received just over \$7 million—an amount that barely addresses the scale of need.

Looking ahead to the next legislative session, it is imperative that the State of Oregon prioritize Policy Option Packages for VR that increase staffing and provide general funds to support the hiring and training necessary for manageable caseloads and effective employment services.

“Vocational rehabilitation services are not just about employment—they are critical to survival, stability, and dignity for many Oregonians.”

At the federal level, ongoing threats to programs serving individuals with mental health conditions or those experiencing houselessness highlight the urgency of strong state support for VR. Vocational rehabilitation services are not just about employment—they are critical to survival, stability and dignity for many Oregonians. Your leadership in expanding behavioral health and housing opportunities has created an important foundation, and with proper funding and staffing, VR can be a vital partner in ensuring

these efforts succeed.

In this Annual Report, you will find stories of individuals who have successfully completed the VR program and secured meaningful employment, along with data demonstrating high levels of satisfaction among participants. You will also see progress on State Plan Goals and Priorities, improvements following the RSA corrective action plan, and impressive outcomes in Pre-Employment Transition Services and ICAP experiences for youth. These successes shine as evidence of what VR can achieve when it has the capacity to serve those who are eligible.

As the governor-appointed council charged with bringing the client voice into policy partnership with VR, the SRC respectfully asks for your continued and increased support. Together, we can help Oregonians live their best lives, prevent houselessness, strengthen behavioral and mental health outcomes and expand meaningful employment opportunities for every Oregonian who is willing and able to work.

With appreciation,
Ed Cortez
Chair, State Rehabilitation Council



VR Director's Message



Returning to the roots of rehabilitation

In 2025, Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) focused on the roots of our mission—helping Oregonians with disabilities achieve their career goals through personalized

support. By returning to the basics, or the roots of rehab, we have made our services stronger, improved how our program works and delivered real results for the people we serve.

Our commitment to excellence shows in our outcomes. We made significant progress in tracking Measurable Skill Gains, a federal performance measure that monitors participants' progress in education, training or job readiness. In program year 2024, VR recorded 1,011 individuals with a skills gains compared with 240 the previous year. This demonstrates both the effectiveness of our services and our strong performance in meeting federal accountability standards.

We also celebrated the graduation of our second cohort of Benefits Champions. These staff are now trained to help clients understand how working affects their Social Security benefits, so they can make informed choices about jobs.

In addition, we made important changes to how we deliver services. We moved to an electronic filing system, saving us time by reducing paperwork. We added more Vocational Rehabilitation Specialists with expertise in areas such as Tribal relations, Brain Injury, Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services, Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, Mental Health, Veterans Affairs and Assistive Technology, among others. This helps us better serve people with a wide range of needs.

Our work with young people continues to grow. This year we delivered over 3,000 Pre-Employment Transition Services to students with disabilities, helping them explore career paths and build skills for the future. On page 31, you can read about how a summer work experience helped two Medford high school students get experience in a field they want to pursue after they graduate.

Our Inclusive Career Advancement Program (ICAP) exceeded expectations. We enrolled 634 participants in a community college program — well beyond our goal of 500. Of those, 270 have earned industry-recognized credentials with many more finishing their programs soon. The 77 who are already working are seeing higher wages and reduced reliance on public benefits. On page 19, you can read about a man who went from believing he had no future to delivering the commencement speech at his graduation.

“We remain committed in our purpose—to support Oregonians with disabilities so they can thrive, work, and live full, self-directed lives.”

We ended 2025 with a big achievement: completion of our Corrective Action Plan in partnership with the Rehabilitation Services Administration. This work brings our program into compliance with federal rules and regulations governing VR.

Moreover, it represents two years of work to update policies, procedures, internal controls and contracts. Completing this work strengthens our program and improves services for the people we serve.

Countless other successes speak to the impact VR has made in many lives. On page 7, you’ll read about how VR helped a woman turn a tough medical diagnosis into a comeback for her mobile notary business.

While we have much to celebrate, we also faced challenges. We began using a waitlist for services in June through the process of Order of Selection. We know this affects people who are eager to work and need our help. We also received fewer federal Reallotment Funds than we ask for, which means the waitlist for services will likely stay in place longer. At the same time, we are working through changes at the federal level, and our state is forecasting a downturn in the economy and difficult program reductions.

Even with these challenges, our staff and partners have continued to step up. I want to extend my deepest gratitude to the State Rehabilitation Council, VR staff and contracted providers for their dedication, professionalism and collaboration throughout the year.

As we look toward 2026, we remain committed in our purpose—to support Oregonians with disabilities so they can thrive, work, and live full, self-directed lives. By staying rooted in the principles of rehabilitation, we are ensuring a strong, resilient future for our program and the people we serve.

Keith Ozols
Director
Vocational Rehabilitation



What We Do

The Oregon State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) aims to ensure Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) is consumer-driven and that available programs, services and resources result in competitive, integrated employment. Members are appointed by the Governor.

Purpose

The SRC represents the voice of those who receive VR services and is an accountability partner to VR. The purpose of the council is to provide VR with an external, consumer-oriented perspective. The council also provides consumers with a formal mechanism to influence the direction of VR programs in Oregon.

Council meetings are structured in order to:

- Listen to and hear from consumers and others.
- Learn about programs, activities and needs specific to each region of the state.
- Build and support collaborations with public and private partners involved in rehabilitation and employment in Oregon.

The SRC is authorized under the federal [Rehabilitation Act of 1973](#), as amended. This legislation identifies the required functions of the council, which include:

- Work in partnership with Vocational Rehabilitation on essential planning and service delivery intended to result in meeting the employment potential of Oregonians with disabilities.
- Review and analyze program effectiveness, create and analyze consumer satisfaction materials, share concerns and recommendations with VR based on performance standards and measurements of rehabilitation services.

- Advise the Governor and state agencies on the performance of VR in Oregon regarding eligibility, program effectiveness and effect on individuals with disabilities.
- Prepare and distribute an Annual Report.
- Coordinate the work of the State Rehabilitation Council with the activities of other disability-related councils in the state, including the State Independent Living Council (SILC).

Stay connected

To get email announcements about opportunities to give feedback to the SRC, please [sign up through GovDelivery](#).

Complaints or problems

VR Dispute Resolution Coordinator

Email: vr.resolution@odhsoha.oregon.gov

Phone: 503-945-6253

oregon.gov/odhs/vr/pages/complaints.aspx

Client Assistance Program

CAP provides free legal help to people who have problems with VR. CAP is part of Disability Rights Oregon, which is separate from VR.

Phone: 503-243-2081 or 800-452-1694 TTY: Dial 711

Email: welcome@droregon.org

Website: droregon.org/request-help

Eugene woman regains her independence with help from Vocational Rehabilitation

With the help of Oregon's Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program, Christy Albin turned a tough medical diagnosis into a comeback for her mobile notary business.

Albin started her business in 2012. But when her knees gave out in 2022, her thriving business came to a halt.

She was diagnosed with bilateral osteoarthritis, which made it hard to walk or stand for long periods. This was a big problem because her job involved visiting retirement homes, hospitals and assisted living centers to notarize legal documents like wills and power of attorney forms.

"It was car-crash-level of pain in both knees," Albin said. "It was like having two flat tires. I could still walk a little ways, but I couldn't stand or walk very far. My knees would just buckle."

Albin could make it up a few stairs and a few steps, but most of her clients were down long halls, such as in nursing facilities. Her doctor recommended a wheelchair, which she needed just to get to her mailbox or do basic tasks at home like cooking or cleaning.

But she had no way to load her wheelchair into her Toyota RAV 4 to get to her clients. She feared losing her independence.

And then she found information online about VR.

"I saw a story about a man getting his vehicle outfitted for his mobility at his job. Vocational Rehabilitation helped him. If they could do that for me, I could get back to work," she said.

Finding help through VR

That same day, she called her local VR office. Her first counselor, Chelsea Miller, recognized the urgency.

