

# Annual Report for FY 2025

New Jersey Division of  
Vocational Rehabilitation  
Services

*State Rehabilitation Council*



SRC/DVRS Partnership Celebrates Accomplishments October 1,  
2024 through September 30, 2025

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## Rehabilitation Council Members

Council Membership is in accordance with Section 105 of the 1998 Amendments to the Rehabilitation Act and New Jersey Executive Order 110 and reflects a diverse range of disability groups, geographical areas, racial, ethnic and gender groups. Each member is appointed by the Governor of New Jersey (or awaiting re-appointment). The Council represents a broad spectrum of individuals who are concerned with the vocational needs of people with disabilities and who support the objectives of the public rehabilitation program in New Jersey. The majority of members are people with disabilities or family members of people with disabilities (55%). For 2025 representation on the Council was as follows:

<u>Member</u>	<u>Representation</u>
Karen J. Alexander	Advocate 1
Vacant	State Workforce Development Board Representative
Mohsen T. Badran	Community Rehabilitation Provider Representative
LaTasha Brown	Division of Mental Health and Addiction Services
Tatsiana DaGrosa	Advocate 2
William Freeman	Office of Special Education Representative
Margaret T. Gilbride, JD	Advocate 3
Stephen Gruzlovic	Advocate 4
Carolyn D. Hayer	Parent Training and Information Center Representative
Dr. Felicia Hopson	Asst. Director of the Division of Voc. Rehab. Services -Ex Officio
Thomas G. Jennings	Business, Industry and Labor Representative 1
Nantanee Koppstein	Advocate 5
Lori Margolin	Business, Industry and Labor Representative 2
Janet Mills	Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired
Nkechi Okoli	Division of Developmental Disabilities
Gwen Orłowski, JD	Client Assistance Program - Disability Rights New Jersey
Dr. Janice Oursler	Vocation Rehabilitation Counselor Representative
Lorna F.M. Runkle	Business, Industry and Labor Representative 3 and Advocate 6
Rebecca Shulman	Advocate 7
Carmela Slivinski	Statewide Independent Living Council
Patricia Tomlinson	Advocate 8
Deborah Vaughn	Asst. Director of the Division of Voc. Rehab. Services-Ex Officio
Cyndy Walsh-Rintzler	Business, Industry and Labor Representative 4
Dr. Charyl Yarbrough	Asst. Commissioner DOL/ Interim DVRS Director- Ex Officio

# Message from the Chair

New Jerseyans,

As the end of 2025 approaches, I'd like to report on some of the work the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) accomplished this year in its effort to support, advise, and collaboratively problem-solve with its partner, the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (DVRS). This annual report reflects progress that was made, systems and operational challenges that were encountered and navigated to varying degrees of success and plans that were drafted (and sometimes redrafted) by members of the SRC working in concert with DVRS leadership. The report also aspires to capture some of the impact of these efforts, realized through the hard work of field staff and their partners in the work. You will also find within its content an outline of priorities for the group that will define its efforts in 2026.

The mission of the SRC remains firm: to ensure through policy development, implementation, and advocacy that New Jersey has a comprehensive, consumer responsive, and effective rehabilitation program. The SRC is committed in its resolve to reflect the larger community it represents by continuing to seek ways to ensure all New Jerseyan voices are reflected in our deliberations. As a result, our meetings remained hybrid to accommodate members for whom attending in-person meetings is not affordable, safe and/or reasonable. If you are a person with a disability, have been a recipient of vocational rehabilitation services, are a member of the business community, and/or are passionate about working to remove barriers to employment for people with disabilities, please reach out to any member of the SRC (listed on Page 3) to express interest in applying for appointment by the Governor to the council. Your input is needed, desired, and welcome.

Accomplishments of the SRC this past year included:

- Providing input and feedback to DVRS staff that resulted in the creation of a “new and improved” Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) Student Referral Form
- Raising awareness of, and knowledge about, Pre-ETS among DVRS staff throughout New Jersey
- Highlighting the inconsistencies in information about Pre-ETS and other services for students being shared with families and school staff, leading to DVRS leadership developing an annual training event for its staff on Pre-ETS and student engagement; and
- Continuing with “mini training sessions” on vocational rehabilitation services delivered at member meetings (Pre-ETS; VR Eligibility, Individualized Plan for Employment, Outcomes/Performance Indicators; RSA Monitoring of DVRS; State Match & Maintenance Effort)

- Advocating for the now-required mandate that candidates for VRC 1 positions have master's degrees
- Sending a letter of support to RSA for the Rutgers School of Health Professions long-term grant application to provide rehabilitation counselor training (successful)
- Expanding the participation of members of the public in both SRC member meetings and committee meetings
- Increasing the response rates on both customer satisfaction surveys through employing several new delivery strategies
- Improving the working relationship between the SRC Customer Satisfaction Committee and the DVRS Quality Assurance team to ensure accurate, meaningful data is collected, analyzed, and used to inform practice.

A main area of concentration for 2026 will be advocating to ensure the new administration addresses the historic non-responsiveness of the Murphy administration to requests for member appointments and re-appointments. In addition to obtaining decisions regarding previously submitted applicant packets, the SRC intends to:

- Recruit SRC members with lived experience of disability and/or business expertise
- Establish a standing committee for SRC Outreach
- Refine the Customer Satisfaction Surveys and further improve return rates
- Update the by-laws
- Review and provide feedback to DVRS on the new policy manual
- Visit local DVRS offices
- Advocate with the Civil Service Commission that the Rehabilitation Aide position be made non-competitive in its designation to expand pool of candidates
- Submit recommendations for the state plan on DVRS as appropriate

I would like to offer my sincere appreciation to the members of the SRC for their unwavering dedication to employment first and community integrated employment. They, together with the leadership team of DVRS operated as an exemplar of collegiality, transparency, and authentic willingness to collaborate meaningfully for positive change. The members of the SRC, DVRS leadership and I are collectively grateful to the many field staff and administrative support people who do “the work” every day, and in so doing strive to make the expectations of employment a reality for the state’s workers with disabilities. This report is a reflection of just some of their efforts.

Respectfully,  
Margaret T. Gilbride, J.D.

## Chair, New Jersey Rehabilitation Council



## Mission and Beliefs

### SRC Mission

The SRC is a partnership of people with disabilities (PWD), advocates, business leaders and others committed to the tenets of employment first in New Jersey. Its members are dedicated to ensuring PWD receive vocational rehabilitation services that result in competitive, integrated employment by supporting the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services in carrying out the spirit, intent, and mandates of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA).

### SRC Beliefs

As members of the New Jersey State Rehabilitation Council (SRC), we believe:

- Each person with a disability has value
- People with disabilities have diverse strengths that must be defined and identified along many dimensions
- Vocational rehabilitation services is a public system responsible and accountable to those it serves and those who fund it

- There is success through partnerships, affiliations, linkages, and authentic collaboration
- Optimal results in rehabilitation depend on the working relationship between consumers and professionals (service providers)
- Consumers should be given enough information to make informed choices about their services
- People with disabilities are ultimately responsible for the choices they make
- Vocational rehabilitation service recipients should have the opportunity to maximize their employment potential
- Mutual respect is critical to the vocational rehabilitation process
- It is necessary to support, advance and exemplify diversity and multiculturalism within the disability community and the community at large
- The rights of people with disabilities should be advanced and protected

### **Messages Received from DVRS Consumers:**

Throughout the year, DVRS receives comments and feedback from the consumers. Below is a sample of the comments that were received this year.

#### ***DVRS Consumer Messages from the Field***

*I am writing to you to express a huge appreciation for the support and guidance you gave throughout my educational journey and professional development. Your sponsorship and guidance I was able to earn my Bachelor of Science in Show Production at Full Sail University. Your commitment to helping me achieve my educational and professional goals is a huge part in my development process. Because of your help I not only graduated college but also landed an amazing job in such a competitive field. I have secured and started my position as a Mobile Unit Engineer with NEP Group. I am now the main brain behind some of the world's biggest events like the Super Bowl on a production standpoint. This achievement would not have been possible without your support and believing in me. You provided me with lots of tools and guidance to help me succeed. I greatly appreciate your support. Thank you once again for having faith in me to be able to get into such a competitive field of work despite my disability. I am excited to see what happens next as I grow throughout my professional journey.*

**Emma Gordon: Bridgeton Office**

## **DVRS Consumer Messages from the Field (continued)**

*Just wanted to send a short message to let you know how grateful I am for your assistance, encouragement, guidance, and empathy shown towards me over the past several years. I have finally landed in a great job. The job is amazing and I'm meeting their standards. I passed the first 8 weeks of probation with flying colors. The folks I'm working for and with are the nicest group of people and very helpful. I am still in touch with my job coach Jon and he is amazing. He stays in touch and has provided plenty of guidance and support. I will stop by as soon as I have a chance. I had to let you know how proud my family is of me, and they thank you for not giving up on me as well as I do. Forever grateful and thankful.*

**Michaela Macauley: New Brunswick Office**

*I am writing this because I feel compelled to share with you that Yigal Falk is a wonderful counselor. Indeed, I have met so many counselors because of my children, but I feel compelled to say that Yigal stands out as the best. He shows deep dedication, respect and empathy and ready to help people like us whichever way possible. I was highly impressed about the way he treated me, my wife and my son today. He was so polite and helpful in answering our questions. Indeed, you have a remarkable person working for you. More grease to his elbow. We want to thank him for everything. Thanks*

**Yigal Falk: Trenton Local Office**

*I woke up this morning thinking about you and all you did to assist me during a tough time in my life. I am grateful to you and the DOL. You really came through with support and resources. The scooter is a blessing; it made functioning possible and so much easier to navigate with my injury. I greatly appreciated the referral to Waters and Sims (Jane Byrd) and the DVRS Business Unit (Irene Perez). Both women were courteous, professional, and eager to help. My husband and I did have to make the choice to relocate to North Carolina as we had discussed. We have a great family support system here. After the definite denial from the board of education to allow me to return to work with the scooter, and the increase in health concerns, it was a choice we had to make. We have been here a few months and are settling in nicely. I have decided to start my own business doing coaching and workshops.*

