



Department of  
**Human Services**

# State Rehabilitation Council

2018 Annual Report

State Rehabilitation Council of Tennessee | Annual Report | December 2018



# Letter from the State Rehabilitation Council

Dear Governor Bill Haslam, Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA), Department of Human Services Commissioner Danielle W. Barnes and Citizens of Tennessee,

On behalf of the members of the Tennessee State Rehabilitation Council, I am honored to present the Council's Annual Report for 2018.

Members of the SRC include a wide range of volunteers dedicated to the improvement of the lives of citizens with disabilities in the State of Tennessee. SRC members bring with them a multitude of skills developed in the public and private sectors that are most valuable in the advisory role which the SRC plays.

The SRC is privileged to partner with Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) services within the Tennessee Department of Human Services and serve as an advisory board & to work closely with the Commissioner and staff to promote the organization's mission and vision. The mutual goal of the SRC and VR partnership is to service and assist the disabled community in Tennessee to obtain and maintain meaningful employment and independence. This annual report includes an accurate picture of the important work being done by the Council.

For the past few years a minimal number of client success stories have been included in the annual report. As the SRC feels that information about the specific VR services provided to individuals on their path to employment is an excellent means of conveying the work of VR, we chose to expand upon the stories in this report. To this end, we requested that each of the VR regions provide the SRC with multiple client success stories and the SRC reviewed and selected a total of 12 stories from across the VR regions to include in the report you are about to read. It is our hope that these client stories will provide you with a greater sense of the work of VR and the direct impact of VR staff and services in assisting Tennesseans with disabilities to achieve competitive integrated employment.

I would like to offer my sincere thanks to the members of the SRC for their dedication and time expended to achieve our goals. It has been my great privilege to work with members of the Council, as well as with Tennessee Vocational Rehabilitation staff, all of whom provide our citizens with the opportunity to obtain meaningful employment and independence.

Respectfully,

Lee A. Brown III  
SRC Chair  
Director Employment / ECF Services Region 2  
Progressive Directions Inc.

## Message from Mandy Johnson, Assistant Commissioner

It is an honor to serve as the Assistant Commissioner of the Division of Rehabilitation Services for the Tennessee Department of Human Services. Sharing in the mission of the Tennessee Department of Human Services, the Vocational Rehabilitation Program is committed to ensuring Tennesseans with disabilities have every opportunity to obtain, maintain, or regain employment and advance in the pursuit of their career goals.

Over the last year, the Vocational Rehabilitation Program has made significant strides in achieving our goals. This report highlights just a few of the key accomplishments achieved this year.

### ***Key Accomplishments***

- Continued partnerships and collaboration with other State departments and divisions
- Increased delivery of transition services to students with disabilities
- Enhanced employment services to Tennessee businesses
- Strategic Plans to modernize TRC Smyrna service delivery model

Additionally, throughout the report, we have inserted client success stories that help bring to life the real work that is being done in the lives of Tennesseans.

The State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) continues to be a key partner and essential asset in helping Tennessee achieve the goals and objectives of the Vocational Rehabilitation Program. We look forward to working with the Council in the upcoming year as we take on new strategic initiatives to strengthen and modernize the operation of the Vocational Rehabilitation Program and advance our efforts to close the gap in the employment rate for people with disabilities. We believe that a thriving Tennessee is built on a workforce that includes a diversity of experiences contributed by people from all backgrounds, including people with disabilities.

Sincerely,

Mandy Johnson, Assistant Commissioner  
Division of Rehabilitation Services  
Tennessee Department of Human Services

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# Vocational Rehabilitation Program Overview

## **Introduction**

Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) is a joint federal and state program that assists people with disabilities to prepare for, secure, retain, advance in or regain employment. The VR program provides a variety of individualized services to persons with disabilities in preparation for their employment in the competitive labor market. VR advocates employment outcomes for clients that are consistent with their individual strengths, resources, abilities, capabilities and informed choice. In Tennessee, the VR program is administered by the Tennessee Department of Human Services (DHS), Division of Rehabilitation Services.

*Vocational Rehabilitation served 14,273 clients in fiscal year 2018.*

## **Services Include:**

- Counseling & Guidance
- Training
- Maintenance & Transportation
- Transition Services from School to Work
- Personal Care Assistance
- Rehabilitation Technology Services
- Job Placement
- Post-Employment Services
- Supported Employment Services
- Independent Living Services

## **Special Emphasis Services:**

### **Tennessee Rehabilitation Center at Smyrna (TRC-Smyrna)**

This State operated comprehensive rehabilitation facility offers a variety of vocational programs on campus with residential housing available.

### **Community Tennessee Rehabilitation Centers**

Centers offer comprehensive vocational evaluation services, employee development services, job readiness training and placement.

### **Services for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing**

The unique needs of individuals who are deaf and hard of hearing are served through this specialized unit.

### **Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired**

The unique needs of individuals who are blind and visually impaired are served through this specialized unit.

## **Key Accomplishments in 2018**

There were several notable accomplishments achieved by the Vocational Rehabilitation Program in 2018. A few of these accomplishments are highlighted in the sections below. They include pivotal partnerships and collaboration with fellow state departments; increased transition services provided to students with disabilities; enhanced business services provided to employers across the state; and the completion of year 1 of the TRC-Smyrna strategic plan.

*VR partnerships include Dept. of Education, Dept. of Mental Health and Substance Abuse, and TennCare.*

## **Collaboration with State Agencies**

Three primary examples of the cooperative spirit across state government for the Vocational Rehabilitation program are the interagency agreements with the Division of TennCare for the Employment and Community First CHOICES program; the Tennessee Department of Education for the pre-employment transition services (Pre-ETS); and the Tennessee Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse for the Individual Placements and Supports (IPS) model of supported employment. All of these partnerships are active, on-going and continue to ensure that employment services and supports for the programs' common customers are coordinated.

