

BREAKING BARRIERS

Building Careers



Vocational Rehabilitation



**2017-2018
Annual
Report**



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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).

Cover photos (left to right):

Andrea Godfroy, Mackenzie Moore-Adams, Theo Harvin, and Michael Hobgood.

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

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 three committees:

Executive Committee conducts FRC business in collaboration with the full FRC, reviews By-laws every five years or as

needed, and promotes and maintains VR/FRC relations.

Evaluation/Planning Committee reviews and advises on State Plan and VR policy changes, manages customer satisfaction survey, develops feedback on the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment, and maintains FRC Accountability Checklist/Strategic Plan.

Legislative/Public Awareness Committee coordinates legislative education and advocacy efforts, oversees and provides input on the Annual Report, and promotes public outreach efforts including those with federally mandated partners.

Two staff members provide support for the FRC; Roy Cosgrove, Program Administrator, and Kim Thomas, Program Consultant.

Message from the Chairman



Michael
Wiseman

The Florida Rehabilitation Council (FRC) and Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program are proud to present the 2017-2018 Annual Report. This year's report highlights the activities and accomplishments of VR and the FRC over this past year. We invite you to review the performance data for our programs. The effectiveness of the VR program and the FRC are best understood however, by hearing from VR participants, many of whom have become successfully employed in meaningful work of their choosing. Some of their stories are included in this Annual Report.

We applaud their successes, but we are also mindful that there are many of you we have not heard from: participants, family members, partners, vendors and many other individuals. We know that we work better when we work together so we need to hear from you. The FRC will promote continual improvement, best practices and innovative processes using your feedback as our guide. As we begin a new year, we pledge to always serve you by adhering to the mission and vision of our Council and making sure that every voice is heard and valued. On behalf of the members of the FRC, we present the VR and FRC Annual Report for 2017-2018.



Kevin Graham, cooking up "love on a plate" at Autism Cooks and Paisley Cafe, would love to have his own bakery one day.

Florida Rehabilitation Council Members



Michael Wiseman

Chair
Hialeah

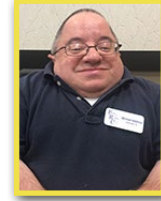
Represents disability groups that include individuals who have difficulty representing themselves or unable to represent themselves



Donte Mickens

1st Vice Chair
Delray Beach

Represents disability groups that include individuals with physical, cognitive, sensory or mental disabilities



Michael

Orlando

Represents disability groups that include individuals who have difficulty representing themselves or unable to represent themselves



Victoria Aguilar

Naples

Represents VR Counselors



Amanda Brown

Gainesville

Represents disability groups that include individuals with physical, cognitive, sensory or mental disabilities



Bob Campbell

Jacksonville

Represents CareerSource Florida



Patrick Cannon

Past Chair
Tallahassee

Represents current or former applicants for, or recipients of, VR services



Ana Laura dos Santos Lara

Miami

Represents the Parent Training and Information Center



Allison Flanagan

VR Director
Tallahassee

Represents VR



Ann Robinson

Represents Client Assistance Program–Disability Rights FL



Janet Severt & Wyland

Orange City

Represents Business, Industry and Labor



Rebecca Witonsky

Boca Raton

Represents groups and persons with physical, cognitive, sensory, and mental disabilities

The FRC offers a hearty thank you to previous members who have served during this time:

Beth Moore John-Henry Douglas Don Chester

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



Allison Flanagan

On behalf of the Florida Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, I am excited to share the 2017-2018 Annual Report, *Breaking Barriers-Building Careers*. Since the passage of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, the FDVR has focused on assisting individuals with disabilities to achieve not only an employment outcome, but also one that is a career.

One of the greatest achievements in life is a meaningful career that aligns with an individual's strengths, interests, abilities, aptitude and priorities. Individuals with disabilities can achieve the success of a career with the partnerships between employers, providers, and agencies like FDVR and a support system from family, community, and the employer.

In keeping with our theme for this year's Annual Report, "*Breaking Barriers-Building Careers*," we are honored to recognize our employers throughout the year who are leading the way in building an inclusive workforce and looking beyond the disability. Without the support of our outstanding employers, the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation would not have been able to assist nearly 5,000

individuals in the last year to successfully obtain or maintain employment. Hiring people with disabilities is a win-win for everyone!

I also want to take this opportunity to congratulate the staff of FDVR who continue to expand their knowledge and implement new approaches to benefit our customers. The dedication demonstrated daily from the staff is a reflection of the success we are celebrating in this annual report.

Enjoy the success we have shared in this annual report and celebrate the collaboration and innovative approaches we have implemented to serve nearly 47,000 individuals with disabilities this year.

