

Changing the World – Ability Works!



West Virginia Division of Rehabilitation Services

A proud partner of the **americanjobcenter** network

2023 Annual Report



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Welcome



James Bailey
Cabinet Secretary
Department of Commerce

Dear Colleagues, Partners, Stakeholders and Friends:

The West Virginia Division of Rehabilitation Services' (DRS) 2023 Annual Report, *Changing the World – Ability Works!*, showcases the hard work of DRS staff, as well as the important associations and valued collaboration with many partners.

Essential partnerships including those with WorkForce West Virginia, West Virginia Adult Education, West Virginia Department of Education, local schools, postsecondary education, Community Rehabilitation Programs, the State Rehabilitation Council, the Statewide Independent Living Council, and West Virginia businesses and employers help DRS to meet the vocational rehabilitation program mission –

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

For DRS, our top priority is always the consumers who benefit from the key programs and services we provide, whether it be assisting people with disabilities in meeting their employment goals, helping West Virginia's businesses and employers to include or to retain people with disabilities in their workforce, or ensuring a smooth adjudication process through the Disability Determination Section for the Social Security Administration for those with disabilities who are unable to work.

In fiscal year 2023, DRS provided vocational rehabilitation services to 12,172 West Virginians with disabilities. Those services play a vital role in empowering individuals with disabilities in their pursuit to work and succeed as productive, self-sufficient community members. We proudly acknowledge the 1,276 determined individuals who, after receiving services from DRS, obtained employment during the past year.

During fiscal year 2023, the Disability Determination Section cleared more than 26,300 Social Security Disability Insurance and Supplemental Security Income claims for the Social Security Administration, which has a significant economic impact for West Virginians with disabilities and their families.

DRS consistently invests our resources in positive change to directly benefit our consumers, which dramatically contributes to West Virginia's economy and to improving the lives of West Virginians with disabilities.

This report introduces you to six hard-working DRS consumers. Their stories illustrate how DRS solutions bring about successful employment outcomes for West Virginians with disabilities who want to work. This report also features seven employers recognized by DRS for their efforts to create a diverse workforce that includes workers with disabilities.

Thank you for your continued support of DRS and West Virginians with disabilities!



Pisinu Bua-lam
Director
Division of Rehabilitation Services

2023 Highlights

- DRS served **12,172** West Virginians with disabilities through the vocational rehabilitation program.
- DRS helped **1,276** vocational rehabilitation consumers obtain or retain employment.
- The estimated annual earnings of vocational rehabilitation consumers at application were **\$32,436,898**. After receiving vocational rehabilitation services, their total estimated earnings rose to **\$48,381,736**, which amounts to a **49%** increase in the total estimated earned income of these hard-working West Virginians, which demonstrates a significant return on investment.
- DRS spent more than **\$31 million** to purchase necessary vocational rehabilitation services for its consumers, which dramatically contributes to West Virginia's economy.
- **86%** of vocational rehabilitation consumers had significant disabilities.
- DRS served **7,502** students (ages 14 to 21) with disabilities, which is **62%** of the total number of individuals served by DRS.
- DRS employment specialists made over **725** employer visits (either in person or virtually), where they provided employers with solutions in the areas of staffing, job retention of employees who have developed a disability, education, technical consultations on the Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act, and tax credit information for hiring individuals with disabilities.
- DRS' Disability Determination Section processed **26,330** Social Security Disability Insurance and Supplemental Security Income claims.
- DRS' Disability Determination Section maintained an accuracy rate of more than **94%** over the past year.

*Changing the World –
Ability Works!*



West Virginia Division of Rehabilitation Services Mission

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



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Customer Service Delivery

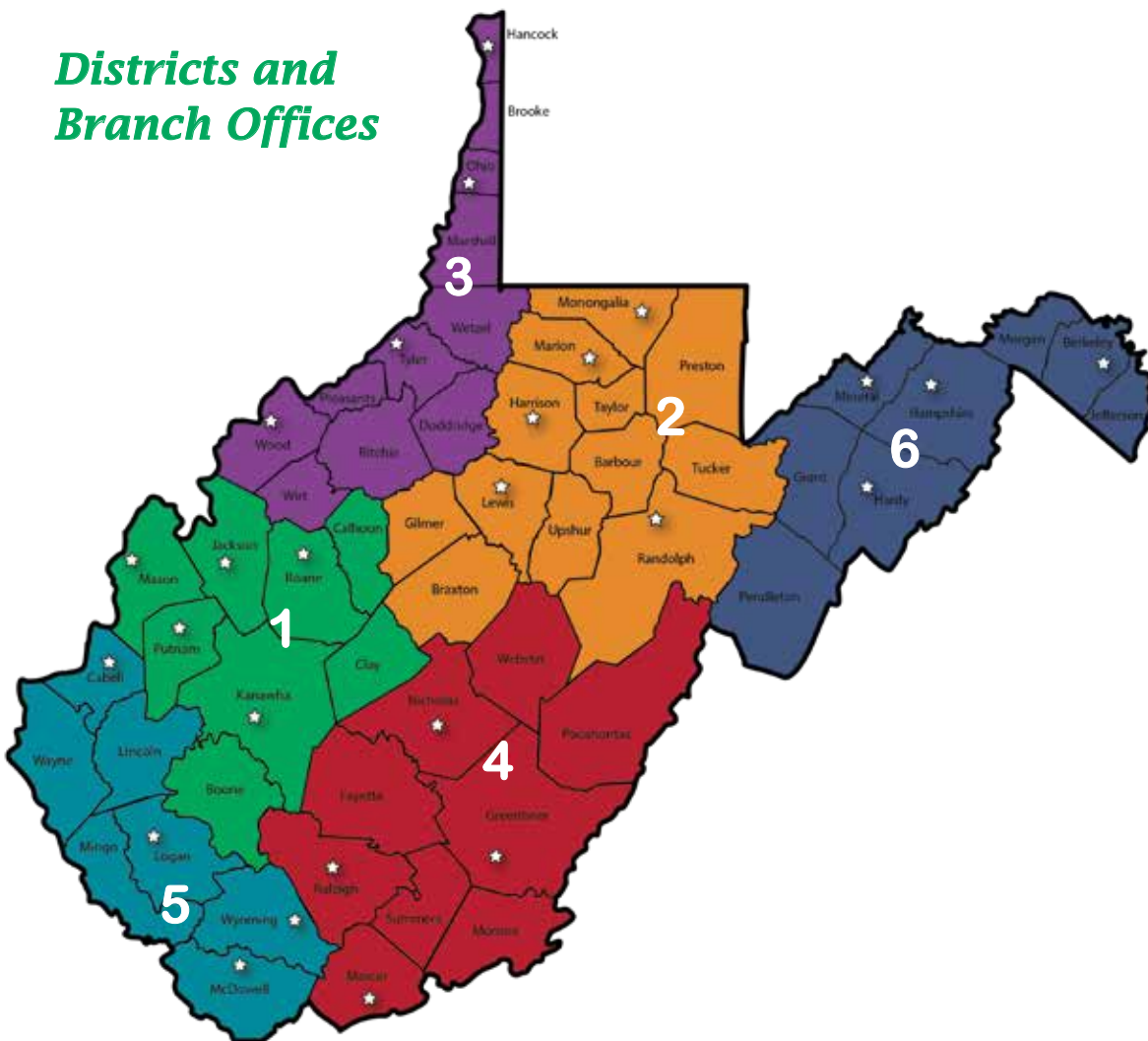
Through our statewide field services program, consumers receive effective one-on-one, personal service from DRS. Throughout the state, DRS vocational rehabilitation counselors carefully evaluate consumers' skills, abilities and interests. Vocational success is achieved by providing the services and comprehensive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

DRS employs 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 DRS field offices has a supervisor who provides leadership and guidance to employees and 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 delivery of the same level of high-quality services to consumers 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 consumer 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 for the consumer to reach his or her employment goal.