Employment and Community First CHOICES (TennCare) - In 2017, to support employment goals of the Employment and Community First CHOICES program, TennCare and the Department of Human Services—Vocational Rehabilitation (DHS/VR) entered into a MOU to provide high quality employment services that lead to competitive integrated employment in a non-duplicative manner. The MOU outlines the roles of each agency, VR Counselors, and the three managed care organizations (MCOs) contracted with TennCare to administer the program.

### **Client Success Story**

Mr. Cuccia came to VR after sustaining a Traumatic Brain Injury that also left him with right side paralysis. From the beginning, he was very passionate about pursuing a career that allowed him to help others. Becoming a job coach seemed like a great fit for Mr. Cuccia given his strong desire to help others and his personal understanding of working with a disability. He received employee development and job readiness services through the Community Tennessee Rehabilitation Center (CTRC) in Franklin followed by placement assistance through VR's Business Employment Consultant services. Mr. Cuccia is now happily employed as a job coach working with individuals with developmental disabilities. His case was closed as successful in the summer of 2018, and he says he loves his job.

### Client Success Story

Mr. Lloyd was incarcerated in 1992 and released from federal prison in 2017. Having received HVAC training in prison, he quickly began seeking full-time employment upon his release. Unfortunately, he was only able to obtain part-time work through temporary services, which exacerbated his anxiety and depression.

Mr. Lloyd learned about Vocational Rehabilitation Services from a local barber school and applied to the VR in order to pursue training to become a barber. After applying for VR services, career exploration helped Mr. Lloyd decide that a career goal of becoming an over-the-road truck driver would be a better fit for him. He chose this goal because he had always enjoyed driving and felt the driving experience helped him control symptoms related to his disability.

A plan was prepared for professional truck driving training, and Mr. Lloyd excelled in his class. His trainer commented on how hard he worked and how quickly he became familiar with the truck and safety procedures. Driving skills came very naturally to him, and Mr. Lloyd set a good example for other students. Mr. Lloyd took full advantage of every opportunity to learn. He also enjoyed meeting company representatives who visited the school to recruit. Mr. Lloyd was eager to present himself in the best possible light, ideally in person, so his criminal record would not be the only thing a potential employer remembered about him.

This proved to be an effective strategy, and Mr. Lloyd was hired directly from his training program as a truck driver. His case was closed as successfully employed in September 2018. Mr. Lloyd continues to stay in touch with his trainer. He is enthusiastic about his future and possible advancement options. Mr. Lloyd takes every opportunity to encourage others. He serves as a great example of how one's past does not have to define one's future.

Entering the second year of this interagency agreement, the partners set out to update training and materials based on lessons learned from the first year. Joint training on the updated materials was conducted in six locations across the state in early 2018. More than 250 MCO support coordinators and VR counselors participated in the training. In addition, both agencies participate in an implementation workgroup to ensure the MOU is successfully carried out, with regional staff members playing an important role in the discussions to help identify potential challenges and brainstorm opportunities for improvement.

### Individual Placements and Supports

(DMHSAS) - Another successful collaboration between state agencies is through the partnership between the Tennessee Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (DMHSAS) and DHS/VR for the Individual Placements and Supports (IPS) Program. This model of supported employment has been very successful in helping persons with behavioral health disorders including mental illness, substance abuse, and co-occurring disorders obtain competitive integrated employment. Since its inception, the program has grown to 12 IPS supported employment sites across the state. An interagency agreement between DMHSAS and DHS/VR was

established in September 2017 to strengthen the collaboration between the two agencies targeted at developing, expanding, and improving opportunities for competitive integrated employment for Tennesseans living with disabilities including mental health and/or substance abuse issues.

Tennessee's efforts received a further boost when in May 2018 the state cohosted the 14th Annual Meeting of the International IPS Learning Community in Franklin, TN. Tennessee had the opportunity to share its IPS journey during a presentation highlighting its growth and successes.

### **Client Success Story**

Ms. Finch was involved in a car wreck in 1994 that forever changed her life. More than 20 years later she made the decision to return to school to pursue training to become a Certified Nursing Aid (CNA) since she enjoyed working as a companion to senior citizens. She wanted to find a satisfying career and become financially stable, no longer relying on her Social Security benefits. While in school to become a CNA, she learned about VR and the possibility of financial assistance for her training as well as help finding suitable employment in her chosen field. Ms. Finch completed her CNA classes while still working as a companion a few days a week. She passed the TN State Boards in December 2016.

Once she became eligible for VR services, Ms. Finch and her counselor worked very closely to map out her next steps. Ms. Finch was accepted into the Practical Nursing Program at Tennessee College of Applied Technology. She was able to achieve her training and employment more quickly with VR than if she had pursued it on her own. She stated, "To date, with the invaluable services from Vocational Rehabilitation, I have four medical licensures, three medical certificates, a technical school diploma with honors and am a member of the National Technical Honor Society Alumni. But most importantly, I am now earning a very good hourly wage as a Licensed Practical Nurse, and I can financially support myself without my monthly social security disability insurance check and have the lifestyle I was looking for."

Pre-Employment Transition Services (Dept. of Education) - As the Tennessee implements its state plan for the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), the Tennessee Department of Education and DHS/VR have established an MOU on the provision of Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS). These five pre-employment transition services allow for students between the ages of 14-22 to receive education, training, and work experiences while still in the supportive high school environment. The MOU clearly identifies the roles and responsibilities of each entity and the shared responsibilities between the two. The agencies conducted four joint training sessions for staff on the agreement and the pre-employment transition services available to students with disabilities.

## ***Transition Services for Students with Disabilities***

The Vocational Rehabilitation program has made significant progress in the implementation of Pre-ETS to students (ages 14-22) across the state.

- Effective January 1, 2018, VR added specialized staff devoted to implementation and delivery of Pre-ETS:
  - Pre-Employment Transition Specialist – 23 positions added statewide.
  - Field Supervisors – 1 position in each of the 3 grand regions of the state.
- On May 1, 2018, VR entered into a special contract with the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center to develop a pre-employment transition portal to provide access to research, training and resources on evidenced based pre-employment transition services. Information will be available for VR staff, educators, community rehabilitation providers, parents and students.
- The state experienced a 500% increase in the number of Pre-ETS services from state fiscal years 2016-17 to 2017-18. Over 10,000 Pre-ETS services were provided to students across the state.

