Empowering Career Possibilities!
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Welcome

Dear Colleagues and Friends:

The West Virginia Division of Rehabilitation Services’ (DRS) 2021 Annual Report, *Empowering Career Possibilities*, showcases the hard work of DRS staff and the valued collaboration with our essential partners – 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. These valued partnerships help DRS to meet 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.*

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 through the vocational rehabilitation program or ensuring a smooth adjudication process through Disability Determination Section for the Social Security Administration for those who are unable to work.

In fiscal year 2021, DRS provided vocational rehabilitation services to 6,272 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 833 determined individuals who, after receiving services from DRS, obtained employment during the past year.

During fiscal year 2021, the Disability Determination Section cleared 26,690 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.

This report also showcases the hard work and contributions of six DRS consumers who represent the career possibilities which are generated through individual perseverance and with assistance from DRS. These stories represent the ongoing accomplishments and positive influence DRS and the vocational rehabilitation program have on West Virginians with disabilities who want to work.

DRS continues to invest its resources in positive change to directly benefit its consumers, which dramatically contributes to West Virginia’s economy and to improving the lives of West Virginians with disabilities.

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

Pisnu Bua-Iam
Acting Director
Division of Rehabilitation Services
2021 Highlights

- DRS served 6,272 West Virginians with disabilities through the vocational rehabilitation program, with 4,095 being transition-aged youth.
- DRS helped 833 vocational rehabilitation consumers obtain or retain employment.
- The estimated annual earnings of vocational rehabilitation consumers at application were $18,608,876. After receiving vocational rehabilitation services, their total estimated earnings rose to $25,292,540, which amounts to a 36% increase in the total estimated earned income of these hard-working West Virginians, which demonstrates a significant return on investment.
- DRS spent more than $14 million to purchase necessary vocational rehabilitation services for its consumers, which dramatically contributes to West Virginia’s economy.
- 90.5% of vocational rehabilitation consumers had significant disabilities.
- Through strong collaboration and cooperation, the WIOA core partners – DRS, WorkForce West Virginia and WV Adult Education – continued to implement West Virginia’s Unified State Plan submitted in 2020.
- Data compiled by the federal Rehabilitation Services Administration measures the percentage of vocational rehabilitation program consumers who remained employed a year after successfully exiting the program. The national average for program year 2018, which is the most current data available, is 58.8% and DRS’ average for that year is 78.3%, making DRS #2 in the nation of all reporting agencies during that timeframe.
- DRS’ Disability Determination Section processed 26,690 Social Security Disability Insurance and Supplemental Security Income claims.
- DRS’ Disability Determination Section has maintained an accuracy rate of nearly 94% over the past year.

DRS helps people with disabilities plan for their future.
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 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.

Vocational Rehabilitation Mission

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

Districts and Branch Offices
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 individual’s vocational rehabilitation program is competitive, integrated employment in a career of the consumer’s 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 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.
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. 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 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.
Economic Impact of Vocational Rehabilitation Services

Fiscal Year 2021 Program Data

$18,608,876
At referral

$25,292,540
After rehabilitation

36% increase in total estimated annual earnings

West Virginians Served by District
Total served 6,272

Wheeling District 789
Charleston District 1,170
Huntington District 1,482
Beckley District 1,303
Clarksburg District 881
Martinsburg District 647
## Referral Sources of Individuals Vocationally Rehabilitated

**Referral Source**
- Adult Education and Literacy: 1
- Community Rehabilitation Programs: 7
- Division of Corrections and Rehabilitation: 2
- Educational Institutions (Elementary/Secondary): 235
- Educational Institutions (Postsecondary): 31
- Family/Friends: 91
- Medical Health Providers: 76
- Mental Health Providers: 14
- One-Stop Partner: 6
- Other Sources: 39
- Self-Referral: 331

## Occupations of Individuals Vocationally Rehabilitated

**Type of Occupation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Occupation</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Architecture and Engineering</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports and Media</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building and Grounds, Cleaning and Maintenance</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business and Financial Operations</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community and Social Services</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer and Mathematical</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction and Extraction</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education, Training and Library</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farming, Fishing and Forestry</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food Preparation and Serving Related</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healthcare Practitioners and Technical</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healthcare Support</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Installation, Maintenance and Repair</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life, Physical and Social Science</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office and Administrative Support</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Care and Service</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Production</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protective Service</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales and Related</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation and Material Moving</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total rehabilitated into competitive, integrated employment</strong></td>
<td>833</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### 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>Secondary education not completed (includes high school students)</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special education certificate</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary school equivalency</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary school diploma</td>
<td>395</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some postsecondary education</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postsecondary certification, license or educational certificate</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate degree</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s degree</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree beyond a bachelor's degree</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Primary Disability of Individuals Vocationally Rehabilitated

