Honoring our Past,
Celebrating our Future

Florida Rehabilitation Council
2014-2015 Annual Report

Partnering to create opportunities to employ all people with disabilities in jobs of their choice.
Dear Stakeholders,

It was a great honor to serve as the FRC Chair from October 1, 2014, through September 30, 2015. I appreciate the support and guidance provided by insightful FRC member colleagues, the FRC administrator and staff, and VR leadership. Congratulations to the newly elected Chair, Patrick Cannon, who served so capably this year as the FRC Public Awareness Chair and who has been an outstanding FRC member. He will be an exemplary chair and a passionate spokesperson for the continued vitality of the VR program.

The FRC and VR are unified in our commitment to increase employment for individuals with the most significant disabilities and to work strategically with our partners in the workforce and CareerSource system. This is an exciting time to build on the momentum of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), and we are ready to reach out to innovate, support, and empower the workers of the next generation. We imagine a future of increased employment opportunities and outcomes for customers of VR.

This year the FRC Annual Report focuses on honoring the past while celebrating the future; so, in keeping with the theme, we will highlight some prominent historical moments during the almost ninety years of serving Floridians.

As immediate past chair looking forward, I will continue to bring my enthusiasm, dedication and career advocacy for individuals with disabilities to my ongoing service to this important Council and the citizens of Florida.

I challenge you and ask, What can you do? Join us, for we are poised for the future, let's go!

Respectfully,
Ann Robinson,
FRC, Past Chair

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Please note, you may request this report in alternative formats.
Contact us at 850-245-3397 or email FRCcustomers@vr.fldoe.org

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Honoring our Past, Celebrating our Future...

Historical points of interest will be highlighted to remind us of where we have been as we plan for the future.

1918
Smith-Sears Vocational Rehabilitation Act.

1920
Smith-Fess Civilian Vocational Rehabilitation Act.

1925
Beginning of Florida Vocational Rehabilitation Program.

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On the front cover, from the upper left corner clockwise, a 1938 photograph of a VR customer; a Fort Myers Beach sunset (by Andrea Schwendinger); a picture of David Jones (Wise Award recipient and past VR customer); and a West Palm Beach sunrise taken by Dr. Steven Collins.

On the back cover, from the upper right corner clockwise, a photograph of Michael Benders, a VR customer; a Fort Myers Beach moon rising (by Andrea Schwendinger); a gray heron; and Michael Sardinas, a VR customer.

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Table of Contents

Letter from the Past Florida Rehabilitation Council (FRC) Chair ................................................................. 3
Letter from the FRC Chair ............................................................................................................................... 4
Letter from the VR Director ............................................................................................................................. 5
VR Overview .................................................................................................................................................. 6
Engaging Businesses ........................................................................................................................................... 8
Employing Our Customers and VR metrics ................................................................................................... 9
Youth Transition Programs and Success Story ............................................................................................... 13
Customer Satisfaction Survey Results for 2014-2015 and VR Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment ................................................................. 14
VR Success Story—The Wonderful World of Discovery .............................................................................. 16
FRC Recommendations to the 2017-2020 State Plan .............................................................................. 17
Public Forums, Forum Dates, and VR Ombudsman Office ...................................................................... 18
Contributions to the Mission—Disability Employment Awareness and the Wise Advocacy Award .......... 19
The 2015-2016 FRC Council Members ...................................................................................................... 20
Special Recognitions, and Meet the FRC staff ............................................................................................ 22
VR Historical List of Directors, FRC Recruitment .................................................................................. 23

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Historical points of interest will be highlighted to remind us of where we have been as we plan for the future.
Hello -

I am honored to begin my term as the newly elected Chair of the FRC. As a person with disabilities and a former customer of VR, I understand the importance of the services this agency provides to the citizens of Florida. This agency has given me the keys to make my own path to the jobs and career that as a child I thought I never could achieve. Through VR, I was able to obtain a Bachelor of Science degree in Political Science from Florida State University. I feel I will always be indebted for the opportunities opened by VR. The best way I have found to give back is to give my service to represent others like myself needing the right supports to gain employment.

