



# State Rehabilitation Council

*Annual Report 2020*

# Letter from the State Rehabilitation Council

*To the Honorable Governor Bill Lee and RSA Commissioner Mark Schultz,*

On behalf of the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) of Tennessee, I am privileged to present the 2020 SRC Annual Report to provide an update on the Tennessee Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Program and to highlight the work of the SRC during the past year. We address the key accomplishments of the VR program during 2020 and look to the future to improve services provided to individuals with disabilities in Tennessee. The report also reviews the responsibilities of the SRC and its achievements during the past year as we serve as the voice of the consumer to review, analyze and advise the VR program.

A highlight of the annual report is the inclusion of customer success stories to convey a picture of the VR program in a way which pure data cannot. These stories reflect individuals at different stages in life and with a variety of backgrounds, experiences, abilities and interests who all share a desire to obtain competitive integrated employment and who required the support of the VR program in order to achieve that goal. We received success stories from Master's Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors for each region and selected two stories from each of the grand regions to represent VR services statewide. Members of the Outreach, Public Relations & Awareness Committee reviewed the stories and identified at least one story from each of the three grand regions and the two sensory services regions. SRC members noted that these stories are important because it puts faces to the individuals the VR program has helped.

In a major undertaking during the fall of 2019, the SRC and VR jointly conducted the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment, the recommendations from which were initially reported in last year's report and carried forward in this report. I want to express my appreciation to the members of our Consumer Satisfaction and Needs Assessment Committee who expended numerous hours to review prior assessments from Tennessee and other states and to work with the VR team to develop the assessment. The full SRC received feedback regarding the results during a quarterly meeting and contributed to the development of key priorities to be addressed by the VR program.

The SRC is comprised of a diverse group of individuals from a variety of backgrounds, perspectives and experiences; however, we all share a common goal in working with the VR program to enhance employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities. The SRC's ability to perform our numerous functions was enhanced by the appointment of six members by Governor Bill Lee during the past year, and we are grateful to his office for the responsiveness to the needs of the SRC. I am thankful for the returning members who are always willing to support the new members and to the new members for their insights, creativity and probing questions which help to keep us all invigorated in our work!

*Sincerely,*  
Christina Clift  
2020 SRC Chair

# Message from the Assistant Commissioner



As the nation celebrates the 100th anniversary of the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program, Tennessee's Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS), particularly the VR program, has taken the opportunity to look introspectively at who we serve, how we serve, and just as important, why we serve. The Division, along with the entire Tennessee Department of Human Services (DHS) is in a period of transformation, moving toward a more integrated service delivery model referred to as "One DHS" that is focused on modernization efforts agency-wide that will dramatically impact the way that human services are delivered and received by Tennesseans. Across the agency, DHS is striving to improve customer interaction, making it less bureaucratic and more customer friendly, efficient, and effective. While these modernization efforts come with enhanced technology to help create a more efficient service delivery model overall, the driving force behind the initiatives taking place is to ensure that the customer we are serving is at the center of any and all improvements being made.

Taking a similar approach, the Division of Rehabilitation Services and its VR Program is also striving to enhance and better integrate the services that we provide. Together with our community partners and stakeholders, including the State Rehabilitation Council, we are on a journey to create a Vocational Rehabilitation program that is:

- Responsive, welcoming, informative, and encouraging showing individuals and businesses what is possible.
- Sought out by businesses to transform their operations, meet workforce needs, and improve their bottom line.
- Offering community-based employment training and connecting customers to education, training and employment resources.
- Collaborating with local education agencies and community partners to prepare students with disabilities for a seamless transition to life after high school.

Together we are transforming lives, transforming businesses, and transforming communities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mandy Johnson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Mandy" being more prominent than the last name "Johnson".

**Mandy Johnson,**

*Assistant Commissioner, Division of Rehabilitation Services  
Tennessee Department of Human Services*

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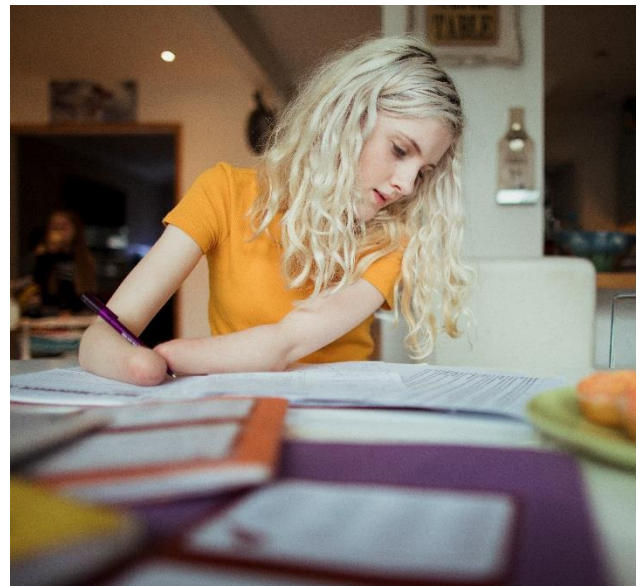


# Vocational Rehabilitation Program Overview

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

## Services Include:

- Information and Referral
- Counseling and Guidance
- Training
- Maintenance and Transportation
- Transition Services from School to Work
- Rehabilitation Technology Services
- Job Placement
- Post-Employment Services
- Supported Employment Services
- Independent Living Services

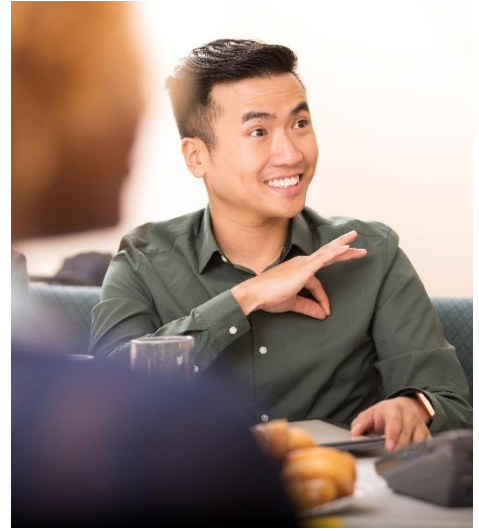


## Specialized VR Services:

In addition to the broad array of VR services available to eligible individuals, VR also provides specialized services to target populations.

**Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS)** are available to students with disabilities ages 14-22. Pre-Employment Transition services are focused on preparing students for life after high school. Pre-ETS services include the following services:

- Job exploration counseling,
- Work-based learning experiences,
- Counseling on opportunities for postsecondary educational programs,
- Workplace readiness training to develop social skills and independent living, and
- Instruction in self-advocacy.



**Business Services** provided by the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program works with employers to promote competitive integrated work opportunities and career exploration for customers through job search and placement services, combined service provision with Workforce Innovation & Opportunities Act (WIOA) core partners and stakeholders, and facilitation of work-based learning opportunities and employer-based training and employment programming. Vocational Rehabilitation program consumers can work with a Business Employment Consultant from the Business Service Unit to explore career opportunities aligning with their occupational goals and desired geographical location of residence. Together, the Business Employment Consultant and Vocational Rehabilitation customer can search for local employment opportunities of interest, apply for opportunities, conduct interview preparation, and execute final placement into opportunities. The success of Business Employment Consultants is measured by their successful service delivery to enhance competitive integrated employment outcomes for customers.

Vocational Rehabilitation's Business Service Unit works with partners from state agencies such as the Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Department of Economic and Community Development, and Department of Corrections to align efforts in serving business customers and agency customers. Through participation in the Department of Labor and Workforce Development's local Business Service Teams, the Vocational Rehabilitation Business Service Unit's Business Employment Consultant provides education and outreach services to employers offering competitive integrated work environments, enabling Vocational Rehabilitation customers to have an expanded horizon of opportunity with Tennessee employers. Last, the Business Service Unit of Vocational Rehabilitation is leveraged for developing work-based learning sites across the state to promote career exploration for individuals with disabilities receiving services through the Division of Rehabilitation Services. Employer-based training and employment programs across the state enable customers to engage in meaningful work in a variety of industries in an integrated setting where compensation and benefits eligibility for full-time employees is competitive with the local labor market and equally available for Vocational Rehabilitation customers.

**Tennessee Rehabilitation Center (TRC-Smyrna) at Smyrna** is a state operated comprehensive vocational rehabilitation training center that offers person-centered, comprehensive services in a supportive learning environment to individuals with disabilities to help increase independent living skills and employment training. Services are provided on a campus setting that also includes residential living for those students who choose to live on campus while receiving services. In addition to traditional classroom instruction, students participate in community-based work-based learning opportunities and internships as part of their course of study. Students can obtain nationally recognized credentials and/or certificates of completion in the following areas of study:

- Automotive Detailing Technician
- Automotive Maintenance & Lubrication Technician
- Business Education Technology
- Certified Logistics Associate/Technician
- Certified Production Technician
- Customer Care (Retail)
- Food Service
- Pharmacy Technician
- Power Equipment
- Certified Nursing Assistant

In addition to the technical and vocational training, TRC-Smyrna provides an array of rehabilitation support services based on the unique needs and circumstances of each student. Rehabilitation Services offered include:

- Student Advisors: assist students in selecting courses in their Area of Study and preparing schedules each quarter.
- Community Training: assist in the development and assignment of internship opportunities with employers during the student's last quarter prior to graduation.
- Employment and Placement: assist students in identifying employment opportunities and applying for jobs in their home communities.
- Disability Services: assist students in obtaining needed accommodations for classroom instruction and employment, provides Orientation and Mobility Services, and prepares students for enrollment in the Tennessee Business Enterprise (TBE) program.
- Health Services: provides urgent medical care as needed through a Wellness Center staffed by nurses and offers physician and psychology services on a limited basis; offers health maintenance courses and behavior education for students and provides work conditioning and work hardening courses for students to prepare them for employment.
- Vocational Evaluation: assist students in identifying their interests, skills, and abilities through a series of educational, hands-on, and work-based tests.