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Disability</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive Impairments</td>
<td>197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hearing/Communicative Impairments</td>
<td>315</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Impairments</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological Impairments</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual Impairments</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Age, Gender and Race of Individuals Vocationally Rehabilitated

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age at application</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 20</td>
<td>334</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 - 34</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 - 44</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45 - 64</td>
<td>242</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65+</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>American Indian or Alaska Native</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or African American</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic or Latino</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>785</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>451</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>381</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not self-identify</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
DRS has chosen to continue measuring performance based on program evaluation standards and performance indicators previously established by the federal Rehabilitation Services Administration. Fiscal year 2021 data show that DRS exceeded the federal benchmarks on four out of the seven measures.

During program year 2020 (July 1, 2021-June 30, 2022), DRS began to transition to the Workforce Investment and Opportunity Act Common Performance Measures. These measures include:

- Employment 2nd quarter, after exit
- Employment 4th quarter, after exit
- Median earnings 2nd quarter, after exit
- Credential attainment rate
- Measurable skills gain rate
- Effectiveness in serving employers

During program year 2021, DRS has a measurable skills gain rate benchmark of 42.0%, and baseline data will continue to be collected for the remaining performance measures during the year.

**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>FY 2021</th>
<th>FY 2019</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>833</td>
<td>868</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>824</td>
<td>1,211</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>FY 2021</th>
<th>FY 2019</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>52.3%</td>
<td>33.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42.6%</td>
<td>42.8%</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 minimum wage. (Federal Requirement – 72.6%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FY 2021</th>
<th>FY 2019</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<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>FY 2021</th>
<th>FY 2019</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>73.2%</td>
<td>99.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>64.2%</td>
<td>98.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Performance Indicator 1.5 — Earnings Ratio**

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FY 2021</th>
<th>FY 2019</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>.80</td>
<td>.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.76</td>
<td>.70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Performance Indicator 1.6 — Self-Support**

Of those earning at least 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>FY 2021</th>
<th>FY 2019</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>46.7%</td>
<td>62.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41.6%</td>
<td>63.1%</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>FY 2021</th>
<th>FY 2019</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>.909</td>
<td>.981</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.915</td>
<td>.957</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.

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 from ages 14 to 21. There are 53 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**, including peer mentoring

Events such as Career Exploration Opportunity (CEO) 2.0 and Instruction in Self-Advocacy have traditionally been held during weeklong, in-person instructional settings. Because of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, Pre-ETS services to students with disabilities were delivered in a variety of in-person and virtual settings throughout the summer. A total of 734 students with disabilities participated in 1,631 Pre-ETS activities that took place across West Virginia from May to September 2021.

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**
Outreach Efforts

DRS collaborates with the West Virginia Department of Education’s Office of Special Education and local high schools throughout the state to reach eligible students with disabilities. These outreach efforts attempt to ensure that students with disabilities enter the vocational rehabilitation program at or around the age of 14 to strengthen their participation in career exploration activities (Pre-ETS).

Fiscal Year 2021 Results

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

- **4,095** students (ages 14 to 21) with disabilities were served, which is **65%** of the total number of individuals served by DRS.
- **2,608** transition students were referred directly from schools to DRS.
- **1,069** students with disabilities developed individualized plans for employment.
- **360** transition clients gained employment, which is **43%** 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 **1,031** students with college education services they needed to meet their work-related educational goals.
DRS’ team of employment specialists work closely with WV employers to help them to determine their workforce needs and then relay current and future job openings to our vocational rehabilitation counselors and consumers (job seekers). During 2021, COVID-19 continued to affect many operating procedures for the Employment Services Unit and DRS employment specialists persisted in figuring out creative ways to meet employer and job seeker needs.

DRS employment specialists routinely communicate with employers throughout the state. As a result, our job seekers have real-time labor market information to assist them in planning their careers and 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 2021, DRS employment specialists made over 1,000 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.

Continuing education and training for DRS employment specialists ensures that they are providing quality services to job seekers. By staying up to date on national recruiting and hiring trends, DRS is able to assist job seekers 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.

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.

