

Annual Report for FY 2023

New Jersey Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services

State Rehabilitation Council



SRC/DVRS Partnership Celebrates Accomplishments
October 1, 2022 through September 30, 2023

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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 appointment, so are non-voting members). 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 (61%) and over a quarter of members (26%) are parents or siblings of people with disabilities. As of 2023 representation on the Council is as follows:

| Member | Representation |
|--------------------------|--|
| Karen J. Alexander | Advocate 1 |
| Gary Altman | State Workforce Development Board Representative |
| Mohsen T. Badran | Community Rehabilitation Provider Representative |
| LaTasha Brown | Division of Mental Health and Addiction Services |
| Karen Carroll | Director of the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation-Ex Officio |
| Tatsiana DaGrosa | Advocate 2 |
| Charles Dodge | Advocate 3 |
| William Freeman | Office of Special Education Representative |
| Margaret T. Gilbride, JD | Advocate 4 |
| Stephen Gruzlovic | Advocate 5 |
| Carolyn D. Hayer | Parent Training and Information Center Representative |
| Thomas G. Jennings | Business, Industry and Labor Representative 1 |
| Nantanee Koppstein | Advocate 6 |
| Helen Liu | Asst. Director of the Division of Voc. Rehab. Services -Ex Officio |
| Lori Margolin | Business, Industry and Labor Representative 2 |
| Janet Mills | Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired |
| Nkechi Okoli | Division of Developmental Disabilities |
| Gwen Orlowski, JD | Client Assistance Program - Disability Rights New Jersey |
| Dr. Janice Oursler | Vocation Rehabilitation Counselor Representative |
| Vito Palo | PPDS QA Division of Vocational Rehabilitation-Ex Officio |
| Wayne L. Roorda | Advocate 7 |
| Lorna F.M. Runkle | Business, Industry and Labor Representative 3 |
| Rebecca Shulman | Advocate 8 |
| Carmela Slivinski | Statewide Independent Living Council |
| Patricia Tomlinson | Advocate 9 |
| Cyndy Walsh-Rintzler | Business, Industry and Labor Representative 4 |

Message from the Chair

New Jerseyans,

As 2023 draws to a close, I appreciate this opportunity to share with you some of the work of the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) in supporting, advising, and collaboratively problem-solving with its partner, the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVRS) this year. This annual report reflects progress that was made, systems and operational challenges that were experienced, plans that were designed and sometimes redesigned, and provides an outline of some of our projected objectives (SRC and DVRS) for continuing to advance the reality of employment first in 2024.

It is the mission of the SRC to ensure through policy development, implementation, and advocacy that New Jersey has a rehabilitation program that is comprehensive, consumer responsive, and effective. The SRC strives to reflect the larger community by seeking ways to ensure all New Jerseyan voices are represented. Our meeting format remained hybrid this year to accommodate members with disabilities and others 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, and/or are passionate about working to remove barriers to employment for people with disabilities, please reach out to me or any member of the SRC (listed on Page 3) to express interest in applying to the council. Your input is needed and welcome.

Accomplishments of the SRC this past year included:

- updating its by-laws to include an expanded role of community members on SRC work committees; and
- the addition of “mini training sessions” on vocational rehabilitation services each meeting; and
- honing of electronic customer satisfaction surveys and processes and use of data analyses to inform policy and procedural recommendations; and
- expansion of information shared in the CAP (Client Advocacy Program) report and application of trends/implications to recommendations; and
- in-depth discussion regarding school-to-work and school-to-post secondary education outcomes and potential strategies to address systemic obstacles.

Planned items of concentration for 2024 include member recruitment, focused attention on cross-system pre-ETS and transition efforts and collaborations, clarity of purpose and increased client representation in SRC public forums, reception, and review of expanded CAP and DVRS director reports every meeting, and advocacy targeted to address the hiring and fiscal practices at the state that impact DVRS services and customer satisfaction. To all council members I extend my deep appreciation for your dedication to disability employment and your ongoing willingness to contribute your time, talent, expertise and lived experience to making access to community integrated employment – *employment first* – more than a tagline.

Respectfully,
Margaret T. Gilbride, J.D.
Chair, New Jersey Rehabilitation Council



Beliefs, Mission, Functions

SRC Beliefs

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

- That people with disabilities, like all people, have diverse strengths that must be defined and identified along many dimensions.
- That each person with a disability has value,
- In a public system of vocational rehabilitation that is responsible and accountable to those it serves and to those who fund it.

SRC Beliefs Continued...

- In partnerships, affiliations, and linkages,
- That optimal results in rehabilitation depend on an equal partnership between consumers and the professional (service provider).
- That all consumers should be given enough information to make informed choices.
- That all people with disabilities are ultimately responsible and accountable for the choices they make.
- That all people with disabilities should have the opportunity to maximize their potential.
- That respect for all is critical to this process.
- That it is necessary to support, advance and exemplify diversity and multiculturalism within the disability community and the community at large.
- That the rights of people with disabilities should be advanced and protected.

DVRS Consumer Messages from the Field

Xiomara Gonell: Paterson Office

Dear Xiomara; Thank you for the fantastic work, commitment, and invaluable help you have given me. Your hard work and dedication have really helped me through this difficult time. I just want to make sure you know how much I value and appreciate you. You did a very good job that made a big difference, I feel happy, rewarded, and recognized under your guidance. Your passion for your work is what makes you an amazing person. Keep up the good work. *Client*

Rafal Kabat: Hackensack Office

I finally passed my state exam. I am officially a certified, central, sterile, processing technician. Thank you for all your help. I could not have done this without the help from you and the rest of the staff at Bergen County DVR. *Client*

Emma Gordon: Bridgeton Office

Dear Emma Gordon & NJDOL, It has been about 2 months after receiving my new hearing aids from NJDOL. The new aids are a major improvement over the old aids. Telephone conversations has been great at work! Communication with my bosses and co-workers been clearer, especially when working in noisy areas. The new hearing aids help me focus on speech at work. I have been to Sound Advice for minor adjustments, and everything has been great. Thank you again, *Client*.

Ashlee Rogers: Phillipsburg Office

Dear Ashlee, I also wanted to thank you guys for your program. I am so happy that I found you and that I am able to be in your program. Because of your funds I have been able to excel in my classes. During this semester we were challenged with getting certified within MBS (Modified Barium Swallow). I got the highest grade on the course within my entire cohort. I just wanted to extend my appreciation. Thank you, *Client (doing her Master's program in Speech Pathology)*

Rachel Pucci: Jersey City Office

I'm very excited and looking forward to my college graduation from NJCU in May 2023. I'd like to thank DVRS and my counselor Rachel Pucci (Jersey City DVR office) for the support provided throughout my college sponsorship. I could not have done it without their support and constant help. DVR is a great program, and I am grateful for being a part of it. *-Client*

Michaela Macaulay: New Brunswick Office

Miss Michaela is my case worker. I remember when I came to DVR for the first time and met with Miss Michaela. She was so pleasant to me. She is a very supportive person and kind. She guided me step by step on everything and I understand very well how this service works. She helped me to guide what I can do to get better in my life. I have two kids and I am a single mother. She builds my confidence. Miss Michaela put me in college to get my phlebotomy certificate. She helped me to find the job. Now I am working. I am thankful for everything what she did for my life, and I am so grateful. I am very happy after everything that has happened in my life. She is like an angel to me and my kids. Thank you so much. *-Client*

Andrea Apner: Somerville Office

I just wanted to take some time to thank you so much for all the support and services that you and the DVR team have provided me with throughout the years. I don't believe that I've truly voiced my appreciation for all that you've done for me in the past and so I wanted you to know that having DVR's help has truly been tremendously appreciated and valued. I will keep you updated on any future assistance that may be needed, for now thank you so much! Keep well.

Best,
-- Client

Jennifer Shaw-Knab: Sewell Office

Hello Jen! Hope all is well! I just wanted to update you on the progress of the course. Today we took our last 2 exams. You'll be happy to know that I passed all 3 exams and received all 3 certifications! I'm so thrilled and I can't thank you enough for all your help! I really do appreciate everything that you as well as DVR did to make this possible for me. Thank you a million! Please let me know where we go from here and what you may need from me, if anything. Thanks again,

--Client

Katie Staudenmayer: Westampton Office

I have been working for 4 months now and I love being a truck driver. I have been in every state east of the Mississippi! Thank you so much for believing in me and helping me fund my schooling. I am happy to be back working again.

Thanks again -Client

Membership, Committees, and Resources

SRC Mission

The SRC is a partnership of persons with disabilities, advocates, and other interested persons. It is committed to ensuring through policy development, implementation, and advocacy that New Jersey has a rehabilitation program that is not only comprehensive and consumer- responsive but also effective, efficient, and significantly funded. The SRC is dedicated to ensuring that persons with disabilities receive rehabilitation services that result in employment.