**Community Tennessee Rehabilitation Centers (CTRCs)** are a part of the Tennessee Facility Network of Vocational Rehabilitation Services. There are seventeen Community Tennessee Rehabilitation Centers strategically located throughout the state. The CTRCs provide rehabilitation services for individuals and employers in their surrounding areas including comprehensive vocational evaluation services, employee development services, job readiness training and placement services. The CTRCs are funded with federal and local dollars. As part of its transformation, the Division of Rehabilitation Services is currently transforming the service delivery model of the 17 CTRCs to best meet the needs of the individuals we serve and their communities. More information about this transformation is included below in the 2020 Innovations section.

**Sensory Services** is a specialized unit within VR that addresses the unique needs of individuals who are blind, visually impaired, deaf, deafblind, or hard of hearing.

**Tennessee Business Enterprises (TBE)**, a program within Sensory Services, offers vocational training and employment opportunities for individuals who are legally blind. The mission of this program is to provide high quality products and customer service while maximizing employment and economic opportunities for legally blind individuals. Federal and State laws grant TBE a priority to operate vending and food service in Federal, State and local government buildings. Tennessee Business Enterprises trains, licenses and places blind individuals in a facility where they function much like an independent business owner. Assistance is provided to these managers by TBE Consultants.

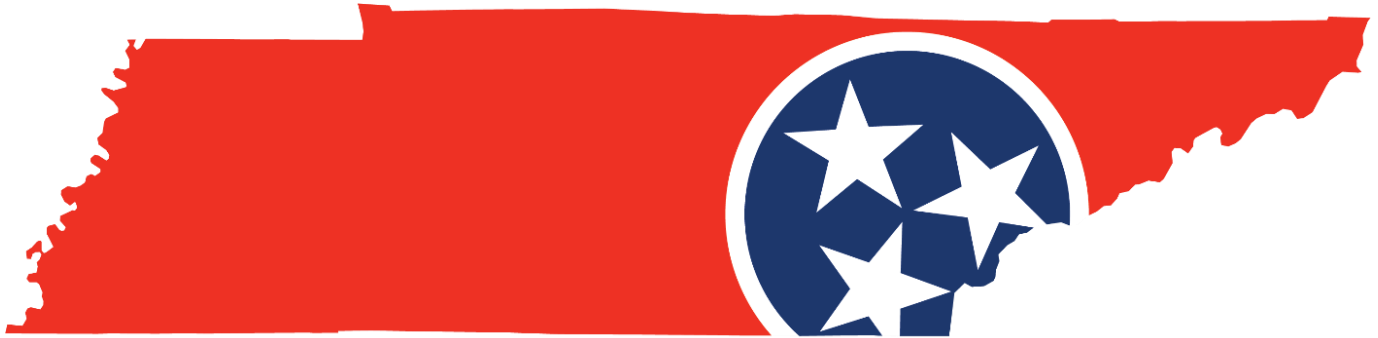


Tennessee Business Enterprises currently operates 110 facilities across the State. These facilities generate over \$20 million in sales annually. The type of facilities managed and operated by the licensed blind vendor include:

- Fully Automated Vending Locations
- Snack Bars
- Cafeterias
- Inmate Commissaries
- Over-the-Counter sales
- Micro Markets

# Key Accomplishments 2020

There were several notable accomplishments by the Vocational Rehabilitation Program in 2020. A few of these accomplishments are highlighted in the sections below.



## ► *Updates from 2019 – Transformation Continues*

As noted in last year's report, the Division of Rehabilitation Services identified five strategic priorities as the foundation to its overall transformation. Each of the priorities aligns with the recommendations of the SRC based on the results of the 2019 Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment.

Strategic Priority	Strategic Goal
<b>Communication</b>	Foster trust and credibility with internal and external stakeholders through reliable, accurate, transparent, and timely two-way communication.
<b>Leadership and Talent Management</b>	Support a professional workforce that is organized and structured to deliver high quality services through effective teams.
<b>Modernization of Systems and Processes</b>	Implement integrated systems and business processes that promote operational efficiency and programmatic effectiveness focused on the customer experience.
<b>Revolutionize Service Delivery</b>	Build innovative and effective service delivery models to better support businesses and individuals with disabilities in driving the achievement of their employment goals.
<b>Data Driven Services and Outcomes</b>	Achieve improved employment outcomes for people with disabilities through data driven rehabilitation services and employment initiatives.

Notable accomplishments in the advancement of these strategic priorities for the year include:

- continued progress on the implementation of a new case management system,
- continued progress on the review and redesign of new staff training, and
- updates to policies and business processes to align with the transformation.

## **New Case Management System – *Aware***

Over the last year, VR staff have been diligently working on the implementation of a new case management system, called *Aware*, that will support their business processes and will increase efficiency for both staff and customers. Many staff from across program lines within the division have been involved on multiple teams responsible for configuring the system, ensuring that data is successfully migrating into the new system from the legacy system, designing interfaces that exchange information with third party systems, providing early testing feedback, and identifying training issues. The new system is scheduled to go-live in May 2021 and will set the stage for future technology transformations.

## **Staff Training**

Two key training initiatives are underway to provide staff with the knowledge and resources to provide high quality vocational rehabilitation services. First, in partnership with the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities, VR has initiated a yearlong training collaborative to equip all staff statewide with the foundational knowledge of person-centered thinking and how to put this philosophy into action through their day-to-day responsibilities and interactions with VR customers. The training will be delivered to all VR staff in three parts and will include person-centered thinking philosophy, tools to bring the philosophy to life, and specialized training tailored to the unique roles and customers our staff serve. The second training initiative is a redesign of new staff training. Expanding beyond its current focus on the VR counselor role, this core training will provide the foundation for all division staff. The new training is scheduled to pilot in late 2020 and roll out to all staff in 2021.

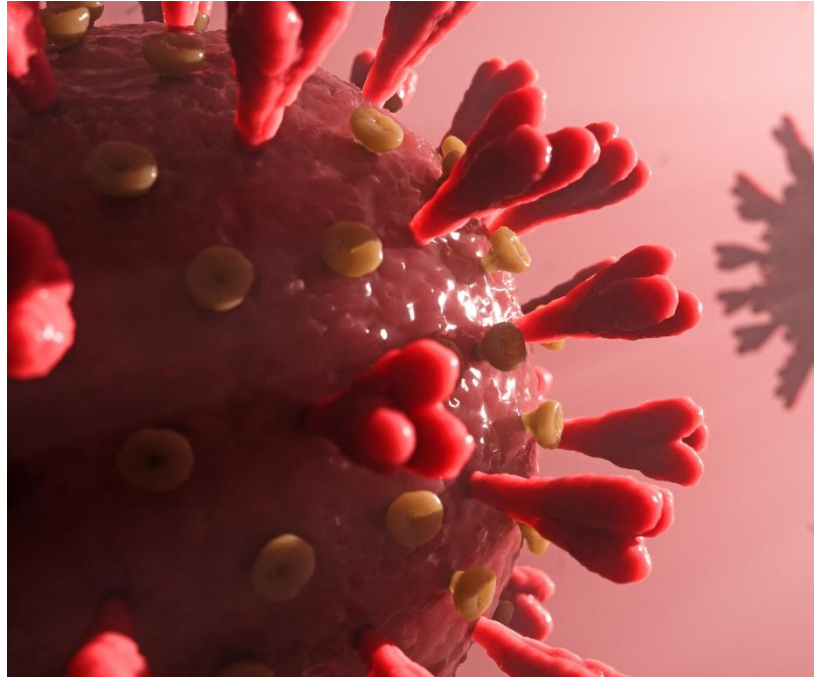
## **Policies and Procedures**

To further support the implementation of the new case management system and to advance the person-centered philosophy embedded within VR culture, the division has been reviewing VR policies and procedures to better align with the overall transformation of the VR program. The first phase included a user-friendly redesign of the VR Policy and Procedure Manual that re-ordered each section of the manual to follow the customer journey through the VR program. The second phase has been focused on reviewing the policies to identify and remove unnecessary restrictions and overly prescriptive language where possible. Finally, the review of policies has and will continue to include a focus on identifying strategies for applying person-centered philosophies to policy. The SRC and other stakeholders will be engaged throughout the review process providing input and feedback on policy drafts prior to the official public comment period that is expected to open in Spring of 2021. Staff and providers will be trained on the new policies and business practices in the late Spring of 2021 prior to the implementation of the new case management system in May 2021.

## ► 2020 Innovations

### COVID-19 Response

It is impossible to prepare a report on the accomplishments and innovations of the Vocational Rehabilitation program in 2020 without addressing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic had on program operations. Overall, the Vocational Rehabilitation program fared extremely well in adapting to virtual and remote service delivery options. In many ways, the VR program's plans for modernization and transformation made the transition less disruptive to service delivery and our customers. And in other ways the pandemic accelerated the transformation in ways we could not have anticipated.



Beginning in March 2020, VR staff were asked to begin working from home or other remote locations while socially distancing as a safety precaution. What began as an effort to stop or slow the spread of COVID-19 became a shining example of transformation, demonstrating the flexibility, creativity, and resiliency of our VR staff. Not only have staff adjusted to this new way of working over the last several months, they have excelled, never missing a beat and continuing to provide excellent customer service, helping customers navigate these uncertain times and ensuring that customers are receiving the services they need in the manner they are most comfortable with.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, VR staff have demonstrated flexibility and resourcefulness in the use of technology, as well as basic VR guidance and counseling methods to ensure continued customer access to services. VR staff are finding themselves using a variety of technology to deliver services, including telephonically, online and web-based, and providing services via distance learning platforms. Staff have reported being able to complete applications for VR services, Individualized Plans for Employment (IPEs), and provide a wide variety of services via these platforms.

