

**VIRGINIA STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL FOR THE BLIND AND VISION IMPAIRED
Quarterly Meeting**

Final Minutes
December 11, 2023
397 Azalea Avenue, Richmond, VA 23227

SRC Members in Attendance

Milford Stern, Roanoke, Representative of Business, Industry, and Labor
Heidi Lawyer, Henrico, Representative of Parent Training & Information Center (PEATC)
Rachael Rounds, Midlothian, Representative of Community Rehabilitation Services Program
Leelynn Untalan Brady, Suffolk, Representative of Statewide Independent Living Council
Beth Sellers, Harrisonburg, Parent/Guardian of a Person with a Disability
Rebecca Ceja, Richmond, Representative of the Virginia Department of Education
Christine Appert, Charlottesville, Current/Former Recipient of Rehabilitation Services

SRC Members Not Able to Attend

Mark Roane, Richmond, Applicant or Recipient of Rehabilitation Services

DBVI Staff Present

Rick Mitchell, Commissioner, DBVI, Ex-Officio Member
Megan Hall, Director of Vocational Rehabilitation and Workforce Services
Ashley West, Executive Assistant to Deputy Commissioners – Recorder of Minutes
Justin Sheets, Assistant Director of Vocational Rehabilitation and Workforce Services

DARS Staff Present

Elizabeth Patacca, Administrative Staff Assistant for Policy and Legislative Affairs
Lori Epik, Counselor

ASL Interpreters

Elizabeth Leitch
Bernice McCormack

Call to Order / Welcome and Introductions

Due to Chair of board's term expiring, Ms. Megan Hall, called the meeting to order. A roundtable of introductions took place. Quorum was met.

Adoption of Agenda

Ms. Lawyer moved to adopt the proposed agenda; Mr. Stern seconded the motion, and the motion was passed unanimously.

Adoption of September 8, 2023, Meeting Minutes

Mr. Stern moved to adopt the September 8, 2023, SRC Quarterly Meeting minutes as amended, Ms.

Lawyer seconded the motion and the motion passed unanimously.

New Member Introductions

Due to new SRC appointments, new members introduced themselves and identified what seat they were filling on the board.

Election of Officers

An election of officers was held during this meeting due to the Chair and Vice Chair of the SRC being vacant. Ms. Hall explained to the members that those who have served more than one year on the board are eligible to be considered and gave a brief explanation of the Chair and Vice Chairs role in the SRC. Mr. Stern put fourth his name for chair. Ms. Appert moved to elect Mr. Stern as Chair and Ms. Lawyer seconded the election and the motion was passed unanimously. Ms. Rounds put fourth her name for Vice Chair. Ms. Lawyer moved to elect Ms. Rounds Vice Chair and Ms. Appert seconded the election and the motion was passed unanimously.

Commissioner's Report – Commissioner Rick Mitchell

Commissioner Mitchell reported that Dante' Quintin Allen has been appointed as the new Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) Commissioner.

Currently, the Library & Resource Center (LRC) is in the early process of renovations, and it is anticipated that construction will start in the late summer of 2024. All staff for the LRC have been relocated and are still able to continue to provide books from the library.

The Vocational Rehabilitation budget is in good shape. October 1, 2022, funds started being spent in the spring of 2023. It is anticipated a carryover will occur into late spring of 2024.

Requests for the Governor's budget have been put forth. Currently, we do not know when we will hear anything, but should be updated on December 20, 2023. *For the next SRC meeting we will be able to report on what got passed and may know what the Governor has put in his budget.*

Deputy Commissioner's Report and VR Program Report – Megan Hall

Written report provided VR Report. Additional comments are as follows:

DBVI Headquarters and the Bristol Regional offices are fully staffed. There are a few positions that are having recruiting challenges such as Orientation and Mobility instructor specialists across the state as well as Rehabilitation and Access Technology positions at the Virginia Rehabilitation Center for the Blind and Vision Impaired (VRCBVI) and the Norfolk Regional Office. DBVI has hired a new Vocational Specialist, Mr. Isaac Crisp. Mr. Crisp worked as a counselor in the Richmond Regional Office and has been with DBVI for 10 years. Currently, a major part of Mr. Crisp's position is working vacant caseloads. Currently, there are two counselor vacancies, one in Norfolk and the other in Richmond. These interviews will take place in January 2024 with seven candidates, as these will be a combined interview for both the Norfolk and Richmond Regional Offices. Ms. Rebecca Keller has been hired as a Pre-ETS Specialist at DBVI headquarters. Currently, Ms. Keller is the lead Orientation & Mobility instructor at VRCBVI and will be covering both positions until a replacement can be hired.

Careers in Action took place at the Double Tree Hotel in Williamsburg, VA on October 13-15, 2023. There was a total of 98 people, with both students and parents/family members taking part in this event. Students took a tour of different hotel departments and were able to do hands on work such as make salads in the kitchen and work with maintenance to fix a flap in a new toilet. The Double Tree

was very supportive in this event and brought three executives out for a question-and-answer session during the event. The students and parents were also able to go to Busch Gardens and get a behind the scenes experience of the type of jobs that are available at the theme parks. Students were able to ask questions such as what a typical day looks like and how they got into that job. Debrief sessions were held throughout the day to allow students to share the information they gathered with their peers and DBVI staff members.

Earlier this month Megan Hall, Tish Harris, And Dan Aunspach, as well as two students, traveled to Phoenix, AZ to take part in the NICE Cybersecurity Education Conference. Students were able to answer questions about the programs they have gone through and how they have shaped their career path. One student is currently attending a college in Boston for architecture, and the other student wants to declare his major in cyber security. The head of Palo Alto global training programs and Dr. Cynthia Sutherland (former Whitehouse CIO), attended this presentation as well.

Old and New Business Hearing Officer Report –

Ms. Elizabeth Patacca from the Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS) introduced herself and gave a report on hearing officers and their roles. Ms. Patacca reported that a new hearing officer was contracted on October 1, 2023, and there are now three hearing officers on contract. Training has been conducted for the new hearing officer, and updated training took place for those who are already on contract. DBVI did not have any hearings for the year.

Annual Report

This year, Mr. Justin Sheets helped work on the annual report, due to the SRC only consisting of four appointed members. Mr. Sheets worked to incorporate writeups from each area of the agency, as well various success stories into this report. It was asked if any members had any comments, feedback or changes they would like to see in this report to please let Mr. Sheets and Ms. Hall know. It was suggested by Ms. Appert that this report be assembled by July of next year, so the board can take more time to review and put together in the event that changes need to be made, as well as have more opportunity to put more items in there as things come to be as accurate as possible. Mr. Stern motioned to adopt the annual report with the understanding that it will be reviewed again for grammatical and spelling issues. Ms. Lawyer seconded the motion and the motion passed unanimously.

2024 Combined State Plan Goals

Mr. Justin Sheets presented the SRC members with a PowerPoint about the Combined State Plan as well as outlined the 2024 Combined State Plan Goals. Each goal was looked at individually, and how that specific goal came to be recommended to be put in the Combined State Plan. Ms. Lawyer motioned to adopt the Combined State Plan Goals, Ms. Sellers seconded the motion and the motion passed unanimously.

2024 SRC Meeting Dates

It was suggested that the SRC meeting dates be moved up a month from the current meeting schedule due to conflicts with the Virginia Board for Workforce Development full board meetings. Ms. Hall suggested the meeting months be moved to February, May, August, and November. The proposed 2024 SRC meeting dates are: February 9th, May 17th, August 9th, and November 8th. Mr. Stern motioned to adopt the 2024 SRC meeting dates, Ms. Appert seconded the motion and the motion passed unanimously.

Seat Name Introductions

Christine Appert – Current/Former Recipient of Rehabilitation Services

Leelynn Brady - Virginia Statewide Independent Living Council

Rebecca Ceja – Department of Education

Heidi Lawyer – PEATC

Rachel Rounds – VCU, Community Rehabilitation Program

Jennifer Sellers - Parent/Guardian of a Person with a Disability

Milford Stern - Business/Labor/Industry

Adjourn

Ms. Lawyer moved to end the meeting. Ms. Brady seconded the motion. All were in favor.

Next SRC Quarterly Meeting

February 9, 2024

STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL

2023 ANNUAL REPORT ON VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SERVICES

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State Rehabilitation Council Chair
Alexa Bowe

Commissioner
Richard L. Mitchell

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Message from the State Rehabilitation Council Chair (should receive on Tuesday, December 5, 2023)

Message from the DBVI Commissioner



Annually, the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) for the Blind compiles and submits a report on the Vocational Rehabilitation Program of the Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired (DBVI). As you read this report, you will realize that this document tells the story of numerous Virginians who have significant vision disabilities and the DBVI program that supports them. This report describes their challenges, accomplishments and opinions of the services provided by DBVI. This annual report also outlines the efforts of the team of vocational rehabilitation professionals who are making a significant difference in so many of the lives of the individuals they serve.

Thank you to the Virginia State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) members for taking the lead on the writing of this annual report and the gathering of the success stories. The SRC not only produces an annual assessment of the Vocational Rehabilitation Program of the Virginia Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired (DBVI), but its members partner with DBVI to assure that residents of the Commonwealth who have vision related disabilities are well served. We are grateful to each SRC member for volunteering to serve Virginians who are blind, low vision, and deafblind.

