



STATE OF NEW JERSEY
DEPARTMENT OF LABOR AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

New Jersey Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services

S TATE
R EHABILITATION
C OUNCIL

Annual Report for FY 2020

The SRC/DVRS Partnership Celebrates Accomplishments
October 1, 2019 through September 30, 2020

New Jersey Department of Labor

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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. 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. As of 2020 representation on the Council is as follows:

Member	Representation
Brian D. Sant'Angelo	Voc. Rehab. Counselor 2
Ms. Kathleen W. Wilson	Disabled Rep. 4
Karen Carroll	Director of the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation
Thomas G. Jennings	Business, Industry and Labor Representative 1
Margaret T. Gilbride JD, CT.	Advocate 1
Dr. Janice Oursler Ph.D. NCC	Voc. Rehab. Counselor 1
Ms. Patricia Tomlinson	Advocate 5
Mary A. Ciccone, Esq.	Client Assistance Program
Ms. Nantanee Koppstein	Independent Living Council
Rebecca Shulman	Advocate 4
Gary Altman	State Workforce Investment Board Representative
James E. Seath Sr.	Advocate 3
Mr. Wayne L. Roorda	Business, Industry and Labor Representative 2
VACANT	SPAN Rep. 1
Mr. William Freeman , M.Ed. NJ Dept. of Education	Office of Special Education Representative
Mr. James R. Thebery M.A.	CSW Advocate 2
Mohsen T. Badran	Community Rehabilitation Program Service Provider
Charles Dodge	Disabled Rep. 1
Lorna F.M. Runkle	Business, Industry and Labor Representative 4
Ms. Carolyn D. Hayer	Parent Training and Information Center Rep.
Karen J. Alexander	Advocate 6
Ms. JoAnn Norflet	Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services Recipient
Margaret Englebert M.Ed.	Business, Industry and Labor Representative 3

Message from the Chair

On behalf of the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) of New Jersey, it is my privilege to present the 2020 Annual Report to our stakeholders. After marking 100 years of Vocational Rehabilitation Services in New Jersey in October of 2019, this program year presented us with challenges never before faced in those previous 100 years.

On October 11, 2019, the SRC hosted an anniversary event highlighting the history of the Vocational Rehabilitation program and the key role many individuals from New Jersey played in the overall VR movement. Steve Wooderson, Executive Director of the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation, gave the keynote address which celebrated this milestone event. Who could have predicted then what the rest of this year would look like?

New Jersey was hit very hard by the novel corona virus (COVID-19) pandemic with many of our State's most vulnerable residents being negatively impacted. From mid-March through the end of this program year, State offices were closed to the public, non-essential businesses were closed or if open, had significant limits place on the number of customers served, schools were providing totally remote or hybrid classes, and life as we know it was significantly changed. We learned many new terms – social distancing, self-quarantine, flattening the curve, zooming, a “new” normal, virtual services, hybrid service delivery - and found ourselves in very different work environments, if we were lucky enough to still be working.

For individuals who have disabilities achieving their employment goals in any given year can sometimes be challenging but in this year of COVID-19 it has become even more difficult. Services went virtual from March through September and it is a credit to the staff of the New Jersey Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services that despite the many challenges of providing virtual services, 2,170 individuals still reached their employment goals and 8,522 individuals were served.

The mission of the New Jersey Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (NJDVRS) is to help individuals with significant disabilities choose and achieve success in competitive-integrated employment aligned with their abilities, strengths, and needs. During these difficult times, it is inspiring to see that the valuable work of the Division continues and that individuals who have significant disabilities have still been able to reach their career goals.

I want to thank Council members for all their hard work and want to acknowledge the efforts made by NJDVRS counselors, support staff, supervisors, managers and central office staff. Their dedication and the contributions they make every day to ensure that individuals who have disabilities are able to reach their career goals is truly noteworthy and greatly appreciated.

Respectfully submitted,

Rebecca Shulman

Rebecca Shulman, M.A., C.R.C, L.R.C.
Chair, New Jersey Rehabilitation Council

Beliefs, Mission, Function

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.
- 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.

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.

When TS applied for NJ-DVRS services in late January of 2019 she was homeless; at the age of 34 she was living in bus terminals, leery of strangers and untrusting of “the system.”

Following an evaluation, she was diagnosed with an intellectual disability. With VR Counseling & Guidance, Supported Employment and Transportation, TS was placed at a nursing home as a dietary aid in May 2019. She needed strong supports to keep her job. Early in her employment, TS did not want to leave work at the end of the day, as she was mainly living at bus terminals. Once the pandemic hit, the nursing home was open to letting TS stay on the premises; simultaneously both her VR counselor and job coach encouraged TS to focus on her goal of obtaining permanent housing. The job coach helped her find a second job that enabled her to secure affordable housing.

