



***West Virginia State Rehabilitation Council
2024 WVSRC Annual Report***

Our vision is to ensure that all people with disabilities are provided with an equal opportunity to receive the vocational rehabilitation services for which they are eligible.

2024 WVSRC Annual Report

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Greetings from the WV State Rehabilitation Council

Pictured Below: 2024 SRC Meeting – Members & Guests





Dr. Gregory Epps, Sr.
WV State Rehabilitation Council
Chairperson

Greetings:

I am thankful for the opportunity to serve as the Chairperson of the West Virginia State Rehabilitation Council. Our dedicated members truly care about the well-being of all citizens in our state and advocating for West Virginians with disabilities. Each council member is passionate about our responsibility to advise and provide wise counsel to the WV Division of Rehabilitation Services. It has been a privilege to be involved with the WVSRC and WVDRS for multiple terms, spanning over a decade.

I have served on the SRC for many years as a Higher Education representative. In my roles at West Virginia University, I have assisted individuals with accessibility services and worked with students, some of whom are eligible for DRS services and others who utilize similar resources. WVU and the DRS work collaboratively serve the needs of the citizens in West Virginia and beyond.

Our director, Julie Justice, has been a pleasure to work with. She has introduced new and efficient processes that have made our council more productive and effective. I deeply appreciate her help and great work.

It is a privilege to work with this outstanding and committed council and to have come in contact with so many remarkable individuals.

Thank you,

Dr. Gregory Epps, Sr.
WVSRC Chairperson



Scott Gossard
WV State Rehabilitation Council
Vice Chairperson

Greetings:

As the Vice Chairperson of the West Virginia State Rehabilitation Council, I have had the privilege of working with the outstanding members of the Council. Our members share a passion for our mission of advising and providing support to the WV Division of Rehabilitation Services. It has been a privilege to be involved with the WVSRC for several years.

Over the years, I have also serve on the WV Statewide Independent Living Council, Traumatic Brain Injury Councils, and the Human Rights Council of the Potomac Highlands Guild. This past year, I retired from the director position at the Upper Potomac Area Agency on Aging. I continue to work and remain active on the Board of Health

The Council continues to grow with new members. Our director, Julie Justice has gained knowledge and quickly developed in her position over the past two and a half years. I am thankful for everyone on the West Virginia State Rehabilitation Council, from the past, in our present, and going into our future.

Likewise, I am grateful for our agency, the West Virginia Division of Rehabilitation Services. WVDRS continues to be one of the country's most successful vocational rehabilitation service agencies. Director Bua-lam and his staff work diligently to make sure all West Virginians who qualify will receive what they need to get a job and maintain employment for a more independent future. I am proud to be a part of such an excellent agency.

Thank you,

Scott Gossard
WVSRC Vice Chair



Julie Justice
WV State Rehabilitation Council
Executive Director

Hello from West Virginia:

I first would like to extend my gratitude to the West Virginia State Rehabilitation Council, national supporters, state agency (WVDRS) and partners. Serving on the WVSRC as the Executive Director has allowed me to build relationships and learn from so many inspirational individuals with similar objectives. I appreciate everyone involved in the vocational rehabilitation community. Each member on the council and state agency staff brings specialized knowledge to pour into people with disabilities in West Virginia, and beyond; to live more independent, fulfilling lives.

I cannot express how encouraging it has been to work with such a dedicated group of people on our council. As terms come to an end and new members are appointed there is always a shift in dynamic. With each new member comes added value to the successful foundation that was laid before us. It reminds me of Tuckman's Model, from forming, to storming, to norming, and performing. We are blessed to have so much knowledge and passion to collaborate in our mission as one council.

Our council values the WV Division of Rehabilitation Services leadership, counselors, and entire staff who embody unique skills to create a culture of quality for consumers. It is rewarding to witness all that WVDRS accomplishes for the people they serve. They have several programs and partnerships that cohesively provide a wide array of services for consumers. WVDRS continues to be recognized nationally as an exceptional vocational rehabilitation state agency. Our Council is honored to be aligned with WVDRS excellence.

Sincerely,

Julie Justice
WVSRC Executive Director



Pisnu Bua-lam
WV Division of Rehabilitation Services
Director

Dear Friends of the State Rehabilitation Council:

On behalf of the West Virginia Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS), I share my sincere appreciation for the State Rehabilitation Council's partnership and support of the DRS mission, which is:

Together, we enable and empower individuals with disabilities to work and to live independently by providing individualized services to consumers and employers.

With the support of the State Rehabilitation Council members, DRS has been working to expand coordination and cooperation with our partners including Special Education, Career Technical Education, local schools and their administrators, community service providers and other partners to further enhance relationships and facilitate a systematic approach to jointly support students with disabilities in maximizing their potential.

Through heightened collaboration, DRS and essential partners are increasing access to and opportunities for individuals, especially students, with disabilities to participate and succeed in education and training programs that will lead to high-quality, integrated, competitive employment outcomes.

SRC members contribute vital experience and efforts to assist DRS in meeting its mission and helping West Virginians with disabilities to achieve their employment goals.

Thank you for your continued dedication and your hard work, which greatly benefits West Virginia's vocational rehabilitation consumers!

Sincerely,

Pisnu Bua-lam
Director

WV State Rehabilitation Council

Our Mission:

The West Virginia State Rehabilitation Council is to review, analyze and advise the West Virginia Division of Rehabilitation Services regarding its program eligibility, performance and effectiveness in empowering individuals with disabilities to achieve their employment goals.



West Virginia State Rehabilitation Council Member Composition

The West Virginia State Rehabilitation Council is composed of at least 15 members, but no more than twenty-six (26) members, appointed by the Governor.

No member of the Council may serve more than two (2) consecutive three (3) year terms. The two-term limit does not apply to the consumer Assistant Program (CAP) representative, Parent Training & Information representative (PTI), Board of Education representative or Vocational Rehabilitation Director.

The knowledge and expertise of the Council members is a valuable asset in carrying out the mission and goals of the SRC. Members take their responsibilities seriously spending a great deal of time and effort to fulfill their duties. Monitoring and advising WVDRS on the issues, services, programs and policies which impact the lives of West Virginians with disabilities is essential.

The majority of SRC members must be individuals with disabilities. For purposes of SRC membership, an "individual with a disability" is anyone who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities; has a record of having such an impairment; or is regarded as having such an impairment.

The Council must have members representing the following:

- at least one representative of the Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC)—who must be either the chairperson or another designee of the SILC;
- at least one representative of a parent training and information center established pursuant to section 682(a) of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act;
- at least one representative of the consumer Assistance Program (CAP) who must be either the CAP director or another individual recommended by the CAP;
- at least one qualified VR counselor with knowledge of and experience with the VR program, who serves as a nonvoting, ex officio member if he or she is employed by the DSA;
- at least one representative of community rehabilitation program service providers;
- four representatives of business, industry, and labor;
- representatives of disability advocacy groups: (a) representing a cross-section of individuals with physical, cognitive, sensory, and mental disabilities; and (b) representing individuals with disabilities who have difficulty representing themselves or are unable to represent themselves due to their disabilities;
- at least one former or current applicant for, or recipient of, VR services;
- at least one representative of the directors of AIVRS projects, if such projects are funded under section 121 of the Rehabilitation Act in the State;
- at least one representative of the State educational agency responsible for the public education of students with disabilities;
- at least one representative from the State workforce development board; and
- Director of the Designated State Unit (VR Agency) shall be an ex officio, non voting member of the Council.

WEST VIRGINIA STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL

2024 MEMBER ROSTER



- **H. David Sanders, of Kanawha County, represents the Statewide Independent Living Council (WVSILC).**
 - David is the current representative of the Statewide Independent Living Council. He is the WVSILC Chairperson and has already been an asset on the WV State Rehabilitation Council during his first year on the WVSRC. Dave has enjoyed a career in the behavioral healthcare field for over thirty years, which include serving in state government, working for non-profits, and consulting with community advocates and policy makers. His experience also includes leading workshops, participating on nonprofit boards and serving as a public policy analyst. The WVSILC promotes the Independent Living Philosophy, which is one of “consumer control, peer support, self-help, self-determination, equal access, and individual and systems advocacy in order to maximize the leadership, empowerment, independence, and productivity of individuals with disabilities, and the integration and full inclusion of individuals with disabilities into the mainstream of society. Find more on WVSILC at: wvsilc.org or call 1-855-855-9743.



- **Brenda Lamkin, of Upshur County, represents the Parent Training and Information center (WVPTI).**
 - Brenda is the representative of a parent and training information center on the WVSRC. She is currently serving as the WVSRC Secretary. Brenda has been the Executive Director at WV Parent Training and Information (PTI) since May of 2015, where she worked as a Regional Parent Trainer for WVPTI since 2002. WVPTI’s Mission is “... to empower families as advocates and partners in improving education, health, and transition outcomes for their children and youth with disabilities and special health care needs with a commitment to diversity and equity.” Brenda’s commitment is evident from numerous special education councils and committees, including both state and national. She was selected as an aRPy Ambassador for WV, a partnership with the Division of Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children, the ECTA, and the Region B PTAC. Brenda has also been a member of the WV Assistive Technology Council since 2010, representing a parent of a child with special needs. Learn what all WVPTI has to offer on their website: wvpti-inc.org or call 1-800-281-1436.

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- **Alia Tanner, of Clay County, represents the Client Assistance Program (CAP): Disability Rights of West Virginia (DRWV).**
 - Alia has been the Client Assistance Program (CAP) representative on the WVSRC since 2024. She is currently the CAP Advocate for the Disability Rights of West Virginia (DRWV). She also has experience advocating for individuals with disabilities for numerous years as a Worker’s Compensation Specialist in private and public sectors. Alia has been an active member on WVSILC as well. “The CAP provides information, assistance, and advice to people who are applying for or receiving Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) services from the WVDRS or IL services from a CIL.” For more information on DRWV’s free and confidential services, advice on legal rights (ex. ADA), representation during reviews/hearings, appeal processes, and more, such as EMS Communication Visor Cards, go to the website: drofwv.org or call 1-800-950-5250.

- **Veronica Bunch, of Kanawha County, represents a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor, from the Designated State Agency, WV Division of Rehabilitation Services (WVDRS).**

- Veronica has been the vocational rehabilitation counselor representative on the WVSRC since 2023. She is a Senior Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor for WVDRS, serving students with disabilities in Kanawha and Putnam County where her main goal is to empower people to meet their work expectations and build confidence in daily living, representing and advocating consumer needs, from age 14 years old, through adulthood. Veronica also travels the state to provide resources to underserved populations. Veronica’s passion is evident in success stories she provides, including a WVDRS 2021 Consumer District Award Winner and her developmental role with the WVDRS 2022 Employer of the Year. Veronica is also a Behavioral Rehabilitation Specialist for WVU Medicine Thomas Hospitals; a Co-President on the Board of Foster, Kinship, Adoptive Network of WV; and a Minority Initiative Outreach Committee appointed member. Veronica advocates for people with disabilities across multiple platforms, such as the “Night to Shine Prom” for people with special needs and festival pageantry, including the Ms. Black West Virginia USA, 2024. For more information from WVDRS on their programs, education support, training/career opportunities, success stories, partnering as an employer, and more, visit wvdrs.org or call 800-642-8207.



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- **Amber Hinkle, of Greenbrier County, represents Community Rehabilitation Program (CRP), from Open Doors, Inc.**
 - Amber has represented community rehabilitation programs on the WVSRC for several years and is the Executive Director of Open Doors, Inc., serving adults and children who have intellectual disabilities and/or other developmental disabilities. In 1990, Amber, along with two other medical professionals, opened the private behavioral health agency: Open Doors for the Developmentally Challenged, Inc. Amber continues to keep and move Open Doors, Inc. to the forefront of quality community based services while supporting individual rights in every single aspect of community living. Amber has also served on the Title XIX I/DD Waiver Quality Assurance and Improvement Council, the WV Olmstead Council, and the WV Developmental Disabilities Council. Additionally, Amber has been an active member of the Greenbrier County Child and Youth Advocacy Center Board as well as a charter member of the Greenbrier County Communities in Schools Board. Amber helps people during their time of need, exuding her care and crisis support from years as a member on the Greenbrier County Multidisciplinary Investigative Team and the Greenbrier County Sexual Abuse Response Team. For more information on services at Open Doors, Inc., go to opendoorswv.com or call 800-439-2135 or 800-491-4460.



- **Karen Haught, of Ohio County, represents Community Rehabilitation Program (CRP), from The Seeing Hand Association.**
 - Karen has been a newer representative of the community rehabilitation programs, serving on the WVSRC, since 2023. She is the Executive Director of The Seeing Hand Association, Inc. where she has served for several years. “The Seeing Hand Association, Inc. offers an innovative array of specialized services for the blind and visually impaired individuals. The services assist in meeting the identified needs of the individual while maintaining our core values of accountability, honesty, integrity, trust, teamwork, independence, personal and professional growth, dignity and self-esteem.” Karen has touched the lives of countless people during her years as a board member and/or involvement with the following entities: The Blind Consumer Affairs Committee, the United Way, the Wheeling Symphony Orchestra, WV National Federation for the Blind, the Big Brothers Big Sisters of America, St. Mark Lutheran Church Choir, Wheeling Symphony Auxiliary, Wheeling Lions Club, Hope on the Hill Ministry, and Leadership Wheeling 2015. Karen’s impact is evident across her many endeavors to enrich the lives of others. For more information about The Seeing Hand Association, Inc., and their services, programs, events, workshops, and more, please visit seeinghandassociation.com or call 304-232-4810.

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- **Fred Chandler IV, of Kanawha County, represents Business, Labor, and Industry, from the Charleston Building and Construction Trades Council.**
 - Fred is a representative of Business, Labor, and Industry. He is the Business Manager and Executive Secretary Treasurer of Charleston Building and Construction Trades Council, AFL-CIO. “The West Virginia State Building and Construction Trades Council is an umbrella group comprised of local building construction trades unions and their members who work in West Virginia and the border counties of our neighboring states. The Council is affiliated with the Building and Construction Trades Department, AFL-CIO.” Fred is involved with multiple councils and unions for various trades. He has served our country with the WV Air National Guard/USAF. Fred also participates in events such as Jobs and Hope 2nd Chance Job Fairs to encouraging consumers with disabilities to explore a tradesperson career, through training and apprenticeship programs. He is passionate in working for a greater purpose, such as employment advocacy for people with disabilities to live more independently. For more information on the WV Building and Construction Trades, please visit actwv.org and wvtrades.org or call 304-346-1367 or 304-343-6952.