For more than a century of service, the Agency has had many opportunities to showcase its distinguished history and commitment to providing quality services. This annual report will reflect the hard work and creativity displayed through DBVI personnel each day by providing life changing services to consumers of vocational rehabilitation. We admire the flexibility and dedication of the DBVI staff in their efforts to help Virginians with vision disabilities to attain and retain employment and to live their lives independently as contributing members of their communities.

The success of the clientele of the VR Program is a testament to the determination of individuals who are vision impaired to be part of the workforce and the effectiveness of the services they receive. We hope you will benefit from reading the stories of some of the program participants. We celebrate their efforts and successes as well as those of the professionals who serve them.

Thank you for taking the time to read this assessment of Virginia's Vocational Rehabilitation Program for individuals who are blind, deafblind, and otherwise vision disabled. We believe you will be both informed and impressed by their achievements.

Dr. Rick Mitchell, Commissioner, VDBVI

A. P. Marshall

Vocational Rehabilitation Program

The Virginia Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired (DBVI) Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Program provides necessary vocational and rehabilitative services to empower individuals who are blind, deafblind, or vision impaired and want to achieve successful employment, education, and independence. Eligible Virginians receive assistance preparing for, securing, retaining, advancing in, or regaining competitive integrated employment. Field-based services reach individuals in their homes, at their jobs, and in their schools. A plan is developed that considers an individual's unique strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, interests, and informed choice. Teams of VR experts assist consumers in reaching gainful employment in accordance with their abilities; loss of vision; vocational and adjustment counseling; post-secondary school or vocational training; eye surgery and/or eye treatment; adaptive equipment for training and/or employment; rehabilitation engineering services to modify training and/or job sites; and customized and supported employment services. Major emphasis is given to the provision of job placement and follow-up services. A core goal of the VR Program is to help individuals with vision loss to successfully work in the community.

State Plan Goals

DBVI, with assistance from the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC), developed six goals and priorities for the VR and Supported Employment Programs for this state plan cycle. The six goals are listed below:

1. Expanding and enhancing workforce development activities to develop and maintain effective working relationships with Virginia business and industry at the local, regional, and state level to develop partnerships that facilitate industry-recognized credential attainment, skill development, and entry into career pathways for eligible individuals who are blind, vision impaired, or deafblind leading to competitive integrated employment.
2. Increasing and improving competitive integrated employment outcomes, with wages above the state average, for all blind, vision impaired, or deafblind individuals receiving services from DBVI.

3. Achieving agency annual performance goals and establishing baselines for the performance accountability measures based on primary indicators of performance in section 116(b)(2)(A) of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014.
4. Providing rehabilitation technology to blind, vision impaired, or deafblind individuals, including youth and students, to facilitate their success in training and competitive integrated employment settings.
5. Expanding transition services for youth and students seeking employment and/or post-secondary training; including pre-employment transition services for secondary school students.
6. Expanding the utilization of Supported Employment services for adults and youth to increase competitive integrated employment outcomes for individuals with the most significant disabilities.

Business Relations Unit

The DBVI Business Relations Team had another stellar year as they continue to cultivate new relationships with business, state, and federal partners on the state and national levels. The Business Relations Team continues to represent DBVI in many different arenas including attending conferences and events with government, industry, rehabilitation, education, and workforce partners. The Director of Business and Corporate Initiatives and the Business Relations Specialists continue to collaborate with the “Virginia Career Works” system, the Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services, and serve on multiple Business Services Teams across the state, while also attending workforce board meetings.

“DBVI Career Connections” has entered its fourth year and continues to have a statewide impact. The virtual platform continues to connect federal partners, business leaders, and workforce partners with professional career seekers. The sessions have hosted private career fairs with private industry and non-profit employers and continue to provide information sessions surrounding career pathways such as registered apprenticeship, Virginia State Alternative Hiring and DBVI services for individuals that included on-the-job training (OJT) and paid or unpaid work-based learning.

“Steer Your Career” will be concluding its third year. The high energy, fast paced career-ready workshop is for individuals moving towards work-based learning or direct employment. Virtual sessions continue to be provided over six consecutive weeks and offer an array of topics that allow career seekers the ability to actively participate. Individuals from across the state are gaining the necessary skills to enter into competitive integrated employment matching their career goal. The DBVI Business Relations Team continues to partner with leaders within the workforce community to provide a solid, yet engaging curriculum. The last series of the year began in November. Class size has increased this year, with the largest being 16 participants.

“Coffee and Collaborations” entered its third year and continues to bring VRCs, Regional Managers, Business Relations, and the Transition Teams together to staff cases and provide business and Pre-ETS updates. This has been an excellent platform for vocational rehabilitation counselors new to the agency, to come and learn from seasoned counselors and members of the business and transition team.

The Business Relations Team continues to be a valued partner with the many Pre-ETS programs that have happened across the state this past year. The team worked closely with the team during various events and spoke on the importance of building a resume, work-based learning and knowing yourself as a future career seeker. They worked closely with VRCBVI Staff and assisted counselors by helping to prepare and enroll students into the work-based learning component of the LIFE (Learning Independence Feeling Empowered program).

The Federal Job Club remains a weekly event for the Northern Va. Business Relations Specialist. DBVI continues to co-host the platform along with DARS (Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services and invites federal recruiters to meet with career seekers on a weekly basis. DBVI continues to collaborate with G3 Global Career Coaching for those seeking federal employment, by learning to navigate the federal hiring process. Career seekers continue to enter into high-level, life-changing positions within the federal government through these two programs.

The DBVI Business Team continues to be a sought-out trainer for “Windmills, Disability Awareness and Etiquette training”. The certified team this year alone has provided training to federal agencies, federal contractors, and non-profits with class sizes of up to 300 nationwide participants.

The Director of Business and Corporate Initiatives continues to maintain a close working relationship with the CSAVR (Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation) and serves as the National Employment Teams point-of-contact (POC) for Virginia as well as the POC for the States within Region Three. CSAVR continues to rely on the DBVI Business Relations Team and the Rehabilitation Technology Team to assist corporate level companies with testing for accessibility. This has led to strong relationships being built and multiple individuals moving into employment. In the Fall, members of the team attended the NET Summit (National Employment Team), where the Program Director was recognized for her work within Va and Region Three. The team also facilitated 6 roundtable discussions (more than any state agency) and provided feedback to the 170 participants.

The DBVI Paid Work-Based Learning program continues to gain momentum and shows no sign of slowing down. It has laid the foundation for many individuals to enter not just a job, but a career. The team is on track to reach 175 paid experiences by the close of this year! Adults, current college students, college graduates, and now those under 18 years of age have been able to take advantage of this program as a means of taking the next step to a successful future. This program has been recognized nationally as the team continues to mentor other states on the process. The Program Director is promoting this as a best practice for our employment services organizations to begin to promote this tool as a means to help those individuals who may need a little more support on the job to move into meaningful employment.

The DBVI Business Relations team and executive leadership welcomed executives from CVS/Aetna to campus to begin conversations about a partnership that would be equally beneficial for both entities as well our career seekers. Aetna has a commitment to assist those with barriers to employment and is very proud of the work DBVI is doing and would like to become a valued partner.

The Capital Area Business Relations Specialist and Community Advisory Council Member for Virginia Ability, is working closely with the council and the Virginia Board for People with Disabilities (VBPD) to embark on a public awareness campaign to change employers' perceptions and show the value people with disabilities bring to the workforce. Billboards were located in the following areas: Richmond, Williamsburg/Newport News, Hampton Roads Tunnel, Falmouth, Garrisonville, Manassas, 1-81 Harrisonburg and Timberville, and 1-81 Raphine. Statewide Billboard Campaign Aims to Educate Employers about Hiring People with Disabilities - The Virginian Review. In addition, WTVR-6 highlighted Commonwealth Senior Living and their efforts to hire people with disabilities.

The Norfolk and Hampton Roads area experienced tremendous growth this year with the assistance of a part-time business relations specialist. She was able to provide "boots on the ground" assistance to staff as career seekers moved into paid work-based learning and direct employment. She grew the relationship with the community college system, workforce partners and the many Ability One Contractors in the area including cultivating business relationships with VIB (Virginia Industries for the Blind) leadership.

The Business Relations Team continues to "move at the speed of business," and if 2023 is any indication, 2024 will be filled with new initiatives, partnerships, and individuals moving into life changing opportunities. The agency has expanded the team by hiring a full-time business relations specialist in Roanoke and recruiting for a full-time business relations specialist in Norfolk. With those hires, the team will be complete and every individual, regardless of where they live will have a champion for employment in their corner!

DBVI Success Story

Richie Padilla

Let me start with: Richie has always been a shy kid that would keep to himself with very few friends. He struggled a lot with his visual impairment and felt different from others. We received some information about the DBVI program from his school vision therapist but didn't think much of it because sometimes they throw a lot of information at you, that you don't know where to begin.

Richie had mentioned to me one night after school that his vision therapist was talking to him about doing some programs with the DBVI but he wasn't too comfortable with it because he didn't know what to expect. I checked out my email and decided to give a call to one of the staff members on the email that I received about an upcoming event called "Careers in Action". The person I spoke with was very informative about all the details and made it very easy to sign up and get things started.



As it got closer to the weekend of the event, Richie was a little nervous and unsure if he wanted to go, but I had to give him a little push and told him we are going to try this and see how it goes. When we arrived for the event, he was very shy and wanted to stay with me at the table. It wasn't long after arriving that the mentors and DVBI staff were interacting with Richie and trying to get him out of his shell. They had the students separate from the parents for some hands-on training and learning to interact with each other. When Richie came back a few hours later he had this huge smile on his face and was excited to tell me what was next on the agenda (scavenger hunt). At that point, I knew I made the right choice to have him come.