The nursing home was very short staffed due to the pandemic and TS became one of their most valued and reliable employees. She is still employed there with support from Long Term Follow Along Services. The nursing home staff really appreciate her contribution to the workplace.

TS has expressed that working steadily at a job she loves has changed her life and she could not be happier with the outcome of NJ-DVRS services.

Membership, Committees and Resources

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 during the February and June meetings with recommendations made to fill vacancies according to the category the vacancy(s) represents. 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.

Officer Elections

Officers are elected bi-annually at the SRC May meeting for a two-year term. The following officers were elected in June 2020: Rebecca Shulman, Chair; Karen Alexander, Vice-Chair and Wayne Roorda, Treasurer. Peggy Englebert, Past Chairperson will continue to serve on the executive committee. The officers were elected for a two-year term through June 2022.

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. 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 and the DVRS Directors ex-officio.
- **Evaluation Committee**– Activities include, but are not limited to, program evaluation activities and consumer satisfaction studies.
- **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, pending and current legislation, particularly with respect to impact on funding.
- **Transition Services for Students and Youth to Work** – Responsible for initiatives relating 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 a 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, attend, and participate 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 10/1/19 – 9/30/20, 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 activities stayed within the allocated 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 13, 2019, February 12, 2020, May 18, 2020 and September 16, 2020. Full Council activities are scheduled in the morning with committees meeting in the afternoon. Committee meetings are also held in the interim months, on an as needed basis. Based on the health emergency ZOOM or other online platforms were used for meetings after March 2020. Regular meetings are open to the public and interested stakeholders are encouraged to attend. An annual planning meeting was held on August 19, 2020.

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. New Jersey SRC representatives attend these meetings and bring back current and critical information to the full 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 state SRCs to use individually. It includes two power point presentations with instructions for use and includes supporting handout materials. They also coordinated the rewrite of the 36th IRI on the SRC/VR Partnership to make it compatible with WIOA 2014, which is now available for purchase or download.

2020 Public Forums

Two public forums were conducted via ZOOM during FY 2020. Without the need to travel to attend, there was greater participation in the forum by members of the public and increased presence of SRC Members.

Dates	Venue	Attendance	Interpreters Provided	#SRC/DVRS Attendees	Written Testimony Provided
July 28, 2020	ZOOM	64	Y	7	Yes
July 30, 2020	ZOOM	48	Y	11	Yes

At both forums Karen Carroll, the Director of NJDVRS offered introductory remarks with a brief update addressing the challenges of providing services safely during the public health emergency created by the pandemic. While offices were closed to the public for much of the year, she reported that staff continued to work remotely as well as physically reporting to work and that DVR will continue to provide remote services and open new cases using virtual platforms. While staff were using personal devices to do their work, laptops were in the process of being distributed.

She also discussed upcoming restructuring of the Division. The current plan is for DVRS, the Division of Temporary Disability & Family Leave Insurance and the Division of Disability Determinations Services to be under a new Directorate named Employment Accessibility Services.

Public comments followed at each of the sessions, with three members of the public presenting comments on July 28th and four presenting on July 30th. There was follow up discussion in response to questions raised at the July 30th forum. Two individuals submitted written comments following their verbal presentations.

Activities and Accomplishments

Eligible Consumers Served in 2020

In FFY' 2020, DVRS served all categories of eligible consumers. The agency currently has the financial resources to serve all categories; however, it was projected that with the implementation of the Workforce Investment Opportunity Act (W.I.O.A.) the agency would need to go into an Order of Selection. DVRS continues to monitor the continuing realignment of federal funds emphasizing Pre- Employment Transition Services for students and youth. In addition, the Department of Human Services has implemented policy changes that now require all individuals with intellectual/developmental disabilities (ID/DD) who seek support through the Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD) to seek employment services first with DVRS.