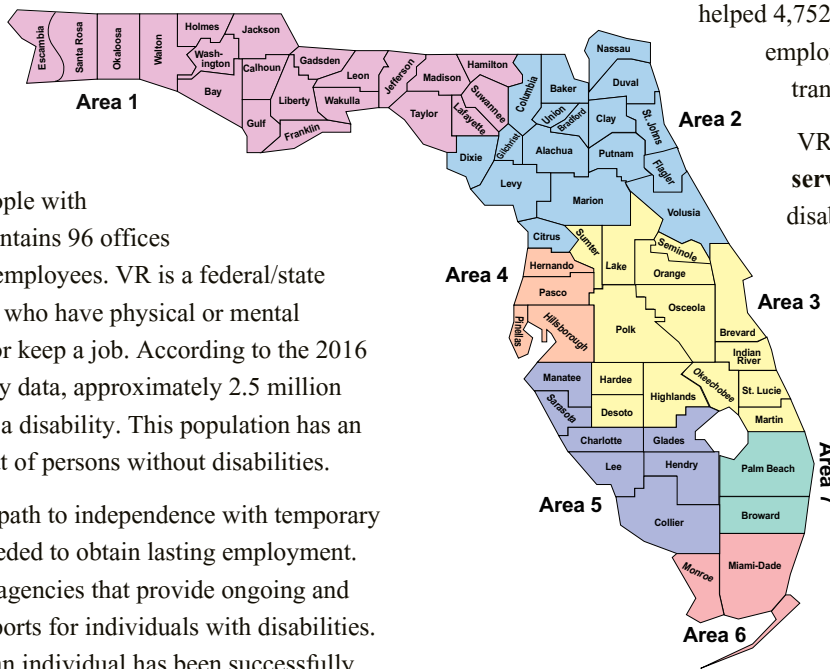
Program Overview

The Florida Department of Education's Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) is Florida's premier

employment program for people with disabilities. The division maintains 96 offices across the state and has 892 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 2016 American Community Survey data, approximately 2.5 million working age Floridians have a disability. This population has an unemployment rate twice that of persons without disabilities.

VR supports an individual's path to independence with temporary and transitional services needed to obtain lasting employment. This differs from other state agencies that provide ongoing and maintenance services or supports for individuals with disabilities. The VR case is closed once an individual has been successfully employed and the individual, employer and counselor are all in agreement.

A large part of VR's mission is focused on preparing students with disabilities for a seamless transition from school to a meaningful career path. The **Transition Youth programs** offer each student the opportunity to participate in Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) through VR. This may include sponsored job exploration counseling, work readiness training, work-based learning experiences, postsecondary educational counseling, and self-advocacy training. Students with disabilities can participate without having to apply to VR, or being determined eligible for services. VR supports students in a variety of evidence based programs, including 15 recognized Inclusive Postsecondary Education (IPSE) programs, 36 Project SEARCH sites, 104 VR Summer Youth Programs, and 40 High School High Tech sites. Last year, VR served 46,848 individuals with over 20,000 being transition age youth. VR



helped 4,752 Floridians become successfully employed; of those 21,672 were transition age youth.

VR offers other **individualized services** to help people with disabilities find or retain employment

including Supported and Customized Employment, Placement Services, VR Business Services and Job Retention Services. Postsecondary college and career training, including apprenticeships, may be provided when necessary to prepare for a vocational goal. Individuals who apply for services are served by one of the 457 public and private counseling staff located throughout the state.

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 customer-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

Launched in the fall of 2014, the Abilities Work Help Desk provides resources businesses can rely upon to advance their disability inclusion efforts. The Help Desk can assist employers with recruiting qualified applicants with disabilities and providing information and referrals on a wide range of disability-related topics.

In 2017, The Abilities Work Help Desk implemented Salesforce, a customer relationship management tool, which has improved employer data tracking for Help Desk and Business Relations activities. During SFY 17-18, the Help Desk assisted over 175 employers with recruitment, and VR participants obtained employment or on-the-job training with employers such as: Florida Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles, Sachs Media Group, the Ft. Lauderdale and Jackson County Chambers of Commerce, and more. Roles varied from Receptionist, Clerical Assistant, Communications Assistant, and Customer Service Specialist to name a few.

Employers can contact the Abilities Work Help Desk at 850-245-3405 or visit the Department of Economic Opportunity's Employ Florida website at abilitieswork.employflorida.com to begin the search for their next great hire.



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

WIOA Overview

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. You can find Florida's Unified State Plan at careersourceflorida.com/wioa/.

FRC Recommendations

The Florida Rehabilitation Council (FRC) is pleased to be a strategic partner with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR). The FRC promotes high standards and expectations for every area of service delivery by recommending best practices in policies using data driven recommendations and by sharing each council member's unique perspective from the constituency they represent.

The FRC applauds VR's effort to reduce the wait list under Order of Selection for individuals with the most significant (Category 1) and significant disabilities (Category 2). Although there is a current small wait list for individuals with disabilities (Category 3), we note that some of these individuals will be served through job retention if they are working and need services to maintain their employment. Although the FRC will continue to monitor the flow of individuals into the VR program as well as those exiting with successful employment and career outcomes, we congratulate VR for reducing wait times of customers as well as initiating employment related information and referral resources for those on the wait list.