Richie had realized that he wasn't so different after all. Richie would always get frustrated with himself for obstacles that have got into his way because of his impairment, but seeing other people like him going through the same obstacles I think was eye opening for him. From that moment on I think it has changed Richie's outlook in such a positive way. He gets so excited for all the events that the DBVI offers. He has attended most all the events since then, even with the travel we couldn't let him miss the opportunity to grow. At this last event Richie was a mentor! Since enrolling with DBVI, Richie has got a job working with the public, which I thought he would never do. He really enjoys having conversations with people now. Richie is now more determined than ever. He is looking to go to college. I would have never expected Richie to make a complete 180 change, but it goes to show the DBVI, students, staff and programs work!

Most importantly, our family would like to thank Tish, she has played a major role in Richie's growth. Her caring, go get it attitude/nothing can hold you back mentality, is exactly what's needed in programs like this, and we look forward to many years of growth to come with the DBVI.

- The Padilla Family

Pre-Employment Transition Services

January 2023 began with New Year, New You: Resiliency which was cohosted by David DeNotaris and Eileen Rivera-Ley along with guest speaker Dr. Rob Gilbert. Dr. Gilbert is a well-known speaker, motivator and sports psychologist who hosts a podcast called Success Hotline. Dr. Gilbert is a fan favorite of the Zoom participants from DBVI for the past two years. On January 10, we had 51 log ins for the program, many of which hosted a group of people, such as the one login from VA School for the Deaf and Blind in Staunton. Many with cameras on reflected families participating together. Great night, great event and we plan to do it again in January of 2024.

Android Answers followed in March of 2023. Last program year, DBVI hosted an Apple Productivity program so this year we followed up with Android! Android Answers began in February and ended in late March. Android Answers was a virtual program with 17 individuals participating, two of whom were paid student mentors, as well as VRCBVI staff and a TVI who joined the program to update their android skills. The program was led by David DeNotaris and Eileen Rivera-Ley, executive coaches, and by JJ Meddaugh, who is the owner of AT Guys Technology, and a blind Android expert! Participants learned to use Talk Back and Google Assistant, cell phone etiquette, planning and personal organization using Google calendar, using a blue tooth keyboard, time management using clock and alarm apps, building a personal network, and following up using the Contacts app, business etiquette for emailing and texting, and discovering accessibility apps such as Be My Eyes, Google Lookout, BARD and other smart home technology. Attendees also did informational interviews with blind professionals to learn how they use their technology in their business and professional lives, as well as personally. Surveys provided to attendees gave the program great reviews, with all participants reporting that they accomplished program objectives. A note from one of our student mentors read, "I thought the program went well, especially since everyone attended each week of the program, also, it sounds like everyone really enjoys learning new things about their phone. It really put a smile on my face when people had questions and I was able to help others. Also thank you to DBVI for making this program possible"- Jacob Warner

That's Entertainment began in April 2023 and followed through early May as a virtual program hosted by executive coaches David DeNotaris and Eileen Rivera-Ley, along with award winning country music artist and songwriter JP Williams, who is blind. Students began the program by taking their ONet interest profile, which gave them their areas of interest as a Creator, Organizer or Conventional, Persuader or Enterprising, Social or Helper, Thinker, or Investigator. Throughout the program, students looked at the variety of people needed to create an entertainment product and how their skill set and interests could integrate into the process. Our first evening began with a challenge to name jobs or people that would be needed to produce a music CD, and students came up with over 30 jobs in less than 2 ½ minutes. Students learned about professional networking, time management, advocacy, and resiliency. Informational interviews were held with a variety of blind and low vision entertainment professionals, including Steven McCoy, the first deaf-blind entertainment journalist, Kaleigh Brendle, performer and producer of Sing for Serenity, Scott MacIntyre, American Idol performer, Genny Owens, award winning gospel musician, and JP Williams. Students learned about non-linear careers and were encouraged to dream and enjoy entertainment whether it turned out to be their career choice or not.

This program brought a high level of excitement, with students showing up early every week for class! The student team has been making a concerted effort to reach out to seniors graduating high school and those students turning 14 with letters to families, emails and even text messages. A one-hour virtual information session took place on May 2 to quickly cover program opportunities for the summer and early fall and to encourage students to participate. We were surprised to have 40 individuals logged in to hear the information and were very pleased when students and parents spoke up to encourage others to join the wonderful programs that DBVI is providing, which struck a note with the parents attending.

The energy was high on the Info Session, with questions from both students and parents. Thankfully, we can now direct families to the DBVI website under the Students and Transition section where they can find a Universal Application to fill out, as well as flyers for all programs. The student team continued innovate our processes through the year with our goal of providing the best service possible to our students and their families with one universal application that can be used to apply to all programs instead of duplicative applications and release signatures. We have ironed out the process, which is running smoothly with a tracking sheet and constant updates. Parents have been appreciative of the communication on program acceptances so that they can plan their summers, as well as the variety of programs offered. We will continue to innovate our processes to provide the best possible service to our students and their families.

DBVI partnered with Virginia Commonwealth University Rehabilitation Research and Training Center, to pilot a new peer mentoring program to be offered from April 2023 to March 2024. The Peer Mentoring Project is an initiative that is designed to support blind, vision impaired, and deafblind youth in Virginia to build self-advocacy and career readiness skills through the support of peer mentors. This is a one-year, virtual mentorship program that provides free support for mentees through a total of 6 individual sessions with a peer mentor and 6 group sessions with a cohort of blind, vision impaired, and deafblind youth in Virginia.

DBVI and VCU interviewed and selected 4 mentors between the ages of 23-29, who previously received services from DBVI. Thirteen transition-aged students across Virginia were paired with an older, more experienced mentor who is blind, vision impaired, or deafblind to gain practical and personal support.

Mentees work closely with their peer mentors to identify their career path, prepare for reaching their career goals, and improve their self-determination and self-advocacy skills. Through personal conversations, group discussions, and activities, they explore and prepare for life after high school and the world of work. All of the mentors expressed seeing benefits in the program and stated they wished it was available when they were in high school. The mentees found additional support through the group meetings and connected with their peers outside of the virtual session some students discovered they would be attending the same college and independently scheduled to meet on campus to network and support each other.

The DBVI student team and the Rehabilitation Technology Services Department participated in the Techknowldgy 2023: Empowerment through Inclusive Technology conference hosted by VCU on April 26th and 27th. The audience included individuals who support students with disabilities (PreK-12), teachers, paraprofessionals, related services personnel, assistive technology team members, instructional technology specialists, coaches, administrators, family members, and

more. We shared information regarding agency services and student programs. We displayed samples of the kits the students used during our summer programs and various forms of adaptive equipment they used to complete the programs.

Financial Foundations for Success and Wealth held on May 5, 2023, was a one-hour virtual program hosted by the Student Team with guest speakers from the Bradford Company and the Virginia Credit Union. The 35 Participants on the Zoom heard advice and tips on preparing for employment, documents needed on day 1 of employment and where to obtain them, financial literacy, budgeting, accessible banking, and even saving for retirement and the Rule of 72! Students and parents were very engaged with 35 attendees for the information program. We know this will jump start our students as they prepare for work experiences this summer.

The student team participated in a transition workgroup on May 16-18 through the NTACTION 2023 Capacity Building Institute. This group was represented by Virginia VR (Both DARS and DBVI), the Virginia Department of Education, VCU Center on Transition Innovations, PEATC (Parent Educational Advocacy Training Center), I'm Determined, and Yeti (Youth Engagement Transition Initiative). The workgroup was developed in 2019 with the express goal of identifying and coordinating resources for transition age youth with disabilities. An assessment was completed recently by stakeholders to help direct resources and planning efforts towards addressing the most pressing needs, which appear to be data sharing and increasing awareness of resources available to youth with disabilities. At this time, no formal data-sharing agreements exist, and data is pieced together by each agency or organization to identify gaps in service provision – but this can be difficult to verify against other agencies' data, as there are no common participant IDs.

The group will prioritize the following 3 goals:

- **Roadmap to the Final Destination**
Developing a roadmap for what we envision successful transition services looking like, with the collaborative input of relevant providers there at the table, engaging with youth and families as early on as possible.
- **Data Drives Decisions**
We need to review the data to see what it's telling us so that we can determine where we focus our outreach and attention.
- **Scaling Misinformation Mountain**
Developing a comprehensive resource guide designed to help youth and families understand the resources available to them and the timelines for engaging in services to enhance transition outcomes.

Next up on May 23, the Student Team kicked off summer with a virtual presentation with 12 students called Gaming Your Career presented by the Director of the George Mason University Gaming Institute. The tour highlighted the careers in the gaming industry that most people do not think about, including music, art, sales, business management, and cyber security. The Gaming Industry is now twice as large as both the music and film industry added together. Twelve students logged in to get the information and take the tour.

Leap into Linux was held June 25-30 this summer. We had a limited number of seats due to the renovation of the LRC (Library and Resource Center) making the large classroom unavailable.