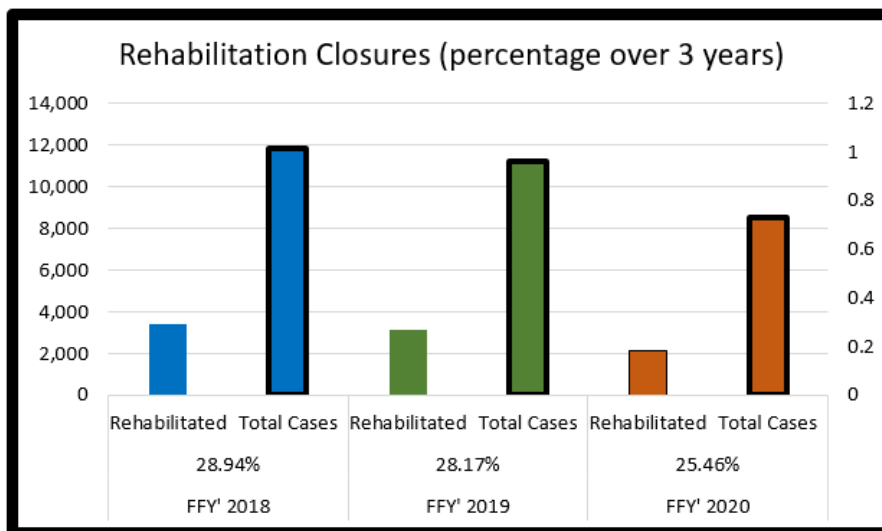
Successful Employment Outcomes

In FFY'20, 2,170 closures decreased from 3,163 in FFY' 2019, and from 3,422 in FFY' 2018, however; this year there is no percentage increase nor a decrease due to the total number of closed cases. In 2018, DVRS closed 11,826 cases and in 2019 DVRS closed 11,227 cases. Quality of the rehabs remains at its highest level even due to the leveling out of total closed cases.

Rehabilitated Closures / Total Cases

**Rehabilitation Closures
(percentage over 3 years)**

FFY' 2018		FFY' 2019		FFY' 2020	
28.94%		28.17%		25.46%	
Rehabilitated	Total Cases	Rehabilitated	Total Cases	Rehabilitated	Total Cases
3,422	11,826	3,163	11,227	2,170	8,522



2020 Minority Closures/Rehabilitation Closures - Minority Identification

There were 10,088** closed cases in FFY'20. DVRS served all these individuals and closed their cases for other reasons or were successful rehabilitations.

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

The tables below summarize FFY 2020 outcomes by total cases and identifier group.

FFY 2020 Total Closures vs. Rehabilitation Closures, Percentage by Identifier Group					
Identifier	# Closed Other	% by Identifier Closed Other	# Closed Rehab	% by Identifier Closed Rehab	# Total Closed
White	3,693	70.8%	1,526	29.2%	5,219
Black/American	2,309	80.9%	544	19.1%	2,853
Hispanic/Latino	1,071	75.6%	345	24.4%	1,416
Asian	205	74.8%	69	25.2%	274
American Indian/Alaskan Native	181	77.0%	54	23.0%	235
Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiian	33	78.6%	9	21.4%	42
Does Not Wish to Self-Identify	42	85.7%	7	14.3%	49
TOTAL	7,534	74.7%	2,554	25.3%	10,088

Rebekah was referred to DVRS by Mainland Regional High School for transitional services, for assistance with gaining employment after graduation.

Rebekah had worked at the Snack Attack Program at her school, where she stocked shelves, sold snacks, and assisted with purchasing snacks at BJ's. She enjoyed the job and liked interacting with students. She was open to learning new job skills.

Rebekah and her Counselor jointly identified working in the food service field as an employment goal. To support her search, Rebekah worked with JEVS Hireability. She met with her job coach on a regular basis, learned how to complete online applications, strengthened her interviewing skills, and followed up with potential employers. Rebekah was hired at Texas Roadhouse in Egg Harbor Township in February of 2020. Although her start date was pushed back due to COVID -19, while disappointed, Rebekah remained positive and patiently waited for the restaurant to re-open. Finally, she was contacted by the employer that outside dining was permitted in NJ and she started work in July 2020. Rebekah continues working at Texas Roadhouse and is doing wonderfully.

