

2020-2021
ANNUAL REPORT



Florida:
POWERED BY INCLUSION

**EMPLOYING INDIVIDUALS
WITH DISABILITIES**



FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION
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VOCATIONAL
REHABILITATION

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Public Forums

The Florida Rehabilitation Council (FRC) and Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) partner together to hold public forums that 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 open to the public statewide by conference call and CART text through the internet. There were four public forums conducted during the 2020-2021 State Fiscal Year (SFY). Areas of comment received included feedback on the delivery of Vocational Rehabilitation services, customer concerns, Independent Living Services, State Plan for Independent Living, Client Assistance Program services, VR Customer Satisfaction Survey, FRC membership and appointments.

2022 FRC/VR Public Forums

February 15	Gainesville or Jacksonville
May 3	Ft. Myers or Naples
August 9	Fort Lauderdale
October 25	Tampa

Call-in Public Forum Number
 888-585-9008
 Room: 873574258#

For updated information go to RehabWorks.org/rehabcouncil.shtml.

Florida Rehabilitation Council



Patrick Cannon
Chair

Message from the Chair

On behalf of The Florida Rehabilitation Council (FRC), I would like to present our Annual Report. Our council works together with the Florida Department of Education, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) to help Floridians with disabilities to successfully integrate into the workforce.

This past year has been unlike any other. Everyone has been affected in one way or another by the COVID-19 pandemic as we have seen individuals, families, businesses and communities struggle to cope with loss, maintain health and their financial independence. Federal, state and local officials have developed ways to respond to safety concerns and the medical and economic needs of our state and nation. We know that persons with disabilities continue to be disproportionately affected and in need of services to promote their health, safety and economic opportunity to successfully live independent lives and be fully integrated into their communities.

In order to develop, evaluate and improve the services needed to address these ongoing and evolving challenges, we need your help. We need you to provide your feedback, recommendations, ideas and participation to ensure VR services are safely and effectively provided to all Floridians. To learn more about how to participate and apply for FRC Membership, visit FRC's website at <https://www.rehabworks.org/rehabcouncil.shtml>.

The FRC will continue to engage all individuals and stakeholders to work with us on the state and national levels. Together, we can help make Florida's VR program a recognized leader in helping people with disabilities safely find and maintain meaningful employment, thereby enhancing their independence. When we work together, all things are possible. In the words of our VR Director Allison Flanagan, "Keep Going!"

Respectfully,

Patrick Cannon
Florida Rehabilitation Council

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.

Florida Rehabilitation Council Vision

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

About the Florida Rehabilitation Council

The 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 VR in planning and developing statewide rehabilitation programs and services and recommending improvements to programs and services.

Division of Vocational Rehabilitation



**Allison
Flanagan**

Message From the Director

The Florida Department of Education, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) is pleased to join the Florida Rehabilitation Council (FRC) in presenting its 2021 Annual Report highlighting accomplishments throughout the program year of July 1, 2020 – June 30, 2021. The successes shared in this report capture the commitment of the division to continue supporting individuals with disabilities in obtaining and maintaining competitive, integrated employment during unprecedented times.

Despite the global pandemic, it was a year of celebration. The public VR program celebrated 100 years of employment supports and services for individuals with disabilities. In addition, the Americans with Disabilities Act celebrated 30 years of supporting equality for individuals with disabilities.

The division exceeded the Measurable Skills Gains federal performance measure and successfully supported over 5,000 competitive, integrated employment outcomes throughout the program year. Our accomplishments are a direct reflection of the commitment by staff and stakeholders; and the tremendous work that continues to happen amid challenges.

Strategies and services were implemented to meet the demand of not only our customers, who are seeking employment opportunities, but also for our business and employer customers, who are committed to an inclusive workforce. Opportunities include expanded services in rural and underserved areas through virtual approaches, adaptive services that meet the needs and preferences of our customers, enhanced collaboration between workforce partners and innovative approaches in the virtual setting.

The accomplishments shared in the annual report reflect the support and partnership between VR and the FRC. The commitment for continuous improvement is evident through our partnership and the benefits realized with successful outcomes for individuals with disabilities in achieving competitive, integrated employment.

Vocational Rehabilitation Mission

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

Vocational Rehabilitation Vision

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

The Florida Department of Education, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) is an equal opportunity employer. It is against the law for VR as a recipient of Federal financial assistance to discriminate against any individual in the United States on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, political affiliation or belief. The application process used by VR to determine eligibility for services, any subsequent services and the entire VR process are subject to these non-discrimination requirements. Auxiliary aids and services are available upon request to individuals with disabilities. VR program receives 78.7 percent of its funding through a grant from the U.S. Department of Education. For the 2021 Federal Fiscal Year, the total amount of grant funds awarded were \$176,836,896. The remaining 21.3 percent of the costs (\$47,860,557) were funded by Florida State Appropriations. Revised October 2021.

Program Overview

VR is Florida's premier employment program for people with disabilities. VR is a federal/state partnership that helps people who have disabilities prepare for, get, advance in or keep a job.

The division has seven areas and over 1,000 employees across the state.

According to the 2019 Centers for Disease Control Disability and Health Data System, an estimated 28 percent of Floridians over the age of 18 have a disability. This population has an unemployment rate twice that of persons without disabilities.

Last year, VR served 39,460 individuals including more than 20,000 transition-age youth. VR assisted 5,055 Floridians to become successfully employed.

Traditional Vocational Rehabilitation Program

VR supports an individual's path to independence with services needed to obtain lasting employment. This differs from other state agencies that provide ongoing maintenance services or supports for individuals with disabilities. Once an individual, their employer and their VR counselor agree that the employment opportunity is successful, the individual's VR case is closed; however, the individual can return to VR for additional services if needed to maintain their job.

Generally, VR offers a wide range of individualized services to help people with disabilities prepare for, find, advance in or retain employment through a variety of initiatives and programs, including:

- Supported and customized employment placements
- Job retention services
- Postsecondary college and career training, including registered apprenticeship programs

Vocational Rehabilitation Services for Youth and Students with Disabilities

VR provides individualized services to assist students with disabilities in a seamless transition from high school to a meaningful career path. Students with disabilities may participate in Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) without having to apply to VR, or be determined eligible for services. Under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act (WIOA), every student with a disability has the opportunity to participate in Pre-ETS through VR, including sponsored job exploration counseling, work readiness training, work-based learning experiences, postsecondary educational counseling and self-advocacy training (includes training delivered by peer mentors).