This summer, 14 new students and 6 student mentors came together under the direction of Dr. Chuck Gardner of Cyber.org and Dr. Thomas Trevethan of Palo Alto Networks. Students created emails and then hacked them on a safe cyber range. Students learned how easy it is to get hacked, raising their awareness of cyber safety musts. Students also learned about firewalls with state-of-the-art firewalls on loan from Palo Alto Networks and created their own websites. Students had the opportunity to perform informational interviews from multiple IT experts who visited the classroom. The evening activities this year included comedy improv, bowling, tandem bicycling, and the ever-popular super soaker showdown! A new guest to evening activities this year was Antoine Craig, who is on the Team USA blind soccer team. Antoine showed the basics of soccer to our students and motivated them to reach higher! Parents came in on Friday for our Cyber Celebration, along with special guests Kenny McCabe (Dept of Planning and Budget); Lynne Daley, Talent Acquisition Manager for DBVI and DARS; Rob Perrine, Information Security Officer for DBVI and DARS; and Lee Tinsley, Chief Information Officer for DARS.

DBVI participated in a panel discussion and show and tell at the 2023 Virginia DeafBlind Transition Retreat. Several community partners such as DARS, Sportable, VDDHH (Virginia Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing), VCU (Virginia Commonwealth University), and PEATC (Parent Education and Training Center) provided information and resources to middle and high school youth, families, and mentors. There were approximately 6 students and 14 family members in attendance. The scheduled activities encouraged young adults and their families to think and plan for life after high school. Half of the students said they were actively engaged in programs with DBVI. During a discussion with the parents, a family from North Carolina said their agency modeled a program in their state after Careers in Action- Natural Bridge. They said it was a great program and they hope their state models other DBVI student programs.

Summer also began the virtual push for career exploration and training with Cyber Warriors, presented via Zoom by our partners at Intellectual Point. Each class is a half day one Monday through Friday, with breakout rooms for questions and problem solving, and recorded training sessions. All equipment and materials or supplies needed are sent to a student's home in advance, and then the students participate on Zoom for training. Loaner laptops are made available to those students who do not have a robust laptop for these trainings. Topics this summer included (participants): Robotic Arm Bootcamp for Robotics Beginners (14), two 3-D Printing Academies (30), Practical Threat Hunting with Splunk and Data Science (10), Drone Programming and Hacking (13), Advanced Robotics with a Robotic Dog (15) and Robomaster (5). These programs have been confidence builders and a fun way to learn. Rehabilitation Engineer Shawn Corcoran reminds staff that he can tell which students have taken these and other programs because when they are ready for higher education or job credential training, they can use their Assistive Technology at a higher level than most!

Our college immersion program Launching Point at JMU held July 16-23 was a success again this year. We had 21 students, and 6 student mentors participate. We extended the program from 5 days to 7 days and added new activities such as a visit to the Gilliam Entrepreneurship Center, a visit to the Rock and Mineral Museum on campus, adaptive sports, and bus rides all over campus. We also repeated some of the great pieces from the year before, including sessions on advocacy, networking, and resiliency with David DeNotaris and Eileen Rivera-Ley, rock climbing, presentation of key admission and student disability services for students to consider, and a session with I'm Determined key leader Kendall Swartzentruber. Students enjoyed living in the freshman dorms and experiencing the dining hall and shuttle transportation. JMU President Jonathan Alger met our DBVI students and addressed them, encouraging them to

pursue their dreams. On Saturday parents came in for a recognition dinner with students. Parents on Sunday morning had the opportunity to ask questions to DBVI leadership before picking up their students at the Chesapeake dorm. One mother told us, "The Ben we left is a different Ben. It seems like he grew up over the week." She was proud of his confidence and independence. Other parents mirrored the same excitement over the growth of their student.

An additional piece to note from this year is that the Student Team has created and reviewed a balance scorecard to help us identify where we can strengthen services to our students and their families. We have asked for feedback during the year at various programs and are implementing surveys to obtain valuable feedback. An important note is that most of our students in programs this year are new to DBVI. The student team is making a concerted effort to reach out to both 14-year-olds and to those graduating that have not yet connected with DBVI. We were shocked to have at least 6 families of students graduating ask why their schools had never told them about DBVI. Next year, a priority for the student team will be reaching out to school administrators. We will also be working with Kendall Swartzentruber of I'm Determined to provide him with postcards to hand out at his faculty, SpED administrator, and educator seminars through the year.

Careers in Action took place October 13-15th in Williamsburg, VA. Careers in Action brought together 26 students and their families and 6 Student mentors and their families for an inspiring weekend! The career exploration weekend opened with a lunch attended by local legislators Delegate Batten and Senator Monty Mason, along with special guest Dr. Thomas Trevethan of Palo Alto Networks. After lunch, students went on a hands-on tour of five areas set up by the Doubletree General Manager to interactively show career opportunities. Doubletree staff led groups of students through Maintenance, Kitchen, Food and Beverage, Front Desk and Hospitality. Students made salads, learned to approximate ordering needs for food and beverage for large groups, how to check in guests and handle customer complaints, and they even made salads and changed a flapper on a toilet! While students were on the career exploration tour, parents heard from staff from I'm Determined on how to support their students with self-determination and advocacy. At the end of the tour, students and parents joined all DBVI staff in the hotel auditorium for a Question-and-Answer session with the Doubletree General Manager, Shamin Hotel Group Director of Sales, Shamin Hotel group Food and Beverage Director and the Shamin Hotel Group Chief Executive Officer. The hotel representatives answered questions about the variety of careers in the hospitality industry, how to get started and shared their personal journeys. Friday evening ended with dinner and an interactive activity from I'm Determined that included both students and parents.

Saturday was a full day. After breakfast, students left to go into groups to rotate between sessions on Interview Basics, Personal Branding, Networking, and How to Turn your Passion into a Career Path. Parents heard from speakers to answer questions about Social Security, Resources for families, DBVI programs, What Changes at Age 18, ABLE Accounts, Connecting with Business Relations for student internships, job shadows and work experiences, and help with IEPs and 504s. Several parent volunteers also spoke about the journey their families have travelled and gave advice and an offer to network during or even after the event. After lunch, families had free time to explore the resort or area businesses to look at the career opportunities. During dinner, students and student mentors were recognized. One of the great pieces of the weekend took place after the scheduled activities as we saw parents group together to network, and students join in on a pool party or Uno tournaments that they put together!

On Sunday, the day began with breakfast and then moved to a panel discussion with a current and a former Busch Gardens employee, who answered questions provided by a

moderator. Families were surprised at the number of career pathways that can be found at a facility as large as Busch Gardens. Students and families were then charged to go discover for themselves by going to Busch Gardens, observing careers in action, and asking staff what they did and how they got into that line of work. Feedback from students and parents was very positive!

In November, DBVI hosted the IT Credential Fair, which was well attended by DBVI individuals. Guest speakers on the demand and opportunities in the industry included Dr. Thomas Trevethan of Palo Alto Networks and Mr. Prem Jadhvani of Government Acquisitions. Both spoke to the urgent need both in Virginia where tens of thousands of jobs are open, as well as nationally. Following the industry overview, Ishan Jadhvani did an AI demonstration and an overview of this summer's Cyber Warriors programs. Dr. Trevethan invited students to try free Cyber training modules on the Palo Alto Networks website and Mr. Jadhvani described the tiered IT cohort model that Intellectual Point offers. Dr. Audrey Perselay gave an overview of the Blue Ridge Community College programs, and also spoke to the community college tech programs throughout the state, transfer programs and Associates degree programs, as well as credit for prior work experience. Jarad Collins presented on behalf of the American Job Centers, explaining co-enrollment with WIOA (Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act) partners and free resources available to anyone at the American Job Centers, also commonly called one-stop centers. Cindy Roberts, DBVI Director of Business and Corporate Initiatives, presented information to help individuals build or enhance their resume, spoke to job experiences, internships and job shadows and building skills to go to work. Great energy, great door prizes for the 45 students and 65 adults on the Zoom!

Other key takeaways from this year:

- Pre-ETS Coordinator Tish Harris became a certified Windmills trainer to lead sessions on disability with employers
- DBVI Student Team was honored with 2 acceptances to the Inspiration Innovation Expo, one of which offered a live Q&A (only 8 presentations offered live Q&A after, the rest of the presentations were recorded with no live Q&A). This is the second year in a row that the team has been honored to present live Q&A to deliver innovative Pre-ETS solutions
- In June, Pre-ETS Coordinator Tish Harris and VR Director Megan Hall joined Dr. Chuck Gardner of Cyber.org and Dr. Thomas Trevethan of Palo Alto Networks to present at the National Cyber Educators' Initiative in Seattle. VA DBVI was the only VR agency in the country accepted to present. The presentation had great traction, and the group was accepted to present again in December in Phoenix. We are opening doors in the cyber world for individuals with different abilities!
- In his welcome back address in August of 2023, JMU President Jonathan Alger spoke to all at JMU on the importance of Inclusion for their JMU community, and specifically called out the incredible group of students that he had the pleasure to meet and speak with from VA DBVI. President Alger had a photo of himself with the group showing in the background!

WIOA Required Pre-Transition Employment Services

1. job exploration counseling
2. counseling on opportunities for enrollment in comprehensive transition or post-secondary programs at institutions of higher education
3. workplace readiness training
4. work-based learning experiences
5. instruction in self-advocacy

Education Services for Children and Youth

DBVI provides services for children birth through age twenty-two, who are blind, deafblind, or vision impaired. An Education Coordinator provides consultation services to children and young people through one of the six regional offices located in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

The Education Coordinators have collaborated with DBVI's Pre-ETS Services staff and the staff from Virginia Rehabilitation Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired (VRCBVI) to recruit students and staff for multiple virtual and in-person, training opportunities. The training sessions included topics such as Careers in Action, Power Up Your Robotics Virtual STEM Academy, Cyber Warriors Virtual Academies, and other topics relative to the five required Pre-ETS services. Pre-Ets also included Leap into LINUX STEM Academy, the COLLEGE Success Summit at James Madison Univ., IT Credential Fair, Tiered IT Cohort, and the LIFE program at VRCBVI.