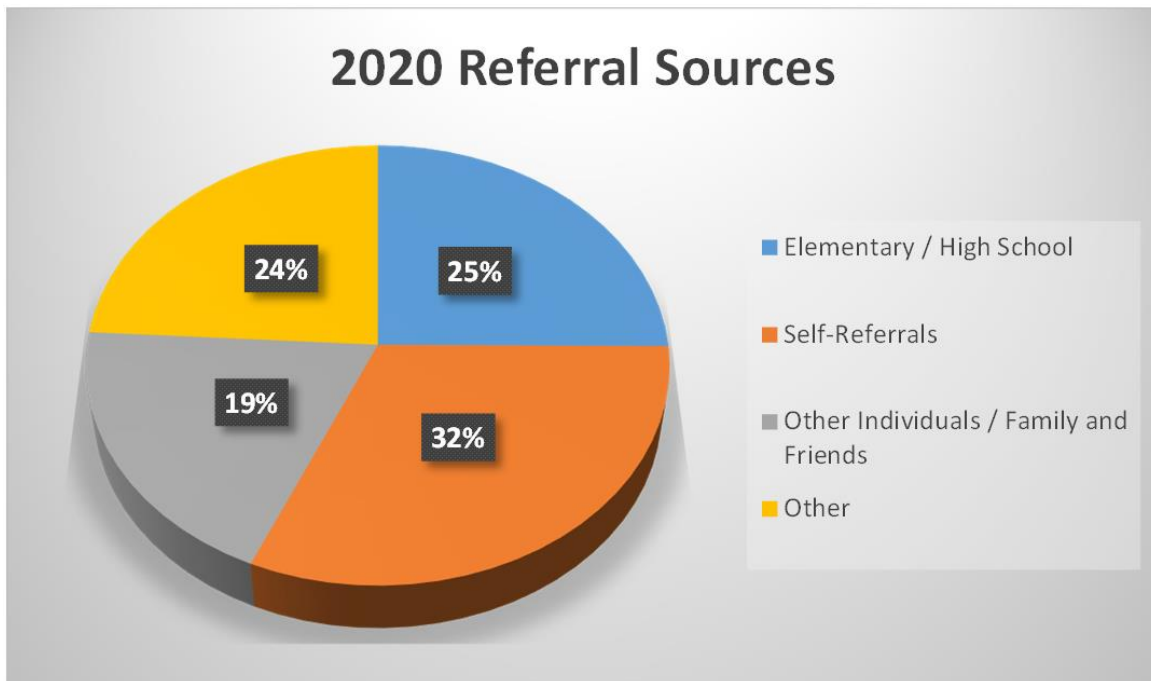
Her employer appreciates her work ethic and scheduling flexibility, especially given the pandemic-related delay.

Referral Sources

The DVRS received a total of 9,768 referrals during FFY'20. 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.

Referral Source	# of Referrals	% of Referrals
Elementary / High School	2,451	25%
Self-Referrals	3,071	31%
Other Individuals / Family and Friends	1,894	19%
Other	2,352	24%
TOTAL REFERRALS	9,768	100%



Referrals by Region

NORTHERN REGION

Office	Caseloads	Referrals
Paterson	19	412
Randolph	14	273
Phillipsburg	10	297
Hackensack	21	469
Jersey City	22	351
Total	86	1,802

CENTRAL REGION

Office	Caseloads	Referrals
Newark	44	942
New Brunswick	22	891
Elizabeth	21	805
Somerville	12	346
Trenton	20	408
Neptune	20	544
Total	139	3,936

SOUTHERN REGION

Office	Caseloads	Referrals
Toms River	21	947
Camden (Cherry Hill)	25	796
Thorofare (Sewell)	13	563
Westampton	17	664
Pleasantville	16	433
Bridgeton	14	533
Wildwood	7	161
Total	113	4,097

Supported Employment Assists Consumers with Significant Disabilities

The DVRS successfully rehabilitated 640 individuals who received Supported Employment services in FFY'20. The following represent the most significant disabilities:

- Cognitive Impairment
- Psychosocial Impairments

In each of these disability groups the division worked with Community Rehabilitation Programs with specific expertise in the provision of services.

WIOA and DOL/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 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 for services to students with disabilities. Pre-employment transition services are another new requirement in the Act, and DVRS has identified 21 dedicated counselors to take 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 specifically designed for these 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 provided career counseling services to individuals in all of the extended employment facilities funded by DOL, and also provided counseling services to other providers as requested. DVRS needed to re-develop a strategy to provide the

required counseling during the current pandemic. In total, over 3,879 counseling sessions were conducted by DVRS. Due to the pandemic, the majority of counseling sessions conducted over the course of FY 2020 were done in a virtual format. This required an enhanced level of coordination, communication and flexibility on the part of the local DVRS offices and the extended employment providers.

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 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 have the opportunity to 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 17 contracts to vendors to provide Pre-ETS services in all counties. In addition, there are 28 Fee for Service vendors who provide Pre-ETS. 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.

Although DVR desired to provide another year of having paid summer internship experiences, Due to the COVID pandemic the Summer Internships were postponed to 2021. The Notice of Contract opportunity process had been completed and 16 vendors were recommended for approval to deliver the services. A new NCO will go out for the summer of 2021 and those vendors who were already recommended for approval will not need to apply again.

DVRS has dedicated Pre-Employment Transition Counselors in each of the 18 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.

