



2015-2016 Annual Report



A New Day

Employment is our Business!

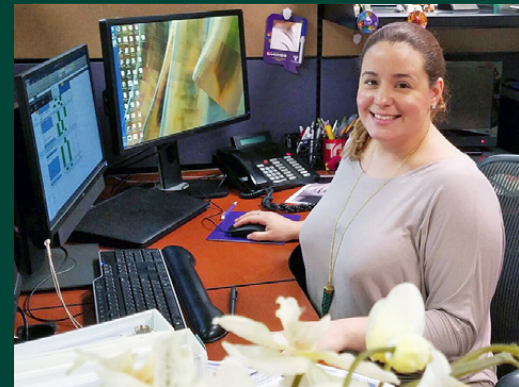


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Cover photos (left to right): Fernando Zuluaga, Clearwater Marine Aquarium, Clearwater; Shawn Burrows, Wuesthoff Hospital, Cocoa; and Ingrid Cupeiro, NBC Universal Telemundo Inc., Miami

Back cover artwork by Andrea Schwendinger

To request this report in alternative formats, contact FRCcustomers@vr.fldoe.org.

Statutory authority and governing guidelines may be found in 34 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), Chapter III, Part 361 and Chapter 413, Part II, Florida Statutes (FS).

Florida Rehabilitation Council

Mission

The Florida Rehabilitation Council is committed to increasing employment, enhancing independence, and improving the quality of life for Floridians with disabilities.

Vision

Partnering to create opportunities to employ all people with disabilities in competitive jobs of their choice.

About Us

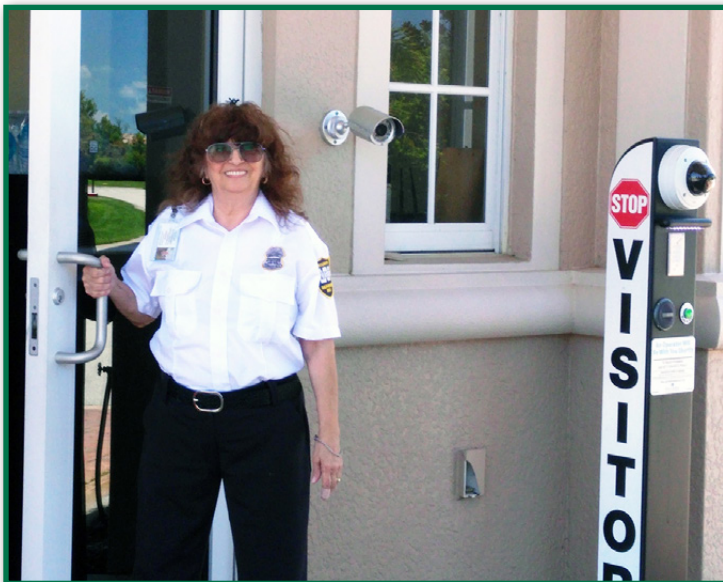
The Florida Rehabilitation Council (FRC) is part of a network of state rehabilitation councils created by the 1992 Amendments to the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. The FRC was established to help Vocational Rehabilitation in planning and developing statewide rehabilitation programs and services, and recommending improvements to programs and services.

Council Members are appointed by the Governor and must represent a majority of individuals with disabilities. Appointments are for three years and a member may serve two consecutive terms. Florida State law sets a maximum number of members at 25.

The organizational structure is made up of five main committees: **Executive Committee**, addresses major issues

facing the FRC; **Legislative Committee**, visits and educates state legislators during legislative session; **Planning and Coordination Committee**, works as a strategic partner with VR for the Unified State Plan, and developing and maintaining the FRC strategic plan; **Evaluation Committee**, responsible for the oversight of the VR customer satisfaction survey; and **Public Awareness Committee**, develops the Annual Report and marketing materials for the FRC.

Three staff members provided support for the council, Roy Cosgrove, Program Administrator, Andrea Schwendinger, Government Analyst, and Rasheeda Snell, Administrative Assistant.



Rida Hernandez is blind in her left eye and also has Common Variable Immune Deficiency Disorder, which means she is highly susceptible to infection from outside sources. With such a risky disorder, Rida needed to find just the right job for her – and she finally has – as a security officer at a gated community.

Message from the Chairman



Patrick Cannon

I am honored and humbled to begin my second term as Chair of the Florida Rehabilitation Council (FRC). This is an exciting time of transition and truly represents “A New Day” in how Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) and other stakeholders work together on both national and state levels through the new Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. It is the intent of the FRC to have our Annual Report be an overview of the activities undertaken by the FRC and VR during the past year, with an eye on new process and policy being initiated. Council members are extremely proud to work with and advise VR and to represent the voice of the consumer during this critical time. Please know that the FRC and VR will continue to reach out to individuals of all abilities to understand their needs and help them achieve meaningful employment of their choice. On behalf of the members of the FRC, we proudly present you with this 2016 Annual Report.

Florida Rehabilitation Council Members



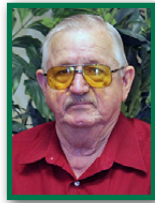
Patrick Cannon
Chair
Tallahassee
Represents current or former applicants for, or recipients of, VR services



Don Chester
West Palm Beach
Represents Business Industry and Labor



Vincent Cosentino
Planning/Coordination Committee
Tampa
Represents VR Counselors



John-Henry Douglas
Planning/Coordination/Evaluation & Public Awareness Committee
Lake City
Represents groups and persons with physical, cognitive, sensory, and mental disabilities



Christine Goulbourne
2nd Vice-Chair & Public Awareness Committee Chair
Trinity
Represents groups and persons with physical, cognitive, sensory, and mental disabilities



Lori Kijanka
Evaluation Committee
Ft. Lauderdale
Represents Community Rehabilitation Providers



Aleisa McKinlay
VR Director
Tallahassee
Represents VR



Donte Mickens
Delray Beach
Represents disability groups that include representatives of individuals with disabilities who have difficulty representing themselves or unable to represent themselves



Beth Moore
Planning & Coordination Committee
Tallahassee
Represents Individuals with Disabilities Education Act



John Pribanic
Planning & Coordination Committee Chair
Tampa
Represents Business, Industry and Labor



Ann Robinson
1st Vice Chair & Evaluation Committee Chair
Tallahassee
Represents Client Assistance Program–Disability Rights FL



Janet Severt & Wyland
Planning/Coordination Committee
Orange City
Represents Business, Industry, & Labor



Kara Tucker
Legislative Committee Chair
Neptune Beach
Represents persons with physical, cognitive, sensory, and mental disabilities



Michael Wiseman
Hialeah
Represents disability groups that include representatives of individuals with disabilities who have difficulty representing themselves or unable to represent themselves



Rebecca Witonsky
Evaluation Committee
Boca Raton
Represents groups and persons with physical, cognitive, sensory, and mental disabilities

Division of Vocational Rehabilitation

Mission

To help people with disabilities find and maintain employment, and enhance their independence.