Looking forward, this is a transition period for Vocational Rehabilitation and other stakeholders on both national and state levels who must implement the new guidelines of Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. This Act brings together core programs and requires a unified strategic plan which includes Title I Adult, Dislocated Workers and Youth programs; Adult Education and Literacy programs; the Wagner-Peyser Employment Service; and Title I of the Rehabilitation Act programs. In Florida, this will be carried out by strengthening communication and the coordination of services with CareerSource Florida and other partners and service providers to maximize the resources available to assist individuals of all abilities find and maintain meaningful employment.

As chair of the FRC for the upcoming year, I look forward to working with VR and our federal and state partners to fully realize this opportunity and make Florida VR a nationally recognized leader in providing quality vocational rehabilitation services.

Respectfully,
Patrick Neel Cannon

Vision: 
Partnering to create opportunities to employ all people with disabilities in competitive jobs of their choice.

Mission: 
To increase employment, enhance independence and improve the quality of life for Floridians with disabilities.

Greetings -

The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) has enjoyed another successful year, helping 5,760 Floridians with significant disabilities prepare for, get, or keep a job! The Florida Rehabilitation Council (FRC) continues to be a valuable partner in our efforts and a strong, effective voice in advocating for Floridians with disabilities. The division has operated under an Order of Selection since 2008, which means that because we cannot serve every eligible individual who comes to the door, we must follow a federal mandate to prioritize services to people whose disabilities pose the greatest barriers to employment. As a result, the complexity of our customers' needs has increased significantly. We are proud to say that in SFY 2014-15, the lives of 5,760 people were changed for the better in ways we can only begin to imagine.

VR currently maintains waiting lists for customers in two of our three service categories. Since early 2015, there has been no wait for individuals in Service Category 1, those with the most significant disabilities. By January 2016, there will be no wait for individuals in Service Category 2 (significant disabilities). As resources allow, we will assess our ability to serve individuals with other disabilities (Category 3).

The division undertook many new initiatives this year in response to the passage of the federal Workforce Opportunity and Innovations Act (WIOA) in July 2014. Many provisions took effect this year, allowing us to increase both the breadth and depth of services to youth (ages 15-21) and to implement a new Business Relations program, geared to better meet the needs of Floridians’ employers. We believe that our new ‘dual customer’ approach will lead to improved job outcomes for jobseekers with disabilities. We are excited about our enhanced relationships with CareerSource Florida and the Department of Education's Career and Adult Education program, as well as our other core WIOA partners.

We are extremely grateful to the legislature and to the many internal and external partners who supported us in these initiatives. We continue our efforts to improve our internal administrative processes, as well as our interface with customers, schools, businesses, and other community partners, recognizing that the challenges are many, but the opportunities to help our customers live more independent, productive lives, far greater. We look forward to having the Florida Rehabilitation Council by our side every step of the way! On behalf of Florida VR, thank you, FRC, for your support, dedication, and accomplishments.

Regards,
Director Aleisa C. McKinlay

Mission: 
To help people with disabilities find and maintain employment and enhance their independence.

Vision: 
To become the first place people with disabilities turn when seeking employment and a top resource for employers in need of qualified employees.

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Florida Vocational Rehabilitation

VR differs from other state agencies that provide support and other services to individuals with a disability. VR does not maintain long-term caseloads or ongoing responsibility for the health and welfare of vulnerable individuals. Once an individual has been successfully employed for a designated period of time (a minimum of 90 or 150 days), the VR case is closed.

Customer eligibility is based on the presence of a physical or mental impairment, job limitations, and a goal to be employed. The customer shares responsibility with the VR counselor for identifying options and exploring the advantages and disadvantages of each option to decide an employment outcome, services needed to reach the employment goal, and who will provide these services. The customer’s choice of employment outcome must be consistent with his/her unique strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, and interests.

VR programs include:
- Transition Youth Program
- Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and Deaf-Blind Services
- Employment and Business Relations/Abilities Work Help Desk
- Supported Employment
- Assistive Services and Rehabilitation Technology
- Ticket to Work
- Migrant and Seasonal Farm Worker Outreach
- Self-Employment Supports
- Native American Outreach
- Physical and Mental Restoration

National and State Employment
- Recognizing that Americans with disabilities have an employment rate about half that of Americans without disabilities, and are underrepresented in the federal workforce, President Obama issued Executive Order 13-548 to establish the federal government as a model employer of individuals with disabilities. Four years into that commitment, the Federal Office of Personnel Management reports that 57,491 workers with disabilities have entered the federal workforce, more than half of the Executive Order’s goal. More people with disabilities are in federal service than at any time in the past 33 years.
- According to the 2014 American Community Survey estimates, there are more than 2.4 million Floridians age 16 and over who have a disability. Of those, only 18 percent, or 443,570, are employed.