Out of School Youth Employment Services (OYES)

Out of School Youth Employment Services are new youth services that were initiated in FY 2020. OYES recognizes that, when a youth or young adult is both not in school and not employed, a dangerous disconnection can develop. DVRS now offers individualized support to help 16- to 24-year-olds get back on the path to self-sufficiency, the development of job skills and career pathway planning. Topics covered through OYES 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. Being a new program there is currently one vendor who has expressed interest and has been vetted for providing these new services.

Changes with Master's Degree Programs for DVRS

With the passage of recent federal legislation, the US Department of Education's mandatory requirement of a Master's degree standard for the VRC counselor has been lifted. Under the new W.I.O.A legislation DVRS can accept the Bachelor's degree as the minimum education requirement. In 2018, DVRS collaborated with DOL's HR department and the Civil Service Commission to change the education requirements in compliance with this change. These changes meet all the recruitment and promotional needs. The SRC continues to recommend that DVRS maintain its requirement for counselors to have Master's degrees in vocational rehabilitation or a closely related field.

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 rehabilitation specific presentations and webinars. Training was held statewide as part of the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) corrective action plan in which counselors, supervisors and managers were required to attend. There was a total of 184 attendees who were given six opportunities to attend training. During the training those in attendance learned or received a refresher on the role and responsibilities counselors,

supervisors and managers play in DVRS. Also, Supported Employment training was given to all of DVRS professional staff as part of the corrective action plan and CRC credits were offered. Additionally, two of the biggest conferences that DVRS staff attend, NJAPSE and GSETA were cancelled due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Project SEARCH and NJDVRS – Making a Difference in New Jersey

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.

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, to 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 over 500 across 45 states and 10 countries.

Stephen was part of his high school’s transitional living skills program – this allowed him to participate in several structured learning experiences.

These experiences offered him a chance to identify his work interests, strengths, and preferences. He participated in a work experiences at Shore Medical Center, which he really enjoyed. Stephen worked very well with a specific job coach from JEVS HireAbility; with the coach’s help, Stephen was offered a “dream job” opportunity to work in the linen room at Shore Medical Center. He stocks linens, helps to make deliveries, and cleans areas of the hospital. With the support of family, co-workers, JEVS HireAbility and DVRS, Stephen has maintained employment. He is a success because his skills, strengths and abilities match his job and he has become a part of the Shore Medical Center family. Stephen looks forward to going to work, doing his job and enjoys the camaraderie of his co-workers.

Stephen’s work ethic, ever-present smile and positive attitude are an inspiration!

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

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 family, a special education teacher and Rehabilitation Services 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.
- Social Security Administration (SSA).
- NJTIP @ Rutgers – Travel Training.
- Other Partners as recommended by the Steering Committee.

New Jersey Project SEARCH – Overview

There are Ten (10) ongoing Project SEARCH Programs across 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.
- Bergen County Office Building Project SEARCH (**High School Program**) - Hackensack, Bergen County – 2016
- Jefferson Health Project SEARCH (**High School Program**) – Cherry Hill, Camden County - 2016
- 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
- Newton Medical Center Project SEARCH (**Hybrid/Blended Program**) Newton, Sussex County – 2019.
- Monmouth Medical Center Project SEARCH (**Hybrid/Blended Program**) Long Branch, Monmouth County – 2019.
- New Site In Process (North): Embassy Suites by Hilton Parsippany Project SEARCH (**High School Program**) – Scheduled to start Fall, 2021.

Benefits to the Students:

- Gain increased independence, confidence, and self-esteem.
- Obtain work based individualized coaching, instruction and feedbacks.
- 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.*

Business Outreach Team (BOT)

The Business Outreach Team was at the forefront of a Recruitment and Inclusion Fair held on November 20th, 2019 at the Conference Center at Mercer in West Windsor. The event was cohosted by JEVS Hireability.

One hundred and ten job seekers registered for the event via Eventbrite with foot traffic on the recruitment floor of at least one hundred and fifty visitors. Thirty-six different businesses attended along with ten community partners who shared resources relevant to job seekers with disabilities. Eight Federal Government agencies were on site, including The US Secret Service, US Mint, US Census, Department of the Air Force, the National Security Agency and the Social Security Administration.

The Social Security Administration interviewed at least five DVRS consumers while the US Citizenship and Immigration Services collected twenty-one applications. On the feedback sheets collected at the event, employers reported high satisfaction with the job seeker turnout.

Breakout sessions, with content provided by Dress for Success and the Trenton Veterans Center, were well attended. The venue was an excellent choice for a job fair, due to its central location and plentiful free parking.