Project SEARCH® continues to be a successful collaboration with several

### **Client Success Story**

Ms. Clements initially learned of VR in 2011 when a VR counselor noticed her working in the front office during a visit to her high school. Ms. Clements had known from a very early age that she wanted to become a meteorologist, which is a very demanding and competitive field. However, school records and a vocational evaluation confirmed that this was an appropriate job goal for her. Ms. Clements wanted to attend the University of Oklahoma and worked closely with her VR counselor to obtain the necessary approvals to attend school out of state. She also received significant guidance and counseling from VR while she was in college.

Ms. Clements graduated from the University of Oklahoma in May 2016 with a 3.41 GPA. She returned home to Tennessee and began working with a VR Business Employment Consultant (BEC) on her job search. The BEC assisted Ms. Clements with creating a professional resume and identifying appropriate job leads in her chosen field. She applied for countless jobs and had numerous interviews, but a job offer did not come. Because Ms. Clements had always focused solely on her studies, she did not have any work history. She was encouraged by her VR Counselor and the BEC to find a part-time job to gain valuable work experience and references. Ms. Clements began working for Applebee's, but never lost sight of her goal of becoming a meteorologist. Her VR counselor and BEC worked closely with her through tough times and barriers during the job search phase.

In December 2017, the National Weather Service (NWS) released 35 entry level meteorology jobs across the U.S. and Ms. Clements applied for every job. She had numerous interviews with the NWS in early 2018, and her goal of becoming a meteorologist seemed closer to coming true. She was ultimately offered a job as a meteorologist and began working in May 2018. Ms. Clements is truly a success story and proof that persistence pays off and dreams really can come true.

businesses across the state of Tennessee. Project SEARCH® is a one-year internship program for students with disabilities in their last year of high school or for young adults working with a disability service provider. It is targeted for interns whose goal is competitive, integrated employment within their communities. Interns get hands-on training, learn work skills, and have real-world opportunities to strengthen their independent living skills. DHS has helped implement the program in partnership with organizations across the state, by providing Workplace Readiness Specialists, training, and technical assistance from the national Project SEARCH® organization. Tennessee currently has 12 active Project SEARCH® programs:

- Maryville College, Blount County Schools – Maryville, TN
- Downtown Sheraton Hotel, Shelby County School System – Memphis, TN
- Le Bonheur Children’s Hospital, Shelby County School System – Memphis, TN
- West Tennessee Healthcare, Jackson-Madison County School System – Jackson TN
- Vanderbilt Children’s Hospital, Progress, Inc. – Nashville TN
- Embassy Suites, Metro Nashville Public Schools – Nashville, TN
- Amerigroup, Progress, Inc. – Nashville, TN
- Montgomery County Government, Clarksville/Montgomery County Schools – Clarksville, TN
- Embassy Suites, Rutherford County Public Schools – Murfreesboro, TN
- East TN Children’s Hospital, CP Center – Knoxville, TN
- University of TN Medical Center, Breakthrough Corp. – Knoxville, TN
- BlueCross/Blue Shield, Hamilton County Schools – Chattanooga, TN

#### **Project SEARCH® Highlight**

Maryville College’s Project SEARCH® program has achieved 100% successful employment outcomes for all of its interns since the program began in the 2015-16 school year at William Blount High School.

- During the first year five interns had the opportunity to participate in four rotation options with Metz Culinary Management, which provides dining services at Maryville College. Before the spring semester, Metz inquired about hiring an intern and by the end of that semester all of the interns were hired within their communities and remain employed.
- In the 2016-17 school year, the program expanded to include Heritage High School, seven interns, and an additional Metz service rotation. All members of the Blount County Schools’ intern class of 2016-17 were employed by April 2017 and continue to maintain employment.
- In the 2017-18 school year, the Access Program joined the partnership as a community service provider. Five interns completed the program and all began their employment journey at employment sites in the community.

## Transition School to Work

During the 2017-2018 school year, 38 local education agencies participated in the Transition School to Work (TSW) program. These programs served over 6,000 students with disabilities in preparing for the transition from high school to post-secondary training, education and/or employment.

In October 2017, the annual presentation of the Expect Employment report to the governor took place in Kingsport. During this event the governor toured a Food City grocery store location, which is a TSW site for Dobyns-Bennett High School, and met with several students who gained real-world job skills at the store. The event was attended by state lawmakers, community leaders, employers and was covered by the local media. You can see more about this event on the DHS website: <https://www.tn.gov/humanservices/ds/vocational-rehabilitation/vr-transition-school-to-work-tsw-program.html>

### **Client Success Story**

Mike\* is a 22-year-old young man with an intellectual disability, affecting his cognitive and visual functioning. He enjoys video games, music, dancing, and interacting with people. He was already receiving services from a community provider through the Employment and Community First (ECF) CHOICES waiver program; however, he needed a little more support. When he sought VR's assistance to achieve his employment goal of working in the food preparation industry, he did not have any prior work experience. He was given the opportunity to participate in a few internships which introduced him to the food preparation industry and showed him the skills he would need to be successful on the job.

Mike began his internship as a kitchen steward with the assistance of a job coach at a local business that prepares fresh, healthy meals daily to be packed and delivered to their clients. His main responsibilities were taking out the trash, wiping down tables, assisting with meal prep (i.e. dicing vegetables or filling cups with condiments), washing dishes, and packaging meals for delivery. It was quickly discovered that the client had a very strong work ethic. Within a week, the company offered the client a permanent position working 18 hours/week. The leadership team praised his positive attitude, work ethic, and consistent productivity as motivators for wanting him to join the team.