The anticipated outcome of the consumer's vocational rehabilitation program is competitive, integrated employment in a career of his or her choice.

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

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

Steps to Success



Available Services

To help people with disabilities, ages 14 and up, achieve their employment goals, DRS is able to provide a variety of services to eligible individuals. DRS consumers and vocational rehabilitation counselors work together to determine the necessary and appropriate services to enable each consumer to meet his or her identified employment goal. The services provided to each DRS consumer 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 consumer to become employed.
- **Vocational counseling and guidance** are provided directly by a vocational rehabilitation counselor during the consumer'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 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 a consumer in obtaining or retaining employment.
- **Physical and mental therapeutic services** may be provided to correct or substantially modify a consumer's physical or mental condition.
- **Specialized services** for consumers 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 a consumer 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 consumers when needed to maintain or regain suitable employment.



Fiscal Year 2023 Program Data

Economic Impact of Vocational Rehabilitation Services

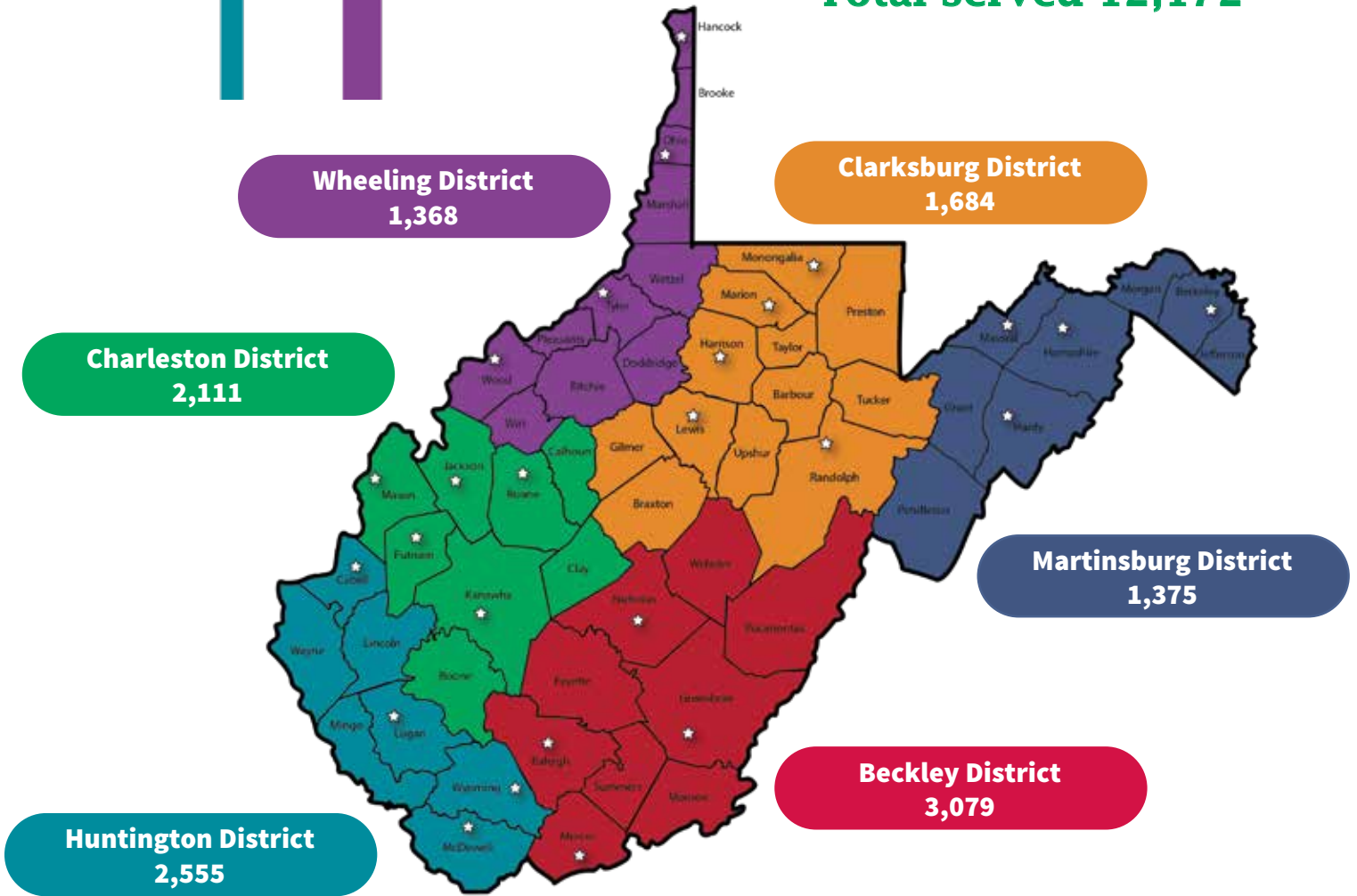
49% increase in total estimated annual earnings

\$32,436,898
At referral

\$48,381,736
After
rehabilitation

West Virginians Served by District

Total served 12,172



Occupations of Individuals Vocationally Rehabilitated

<i>Type of Occupation</i>	
Architecture and Engineering	13
Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports and Media	16
Building and Grounds, Cleaning and Maintenance	50
Business and Financial Operations	40
Community and Social Services	67
Computer and Mathematical	12
Construction and Extraction	60
Education, Training and Library	99
Farming, Fishing and Forestry	6
Food Preparation and Serving Related	67
Healthcare Practitioners and Technical	122
Healthcare Support	73
Installation, Maintenance and Repair	58
Legal	7
Life, Physical and Social Science	15
Management	97
Office and Administrative Support	128
Personal Care and Service	45
Production	82
Protective Service	35
Randolph-Sheppard Vending Facility Operator	2
Sales and Related	64
Transportation and Material Moving	118
<i>Total rehabilitated into competitive, integrated employment</i>	<i>1,276</i>

Education at Time of Individualized Plan for Employment of Individuals Vocationally Rehabilitated

<i>Education</i>	<i>At IPE</i>
High school diploma, equivalency or special education certificate	186
Enrolled in high school	832
Less than high school diploma, not attending at time of IPE	194
One or more years of postsecondary education	27
Postsecondary certification, license or educational certificate	5
Associate degree	10
Bachelor's degree	16
Degree beyond a bachelor's degree	6

Primary Disability of Individuals Vocationally Rehabilitated

<i>Type of Disability</i>	
Cognitive Impairments	204
Hearing/Communicative Impairments	676
Physical Impairments	194
Psychological Impairments	167
Visual Impairments	35

Age, Gender and Race of Individuals Vocationally Rehabilitated

<i>Age at application</i>	
Under 20	307
20 - 34	191
35 - 44	116
45 - 64	484
65+	178
<i>Race</i>	
American Indian or Alaska Native	7
Asian	7
Black or African American	51
Hispanic or Latino	7
Native Hawaiian Pacific Islander	1
Other	3
White	1200
<i>Gender</i>	
Female	642
Male	633
Did not self identify	1