Several high schools transported their students to this event and student applications for DVRS services were accepted on site. The Mercer County DVRS office received over fifty-one queries prior to the event, opened five cases at the event and acquired three new referrals with five referrals coming in for other counties. As a pilot event, it exceeded the goals and expectations of the planning committee. Overall, it was a success for NJDVRS and we spread the name of DVRS further into the Central Jersey area.

The BOT participated in a Disability Inclusion Forum as part of the Morris Sussex Warren Workforce Development Board's Disability Committee. The Forum took place in Morristown at headquarters of Porzio Bromberg. We featured a panel discussion with a lawyer from Porzio Bromberg discussing legal issues surrounding working with the disabled, an HR Representative from Unilever, Editor of NJ Monthly magazine, a disabled employee at NJ Magazine, and a demonstration of Assistive Technology devices.

BOT also participated in Disability Mentoring Day Event at the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey. Informed the field of the event and reviewed resumes before submitting them to PA representatives. Since development of the Business Outreach Team, this was the 3rd year DVR was able to submit resumes. Event was held at PATH Headquarters on October 31, 2019. Selected mentees heard from PANYNJ executives who discussed the numerous employment opportunities, including paid Internships. The BOT held numerous targeted hiring events with

Fedcap/Enable in an effort to staff Amazon's Sortation Centers in Avenel and Teterboro. Clients were hired by Amazon from Bergen, Essex, Union, Passaic, and Middlesex Counties.

Employer Engagement

Connections have been made with the following businesses and various services have been offered or provided to each of them:

Sonic, Blinds To Go, Zenas Shoes, Hennes & Mauritz, Geodis, Sodexo, CVS, Unilever, Century 21 Clothiers, Premiere Response, Port Authority of NY & NJ, Center for Airport Opportunity, UPS, SUEZ, Hartz Mountain, Amazon.

This list provides a sampling of employers contacted statewide representing a number of different business sectors. Members of the BOT have been very helpful to DVRS local offices by assisting with making needed connections to facilitate employment for individuals serviced by NJDVRS local offices.

BOT members have been attending Workforce Development Board and Disability Committee meetings throughout the state. BOT members are active in planning and facilitating disability related events.

BOT members have begun to assist counselors by offering job assistance to Job Ready clients with clear cut vocational goals. Upon referral, resumes are reviewed and edited, if needed. Clients have been responding very positively to this individualized service. AWARE case notes are made by the BOT as progress towards employment.

The BOT is continually updating field offices with current job openings, Labor Market Information, and resources to assist with employment initiatives. Access to AOSOS allows DVR to provide the most current and up to date job information to its consumers.

BOT members have taken an active role in the Project Search program. They have been added to Steering Committees.

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 grant 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.

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- 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 with 5 services in the areas of job exploration, post-secondary guidance and counseling, self-advocacy training, work readiness skills, and work-based learning experiences.

All of these services are provided statewide. Each RCC covers 7 counties.

- Career Pathway Connections (operated by Easterseals NJ (Northern New Jersey)
- Career Development Center (operated by Alternatives Inc. Bridges to Employment (Central New Jersey)
- Career Pathway Connections (operated by Easterseals NJ (Southern New Jersey)

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).

Significant Issues

Appointments

THE DVRS and the SRC continue to work with the Governor's Appointment office to provide all the paperwork necessary so appointments can be made on a timely basis to ensure compliance with the WIOA requirements for appointments. There has been additional outreach being conducted to fill vacancies for vocational rehabilitation counselors. This has included reaching out to a wide array of graduate programs throughout the state as a means to recruit potential employment candidates.

Impact of COVID-19

Over the past several years there have been changes in technology that have made a significant impact on the provision of vocational rehabilitation services. As a result of the current pandemic, there have been opportunities to embrace technology in new and increased ways. DVRS offices had been closed to the public since March of 2020 and as a result needed virtual platforms as a means to connect with consumers, providers and employers. DVRS recognized the need to develop a structure to evaluate, assess and fill gaps as they became identified during the COVID pandemic.

Significant Issues have included:

- Moving DVRS staff to a virtual base
- Ensuring health & safety protocols for staff and consumers while continuing services
- Identifying measures to increase referrals to local DVRS offices

Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA)

This year NJDVRS completed information gathering for the CSNA. A report detailing information gathered and results was completed January 2020.