- **Robert “Bob” Gray, of Kanawha County, represents Business, Labor, and Industry, from Thomas (Hospital) Health System.**
 - Bob is a representative of Business, Labor, and Industry for the WVSRC. He has been a foundational member of the WVSRC and is also serving as the WVSRC Treasurer. Bob was the Senior Vice President of Thomas Hospital Health System for 34 years which gives him the unique business perspective and experience of the large operational healthcare industry. Thomas Hospital has been a workplace training site for people with disabilities for several years, from supportive relationships such as the one fostered by Bob Gray. Bob has been an advocate for multiple organizations in the community, previously serving on boards such as the Roark-Sullivan Lifeway Center for the unhoused population and a prior member of the Region III Workforce Investment Board. His valuable assets also include knowledge of policies, procedures, and best practices.

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- **Travis Kline, of Harrison County, represents Business, Labor, and Industry, from Job Squad, Inc.**



- Travis has been a representative of Business, Labor, and Industry on the WVSRC since 2023. He is the CEO of the Job Squad, Incorporated who has also worked with individuals with disabilities for almost 20 years. He has seen the need of services in West Virginia as it is the state with highest prevalence of people with disabilities in the nation. He works to close that gap and believes that through his experience, knowledge of service delivery, policies, and dedication he can help make a difference. Travis' dedication on the WVSRC is to enact real change for WV residents with disabilities to have a better quality of life with more successful outcomes. Some of Travis' experience includes being a Psychometrist, a Research Assistant for Behavioural Analysis, a Case Manager, Services Coordinator, and Employment Manager. He has also been on multiple boards, such as the WV ABLE Account Advisory Board, WV Association for Disability Employment, Business Service Team Member for the Region VI Workforce Development Board, Data Analysis Work Group Member for Employee Research System, Source America, and the Bridgeport Rotary Club. For more information on Job Squad, Inc. please see <https://www.jobsguadinc.org>.

- **Kevin Trippett, of Wood County, represents Business, Labor, and Industry, from Westbrook Health Services, Inc. (Behavioral Health Center) and a Certified Management Accountant.**



- Kevin has been a representative of Business, Labor, and Industry on the WVSRC since 2023. He is the CEO of Westbrook Health Services, Inc., a Behavioral Health Center and a Certified Management Accountant. Kevin's passion is to not only help people with disabilities find employment but help them remain successful in their work. He also coordinates with WVDRS on referrals and services. For more information on Westbrook Health Services, Inc., please see their website: <https://www.westbrookhealth.org>.

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- **Ashley Skeens, of Putnam County, represents Business, Labor, and Industry, from Advocacy in Motion.**
 - Ashley is a representative of Business, Labor, and Industry on the WVSRC since 2023. She is the Business Owner for Advocacy In Motion (AIM) and has several years of experience with IDD waivers, from case management to being an Executive Director. She is also an ancillary & previous Member of the IDD Waiver Quality Improvement Advisory Council (QIA). Ashley serves on the WVSILC as well. Her employment history with has provided her with a vast amount of knowledge on policies and procedures from several roles serving people with disabilities. Ashley has the passion to spread education of IDD waivers and services provided to fill the gaps for the population with disabilities and allow them to intentionally be placed first. For more information on AIM, please see their website: www.aim-wv.com.
- **Scott Gossard, of Grant County, represents Disability Advocacy Groups, from the Upper Potomac Area Agency on Aging, Inc.**
 - Scott has been a foundational member of the WVSRC and represents the Disability Advocacy Groups. He retired this past year as the Director of the Upper Potomac Area Agency on Aging, Inc. Scott has been on several boards and councils for his entire career, including WVSILC, Traumatic Brain Injury Councils, the Human Rights Council of the Potomac Highlands Guild, and the Board of Health. He has devoted his career to make a difference in communities for people with disabilities. Scott has served on the WVSRC Executive Board as the previous Chairperson, previous Treasurer and most recently filled the role of our Vice Chair. For further information from the Upper Potomac Area Agency on Aging, Inc. services, such as aging and disabilities, please visit the following website: <https://www.regioneight.org/upaaa>.

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- **Dr. Janet Lintala, DC, of Raleigh County, represents Disability Advocacy Groups, from Autism Health! PLLC.**
 - Janet is a representative of Disability Advocacy Groups on the WVSRC and has actively served for several years across multiple terms. She is an autism parent, clinician, and author. She is also the President of an autism non-profit. The non-profit foundation and eight-time award winning book, is titled, *The Un-Prescription for Autism Inc.* Janet has multiple books and continues to spread education on autism internationally, through several speaking engagements and contributions in magazines, blogs, and publications in multiple languages. Autism Health! PLLC. provides support to children and adults on the autism spectrum for whole health by evaluating and providing services, which include correlating side-effects. To find out more about her book and foundation please see the Autism Health! PLLC. website at <https://loveautismhealth.com>.



- **Angela Adams, of Cabell County, represents Disability Advocacy Groups, from Mountain State Centers for Independent Living.**
 - Angela is a representative of Disability Advocacy Groups for the WVSRC since 2023. She is the President and CEO of the Mountain State Centers for Independent Living. President CEO of Mountain State Centers for Independent Living. Throughout her career she has collaborated with WVSILC, WV Independent Network (WIN), National Council on Independent Living (NCIL), WVDRS, and the Fair-Shake Network. She has also been a small business owner for thirty years. To find out more about Mountain State Centers for Independent Living, please visit their website: <https://mtstcil.org>.

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- **Jason Bailey, of Wood County, represents Current or Former Applicant for, or Recipient of Vocational Rehabilitation Services.**
 - Jason is the WVSRC member who represents a Current of Former Applicant for, or Recipient of Vocational Rehabilitation Services. He is the Executive Director of the WV Association for Disability Employment (WVADE) and Primary Therapist at Peer Solutions. His past experience includes being the Director for multiple community rehabilitation programs and agencies providing services to people with disabilities. Jason has also been an active member on the Mountain State Parent Children Adolescent Network Board since 2016. His life's work has revolved around providing services and advocating for people with disabilities. His brother received services from WVDRS that assisted him to be on a successful path. His belief that every individual with a disability has the ability and right to work and make an "honest wage" is evident in his passionate efforts, progress, and achievements. For more information on WVADE and their services, please visit <https://wvade.org> and find out more on Peer Solutions on their website: <https://peer-solution.com>.



- **Nancy Cline, of Kanawha County, represents State Educational Agency, from the WV Department of Education.**
 - Nancy is the WVSRC representative of the State Educational Agency. She is a Coordinator in the Office of Federal Programs for the West Virginia Department of Education. She worked in PreK-12 special education in public schools at the district and state levels for over 30 years. Nancy has experience working with students, school personnel, parents, community and state agencies, and the federal government on matters that pertain to the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) in various capacities. She has been a special education teacher, a job coach, and a coordinator for special education services. She served as the President of the WV Council for Exceptional Children (WVCEC) from 2019 to 2024 and has acted as a liaison to the WV Advisory Council for the Education of Exceptional Children (WVACEEC) since 2016. Nancy desires to help WV students with disabilities prepare for, find, and keep jobs to live as independently and productively as possible. She has been active on the WVSRC for multiple years, adding valuable knowledge, connections, and positivity. Nancy retired in 2024 and will continue channeling the same passion in her next chapter of life.

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- **Abby Reale, of Putnam County, represents the State Workforce Development Board.**
 - Abby is the new representative of the State Workforce Development Board, as she was appointed in 2024 to the WVSRC. She also has served as a Director of Government and External Affairs for Marshall Health Network, a member of the WV State Workforce Development Board and a board member for the non-profit, Unlimited Future Inc. Abby has a passion for serving on the WVSRC from her long-standing engagement in the healthcare industry and as an involved citizen who cares about her fellow West Virginians with disabilities, for their success, and equality. Abby uses her unique background to advocate for individuals with disabilities in our state and beyond the borders of West Virginia.



- **Pisnu Bua-lam, of Putnam County, represents the Designated State Vocational Rehabilitation Agency Director for the WV Division of Rehabilitation Services (WVDRS).**
 - Pisnu has been appointed as the Director of the WV Division of Rehabilitation Services after serving as Acting Director for WVDRS from August 2021 through June 2022. Prior to being the Director, he was the Deputy with oversight of Administrative and Support Services, Governmental and Public Relations, and State Plan and Program Evaluation for the agency. Pisnu has 35 years of experience in vocational rehabilitation. He started his career with WVDRS over 20 years ago as the Manager of the Program Evaluation Unit. He is a nationally recognized expert on program evaluation and return-on-investment of public vocational rehabilitation programs and has authored numerous journal publications. Pisnu has worked diligently on creating and maintaining relationships with Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act core partner agencies, Workforce WV, WV Adult Education, and Community Rehabilitation Programs to create a cohesive culture for quality consumer services for West Virginians with disabilities. The success of WVDRS continues to be acknowledged nationwide. For more information on WVDRS and their services, please visit wvdrs.org or call 800-642-8207.

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- **Dr. Gregory Epps Sr., of Monongalia County, is Higher Education Representative, from West Virginia University (WVU).**
 - Greg has been an appointed “additional” representative from the Higher Education Institution on the WVSRC for multiple terms and most recently served as our Chairperson. He is a Program Manager with West Virginia University’s Health Sciences Center, working with students coming from underrepresented backgrounds, helping them become successful at WVU and transitioning into independence. Greg has been a mentor and faculty affiliate for WVU Honors EXCEL Program. He previously served as Senior Advisor, the Vice President for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at WVU, which involved collaboration with the Director of Accessibility Services for academic accommodations, special housing needs, suitable transportation for students, as well as Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance for the entire university. His years of service will continue to shine in future generations to come. Greg invited multiple guest speakers from WVU to WVSRC meetings. For more on WVU accommodation programs and services, please visit <https://osa.wvu.edu/programs>.



- **Teresa Cunningham, of Cabell County, is a Special Education Representative, and President of WV Gold Star Mothers.**
 - Terry has been an appointed “additional” representative from Special Education on the WVSRC. She has had approximately 40 years of experience as a Special Education Teacher which includes time as a Job Coach. She continues to serve as a substitute teacher after retiring from her full-time position, mostly teaching students in “special education,” including those on the autism spectrum. Her career reflects her dedication to advocate and empower students and all people with disabilities. Terry is also the President and active member of WV Gold Star Mothers, which is an affiliate of the American Gold Star Mothers who have lost a son or daughter during service or resulting from their service of our country. WV Gold Star Mothers are active in Veteran advocacy across the state of West Virginia (see slide 54). For information on Veteran services, please visit <https://veterans.wv.gov/pages/vsos.aspx>.

WEST VIRGINIA STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL

Executive Committee Officers, Liaison & Staff

WVSRC Executive Committee 2024 Council Officers

Dr. Gregory Epps, Sr. - Chairperson
Monongalia County, West Virginia

Scott Gossard - Vice Chairperson
Grant County, West Virginia

Bob Gray - Treasurer
Kanawha County, West Virginia

Brenda Lamkin - Secretary
Upshur County, West Virginia

WVSRC Liaison (non-member)

Richard “Rich” Ward, WVDRS Programs Specialist and dedicated WVSRC Liaison for several years



WVSRC Staff (non-member)

Julie Justice, WVSRC Executive Director since 2022



WEST VIRGINIA STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL

Upcoming Members for Fiscal Year 2025

Michael Casey



- Kanawha County, WV
- Representative of Disability Advocacy Groups
- Michael is currently the Director for Disability and Accessibility at WV State University. He is also on the Appalachian Center for Independent Living; the Association of Higher Education and Disability; the Society of Disability Studies and has previously served on the WV State Rehabilitation Council.
- Quote: *“I believe that everyone should have the right to be treated equally without discrimination or bias. My lifelong mission to assist people in finding their own way led me to becoming a Certified Rehabilitation Counselor and opening the doors of access to education, training and employment for all individuals as they pursue their path to become who they determine to be. I hope I can serve as well as everyone who has served previously on the council to represent all people with disabilities in their desire for equal quality of life.”*

Tonya Rutkowski



- Kanawha County, WV
- Representative of the State Educational Agency, Department of Education
- Since joining the West Virginia Department of Education (WVDE) in 2021 as the State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP) and Secondary Transition Coordinator Tonya has been responsible for delivery of technical assistance (TA) and support to both state and local level education staff. This TA includes improving secondary transition planning at the local level and implementing evidence-based practices related to improving graduation and post-secondary outcomes for students with disabilities. She has also presented at multiple national conferences including those hosted by the Office of Special Education (OSEP) and OSEP-funded technical assistance centers. With over 20 years of combined classroom and leadership experience serving students in K-12 special education Tonya has developed a leadership philosophy and work ethic focused on the three factors: influence (spreading passion for educating all students), inspiration (building relationships that inspire others), and impact (getting desired results). Tonya is also the current designee for the State Director of Special Education on both the DD Council and the Employment First Taskforce.

COUNCIL RESPONSIBILITIES AND PURPOSE

The West Virginia State Rehabilitation Council (WVSRC) is established in Section 105 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended (ACT), and 34 CFR 361.16 - 361.17 of its implementing regulations. The WVSRC gives advice to and works in partnership with the West Virginia Division of Rehabilitation Services (WVDRS).

In compliance with the guidelines of the 1998 amendments to the Rehabilitation Act, the WVSRC must perform the following functions, after consulting with the State Workforce Development Board:

In partnership with WVDRS, the Council:

- a. Develops, agrees to, and reviews WVDRS goals and priorities;
- b. Evaluates the effectiveness of their program and submit annual progress reports to the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) Commissioner;
- c. Conducts a statewide needs assessment of individuals with disabilities living in the State every three (3) years;
- d. Advises WVDRS regarding vocational rehabilitation activities;
- e. Serves as the Policy Consultation Committee for the Agency; and,
- f. Attends Agency functions, training events & national conferences.