**Nohemi Andujar: Cherry Hill Office**

*I Can't thank you enough. This is a blessing. This program is amazing. Giving a disabled boy a chance to become something of himself and enjoying it so much. I wish I could thank someone and tell them how much I appreciate them giving my son this opportunity.*

**Mariam Jacob: Paterson Office**

## **DVRS Consumer Messages from the Field (continued)**

*We are absolutely thrilled that Terence has secured work, and a full-time role at that. It all happened much faster than any of us anticipated. Our hope is that he could be effective in the role so that it can be, as you said, a positive and successful experience. We're so grateful to you and DVRS for all the support at every step of the way!*

**Shari Stengel: Hackensack Office**

*I Should Be Done With my Current Section Today and I Will Be Giving Mr. Driving School Tomorrow to See What My Next Step Is. Just Keeping You Up to Date I Just Want Thank You and DVRS for even giving me the opportunity to change my life.*

**Deanna Bullock: Somerville Office**

*Just letting you know that we Responded to the DVR survey and let them know what an amazing job you've done to support ---- and help her and that we would not have been able to navigate all this without you. Just a little thank you again for everything that you do.*

**Gina Saracino: Toms River Office**

*You have been an amazing Counselor. My experience with you could have gone in another direction. Either way, the professionalism you have exhibited would have been the same. From our first email, video and to present your performance has been exceptional. Not one day passed did I feel you would not be an advocate for me. Not once did I have to worry about when you would get back to me. Your extreme dedication and drive for me is as I am sure how you dedicate yourself to each and every one of your clients. So here's to a better day and know that you are AMAZING! Please feel free to forward this to your management team.*

**Brittany Nagle: Phillipsburg Office**

## **Function, Committees and Resources**

### **SRC Mandated Function**

The SRC, on behalf of the community it represents, reviews, analyzes, and advises the New Jersey Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (DVRS) regarding the performance of its responsibilities. Council goals and activities are set annually and in response to both national and state issues, as mandated by Section 105 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended. The focus of Council goals and activities

includes, but is not limited to: consumer satisfaction, the statewide needs assessment, the state plan and amendments, policy, interagency collaboration, and the extent, scope and effectiveness of the division's community integrated employment programs.

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

## **Membership Development**

Historically, the full council participated in identifying potential members for the Governor's office to review and consider. Recommendations were made based on member attendance, position vacancies, pending term expirations, and mandated functions not represented. The Council reviewed these on an ongoing basis and made recommendations to the Governor's office. After the office of the Governor completed its vetting process, the Governor would appoint members (typically for three-year terms). For the past three years, the SRC Chair, with the support of DVRS staff, submitted a number of applicant packets for both appointment and re-appointment to the Council and monitored the process. In 2023 several appointments or re-appointments came through but were for short timespans; each of those appointments have since expired (along with many others).

Regular communication was maintained with the Governor's appointments office relaying the Council's ongoing need for action that, this past year, dwindled to non-responsiveness on the part of the office to the SRC Chair.

In 2024, despite having submitted 11 complete application packets for people with disabilities and 2 complete packets for business/industry reps, 0 appointments were made. Additionally, despite sending 7 updated application packets for members seeking reappointment, 0 re-appointments were made by the Governor. In 2025, with no action having been taken on previous recommendations for appointments and reappointments, only one new applicant packet was submitted (it is of a person with a disability who is also an employer). The appointments office

explained that in the absence of re-appointments, serving members may continue to serve. That is the only thing that has kept New Jersey's SRC a functioning entity. As of December 31, 2025, nineteen of twenty (95%) SRC member appointments will be expired; the last appointee's term expires January 7, 2026.

Despite this on-going lack of timely appointments and re-appointments, the SRC remained technically compliant with its requirements under Section 105 in the law, in large part because the members awaiting reappointment have continued to serve.

The 2026 executive committee of the SRC has done a full review of the appointments situation and outlined a plan of approach to take once the new Governor and her administration is in place. It will involve resubmitting all previous applicant packets as well as materials necessary for any members whose positions expired in 2024 and 2025 who wish to seek re-appointment.

Although it has not gone smoothly in recent years, the appointment application process itself is straightforward: people interested in becoming a member of the SRC should reach out to the Chair or any other member. An application (from the state) will be supplied to the interested candidate along with a request for a letter or email stating a desire to join and reason for wishing to do so, as well as a resume. These items comprise the "application packet" and are forwarded to the Governor's office for consideration. Progress is tracked by the SRC until the Governor's office makes its determination and communicates with the applicant by traditional mail. Confident the process can only improve, we encourage anyone interested to consider applying for appointment.

## Officer Elections

Officers are elected bi-annually for a two-year term and comprise the Executive Committee of the SRC:

- **Carmela Slivinski** serves as Chair - her term ends September 30, 2027
- **Tatsiana DaGrosa** and **Lori Margolin** serve as Co Vice-Chairs and their term ends September 30, 2027
- **Nantane Koppstein** serves as Treasurer and her term ends September 30,

2026.

- **Margaret Gilbride** serves as Past Chair, continuing to serve until her retirement December 31, 2026
- **Felicia Hopson** serves as the Executive Director of DVRS and an ex-officio, non-term-limited member of the SRC Executive Committee

## Committees

The SRC Chair, in consultation with the DVRS leadership team, evaluate the organization's standing committees to determine if they are adequate to meet the federally mandated activities of the SRC and the state's priority and/or high-need areas. At the annual planning meeting (held August 2025 for the upcoming year), it was determined with the agreement of the SRC members and DVRS leadership team that two existing committees should be maintained (Evaluation and Consumer Satisfaction as well as Legislative/Policy) and the third (Transition from School to Work) should be disbanded and replaced by an Outreach Committee.

It was agreed that while transition from school to work remains a critical service about which the SRC would like to be informed, it can be removed as a standing committee and covered as a permanent item in the Executive Director report. To retain momentum the committee had made, it was decided that outreach efforts extended to high school students, their families, and educators will be included in the targeted populations on which the new committee focuses its efforts.

Each SRC member is required to serve on a standing committee; each standing committee must have at least one SRC officer and one person from the DVRS leadership team and be chaired by a member of the SRC. Members of the public are welcome to serve on a committee of their interest. Standing committees that were identified in 2025 and will be working through 2026 are:

**Executive Committee** – Activities include but are not limited to establishing the agenda for the meetings of the Council, ensuring management of the Council's financial business, advocating the Council's membership follows state and federal mandates, and operating in lieu of the full Council in emergency situations. Members:

- Carmela Slivinski, Chair

- Tatsiana DaGrosa and Lori Margolin, Co Vice-Chairs
- Nantanee Koppstein, Treasurer
- Felicia Hopson, DVRS Director (ex officio)
- Margaret Gilbride, Past Chair

**Evaluation and Consumer Satisfaction Committee** – Activities include, but are not limited to, program evaluation activities and consumer satisfaction surveys, analyses, and data-based policy/program recommendations. Members:

- Karen Alexander
- Tina Brand
- Bill Freeman
- Margaret Gilbride
- Cyndy Walsh Rintzler, Chair
- AC Charyl Yarbrough

**Legislative and Policy Committee** – Activities include, but are not limited to, advocacy and education, policy and state plan review, administrative code review, the statewide comprehensive needs assessment, and monitoring/reacting to pending and current legislation, particularly with respect to impact on funding. Members:

- Mohsen Badran
- Tom Jennings
- Nantanee Koppstein
- Lori Margolin
- Gwen Orłowski
- Janice Oursler
- Becky Shulman, Co-Chair
- Pat Tomlinson, Co-Chair
- Deborah Vaughn

**(NEW) Outreach Committee** – Activities include addressing the on-going need to outreach to the varied pools of DVRS consumers and employment partners, liaise with business community members, and market the SRC and DVRS to expand its recognition to the public. Members:

- LaTasha Brown

- Tatsiana DaGrosa
- Felicia Hopson
- Jay Mills
- Dawn Monaco, Chair
- Lorna Runkle
- Carmela Slivinski

Ad Hoc Committees, Task Forces, and Study Groups are created on an as needed basis by the SRC Chair. Non-Council members may serve on these groups, but the Chair of the group must be an SRC member. Examples of Ad Hoc Committees that have been created include:

**By-Laws Review Committee** – Activities include reviewing, updating, and making recommendations to the full Council for needed revision. This is typically done every two years.

**Membership Committee** – Activities include developing plans to bring membership into compliance with RSA mandates and identifying people with lived experience who would like to apply for membership.

## Resource Plan

The following DVRS staff provide support to the SRC and its Chair, attend meetings, and participate in the activities of the Rehabilitation Council:

- **DVRS Director** (ex-officio member) attends all SRC meetings, is a member of the Executive Committee, serves on a standing committee, and ensures the SRC receives other necessary staff support.
- **Assistant Director(s)** attends all SRC meetings and serves on a standing committee.
- **DVRS staff** participate on the evaluation and consumer satisfaction committee and work to ensure adequate design, analysis and reporting of survey responses occurs.

- **DVRS staff**, at the direction of the executive director, provide logistical support for meetings, prepare folders for all available handouts, and perform varied and critical duties necessary for the SRC meetings, public forums, and maintenance of the SRC web page.
- **DVRS staff**, as needed and at the direction of the executive director, are assigned as needed to share their expertise with the SRC in formal and/or informal presentations appropriate to their area of expertise.