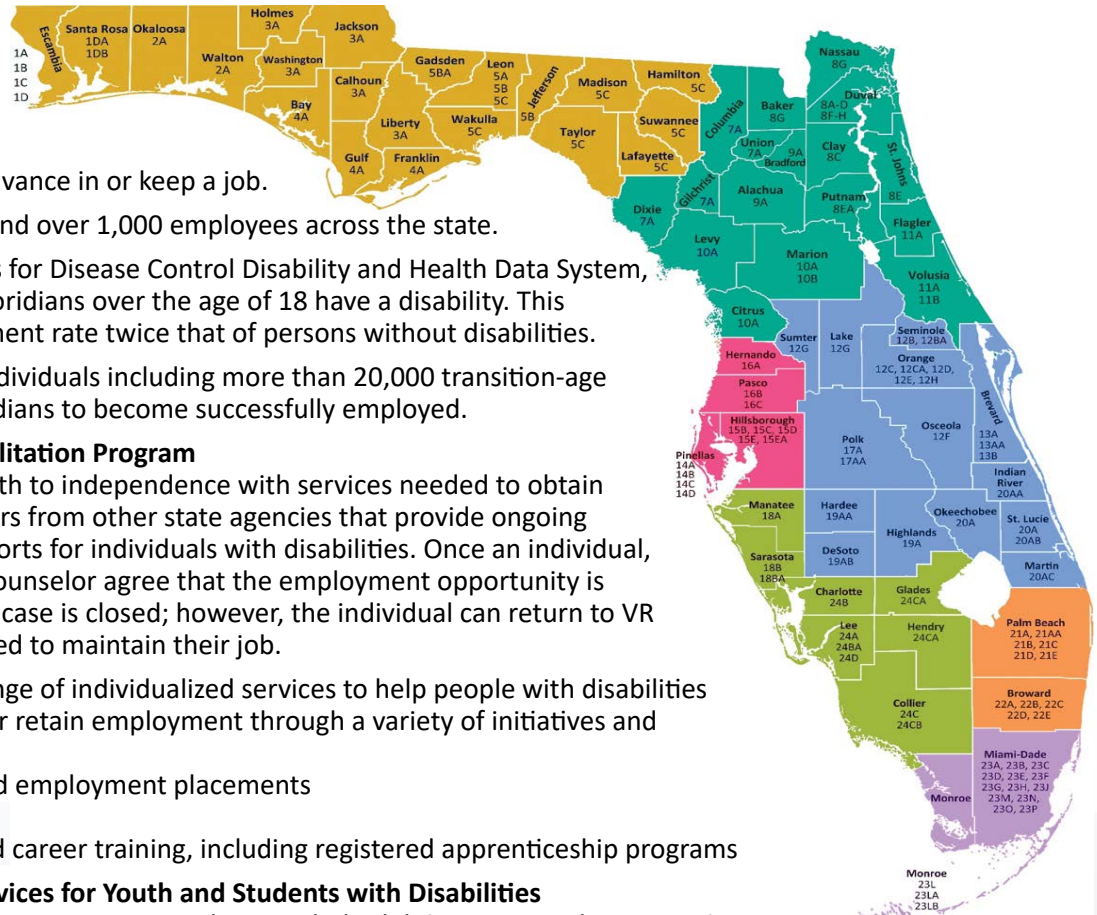
Annual Highlights

Over the last year, VR evaluated new processes, virtual service delivery of communications and other changes that were made in response to the pandemic. To the extent that VR became more efficient and effective, some of the changes have been made permanent. As part of our ongoing efforts, VR has:

- Continued to carry out the Florida Department of Education's initiative to reduce VR's physical footprint. The Facilities Management Unit coordinated the consolidation of several offices, negotiated reduced space and facilitated re-configurations of current office space. VR consolidated 13 unit offices and reduced headquarters office space during 2020-2021. These efforts will result in a cost savings of \$1 million in the 2021-2022 fiscal year, which will be directed to customer services and programs.
- Maintained a flexible approach to customer interactions, including both face-to-face and virtual meetings, to meet customers where they were most comfortable.
- Continued to improve VR's technological infrastructure to increase the speed and stability of communications across the state.
- Expended the 15 percent required federal allotment on Pre-ETS for students with disabilities.

VR has also continued to improve overall service delivery and outcomes, including:

- Remaining the national leader in Project Search with 42 active sites around the state.
- Working diligently to implement a new case management system that will increase efficiency and effectiveness.
- Increasing the number of schools providing work-based learning experiences, peer mentoring programs and supported employment providers, so that VR customers have more choices.
- Improving compliance with federal deadlines for eligibility and plan development.