Vision

To become the first place people with disabilities turn when seeking employment and a top resource for employers in need of qualified employees.

Message from the Director



Aleisa McKinlay

Florida's Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) has enjoyed another productive year! In State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2015-16, 5,194 Floridians with significant disabilities found or kept a job through the good work done by VR staff and community partners. That means 5,194 lives were changed for the better in ways we can only begin to imagine! Major initiatives and events within the division include:

- Eliminating the waiting list (WL) for service Categories 1 (most significant disabilities) and 2 (significant disabilities) under the Order of Selection (OOS); reducing the WL for individuals in Category 3 (other disabilities) through ongoing, regular releases
- Ongoing improvements to our budgeting processes, data integrity, and management information systems
- Implementation of the federal Workforce Opportunity and Innovations Act (WIOA), particularly enhanced services to youth through Pre-Employment Transition Services and providing job retention services outside the Order of Selection
- Strengthening relationships with CareerSource Florida and the Department of Education's Career and Adult Education program, our WIOA partners
- Continued collaboration with Florida's Agency for Persons with Disabilities in preparation for WIOA-driven changes to participation in sub-minimum wage settings
- Continued implementation of VR's Business Relations program to better-assess and meet the needs of Florida's employers, a co-equal VR customer under WIOA
- Increased quality improvement and performance management activities through restructuring of headquarters bureau management

People want to work, and we want to give them the tools they need to achieve that goal. The typical VR customer has changed a great deal since 2008 (establishment of the OOS), as has Florida's business climate. We continue to work with our state and community partners to help VR customers succeed in careers that meet their needs and those of Florida's employers, as well. WIOA brings us many opportunities, and we aim to be good stewards of the taxpayer dollar as we work to increase successful employment outcomes, focusing on school-age youth as they prepare for careers in the 21st century. They are Florida's future, and it is a privilege to be part of this most exciting joint venture!

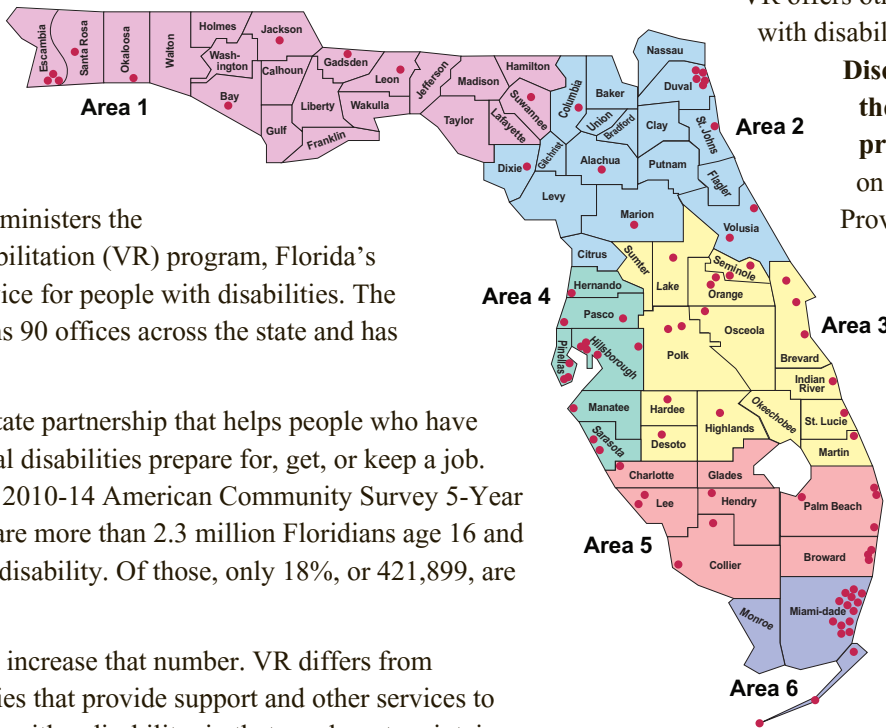
Program Overview

The Florida Department of Education's Division of Vocational Rehabilitation administers the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program, Florida's employment service for people with disabilities. The division maintains 90 offices across the state and has 931 employees.

VR is a federal/state partnership that helps people who have physical or mental disabilities prepare for, get, or keep a job. According to the 2010-14 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, there are more than 2.3 million Floridians age 16 and over who have a disability. Of those, only 18%, or 421,899, are employed.

Our mission is to increase that number. VR differs from other state agencies that provide support and other services to individuals living with a disability, in that we do not maintain long-term caseloads or ongoing responsibility for the health and welfare of vulnerable individuals. Once an individual has been successfully employed and is stable in that position for a designated period of time (a minimum of 90 or 150 days), the VR case is closed.

Another focus of VR is transitioning students with disabilities from school to postsecondary training, education, and employment. The **Transition Youth program** helps students with disabilities identify a career path, train for a job, continue their education, and find a job after high school. Students who apply for services while in high school are served by 488 public and private counseling staff. Last year, VR helped 1,673 youth become successfully employed.



VR offers other programs to help people with disabilities find employment including **Discovery, Project SEARCH, and On-the-Job Training**. With the **Discovery program**, a VR customer gets one on one attention from his Discovery Provider, figuring out what his interests are and what barriers are keeping him from getting a job. With **Project SEARCH**, students have the chance to participate in targeted internships hosted at job sites across the state of Florida. **On-the-Job Training** gives the employer and trainee a chance to try out the job, at no cost to the business owner, and see if it's a good fit.