Additionally, VR has provided tools and resources to our community rehabilitation providers (CRPs) to support them in providing services in new and innovative ways. Guidance and tools to accept electronic signatures, along with resources on virtual and remote service delivery have all played a key role in increasing the flexibility of VR services and continuing to meet the needs of customers through uncertain times.





## **Tennessee Rehabilitation Center - Smyrna**

Since initiating the new Career and Technical Education (CTE) model on July 22, 2019, the Tennessee Rehabilitation Center - Smyrna (TRC-Smyrna) has seen continued growth in its student population and increased interest in the areas of study offered. Enrollment at TRC-Smyrna in the Fall of 2019 was reaching campus capacity and by the Winter of 2019 nearly all dorm rooms and apartments were full. Students across the state were drawn to the individualized, person-centered approach that led to industry recognized credentials offered by TRC-Smyrna.

TRC-Smyrna suspended on campus learning on March 14, 2020. Within two weeks of the students' departure from campus they began reaching out to instructors asking for work to keep them moving forward in their vocational goals. Instructors began sending assignments to those interested, through email and talking with them on the phone. After determining that on campus learning would remain suspended for the summer quarter, TRC-Smyrna staff began working to identify an on-line platform that could be used for distance learning. Google Classroom was chosen and TRC-Smyrna staff immediately began training on how to use the platform. Within two weeks they had re-written curriculums, re-designed lesson plans, and developed new courses to offer to students through distance learning. Each student was contacted to determine their interest in participating in distance learning and to assess their technology and resource needs.

As a result of these efforts, over 70% of enrolled students elected to participate in distance learning to continue building on skills already obtained in their Area of Study. The distance learning quarter began on June 22, 2020 with students participating in a week of virtual orientation classes that provided training on how to use the platform, how to request a tutor, how to access their advisor, and a general information on student and instructor expectations and distance learning etiquette. Classes began virtually on July 6, 2020.



## Community Tennessee Rehabilitation Centers (CTRCs)

The transformation of the seventeen (17) Community Tennessee Rehabilitation Centers (CTRCs) is underway. With the help of a national consultant and input from the local community, stakeholders, and staff, the CTRCs are implementing their individualized transformation plan. While each plan is



unique and tailored to the needs of the local community, they each reflect the core values and services offered by the vocational rehabilitation program. Using a hub and spokes as the conceptual framework for the service delivery model, the CTRC transforms into a community hub of services and supports. The function of the hub is to develop and coordinate the various services made available to the community through the spokes of the hub. There are 3 major spokes coordinated through the hub. Each spoke offers a variety of services and supports to assist individuals in need of those services. Together the hub and spokes create the ***Road to Independence, Success, and Employment – R.I.S.E.***

- Services within the **INDEPENDENCE** spoke consist of an array of services that include life skills assessments and basic independent living skills to support VR customers.
- Services within the **SUCCESS** spoke consist of services such as self-advocacy, self-determination, assistive technology assessment and assistive technology counseling.
- Services within the **EMPLOYMENT** spoke consist of a full array of more traditional vocational rehabilitation services that include career assessment and career readiness services to support VR customers as well as Pre-ETS services, such as post-secondary counseling, work-based learning, and self-advocacy.

## Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS)

The Vocational Rehabilitation Program continues to make significant progress in the delivery of pre-employment transition services (Pre-ETS) to students with disabilities ages 14-22 across Tennessee. Pre-ETS services include counseling in post-secondary education, career exploration, self-advocacy, workplace readiness, and work-based learning. Even in a school year where student classroom days were cut short due to the pandemic, VR continued to increase the delivery of Pre-ETS services by over 30%. During the 2019-2020 school year, VR's contracted Community Rehabilitation Providers (CRPs) delivered over 56,000 pre-employment transition services to students with disabilities.

In addition to the Pre-ETS services provided by CRPs, VR works directly with local school districts through the Transition School to Work (TSW) program. The TSW program focuses on the provision of Pre-ETS services to VR eligible and potentially eligible high school students with disabilities who are interested in employment after leaving high school. During the 2019-2020 school year, VR operated, through contracts with local education agencies (LEAs), 48 TSW programs across the state. Additionally, as the state faced uncertainty heading into the Fall 2020 school year, VR is proud to be bringing on several new TSW schools, increasing collaboration with schools particularly in the state's most economically distressed areas. Following the TSW application period that ended in May, three new distressed counties submitted a TSW application - Jackson, Perry, and Wayne counties. Additionally, all six existing TSW programs in the distressed counties re-applied for VR funding. These include Lauderdale, Hardeman, McNairy, Grundy, Bledsoe, and Cocke counties. As a result, 60% of the state's distressed counties will receive TSW funds for the 2020-2021 school year, representing a 20% increase over last year.

In June 2019, the VR program launched a new website, Transition TN, to expand the state's capacity to provide high-quality, evidence-based Pre-ETS that lead to successful post-secondary and employment outcomes for students with disabilities. Working with experts from Vanderbilt University-Kennedy Center, Transition TN has proven to be a resounding success, both as a resource for students and parents, but also as a partnership platform for educators, providers, VR, and other stakeholders in the disability community. There are currently more than 6,000 registered Transition TN users, and that number continues to grow.

Content on the site continues to grow as well, with new content recently being added to the Provider Portal to support the work of providers as they deliver services to students. The new content includes courses like Connecting with Employers and Providers and Introduction to Self-Advocacy and a searchable curriculum database to help providers research and identify quality, evidence-based curricula.

Lastly, as we continue to navigate the unprecedented times that a global pandemic has brought upon us, VR has diligently sought guidance on how to continue to provide high-quality Pre-ETS with the unique challenges we now encounter. Together in partnership with Transition Tennessee, VR has created a Virtual Pre-ETS Best Practice Guide. This guide is not meant to provide a definitive solution to every situation that will be encountered, but rather provide general strategies, techniques, tips, and resources for providing Pre-ETS. The guide can be accessed on our website at <https://www.tn.gov/humanservices/ds/vocational-rehabilitation/transition-services.html>.



# Success Stories

## Region 1



Richard started his journey with the Vocational Rehabilitation Program in July 2019. He attended the Tennessee Rehabilitation Center (TRC) in Elizabethton, where he participated in job readiness classes and work adjustment training. Richard worked hard and excelled in his training programs. During this time, Richard also helped take care of his elderly mother. When she passed away, he wanted to start his job search. Richard had never worked outside his home. Through a personal contact at Walmart in Elizabethton, Chuck Hamilton, Elizabethton TRC Manager, set up a meeting for Richard. Chuck and Todd Hopkins, Elizabethton TRC Rehab Assistant, assisted Richard with his resume and application and accompanied him to the job interview. Richard was hired on the spot!

Richard's job was a new COVID-19 affiliated position at the store. It requires him to count customers entering the store to ensure they have not reached their maximum count for social distancing as well as sanitizing carts. Richard was so excited about the opportunity that he accepted full time hours. VR assisted Richard with setting up transportation through NET Trans and regular counseling and guidance for reaching his employment goal. He began working at Walmart on June 3, 2020 and loved the job; but after a couple of shifts, he began to have issues with his legs. He was very worried about not being able to stay in the position. After Anna Hogan, his VR Counselor, and Chuck, TRC Manager talked with him at length, they all decided that it would be best if he reduced his hours. At that point, Richard and his VR team scheduled another meeting with the Walmart management team. Anna and Chuck also reached out to C-Ann Chapman, Business Employment Consultant, and Teresa Smith with the University of



Tennessee Center for Literacy, Education and Employment for information on accommodations and the best way to approach Walmart. Chuck, Todd, and Teresa attended with Richard, and he did a fantastic job articulating the need to reduce his hours. The Walmart Manager told him that she would be glad to reduce his hours to 5 ½ hour shifts (from the previous 8-hour shifts). She also stated that it takes everyone a while to adjust to standing on concrete. She said they did not want to lose him because he was such a great worker, and if VR has anyone else like him to send them their way!

Since that meeting, Richard has continued to work very hard. He was always told at the TRC to stay busy so he began sweeping at Walmart when he wasn't busy doing his main job. When one of the managers couldn't find him at the cart sanitizing station, they went looking for him and found him sweeping inside the store. They say he could sweep the whole store in an hour! They are thrilled with his attitude and initiative. Richard has earned consistent paychecks from working at Walmart which has enabled him to continue using NET Trans on his own. Richard has gained self-advocacy skills, work ethic standards he set for himself, and improved sense of well-being with employment. This has been an amazing opportunity for Richard to use his strengths, give back to the community, make friends and to be able to support himself! We are so proud of his accomplishments!

## Region 2



Melanie came to the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Program as a wheelchair user and had some difficulty with talking. She began telling her personal story of working full-time as a Barista at Starbucks, being a wife, and a mother of a daughter who was around two years old. Melanie explained how life was good for her and her family. On January 9, 2014, she left work not feeling well and on January 10, 2014, woke up paralyzed from the neck down. Melanie was rushed to the hospital and diagnosed with Guillian-Barre syndrome. Melanie's limitations included her

inability to hold her head up, close her left eye, muscles of facial expressions were weak, and she was unable to use her arms or legs.

She worked with Patricia Neal Rehabilitation Center for many months to regain her ability to hold her neck up, talk, eat, use her arms, hands, legs, and feet. Melanie was determined to move forward and achieve the goals she had set for herself in education and employment, while she was going through physical rehabilitation at Patricia Neal Rehabilitation Center. Melanie worked with the VR Program to achieve her goals for a career.

In 2015, she was accepted to Maryville College and graduated in May of 2019 with a Bachelor of Arts/Psychology (Counseling). Throughout her educational experience, Melanie kept a positive attitude and continued to heal physically. Melanie went from having a personal care attendant and using a wheelchair (no feeling from the neck down), to crutches, eventually walking on her own without assistance and no longer needing a personal care attendant. Melanie's family has also grown as she now has two daughters.

