West Virginia Division of Rehabilitation Services Annual Report
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Dear Colleagues and Friends:

The West Virginia Division of Rehabilitation Services’ (DRS) 2019 Annual Report, Investing in Futures, showcases the hard work of DRS staff and the valued collaboration with our essential vocational rehabilitation program partners – WorkForce West Virginia, West Virginia Adult Education, secondary and postsecondary education, Community Rehabilitation Programs, the State Rehabilitation Council, the Statewide Independent Living Council and West Virginia businesses and employers. These partnerships exemplify the mission of the vocational rehabilitation program:

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

In fiscal year 2019, DRS provided vocational rehabilitation services to 8,240 West Virginians with disabilities. Those services play an essential role in empowering our consumers, people with disabilities, in their pursuit to work and succeed as productive, self-sufficient community members.

We proudly acknowledge the 868 determined individuals who, after receiving services from DRS, obtained employment during the past year. These hard-working citizens represent the powerful impact of vocational rehabilitation with an average increase in estimated annual earnings of 354 percent!

This report also highlights the accomplishments of DRS’ Disability Determination Section (DDS), which adjudicates Social Security Disability Insurance and Supplemental Security Income claims for the Social Security Administration (SSA), and they cleared 36,817 claims during fiscal year 2019.

Through continued investment of resources for positive change, DRS dramatically contributes to West Virginia’s economy and to improving the lives of West Virginians with disabilities.

Thank you for sharing in our successes!
Together, we enable and empower individuals with disabilities to work and to live independently by providing individualized services to consumers and employers.
Highlights

Vocational Rehabilitation Program

• DRS served 8,240 West Virginians with disabilities, with 4,894 being transition-aged youth.
• DRS helped 868 job seekers with disabilities obtain or retain employment.
• The estimated annual earnings of individuals at application were $5,131,880. After receiving vocational rehabilitation services, their total estimated earnings rose to $23,316,176, which amounts to a 354% increase in the total estimated earned income of these hard-working West Virginians, which demonstrates a significant return on investment.
• DRS spent more than $16 million to purchase necessary vocational rehabilitation services for its consumers, which dramatically contributes to West Virginia’s economy.
• DRS continued to work toward the goals identified in the Unified State Plan that was developed in collaboration with core partners, WorkForce West Virginia and West Virginia Adult Education, as required by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA).
• 93% of individuals served had significant disabilities.

Disability Determination Section

• DDS cleared 36,817 disability claims.
• DDS met SSA’s priority goal in the Continuing Disability Review case workload.
• DDS assisted other states with over 4,166 claims.
• DDS continued to partner with the SSA, Office of the Inspector General and the West Virginia Attorney General to maintain the Cooperative Disability Investigation Unit in Charleston. 109 referrals were made to the unit.
Customer Service Delivery

Through our statewide field services program, clients receive effective one-on-one, personal service from DRS. Throughout the state, DRS rehabilitation counselors carefully evaluate clients’ skills, abilities and interests. Vocational success is achieved by providing the services and comprehensive support each client needs to meet his or her employment goal.

DRS employs approximately 79 extensively trained vocational rehabilitation counselors who work directly with individuals with disabilities throughout the vocational rehabilitation process. Vocational rehabilitation counselors are required to meet a stringent certification criterion.

Each of the field offices has a supervisor who, in addition to providing leadership and guidance to employees, takes the lead in developing partnerships with area employers, workforce centers, schools and other public and private service agencies within the community.

Through our statewide quality assurance program, DRS strives to ensure that the same level of high-quality services is delivered to individuals with disabilities throughout West Virginia. Quality assurance specialists work in each DRS district, and as a team, to develop client services policy, review casework practices, assure consistent interpretation of policy throughout the state and provide training on policy and casework.

Districts and Branch Offices
Vocational Rehabilitation Process

The vocational rehabilitation process begins when an individual applies for DRS services. An application is completed, and an intake interview is held to explore the individual’s medical, social, financial, educational and vocational experiences. This is an opportunity to explore the applicant’s skills, abilities and interests and to understand his or her specific vocational rehabilitation needs. Further assessment of the individual’s employment barriers is conducted when necessary to establish eligibility for services.

Once eligibility is established, the client and his or her vocational rehabilitation counselor work together to develop an individualized plan for employment (IPE). This plan describes the services that will be needed so the individual can reach his or her employment goal.

The anticipated outcome of the individual’s vocational rehabilitation program is competitive, integrated employment in a career of the individual’s choice.

Depending on the services needed, the individual’s involvement with DRS can last anywhere from a few months to several years.

Follow-up services are provided by the rehabilitation counselor to assure that the individual’s employment is stable and satisfactory. Advocacy and support services are available through the Client Assistance Program throughout the term of the individual’s involvement with DRS.

Steps to Success

1. Application
2. Intake
3. Assessment
4. Eligibility
5. Provision of Services
6. Individualized Plan for Employment
7. Employment Secured
8. Follow-up
9. Case Closed
10. Success!
Available Services

To help people with disabilities achieve their employment goals, DRS is able to provide a variety of services to eligible individuals. The client and the vocational rehabilitation counselor work together to determine the necessary and appropriate services to enable the client to meet his or her identified employment goal. The services provided to any eligible person are determined by his or her unique employment barriers, chosen employment goal and individual circumstances.

DRS services include:

• **Evaluation and diagnostic services** may be provided to determine eligibility and the services needed for the individual to become employed.

• **Vocational counseling and guidance** are provided directly by a vocational rehabilitation counselor during the client’s plan of services to accomplish a variety of objectives leading to successful employment.

• **Pre-employment transition services** may be provided to students with disabilities and can include job exploration counseling, work-based learning experiences, counseling for postsecondary education, workplace readiness training and instruction in self-advocacy.

• **Training services** may be provided to meet the employment goal and may include vocational training, college or other academic training, personal and vocational adjustment training, job coaching, on-the-job training, job-seeking skills training, as well as books, tools and other training materials.

• **Rehabilitation technology services** may include assistive technology devices, driver evaluation and education services, assistive technology services and rehabilitation engineering services to address barriers encountered by an individual in obtaining or retaining employment.

• **Physical and mental therapeutic services** may be provided to correct or substantially modify an individual's physical or mental condition.

• **Specialized services** for individuals who are blind, deaf and deaf-blind may include orientation and mobility training, interpreter services, note-taking services and reader services.

• **Placement services** may be provided to assist an individual with a disability to find adequate and suitable employment in his or her chosen field.

• **Support services** such as maintenance, transportation assistance, personal care assistance and services to family members may be provided, if necessary.

• **Post-employment services** may be provided to previously rehabilitated individuals when needed to maintain or regain suitable employment.
Lezlie Henderson never thought she would see herself as compassionate and hard-working, let alone as a productive member of society.

Lezlie grew up in rural Wyoming County, where she spent a lot of time outside because her mother and father were both addicted to drugs and the environment inside the house wasn’t good.