SRC Mandated Function

The SRC, on behalf of the community it represents, reviews, analyzes, and advises the New Jersey State Vocational Rehabilitation Program (DVRS) regarding the performance of its responsibilities. Council goals and activities are set annually and are 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, Statewide Needs Assessment, State Plan and Amendments, Policy, Extent/Scope/Effectiveness of Services, Interagency Agreements and New Jersey's 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 appropriate support to the DVRS in its implementation of WIOA.

Membership Development

The full Council participates in identification of potential members appropriate to the beliefs and mission of the SRC. Member attendance, vacancies, and upcoming term expirations are reviewed ongoing with recommendations made to fill vacancies according to the category the vacancies represent. The SRC is fully compliant with the requirements under Section 105 in the law; members have been appointed by the Governor and at least half of the SRC membership is comprised of persons with disabilities who are not employed by the DVRS. A wide range of disability representation has been achieved. The appointment process is relatively straightforward: persons 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 and a letter or email stating a desire to join and reason for wishing to do so will be requested as well as a resume when available. These will be forwarded to the Governor's office for consideration and tracked by the SRC until the governor's office makes its determination.

Officer Elections

Officers are elected bi-annually for a two-year term. The following officers were elected in June 2022: Margaret Gilbride, Chair; Gary Altman, Vice-Chair and Wayne Roorda, Treasurer. Because Wayne Roorda's appointment expired in October 2023, Nantanee Koppstein was elected Treasurer in August 2023.

Rebecca Shulman, Past Chair, continued to serve on the executive committee.

The Chair and Vice-Chair were elected for a two-year term through June 2024 and the Treasurer for a two-year term through June 2025.

Committees

The SRC Chair, in conjunction with the Executive Committee, appoints committees annually to meet federally mandated activities and SRC priority areas. Each SRC member is expected to participate on a committee, and, per the by-law's revision of 2023, community participants (non-SRC appointees) are welcome to be active committee members. The DVRS supports each committee by assigning a DVRS staff member to provide information as requested. Standing committees include:

- **Executive Committee**– Comprised of the SRC Chair, Vice-Chair, Treasurer, the DVRS Director, and Immediate Past Chair ex-officio.
- **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.
- **Legislative and Policy Committee** – Activities include, but are not limited to, advocacy and education, policy and State Plan review, Administrative Code review, State Plan Public Hearings, Statewide Comprehensive Needs Assessment, and monitoring/reacting to pending and current legislation, particularly with respect to impact on funding.

- **Transition from School to Work Committee** – Responsible for initiatives related to providing pre-employment transition services, transition services, and services to youth with disabilities as outlined in WIOA.
- **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. Ad Hoc Committees include:

By-Laws Review Committee – Is appointed by the SRC Chair on even-numbered years to review and make recommendations to the full Council for needed revision.

Membership Committee – Is charged with developing plans to bring membership into compliance with RSA mandates.

Resource Plan

The following DVRS staff provides support, attends, and participates in the activities of the Rehabilitation Council:

- DVRS Director attends all meetings and provides staff support to the executive committee.
- Assistant Directors provide staff support to the legislative/policy and transition services committees; the executive assistant to the DVRS director provides staff support to the evaluation committee and day-to-day requests that come from SRC members.
- Executive secretary to the director provides minutes for every meeting and prepares handouts for all SRC meetings.
- Other DVRS staff members are assigned as needed to support the Council and as appropriate to their area of expertise.

For the period of 10/1/22 – 9/30/23, a \$46,500 budget was established for SRC operating expenses. The budget covered: quarterly and special meeting costs, annual planning summit, member expenses to attend and participate in meetings and training, accommodations, training, printing costs, fiscal agent budget administration and miscellaneous funds needed to support Council activities as appropriate. Council expenses and activities were conducted within the allocated budgeted amounts.



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, interpreter services, computer assisted real-time transcription (CART) and assistive listening devices. Teleconferencing is made available to accommodate persons who have difficulty traveling, or who reside in rural or remote areas. In addition, all documents are sent out prior to each SRC meeting via email.

Regular New Jersey SRC Meetings

The SRC conducts quarterly meetings. Meetings were held on November 16, 2022, February 8, 2023, May 3, 2023, and June 28, 2023. The annual planning meeting for 2024 was held August 16, 2023. Full council activities are scheduled first in the morning, with committees meeting mid-morning. Committee meetings are also held in the interim months, on an as-needed basis.

The meetings were all hybrid (in-person and virtual via Zoom). All regular meetings are open to the public and interested stakeholders are invited to attend. Members of the public can also join and participate in one of the standing committees. The dates were determined for 2024 and are: November 1, February 14, May 15, and September 18th. Meetings are held from 9:30-3pm at the New Jersey Law Center at One Constitution Square, New Brunswick.

SRC Members participate in the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) and the National Coalition of State Rehabilitation Councils (NCSRC).

Council representatives regularly attend the CSAVR spring and fall meetings. The NCSRC has a special track for SRC leadership nationally that meets for two days prior to the general CSAVR meeting. The New Jersey SRC is a member of the NCSRC and a typical minimum of two New Jersey SRC representatives attend these meetings and bring back current, critical information to the council.

Two NJSRC members are active on the NCSRC Board and assist with training sessions at the spring and fall meetings. They have developed an orientation/training package for use by state SRCs which includes two power point presentations, instructions for use, and supporting handout materials.

2023 Public Forums

Two public forums were conducted virtually using the Zoom platform. Both were held on the same day, April 11. One session was held at 10-noon and a second from 2-4pm.

At both forums Margaret Gilbride, SRC Chair and Karen Carroll, Director of NJDVRS provided introductory remarks. The primary topic about which the SRC was soliciting feedback this year was experience with DVRS specific to transition from school to work. Members of the public were also able to provide comments on any other dimension of DVRS service delivery they wanted the SRC to additionally consider. Comments from the sessions regarding transition included such things as:

- Concerns with wait times from application to referral for services
- Lack of clarity regarding the application timeline and age at which DVRS can begin working with students
- Apparent inconsistency in operational practices between counselors and/or offices
- Inability to access pre-ETS services
- Confusion regarding the role of DVRCs during the IEP meetings on transition

Other topics on which the public brought forward comments included:

- Questions about the eligibility determination process
- Observations regarding lack of consistent messaging between local offices and central office
- Issues with timeliness of contract payments
- Difficulty navigating the DVRS website

- Underutilization of the Extended Employment hybrid model

| Dates | Venue | Attendance | Interpreters Provided | #SRC/DVR Attendees | Written Testimony Provided |
|-------------------|-------|------------|-----------------------|--------------------|----------------------------|
| April 11, 2023 am | ZOOM | 200 | Y and CART | 50 | Yes |
| April 11, 2023 pm | ZOOM | 123 | Y and CART | 20 | Yes |

At both forums Karen Carroll, Director of NJDVRS, offered introductory remarks with a brief update addressing the ongoing challenges of providing services safely during the public health emergency created by the pandemic. She affirmed that DVRS continues to be open and moving toward seeing consumers and others in person. Through FY 2023, she explained that DVRS staff have been engaging in a hybrid schedule (office and remotely from home), as well as efforts to collaborate with partners including schools, to conduct outreach.

Ms. Carroll also discussed the comprehensive statewide needs assessment and the combined state plan and solicited from participants feedback on four questions:

- What are some of the external barriers that you see as really preventing people with disabilities from entering the competitive, integrated workforce?
- What supports are needed for an individual with disabilities to be successful?
- What do individuals with disabilities need from DVR to attain greater access to a career pathway?
- When considering individuals with significant disabilities specifically, what populations of persons do you consider unserved or underserved by DVR currently?

Feedback provided by the public in the 2023 forums was synthesized and shared with the SRC in both the synthesized and long-form transcript versions for use in planning for 2023. What follows is the synopsis (categorized in three themes) that was shared:

Transition

English Language Learners need to be outreached.

Time from 1st appointment to hearing anything back from DVRS needs to be shorter, especially for students with IDD (Intellectual/Developmental) Disability

Get schools more information on Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS)

We need more Pre-ETS providers in the state and better timing of provider approvals so, they can be effective before summer.

Virtual meetings with DVRS Counselors and transitioning students, classes would be helpful

Transition forums by DVRS Counselors with transition aged students and their families would be helpful.

Marketing/Outreach

Need to increase outreach to people with significant disabilities.

Increase outreach to High School students who are English language learners.

Get schools information on Pre-ETS

Have a formal marketing plan.

Increase outreach to DDD support coordinators, High School students (especially English Language Learners), schools, faith communities, community groups

Have forums with High School students and families.

General Operations

Increase availability of benefits counseling: more vendors; allow all (vendor) virtual meetings as opposed to face to face; require it for all DVRS clients including those in LTFA (Long-Term Follow-Along) and EE (Extended Employment).