Melanie continued to work with the VR Program to obtain employment. She was referred to the Access Program in June 2019 to assist with job placement. Melanie accepted employment with Camelot of Smokey TN, working as a Social Worker full time with benefits. Melanie is a role model for many due to her perseverance in achieving success.

## Sensory Services East

Mr. Gary Forester is a 65-year-old gentleman with Retinitis Pigmentosa. He had fallen several times on his farm and in the community, because of his declining and limited field of vision. He is the primary caregiver for his 93-year-old father and assists his brother with tasks such as laundry and preparing meals. His barriers were scheduling transportation and medical appointments over the phone for himself and his father, in addition to navigating his community safely and independently. Mr. Forester contacted the IL program in October 2019 and requested services from the Independent Living Older Blind (ILOB) program.

Rehabilitation Teacher (RT), Nancy Feist, administered a thorough Daily Living Skills Assessment. As a result of the assessment Mr. Forester was offered different equipment options and shown techniques to help him meet his goals for independence. Mr. Forester chose Orientation & Mobility (O&M) services to assist with orienting and navigating his surroundings. A partner agency, Opportunity East, provided O and M training. Mr. Forester completed O&M services prior to the pandemic, and reports that he is more confident with his ability to navigate his farm and community. Mr. Forester also uses a mobility cane he received from the Independent Living program.



Mr. Forester also wanted to use his phone independently. RT assisted Mr. Forester with applying for an iPhone through the Tennessee Regulatory Authority/Telecommunications Devices Access Program (TDAP). After receiving his phone, the RT and Mr. Forester worked together through remote services and social distancing during home visits to provide the initial setup and training to use the iPhone. Mr. Forester used his iPhone to report that he is now able to easily manage the scheduling of his and his father's medical appointments and transportation.

RT trained Mr. Forester to use the SmartLux, a digital magnifier, to assist with his goals of reading mail, medication administration, and cooking meals. As a result of training from the RT, Mr. Forester is now able to read his mail and prescription bottles as well as that of his father's, using this device. Mr. Forester also learned techniques to help with identifying and storing medication. He reported that the technique to open the bottle of pills over a bowl has been the most helpful to prevent losing pills. He also found that marking the kitchen appliances and setting the temperature for preparing meals to be helpful. Mr. Forester reported that he can prepare meals for his family again, read the labels and directions on food packages and cans, and he can also see the finished meal with the magnifier. RT provided Mr. Forester with information about agencies and programs in his area providing emergency resources. He was able to connect with these services and get groceries for his family.

Mr. Forester states that his independence far exceeds what he had ever expected and is very thankful for services.

## Region 4

Charlie Guffey sought out Vocational Rehabilitation services in 2010 while she was a senior in high school. She suffered from back pain and was unable to sit, stand, or walk for extended periods of time and had leg numbness. She knew from the beginning that she wanted to be an attorney and discussed her dreams with her counselor. Ms. Guffey was serious about pursuing her dream: she completed dual enrollment classes in high school to get ahead in college and had been working for an attorney for a short period of time. Ms. Guffey was accepted into and started attending Tennessee



Technological University. During her time in school, her Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor provided counseling on her career path, discussing options that Ms. Guffey had, and helped her to figure out the path that would support her in achieving her career goal. She passed the necessary examinations and obtained the requirements to teach and wanted to do that in the event she was unable to get into law school. She did not need to worry about that because when she applied to the Nashville School of Law, she was accepted! Ms. Guffey graduated with her Bachelor of Science in Education in May of 2014 and started her law program in August of 2014.

Ms. Guffey moved to Nashville and graduated from the Nashville School of Law in June 2019 and proceeded to pass the bar on her first attempt. Ms. Guffey was able to move back to Cookeville, where she is originally from, and is now employed by the law firm Romer and Lane, the same law firm where she previously worked as a Clerk in high school. She works with real estate and personal injury cases and her cases continue to grow. Ms. Guffey reports that she, “has had a really awesome first year of practice and am able to start my own firm, which I am in the process of doing.” Her new law firm will be called Guffey Law. She has expressed her gratitude, sharing how VR was a blessing to her in completing law school. She reports that her Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor, Tammie Winningham, went above and beyond to help her in any way she could. Ms. Guffey is excited about her future and the new opportunities waiting for her.

## Region 6

In 2016 Molly became a customer of the Vocational Rehabilitation Program to explore career opportunities that were in alignment with her individual strengths and abilities. She had been employed as a licensed educator but was unable to return to the classroom setting due to high levels of anxiety. She was receiving Social Security Disability Insurance benefits and determined eligible for the Vocational Rehabilitation program.

During this time Molly recognized that she needed to think outside the box in what her career path would be and what were her true interests. She expressed she always liked math and problem solving. Following several meetings with her Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor, it was determined engineering would be an appropriate field for her to pursue. Vocational Rehabilitation was able to assist Molly in training toward her career goal.



Molly completed classes that were available through Columbia State and then transferred to Lipscomb University. Molly was active in her program and forward thinking by participating in an internship through Lipscomb at the NASA location in Huntsville, Alabama for one semester. Molly maintained the relationships she built during that time and was notified of an opening when she graduated from Lipscomb. She was hired by JACOBS, which is a contractor at the NASA location and now works as an engineer full time. Molly worked hard to achieve her goal and always took advantage of opportunities that would assist in her success. She is excited about the opportunity to make a difference in her career and represent women in the engineering field.

## Region 7

Joseph Streetman is a recovering addict who also has struggles with bipolar disorder and schizophrenia. He applied for VR services after being referred by Ms. Virginia Lott from Horizons prior to widespread business closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor David Lee gave a presentation at Horizons informing the staff about VR services. Ms. Lott determined that Joseph would be a good candidate for the services and supports Vocational Rehabilitation could provide. Joseph's goals were to find employment, get his GED, and develop skills that will allow him to continue down a positive path in life.

Mr. Streetman was concerned about having a felony charge and was on probation for 3 years. Joseph indicated to the VR Counselor that he was interested in finding employment so that he could be self-sufficient and support his own needs. Joseph shared with the VR Counselor that he has difficulty working in large groups, as he becomes angry due to his disability. At Quinco he receives services that assist him in obtaining and maintain employment. In working with his Quinco mental health counselor, he has been able to work past these problems.

Joseph's goals were to find employment, get his GED, and develop skills that will allow him to continue down a positive path in life.

The Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor contacted the STAR Center and Joseph began working with Ms. Michelle Livingston on job readiness, including creating an updated resume and reviewing and practicing interview skills. Linda Malone, also from the STAR Center, provided job development and placement services which included assisting him with finding and applying for available positions in his areas of interest. Following the completion of preparative services, Mr. Streetman was hired in a position making \$14 an hour and working 40 hours per week. He has been successfully employed at Fluid Routing Solutions as an assembler/fabricator, making rubber and plastic beltings and hoses.



Mr. Streetman is on track with his goals and is pleased with the progress he has made on the job with the assistance of VR and The Star Center. His next goal is to complete his GED and continue making positive changes in his life.

## Region 9

Kiara Benson has been a customer with Vocational Rehabilitation since 2017. Her employment aspiration was to work in the field of electrical engineering. As a young child, her grandfather instilled a love for electrical engineering and tinkering. Before



applying for Vocational Rehabilitation services, Ms. Benson faced some academic deficiencies. She did not request Dyslexia related training/services because she self-taught alternate learning skills. (Auditory instead of reading, etc.) At that time, Ms. Benson had a 2.20 grade point average. She continued her studies at the University of Memphis, Mississippi State University, and Tuskegee University for Electrical Engineering, where she now maintains a 3.078 average with pending December 2020 graduation. She said, "TN VR has been the only entity to accept my issues (barriers) and ask how they affected my performance."

**"TN VR has been the only entity to accept my issues (barriers) and ask how they affected my performance."**

VR provided resume editing, interview skills and employment development. She received counseling regarding which direction of study, class selection, and how that would lead to her desired goal. Tutorial services were used during her senior year to assist with explaining electrical/math concepts faster for better clarity/comprehension. These supports gave Ms. Benson the tools she needed to succeed both in and out of the classroom.

She was issued specialized equipment during her final internship to assist in completing complex tasks for use with Eaton dedicated software for electrical projects. This equipment helped create Process instrumentation diagrams for Southwest Airlines equipment library using Electrical AutoCAD. Counseling and guidance were provided throughout her senior year to create a range of skills and talents to demonstrate during interviews. She completed internships

with Lucite Industries and Eaton Corporation. Ms. Benton has served as the Society of Women Engineers Senator-Proxy (2018-2020), Electrical Engineering Teaching Assistant (2019-2020), and was awarded the Chevron Scholarship (2019-2020), and the Engineering Alumni Achievement Scholarship (2019-2020). She is a member of the National Society of Black Engineers (2016-present) and the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (2017-present). Ms. Benton has also received an offer to join the Boeing Aerospace Company.

The partnership between Ms. Benson and VR has allowed her to flourish and she is on her way to accomplishing her goal of becoming an electrical engineer and realizing the dream of her grandfather.

## Sensory Services West

Mr. Patterson was not surprised when he initially noticed a decline in his hearing once he reached late adulthood, due to a genetic predisposition to hearing loss. However, following an unfortunate shooting range incident Mr. Patterson experienced a noticeable shift in his hearing once again. Like many others, he did his best to communicate without assistive devices for quite some time. He was missing important details at work, at home, and in the deer woods. Simple activities such as watching television and conversing with loved ones slowly became more frustrating. Mr. Patterson reached out Vocational Rehabilitation program for assistance in retaining his current employment and participating in the activities he enjoyed again.