He is still working and thriving in his position as a kitchen steward. During a recent visit to his job site the VR team observed that he was very enthusiastic and stated that he loves his work and loves getting paid. When asked what his job responsibilities were, he laughed and said, "Everything - what he (the co-founder) tells me to do." The client was excited to share with VR that he was featured in an international video showcasing individuals with impairments working in an integrated workforce. He boasted that his video had approximately 600 views on YouTube. We are proud of the progress he has made. With his winning attitude, VR is confident that he will continue to prosper. \*Name changed

## ***Business Services Unit Enhancements***

In July 2018 the Vocational Rehabilitation Program introduced Ryan Jolley as the new Director of Business Services. As the Director of the Business Services Unit, Mr. Jolley is responsible for building long-term relationships with businesses to meet the individual needs of those businesses while increasing the employment of individuals with disabilities in the competitive integrated labor market. He is responsible for developing and implementing strategies that identify and meet employer needs and for providing leadership to the team of professional Business Employment Consultants (BEC) that are located across the state.

*In addition to serving individuals with disabilities, VR also provides services to businesses located in Tennessee.*

Mr. Jolley came to VR from Trevecca Nazarene University where he served as Director of the Office of Student Employment. During his 8 year tenure at Trevecca, Mr. Jolley was responsible for development and creation of the student workforce program using labor market data to identify and create employment opportunities for students in the Nashville community, including students with disabilities. Concurrent to his responsibilities managing the Office of Student Employment, Mr. Jolley was founder and creator of two campus coffee shops that played a critical role in creating employment opportunities for Trevecca students and work based learning opportunities for students with disabilities in the Metro Nashville Public School System. Mr. Jolley holds a Bachelor of Arts and is taking courses to complete his Masters of Business Administration.

### Job-Driven Vocational Rehabilitation Training and Technical Assistance

During federal fiscal year 2018, the Vocational Rehabilitation program's Business Services Unit (BSU) participated in intensive technical assistance provided by the Job-Driven Vocational Rehabilitation Technical Assistance Center (JDVRTAC). The goal of the JDVRTAC is to improve the capacity of state VR agencies and associated rehabilitation professionals to work with employers and training providers as they develop partnerships that lead to increased opportunities for individuals with disabilities to engage in competitive employment.

As a result of the technical assistance:

- The BSU developed an organizational plan, revised job descriptions and hired additional Business Employment Consultants for more coverage across the state.

- Additional training opportunities for BECs were provided through the University of Tennessee Center for Literacy, Education and Employment (UT CLEE) on business engagement topics.
- JDVRTAC provided the BSU with a data tracking tool to capture business engagement activities and outcomes until the new VR case management system is procured.
- An assessment of staff knowledge and use of labor market information was completed. Tools and training resources, including the career index, were also provided to the BECs.

### Client Success Story

Mr. Taylor was 18 years old when he had a devastating motor vehicle accident in 2001. Due to the extent of his injuries, he was transferred from an outlying hospital to an acute care hospital in a major metropolitan area where he was diagnosed with C3 quadriplegia. He was later transferred to a rehabilitation hospital for intensive physical, speech and occupational therapy services. Despite the many challenges he encountered, Mr. Taylor made an internal decision to continue to live life and not lose hope.

Over the subsequent years, Mr. Taylor has worked with VR on three separate occasions, with the first two experiences being unsuccessful in assisting him to become employed. Since his initial application, VR has assisted him to secure the following: a "sip and puff" electric wheelchair, a Dragon Naturally Speaking program added to his computer with training for voice recognition, and modifications added to his van when he had found employment in an integrated setting. Unfortunately, at that time this job did not work out and he never was able to work there. He was beginning to wonder if employment was meant for him.

During his third, and most recent case with VR, Mr. Taylor was assigned to work with a fairly new VR counselor who was determined to help him achieve his employment goal of working with computers in some way. The VR counselor connected Mr. Taylor with a job placement vendor who identified a company that agreed to a trial work period to see if Mr. Taylor could meet the employment requirements to be permanently employed. The vendor quickly provided the equipment needed for Mr. Taylor to perform the job duties, including a special phone with a headset, mouth sticks and a docking station. He worked at home via computer, as he had wanted to do from the beginning. After the trial job ended, Mr. Taylor was notified by the company that his work speed was not sufficient for them to hire him.

Mr. Taylor remained optimistic and the job placement vendor identified a different company which offered a position which matched with his interests, abilities and skills. He now happily and successfully works from home for a telemarketing company and is able to perform the type of work he has wanted to do since he first came to VR many years ago. Mr. Taylor reports that his VR counselor was instrumental in his success and she indicates that he has shown her how to have patience and tolerance while being a true example of hope.

## ***Tennessee Rehabilitation Center at Smyrna Strategic Plan***

The Tennessee Rehabilitation Center in Smyrna completed year one of a three-year strategic plan to modernize service delivery. The plan will allow TRC-Smyrna to transition from a program based model of training delivery to a career and technical education model focused on a career path and providing students the opportunity to individualize and customize their learning experience to their unique strengths and vocational training needs.

Under the new model, TRC-Smyrna will offer courses of study in an academic calendar year with one graduation planned for end of term completions. The courses of study will be the courses offered specific to obtaining national certifications and/or credentials in vocational training. Courses will be arranged in terms and structured for term hours developed for the student.

Transformation is underway and it will not only change the way TRC-Smyrna has operated for the past 40 years, but will bring about positive change. Each step taken to provide quality services and supports to individuals with disabilities, are contributing not only to one individual, but to the total welfare and socio-economic status of generations to succeed and play a productive role in the workplace for years to come.

### **Client Success Story**

Erin started life 16 weeks prematurely with less than a 1% chance of surviving. She spent the first 5 months of her life fighting in the NICU through surgeries, heart catheterizations, pneumonia, and kidney failure. The first few years of Erin's life were just as riddled with interventions, from surgeries and doctors to missed milestones and therapists. Erin also experienced countless problems with her vision, resulting in significant vision loss. Through it all though, her spirit always remained positive and optimistic.

Erin's mother protected her and wrestled with letting her grow up to become independent until the day she met a VR counselor. After getting to know Erin, the VR counselor suggested the Tennessee Rehabilitation Center in Smyrna for Erin to help with social skills, education, and independent living. This was the answer Erin and her mother had been waiting for. Erin could learn and grow and become independent. Their expectations were exceeded. Erin blossomed into a thriving young lady who now has confidence in herself despite her visual impairments.