For the period of 10/1/24 – 9/30/25, a \$46,500 budget was established for SRC operating expenses. The budget covered: quarterly and special meeting costs, the annual planning day, member expenses to attend and participate in meetings and training, member participation at national council meetings, a Survey Monkey account for customer satisfaction surveys, ASL interpreters and CART service providers as needed for meetings and public forums, printing and other outreach costs, fiscal agent budget administration and other expenses required to support council activities. Expenditure reports are reviewed, discussed, and voted on by the SRC members each meeting. The annual budget for 2026 was presented and approved by vote at the September 2025 meeting.



## Meetings, Trainings and Forums

The council promotes inclusion at all sponsored meetings for members and other participants by providing, as needed, personal care attendant services, transportation services, ASL interpreter services and computer assisted real-time transcription (CART) devices. A Zoom link is made available to accommodate members of the SRC and public (as requested) who have difficulty traveling to in-person meetings, or who reside in rural or remote areas without reliable access to transportation. In addition, all documents reviewed during SRC meetings are posted on the SRC web page after the meeting, once all items have been received digitally.

## **Regular New Jersey SRC Meetings**

The SRC conducts quarterly meetings. Meetings days were November 13, 2024, February 12, 2025, May 14, 2025, and September 17, 2025. The annual planning meeting for 2025 was August 13, 2025. All meetings were held from 10:00am-3:30pm. Full council business was conducted in the morning, and at the end of the day, following committee work and report-outs. At every meeting this year the members of the public were invited to offer comment twice: once at the start of the meeting, prior to business being initiated, and once prior to the lunch break. It should be noted that while every meeting devotes time to committee work, some committees additionally meet, and some exclusively so, outside of SRC meetings. When standing committees met outside of the quarterly structure, their work product was included in the regular meeting report-outs and notes; when an ad hoc or the Executive Committee met, their report-outs were included on the regular meeting agenda under the “business items” section.

All regular meetings were hybrid (in-person and virtual via Zoom) and open to the public and interested stakeholders. Meeting dates and times were broadly advertised, including through flyers, stakeholder social media avenues, and web posting. Members of the public were also welcome to join and participate in one of the standing committees. The August planning meeting was closed, in-person, and comprised of SRC members and DVRS leadership only.

The meeting dates selected for 2026 are: November 3<sup>rd</sup>, February 18<sup>th</sup>, May 5<sup>th</sup>, and September 16<sup>th</sup>. To accommodate members who are PWD or parents of PWD, 2026 meetings will again be held from 10:00am-3:30pm at the New Jersey Law Center at One Constitution Square, New Brunswick. The virtual option will only be available

for the SRC business parts of the meeting and not for the committee meetings as logistically it worked best this past year. The planning meeting for 2027 will be August 12<sup>th</sup> and again be closed, in-person, and comprised of SRC members and DVRS leadership only.

SRC Members participate in the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) and the National Coalition of State Rehabilitation Councils (NCSRC) and two members again represented New Jersey at the spring and fall CSAVR national meetings. Those representatives attended the two-day track devoted to SRC leadership that is offered prior to the general CSAVR meeting and reported to the whole council on the current, critical information gained.

It should be noted that the two NJSRC members who attend the national meetings are also active members of the NCSRC Board and assist with training sessions at the spring and fall meetings, including how to best on-board new SRC members. They regularly update the Power Points, scripts and accompany handouts for state use.

## **2025 Public Forums**

Three public forums were conducted virtually using the Zoom platform. An evening forum was held again this year and three different days of the week, times of day, and months of the year were chosen in hope of again increasing attendance and participation on the part of PWD and advocates. The forums were held Wednesday, April 30<sup>th</sup> noon-1:00pm, Tuesday, May 20<sup>th</sup> 6:00-7:00pm, and Thursday, June 5<sup>th</sup> 3:00-4:00pm.

Advertisement of the forums was wide-spread through the DVRS and SRC websites, the DVRS consumer email distribution list, and the email lists and social media pages of such partners as NJAPSE, SILCs, DRNJ, SPAN, NJCDD, NJDOE-OSE projects, vendors, etc. An explanatory flyer was designed and distributed through these media inviting the public to share comments, concerns, and any reflections on their DVRS lived experience (positive or negative) about which they wanted the SRC and DVRS leadership to know.

This year there was more publicity about the forums, an increased amount of advanced notice about them, and expanded registration times. These were positives, as was the invitation to attend that DVRS sent out to its client list, enhanced web

presence for the flyer, and the way questions/concerns and comments submitted during registration were addressed. Upon reflection the SRC determined it would have helped to have DVRS provide a short presentation on its services and processes for those who logged on who were still looking to receive rather than share information. It was evident to the SRC that the public still did not understand the purpose of the forums; it was also agreed upon reflection that it would have been helpful to have several people pre-planned to speak at each session so others would have felt more comfortable doing so.

For each 2025 forum Margaret Gilbride, SRC Chair provided introductory remarks, introduced the new DVRS Director, shared write-in comments received beforehand, and invited the public to speak. The Chair's email address was shared several times in the chat function of the Zoom platform, and the public was invited to send comments after each forum as well. Five such emails were received and shared with the SRC and DVRS leadership; appropriate follow-up was conducted.

Based on a decision made at the annual planning event for 2025, and reaffirmed prior to advertising the annual forums, the public forum announcement and registration page provided samples of topics about which the SRC was hoping to hear from the public:

- Their direct experience with accessing and/or receiving DVR services
- Suggestions they had for increasing awareness of DVRS
- Benefits students realized as a result of receiving Pre-Employment Transition Supports (pre-ETS)
- Whether they achieved what they'd hoped to achieve through DVRS
- The process of transition from school to DVRS from their perspective
- Suggestions they have for improving DVRS access and services

While there was an increase in attendance this year over last, and it is agreed the specificity/guidance provided regarding possible topics may have increased participation to a degree, strategies to further improve the public forum participation the SRC will consider for 2026 include:

- Having the DVRS Director make a brief presentation on DVRS services and outcomes as part of the Chair's opening remarks
- Using testimonials to inspire public comment
- Exploring the use of Zoom polls and/or the chat feature to increase participation
- Improving the flyer - making its message clearer and having a Spanish version

- Seeking to further clarify for the public the purpose and intent of the forums and again provide suggested topics for remarks
- All verbal and written comments received prior, during, and following the three 2025 forums were compiled by the Chair and shared with the SRC and DVRS Leadership at the planning meeting for 2026. The feedback was analyzed and discussed during that meeting and resultant themes and/or recommendations that resulted include:
  - Collaborating with DVRS to determine a way information on DVRS services (including information on post-secondary educational services) can be made easily available to the public
  - Continuing efforts to ensure consistency of communication about and availability of services across offices/regions
  - Making benefits counseling a standard expectation for all recipients of DVR services
  - Streamlining the intake process (referral-application-eligibility determination) to maximize timeliness
  - Exploring ways to address transportation barriers for/with consumers

## 2025 Public Forums Statistics

<b>Dates</b>	<b>Venue</b>	<b>Attendance (Total)</b>	<b>Interpreters Provided</b>	<b>#SRC/DVR Attendees</b>	<b>Written Testimony Provided</b>
April 30 12:00 pm	ZOOM	96	Yes, and CART	45	Yes
May 20 6:00pm	ZOOM	43	Yes, and CART	19	Yes
June 5 3:00pm	ZOOM	97	Yes, and CART	39	Yes

## Activities and Accomplishments

### Eligible Consumers Served in 2025

In FFY' 2025, DVRS served all categories of eligible consumers. The agency currently has the financial resources to serve all categories; DVRS continues to monitor the continuing realignment of federal funds emphasizing Pre-Employment Transition Services for students and youth.

### Successful Employment Outcomes

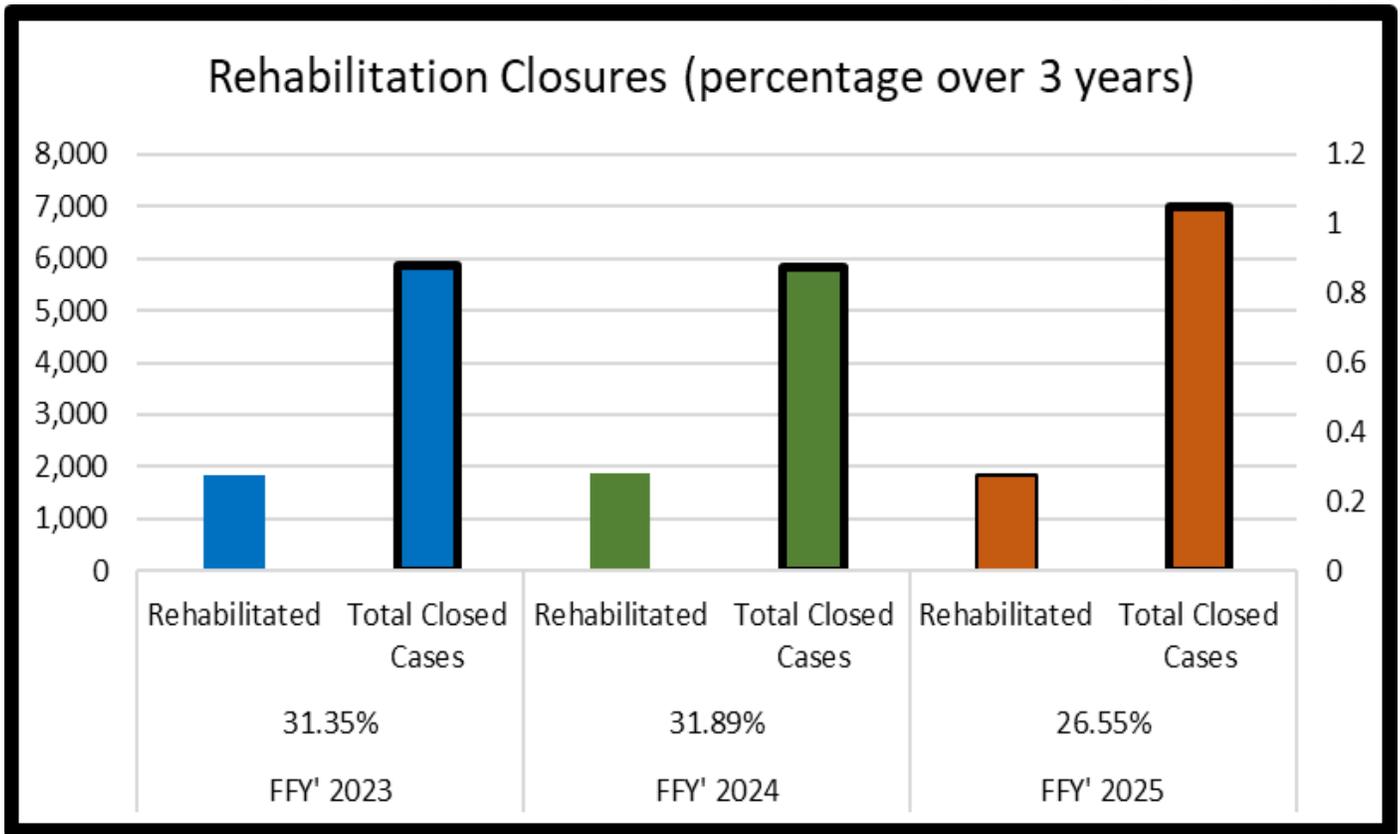
In FFY'25, there were 1,850 Rehabilitation closures, compared to 1,857 Rehabilitation closures in FFY'24, and 1,828 Rehabilitation closures in FFY'23. In FFY'25, the percentage of Rehabilitation closures relative to all closures was 26.55%, which is a decrease when compared to the FFY'24 results of 31.88%, In FFY'23 the percentage was 31.55%.