We appreciate VR's enthusiasm to commit resources to web based communication platforms so that the VR Director's report and other FRC presentations can be offered to the public throughout the state rather than just to those who can only attend the FRC quarterly meetings in person. Advances in meeting technology are opening up a rich resource for the sharing of information and communication. VR has embraced this opportunity.

The FRC offers the following robust recommendations to enhance service delivery and career achievement by individuals with disabilities.

Recommendation 1: Transition

- Promote early contact and the provision of Information and Referral (I&R) guidance for transition students.
- Expand and offer additional opportunities for pre-vocational and/or technical training for students.
- Increase communication and collaboration by VR representatives with school districts and increase participation in the education of options available to students.

- Continue to emphasize peer mentoring in Florida.
- Increase the capacity of transition service providers while encouraging self-employment and entrepreneurial options.

Recommendation 2: Job Placement Strategies

- Analyze and identify any trends in services provided under the rehabilitation engineering service category by service type and VR area.
- Continue strengthening efforts with business leaders to improve employment opportunities and meaningful careers.
- Develop a deeper understanding of customer strengths and develop tools to communicate succinctly to potential employers.
- FRC fully supports the VR initiative to obtain Worker's Compensation coverage to mirror current coverage of CareerSource Florida customers. This will remove a substantial barrier to employment and allow for increased On-the-Job (OJT) opportunities for VR and Division of Blind Services (DBS) customers.
- FRC applauds VR efforts to increase capacity of the number of providers using the Discovery Model. Self-employment Certified Business Technical Assistance Consultant (CBTAC) initiatives should continue to be emphasized.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of the Abilities Work Help Desk.
- Further build capacity for job customization and Innovation and Expansion projects to include unserved and underserved populations.

Recommendation 3: Mediation and Conflict Resolution

- Promote Rights education for customers and VR staff as a core principle. Collaborative discussions enhance informed choices.

Recommendation 4: Public Awareness of VR

- Develop a media campaign to share the history of VR, Florida specific services, successes and accomplishments.
- Provide an accessible online application system.
- Engage businesses as mandated partners.

Recommendation 5: Counselor Recruitment and Retention

- Actively promote advocacy curriculum that's been developed.
- Identify new ways to recruit employees while implementing long-term retention strategies.
- Continue to promote supervisor succession training.

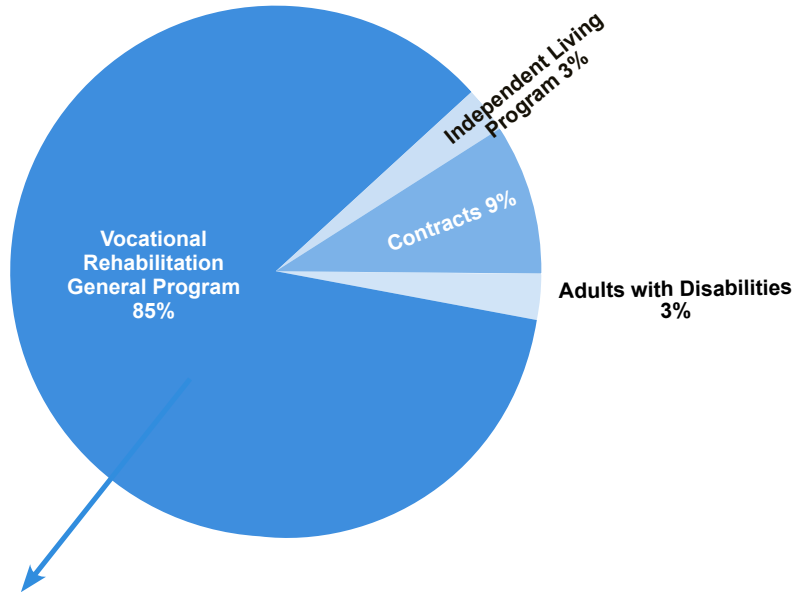
Performance Highlights

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

For every \$1 invested in rehabilitating the customer, an estimated \$6.66 was returned to the Florida economy in state fiscal year 2017-18.