Improve pay rates (for vendors)

Shorten the time from opening a case to referral to a provider.

Have speedier DVR Counselor communication with clients, families, vendors.

Make sure vendors know the meeting schedules/drop-ins with local DVRS offices.

Keep virtual meetings with DVR Counselors an option, especially for High School students.

Address DVRS local office-to-office inconsistencies (i.e., transportation vouchers)

Activities and Accomplishments

Eligible Consumers Served in 2023

In FFY' 2023, 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'23, there were 1,838 Rehabilitation closures, compared to 2,335 Rehabilitation closures in FFY'22, and 1,948 Rehabilitations closures in FFY'21. In FFY'23, the percentage of Rehabilitation closures relative to all closures was 27% less than FY'22.

DVRS is currently down by 23% of its staff. Successful Rehabilitation Closures occurred over a longer period of time due to cases remaining open for education, training and finding employment to suit the needs of the participant's career pathway goals.

Along with cases remaining open longer, these outcomes are also likely due to health and

safety measures initiated in New Jersey (March 2020) in response to the Covid pandemic and continuing through FFY'23.

The chart below reflects the data differences:

The chart below reflects the data differences:

| Service | FFY21 | FFY22 | Difference FFY22 to 21 | % Difference | FFY23 | Difference FFY22 to 23 | % Difference | COMMENTS |
|--------------|-------|-------|---------------------------|-----------------|-------|---------------------------|-----------------|---|
| Referrals | | | | | | | | |
| Applications | 5471 | 6505 | 1034 | 18.9% | 7100 | 595 | 8.4% | Saw an increase of 19% apps in FY22 and 8.4% from 22 to 23 |
| Eligibility | 4556 | 5451 | 895 | 19.6% | 6270 | 819 | 13.1% | Saw an increase of 20% elig in FY22 and 13.1% from 22 to 23 |
| Plan | 3905 | 4586 | 681 | 17.4% | 5100 | 514 | 10.1% | Saw an increase of 17% plans in FY22 and 10% from 22 to 23 |
| Employed | 2040 | 2361 | 321 | 15.7% | 1773 | -588 | -33.2% | ¹ Saw an increase of 16% emp in FY22 |
| Rehabs | 1948 | 2335 | 387 | 19.9% | 1838 | -497 | -27.0% | ² Saw an increase of 20% rehab in FY22 |
| Closed Other | 5682 | 4320 | -1362 | -24.0% | 4027 | -293 | -7.3% | Saw a decrease of 24% closed-other in FY22 and 7% from 22 to 23 |

¹ During this time-period the agency focused on WIOA and RSA requirements to move towards career pathways vs. placement in entry level work. This created training opportunities that take extended time to prepare our consumers to qualify for jobs based on their interests, preferences, unique skills and abilities, to earn a sustainable wage.

² More participants are enrolled in MSG trainings that are intended to prepare them for high quality employment opportunities in the workforce based on their interests, preferences, unique skills and abilities, that will set a career pathway to financial independence.

The agency maintains compliance above the mandatory quarterly average per RSA in timeliness of case movement, specifically from enrollment to eligibility, and eligibility to service.

| Total Participants Served | 10645 | % per svc | 10637 | % per svc | 11011 | % per svc | 11161 | % per svc |
|---|-------|-----------|-------|-----------|-------|-----------|-------|-----------|
| Career Svs | 9375 | 88.1% | 9029 | 84.9% | 9576 | 87.0% | 9919 | 88.9% |
| Training Svs | 1294 | 12.2% | 251 | 2.4% | 811 | 7.4% | 979 | 8.8% |
| *Difference between Career and Training | 10669 | 86.2% | 9280 | 97.2% | 10387 | 91.5% | 10898 | 90.1% |

*numbers represent trainings that are not MSG qualifiers

| | | | | | | |
|--|--------|-------|--|--|--|---------------------------------|
| Graduate College or University Training | 45 | 4.8% | | | | |
| Four-Year College or University Training | 420 | 45.1% | | | | |
| Junior or Community College Training | 116 | 12.5% | | | | |
| Occupational or Vocational Training | 281 | 30.2% | | | | |
| On The Job Training | 43 | 4.6% | | | | |
| Registered Apprenticeship Training | 2 | 0.6% | | | | |
| Disability Related Skills Training | 15 | | | | | |
| Miscellaneous Training | 9 | | | | | |
| Total in MSG Training | 931 | | | | | |
| Total non-MSG Training | 24 | | | | | |
| Total Training | 964 | | | | | |
| MSG Rate | 58.8% | | | | | Exceeded negotiated rate of 47% |
| Credentials Attained (CA) | 42.40% | | | | | Exceeded national avg of 38% |

WIOA Performance Metrics

Measurable Skill Gains PY 2022 - National Average = 49%
 NJDVRS - 56.1%

Credential Attainment PY 2022 - National Average = 38%
 NJDRS - 42.4%

Employment Rate Q4 PY 2022 - National Average = 53%
 NJDVRS - 46.4%

Median Earning PY 2022 - National Average = \$5,130
 NJDVRS - \$6,330

Rehabilitated Closures / Total Cases

Rehabilitation Closures (percentage over 3 years)

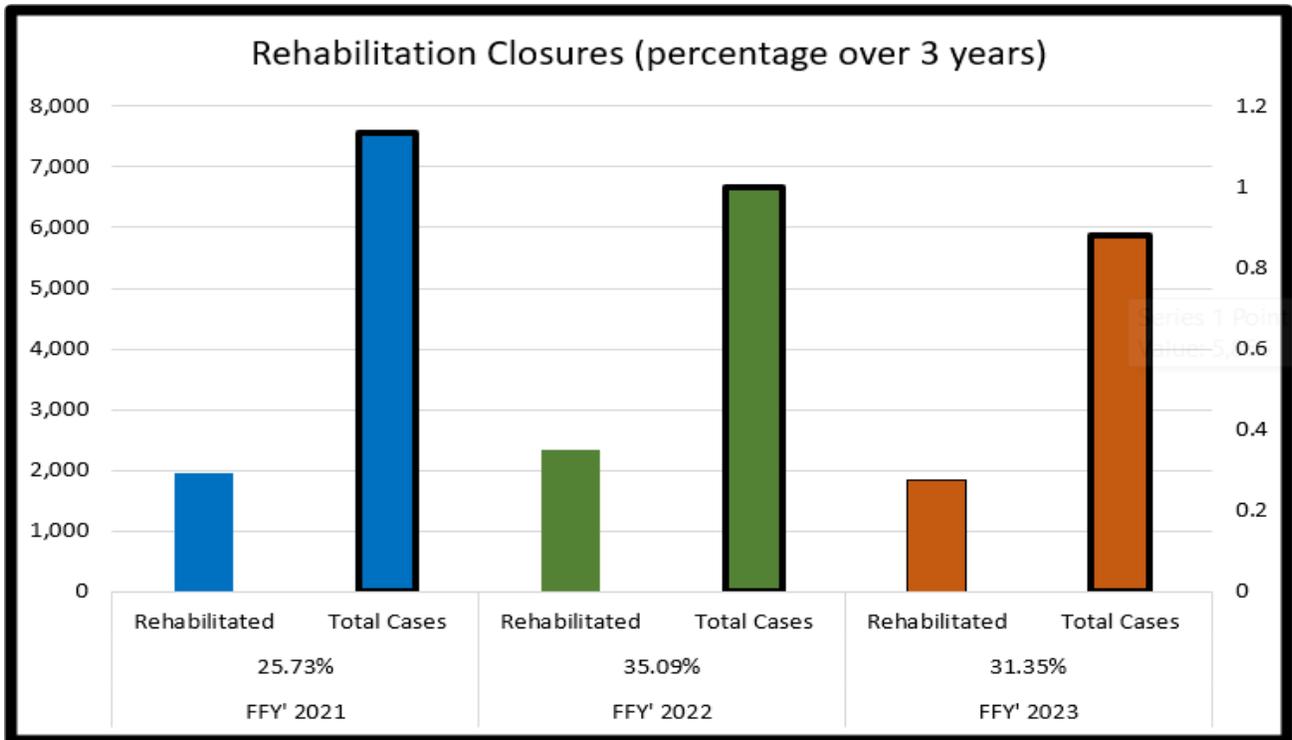
FFY'23 Minority Closures/Rehabilitation Closures - Minority Identification

There were **5,866 closed cases in FFY'23. DVRS served all these individuals and closed their cases for other reasons or as successful rehabilitations. The table in the next page summarizes FFY 2023 outcomes by total cases and identifier group.