The Council assists in the preparation of the State Plan for Vocational Rehabilitation, amendments to the plan, applications, reports, needs assessments and evaluations, including those necessary for WVDRS to satisfy requirements.

COUNCIL RESPONSIBILITIES AND PURPOSE (Continued)

Responsibilities include: reviewing and analyzing the effectiveness of the programs, services and consumer satisfaction. All consumers with closed cases are sent a survey. This information is compiled by an independent consultant and provided to the Agency and Council. Data is posted on the Agency and WVSRC's websites.

An annual report is prepared and submitted to the Governor and RSA on the status of Vocational Rehabilitation services and the Council's activities for the year. This report is disseminated to all SRC's throughout the U.S. and territories and other state representatives. The information is posted on the Agency and WVSRC websites, and available to the public.

The WVSRC coordinates various activities with other partners to assist in educating the public on pertinent issues. The Council continually strives to enrich and maintain the working relationships between WVDRS, the National Coalition of State Rehabilitation Councils (NCSRC), Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR), WV Statewide Independent Living Centers (WVSILC), Centers for Independent Living (CIL) throughout WV and other partners.

Members of the Council and WVSRC staff perform other functions that are determined appropriate and comparable to other required functions, provided they are consistent with the purpose of Title I of the ACT and its implementing regulations.

Sunshine Act Reporting: "Service Agreement to support operation of the West Virginia State Rehabilitation Council as required by the Federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973, pursuant to assurances provided by the State of West Virginia and the State Department of Commerce, Division of Rehabilitation Services, to the Federal Government under the current approved WV State Plan for VR Supported Employment. All expenditures and work performed shall be consistent with the Statement of Work and other provisions of the contractual agreement hereto Only federal funds will be expended for the purpose (of the WVSRC)." – Source: State of WV, Agency Contract, WVDRS Purchase Requisition ACT DRS24* 10/01/2023–9/30/2024.

COUNCIL ACTIVITY AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Meetings and Conferences: The Council meets four (4) times at minimum during the fiscal year. The WVSRC scheduled meetings were held with a hybrid approach, virtually and in person. Members reviewed and amended documentation; reported on collaborations with partners in consumer related events; recommended reappointments and new nominations for Governor appointments; and held votes according to council needs. Guest presentations offered valuable information on consumer services and networking relationships. The Council received State of the Agency presentations by West Virginia Division of Rehabilitation Services (WVDRS) Director or their representative at each WVSRC meeting. WVSRC was provided current information from WVDRS at quarterly meetings regarding financial status, performance benchmarks, changes in Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) regulations and any other information by VR staff. The Council is continually educated on the WIOA changes and the impact on the Agency. The WVSRC website continues to be maintained and updated. The Council has also established standing and ad-hoc committees to continue to meet all operational goals for the next fiscal year. The Council members and Executive Director, along with WVDRS staff, attend the national spring and fall Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) and the National Coalition of State Rehabilitation Councils (NCSRC) conferences.

State Plan Recommendations: One of the most important responsibilities of the State Rehabilitation Councils is to advise, make recommendations and assist the WV Division of Rehabilitation Services (WVDRS) in preparing their State Plan for Vocational Services. The overall purpose of the State Plan is to assure that State and Federal governments play a leadership role in promoting employment for persons with disabilities and to ensure a link between citizen participation and the legislative process. Council reviewed the WVDRS Combined State Plan for the upcoming fiscal year and provided our recommendations to WVDRS.

COUNCIL ACTIVITY AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS (Continued)

WVDRS Consumer Satisfaction Surveys: The Council is responsible for reviewing and analyzing the effectiveness and satisfaction of rehabilitation services provided by WVDRS from information gathered from the consumers. The Council does not assist in the resolution of any individual case issues. Consumer Satisfaction Surveys are mailed or distributed through email via Survey Monkey by the WVSRC to all consumers statewide whose case has been closed. The collected data is returned with only the consumer's district and category for the information to be compiled by an independent contractor annually. The Consumer Satisfaction Survey summary is presented orally and in writing to Council members and DRS staff by consultant Dr. Denetta Dowler. Pertinent information from the survey was documented in the Annual Report which is available on WVSRC and WVDRS websites; or upon request from the WVSRC office. Fiscal Year 2024 was the first year the Council disseminate electronic versions of Consumer Satisfaction Surveys, in attempt to collect more valuable consumer feedback, as represented in increased survey data.

Annual Reporting: The WVSRC prepares an Annual Report highlighting the Council's past fiscal year's activities and accomplishments. This functions as a status report from the WVSRC of the vocational rehabilitation programs across our state that is submitted to the Governor, Commissioner of the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA), State legislators and State members of Congress, various state officials, WVDRS staff and other SRCs throughout the United States and its territories. This report is also available on the WVSRC, WVDRS and NCSRC websites.

COUNCIL ACTIVITY AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS (Continued)

WVSRC EVENTS (Pictures in Following Slides):

- WVSRC Meetings, Activities, and Events
- 2024 Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) and the National Coalition of State Rehabilitation Councils (NCSRC) Conferences
- Annual Disability History Essay Contest (WVSRC, WVDRS, WVSILC & Partners)
- WVSILC (and Partners) Freedom Car Show (Fundraiser for Vehicle Modifications)
- WVDRS Sponsored Consumer Events and Job Fairs (Ex. Bridging Barriers, Second Chance Job Fair)
- WVDRS Events, Consumer Success, and Ability Works Recognition Ceremony
- Event Locations (Ex. Independent Living Day at the WV Capitol in Charleston, WV)

WVSRC Meetings, Activities, and Events



WVSRC Attendance at Events

WV Association of Rehabilitation Facilities (WVARF) – Annual Awards Banquet

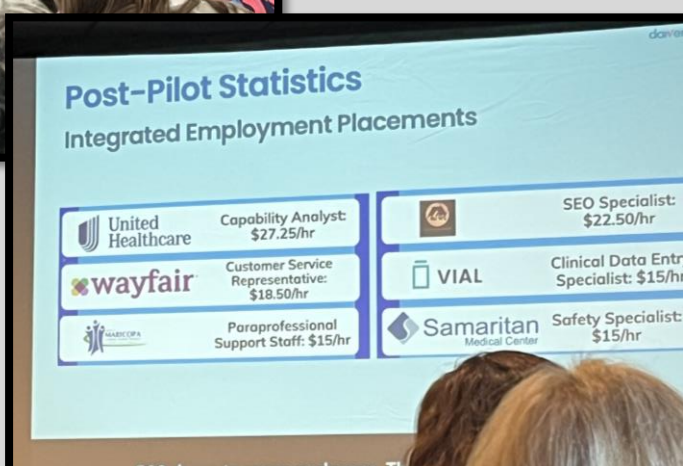
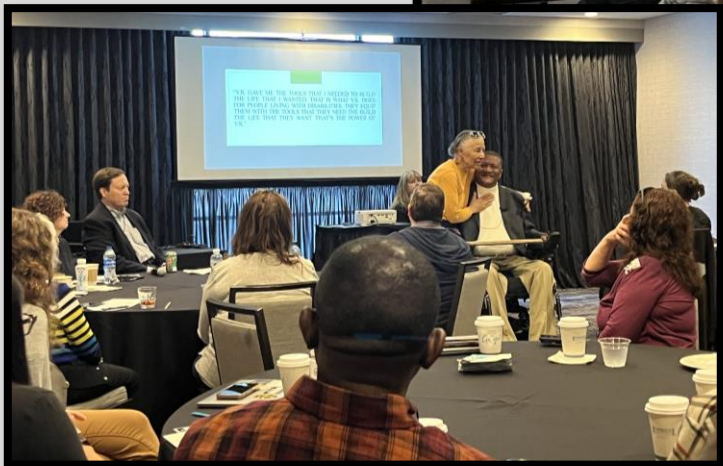


WVSRC in Attendance: Julie Justice (Guest); Travis Kline (Award Recipient); Jason Bailey (Guest Presenter)

Keynote Speaker: Rob Oliver, Author of "Still Walking: The Story of a Life Full of Love, Laughter, and Lessons"

2024 NCSRC & CSAVR Conferences

NCSRC Conference Presentations and Documents: <https://www.ncsrc.us/meeting-materials>
CSAVR Conference Presentations and Documents: <https://www.csavr.org/conference-presentations>



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CSAVR Conference Presentations and Documents: <https://www.csavr.org/conference-presentations>



2024 NCSRC & CSAVR Conferences



2024 Annual Disability History Essay Contest

West Virginia Statewide Independent Living Council (WVSILC):

“The Disability History Essay Contest is a partnership with the WV State Rehabilitation Council and the WV Division of Rehabilitation Services that coincides with WV Disability History Week and is open to all WV high school seniors. This contest is designed to provide WV high school seniors with an opportunity to showcase their writing skills, share what they have learned about disability issues in their community, use their ability to form and express opinions, and perhaps to earn some money!”

State Winner - \$3,250

District 1st Place Winners - \$1,750

District 2nd Place Winners - \$1000

2024 Annual Disability History Essay Contest – State Winner



State Winner



Caleb Messer is a senior at Scott High School. During high school he served four years as student body council, holding multiple positions including President. He was active with the marching band as drum major, a member of the National Honor Society, and the president of the Tri-M Music Honor Society. He is graduating with high honors including 44 hours of college credit through dual-credit high school classes and another 18 hours of college credit through online college classes.

He has accumulated more than 100 hours of community service by volunteering at multiple events held by non-profits including the America Red Cross blood drive and United Way Backpack Buddies Packing Day.

Caleb plans to attend Marshall University to earn a bachelor's degree in elementary education along with certifications in early childhood education and special education. His goal is to become an elementary school teacher and principal in West Virginia. ■



Caleb Messer Scott High School

The Historical Significance of The Rehabilitation Act of 1973

Although it is a rural area that has been ravaged by the opioid epidemic and economic downturn, my county still offers an abundance of opportunities to individuals with disabilities. That is a testament to the organizations and leaders who champion that cause in their communities. However, it also is the result of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, a historic piece of legislation that created employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities (United States Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2023). For example, Section 503 not only prohibited federal agencies from discriminating against individuals with disabilities in their employment practices, but also required them to implement policies and procedures that led to recruiting, hiring, promoting, and retaining individuals with disabilities (United States Department of Labor, 2023). The result: Individuals with disabilities were protected and empowered for the first time in our nation's history. Furthermore, the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 laid the foundation for legislation like the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990 and the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act in 2014, which might be its most significant impact because of the access and equity that they produced for that underserved population (Department of Homeland Security, 2023). Indeed, it served as a catalyst of the civil rights movement for individuals with disabilities.

This topic is important to me because I plan to become a special education teacher after I graduate from Marshall University. My father was a special education teacher before becoming an administrator, and I saw firsthand the difference he made in the lives of his students; many of them still contact him and thank him for his impact and influence. My participation in my high school's Partners Club also has persuaded me to pursue a career in which I work with individuals with disabilities. The Partners Club pairs general education students with special education students who have severe and profound disabilities. Its goal is to promote inclusion in our school. We spend lunch with our assigned students. I love my time with my partner, whose happiness is contagious. I look forward to it as much as he does — and maybe more. Our friendship is a mutual blessing, and I know I will be able to develop similar relationships with my students as a special education teacher, and I know I will be able to implement or continue similar programs at my school as an administrator.

It is sad to think that my partner and other individuals with disabilities would not have employment opportunities in particular or civil rights in general if the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and subsequent legislation had not been passed. That was an eye-opening fact that I learned this summer when I took English 200 from Dr. Roxanne Aftanas at Marshall University. In that online college class, we watched the Netflix documentary "Crip Camp: A Disability Revolution," which highlights the discrimination and mistreatment that individuals with disabilities faced in America before and during the 1960s and 1970s (Lebrecht & Newnam, 2020). What I saw and heard in that documentary reinforced my desire to become a special education teacher so I can educate those students and advocate for them.

Fortunately for individuals with disabilities, we have made significant strides in access and equity for them in our country and my county. For example,

(See Messer p14)

2024 Annual Disability History Essay Contest - District 1 Winners

Joselyn Camargo South Charleston High School

Historical Equal Employment Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities

In 2023, the Federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973 marked its 50th anniversary since its inception. This landmark legislation, initially incorporated as Title IV of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act in 2014, has played a pivotal role in advancing access to and equity in employment opportunities for people with disabilities in communities across the United States. This essay explores the historical significance of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, its impact on fostering inclusivity, and its continuing relevance in my community.

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 was a watershed moment for disability rights in the United States. It was a response to a growing awareness of the systemic barriers that individuals with disabilities faced in accessing education, employment, and other opportunities. The Act aimed to level the playing field by prohibiting discrimination on the basis of disability in programs conducted by federal agencies, in programs receiving federal financial assistance, and in federal employment. This was a momentous step towards ensuring that individuals with disabilities had an equal shot at success in the workforce.

One of the key provisions of the Rehabilitation Act was the creation of vocational rehabilitation programs. These programs have been instrumental in helping individuals with disabilities in my community gain the skills and training necessary to secure meaningful employment. The Act's emphasis on providing comprehensive vocational rehabilitation services, including counseling, job training, and placement, has paved the way for countless success stories in my community.

Furthermore, the Act established the Architectural and Transportation Barriers Compliance Board, also known as the Access Board. This board was charged with developing guidelines and standards for accessible design and construction. As a result, public spaces, transportation systems, and buildings in my community have become more accessible, allowing individuals with disabilities to move freely and independently. This has not only enhanced their employability but also improved their overall quality of life.

In 2014, the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 was incorporated as Title IV of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). This integration emphasized the Act's role in workforce development and modernized its provisions to align with the changing landscape of employment. It reinforced the importance of vocational rehabilitation services and promoted collaboration between workforce development and disability service systems.

In my community, the impact of the Rehabilitation Act is palpable. Employment opportunities for people with disabilities have expanded significantly over the years. Local businesses have recognized the value of a diverse workforce and have taken steps to ensure inclusivity. Many organizations have partnered with vocational rehabilitation agencies to create tailored job training programs. This has not only empowered individuals with disabilities but also enriched our community by harnessing their unique skills and talents.

(See Camargo p13)

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District 1 First Place



Joselyn Camargo is a senior at South Charleston High School. During high school she had a cumulative GPA of 4.68 and was valedictorian for the class of 2024.