Referral Sources of Individuals Vocationally Rehabilitated

<i>Referral Source</i>	
Adult Education and Literacy	2
Community Rehabilitation Programs	6
Division of Corrections and Rehabilitation	1
Educational Institutions (Elementary/Secondary)	199
Educational Institutions (Postsecondary)	62
Employers	14
Family/Friends	195
Medical Health Providers	257
Mental Health Providers	27
One-Stop Partner	8
Other Sources	47
Self-Referral	458

WIOA Performance Indicators and Measures

For PY 2022 (July 1, 2022-June 30, 2023, which is the most recent program year data available), DRS achieved the following performance on the performance accountability indicators under section 116 of WIOA:

Employment Rate – 2nd Quarter After Exit

- The percentage of program participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the second quarter after exit from the program – 72.8% (negotiated level for PY 2022– 64%)

Median Earnings – 2nd Quarter After Exit

- The median earnings of program participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the second quarter after exit from the program – \$7,063 (negotiated level for PY 2022– \$5,371)

Employment Rate – 4th Quarter After Exit

- The percentage of program participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the fourth quarter after exit from the program – 70.1% (negotiated level for PY 2022– 61.6%)

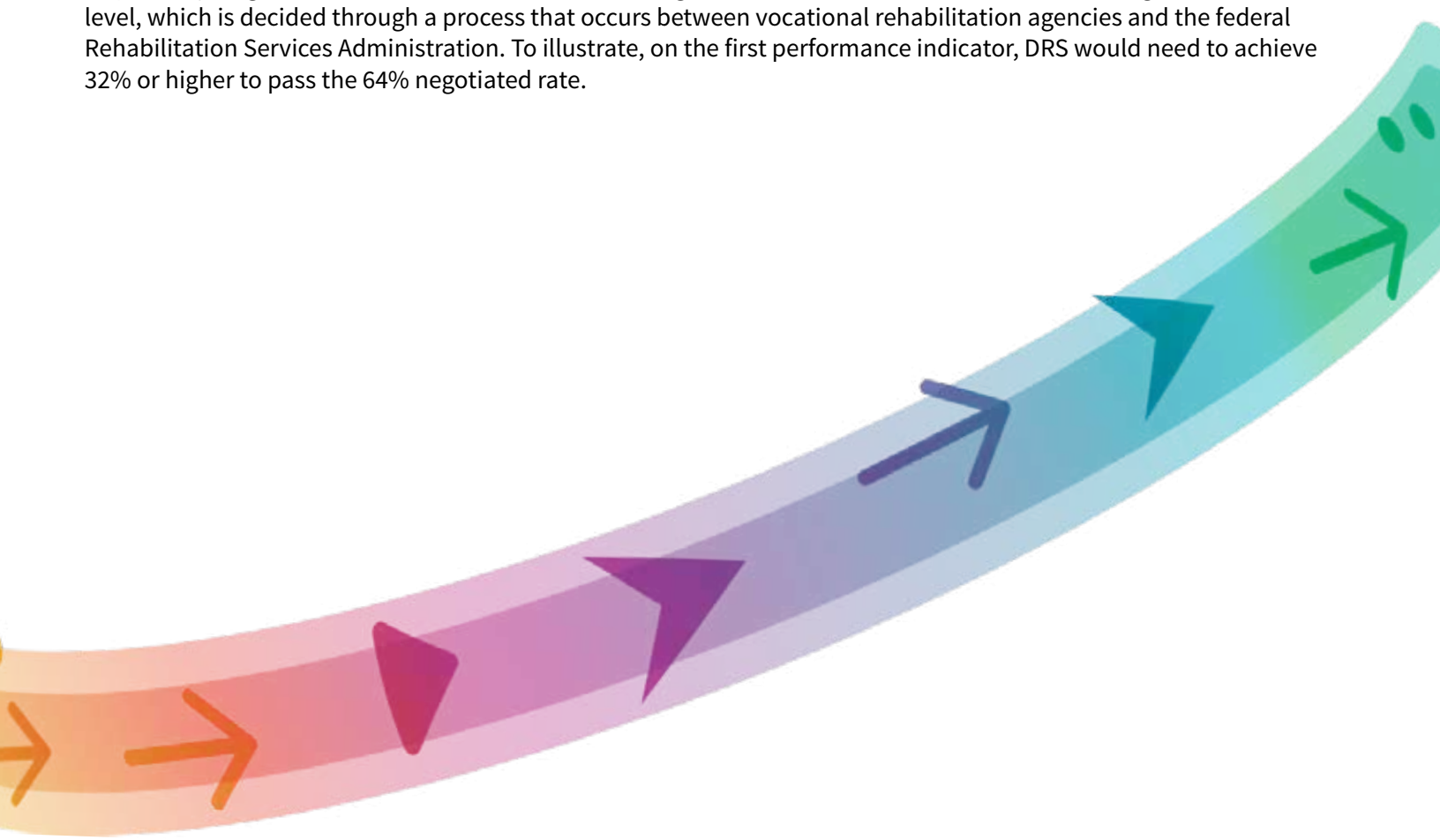
Credential Attainment

- The percentage of program participants who obtain a recognized postsecondary credential, or a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent, during participation in or within 1 year after exit from the program – 48.8% (negotiated level for PY 2022– 44.2%)

Measurable Skill Gains

- The percentage of program participants who, during a program year, are in an education or training program that leads to a recognized postsecondary credential or employment and who are achieving measurable skill gains toward such a credential or employment – 46.3%

To pass any single measure, vocational rehabilitation agencies must achieve at least 50% of the negotiated level, which is decided through a process that occurs between vocational rehabilitation agencies and the federal Rehabilitation Services Administration. To illustrate, on the first performance indicator, DRS would need to achieve 32% or higher to pass the 64% negotiated rate.



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. DRS has 64 vocational rehabilitation counselors assigned to work with students with disabilities throughout the state. Thirty-seven counselors are assigned exclusively to high schools.

Pre-Employment Transition Services

DRS provides pre-employment transition services (Pre-ETS) to students with disabilities ages 14 to 21.

Pre-ETS are mandated under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and include the following five required activities:

- **Job exploration counseling** – to help students identify potential occupations and career paths
- **Work-based learning experiences** – to help students gain information about occupations in the workplace
- **Postsecondary education counseling** – to help students understand postsecondary options and plan training
- **Workplace readiness training** – to help students develop social and independent living skills
- **Self-advocacy instruction** – to enable students to learn how to represent themselves, their views or interests

During fiscal year 2023, **1,988** students with disabilities participated in **3,583** Pre-ETS, including Career Exploration Opportunity (CEO) 2.0 workshops, Work-Based Learning experiences and Instruction in Self-Advocacy training.

Fiscal Year 2023 Results

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

- **7,502** students (ages 14 to 21) with disabilities were served, which is **62%** of the total number of individuals served by DRS.
- **4,602** transition students (**61%** of all transition students) were referred directly from schools to DRS.
- **2,758** students with disabilities (**37%** of all transition students) developed individualized plans for employment.
- **344** transition consumers gained employment, which is **27%** 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.

- Assisted **2,301** students (**31%** of all transition students) with college education services they needed to meet their work-related educational goals.

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**



Employment Services Program

DRS' team of employment specialists work closely with West Virginia employers to help them determine their workforce needs, and then they relay current and future job openings to our vocational rehabilitation counselors and DRS consumers seeking employment.

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

In fiscal year 2023, DRS employment specialists made over 725 employer visits (either in person or virtually), 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.