### 2021 Accomplishments

In fiscal year 2021, the Employment Services Unit completed the following activities to increase opportunity for DRS job seekers:

- provided virtual services including the Employer Spotlight program, which promotes face-to-face interaction between employers and job seekers. This networking opportunity allows the employer to reach potential applicants and allows job seekers to find out specifics about available jobs offered through an employer and the traits that make a good candidate for those positions. Participating employers included Federal Bureau of Prisons, Birth to Three, Valley Health, NECCO, Manpower, Goodwill, Quality Insights, Enterprise, Ticketmaster and West Virginia Rural Water Association.

- provided disability inclusion training from WINDMILLS to the National Conservation Legacy Program, which focused on reducing stigma surrounding disability and barriers in the workplace. As a direct result from this training, the STEWARDS program in West Virginia was able to connect with the National Employment Team within the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) and had the opportunity to present information about their hiring initiative to create a more diverse workplace and more outdoor recreation opportunities for people with disabilities during the CSAVR Fall Conference.

- provided virtual Job Club training to DRS job seekers, which provides training on work readiness topics to help prepare a job seeker in learning skills to be ready to enter the workforce. Topics include positive attitude, skill assessment, interviews, résumé development, job search process, self-advocacy, transportation, social media and maintaining a job.

- secured 16 on-the-job training opportunities for DRS job seekers.

- attended approximately 20 job fairs, both in person and virtually. These job fairs included employers such as Amazon, Sysco, IRS, West Virginia University, Davis and Elkins College and Waste Management.
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 63 DRS-acknowledged CRPs with 73 total service locations throughout West Virginia.

To better meet the needs of DRS and its clients during the COVID-19 pandemic, DRS worked closely with the CRPs and other local community providers to develop and expand into virtual versions of services, such as life skills training, work adjustment training and job coaching. Additionally, many of the special Pre-ETS were offered virtually. As in-person training began to resume, additional funds were paid to CRPs to help offset the costs of providing personal protective equipment (PPE) and smaller group delivery.

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.

2021 Accomplishments

- More than 1,000 clients and potentially eligible students received one or more CRP services, with payments to CRPs totaling over $2 million.
- 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. There are currently 65 approved STEP service vendors.
- 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 2021, due to the pandemic, the number of individuals working in these programs dramatically decreased. CRP staff coordinated and delivered the training to 98 employees with disabilities at four different programs throughout the state. Given the restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic, some of these sessions were conducted virtually. A number of previous providers have let their certificates lapse and at this point, may not renew.
- A new Pre-ETS service effort was initiated this year. Providers were asked to develop and submit Pre-ETS projects that would differ from current program offerings. Over 40 new service projects were approved and initiated prior to the summer of 2021. In addition, the existing Pre-ETS services of Work-Based Learning Experiences, Career Exploration Opportunity camps and Instruction in Self-Advocacy camps were also offered. A number of special Pre-ETS programs were also developed specifically for the Sensory Impairment population.

DRS empowers a multitude of possibilities!
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 260 people with blindness or significant vision impairments.
- 20 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 822 clients who listed hearing impairments as their primary or secondary disability, which included people who are deaf or deaf-blind.
- 321 clients with hearing impairments achieved their employment goals.
- Spent $1,410,660 on deaf and hard of hearing services.

2021 Accomplishments

- DRS collaborated with the Children’s Vision Rehabilitation Project for a fifth straight year on five summer Pre-ETS camps for West Virginia high school and college students who are blind or visually impaired.
- DRS sponsored three Pre-ETS events throughout the state specifically for students who are deaf and hard of hearing.
- DRS developed a comprehensive online deaf and hard of hearing resource guide for sharing with staff, clients, professional organizations, employers and the community. It is available online at wvdrs.org and at pathwayswv.org.

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.

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 2021, 471 consumers were served statewide through the VISIONS program.

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 176 people, providing 246 services, which included 53 rehabilitation engineering services, 71 assistive technology services, 110 driver rehabilitation services and 12 environmental modification services.
- Assisted Bluestone State Park with accessibility planning for the park office and other buildings.
- Provided training in the areas of job exploration, self-advocacy, workplace readiness, job shadowing, money management and transportation training (learner’s permit, biking, ride sharing, all-terrain vehicles, public transportation and pre-driving readiness).
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. The Community Assets initiative involves working with various partners such as 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 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 maintains active participation on the state Behavioral Health Planning Council, the West Virginia Olmsted Council and the West Virginia Achieving a Better Life Experience (WVABLE) Advisory Committee, as well as the Traumatic Brain Injury Advisory Board and the Fair Shake Network. 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. The project involves working collaboratively with Comprehensive Behavioral Health Centers to improve employment services to mutual consumers who are living with serious mental illnesses.