Traditionally, each year, DBVI hosts a free residential “Super Summer Camp” at Camp Easterseals in New Castle, Virginia. The camp was held again this year in person with students from across the Commonwealth of Virginia. There was a total of 30 students that attended camp and enjoyed their experiences. The camp experience lasted seven days and included fun-filled activities. The students had the opportunity to participate in camp activities which included kayaking, canoeing, horseback riding, archery, goal ball, swimming, and arts and crafts. In addition, topics related to work readiness skills, independent living skills, social skills, and self-advocacy were incorporated.

The Education Services program collaborated with the Virginia Department of Education, Outreach Services for the Virginia School for the Deaf and Blind, and the Virginia Consortium for Vision Impairment Program at GMU to provide professional development training to Teachers for the Vision Impaired (TVIs) and related professionals and DBVI staff. Topics have included Vision Impairment, the Statewide Assessments and Accommodations, Braille, Assistive Technology, materials from American Printing House for the Blind information, Individualized Education Program discussions and a variety of questions and answer sessions. The statewide meetings were well received by teachers and the meetings provided opportunities to interact as a profession. Some noteworthy events are highlighted below:

- Regional Teachers Meeting – Norfolk Regional Office
 - Meetings were held to inform teachers of the visually impaired about ECC activities in the area that they and their students could participate in, including Dramatically Able, Mighty Monarchs, Super Summer Camp

- This meeting also introduced the TVI's to the Norfolk VR counselors with explanations of the VR role with transition age students.
- Chrysler Museum of Virginia in Norfolk
 - This was an outreach provided to Docents of the museum to discuss how DBVI assists individuals who are blind, visually impaired, or dual sensory impaired.
 - This outreach covered how to describe artwork to individuals who are visually impaired
- LIFE Interviews at the VRCBVI
 - Participated as interviewers for teens who were part of the LIFE program.
- Super Summer Camp
 - Visited the DBVI sponsored Super Summer Camp to learn more about the camp and to show support for the camp program
- Presentation at the International Orientation and Mobility Symposium
 - This was a presentation to over one hundred professionals on how Cerebral Visual Impairment impacts orientation and mobility in children and adults.

Services Provided by DBVI Educational Coordinators

- support parents and professionals who are involved in homeschooling children and students
- provide functional vision assessments for children who do not attend public school
- attend Individualized Education Program (IEP)/Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP)/Special Education Eligibility meetings upon request

DBVI Success Story

A Collaborative Effort

Anthony "Toni" Cali is an individual in the Wytheville area who lost the vast majority of his vision during a routine procedure where he was put under anesthesia. Before this, his vision was fine, no issues, and he was now legally blind. As you can imagine, this came as a huge shock to him and his family. He could no longer work as he had before, get around as he was used to, take care of his or his family needs, and didn't know what to do about it. He was referred to the rehabilitation teaching program first and then came to vocational rehabilitation when he knew he needed more money to support himself and his family. He also wanted to be more productive than just sitting at home. It wasn't easy. Everything he was interested in or had skills with had visual aspects that he could no longer do, and finding work was becoming more and more difficult. He did try working for a family member, but ended up quitting because he couldn't do the work that was needed. He didn't want to be a bother to the family or the employees. With this, his mental health took a bigger hit. His finances were not good, and he couldn't be a provider as he had been before he lost his vision. The VR team decided, with Tony, that he needed a more hands on approach. In his words "I need someone to walk through that door with me", and DBVI did just that. David Bowers, who is the VR assistant, took Tony to

several locations and talked to employers with Tony. Eventually, Tony would go in on his own if he wanted to see if a business was hiring. With the help of the assistant, Tony was able to apply for and gain a position at a local Truck Stops of America. Getting this job, and the extra income, gave Tony the confidence he needed to go to work every day. Tony loves his job and works hard. Anytime the rehab counselor or assistant would go into the store every worker there would know Tony and talk about how great of a worker he is. Tony is successful in his position, and everyone can tell how happy he is. He had done such a great job that he was interested in more responsibilities. This led the VR counselor to get him an electronic magnifier that would allow him to visually complete the work that comes along with more responsibilities in his position. Even after case closure, Tony continues to call the VR counselor to express how happy he is and how much getting this job changed the course of his life. He is very open about his depression, and having the support he needed to walk through an employer's door made all the difference for him.

Along with Vocational Rehabilitation, Tony's receipt of Rehabilitation Teaching and Orientation and Mobility services was another act that moved him toward regaining his confidence. He is now able to use his cane and get around the locations he travels to effectively and as safely as he can. Tony has even travelled back to New York City, where he used to live and was employed as a bus driver. During this trip, he used his cane to navigate the city and show his family around. He was so proud of this accomplishment.

Tony is the definition of a success story and loves to tell anyone who will listen how he got to where he is today.

Regional Offices

DBVI has six regional offices strategically situated throughout the Commonwealth. The Bristol, Fairfax, Norfolk, Richmond, Roanoke, and Staunton locations are staffed by qualified professionals who provide Vocational Rehabilitation, Education, Independent Living, Orientation and Mobility, Low Vision, Rehabilitation Technology, and Deafblind Services. In preparation for the 2023 Annual Report, the Regional Office Managers summarized key program activities and accomplishments in response to the following questions:

1. Describe one or two of your regional office's greatest accomplishments for this year. Why were they outstanding?
2. What innovative activities or practices did you try that had a positive impact on staff or clients?
3. Anything else that you would like to share?

Regional Managers continued to be amazed at their staff's ingenuity, commitment to serving the community, and response to the continued demands and issues related to the pandemic. The collaboration continued with agency staff such as the Business Relations Specialists and Pre-ETS student team who contributed to planning virtual and in-person programs and supports for individual consumers. Throughout the state, staff members continued to foster partnerships with local businesses and agencies.

Accomplishments and Innovative Activities

All six regional offices worked collaboratively within their communities to serve individuals and provide innovative programming and opportunities for participants. There were many noteworthy accomplishments throughout the year detailed below, but of significant note, DBVI's dedication to our consumers did not go unnoticed, and all our Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors, Business Relations, and Pre-ETS student team members were recognized for their excellence at the National Council of State Agencies for the Blind's 2023 "Trailblazer Recognition" luncheon held during their annual conference in Savannah, GA.

The talented Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors (VRCs) at the Virginia Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired (DBVI) have had an unusual and exceptional year. Unusual because DBVI's dedicated VRCs experienced a high rate of vacancy, up to 33%, in their colleagues' positions across all DBVI's six regional offices. This vacancy rate necessitated and paved the way for increased collaboration, innovative staffing decisions, and creative case management. The year was also exceptional for many reasons. This program year, DBVI's VRCs served 5% more participants in the VR program than last year. The VRCs focused on engagement with the individuals being served and accomplished a 12% decrease in attrition rate prior to IPE development.

Numerous agency vacancies throughout the year continued to make it challenging to meet individual's needs while not overworking the current staff; primarily this was felt in the Norfolk office with two VRC vacancies at one point, however, each regional office worked together and support was provided to make sure that quality services were not interrupted, and that staff were not spread thin in any one office.

Despite the continued trend of agency vacancies due to challenges in recruiting qualified staff, multiple promotions and new hires were made in the regional offices; two new positions were also created, the VR Specialist and Pre-ETS Specialist. Both positions will provide programmatic support in new capacities to better serve individuals. The VR Specialist will work vacant caseloads across the State to limit any disruptions in services as vacancies arise, and the Pre-ETS Specialist will focus on expanding DBVI's presence in school systems Statewide so that students have every opportunity to benefit from programming and are engaged as early as possible with transition and VR activities.

A collaborative five-day workshop “Blind Design,” established by the Bristol Regional (BRO) and the Roanoke Regional (VRO) offices with Ms. Margarita McGrath, Chair of Virginia Tech's Undergraduate School of Architecture and Design continued for a second year. DBVI students from around the state worked alongside Virginia Tech students to discover universal design principles, develop their own architecture projects, and explore the intersection of accessibility and design in the creation of public and private spaces.

The Roanoke Regional (VRO) Office also made big strides in recruiting staff this year to fill vacancies. The office welcomed a new Regional Manager, Julianna Drummond, as well as one Vocational Rehabilitation counselor, Rehabilitation Technology Specialist, Rehabilitation Teacher, Business Relations Specialist, and Education Coordinator. VRO continued to support regional programming, with many staff participating in the “Blind Design,” and “JMU Launching Point” weeklong student learning camps.

In 2023, the Staunton Regional Office (SRO) experienced a flood which displaced the team and required them to work remotely; work is still ongoing to repair the damage. The office was quickly able to transition to remote work and there were no disruptions to services to clients despite the setback in office space and destruction of computer hardware. During the year, Staunton continued to be actively engaged in the community.