She went to Huntington High School for one year but dropped out of school in 2010. She later went on to complete her GED.

Lezlie has a substance use disorder and truly believes that Huntington’s Drug Court saved her life.

“My drug addiction started young… It started out with just marijuana, Xanax’s here and Xanax’s there,” explained Lezlie. As a teenager, a doctor prescribed Lortabs and it progressed from there to heroin, cocaine and anything she could get her hands on, except for meth.

Lezlie admits that, early on, she struggled with Drug Court.

“In the beginning, I was stubborn,” Lezlie said. “I didn’t want anybody to have authority over me, but once I buckled down, my probation officer was like, ‘either it’s this or prison.’ … I started paying attention to the classes, I started listening to what she was telling me – it made me who I am today – I can be a mother, a coworker or a friend, a daughter that I was never able to be before.”

Lezlie learned about DRS through a caseworker at Harmony House, which was part of the tracking system when she was on home confinement at the Huntington City Mission.

Dustin Mills, Lezlie’s Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor, explained that DRS provided a lot of vocational counseling and guidance, as well as encouragement and connections to other resources in the community, to support Lezlie on her path to employment. Because she had no real work experience, DRS also provided work adjustment training through Harmony House, which was an opportunity for Lezlie to gain hands-on job skills needed for employment.

According to Lezlie, her biggest challenge to her own employment was accepting others’ authority. She admits that, in the beginning, she made excuses to try to get out of going to work, but her supervisor held her accountable and she learned to grow during the experience.

Lezlie started working at Harmony House as a shelter assistant but has been promoted to peer support specialist, where she works as a caseworker to help people who are in circumstances like what she’s been through during her lifetime.

Stephanie Swartek, Cooperative Agreements to Benefit Homeless Individuals (CABHI) Program Coordinator at Harmony House, which is a resource for people who are experiencing chronic homelessness, many of which have mental health conditions and/or substance use disorders, believes Lezlie’s best qualification for her job is her own life experiences.

“She understands what our clients are going through because she has been through a lot of it, so they feel comfortable working with her and building that relationship with her – they trust her,” Swartek explained. “Also, she has a natural ability to make people feel understood and accepted regardless of their barriers or what they might be struggling with, they feel comfortable communicating with her.”

Mills also believes Lezlie’s personal experience allows her to be a role model for the people she’s helping. “She is not judgmental, so she accepts people for who they are, where they are, and has the experience of a person who was homeless, who was in active addiction, and is now in permanent housing and is working,” said Mills.

Her long-term goal is to go back to school to be a substance abuse counselor, so she can work with kids who come from backgrounds similar to her own.

Lezlie credits DRS, Harmony House and Drug Court as the three biggest things that helped her get where she is today. “If I wouldn’t have had [their support], honestly, I would probably be in the federal penitentiary or dead,” said Lezlie.
Fiscal Year 2019 Program Data

Economic Impact of Vocational Rehabilitation Services

$23,316,176 After rehabilitation

354% increase in total estimated annual earnings

$5,131,880 At referral

West Virginians Served by District

Total served 8,240

Charleston District 1,510

Clarksburg District 1,188

Wheeling District 1,193

Martinsburg District 886

Beckley District 1,554

Huntington District 1,909
### Education at Time of Individualized Plan for Employment of Individuals Vocationally Rehabilitated

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education</th>
<th>At IPE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High school graduate, GED or special education certificate</td>
<td>471</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrolled in high school</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One or more years of postsecondary education</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attained postsecondary certification, license or educational certificate</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate degree</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s degree</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree beyond a bachelor’s degree</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than high school diploma</td>
<td>40</td>
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</table>

### Referral Sources of Individuals Vocationally Rehabilitated

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Count</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community Rehabilitation Programs</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department of Corrections/Juvenile Justice</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Institutions (Elementary/Secondary)</td>
<td>333</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Institutions (Postsecondary)</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family/Friends</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical Health Providers</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental Health Providers</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One-Stop Employment/Training Centers</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Sources</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Referral</td>
<td>218</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Security Administration</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Primary Disability of Individuals Vocationally Rehabilitated

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disability</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive Impairments</td>
<td>318</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hearing/Communicative Impairments</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Impairments</td>
<td>238</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological Impairments</td>
<td>236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual Impairments</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Age, Gender and Race of Individuals Vocationally Rehabilitated

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 20</td>
<td>444</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-34</td>
<td>210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-64</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65+</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>American Indian or Alaska Native</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or African American</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than one race</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Hawaiian Pacific Islander</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>809</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Gender

Male 469
Female 399
## Occupations of Individuals Vocationally Rehabilitated

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Field</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Architecture and Engineering</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports and Media</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building, Grounds Cleaning and Maintenance</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business and Financial Operations</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community and Social Services</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer and Mathematical</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction and Extraction</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education, Training and Library</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farming, Fishing and Forestry</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food Preparation and Serving Related</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healthcare Practitioners and Technical</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healthcare Support</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Installation, Maintenance and Repair</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life, Physical and Social Science</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office and Administrative Support</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Care and Service</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Production</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protective Service</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Randolph-Sheppard Vending Facility Operator</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales and Related</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation and Material Moving</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total rehabilitated into competitive, integrated employment</strong></td>
<td><strong>868</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Performance Standards and Evaluation Indicators

DRS has chosen to continue measuring performance based on program evaluation standards and performance indicators previously established by the federal Rehabilitation Services Administration. To successfully meet these standards, DRS must pass four of the six employment outcome indicators (Indicators 1.1 to 1.6) and pass two of the three primary indicators (Indicators 1.3, 1.4 and 1.5). DRS must also pass the equal access indicator (Indicator 2.1).

Fiscal year 2019 data shows that DRS exceeded the federal benchmarks, which demonstrates a trend of successful employment outcomes for West Virginians with disabilities, benefiting taxpayers and rehabilitation consumers alike.

**Evaluation Standard 1 – Employment Outcomes. DRS assists eligible individuals to obtain, maintain or regain high-quality employment.**