These three additional programs receive funding through VR.

The Independent Living Program provides services through a statewide network of private non-profit, non-residential, locally-based, and consumer-controlled Centers for Independent Living. Their mission is to maximize the leadership, empowerment, independence, and productivity of individuals with disabilities. Services are intended to lead to the integration and full inclusion of individuals with disabilities in their communities of choice.

The Florida Alliance for Assistive Services and Technology (FAAST) provides assistive technology products and services.

The Able Trust partners with VR on **'High School-High Tech'** programs for high school students with disabilities.

Florida Abilities Work Help Desk

Employers now have two additional tools to help them in their search for potential employees – the Abilities Work Web Portal and the Help Desk. The Abilities Work Help Desk can help employers find a job candidate who has the skills needed to do the job and answer any questions about hiring people with disabilities. Last year, the Help Desk was contacted approximately 200 times on behalf of more than 50 different businesses.

Employers can call the Help Desk at 844-245-3405 or visit the Department of Economic Opportunities' Employ Marketplace website at abilitieswork.employflorida.com to look for your next hire.



WIOA Overview with FRC Recommendations to the 2016-2020 Unified State Plan

In 2014, the federal government passed the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). WIOA is designed to give job seekers easier access to employment, education, training, and support services needed to succeed in the labor market, and to match employers with the skilled workers they need to compete in the global economy.

WIOA requires partnerships between core education, training, and employment services under a strongly collaborative statewide service delivery system. In Florida, these services are provided by the Department of Economic Opportunity, CareerSource Florida, and the Department of Education's Divisions of Vocational Rehabilitation, Career and Adult Education, and Blind Services. We have developed a Unified State Plan for Employment Services that describes how we will work together to prepare potential employees for the workforce and fulfill the needs of employers. You can find Florida's Unified State Plan at careersourceflorida.com/wioa/.

The FRC is encouraged by the leadership Florida has shown in implementing the new unified state plan for 2016-2020 which is required by WIOA.

WIOA strengthens the alignment of the VR program with other components of the workforce development system by requiring strategic planning and common performance accountability measures. The new Act has recently deployed the rules and measures to be used. VR and its partners will have new standards and expectations. The FRC looks forward to reviewing the WIOA measures for the VR system and continuing to encourage high levels of performance.

Opportunities for continued collaborative efforts are plentiful, and communication has never been better between VR and the FRC. We look forward to continuing our positive relationship and promoting increased employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities.

The FRC identified recommended areas of interest for input into the 2016-2020 Unified State Plan. The following are continuing recommendations listed by level of importance, that meet the FRC's federal mandates to review, analyze, and advise VR. The FRC statement to the 2016-2020 Unified State Plan indicates that the recommendations provided are designed to strengthen VR efforts and the collective workforce system to employ all customers in competitive jobs.

Recommendation 1: Transition

The FRC is encouraged by the agency's efforts to strengthen transition programs and outreach. In alignment with WIOA mandates, FRC supports early contact to provide quality Information and Referral (I&R) guidance to educate and train youth for employment.

Recommendation 2: Order of Selection

The FRC would like to see VR increase service capacity and reduce waiting times for those currently on Order of Selection and provide waiting customers with quality referral information, encouraging self-advocacy when possible.



Henry Eichner, who has muscular dystrophy, received van modifications from VR so he could continue working.

Recommendation 3: Job Placement Initiatives

The FRC encourages increased use of rehabilitation engineering services for VR customers. Also the FRC would encourage that all eligible individuals have access to phase two supported-employment services. The FRC is concerned with the limitations and restrictions of long-term funding and follow-along supports and encourages investigation of stronger resources. FRC members would like to recommend additional supports be made available for job customization and that additional Innovation and Expansion grants be offered to meet the growing needs of our customers

Recommendation 4: Public Awareness of VR

The FRC recommends that a media campaign be developed to share VR history and services available in Florida. The FRC also suggests the development of an online application.

Recommendation 5: Counselor Recruitment and Retention

The FRC encourages VR to identify new ways to recruit employees while implementing long-term retention strategies. The FRC supports VR in their efforts to have the highest level of counselor education and skill level available to support the best practices and quality of care so needed for this vulnerable population. This is critical, especially in light of the continued level of counselor turnover and staff retirement.

Recommendation 6: Mediation and Conflict Resolution

The FRC continues to promote conflict resolution strategies including mediation prior to formal appeals.

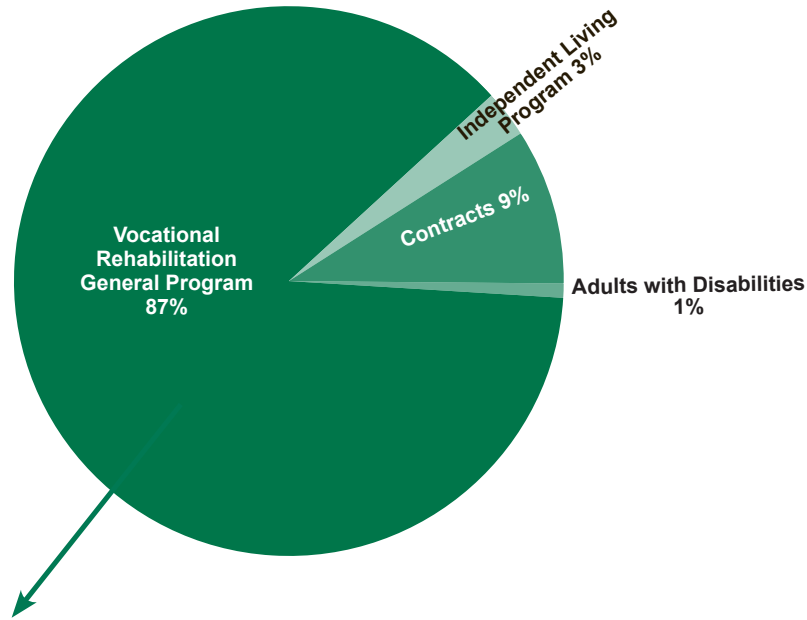
Performance Highlights

VR is a federal/state partnership – 78.7% of funds for VR program expenditures come from federal sources and required match of 21.3% from state general revenue.