Of note, the SRO supported the Virginia Association of the DeafBlind (VADB), a statewide consumer group, to execute the first ever DeafBlind Camp of Virginia at Camp Easter Seals, near Roanoke VA from August 10 to 13, 2023. Charity Reid-Davis, DeafBlind Specialist at DBVI's Staunton Regional Office, was the director for this camp. The event was very successful. Ten deafblind campers attended the camp, along with seven support service providers and four interpreters/support service providers. Staff from Camp Easter Seals also provided support to the campers as well. Campers had an ice breaker activity at a campfire, complete with s'mores. They also participated in horseback riding, canoeing, archery, ziplining, swimming, arts and crafts, hiking, and games. Campers learned about orientation and mobility throughout the camp. During social hour, campers talked about their experiences being deafblind. They gave each other tips on how they can do things more independently and communicate more easily with other people. They also shared things like their favorite recipes. On the last evening there was social time and a dance. They bonded together and shared much laughter and many joyful moments. Everyone had a wonderful time and did not want to return home. VADB plans to do this again next summer. Additionally, the Staunton Regional Office participated in many events this year such as Blind by Design, Launching Point at JMU, and LIFE.

The Fairfax Regional Office (FRO) also recruited and successfully filled vacant positions including one Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor, one Education Coordinator, one Rehabilitation Teacher and two administrative staff which allows for more service and outreach in a very busy territory.

The Norfolk Regional Office (NRO) office had multiple vacancies, but progress was made with several new hires, including a VRC and O&M Specialist. The office engaged and attended multiple community events throughout the year and supported many of DBVI's programs. Staff

were present in October for the “Careers In Action” student weekend in Williamsburg, providing support with both parent and student learning sessions and activities.

The Richmond regional office hired a Counselor Trainee in January who has now completed all of her educational requirements and is a full-fledged Counselor II. In addition, 2 new Rehabilitation Teachers were hired in May and September.

A variety of outreach activities were conducted during the year including participation in Senior Day in the Park for Richmond City, a collaboration with the Veteran’s Administration Hospital VISOR program for recognition of White Cane Day and participating in transition fairs for both Hanover and Henrico County schools.

Staff in all programs remain very busy engaging individuals and providing individualized services. Field staff also have assisted in providing coverage during the special Pre-ETS student events including Careers in Action, LIFE program, and Leap into Linux.

DBVI Success Story

Rose Flory

Rose Flory was self-referred to DBVI on February 8, 2022. The client earned her Psy.D. from James Madison University in 1999 and had a long and distinguished career in the educational and mental health fields as a teacher, school counselor, mental health advocate and therapist. She came to DBVI with deteriorating vision which led to her deciding to retire several years before. She stated that she wanted to work part-time for additional income and for purpose. Her visual deficits are caused by glaucoma.

Rose received multiple services that were instrumental in her being able to return to work part-time as a therapist at a local community agency where she now helps people face challenges with issues such as co-parenting, addiction, and life transitions. These services included participating in a 6-week Steer Your Career (SYC) employment group led by the DBVI Business Team, assistive technology services, orientation and mobility services, guidance and counseling, low vision services and technology tutoring.

Ms. Flory spoke highly of the SYC group, which she attended in May and June of 2022, indicating that it increased her confidence and was essential in helping her to return to work. During this group, she had two informational interviews with local community centers one of which led directly to her part-time position. The BRS team indicated that the client was a pleasure to work with and added a great deal to the group.

Due to declining vision, the client participated in two low vision examinations during her DBVI program and was provided with multiple low vision aids several of which were helpful to her. With relation to orientation and mobility, she was issued a 56-inch Ambutech folding cane with roller tip and had the opportunity to practice the Constant Contact Technique which proved very effective for her. At the time of discharge, Rose felt that she did not need to use a long cane but

has exposure in case she needs it in the future. Guidance and counseling were provided from intake to discharge, assisting her through the vocational rehabilitation process.

In July of 2022, Assistive Technology Specialist, Shawn Corcoran, met with Ms. Flory at her workplace to evaluate her technology needs for returning to work. She had been having trouble using the computer and completing handwritten evaluation forms. DBVI purchased an HP 17.3” Notebook with MS Office, a large external monitor, keyboard, and a mouse so that she can have an accessible workstation in her office but still take the laptop home when needed.

Technology tutoring was another important service provided to assist her in being successful in her new position. Since Ms. Flory had not used technology in a work environment in years, she needed assistance in learning how to complete certain work tasks. Tutoring objectives included learning how to communicate with staff using the office e-mail, being able to generate a letter to an attorney or guardian ad litem, then send the information to the printer, using the laptop to research a relevant topic and prepare handouts to be presented at staff meetings, and using the laptop to save copies of documents and correspondence, then being able to find the file later.

Ms. Flory is delighted to be back in the workforce and remains gainfully and happily employed!

Virginia Enterprises for the Blind – The Randolph Sheppard Program

Program Year 2023 has proven to be challenging for Virginia Enterprises for the Blind (VEB) as our customers continue to slowly get back into the office. VEB however, despite inconsistencies created by telework has continued to move forward and open new Vending and Micro Market locations. VEB currently has 34 vendors running facilities daily and 2 new licensed vendors joined the vendor workforce in 2023. With Forty-Six facilities now open and sales up 21% over prior year, VEB continued to grow despite the market challenges it faced.

New business opportunities for 2023 included the Western Rehabilitation Center, Norfolk Naval Shipyard and Veterans Care as well as Fort Gregg-Adams Military Feeding contract. Micro-Markets and Vending fueled the growth sending VEB into the new fiscal year with 21 pending new accounts. This new excitement going into the new fiscal year was preceded by our first in person annual meeting in 2 years, which proved to be a great motivational success.

Looking ahead, the goal for VEB is to receive the Yorktown United States Coast Guard contract, re-open 4 facilities that closed due to the pandemic as Micro Markets and license the three new vendors currently in class. VEB also has four vendor training candidates who have been offered entry into the 2024 Spring training class, establishing a strong vendor pool for the future.

Business highlights as of July 2023

- 34 RS Vendors
- 1 RS Probationary Vendor
- 3 Students in training
- 2 RS Vendors licensed.

- Fiscal 2022 Sales 19.6 million
- Fiscal 2023 facility sales up 21% versus prior year
- Total Facilities open 46.
- Facilities could/pending to open 4 (ALU, DECA, DCMA, Mark Center)
- Facilities permanently closed 5 (Monroe, Social Security, DIA, DLA, OAA)
- Highway Vending Sales trending 3% greater than PY or about \$4.9 million
- 3 new vending accounts (Western Rehabilitation Center, Norfolk Naval Shipyard, Veterans Care)
- 21 pending new accounts (vending and micro markets)
- 2023 Focus: Self-Checkout POS systems

Vocational Rehabilitation Consumer Satisfaction Evaluation Program Summary

Federal Program Year (FPY) 2022, September 2022 through June 2023

The Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Program, housed in the Services Division at DBVI, is responsible for the administration and operation of Virginia's VR program serving individuals who are blind, vision impaired, or deafblind, as described in the Workforce Innovations and Opportunities Act (WIOA) of 2014. The State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) partners with and assists DBVI in reviewing the effectiveness of, and individual satisfaction with the VR services. Services are designed to meet the needs of individuals consistent with their strengths, resources, priorities, abilities, interests, and informed choice so that they may prepare for, engage in, and retain competitive integrated employment. The Policy, Planning, & Evaluation (PPE) team, housed in the Administration Division at DBVI, partners with Services Division staff to administer the VR consumer satisfaction evaluation program. PPE staff provide oversight, review, and analysis of evaluation results. The evaluation program is designed to include individual consumer surveys that eligible VR participant can complete on their own.

The survey process provides a systematic method of learning the point of view of individuals being served. It is one measure of program effectiveness and a quality-of-service indicator. In their confidential responses to the survey questions, individuals can provide their level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with received services, VR staff, and various aspects of the VR program. DBVI distributes surveys at the time of VR case closure, to assess consumer satisfaction with VR services. Reports of survey results are created annually and upon request. Additionally, quarterly data is provided to the SRC and the DBVI VR team. All individuals with an eligible VR cases closure, who received VR services, are provided an opportunity to complete a survey to express their satisfaction with the VR program, services, and service providers.

During the 2022 federal program year, DBVI maintained steps that were taken in the 2020 federal fiscal year (Oct 1, 2019, to Sept 30, 2020) to increase the response rate from individuals who received VR services. Three main areas of focus to address the response rate were determined: communication, utilization of agency resources, and updating and editing the survey platform and

questions. For communication, DBVI updated the VR case closure letters that are provided to individuals at the end of their VR program, to include information about the VR consumer satisfaction evaluation. Additionally, training was provided to VR staff to engage staff in the evaluation process and reaffirming the importance of communication about the evaluation. DBVI partnered with the SRC to accomplish the third focus area of updating and editing the survey platform and questions. The number of questions required to be completed decreased from nineteen to nine. The estimated completion time also decreased. The questions were also reviewed and edited for simplification. To align the collecting and reporting of evaluation responses with the Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act (WIOA) federal program year reporting, the new survey questions and format were first used for a partial 2020 federal program year (FPY) to include Sept 2020 through June 2021. Use of these questions has continued through PY2021 and PY2022. A copy of the updated survey questions is included in Attachment A at the end of this document.

During the calendar year 2021, DBVI also implemented additional assistance, to improve utilization of agency resources, to address the second focus area identified above. The additional assistance included outreach and follow up activities that have proven successful in the past. Additional staff have worked on these activities, including mailing a paper copy of the consumer satisfaction survey with the VR case closure letter, and email and phone call follow up activities to individuals who were eligible to complete the survey. These practices continue through PY2022.