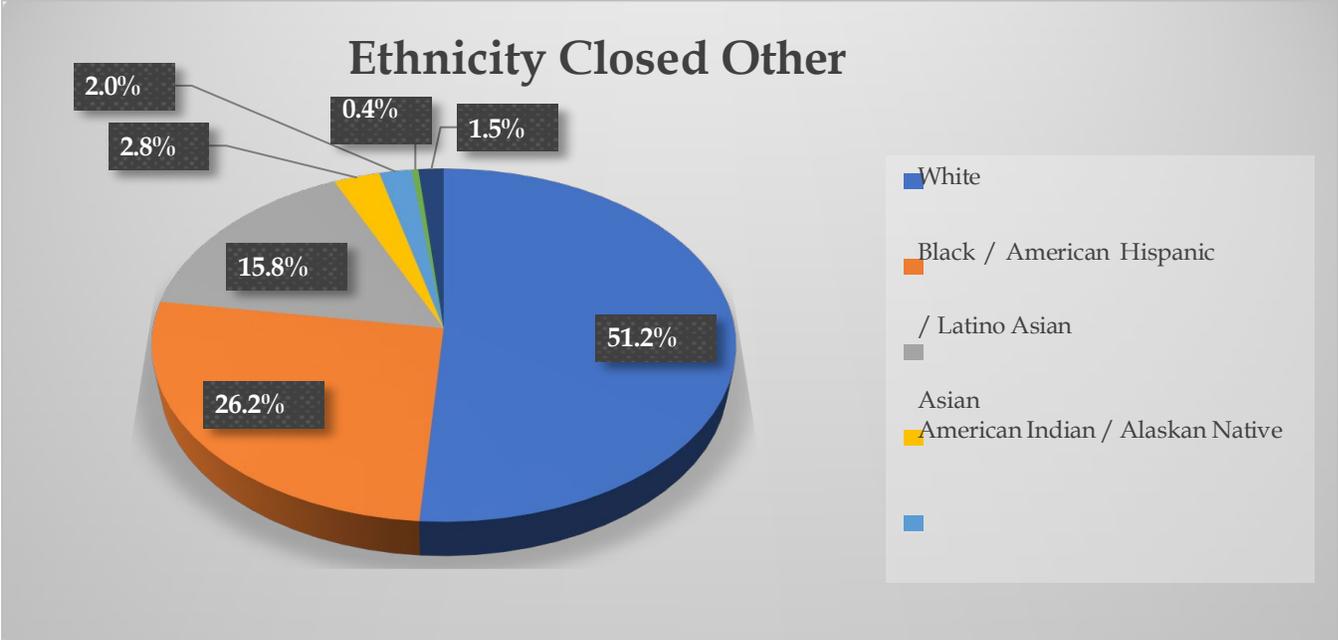
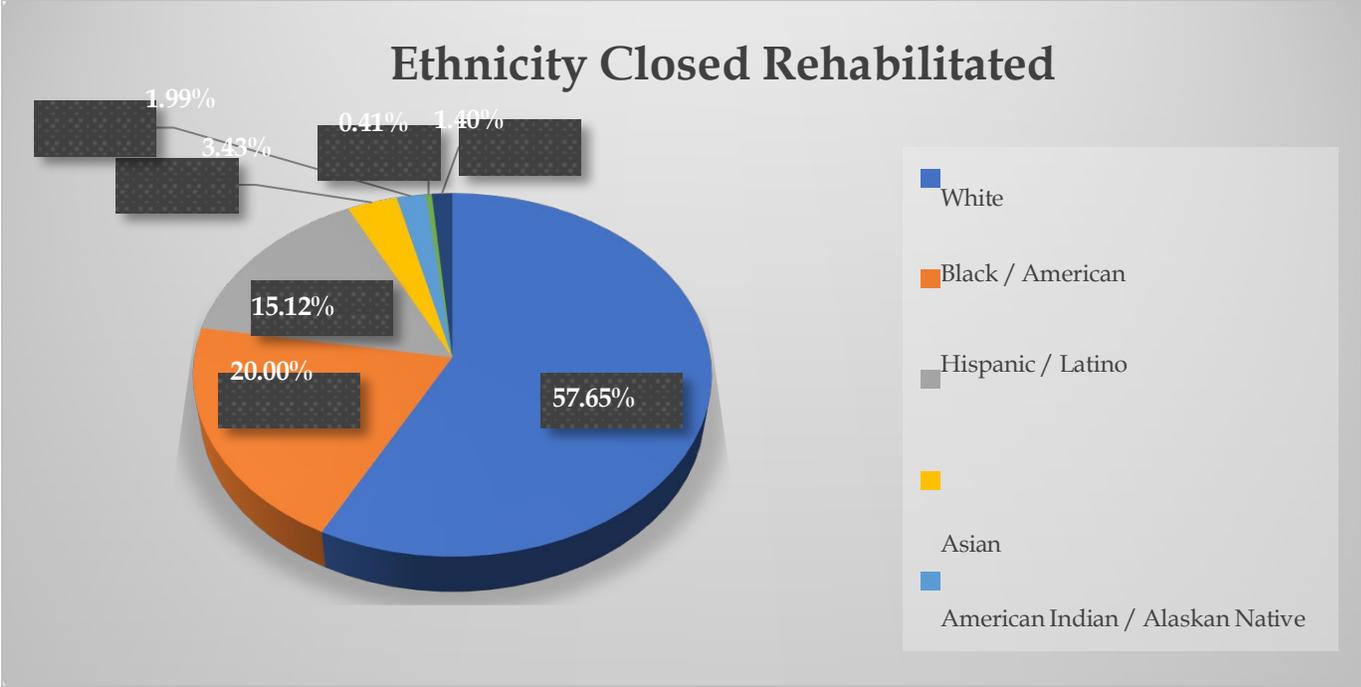
****Please note: Consumers can choose 2 or more minority identifiers on their applications or wish to not identify.**

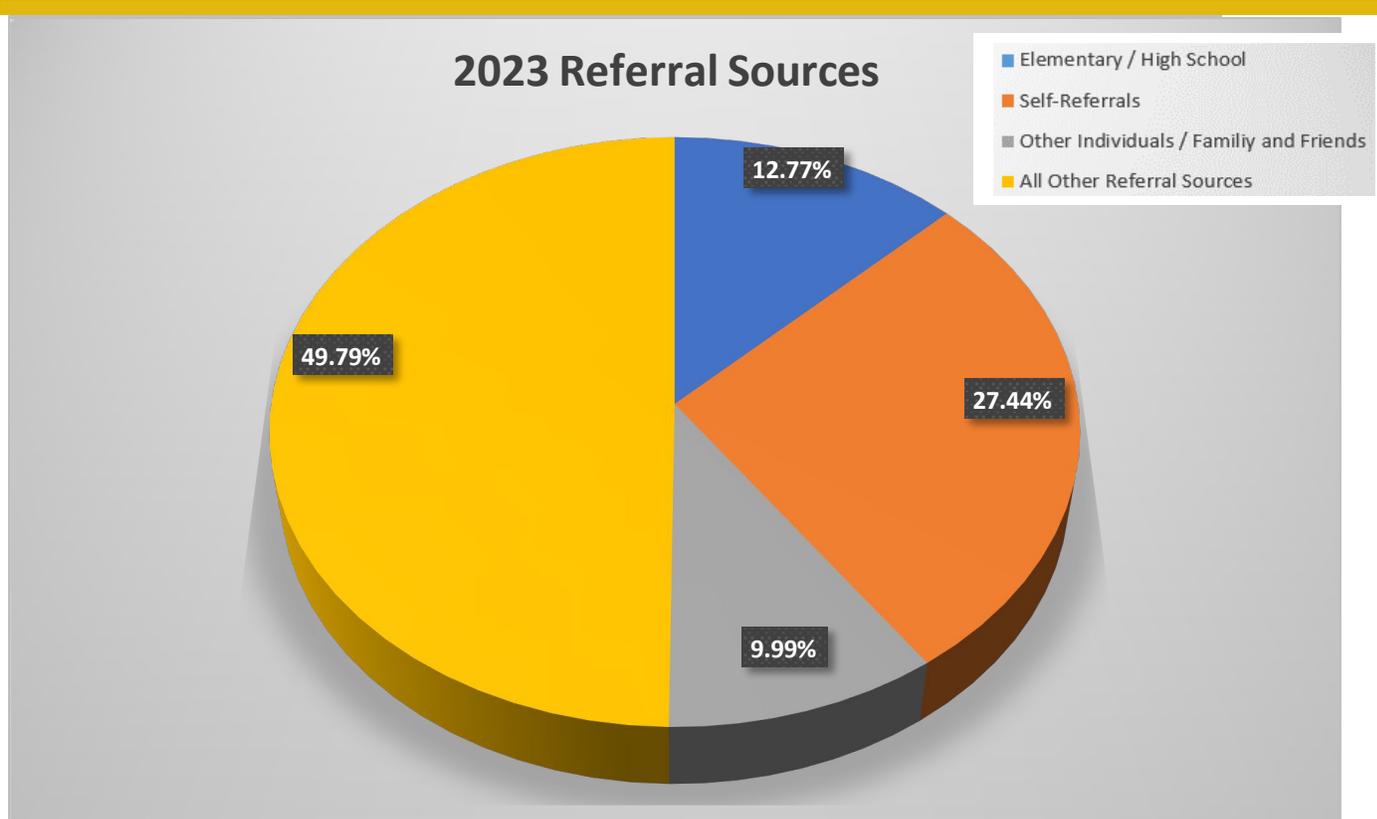
Rehabilitation Closures (percentage over 3 years)