He is looking forward to being able to communicate with his new grandson, Maddox

Mr. David Patterson has been the Plant Controller at Teknor Apex for nearly twenty years. His job duties are vast and necessary to the everyday operations that help keep the plant running smoothly. He is responsible for overseeing several major functions at the Brownsville, Tennessee location. A large portion of his job involves communicating well with others in both a supervisory and collaborative role to ensure that many financial decisions are handled effectively. Mr. Patterson is also involved in supporting the accounting staff at the Pawtucket, Rhode Island location. Per recommendations from his audiologist, partnered with the individual considerations for Mr. Patterson's job and home life, a specific set of hearing aids were purchased for him. Mr. Patterson experienced a noticeable improvement in his hearing and moreover his work performance within a few short weeks of receiving the hearing aids.

Within a few months, Mr. Patterson reported an overall improved quality of life. He enjoys having more conversations both at home and at work, as well as being able to hear the television at a normal volume. Mr. Patterson says, "he is looking forward to being able to communicate with his new grandson, Maddox".



# Vocational Rehabilitation Program Outcomes

In addition to the success stories shared throughout this report, the tables and figures included below offer additional information regarding the performance of the VR program. In order to align this report with the VR program's federal reporting and the state's Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Combined state plan, we have adjusted the reporting timeframe provided in this report from the federal fiscal year to program year. The table below provides the full year name, year abbreviation, start date and end date for each year.

Year Name	Start Date	End Date
State Fiscal Year 2020 (SFY20)	July 1, 2019	June 30, 2020
VR Program Year 2019 (PY19)	July 1, 2019	June 30, 2020
Federal Fiscal Year 2020 (FFY20)	October 1, 2019	September 30, 2020

## ► VR Program Statistics

Program Participation	FFY2017	FFY2018	FFY2019	PY19/SFY20
New Applications	5,892	5,532	5,990	4,823
Total number of people with disabilities served	15,505	14,273	13,434	12,991
Number of persons obtaining employment/closed successfully	1,859	1,620	1,606	1,494

Return on Investment	FFY2018	FFY2019	PY19/SFY20
Average Hours Worked	28 hours per week	30 hours per week	30 hours per week
Average Hourly Wage	\$10.30 per hour	\$11.13 per hour	\$11.14 per hour
Total SSA Reimbursements	\$2.2 million	\$1.6 million	\$1.9 million

# Vocational Rehabilitation Satisfaction



Every three years, the SRC collaborates with the Tennessee Department of Human Services, Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS) to determine the vocational rehabilitation needs of Tennesseans with disabilities. The Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA) is required as part of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 as amended by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act. The CSNA serves as the basis for state plan goals, objectives, and strategies and is used as a tool for informing the public and enhancing community awareness about the VR program. It also provides a means to assess consumer satisfaction with VR services during that particular year. The results of the 2019 CSNA were shared in last year's report and can be accessed on the DHS website at <https://www.tn.gov/humanservices/ds/councils-and-committees/state-rehabilitation-council.html>.

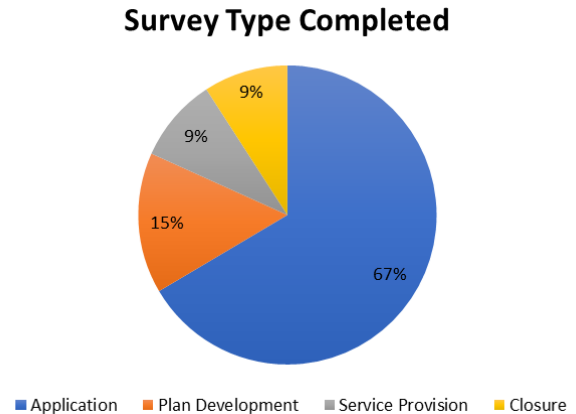
Another tool used to assess customer satisfaction are ongoing surveys of VR customers at four significant stages of the VR customer journey – application, plan development, service provision, and closure. Specifically, these surveys are provided to customers through key documents that are mailed to the customer at these stages of their journey. Each survey is a quick five question survey designed to gain essential feedback without overburdening the customer. The complete list of survey questions for each survey are provided in the appendix.

## Trends

In a review of the surveys completed between July 1, 2019 and June 30, 2020, there are several trends worth noting.

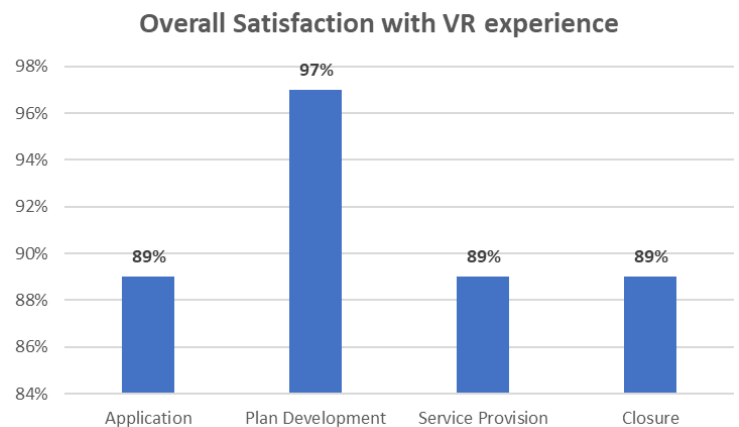
### Figure 1

First, VR customer participation in completing the survey is highest at the application phase of the customer journey. As shown in Figure 1, 67% of the surveys completed were the application survey. Participation in completing the surveys drops off considerably after application with plan development, service provision, and closure accounting for 33% of surveys combined.



### Figure 2

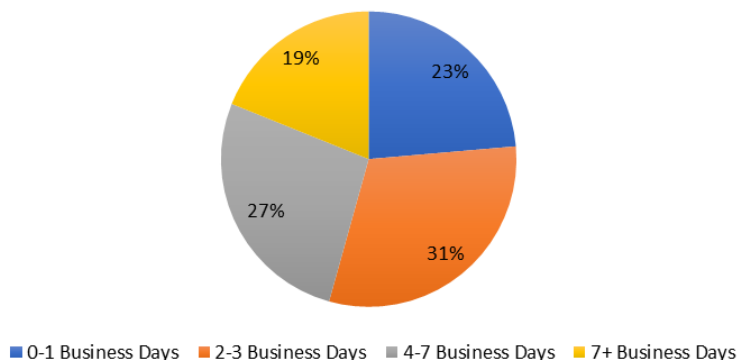
Nonetheless, when looking at all surveys combined, the overall customer satisfaction with their VR experience is high. As shown in Figure 2, customers are most satisfied with their VR experience at plan development (97%), followed by an 89% satisfaction rate with application, service provision, and closure.



**Figure 3**

Other trends of note at the application stage include the timeliness with which customers were able to schedule an appointment to apply for VR services. As shown in Figure 3, over 80% of customers report that they were able to schedule their appointment within 7 business days.

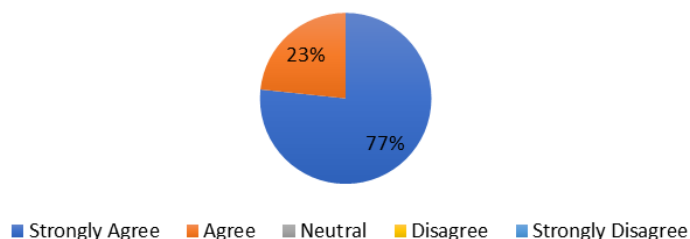
**I was able to schedule an appointment to apply for VR services within:**



**Figure 4**

During plan development, two key themes emerged. First, nearly 100% of customers who responded to the survey reported that they were engaged as a full partner in the decision-making process.

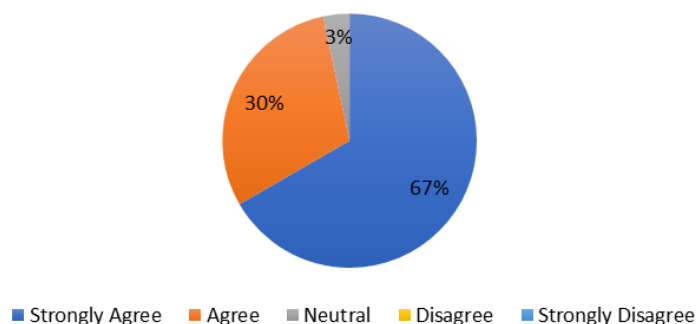
**I was a full partner in the decision making process for the selection of my employment goal, the services necessary to help me reach my employment goal, and the service providers.**



**Figure 5**

Second, an equally high percentage of customers responded that their VR counselor listened to their ideas and suggestions.

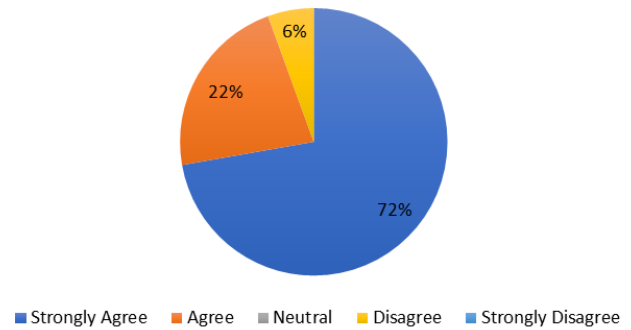
**I felt my VR Counselor listened to my ideas and suggestions when writing my plan for employment.**



**Figure 6**

Throughout the provision of VR services, customers reported that they felt their VR counselor understood their disability, their needs, and their concerns.