"As a Mobile Notary by trade, it was hard for her to travel to get to her clients. Her business had gone by the wayside," Miller said.

Miller brought in mentor Shawn Winkler-Rios of Solopreneur to help her reimagine her business and write a business plan.

"She already knew the notary business," Winkler-Rios said. "We identified gaps such as financial and marketing. We looked at strengths and weaknesses. I created an AI customized system for her."

Albin's determination impressed him.

"Christy really has that drive. When I was able to guide her, Christy would come back the next week and she had done what was needed. She's a do-er," Winkler-Rios said.

With a solid business plan in place, VR helped Albin develop an Individualized Plan for Employment. The plan listed what she already had and what she needed to restart her business.

In December 2023, Stephanie Kirkland took over as Albin's counselor. She helped finalize the most critical piece: a new vehicle with a ramp for her wheelchair.

A new ride, a new chapter

VR purchased a 2021 obsidian blue Honda Odyssey with a wheelchair ramp and wrapped it with Albin's new business name and logo: Legal Eagles of the Lake.

The business name is a nod to her previous business, Lady of the Lake Mobile Notary, and to partner Henry "Butch" Grambusch's notary



service, Eagle Mobile Notary. The two often work together to serve clients faster. They also partner on marketing.

VR also funded additional notary certifications and supported Albin in launching a marketing campaign. She reconnected with local title companies and printed branded t-shirts, posters, postcards, banners and other items to promote her services.

“Now Christy is able to get back out there and start working again. She gets calls from people who used her in the past,” Kirkland said. “It’s so nice to see somebody who felt like they can’t work, to seeing the change in them.”

Christy Albin stands in front of her new van with business partner Henry “Butch” Grambusch. They are dressed up for a Halloween networking event.

She is also bilingual in German, has emerging language skills in Spanish and French, all of which she uses in her businesses to help her customers when needed.

“I am now able to again take the attorney prepared documents out to clients,” she said. “They are more comfortable meeting in libraries, cafes and public spaces or their homes to sign things privately. I know the notary laws. I have the experience. I enjoy it a lot.”

Albin is thankful for all the support that she receives through VR to help her get back to work and to be able to once again become financially independent.

“Vocational Rehabilitation has given me so much, I am really amazed,” she said. “It is wonderful to be able to reclaim my personal and financial independence once again with the help of Oregon VR.”

Back in business — and thriving

With her mobility restored, Albin’s business is thriving again. She handles both general notary work and loan signings directly for title companies and escrow officers. She also occasionally works as a subcontractor to loan signing services from out of state.



2025 Year in Review

In 2025, the Oregon State Rehabilitation Council remained focused on its mission to support and strengthen the state's Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program. A major development this year was VR's announcement in February that it needed to implement an Order of Selection due to limited resources. This means the program had to create a waitlist for services that went into effect in June. The SRC responded by increasing its oversight and engagement to ensure transparency and accountability during this transition.

The Executive Committee began drafting updates to the SRC's bylaws and initiated work on a new Policy and Procedure Manual to clarify the council's responsibilities and operations. These efforts are ongoing, with discussions continuing into 2026.

To strengthen community partnerships, the SRC held its May quarterly meeting in Klamath Falls, where it co-hosted a Networking and Appreciation Event with the VR Workforce and Business team. The event recognized local businesses for their outstanding support of VR clients. Council members also toured the Running Y Resort, a rural employer that partners with VR to provide summer work experiences for youth. The council also heard many success stories from the Klamath Falls area.

The third quarterly meeting took place at Clackamas Community College in Oregon City. The council received updates on the Order of Selection. Members also met with staff from the Milwaukie VR office and heard many local success stories. The meeting included a



discussion with Kelly Franklin with the Center of Continuing Education in Rehabilitation on strengthening collaboration between SRC and VR.

Throughout the year, the SRC hosted three virtual listening sessions, attended by over 100 current and former VR clients and advocates. These sessions provided valuable feedback on the VR experience, which the SRC uses to evaluate services and make recommendations for improvement. [Summaries of listening sessions](#) are available on the SRC website.

In July, the SRC received the first report from the relaunched Client Satisfaction Survey, offering additional insight into client experiences. Results are included on page 13 of this report.

To ensure compliance with state and federal requirements, the SRC Chair and Coordinator consulted with the Governor's Office, the Department of Justice, and the Oregon Government Ethics Commission. They also participated in public meetings law training to strengthen the council's governance practices.

SRC Committees

The Oregon State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) organizes its work through several standing committees that meet monthly. Each has specific responsibilities that contribute to the council's mission. The SRC chair appoints chairs and co-chairs of committees.

Here's a summary of each committee and highlights from 2025.

Executive Committee

This committee is made up of a chair, vice chair, committee chairs and co-chairs. It is tasked with sharing information among all of the committees.

As the SRC governing body, members meet with the VR Director monthly to provide input and recommendations. This group also reviews final drafts of SRC projects before submitting to make sure the council body is represented.

Evaluation and Recommendation Committee

This committee, chaired by Melinda Boley, focuses on reviewing program data and making recommendations to VR leadership to help inform the State Plan, trainings, policies and procedures. The committee also reviews and analyzes results from listening sessions and the VR Consumer Satisfaction Survey.

Projects and accomplishments:

- Worked with VR staff and the ODHS Office of Reporting, Research, Analytics, and Implementation (ORRAI) to redevelop the Consumer Satisfaction Survey.
- Launched survey in May 2025. See page 13 for a summary of findings.
- Worked with VR staff to figure out the best ways to collect useful data that supports ongoing program review and improvement. This group welcomed VR's Quality Assurance Manager Don Alveshire to help with this work.

Legislative Committee

This committee, chaired by Bridget Dazey, focuses on legislative advocacy.

Projects and accomplishments:

- Worked to build connections with lawmakers and make the needs of Oregonians with disabilities a priority across the state. Committee members traveled to the Capitol in Salem to meet with representatives, senators and their staff. They helped lawmakers understand what it is



like to work, study and live with a disability in Oregon, and explained that VR will soon begin using an Order of Selection waitlist system due to limited resources.

- Submitted testimony during the Legislative session in support of SB 810 and SB 20 to make sure voices from the disability community were included in decisions about how new laws would work.
- Tracked bills affecting disability rights and workforce development, providing testimony and closely following issues that affect the disability community. VR Policy Analyst Robin Brandt supported the committee by tracking each bill as it moved through the Legislature so the committee could respond quickly.
- Tracked national changes in policy that could affect Oregonians.

The committee thanks the following legislators and offices who welcomed and listened to our concerns: Senator Khana Pham, Representative Rob Nosse, Representative Leslie Munoz, Representative Lucetta Elmer, Representative Zach Hudson, Representative Ricki Ruiz, Representative Anna Sharf, Senator Floyd Prozanski, Senator Danie Bonham, Representative Emily McIntire, Representative Julie Waters, Representative Lisa Fragala, Representative Annessa Hartman, Senator Sara Gelser-Blouin, Representative Cyrus Javadi and Senator Kathleen Taylor.

SRC/VR Policy and Budget Committee

This committee, chaired by Susie Calhoun, focuses on reviewing policy updates and monitoring VR's budget. Over the last year, the committee's main focus has been staying informed about Order of Selection and new policies and trainings related to this change.

The committee's feedback has led to changes and updates to the language VR uses in its transmittals, policies and rules, and how they are administered. This committee keeps partners and the council informed about the state VR budget and upcoming changes through contracts with vendors. VR staff provide updates to the SRC about the program budget and expenses related to services. This helps to make sure that money is being drawn down in a timely manner and that the state is watching for additional funding. All policies are on the [VR Rules and Regulations web page](#).

Disability and Incarceration Committee

This committee, chaired by Ann Chakwin, focuses on supporting people with disabilities who have been involved in the justice system. The committee aims to raise awareness, improve services and push for system-wide changes that support this often-overlooked population with multiple needs.

In its second year, this new committee looked at research, shared best practices and promoted trauma-informed services.