Florida Rehabilitation Council Members



Patrick Cannon
Chair
Lakeland

Represents current and former VR participants



Molly Hullinger
St. Augustine

Represents individuals with disabilities and disability groups



Allison Flanagan
VR Director
Tallahassee

Represents Vocational Rehabilitation

How to Become a Florida Rehabilitation Council Member*

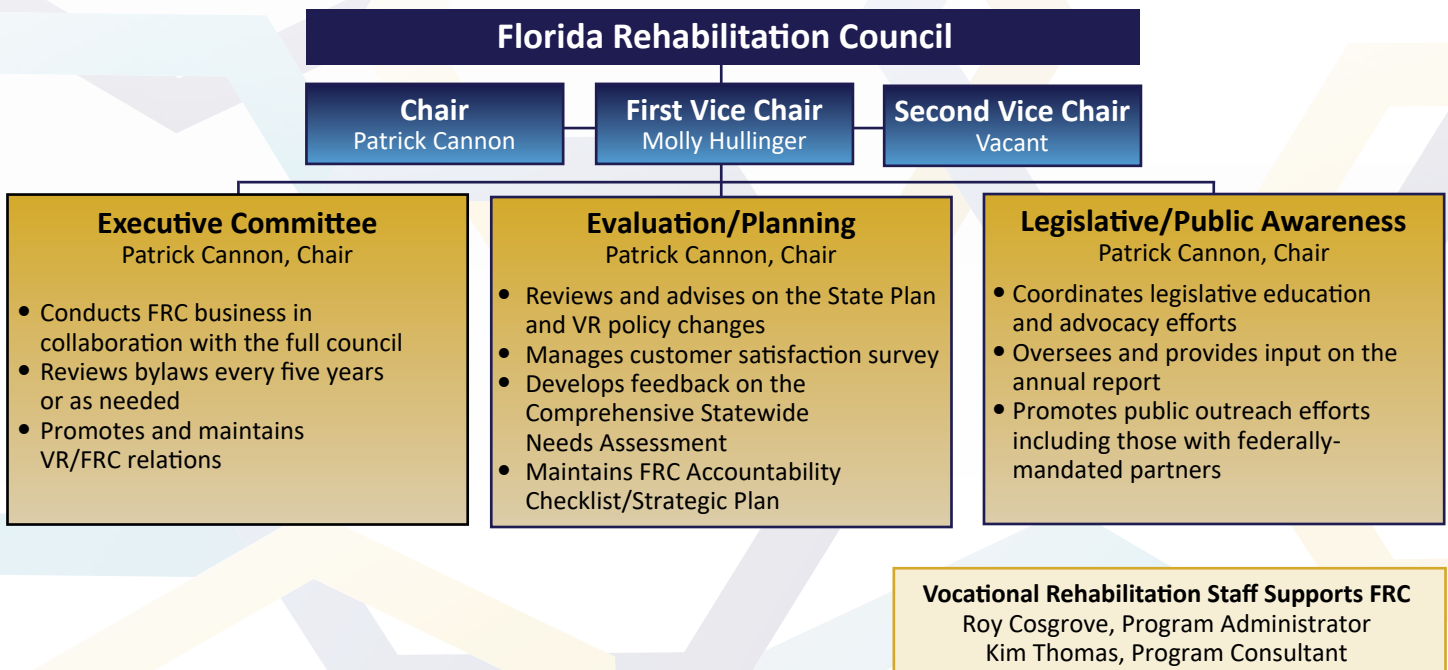
FRC members are appointed by the governor. FRC members and VR work in strategic partnership to increase the employment of people with disabilities in competitive, integrated jobs of their choice and in keeping with their skills and abilities.

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

The process for appointment to the FRC is to complete the governor's appointment application or to speak with the Appointments Office at 850-488-7146. The application is available at www.flgov.com/appointments.

For more information about becoming an FRC member or the expectations of membership, go to www.RehabWorks.org/rehabcouncil.shtml and click on FRC Membership or contact the FRC at 850-245-3397. For an electronic copy of this annual report with a direct link to the Appointments Office, go to www.RehabWorks.org/rehabcouncil.shtml and click on 2020–2021 FRC Annual Report.

*Statutory Authority and Governing Guidelines may be found in 34 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), Chapter III, Part 361.17 and Chapter 413, Part II, Florida Statutes (F.S.).



Summary of Council Recommendations to the 2020-2024 Unified State Plan*

The FRC is pleased to be a strategic partner with 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 emphasizes the need to improve deaf and hard of hearing services by the creation of a Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services Bureau by VR and the Florida Department of Education (FDOE). Over the past year, the council has reviewed presentations and received additional information, that when combined with survey results, leads the council to believe that a Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services Bureau should be created to better serve this underrepresented and underserved population.

The FRC is equally concerned, as is the agency, with staff retention and turnover. The FRC encourages the on-going analysis of the impact of turnover on the clients being served, as well as staff. For Florida to have a state-of-the-art program of services for individuals with disabilities, actions should be taken to, at a minimum, identify, prevent and mitigate the impact of turnover. Action is needed so that VR can be competitive in recruiting, hiring and retaining staff.

The FRC is ready to meet the challenges with VR as a partner.

State Rehabilitation Council Recommendations

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

Recommendation 1. Deaf and Hard of Hearing

- Although VR has a specific unit dedicated to serving people who are deaf, hard of hearing and Deafblind, the FRC recommends realigning existing resources for the creation of a Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services Bureau be considered by VR and FDOE.

Recommendation 2. Counselor Recruitment and Retention

- Build on the success of the Learning Management System and other training opportunities that will increase staff confidence and skillsets.
- The FRC strongly recommends consideration from savings generated through office consolidations and other efficiencies pay incentives to meet or exceed the national average for Certified Rehabilitation Counselors currently hired or working to attain the credential and upon recruitment of Certified Rehabilitation Counselors. The FRC believes this is a critical need to stabilize the VR workforce.
- Provide supervisors with opportunities for the training they need in an environment where they can be productive.
- Ensure that staff is equipped with state-of-the-art resources to do their job duties.

Recommendation 3. Transition

- Continue to promote early contact and assistance to all students with disabilities under an Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) or a 504 Plan.
- Continue to expand and offer career paths to include vocational exploration, technical training, registered apprenticeship programs and postsecondary options for transition students.
- Continue to emphasize peer mentoring in Florida, especially to underserved groups who are deaf and/or hard of hearing. Assure that there is a network of proficient providers and supports for those providers, including those working with individuals who are deaf.

Recommendation 4. Job Placement Strategies

- Continue to 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, including increasing partnerships with local chambers of commerce.
- Remain focused on customer strengths and develop tools to communicate effectively and succinctly to potential employers.
- FRC applauds VR efforts to increase capacity of the number of providers using the Discovery model.
- Continue to evaluate the effectiveness of the Abilities Work Help Desk and provide regular reports to the FRC.
- Further build capacity for job customization and innovation and expansion projects to include unserved and underserved populations.
- Evaluate self-employment services across the board to include the evaluation of the Certified Business Technical Assistance Consultant model. Consider ways to streamline and expedite the provision of self-employment services.

Recommendation 5. Rights and Conflict Resolution

- Continue to promote advocacy and a Disability Rights curriculum for clients, staff and providers as a core principle. Collaborative discussions enhance informed choices.
- Continue to implement strategies to improve satisfaction survey results on client knowledge of all levels of rights to resolve any difficulties with VR.