**Performance Indicator 1.1 — Change in Employment Outcomes**
The number of individuals who achieved an employment outcome in the current year must equal or exceed the number from the previous year. (Federal Requirement – equal to or greater than prior year)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>FY 2019</th>
<th>FY 2017</th>
<th>FY 2018</th>
<th>FY 2016</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>868</td>
<td>1,671</td>
<td>1,211</td>
<td>1,803</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Performance Indicator 1.2 — Percent of Employment Outcomes**
The percentage of individuals exiting the program during the current year who have achieved an employment outcome after receiving services. (Federal Requirement – 55.8%)  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>FY 2019</th>
<th>FY 2017</th>
<th>FY 2018</th>
<th>FY 2016</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>33.8%</td>
<td>43.7%</td>
<td>54.4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Performance Indicator 1.3 — Competitive Employment Outcomes**
The percentage of individuals who achieved an employment outcome and are earning at least the minimum wage. (Federal Requirement – 72.6%)  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>FY 2019</th>
<th>FY 2017</th>
<th>FY 2018</th>
<th>FY 2016</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>99.4%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Performance Indicator 1.4 — Significance of Disability**
Of those earning at least the minimum wage, the percentage who have significant disabilities. (Federal Requirement – 62.4%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>FY 2019</th>
<th>FY 2017</th>
<th>FY 2018</th>
<th>FY 2016</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>99.4%</td>
<td>88.1%</td>
<td>98.9%</td>
<td>83.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Performance Indicator 1.5 — Earnings Ratio**
The ratio of the average hourly earnings of all individuals earning at least the minimum wage to the average hourly earnings of all employed individuals in the state. (Federal Requirement – Ratio of .52)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>FY 2019</th>
<th>FY 2017</th>
<th>FY 2018</th>
<th>FY 2016</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.72</td>
<td>.70</td>
<td>.70</td>
<td>.66</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Performance Indicator 1.6 — Self-Support**
Of those earning at least the minimum wage, the difference in the percentage of individuals who at program entry reported their income as the largest single source of support, and the percentage that reported their personal income as the largest single source of support at program exit. (Federal Requirement – 53% mathematical differences)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>FY 2019</th>
<th>FY 2017</th>
<th>FY 2018</th>
<th>FY 2016</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>62.9%</td>
<td>56.9%</td>
<td>63.1%</td>
<td>56.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Evaluation Standard 2 – Equal Access to Services. DRS must ensure that individuals from minority backgrounds have equal access to services.**

**Performance Indicator 2.1 — Minority Background Service Rate**
The service rate for individuals with disabilities from minority backgrounds as a ratio to the service rate for all non-minorities with disabilities. (Federal Requirement – Ratio of .80)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>FY 2019</th>
<th>FY 2017</th>
<th>FY 2018</th>
<th>FY 2016</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.981</td>
<td>.922</td>
<td>.957</td>
<td>.893</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>FY 2019</th>
<th>FY 2017</th>
<th>FY 2018</th>
<th>FY 2016</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.981</td>
<td>.922</td>
<td>.957</td>
<td>.893</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Programs and Services

Transition Program

A successful and seamless transition from high school into appropriate vocational training, postsecondary education or employment is the goal of the transition program.

DRS maintains cooperative agreements with the West Virginia Department of Education, each of the 55 county school systems and the West Virginia Schools for the Deaf and the Blind to ensure effective collaboration for school-aged youth with disabilities.

RESULTS

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

- **4,894** students (ages 16 to 21) with disabilities were served, which is **58%** of the total number of individuals served by DRS.
- **3,208** transition students were referred directly from schools to DRS.
- **382** students with disabilities developed individualized plans for employment.
- **493** transition clients gained employment, which is **57%** of the total number of rehabilitation closures.

PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES

Since the enactment of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), DRS has focused on expanding its transition program by providing pre-employment transition services (Pre-ETS) to students with disabilities up to age 21. There are 69 counselors assigned to work with students with disabilities throughout the state.

Pre-ETS are mandated under WIOA and include the following five required activities:

- **Job exploration counseling**
- **Work-based learning experiences**, which may include in-school or after-school opportunities or experience outside the traditional school setting (including internships), that are provided in an integrated environment to the maximum extent possible
- **Counseling on opportunities for enrollment** in comprehensive transition or postsecondary educational programs at institutions of higher education
- **Workplace readiness training** to develop social skills and independent living
- **Instruction in self-advocacy**, which may include peer mentoring

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.

- Assisted **2,002** students with college education services they needed to meet their work-related educational goals.
INITIATIVES

PATHWAYS TO THE FUTURE

DRS maintains the Pathways to the Future website (pathwayswv.org), which is a self-guided resource center that provides direct information and services to students with disabilities, parents, educators and vocational rehabilitation counselors regarding all five required Pre-ETS in order to help students transition from school and prepare for employment. Outreach activities promote this self-guided resource in high schools throughout the state.

The online resource center focuses on transition planning:

- Career Planning
- Education Planning
- Independent Living
- Work-Based Learning Experiences
- Self-Determination/Self-Advocacy
- Independent Living Skills
- Self-Determination

WEST VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION (WVDE) COLLABORATION

- DRS and the WVDE’s Office of Special Education and Support Services jointly developed and hosted the first ever Capacity Building Institute for special education teachers and DRS transition counselors, which was held in July. This three-day cross-training enabled DRS and WVDE to better serve students with disabilities in West Virginia. Staff from WVDE learned about DRS services, including Pre-ETS. DRS staff gained an enhanced understanding of the roles and responsibilities of WVDE.
- DRS and WVDE’s Office of Special Education and Support Services partnered to coordinate a mass distribution of Pathways to the Future and other transition-related materials to high schools throughout West Virginia. These materials are being used by teachers, students and parents to help students with disabilities prepare for their futures.
2019 PRE-ETS SUMMER ACTIVITIES

During the summer of 2019, DRS initiated Pre-ETS summer activities for transition-age students throughout the state. Those activities included:

**Career Exploration Opportunity (CEO) Summits**

CEO Summits for transition students entering their senior year of high school were held in 60 areas throughout DRS’ six districts. Attendance was approximately 1,000 students and those participating earned a stipend for the time they attended.

Topics covered included career planning and preparation, communication, conflict management, employer expectations, attendance and punctuality, timeliness of task completion, working without supervision, positive work ethic, multitasking, high-growth jobs, personal brand, and job hunting tools, including résumés, cover letters, interviews, and digital profiles.

**Instruction in Self-Advocacy Programs**

In collaboration with Community Rehabilitation Programs, the Statewide independent Living Council and the Centers for Independent Living, DRS also established Instruction in Self-Advocacy programs at 25 locations across the state, serving 294 students with disabilities. These programs provided students with disabilities with the skills necessary to be confident and independent self-advocates.

Students also learned about their legal rights and responsibilities, the history of the disability movement, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, the Americans with Disabilities Act and Individualized Education Plans.

**Build It, Keep It, Share It Program**

To promote Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) fields, DRS sponsored a “Build It, Keep It, Share It” program. Through a one-week training, students received the knowledge, tools and components they needed to build a computer. At the end of the training, they took the knowledge – and the computer – home with them. The program was designed to develop student interest in the sciences through computers and to subsequently promote interest in high-paying jobs within in-demand job sectors. The program was held in 12 locations and served 363 students with disabilities.

**Work-Based Learning Experiences at State Parks**

DRS collaborated with the Division of Natural Resources to place students with disabilities in West Virginia’s State Parks to gain hands on work-based learning experiences through temporary summer employment. Approximately 70 students with disabilities participated at the following parks: Babcock, Cabwaylingo, Camp Creek, Hawks Nest, Kanawha State Forest, Little Beaver, Twin Falls and Watoga.
Josh Kittle knew he needed to apply himself and get his life on track, but he knew he couldn't do it without some guidance to help him along the way.

Josh grew up in Belpre, Ohio, but moved to Parkersburg in 2012. He graduated from Parkersburg South High School in 2014.