The group welcomed VR Counselor Specialist Linda Sisemore, who brings real-world insights from her work supporting VR counselors across the state in serving the carceral-impacted population.

Outreach Committee

The Outreach Committee, chaired by Susan Collins, focuses on recruiting new members and raising awareness about the SRC.

Over the last year, the committee welcomed to the SRC Amy Geoffroy, Melaney Grenz, Katie Miranda, Jennifer Rice, Julie Silberman, and Jeff Wiesinger.

Projects and accomplishments:

- Developed a new logo for the SRC that highlights the council's partnership with VR while showing it's a separate organization. This committee worked with the ODHS design team to develop a logo that features a listening icon and two people reaching for a star—symbolizing collaboration and success. The SRC approved the logo at its Nov. 13 meeting.
- Hosted three virtual quarterly listening sessions in 2025 to hear directly from VR clients and advocates. Feedback from these sessions is shared with other SRC committees to help improve services.
- Recognized outstanding community partners and employers during the May and August meetings. As part of the May quarterly meeting, the committee co-hosted with the VR Workforce and Business team a Networking and Appreciation Event in Klamath County. Members also coordinated a tour for the SRC of local business Running Y Resort to learn about the many career opportunities available there. The Outreach Committee celebrated two additional partners at the August Quarterly meeting. Read more about these award winners on page 21.



Visit the [State Rehabilitation Council website](#) to nominate a provider or VR business partner for recognition at a future SRC meeting.

VR Consumer Satisfaction Survey

The SRC organizes and distributes the VR Consumer Satisfaction Survey, as required by federal law. The survey provides a way to hear from clients about what's working well and what needs to improve.

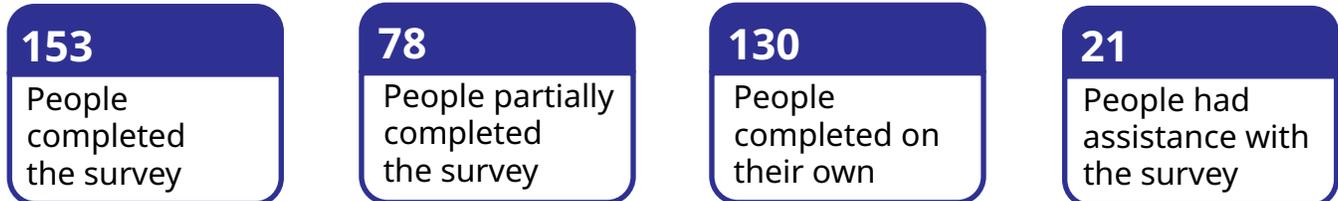
In 2023, the council ended its contract with the organization that previously administered the survey to reduce costs. The council worked with the ODHS Office of Reporting, Research, Analytics, and Implementation (ORRAI) to redevelop the survey, and it launched in May 2025. The results below reflect responses received between April 1 and Sept. 30, 2025.

The council created flyers for local offices to promote the survey and also included the link to the survey in all email communications to clients about upcoming listening sessions and meetings.

Survey background

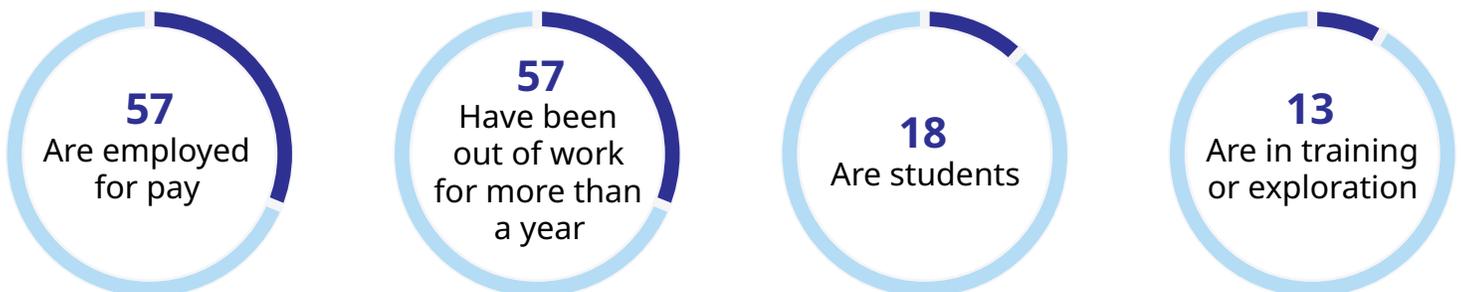
- The survey was translated to Spanish, Russian and Arabic.
- Respondents were asked to identify their gender, race/ethnicity, language, disability type, age and if they use adaptive equipment.

Of the 231 people who responded to the survey:



Responses by employment status:

The graphic below shows where clients were at in the VR process at the time they took the survey. Almost 40 percent were employed, and about 40 percent had been out of work for more than a year. The final 20 percent were students or in a training program or exploring career options.



Responses by age

The graphic below shows clients' age when they took the survey. It shows the majority of responses (61.9%) were from those over 40. The survey captured 24 responses from those ages 18-29. One person responded who is under 18, and 27 respondents were over 60.

Age	Percent	Responses
Under 18	0.6%	1
18-24	10.3%	16
25-29	5.1%	8
30-39	21.2%	33
40-49	16.7%	26
50-59	28.8%	45
60+	17.3%	27

Totals: 156

Key findings

Survey results show a mix of positive experiences and areas for improvement. Many consumers shared appreciation for the support they received. Recurring concerns emerged around communication, timeliness and confusion about services available.

Positive feedback

- Many respondents appreciated the **dedication of their counselors** and the **availability of resources**. 73% of respondents said they felt that VR staff treated them with respect and kindness.



- Several noted that VR helped them **gain employment or return to school**, which they considered life-changing.
- Clients appreciate the option to **meet virtually**. Around 50% of appointments were virtual. Of respondents who had virtual appointments, 64% are satisfied with this option.

Direct feedback

“My counselor was amazing and helped me get back on my feet.”

“The training program gave me the confidence I needed to re-enter the workforce.”

Common challenges

- **Communication gaps:** Delays in responses or unclear expectations were frequently mentioned.
- **Long wait times:** Some respondents reported waiting months for services or follow-ups.
- **Lack of individualized support:** A few felt their unique needs weren't fully understood or addressed.
- Responses show VR needs to do a better job referring clients to other services. Only a third of respondents (36%) said VR staff referred them to other resources while waiting for employment.
- Less than half (41%) are satisfied with their progress toward getting a job.
- Less than half (45%) feel the amount of communication with VR staff met their needs.
- Half said they felt like VR staff had enough time for them.
- Less than half (49%) said the VR experience met their expectations.

Direct feedback:

“I didn't hear back for weeks after my intake.”

“It felt like a one-size-fits-all approach.”

“I wish there was more help for people with mental health disabilities.”

“The paperwork was overwhelming and confusing.”

“I had to advocate for myself constantly to get what I needed.”

“My counselor changed three times in a year. It was hard to build trust.”



Other observations

- The survey captured a decrease in satisfaction levels with services from previous years. A number of reasons could explain this decrease. VR put a waitlist into effect in June, which means people are not getting services right away. Additionally, people who have been in plan are seeing delays due to high workloads for VR staff, and a shortage of vendors who provide job development and job coaching services.
- Survey results do not reflect the full span of ages VR serves. The majority of respondents were over age 40 (62.8%). However, the majority of VR clients are under age 40 (61.9%). The SRC is exploring ways of gathering feedback from younger clients, including through quarterly listening sessions.
- The majority of respondents (98%) took the survey in English. The SRC is exploring ways to increase participation from non-English speakers.
- 65% of respondents said they were looking for a long-term career opportunity, showing people come to VR seeking a good career fit, not just a job.

The table below provides more detail on client satisfaction. It shows responses to questions about clients’ satisfaction who strongly agree or somewhat agree with questions about their VR services. About 40 percent of respondents agreed that they were happy with their progress towards getting a job, and 45 percent said the amount of communication from VR met their needs. About 55 percent felt VR staff listened to them, and that their feelings were important to VR staff.