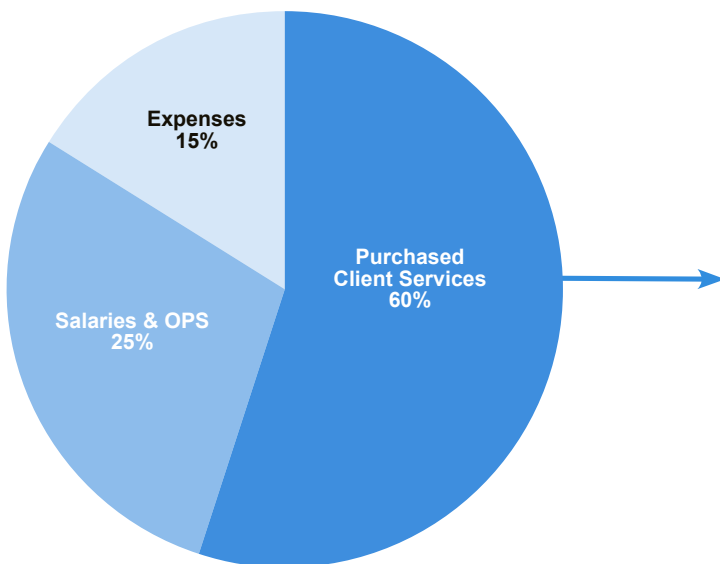
2017-18 Division Programs

Total Division Expenditures \$204,311,015



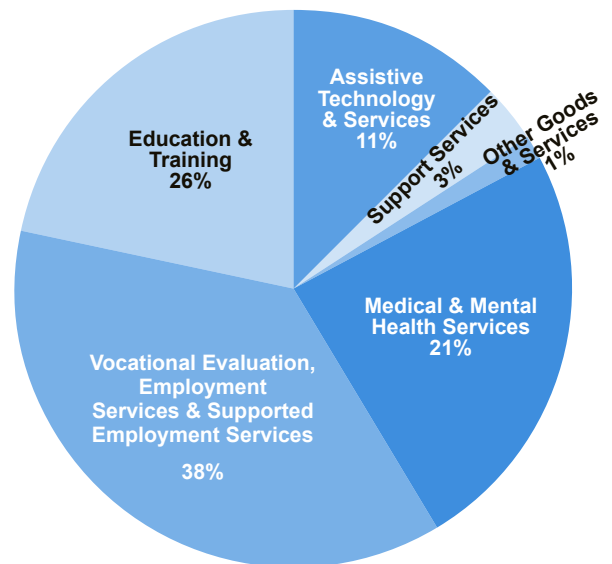
2017-18 VR General Program Expenditures

Total VR Expenditures \$189,838,244*



VR Purchased Client Services (PCS) Expenditures by Category

Total PCS Expenditures \$113,015,460



*This total is a combination of VR General Expenditures plus 93% of Contracts expenditures also related to the VR General Program.

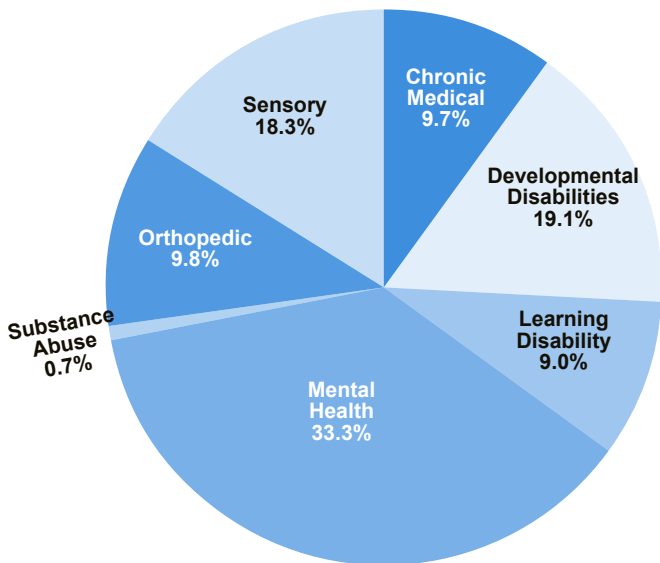
VR Facts at a Glance

SFY 2017-18

Persons with disabilities who got or kept jobs.....	4,752
Average hours worked per week.....	28.42
Average hourly earnings	\$11.94
Projected average annual earnings.....	\$18,554.98
Total projected earnings in the first year	\$88,173,266.48
Median monthly caseload per counselor.....	97
Number of Individual Plans for Employment created	15,577
Number of customers age (14-21)	25,607
Number of Customers with the Most Significant Disabilities.....	26,667

VR Customers Gainfully Employed* by Primary Disability Category

* Gainful employment occurs when a customer has job stability for at least 90 days and 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, 2018

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.