For every \$1 invested in rehabilitating the customer, an estimated \$8.38 was returned to the Florida economy in state fiscal year 2015-16.

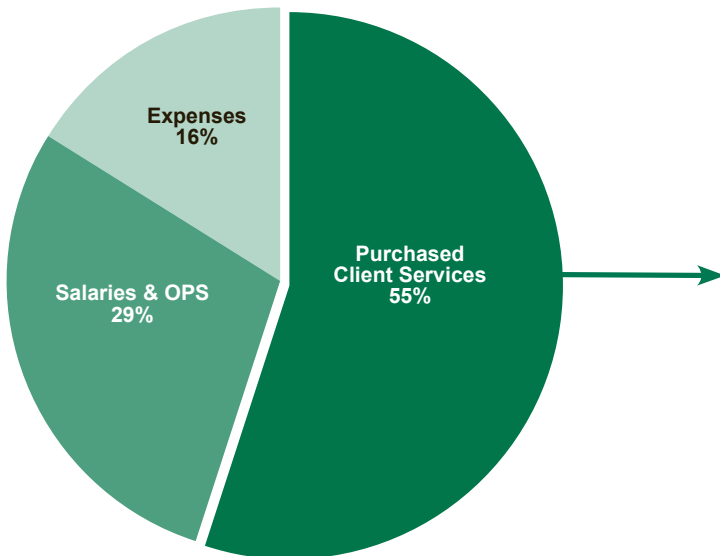
2015-16 Division Programs

Total Division Expenditures \$173,803,157



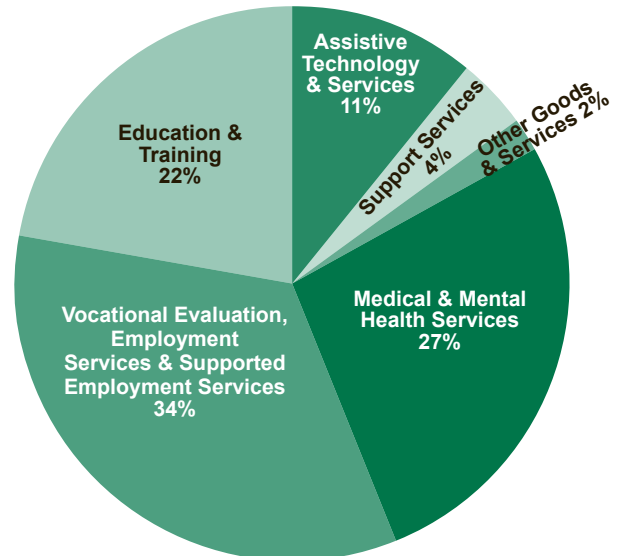
2015-16 VR General Program Expenditures

Total VR Expenditures \$165,684,794



VR Purchased Client Services (PCS) Expenditures by Category

Total PCS Expenditures \$91,687,009



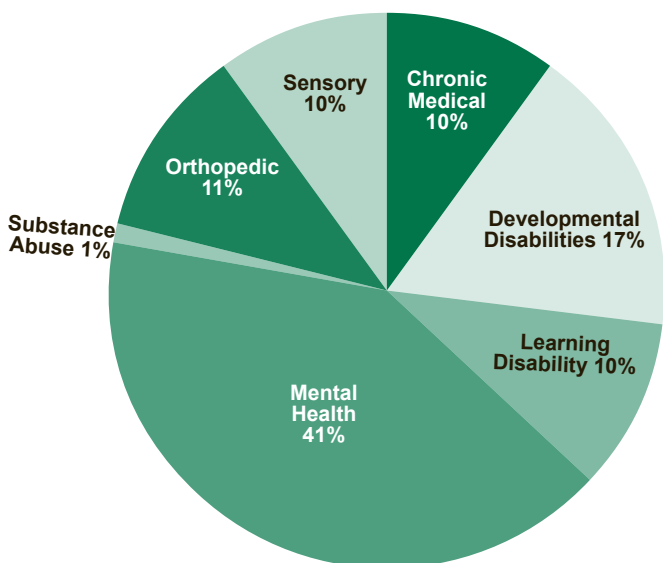
VR Facts at a Glance

SFY 2015-16

Persons with disabilities who got or kept jobs.....	5,194
Average hours worked per week.....	28
Average hourly earnings	\$11.44
Projected average annual earnings.....	\$17,189
Total projected earnings in the first year	\$70,862,989
Median monthly caseload per counselor.....	98
Number of Individual Plans for Employment created	17,628
Number of Transition Student Cases	13,133
Number of Customers with the Most Significant Disabilities	27,840

VR Customers Gainfully Employed* by Primary Disability Category

* Gainful employment occurs when a customer has job stability for at least 90 days and in employment that is competitive, integrated into the community, and for which they receive at least minimum wage.



The Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) defines primary disability as the individual's primary physical or mental impairment that causes or results in a substantial impediment to employment.

Order of Selection Waiting List Status Summary

as of September 30, 2016

Under Order of Selection, all eligible individuals are placed on a prioritized waiting list based on the significance of their disability. Significance is assessed by the number of barriers created in getting or keeping a job and the nature of VR services needed. Federal law requires that individuals with the most significant disabilities be served first.

Category 1 and 2 customers are currently being immediately released from the waiting list.

Category 1 – Most Significant Disabilities (0)

Limits three or more functional capacities in terms of work; requires three or more primary services; lasts at least 12 months.

Category 2 – Significant Disabilities (0)

Limits one or two functional capacities in terms of work; requires two or more primary services; lasts at least six months.