DRS continues its relationship with the Division of Corrections and Rehabilitation. In fiscal year 2021, DRS served approximately 114 individuals with disabilities and criminal histories. DRS maintains active participation on the reentry councils across the state. These councils focus on solving barriers to reentry, connecting with employers and improving outcomes through collaboration. DRS also participated in the Criminal Justice Reform Summit.

DRS is an active partner in the Jobs and Hope West Virginia program and collaborates to provide West Virginians in recovery the opportunity to obtain career training to secure meaningful employment. DRS exhibited at the 2021 West Virginia Peer Recovery Support Services Conference to provide outreach and resources to peer recovery support specialists, who are assisting others in recovery.

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 seven 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 2021 was $63,600 with gross sales of $445,200.
Disability Determination Section

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 26,690 claims in fiscal year 2021. Its goal in fiscal year 2022 is to process 30,500 because national projections show that disability claim applications will increase over the course of the year. Although DDS productivity was slightly lower than usual due to challenges relating to COVID-19, telework and ongoing staffing losses, DDS has maintained an accuracy rate of nearly 94% over the past year. DDS’ quality service to West Virginia’s citizens remains paramount to moving forward to meeting goals.

DDS successfully transitioned to a new computer system called the Disability Case Processing System (DCPS). This transition involved the training of all DDS staff in both the Charleston and Clarksburg offices (more than 200 employees with various duties and responsibilities) and the movement of some 13,000 claims from one system to the other. Some claims did not automatically transition to the new system. Approximately 1.5% of claims remain in the old system to be processed, which requires DDS staff to continue working cases in dual systems during the transition. The transition to DCPS affected every DDS employee and has required numerous changes in fiscal processes, day-to-day operations, ordering consultative exams, assigning claims, dispatching claims and more, and DDS will continue to excel in this new system in the new year.

In fiscal year 2021, DDS continued working toward hiring employees to return to more acceptable staffing levels to better meet consumer needs. Past hiring freezes by the SSA, employee retirements and separations and COVID-19 have resulted in DDS being significantly understaffed. DDS had the authority from SSA to hire 19 new employees during fiscal year 2021, but only six new hires occurred. DDS is working closely with the DRS Human Resources Unit and will continue this initiative in fiscal year 2022.

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.
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 2021, DRS, along with its core partners, WorkForce West Virginia and West Virginia Adult Education, continued to implement the two-year modification to the West Virginia Unified State Plan submitted in 2020. 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, six statewide goals were established:

• 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 Unified 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 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.

In fiscal year 2021, 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.

In fiscal year 2021, DRS worked closely with the three Center for Independent Living (CIL) corporations in the state to provide Pre-ETS in the area of Instruction in Self-Advocacy to students with disabilities.

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 2021, a total of 104 consumers completed CLSP services and were successfully enabled to remain in their own homes. The average cost per consumer to complete their goals was $6,486. According to Genworth 2020 Cost of Care Survey, the cost for a semi-private room in a nursing home has a median annual rate of $136,510 in the state of West Virginia. Therefore, the diversion or transition of 104 consumers from nursing home care through CLSP is estimated to have created a net annual savings of nearly $14,197,040 in fiscal year 2021.

At the end of fiscal year 2020, 491 consumers were on waiting lists to receive services. In late autumn of 2020, the Statewide Independent Living Council and the three Center for Independent Living Corporations, supported by DRS, requested additional funding to reduce the waiting list for the CLSP. Realizing the importance of protecting individuals with disabilities from COVID-19, Governor Justice allocated $350,000 of Cares Act funding to support the program. In fiscal year 2021, an additional 58 consumers completed CLSP services, which allowed them to successfully remain in their homes, out of congregate care and safer from COVID-19.

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.
Determined is the word Chrystal Nugent-Hicks uses to describe herself, and that characteristic has helped her get where she is today, both personally and professionally, and her accomplishments have earned her recognition as the State Ability Works Award recipient from DRS.

Chrystal was diagnosed with McCune-Albright syndrome when she was 22 months old. The disease is caused by a genetic mutation, but it is not hereditary. It causes polyostotic fibrous dysplasia, which is scar-like tissue in the bones, and can often lead to bone fractures.

Chrystal is only 24 years old and has already had about 22 surgeries during her lifetime. She has rods in her legs and plates in her hips, and she walks with crutches.