| FFY' 2021 | | FFY' 2022 | | FFY' 2023 | |
|---------------|-------------|---------------|-------------|---------------|-------------|
| 25.73% | | 35.09% | | 31.35% | |
| Rehabilitated | Total Cases | Rehabilitated | Total Cases | Rehabilitated | Total Cases |
| 1,948 | 7,572 | 2,335 | 6,655 | 1,839 | 5,866 |



| Ethnicity | # Closed Other | % by Identifier Closed Other | # Closed Rehab | % by Identifier Closed Rehab | # Total Closed |
|------------------------------------|----------------|------------------------------|----------------|------------------------------|----------------|
| White | 2,519 | 51.2% | 1,277 | 57.65% | 3,797 |
| Black / American | 1,291 | 26.2% | 443 | 20.00% | 1,734 |
| Hispanic / Latino | 779 | 15.8% | 335 | 15.12% | 1,114 |
| Asian | 138 | 2.8% | 76 | 3.43% | 214 |
| American Indian / Alaskan Native | 97 | 2.0% | 44 | 1.99% | 141 |
| Pacific Islander / Native Hawaiian | 20 | 0.4% | 9 | 0.41% | 29 |
| Does Not Wish to Self-Identify | 75 | 1.5% | 31 | 1.40% | 106 |
| Total | 4,919 | 68.9% | 2,215 | 31.0% | 7,135 |





2023 Referral Sources

The DVRS received a total of 11,899 referrals during FFY'23. The following referral sources were the highest: Self Referrals, Elementary/High School, Other Individuals and Other.

Some of the “Other” referral sources include CRPs, medical professionals, One-Stop Career Centers, Social Security Administration, employers, family and friends, welfare, etc.

2023 Referrals = 11,899

| | | |
|--|-------|--------|
| Elementary / High School | 1,520 | 12.77% |
| Self-Referrals | 3,265 | 27.44% |
| Other Individuals / Family and Friends | 1,189 | 9.99% |
| All Other Referral Sources | 5,925 | 49.79% |

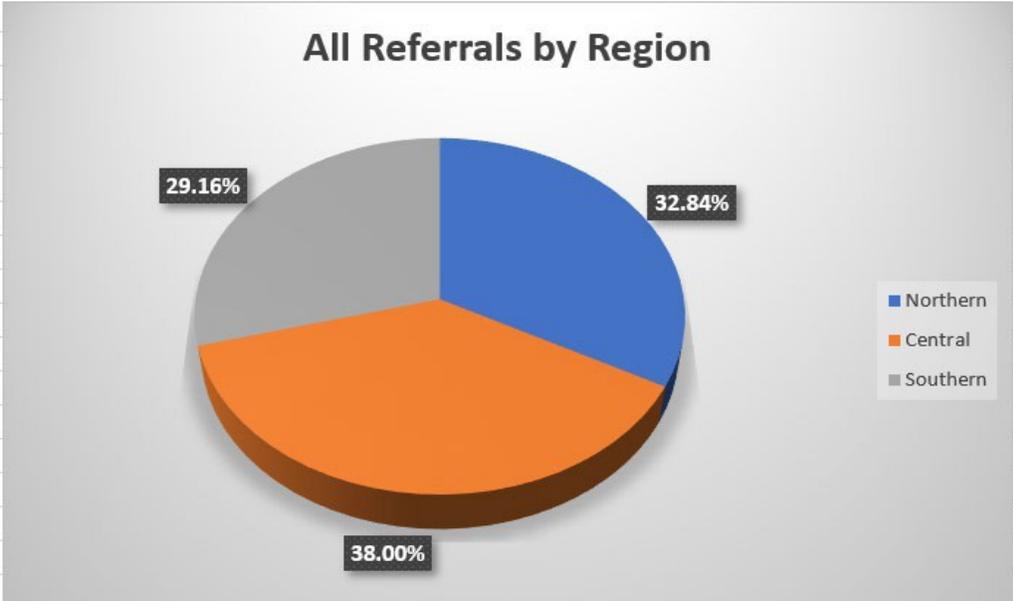
Total 11,899

FFY'23 All Referrals by Region

Northern: 32.84%

Central: 38.00%

Southern: 29.16%



Referrals by Region

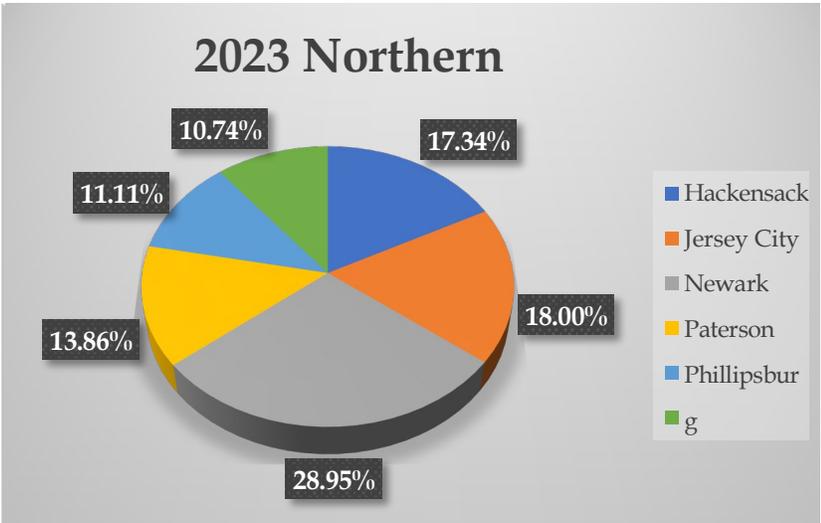
*(PE) Potentially Eligible Case

*(VR) Vocational Rehabilitation Case

| Office | PE | VR | Referrals |
|--------------|----|----|-----------|
| Hackensack | 9 | 12 | 549 |
| Jersey City | 11 | 11 | 570 |
| Newark | 21 | 28 | 917 |
| Paterson | 9 | 10 | 439 |
| Phillipsburg | 5 | 5 | 352 |
| Randolph | 7 | 7 | 340 |

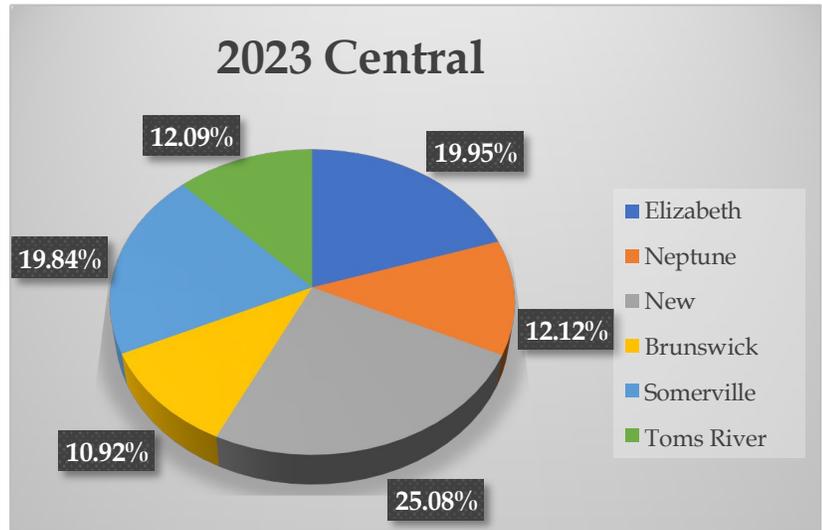
3,167

**Northern Region
Caseloads**



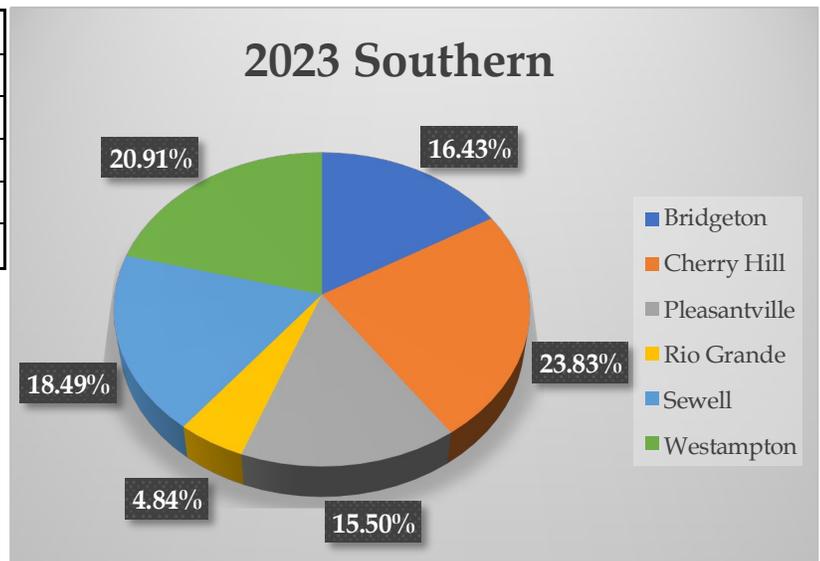
| Office | PE | VR | Referrals |
|---------------|----|----|--------------|
| Elizabeth | 8 | 11 | 731 |
| Neptune | 8 | 12 | 444 |
| New Brunswick | 11 | 11 | 919 |
| Somerville | 6 | 6 | 400 |
| Toms River | 10 | 11 | 727 |
| Trenton | 10 | 11 | 443 |
| | | | 3,664 |