VR pass-through programs include:
- Adults with Disabilities—provides funds to 40 school districts and 10 state colleges
- Independent Living—16 Centers (CILs) and the Florida Independent Living Council (FILC), which is a mandated member of the FRC
- Florida Alliance for Assistive Services and Technology (FAAST)
- Able Trust—partner with VR on ‘High School-High Tech programs

For more information about VR and its services, call (800) 451-4327 or visit www.Rehabworks.org
Focusing on Employers and Business Needs

This is the time to let Florida’s employers know about the untapped resources within VR. VR’s approach to meeting the needs of employers and customers is twofold. One outreach effort to businesses is the Abilities Work Help Desk, which was created in accordance with a 2012 recommendation by the Governor’s Commission on Jobs for Floridians with Disabilities. Governor Rick Scott and the Florida Legislature supported the Commission’s recommendation and funded the Help Desk in the 2014 legislative session. Two founding documents relating to the creation of the Abilities Work Help Desk are the Governor’s Executive Order 13-284, Reaffirming Commitment to Employment for Floridians with Disabilities, and the Interagency Cooperative Agreement (Employment First Initiative with the following partners—the Agency for Persons with Disabilities, the Department of Education’s Division of Blind Services and the Bureau of Exceptional Education Student Services, the Department of Economic Opportunity, and the CareerSource centers).

Housed in VR headquarters, the Help Desk is designed to establish relationships with employers, help them connect employers with qualified job seekers with disabilities, and to provide information and referral services on topics such as accommodations, tax credit opportunities, and other supports. A major goal is to become the foremost recognized and trusted resource for employers disability inclusion needs, and to be a top resource for those in need of qualified employees. From January to June 2015, the Help Desk has engaged 29 unique employers with 104 different job titles and 987 openings.

Employers can reach the Help Desk at:
1-844-245-3405 or AbilitiesWorkHD@vr.fldoe.org.

Another employer resource is the Abilities Work Web Portal which links individuals to statewide recruitment services, a list of employer benefits, apprenticeships, job fairs, and labor market information and trends. This resource located on the Department of Economic Opportunity’s Employ Florida Marketplace website can be found at https://abilitieswork.employflorida.com.

The second program within VR to assist employers with their hiring needs is the VR Business Relations program. The program has two business relations representatives in each of the six VR areas to customize employer relations and strategically meet the needs of the business community. Program objectives include coordinating and providing a pipeline of qualified individuals and a seamless network of support services for the company and employee. A primary goal is to expand career opportunities for VR customers, by increasing the understanding of in-demand jobs and the high-growth industry job qualifications among VR staff. This outreach has generated opportunities for VR to provide work site trainings with business partners to address a wide variety of issues. For example, trainings offered may address the myth that accommodations are too expensive; however, most are free or cost less than $500. Another myth is that an employer would need to offer a person with a disability extensive training. Most individuals are ready to get to work, but, if not, then VR offers On-the-Job Training and supports.

It is the hope of the FRC and VR that these business engagement programs will increase opportunities for VR customers and strengthen the state workforce efforts while providing employers with resources and excellent workers.

Employing our Customers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Persons with disabilities who entered gainful employment</td>
<td>5,760</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customers self-supporting at acceptance</td>
<td>13.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average hours worked per week for closed cases</td>
<td>29.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average hourly earnings for closed cases</td>
<td>$11.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average annual earnings for closed cases</td>
<td>$17,411</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total earnings for all customers in the first year</td>
<td>$100,289,248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average number of active customers</td>
<td>32,840</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Individual Plans for Employment (IPEs) created during the year</td>
<td>10,810</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average cost of case life for customers with a significant or most significant disability</td>
<td>$4,632</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of customers served with a significant disability</td>
<td>99.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of customers referred to VR</td>
<td>42,614</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

VR served customers in multiple age groups during SFY 2014-2015. One major focus of VR is transitioning students from school to work. The number of transition-age youth served by VR during 2014-2015 was 15,707, or 40 percent of all customers. The number of youth employed following VR services has increased in each of the last five years and is expected to increase with the added focus on youth with the recent WIOA legislation.