She plans to attend West Virginia University (WVU) to major in Neuroscience, pursuing a minor in Psychology. She wants to eventually earn her MD degree. She wants to specialize in Psychiatry because she has a passion for mental health advocacy. She wants to provide compassionate care and support to individuals facing mental health challenges.



District 1 Second Place



Alexandria Harper is a senior at Riverside High School. During High School she maintained a 5.0 GPA and will be graduating in the top 1% of her class. She is an active member of Riverside's National Beta Club and the president of Mu Alpha Theta. She is an avid cheerleader and became the cheer captain her senior year.

Alexandria has developed a passion for STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) and the environment. She created a Teens for Change community service group before her senior year. The group planted trees, pollinator gardens, Firefly Sanctuaries, Habitats for bats, and cleaned up streams and roadways in the community.

She plans to obtain an undergraduate degree in biology, followed by attending medical school with the purpose of making a positive impact on her community.



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(See Harper p16)

Alexandria Harper Riverside High School

"In 2023, the federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973, which was incorporated as Title IV of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act in 2014, celebrated its 50th anniversary"

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 is a federal act passed by Congress that "prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability in programs conducted by federal agencies, in programs receiving federal financial assistance, in federal employment and in the employment practices of federal contractors." (Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Rehab Act), n.d.). The passing of this Act had a profound impact on the lives of those living with disabilities. Thanks to this law, persons with disabilities could obtain jobs and establish careers that could support them and their families. This law prevented discrimination based on a disability that should never have been used to define them. It allowed them to make meaningful contributions to society.

This historic legislation allowed persons with disabilities to enter the federal and federal contractor workforce. This was the first major federal disability rights law, and it served as a model for the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, which protected individuals with disabilities from being discriminated against in the private sector (Employment Protections Under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973: 50 Years of Protecting Americans With Disabilities in the Workplace, n.d.). This Act also requires employers to "take affirmative action to recruit, hire, promote, and retain these individuals." (Section 503, n.d.). Requiring employers to seek out, employ, and keep workers with disabilities helps open job opportunities and increases the understanding employers and coworkers have regarding a disability, making the workplace a better environment for everyone.

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 has had a positive impact on my community. It has provided career opportunities for people with disabilities and helped them provide for themselves and their families while contributing to the community with valuable life skills and lessons to which others might not have been exposed. I have had the pleasure to learn from a teacher with a disability; his sense of humor, perseverance, and unique teaching style are inspiring. Most students do not have the opportunity to learn from such a robust and inspiring individual; with this law, he might have been given that opportunity to impact so many.

On a more personal level, the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 has impacted my life. My grandfather and sister were diagnosed with epilepsy and migraine disorder. Epilepsy is a disorder that causes people to lose consciousness and have seizures. After a seizure, a person can remain postictal for hours. Recovery from a seizure can last for days. Migraine disorder can also cause a person to be bedridden for days at a time. This makes it difficult for them to gain employment and work. This Act enabled my grandfather to maintain employment and provide for his family. My grandfather was one of the best employees at his office. His employer bragged about him often and even stated that he was so thankful he did not let a disability prevent him from hiring him because he was the hardest-working person he had ever employed.

2024 Annual Disability History Essay Contest - District 2 Winners

Lane Siciliano University High School

In 2023, the federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973, which was incorporated as Title IV of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act in 2014, celebrated its 50th anniversary

"Just because a man lacks the use of his eyes, doesn't mean he lacks vision."
— Stevie Wonder

Mr. Stevie Wonder, one of the most celebrated and influential musicians in modern popular music, is living proof that a disability is nothing more than a different ability. He and others who have risen to the pinnacles of their profession show us that people living with disabilities work as hard and contribute as fully as those who are not when provided the proper accommodations. People with disabilities deserve not only equal but equitable opportunities to realize their full potential.

Through the Federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973, we took our first legislative step to provide such opportunities, and few acts, before or after, have had as great an effect. Living alongside family, friends, and neighbors with disabilities has given me a special opportunity to see firsthand the power and long-lasting effects of this legislation. It has been crucial to dismantling systemic barriers and fostering inclusivity in both employment and the workplace. My aunt worked in integrated environments for more than 25 years despite her limitations due to Section 504 and its provisions for reasonable accommodation. Just weeks ago, my best friend was hired for the first time due to affirmative action requirements outlined in Section 501. The nation, and more specifically my community, have seen substantial improvements in employment opportunities for my aunt, my friend, and countless others as a direct result of the 1973 Rehabilitation Act and additional legislation it inspired down the line.

Discrimination Throughout Our Nation's History Since the founding of the United States, our nation's citizens with disabilities have experienced intense discrimination for their differences. By the mid-1600s, colonial laws were in place that reflected Elizabethan "Poor Laws" (which determined the value of a person based on their ability and willingness to work). They instituted deportation to Europe of those deemed "unworthy," "unfit for work," and a "societal burden." (Patterson)

Later, the Industrial Revolution introduced new impediments to workers with disabilities, as repetitive tasks performed with minimal assistance and within limited timeframes became the norm. Individual ability and productivity largely replaced the cooperation and community present in agrarian work environments. This rigid, unwelcoming system effectively separated the "able" from the "unable," and helped employers begin to unfairly classify those who did not fit the mold as "disabled" (Patterson).

Stripped of the little tolerance and aid they received before, members of the disabled community were often forced to engage in work that exploited their differences for entertainment: circus acts and freak shows. From the 1840s through the 1960s, when they finally (mostly) died out, these shows profited from people with disabilities, reflecting the broader difficulties faced

(See Siciliano p17)

District 2 First Place



Lane Siciliano is a senior at University High School. During high school he was a member of Rho Kappa, Future Leader Program (FLP), Color Guard, (NSHSS) National Society of High School scholars, (NYLF) National youth leadership foundation, and a promise scholarship awardee. He is a three-year member of WVU fencing club.

Lane appreciates spending time outside; hiking, rock climbing, and being a star scout. He enjoys videos games, history, and staying up late to watch lore videos.

Lane plans to join AmeriCorps for a year then attend Haverford University majoring Anthropology and Psychology. He desires to serve. ■



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District 2 Second Place



Jordan Cox is a senior at North Marion High School. During high school he was a varsity tennis player, a tennis team captain for two years, a two-year varsity swim member, a cross country team member and National Honor Society member.

He has served his community through volunteering for projects such as making blankets for the humane society and kits for the homeless.

He intends to enroll at West Virginia University with a focus on Exercise Physiology, with the ultimate goal of pursuing a career in the medical field as a certified radiologist. ■



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Jordan Cox North Marion High School

Discuss how the Federal Rehabilitation Act has advanced access to and equity in employment opportunities for people with disabilities in your community

The Federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973 commemorates 50 years of helping people with disabilities. As the first federal disability rights law to be passed, it brought forth equal opportunities for individuals with disabilities by prohibiting discrimination from federal contractors and subcontractors.

The two core provisions of the Federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973 are sections 501 and 503. Section 501 specifically states that people with disabilities be protected from disparate treatment and harassment because of their disability. This required federal government agencies to limit their questions and medical examinations of those disabled as well as maintaining confidentiality of such medical records for prospective employees. The Federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973 also required agencies to provide reasonable accommodation, both physically and mentally, to aid qualified applicants. These accommodations include facility enhancements such as installing ramps, modifying restrooms or workspace layouts; utilizing assistive technologies such as specialized computer software such as screen reader software or use of videophones; or providing Braille, large print, closed captioning, or sign language interpreters to aid communication. Other accommodations that minimized financial strains to employers includes services such as adjusting work schedules to allow for medical appointments and making modifications to current facility policies to allow for service animals.

Section 501 also allows for the use of personal assistant services to those disabled. They assist in personal non-medical services such as helping someone to eat or use the restroom should they be unable to complete those tasks on their own.

The employer must adhere to all the above unless doing so would cause undue hardship to them. An undue hardship refers to not only the financial hardship but also any substantial change that would alter the nature or operation of the business.

Under section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act, any contractors or subcontractors with 50 or more employees and a federal contract of \$50,000 or more who do business with the federal government are required to not only recruit, hire, retain and advance qualified people regardless of disabilities, but must also develop and maintain an affirmative action program within 120 days from the start of their contract.

This affirmative action program establishes, in writing, a one-year program in which audits are utilized to identify specific problem areas regarding equal opportunities for disabled individuals. For instance, the audit would be looking to confirm that federal contractors have met the 7% employment hiring goal, allow for individual to self-identify as disabled, be proactive about asking disabled employees if they need accommodations, utilizing inclusive recruiting methods in order to find qualified workers, and by developing and implementing

(See Cox p16)

2024 Annual Disability History Essay Contest - District 3 Winners

Connor Dorsey John Marshall High School

Discuss how the Federal Rehabilitation Act has advanced access to and equity in employment opportunities for people with disabilities in your community

Coming off of the heels of the Civil Rights Movement, people with disabilities were still marginalized, continuously being discriminated against in their efforts to join the workforce. Through nine years of debating and fighting against their oppression, the federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973 was enacted. With this act in effect, people with disabilities were guaranteed no discrimination in employment in federal agencies and programs receiving federal financial aid. Although these rights were given, many people with disabilities still felt that they were not given the equity they deserved.

Extensive protest and advocacy for something to change was a large reason the federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973 was enacted. In Time Magazine's article about Judy Heumann, a current teacher and activist diagnosed with polio, the story of her persecution is shared. "She'd gotten dressed up and her mother had pulled her wheelchair up a flight of stairs before the principal intervened. Her disability, he said, meant she was not allowed to attend the school. Heumann had polio as child, and it left her legs paralyzed and limited use of her hands and arms." Given no resources or effort, Heumann along with thousands of other people with disabilities were continuously discriminated against. In my opinion, the discriminatory actions towards people with disabilities is inhumane, and should have been acted on prior to when it was. When the benefits of the federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973 were given, requiring the government to grant equal access to employment opportunities, people with disabilities were relieved, but not satisfied.

Due to the implementation of the federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973, people with disabilities were given equity in employment, but other essential elements to independence were not. This lack of opportunity led to continued protest in favor of more change, ultimately leading to the establishment of the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990. It was not until this act was introduced, prohibiting discrimination against people with disabilities in employment, transportation, and communications, that people with disabilities felt they were given the resources needed to succeed. The ADA, built on the foundation that the federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973 introduced, granted every person with disabilities the resources needed for a fair opportunity to succeed. Things such as access ramps, reasonable accommodations, and handicap designated areas were placed throughout communities across the U.S. Given equity in schools, transportation, and many public places, the fight against fairness for people with disabilities took a significant step in the right direction.

Rising from little to no employment for people with disabilities, the Bureau of Labor Statistics' 2022 survey reports that "21.3 percent of persons with a disability were employed, up from 19.1 percent in 2021", and "The employment-population ratio for persons with a disability in 2022 was the highest record since comparable data were first published in 2008". Not only do these statistics hold significant numerical value, they also go to show how much of an impact the federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973, along with the Americans with Disabilities Act have had on the employment of those with disabilities.

The federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973 has proven to be a significant milestone
(See Dorsey p14)

District 3 First Place



Connor Dorsey is a senior at John Marshall High School. During high school he was a member of the John Marshall High School orchestra, a WVU Bucklew Scholar, a member of the WV All State orchestra, and on the lacrosse team.

He has successfully maintained employment with Menard courtesy patrol while also overseeing operations as a manager of a landscaping business.

He intends to enroll at West Virginia University in order to pursue a Bachelor of Science degree in Data Science. ■



District 3 Second Place



Kathryn Prather is a senior at Wheeling Park High School. During high school she passed 20 Advanced Placement Exams and has taken junior level college classes outside of high school. She was named a U.S. Presidential Scholar Semifinalist, a National Merit Scholar, and named as the 2023-2024 Female Athlete in the West Virginia Secondary School Activities Commission (WVSSAC) Academic Achievement Program. She is a four-year letterman on the varsity soccer team and principal cellist of her orchestra.

Kathryn volunteers for the SMART Centre (Science, Mathematics, Art, Reading, and Technology), a local science center and the Wheeling Area Soccer Association as a head coach for multiple teams. She enjoys participating in Junior Nature Camp and relaxing in a hammock during pleasant weather.

Her intention is to enroll at Johns Hopkins University to pursue a dual major in Engineering and Economics. ■



Kathryn Prather Wheeling Park High School

Discuss how the Federal Rehabilitation Act has advanced access to and equity in employment opportunities for people with disabilities in your community

In the 1950s, over 2,400 patients were confined to the Trans-Allegheny Lunatic Asylum, or the Weston State Hospital, located in Weston, West Virginia. The building was only designed to house 250 (Trans-Allegheny Lunatic Asylum). Throughout the history of West Virginia, it has made strides to improve opportunities for people with disabilities, but there is a long way left to go to reach equality in education and employment.

People with disabilities have been mistreated by society as a whole longer than West Virginia has been a state. The Trans-Allegheny Lunatic Asylum was opened in 1859, just before the start of the Civil War (Hurd 809), and it remained open and overcrowded until it was forced to close in 1994 (Disability Rights of West Virginia). Overcrowded asylums are one example of the mistreatment that people with disabilities have endured, but the discrimination does not end there. People with disabilities have been treated as second-class citizens in their education, employment, and self-autonomy. It is an ongoing fight at the national level to ensure civil rights for disabled people and help all be enabled to reach their potential. Fifty years ago, the federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973 kicked off progress in disability rights nationwide, and its impacts in the community of West Virginia are still felt today. Greater wellbeing in the community has been achieved through increased access and equity in education and employment, thanks to further legislation.

In order to understand the modern effects of disability rights legislation in West Virginia, the history of the Disability Rights Movement overall must first be addressed. The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 laid the groundwork of the Movement by prohibiting programs receiving federal funding from discriminating against people with disabilities in Section 504 (Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion). In other words, in order to secure funding from the federal government, programs had to comply with the regulations established regarding employment and discrimination. This was the first major step in advancing equity and access to employment opportunities for people with disabilities. It meant more people with disabilities could equitably apply for jobs in programs receiving federal funding, and they could gain employment on a more equal footing than was previously possible. One example of this in effect would be that a person with a disability could apply to work at a government job without being discriminated against. So, people with disabilities were given more ability to reach their potential, at least in federally funded sectors. Other legislation, amendments, and court cases followed suit in the ensuing years on both the national and state levels to make employment more accessible.