At the age of 11, Chrystal and her family moved from Virginia to Charles Town, West Virginia. As a senior at Washington High School, she was referred to DRS for vocational assistance to help her transition from high school to postsecondary education.

Rehabilitation Counselor Ann Ramos explained that DRS worked with Chrystal to help her learn about different types of jobs, how much they paid and whether there were available opportunities in her location, and DRS also helped with college financial assistance.

After graduating in 2015, Chrystal went on to attend Blue Ridge Community and Technical College, where she ultimately ended up participating in the paralegal program.

Fortunately, Chrystal did not let several health issues stop her from pursuing her goal. She did have to take some time off from college to have three surgeries, but she earned her associate degree in 2019 with a 3.8 grade point average.

Chrystal's job search was not easy. Her biggest challenge was job interviews, where a handshake was expected, and that was awkward for her because of her crutches. She feels that employers concluded that she was not suited for jobs that would require her to do things like carry heavy files to a copier machine. However, Chrystal continued her search and was ultimately hired as a legal assistant by Winchester Law Group in Virginia.

According to Ramos, Chrystal found her job on her own, and Ramos could not be more pleased with Chrystal's accomplishments despite the obstacles she faced due to her disability.

Beth Coyne, a partner with the law firm, described the firm as small, with only four attorneys. They represent local social service departments. Chrystal was interviewed by Coyne, as well as the firm's office manager and the individual that she would ultimately replace. All three believed that Chrystal would be a good fit for the job.

Coyne explained that Chrystal stood out in the interview because of her enthusiasm about the job opportunity, and her enthusiasm became contagious. Coyne described Chrystal as eager, organized, willing to learn new things, open to constructive feedback, positive and extremely happy to be in the job.

According to Coyne, Chrystal is responsible for processing all documents and paperwork, including legal pleadings and filings, related to the representation of their clients. Coyne has been practicing law for 35 years, which makes her appreciate Chrystal's knowledge of social media and technology because they have added additional complexities to her field in the last several years.

Chrystal loves her job, her employer and being able to use her organizational skills. An internship with the Jefferson County prosecuting attorney's office helped to prepare her for her current job.

Chrystal is proud of her accomplishments. She worked hard to earn them, and she appreciates the chance she has been given to prove herself.

“It was really important for me to get the job because I saw things in myself, and I wanted other people to see them,” said Chrystal. “I’m so determined, and I wanted people to see that.”
Robert Partin’s persistence and hard work have generated great personal growth and progress in his life, and he is not finished yet.

Robert moved to Ripley to live with his dad when he was around nine years old and relocating to West Virginia had a positive effect on his life.

Robert has attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), which can make it very difficult for him to focus, and he has to work really hard to stay on track at times. As a senior at Ripley High School, he and his dad met Betty Parsons, a rehabilitation counselor from DRS. At this meeting, they learned more about how DRS could provide vocational assistance to help Robert find a job.

While Robert had worked some at mowing lawns, he had no real work history because he was still in school. But he wanted to find steady employment so he could gain valuable work experience.

Parsons and Robert discussed his interests and abilities to try and determine a suitable employment goal for him as he was getting ready to graduate from high school. Kroger in Ripley advertised some job openings, and Robert was interested in applying.

Parsons helped Robert to complete Kroger’s online job application, and she also helped him to prepare for a job interview so he would know how to appropriately answer questions. These steps can be intimidating to experienced job seekers, and Robert is appreciative of the help he received from DRS.

But the most difficult part for Robert was being patient as he waited to hear back from Kroger to know if he had gotten the job.

Robert did get the job at Kroger, and his perseverance and success at meeting his employment goal has earned him recognition from DRS as the Charleston District Ability Works Award recipient.

Robert was cross trained by Kroger to work in different areas, including stocking shelves, the meat department, Click List and as cashier. According to Robert, he would work in whatever area Kroger needed him most, and it often changed from day-to-day, which was something Robert liked about the job.

Parsons believes Robert has several qualities – being easy-going, eager to please, cooperative, dependable, and able to follow instructions – that make him a good employee.

“He’s very personable and gives attention to detail and assists the customers,” said Parsons. “He is punctual and very friendly and gets along well with his co-workers.”

She is very proud of how he has progressed on the job, and Parsons recognizes that Robert will continue to grow.

Robert was employed with Kroger for more than a year, and he gained essential knowledge and experience that helped him grow. But he is not finished.

This year, Robert obtained his driver’s license, which opened up the possibility of new work opportunities because transportation was no longer a limitation for him. So, Robert set a new goal for himself. He wanted to obtain employment in the industrial sector, and he recently met that goal when he accepted a position with STAR Plastics, located in Millwood.