At an early age, Josh had developed a strong interest in computers. After high school, he tried college at West Virginia University at Parkersburg, but it didn't work out for him.

Josh has attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), bipolar disorder and anxiety disorder, which made it difficult for him to pursue an education or employment.

In 2017, Josh realized that he really needed to do something to help himself become more independent, so he approached DRS for assistance. He had worked with DRS once before but at that time he really wasn’t ready to pursue employment.

According to Linda Lucas, Josh’s Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor, Josh had never felt like he fit in anywhere. He was interested in computers and electronics, but he didn’t feel like he could work in the field since he didn’t have a college degree.

Lucas set Josh up for services through SW Resources, a community rehabilitation program in Parkersburg, where his work skills were assessed. Lucas and SW Resources worked together to secure an opportunity for Josh to do a community-based assessment at Really Cheap Geeks, a locally owned business in Parkersburg that does computer and technology repairs.

The community-based assessment gave Josh the opportunity to test his abilities but also a chance to build confidence and self-esteem when it comes to working with and around other people.

According to Lucas, DRS also helped Josh get treatment to help with his depression and anxiety so that he could learn better coping skills to deal with his disabilities.

Josh explained that he gets overwhelmed at times. “With ADHD and depression, it’s always made it hard for me to focus and buckle down and my anxiety would be bad,” he said. “There are days when I have a lot of energy and days when I’m just tired, I just don’t want to do a lot, but I still kind of focus on it.”

Josh’s success and growth during his community-based assessment at Really Cheap Geeks ultimately led to employment as a Computer Technician with the business. “He did really well, and he was eventually hired at Cheap Geeks, and that’s where he works doing electronics and computer repair,” Lucas explained.

Edward Escandon, Owner of Really Cheap Geeks, believes one of the biggest things Josh needed was self-confidence. Building more self-assurance has enabled him to relax around people so that he can help them with their computer or phone repairs.

Escandon refers to Josh as his “go-to guy for Androids,” calling that Josh’s specialty area.

“It seems like he’s self-taught,” explained Escandon. “Most techs – I think they get into it because of their own interest and that’s what helps them dig in and really get good at it and Josh has clearly done that on his own and since he’s been with us. You get to fill in a lot of the gaps because of the problems that come your way and he’s continued to grow and learn and that’s exactly what we need from him.”

Josh describes himself as adaptive. “I’m always willing to learn,” Josh said. “I’ve learned a lot of things over time that just a matter of two or three years ago I would never have thought of being able to do. I would do minor projects on my own, but with help from others, I’ve actually learned how to do things either better, more efficiently, or even new things I wouldn’t have even thought of.”

Just recently, Josh expanded his skills to be able to work on iPhone screens, something his anxiety would not have previously allowed him to do.

Josh likes working and believes that he would not be where he is today without the help he’s received along the way from DRS, SW Resources, his family and Really Cheap Geeks.
Employer Services Program

DRS’ team of employment specialists work closely with local employers to help them to determine their workforce needs and then relay current and future job openings to our vocational rehabilitation counselors and clients.

The DRS employment specialists routinely visit with employers throughout the state. As a result, our clients have real-time labor market information that will assist them in planning their careers. Employers share information about current and future job openings, which allows DRS counselors to better inform clients about occupations that are currently in demand and the necessary skills to obtain jobs in those fields.

In fiscal year 2019, DRS employment specialists made 529 employer visits, where they provided employers with solutions in the areas of staffing, job retention of employees who have developed a disability, education, technical consultation on the Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act, and tax credit information for hiring individuals with disabilities.

Continuing education and training for DRS employment specialists ensures that they are providing quality services to clients. By staying up to date on national recruiting and hiring trends, DRS is able to assist clients with remaining competitive in the job market, which improves their chances of finding a job, boosts their visibility to maximize their career opportunities and increases their competitive advantage.

To better serve youth with disabilities, DRS employment specialists have knowledge of workplace ethics, sometimes referred to as soft skills. Employment specialists are able to assist students with disabilities in understanding how to make a good first impression, grasping the concept of interpersonal skills, and increasing their awareness of what employers look for and consider when they hire and promote employees.

The DRS employment specialists also work to recruit local employers who will provide job shadowing experiences for students with disabilities.

AMAZON PARTNERSHIP

DRS began working with representatives from Amazon in Huntington and representatives from PCSI, which is a nonprofit headquartered in Austin, Texas, that provides staffing support services to hospitals, military bases and private-sector clients throughout the United States. PCSI staffs its teams with disabled veterans and other people with disabilities and it works like any other contractor – recruiting, training and managing teams of workers to deliver services to its customers. Amazon is working diligently to assist individuals with disabilities to overcome barriers to employment in order to work at the company. PCSI is providing job coaching and support to make DRS employment referrals successful.
Cheryl Holstein used to believe that “jobs are jobs,” but she now has a career that she wouldn’t give up for the world.

Cheryl grew up in Cabin Creek in Kanawha County. She was in her sophomore year at East Bank High School when a car accident in 1990 left her with a broken back. She was completely paralyzed from her waist down. Over the years, some of the nerve damage has healed and she can walk some with crutches but uses a wheelchair as her primary source of mobility.

After her accident, Cheryl was homeschooled for the remainder of her sophomore year. She ultimately went back to school, attending and graduating from DuPont High School.

After high school, Cheryl spent some time at the West Virginia Rehabilitation Center, formerly operated by DRS, where she obtained accounting training and driver’s education services.

Cheryl went to work for Ticketmaster for several years and started a family. She has two daughters that are her life’s biggest accomplishments thus far.

As her daughters got older, Cheryl decided she needed a change. A friend’s daughter was attending Ross Medical Education Center and she decided to check it out, ultimately enrolling in the pharmacy technician program.

According to Meredith Perry, Cheryl’s Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor, Cheryl came back to DRS to see if the agency could help her with her new career goal. DRS did provide her with job training assistance, and she completed her pharmacy technician certification in 2018.

According to Cheryl, her job search didn’t take that long but her first interview was unpleasant. Unfortunately, that pharmacy was not very open to her disability. However, things turned around when she interviewed with the Rite Aid in Kanawha City. She began working there as a Certified Pharmacy Technician in April 2018.

“They’ve never, not once treated me like I was disabled,” explained Cheryl. “They offered me anything that I needed, all I have to do is ask.”

Brad Hatcher, Pharmacy Manager where Cheryl works, explained that they are in the process of transitioning to Walgreens and Cheryl’s top responsibility is to take care of their customers. She also assists the pharmacists in everything they do – from counting pills, running prescriptions and taking care of customers at the register, as well as taking care of outdated or overstocked materials and hazardous waste.

According to Hatcher, not only did Cheryl have to have her license, but Walgreens has a pharmacy technician university and she had to complete that training and pass an exam to work there. Their pharmacy technicians also must take monthly computer-based training to keep up on the various aspects of pharmacy.