Erin began interning at the reception desk and assisted with admissions at TRC-Smyrna. She excelled in this role, and she was recommended to fill a position permanently. Erin is now thrilled to be working for Tennessee State Government as an Administrative Assistant II. Erin's mother couldn't say enough about her VR counselor, who was so instrumental in supporting Erin as she realized her potential.

## Vocational Rehabilitation Program Outcomes

In addition to the success stories shared throughout this report, the tables and figures included below offer additional information regarding the performance of the VR program for the 2018 federal fiscal year (October 1, 2017 through September 30, 2018).

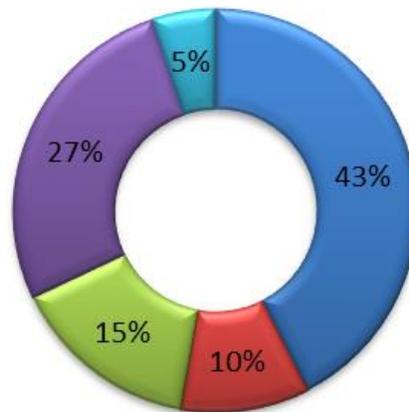
*The VR Program received over \$2.2 million in FY18 from the Social Security Administration (SSA) for the costs of providing services to assist SSA disability recipients in becoming gainfully employed.*

### VR Program Statistics

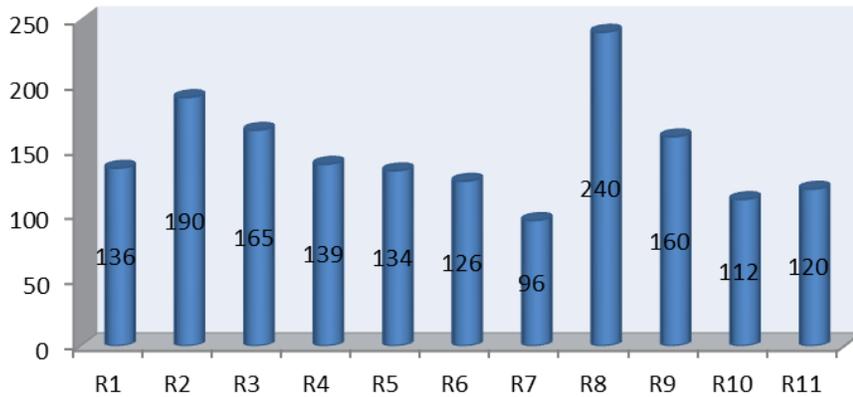
| Year                                                              | FY2014 | FY2015 | FY2016 | FY2017 | FY2018 |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| <b>New Applications</b>                                           | 7,689  | 6,782  | 6,002  | 5,892  | 5,532  |
| <b>Total number of people with disabilities served</b>            | 22,094 | 19,656 | 17,815 | 15,505 | 14,273 |
| <b>Number of persons obtaining employment/closed successfully</b> | 2,161  | 2,358  | 2,130  | 1,859  | 1,620  |

### Percentage of Applicants by Age

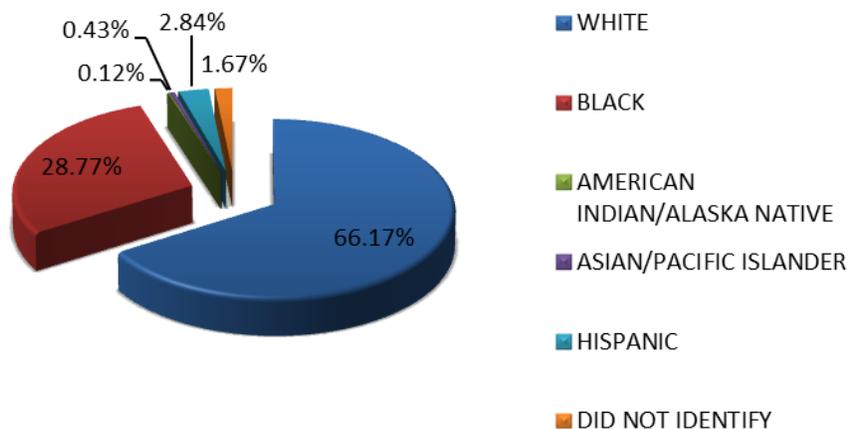
■ 24 OR LESS ■ 25-29 ■ 30-39 ■ 40-59 ■ 60-99



## Number of Successful Closures by Region



## Successful Closures by Ethnicity



## Return on Investment



**Average Hours Worked 28 hrs wk**

**Average Hourly Wage \$10.30**



**Average Weekly Wage \$308.70**

### Client Success Story

Mr. Villareal has autism, which presents difficulties with interpersonal and behavioral interactions with others and difficulties coping with his environment. He is a high school graduate and came to VR with previous volunteer experience at a YMCA and a local hospital. During the VR application, Mr. Villareal expressed a desire to work with the public.

It was determined that Mr. Villareal would most benefit from supported employment services, which provides additional support for individuals with the most significant disabilities to obtain and maintain employment. He was originally hired as a customer associate and greeter at a local food establishment. Following job stabilization, Mr. Villareal sought additional work hours and placement opportunities. Ultimately, Mr. Villareal pursued a different employment opportunity as a dishwasher at a large restaurant. He reported being extremely happy in his position, and both his hours per week and hourly wage were increased when he moved to his new job.