Through continuing education and training, DRS employment specialists are able to provide quality services to West Virginia employers and DRS consumers seeking employment. By staying current on national recruiting and hiring trends, employment specialists assist DRS consumers seeking employment to compete in the job market, boost their visibility to maximize their career opportunities and increase their competitive advantage, all of which improves their chances of finding a job.

Employment specialists help prepare youth and students with disabilities for the workplace by providing various work readiness workshops and one-on-one activities such as:

- understanding the importance of and how to make a good first impression,
- concepts relating to interpersonal skills and
- awareness of qualities employers look for when they hire and promote employees.

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

2023 Accomplishments

The following activities increased opportunities for DRS consumers seeking employment:

- Helped secure 115 successful job placements for DRS consumers seeking employment.
- Increased business engagement strategies by promoting the on-the-job training (OJT) program throughout the state. The employment specialists go out in the community, approaching businesses, making stronger job matches between DRS consumers and employers, and creating a larger network of employers by joining the local Chamber of Commerce, which resulted in an increase in OJT services from 35 to 59, which expanded employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities.
- Implemented an Employer Recognition Program, where employers in DRS' six districts were presented with awards to show appreciation for their efforts to create a diverse workforce and for their collaboration with DRS to create job opportunities for individuals with disabilities. Awards were presented to: Blenko Glass (Milton), Precision Services, Inc. (Gassaway), Russell Nesbitt Services, Inc. (Wheeling), Hampton Inn (Princeton), The Peddler (Huntington), McDowell County Commission (Welch) and Mineral County Commission (Keyser).
- Developed a partnership between DRS' Martinsburg District and the National Telecommuting Institute (NTI) to increase remote work opportunities. NTI provides work readiness training to consumers who want to work from home but lack customer service or call center experience. NTI also assists with job placement activities through their relationships with national companies. The first referrals were sent to NTI in July 2023, and as of October 2023, four DRS consumers had been placed with an employer. The number of placements is expected to grow due to the increased utilization of remote workers in the current labor market.
- Initiated a partnership between WV Bureau for Behavioral Health (BBH) to increase Peer Recovery Support Specialist (PRSS) job opportunities. The partnership promotes a 500-hour on-the-job training program. This program benefits individuals in recovery needing to earn an income while pursuing PRSS certification. Employers meet their need to build a workforce with qualified PRSS employees, allowing them to pay PRSS candidates before they complete the certification process, which helps provide the funding for the PRSS position until it's possible to bill Medicaid for PRSS services provided to individuals in recovery.

Community Rehabilitation Programs

The state network of Community Rehabilitation Programs (CRPs) 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 73 DRS-acknowledged CRPs with 69 total service locations throughout West Virginia.

In addition, approximately 85 distinct pre-employment transition services (Pre-ETS) programs, which focus on work-based learning, instruction in self-

advocacy, workplace readiness, career exploration, and postsecondary exploration opportunities are available to consumers on a statewide basis. These services are commonly purchased by DRS to assist individuals with significant disabilities to achieve successful employment outcomes.

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, competitive, integrated employment outcomes.

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.

2023 Accomplishments

- More than **2,200** clients and potentially eligible students received one or more CRP services, with combined payments to CRPs totaling over **\$11 million**.
- To meet the needs of underserved areas and rural communities, DRS encourages CRPs to offer and provide services on a statewide basis. Any CRP, acknowledged by DRS as a vendor, can provide services to consumers anywhere in West Virginia, if they so choose.
- 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 2023, the number of individuals working in these programs continued to decrease. CRP staff coordinated and delivered the training to fewer than 40 employees with disabilities at one location in the state.
- DRS continued 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. There are currently 62 approved STEP service vendors.
- DRS continued to encourage CRPs to develop Pre-ETS projects that would differ from current program offerings. New initiatives include STEM/STEAM programs.
- DRS initiated a Benefits Counseling Model to help consumers needing assistance in determining the impact of work on their benefits. The initiative focuses on general to specific consumer needs and provides for ongoing follow-up through the CRPs. Benefits counseling is a service DRS purchases from CRPs so each CRP must be accredited through the Social Security Administration (SSA) and certified as a Community Work Incentives Coordinator (CWIC).

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 **363** people with blindness or significant vision impairments.
- **35** individuals obtained or retained employment after completing their vocational rehabilitation programs.
- Spent \$1,205,950 on blind and visually impaired services.

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 **1,170** clients who listed hearing impairments as their primary or secondary disability, which included people who are deaf or deaf-blind.
- **687** clients with hearing impairments achieved their employment goals.
- Spent **\$3,557,242** on deaf and hard of hearing services.

2023 Accomplishments

- DRS collaborated with the Children's Vision Rehabilitation Project for a seventh straight year on three summer Pre-ETS camps for West Virginia high school and college students who are blind or visually impaired.
- DRS and the U.S. Space & Rocket Center in Huntsville, Alabama developed a relationship to provide Pre-ETS to West Virginia students who are blind and visually impaired (ages 14 to 18). The U.S. Space & Rocket Center's Space Camp program provides students who are blind and visually impaired the opportunity to fully participate in a hands-on science and math experience with the emphasis on teamwork, space science and independent living skills. DRS sponsored six students in 2023. Braille, large print, assistive technology and assistance from certified teachers of the visually impaired make the program accessible for their students.
- DRS collaborated with a growing list of vendors to provide five Pre-ETS events for students who are deaf and hard of hearing. Vendors included 360 Degree Academy, WV Deaf Service Center, Moving Mountains and Positive Professional Possibilities.
- DRS and the WV Department of Education served as co-leaders, collaborating with members of the National Deaf Center's WV State Team members to host "Better Together: Employment," an event in Clarksburg that promoted awareness of employment-related issues affecting individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing.
- DRS established a relationship with Volatia Video Language Services, a vendor that provides on-demand interpreter services including American Sign Language and over 200 other languages to facilitate communication in the preferred language of consumers. This service can be used during meetings with vocational rehabilitation counselors, educational trainings, evaluations, doctor and other medical appointments, job interviews and more.

Rehabilitation Technology Services

The Rehabilitation Technology Unit travels statewide to provide services to improve DRS consumers' 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. Rehabilitation Technology staff also assist DRS with inventory, surplus property, and records retention services.

- Served **448** people, providing **533** services, which included **48** rehabilitation engineering services, **226** assistive technology services, **235** driver rehabilitation services and **24** environmental modification services.

Behavioral Health, Corrections and Community Assets Program

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

The program focuses on collaborating with other agencies 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.