Caseloads



| Office | PE | VR | Referrals |
|---------------|----|----|--------------|
| Bridgeton | 7 | 7 | 462 |
| Cherry Hill | 12 | 13 | 670 |
| Pleasantville | 8 | 8 | 436 |
| Rio Grande | 3 | 4 | 136 |
| Sewell | 6 | 7 | 520 |
| Westampton | 9 | 8 | 588 |
| | | | 2,812 |

Southern Region Caseloads



WIOA and DOL/SETC (State Employment Training Commission) 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 in an effort to better address the employment and skills needs of current employees, jobseekers, and employers. WIOA requires a single, unified state plan that includes all of the core programs under it. It 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 program to

include an enhanced focus on Employer engagement. WIOA identified that businesses and employers that hire individuals with disabilities are a dual customer of the public VR program.

In order 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 development specialists who are assigned regionally. These BOT staff work with employers and the local DVRS offices to identify competitive integrated employment and career exploration opportunities for DVRS consumers.

The Act also included an emphasis on services to students with disabilities. Pre-employment transition services are a requirement in the Act, and DVRS has 20 dedicated counselors who continue to take on the role of providing pre-employment transition services throughout the New Jersey. Since FFY2017 DVRS has continued to provide pre-employment transition services through a fee-for-service model as well as contracts for paid internship programs. The number of Pre-employment providers have also increased over this past year for both fee for service and contracted services.

The WIOA amendments added section 511 to the Act that 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 employ individuals with disabilities at a subminimum wage.

To meet the requirements under section 511, DVRS needed to re-develop a strategy to work with the providers who employ individuals with disabilities in subminimum wages who are known to the division. DVRS Counselors from local offices continue to provide career counseling services to individuals in all the extended employment facilities funded by DOL and provide counseling services to for consumers served by other extended employment programs as requested.

In 2022, NJDOL submitted the modification to the combined state plan for PY 2022-2023. NJDVRS agreed to each SRC recommendation for NJDVRS as noted in the state plan Modification. This modified plan was approved by RSA. NJDVRS completed its Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA) January 2023 covering the years of 2020 through 2022. This CSNA will inform the upcoming state plan to be submitted in March of 2024.

Benefits Counseling

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

Services are currently provided by ten DVRS vendors whose staff have been deemed as certified benefits counselors. This service is provided in a range of service delivery that included basic benefits counseling and more comprehensive services that can be delivered over a period of time throughout the consumer's case with DVRS. Services are available for youth receiving 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 provide 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 for 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. DVRS awarded 20 contracts to vendors to provide Pre-ETS Paid Internships. In addition, there are 36 Fee for Service vendors who provide 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; exploration of education and training programs for after high school; workplace readiness training to develop social and independent living skills; and self-advocacy.

DVRS provided another year of paid internship experience, to in-school youth. The Notice of Contract opportunity process was completed, and in 2023, twenty vendors were approved to deliver the services.

DVRS has dedicated Pre-Employment Transition Counselors in each of the eighteen DVRS Offices. Counselors have planned and organized Transition Fairs and Career events throughout the state. These transition events allow stakeholders to collaborate with each other and provide information to the public on DVRS services.

DVRS Counselors work alongside state education representatives to initiate and organize the most appropriate services for students with disabilities in order that the students' transition from secondary to post-secondary life is centered around choice and the ability to engage in meaningful competitive-integrated employment.

WIOA requires state Vocational Rehabilitation Agencies and 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, and VR Transition Services. The Interagency Agreement is between the Department of Education and the State's two Vocational Rehabilitation agencies, Division of Vocational and Rehabilitation Services and Commission for Blind and Visually Impaired.

Out of School Youth Employment Services (OYSES)

Out of School Youth Employment Services 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, 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 21 vendors providing 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 all local offices.
- 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 that helps forge new initiatives for the program. Several members of the DSU and 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. Trainings of specialized services including but not limited to Trial Work Experience, Competitive Integrated Employment and Supported Employment were offered, CRC credits are given for

Individuals who requested information regarding ethics courses were directed to various webinars and sites that offered Ethics training and CRC credits, which count toward the ten-hour Ethics requirement to maintain Certified Rehabilitation Counselor Certification. Staff utilized scholarships and tuition reimbursement to obtain additional training including but not limited to Forensics in Rehabilitative Counseling. Program specific staff attended trainings and workshops which corresponded to their program areas.

DVRS has utilized the training and consultation provided by the RSA (Rehabilitation Services Administration) sponsored VR Technical Assistance Centers to include: National Technical Assistance Center on Transition (NTACT), DVRS continues to work collaboratively with the New Jersey Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (CBVI) and the New Jersey Department of Education on the development and implementation of transition services and implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding. Vocational Rehabilitation Technical Assistance Center for Quality Management (VRTAC-QM) and the Vocational Rehabilitation Center for Quality Employment (VRTAC-QE)- DVRS staff have participated in training modules offered by the VRTAC-QM and VRTAC-QE as well as receiving targeted technical assistance. DVRS staff are also involved in the TACs' community of practices for supported employment and quality assurance.

This past year, NJDVRS supported 6 staff to attend a six-month training program at the National Training Center for VR Transformational Leadership sponsored by the University of Wisconsin-STOUT and ICI. This was the second cohort of DVRS staff to attend this program.

New Jersey Project SEARCH

The Project SEARCH High School Transition Program is a unique, business led, One-year school-to-work program that takes place entirely at the workplace. Total workplace immersion facilitates a seamless combination of classroom instruction, career exploration, and hands-on training through worksite rotations.

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 **711 Programs, 48 USA States, 10 Countries, and 42,909 individuals served.**

Key Points – Project SEARCH

- The High School Transition Program is a one-year internship program for students with disabilities, in their last year of high school.
- It is targeted for students 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 participate in three internships to explore a variety of career paths.
- The students 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 Steering Committee

New Jersey Project SEARCH – Overview

There are Fifteen (15) ongoing Project SEARCH Programs in different areas of New Jersey:

- Overlook (AHS) Medical Center Project SEARCH (**High School Program**) - Summit, Union County – **2016**
- Bergen County Project SEARCH (**Adult Program**) – Hackensack, Bergen County Plaza – **2019.**
- Holy Name Medical Center Project SEARCH (**High School Program**) - Teaneck, Bergen County – **2016.**
- New Bridge Medical Center Project SEARCH, Paramus – Bergen County **2021**
- Jefferson Health Project SEARCH (**High School Program**) – Cherry Hill, Camden County – **2016.**
- Jefferson Health Project SEARCH – Stratford, Camden County - **2021**
- TD Bank Project SEARCH (**High School Program**) – Mount Laurel, Burlington County – **2017.**
- Jersey City Medical Center Project SEARCH (**High School Program**) – Jersey City, Hudson County - **2018**
- Double Tree By Hilton Hotel & Suites Jersey City (**High School Program**) – Hudson County – **2018.**
- Hudson County Project SEARCH (**Adult Program**) Jersey City - **2020**

- Hudson County Community College, North Campus in Union City (18-21 Young Adults Ineligible for DDD due to age requirement) - **2022**
- Newton Medical Center Project SEARCH (**Hybrid Program**) Newton, Sussex County – **2019**.
- Monmouth Medical Center Project SEARCH (**Hybrid Program**) Long Branch, Monmouth County – **2019**.
- Jefferson Washington Township Hospital Project SEARCH, Washington Township, Gloucester County - **2022**.
- Hackettstown Medical Center Project SEARCH, Warren County - 2023

Approved Project SEARCH Programs - Scheduled to Start in 2024

- Community Medical Center Project SEARCH, Ocean County
- Preakness Healthcare Center Project SEARCH, Passaic County
- Somerset County Project SEARCH
- Mercer County Project SEARCH
- Atlantic County Project SEARCH
- Essex County Project SEARCH

The goal is to have the unique Project SEARCH program in all the twenty-one (21) counties in the State of New Jersey. Currently, there are Project SEARCH programs in fifteen (15) counties.