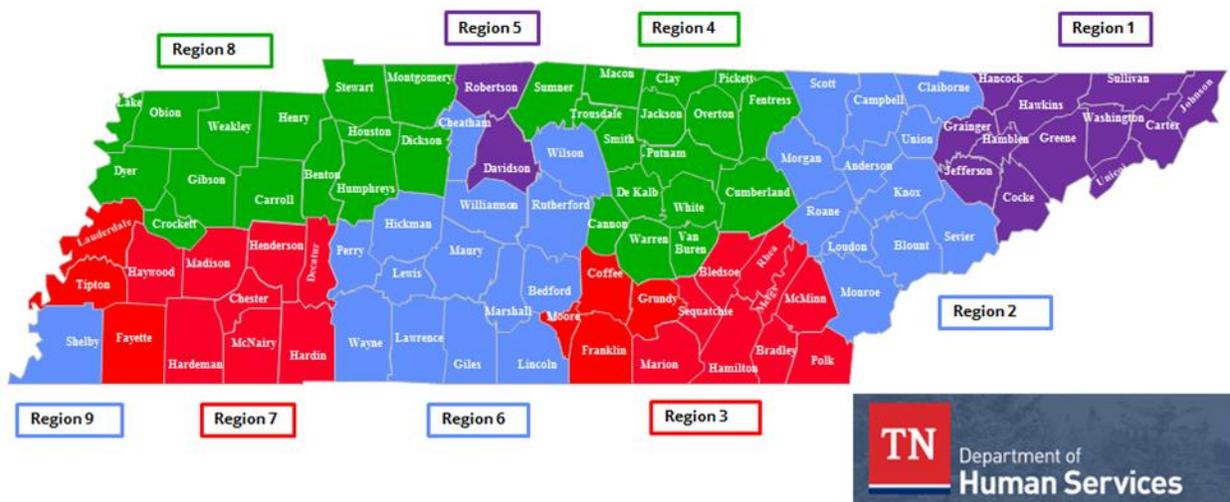
Vocational Rehabilitation also assisted Mr. Villareal with transportation by providing a one-time bus pass with the local transit system and helped him submit a permanent application for such a pass. He now no longer has to rely on his parents and, instead, has independent transportation to and from work.

## Plans for the Future

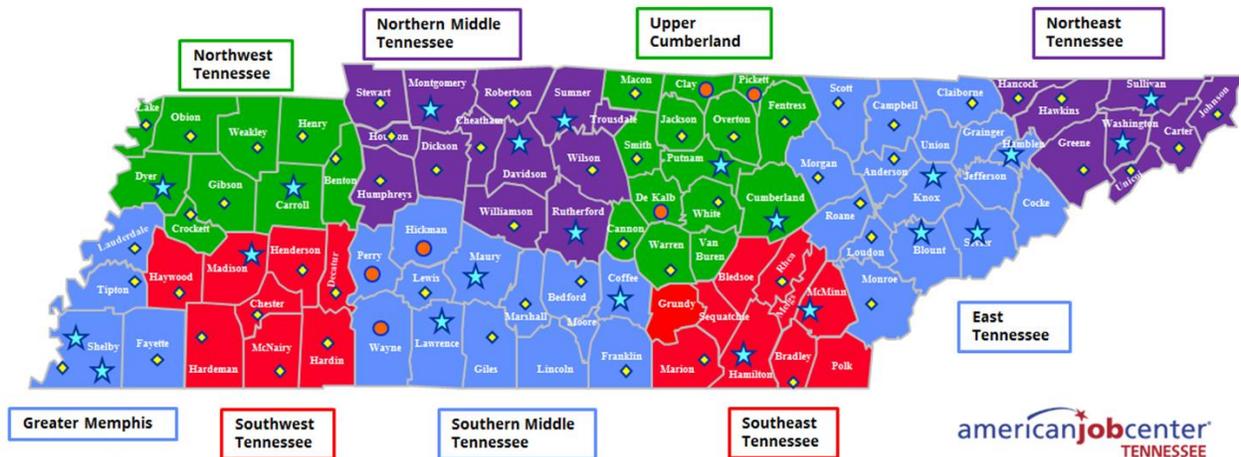
Looking forward to 2019, the Division of Rehabilitation Services is working on several strategic initiatives to strengthen and modernize operation of Vocational Rehabilitation services.

1. As part of a larger division reorganization, four new leadership positions have been created to lead and direct VR program operations in the field. Three Area Director positions (DHS Program Director 2) have been added to serve each grand division of the state (east, middle, and west) and a fourth Area Director will serve as the lead for sensory services. The goal is to have these individuals hired in early 2019 and fully on-boarded by April 2019.
2. The VR program will begin piloting a centralized intake and inquiry process with staff in the Davidson County DHS office. The goal is to develop and test a centralized process for receiving referrals and inquiries that will ensure consistent client experience and allow program leadership the ability to more closely monitor program operations. The pilot will begin in January 2019 and a recommendation to expand or conclude the pilot will be made by June 2019.
3. The VR program is working to realign geographic regions to match the new local workforce development areas established by the Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development. The goal is to have the current 9 geographic regions for the VR program transition to the 9 regions established by the Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development as depicted in the maps below by June 2019.

### Current Vocational Rehabilitation Program Regions



## Alignment with Department of Labor and Workforce Development



### Client Success Story #7

Ms. Black had an accident in 2016 while working on an assembly line job, causing a complete traumatic amputation of her left arm below the elbow. The year following the accident, she was unable to work and had no income; although she did attend counseling for depression and post-traumatic stress disorder. During this time, she began working around the house with her chickens and bees, in preparation to sell eggs and honey. She began to really enjoy these activities and wondered about the possibility of starting her own business.

Ms. Black approached VR in the summer of 2017 with a small-business idea to start a berry farm. Together with the counselor, a business exploration agreement was completed, which outlined a list of items needed to start her business. Ms. Black was very diligent in gathering and preparing the necessary items to move forward with her business. She returned to VR with a market analysis and a draft of her business plan. She began to become more upbeat and less depressed as she worked toward her goal of starting her business. She was determined to let nothing, including her disability, stand in the way of her dreams.

Ms. Black named her business *Black's Berry Farm*, which was a great fit with a fun play on words. She made business cards with the name and logo, completed her business plan, and returned to VR with her list of needs. Ms. Black requested funding for two greenhouses and the material to build raised beds in them, which totaled less than \$11,000, and her business plan was approved. She quickly set up the greenhouses and beds with the help of her family and soon began planting her berries and trees. Ms. Black also increased the number of chickens she raised and added several more bee hives to her farm, which helped to supplement her income until her berries were ready.