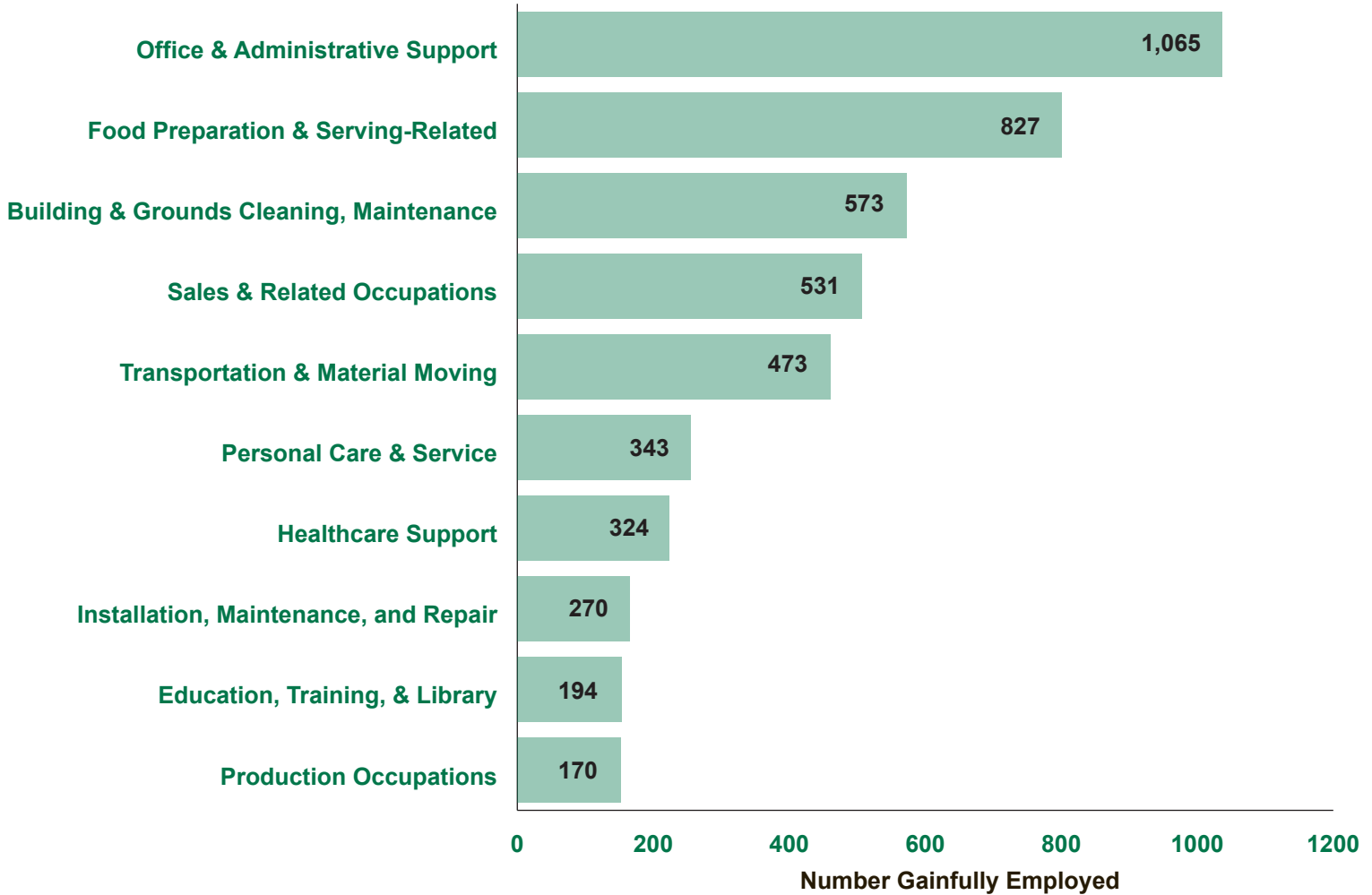
Category 3 – Other Disabilities (577)

Does not seriously limit functional capacity in terms of work; lasts less than six months.

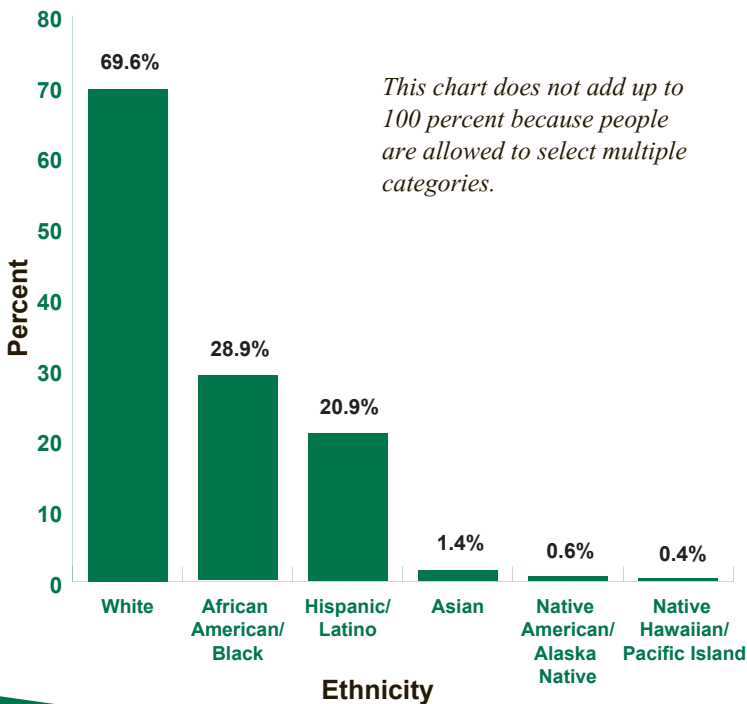
VR now offering Job Retention Services

VR is now providing job retention services to eligible individuals, regardless of order of selection, who require specific services or equipment to keep their job. This new option was created by the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). VR discussed this service option with the FRC, and public input was received.