Data gathering activities this year included the following activities:

Key Informant Interviews:

- Division of Deaf and Hard of Hearing 10/7/19
- Disability Rights NJ 10/8/19
- Rutgers Center for Adults with Autism 10/16/19
- Mental Health and Addiction Services 10/23/19
- Employment Work Group of Developmental Disabilities Advocacy Network (DDAN)11/18
- NJ Council of Developmental Disabilities 11/21/19
- NJTIP @ Rutgers 10/14/19

Informal Consumer Focus Group:

- NJ DMHAS 10/14/2019

Results summary

The most common themes that emerged concerning barriers to employment for Individuals with disabilities were:

- Transportation;
- Fear of losing benefits and;
- Employers unwilling to hire Individuals with Disabilities who need significant support.
- Individuals with Disabilities are limited to employment opportunities in the five most common occupations: Food service, janitorial maintenance, retail, personal care services. These occupations also correspond to the most common vocational goals for client/consumers' Individual Plans for Employment (IPE). These occupations do not completely reflect New Jersey's key industry clusters.
- Employer perceptions about skill, ability and value of Individuals with Disabilities in the workplace impacting a persons' career path and wage.

Most frequently named barriers to services included the following:

- Geographic access given limited transportation options.
- Interview participants added to this that low expectations, overwhelming bureaucracy (timeframe for services, paperwork) and limited options and availability of services such as skills training (for Individuals with complex support needs-Individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities and Autism Spectrum Disorder, mental health/illness, dually diagnosed- addiction support needs) are major concerns.
- The NJ DVRS service delivery practices such as inconsistent communications about process, policies, services differ in accuracy, and subjectivity about consumers at NJ DVRS offices confused families about the NJ DVRS agency and process and might be considered discriminatory to consumers.

Other issues included a lack of information about, and means to access the NJ DVRS through:

- Website is seen as not user-friendly, lacking information and transparency about service providers and specialists in specific services for disabilities; sufficient details are not provided on the website.
- General and targeted public relations and marketing campaigns are needed to reach disability groups and minority groups (specifically in counties with large representations of specific minority groups).
- Socio-economic data regarding the number of Individuals who receive social security benefits, NJ residents living at or close to the poverty level, and the NJ DVRS consumer limits for individuals' available income to expend travel funds (e.g., to travel to DVRS office to meet with counselors, employment activities, pay for child care).

Conclusion

Key Informants, survey respondents and consumer focus group participants confirmed that the services, methods, and access to services provided by the New Jersey Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (NJ DVRS) are broad and varied. Individuals with Disabilities age fourteen and over are served by the NJ DVRS in an effort to assist all consumers with achieving their employment goals.

Despite the wide net cast by the NJ DVRS, the needs of some populations of clients/consumers appear to be unserved. Unserved populations may include the specific individuals within minority populations with disabilities, specific individuals within the Deaf and Hard of Hearing population, at-risk youth between ages 14-21 who are homeless, and remanded to the Juvenile Justice Commission or correctional facilities, and/or youth in the foster care system, as well as those not enrolled in secondary schools.

A wider range of client/consumer populations does receive the services yet could benefit more from them. Underserved populations identified by key informants and survey respondents include Individuals with Hearing Disabilities, transition-age youth age 14 to 21 with Section 504 educational plans, non-English speakers, Individual with mental health disabilities, mental illness, addictions and Individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder who require significant ongoing supports, and individuals who live in rural areas in New Jersey where the New Jersey Transit public transportation system is not available.

Key informants also identified perceived gaps in the NJ DVRS and provided suggestions about ways to resolve them. Frequently cited Informational gaps included:

- Lack of knowledge about the NJ DVRS, gaps in NJ DVRS staff knowledge of particular disabilities, such as Deafness and/or Hard of Hearing, Autism Spectrum Disorder, and Serious Mental Illness.
- Poor communication between the NJ DVRS staff and client/consumers with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities and Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder
- Slow process between referral and service delivery
- Lack of coordination and communication among the NJ DVRS staff and supported employment providers.

Suggested solutions included the following:

- Increased visibility of the NJ DVRS with a stronger marketing and public relations campaign strategy to a variety of populations;

- Training for the NJ DVRS staff and community rehabilitation programs and supported employment provider staff members;
- Simplify methods of promoting better coordination, collaborations, and communications between the NJ DVRS, providers, referral sources, treating professionals and agencies.

Supported employment was described as an essential service for several client/consumer populations served by the NJ DVRS. This includes although not limited to Individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, Individuals on the Autism Spectrum, Individuals with Mental Health Disabilities, serious mental illness, and Individuals who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing. Key informants and consumer focus group participants stressed the importance of expanding access and quality of supported employment services, community-based assessments, internship opportunities and providing better training for employment specialists and job coaches.