Robert is grateful for the support and encouragement he received from his dad and Betty Parsons. He believes he would not have gotten hired at Kroger without help from Parsons. And Robert knows he would not be where he is today without his dad.
James “Jimmy” Harris graduated from Fairmont Senior High School in 2020, and instead of taking the summer off like a lot of other kids his age, Jimmy took the initiative to begin his career.

His personal resolve to succeed in his employment has earned Jimmy recognition as the Clarksburg District Ability Works Award recipient from DRS.

As a freshman in high school, Jimmy was referred to DRS. Jimmy had been diagnosed at a young age as being hard of hearing and later as having a type of autism, which manifested in ways that caused him to have anxiety about doing certain things and to be somewhat socially awkward or shy.

During high school, Jimmy worked with DRS Senior Rehabilitation Counselor Lauren Carte, who helped him begin to think about his interests and abilities and what he wanted to do after graduation.

Carte used different assessment tools to help Jimmy identify a vocational goal, but his older brother worked as a coal miner, and Jimmy had an ongoing interest in that field. Right after graduating high school, Jimmy's brother told him about an 80-hour mining training program in Morgantown, and Jimmy was quick to sign up for the class.

During this training, Jimmy learned essential safety protocols and rescue techniques in case of any type of mining emergency or disaster.

Jimmy applied for and got a job with Jennmar Services, and he works at the same mine in Marion County as his brother. Jimmy has moved from being a “Red Hat” miner to a “Black Hat” miner, which means he's no longer a rookie on the job.

Jimmy works underground, where he uses different machinery, like a micro track, mantrips, scoops, buggies and trolleys, to move dirt around.

He admits the job is tiring, but Jimmy loves his work and says it’s the only thing he would ever want to do.

DRS helped Jimmy get ready for his job by providing him with appropriate and necessary work clothing and boots, which he really appreciated.

Carte is proud to see how Jimmy has transitioned from an awkward high school freshman, who struggled with school, into an independent, hard-working young man who used his personal determination to bring about his employment success.

According to Carte, Jimmy is an employee with a lot of commitment and a positive attitude.

Jimmy just recently passed his driver's test, earning his license, which is the accomplishment he is most proud of at this point in his life. To get to work, Jimmy had been riding with his brother or his mom would drive him. Since he got his license, he is committed to saving money so he can buy a car.

Jimmy admitted that the most challenging part of finding a job was contacting people because he was shy and had anxiety about doing that. But his brother assisted him with that and with learning the job, and Jimmy is grateful for his help.

His mom also played an important role in his life, and Jimmy appreciates everything she taught him.

When asked why he likes working in the coal mines, Jimmy explained, “It’s something about going underground where nobody else has ever been. I don’t know ... it’s a weird feeling. I love it.”
Rachel Woods
Wheeling District Success Story

Rachel Woods was looking for someone to give her a chance to prove herself, and finally the store director at Riesbeck’s Food Markets, a family-owned grocery store in Follansbee, provided her with the opportunity she was seeking.

Rachel grew up in Weirton and graduated from Weir High School in 2009. After graduating, she went on to a local community college and then to Bethany College, where she was pursuing a social work degree.

She was two weeks away from graduation in 2013 when she was in a serious car accident that dramatically affected her life. Rachel was not wearing a seatbelt when the car she was in flipped, and she was thrown from the vehicle.

Rachel was life flighted to a hospital in Pittsburgh, where she was in a coma for about a month. She had sustained a traumatic brain injury during her accident. Ultimately, she was transferred to a rehab facility, where she had to relearn things like how to balance herself so she could walk again. She also has permanent hearing loss and double vision since her accident.

According to Rachel, there is no cure for a brain injury, and she will always have ongoing issues because of it. But it was important for Rachel to move on and do something with her life.

A friend told Rachel about DRS, which provides vocational assistance to people with disabilities, and she applied for services.

DRS Rehabilitation Counselor Kaylee Carpenter explained that Rachel had experience working at a grocery store prior to her accident, but she needed some training to further develop skills that she had not used in a long time. Carpenter got Rachel into a program at Goodwill Industries, where she gained hands-on experience, learning things like how to work the cash register, customer service and how to stock merchandise.

The program also helped Rachel with building her work tolerance because she had difficulty standing for very long, and she strengthened her soft skills, which included appropriate workplace behaviors like communicating with customers and coworkers.