### FFY25 DVRS REHABILITATED CASES

DVRS closed 5,863 cases in FY'23, in FFY'24 DVRS closed 5,824 cases, and in FFY' 2025, there were 6,968 closed cases.

#### Rehabilitated Closures / Total Closed Cases

FFY' 2023		FFY' 2024		FFY' 2025	
31.35%		31.89%		26.55%	
Rehabilitated	Total Closed Cases	Rehabilitated	Total Closed Cases	Rehabilitated	Total Closed Cases
1,838	5,863	1,857	5,824	1,850	6,968



**FFY'25 Minority Closures/Rehabilitation Closures - Minority Identification**

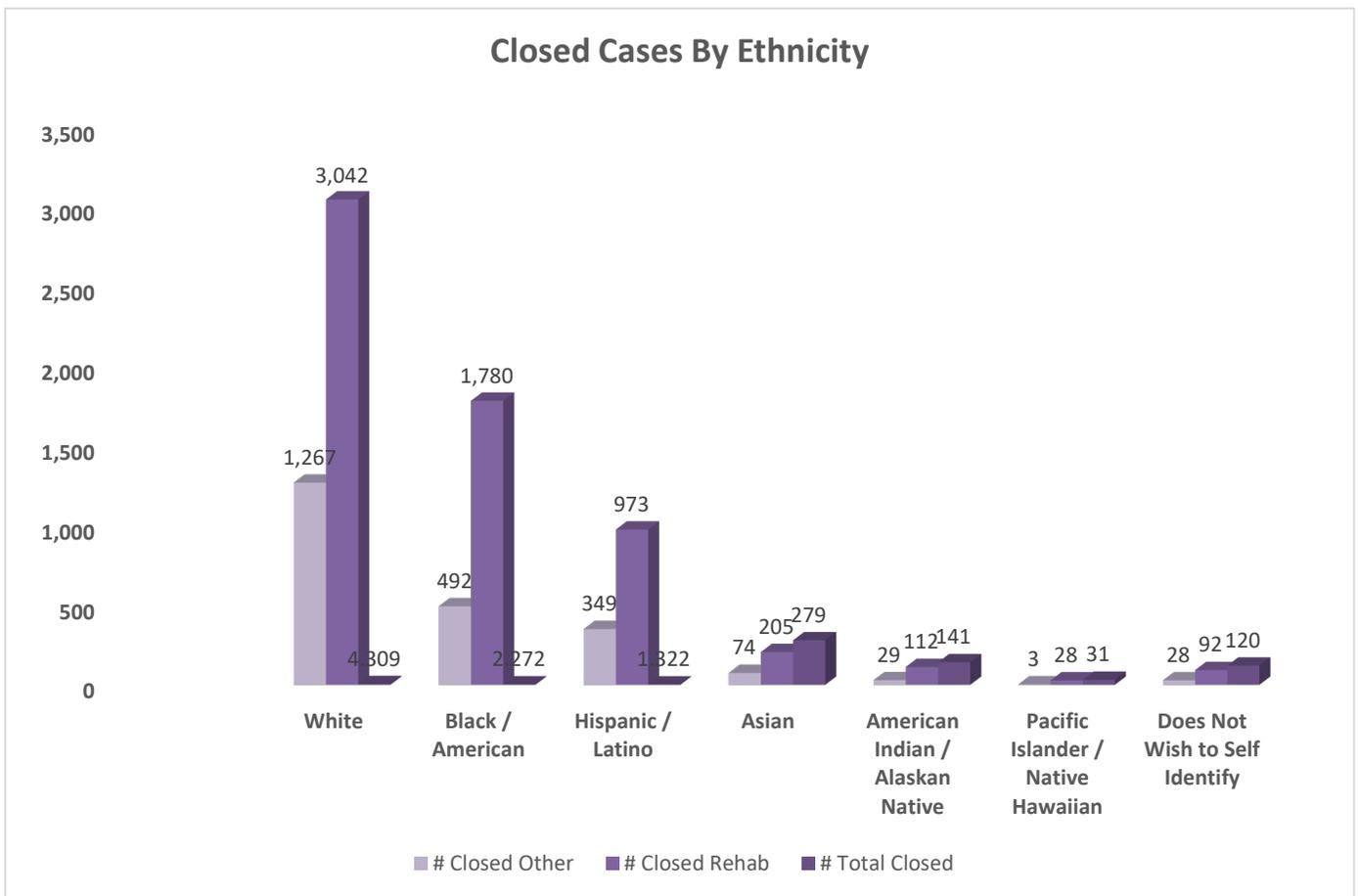
There were 6,968\*\* closed cases in FFY'25. DVRS served all these individuals and closed their cases for other reasons or as successful rehabilitations. The table in the next page summarizes FFY 2025 outcomes by total cases and identifier group.

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

**FFY'25 Total Closures vs. Rehab Closures, Identifier Group**

FFY25 CLOSED BY ETHNICITY			
Ethnicity	# Closed Rehab	# Closed Other	# Total Closed

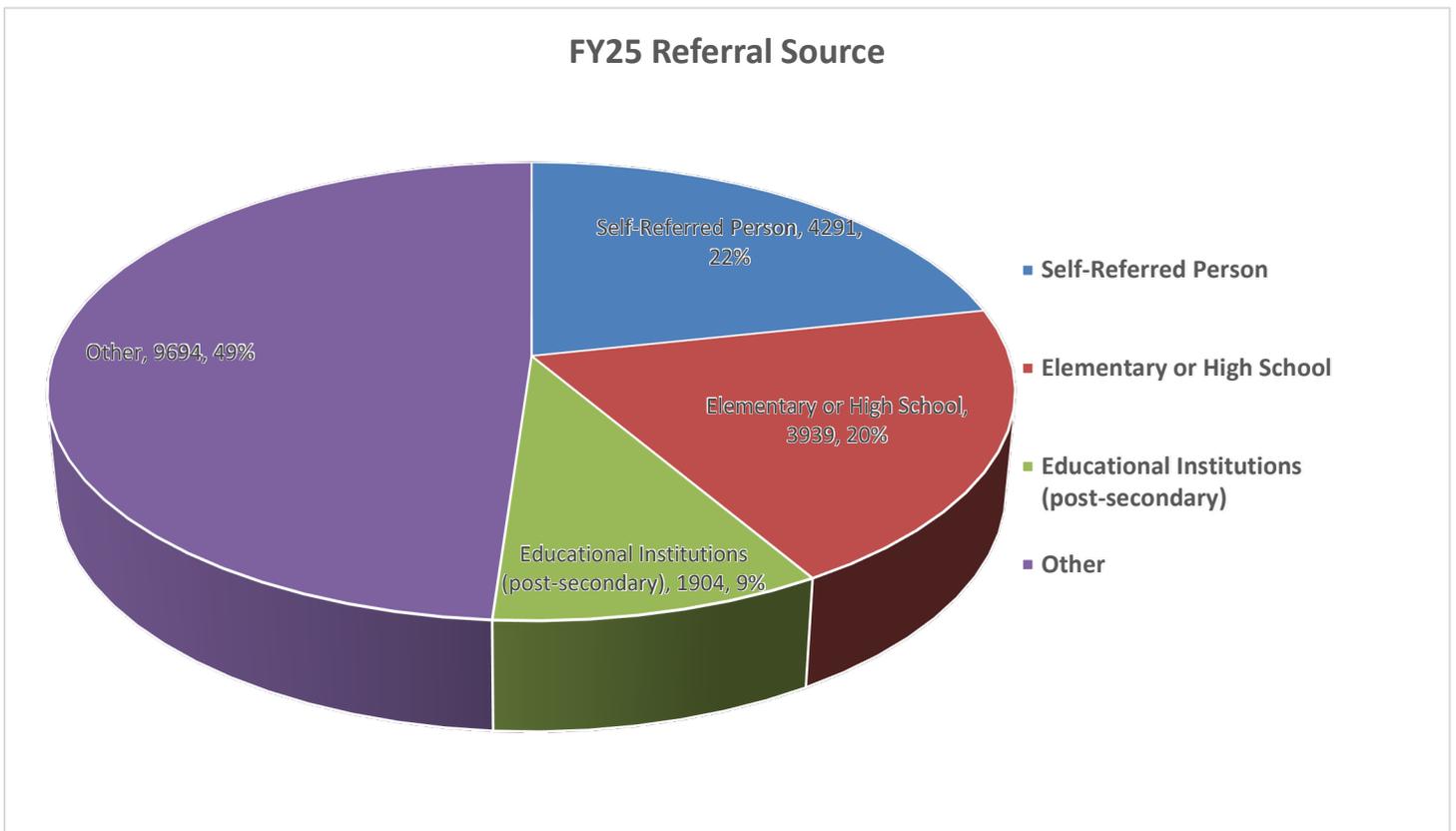
White	1,267	3,042	4,309
Black / American	492	1,780	2,272
Hispanic / Latino	349	973	1,322
Asian	74	205	279
American Indian / Alaskan Native	29	112	141
Pacific Islander / Native Hawaiian	3	28	31
Does Now Wish to Self-Identify	28	92	120
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>2,242</b>	<b>6,232</b>	<b>8,474</b>