Project SEARCH National Awards

A team of Project SEARCH representatives attended the 2023 Project SEARCH National Conference in Milwaukee. The conference was a great opportunity for the NJ PS Team to network and continue to develop the program with other programs across the country and across the globe. The following sites were awarded a certificate for having outstanding successful placement of graduates in the 2022-2023 school year:

- Jefferson Stratford Hospital
- Newton Medical Center
- TD Bank

New Jersey Project SEARCH by the numbers

- Average graduate wages: \$15.99
- Average hours per week: 20.91
- Industry placements: Retail, Childcare, Courier/Deli/very, Food Service, Grounds Crew, Patient Care/Transport, Reception, Materials Management, Financial Industry, etc.

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.

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 supports 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 NJ State Project SEARCH Liaisons.

- Performance and retention in some high-turnover, entry-level positions increase dramatically.

Business Outreach Team (BOT)- Employer Engagement

The BOT unit continues to share labor market information, resources and relevant job leads with the field. Members of the BOT supported DVRS local offices through facilitation of employment outcomes including competitive integrated employment, internships, and positions funded with on-the-job training contracts. In FY 2022, connections were made with the following businesses and various services have been offered or provided to them:

Apple Physical Therapy, Advance Auto, Amazon, American Water, Aramark, Aldi Corporation, BAE Systems, B&H Photo, Bottle King, Brady’s Hoagie Dock, Breeze Eastern, Burlington Coat Factory, Coastal Linens, Connect Plus Therapy, Cooper Hospital, County Correctional Police Officers, Cups and Cones, CVS, Edgewood Properties, Eli Lily, Gardland Foods, Global Documents, Home Depot, HD Supply, Imperial Dade, Inspiritec, Ivystone, J-DOGS Catering,

KPMG Talent acquisition, Lavner Summer Camps, Liscio’s Bakery, Lockheed Martin, Loomis, Lowe’s, Marotta Controls Inc., Mathematica, Media Square, Meridian Hospital, Mount Laurel Animal Hospital, Navient, NJ Transit, New Lisbon Developmental Center, No Limit Café, Oldcastle Building Envelope,

Oxford Instruments, Peopleshare, Philadelphia 76ers, Pinnacle Services, Pfizer, PwC (Price Waterhouse Cooper), PNC Bank, PILOT, Rita's Water ice, Saab Inc, Sodexo, Sonic, South Jersey Bakery, Theradex, Volunteers of America, Victoria's Bagels, Virtua Health Systems, Wawa, Zena's Shoes.

Events & Special Projects

The Business Outreach Team partnered with the Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs (OFCCP) to sponsor the second annual Targeted Hiring Event for individuals with disabilities and veterans with service-connected disabilities on June 28, 2023. This event was offered in a hybrid format with interviews being conducted on site and virtually. Twelve employers participated and the job seeker turnout was robust. BOT consultants coordinated with employer representatives, posted job descriptions and potential vacancies, and tracked job seekers throughout the process.

The BOT published a second newsletter, the BOT SPOT, highlighting employment activities throughout the three regions in the State. Other BOT activities throughout the year: advertising and marketing the State as Model Employer (SAME) program, managing the new Employment First Innovation and Expansion Grants, learning to administer CIE evaluations, attending Project SEARCH Steering committee and Business advisory council meetings throughout the state, collaborating with other DVR units to develop a new Paid Internship program, helping with the NJDVRS Apprenticeship policy, which is pending approval.

BOT 2023 Presentations

The BOT team gave presentations at the following meetings and events: Autism Awareness Event 4/26/23 with the Middlesex County Office of Career Services, Disability Etiquette presentations throughout New Jersey via the NJDOL virtual Lunch and Learn series for employers, Camden County College HR, Meridian Hospital, Walgreens, Paid Internship meeting with E-Title, Foodbank of Pennsauken, NJ, Discussion of Disability Programs with Senator Anthony Bucco in Morris County.

DVRS BOT Success Story:

Two job seekers from the Westampton office accepted positions at PNC Bank Operations in Mount Laurel. Both began work in May 2023 in the title of Lock Box Processor and they continue to gain confidence and skills in their positions.

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 assigns a Planning Program Development Specialist (PPDS) as the official liaison for the program.

DVRS continues to collaborate with the CIL Centers to increase their ability to provide services under a fee-for-service opportunity. DVRS also worked with the CIL Centers to develop opportunities for Pre-ETS services.

The CIL Centers and DVRS have worked collaboratively and partners 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 704 Report.
- Participated in drafting SILC Policy Manual.
- DVRS presence and active participation in the SILC Monthly Meeting.
- Will continue to monitor SPIL (State Plan for Independent Living)

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 age 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.

All services in 2022 were provided statewide. Each RCC covers 7 counties and is operated by Easterseals NJ's Career Pathway Connections.

- 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 Onsongo, 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 skills building group meets quarterly. 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 for 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 Onsongo 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 1st annual We Can! Virtual Career Day on December 2nd, 2021. 27 Deaf and hard of hearing panelists inspired 64 high school juniors and seniors by sharing their own career pathway. The 2nd We Can! Career Day was held in December 2022.

Disability Employment Awareness Month (DEAM) 2023 Events

The NJDVRS Business Outreach Team, (BOT) was assigned to manage Innovation and Expansion - Employment First Contracts issued by NJDVRS. The BOT Unit negotiated and revised contracts so that all counties in New Jersey could be covered. One area of focus was for the vendors who were issued contracts to conduct DEAM events. DEAM events that occurred in 2023 took place in various DVRS Field offices, DVRS Central Office and at the site of a DVRS vendor. Central Office had a statewide hybrid in person and virtual event. Presenters included the NJDOL Commissioner, Deputy Commissioner, Assistant Commissioner of Employment Accessibility Services and the NJVRS Director.

The Pleasantville office recognized the contributions of an Employment Specialist from a DVRS Supported Employment vendor (CODI) and recognized a consumer who had overcome many obstacles to obtain her CDL B licensure and obtain full-time employment. DVRS vendor Waters and Sims, hosted an event with the Rio Grande Office recognizing a consumer who obtained certification as an Emergency Medical Technician and gained employment at a medical center. A certificate of appreciation was also provided to DVRS vendor the Arc of Cape May for their work providing supported employment services.

The Sewell Office recognized a DVRS consumer who received training as a medical coder that led to employment with a local hospital. In Hudson County, two events were held including a "Breakfast of Champions" recognition event and a "Recognizing Changemakers event." An event was held in Westampton that included providers, state agencies, DVRS staff, school personnel and students as well as potential DVRS consumers. One hundred and seventy-five individuals were in attendance.

The Newark and Essex County Workforce Development Boards Disability Issues Committee (co-sponsored by the Essex and Newark Workforce Development Boards, Kessler Foundation, DVRS and DVRS vendor Jewish Vocational Services of Metrowest) hosted a disability employment

Awareness Month event to honor employers who champion employment for people with disabilities. Several speakers were in attendance, including NJDOL Assistant Commissioner of Employment Accessibility Services. Awards were given to several employers.

Significant Issues

Appointments

The DVRS and the SRC worked with the Governor's Appointment office to ensure that there is a full and diverse membership on the SRC. There were only two (2) new members officially appointed to the SRC during the course of this past year, and fourteen (14) reappointed. One (1) person whose application has been submitted is still being vetted after 5 months. The amount of time it takes for appointments to be made is a huge issue faced by the SRC.

Of the new appointments and re-appointments made this year, seven (44%) members were appointed for less than a year and are already expired at the time of this report. Another three (19%) expire in 2024. When the SRC asked the Governor's office why appointments were being made for less than three years, it was explained that the office considered these appointments to be filling vacated slots as opposed to "new" slots. The burden of such short appointments makes it difficult for the SRC to concentrate its energies on doing the business of the council as opposed to recruitment and monitoring of appointments. It also impacts the ability to adhere to the two-year officer term requirements.

Of the non-DVRS members, sixteen (16) have terms that are either expired or soon-to-be expired (67%). Recruitment and appointment of new members, particularly members with disabilities and experience as DVRS recipients is critical.

Public Forums

As was discussed elsewhere the publicity and outreach for the SRC Public Forums was an issue in 2023 and there is a plan to address this in 2024. The use of partners to outreach advocates with lived experience with disability, a wider registration window, and publicity that clearly explains the purpose and scope of the forums will be implemented.

Order of Selection

DVRS continues to serve all eligible individuals and as of FY 2022 continued to not have a need to exercise an order of selection. DVRS has assured the SRC that DVRS will be able to serve all eligible individuals and will advise the SRC if the Order of Selection needs to be reinstated in the future.