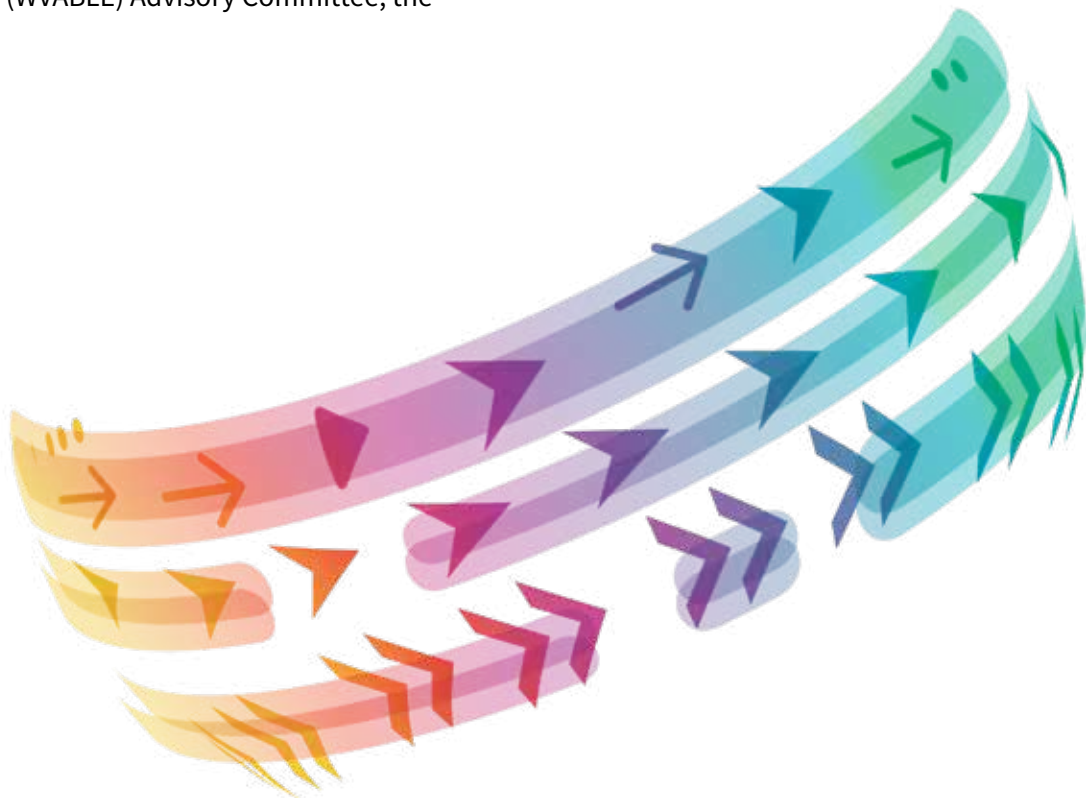
DRS maintains active participation on the state Behavioral Health Planning Council, the West Virginia Olmsted Council, the West Virginia Achieving a Better Life Experience (WVABLE) Advisory Committee, the

Developmental Disabilities Council, the Traumatic Brain Injury Advisory Board, the Fair Shake Network, the Dangerous Assessment Advisory Board, Jobs and Hope and several others. These programs work to promote wellness, recovery, resiliency and financial security for West Virginians with disabilities.

DRS continued its work with the Boston University Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation and, in partnership with the WV Bureau of Behavioral Health, is implementing a pilot project for Enhancing Employment Services for People with Mental Illness. In fiscal year 2023, DRS collaborated with the WV Bureau of Behavioral Health to increase employment opportunities for Peer Recovery Support Specialists through our on-the-job training program.

DRS continued collaboration with the Division of Corrections and Rehabilitation and other organizations that serve justice-impacted individuals. In fiscal year 2023, DRS served approximately **238** justice-involved individuals with disabilities, a 45% increase from fiscal year 2022.

DRS maintains active participation in the various reentry councils across the state and remains involved with our various partners in the planning and implementation of Second Chance Job Fairs. In fiscal year 2023, DRS also participated in the REACH Initiative Reentry Leadership Conference.



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 five licensed, self-employed blind vendors, providing concession services to **235** governmental facilities throughout the state. Average income for vendors in West Virginia for fiscal year 2023 was **\$101,573** with gross sales of **\$1,482,300**.

During fiscal year 2023, two consumers who are blind were trained to be vendors through the program. One vendor was successfully transitioned into operations in the Charleston area. The other is awaiting placement in the Huntington area. Two additional consumers began Randolph-Sheppard training in late fiscal year 2023 and will be placed in fiscal year 2024.

The program successfully bid on and was awarded the contracts for two large-scale dining facilities at federal government locations. The contracts will provide additional revenue for the blind vendors in the program. One contract is with the U.S. Army National Guard at Camp Dawson in Preston County and is our first military dining facility contract in the history of the program. The second contract is with the U.S. Customs and Border Protection Advanced Training Center in Harpers Ferry.

VISIONS

DRS 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.

The VISIONS program serves individuals ages 55 and older with permanent vision loss. The program uses skills trainers to provide services that enable individuals to live as independently as possible within their home and community. The program collaborates with and participates in a variety of community meetings and events including with the Teubert Charitable Trust, American Printing House and the annual optometrists' convention.

Training focuses on activities of daily living such as identifying money, using large print, utilizing community resources, and using low-vision adaptive aids, including magnifiers, writing equipment, talking watches and large-button telephones. Services are provided both in person and virtually. Referrals to the Talking Book library for audio books and to other sources may also be made to maximize self-sufficiency and independence.

In fiscal year 2023, **611** consumers were served statewide through the VISIONS program.

Disability Determination Section



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 fully funds DDS.

DDS processed **26,330** claims in fiscal year 2023. DDS has maintained an accuracy rate on initial claims, as determined by regular case reviews by SSA, of more than **94%** over the past year, which is one of the highest in the Philadelphia Region.

After several years of declining SSI/SSDI applications, the number of new claim applications have steadily increased over the last two years. SSA projects that applications will continue to rise for the next several years.

In fiscal year 2023, DDS continued to face ongoing issues created by high attrition due to retirements and resignations. The increases in the number of new applications and the loss of experienced staff caused decreases in productivity, which has resulted in a backlog of more than 10,000 claims. This, in turn, has caused the number of aged claims to dramatically increase and processing times to nearly double. In fiscal year 2017, the average processing time for both initial and reconsideration claims was approximately 90 days. In fiscal year 2023, the processing term for initial claims was 163 days and over 200 days for reconsideration claims.

Fortunately, through the support of SSA and the Governor Justice Administration, DDS was able to obtain significant salary increases for all staff in June of 2023. With these increases, DDS has gained much more interest from qualified applicants for all advertised job positions. Toward the end of fiscal year 2023, DDS was able to hire nearly 40 new staff. DDS examiner staff is now at 82. While DDS continues to focus as many resources as possible on the training and development of the new employees, DDS is in a much better position to take on the expected caseloads and return to a more acceptable level of customer service.

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

West Virginia Combined State Plan Partners

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 2022, as part of the two-year modification of the *WV Unified State Plan*, Governor Justice added additional programs to what is now the *WV Combined State Plan*. *The Combined 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.

The *WV Combined State Plan* partner agencies and programs are as follows:

- **WV Division of Rehabilitation Services**

- » Vocational Rehabilitation program under Title IV of WIOA

- **WorkForce WV**

- » Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth programs under Title I of WIOA
- » Jobs for Veterans State Grants programs
- » Trade Adjustment Assurances for Workers programs
- » Unemployment Insurance programs
- » Wagoner-Peyser Employment Service program under Title III of WIOA



- **WV Bureau of Senior Services**

- » Senior Community Service Employment Program

- **WV Community and Technical College System/Higher Education Policy Commission**

- » Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act Career and Technical Education programs

- **WV Department of Education**

- » Adult Education and Family Literacy Act Program under Title II of WIOA



- **WV Department of Health and Human Services**

- » Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Employment and Training programs
- » Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program



- **WV Development Office**

- » Community Services Block Grant

As part of the *Combined State Plan*, the existing six statewide goals were renewed and are as follows:

- Maximize efficiency of the workforce development system.
- Strengthen relationships with employers.
- Overcome employment barriers of individuals.
- Promote career pathways.
- Identify and maximize postsecondary and employment opportunities for youth.
- Align West Virginia's Labor Force Participation Rate with the National Labor Force Participation Rate.