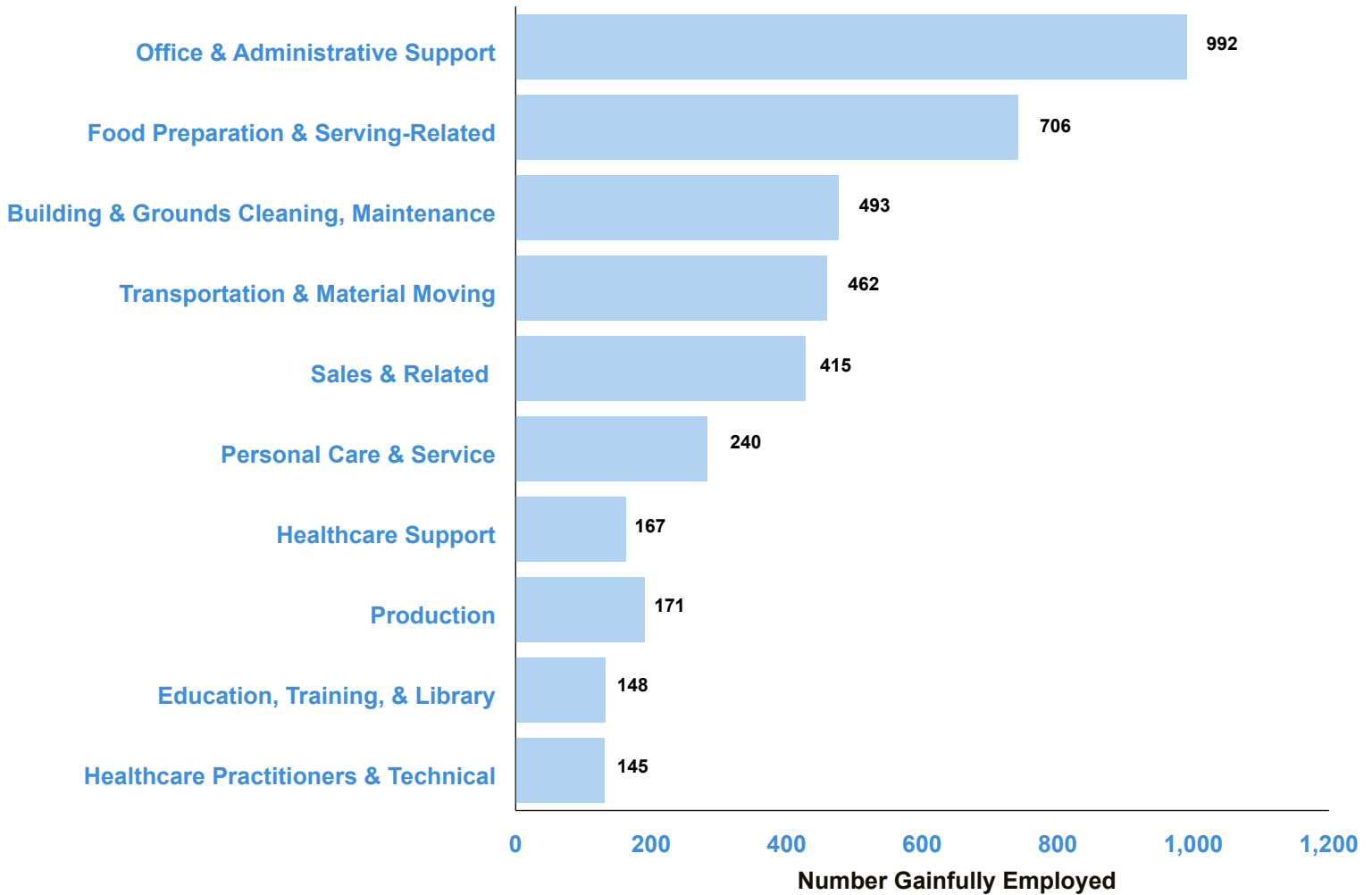
Category 3 – Other Disabilities (286)

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

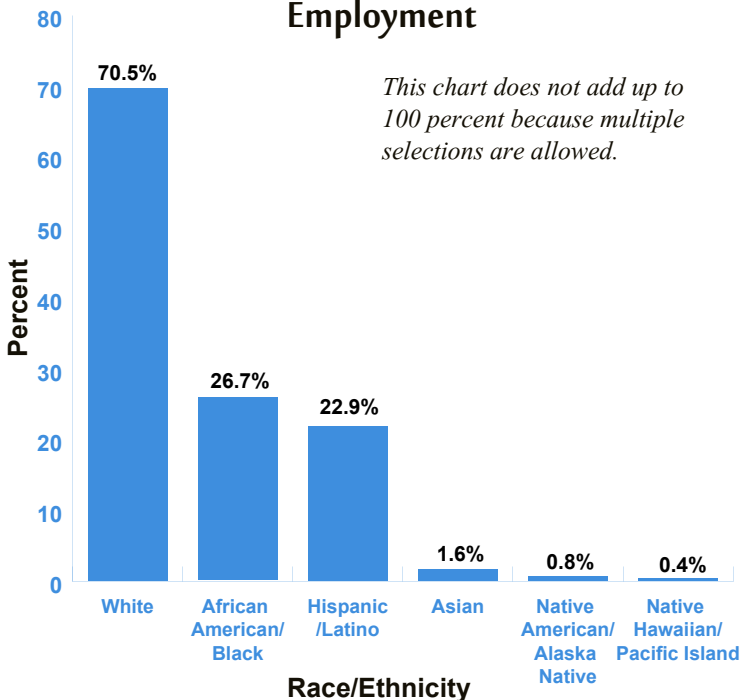
VR now offering Job Retention Services

VR provides job retention services to eligible individuals who require specific services or equipment to keep their job, regardless of order of selection. 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.