The VR Facts at a Glance are a snapshot of figures that provide some guidance regarding the accomplishments for the SFY, July 1, 2014—June 30, 2015. The number of customers referred to VR from any source, including self-referrals, reached 42,614 individuals this year. This figure may increase as WIOA is further implemented within the State of Florida. The average hourly earnings for closed cases rose slightly, for in SFY 2013-2014 it was $11.15 vs. SFY 2014-2015 where the average is $11.38 per hour.

For every $1 invested in rehabilitating the customer, an estimated $10.67 was returned to the economy in state fiscal year 2014-2015.

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The Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) is founded.

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The first meeting of the National Employ the Physically Handicapped Week convinces the public that it’s “good business to hire the handicapped.”
Note: The Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) provides the following definitions:

- **Primary disability** as the individual's primary physical or mental impairment that causes or results in a substantial impediment to employment.
- **Gainful employment** occurs when a customer has job stability for at least 90 days and is placed in employment that is competitive, integrated into the community, and for which they receive at least minimum wage.

VR serves people with many disability types, as the chart provided illustrates. The largest disability group served is individuals with a mental health disability, which is approximately 51 percent of the clients gainfully employed. All individuals are encouraged to choose a profession that is most suitable for their skill set. Jobs obtained by customers vary, but often include: office and administrative support jobs, food service jobs, building and grounds cleaning, and sales related occupations, to name a few. Efforts are being made to increase the number of science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) focused employment opportunities while encouraging additional certification, as appropriate for our customers.

Federal indicators are the only statistics presented on the federal fiscal year (FFY) 2014-2015. The WIOA Common Performance Accountability provisions are projected to be in effect by July 1, 2016, to align federal investments to support job seekers and employers. WIOA will align the governing bodies that establish state, regional, and local workforce priorities. Areas of focus for VR in WIOA will be increasing service to youth with preemployment transition services, increasing business relations outreach, and continuing the focus on competitive integrated employment.

### Federal Indicators (FFY October 1, 2014 to September 30, 2015)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Persons with disabilities who entered gainful employment (Federal Indicator 1.1)</th>
<th>5,034</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rehabilitation rate (Federal Indicator 1.2)</td>
<td>37.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage placed in Competitive Employment (Federal Indicator 1.3)</td>
<td>99.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customers with a significant or most significant disability (Federal Indicator 1.4)</td>
<td>98.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earnings Ratio (Federal Indicator 1.5)</td>
<td>0.530</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customers self-supporting at closure (Federal Indicator 1.6)</td>
<td>65.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Primary Disability Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Order of Selection Category</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chronic Medical</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>3,931</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developmental Disability</td>
<td>5,829</td>
<td>404</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6,234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Disability</td>
<td>214</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>282</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental Health</td>
<td>15,774</td>
<td>5,313</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>21,124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orthopedic</td>
<td>2,178</td>
<td>2,448</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>4,666</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensory</td>
<td>1,296</td>
<td>1,140</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>2,505</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substance Abuse</td>
<td>370</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>459</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>27,681</td>
<td>11,317</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>39,207</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Since early 2015, there is no wait for services for individuals in Category 1. Individuals identified with Category 2 status are waiting fewer days than a year ago. It is anticipated that all individuals currently in Category 2 waiting list will receive services by January 2016.

Even with a large number of new applicants each year, VR has still been able to decrease the number of individuals on the waiting list. The number of cases on the waiting list rise and fall throughout the months and years. For example, in the fall of 2008 when the OOS was implemented, the waiting list had 5,628 people. Yet in 2009, it grew to 11,145 and decreased by September 2010 to 2,039 individuals on the waiting list. For further information on OOS, categories, and the factors that influence, please contact a VR representative.

The chart below highlights the number and percent of customers served by primary disability group with the severity category for the SFY July 1, 2014, through June 30, 2015. There were a total of 39,207 served (with a few cases with no major disability grouping identified).