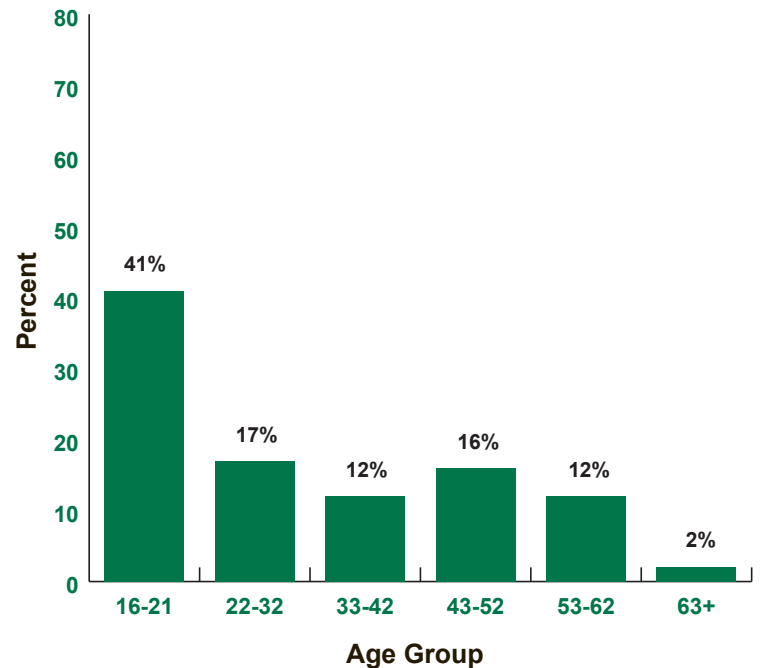
Top 10 Occupations of VR Customers for 2015-16



Ethnicity of Customers who Received Services Under an Individualized Plan for Employment



Age Groups of Customers who Received Services Under an Individualized Plan for Employment



Dolphins Have a New Friend in Zuluaga, Who Also Has a Disability

Clearwater – Hope and Winter, the two famous dolphins at the Clearwater Marine Aquarium, have a new friend – Fernando Zuluaga. Fernando points out that, just like Hope, he too has a disability. He had polio as a child, and it affected his mobility. He uses crutches to get around and has a wheelchair to use when his legs are tired and don't want to hold him up anymore. He can definitely relate to the people who have disabilities who come to meet Hope personally.

Fernando is thrilled with his new job as a guest operations host at the Aquarium, but it was a difficult journey getting there. Fernando also has vision problems due to a head injury, and he was having trouble finding a job because of it. He came to Vocational Rehabilitation (VR), a state agency that helps people with disabilities get or keep a job, to see if they could help.

He met with VR Counselor Andrea Bennett to decide on the best career direction for him. She brought in a job coach to help him write his resume and search for jobs. Fortunately, Fernando was willing to



relocate from New Port Richey, so his job coach had a larger area to search. They found out the Clearwater Marine Aquarium was holding a group interview for a number of available jobs, so Fernando was encouraged to go.

“It was a group interview and they asked me to tell them more about myself,” Fernando says. “I stood up and picked up my crutches, and I looked at all the supervisors and people applying for the jobs. I said I’m kind of shy. You’re lucky that I can’t see very well because if I could read all of the jobs listed that are open, then I would take all the jobs away from you guys.”

His new job fits his personality perfectly. Fernando greets guests arriving at the Aquarium and makes sure they know which way to go to get tickets and enter the Aquarium. “When people come in I say “Hi, how are you?” and try to start a conversation to make them feel comfortable. I give stickers for the kids. I say “Can you do something for me?” and they wonder what I’m going to ask and then I say “Have fun!” and then they laugh.”

Fernando is thankful for Andrea and VR because they gave him a chance when others wouldn't. Andrea says, “I truly enjoyed working with him. He didn't ask for much, he just wanted someone to believe in him. And now he's doing so well and thriving.”

What Employers are Saying About Hiring & Working with People with Disabilities

This year, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) celebrated its 26th Anniversary. A generation later, many places have become more accessible. One area that still needs improvement is the number of people with disabilities who are employed. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, only 17.5 percent of people with disabilities were employed in 2015. Even as the economy improves, people with disabilities consistently remain out of work.

Employers may be hesitant to hire someone with a disability because they're afraid the person can't do the job or it will take too much time to train him or her. VR can help. At VR, our customers all have a disability, and they all want to work. We train them and provide the services they need so they can do the job. Plus, VR provides accommodations, if needed.

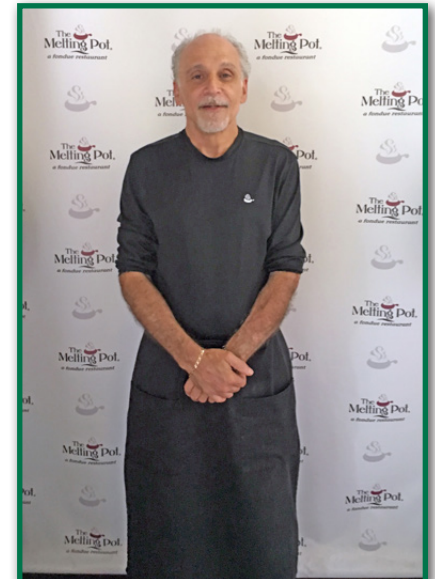
VR also offers On-the-Job Training for businesses that are hesitant to hire a person with a disability. On-the-Job Training gives the employer and trainee a chance to try out the job, at no cost to the business owner, and see if it's a good fit.

Jere Cook, owner of The Melting Pot in Coral Springs, had seen his business partner hire a person with a disability and was inspired to do the same, so he reached out to VR. He hired Richard Kramer (*right*), who has degenerative disc disease. “Richard is the first person with a disability who I've hired and worked with, and he's a great addition to our team,” he says.

Jere's advice to other business owners who are considering hiring someone with a disability is to, “go into it knowing that you have to

find the right person for the job and modify the job for the person's capabilities. It's always a work in progress.”

The Clearwater Marine Aquarium hired Fernando Zuluaga, who uses crutches and a wheelchair, as a guest operations host. Guest Operations Supervisor, Chad Laughhunn, says employers should, “take the risk. It's worth it. Since Fernando came to work here, we've hired a couple other people with disabilities. We're so happy we made that decision, and they should give it a shot too.”



Business owners can grow their business and become more inclusive by hiring others like these few successful employees. By working with VR to find their next employee, they can help decrease the unemployment rate for people with disabilities and fulfill the goals of the ADA.