How much do you agree or disagree with the following?	Percent	Number of responses
I am happy with my progress towards getting a job.	41.3%	69
The amount of communication with my VR staff met my needs.	45.4%	75
I felt that my VR staff really listened to me.	54.8%	91
My thoughts and feelings were important to my VR staff.	55.1%	91

Working together with Oregon's Tribal Vocational Rehabilitation programs

Vocational Rehabilitation is proud to continue building strong partnerships with Oregon's Tribes that have American Indian Vocational Rehabilitation Services (AIVRS) programs. We are also honored to work with all nine federally recognized Tribes. Together, we share the goal of supporting Tribal members in reaching their career goals.

VR holds cooperative agreements with five Tribal Nations that provide Tribal VR programs:

- Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde
- Klamath Tribes
- Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation
- Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians
- Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs



VR Director Keith Ozols with James Halliday, Director of the VR program for the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs. They are holding the CTWS banner during the banner walk at the annual Consortia of Administrators for Native American Rehabilitation.

Tribal members have the option of seeking state VR services in addition to, or instead of, Tribal VR services. State VR endeavors to collaborate with Tribal VR to provide dual-enrolled clients with the best possible services that are aligned with client choice and culture.

Throughout this past year, VR worked closely with Tribes in many ways:

- In May, state VR held an online Tribal engagement meeting with Tribal VR staff and state VR counselors who work directly with Tribal programs. The convening created a valuable space to talk about best practices, learn from each other and build stronger relationships.

- In June, VR Director Keith Ozols attended the Consortia of Administrators for Native American Rehabilitation (CANAR) conference in Spokane, Washington. He co-presented with Susie Calhoun, Director/Manager of the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation's VR program. They shared best practices for co-enrolling and serving Tribal members in both Tribal and state VR programs. This teamwork between programs continues to benefit participants.
- VR also created a new position focused on Tribal relations. A longtime partner of Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, Diane Ashley was chosen for the VR Specialist role. Diane will help improve communication between state and Tribal VR and help assure services to Tribal members are respectful and culturally informed across the state.
- We congratulated the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, who received a new five-year federal grant to continue their Tribal VR program. Our partnership with Grand Ronde continues to grow. We celebrated this partnership with a [video success story featuring photographer Amanda Freeman](#). After successfully completing both her Tribal and state VR programs, Amanda is now self-employed and thriving — a powerful example of what is possible when we work together.
- VR also invited all nine Oregon Tribes to consult with us about moving to an Order of Selection service delivery model. A Dear Tribal Leader Letter was sent the week of April 21. These talks help make sure tribal voices are heard when we make decisions that affect Tribal communities.
- A new Tribal 101 training is now available to help staff across the Oregon Department of Human Services (ODHS) understand Tribal history, culture and government. The Southwest Oregon Branch (Roseburg, North Bend, Coos Bay, and Brookings) showed their leadership by completing the training together.

Looking ahead to 2026, VR is excited to partner with the American Indian Vocational Rehabilitation Training and Technical Assistance Center (AIVRTTAC) and the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (CTUIR) to host a statewide Tribal Vocational Rehabilitation training. For this event, we will invite all nine Tribes and state VR staff to share ideas, learn together and strengthen teamwork.

We are deeply thankful to Oregon's Tribal VR programs and partners. Your leadership, knowledge and partnership help us move forward together — creating culturally respectful vocational rehabilitation services for Tribal members across Oregon.

ICAP helps Irving Daniel reimagine his future

For a long time, Irving Daniel believed the message he received at age 17, after intervening in an altercation that nearly killed him.

“You’re going to be disabled for the rest of your life, and you won’t be able to do a whole lot.”

What followed was depression, alcoholism, job instability, housing insecurity and hopelessness.

With support from Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) and the Inclusive Career Advancement Program (ICAP), Irving went from believing he had no future to delivering the commencement speech at his graduation.

Now 37, the Bend resident is getting practical experience working in mental health and continuing his education, with a goal of working in public health and prevention.

From darkness to recovery

Irving thinks often about the day he stepped in to help and ended up getting shot multiple times. That brief impulse to intervene changed the trajectory of his life. He never set foot in his high school again, and that feeling of helplessness stayed with him for more than a decade.

“From the day I got shot, I lost my job, I lost myself — I lost everything. It was really hard for me to just push through it,” Irving said.

Irving found himself in a “dark hole.” He describes the depression and anxiety that weighed on him for years. He coped with alcohol, which only took him deeper into despair.

“In my 30s, I realized I hated what my life had become. I didn’t like anything I was doing. I

didn’t like looking at myself,” he said. “I had fought so hard to live — because I really did almost die — and realized I’d fought so hard... for this. I was 30, divorced, my kids were spread out, I was an alcoholic. I didn’t know what to do with myself. I was determined to get sober, because I knew drinking was the worst thing I could do.”

After years of couch surfing and inconsistent employment, he decided he needed to make some tough decisions and change things for himself and for his family.

“I was determined. I got into treatment and tried to get sober, but it wasn’t easy. I got to a point where I knew this was it for me — I was going to disappear. I didn’t want my family to see me drink myself to death. So, I walked into an AA meeting. I started attending them regularly, and they were really helpful — I met a lot of people that helped me.”

Finding a support network

During that time of fighting for his sobriety, Irving got connected with WorkSource, where he then connected with VR and met his VR Counselor, Darla Kennedy. Through the support of WorkSource, VR, STEP, and Abilitree, Irving received the guidance and support that he needed in various forms. Each person along the way providing insights and opportunities that helped Irving find his path forward.

As he was completing his GED, Irving realized how much he enjoyed school and recognized that furthering his education could lead him to a meaningful career, not just a job. He saw the potential to find fulfilling work that would also give him the opportunity to help others. With this in mind, Kennedy helped Irving enroll at Central Oregon Community College and connected him with COCC’s on-campus ICAP Career Coach, Sue Pierce.

Pierce quickly became a trusted source of support and guidance as Irving continued his studies. He completed his GED, enrolled in ICAP, and worked toward earning his Community Health Certificate. By bringing together VR resources and community college services, ICAP provided Irving with a unique, comprehensive network of support to help guide his journey.

Irving remembers those first couple of college classes where he learned about peer support and public health and recalls how a lightbulb turned on when he realized he could go into a profession that focuses on prevention. He could help others avoid some of the things he had to go through in his life.

Building on that realization, Misa Olsen from VR's Workforce and Business team connected Irving with an internship focused on reducing binge drinking in the local community. Through this experience, Irving discovered not only his passion for prevention, but also his natural leadership skills — insights that would guide his decisions as he continued to shape his career path.



Graduation and beyond

This past June, Irving spoke at his commencement after completing his Community Health Certificate. In that speech, he recalled the two words that haunted him throughout his life as he struggled: “What if?” Then he continued, “But today, I don’t have to wonder anymore. I’m standing here

proud alongside my peers, each of us having succeeded in our own way to get here.

“...My time here at COCC has taught me more than I expected. When I started it, I was shy and introverted, not someone who pictured himself giving a speech in front of a crowd. But here I am. The tables have truly turned, and I can’t take all the credit. I’ve been lucky to have incredible supporters, mentors and peers who encouraged me in ways I never expected.”

As he continues his education, Irving is also gaining valuable experience in his field. He has been employed since March of 2024 and is steadily advancing in his career. Though he began with limited experience, his employer — who, as Irving puts it, “took a chance on him” — recognized his potential. Now working as a Qualified Mental Health Associate, Irving has taken on increasing responsibilities, including group facilitation, one-on-one counseling and case management.

In addition to his professional growth, Irving remains committed to his academic journey. He is currently working toward an associate’s degree and plans to continue his education beyond that. His long-term goal is to pursue a career in public health and prevention work, where he can make a lasting impact on the well-being of others.