Most recently, during the FPY 2022, 219 individuals were eligible to receive the VR consumer satisfaction survey (CSAT). Of those 219 individuals, approximately 12% or 28 individuals were closed as “unable to locate, contact, or moved” which decreased the likelihood of receiving a response to the survey. The continued implementation of the improvement strategies described above resulted in 43 responses received, equaling an approximate 23% response rate. This response rate is less than the 44% and 30% response rate received for the previous program years PY2021 and PY2020, respectively, however, it is exceeding the DBVI target response rate of 20%. Monitoring and optimizing of the implemented strategies will continue for FPY2023, which includes July 2023 through June 2024. Additionally, DBVI continues to see a 100% completion rate for survey respondents, meaning once the participant began the survey, 100% of the time the survey was completed.

Federal Program Year (FPY) 2022 consumer satisfaction survey responses indicate:

- Individuals with employment outcomes (rehabilitated) continue to report high overall satisfaction with the VR program, with a weighted score of 95.00 (out of 100), the highest reported score in the last seven years. Individuals without employment outcomes (other than rehabilitated) reported a score of 67.69, dropping approximately 9 points from last year’s historically high score of 76.66.
- Most respondents, eighty six percent, reported being “Very Satisfied” or “Satisfied” with the VR services received from DBVI.
- The overall satisfaction score for FPY22 is 85.58, the second highest reported score in the last seven years.

Results for overall satisfaction scores with the VR program from FFY2016 through FPY2022 are included in the table below.

Table 1. Overall Satisfaction scores FFY2016 through FPY2022

Year	All	Rehabilitated	Other than
Rehabilitated			
FFY2016	73.66	82.75	63.33
FFY2017	79.65	85.57	69.79
FFY2018	78.60	94.70	58.50
FFY2019 and 2020	73.33	87.32	45.54
FPY2020*	78.80	91.82	71.20
FPY2021	87.74	94.73	76.66
FPY2022	85.58	95.00	67.69

When compared to the last reporting period, FPY2021, scores for FPY2022 remained consistently high for individual perception of VR staff being respectful, knowledgeable about disability, and sensitive to needs. FPY 2022 survey highlights are provided below:

- ❖ 88 percent of individuals agreed their VR counselor was respectful, resulting in a weighted score of 88.57. Additionally, 81 percent agreed their VR counselor delivered services and service items in a timely manner, scoring 87.32.
- ❖ Individuals believed their VR counselor was sensitive to their needs, scoring an 88.29 (86 percent), and partnered with them in developing their vocational goal, scoring 88.11 (72 percent).
- ❖ 86 percent of individuals agreed their counselor was knowledgeable about their disability, scoring 90.5, the highest score in the last seven years. Additionally, 77 percent agreed their VR counselor partnered with them in choosing services and service providers, scoring 87.18.

Results for satisfaction scores with VR staff from FFY2016 through FPY2022 are included in the table below.

Table 2. Satisfaction scores with VR Staff FFY2016 through FPY2022

Year	Respectful	Knowledgeable about disability	Sensitive to needs
FFY2016	83.71	78.59	77.96
FFY2017	86.61	85.96	83.93
FFY2018	92.86	81.43	85.71
FFY2019 & 2020	84.38	83.75	80.00
FPY2020*	85.83	87.23	84.26
FPY2021	90.87	88.70	90.97
FPY2022	88.57	90.50	88.29

In FPY2020 DBVI introduced a Net Promoter Score (NPS) question to the survey. The NPS is a metric used in customer experience evaluation programs. A NPS is used to measure how likely a customer is to refer your product or service to others, scores can range from -100 to +100, a higher score is desirable. A national benchmark NPS for government organizations in 2023 is 48. The FPY2020 NPS responses were calculated to establish a baseline for DBVI equaling 36. The

DBVI NPS for FPY2022, the third year this metric was used is 47, an improvement from the baseline, however less than last year's rating of 57. The NPS will continue to be monitored and analyzed in the coming years.

Given the number of evaluation responses submitted in FPY 2022, it is difficult to determine how well the summary statistics represent the entire group of eligible individuals served; as a result, please view the summary information as informative, and providing general guidance, rather than as definitive statements regarding the consumer satisfaction results of any specific subset of VR cases or individuals being served. A detailed summary of all evaluation questions and responses is located at the website listed below and is available for review and comment.

https://www.surveymonkey.com/stories/SM-XRxTVNBo_2B_2F23NFc08eW1OA_3D_3D/

The open-ended responses from the VR consumer satisfaction evaluation included numerous comments from consumers regarding their experiences with the agency and their satisfaction with their VR counselors and trainers. Independence and accessibility to services and opportunities continue to be a focus for individuals DBVI serves. DBVI is also aware of the need to continue with early engagement and follow up with individuals to improve services and access to services. Additionally, DBVI is focused on the need to optimize staff coverage for service provision and minimize staff turnover. All responses are included in Attachment B at the end of this document.

The DBVI VR Program is part of the Workforce system within the Commonwealth of Virginia. As a member of this large, coordinated network, DBVI continues to position itself to maintain strong partnerships within the Virginia Workforce system as the Commonwealth continues to implement the Workforce Innovations and Opportunities Act (WIOA) of 2014. The results of the consumer satisfaction survey will be used by DBVI decision makers and the SRC in the continued development and implementation of the Combined Virginia State Plan and WIOA implementation. The feedback and insights will also be used to make recommendations for improvement of services on behalf of individuals. The comments provided by the consumers are rich in content and will continue to aid in improving the high-quality service delivery program that exists at DBVI.

* FedProgramYear2020 is a partial federal program year, from September 2020 through June 2021. This timeframe is used for this reporting year to align the reporting year at DBVI with the federal program year in WIOA. The next reporting timeframe, Federal Program Year 2021, corresponds to July 1, 2021, through June 30, 2022.

DBVI Success Story

James Ricci

James applied for services in September 2017 as his vision was impacted by Glaucoma. At that time, he had just relocated to Virginia. A low vision exam was scheduled for him after he was determined eligible for services and low vision aids were provided to him. James then opted to go to the Virginia Center for Blind and Vision Impaired in Richmond in which he learned blindness skills. Once he returned from the Center, he was interested in finding employment. However, progress was slow due to changes in DBVI staff, as well as James not finding a good fit to employment. To increase his options, he began a GED study program through

Rappahannock Area Regional Adult Education. Due to COVID-19 impacts on services in early 2020, his studies were put on hold for over a year. In that time, a new team was formed, under the direction of VRC LaSonya Jackson.

Working with DBVI staff, a plan was developed for James to restart his job search. He attended Steer Your Career and worked with Karen Kahn and the Business Relations Specialist team. He also began working with a job coach to determine the best options for applications. Based on his strengths and interests of custodian, James was able to secure a work-based learning experience at Germanna Community College working for Portco. Once he completed the work-based learning experience, Portco asked if DBVI could assist with doing an On-the-Job-Training (OJT). OJT was successful and he then moved to Virginia Department of Transportation to work to do the same tasks. Because James doesn't drive, DBVI provided James with transportation card from Uber to get to and from his work-based learning experience. James was supported not only by his VRC, LaSonya Jackson, but also an outstanding job coach. His job coach continually advocated on his behalf and made James feel comfortable doing his different duties. He said he's never been treated so well by his team at DBVI, job coach and his supervisor. He is so appreciative for all the support. VRC Jackson is very proud of James and all the wonderful things that he is doing. James stated that he's still learning and growing each day he's at work.

Glossary of Abbreviations

Table 3 - Abbreviations and Terms

ACB	American Council of the Blind
ADA	Americans with Disabilities Act
AER	Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired
AFB	American Foundation for the Blind
AT	Assistive Technology
BEP	Business Enterprise Program
BOB	Business Opportunities for the Blind
BVA	Blinded Veterans Association
CAP	Client Assistance Program
CIL	Center for Independent Living
CRC	Certified Rehabilitation Counselor
CRP	Community Rehabilitation Program
CSAVR	Council of State Administrators for Vocational Rehabilitation
CSPD	Comprehensive System for Personnel Development
DBVI	Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired
DDS	Disability Determination Services
DOE	Department of Education
DOL	Department of Labor
DRS	Department of Rehabilitative Services
EEOC	Equal Employment Opportunity Commission
EN	Employer Network
IDEA	Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
IEP	Individualized Education Plan
IL	Independent Living
SILC	State Independent Living Council

IPE	Individualized Plan for Employment
JWOD	Javits-Wagner-O'Day Act
LEA	Local Education Agency
LRC	Library and Resource Center
LWIB	Local Workforce Investment Board
NCSAB	National Council of State Agencies for the Blind
NFB	National Federation of the Blind
NIB	National Industries for the Blind
ODEP	Office for Disability Employment Policy
OJT	On-the-Job-Training
OSERS	Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services
O&M	Orientation & Mobility
RSA	Rehabilitation Services Administration
RT	Rehabilitation Teaching
RT/IL	Rehabilitation Teaching/Independent Living
SGA	Substantial Gainful Activity
SRC	State Rehabilitation Council
SPIL	State Plan for Independent Living
SSA	Social Security Administration
SSDI	Social Security Disability Income Insurance
SSI	Supplemental Security Income
SWIB	State Workforce Investment Board
VATS	Virginia Assistive Technology System
VEC	Virginia Employment Commission
VIB	Virginia Industries for the Blind
VOPA	Virginia Office for Protection and Advocacy
VR	Vocational Rehabilitation
VRCBVI	Virginia Rehabilitation Center for the Blind and Vision Impaired
VSDB	Virginia School for the Deaf and Blind
WWRC	Woodrow Wilson Rehabilitation Center
WIA	Workforce Investment Act
WIOA	Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act

About DBVI and the SRC

Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired (DBVI)

DBVI is committed to providing quality services to assist Virginia's citizens who are blind, deafblind, or vision impaired in achieving their maximum level of employment, education, and personal independence. The department provides an array of specialized services to eligible individuals of all ages to assist them in attaining the skills, confidence, and positive outlook that are critical to independence.