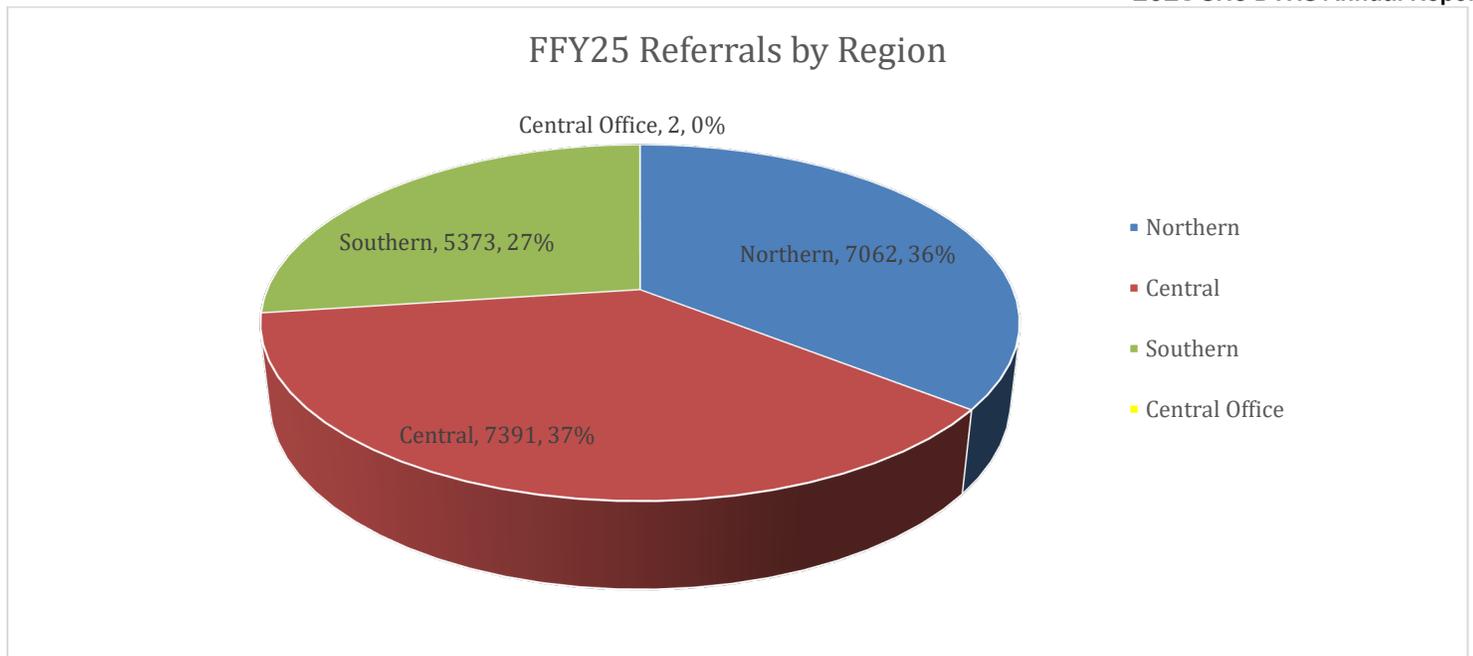
DVRS received a total of 19,828 Referrals during FFY25. The following referrals sources were the highest: Self-Referred Person, Elementary or High School, Educational Institutions (post-secondary) and Other. Some of the "Other" referral sources include Family / Friends, One-Stop Career Centers, Community Rehab Programs (CRPs), Mental

Health Providers, etc....

FFY25 REFERRAL SOURCE	
Referral Source	# of Referrals
Self-Referred Person	4,291
Elementary School or High School	3,939
Educational Institutions (post-secondary)	1,904
Other	9,694
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>19,828</b>



FFY25 REFERRALS BY REGION				
Northern	Central	Southern	Central Office	TOTAL
7,062	7,391	5,373	2	19,828



## **Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and Department of Labor (DOL) and State Employment Training Commission (SETC) Combined State Plan**

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

Title IV of WIOA included many key changes for the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program to include an enhanced focus on Employer engagement. WIOA identified that businesses and employers that hire individuals with disabilities are dual consumers of the public VR Program. To meet the needs of the business community in New Jersey, DVRS continues to operate a Business Outreach Team (BOT). The BOT has Program Planning and Development Specialists (PPDSs) who are assigned regionally. The BOT staff work with employers and the local DVRS offices to identify competitive integrated employment and career opportunities for DVRS consumers.

WIOA also emphasizes providing services for students with disabilities. Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) are a requirement in the Act, and DVRS has

dedicated transition counselors in each of the 18 local offices who focus on providing Pre-ETS to New Jersey students. Since federal fiscal year 2017, DVRS continues to provide Pre-ETS through a fee-for-service model as well as contracts for internship programs.

The WIOA amendments added Section 511 to the Act. Section 511 pertains to individuals working under a special wage certificate issued to an employer under Section 14(c) of the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 (FLSA) that authorizes payment of subminimum wages under certain conditions. Section 511 applies to all entities holding a certificate under Section 14(c) and employs individuals with disabilities at a subminimum wage. Section 511 emphasizes that individuals with disabilities, including youth and those with most significant disabilities, can achieve a competitive integrated employment (CIE) outcome if provided the necessary support and services.

To meet the requirements under Section 511, DVRS re-developed a strategy to work with 14(c) employers. DVRS Counselors from local offices provide career counseling and information and referral services to individuals employed at the extended employment facilities (Sheltered Workshops) funded by the Department of Labor and by request to other extended employment facilities (Sheltered Workshops).

### **Combined State Plan Modification and Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA)**

New Jersey submits a Combined State Plan every four years to the US Department of Labor and Department of Education. Updates to the plan are required after two years. The current Combined State Plan (2024-2027) includes eight core programs:

1. Adult Program
2. Dislocated Worker Program
3. Youth (Title I)
4. Wagner-Peyser Act (Title III)
5. Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (Title II)
6. **Vocational Rehabilitation (Title IV)**
7. Jobs for Veterans State Grants Program
8. Senior Community Service Employment Program

The New Jersey Combined State Plan establishes core measures that are designed to determine the effectiveness and continuous improvement of delivery systems. The

Program sections of the plan provide an overview of priorities, status of new initiatives, and next steps.

The Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) section of the current plan includes 13 key sections:

1. State Rehabilitation Council (SRC)
2. Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA)
3. Goals, Priorities, and Strategies
4. Evaluation and Reports of Progress
5. Supported Employment Services, Distribution of Title VI Funds and Arrangements and Cooperative Agreements for the Provision of Supported Employment Services
6. Annual Estimates
7. Order of Selection (OOS)
8. Waiver of Statewideness
9. Comprehensive System of Personnel Development
10. Coordination with Education Officials
11. Coordination with Employers
12. Interagency Cooperation with Other Agencies
13. Assurances

The next Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA) will be conducted in 2026 reviewing Program Years 2023-2025. The CSNA evaluates the extent to which the VR Program meets the needs of individuals with disabilities (especially those who are most significant) relating to developing, establishing, or improving all services and programs offered by DVRS.

## **Benefits Counseling**

DVRS currently has a state-wide benefits counseling program. Through a collaborative effort with the Social Security Administration, Virginia Commonwealth University, and ASM Research, DVRS implemented a fee for service model to address consumer needs in New Jersey.

Services are currently provided by thirteen (13) DVRS vendors whose staff have been deemed as certified benefits counselors. This service is provided in a range of service

delivery that includes basic benefits counseling and more comprehensive service that can be delivered over a period throughout the consumer's case with DVRS. Services are available for youth to receive Pre-ETS services as well as for consumers receiving vocational rehabilitation services through DVRS. This program was developed to alleviate the fears that can be associated with the loss of health benefits when obtaining employment.

### **Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS)**

The implementation of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act in 2014, as amended by the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, made significant changes to the DVRS responsibility for transition services. Specifically, the law requires that the public (Vocational Rehabilitation) VR program provides Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) to all students with disabilities. DVRS identified strategies to ensure that all transition students with disabilities can receive these services. DVRS has allowed students seeking Pre-Employment Transition Services to obtain these services without undue delay by allowing an "expedited" method of service delivery for Pre-Employment Transition Services. There are 45 Fee-for-Service providers who deliver Pre-ETS covering all counties. Pre-Employment Transition Services offer students with disabilities an early start at career exploration and preparation for adult life. Beginning at age 14, students with disabilities can connect with DVRS for Pre-ETS. DVRS works with students, their families, their schools, and community partners to enrich transition planning and support students with gaining knowledge and experiences necessary so they may make informed decisions about their future. Topics covered through Pre-ETS include career exploration; work-based learning experiences; counseling on enrollment in post-secondary education; workplace readiness training; and self-advocacy.

DVRS provided another year of paid internship experiences, to in-school youth. DVRS awarded 20 vendors contracts for a three-year period to provide Pre-ETS Paid Internships, serving all 21 counties statewide.