Irving lights up when he talks about the people who helped guide him toward a career he is passionate about. He views each person he’s met along the way as a lighthouse illuminating the path forward and helping him navigate toward a future he can be proud of.

His advice to others seeking a better future is simple yet powerful: “Reach out. Don’t be afraid to ask for help. Things don’t always work out, but you have to keep trying. If you keep reaching out, you’ll find what you’re looking for.”

SRC/VR Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Access Awards 2025

The SRC recognizes the hard work community partners and businesses do to help VR consumers achieve their employment goals. The SRC presents the Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Access Awards at quarterly meetings.

May 2025

The following Klamath Falls area businesses were recognized during the May quarterly meeting.



Sean Trujillo with DP Redding (Left) receiving his DEIA award from SRC Vice Chair Jennifer Cassidy (Right).

DP Redding

Pam Redding, Cody Redding and Sean Trujillo of [DP Redding](#) were recognized for providing top-notch employment services in this rural area.

“Pam and her team always go the extra mile, literally. They are the only job developer available to support our participants in Lake County. They job develop, job coach and even do community outreach in Lake County. ... This community is underserved in so many ways, and we appreciate their willingness to step up to the challenge.

... They have established a rapport with employers in the area and have created a culture of trust that enables their ability to place our participants in community integrated employment.”—Tammi Kuehn, VR human services assistant

Sean Trujillo thanked the SRC for the honor.

“We’re deeply grateful to our local partners, staff and especially the clients who trusted us to walk alongside them on their journey.

This work is about people, not programs—and it’s their strength and determination that continue to inspire us every day.”—

Sean Trujillo, Direct Support Professional at DP Redding

Running Y Resort

Running Y Resort has been a great partner in hosting a conference for students with disabilities two years in a row. The resort also provides informational interviews and site tours to support VR’s Pre-ETS opportunities for students.

“Running Y has been extremely helpful in supporting the Klamath Falls Student Summit. Offering students a conference-like event with all the bells and whistles of a traditional adult conference — from the food to the décor — made this a 100% top notch event. They have offered to support our informational interviews and site tours. They are a wonderful business to partner with in Klamath.”—Michelle Prudden, VR youth services coordinator

“Running Y went over and above to support the Student Summit. ... Tech set up, conference set up, breakout room set up was seamless.

After lunch, Running Y assembled all the leads or managers of the different departments and gave small group tours of different employment opportunities and information about the Running Y.

“The students shared that they did not know Running Y existed. They said all the staff were so kind, and they loved being able to tour the facility and learn about different job areas, including housekeeping, event coordination, the golf shop, the restaurant, the commercial kitchen for events and the spa.

“I appreciate Running Y for all the fantastic service I have received. They are the best.”—Cindy Cameron, youth employment specialist with Southern Oregon Education Service District

Sodexo

Klamath Falls VR staff nominated Steven Keppler, general manager of Sodexo. Sodexo holds the food contract for Oregon Institute of Technology in Klamath Falls and has hired many VR participants.

“Steven and his staff have made their organization a welcoming environment for both people with disabilities and those that support them. They are always patient and willing to make needed accommodations to fit the needs of our individuals, while maintaining

participant dignity. Their communication with both our participants and our job developers is always open and honest, and they are not afraid to have those “hard” conversations when necessary.

“Our younger participants love the opportunity to work on the college campus surrounded by their peers and feel included while on campus. Steven is a remarkable asset to our community, our workforce and an advocate for those we support through VR.”—Klamath Falls VR team

August 2025

These east Portland businesses were recognized during the August quarterly meeting.



Joni Foreman with Attainable Employment receiving her DEIA award.

Attainable Employment in Oregon City

VR counselors Rachel Britsch and Markus Fant nominated Joni Foreman, owner of [Attainable Employment](#).

“Best job developer I have ever worked with in my 11 years. Professional, kind, most productive in getting clients jobs and always finds the most creative jobs given the clients skill sets, thinks outside the box, phenomenal at building relationships with any employer.”—Rachel Britsch, VR counselor

“They are incredibly good at what they do. Joni runs a very professional company, and her ethics are impeccable. From talking with her, I know the environment she works to create for her staff and the high standards of individualized service she sets for every client, regardless of their support needs.”—Markus Fant, VR counselor

Relay Resources

[Relay Resources](#) was recognized for providing person-centered employment services.

“Their job developers exemplify what it means to walk alongside individuals—not only helping establish meaningful employment goals, but doing so in a way that uplifts each person’s inherent dignity, self-worth, and life journey.

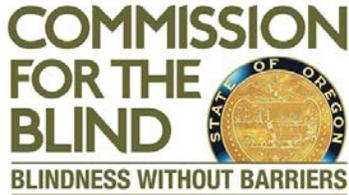


Megan Almrayatee with Relay Resources accepts her award. She is pictured with VR Counselor Aarynn Cypher (left) and SRC Outreach Committee Chair Susan Collins (right).

“At the heart of their work is a deep respect for every individual’s unique potential. Relay Resources honors the diverse backgrounds and aspirations of VR participants, ensuring that job development is never a one-size-fits-all service, but a relationship grounded in care, understanding, and unwavering belief in each person’s value.”—
Aarynn Cypher, VR Counselor

Partners

The SRC is committed to being an active member of the disability advocacy community. Partnerships allow us to gain perspectives, enhancing our advocacy for Oregon VR customers. We have council partnerships with each of the following agencies and programs:



Trenditions



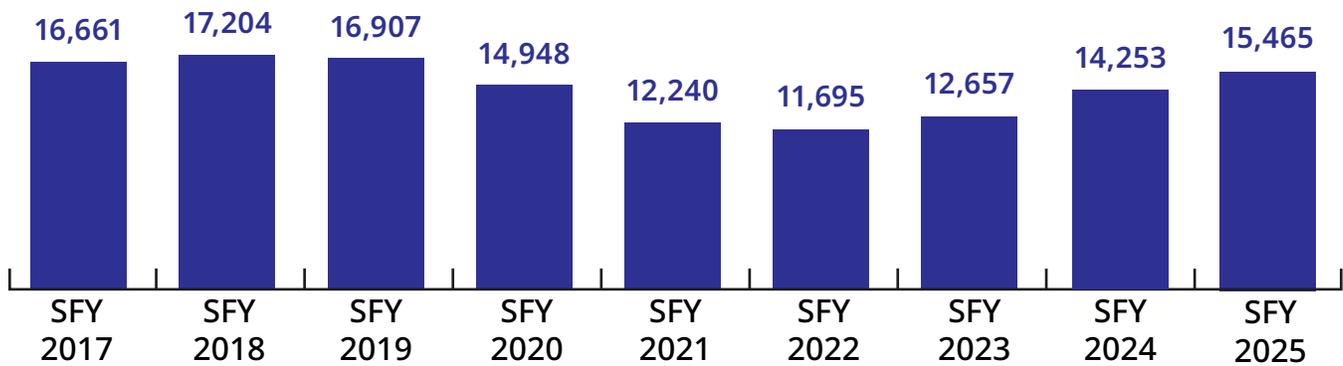
VR's Client Outcomes, Measures and Demographic Graphs

The following graphs show an overview provided by Oregon Vocational Rehabilitation of clients served and outcomes for state fiscal year (SFY) 2024 compared with previous years.

Total clients served

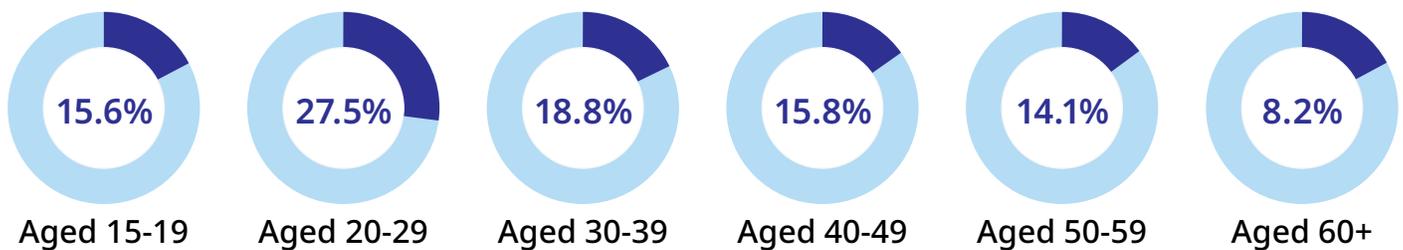
The graph below shows people served from 2017 through 2025. This includes people who are in any part of the VR process, from application to exit.