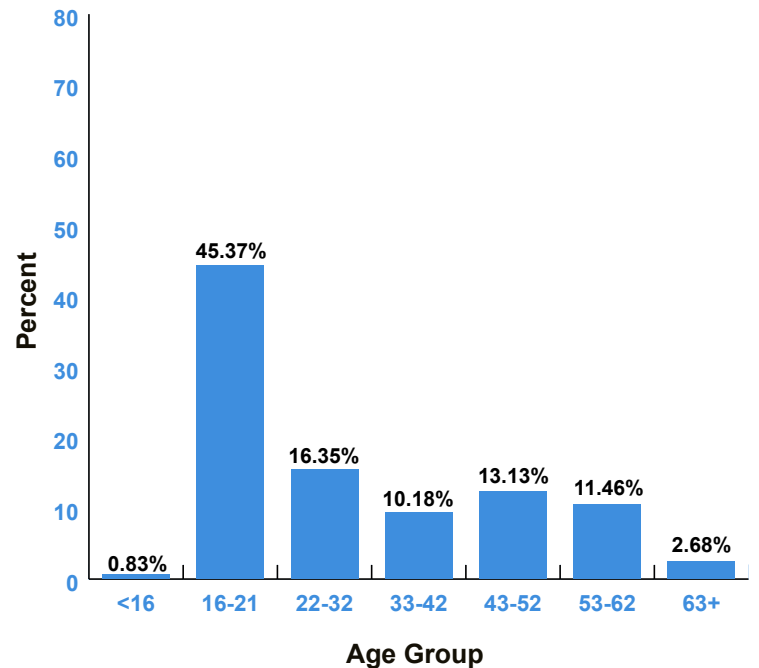
Top 10 Occupations of VR Customers for SFY 2017-18



Race & 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



Success Story: Andrea Godfroy

Westin- “Mind-blowing” is how Andrea Godfroy describes the experience of using her hearing aids for the first time. “I will never forget that moment, everything was louder. I got in my car, used the turn signal and could hear the click, click, click.” Her quiet world suddenly amplified.

As a struggling college student, Andrea received hearing devices and tuition assistance through VR. She graduated with her Bachelors of Nursing from the Chamberlain College of Nursing and passed the nursing board exam on the first try.

VR Counselor, April Rosenblatt, was not surprised. “Working with Andrea has been a pure joy. I have gotten to watch her work hard in school, counsel and support her through the ups and downs and witness her accomplish all the goals she set for herself.”

Andrea just celebrated her first year as a nurse at a Florida hospital. “The best part of my job is getting to be there for my patients. I want to help them get better so they can go home and do the things they love, because I am getting to do what I love.”



Success Story: Mackenzie Moore-Adams

St. Augustine- Mackenzie Moore-Adams is a hard worker with very little time off—many of her days are non-stop, and she works from sunrise to sunset! Despite the long hours, she would not trade her place for anything in the world because she is a small business owner who dearly loves her job.

Mackenzie’s Mighty Mutt Cuts has been operating for three years in the St. Augustine area, and business is growing. Mackenzie offers many grooming services to her canine clientele, which are available in packages or a la carte. They even offer a lending library for pet owners with non-fiction, instructional, and fiction books—all of which involve dogs!

Before finding joy in self-employment, Mackenzie was a seasonal volunteer at The Alligator Farm and Cindy’s Dog Retreat and gained valuable work experience with Winn Dixie. She expressed language and vocabulary as the biggest challenge to finding a job. Though Mackenzie has congenital hearing loss, her main barrier to employment was a specific learning disability that made it difficult for her to participate in interviews even with the assistance of an interpreter. Mackenzie also sought full-time work, an opportunity that is hard to come by in the pet grooming industry.



VR assisted Mackenzie in obtaining hearing aids and rehabilitation technology, which were necessary to work with the tools of the industry. Additionally, VR and Mackenzie’s stepfather helped with the construction of an in-home shop and outfitted the store with all the necessary trimmings, such as lights, kennels, and air-conditioning. Most importantly, Mackenzie was able to receive the education and training to become a licensed pet groomer and stylist. “I will always be grateful for VR’s valuable assistance in my dream to be independent in a profession where I may work with animals,” she said.

While she is always striving to improve and grow her business, Mackenzie also finds the time to donate her talents to a special cause. She works closely with K9s for Warriors in Ponte Vedra, which is a charity and veterans’ service organization that provides service dogs to veterans. Mackenzie offers free baths and grooming to all fosters puppies for the warriors.

Senator Dennis Baxley Honored with Stephen R. Wise Advocacy Award

The Florida Rehabilitation Council (FRC) created the Stephen R. Wise Advocacy Award to recognize a dedicated Florida leader and champion who promotes independence through work and community activities for individuals with disabilities. The FRC selected Senator Dennis Baxley, as the 2018 Stephen R. Wise Advocacy Award winner.



Throughout his career, Senator Baxley has championed and sponsored legislation that promotes vital employment services, as well as access to health and support services, for individuals with disabilities. This legislative session, he was the Senate sponsor and secured passage of HB 1437, which provides state-paid

The FRC considered many outstanding nominees for this year's award and voted on May 16, 2018, to present this award to Senator Baxley to recognize his legislative leadership and personal commitment over many years to create and promote meaningful employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities.