Ms. Black is now a successful business owner, selling eggs, honey, and berries. She has also expanded her farm to growing grapes and other fruit. She has worked hard to develop a customer base to ensure all of her crops are purchased and not wasted. She is very proud of her business, which has been a huge success thanks to VR and Ms. Black's dedication and determination.

# State Rehabilitation Council of Tennessee

## **Mission**

Serving all citizens of Tennessee, the mission of the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) of Tennessee is to advise, evaluate and partner with the public vocational rehabilitation program in support of improving access to employment and promoting a diverse workforce statewide.

## **Vision**

The SRC of Tennessee envisions a statewide workforce that values disability and diversity and is committed to full participation of its citizens.

## **Responsibilities and Functions**

The SRC of Tennessee works in partnership with the Tennessee Department of Human Services Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS) to maximize employment and independent living for Tennesseans with disabilities. The SRC advocates for the Vocational Rehabilitation program as well as advises the division on issues facing consumers of the VR program. The SRC acts as the voice of the consumer and other stakeholders in the VR program.

The SRC's responsibilities and functions, as outlined in the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, include:

- Review, analyze, and advise DHS/DRS regarding responsibilities related to eligibility, order of selection, effectiveness of services provided, and functions performed by state agencies that affect the employment of individuals with disabilities.
- Partner with DRS to develop, agree to, and review VR goals and priorities. DRS and the SRC evaluate the effectiveness of the VR program and submit reports of progress to the federal Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) commissioner.

### **Client Success Story**

Mr. Ballard applied for VR services with hopes of becoming a Tennessee Business Enterprise (TBE) vending facility operator. He received a comprehensive TBE evaluation to help determine his abilities, aptitudes, and interests for the program. Through this exploration, he was found to be an excellent candidate for the TBE program.

He first attended a 12-week Vision Impairment Services (VIS) program at TRC Smyrna, receiving training in orientation and mobility, adaptive communication skills, Braille, basic education, transitional skills, and assistive technology. Mr. Ballard successfully completed the VIS program in May 2017 and was recommended for the TBE program. *(Continued page 20)*

- Advise DRS regarding activities carried out and assist in preparation of the state plan and amendments to the plan, applications, reports, needs assessments, and evaluations. The SRC is responsible for the portion of the state plan which contains recommendations from the annual report, review and analysis of consumer satisfaction, other council reports, DRS responses to the comments and recommendations, and explanations for rejection of input or recommendations by DRS.
- Conduct a review and analysis of the effectiveness and consumer satisfaction of DRS, VR services provided and the employment outcomes achieved by eligible individuals.
- Prepare and submit an annual report to the Governor and the RSA commissioner on the status of VR programs in the state. This report highlights the goals and achievements of the VR program, the Council's accomplishments for the year, VR program statistics, and VR client success stories.
- Coordinate activities with other councils to avoid duplication of efforts and enhance the number of individuals served.
- Coordinate and establish working relationships between DRS and the Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC) and centers for independent living within Tennessee.
- Perform other functions consistent with VR services deemed appropriate by the SRC.

### Client Success Story continued

Mr. Ballard worked diligently with his VR counselor to ensure transportation and all necessary steps were taken care of prior to entering the TBE program.

In July, he began the TBE training program in Morristown where he learned ServSafe food prep training, and participated in on-the-job-training. He also received recommended assistive technology and other support services to assist him in the successful completion of the TBE program.

Mr. Ballard interviewed for a vending facility in February 2018, and eagerly informed his VR Counselor that he won the bid for the vending route. Mr. Ballard began employment as a TN Business Enterprise Vendor in May 2018. He received his first vending route in Nashville which included colleges and federal buildings. Mr. Ballard also received a Perkins Braille, printer, and Braille labeler to help with his job by allowing him to keep notes and label product bins and shelving. He is now working 40 hours a week and has also hired an additional employee to help him with his route.

***The SRC is established according to Title I, Section 101(a) (21) of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and in Title 34 Part 361.16 of the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR).***

## **Membership**

Council members are appointed by the Governor to serve a term of three years and may not serve more than two consecutive terms. When making appointments, the Governor must consider participants representing a broad range of individuals with disabilities and organizations interested in individuals with disabilities. The Governor, to the extent possible, must consider that minority populations are represented on the Council. The majority of members must be individuals with disabilities not employed by the Tennessee Department of Human Services, Division of Rehabilitation Services.

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***CFR Title 34 Part 361.17 contains details on membership, appointments, terms, and electing of a chairperson.***

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### **Officers for FY2018**

#### **Chair**

**Lee Brown**  
***Community Rehabilitation Program***  
**From:** Pulaski  
**VR Region:** 6

#### **Secretary**

**Rhonda Holder** (10/1/2017 – 3/31/2018)  
***Disability Advocacy Group***  
**From:** Pinson  
**VR Region:** 7

#### **Vice Chair**

**Becky Allen**  
***Client Assistance Program***  
**From:** Knoxville  
**VR Region:** 2

#### **Secretary**

**Allison Shipp**  
***Rehabilitation Counselor***  
**From:** Jackson  
**Region:** 7

### **Members for FY2018**

**Christina Clift**  
***Disability Advocacy Group***  
**From:** Millington  
**VR Region:** 9

**Lou Conley**  
***Disability Advocacy Group***  
**From:** Memphis  
**VR Region:** 9

**David Cole**  
***Business, Industry and Labor***  
**From:** Oakland  
**VR Region:** 7

**Joey Ellis**  
***Parent Training and Information Center***  
**From:** Nashville  
**VR Region:** 5

**Susan Johnson**  
***Business, Industry and Labor***  
**From:** Maryville  
**VR Region:** 2

**Burns Phillips**  
***Workforce Investment Board***  
**From:** Nashville  
**VR Region:** 5

**Tom Kakac**  
***Business, Industry & Labor***  
**From:** Columbia  
**VR Region:** 6

**Jim Sharp**  
***Business, Industry, and Labor***  
**From:** Corryton  
**VR Region:** 2

**Paula Knisley**  
***Director of VR Program***  
**From:** Nashville  
**VR Region:** 5

**Blake Shearer**  
***State Education Agency***  
**From:** Cookeville  
**VR Region:** 4

**Linnet Overton**  
***Statewide Independent Living Council***  
**From:** Nashville  
**VR Region:** 5

**Denise Wardle**  
***Disability Advocacy Group***  
**From:** Puryear  
**VR Region:** 8

Membership positions awaiting appointment in Governor's Office: Current or former VR applicant or recipient (2 positions).