Within West Virginia, multiple pieces of legislation and orders were passed which furthered the inclusion of people with disabilities in employment opportunities. For example, in 1981, the Medley Consent Decree was signed, and it required that the WV Departments of Health and Human Resources, the WV Department of Education, and the WV Division of Rehabilitation Services all had to "develop and coordinate specific community-based services" for school-aged individuals with developmental disabilities who lived in institutions for more than 30 days (Disability Rights of West Virginia). In plain English, the state was made to educate institutionalized individuals. Education is often the first step towards employment, so this was a significant step in advancing

2024 Annual Disability History Essay Contest - District 4 Winner

Reagan Bennett Shady Spring High School

"In 2023, the federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973, which was incorporated as Title IV of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act in 2014, celebrated its 50th anniversary. Discuss how this historical legislation has advanced access to and equity in employment opportunities for people with disabilities in your community"

Throughout the whole United States, there are thousands of federal or federally funded jobs. For example, in the city of Beckley, West Virginia, which is a city with an average population for the state, there are over 200 federal or federally funded jobs. This amount increases exponentially with larger cities in the state and the country. In the past, these jobs would not have been filled by someone with any form of a disability. However, times have changed and laws have been passed. The Federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973 helped to change the course of history for people with disabilities. This act banned the use of discrimination on the basis of disabilities in a workplace that is federally run, federally funded, or has federal contractors. The four main sections of the act, especially the 504 section, outline the rules and regulations for how the workplace will be operated under this act. Therefore, it provided a huge step forward in the movement for people with disabilities.

In the early 1960s, there were many movements that started to take ground. One of the most notable being the Civil Rights Movement, but there was also a major movement that coined the term the Disability Rights Movement. This movement aimed to increase the rights for people with disabilities and to end the stigmatism around them being in the workplace. Therefore, when the Federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973 was introduced, it provided a huge step forward for the movement. In the times before the act, it was not common to have an employee with any form of a disability in the workplace. This is largely due to the amount of discrimination faced in the workplace. However, the act introduced the idea of prohibiting this form of discrimination in the workplace.

The act was written and introduced in 1973. However, section 504 of the act was not implemented at the time. It would not be implemented until 41 years later when the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014 was passed into law. This act was created to aid jobseekers in the process of gaining employment. It provided easy access to the job market, education, and support systems for anyone that is struggling to find employment. Therefore, this passed even more legislation that gained rights for people with disabilities. The original act in 1973 provided support for people with disabilities in the federal workplace, support for education and training of people in minority groups, and guaranteed equal access to technological information. The new act in 2014 provided the 504 section, which was introduced in the original act in 1973, that prohibits discrimination on the basis of having a disability and provided a new system that was easily accessible to find and gain employment. Therefore, people with disabilities gained access to these new systems that could benefit them in gaining employment and, also, protected them from the discrimination that was faced before.

These acts affected the United States as a whole, which includes many
(See Bennett p18)

District 4 First Place



Reagan Bennett is a senior at Shady Spring High School. During high school she was the Vice President of the National Honors Society, involved in the Next Step Mentoring Program and the Fellowship of Christian Athletes. She maintained a GPA above 4.0 throughout high school and took several Advanced Placement and Honors courses.

She balances her time between being a dancer and a student teacher at Rhythms of Grace Dance Studio, and works part-time at Chick-fil-a.

She plans on attending Concord University to study Biology with the goal of pursuing a career in medicine and healthcare.



WVSRC Director, Julie Justice & WVSRC Member/WVDRS Senior Counselor, Veronica Bunch - Presenting Award to Reagan Bennett at Shady Spring High



2024 Annual Disability History Essay Contest - District 5 Winners



District 5 First Place



Megan Griffey is a senior at Tug Valley High School. During high school she was a member of the Beta Club, National Honor Society, the Math Field Day team, the Academic team, the Pumpkin Drop Team, and the Tug Valley Lady Panthers Softball Team. During her senior year she was the secretary of the school's National Honors Society, and the team captain of the Academic Team.

As a member of the local Tug Valley Area Juniorette Club she had the opportunity to actively participate in community service initiatives within her community.

She plans to attend Marshall's Bachelor of Science/Doctor of Medicine (BS/MD) program and Biological Science with Pre-med Concentration. Her goal is to become a physician and give back to her community in rural West Virginia to help serve the underprivileged. ■



Megan Griffey

Tug Valley High School

The Advancement of Equity for Individuals with Disabilities

"Inclusion is intentional. It is about identifying and removing barriers so that everyone can participate to the best of their ability" (The Centre for Inclusive Leadership). Originating from the Declaration of Independence, the American philosophy has been centered around equity for every citizen. Despite the initial goal for all men to be equal, this standard has not been upheld for all Americans. Throughout history, individuals with disabilities have not received equal opportunities in their daily lives. In response to the drastic indifference that individuals with disabilities face, the American government has passed various acts, such as the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, to provide equity for all American citizens.

In 1973, the first major step towards equity among individuals with disabilities was taken by the federal government. The passage of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 provided the first federal law which addressed the discrimination against people with disabilities. According to the Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion, "The Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as Amended (Rehab Act) prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability in programs conducted by federal agencies, in programs receiving federal financial assistance, in federal employment and in the employment practices of federal contractors" (EARN). Through this act, the federal government took steps to remove the barriers that prevented equal opportunities for individuals with a disability. This historical legislation served as a precursor for the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, which continued to make advancements for equity for individuals with disabilities.

As the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, which was incorporated as Title IV of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act in 2014, celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2023, it continues to impact the daily lives of individuals across the nation. This has explicitly been apparent in my community as various measures have been taken to provide equity for individuals with disabilities. In recent years, my community has integrated new advancements that allow individuals with disabilities to have the same opportunities as others.

The impact of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 has been largely apparent in my personal life. Throughout my life, I have witnessed an immediate family member struggle with medical issues pertaining to her foot. As a result, she has been forced to wear a walking boot and use either crutches or a scooter to be mobile to perform her job. Despite her condition, she has held a job at both a local school and as a pharmacy technician. The advancements through the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 have been seen through both these job positions, as accommodations were made for my family member to ensure she had equity in her employment.

While working at a local school, my family member was forced to travel throughout the school to complete her daily tasks. In order to do this, she used her mobility scooter daily to complete mundane tasks. The school provided her equity in her employment as they did not discriminate against her despite her being an individual with a disability. To help ensure equity, they allowed her to use her scooter and gave her access to the elevators to prevent her from climbing several flights of steps. Furthermore, the school established a parking spot for my family member near a ramp and the school entrance to lower the

Piper Cook

Wyoming East High School

The Impact of The Rehabilitation Act of 1973

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973, also known as the Rehab Act, enacted no discrimination against people with a disability in the workforce of a federal institution or a workforce receiving federal aid. The Rehab Act was the first federal addressing of protecting people with a disability and securing them equal opportunities. Based on the 2021 US Census, West Virginia has nearly 20% of the population of people with a disability, which is in the top three states with the highest percentage of people with a disability. The Rehab Act allows that percentage of the WV population to have an equal opportunity in federal jobs and to not face discrimination. This act has impacted communities in numerous ways over the past 50 years, but the best example would be about my papaw who was active his entire life in his community.

When he was born, he was diagnosed with Spina Bifida. This defect occurs when along the spinal cord the neural tube does not close all the way causing the spine to not form and close as it should. The intensity of the effects of Spina Bifida ranges based on where the opening is located and the size. Each person who has Spina Bifida can react differently; some may see little effects while some will see physical and mental disabilities. People with a disability from Spina Bifida can still have a life that allows them to reach their full potential, but some face more hardships than others. When a baby is diagnosed with Spina Bifida it is unknown what that individual will face during their lifetime and leaves the family worried. While my papaw was little, he had many surgeries to try and ease his pain and fix his defect. He would end up having more surgeries as he aged, but he struggled with a physical disability his entire life.

The members of the community grew fond of my papaw and felt the impact he wanted to leave on them. As a D.A.R.E. officer, he warned students about the dangers of drugs, but he was also able to show students to never stop fighting. He was a true example of never letting yourself get in your way and if you believe in yourself you can succeed. The Rehab Act affected his life by allowing him to live his dreams and not face discrimination in the workplace. At the same time, the Rehab Act affected the community by giving the people of the community a chance to find a friend in him even though he had a disability. Without the passage of this Act, he could have been dismissed from the force as soon as he was unable to do field work and never had the opportunity to impact the thousands of students he did.

When my papaw got older, he lost his ability to walk completely. He fought for many years to try and be able to walk for his grandkids, but even a wheelchair did not stop him. He became a town council member of the community and was the head of the town police section for over a decade. Because of the Rehab Act, he was able to work as the head of the town police section for over a decade. Because of the Rehab Act, he was able to work for many years meeting the people of the community and building relationships with them as students that they would later remember when electing him to the town council. Because my papaw fought his entire life to never let his disability stop him, he taught all his grandkids to do the same. He was a true example of how The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 impacted communities and the lives of people with a disability. ■

District 5 Second Place



Piper Cook is a senior at Wyoming East High school.

She intends to obtain a dual degree in Mathematics and Statistics from Marshall University. She has been selected to be a Yeager Scholar at Marshall University.

In her spare time, Piper finds joy in listening to the music of Taylor Swift, socializing with her friends and family, and participating in theatrical activities. ■



2024 Annual Disability History Essay Contest - District 6 Winner



District 6 First Place



Kyra Biser is a senior at Keyser High School. She consistently strived for excellence in all her endeavors, excelling in English. Throughout her high school years, she maintained a 3.75 GPA and actively participated in various extracurricular activities such as Student Council, Art Honors Society, Drama Club, and the Keyser High School Bowling Team. She discovered her passion for writing through AP Literature courses and achieved success in composing a play for the Drama Program where she took on lead roles and directed performances.

Kyra plans to earn a bachelor's degree in biology at Potomac State College before enrolling in a one-year certificate program at WVU for Radiation Therapy. Her ambition is to become a Medical Dosimetrist, specializing in customizing chemotherapy doses for patients. ■



Kyra Biser Keyser High School

Discuss how the Federal Rehabilitation Act has advanced access to and equity in employment opportunities for people with disabilities in your community

A person like me gets overlooked and lost in a crowd because I am pretty average in looks and abilities, just an average girl. My ability in sports is average, and because of asthma will never be Olympic style. My brain is also pretty average but at times becomes a little distracted and never a good tester, and one would never know my hearing is imperfect because I adapt well. Senior award night I will be overlooked and no scholarships will go towards me. There are many students out there who have some limits and are not given the same opportunities because of being a little different. I am one of those.

I plan to get attend a community college to start my Radiation Therapy program and then apply into WVU Medical school to further the degree. My freshman year of high school I was placed in a program developed to make sure a student like myself would be given an amazing opportunity to work with the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation, which has guided me during high school and has helped keep me on track for reaching my goals. Bridgette Kady has been an asset and placed me into programs like building a computer from nothing to functioning. These opportunities will give me a little extra something special on my transcript and real world experience and opportunity. The program has also helped other students who do not plan to go to college get into the workforce. With her help I was even able with my disabilities to get a job at McDonald's and after a year of working there became a trainer and crew trainer.

Before the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 people like me where not so fortunate. Often times people with disabilities were overlooked for employment; if not the best of the best then people are overlooked. People who are driven and have the abilities to do great things were often shadowed by others. The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 changed things in the workforce.

Our American society is a face paced world and is driven by many innovative and hard-working people. Before these acts were passed those who with disadvantages were often overlooked and not considered for jobs. When the Rehabilitation Act came into effect it allowed those who were disadvantaged to be given a fair chance, and now people like me are not even aware of the issues ones before had to face.

Although I love my home state of West Virginia, it at times can be brutal for the citizens. There are a lot who are disabled, on fixed incomes, who are living in generational poverty and come from families who never have graduated or made it into college, and many of them are struggling for employment opportunities. There are many on disability or who are at a disadvantage and do not have the skills needed for the workforce. However, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014 gives access to support services of education and training. It has allowed many in our poor state to have the support for a chance and a means for a change of life. Good employment is a key factor in success of life. It is also the only way to get out generational poverty which has seized many citizens of the state.

2024 Freedom Car Show – WVSILC, WIN, & Partners

Raising Awareness and Funding for Vehicle Modifications
Donations: pay.freedomcarshow.org



WV Division of Rehabilitation Services Recognizes Exemplary Employers and Partners



WV Division of Rehabilitation Services & Program Partner Fairs



**STATEWIDE
VIRTUAL
JOB FAIR**

Wednesday,
September 6
1:00 - 3:30



Registration is now open for West Virginia employers and job seekers!

WorkForce
WEST VIRGINIA

A proud partner of the
AmericanJobCenter network



WV Division of Rehabilitation Services – Consumer Success

Dylan Worrell – Flight Instructor, Marshall Aviation Program



Dylan is thankful to WVDRS for the services he received to help him overcome obstacles and achieve his goals. His career assessment confirmed his interest in aviation. He was connected to training support to reach academia requirements as well as funding for tuition and fees.

Dylan completed the Aviation Program at Middle Tennessee State in 2024. He continued to work hard and was able to obtain his flight lab certificate. He has transitioned successfully into his career as a flight instructor at Marshall University, in West Virginia.