John Ficca Honored with Stephen R. Wise Advocacy Award



The Florida Rehabilitation Council (FRC) selected John Ficca (*right with FRC Chair Patrick Cannon*), founder and CEO of Hands on Education, as the 2016 Stephen R. Wise Advocacy Award winner. The award honors Senator Wise, a distinguished leader and advocate for persons with disabilities. While working with high school special education students, John became frustrated watching young people leave school with few job skills and little hope. With the help of Vocational Rehabilitation, the Division of Blind Services, and Hyatt Hotels, he developed Hands on Education to help what he calls “the in-betweeners,” those whose performance levels far exceed their academic test scores. “This population thrives on experiential environments, not classroom settings,” says John. The program assists adults who have learning and physical disabilities so they may lead more productive lives and be successful. He even returned to school to learn American Sign Language so he could better communicate with his students who are deaf. “I don’t want to wait for an

interpreter when I need to compliment or correct a student. Students who are deaf deserve immediate feedback and an opportunity to discuss their progress, issues, or simply ask questions without having to use an interpreter.” Additional information about John and Hands on Education is available at www.handsoneducation.net.

Public Forums

The FRC and VR hold public forums to promote and maintain open lines of communication with VR customers, stakeholders, and interested parties. The public forums are held at each FRC quarterly meeting or when policy changes require public input. These forums give council members, VR staff, and members of the community a chance to discuss and share success stories, networking and partnership opportunities, and concerns and suggestions about the VR program. Anyone can participate in the public forum or attend the entire quarterly meeting.

Four public forums were held during SFY 2015-2016. These forums were open to the public through telephone or streaming text on the internet. Areas of comment included transition services, a request for more licensed mental health providers, success stories, encouragement for additional advocacy for VR in the Legislature, Order of Selection and waiting list concerns, vendor referrals, advocacy, and opportunities for rehabilitation engineering.

Upcoming FRC/VR Public Forums

January 31, 2017 – Lake Mary, FL

TBD - April, 2017 – VR Area 6

TBD - August, 2017 – VR Area 4

TBD - November, 2017 – VR Area 5

Forum Call-in number is:

1-888-670-3525; Pass code: 7513637441#

Please check the for the latest calendar of events at:

rehabworks.org/rehabcouncil.shtml

How to Become an FRC Member

FRC members are appointed by the Governor. As FRC members and VR advocates, we work in strategic partnership to increase the employment of people with disabilities in competitive, integrated jobs of their choice and in keeping with their skills and abilities.

Federal law governing membership requires that certain categories be represented on the council (e.g., businesses, community rehabilitation providers, disability groups), and these category assignments are made by the Governor’s office, in light of applicant experience and expressed representational preferences.

The process for appointment to the FRC is to complete the Governor’s appointment application, identifying your wish to serve on the FRC. You can find an application at www.flgov.com/appointments or by calling (850) 488-7146.

For more information about becoming an FRC member or the expectations of membership, please contact FRC Program Administrator Roy Cosgrove at (850) 245-3317.

Tackling a Disability Comes Easy for Football-Player-Turned-Police-Officer

Mobile, AL/Pensacola – Kenneth Johnson Jr. (*below left with University of South Alabama Police Chief Zeke Aull*) has found his dream job working as a police officer at the University of South Alabama. It's also the place where he earned his degree while playing college football. "It's home for me," he says. Kenneth has found his niche, but there were challenges to tackle along the way.

In elementary school, Kenneth began having trouble paying attention, and was diagnosed with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). In high school, his counselor suggested VR for help planning his career. Kenneth decided to give it a try, and began meeting with VR Counselor Carol Archie.

"Kenneth showed a lot of independence. He was the one who came in by himself," Carol says. "It was hard for him to focus sometimes with ADHD, and he needed a lot of encouragement. We were able to provide ongoing vocational guidance and counseling."

Earning a college degree and playing football had always been a dream of Kenneth's, but when he wasn't offered a football scholarship on the University of South Alabama team, he wasn't

sure what to do. VR made playing as a walk-on offensive lineman a reality. "Thanks to VR, I didn't have to worry about where to stay," Kenneth says. "I knew I wanted to go to college, but I didn't have the resources. They helped me do that and allowed me to focus on academics and not finances."



In addition to playing football, Kenneth also dedicated himself to earning his degree in Criminal Justice. Carol agrees that being a police officer was the perfect path for him. "He is very respectful to everyone," she says. "You could look up to him, as a person, and an officer."

After Kenneth completed his degree, he was offered an internship at the University of South Alabama Police Academy, which turned into a job offer. Kenneth doesn't let his ADHD keep him from focusing on his ambitions, and believes it contributes to his strong work ethic.

If working full-time as a police officer wasn't enough, Kenneth is also earning his Master's degree. Scheduled to graduate in spring of 2017, Kenneth is earning a degree in Time Management and Discipline.

"I knew I wanted to further my education and do something that is bigger than me," Kenneth says. "Carol really wanted to help me become successful," he says. "She is still a part of my life, and I really appreciate all that she has done."

Young Man with Disability Surprises Himself and His Family

Cocoa – When Shawn Burrows heads to work each day, he does it without complaint – in fact, a smile stretches across his face as he enters Wuesthoff Hospital in Rockledge. For Shawn, who has had three open-heart surgeries due to a pulmonary valve disorder, having a job has changed his life. His condition must be monitored and requires multiple medications, but that doesn't stop him from excelling as a materials management technician at Wuesthoff.

Shawn got the job with the help of VR. He first came to VR as a senior in high school, unsure of what he wanted to do after graduation. VR Counselor Lynda Schuchert met with him and went over his options. Shawn decided he wanted to work, so Lynda suggested a volunteer position at Wuesthoff Hospital.

Though he was hesitant to work at a hospital after spending so much time in operating rooms for his surgeries, he agreed to start volunteering at Wuesthoff because it was a special place for him. "My grandmother worked there as a manager in the dietary department, so I wanted it to be a family thing," Shawn explains.

He spent time working in the materials management department, which supplies necessary items to employees throughout the hospital. "It's like a store," Shawn says. "Hospital workers send us requests



for items, and we fill the orders. We also stock the shelves and keep the store clean."

Shawn quickly found that he liked the work. His supervisor noticed his exceptional performance and offered him a part-time position. After a few months working part-time, Shawn's hours have increased to almost 40 hours a week. His hours are flexible, in case he has any medical issues, but so far, he's still going strong. He now makes enough money to cover the cost of his own health insurance and to pay the rent for his own apartment.

Shawn has surprised himself and his parents with how well he is doing in his new job. "His boss says he's just a godsend, they love having him here," says Lynda. "They're trusting him more, and he's responsible for doing more things on the job."