Recommendation 6. Public Awareness of VR

- Develop a media campaign to share the history of VR, Florida-specific services, successes and accomplishments.
- Implement an online application system.
- Continue to engage businesses and mandated partners.

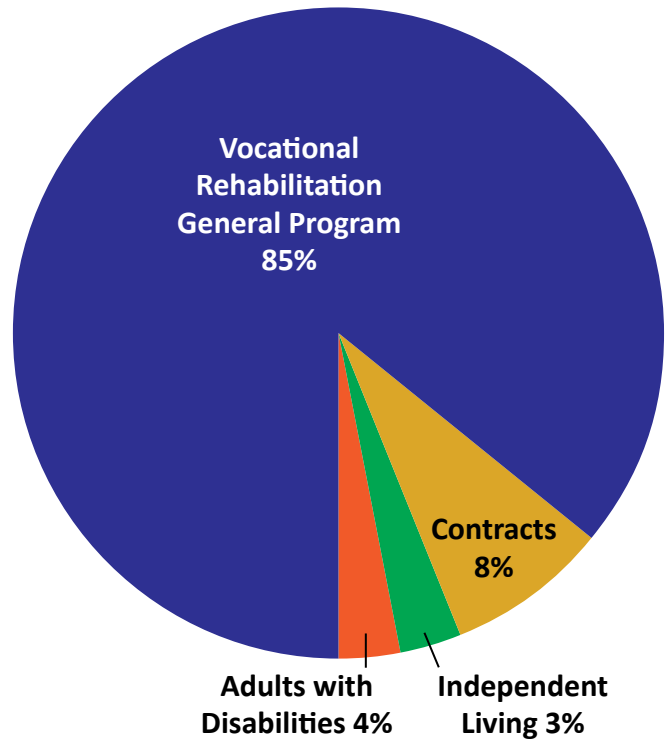


* The Unified State Plan is found at <https://wioaplans.ed.gov/node/31>.

Vocational Rehabilitation Performance Highlights

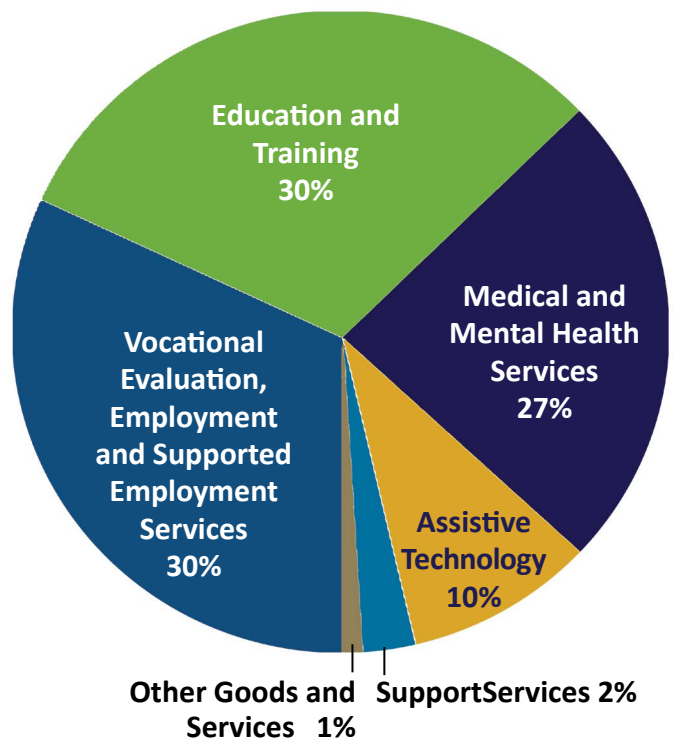
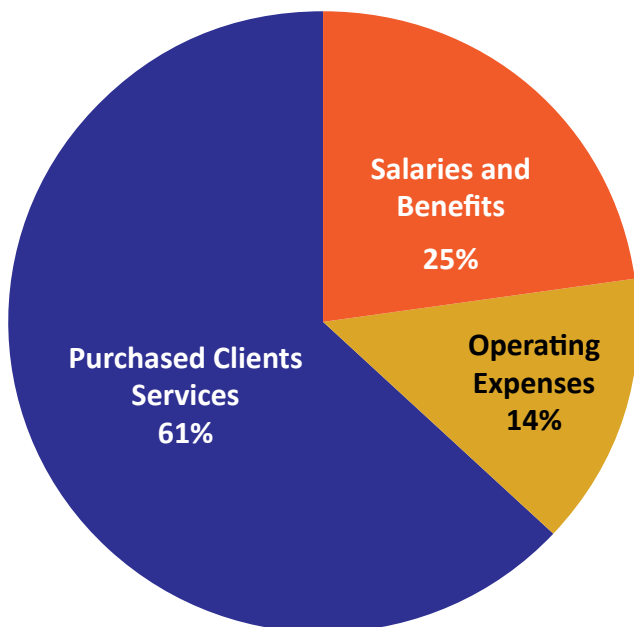
2020–2021 Division Programs
Total Division Expenditures \$209,378,174

For every **\$1** invested in rehabilitating a customer, an estimated **\$8.73** was returned to the Florida economy in the 2020–2021 state fiscal year.