In 2025, VR served 15,465 people. This was the highest number of people served since 2021, when fewer people sought services because of the pandemic. VR served the most people — over 17,000 — in 2018.



Percent of clients served by age group

The graphic below shows VR serves people across their lifetime, from age 15 to 60 and older. One in four people served were ages 20–29, and one in six were younger than 19.

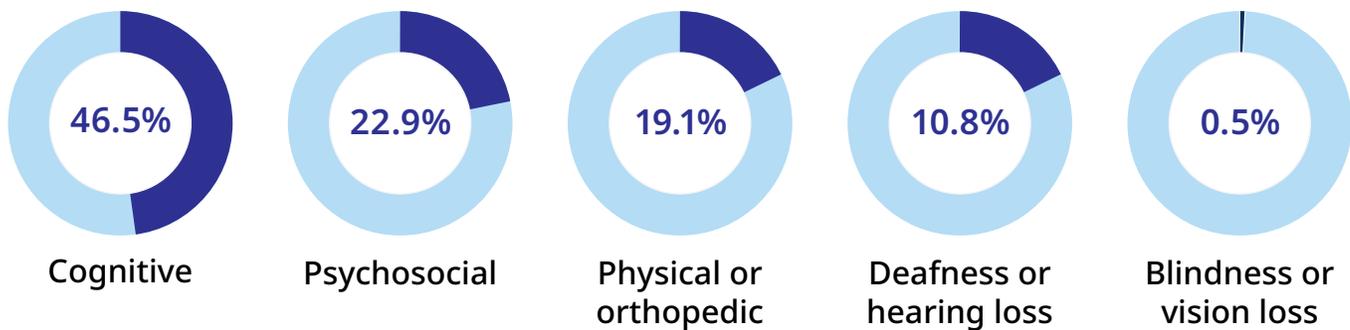


*State fiscal year is July 1, 2024–June 30, 2025.

Percent of clients served by primary disability reported

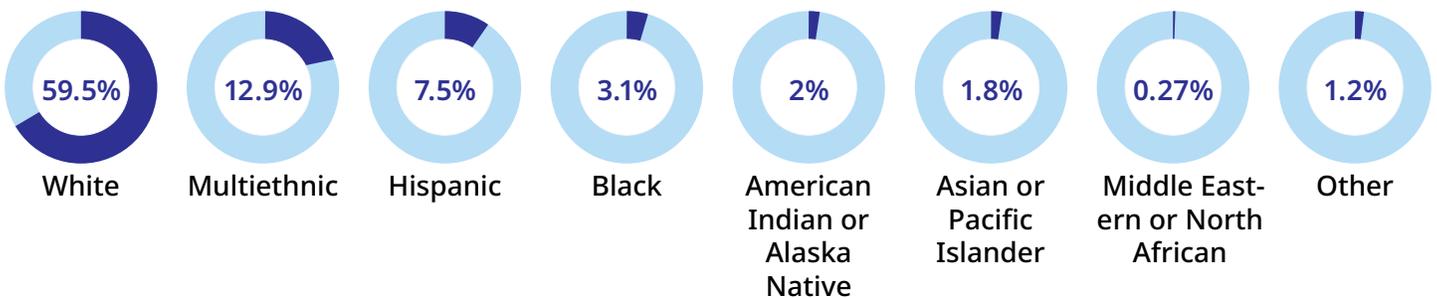
The graphic below shows nearly half (46.5%) of people served had a cognitive disability, which includes intellectual and developmental disabilities. Just under a quarter (22.9%) had a psychosocial disability such as a schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, PTSD, depression or anxiety. Two in every five people served had a physical or orthopedic disability and about one in five had deafness or hearing loss.

The graphic shows only a fraction of a percent with blindness or vision loss; this is because VR refers most of those clients to the Oregon Commission for the Blind (OCB). The half percent represent people getting services from both VR and OCB.



Race and Ethnicity

The graphic below shows the diversity of people VR serves. Three in five people served identify as white, and one in eight identify as multiethnic. Others identify as Hispanic (7.5%), black (3%) and American Indian or Alaska Native (2%). The remaining 3.3% identify as "Asian or Pacific Islander," "Middle Eastern or North African," or "other."



*State fiscal year is July 1, 2024–June 30, 2025.

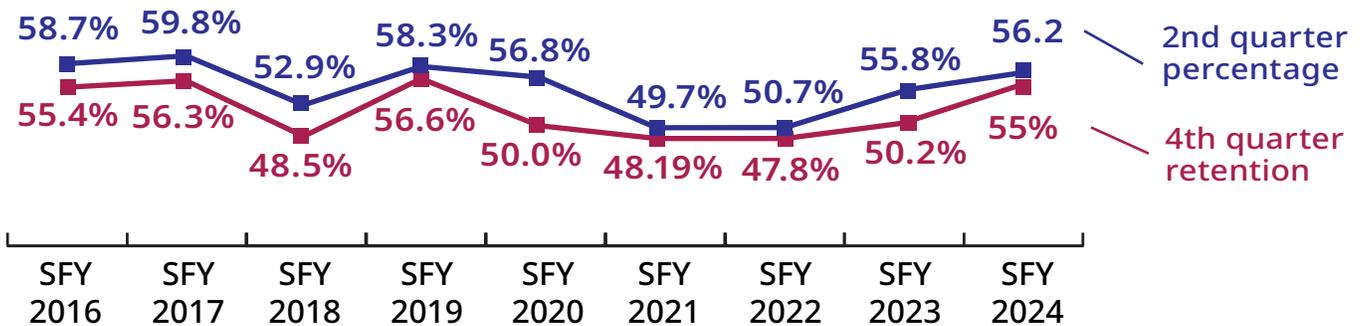
Rates of retention in employment*, second and fourth quarters after exit

VR tracks if clients are still employed six months and 12 months after they exit VR.

The graph below shows retention has not fluctuated much over the past nine years. On average, just over half of clients (55.4%), were still employed after six months. After a year, most of those remained employed; the average percentage dropped to 52%.

In 2024, the percent of clients still employed was higher than the nine-year average after both six months and a year.

*2025 data for this metric was not available at time of publication



Median monthly income during second quarter after exit

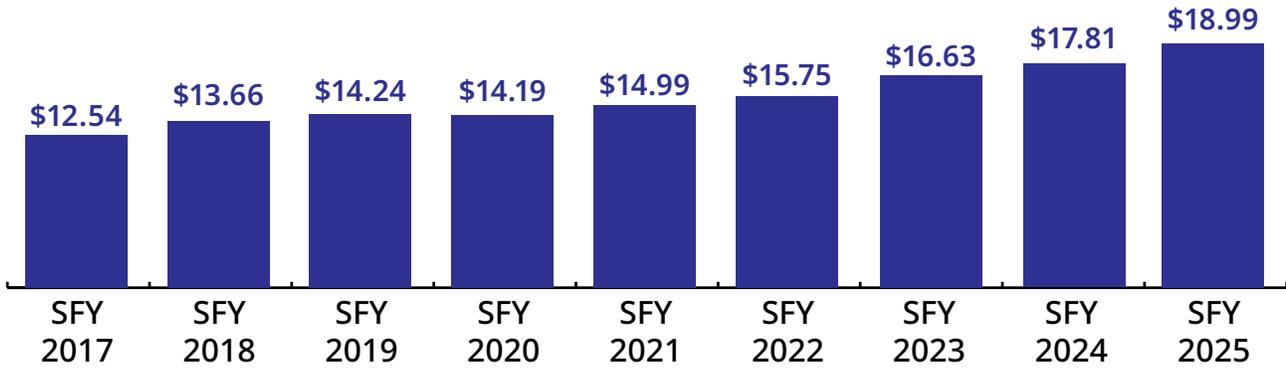
VR tracks the median monthly income for people served during the six months after they exit the program. This graph shows a steady increase in median monthly income since 2017, from \$2,831 in 2017 to \$4,153 in 2024.