### Category (CAT) 1: Includes individuals determined to have a most significant disability and the greatest job limitations

### Category (CAT) 2: Includes persons who have a significant disability with some job limitations

### Category (CAT) 3: Includes all other eligible individuals determined to have a disability with some job limitations

An FRC concern and a very important piece in serving those on a waiting list is the information about alternative services our customers receive when they enter the VR system. Quality information from the start can empower individuals with disabilities to be self-advocates, maximize employment opportunities, increase economic self-sufficiency, and independence, encourage inclusion and integration into society.
VR is a federal/state partnership - 78.7% of funds for VR program expenditures come from federal sources with a required match of 21.3% from state general revenue.

1958
PL 85-926, provides federal training funds for teachers educating children with mental retardation.

1960
The American Social Security Amendments pass, extending Social Security benefits to the disabled and eliminating the 50 or older age restriction for workers receiving benefits.

1961
President John F. Kennedy appoints a President’s Panel on Mental Retardation.

1962
The President’s Committee on Mental Retardation is renamed, Employment of the Handicapped, reflecting employment of people with cognitive and mental disabilities.

1963
President John F. Kennedy calls for the deinstitutionalization of residential confinement, while increasing community services.

1965
Medicare and Medicaid are established through passage of the Social Security Amendments to provide health care to the elderly and disabled.

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Six Project SEARCH sites reach 100% Employment
Finding a job immediately after graduation is a dream for many students. Project SEARCH is a unique program designed to help students with developmental disabilities successfully transition from high school to the workforce.

Project SEARCH is a full immersion experience. It is as if the classroom moved to a job site. Over the course of a year, students have the chance to participate in targeted internships hosted at job sites across the State of Florida. Project SEARCH Florida leads the nation with 21 sites, and approximately 160 youth were served in the program for the 2013-14 school year. It also boasts an impressive 70 percent or higher employment rate for participants. Pictured below is Alex Boullion, a Project SEARCH success story.

Project SEARCH recently achieved a new milestone in job placement, with six host sites in Florida reaching a 100 percent employment rate. Every intern trained at the City of Hialeah, Holmes Regional Hospital, Cape Canaveral Hospital, Rosen Shingle Creek, Florida Hospital-Winter Park, and Florida Hospital-Orlando during the 2014-15 school year has been able to find a job after completing the program. The collaboration between school districts, community partners, the host sites, VR, and the Agency for Persons with Disabilities is important.

The program not only lets the students demonstrate their capabilities, but also gives employers the chance to work with people with disabilities. Many job sites that host interns find it to be a positive experience.

City of Hialeah Mayor Carlos Hernandez says, “The students have truly been an inspiration to me, and I encourage businesses to become more aware, for I always learn much more from them than they do from us.”

VR Transition Youth Program
The VR Transition Youth Program provides individualized services to help eligible students with disabilities in a seamless transition from high school to an identified career. Under WIOA, students with a disability may have the opportunity to participate in Pre-Employment Transition Services, including sponsored career counseling, work readiness training, and community-based work experiences. The focus is to develop work skills, practice social skills, and acquire a network of community supports while the student is still in high school.

There are over 400 counselors available to serve youth preparing to become independent and contributing members of the community. VR supports students in both secondary and postsecondary evidence-based models that have proven to be effective in serving those with the most significant disabilities. These efforts are increasing VR's capacity to deliver services while sustaining programs that result in employment.

VR supports students in a wide variety of programs, including the Postsecondary Education (PSE) Programs (16 statewide) that provide age-appropriate opportunities for learning, employment preparation, recreational activities, social interactions, and the development of natural supports to students with intellectual and other developmental disabilities. The Florida State College at Jacksonville’s VERTICAL Training Program is the first of its kind to deliver career and technical training leading to industry certifications. Project SEARCH is a collaborative partnership with local school districts, a host business, and VR. Florida was singled out by the National Project Search program for its efforts. Third Party Cooperative Arrangements (TPCAs) are partnerships with local school districts, designed to improve outcomes for students with the most significant disabilities. Twenty school districts will be participating in TPCAs during the 2015-2016 school year. The Discovery program is an alternative to traditional assessments. High School/High Tech (HSHT) is a collaborative partnership between VR, the Able Trust, and local school districts.
Customer Satisfaction Survey