DVRS has dedicated Pre-Employment Transition Counselors in each of the 18 DVRS Offices. Counselors have spearheaded outreach presenting at events to other state agencies and organizations. Counselors collaborate at a local level with the local school districts, at Transition Coordinator Network meetings, Community of Practices, and other conferences.

DVRS Counselors collaborate with state education representatives to design and coordinate services that best support students with disabilities. Their goal is to ensure that each student’s transition from secondary to post-secondary life is guided by person-centered planning, informed choice, and opportunities to pursue meaningful, competitive integrated employment.

### **Interagency Agreement (Pre-ETS)**

WIOA requires state Vocational Rehabilitation Agencies and the state education agency to enter into a formal interagency agreement to facilitate and coordinate services needed by students with disabilities to successfully transition to employment or other post-secondary activities leading to employment. These services include Pre-Employment Transition Services, Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VR), and VR Transition Services. The Interagency Agreement is between the Department of Education and the State’s two Vocational Rehabilitation agencies, the Division of Vocational and Rehabilitation Services and the Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (CBVI). The current Interagency Agreement shall remain in full force until May 31, 2029.

### **Protocol for Collaboration Between NJDVRS and School Districts**

DVRS implemented the Protocol for Collaboration between NJDVRS and school districts. This protocol is designed to streamline the process of preparing students for competitive integrated employment. It aligns with WIOA, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and New Jersey’s Employment First Initiative ensuring compliance with state and federal regulations.

### **Statewide Training/ Professional Development**

The “All Things Pre-ETS” initiative successfully conducted five mandatory statewide trainings targeting all DVRS staff and Pre-ETS providers. This comprehensive training effort aimed at standardizing practices across all local and central offices ensuring consistency and efficiency in service delivery. A total of over 450 staff were trained through in-person, full-day sessions. The training courses encompassed all 18 local offices and Central Office ensuring uniformity in all dissemination of information.

By conducting these trainings, DVRS has addressed concerns from the public, SRC, and DRNJ regarding inconsistent practices among offices. The standardized training ensures that all offices operate under the same guidelines, reducing variability in service provision.

The first training session included participation from our Federal Technical Assistance partners at the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition: The Collaborative (NTACT:C), highlighting the collaborative nature and federal alignment of the initiative. Initial feedback indicates a positive reception from attendees, with staff expressing greater confidence in the uniform application of Pre-ETS. This initiative sets a strong foundation for future training, underscoring the importance of consistent and efficient service delivery across the state.

The accomplishment of the “All Things Pre-ETS” training not only enhances the capability and confidence of DVRS staff and providers but also ensures a more reliable and consistent experience for all the individuals and communities we serve.

### **Out of School Youth Employment Services (OYSES)**

Out of School Youth Employment Services (OSYES) are youth services to assist 16 to 24-year old’s who are out-of-school and at-risk. OSYES recognizes that, when a youth or young adult is both not in school and not employed, a dangerous disconnection can develop. These services focus on ensuring out-of-school youth get back on the path to self-sufficiency with the development of job skills and career pathway planning. Topics covered through OSYES include career exploration; work-based learning experiences; exploration of education and training programs for after high school; workplace readiness training to develop social and independent living skills; and self-advocacy. There are currently 29 providers delivering OSYES and ongoing vetting of additional vendors.

### **Master’s Degree Programs Collaborate with the DVRS**

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

activities:

- The DVRS regularly provides practicum and internship placements in our local offices. DVRS, in accordance with the guidance of the SRC, has continued a paid internship program (as a paid DVRS temporary employee) for interested Rutgers' students during their practicum/internship periods. The SRC and DVRS view this program as a pipeline for employment for the graduates of this program.
- The DVRS and the SRC members have provided letters of support for grant applications for rehabilitation education program students at both the graduate and undergraduate level. The school has an excellent record for receiving these grants.
- The DVRS staff and the SRC members provide classroom lectures, mentor students, assist with case conferences and provide knowledge of current practices in the field.
- The SRC members take part in focus group activities of this program which helps forge new initiatives for the program. Several members of the SRC are active members of the Rutgers University, School of Health-Related Professions Rehabilitation Counseling Program Advisory Council.

### **Staff Development and Training**

Although DVRS no longer has specific training funding dollars, staff continue to pursue professional development and CRC credits. Staff attended virtual rehabilitation specific presentations, virtual conferences, trainings, and webinars. Training provided for staff included:

- The Fiscal Decision-making training – D-RAN
- The Trust Trauma Survey
- Multiple trainings from the DVRS Community Rehabilitation Program unit on Competitive Integrated Employment
- Facing the Future Conferences for counselors in October of 2025
- GSETA; Garden State Employment and Training Conference in October of 2025
- Other mandatory training provided by Civil Services and DOL. e.g. AI training, ethical training, cyber security etc.
- Staff were also trained for various leadership and career advancement programs including trainings such as: Supervisory Training Empowering Performance (STEP) for supervisors, Certified Public Manager (CPM) for

managers, Certified Rehabilitation Leaders and other college credits through NJDOL tuition reimbursements program.

The Community Rehabilitation Unit (CRU) conducted training courses for staff and providers:

- AwareSign - April 3, 2025 (Collaboration with MIS Unit)
- Extended Employment - April 30, 2025
- Trial Work Experience/Community Based Work Evaluations – March 23, 2025, and September 10, 2025 (AM and PM sessions)
- Supported Employment/Long-Term Follow-Along – September 17, 2025
- Sub-Minimum Wage Youth Referrals (Youth referrals to Extended Employment) – September 24, 2025
- Extended Employment/Hybrid Documentation – October 15, 2025

The Quality Assurance Unit coordinated and/or conducted the following training courses open to all DVRS staff:

- **Connecting the Performance Dots with Data – Why Every Click Matters** (June 2025). This training was conducted with our federal partners at Vocational Rehabilitation Technical Assistance Center for Quality Management (VRTAC-QM). Key topics included Performance Accountability, Internal Controls and Data Validation.
- **Measurable Skill Gains and Credential Attainment** (August and September 2025). This training introduced the newly created comprehensive policy and procedure for Measurable Skill Gains and Credential Attainment while providing practical examples and how-to's for counselors and staff.

### **Community Rehabilitation Unit (CRP) Activities:**

- **Provider Forums** – April 30, 2025 (Spring), November 19, 2025 (Fall)
- CRP Unit presented on the **Extended Employment Transitional Employment Plan** at the Annual STAR Conference in Atlantic City on October 9, 2025

- CRP Unit presenting at GSETA Conference on **Rediscovering Supported Employment Building Foundations for Inclusive Workplaces: Unveiling the Core Principles to Empower Diverse Talent in Today's Economy** in Atlantic City on October 22, 2025, with Assistant Director and Director
- CRP Unit PPDS participated in NJ APSE Facing the Future Conference. Planning Committee and Unit attended annual NJ APSE Facing the Future Conference on October 10, 2025

## **New Jersey Project SEARCH**

Project SEARCH is a nine-month transition program for high school students and young adults with developmental and/or intellectual disabilities. The program takes place entirely within a regular community business. Interns attend one hour of class and participate in three different internship rotations that last 10 to 12 weeks, working at least four hours per day. During this time, they learn a variety of transferable skills. Upon completion of the program, they receive assistance in finding a job in the community or at the business host site using the skills they have developed.

### **Program Philosophy**

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

Stephen Simon, ADA Quarterly, Fall 1998

### **Brief History – Project SEARCH**

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

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

Project SEARCH has grown from one original program site at Cincinnati Children's Hospital to **797 Programs, 48 USA States, 9 Countries, and 53,890 individuals served.**

### **Key Points – Project SEARCH**

- Project SEARCH Program is a nine-month internship program for high school students in their last year of high school and young adults with disabilities.
- It is targeted for students and young adults whose goal is competitive employment.
- The program takes place in a healthcare, government or business setting where total immersion in the workplace facilitates the teaching and learning process as well as the acquisition of employability and marketable work skills.
- Students and young adults participate in three internships to explore a variety of career paths.
- Students and young adults work with a team that includes their family, a special education teacher and Rehabilitation Services Administration to create an employment goal and support the student during this important transition from school to work.

### **Project SEARCH – Partners**

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

### **New Jersey Project SEARCH – Overview**

There are seventeen (17) Active Project SEARCH Programs in different areas of New Jersey

- Overlook (AHS) Medical Center Project SEARCH (**High School Program**) - Summit, Union County.
- Holy Name Medical Center Project SEARCH (**High School Program**) - Teaneck, Bergen County.
- New Bridge Medical Center Project SEARCH (**Adult Program**) Paramus – Bergen County.
- Bergen County Administration Offices Project SEARCH (**Adult Program**) – Hackensack, Bergen County
- Jefferson Health Project SEARCH (**High School Program**) – Cherry Hill, Camden County.
- Jefferson Health Project SEARCH (**Adult Program**) – Stratford, Camden County
- TD Bank Project SEARCH (**High School Program**) – Mount Laurel, Burlington County.
- Jersey City Medical Center Project SEARCH (**High School Program**) – Jersey City, Hudson County.
- Hudson County County Community College Project SEARCH (**Adult Program**) Jersey City, Hudson County.
- Hudson County Community College Project SEARCH, North Campus in Union City, Hudson County (**18-21 Young Adults Ineligible for DDD due to age requirement**)
- Newton Medical Center Project SEARCH (**Hybrid Program**) Newton, Sussex County.
- Monmouth Medical Center Project SEARCH (**Hybrid Program**) Long Branch, Monmouth County.
- Jefferson Washington Township Hospital Project SEARCH (**High School Program**), Washington Township, Gloucester County.
- Community Medical Center Project SEARCH (**Hybrid Program**), Toms River, Ocean County.
- Novo Nordisk Project SEARCH (**Hybrid Program**), Plainsboro, Mercer County.
- Virtua Mt. Holly Hospital Project SEARCH (**High School Program**), Mt. Holly, Burlington County.
- RWJ University Hospital Somerset Project SEARCH (**High School Program**), Somerset, Somerset County.