*2025 data for this metric was not available at time of publication



Average hourly wage at exit

VR tracks hourly wage at the time people exit the program. This graph shows hourly wages increased steadily, from \$12.54 in 2017 to \$18.99 in 2025.



Average weekly earnings at exit

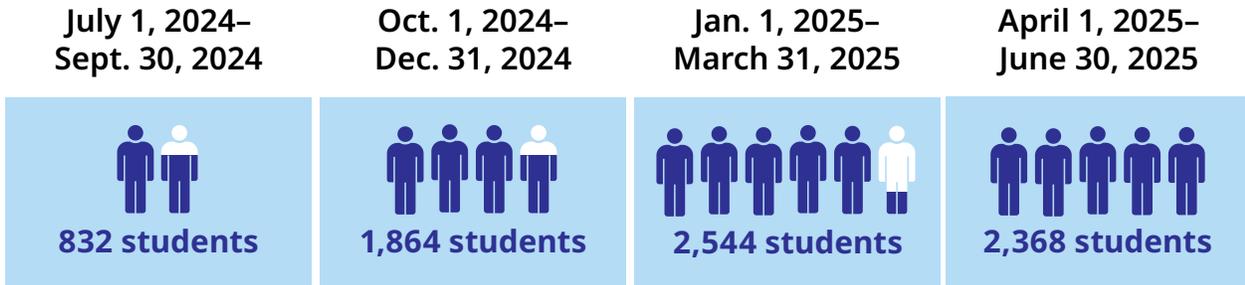
VR tracks average weekly earnings at the time people exit the program. This graph shows weekly earnings barely increased from 2017 to 2020, and have been steadily increasing since. Average weekly earnings were \$455.76 in 2025, up from \$325.97 in 2017.



Pre-employment Transition Services

The graphic below shows the number of students who received pre-employment transition services by quarter. VR tracks students by quarter, so a student will be counted in each quarter they received services.

The program served on average about 2,260 students each quarter that school was in session. The number served dropped in the summer to 832 students because school was not in session.



Total pre-employment transition services provided
July 1, 2024–June 30, 2025

**16,337 services
provided**



Work-based learning experience program

VR coordinates and sponsors a paid work experience program to help students get real-world experience and sample different jobs. Community organizations and schools apply to develop a work-based learning experience at a local business.


36
 school districts
 coordinated work-based
 learning experiences


403
 students worked


\$13.20–\$25.18
 hourly wage range



Examples

- Cabinet finishing
- Customer service
- Kindergarten classroom aide
- Railroad attendant
- Water system maintenance

An amazing opportunity

How Vocational Rehabilitation helps students step into their future

For two Medford students, a dream of becoming cosmetologists is becoming a reality—thanks to a partnership among **Vocational Rehabilitation (VR), South Medford High School** and **Imani Institute of Cosmetology**.

Kayla and Alayna, students at South Medford High School, spent the summer working at Imani and getting an up-close view of the school they would both like to attend after they graduate. Both said the experience was more than a paycheck — it gave them a glimpse into the future.

“I’ve always been interested in hair,” Kayla, a senior, said. “So it’s cool having my first job be somewhere I can see how the hair students work—and possibly get into this field when I’m older.”

Alayna, a junior, was equally enthusiastic about the opportunity.

“I’ve always wanted to go into cosmetology. I literally was the kid who would dream about it since they were seven years old,” she said. “This is an amazing opportunity.”

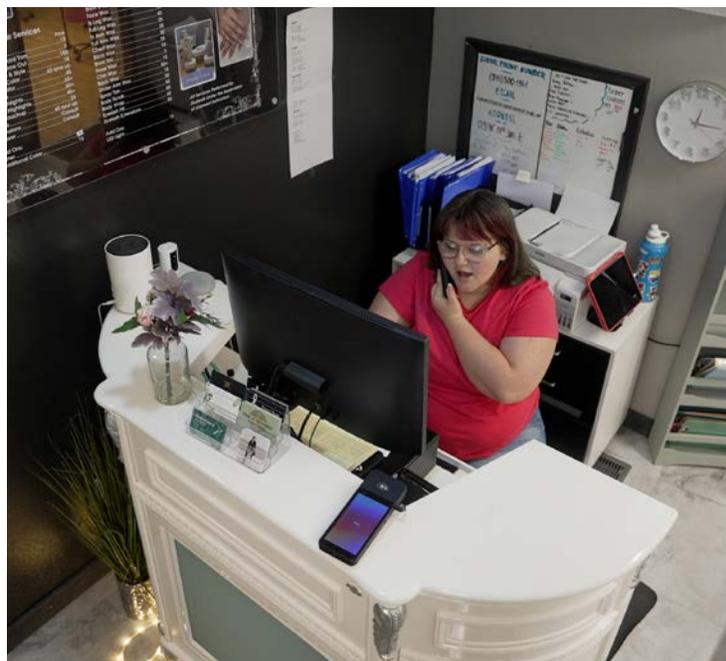
A safe place to learn and grow

Work-based learning is one of the [Pre-Employment Transition Services \(Pre-ETS\)](#) available to students with disabilities ages 14 to 21. VR works with schools and businesses across Oregon to help students with disabilities transition from school to work.

Pre-ETS help students build confidence, learn workplace skills and explore careers in real-world settings. The services are coordinated

by [Vocational Rehabilitation](#), a program of the Oregon Department of Human Services that helps people with disabilities find and keep jobs and advance in their careers.

At Imani Institute of Cosmetology, Kayla and Alayna started at the front desk, learning how to answer phones, file paperwork and greet clients. Over time, they were invited to shadow instructors and learn more about the cosmetology program. The students grew quickly.



“I’m definitely a lot more confident now than when I first started. I thought the smallest mistake would get me fired,” Kayla said. Now, she said, “I love talking to customers. It’s definitely something that will help me get jobs in the future.”

“The customer service skills, being able to manage your own time—no matter what career you go into, all of those skills will be needed and are extremely important,” Alayna added.

The placement was coordinated by Kat Walker, a youth employment services specialist with South Medford High School.

The partnership began with a tour for South Medford students at Imani, owned by Ronda and Dan Partsafas. When the Partsafases learned Kayla and Alayna were interested in cosmetology, they offered them positions on the spot.

The students were thrilled. Alayna said she had a “smile up to my ears. Of course I wanted to work here.”

Why it matters

Research shows that students who participate in work-based learning during high school are more successful after graduation. Programs like Pre-ETS help bridge the gap between school and career, especially for students who may face additional barriers.

“I’ve always wanted to go into cosmetology. I literally was the kid who would dream about it since they were seven years old. This is an amazing opportunity.” – Alayna

“They are a lot stronger in their work experience,” Walker said of Alayna and Kayla. “They have a lot more confidence in themselves and being able to do the job.”