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

- Provide integrated vocational rehabilitation services to West Virginians with disabilities to promote attainment of a high school education or greater in order to increase their ability to move through meaningful career pathways.
- Provide pre-employment transition services to students with disabilities.
- Provide integrated vocational rehabilitation services to West Virginians with disabilities, committing to the use of the Employment First framework, to enable them to obtain competitive, integrated employment, especially in occupations and careers within emerging industries statewide.
- Improve access and availability of transportation options for DRS consumers who need transportation assistance to achieve or maintain competitive, integrated employment.
- Continue to build collaborative relationships with community providers (including CRPs, Independent Living, and other community providers) to enhance the availability of services to DRS consumers. Vocational rehabilitation consumers require specialized services provided by CRPs statewide to achieve an integrated, competitive employment outcome.

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.

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 *WV Combined 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 ensure this aspect is met, the SRC participates in the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) and the National Coalition of State Rehabilitation Councils (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 (SILC) 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 they cannot perform on their own.

In fiscal year 2023, DRS contracted with the SILC to coordinate the Disability History Essay Contest, an event that coincides with West Virginia Disability History Week and is open to all high school seniors throughout West Virginia. This contest is designed to provide these individuals 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.

The governor appoints council members in accordance with provisions of the federal Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1992 and the West Virginia Independent Living Act of 2001.



Centers for Independent Living

The Centers for Independent Living also operate the Community Living Services Program (CLSP), which 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 CIL corporations: Appalachian Center for Independent Living, Mountain State Center for Independent Living and Northern West Virginia Center for Independent Living.

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 2023, a total of 81 consumers completed CLSP services and were successfully enabled to remain in their own homes. The average cost per consumer to complete their goals was \$3,990.

According to Genworth 2021 Cost of Care Survey, the cost for a semi-private room in a nursing home has a median annual rate of \$139,430 in the state of West Virginia. Therefore, the diversion or transition of 81 consumers from nursing home care through CLSP is estimated to have created a net annual savings of nearly \$12 million in fiscal year 2023.

As of June 30, 2023, 525 consumers were on the waiting list to receive services.





Celebrations

Successes

Exemplary Employers

The West Virginia Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS) recognized seven exemplary employers and partners as part of National Disability Employment Awareness Month in October 2023.

DRS acknowledged these employers for demonstrating excellence in their diverse hiring practices by creating inclusive workplaces and for their positive contributions within West Virginia's communities.



Blenko Glass in Milton

Blenko Glass hired one DRS consumer through DRS' on-the-job training program and has served as a training site for several students participating in work-based learning opportunities, which provides hands-on, job-related skills training in a real work environment.

Pictured: Michael Lamb (DRS), Veronica Bunch (DRS), Cody Myers (Blenko), Gavin Vanover (HRDF), David Wertz (Blenko) and Cedrick Greene (Blenko)

Mineral County Commission in Keyser

Mineral County Commission has provided trial work experience opportunities to several DRS consumers, which allows them to try working in a real job setting so they can learn new skills and see if the type of work is a good fit for them before committing to a long-term job. The Commission has also hired one DRS consumer to work as a full-time employee.



Pictured: Sherry Faulk (DRS), Bridgette Kady (DRS), Jill Cosner (Mineral County), Roger Leather (Mineral County), Isaac Snyder (Mineral County), Jerry Whisner (Mineral County) and Luke McKenzie (Mineral County)



Russell Nesbitt Services, Inc. in Wheeling

Russell Nesbitt Services, Inc. has hired many DRS consumers in competitive integrated employment throughout the years and has been an invaluable decades-long DRS partner.

Pictured: Greg Blazy (Russell Nesbitt), David Valentine (DRS), Tamika Jones (Russell Nesbitt), Emily Doyle (Russell Nesbitt), Angela Reed (DRS) and Frank Collelo (DRS)

The Peddler in Huntington

The Peddler provided a job opportunity to a DRS consumer through DRS' on-the-job training program. The Peddler was enthusiastic to provide an opportunity for a person with a disability to gain hands-on experience and was understanding of the individual's need for accommodations to perform necessary work tasks.

Pictured: Leslie Scragg (DRS), Tim Bowens (DRS) and Jeff Castle (The Peddler)



McDowell County Commission in Welch

McDowell County Commission hired two DRS consumers through DRS' on-the-job training program. Their willingness to partner and provide training opportunities to DRS consumers benefits people with disabilities.

Pictured: Michael Brooks (McDowell County), Cecil Patterson (McDowell County), Cody Este (McDowell County), Jennifer Wimmer (McDowell County) and Randall Coleman (DRS)



Precision Services, Inc. in Gassaway

Precision Services, Inc. hired two DRS consumers through DRS' on-the-job training program. They have been a patient and accommodating employer to DRS consumers who are adjusting to the workforce, and they frequently provide transportation assistance to employees who lack a way to get to the job site.

Pictured: Taylor Darnall (DRS), Artemisa Gutierrez (DRS), Rachel Barrow (Precision Services), Jack Holcomb (Precision Services), Peggy Tingler (DRS) and Jeff Seabury (DRS)



Hampton Inn in Princeton

The Hampton Inn, Princeton has provided job opportunities to three DRS consumers and has been a supportive and valued partner by offering opportunities to include people with disabilities in their workforce.

Pictured: Randall Coleman (DRS) and Ruth Adams (Hampton Inn)



Keonea Cooper – Huntington District



With a smile on her face, Keonea Cooper helps customers and performs her other job tasks at a Goodwill store in Huntington.

The Goodwill store is part of Goodwill Industries of KYOWVA, a multi-service agency that provides training and employment-related services to people with disabilities, according to Community Work Readiness Coordinator Erica Finster.

After graduating from Huntington High School, Keonea approached DRS because she was interested in getting a job. DRS Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Joy Winters explained that Keonea had a stroke when she was an infant, which left her with a learning disability and weakness in some of her extremities.

Winters said that Keonea had been involved in a high school work program, where she had the opportunity to work at different job sites, including a library, some restaurants, and at Goodwill. Her experience at the Goodwill store had been positive, and Keonea really wanted to return to work there.

Goodwill Industries of KYOWVA is a Community Rehabilitation Program that DRS utilizes to provide training services to some of its consumers. Winters arranged for Keonea to participate in several services, including a facility-based work adjustment training program, life skills training, and a community-based work adjustment training program. These services helped Keonea to gain self-confidence, develop stamina for working, and learn specific retail-related job skills.

After completing her training through Goodwill, Keonea obtained part-time employment with the store. Winters believes that Keonea's positive attitude and her performance in the Goodwill training programs helped her to secure employment with them.

Finster agrees with Winters.

"With Keonea, one of the fantastic things that I love about working with her is that she began working with me in our work adjustment training program," she said. "And she did so well that we hired her as an employee."

Keonea works as a store retail associate, where she handles multiple duties including assisting with processing merchandise in the back warehouse area and with engaging customers and other merchandising responsibilities on the retail floor.

Finster also stated that Keonea's responsibilities have grown since she started working there. She often contributes to the training of new people who are being introduced to the workforce and serves as a good example of what someone can accomplish.

Keonea is happy with her job and plans to stay there indefinitely. She really enjoys helping people at the store, and she is proud of her accomplishments, the most recent of which was earning her purple belt in karate.

"The feedback that I've gotten from both Keonea and her mom is that she's really happy about her employment, and she gets a lot of fulfillment from what she's able to do," said Finster.

Keonea contributes a lot to the store.