Since Cheryl was injured when she was so young, she’s adopted the attitude that you must make the best of every situation.

“Because being in a chair just more or less changes your outlook on life,” she explained. “It just gives you a different perspective and there is not really anything anybody can’t do. It’s just a matter of sometimes you have to go around it to do it.”

Hatcher believes Cheryl’s best attributes are her positive attitude and people skills. “She deals with the customers and nobody gets mad at her,” Hatcher said. “Somebody might be stressed, and you figure out solutions to things, and she is really good at working with people.”

Cheryl is grateful to DRS for helping her obtain her pharmacy technician training. She also appreciates and respects the pharmacists that she works with regularly. They gave her a chance and taught her a lot.

For Cheryl, the best part of her job is helping her patients. “I love this job,” Cheryl said. “When you have a job that you like to come to, that when you wake up and you know you have to go to work, it’s not disappointing.”

Her goal is to stay where she is, learn as much as she can and be the best pharmacy technician that she can be.
Community Rehabilitation Programs

The state network of Community Rehabilitation Programs (CRP) is critical to the effective and efficient delivery of vocational rehabilitation services to West Virginians with significant disabilities.

DRS maintains strong working relationships with CRPs in West Virginia that provide supported and direct employment, community-based assessment, work skills assessment, job coach training, work adjustment and/or life skills training. These services are commonly purchased by DRS to assist individuals with significant disabilities to achieve successful employment outcomes.

There are 72 DRS-acknowledged CRPs with 80 total service locations throughout West Virginia.

To better meet the needs of DRS and its clients, DRS works closely with the CRPs and other local community providers to expand programs, such as pre-vocational training, employment-readiness services and job coaching.

DRS has ongoing collaboration with the CRPs and other local community providers to identify needs, available resources, training opportunities and best practices to enable positive changes to assist West Virginians with disabilities to achieve successful, integrated employment outcomes.

DRS continues to cultivate and expand the Student Transition to Employment Program (STEP) to directly assist transitioning youth with obtaining needed employment services. STEP is designed to train special education teachers, school transition teachers, and/or teacher’s aides to provide job placement skills to participating high school students. A DRS employee exclusively recruits and trains school system employees to become new STEP vendors throughout the state.

Two specially trained employees, one in northern West Virginia and the other in the southern region, generate ongoing communication between DRS and CRPs. They also address training needs for new CRPs and existing CRP staff.

As required by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, DRS continued a training program for individuals with disabilities who work in programs covered under the U.S. Department of Labor’s Sub-Minimum Wage Certificate program. The training focuses on ensuring that these individuals are aware of the employment-related services and supports that are available to enable individuals with disabilities to explore, discover, experience and attain competitive, integrated employment. In 2019, CRP staff coordinated and delivered the training to 244 employees with disabilities at eight different facilities throughout the state.

Rehabilitation Technology Services

The rehabilitation technology unit travels statewide to provide services to improve DRS clients’ independence in the workplace, home and community. This unit consists of a group of experienced engineers, computer specialists, driving instructors and technicians who specialize in job accommodations, custom-designed assistive technology, product fabrication and driver education.

- Served 130 people, providing 272 services which included 27 rehabilitation engineering services, 88 assistive technology services, 146 driver rehabilitation services and 11 environmental modification services.
By the time Lee Pittsenbarger was 50, he was living a very ideal life. He was married with two sons, living in Ronceverte, and he had worked for the same company, Mullican Flooring, for 28 years. In his spare time, he liked to hunt, go boating on the lake and he was involved in the community as a West Virginia Secondary School Activities Commission (WVSSAC) referee, where he officiated local sporting events, including softball, baseball and volleyball.

In September 2017, Lee had a stroke and his life unexpectedly changed in an instant.

The stroke left him with significant weakness on his left side, in both his arm and his leg. Doctors didn’t initially know what caused it but a hematologist/oncologist in Princeton eventually diagnosed him with a blood clotting disorder called Factor VIII, which caused the stroke.

Lee spent several weeks in a physical rehabilitation program at The Brian Center in Low Moor, Virginia, where his wife stayed by his side every night, encouraging him in his recovery. Upon release from that facility, Lee needed months of intensive physical therapy to rebuild his strength and relearn to use his left arm, hand and leg.

While Lee was not aware of DRS, a friend referred him, and he ultimately sought assistance to help him get back to work. His initial vocational goal was to go back to work in the same job he had before his stroke.

DRS provided Lee with vocational counseling and guidance and rehabilitation technology services, in addition to providing physical therapy assistance and some computer training in case he was not able to go back to the type of work he had done most of his life.

Before Lee could fully recover from his stroke, he lost the job he’d had at Mullican Flooring.

Lee wanted to go back to work and this setback did not stop him from achieving his goal.

Jamie Lafferty, Lee’s Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor, believes that Lee is very driven.

Working with DRS, Lee was able to secure an interview with another woodworking company called Mountain Lumber in Maxwelton, and according to Lee, the gentleman he interviewed with offered him a job right there on the spot.

Lee was very happy to get back to work, but the physical aspect of the job was very demanding for him after his stroke. Lee worked at Mountain Lumber for nearly a year.

During his recovery, a gentleman named Curtis Persinger kept in touch with Lee. Persinger and Lee had known each other for many years and had previously worked together at Mullican Flooring. Persinger works as the Logistics Manager for The Greenbrier Resort. That connection ultimately led Lee to his present job in the Purchasing Warehouse Department at The Greenbrier.

“Here at the warehouse, we basically cater to all the Greenbrier’s needs” explained Persinger. “We receive all the dry goods, beverages, pretty much everything that the hotel uses comes here and then we check it in, receive it, and ship it over to the hotel.”

Persinger further explained, “Lee will receive a lot of products and put the orders together and get them prepared to go over to the different facilities there at the hotel.”

Lee’s strongest qualities, Persinger believes, are that he’s a fast learner and very good with the computer.

The stroke has been Lee’s biggest life challenge so far. The support he’s received from his family and his community has been his primary source of motivation through the difficult times. His stroke happened during his son’s high school senior year, where he was playing soccer. The support from the team was also a source of encouragement for him.

Lee is happy to be working again. He likes the variety of the job he has and believes it to be more laid-back than his previous jobs doing production work. And he really enjoys working with people.

His goal is to work until he can retire and then just relax on the lake.
Sensory Specialty Unit Programs

**BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED SERVICES**

DRS has specially trained rehabilitation counselors to meet the vocational rehabilitation needs of people with blindness and significant vision impairments.

- Served 310 people with blindness or significant vision impairments.
- 34 individuals obtained or retained employment after completing their vocational rehabilitation programs.

DRS offers individualized and intensive training to those clients who need to learn skills to effectively compensate and live independently with blindness or limited vision. This training may include orientation and mobility, computer literacy, assistive technology, Braille, individual counseling and career development.

In addition to compensatory skills training, blind and visually impaired clients may receive job training, job placement or access technology to assist in training or to help them function on the job.

**DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING SERVICES**

DRS has specially trained rehabilitation counselors to meet the vocational rehabilitation needs of people who are deaf and hard of hearing.

- Served 991 clients who listed hearing impairments as their primary or secondary disability, which included people who are deaf or deaf-blind.
- 58 clients with hearing impairments achieved their employment goals.

**INITIATIVES**

DRS developed a resource guide that includes contact information relating to blind and visually impaired service agencies and organizations that will be given to teachers of the blind, doctors, civics clubs and more.

DRS collaborated with the Children’s Vision Rehabilitation Project for a third straight year on a youth summer camp for high school students from across the state who are blind or visually impaired. The camp provided these individuals with opportunities to interact with peers with similar disabilities. DRS provided guidance and pre-employment transition services, as well as information about college and vocational training, orientation and mobility, assistive technology, self-advocacy training and Braille training.

DRS hosted three summer pre-employment transition services experiences specifically for deaf and hard of hearing students throughout West Virginia.

- **Reach for the Stars** was a one-day event held at West Virginia University and was a collaboration with the ARC of Harrison County, Harrison and Monongalia County Schools and West Virginia University. Students used a self-advocacy program from the National Deaf Center to explore potential careers and learn about completing job applications.
- **Camp Can Do** was a weeklong experience in Raleigh County where participants got to learn about career exploration, work-based learning, workplace readiness, self-advocacy and postsecondary training options.
- **Camp New Frontier** was a weeklong experience at Cedar Lakes in Jackson County where students participated in activities related to career exploration, work-based learning, workplace readiness, self-advocacy and postsecondary training options.

**VISIONS**

DRS also administers and operates the Visually Impaired Seniors In-home Outreach and Networking Services (VISIONS) program, through an independent living grant from the federal Rehabilitation Services Administration.

VISIONS serves individuals age 55 and older with permanent vision loss. The purpose of the program is to enable individuals to live as independently as possible within their home and community. Training focuses on activities of daily living such as identifying money, using large print and maximizing remaining vision. Low-vision adaptive aids, including magnifiers, writing equipment, talking watches and large-button telephones, may be provided to help individuals become more self-sufficient. Referrals to the Talking Book library (audio books and Braille) may also be made.

In fiscal year 2019, 1,168 consumers were served statewide through the VISIONS program.
Cynthia Jamison – Housing Family Mentor
Martinsburg District Success Story

Cynthia Jamison made the choice to have a better life, and in doing so, she’s helping others to try and improve their own circumstances.

Cynthia grew up in the Eastern Panhandle, graduating from Paw Paw High School in 2007.

When referring to her upbringing, Cynthia defines it as very dark because she grew up in a family struggling with addiction.

“I was able to complete my high school education,” Cynthia explained. “However, my college endeavors were put on hold due to a physically abusive relationship that I was in at the time.”

Eventually, Cynthia did pursue postsecondary education. She wanted to get her social work degree, but she was raising her son on her own and she was struggling financially to pay for the education. So, in 2015, Cynthia sought out DRS for assistance.

Cynthia has a spinal condition called spondylolisthesis, where the vertebra slips onto the bone below it. She also has bipolar disorder and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Cynthia’s disability causes her daily pain. She uses herbal treatments; she refuses to take narcotic painkillers because of her family’s history with addiction. She also doesn’t sleep much because of night terrors associated with her PTSD.

According to Ann Ramos, Cynthia’s Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor, DRS provided vocational counseling and guidance, as well as evaluations to determine that social work was a good employment goal for Cynthia, and college financial assistance.

Cynthia earned a liberal arts associate degree from Blue Ridge Community and Technical College and a bachelor’s degree in social work from Shepherd University.

While going to school, Cynthia did an internship with Telamon Corporation in Martinsburg and then continued working as a volunteer. A position came open at Telamon for which Cynthia had the training and she met the job requirements, so she applied and was ultimately hired as a Housing Family Mentor.

At her job, Cynthia works with a caseload, providing a wide variety of case management services, explained Marian House, Housing Program Coordinator for Telamon Corporation. Her responsibilities change daily and include working with both the homeless and at-risk populations.

“I can be dealing with bedbugs and cockroaches one day and the next day I’m taking someone to the doctor,” Cynthia said.

Ramos believes Cynthia to be strong, dedicated, persistent and goal oriented. “She goes above and beyond for her clients,” explained Ramos. “She really brings all of her own experiences with being homeless herself – so, she has been able to connect her past experience to her work and that has really helped her.”

According to House, “Cynthia is very motivated; she is quite unstoppable sometimes – she goes the extra mile for her consumer.”

“This is a good fit for me, as a job, because I have ‘lived experience’ – not just in being homeless” said Cynthia. “I have ‘lived experience’ of being around people that are addicted. I grew up in an addictive household. I have dealt with physical disabilities. A lot of my clients have addictions, they have physical disabilities, or they have mental disabilities. … Some of these disabilities, I have encountered myself, in my past as a person, whether it be me directly or someone that was very close to me such as my biological mother or my biological brother. I’ve had a lot of adversities; I was a victim until I was 25.”

Cynthia’s biggest challenge in life, thus far, has been to completely sever ties with her family. “It is very hurtful at times when I want to celebrate events with my family and stuff and I just don’t have a family,” Cynthia stated. “I have an adopted family that took me in when I got older, but my biological family is very toxic to me and my son.”

On a personal and professional level, Cynthia wants to earn a master’s degree in social work before her physical condition worsens.
Behavioral Health, Corrections and Community Assets Program

The Behavioral Health and Corrections facilitates a coordinated approach to serving individuals with behavioral health conditions, as well as people with criminal histories who have disabilities. The Community Assets initiative involves working with various partners such as the State Rehabilitation Council, the Statewide Independent Living Council and the Centers for Independent Living. Each of these valuable partners help support the vocational rehabilitation mission.

The program focuses on collaborating with other agencies in order to:

• provide information about DRS services to those who may make new client referrals to DRS and to those who may be eligible for services through DRS,

• obtain information and resources that DRS counselors can use to assist individuals with mental health conditions and substance related disorders, as well as people with disabilities who are involved in the criminal justice system, to achieve their employment goals and

• promote self-sufficiency for West Virginians with disabilities.

DRS continues its relationship with the Division of Corrections and Rehabilitation and maintains active participation on the Behavioral Health Planning Council, the West Virginia Olmsted Council and the West Virginia Achieving a Better Life Experience (WVABLE) Advisory Committee to promote wellness, recovery, resiliency and financial security for West Virginians with disabilities.

In cooperation with the West Virginia Council of Churches, DRS assisted in the development of re-entry councils across the state. These councils focus on solving barriers to re-entry, connecting with employers and improving outcomes through collaboration.

DRS is also a partner in the new Jobs and Hope West Virginia program and looks forward to collaborating with others to provide West Virginians in recovery the opportunity to obtain career training to secure meaningful employment.

In 2019, DRS served approximately 92 individuals with disabilities who have criminal histories, and those referrals came from a variety of sources, including the Division of Corrections and Rehabilitation, mental health providers and faith-based organizations.