A new survey contractor, Market Decisions, was hired in October 2014. The FRC and VR are excited about the Customer Satisfaction Survey and the wealth of information becoming available. Unlike the past, the new survey instrument provides analysis of process, in addition to customer satisfaction, and may allow VR to assess and ultimately offer customer quality ratings of vendor performance. Survey findings are now available to all VR employees for further comparison and analysis, and area offices have been encouraged to use the reports to identify potential opportunities to make real-time improvements in their customer service. Although the sample size is still too small for broad generalization, we are encouraged when compared to a national survey conducted by the Conference Board (www.forbes.com/sites/susanadamis/2014/06/20/most-americans-are-unhappy-at-work) that suggests only 47.7 percent of Americans are happy at work. The FRC commends VR to identifying potential opportunities to make real-time improvements in their customer service.

The following items were considered statistically significant at a 95 percent confidence level:

- 80 percent of individuals surveyed reported satisfaction with their involvement and their VR experience, and 80 percent were satisfied with their choice of vocational goal.
- 80 percent of survey participants were satisfied with the information they were given about the choices they had.
- 81 percent of VR customers indicated they were satisfied with their choice of services.

Demographic differences include:

- Customers age 18 to 24 are more likely to have more positive scores on nearly all measures.
- Those with a Bachelor's degree were more likely to have less positive scores on more than half of the measures.
- Customers age 45 and older were less positive about whether the VR services received helped them become more financially independent.
- 93 percent reported that VR staff treat them with dignity and respect, 84 percent agreed that VR services are helping them become more financially independent.

In the Customer Satisfaction Survey, evaluators found a few statistically significant differences by race/ethnicity:

- Black or African Americans were more positive about their satisfaction with their VR experience.
- Hispanic customers reported they were satisfied with service choices and their overall VR experience.

There were a few differences by disability category:

- The greatest barrier to employment identified by respondents was training and job search/placement/coaching.
- The most important work factors to job seekers with a disability were finding the type of job matching their abilities, the work environment, the location, and whether transportation is available.
- Those who are perceived to have limited access to VR services include job seekers with mental health disabilities, those living in rural areas, and those with a criminal background.
- The greatest barrier to employment identified by respondents is that employers underestimate the talent and skills of people with disabilities.

During this first year of surveying completed by Market Decisions, FRC also contracted for two focus groups. The topics of interest to the Council discussed with participants were the waiting list and the appeals process. The inquiry about the appeals process was found to be not very relevant to participants and did not rise to the level of serious concern. Most participants would address a problem with their counselor, and, if that did not work, they went to their counselor's supervisor.

The general attitude was of acceptance and appreciation. There were some statements that concerned the FRC. One focus group finding was the limited information provided to waiting list members. Very few remembered receiving referrals for alternative supports to other agencies while on the list. The limited information provided to our customers when placed on the waiting list has been a concern of the Council and a focus of advocacy with VR during this SFY. Members of the focus group wished for more frequent updates and suggested an online check-in for status updates. These are two areas the Council will continue to follow to ensure implementation of best practices.

FRC and VR look forward to gathering more data points and considering the opportunities for further analysis and information on the needs of our customers.
The Wonderful World of Discovery

Imagine living most of your life in an institution and wanting more – more freedom, more choices, more opportunities.

Robert Halliburton, who has Cerebral Palsy and uses a wheelchair, had spent most of his life in an institution for individuals with disabilities. With support from the Agency for Persons with Disabilities and community providers, Robert moved out of the institution and into the community. He attended an adult day care program and was proud of his accomplishments, but he continued to want more. He wanted to go to work, and that’s where VR came in.

Robert met with his VR counselor, and they tried many of the usual services. She referred him to community providers who tried their best to help him find a job, but there were a lot of obstacles and roadblocks in his way, and years went by without a job opportunity.

Then in 2011, VR launched the Discovery program, and Robert and his counselor decided to give it a try. With the Discovery program, a VR customer gets one-on-one attention from his Discovery Provider, figuring out what his interests are and what barriers are keeping him from getting a job. Robert’s coach, Desiree Robles with Bishop Grady Villas, started the process by interviewing people who interacted with him in his daily life at home, church, and at the adult day training program. She saw how he interacted with others, and how they interacted with him.

“I found the whole point of the Discovery process was discovering that the obvious needs are not always obvious,” said Desiree. “In the different settings, you can identify what is really needed, and then go into more depth to find out what their skills are and what they can or cannot do.”