Workers' Compensation coverage for customers of Vocational Rehabilitation and the Division of Blind Services to enhance their work experience activities.

The FRC is proud to recognize Senator Baxley with the Stephen R. Wise Advocacy Award for 2018.

Public Forums

The FRC and VR partner together to hold public forums to promote and maintain open lines of communication with VR customers, stakeholders, and interested parties. This collaborative effort to reach customers, vendors, businesses, and other stakeholders is a continued focus. The public forums are held at each FRC quarterly meeting or when policy changes may require public input. Access to these forums is not limited to individuals where the meeting is located, but they are open to the public statewide via telephone conference call and CART text through the internet.

There were four public forums conducted during SFY 2017-2018. Areas of comment received have included feedback on: High School High Tech Program, Project Search, issues affecting individuals who are deaf/blind, transition services and coordination with school systems, vendor benchmarks and referral issues, success stories, customer concerns, VR policy changes, customer choice, peer mentoring and other topics.

Upcoming FRC/VR Public Forums

January 15, 2019 - Tallahassee

April 16, 2019 - Palm Beach Gardens

August, 2019 - TBD in VR Area 4

November, 2019 - TBD in VR Area 2

Forum Call-in number is:

1-888-585-9008; Room #: 873574258#

Please check for updated information 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, and 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.

Success Story: Theo Harvin

Bartow- Watching Othedus (Theo) Harvin at work in the kitchen at Sonny's BBQ is like watching a graceful ballet. He moves from the grill to the refrigerator to the slicer and back again in one seamless motion. He pulls a lever to stand up so he can use the slicing machine or reach into the refrigerator, and he lowers the lever to sit down at the grill and get supplies. His movements are smooth and fluid as he maneuvers his wheelchair around the kitchen.

Theo is paralyzed from the waist down. Surgery to remove a tumor on his spine left him with a spinal injury, but that doesn't stop him now. He uses a stand-up wheelchair to get around. "I'm all over that kitchen," he says. "I can stand up the whole shift, if I need to."

Before the tumor and surgery, Theo had worked at Sonny's for 13 years. Becoming paralyzed took a toll, and he stopped working. Then in 2008, he met with VR Counselor Katie Kummer to discuss his job goals. He had always been a chef and wanted to continue that career path.

Katie was able to get Theo a wheelchair that would fit his needs – a stand-up wheelchair. Then, he attended the Hands On Education program, a two-week culinary program at the Grand



Hyatt Regency in Tampa, Florida. He graduated with flying colors and began to look for employment.

Zach Drehmer, owner of Sonny's BBQ in Bartow, is glad to have Theo back in the kitchen. "I hired him because of past experience. I'd worked with him for 10 years before his surgery. But he's the same person he was before. He has a positive attitude, doesn't get stressed out, and always has a smile."

Katie is thrilled that Theo is, once again, doing what he loves to do. "He is so happy in the kitchen and is just an awesome person! He recently came back to VR for a new stand-up wheelchair because the old one wasn't working anymore. VR also modified his vehicle so that he could drive to and from work independently. I'm glad we could get it for him so he could continue working and providing for his family."

Theo is grateful for VR and Katie. "I appreciate VR. They really helped me out a lot. At one point, I thought I was just going to sit around and not do all the things I do now. Working with Katie was a blessing. She helped me get back on my feet. She's like a second mom, and she really stayed on me. If it wasn't for her, I don't know where I'd be."

Success Story: Michael Hobgood

Hosford- Michael Hobgood is a foreman in the construction business and continues to pursue higher career goals by affirming his independence and becoming a self-advocate for his needs. Wendy Dunn, VR Senior Counselor, finds Michael's story captivating because he was able to overcome great adversity despite the hardships and obstacles he has experienced.

When Wendy first began working with Michael, he was working in heavy construction, using a broken prosthetic, which was held together by duct tape. Not once did he complain about the pain, nor did it stop him from going to work, even though the ineffectiveness of the prosthetic could have impeded his ability to perform his job. Though he would eventually have surgery to remove painful tissue, Michael continued to work and demonstrate a positive attitude.

Mark Gibson, a prosthetist, designed two prosthetics for Michael -- a high power, body-powered prosthetic for work activities and a lighter one that would allow him to grasp and hold a small object such as a plate, cup, or fishing rod. While VR did not provide any job training, Wendy offered guidance on the importance of self-care and being present for mental wellness sessions. Mr. Gibson also mentored Michael through encouragement of personal success and trading fishing stories. Michael likes to fish as a form of self-reflection and meditation. "It brings me peace," he says.

This past January, Michael was presented with the Education Commissioner's Leadership Award in Tallahassee. Wendy, Michael's parents, and Mr. Gibson proudly stood beside him as he received the award. When asked about his future work goals, Michael says that he wants to be the "Main Foreman" at work. Through his determination and drive, Michael clearly demonstrates that he has the ability to achieve his goals.