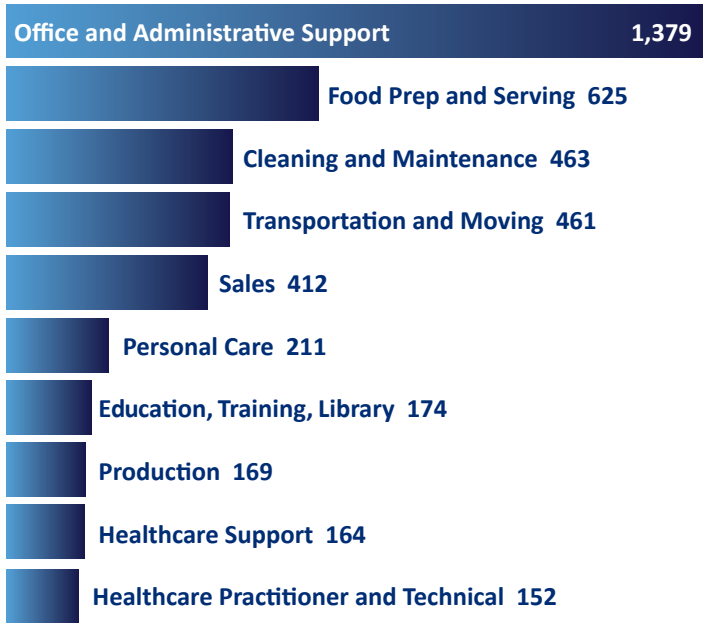
2020-2021 General Program Expenditures
Total Vocational Rehabilitation Expenditures \$194,264,850*

Client Services Expenditures by Category
Total Purchased Client Services Expenditures \$118,350,545

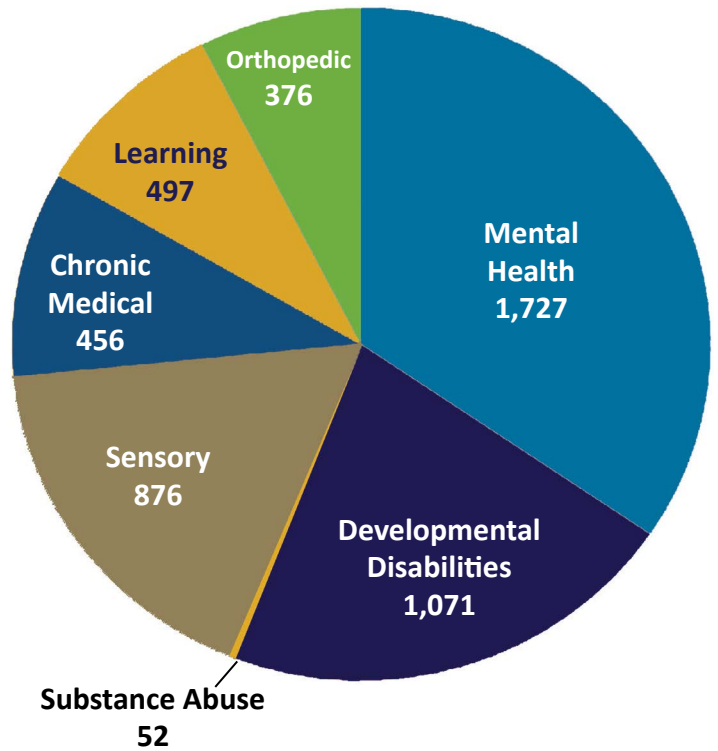


* This total is a combination of VR General Expenditures plus 93% of contracts expenditures also related to the VR General Program.

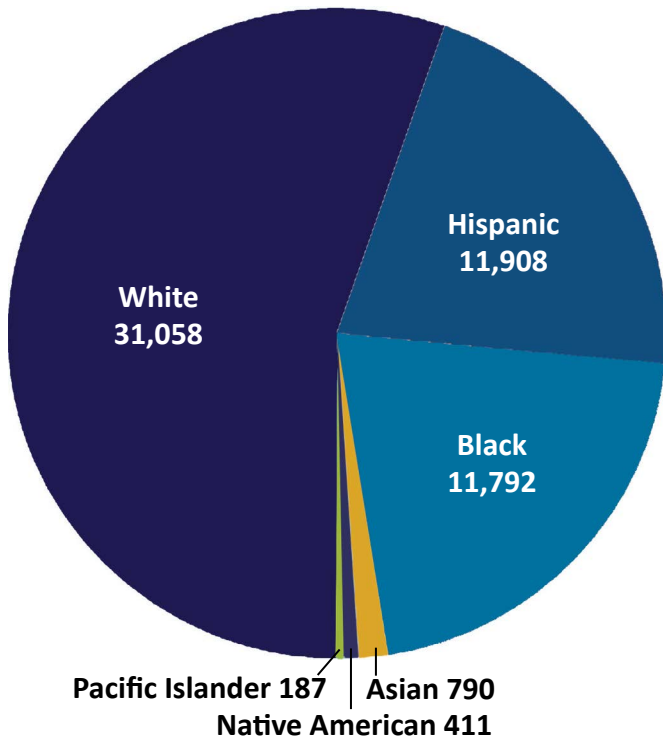
Top 10 Occupations of Vocational Rehabilitation Customers



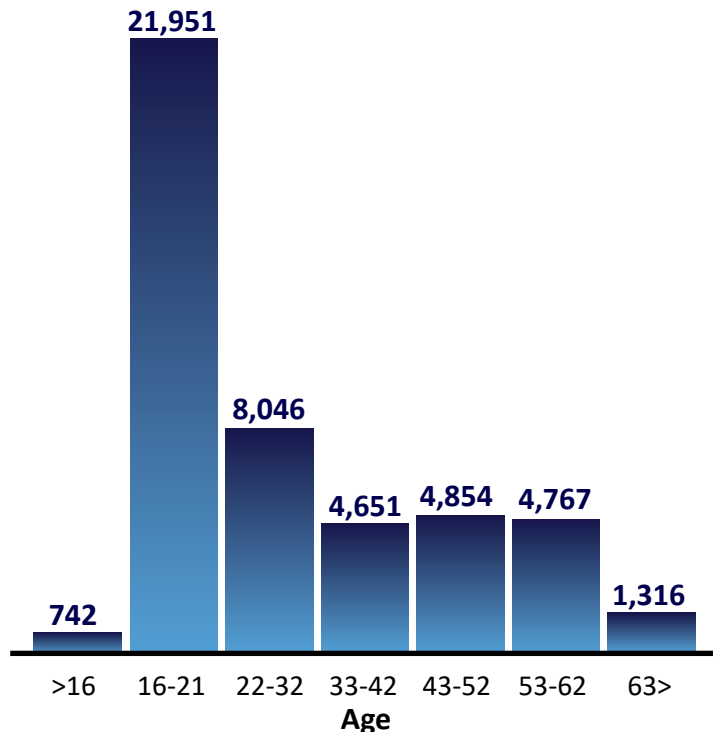
VR Customers Gainfully Employed by Primary Disability Category



Race and 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



Facts At-a-Glance

2020-2021 SFY



Order of Selection Status Summary

As of June 30, 2021

Under Order of Selection, all eligible individuals are placed on a prioritized waiting list based on the significance of their disability. Albeit, thankfully, Category 1 and 2 customers are currently being immediately, therefore released from the waiting list immediately. 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. Listed below are by category, title, number on the wait list and definition of each category:

- 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 (12): Does not seriously limit functional capacity in terms of work; lasts less than six months.