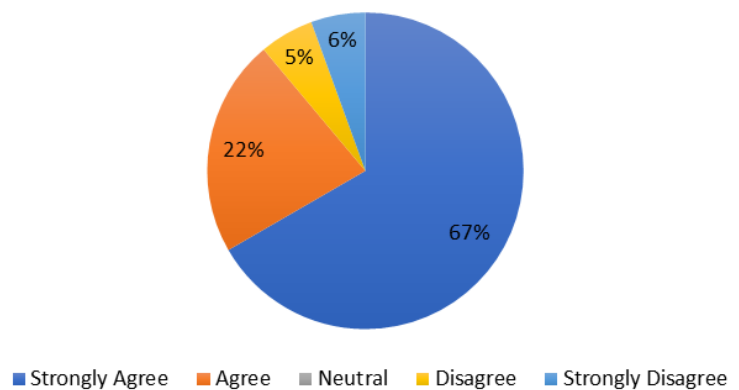
**I feel that my VR Counselor understands my disability, my needs, and my concerns.**



**Figure 7**

Finally, at case closure survey respondents reported agreement to the statement that VR was committed to helping them obtain employment. Sixty-seven percent strongly agreed and 22% agreed for a total of 89%.

**I feel that VR was committed to help me obtain employment.**



While these surveys provide a glimpse into the reported satisfaction of VR customers, there is still considerable work for the VR program to do in increasing the number of customers that complete surveys at each stage of the process. Increasing customer engagement and improving the tools available to capture the voice of the customer are strategic priorities for both the Department of Human Services and the Division of Rehabilitation Services. Over the course of the next year, the department is working to implement an enhanced, Voice-of-Customer (VOC) program to better gauge customer sentiment and understand customer preferences. The department will use customer insights to define and prioritize experience requirements and opportunities for improvement.



# Plans for the Future

As noted in last year's report, the information collected in the 2019 CSNA revealed that individuals who interact with the VR program believe that VR provides beneficial and much-needed services to Tennesseans who need it. However, that same information also illustrated that the program has opportunities to improve and strengthen service delivery, internal and external communication, and efforts to train and retain VR's most important asset – its staff.

To that end, the VR program, in collaboration with the SRC, identified specific actions for VR to take. This list is included below along with a status update on the progress made to date.

- Continued implementation of the new case management system, *Aware* (target implementation date June/July 2021). **Status: In progress. Target Implementation Date: May 2021**
- Review and revision of VR policies and procedures to ensure alignment with the division's mission, vision, and values – included a renewed emphasis on person-centered practices. **Status: In progress. Target Implementation Date: May 2021**
- Statewide implementation of person-centered training for all staff. **Status: In progress. Target Completion Date: July 2021**
- Design and development of the plan to transform the 17 Community Tennessee Rehabilitation Centers based on the findings and recommendations of Synergy Consulting partners. **Status: In progress. Implementation Date: October 2020**
- Assess and evaluate the division's approach to professional development including an update and re-design of new counselor training, general staff on-boarding and other professional development opportunities for staff on an ongoing basis. **Status: In progress. Target Implementation Date: December 2020**
- Assess and evaluate the division's staffing to include a review of position classification and compensation for alignment with the roles and responsibilities of a modernized, community-based vocational rehabilitation program. **Status: In progress. Target Implementation Date: March 2021**
- Improve and expand opportunities for customer engagement throughout the vocational rehabilitation process, gathering feedback and input from VR customers at various points throughout their employment journey. **Status: In progress. Target Implementation Date: June 2021**

In addition to the on-going efforts listed above, the VR program set some specific performance goals for program year 2020 (July 1, 2020 – June 30, 2021) to further its transformation and increase its service to Tennesseans with disabilities.

- Reduce administrative tasks through the implementation of innovative technologies that enable more service delivery time with customers through a virtual customer chat communication channel. **Target: 12 chat flows by June 2021**
- Reduce the average number of days to develop an Individual Plan for Employment (IPE). **Target: 56-day average by June 2021**
- Increase the number of customers engaged in VR who are working towards employment and who exit the program in competitive, integrated employment. **Target: 5% increase by June 2021**
- Increase student access to Pre-Employment Transition Services through the use of virtual or remote learning. **Target: Increase the number of providers offering virtual or remote learning by June 2021**
- Enhance the customer experience and organizational efficiency by exploring alternative methodologies for caseload assignment and distribution. **Target: Develop a set of recommendations for how to better allocate staff and distribute caseloads to achieve optimal performance and customer service for VR customers by June 2021.**

Through these transformation efforts, the Tennessee Vocational Rehabilitation program, together with our community partners and stakeholders, including the State Rehabilitation Council, are transforming the VR program to better meet the needs of the individuals we serve, the businesses we rely on, and the communities we live in.



# State Rehabilitation Council

## ► **Mission**

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

## ► **Vision**

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

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***As a result of the 1992 amendments to the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, each state VR agency was required to establish a State Rehabilitation Advisory Committee. The role of the committee was strengthened in the 1998 amendments to the Act when each state was mandated to establish a State Rehabilitation Council.***

***The mandate for the SRC and the definitions of its composition and functions are delineated in Section 105 within Title I of the Rehabilitation Act, as amended, and in Title 34 Parts 361.16 and 361.17 of the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR).***

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## ► **Responsibilities and Functions**

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

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

- Review, analyze, and advise DHS/DRS regarding responsibilities related to:
  - eligibility, including order of selection;
  - effectiveness of services provided; and
  - functions performed by state agencies that affect the employment of individuals with disabilities.
- Partner with DRS to:
  - develop, agree to, and review VR goals and priorities;

- evaluate the effectiveness of the VR program and submit reports of progress to the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) commissioner.
- Assist in preparation of the VR services portion of the combined state plan and amendments to the plan, applications, reports, needs assessments, and evaluations.
- Conduct a review and analysis of the effectiveness and consumer satisfaction with:
  - functions performed by the DRS;
  - VR services provided; and
  - the employment outcomes achieved by eligible individuals.
- Prepare and submit an annual report to the Governor and the RSA commissioner on the status of VR programs in Tennessee.
- Coordinate activities with other councils to avoid duplication of efforts and enhance the number of individuals served.
- Coordinate and establish working relationships between DRS and the Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC) and centers for independent living within Tennessee.
- Perform other functions consistent with VR services deemed appropriate by the SRC.

## ► **Membership**

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

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

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## ► **Officers for FY2020**

### **Chair**

**Christina Clift**

***Representative of Disability Groups***

**From: Millington**

**VR Region: 9**

### **Vice Chair**

**Lee Brown**

***Community Rehabilitation Program***

**From: Pulaski**

**VR Region: 6**

### **Secretary**

**Susan Johnson**

***Business, Industry and Labor***

**From: Maryville**

**VR Region: 2**

### **Immediate Past Chair**

**Becky Allen**

***Client Assistance Program***

**From: Knoxville**

**VR Region: 2**

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

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## ► **Members for FY2020**

### **David Cole**

***Business, Industry and Labor***

**From: Oakland**

**VR Region: 9**

### **Rebecca Bordenet-French**

***Business, Industry, and Labor***

**From: Manchester**

**VR Region: 5**

### **Lou Conley**

***Representative of Disability Groups***

**From: Memphis**

**VR Region: 9**

### **Greyson Jennings**

***Current/Former VR Applicant/Recipient***

**From: Johnson City**

**VR Region: 1**

### **Joey Ellis**

***Parent Training and Information Center***

**From: Nashville**

**VR Region: 5**

### **Paula Knisley**

***Director of VR Program***

**From: Nashville**

**VR Region: 5**

**Kate Martin**  
***State Education Agency***  
**From:** Nashville  
**VR Region:** 5

**Laura Payne**  
***Current/Former VR Applicant/Recipient***  
**From:** Knoxville  
**VR Region:** 2

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

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

**Deniece Thomas**  
***Workforce Investment Board***  
**From:** Nashville  
**VR Region:** 5

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

**Wanda Willis**  
***Representative of Disability Group***  
**From:** Nashville  
**VR Region:** 5



## ► Accomplishments for FY2020



- Held four SRC quarterly meetings to conduct SRC business.
- Held multiple conference calls to conduct SRC committee business and to prepare for quarterly meetings.
- Held Fall 2019 SRC member training sessions for all SRC members to include information regarding VR services as well as training regarding the role and responsibilities of the SRC.
- Prepared FY2019 Annual Report with the DHS Division of Rehabilitation Services.
- Partnered with VR to conduct the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment, which was submitted to RSA in the fall of 2019. This process involved multiple meetings and phone calls for the Consumer Satisfaction and Needs Assessment Committee as well as the involvement of the full SRC in the final review of items to be included in the assessment surveys. The full SRC received feedback from the surveys and the committee, along with the SRC officers, identifying the key priorities to be addressed by VR.
- Made contact with the office of Governor Lee via DHS to monitor the appointment of two previously nominated SRC membership positions which were subsequently appointed.
- Held a quarterly meeting at the Tennessee Rehabilitation Center (TRC) in order to gather information on the transformation of its training programs and the impact it has had on VR customers. Members of the SRC also received an update from the consultants on the transformation of the Community Tennessee Rehabilitation Centers (CTRCs).
- Held a training session for SRC members regarding Project SEARCH, which was jointly conducted by the VR Transition Director and with two Project SEARCH site coordinators.
- Educated state legislators during Disability Day on the Hill on the role of the SRC and how increasing funding for the VR program could assist Tennesseans to gain employment as well as the impact that it has on communities across the state.
- Established a committee to examine and identify policies or practices within the VR program that could be biased or discriminatory towards a particular group of customers.
- Worked on updating the current bylaws.
- Continued participation in the National Coalition of State Rehabilitation Councils (NCSRC) via participation in national quarterly conference calls.
- SRC Vice Chair Lee Brown attended the NCSRC Fall Training Conference in October 2019.
- Participated in call with Rehabilitation Services Administration staff and SRC representatives designed to identify ways for RSA to better support grantees and improve program performance, particularly that of the VR program. Additionally, the SRC of Tennessee submitted written feedback via information provided to the NCSRC.