DRS also released a 15-module online training for vocational rehabilitation counselors and community partner staff on effective strategies for helping people with serious mental illnesses obtain and maintain employment. The project was in partnership with Boston University Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation, and DRS was one of the 12 organizations from across the country selected to participate.

Randolph-Sheppard Program

DRS serves as the State Licensing Agency for the Randolph-Sheppard program in West Virginia. The purpose of the federal Randolph-Sheppard Act and West Virginia state law (WVC §18-10G) is to provide gainful employment for individuals who are legally blind. In carrying out the intent of Congress and the West Virginia Legislature, the Randolph-Sheppard program promotes economic opportunity and profitability through self-employment for people who are legally blind.

The Randolph-Sheppard program provides training in food service management to DRS clients who are blind and who meet eligibility requirements under the Randolph-Sheppard Act. These individuals are referred to the Randolph-Sheppard training program by DRS rehabilitation counselors. Other services include upward mobility training, in-service training, food service training, maintenance of equipment and inventory management.

Randolph-Sheppard vendors are self-employed and must possess the aptitude and abilities required to function as a business owner and manager.

The program provides services to 14 licensed, self-employed blind vendors, providing concession services to 230 governmental facilities throughout the state. Average income for vendors in West Virginia for fiscal year 2019 was $49,608 with gross sales of $1.7 million.
Rueben Kerns is a stalwart example of his belief that “tough times don’t last; tough people do.”

Rueben works for the Post Audit Division of the West Virginia Legislative Auditor’s Office in Charleston.

He grew up in Barbour County, where he attended Philip Barbour High School, graduating in 2012.

In school, Rueben excelled academically. However, a speech impediment caused Rueben to have a stuttering problem, which made communicating difficult. A high school teacher referred Rueben to DRS for assistance with transitioning from school to postsecondary education.

According to Donna Cain, Rueben’s Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor, DRS provided career exploration services, vocational counseling and guidance and vocational assessment, as well as assistance through his college career and employment search.

According to Donna Cain, Rueben’s Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor, DRS provided career exploration services, vocational counseling and guidance and vocational assessment, as well as assistance through his college career and employment search.

Rueben attended Davis and Elkins College, graduating in 2015 with a Bachelor of Arts in criminology. After that, he earned a Master of Forensic Accounting from the University of Charleston in 2018.

One of his biggest challenges while pursuing his education was communicating.

“In college, there are countless times where civil discourse between students and professors is the primary way of communicating, whether that be answering questions, presentations, or generally discussing topics,” Rueben explained. “It’s difficult to effectively state your position and knowledge on a subject area when the flow of your speech is hindered.”

Despite the challenge, Cain stated that Rueben did excellent in school through his own hard work and personal integrity.

Rueben believes technology has helped him adapt to and overcome the adversities related to his speech impediment. A cell phone allows him to communicate by text message, which is the primary way he talked with Cain during meetings to plan what he needed to meet his career goals. During his graduate work, he used text-to-speech technology for presentations. And now, in his job, he frequently uses his cell phone to text with his supervisor and coworkers.

For Rueben, the hardest part of his job search was the interviewing process. “Getting interviews is relatively straightforward if you have relevant experience and/or education,” said Rueben. “However, when you have a disability, interviews become the toughest part of procuring gainful employment.”

But Rueben believes that you must be resilient, and things will ultimately work out in the end.

Rueben secured his job as Auditor with the Post Audit Division in September 2018.

According to Adam Fridley, Audit Manager, Rueben is a member of his audit team. The role of the Post Audit Division is to execute performance audits on state agencies. Once they get an audit assignment, they must do a lot of research to identify an agency’s specific programs to determine critical functions and core missions. The audit is used to determine whether the agency’s operations are being achieved effectively, efficiently and economically.

Rueben’s specific job functions are to work with an agency to execute the audit plan, which includes collecting and analyzing information, as well as compiling reports and presenting them to members of the West Virginia Legislature.

Fridley believes Rueben’s strongest assets are his objective mind and critical thinking skills. “In my experience with Rueben, I found him to be very good at the written aspects of taking those complex audit issues and really writing them up in a way that is understandable for a very broad audience.”

When it comes to workplace accommodations, Fridley leaves it up to Rueben to tell them what he needs in order to make communication easier and more comfortable for him.

Rueben believes he still has a lot of goals to accomplish. Right now, his goal is to be the best version of himself in whatever avenue he’s pursuing.
Disability Determination Section

Mission

To process Social Security Disability Insurance and Supplemental Security Income Disability claims in a manner that is accurate, timely, compassionate and cost-effective.

Under contract with the Social Security Administration (SSA), Disability Determination Section (DDS) makes eligibility determinations on disability claims filed by West Virginians for Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) and Supplemental Security Income (SSI). SSA, which fully funds DDS, authorized $18.1 million to fund DDS for fiscal year 2019.

DDS cleared 36,817 claims in fiscal year 2019. DDS met the established goal in all caseload types including the critical Continuing Disability Review case workload, which was a priority for SSA. DDS also assisted other states with over 4,166 claims.

During fiscal year 2019, DDS again collaborated with SSA, the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) and the West Virginia Attorney General to maintain the Cooperative Disability Investigation Unit (CDIU) in the Charleston DDS office. This unit was established to assist in the detection and prevention of fraud in the Social Security Disability program. For 2019, DDS made 109 referrals to the CDIU.

DDS had hiring authority from SSA during fiscal year 2019, which was limited to nine positions. Two of these positions were filled in the Clarksburg DDS office and seven were filled in the Charleston DDS office. DDS did have overtime authority from SSA and worked over 14,024 hours of overtime during the year.

SSDI and SSI disability benefits have a significant economic impact for West Virginians with disabilities and their families. In 2018, an estimated 155,588 disabled West Virginians and 24,626 spouses and 37,649 dependent children of disabled workers received over $1.7 billion in Social Security and/or Supplemental Security Income payments based on disability or blindness.

Individuals eligible for SSI disability payments also receive Medicaid, and those eligible for Social Security disability payments for more than 24 months receive Medicare. The $1.7 billion in cash payments and the health insurance entitlement significantly affect the state’s economy and the quality of life for recipients.
Partnerships

WorkForce West Virginia and West Virginia Adult Education

In 2014, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) was signed into law and established the formation of a coordinated workforce development system, which consists of three core partners: WorkForce West Virginia, West Virginia Adult Education and DRS. The workforce development system is responsible for the integration of employment services to West Virginians, particularly those with barriers to employment, to increase their access to and opportunities for the employment, education, training and support services they need to succeed in the labor market.

In 2018, DRS, along with its core partners, WorkForce West Virginia and West Virginia Adult Education, updated the Unified State Plan but maintained the goals identified in the original plan. The Unified State Plan delineates the road ahead for West Virginia’s workforce development system under WIOA, and how the partnering agencies will navigate that road to ensure that West Virginians, particularly those with barriers to employment, are ready and able to enter and remain in gainful employment.