Lileana de Moya and Rep. Allison Tant Honored with 2021 Stephen R. Wise Advocacy Award

The annual Stephen R. Wise Advocacy Award recognizes dedicated leaders and champions in the cause of helping persons with disabilities achieve independence and dignity through meaningful employment. FRC considered outstanding nominees for this year’s award and selected two recipients due to their outstanding leadership and personal commitment to serving individuals with disabilities — Lileana de Moya and Rep. Allison Tant.



Lileana de Moya
de Moya Foundation
Employment

Among **Lileana de Moya’s** many accomplishments, she founded the de Moya Foundation (DMF) Employment Opportunities for the exclusive purpose of addressing the underemployment of young adults with disabilities by offering customized employment that includes extended services to ensure long-term employment. Lileana has a history of service to Miami-Dade. She was appointed to The Children’s Trust Board in 2011, served as chair of the Program Services/Childhood Health Committee and vice chair until 2018. She also served on the FIU College of Education Dean’s Advisory Council, FIU Special Education Advisory Board, the State Advisory Committee for the Education of Exceptional Students and the University of Miami (UM) Mailman Center for Child Development Advisory Committee. Lileana was awarded the Henry Bandier C.A.M.P for Justice Fellowship by the UM Children’s Youth and Law Clinic for her work with children and young adults with disabilities in foster care. She has inspired 60 local businesses to hire young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities and continues to motivate others to open their doors to new possibilities. Ms. de Moya inspires passion in others, “to build a community where everyone has the opportunity and support they need to participate fully in economic and community life, so that each individual may develop their own potential and be treated with dignity and respect.”



Rep. Allison Tant
Keys to
Exceptional
Youth Success

Among Representative **Allison Tant’s** many accomplishments, she is a disability rights advocate. Allison has received praise from both sides of the aisle for developing legislation to help students with disabilities and wants to see schools focus on helping students with disabilities build job skills. “Getting a job is an important step toward living autonomously.” Allison founded Keys to Exceptional Youth Success (KEYS), a scholarship program for students with disabilities. In 15 years, KEYS has raised over \$405,000 and awarded 206 scholarships to students with disabilities. She also led the charge for creating the Eagle Connections Program at Tallahassee Community College for students with cognitive disabilities who seek a collegiate experience, facilitated the creation of the SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access and Recovery (SOAR) job certificate program for students with cognitive disabilities at Lively Technical College and founded the Adult and Community Education (ACE) Summer Institute. The State Vocational Education Bureau recognized the ACE Summer Institute as one of the best in the state teaching life, social, job and independence skills to transition-age students through young adults — now serving more than 180 students in the area. She has served as president, treasurer and advocacy chair of the Children’s Home Society in Tallahassee, secretary of the Tallahassee Community College Foundation, chair of Holland and Knight’s Opening Doors for Children fund and board member of Big Brothers Big Sisters. She is a former member of the Leon County Schools Exceptional Student Education Advisory Committee and District Advisory Committee. Recently, Allison helped launch Tallahassee’s Independence Landing, an innovative, exciting and affordable housing option for adults with a range of cognitive and physical disabilities.

Past Award Recipients

- 2013 Steve L. Howells (Executive Director, Florida Alliance for Assistive Services and Technology)
- 2014 Carol Borden (CEO, Guardian Angels Medical Service Dogs)
- 2015 David C. Jones (Founder, Florida Disabled Outdoors Association)
- 2016 John Ficca (Founder/CEO, Hands on Education)
- 2017 Rhonda Beckman (Executive Director, The Arc, Ridge Area)
- 2018 Senator Dennis Baxley (Florida State Senate, District 12)
- 2019 Becki Forsell (Founder, YES! of America United)
- 2020 Ann Siegel, JD (Legal Director, Disability Rights Florida)

Vocational Rehabilitation Offers Job Retention Services

VR provides job-retention services (JRS) to eligible individuals who require specific services or equipment to keep their job, regardless of Order of Selection. This new option was created by WIOA. Since JRS began, VR has helped 630 customers at risk of losing their jobs.



Michael Alexander: VR Statewide Success of the Year

Michael Alexander, who has a specific learning disability, is an important member of the senior living community, Grand Villa of Palm Coast. “I assist in the dining room and make sure the tables are clean and dirty dishes have been removed from tables. I want the residents to have a clean place to sit and enjoy their meal,” Michael said. “It also gives me the opportunity to get to know the residents.”

Michael learned about VR through the TRAIL Transition program. After applying for services, he worked with Area 2, Unit 11A VR Supervisor Cynthia Tucker to uncover his strengths and interests to determine what services would assist him in finding a job after high school. Through VR, Michael participated in the Project SEARCH program where he had the opportunity to participate in OJT and placement transition. During his OJT at Princeton Village, Michael was proactive in learning interpersonal and job skills needed to be successful in the internship. He was praised for his work ethic and willingness to go above and beyond to get the job done. Michael also assisted in training current Project SEARCH students and enjoyed the feeling of being a part of the program. VR helped him become more independent. Not only has he transitioned into full-time employment, but he was also able to purchase a bicycle and no longer has to rely on his mother or public transportation to get to his job. “I am grateful for the help VR and my counselor have provided to better my future – working with VR was a great experience,” said Michael.