Ombudsman

Florida VR is one of only a few states that offers 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 SFY 2017-2018, the Ombudsman’s Office responded to 2,305 complaints or requests for information. Of the total, 1,118 (49%) were complaint requests. Complaints involved issues such as quality of counseling and delivery of services, as well as plan development and service cost concerns. Customers expressed satisfaction with the resolutions to their concerns in nearly 92% of the requests.

The Ombudsman’s Office continues working with staff from around the state in the implementation of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). For more information, you may contact the Ombudsman’s Office at Ombudsman@vr.fldoe.org or (866) 515-3692.

Customer Satisfaction at a Glance

The FRC is required to review and analyze the effectiveness of and consumer satisfaction with VR agency functions, rehabilitation services, and employment outcomes achieved by eligible individuals including the availability of health and other employment benefits. The FRC and VR contract with Market Decisions to obtain this information. The wealth of data is being used effectively by the FRC and VR to focus on specific areas of excellence for recognition as well as specific opportunities for improvement.

State Fiscal Year 2017-18

VR customers satisfied with Florida’s VR program	84%
VR customers satisfied with the services provided by VR	80%
VR customers satisfied with their involvement in their VR experience	84%
VR customers who say VR staff treated them with dignity and respect.....	96%
VR customers satisfied with their choice of vocational goal.....	80%
VR customers who say VR staff were helpful in achieving their job goal	89%
VR customers who say VR services received helped them become more independent..	85%
VR customers who say VR services they received helped them become more financially independent	79%
VR customers satisfied with what they’re doing at their current job.....	80%
VR customers who would tell their friends with disabilities to go to VR	90%

Success Story: Sammy Brightman

St. Petersburg- You can count on Sammy's sunny, smiling face to greet you whenever you see him. He has a positive, can-do attitude and a demeanor that says, "I don't give up." TJMaxx was not blind to these attributes and created a position specifically tailored for Sammy.

Sammy prepares items for readiness before they are placed on the retail floor and sold to customers. He processes merchandise by taking them out of their protective wrap and attaches security sensors, sorts clothing by size, and organizes apparel hangers for storage when needed. He works to the best of his ability, considering his physical and cognitive limits.

Sammy has Central Pontine Myelinolysis (CPM) that contributes to neurologic deterioration, and causes auditory process deficiency, fatigue, lethargy, difficulty with balance and/or speech. Sammy is very self-aware and is able to ease his symptoms by taking frequent breaks and recognizing when he needs to sit or stand to keep his blood flowing.

While having no previous work experience, Sammy briefly attended and volunteered with St. Petersburg College where he learned and performed various office activities. Christy



Brown, President for PlacementWorks, states that the solid partnership among TJMaxx, PlacementWorks, and Vocational Rehabilitation is what resulted in a positive employment setting for Sammy's strengths. "He brings a smile to my face and teaches us what perseverance truly looks like," Ms. Brown says.

In order to place Sammy on the path to triumph and independence, TJMaxx worked with PlacementWorks and VR to secure a safe working environment. Accommodations were made within the store to allow both Sammy and TJMaxx to benefit from his work efforts.

Roy Allen, store manager, had this to say about Sammy: "Sammy's personal commitment to excellence has inspired others to push past mediocrity and has increased associate morale throughout the store. He has

continued to learn and grow with the company; as he masters a task, he is always eager to learn something new. Sammy has taught us to be more accommodating to people. By doing so, we would all be successful. He has taught us that sometimes all we need is to take a step back and look at the big picture—a little bit of perspective can go a long way."

Sammy loves coming to work and works hard every day to make sure he completes his tasks. "I know what I do is important to the team," he says.

Success Story: Martin Grasser

Naples- Martin is a previous participant in the Lorenzo Walker Technical College Project Explorer where he worked at Moorings Park with a mentor in the facilities department. Project Explorer is an off-campus program that provides hands-on career exploration experiences and instruction on life skills. After exiting the program, Martin revealed that he had a lot more skills to offer. Two years ago, he found a job with McAllister's Deli, and he has since become a fixture.

Martin has a visual impairment that affects his depth perception, balance, and gross motor coordination. Additionally, he experiences tremors that causes his hands to shake. With his physical limitations and a learning disability, he has never let challenges stand in his way. He has learned workaround techniques to perform his job successfully, and he always has a great attitude.

Lisa O'Leary, VR Consultant in Area 5, finds Martin to be the epitome of perseverance. Ms. O'Leary says that Martin



faces disappointment with optimism and grace. When he was first struggling to find a place after leaving Moorings Park, he always remained positive and upbeat. "Martin is an inspiration, and I am happy to have had the privilege to have been his VRC," says Ms. O'Leary.

Nahomi Castro, General Manager at McAllister's Deli, comments that "Martin is one of our best employees. He is always on time and happy; he is the hardest worker and happy to help guests. Martin is meticulous in his job duties and makes everyone feel welcome." Wow!

In addition to working five days a week, Martin continues to be an active member of his community and is as a valued member of Special Olympics—he competes not only locally, but at the state level, too! Everyone at VR congratulates Martin with his long-term success and will continue to cheer him on as he achieves his future goals.



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