The workforce investment system is a crucial partner for the NJ DVRS. Increased collaboration with the NJ DVRS is needed to improve the NJ DVRS client/consumer services.

Many workforce investment system limitations in relationship with the NJ DVRS were described, including:

- Limited knowledge of their services;
- Inter-department training to clarify services and available employment opportunities for Individuals with Disabilities;
- Sharing referral information, increase co-enrollment.

Any or all of the above could improve communication and enhance collaborations between agencies.

There were varied opinions on both the quality of community rehabilitation program and supported employment providers. There may be a need for additional supported employment providers in some geographic areas of New Jersey to serve unserved and underserved populations such as Individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, Individuals on the Autism Spectrum as well as with mental health, mental illness, addiction and Hearing disabilities.

While many existing community rehabilitation programs and supported employment providers provide excellent employment services, others produce lower quality results, and require additional training. Key Informants and consumer focus group participants also noted a need for cultural competence training for community rehabilitation programs and supported employment providers, and the NJ DVRS agency staff.

The WIOA 2014 mandate to provide Pre-Employment Transition Services to youth with disabilities age 14 to 21 is a relatively new area that the NJ DVRS continues to cultivate through

additions of service providers and program development. Summer internships, and Project SEARCH offer youth with disabilities an opportunity to experience the workplace and develop skills in supportive environments.

Both survey respondents and key Informants agreed that NJ DVRS needs to continue to improve the methods it uses to publicize transition services to families, guardians and advocates of students and youth with disabilities age 14 to 21, to expand awareness, service utilization, and add transition service providers.

Key informants and the NJ DVRS survey respondents also identified a need to improve communication with secondary school personnel and provide training about the NJ DVRS' transition services and guidelines. Furthermore, they noted the importance of outreach and memoranda of understandings with agencies to provide services to at-risk youth who are not enrolled in secondary schools.

Finally, survey respondents, key informants, and consumer focus group participants related several positive observations about the NJ DVRS, its employees, and progress over the years. They described employees as dedicated, caring, creative, and responsive to ideas that would enhance client/consumers' welfare to help them reach their employment goals.

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:

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

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 collaborated 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 Grants 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 Alliance Center for Independent Living Audit – MOCEANS Center for Independent Living Audit – Center for Independent Living of South Jersey is scheduled for audit in November 2020.
- 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)

Planned Activities for FY 2021

Meetings

- Continue quarterly Council meetings with an annual planning summit as a one-day event;
- Conduct public forums in geographically diverse areas to obtain input regarding specific topics identified by the SRC;
- 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; and.
- Keep abreast of the goals in the New Jersey combined state plan and support the outcomes identified in the new comprehensive statewide needs assessment.

Committees

- Enhance and support the sub-committee structure;
- Enhance and support the recommendations of the sub-committees by full disclosure of sub-committee recommendations in advance of meetings where possible and follow-up by the full SRC;
- Review and enhance consumer satisfaction and evaluation activities, strengthen analysis to ensure the DVRS is meeting the changing needs of its consumers. Utilize SurveyMonkey for electronic delivery of consumer survey, to gather responses and improve analysis and utilization of satisfaction feedback;
- Collaborate with DVRS staff in updating the Client Handbook and explore dissemination strategies; and
- Assist DVRS staff in completing the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment.

SRC Membership

- Develop screening guidelines for recruitment and membership and review membership activities/status at each Executive Committee meeting, including resignations/expiration of appointments;
- Provide guidance re: issues relating to recruitment and approval of members;
- Disseminate SRC member Handbooks to all members; and
- Conduct new SRC member orientation/training, including consideration of joint efforts with the CBVI.

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, including legislative district break down; and send the information to New Jersey representatives.

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;
- 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.

Communication

- Continue to look at opportunities and encourage the use of technology including, but not limited to conference calling, long distance learning, and/or a dedicated web site for purposes of information sharing, receiving input, training of members (including staff), emergency and routine notifications;
- Continue use of Zoom, WebEx, and other videoconferencing technology to enhance access for SRC Members and members of the public to engage in SRC public activities, such as meetings and forums.

Summary

During FFY'20, the Rehabilitation Council continued to work cohesively and productively, partially as a result of renewed emphasis on the tools at hand, utilizing an updated committee structure, staff and member dedication and focus on staffing to achieve maximum employment outcomes. Members worked closely with each other, the DVRS, 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.

The Rehabilitation Council has benefited from the support and cooperation of the New Jersey Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services. The Council looks forward to another year of challenges and successful outcomes for persons with disabilities who seek employment and other services through the New Jersey DVRS.

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