DRS also helped Rachel with her job search, which was a difficult process for her. According to Rachel, she applied for a lot of retail positions in the Weirton area and got several interviews, but no one would give her a chance until she came to Riesbeck’s Food Markets, which she calls a “magical place.”

Store Director Burke Nickerson hired Rachel to work as a cashier at Riesbeck’s, where it is essential that employees treat customers like family, and Rachel is a good fit for the family-owned business.

“Rachel was a talker, but in a good way,” said Nickerson. “She brings in happiness. She’s very friendly with the customers. Customers enjoy that.”

For Rachel, her favorite part of working is talking with her customers and listening to the stories they tell her as they move through her checkout line.

“…The customers are the biggest part of my soul,” Rachel said. “I love them. They are like extended family…”

Rachel has worked at her job for over a year now, and she is so thankful that she has regained some of her independence. She’s accomplishing things some people thought she would never do again.

Rachel’s vocational success has earned her recognition from DRS as the Wheeling District Ability Works Award recipient.

For Rachel, having the opportunity to prove herself has been surreal. She admits that the odds were stacked against her but getting the chance to work again has made her feel like a true champion.
Lindsay Brady wanted to be more than what she was, and by making positive choices and working extremely hard, she has accomplished that goal. Now, she is helping others make positive changes in their lives, and her success has earned her recognition as the Beckley District Ability Works Award recipient from DRS.

Lindsay grew up in Braxton County, where she was homeschooled through most of her high school experience. She ultimately earned her general educational diploma (GED).

At a time when she might have been planning to move forward with her future, Lindsay was plagued by a debilitating anxiety disorder that made her afraid to leave her own home, and she developed a substance use disorder.

“My addiction stemmed from childhood trauma,” Lindsay explained. “It was my way to escape, and I found that escape in the form of a pill, which quickly spiraled me out of control. I was doing fentanyl, getting in trouble, almost lost my children … I had two children at this time.”

Eventually, she made the positive choice to move on with her life. For 16 years, Lindsay has been sober, and she thanks God that her disabilities do not affect her life now as they once did.

Lindsay had wanted to be a counselor, even during times when she could not help herself. She decided to go back to school, so she sought support from DRS. According to Rehabilitation Counselor Brandon Smith, DRS provided Lindsay with college financial assistance, as well as vocational counseling and guidance.

Later this year, Lindsay will earn her master's degree in industrial and organizational psychology from Indiana Wesleyan University, where in 2019, she also completed her bachelor’s degree in addictions counseling, and she plans to pursue a Doctor of Philosophy degree in organizational leadership beginning in 2022.

Lindsay works as the assistant director of the Nicholas County Day Report Center and as a grant writer for Nicholas County.

Nicholas County Day Report Center Director, Gary Jarrell, supervises Lindsay. He explained that the purpose of the center is to rehabilitate nonviolent offenders, who are referred to their program, in a way that helps them get on their feet and back into society. Participants enter their program through directives from magistrate court and circuit court. Other participants are either on parole, probation or home confinement. About 95% of the crimes committed by their program’s participants are drug related.

As assistant director, Lindsay handles a caseload. She also does everything from crisis intervention to program development and implementation, as well as data entry and billings.

Jarrell refers to her as an energetic go-getter who serves as his right hand. They work as a team, whether it is planning how the program should run or going out during the middle of the night to help someone who has overdosed on drugs.

Lindsay believes her personal experiences have helped her to progress in her job.

“Because I’m able to relate to my client base on a level that most are not able to do, they know that I’ve been through the same struggles that they are going through,” said Lindsay.

Lindsay truly enjoys working with her clients; it is therapeutic for her. She believes they have made bad decisions, which has resulted in them being judged for their choices, and she wants to help them.

She also believes that she was her most significant barrier to her employment success. Lindsay feared that people would judge her and think she was unworthy of a job, but she has found that people are kind and accepting of her.

Smith is hopeful that people will hear Lindsay’s story and take it to heart to make positive changes in their own lives, just by putting in the effort and reaching out to the right resources.
Luke Hubbard works as a retail associate at Goodwill Industries of KYOWVA in Huntington, and his employment success has earned him recognition as the Huntington District Ability Works Award recipient from DRS.

Luke became involved with DRS about two years ago at his mother’s request. She had been seriously injured in a car accident, which created a lot of stress for Luke, and she encouraged him to seek vocational assistance to help him find a new job. 

Luke had been diagnosed with an intellectual disability when he was younger. He admits that it may take him a little longer to understand and learn new things but that does not keep him from getting the job done. 