As part of the Unified State Plan, four statewide goals were established:

• Integration of the workforce development system,
• Creation of a customer (individual and employer) driven approach,
• Development of career pathways, and
• Increase in opportunities for youth.

DRS also continues to work towards five auxiliary goals in the Unified State Plan designed specifically to improve the employability of individuals with disabilities:

• Provide integrated vocational rehabilitation services to West Virginians with disabilities to enable them to attain a high school education or greater;
• Provide pre-employment transition services to students with disabilities;
• Provide integrated vocational rehabilitation services to West Virginians with disabilities to enable them to obtain competitive employment, especially in occupations and careers within emerging industries statewide;
• Improve access and availability of transportation options at the community level for DRS consumers who need transportation assistance to achieve or maintain competitive, integrated employment; and
• Continue to build collaborative relationships with community providers (including Community Rehabilitation Programs, Independent Living and other community providers) to enhance the availability of services to DRS consumers.

DRS is also one of eight state agencies represented on the Interagency Collaborative Team (ICT). As the ICT identifies ways to more effectively serve citizens seeking employment and employers who need trained and qualified workers, DRS involvement ensures that people with disabilities are given due consideration.

During fiscal year 2019, the data sharing project among the three core agencies was completed and these agencies started sharing data pertaining to their common consumers. The ICT continued its focus on expanding business services teams so that all seven workforce regions can better serve employers by coordinating visits and sharing resources. All DRS employment specialists are members of those teams, and they offer their unique abilities and expertise in helping individuals with disabilities to become employed and self-sufficient.

DRS actively supports and assists WorkForce West Virginia in honoring the commitment of seamless access to employment services for all citizens. Formal agreements among DRS and its WorkForce partners specify how DRS will contribute needed expertise, share costs and otherwise support the WorkForce West Virginia infrastructure.
State Rehabilitation Council

The West Virginia State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) is a federally mandated partner with DRS and assists in the development of goals and priorities, programs and policies. The SRC also contributes toward the development of DRS' portion of the Unified State Plan.

The SRC is responsible for reviewing and analyzing the effectiveness and satisfaction of rehabilitation services provided by DRS from information gathered from DRS clients. The SRC conducts two consumer satisfaction surveys, one of which targets youth with disabilities who are transitioning from high school to postsecondary education or employment and another that targets the remaining client population, asking consumers to rate the effectiveness of services received through DRS. This information is evaluated by an independent consultant, who prepares a summary report that is disseminated to the federal Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA), the SRC and DRS staff.

Keeping abreast of national trends, trainings, legislative agendas and innovative networking is vital to the success of the SRC. To assure this aspect is met, the SRC participates in the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) and is an active trainer for the National Coalition of State Rehabilitation Councils (NCSRC). The SRC executive director serves as the Region 3 liaison for the SRC and as vice chair of the NCSRC.

SRC members are appointed by the governor, according to the provisions of the federal Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1998 and are dedicated to helping ensure that people with disabilities identify and achieve their individual vocational rehabilitation goals.

Statewide Independent Living Council

In partnership with DRS, the Statewide Independent Living Council is responsible for jointly planning and submitting the State Plan for Independent Living (SPIL) every three years. The council also monitors and evaluates the implementation and effectiveness of the plan.

The council’s mission is to ensure that people with disabilities have access to community-based resources that promote personal choice and facilitate the fulfillment of their independent living goals.

The council, in cooperation with DRS and the centers for independent living, coordinates an annual survey of consumer satisfaction of all individuals who receive independent living services. Through collaboration and systems advocacy, the council works to ensure the development of appropriate services and public policies affecting people with disabilities.

DRS contracts with the council to administer the Ron Yost Personal Assistance Services Program, which reimburses West Virginians with various disabilities an hourly rate to hire personal assistants to help them with everyday tasks that they cannot perform on their own.

Community Living Services Program

The Community Living Services Program (CLSP) assists eligible individuals with disabilities to return to or remain in their homes and communities by enabling them to function more independently.

As provided in the West Virginia State Plan for Independent Living, state and federal funds for this program provide services such as home modifications, assistive devices and equipment, vehicle modifications and durable medical equipment.

Under administrative oversight by DRS, in partnership with the West Virginia Statewide Independent Living Council, CLSP services are provided statewide through the three West Virginia center for independent living (CIL) corporations: Appalachian Center for Independent Living, Mountain State Center for Independent Living and Northern West Virginia Center for Independent Living-Morgantown.

When requests are received for services, CIL employees make every effort to locate needed resources, including donations by third parties. If the necessary funds are not available, applicants are prioritized in order of request and are served as funds are received.

In fiscal year 2019, a total of 120 consumers completed CLSP services and were successfully enabled to remain in their own homes. At least 55 of the successful consumers were either diverted or transitioned from nursing homes. According to Genworth 2019 Cost of Care Survey, the cost for a semi-private room in a nursing home has a median annual rate of $128,480 in the state of West Virginia. Therefore, the diversion or transition of 55 consumers from nursing home care through CLSP is estimated to have created a net annual savings of over $7 million in fiscal year 2019.

Consumer Affairs Committees

DRS has four Consumer Affairs Committees that support its mission by working to empower people with disabilities in making informed choices and achieving equality of opportunity, meaningful employment, independent living and economic and social self-sufficiency.

With local leadership, the Consumer Affairs Committees work independently as concerned citizens to plan and carry out a wide variety of activities in cooperation with community leaders in business, government, healthcare, education and others. Committee activities address a broad range of shared goals, including public awareness and support for the rights, individual dignity, personal responsibility, full inclusion, equal access, self-determination and community involvement for all people with disabilities.

DRS provides guidance, information and other resources to committees statewide through its consumer affairs liaison and district offices. Membership is open to anyone wishing to participate. All members are volunteers, and all meetings are open to the public.
Financial Report

Source of Funds

State Appropriations 14,287,869
Federal Grants 38,558,534
Program Income 188,433
Special Revenue 496,039
Total Funds $53,530,875

Expenditures by Program Category

Administration 8,429,757
Vocational Rehabilitation Program:
  Case Services 10,125,917
  Counseling, Guidance and Placement 10,965,424
  Disability Determination Services 17,857,938
Other:
  Employment Attendant Care Program 131,529
  Independent Living 569,484
  Older Blind (VISIONS) 340,503
  Pre-Employment Transition Services 1,818,804
  Randolph-Sheppard Program 982,227
  Ron Yost Personal Assistance Services Fund 333,828
  Supported Employment 172,465
  Supported Employment Extended Care 69,240
  Workshop Development 1,733,759
Total Expenditures $53,530,875

Classification of Expenditures

Personal Services 25,962,475
Current Expense 8,407,946
Repairs and Alterations 20,693
Equipment 14,066
Grants 3,194,158
Purchased Case Services 15,931,537
Total $53,530,875

Statement of Funds and Expenses for the year ended June 30, 2019
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