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*The council must be comprised of at least 15 members from the following groups/organizations: Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC); Parent Training and Information Center; Client Assistance Program (CAP); VR counselor (ex officio, non-voting member if Department of Human Services (TDHS) employee); community program service providers; business, industry, and labor representatives (at least 4); disability groups; current or former VR recipient; State educational agency, State workforce investment board; and the Director of the DRS (ex-officio, non-voting).*

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## ***Accomplishments for FY2018***

- Held four SRC quarterly meetings to conduct SRC business.
- Held multiple conference calls to conduct SRC committee business and to prepare for quarterly meetings.
- Prepared FY2017 Annual Report with the DHS Division of Rehabilitation Services.
- SRC Chair Lee Brown served as a presenter at two training sessions for new VR Counselors and provided information regarding the role and responsibilities of the SRC.
- Maintained contact with the Governor's Office via DHS throughout the year to monitor the appointment of 11 of the 13 SRC membership nominations which were presented to the Governor's Office at the end of FY2017.

- Recruited and submitted nominations for the appointment or re-appointment of two additional SRC positions with both positions being appointed by the Governor’s Office in mid-year of FY2018.
- Reviewed the VR portion of the Combined State Plan and presented SRC input for inclusion in modifications to the Combined State Plan.
- SRC Chair and Vice Chair represented the SRC at an update and training session regarding the Employment Community First (ECF) CHOICES program.
- Invited current and former VR recipients to attend SRC meetings with their VR counselors to share their success stories.
- Continued participation in the National Coalition of State Rehabilitation Councils (NCSRC) via participation in bi-monthly national conference calls.
- SRC Chair and Community Rehabilitation Program Representative Lee Brown attended the NCSRC Fall Training Conference in November 2017.

#### **Client Success Story**

Ms. Lyon contacted VR to receive assistance in keeping her job as a teacher’s aide. She had been in her position for over a year but struggled due to her hearing loss. She had difficulty developing relationships with her students because she could not hear them very well and she often had to ask them to repeat themselves. Ms. Lyon had experienced hearing loss her entire life, but she had never found much benefit from hearing aids. She found them either uncomfortable or ineffective.

VR worked diligently with Ms. Lyon and a provider to explore hearing aid options that would meet her needs. Working together, they found a pair of comfortable and effective hearings aids that would work well for her. After exploring comparable benefits and finding none, VR agreed to purchase the hearing aids for Ms. Lyon.

Ms. Lyon said her relationship with her students are growing and that work is so much easier now that she can hear her students. During weekly contact with her VR counselor, Ms. Lyon also noted that she never knew birds could be so noisy and expressed excitement at first hearing the ocean. The hearing aids not only made Ms. Lyon more successful in her job, but they also improved her overall quality of life.

### ***FY2019 SRC Quarterly Meeting Schedule***

The SRC holds quarterly meetings and the dates, times and locations are posted on the State of Tennessee Public Meetings Calendar at <http://www.tn.gov> at least 30 days in advance of the meeting.

#### ***Meeting Dates:***

*November 8, 2018*  
*February 7, 2019*  
*May 9, 2019*  
*August 8, 2019*

## ***Join the SRC***

If you are a person with a disability or someone interested in having input regarding employment services to individuals with disabilities, the State Rehabilitation Council of Tennessee may be for you. If you are interested in learning more about this unique opportunity to serve, please visit the SRC website at <https://www.tn.gov/humanservices/ds/councils-and-committees/state-rehabilitation-council.html> for further information regarding the application process. You may also contact the SRC directly at [srctennessee@gmail.com](mailto:srctennessee@gmail.com).

### **Client Success Story**

Albert is a young man who has been diagnosed with Usher Syndrome and is considered Deaf-Blind due to his combined hearing and vision loss. Prior to moving to Tennessee, Albert was also diagnosed with several mental health disorders, resulting in prescription of heavy psychotropic medication.

The psychiatric report did not seem to be congruent with the person that VR staff had come to know. When asked about the testing, Albert told VR staff that the doctor's office did not use a sign language interpreter during psychiatric testing. Instead, he and the doctor wrote notes back and forth, which resulted in a language barrier that led to severe misdiagnoses. VR arranged for Albert to meet with a mental health counselor who is fluent in American Sign Language (ASL) and also provided for transportation services for him to attend the appointment. He communicated well with the ASL-fluent counselor and his mental health diagnoses changed from paranoid schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, anxiety and others to a diagnosis of mild depression.

The Deaf-Blind Services Coordinator and the VR counselor provided Albert with information about the Helen Keller National Center (HKNC) in New York. VR felt he may benefit from the specialized training HKNC offers for people who are Deaf-Blind and explained to him that all staff are fluent in ASL. After being accepted, VR assisted with transportation and the cost of the training program. Throughout his training, Albert learned skills such as navigating with a white cane, Braille training and assistive technology available to help him adjust to losing his sight. VR and HKNC assisted Albert in contacting the ICANCONNECT program, which provides distance communication devices and technology for individuals with a combined vision and hearing loss. Through this program Albert received the assistive technology needed to ensure his success.

Due to Albert's ambition and motivation, he completed the training at HKNC in 13 weeks. Upon returning home, he continued to exhibit strong motivation and not only obtained one job, but two! He works at McDonald's 4 days a week performing tasks such as maintaining the lights and other equipment along with performing other mechanical tasks. Albert's second job is at Sonic where he works as a manager.

Through the collaboration between VR and several service providers, Albert was able to receive a proper mental health assessment, transportation, assistive technology, training, and successful employment. Albert has been actively employed for over 6 months now and is doing very well. Albert went from feeling hopeless and insecure with several misdiagnoses to feeling independent and successful with minimal barriers.