State Rehabilitation Council (SRC)

The purpose of the federally mandated SRC is to work in partnership with DBVI to review, analyze, and advise the agency on its Vocational Rehabilitation Program, policies, and practices. Further collaborations include the development of the Agency State Plan, federally required needs assessment, consumer satisfaction surveys, training, and employment opportunities for individuals who are blind, visually impaired, and deafblind.

Members, all of whom are appointed by the Governor, represent current or former recipients of VR services, and representatives of parent groups, the Client Assistance Program VR, disability advocacy groups, the Department of Education, community rehabilitation providers, a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor, the Commissioner of DBVI, and members of business, industry, and labor. The Council meets quarterly on Fridays, at the Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired in Richmond. Citizens are welcome to attend Council meetings and offer their comments.

To learn more about the work of the SRC or Council membership, please contact the Council liaison, Megan O'Toole Hall at megan.hall@dbvi.virginia.gov

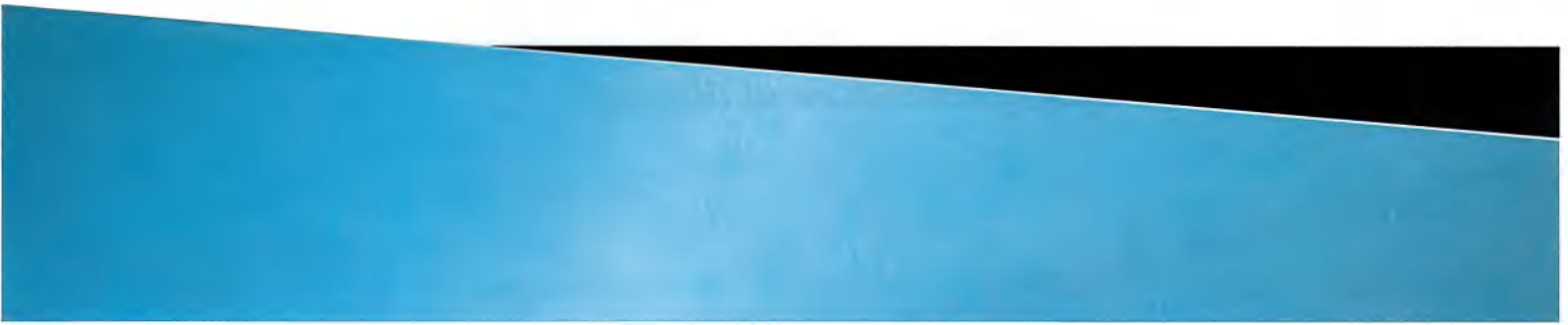
Table 4 – SRC Membership Roster

Name	Location	Term Expires	Seat Requirements
<u>Chair:</u> Alexa Bowe	Alexandria, VA	9/30/2023	Representative of Business, Industry, and Labor 34 CFR §361.17 (b)(1)(vi)
<u>Vice Chair:</u> Chanthen Nene	Manassas, VA	9/30/2023	Representative of Disability Advocacy Group 34 CFR §361.17 (b)(3)(ii)(A)
Leelynn Untalan	Suffolk, VA	9/30/2024	Representative of the Statewide Independent Living Council 34 CFR §361.17 (b)(1)(vii)
Annette Hyde	Radiant, VA	9/30/2023	Representative of the Virginia Workforce Board 34 CFR §361.17 (b)(1)(B)(xi)
Edna Johnson	Alexandria, VA	9/30/2023	Former or Current Recipient of Vocational Rehabilitation Services 34 CFR §361.17 (b)(1)(B)(viii)
Heidi Lawyer	Henrico, VA	9/30/2024	Representative of a Parent Training and Information Center 34 CFR §361.17 (b)(1)(viii)
Liang Liao	Richmond, VA	9/30/2023	Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor-Ex-Officio, Non-Voting Member 34 CFR §361.17 (b)(1)(iv)
Joliefawn Liddell	Richmond, VA	9/30/2023	Representative of Client Assistance Program 34 CFR §361.17 (b)(1)(iii)
Ricardo Lizama	Arlington, VA	9/30/2023	Representative of Disability Advocacy Group 34 CFR §361.17 (b)(3)(ii)(A)
Rachael Rounds	Midlothian, VA	9/30/2024	Representative of Community Rehabilitation Services Program Provider 34 CFR §361.17 (b)(1)(v)
Richard Mitchell	Henrico, VA	NA	The Director of the designated Statue Unit DBVI as an ex-officio, non-voting member 34 CFR §361.17 (b)(1)(B)(viii)
Marianne Moore	Richmond, VA	9/30/2023	Representative of Department of Education 34 CFR §361.17 (b)(1)(B)(x)
Milford Stern	Roanoke, VA	9/30/2023	Representative of Business, Industry, and Labor 34 CFR §361.17 (b)(1)(vi)



The SRC's Role in the Combined State Plan

December 11, 2023





The SRC and VR Program Working Together

As advocates for the inclusion of individuals with disabilities in securing competitive, integrated employment, the Combined State Plan for Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) stands as one of the more critical aspects of our collective mission. This comprehensive document serves as a roadmap, which guides the provision of Vocational Rehabilitation services within our State. Its significance lies not only in the articulation of strategic objectives for the four-year period, but also in its capacity to measure progress and ensure the efficacy of our efforts in serving blind, vision impaired, and deafblind Virginians.

The State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) plays a pivotal role in both the development and ongoing evaluation of this plan.

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The Role of the State Plan

- **Strategic Alignment:**

The State Plan provides a strategic alignment of goals, priorities, and initiatives essential for the effective functioning of Virginia's Vocational Rehabilitation program, and the broader workforce development system.

- **Federal Compliance:**

Compliance with Federal regulations, particularly those outlined in the Rehabilitation Act and amended in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, is a fundamental requirement. The State Plan ensures adherence to these guidelines, fostering accountability and securing Federal funding vital for sustaining and enhancing our Vocational Rehabilitation programs.



The Role of the State Plan

- **Stakeholder Engagement:**

The development of the State Plan involves extensive consultation with stakeholders, including individuals with disabilities, service providers, employers, and advocacy groups. This inclusive approach ensures that the plan reflects the diverse needs of our community and promotes collaboration.

- **Continuous Improvement:**

The State Plan is not static; it evolves in response to changing needs, technological advancements, demographics of individuals served, and shifts in the labor market. It serves as a living document that facilitates continuous improvement, allowing us to adapt our strategies to address emerging challenges and opportunities for improvement.



The Role of the SRC in the Development of the State Plan

- **Advisory Function:**

The SRC serves as a vital advisory body in the development and revision of the State Plan. Drawing on its diverse membership, the SRC contributes valuable insights, ensuring that the plan is comprehensive, inclusive, and responsive to the needs of individuals with disabilities.

- **Oversight and Evaluation:**

A core responsibility of the SRC is the ongoing evaluation of progress made in the implementation of the State Plan. Through systematic reviews, data analysis, and stakeholder feedback, the SRC assesses the effectiveness of Vocational Rehabilitation program and recommends adjustments as needed.



The Role of the SRC in the Development of the State Plan

- **Advocacy for Improvement:**

The SRC acts as a proactive advocate for continuous improvement within the Vocational Rehabilitation program. By identifying areas of success and areas needing improvement, the SRC plays a crucial role in shaping policies and practices that better serve the interests of our participants.

- **Community Engagement:**

The SRC fosters community engagement by soliciting input, conducting public hearings, and maintaining open lines of communication. This ensures that the State Plan is not only reflective of the community's needs but also enjoys widespread support and understanding.



Suggested Language for 2024–2028 Goals

1. Engage and collaborate with WIOA core partners to coordinate business service efforts to include the blind and visually impaired labor market.
2. Provide comprehensive vocational rehabilitation services, including rehabilitation technology services, to students with disabilities, youth in transition, and adults resulting in the attainment of industry recognized credentials to obtain competitive integrated employment.
3. Conduct outreach efforts to Local Education Agencies and other Community Partners to assist in increasing the number of students with disabilities participating in and benefiting from DBVI offered Pre–Employment Transition programs.



Suggested Language for Goals 2024–2028 Cont.

4. Continue to expand the utilization of Supported Employment and Customized Employment services for adults and youth to increase competitive integrated employment outcomes for individuals with the most significant disabilities.
5. Achieving agency annual performance goals for the performance accountability measures based on primary indicators of performance in section 116(b)(2)(A) of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014.
6. Increase collaboration with the Virginia Department of Aging and Rehabilitative Services to provide comprehensive wrap around services to address the needs of individuals who have dual diagnoses.



The SRC's Impact on VR

The completion of the State Plan represents a fundamental commitment to the principles of equity, inclusion, and empowerment for participants in the Vocational Rehabilitation program. The State Rehabilitation Council, as the steward of these principles, plays an instrumental role in not only shaping the plan, but also in rigorously evaluating its implementation to ensure meaningful progress and lasting impact. Through this collaborative effort, we strengthen the foundation upon which individuals with disabilities can build successful, fulfilling futures in the workforce and society at large.

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