VR Director Allison Flanagan selected the Statewide Success of the Year from the seven area cases and presented the award to Area 2 VR Supervisor Cynthia Tucker. Impressed by the process from high school to working, Cynthia’s case is an example of the ideal model of transition services progressing from high school to the workplace. The customer’s limitations to employment were self-direction, interpersonal, work tolerance and work skills with a diagnosis of specific learning disabilities and anxiety. The participant received Pre-ETS through community-based work experience. Later, he participated in Project Search gaining and strengthening employment skills. After exiting high school, the customer transitioned to Supported Employment.



Susan Wachob: Project Manager to VR Counselor

As an individual with test anxiety and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, you can imagine the challenges Susan Wachob has faced since adolescence. Not only did test anxiety affect her ability to complete high school, but it carried over into college. Despite the challenges, Susan did not let that hold her back from graduating with a bachelor's degree in Project Management. She expressed how difficult it was to complete her degree because of test anxiety, but with the help of VR she was given an opportunity to be evaluated to determine what accommodations she would need in order to be successful in her classes. “The evaluation results changed my life. I began to better understand myself,” said Susan.

Before working with VR, she was not aware of testing accommodations (e.g., testing in different settings and extra time). Once given those accommodations Susan noticed an increase in her GPA and that she now had the ability to complete her degree. VR Counselor Catherine Casler was very encouraging and helped her more completely explore her feelings and thoughts. This allowed Susan to focus on the opportunities she earned. During that transition period from college into the workforce, Catherine helped Susan create goals and develop a plan for what she would do next. Susan obtained employment with Goodwill Easter Seals as the Program Manager for Youth and Workforce Development. This is when Susan began her career working with individuals with disabilities. While at Goodwill, she worked in support services for youth in transition. Local school districts work in conjunction with Goodwill to offer individuals with disabilities the opportunity to learn workplace skills. As the Project Manager, Susan helped individuals learn skills that would transfer into the workplace. Now as a VR counselor herself, Susan recalls “It is funny. I received similar services offered in the TED Training on Customized Support that I offered to youth in the Goodwill program.”

Susan enjoys working with individuals with disabilities and appreciates the impact she is able to make on customers' lives. She hopes to continue to grow within VR. The best advice she would give to others who may be experiencing similar challenges is to “Breathe. Learn to look for the positive in the situation. Be your own cheerleader.” Susan says the most important thing is to, “Discover what you really want in life and go after it.”

Patrick Fuller: Data Input for Technical Legal Findings

When Patrick Fuller moved to Brevard County with his family seven years ago, he was non-verbal and had trouble making eye contact with his peers. Patrick is on the Autism spectrum and is challenged by significant developmental disabilities. He participated in Brevard Achievement Center's Adult Day Training program where he took part in life skills training, computer classes and performing arts.



In July 2017, Patrick advanced to the Industry Readiness Training (IRT) program. As an IRT participant, he was given the opportunity to have weekly trainings in community work pods, learn soft skills and earn certifications, which included the bustling kitchen at Perkins Restaurant to the hotel suites of Holiday Inn Express. Patrick was flexible and adapted easily. He applied the many work-maturity skills he learned in IRT. When Patrick began training in the technical skills work pod, IRT staff saw Patrick's hidden potential emerge even more. He quickly developed the skills needed for data entry occupations. Beaming smiles and high fives all around as they all realized Patrick had found his niche.

IRT's employment consultants jumped into action to help match Patrick with the best environment for his skills and abilities. A short time later, Patrick began on-the-job training (OJT) at a local law firm. He was trained to provide data input of technical legal findings into specialized software. Patrick was proficient and dependable. After the 12-week OJT ended, the firm invited Patrick, his family and IRT's employment consultant to celebrate over cake, where they announced they were interested in hiring Patrick as a regular employee. Glowing reviews from the firm revealed that not only was Patrick making eye contact and even socializing with his co-workers, he was also completing the same amount of data entry as a full-time employee in only half the time.

Each person involved in Patrick's journey shares feelings of joy, pride and gratitude. Patrick's father, Richard, a local pastor and active member of the community, was so appreciative of the IRT program that he and Patrick traveled to Tallahassee to address legislators about the needs of the disabled community. Richard also created a testimonial video about Patrick's success where he described IRT not as a program but as "people making a difference" in the lives of others and the community. The video was presented at the Florida Division on Career Development and Transition's 2019 Visions Conference and brought many to tears. On February 5, 2020, Patrick celebrated his one-year anniversary at Lotane and Associates. His story continues to inspire, motivate and serve as a powerful representation of how the VR program can truly change lives.

Jillian Stover: Cybersecurity

Most high school students are unsure about the career path they want to take when they graduate, but not Jillian Stover. She has always been fascinated with forensic science and has a talent for working with computers, which lead to her interest in the cybersecurity field. Jillian became interested in cybersecurity while she was pursuing digital forensics. Jillian has a learning disability that affects the way she processes information. Living with an invisible disability has its own unique challenges as Jillian navigates through school as well as daily activities. To overcome these challenges, Jillian worked with the Office for Students with Disabilities to provide the accommodations needed to be successful in her classes. Due to the processing disorder, Jillian works best when provided extended time to comprehend and complete tasks.



Jillian learned about VR at her high school and began working with them in Fall 2018 where she met Mike Cornelius with the Hands On Education Program. Jillian was able to build her resume, gain work experience and take computer classes at Hillsborough Community College. She also participated in internships at the USF Center for Assistive and Rehabilitation Robotics Technology (CARRT) Lab, Hillsborough County Center and online in the Information and Innovation Office. While working at the CARRT Lab she wrote programs that helped her understand the specific type of coding language similar to Python and had the opportunity to learn SQL coding language. She also received job coaching and placement services through the Grow Group.

When asked how VR has helped, Jillian said her counselor Brianne Chandler has been patient and helpful in getting authorizations and payment for tuition and books. VR also helped Jillian gain confidence through work experiences and adapt to an independent lifestyle. She is very thankful for the many ways VR has been able to assist her in pursuing her career in cybersecurity. Once Jillian has completed her training, she plans to seek employment as an information security analyst.