NJDOL Pilot Tele-Work Program

DVRS staff continued to work in a hybrid model over the course of this past year, working part-time in the office and part-time from their homes. Staff have continued to be acclimated to the use of virtual platforms for appointments, meetings, and trainings. The amount of time spent working in the office is based on operational need and consideration of staff's assigned work duties based on their title.

DVRS offices are open to the public. Local Field offices continue to accept referrals and serve consumers in both a physical and virtual capacity.

Outreach

Over the course of the past fiscal year, DVRS has made outreach a high priority. Increased outreach efforts have been made to increase referrals to local offices. These efforts involve engagement with stakeholders to include state agencies, employers, schools, community agencies and others. DVRS continues to work with the NJ Division of Development Disabilities in developing a Career Pathway Navigation Model with a goal of increasing referrals to DVRS of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

DVRS will continue to work with the New Jersey Office of Special Education Programs and organizations serving youth as DVRS is committed to increasing referrals of students and youth to DVRS and ensuring that effective service delivery is being provided.

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

In 2022, NJDOL submitted the modification to the combined state plan for PY 2022-2023. NJDVRS submitted the needed modifications for designated sections in the plan including the program requirements under Title IV: Vocational Rehabilitation, Division of Rehabilitation Services. Plan modification was approved by the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA).

In 2022, DVRS continued the work of the current Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment that covers the performance years of 2020 through 2022. Surveys were conducted this past year for staff and employers. Public forums were held as well as focus groups. All efforts were conducted as a means to inform the CSNA and upcoming state plan.

A statewide benefits counseling program has been in place for the last several years in conjunction with Ticket to Work and Partnership Plus to help address the impact of work on social security benefits. Fear of loss of benefits has continued in the current CSNA to be cited as an impediment to employment. The statewide program has continued to grow in 2022 and 2023. It has a multi-touch point process to ensure continued support and smooth

handoff to an employment network upon case closure.

In response to the needed focus on working with transition students and youth:

Project SEARCH has expanded to include more sites, offering additional opportunities for high school students. Project SEARCH training was offered to the partners statewide for feedback, questions, and overview of the milestone payment system. Sessions in 2022 and again in 2023 have been well received.

Pre-Employment and Out of School Youth Employment Services has continued to develop additional fee-for-service vendors statewide offering more services to youth. In addition, contracts had been issued for the Pre-Transition Employment Services Internship Program for 2022, and again for 2023.

Work based learning opportunities: DVRS has continued to initiate efforts to increase internship and apprenticeship opportunities for staff and played a key role in initiating New Jersey's State as the Model Employer Program (SAME). DVRS looks forward to building on the initiatives created and exploring additional opportunities to develop career pathway opportunities for DVRS consumers.

Conclusion

- DVRS will continue to utilize the Quality Assurance and Monitoring Unit to assist in compliance with WIOA performance metrics as well as strategic planning for the agency.
- Performance Metrics- DVRS has performed well regarding key WIOA performance metrics outlined in this report. However, there remains a need to increase all activities to pre-pandemic levels including the number of referrals made to DVRS and the number of consumers who achieve successful employment outcomes.
- Strategic Outreach- Efforts need to continue as to how to identify methods to increase referrals to local DVRS offices and provide effective outreach to the community.
- Staff succession- applications for job vacancies for key entry level and promotional opportunities need to increase to ensure adequate staffing.

Planned Activities for FY 2024

Meetings

- Continue 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;
- Conduct virtual public forums to facilitate broad participation and input from constituents statewide regarding specific topics identified by the SRC;
- Explore avenues of forum marketing to reach historically under-represented stakeholders;
- Support the agency's efforts to meet on a regularly scheduled basis with service providers and/or other agencies for planning, problem solving, grant development and other purposes as needed;
- Participate in quarterly meetings with DVRS leadership, NJAPSE leadership and ACCSESNJ leadership to collaboratively identify and problem solve challenges in community integrated employment services; and,
- Keep abreast of the goals in the New Jersey combined state plan and support the outcomes identified in the comprehensive statewide needs assessment.

Committees

Transition Committee

- Work in collaboration with DVRS staff to develop a template that DVRS staff will use for documenting Pre-ETS that students with disabilities will receive from DVRS and other information such as the vendor of services, duration of services, etc. and share this information with students, their families, vendors, and school staff;
- Examine and provide feedback to DVRS on the referral processes for Pre-ETS and traditional VR services to improve this experience for students, their parents, and educators so that students can receive needed services and supports from DVRS to achieve competitive integrated employment in the community;
- Examine and provide feedback to DVRS on the outreach efforts to promote DVRS services for both students ages 14 to 21 years old, and out-of-high school adults aged 18 to 30 years old; and
- Work with DVRS staff to examine current VR practices and make recommendations to increase collaboration across all stakeholders in the VR process.

Evaluation and Consumer Satisfaction Committee

- Review surveys in advance of quarterly SRC meetings; at meetings identify areas of strength and those needed attention. Forward findings to DVR Director (via SRC Chair) for response within DVR Director's report at the next subsequent SRC meeting;
- Report survey findings to SRC on a regular basis, sharing cumulative FF YTD findings; reporting at mid-year (May for Q1 and Q2) and FFY year end in November for Q1 through Q4;
- At alternate SRC meetings (February and September), the Evaluation and Consumer Satisfaction Committee will invite Disability Rights NJ to share themes and issues arising from the Client Assistance Program (CAP). The DVR Director will address the issues in the bi-annual CAP reports at the next SRC meeting; and
- Increase awareness of VR services (as a response to total number of cases served, which has trended downward over last two years).

Policy/Legislative Committee

Policy Goals

- Review and provide input to the VR section of the Combined State Plan;
- Review Administrative Code changes;
- Participate in planning and provide input to the 3-year Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA);

- Monitor Civil Service revisions of educational requirements for hiring DVRS counselors;
- Develop in coordination with NJDVRS the internship process & practices to share with local DVRS staff to encourage more opportunities for internships in local offices;
- Review DVRS policy casework manual section on Post-Employment Services in light of RSA changes to determine if any changes need to be made; and
- Review DVRS Fair Hearing Process & who makes the final determination to ensure regulations align with the law.

Legislative Goals

Review/monitor current and pending legislation – identify issues and recommend strategies as indicated;

Provide input to re-establishing a Civil Service exemption for hiring people with disabilities.

Review this pending legislation and support if in agreement; and

- Coordinate with other agencies and groups that share an interest in legislation and regulations relating to vocational rehabilitation services to people with disabilities as these issues or bills are introduced.

SRC Membership

- Develop screening guidelines for recruitment and membership and review membership activities/status at each Executive Committee meeting, including resignations/expiration of appointments;
- Expand representation of people with disabilities and former DVR service recipients on the Council while ensuring access to meaningful participation in meetings;
- Pursue appointments to seat a full complement of SRC appointees, representative of all categories of members;
- Provide guidance re: issues relating to recruitment and approval of members;
- Disseminate SRC member Handbooks to all members; and
- Establish a member training and development task force, conduct a survey of members to prioritize high-need topics and generate a training schedule that includes orientation for new members and on-going development for established members.

Educational Effort

- Continue leadership in providing training, support, and access to the One-Stop systems regarding persons with disabilities and the workforce; and
- Develop educational information regarding the services provided to, successes and outcomes of the DVRS constituents and include in the annual report.

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 a full range of services to 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 the state;
- Advocate for funding to support the RSA's requirements for state match, including third-party cooperative agreements; and
- Provide support to the DVRS in applying for grants that enhance successful employment outcomes for persons with disabilities.

Collaboration

- Support the DVRS' effort to develop opportunities for paid internships;
- Participate in development of goals and work plan 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; and
- Leverage partnerships with NJAPSE, NJSOE-OSE, CBVI, DDD, ACCSES NJ, and others in identifying systemic barriers to employment first implementation and problem-solving effective cross-entity solutions.

Communication

- Continue use of Zoom and other virtual platforms to enhance access for SRC Members and members of the public to engage in SRC meetings, committee and sub-committee meetings and public forums.

Summary

During FY'22, the Rehabilitation Council continued to work cohesively and productively, partially as a result 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. Members of the SRC, DVRS and DOL were instrumental in the planning to bring P.L. 2021, Chapter 465 and P.L. 2021, Chapter 466, requiring the Division of EEO/AA to develop and implement a State as Model Employer of People with Disabilities (SAME) program. The law was effective May 1, 2022 and launched in early 2023.

The Rehabilitation Council has benefited from the support and cooperation of the New Jersey Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services in myriad ways, most markedly in the redesign of the system for solicitation, collection, and analysis of consumer satisfaction. The Council looks forward to another year of meaningful collaboration around shared our shared vision of increased community integrated employment outcomes for New Jerseyans with disabilities who seek employment and ancillary services through their state’s DVRS.

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