The goal is to have the unique Project SEARCH program in all the twenty-one (21) counties in the State of New Jersey.

DVRS has provided Project SEARCH Student Adult Financial Assistance (PS SAFA). PS SAFA has provided tuition, transportation, and uniform financial assistance to Project SEARCH interns. PS SAFA flyer is attached.

### **Project SEARCH National Awards**

A team of Project SEARCH representatives attended the 2025 Project SEARCH National Conference in Austin, Texas. The conference was a great opportunity for the New Jersey Project SEARCH Team to network and continue to develop the program with other programs across the country and across the globe. The following programs were awarded a certificate for having outstanding (100%) placement outcomes and Excellent placement for 2023-2024 school year.

### **Outstanding (100%) Employment Outcomes**

- Newton Medical Center Project SEARCH Program
- Hackettstown Medical Center Project SEARCH Program

### **Excellent Employment Outcomes**

- Overlook Medical Center Project SEARCH Program
- New Bridge Medical Center Project SEARCH Program
- Jefferson Health Project SEARCH Program, Cherry Hill
- Monmouth Medical Center Project SEARCH Program

### **Program Benefits to the Students:**

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

## Program Benefits to the Business:

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

## Comments

“Project SEARCH breaks down stereotypes by increasing the public’s expectations about people with significant disabilities. The Project SEARCH Program provides young people with significant disabilities the opportunity to contribute to their communities and to society at large by providing the necessary support to work and receive minimum or prevailing wage. We are proud here at DOL to be the first Federal agency to embrace this program. We will hire several Project SEARCH graduates at above minimum wage.”

**Kathleen Martinez, Assistant Secretary for the Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP), Department of Labor, Washington, DC.**

The New Jersey Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (DVRS) has maintained exceptional Leadership in the stability of Project SEARCH Programs. Two Program Planning Development Specialists are assigned as New Jersey State Project SEARCH Liaisons.

DVRS Field offices with Project SEARCH in their Counties are immersed in the program with assigned VR Counselors. The goal is to have a sustainable Project SEARCH program in every county of the State.

## DEAM Events

The NJDVRS Business Outreach Team was involved with Disability Employment Awareness Month (DEAM) events in October 2024 which took place throughout the

state at various venues. DEAM events were held in Burlington, Cumberland, Gloucester, Ocean, Monmouth and Essex Counties during the month of October. Several were combined hiring events and job fairs.

NJ DVRS hosted an event on 10/21/2025 in Central Office to celebrate the "80th anniversary of National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM), an annual recognition of the positive impact of people with disabilities in the American workforce." (<https://www.dol.gov/agencies/odep/initiatives/ndeam>).

The theme for 2025 is "Celebrating Value and Talent" and celebrate we did! The event began with many insightful and motivating speeches by: NJDVRS Director – Dr. Felicia Hopson, Assistant Commissioner - Dr. Charyl Yarbrough, Deputy Commissioner - Julie Diaz, Diversity and Inclusion Officer - Braheim Knight and Senior Project Manager of the Competitive Integrated Employment Grant Program - Quiana Brifu.

A total of 23 awards were given out at the event to consumers, employers and their staff, and NJ DVRS staff. There was a total of 108 individuals registered to attend the event and over 70 Zoom attendees.

### **Business Outreach Team (BOT)- Employer Engagement**

Members of the BOT continue to support DVRS local offices through facilitation of employment outcomes including competitive integrated employment, internships, and positions funded with on-the-job training contracts. The BOT unit also shares labor market information, resources, and relevant job leads with DVRS field staff.

### **Special Projects**

BOT representatives were involved with numerous special projects, including:

- Acting as liaisons to three Infrastructure Megaprojects in NJ. These projects include the Route 7 Resurfacing Project, the Penn Station Access, and the Hudson Tunnel Project.
- Partnering with CVS Health Workforce Initiatives to present a webinar, [A Day in the Life of a Pharmacy Tech](#), followed by an application workshop
- Attending the DREAM conference in Albany, NY and the GSETA conference in Atlantic City, NJ
- Offering Disability Etiquette for Business Professionals in Middlesex County

- Partnering with Port Authority Abilities Network to enhance inclusive recruiting efforts
- Greater Raritan Workforce Development Board to host hospitality and healthcare recruitment events
- Conducting Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE) evaluations
- Collaborated in Justice Impacted Job Fairs
- Developed 2 Employer Roundtables
- Assisted with Apprenticeships, Paid Internship and OJT contracts
- Provided testing and recommendations to Employer Module
- Participated in Self-Employment Training
- Obtained ETPL training
- Received Training in Salesforce
- Provided Neurodiversity Training to DOL Executives and DOL employees

**BOT SUCCESS STORIES**

- Three candidates (two from the Jersey City office, one from the Somerville office) were hired by InspiriTec as Customer Service Representatives
- A DVRS job seeker participated in an eight-week paid internship with the Cumberland County Historical Society and was subsequently offered a paid position

**BOT Employer Engagements**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ABA4U</li> <li>• Ace Plumbing</li> <li>• Adecco Staffing Services</li> <li>• Allied Universal</li> <li>• Amazon</li> <li>• American Water</li> <li>• Apprenticeship for Yacht in</li> <li>• Aspire Bakeries</li> <li>• Associated Fire Protection</li> <li>• Atlantic City Medical Assistant Apprenticeship</li> <li>• Benco Dental</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NJ Department of Transportation</li> <li>• NJ Transit</li> <li>• Norwescap</li> <li>• One Love CPR</li> <li>• Penn Medicine</li> <li>• Retail Data Solutions</li> <li>• Pillar Care Continuum</li> <li>• Pletho</li> <li>• PNC Bank</li> <li>• Prevention Link</li> <li>• Shionongi</li> </ul>
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Braco Manufacturing</li> <li>• Bridgeton Public Library</li> <li>• Bridgewater Marriott</li> <li>• Brightview Atlantic City</li> <li>• Cooper Hospital</li> <li>• Fed Ex</li> <li>• Glamorous Hair and Spa</li> <li>• Hackensack Meridian Health</li> <li>• Haddonfield United Methodist Church</li> <li>• Helene's Thrifts &amp; Gifts</li> <li>• InspiriTec</li> <li>• IRS</li> <li>• Jag Physical Therapy</li> <li>• Kearloft</li> <li>• Labvantage</li> <li>• LaMonica Fine Foods</li> <li>• Legacy Empowers</li> <li>• Mi Cafecito Spot</li> <li>• Microsoft</li> <li>• Mondelez International</li> <li>• NJ Civil Service Commission</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shoprite</li> <li>• St. Claire's Hospital</li> <li>• Stryker</li> <li>• Sussex Rural Electric Cooperative</li> <li>• Tek Systems</li> <li>• TerrAscend</li> <li>• Teshley Solutions</li> <li>• Tiffany's</li> <li>• TLEHL</li> <li>• Total Healthcare Staffing</li> <li>• Travel Unity</li> <li>• Unilever</li> <li>• Wakefern</li> <li>• WalyZav's Autistic Kids Can Do</li> <li>• Wegmans</li> <li>• Williams Sonoma</li> </ul>
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## Centers for Independent Living

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

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

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

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

NJDVRS continues to be the designated state entity (DSE) for the Centers for Independent Living and assigned a Grant/Contracts manager as the official liaison for the program.

Over the course of the past program year, DVRS and the New Jersey Centers for Independent Living have continued to strengthen their partnership and coordination efforts. A solid and consistent working relationship has been established between DVRS leadership, the CIL Executive Directors, and the DSE, resulting in more productive communication, timely problem-solving, and clearer alignment of priorities. This enhanced partnership has led to thriving meetings, more intentional planning, and increased collaboration across multiple program areas.

In addition to the traditional core services, DVRS and the CILs have expanded their joint efforts in the following ways:

- **Enhanced Communication & Coordination:** Regularly scheduled statewide meetings have allowed DVRS and CIL leadership to identify emerging needs, share best practices, and respond to service disruptions quickly and effectively.
- **Strengthening Fee-for-Service Capacity:** DVRS has collaborated with CILs to increase their readiness to deliver high-quality, outcome-driven services under fee-for-service arrangements. This includes technical assistance, contract guidance, and fiscal support to stabilize CIL operations.
- **Emergency and Sustainability Planning:** DVRS worked closely with CILs to address emergent organizational challenges, including temporary shutdowns, ensuring consumers continued receiving uninterrupted independent living

services in their respective counties and regions.

- **Pre-ETS Collaboration:** Joint efforts have expanded opportunities for CILs to support Pre-ETS initiatives, including skill-building workshops, referrals, and targeted consumer engagement aligned with WIOA Title IV expectations.
- **DSE Oversight & Support:** As the Designated State Entity, DVRS strengthened its oversight role by providing clearer fiscal guidance, contract monitoring, and technical assistance to ensure compliance with federal requirements and to promote continued consumer-directed programming within each CIL.

This growing partnership has positioned DVRS and the CIL network to better serve consumers statewide, improve accessibility, and expand opportunities for individuals with disabilities seeking independent living support.

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

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

As we move into the next program year, DVRS will continue to build upon this foundation strengthening program infrastructure, supporting CIL sustainability, and advancing initiatives that enhance service delivery statewide. By maintaining this strong working relationship and continuing to engage in open dialogue, data-driven decision-making, and shared leadership, we are well-positioned to expand opportunities and further improve outcomes for the disability community in New Jersey.

Together, DVRS, the SILC, and the CIL network remain committed to ensuring that every individual has access to the resources, support, and advocacy needed to live independently and with dignity.

## Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services

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

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

- Vocational Assessments to identify career options and goals based on the consumer's interests, capabilities, and abilities as well as the job market trends.
- Job Readiness Services to prepare the consumers for employment by providing such things as resume assistance, mock job interviews as well as training in self-advocacy, communication needs and work-place general rules and culture.
- Job Placement Assistance that will offer help in finding job openings and securing job placement.
- Job Coaching Assistance that will offer training on the job.
- Assistive Technology Center houses various assistive technology devices for individuals with hearing loss on display and to be demonstrated by staff. This will provide awareness that may benefit the individual in the workplace.
- Pre-Employment Transition Services (pre-ETS) provides students aged 14-21 with five services in the areas of job exploration, post-secondary guidance and counseling, self-advocacy training, work readiness skills, and work-based learning experiences.

Out of School Youth Employment Services (OSYES) provides youth 16-24 who are not in school and not employed with job exploration, post-secondary guidance and counseling, self-advocacy training, work readiness skills, and work-based learning experiences.

- Two new services have been added to the Regional Career Center

(RCC) for Individuals who are Hard of Hearing contract and achieved by ESNJ's Special Programs Manager, Erin Puck.

- Sign Language Instruction for DVRS consumers from other countries who need to learn ASL and for those who are oral and believe they could benefit from learning sign language to support their communication.
- Driver Education Support assists participants prepare for the Knowledge/written portion of the MVC test, organizes interpreters through the MVC for the MVC test, coordinates private driving school training and Behind the Wheel (BTW) instruction through a driving school for eligible consumers.

All services in 2025 were provided statewide. Each RCC covers 7 counties and is operated by Easterseals NJ's Career Pathway Connections under the supervision of the Director of Workforce Development, Audra Zammit.

- North RCC is located in Maplewood, NJ
- Central RCC is located in East Brunswick, NJ
- South RCC is located in Woodbury, NJ

All staff are knowledgeable as to the needs of people who are Deaf and hard of hearing and are fluent in American Sign Language (ASL).

### **American Sign Language Supported Employment Skills Building Group**

DVRS introduced a new American Sign Language (ASL) Supported Employment Skills Building Group in FFY'21.

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

### **National Deaf Center on Postsecondary Outcomes (NDC) Engage or Change| New Jersey State Team**

The National Deaf Center seeks to engage with stakeholders to create change at multiple levels of the system: local, state, and national. NDC uses different approaches at each level to engage with local communities, state leaders, and national experts. Under the guidance and collaboration with National Deaf Center's state model, New Jersey State team, co-led by SCD Tanya Fowler and Coordinator of Deaf Education, Wendy Eufemia and the team of various stakeholders, their goal is to promote higher expectations for students in NJ who are Deaf or hard of hearing as they prepare for adult life. The team coordinated the fourth We Can! Virtual Career Day which was held October 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2025. 100 deaf and hard of hearing students in NJ were registered to attend. 14 deaf panelists and 3 recorded videos of deaf individuals with various modes of communication, including American Sign Language and listening and spoken language volunteered their time.

## **Significant Issues**

### **Appointments**

The lack of SRC Appointments and re-appointments from Governor Murphy's office was noted as a significant issue in the 2024 SRC Annual Report. Though repeated attempts were made by the Chair to ascertain when the vetting process would be complete for the 11 complete application packets that had been submitted in 2023 for 2024, there were again 0 new members appointed to the SRC during this past year. There have been no new appointments for two consecutive years.

And, despite 7 members of the SRC submitting letters of intent and updated resumes for reappointment in that same timeframe, 0 were reappointed (including the Treasurer). One (1) person whose application has been submitted is still being vetted after 29 months. The amount of time it takes for appointments to be made has been a historic issue faced by the SRC; the past two years of 0 appointments has elevated this issue to be beyond critical.

As noted in the report above, as of December 31, 2025, nineteen of twenty (95%) SRC member appointments will be expired, and the twentieth appointee's term will expire after the first week of the new year. Because of the two-year dearth of appointments and re-appointments, the SRC recruitment of new members was suspended; at this point, it is unknown how to proceed. With a new administration coming into office January 2026, the SRC Executive Committee will be strategizing the best tactic for

appointment solicitation moving forward.

## **National and State Unknowns**

The SRC is compelled to acknowledge the issue of the huge fiscal and structural uncertainties facing us on national and state fronts. These uncertainties unquestionably have the potential of significantly impacting the SRC's ability to function, meet its mandated duties, and meaningfully advocate for vocational rehabilitation services for citizens with disabilities. The national government was shut down, nearly all funding was frozen, and the future of key partners in DOE-OSE, CAP, CILs, etc., are still not fully known. At the same time, we are about to transition into a new state administration, are responding to the uncertainty of SNAP benefits and navigate huge health care increases for our citizens (particularly impactful for those living with disabilities), our understaffed DVRS local and state offices, and generally navigating a time of deep uncertainty.

## **Outreach**

The SRC continues to discuss the challenge presented by the drop in traditional rehabilitation populations since the embrace of WIOA and explored ways it could support DVRS in reaching non-youth-based referral sources across the state. To address this continuing issue, a standing SRC Outreach Committee has been established for 2026, and the DVRS Director has committed to membership on that committee.

## **SRC Presence/Publicity**

The DVRS website, managed through DOL, was outdated in terms of how it described the SRC and its role so in 2025 this was addressed. Additionally, in collaboration with DVRS staff and DOL IT staff, a process was developed whereby the SRC could have all its meetings and forums advertised and all meeting notes/handouts made available to the public for download.

## **SRC Public Forums**

While the numbers of people who register for the public forums have increased, participation on the part of the public, people with disabilities, family members,

vendors and other stakeholders, continues to be an issue. In the planning meeting for 2026, some strategies were explored to improve the level of public participation and progress will be monitored closely.

## **Conclusion**

### **Planned Activities for FY 2026**

#### ***Meetings***

- Continue holding quarterly Council meetings in a hybrid format to allow greater participation of members with disabilities and/or those for whom travel is a challenge, with a one- day annual planning summit
- Maintain the meeting times from 10:00 – 3:30 to accommodate morning preparation and travel time for PWD and advocates
- Keep the second opportunity, at the end of the SRC’s morning business meeting, for members of the public to comment
- Continue to have structured work time during meetings for committee work and allow members of the public to participate
- Be mindful of acronyms and the need to use full words so all people present understand
- Require all presentation PowerPoints to use at least 28-point font and non-contrasting colors
- Ensure meeting business includes follow up to previous discussion topics and identified “things to do”
- Conduct at least three virtual public forums, including an evening option, to facilitate broad participation and input from constituents statewide and request input on specific topics identified by the SRC. Add a brief presentation by DVRS Director on services
- Participate in quarterly meetings with DVRS leadership, NJ Association of People Supporting Employment First (NJAPSE) leadership and ACCSESNJ leadership to collaboratively identify and problem solve challenges in community integrated employment services

#### **Committees**

##### **(New Outreach Committee)**

- Address on-going need to outreach to the traditional (non-school-aged/transition aged) consumer base (adults, people acquiring disability later in life) as well as school-aged
- Address on-going need to outreach to employers/businesspeople/labor representatives
- Recruit for the SRC from the business community-even as guest speakers/attendees
- Other activities as ideas/needs arise

### **Evaluation and Consumer Satisfaction Committee**

- Work closely with the DVRS Quality Assurance team to refine/streamline the survey questions and determine the best way to distribute, collect, analyze, and report customer satisfaction feedback
- Review survey results in advance of quarterly SRC meetings; at meetings identify areas of strength and those needing attention. Forward findings to DVR Director (via SRC Chair) for response within DVR Director's report at the next subsequent SRC meeting.
- Report detail survey summations to the SRC twice a year: provided a presentation and analysis of the full FY 25 data trends at the February meeting and of the half year (Q1 and Q2) at the September meeting.
- Explore processes and modalities that will increase response rates

### **Policy/Legislative Committee Goals**

- Provide review and feedback to DVRS Director on the DVRS policy manual revisions
- Review and recommend by-law revisions
- Organize visits by SRC members to local DVRS offices and provide presentation materials for their use at these visits
- Review Administrative Code based on current legislation
- Survey members about training and suggest mini-training topics as appropriate
- Advocate with the Civil Service Commission for the Rehabilitation Aide position to be classified as non-competitive

## Advocacy

- Continue to advocate for funding which will provide support to the DVRS for staffing, programs, staff development and vocational rehabilitation services as mandated by the RSA and the demands of NJ's population
- Advocate for funding to support the DVRS' efforts to expand services through grants and other means as appropriate to support the availability of a full range of services for individuals, including those in transition
- Explore avenues for vendor training in high demand DVR services and/or services for which approved vendors are lacking in either the state or specific regions
- Advocate for funding to support the RSA's requirements for state match, including third- party cooperative agreements
- Provide support to the DVRS in applying for grants that enhance successful employment outcomes for people with disabilities

## Collaboration

- Support the DVRS' efforts to develop increased opportunities for paid internships
- Participate in the development of goals and work plans to enhance services to consumers who are the most significantly disabled
- Continue active involvement with the CSAVR National Employment Network (The NET) and partner with the DVRS in the development of new goals
- Leverage partnerships with NJAPSE, NJSOE-OSE, CBVI, DDD, ACCSES NJ, and others in identifying systemic barriers to employment first implementation and transition from school to adult services. Together with these entities engage in group problem-solving and effective cross-entity solutions

## Communication

- Continue use of Zoom platform to enhance access for SRC Members and members of the public to engage in SRC meetings and public forums.

## Summary

During FY'25, the Rehabilitation Council continued to work cohesively and

productively, partially because of a renewed emphasis on the tools at hand, fully embracing the updated committee structure, and staff and member dedication to marshal a strong, hybridized plan to support people with disabilities in achieving maximum employment outcomes. Members worked closely with each other, the DVRS staff, Department of Labor and Workforce Development personnel, other state agency directors, and most importantly with the constituency it is mandated to serve. It made recommendations on topics of importance to the Federal and State governments and supported the participation of the DVRS in local initiatives.

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