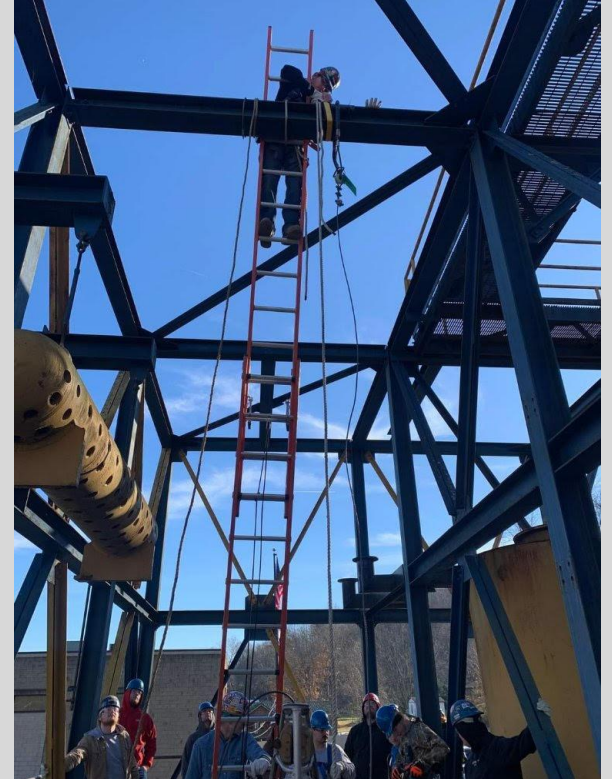
WV Division of Rehabilitation Services – Consumer Success

Brian Dailey, Boilermaker



Brian was referred to the WV Division of Rehabilitation Services from Winfield High School. He received supportive services and assistance with his training goals while studying at Mountwest Community and Technical College. He pushed through adversity and graduated in 2022.

Brian successfully ranked at 12 out of 146 positions with the Boilermaker Union at John Amos. He is excited about his career and future.

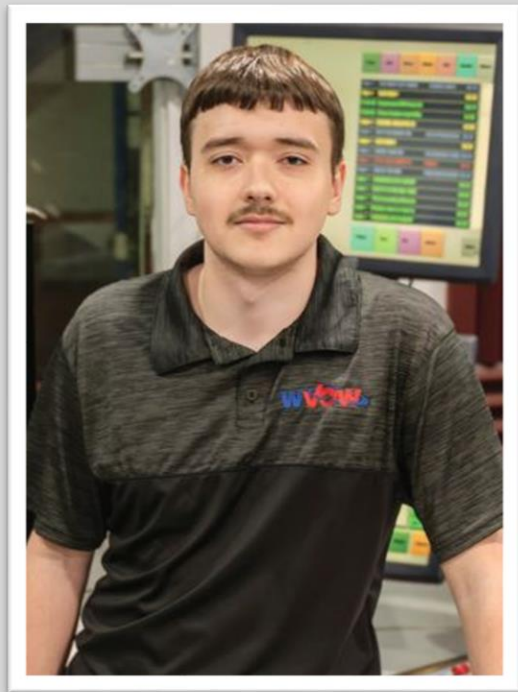


2024 WV Division of Rehabilitation Services Ability Works Recognition Ceremony: <https://wvabilityworks.org>

“The Ability Works Recognition Ceremony honors individuals who have achieved their vocational goals by means of their own perseverance and with assistance from the West Virginia Division of Rehabilitation Services.” - 2024 WVDRS Ability Works Program



2024 WVDRS Ability Works Recognition Ceremony - State Winner



Tanner Thomas
Radio Host
State Winner

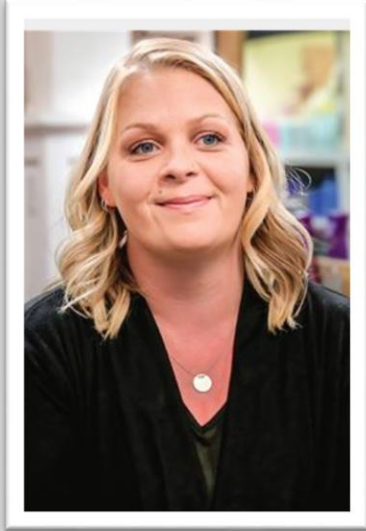
“Tanner is very proud of his life, and he is humbled by the opportunities and support he has received.

“I would like to thank Gina, my DRS counselor, for helping me to get this job,” Tanner said. “I’d like to thank my parents for supporting me. I’d like to thank all of my friends who were there for me when others weren’t. And I’d like to thank my co-workers for treating me the way I like to be treated.”

Tanner plans to stay in the field, but in the future, he wouldn’t mind broadening his horizons and being heard across the nation. For now, Tanner just doesn’t want to become complacent.”

“Bivins believes Tanner is made for radio. She had been asked by some of her peers to see the voice on the radio, and it was Tanner they were talking about.”

2024 WVDRS Ability Works Recognition Ceremony - District Winners



Andrea Pugh
Cosmetology
Stylist

“DRS helped me by making sure that I was at school when I was supposed to be and getting the things done that I needed to get done and keeping me on track,” Andrea explained. “Because my ADHD kind of keeps me out of control, DRS helped me stay on track with everything when it came to school.” Billie-Jo High, Andrea’s DRS rehabilitation counselor, explained that Andrea was committed to earning her cosmetology license, and she worked hard in school. DRS was able to help pay for her training and for the cost of the licensure exams when Andrea was ready to take them.”



Dakota Walls
Business Systems
Analyst

“Ross credits Dakota with being a top performer who is always taking on new challenges and more responsibility. She used words like motivated, problem solver, good communication skills, quick learner and exceeds expectations to describe him. She believes he will continue to excel and advance with the company. Dakota is very appreciative of the help he’s received to get where he is today, and he is most proud of rebuilding his life after having to start over. “Starting from nothing to something again is probably the biggest accomplishment to be honest,” said Dakota. His advice to others is to “... keep going and do the best you can with what you have. Eventually, you will find your opportunity.”

2024 WVDRS Ability Works Recognition Ceremony - District Winners



Elijah Goins
Entrepreneur
“Pilot Painting”

“Elijah’s business concentrates on interior and exterior painting for residential and light commercial jobs. As owner, he manages the company and handles sales. He also employs three additional full-time team members. His responsibilities include taking care of payroll, taxes, sales calls and customer relations. He meets with prospective customers to take measurements and prepare cost estimates. “I’m the CEO, Chief Everything Officer ... I have my hand in every single part of this business,” said Elijah. Elijah also considers his business to be a ministry. Their mission is to honor God, have a delighted customer and do a good job... According to Jennifer Surface, DRS employment specialist, DRS provided Elijah with financial support, including assistance with his tuition, books and supplies, at all three higher education institutions”



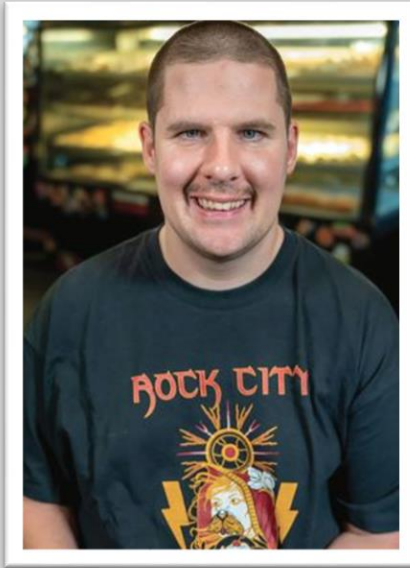
George Barnhart
Business Owner

“George is also proud of being able to own and operate his vending business. And he is grateful to Perry and the DRS Randolph-Sheppard program staff who helped and supported him during the training. “I went there [to DRS] and spoke with them and got into the Randolph-Sheppard program, and this was the perfect thing for me,” George explained. “I had to do something. With the loss of my vision, there wasn’t a lot I could do, and this fit perfectly with me.”
“Through the program, DRS recruits individuals who are legally blind and then trains, licenses and places them into vending operations, snack bars and cafeterias that are located on federal and state government properties. Essentially, the program sets participants up to run a small business.”

2024 WVDRS Ability Works Recognition Ceremony - District Winner

“There are probably very few people in West Virginia who can claim “master cake ball roller” as their job title, but Ryan Bush can. Ryan works for Rock City Cake Company, a full-service bakery, in Charleston. Ryan was born with autism. He grew up in St. Albans and graduated from St. Albans High School in 2010. A former high school teacher encouraged Ryan to pursue getting a job so he could have his own money and stand on his own two feet.”

“According to Alicia Foster, DRS rehabilitation counselor, Ryan had participated in a career exploration program, and he had an interest in working in a food-service setting, like a cafeteria.”



Ryan Bush
Rock City’s Master
Cake Ball Roller

“After getting to know his unique circumstances, Job Squad identified Rock City as a perfect opportunity for Ryan.”
“It’s truly like he’s just as capable as anybody else, and honestly, he’s better than most of the employees we hire,” Morrison explained. “And I wish people out there would realize that and have people like Ryan advocating for them because it’s changed my entire outlook and meeting him is truly something I’ll never forget. Having him as a part of the company is something that I’ll carry with me forever because he’s more than just an employee, he’s truly changed all of our outlooks and ... we’re lucky to have him more than he’s lucky to have us.”

2024 WVDRS Ability Works Recognition Ceremony - District Winners



Travis Stone
Dietetic Assistant

“Travis believes Project SEARCH is the greatest program. Not only did it teach him job skills, but he learned how to be more confident, how to trust others and how to overcome his shyness. According to Lafferty, four classes of interns have been hosted at Ruby Memorial Hospital, and he has seen firsthand how the Project SEARCH program changes lives, with Travis being one of them.”

“According to Melodie Nichols, DRS rehabilitation counselor, Travis needed job readiness training, and he seemed to be ideally suited for the Project SEARCH program, which is an employment preparation program for individuals with disabilities that takes place entirely at a workplace.”

“Harper and Nichols both identify his positive attitude as Travis’ best workplace characteristic. “He is a great overall person,” said Harper. “And he brings positivity that rubs off on the people around him.”



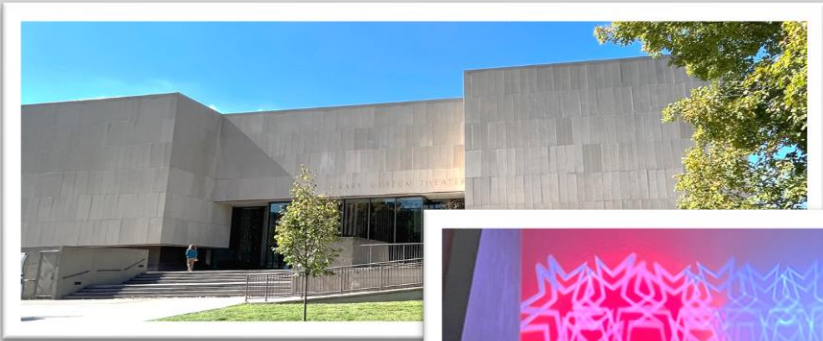
Tyler Evert
Photographer

“Tyler grew up in Hampshire County, where he was a “typical kid.” He loved to spend time outdoors. But Tyler was born with a congenital condition called proximal femoral focal deficiency, which meant that he was born with a short thigh bone. As he got older, the problem became more pronounced, and at the age of 10, he had to choose between three different surgery options to fix the problem. Tyler opted to have part of his leg amputated so he could be fitted for a prosthetic device that would bend at the knee.”

“Prior to his employment with Commerce, Tyler worked as a photographer for the West Virginia Division of Culture and History for about five years, a job he credits the West Virginia Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS) with helping him get his foot in the door.”

“Steven Hoffman is executive producer for Commerce’s Office of Marketing and Communications, and he supervises Tyler. Hoffman considers Tyler to be more than just a photographer and a videographer. He refers to him as an event planner and a storyteller. According to Hoffman, “Tyler is exceptional.”

2024 WVDRS Ability Works Recognition Ceremony



Events & Locations: WVDRS Ability Works Ceremony at the Capitol Culture Center; WV Independent Living (IL) Day at the Capitol; Gold Star Families & Veterans Memorial Monuments on Capitol Grounds





WEST VIRGINIA DIVISION OF REHABILITATION SERVICES

Our WV State Rehabilitation Council values the WV Division of Rehabilitation Services leadership, counselors, and entire staff who embody unique skills that fit together perfectly to create a culture of quality which echoes throughout programs and services for consumers' success.

WVDRS stands on their mission, which states, "Together, we enable and empower individuals with disabilities to work and to live independently by providing individualized services to consumers and employers." It is rewarding to witness all that WVDRS accomplishes, not for recognition, but for consumers. WVDRS has several programs and partnerships throughout communities across the entire state, assuring the consumers have an array of opportunities to succeed. WVDRS continues to be recognized nationally as an exceptional vocational rehabilitation state agency, across numerous rankings. Our Council is honored to be aligned with WVDRS excellence.

WVDRS OVERVIEW:

The West Virginia Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS) assists youth and adults with disabilities (ages 14 and up) on their path to work and live independently. DRS can deliver a multitude of possibilities to empower successful work opportunities for individuals with disabilities throughout their lifetime.

DRS provides vocational services that help individuals with disabilities prepare for, obtain, regain, maintain or advance in employment. Through DRS' statewide field offices, vocational rehabilitation counselors help consumers assess interests and abilities, as well as explore career options to develop individualized employment plans that will empower each person to meet his or her unique employment goals.

Services include: • Career exploration activities • Vocational training • College assistance • Work-based learning experiences • Job coaching • On-the-job training, internships or apprenticeships • Résumé development • Job search assistance • Assistive technology • Workplace accommodations

DRS also supports employers in their quest to include people with disabilities in the workforce.

DRS' rehabilitation professionals also aid West Virginia's businesses and employers by being their leading employment resource to include or to retain people with disabilities in their workforce. DRS can help with staffing, job retention and disability-related employment issues, as well as accessibility evaluations of businesses and worksites.