Carla Monnier: Physical Therapist to Teacher

In October 2018, Carla Monnier was involved in a shooting incident during a random act of violence while driving home from work. After being shot in the chest, Carla was rushed to the hospital in critical condition; ultimately, this caused her to become paralyzed from the waist down. As an individual diagnosed with T6 Paraplegia, Carla has faced many challenges on the road to recovery. Despite the obstacles, with the support of family, friends and VR she has gained the confidence needed to get back to doing what she loves – teaching. Prior to the incident, she was a physical therapist working at

AdventHealth. In February 2020, Carla was hired back at AdventHealth working from home in a hybrid role supervising Physical Therapists and Physical Therapy students. After months of multiple surgeries, Carla was able to go back to work. With the help of VR along with the Rehab Engineering Team, not only was she able to obtain employment but vehicle modifications were also provided to allow Carla to securely and reliably drive to and from work. “VR is a wonderful program and I am so grateful for their assistance with getting back to work,” said Carla. While working with VR Counselor Tyler Wild, she was provided guidance throughout the process in obtaining work as well as assistance with accommodations needed to get to work.

Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, Carla continues to work at AdventHealth, but hopes to one day go into education. She is currently adjunct teaching a course at the University School of Allied Health in the Doctor of Physical Therapy Department. Carla has enjoyed teaching others how to improve their quality of life through a healthy and active lifestyle and would like to explore other forms of teaching as a profession.



James Remoussin: Finding a Job and Co-Worker Relationship Success

Finding and keeping the right job has been a challenge for James Remoussin. As a person living with a mental health condition, his day-to-day living and relationships with others have been affected due to the disorder. Despite the hurdles he faced, James continued to work with VR Counselor Rachel Gilmore. They worked together to determine what accommodations he would need to be successful not only with his job at Publix but also in his relationships with co-workers.

Prior to seeking VR services, James had difficulties finding and keeping a job due to his disability. He experienced unusual shifts in moods as well as decreased interest in establishing new relationships. “VR not only saved me time but it provided services that I would otherwise not have been able to afford on my own,” said James. Services included therapy, transportation and job coaching. While attending counseling sessions James was able to voice some of his concerns about fellow employees and receive the support and guidance needed to address the issues in the most appropriate manner. James’ job goals are to find a job where he is able to learn and grow as well as develop communication skills. James would like to feel more comfortable and confident in his job without the feeling that his disability is interfering with his work. He continues to work on learned coping strategies and how to apply them in stressful situations. The best advice James would give other individuals living with a mental health condition is that hard work and determination will get you where you want to go. “If I can do it, so can you,” says James.



Shaneece Joseph: Recreation Aide

Living with an intellectual disability, depression and a seizure disorder is not easy, but Shaneece Joseph was proactive about gaining independence through means of employment. She began working with VR as a transition student and worked with different provider agencies where she participated in an OJT that led to permanent employment. Prior to gaining employment, Shaneece attended adult day training through the Marian Center.

Shaneece volunteered every Wednesday at a retirement home where she assisted elderly residents. She enjoyed going to the facility and worked with her Private Provider Counselor MaryEllen Hernandez and her job coach to secure employment at the retirement home. Aside from volunteering, Shaneece did not have any previous paid experience. While working with ICAN, LLC., Shaneece participated in an OJT at Regents Park of Aventura where she was able to gain hands-on experience and the knowledge needed to organize and promote interest in recreational activities at the facility. After the completion of the OJT Shaneece was offered employment at Regents. The employer was pleased with her job performance and believed Shaneece would be a good fit for the recreation aide position.

VR Ombudsman

Florida VR is unique in that it offers a service to its customers to resolve concerns or complaints prior to accessing the appeal process. The VR Ombudsman 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 feels they may have been treated unfairly.

During the 2020-2021 SFY, the Ombudsman Office responded to 2,988 complaints or requests for information. Of the total, 974 (32.6 percent) were complaint requests. Complaints involved issues such as quality of counseling and delivery of services, as well as plan development and service cost concerns.

You may contact the VR Ombudsman Office at Ombudsman@vr.fldoe.org or 866-515-3692.

Customer Satisfaction Survey Results

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. While the FRC and VR previously contracted with Market Decisions to conduct the customer satisfaction survey, it will soon be administered in-house. The survey is currently being redesigned. The data below is for July to September 2020, which marks the end of the Market Decisions contract.*

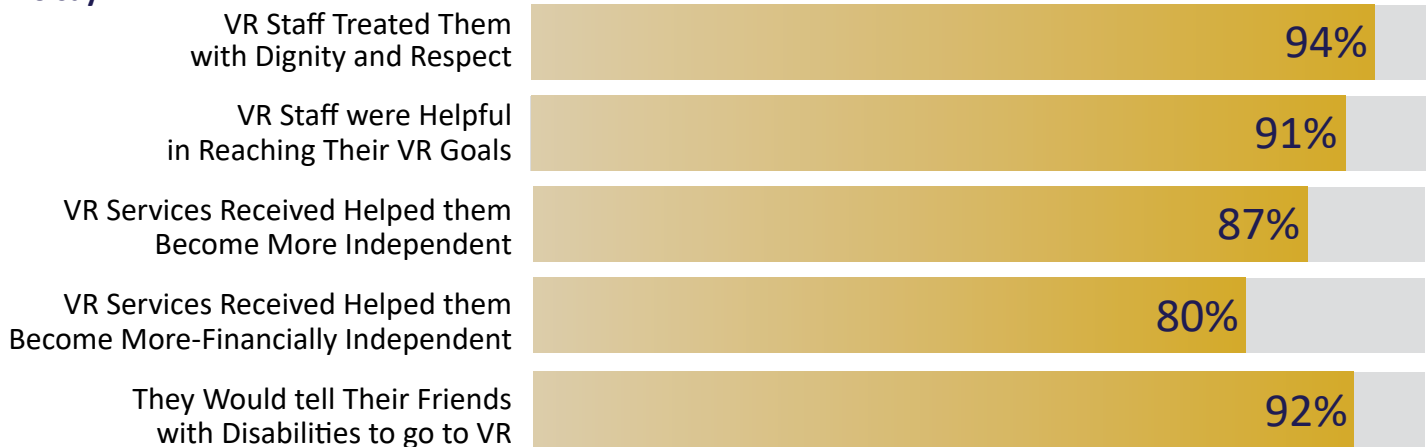
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