## ► ***FY2021 SRC Quarterly Meeting Schedule***

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

- December 10, 2020
- March 11, 2021
- June 10, 2021
- September 9, 2021

## ► ***Join the SRC***

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





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# VR Customer Service Survey

## Tennessee VR Customer Service Survey - Application

Recently, you applied for services with the Vocational Rehabilitation program. In our ongoing efforts to provide quality services, please take a few moments to answer the questions below. Your honest, thoughtful, and prompt reply will assist us in evaluating and improving our services to you and other VR customers. Have a wonderful day!

1. I was able to schedule an appointment to apply for VR services within:

- ☐ Business Days
- ☐ 2-3 Business Days
- ☐ 4-7 Business Days
- ☐ 7+ Business Days
- ☐ If longer, please specify:

2. I was treated with courtesy and respect during the application process.

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

3. It was explained to me that the purpose of the VR program is to provide opportunities for individuals with disabilities to improve their lives through employment.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Unsure

4. The VR office was clean and organized:

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

5. Overall, I am \_\_\_\_\_ with my experience with Vocational Rehabilitation.

- ☐ Very Satisfied
- ☐ Satisfied
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Dissatisfied
- ☐ Very Dissatisfied
- ☐ Comments:

### **Tennessee VR Customer Service Survey - Plan Development**

Recently, you developed an Individual Plan for Employment with your VR Counselor. In our ongoing efforts to provide quality services, please take a few moments to answer the questions below. Your honest, thoughtful, and prompt reply will assist us in evaluating and improving our services to you and other VR customers. Have a wonderful day!

1. I was able to reach my counselor or another Vocational Rehabilitation Service staff member within:

- ☐ 0 – 3 Business Days
- ☐ 4 – 5 Business Days
- ☐ 6 – 7 Business Days
- ☐ 7+ Business Days
- ☐ If longer, please specify:

2. I was a full partner in the decision-making process for the selection of my employment goal, the services necessary to help me reach my employment goal, and the service providers.

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

3. I felt my Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor listened to my ideas and suggestions when writing my plan for employment.

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

4. I am \_\_\_\_\_ with the plan my counselor and I developed to meet my employment goal.

- ☐ Very Satisfied
- ☐ Satisfied
- ☐ Somewhat Satisfied
- ☐ Not Very Satisfied
- ☐ Not Satisfied At All

5. Overall, I am \_\_\_\_\_ with my experience with Vocational Rehabilitation.

- ☐ Very Satisfied
- ☐ Satisfied
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Dissatisfied
- ☐ Very Dissatisfied
- ☐ Other (please specify)

### **Tennessee VR Customer Service Survey - Service Provision**

Within the last year you began receiving services from the Vocational Rehabilitation program. In our ongoing efforts to provide quality services, please take a few moments to answer the questions below. Your honest, thoughtful, and prompt reply will assist us in evaluating and improving our services to you and other VR customers. Have a wonderful day!

1. My Counselor contacts me on a regular basis, every \_\_\_\_\_.

- ☐ 30 Days
- ☐ 60 Days
- ☐ 90 Days
- ☐ 120 Days
- ☐ 120+ Days

2. I am \_\_\_\_\_ with the quality of service from Vocational Rehabilitation.

- ☐ Very Satisfied
- ☐ Satisfied
- ☐ Somewhat Satisfied
- ☐ Not Very Satisfied
- ☐ Not Satisfied At All



3. I feel that my Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor understands my disability, my needs, and my concerns.

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

4. I am \_\_\_\_\_ with the quality of services from my service providers.

- ☐ Very Satisfied
- ☐ Satisfied
- ☐ Somewhat Satisfied
- ☐ Not Very Satisfied
- ☐ Not Satisfied At All

5. Overall, I am \_\_\_\_\_ with my experience with Vocational Rehabilitation.

- ☐ Very Satisfied
- ☐ Satisfied
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Dissatisfied
- ☐ Very Dissatisfied
- ☐ Other (please specify)

### **Tennessee VR Customer Service Survey - Closure**

Recently, your case was closed from the Vocational Rehabilitation program. In our ongoing efforts to provide quality services, please take a few moments to answer the questions below. Your honest, thoughtful, and prompt reply will assist us in evaluating and improving our services to you and other VR customers. Have a wonderful day!

1. My counselor informed me of the roles of the Client Assistance Program at: (check all that apply)

- ☐ Application
- ☐ IPE Plan Development
- ☐ Priority Category Assignment
- ☐ Suspension or Reduction of Services
- ☐ Case Closure

- All of the Above
- None of the Above

2. I was able to communicate my needs to my counselor.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

3. I was \_\_\_\_\_ in planning my rehabilitation program.

- Very Involved
- Somewhat Involved
- Not At All Involved

4. I feel that Vocational Rehabilitation was committed to helping me obtain employment.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

5. Overall, I am \_\_\_\_\_ with my experience with Vocational Rehabilitation.

- Very Satisfied
- Satisfied
- Neutral
- Dissatisfied
- Very Dissatisfied
- Other (please specify)

# 2020 Staff Updates



**Ryan Barnhart,**  
**CTRC East TN Area Manager,**  
**Division of Rehabilitation Services**

Ryan Barnhart began working for the Tennessee Department of Human Services (DHS), Division of Rehabilitation Services in April 2015. He started as a Field Supervisor 1, then became the Cookeville TRC Manager in 2017. In 2019 he was promoted to the position of Program Manager over the East Tennessee Rehabilitation Centers.

Ryan was born in Canton, Ohio. He has also lived in Staten Island, NY and Sevierville, TN. For the past 31 years he has called Cookeville home. Ryan received a Master of Arts in Public Policy. Ryan and his wife will celebrate their 25th anniversary this coming June. They have 3 beautiful daughters. He has also had the privilege of being a minister for almost 20 years. Currently he is a pastor at a small Presbyterian church in his local hometown. In his spare time, he enjoys spending time with family, as well as rooting for The Ohio State Buckeyes!

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**Mandy Board,**  
**West TN Area Manager of Business Services,**  
**Division of Rehabilitation Services**

Mandy assumed her role within the Division of Rehabilitation Services in November 2019. In this role, Mandy provides leadership and oversight for Business Services across 21 counties in VR Regions 7, 8, and 9 in West Tennessee.

Mandy started working for the Tennessee Department of Human Services as a Pre-ETS Specialist with Vocational Rehabilitation in April 2019. She has worked with local Community Rehabilitation Providers and schools in Shelby County to facilitate providing pre-employment transition services to students with disabilities. She has a Bachelor of General Studies degree from the University of Michigan (Ann Arbor). She has certification in Non-Profit Management and is a certified Employment Training Specialist. She has over 10 years of experience working with Vocational Rehabilitation programs.

Prior to joining DHS, Mandy worked for Goodwill Industries of Mid-Michigan as a Workforce Development Manager where she developed, implemented and managed job placement

programs, business development programs, community based vocational assessment programs, and Pre-ETS programs across a multi-county area. Throughout her time with Goodwill, she was actively involved in the communities she served raising awareness of the benefits of hiring people with disabilities and building strong relationships with local businesses to hire the individuals Goodwill served. She is looking forward to building relationships with local employers and advocating for the hiring of people we serve.

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**Linda Fisher,  
Rehabilitation Center Manager – Shelbyville,  
Division of Rehabilitation Services**

Linda assumed this new role within the Division of Rehabilitation Services in March 2020. As a manager, Linda provides leadership and oversight for the team at the Community Tennessee Rehabilitation Center (CTRC) in Shelbyville. Her team provides services to residents of Bedford County and the surrounding area.

Linda started her employment with Tennessee State Government with the Tennessee Department of Health in October 1993. She transferred to the Department of Human Services (DHS), Division of Rehabilitation Services in May 1997 and found her career. She left Tennessee briefly from 2007-2012 to first pursue further graduate studies in Rehabilitation and Special Education at Auburn University then to work as a Certified Rehabilitation Counselor (CRC) in Georgia. She returned to Middle Tennessee in order to be closer to family and to work for Tennessee DHS, VR in March 2012. Over the years, Linda has held various positions within DHS' VR program including Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor I, II, and Masters, Instructor for the Blind, and Field Supervisor 1.

Linda resides in Shelbyville, Tennessee, with her son, Alex, and mother, Ophelia. She earned a Master of Education in Rehabilitation Services from Auburn University and is pursuing her Master of Science in Management/Organizational Leadership from Middle Tennessee State University. She is a Certified Rehabilitation Counselor (CRC) and has been since 2007. In her free time, Linda enjoys spending time with her family, reading, and watching movies.

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**Pam Furlong,  
CTRC Middle TN Area Manager,  
Division of Rehabilitation Services**

Pam assumed her current role in October 2019. In this position, Pam provides leadership and oversight for the six Community Tennessee Rehabilitation Centers in middle Tennessee.

Pam started her career with the Tennessee Department of Human Services (DHS), Division of Rehabilitation Services in May 2006. She began this journey as a Rehabilitation Behavioral Instructor in the JOBS program at the Tennessee Rehabilitation Center in Smyrna. In 2010, Pam was promoted to a Rehabilitation Training Center Manager and has worked in this role at the Franklin and Murfreesboro centers.

Pam received a Bachelor of Science degree in Rehabilitations Services from Wright State University, Dayton, Ohio and a Master of Science degree in Rehabilitation Counseling from the University of Wisconsin – Stout. She has been a Certified Rehabilitation Counselor since 2010. Pam and her husband, Denny, live in Smyrna, TN. She spends her free time with her children and grandchildren.



**Charles “Chuck” Hamilton,  
Rehabilitation Center Manager - Elizabethton,  
Division of Rehabilitation Services**

Chuck assumed this role within the Division of Rehabilitation Services in December 2020. In this role, Chuck provides supervision for the Community Rehabilitation Center in Elizabethton which serves Carter, Johnson, Unicoi, Washington, and Sullivan Counties.

Chuck began his journey with the Tennessee Department of Human Services (DHS), Division of Rehabilitation Services in March of 2012. He began work as a Rehabilitation Assistant, a position he held for nearly 8 years at the Tennessee Rehabilitation Center in Elizabethton, before receiving his promotion to manager. Before joining the state, Chuck has worked in both the retail and customer service industries.