**WEST VIRGINIA DIVISION OF REHABILITATION SERVICES
ANNUAL REPORT STATISTICS FOR FEDERAL FISCAL YEAR 2024**

**PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS OF STATE
REHABILITATION INDIVIDUALS IN FFY 2024:**

NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS FROM EACH DISTRICT SERVED FFY 2024

District 1	2,883
District 2	2,153
District 3	1,728
District 4	3,763
District 5	3,181
District 6	1,981
TOTAL / STATEWIDE	15,689

**EDUCATION AT TIME OF INDIVIDUALIZED PLAN FOR EMPLOYMENT (IPE) OF
INDIVIDUALS VOCATIONALLY REHABILITATED FFY 2024**

EDUCATION LEVEL	NUMBER & PERCENTAGE OF INDIVIDUALS	
High School Diploma, Equivalency, or Special Education Certificate	792	45.15%
Enrolled in High School	832	47.43%
One or More Years of Postsecondary Education	16	0.91%
Attained Post Secondary Certification, License, or Educational Certificate (non-degree)	3	0.17%
Associate's Degree	3	0.17%
Bachelor's degree	5	0.29%
Degree Beyond a Bachelor's Degree	0	0.00%
Less than High School Diploma, Not Attending at Time of IPE	103	5.87%
TOTAL	1,754	100%

AGE AT APPLICATION OF INDIVIDUALS VOCATIONALLY REHABILITATED FFY 2024

AGE	NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS
Less than 20	375
20 through 34	253
35 through 44	155
45 through 64	685
65 and over	286
TOTAL	1,754

RACE OF INDIVIDUALS VOCATIONALLY REHABILITATED FFY 2024

RACE	NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS
White or Caucasian	1,665
Black or African American	57
American Indian or Alaska Native	8
Asian	8
Native Hawaiian Pacific Islander	3
Hispanic or Latino	8
Other	5
TOTAL	1,754

GENDER OF INDIVIDUALS VOCATIONALLY REHABILITATED FFY 2024

GENDER	NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS
Male	920
Female	834
Did Not Self Identify	0
TOTAL	1,754

REFERRAL SOURCE OF INDIVIDUALS VOCATIONALLY REHABILITATED FFY 2024	Number of Individuals
Adult Education and Literacy	2
Centers for Independent Living	4
Community Rehabilitation Programs	15
Consumer Organizations or Advocacy Groups	1
Corrections/Other (Adult 18+ NOT direct referral by WV	1
Div of Corrections to DRS/Corrections prog.	0
Educational Institutions (elementary/secondary)	257
Educational Institutions (post-secondary)	72
Employers	17
Faith Based Organizations	2
Family/Friends	350
Jobs and Hope	1
Medical Health Provider (Public or Private)	392
Mental Health Provider (Public or Private)	30
Other One-Stop Partner	5
Other Sources	57
Other State Agencies	13
Other VR State Agencies	2
Other WIOA-funded Programs	3
Self-Referral	526
Social Security Program (DDS)	1
Welfare Agency (State or Local Government)	2
Worker's Compensation	1
Total	1,754

PRIMARY DISABLING CONDITION OF INDIVIDUALS VOCATIONALLY REHABILITATED FFY 2024

SENSORY/COMMUNICATIVE IMPAIRMENTS:	NUMBER
Blindness	5
Other Visual Impairment	12
Deafness, Primary Communication Visual	8
Deafness, Primary Communication Auditory	42
Hearing Loss, Primary Communication Visual	4
Hearing Loss, Primary Communication Auditory	940
Other Hearing Impairments (Tinnitus, Meniere's Disease, Hyperacusis, etc.)	10
Deaf-Blindness	1
Communicative Impairments (Expressive/Receptive)	1
PHYSICAL IMPAIRMENTS:	-
Mobility Orthopedic/Neurological Impairments	59
Manipulation/Dexterity Orthopedic/Neurological Impairments	17
Both Mobility and Manipulation/Dexterity Orthopedic/Neurological Impairments	17
Other Orthopedic Impairments (e.g., limited range of motion)	24
Respiratory Impairments	8
General Physical Debilitation (fatigue, weakness, pain, etc.)	32
Other Physical Impairments (not listed above)	52
MENTAL IMPAIRMENTS:	-
Cognitive Impairments (impairments involving learning, thinking, processing information and concentration)	268
Psychosocial Impairments (interpersonal and behavioral impairments, difficulty coping)	244
Other Mental Impairments	10
Total	1,754

COUNTY OF INDIVIDUALS VOCATIONALLY REHABILITATED IN FFY 2024 (1 of 2)

Barbour	29	1.7%
Berkeley	30	1.7%
Boone	23	1.3%
Braxton	4	0.2%
Brooke	27	1.5%
Cabell	57	3.2%
Calhoun	2	0.1%
Clay	6	0.3%
Doddridge	5	0.3%
Fayette	49	2.8%
Gilmer	7	0.4%
Grant	40	2.3%
Greenbrier	88	5.0%
Hampshire	48	2.7%
Hancock	27	1.5%
Hardy	86	4.9%
Harrison	63	3.6%
Jackson	53	3.0%
Jefferson	16	0.9%
Kanawha	122	7.0%
Lewis	21	1.2%
Lincoln	16	0.9%
Logan	60	3.4%
Marion	26	1.5%
Marshall	29	1.7%
Mason	14	0.8%
McDowell	30	1.7%
Mercer	60	3.4%

COUNTY OF INDIVIDUALS VOCATIONALLY REHABILITATED IN FFY 2024 (2 of 2)

Mineral	24	1.4%
Mingo	19	1.1%
Monongalia	68	3.9%
Monroe	13	0.7%
Morgan	11	0.6%
Nicholas	26	1.5%
Ohio	33	1.9%
Pendleton	13	0.7%
Pleasants	5	0.3%
Pocahontas	18	1.0%
Preston	21	1.2%
Putnam	25	1.4%
Raleigh	93	5.3%
Randolph	70	4.0%
Ritchie	10	0.6%
Roane	12	0.7%
Summers	11	0.6%
Taylor	12	0.7%
Tucker	7	0.4%
Tyler	3	0.2%
Upshur	44	2.5%
Wayne	20	1.1%
Webster	10	0.6%
Wetzel	7	0.4%
Wirt	6	0.3%
Wood	39	2.2%
Wyoming	24	1.4%
Out of State	72	4.1%
TOTAL WV	1,754	100.0%

OCCUPATION OF INDIVIDUALS VOCATIONALLY REHABILITATED IN FFY 2024

Management Occupations	135
Business and Financial Operations Occupations	42
Computer and Mathematical Occupations	15
Architecture and Engineering Occupations	33
Life, Physical, and Social Science Occupations	21
Community and Social Services Occupations	80
Legal Occupations	13
Education, Training, and Library Occupations	112
Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports, and Media Occupations	27
Healthcare Practitioners and Technical Occupations	184
Healthcare Support Occupations	99
Protective Service Occupations	49
Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations	70
Building and Grounds Cleaning and Maintenance Occupations	74
Personal Care and Service Occupations	52
Sales and Related Occupations	70
Office and Administrative Support Occupations	162
Farming, Fishing, and Forestry Occupations	16
Construction and Extraction Occupations	96
Installation, Maintenance, and Repair Occupations	88
Production Occupations	120
Transportation and Material Moving Occupations	195
Military Specific Occupations	1
Randolph-Sheppard Vending Facility Clerk	0
Randolph-Sheppard Vending Facility Operator	0
Homemaker (*Occupation outside of the competitive labor market)	0
Unpaid Family Worker (*Occupation outside of the competitive labor market)	0
Total	1,754

CONSUMERS VOCATIONALLY REHABILITATED IN FFY 2024

Number of Individuals Rehabilitated (with an employment outcome)	1,754
Number of Vocationally Rehabilitated Individuals Placed in Competitive Employment	1,754 (100%)
Number of Individuals with Significant Disabilities Served	13,308
Total Number of Clients Served	15,689

TOTAL ANNUAL EARNINGS OF THOSE RECEIVING VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SERVICES IN FFY 2024

Total Earnings at Referral	\$47,445,240
Total Earnings after Rehabilitation	\$70,840,588
Percentage Increase in Annual Earnings Due to Rehabilitation	49%

FFY 2024 Transition Annual Report Numbers

Comprehensive vocational rehabilitation services and careful planning that involved students, their families, and school personnel garnered the following results:

9,079 students (ages 14-21) with disabilities were served, which is 58% of the total number of individuals served by DRS.

5,242 transition students were referred directly from schools to DRS.

2,885 students with disabilities developed individualized plans for employment.

430 transition clients gained employment, which is 25% of the total number of rehabilitation closures.

College Education Services

A college education provides increased opportunities for vocational success and independent living. DRS Counselors are assigned liaison responsibilities with public and private colleges and universities throughout West Virginia.

2,202 students were assisted with college education services they needed to meet their work-related educational goals.

WVSRC REPORT OF SURVEY FINDINGS
WVDRS CONSUMER SATISFACTION SURVEY

OCTOBER 2023 THROUGH SEPTEMBER 2024

WEST VIRGINIA STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL

PREPARED BY DR. DENETTA DOWLER, ED. D. DECEMBER 2024

WVSRC Report of Survey Findings

WVDRS CONSUMER SATISFACTION SURVEY

(October 2023 – September 2024)

The WV State Rehabilitation Council and the WV Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS) work cooperatively to conduct a survey of consumer satisfaction with DRS services in West Virginia. This year, the Council re-worked the survey to reflect current information needs, to increase the readability of the survey instrument, and to produce a survey instrument that can be distributed electronically. Survey Monkey was selected as the tool for distributing the survey and collecting the responses. The instrument facilitates consumer ratings of services consumers received through WVDRS and enables them to provide specific information related to services and their rights as a consumer. A final section includes open-ended items designed to determine the consumers' opinion about their services, service needs, and changes that would enhance WVDRS services.

The composition of the sample for this year is similar to the previous year in terms of age of respondents and disability category. The surveys were distributed during the year to consumers whose cases were closed in Status 26 (successful closure) or Status 08, 28, 30, or 38 (unsuccessful closure) between October 1, 2023, through September 30, 2024. Those in Status 08 were closed as ineligible to receive services. Those in Status 28 were closed as not rehabilitated after their plan was initiated. Those in Status 30 were closed if no services were initiated after a plan was developed. Those in Status 38 were closed from the waitlist. There were 0 consumers in Status 38 this year. That may be an indicator that the waitlist is being managed efficiently. Those in Status 26 were closed as rehabilitated in competitive integrated employment. The Council also examined the pattern of responses for transitioning youth for the same time-period.

A total of 3,921 survey invitations were sent via Survey Monkey to consumers whose cases were closed during the target time-period. A total of 348 of surveys were completed and submitted through Survey Monkey. In addition, paper copies of the survey were distributed to individuals who did not have cell phone or email. Approximately 470 paper surveys were sent to Adult consumers who did not have email contact information and 450 were sent to Transitioning Youth who did not have an email address.

WVSRC Report of Survey Findings

WVDRS CONSUMER SATISFACTION SURVEY

SUMMARY OF RESPONDENTS

Closure Status

Survey Monkey Responses

Adults by Status	Responses	Youth by Status	Responses
Adults Status 08	19	Transitioning Youth Status 08	11
Adults Status 28	39	Transitioning Youth Status 28	34
Adults Status 30	33	Transitioning Youth Status 30	9
Adults Status 26	267	Transitioning Youth Status 26	30

Paper Responses from 2023-24 Survey

Adults by Status	Responses	Youth by Status	Responses
Adults Status 08	1	Transitioning Youth Status 08	2
Adults Status 26	66	Transitioning Youth Status 26	6
Adults Status 28	5	Transitioning Youth Status 28	9
Adults Status 30	4	Transitioning Youth Status 30	1

WVSRC Report of Survey Findings

WVDRS CONSUMER SATISFACTION SURVEY

SUMMARY OF DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

DEMOGRAPHICS INFORMATION OF RESPONDENTS:

District. The recipients were asked in which WV county they live. There were 423 people who listed a county. There was at least one responder from 50 of the 55 counties in WV. District 1: Boone County (3 responses), Calhoun County (0), Clay County (3), Jackson County (15), Kanawha County (47), Mason County (1), Putnam County (9), and Roane County (2). District 2: Barbour County (4 responses), Braxton County (1), Gilmer County (2), Harrison County (15), Lewis County (5), Marion County (6), Monongalia County (19), Preston County (2), Randolph County (16), Taylor County (9), Tucker County (1), and Upshur County (8). District 3: Brooke (3 responses), Doddridge (1), Hancock (6), Marshall (5), Ohio (3), Pleasants (0), Ritchie (1), Tyler (1), Wetzel (0), Wirt (0), and Wood (18). District 4: Braxton (0 responses), Fayette (15), Greenbrier (26), Mercer (20), Monroe (5), Nicholas (8), Pocahontas (5), Raleigh (16), Summers (4), and Webster (4). District 5: Cabell (21 responses), Lincoln (6), Logan (8), McDowell (9), Mingo (4), Wayne (4), and Wyoming (3). District 6: Berkeley (14 responses), Grant (9), Hampshire (9), Hardy (16), Jefferson (7), Mineral (3), Morgan (0), and Pendleton (1).

Responses by WV DRS District

District	Responses	Percent
1	80	19%
2	88	21%
3	38	9%
4	103	24%
5	55	13%
6	59	14%

WVSRC Report of Survey Findings

WVDRS CONSUMER SATISFACTION SURVEY

SUMMARY OF DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

DEMOGRAPHICS INFORMATION OF RESPONDENTS:

Work Status. Responders were asked to select their current work or school participation from a list of options. Consumers were able to select more than one response (e.g., In School/Training and Working) so the total number of responses is greater than the number of participants.

Work Status	Responses
In school/training	23
Working	298
Self-Employed	12
Looking for work	27
Unable to work	25
Don't want to work	1
Retired	25
Other (please specify)	30

Age Group. Consumers were asked to indicate their age group. There were 410 responses to this question. Of these, 59 people said they were “24 Years Old and Under;” 133 were “Between 25 & 50;” 184 were “Between 51 & 70;” and 34 people said they were “Older Than 71 years old.”

WVSRC Report of Survey Findings

WVDRS CONSUMER SATISFACTION SURVEY

SUMMARY OF DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

DEMOGRAPHICS INFORMATION OF RESPONDENTS:

Disability Category. The survey included a space for responders to provide information about their disabling condition. There were 386 people who reported a diagnosis (e.g., Type I Diabetes, Multiple Sclerosis) or a description of their disability (e.g., Hard of hearing, learning problem). The following table lists the disability category, the number of people who reported a disability in that category, and the percentage of responders within each category. Over half of responders in this sample (53.11%) reported having “Hearing-related” disabilities. The “Mental Health” category included Depression, Bi-Polar Disorder, PTSD, Anxiety, and Substance Use Disorder and represented about 16% of the sample. The “Various” disabilities category (11%) includes people who reported multiple disabling conditions that crossed over more than one category (e.g., hearing loss and depression). The “Cognitive” category (7%) included disabilities such as Autism, Dyslexia, and Slow Learner. The “Motor” category included disabilities related to Arthritis, Amputation, Paralysis, and movement, also represented about 7% of the responders who reported a disability. The “Other” category included disabilities such as Cancer, Diabetes, or Kidney Disease. The Other group included 7.25% of the total responders who provided an answer about their disabling condition.