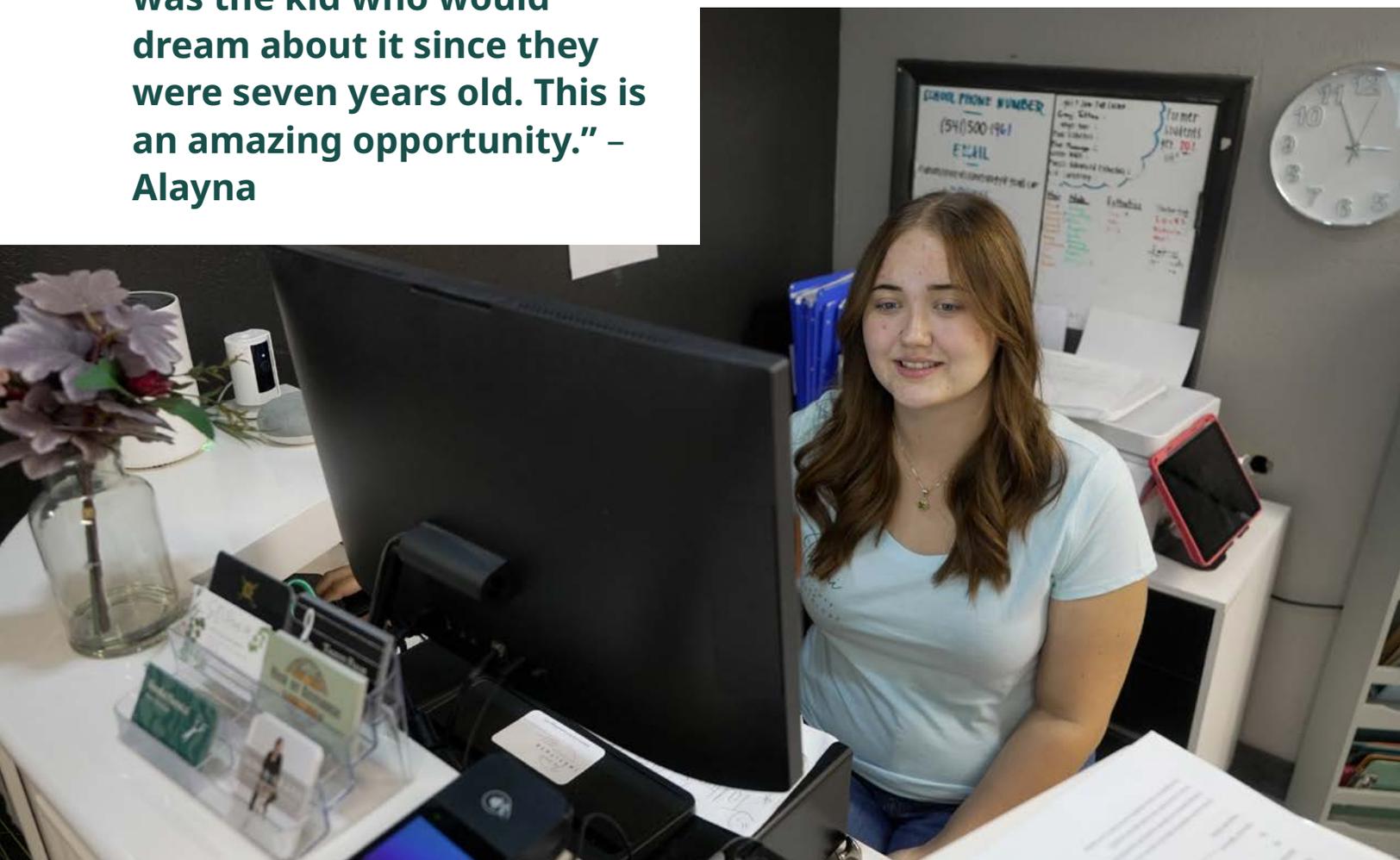
Walker supported both the students and the business throughout the work experience.

“Kat has been such a great help,” Ronda Partsafas said. “She comes in all the time to check to see how things are going, if there’s anything that she can help me with.”

For the team at Imani, it’s about more than filling a position.

“The thing about this school that means the most to us is that we get to mentor people,” said Dan Partsafas.

“I think every business should bring this to the table,” Ronda Partsafas added. “You’re giving them opportunities to start their careers now. They’re learning real life experiences.”



SRC Member Roster



Melinda Boley
Former VR Consumer



Susie Calhoun
121 Tribal VR



**Jennifer Cassidy
(Vice Chair)**
Advocate



Ann Chakwin
Advocate



Susan Collins
Youth Transition



Ed Cortez (Chair)
Community
Rehabilitation Partner



Bridget Dazey
Advocate



Shava Feinstein
Oregon Department
of Education



Julie Silberman
VR Client



Melaney Grenz
Advocate



Amy Geoffroy
Parent Training
Institute (FACT)



Nicholas Kaasa
Advocate



Katie Miranda
VR Counselor



Keith Ozols
VR Director



Jennifer Rice
Workforce Talent
and Development
Board (HECC)



Brian Sacre
Assisted Technology



Corinne Schram
Client Assistance
Program, DRO



Jeff Wiesinger
Advocate



Brooke Wilson
Statewide Independent
Living Council

Acknowledgements

The State Rehabilitation Council would like to give special thanks and acknowledgments to the following people:

Ed Cortez, for your continued enthusiasm and dedication to the mission of the SRC and serving as chair while mentoring new leaders. Your approach to this work is gentle and grounded while being responsive to all the unpredictable chaos this year has brought.

Susie Calhoun, for serving many years as vice chair and chair of the Policy and Budget Committee. Your leadership and representation of the Tribal VR programs and rural and frontier areas of the state has led to improvements in VR services and partnerships that make a true difference for rural communities.

Elizabeth Archer Captioning Services, for continuing to be the most reliable CART provider in the industry. You are responsive to requests, delightful to work with, patient and kind. We are so lucky to have you as a vendor partner in this work.

Diane Navarrete, for helping the SRC share clear and consistent messages with VR clients. Your support in working with the council and program leaders helps us tell more people about the SRC and how they can make their voice heard. We appreciate your knowledge of communications tools and your advocacy for the people receiving VR services.

All of the committee chairs who work hard to adapt to the needs of the council and program, endlessly learning new skills and using their strengths to stay organized and keep the work flowing. A special thanks goes to Susan Collins, chair of the Outreach Committee. You have

the most amazing skills of communication, engagement and follow-through. You enter every space with a warm and open heart. The SRC thanks you for your work recruiting new potential members, and for being adaptive to the growing needs of the program and council.

The VR staff who serve on the SRC committees as ad-hoc members to help the SRC accomplish its goals and responsibilities. Special thanks to **Robin Brandt** for your dedicated and consistent leadership and organization in the Policy and Budget Committee. Another shoutout goes to **Gary Chiaravalli**, for showing up with passion and consideration to support the work of the Disabilities and Incarceration Committee alongside Linda Sisemore. You are both tireless advocates for the most vulnerable clients and go above and beyond in every way to serve the community.

The VR counselors who continue to show up for clients during Order of Selection and continued federal funding challenges, while nourishing the needs of their communities. You are seen, you are appreciated. The SRC values your passion as we all navigate the continued unknown landscape of this work.

The VR clients who continue to put their faith in the VR program and hope for the best outcome, even when it is slow, challenging and difficult to complete. We give special thanks to the brave individuals who show up to provide vulnerable personal public comments and testimony at the listening sessions. The SRC sees you, hears you, and is fighting alongside you to advocate for the improvements and access you so desperately need and deserve.

VR Director Keith Ozols, for the grace and professionalism you bring to the partnership with the SRC. Your calm and steady leadership has been a welcome presence as we learn to collaborate and be responsive to the needs of clients.



VR Director Keith Ozols, SRC Chair Ed Cortez and SRC Coordinator.

Become a Member

To apply: Go to the [Workday web page for the SRC](#). If you don't already have a Workday account, you will need to create one.

Applications are reviewed by the SRC. After an interview and screening, a recommendation vote is forwarded to the Governor's office. The Governor makes all appointment decisions.

Members may serve two consecutive three-year terms. Members spend about 4 to 6 hours each month on Council activities. You can read the national [SRC Guidebook \(pdf\)](#) for more information.

The commitment, vision, skills and abilities of our council members are the basis of success for the Oregon State Rehabilitation Council. If you are interested in becoming a member we look forward to hearing from you.

2026 SRC Quarterly Meeting Schedule

Meeting dates are subject to change. For additional meeting information and materials, visit the [SRC web page](#) online or by using the QR code.

- February 5
- May 7
- August 6
- November 5





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