Through these observations, she and Robert began to translate his life skills into potential areas of employment. Her final report on Robert was positive, enthusiastic, and optimistic. VR provided Robert with new clothes for interviews, a shower chair with the appropriate lift, and other assistance to make it easier for him to prepare for work opportunities.

Finally, at an age when most people are considering retiring, Robert found his first job, and he loves it! He is a part-time office assistant for Perfect Petroleum, a marketing company, and he’s really found his niche. “When I first came here,” said Robert, “they said that the paper was really stacking up, and they needed shredding, so that’s what I do.” His co-workers have boxes on their desks where they collect papers that need to be filed or shredded. Robert collects the paper files or shred. He’s also willing to help in other ways such as putting together the marketing bags they send out to customers.

Robert is appreciative and grateful for the opportunity. “It’s a wonderful job, and I couldn’t ask for a better job,” he said. “And the owner, is a wonderful man. He also has a son with a disability. They’re [his co-workers] all very caring people and have faith in me.” Robert is proud that he’s now a tax-paying citizen, but he says it’s not so much the money that’s important. What really matters is your dedication and being able to make a difference.

Desiree is proud of Robert, “The Discovery program was an opportunity to work with someone who had been in the system for many years, and, because of that, he didn’t have a lot hope for a different outcome. The program gave him the hope he needed. It took time to really see beyond the disability and get to the person; but in the end, it always turns out to be a positive experience.”

Council Recommendations to the 2017-2020 Unified Plan

The FRC acknowledges the many challenges and opportunities confronting VR and other stakeholders in preparing the 2017-2020 unified plan. The FRC recognizes the diligent efforts of VR staff to help Council understand WIOA, while developing the new VR services portion for the 2017-2020 unified plan. Although the new Act rules and measures are being established, the FRC supports high standards and expectations in every area of the VR system. Challenges may include: preparing for and implementing the requirements and new partnerships required under WIOA; ensuring high quality and consistent information and referrals for waiting list customers; increased service availability for transition students; counselor retention; and, continuing strong partnerships to facilitate best practices in policies and procedures to make the VR program even more successful. Opportunities for continued collaborative efforts are plentiful, and communication has never been better between VR and the FRC. We look forward to continuing our positive relationship and promoting increased employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities.

The FRC has identified recommended areas of interest for input into the 2017-2020 State Plan. The following recommendations are listed by level of importance, and meet the Council’s federal mandates to review, analyze, and advise VR.

- **Recommendation 1**: Transition - The FRC is encouraged by the agency’s efforts to strengthen transition programs and outreach. In alignment with WIOA mandates, FRC supports early contact to provide quality Information and Referral (I&R) guidance to educate and train youth for employment.

- **Recommendation 2**: Order of Selection - The FRC would like to see VR increase service capacity and reduce waiting times for those currently on Order of Selection and provide waiting customers with quality referral information, thus encouraging self-advocacy when possible.

- **Recommendation 3**: Job Placement Initiatives - The FRC encourages increased use of rehabilitation engineering services for VR customers. Also, the FRC would encourage that all eligible individuals have access to phase two supported-employment services. The Council is concerned with the limitations and restrictions of long-term funding and follow-along supports and encourages investigation of stronger resources. Council members would like to recommend additional supports be made available for job customization and that additional Innovation and Expansion grants be offered further within the state to meet the growing needs of our customers.

- **Recommendation 4**: Public Awareness of VR - The FRC recommends that a media campaign be developed to share the VR history and services available in Florida. The Council also suggests the development of an online application.

- **Recommendation 5**: Counselor Recruitment and Retention - The FRC encourages VR to identify new ways to recruit employees while implementing long-term retention strategies. The Council supports VR in their efforts to have the highest level of counselor education and skill level available to support the best practices and quality of care so needed for this vulnerable population. This is critical, especially in light of the continued level of counselor turn over and staff retirement.

- **Recommendation 6**: Mediation and Conflict Resolution - The FRC continues to promote conflict resolution strategies including mediation prior to formal appeals.