Disability Category	Responders	% of Total
Hearing-Related	205	53.11%
Mental Health	60	15.54%
Various	41	10.62%
Cognitive	26	6.74%
Motor	26	6.74%
Other	28	7.25%
Total	386	

WVSRC Report of Survey Findings

WVDRS CONSUMER SATISFACTION SURVEY

SUMMARY OF SATISFACTION RATING

SATISFACTION RATING OF RESPONDENTS:

The survey recipients were asked to indicate their level of agreement with a series of statements about the rehabilitation process, their services, and their experience with the Division of Rehabilitation Services. The following table includes the statements, the number of people who responded to each item along with the number and percentage of positive responses to each item. As may be seen in the table, each item was rated above 80% satisfaction with levels from 81% agreement to 95% agreement. Consumers did not have to respond to each item and the number of individuals responding to each item varies widely (see next slide).

WVSRC Report of Survey Findings

WVDRS CONSUMER SATISFACTION SURVEY

SATISFACTION RATING OF RESPONDENTS:

Statement	Total Ratings	Number Positive	Percent Positive
The DRS Counselor clearly explained what you needed to do to receive services.	419	387	92%
Your questions were answered clearly by the DRS Counselor.	413	379	92%
Your DRS Counselor helped you identify jobs you want to do.	262	214	82%
You worked with the DRS Counselor to make a plan for reaching your employment goal.	278	238	86%
The DRS Counselor told you about the steps to take to reach your employment goal.	284	242	85%
The DRS Counselor stayed in contact with you so you knew what was happening with your services.	407	347	85%
You received the services you needed to reach your employment goal.	351	296	84%
You are satisfied with the services provided by DRS.	418	362	87%
The DRS Counselor told you about job opportunities.	288	236	82%
The DRS Counselor treated you with courtesy and respect.	375	355	95%
How would you rate the accessibility at your local DRS office?	402	332	83%
How would you rate your DRS Counselor?	402	343	85%
How would you rate your overall experience with DRS?	404	327	81%

**WVSRC Report of Survey Findings
WVDRS CONSUMER SATISFACTION SURVEY
SUMMARY OF SATISFACTION RATING**

SATISFACTION RATING OF RESPONDENTS (CONTINUED):

It has traditionally been the case that those consumers whose cases are closed as Unsuccessful (Status 08, 28, or 30) are less satisfied with services and their experience with DRS than those who are closed as Successful (Status 26). In the sample, there were 145 people who were closed as Unsuccessful and 297 individuals whose cases were closed in Status 26. The satisfaction rating comparison is displayed in the following table.

WVSRC Report of Survey Findings

WVDRS CONSUMER SATISFACTION SURVEY

SATISFACTION RATING OF RESPONDENTS:

Statement	Successful Closure (Status 26)	Unsuccessful Closure (Status, 08, 28, or 30)
The DRS Counselor clearly explained what you needed to do to receive services.	99%	79%
Your questions were answered clearly by the DRS Counselor.	99%	77%
Your DRS Counselor helped you identify jobs you want to do.	96%	65%
You worked with the DRS Counselor to make a plan for reaching your employment goal.	98%	67%
The DRS Counselor told you about the steps to take to reach your employment goal.	97%	68%
The DRS Counselor stayed in contact with you so you knew what was happening with your services.	97%	60%
You received the services you needed to reach your employment goal.	97%	58%
You are satisfied with the services provided by DRS.	98%	63%
The DRS Counselor told you about job opportunities.	95%	63%
The DRS Counselor treated you with courtesy and respect.	100%	85%
How would you rate the accessibility at your local DRS office?	92%	61%
How would you rate your DRS Counselor?	95%	62%
How would you rate your overall experience with DRS?	93%	52%

Report of Survey Findings

WVDRS CONSUMER SATISFACTION SURVEY

SUMMARY OF RIGHTS INFORMATION FINDINGS

RIGHTS INFORMATION: The consumers were asked to indicate which rights had been explained to them. There were 374 individuals who responded that at least one right had been explained (85% of the sample). Of these, 168 people (29%) indicated that all rights were explained. Most individuals indicated that they had received several rights explanations. The total number of rights explained was 1,729. If each of these individuals had been given information about each of their rights, the total number of rights explained would have been 2,992 (374 individuals X 8 issues). The consumers recalled having been told 58% of the possible rights information. Sixty-eight people said they received no rights information; 197 people said they received information about 1 to 4 rights; and 177 people said they received information about 5 to 8 rights.

Rights Information	Responses
Participate in making your plan	313
Know about all the services that were available	289
Contact the Client Assistance Program (CAP) to solve problems	166
Choose how your services were provided	240
Choose who provided your services	231
Ask for a different DRS Counselor	147
Appeal any decision about your case	176
Appeal any decision about your services	168

Report of Survey Findings

WVDRS CONSUMER SATISFACTION SURVEY

SUMMARY OF OPEN-ENDED ITEMS

Helpful Services. A series of open-ended questions were presented. The first was, “Which service(s) offered by DRS did you find the most helpful?” There were 296 responses to this question that could be categorized as Hearing (118 people), Education/Training (35), None (26), Guidance/Counseling (23), Employment Services (22), All (21), Other (21), Various (18), and Adaptive Equipment (12).

Additional Service Needs. Consumers were asked to indicate “What needs do you have that were not addressed by DRS?” There were 263 responses to this question. Of these, 197 people said they had no additional needs (e.g., All issues were addressed and resolved; All of my concerns and needs were met the DRS is amazing; Anytime I expressed that I had needs, my DRS counselor provided help/assistance; I don't have any needs that haven't been addressed. There were 4 people who said DRS did not meet any of their needs... The other 62 comments were related to Communication needs, Hearing needs, Financial Needs, Other Needs, and Various Needs.

Improvements to DRS Services. The survey recipients were asked how DRS could improve their services. There were 232 responses including 138 people who said no improvements were needed or that they couldn't think of any improvements (e.g., Services were wonderful! The people I worked with was excellent! They did exactly what I needed; They do an excellent job and all staff are knowledgeable and very personable. They were excellent; They don't need to change a thing. They truly helped me). The other 94 responses referenced Accessibility, Communication, Public Relations, Services, Staff, and Timeliness.

Report of Survey Findings

WVDRS CONSUMER SATISFACTION SURVEY

SUMMARY OF OPEN-ENDED ITEMS

Additional Comments. The final question asked consumers if they had any other comments. There were 135 statements where consumers praised the agency/staff, criticized the agency/staff, or provided suggestions and explanations.

All feedback on “Open-Ended Items” from the consumer survey respondents can be seen in the full report. One statement read as follows, *“I am so deeply thankful for the services I was provided; my caseworker was so attentive and helpful throughout my journey. I finished my BSN (graduating Magna Cum Laude) and am now working as a registered nurse. I was supported every step of the way, from uniforms to reimbursement for application fees... I genuinely couldn't ask for more. These services are SO valuable to people like me. I clawed my way out of addiction and poverty because of these programs. I can confidently say I would not be where I am without the DRS; I felt very valued by my case manager and the rest of the staff. Please keep these programs forever!”*

END OF REPORT OF SURVEY FINDINGS (SUMMARY).

WVDRS Districts



WVDRS District Offices

West Virginia Division of Rehabilitation Services
304-356-2060 or 800-642-8207

District 1: Charleston

- Charleston District & Branch Office
601 57th Street SE, Charleston, WV 25304
304-356-2371
- Point Pleasant Branch Office
2807 Jackson Ave. Ste. 200, Point Pleasant, WV 25550
304-675-0867
- Ripley Branch Office
206 Stone Drive, Ripley, WV 25271
304-373-0313
- Spencer Branch Office
321 Market Street, Spencer, WV 25276
304-927-0954
- Teays Valley Branch Office
115 Liberty Square, Hurricane, WV 25526
304-760-7082

District 2: Clarksburg

- Clarksburg District & Branch Office
153 West Main St. Suite F. Clarksburg, WV 26301
304-625-6044
- Elkins Branch Office
1025 North Randolph Ave., Elkins, WV 26241
304-637-0205
- Fairmont Branch Office
416 Adams St., Suite 240, Fairmont, WV 26554
304-367-2714
- Morgantown Branch Office
Sabraton Plaza 1415 Earl Core Rd.
Morgantown, WV 26505
304-285-3155
- Weston Branch Office
306 Market Place Mall, Weston, WV 26452
304-269-0547

District 3: Wheeling

- Parkersburg Branch Office
State Office Bldg. 400 5th St.,
Parkersburg, WV 26101
304-420-4580
- New Martinsville Office
WV Northern Community College Itinerant Office
141 Main Street,
New Martinsville, WV 26155
304-455-4688
- Wheeling District & Branch Office
1324 Chapline St., Suite 200,
Wheeling, WV 26003
304-238-1092
- Weirton Branch Office
100 Municipal Plaza Suite 200,
Weirton, WV 26062
304-723-5311

District 4: Beckley

- Beckley District & Branch Office
800 New River Town Center,
Beckley, WV 25801
304-256-6900
- Lewisburg Branch Office
3293 Jefferson St. N. Suite 105
Lewisburg, WV 24901-5733
304-647-7515
- Princeton Branch Office
195 Davis Street,
Princeton, WV 24739
304-425-1256
- Summersville Branch Office
830 Northside Dr. Suite 113
Summersville, WV 26651
304-872-0813

WVDRS District Offices

District 5: Huntington

- Huntington District & Branch Office
2699 Park Ave. Suite 200,
Huntington, WV 25704
304-528-5585
- Marshall University
Prichard Hall, Room 113,
Huntington, WV 25755
304-696-2394
- Cabell Midland High School
2300 US Route 60 East,
Ona, WV 25545
304-743-7496
- Huntington High School
Highlander Way,
Huntington, WV 25701
304-528-6511
- Logan Branch Office
130 Stratton St. Suite 231,
Logan, WV 25601
304-792-7060
- Mullens Branch Office
316 Howard Avenue,
Mullens, WV 25882
304-294-5653
- Welch Branch Office
110 Park Avenue,
Welch, WV 24801
304-436-3175

District 6: Martinsburg

- Keyser Branch Office
67 North Tornado Way,
Keyser, WV 26726
304-788-2313
- Martinsburg District & Branch Office
489 Mid Atlantic Parkway, Suite 2
Martinsburg, WV 25404
304-267-0005
- Moorefield Branch Office
151 Robert C. Byrd Industrial Park RD, Ste 3
Moorefield, WV 26836
304-538-2701
- Romney Branch Office
WV Schools for the Deaf and Blind
301 E. Main Street,
Romney, WV 26757
304-822-4806



NCSRC

NATIONAL COALITION OF STATE REHABILITATION COUNCILS, INC.

NCSRC MISSION

On behalf of people with disabilities, our national membership coalition will advocate for and work in partnership with the national public vocational rehabilitation system's continual quest for excellence.

NCSRC VISION

NCSRC will be the premiere national organization of the consumer voice to enhance the employment opportunities of persons with disabilities through the public vocational rehabilitation system.

NCSRC CORE VALUES

INTEGRITY - We are honest and straightforward in all that we do. We treat everyone with dignity and respect. We act responsibly with resources entrusted to us. We are accountable and act in accordance with these values.

COMMITMENT – We support the full implementation and enforcement of disability non – discrimination laws, particularly the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended and the American with Disabilities Act of 1990.

EXCELLENCE – We trust that customers of public vocational rehabilitation will be empowered to make choices which lead to ultimate independence.

ADVOCACY – We will work to educate and inform the public and government policy makers regarding issues affecting people with disabilities

DIVERSITY – We will uphold a broad definition of diversity that honors and appreciates disability alongside race, ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation, and religion as an integral part of the human experience.

LEADERSHIP – We will foster leadership among people with disabilities that upholds excellence, quality and inclusive opportunities.

NCSRC

In November 2005, a handful of people affiliated with their State Rehabilitation Councils (SRC), including West Virginia, shared lunch during the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) Conference in San Diego, California. The group began considering the benefits and drawbacks of establishing a national organization. Those present were not elite, some were Governor-appointed volunteers serving on their respective Councils; others were staff with the sole responsibility of working for a Council while some were agency staff assigned to provide support to their respective SRC.

There was also diversity in the structure of those Councils – those who were well-resourced while others had no budget. The various states and territories included representation from agencies with Blind and general programs as well as those with combined programs. Despite the notable differences, there was a great deal in common.

That common ground and the power of the collective potential is what led a motivated core of individuals to move forward from brainstorming to organizing. A Board of Directors was formed and with the support of the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) has convened national conference calls of the SRCs on a quarterly basis focusing on topics members have requested to enhance their Councils.

NCSRC provides quarterly free conference calls with topics requested by members. These calls are facilitated by a Board member(s) or guest speaker to provide training, resources and networking for Councils. The topics are posted on the NCSRC website and emails are sent prior to the calls to Council Chairpersons & liaisons to share with their members. These calls are for any SRC member or VR staff person. In addition, the Board of Directors meets on a monthly basis to further the structure and development of the NCSRC.

For the past several years prior to each CSAVR Conference in the spring and fall, the NCSRC has been providing two (2) full days of training for Council members to become more educated, opportunity to network with other states, given outlines of detailed responsibilities and the tools needed to have an effective Council. Attendees offer topics areas in which they would desire more training during conference calls and at each training.

Special Acknowledgments

The WVSRC is thankful for WVDRS' (Agency) continued support, valuable information, and time contributed to aid in our success. Our Council is grateful for the relationship, guidance, and expertise from the Agency. The WVSRC greatly appreciates WVDRS' meeting presentations, reporting, and inclusion of the Council at State and National events. WVSRC respects WVDRS' devoted support and services offered at every milestone throughout consumers' vocational rehabilitation and career journey, breaking one glass ceiling after the next. Our Council values everyone at WVDRS and their hard work. The WVSRC congratulates WVDRS for continuously being recognized as a national model of success. It is an honor to be aligned with the reputable WVDRS.

Special thanks to:

- Pisnu Bua-lam, Director
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- Jeff Seager
- Trenton Morton
- Dylan Crouser
- Eli Adkins
- Brandon Wandling
- Annie Sumpter



Some of the helpful staff at WVDRS



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