According to DRS Certified Rehabilitation Counselor Dustin Mills, Luke had a fairly good work history, having held previous jobs at Walmart and Kroger, but he needed some vocational training to help him ease back into the world of work.

Mills referred Luke to Goodwill Industries for work adjustment training, where he learned a variety of work tasks, as well as for life skills training, which focused on soft skills like the importance of showing up for work on time, how to talk to his supervisor and how to work with other people, as well as basic accountability in the workplace.

Luke did so well during his training at Goodwill, they later hired him for a full-time position where he’s worked for more than a year now.

Luke explained that he sorts and organizes clothing by color. But according to Amy Coleman, Goodwill representative, Luke is also a very good customer service representative.

“Luke does a fantastic job on the sales floor,” said Coleman. “He is very friendly with the customers. I think he really enjoy his job; he knows where all the product goes on the sales floor. He is able to show the customers where to find those things, and I think it really makes him feel good helping them find what they need.”

Coleman indicated that when Luke first started coming to Goodwill, he was very shy and quiet, but he came out of his shell. Now he is outgoing and is flourishing with their customers.

Mills credits Luke with being very friendly, laid-back and easy to get along with, which are traits that make him a good worker. Mills also believes Luke sets a good example for his coworkers because of his strong work ethic.

For Luke, the best part of his job is being able to spend time with his work friends. He also believes that sorting the clothing helps him to focus.

Luke believes more employers should provide opportunities to people with disabilities. “Just because we have disabilities, doesn’t mean that we can’t be good workers,” said Luke. “Everybody’s good at something.”

Luke is grateful for the encouragement he received from his mom and two of his friends, who never let him believe that he was incapable of working.

Luke believes that anything is possible if you set your mind to it.

While he is not certain what is in his future, Luke indicated he may work toward earning his GED and his driver’s license, and he may save his money to get his own place.

But right now, Luke is happy to have a steady job and very proud that he can help others.
Financial Report

Source of Funds

State Appropriations 14,822,895
Federal Grants 35,816,716
Program Income 483,606
Special Revenue 268,878
Total Funds $51,392,095

Expenditures by Program Category

Administration 8,827,674
Vocational Rehabilitation Program:

  Case Services 8,986,343
  Counseling, Guidance and Placement 10,254,026
Disability Determination Services 16,781,969
Other:

  Employment Attendant Care Program 107,900
  Independent Living 705,440
  Older Blind (VISIONS) 233,972
  Pre-Employment Transition Services 2,863,472
  Randolph-Sheppard Program 260,778
  Ron Yost Personal Assistance Services Fund 333,828
  Supported Employment 144,306
  Supported Employment Extended Care 74,960
  Workshop Development 1,817,427
Total Expenditures $51,392,095

Classification of Expenditures

Personal Services 24,658,168
Current Expense 8,525,240
Repairs and Alterations 5,116
Equipment 0
Grants 2,928,582
Purchased Case Services 15,274,989
Total $51,392,095

Statement of Funds and Expenses for the year ended June 30, 2021
Contact Information

DRS Administrative Offices
State Capitol
P.O. Box 50890
Charleston, WV 25305
304-356-2060

Beckley
800 New River Town Center
Beckley, WV 25801
304-256-6900

Charleston
601 57th Street, SE
Charleston, WV 25304
304-356-2371

Clarksburg
153 West Main Street, Suite F
Clarksburg, WV 26301
304-625-6044

Elkins
1025 North Randolph Avenue
Elkins, WV 26241
304-637-0205

Fairmont
WV State Office Building
416 Adams Street, Suite 240
Fairmont, WV 26554
304-367-2714

Huntington
2699 Park Avenue, Suite 200
Huntington, WV 25704
304-528-5585

Keyser
67 North Tornado Way
Keyser, WV 26726
304-788-2313

Lewisburg
3293 Jefferson Street North, Suite 105
Lewisburg, WV 24901
304-647-7515

Logan
P.O. Box 896
Logan, WV 25601
304-792-7060

Martinsburg
489 Mid-Atlantic Parkway, Suite 2
Martinsburg, WV 25404
304-267-0005

Moorefield
151 Robert C. Byrd Industrial Park Road
Suite 3
Moorefield, WV 26836
304-538-2701

Morgantown
1415 Earl Core Road
Morgantown, WV 26505
304-285-3155

Mullens
316 Howard Avenue
Mullens, WV 25882
304-294-5653

New Martinsville
WV Northern Community College
Itinerant Office
141 Main Street
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