"Keonea just brings a shining light into the store. One of the things Keonea does is she's always eager to help and always eager to interact with the customers," Finster explained. "She's friendly and always has a smile on her face. Regardless of what kind of day you're having, Keonea is going to do something to make it brighter."

Amber Sweet – Charleston District



Amber Sweet wanted to help people, and she accomplishes that goal every day.

Amber works as a crisis counselor for First Choice Services in Charleston, and she has been there for a little over a year.

According to Terrance Hamm, Director of First Choice Services' 988 program, this non-profit organization operates several helpline services throughout West Virginia and several other states. The 988 program is a part of a larger national mental health effort to provide services for people who are having crisis around suicide throughout the nation.

Hamm describes Amber as a great resource for people in crisis.

“So, in her role, she works with people through chat and text all over the nation who reach out to us for support, emotional crisis, having thoughts of suicide, in the act of suicide attempt,” he explained. “Or it can be a third party looking for emotional support for a family member or an organization looking for resources for someone struggling with thoughts of suicide or some type of emotional crisis.”

Amber's educational background helped her to earn the position at First Choice Services, and she credits DRS with helping her to pursue her love of learning.

DRS Branch Office Manager Betty Parsons explained how Amber came to DRS when she was in college for assistance with obtaining her education.

Amber was diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). She was enrolled at Glenville State University and later transferred to University of Charleston, where she obtained a bachelor's degree in psychology in 2021.

Amber had attended Roane County High School, and she admits that she struggled a lot throughout high school.

Parsons described Amber as positive, helpful, and pleasant. She believes her best qualities are that she does not give up easily and she is very determined to succeed. At her job, Parsons feels her problem-solving skills and ability to adapt are an asset to her employer and the people she is trying to help.

Amber's experiences have helped her to grow more confident in her ability to learn, and she's planning to pursue a master's degree starting this fall.

Amber appreciates DRS' assistance with her education and the encouragement and support Betty Parsons provided to her as she pursued her degree.

Amber is happy to be making a difference in the lives of others.

“I love the fact that we get to impact the mental health field and help people with their mental health issues, and I'm really proud that I get to dedicate my life to helping people,” she said.

Tyler Heffner – Clarksburg District



Tyler Heffner has worked very hard to get where he is, and he continues to be diligent in his quest to meet his long-term goals.

Tyler attended Lewis County High School, where he graduated in 2015. He had been diagnosed with autism when he was in middle school. Some of his problem areas were staying organized and on task. While he was known for being quiet and shy, Tyler was very smart and was in the gifted program in high school.

Tyler's high school teachers referred him to the DRS to help him prepare for employment.

According to DRS Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Jamie Paulhamus, Tyler had a strong interest in science and wanted to pursue higher education to ultimately work in the field of aerospace engineering. She reported that DRS helped to arrange some college tours and even a visit to the Katherine Johnson Independent Verification and Validation (IV&V) Facility, home of NASA's IV&V Program, in Fairmont. This facility contributes to the safety and success of NASA's highest-profile missions by assuring the software being used performs correctly.

Tyler chose to attend West Virginia Wesleyan College, and in 2021, he obtained his bachelor's degree in environmental physics.

DRS assisted Tyler with tuition, books, and supplies, as well as computer equipment and with an ergonomic setup for his dorm room to help him to study.

While DRS helped him with developing his résumé and his job search, a job lead from a friend aided Tyler with landing a job at FCX Systems, a manufacturing company, in Morgantown.

FCX Systems' Director of Production Robert Clark explained that the company manufactures solid state frequency converters, which are primarily used in the aircraft industry.

Tyler works as an assembly technician at FCX, and he builds the equipment the company sells. Tyler's job involves assembly work, wiring work, and unit preparation for shipping.

Tyler made an impression at his initial interview.

"I was very interested in Tyler when I first interviewed him. He just seemed to have an underlying interest in learning what we did," Clark said. "A lot of people come here for employment. I think Tyler came here to learn more than just the job."

Clark believes the biggest asset Tyler contributes to their workplace is his drive to produce something tangible. He has learned the necessary skills to do the job and has become proficient at what he does. Not only is he competent in his work, but he really enjoys the hands-on nature of the job.

For Tyler, his favorite part about college was the hands-on learning experiences that took place in his science lab classes.

Tyler is extremely grateful to DRS for the assistance with college. He was overwhelmed by the process, and it was a huge help to have guidance on completing applications and other requirements from year to year.

Tyler feels that working at FCX brings him closer to his dream of working around aircraft and spacecraft. His future plans involve furthering his education to see if he can ultimately get into a position that involves manufacturing engines, either for spacecraft or aircraft.

Andrew Rager – Wheeling District



Andrew Rager's determination to do more and a thriving partnership helped him to foster job skills and self-confidence so he could meet his employment goal.

Anxiety and an intellectual disability have made things difficult for Andrew throughout his lifetime.

After graduating from Brooke County High School in 2002, Andrew was able to get a job, but it was in a sheltered employment setting, which meant he worked part time and was paid less than minimum wage.

DRS reaches out to individuals with disabilities working in sheltered settings to inform them of available services. DRS provides support to help them find jobs in competitive, integrated settings. After hearing a presentation by two DRS employees in 2019, Andrew contacted DRS to help him find a different job. He wanted full-time work in the community, but he needed help.

According to DRS Senior Rehabilitation Counselor Kaylee Carpenter, Andrew wasn't sure what he wanted to do or what he could do. So, she referred him to Goodwill Industries, which is a Community Rehabilitation Program that frequently provides assessment and training services to DRS consumers.

Carpenter wanted Goodwill to begin with a work skills assessment, so they could get a better idea of Andrew's job skills. During this assessment, Andrew worked in the Weirton Goodwill store where he learned a variety of retail skills, including processing clothing and running a cash register.

After that, Andrew received work adjustment training, where a Goodwill job coach worked one-on-one with him at Kroger, which is one of their business partners. During this one-on-one training, Andrew learned specific job skills for working in a grocery store, and he developed better soft skills like communicating with others.

Frequently described as quiet and shy, Andrew became more self-confident and comfortable with what he was doing as his training progressed.

Peter Bortz, Andrew's former job coach, explained that Andrew spent several months applying for jobs after completing his training. But through his own initiative, Andrew applied for and secured employment with Kroger.

According to Kroger Store Leader Keith Leshuk, Andrew works as a courtesy clerk where his primary responsibilities include bagging groceries, retrieving shopping carts, and providing good customer service.

Bortz believes Andrew's best personal characteristic to be his willingness to try new tasks despite his insecurities.

Leshuk has 24 years of experience with Kroger but is fairly new to the Wellsburg location. He explained that Andrew has been trained on the self-checkout technology, and he often manages four registers there.

Leshuk describes Andrew as a dependable employee. He doesn't call off, and he takes care of the customers.

Andrew is extremely happy working at Kroger and believes his coworkers and managers are the best part of his job, referring to them as a second family.

Carpenter is very proud of Andrew for everything he has accomplished and for not being afraid to try to succeed at doing something different. DRS and Goodwill supported him along the way, but Andrew did the hard work, she explained.

Not only did Andrew meet his goal of finding a new job, but he recently took on more hours at the store and is now working full time.

Andrew is proud of his accomplishments, especially for being the one who called 911 five years ago when his mom had a stroke, which helped to save her life.

He also has not given up on trying new things. He has obtained his learner's permit and is working toward getting his driver's license.

Andrew is very happy working at Kroger and plans to stay there. "I love it, love it, love it with exclamation marks," Andrew said enthusiastically.