Chuck resides in Elizabethton, Tennessee, with his wife Brandi and two daughters Brenna and Evie. He has a Bachelor of Science Degree in Psychology with a minor in Sociology from East Tennessee State University. In his free time, Chuck enjoys spending time with family and playing music. Christmas is Chuck’s favorite Holiday.



**Derek Hane,  
Rehabilitation Center Manager –  
Manchester, Division of Rehabilitation Services**

Derek assumed his current role within the Division of Rehabilitation Services in December 2019. In this role, Derek provides leadership and oversight in a managerial position for the Community Tennessee Rehabilitation Center (CTRC) in Manchester, TN.

Derek began his journey with the Tennessee Department of Human Services (DHS), Division of Rehabilitation Services in October of 2016 as a Vocational Evaluator for the CTRC in Murfreesboro. During his time at CTRC Murfreesboro, Derek conducted vocational evaluations for customers at other CTRCs in Middle Tennessee and in multiple locations throughout middle Tennessee; such as the Tennessee School for the Blind. Derek also conducted vocational evaluations for customers at multiple high schools and DHS office locations throughout Middle Tennessee.

Derek received his Associate of Science degree from Motlow State Community College and his Bachelor of Science in Education from Martin Methodist College in Pulaski, TN. Derek resides in Estill Springs with his wife Mary and their son Oliver. In his free time, Derek enjoys spending time with friends and family, watching or playing sports, and enjoying the outdoors.



**John Johnson, Rehabilitation  
Center Manager - Gallatin,  
Division of Rehabilitation Services**

John began his current role as manager of the CTRC in Gallatin manager in June 2020. In this role, John provides leadership and guidance to the staff at the CTRC in Gallatin as they provide support services to staff in VR Region 5.

John joined the Tennessee Department of Human Services (DHS), Division of Rehabilitation Services in November 2010 as a Rehabilitation Assistant in the Clarksville CTRC. Prior to working for Tennessee State Government, John served 24 years in the U.S. Army, spending nearly half of that time stationed with the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division (Air Assault) at Fort Campbell, KY. While in the Army, John not only completed several operational and peacekeeping deployments, but he also completed both his Bachelor of Science and Master of Science Degrees in Management from the University of Maryland – University College.

John is originally from Oregon and choose to stay in Tennessee after retiring from the Army. John now lives in Clarksville, Tennessee with his wife, Carla. He also has five children, John Jr., Ashley, Jessica, Jordan and Casey as well as eight grandchildren.

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**JR Marable,  
Regional Supervisor for Regions 4 and 6,  
Division of Rehabilitation Services**

Jotrone Marable (JR) grew up in Murfreesboro, Tennessee and attended Middle Tennessee State University, obtaining his Bachelor of Science degree in Liberal Arts, with a focus in Political Science and double minors in Public Administration and Criminal Justice. JR then went on to complete the Master of Educational Leadership and Specialists in Education degrees from MTSU. Most recently, JR completed his Doctor of Education, with an emphasis on Organizational Leadership Theory and Practice.

JR worked briefly in the private sector as a Probation Officer and then transitioned to the public sector with Tennessee State Government as an Intrastate Probation Officer II. Later, he became a Release for Success Coordinator with Lois M. DeBerry Special Needs Facility. JR moved on to the role of Special Education teacher with Wilson and Rutherford County schools and worked with students with special needs from 2<sup>nd</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> grade.

JR's current role as Regional Supervisor oversees two regions within Vocational Rehabilitation, primarily in the Upper Cumberland and Southern Middle regions of the state. He leads a team of 15 members, including VR Counselors. He focuses on supporting his team in helping Tennesseans with disabilities pursue their employment goals.

JR has been married to his wife April Thomas-Marable for over 5 years and they have two beautiful daughters, Bella and Ava.

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**David Parrish,  
CTRC West TN Area Manager,  
Division of Rehabilitation Services**

David assumed his current role within the Division of Rehabilitation Services in October 2019. David provides leadership and oversight for 6 CTCRs in Middle and West Tennessee.

David began his journey with the Tennessee Department of Human Services (DHS), Division of Rehabilitation Services in February of 1993 after working in a factory for 15 years. Over the years, David has held various positions within DHS' VR program. He started out working as a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor in Benton County and moved to Obion County in 1994. He worked 8 years as a VR Counselor until 2001 when he was promoted to CTRC Manager in Paris, TN. As the Manager, he not only managed the center but also supervised VR Counselors until July 2019. He also took on the duties of Interim Region 8 Supervisor from 2016 to 2019.

In October 2019, David took over leadership of 6 CTRCs while continuing to be the manager at the Paris CTRC. Since then, David has worked with centers and the rest of the CTRC Leadership team to lead and guide the center through the current transformation process. David has also been a CARF surveyor since 2008. David received a Bachelor of Science in Psychology and Master's in Business Administration from the University of Tennessee in Martin. He also received a Master of Science in Rehabilitation Counseling from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville and became a Certified Rehabilitation Counselor in 2009.

David resides in Martin, Tennessee, with his wife of 43 years, Jayne. David actually lives 2 miles from where he was born many, many years ago. He has 2 children and 5 grandchildren, two of which live very close and are a big part of his life. David also has an extensive, eclectic collection of music.



**Brittney Pipkin,  
VR Fiscal Director,  
Division of Rehabilitation Services**

Brittney Pipkin joined the Division of Rehabilitation Services in August 2020. Brittney joined us as a key member of the VR leadership team in a brand-new role as VR Fiscal Director.

In this role, Brittney quickly made an impact by lending her fiscal expertise in coordinating key financial functions, including the creation and expansion of accounting reports as well as the development and implementation of fiscal review processes. She has begun to educate, inform and engage with team members at all levels on fiscal matters, and in coordination with leadership, is developing and maintaining a working relationship with our federal funding partner. She will also serve as a liaison between the VR program and the DHS fiscal and budget units.

Born and raised in Springfield, Brittney, who has always had a love for numbers, earned a degree in finance and accounting. She began her professional career with "real world" work experience as a budget analyst during the day while pursuing a master's in accountancy at night.



After working as an auditor for several years, Brittney decided to move to Nashville in 2014 and hasn't looked back. Since then she has been expanding her knowledge of local, federal and state government. Brittney enjoys working for organizations that set out to make a difference in other's lives. She is thrilled to join the DHS team in her new role to help further the DHS mission.

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**Travis Rollins,  
Rehabilitation Center Manager - Columbia,  
Division of Rehabilitation Services**

Travis assumed his new role within the Division of Rehabilitation Services in March of 2020. In this role, Travis provides leadership and oversight for the team at TRC Columbia. His team provides services to residents of Maury County and the surrounding area.

Travis began his journey in Rehabilitation Services as a Director of Development for a residential facility that worked with adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. In this position he oversaw multiple programs and worked closely with multiple state agencies.

From there he moved to a non-profit and was responsible for coordinating their employment program throughout the mid-south region of Tennessee. While he was there, he developed the Employment Services program into a respected partner agency that was responsible for placing many people into careers that fit with their various passions. Also, during this time he helped build a Pre-Employment Transition Services program to help better serve youth with disabilities throughout the mid-south area of Tennessee.

Travis received his Bachelor of Science in Sociology from Middle Tennessee State University and is originally from Nashville. He, his wife, and son reside in Huntland where they enjoy spending as much time as possible in the outdoors hiking, camping and pursuing his new hobby of fly fishing.

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**Jessica Schilling,  
Director of Field Operations - Blind Services,  
Division of Rehabilitation Services**

Jessica began her new role as the Director of Field Operations in November 2020. In her role, she is responsible for providing leadership statewide to the sensory field staff within VR.

Jessica began working with the state in 2012 at the Tennessee School for the Deaf as a Youth Service Counselor. She worked with transition age students while completing her Master of Science in Rehabilitation Counseling at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Jessica completed this degree with a concentration in Deaf Counseling.

She also obtained her bachelor's degree from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville in Special Education/Educational Interpreting. Upon completing her Masters, Jessica interned with Vocational Rehabilitation in the Knoxville office and was hired in 2015. She began working as a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor in Blind Services in Region 2 serving individuals who were Blind or Visually Impaired. In 2017, Jessica was promoted to Field Supervisor for Deaf and Blind Services in Region 1 and 2. Jessica was born and raised on Knoxville and currently resides in Fountain City with her fiancé, Leo. She enjoys gardening, traveling, planning her upcoming wedding, and is currently learning Spanish.

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**Breona Washington,  
East TN Area Manager of Business Services,  
Division of Rehabilitation Services**

Breona assumed her new role within the Division of Rehabilitation Services November 2019. In this role, Breona provides oversight for 42 counties in VR Regions 1, 2, 3 and 4 in East Tennessee.

Breona began her journey with Tennessee Department of Human Services, Division of Rehabilitation Services in May 2016 as a Field Supervisor for Vocational Rehabilitation Services. Prior to her time with state government, Breona worked several years at Youth Villages in various roles, but her favorite was Treatment Foster Care as both a Foster Care Counselor and Clinical Supervisor. Breona has always taken pride in advocating, and it has propelled her pursuit of education in such a way that she has attained her Bachelor of Arts in Sociology and Criminal Justice from Mississippi State University, Master of Arts in Human Services and Certification in Mental Health Theory both from Capella University, and a Master of Rehabilitation Counseling with an emphasis in Mental Health Counseling from the University of Kentucky.



Breona is the proud mother of two beautiful children that she shares with her husband, Justin. They reside in the Chattanooga area. In her free time Breona enjoys traveling, spending time with family, shopping, reading, and volunteering. During COVID-19 Breona has started gardening fresh vegetables and canning. Breona plans to pursue furthering her education to be able to better serve and advocate for those in need.