"The last six months, he's been more outgoing," shares Lynda. "He was living with his dad and now he lives with a friend, and he got his driver's license so he's driving himself to work. It's really cool that he came in not knowing what he wanted to do, and now he's just doing it."

In the future, Shawn plans to go to college to become a doctor or nurse. This is the same young man who didn't know if he could work at all because of his disability, who is making plans for a future that includes a career in his now chosen field.

Florida Ombudsman Office Unique for State

Florida VR is unique in that it is one of only a few states that offer a service to its customers to resolve concerns or complaints prior to accessing the appeal process. The VR Ombudsman's Office receives, investigates, and assists individuals in resolving customer service issues. It is an impartial service available to any VR customer with questions or concerns, or who feel they may have been treated unfairly.

During the SFY 2015-2016, the Ombudsman's Office responded to 2,555 complaints or requests for information. Of the total, 1,293 (50.6%) were complaint requests. Complaints involved issues such as quality of counseling and delivery of services, as well as plan development and case closure concerns. Customers expressed satisfaction with the resolutions to their concerns in more than 90 percent (1,165) of the requests.

For more information about the Ombudsman's Office or VR services, you may contact the Ombudsman's Office at Ombudsman@vr.fldoe.org or (866) 515-3692.



Customer Satisfaction at a Glance

	2015-16
VR customers satisfied with Florida's VR program.....	82%
VR customers satisfied with the services provided by VR.....	78%
VR customers satisfied with their involvement in their VR experience.....	82%
VR customers who say VR staff treated them with dignity and respect	94%
VR customers satisfied with their choice of vocational goal.....	81%
VR customers who say VR staff were helpful in achieving their job goal.....	85%
VR customers who say the VR services they received helped them become more independent	86%
VR customers who say the VR services they received helped them become more financially independent	80%
VR customers satisfied with what they're doing at their current job	77%
VR customers who would tell their friends with disabilities to go to VR	90%

Knock on Wood: Man with Disability Becomes Furniture Entrepreneur

Wauchula – If you enjoy going to Florida festivals, you may have seen Paul Yates sitting on his handy cart, selling Amish furniture at one of the booths. Paul, who has cerebral palsy, is one of the latest entrepreneurs to come out of VR this year.

“I met him at the local blueberry festival,” VR Counselor Linda Daffner says. “He was working for an elderly gentleman selling furniture for him, but the man was going to retire so Paul needed to find another job. I could just visualize his success selling furniture on his own at these festivals and said he should stop by VR to see if he qualified for services.”

The first thing Linda did was to have VR purchase a lift for the back of Paul’s truck so he could carry his electric wheelchair with him. Paul’s doctors wanted him to use his electric wheelchair fulltime, but because he couldn’t get it anywhere, he was mainly immobile. He would use his crutches to get around, but he wasn’t supposed to be on his feet for long periods of time.

Linda paired Paul with self-employment specialist, Monica Doyle, who took him through all the steps needed to start a successful business. “We look at a person’s skills and abilities to see what kind

of self-employment they should do,” explains Monica. “Paul’s good with people, likes to be outdoors, and likes to sell, so this business is great for him.”

Paul’s top sellers are the Amish rocking chairs. “The black walnut rocking chair with the flat arm is the most popular. I also sell end tables with matching chairs, foot stools, walking sticks, and benches,” says Paul. “I’ve even had some repeat customers.”

For Paul, owning his own business has been a perfect solution for him. “Self-employment really helps people like me because there might be some days when I can’t work because I’m just in too much pain and then other weeks I can work the whole week, so it’s good for that. I can’t go steady all the time; I have to go and then stop, so self-employment and setting my own hours is the best answer for me.”



Linda and Monica are very proud of Paul and what he has accomplished in such a short time. Linda shares, “He worked so hard to get where he is. It was definitely a worthwhile VR adventure.” Monica agrees, “He’s a great guy; the kind of guy who doesn’t quit. He was able to adapt to the bumps in the road that always come from being an entrepreneur and be a success.”

The Sweetest Job

Jacksonville – Employment is sweet for Ashley Williams. She hand rolls, weighs, and packages caramels at Kilwins in Jacksonville as the candy store’s caramel chew packager – and she does it well. “Ashley has excelled in her duties at our store,” says her supervisor, Alena Tarpley.

Working with candy wasn’t always her career goal. Before her job at Kilwins, Ashley, who has Asperger’s syndrome and a learning disability, had primarily worked in an office setting. With the assistance of VR, she’d previously found a position as a file clerk at a law firm. When that job was no longer available, she turned to VR for help finding work once again.

Ashley met with her VR Counselor, Kelly Harbert, to create a plan to get back to work. Though Ashley wanted to work in an office environment, Kelly encouraged her to expand her job search. “She loved the office job she had before, but I encouraged her to open up to other possibilities,” Kelly explains.

Ashley took her advice and eagerly began searching for jobs. “She was so determined to work that she would call me with job leads,” says Kelly.

Ashley soon found a job posting that peaked her interest. With help from Kelly and her job coach Christine Thomas, she applied for an open position at Kilwins and began working there in June 2015.

Working in a candy store may be different than Ashley’s previous jobs, but the skills she developed in other positions still help her in her current job. Those skills have certainly helped Ashley succeed at Kilwins. She is doing so well in her job that she has been given additional opportunities. Along with her duties as a packager, she’s also been assigned to hand out samples of candy to customers.



Interacting with the customers has quickly become the part of the job that Ashley enjoys the most. “My favorite part is talking to the customers and asking if they want to try some candy,” she says. While she enjoys helping others sample the candy, Ashley is careful not to give into temptation and try it herself. “I don’t eat the samples,” she explains. “I can only have the ones that are left at the end.”

Ashley’s supervisor, Alena, has noticed an improvement in her job performance and is happy to see her progress. “Since I started working with Ashley I have added on responsibilities, and she has accomplished them each time,” says Alena.

Alena believes Ashley serves as proof that people with disabilities can be successful on the job. “Those who have disabilities are just like everyone else; they want to work hard and earn their paycheck,” she says. “If given the opportunity, they’re forever grateful for it. There is always something for them to do.”