John McDowell – Beckley District



When faced with several challenges, some people choose to quit. But John McDowell used his own personal strength to persevere through adversity.

John has several disabilities, including some mobility issues, which make walking difficult, especially on uneven surfaces. He also has a speech disorder, which makes communicating with and being understood by others very difficult.

John had a job that he liked, but when he was in his late 50s, he fell at his workplace. He had to be off work for an extended amount of time, and when he was released to return to work, his employer decided not to bring him back because of concerns relating to his safety.

DRS had previously helped John address disability-related barriers so he could find work. So, John returned to DRS for assistance with finding a new job because he was determined to work.

According to DRS Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Jamie Lafferty, John had previously had a functional capacity evaluation that helped them determine the type of work that he could or could not do, and they used that to help with a new job search.

DRS enlisted the help of Open Doors, a Community Rehabilitation Program, to assist with John's job search. They helped John with job leads, completing applications, and with meeting with prospective employers.

John's job search ended up being lengthy, and the onset of the pandemic in 2020 did not help matters. However, the right opportunity came along just at the right time.

Greenworks Recycling in Lewisburg had an available job opening, and DRS approached them about John participating in an on-the-job training program, which was financially supplemented by DRS and gave the employer the opportunity to see John's work capabilities. The venture turned out to be successful for Greenworks and John.

According to Greenworks' General Manager Myles Yates, John works as a recycling technician and is responsible for sorting a variety of plastics that come into their facility.

DRS utilized a job coach from Lifeworks, another Community Rehabilitation Program, to help John learn the job tasks.

Greenworks does provide John with minor workplace accommodations. The primary accommodation allows him to use a stool so that he can sit when necessary to do his work, which alleviates some of his mobility challenges. They have also determined ways to address communications barriers.

Yates describes John as driven and detail oriented. "You can't just speed through this job," he explained. "You have to take the time to make sure things get to the right places, and he really is committed to that."

Lafferty believes John is one of the most determined people he has ever met. He had set his mind to finding a new job, and he has accomplished that. Lafferty also credits him with having a strong work ethic.

John is very happy to be working again. He gets bored sitting at home.

John enjoys the work that he does, and he likes his coworkers and supervisors.

Yates is thrilled that John is being recognized for his accomplishments. "He's certainly put in the effort and hard work," he said. "And, frankly, this is not the easiest job, and there are some blood, sweat and tears involved, and he's certainly done that."

Lafferty is encouraged by John. "I kind of feel like John makes you want to do better," he explained. "I mean he makes me want to do better either at my job or for my other clients. He is a good example and that is what I would say about John."

Ryan Willis – Martinsburg District



For Ryan Willis, a positive, can-do attitude helps him to handle his job and his personal challenges.

Ryan was born with spina bifida, which is caused when a baby's spinal cord fails to develop properly in the womb, and it resulted in Ryan's legs being paralyzed.

He grew up in Piedmont, located in West Virginia's Eastern Panhandle. He attended Keyser High School, graduating in 2012, and went on to attend Potomac State College.

Ryan's mom works for DRS, so she referred him for vocational assistance when he was in high school, explained DRS Branch Office Manager Sherry Faulk. According to Faulk, Ryan has been a DRS consumer on more than one occasion since he was in high school, and he has received a variety of services, including vocational counseling and guidance, job placement, and transportation assistance.

DRS first assisted Ryan with getting a job, and then later, DRS helped him with job retention services, which involved modifications to his wheelchair accessible van, so he could continue getting to work.

Ryan is a store manager at Hampshire County Special Services Center.

Hampshire County Special Services Center is a Community Rehabilitation Program, which is frequently utilized by DRS to provide certain assessment and training services to consumers, and it also offers employment opportunities in a variety of areas.

According to Jillian Valentine-Bell, a representative of Hampshire County Special Services Center, they operate a store that sells new merchandise, and that is where Ryan works.

Valentine-Bell described Ryan's responsibilities as running the cash register, pricing and stocking merchandise, cleaning merchandise display areas, and providing customer service.

Ryan's favorite tasks are pricing merchandise and getting to know the customers.

Faulk explained that Ryan did not need a lot of training for the job. "Ryan is a quick learner and can kind of do pretty much anything you throw at him," she said.

Valentine-Bell agrees with that and credits him with being able to train others in the store.

Faulk believes Ryan is effective at his job because he is good at working with people.

"He has a great personality and can get along with just about anyone," she said.

Ryan feels his biggest accomplishment, thus far, is living to be 30 because doctors advised his mom that he would not make it that far. He has survived a MRSA infection, kidney failure, and a blood clot that went through his heart and into his lungs, causing him to code for about 20 minutes.

As for plans for his future, Ryan intends to go with the flow. He has never let his disability stop him from doing what he wanted. He just has to go about it a different way sometimes.

According to Faulk, Ryan is easygoing and adaptable, and he can accomplish whatever he wants.

"He has always just picked up and went and did what he wanted to do and doesn't let anything hold him down," she said.

Financial Report

Source of Funds

State Appropriations	14,992,439
Federal Grants	53,281,393
Program Income	626,103
Special Revenue	428,367
Total Funds	\$69,328,302

Expenditures by Program Category

Administration	10,490,795
Vocational Rehabilitation Program:	
Case Services	19,502,385
Counseling, Guidance and Placement	10,797,374
Disability Determination Services	17,834,090
Other:	
Employment Attendant Care Program	109,292
Independent Living	921,320
Older Blind (VISIONS)	297,895
Pre-Employment Transition Services	6,543,036
Randolph-Sheppard Program	928,477
Ron Yost Personal Assistance Services Fund	282,871
Supported Employment Extended Care	41,163
Workshop Development	1,579,604
Total Expenditures	\$69,328,302

Classification of Expenditures

Personal Services	26,816,028
Current Expense	11,013,649
Repairs and Alterations	43,598
Equipment	481,299
Grants	2,419,213
Purchased Case Services	28,554,515
Total	\$69,328,302

Statement of Funds and Expenses for the year ended June 30, 2023

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New Martinsville, WV 26155
304-455-4688

Parkersburg
State Office Building
400 5th Street
Parkersburg, WV 26101
304-420-4580

Point Pleasant
2807 Jackson Avenue
Suite 200
Point Pleasant, WV 25550
304-675-0867

Princeton
195 Davis Street
Princeton, WV 24739
304-425-1256

Rehabilitation Programs
10 McJunkin Road
Nitro, WV 25143
304-760-7166

Ripley
206 Stone Drive
Ripley, WV 25271
304-373-0313

Romney
WV Schools for the Deaf and
Blind
Information Resource Center
301 E. Main Street
Romney, WV 26757
304-822-4806

Spencer
321 Market Street
Spencer, WV 25276
304-927-0954

Summersville
830 Northside Drive
Suite 113
Summersville, WV 26651
304-872-0813

Teays Valley
115 Liberty Square
Hurricane, WV 25526
304-760-7082

Weirton
100 Municipal Plaza
Suite 200
Weirton, WV 26062
304-723-5311

Welch
110 Park Avenue
Suite 200
Welch, WV 24801
304-436-3175

Weston
306 Market Place Mall
Weston, WV 26452
304-269-0547

Wheeling
1324 Chapline Street
Suite 200
Wheeling, WV 26003
304-238-1092

Disability Determination Section

Charleston
500 Quarrier Street
Suite 500
Charleston, WV 25301
304-343-5055

Clarksburg Federal Center
320 West Pike Street
Suite 120
Clarksburg, WV 26301
304-624-0200



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