Progress and areas of success and improvement are recorded and tracked in the FRC strategic plan established in 2011 and reviewed on an annual basis, with new objectives added as appropriate. The closing FRC statement to the 2017-2020 State Plan notes that the recommendations provided are designed to strengthen VR efforts and the collective workforce system to employ all customers in competitive jobs.
Public Forums

The FRC partners with VR to hold public forums. Both entities are trying alternative methods to market and advertise these events to increase client and community participation. This collaborative effort to reach customers, vendors, businesses, and other stakeholders is a continued focus. The public forums are held at each FRC quarterly meeting or when policy changes may require public input. There were five public forums conducted during the SFY 2014-2015.

Access to these forums is not limited to individuals where the meeting is located, but they are open to the public statewide via telephone or streaming text through the internet. Areas of comment have included transition services, standardized curriculum for training employment support service providers, the need for more supported employment vendors, availability of assistive technology, Order of Selection and waiting list concerns, third-party cooperative arrangements with school districts, legislative outreach regarding supports for people with disabilities, vendor referrals, advocacy, and opportunities for rehabilitation engineering. Future forums are planned to promote and maintain open lines of communication with VR customers, stakeholders, and interested parties.

Upcoming FRC/VR Public Forums

- January 27, 2016 - Tallahassee FL
- April 26, 2016 - Tampa FL
- August 9, 2016 - Gainesville FL
- November 1, 2016 - Destin FL

Forums are held at VR locations and can be attended in person or via teleconference. Forum Call-in number is: 1-888-670-3525; Pass code: 7513637441#

Check for updates at rehabworks.org/rehabcouncil.shtml

Florida Ombudsman

Florida is one of a few states that offers a resource alternative for customers to discuss their individual case problems. The VR Ombudsman Office receives, investigates, and assists individuals in resolving client-service issues. It is an impartial service available to any VR customer who may have questions, concerns, or feel they may have been treated unfairly. During the SFY 2014-2015, there were 2,385 contacts.

Areas of inquiry include: information and referral requests, complaints, quality of counseling services, delivery of service concerns, and waiting list concerns and inquiries. Of these areas of inquiry, 54 percent or 1,290 were to address specific customer concerns. Of these concerns, 69 percent or 884 were resolved to the customer’s satisfaction. The Ombudsman Office has received excellent feedback overall regarding the service it provides to our customers.

An ombudsman may be contacted at: 866-515-3692 or by email: ombudsman@vr.fldoe.org

PL 94-142 required regular learning settings while meeting special needs and was renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1990.

1975
- The Education for ALL Handicapped Children Act (PL 94-142) declares handicapped children could not be excluded.

1975
- Parent and Training Information Centers are developed to help parents of children with disabilities exercise their rights with the school systems.

1976
- Disabled in Action of Pennsylvania, Inc. v. Coleman is won so all buses to be purchased with public federal funds will be wheelchair accessible.

1976
- The Disability Rights Center, sponsored by Ralph Nadler’s Center, is created to specialize in consumer protections for people with disabilities.

1976
- The Disability Employment Awareness Month (DEAM) If you know an employer deciding whether or not to hire someone who has a disability, invite him or her to a Disability Employment Awareness Celebration. It is the perfect opportunity to see and hear about success stories directly from employers and their employees.

The events are held in recognition of October as National Disability Employment Awareness Month. At each event, outstanding employers from the area are honored for being leaders in the employment of people with disabilities. During the October 2015 events:
- The St. Petersburg event honored Casita Taqueria, Hyatt Regency Sarasota, Pinellas County School Board, TSE Industries, and the Winn Dixie Stores in St. Petersburg and South Pasadena.
- The Miami event recognized Sodexo/Coral Gables Hospital, MCO Construction and Services, Inc., and Pritchard Sports/Marlins Stadium.
- VR Area 2 conducted a forum/panel discussion on “Learning today for a better tomorrow”.
- Other celebrations were conducted throughout Florida, including joint ventures with the Division of Blind Services and the Agency for Persons with Disabilities.

Steven R. Wise Advocacy Award Winner

The FRC selected David C. Jones as the Steven R. Wise Advocacy Award winner for 2015 (pictured with Ann Robinson, FRC Chair). As founder and president of the Florida Disabled Outdoors Association, he was chosen as the representative who best exemplified the service and dedication of Senator Wise, a distinguished leader and advocate for persons with disabilities.

Through personal experience, David became aware of the incredible value of recreation for rehabilitation, and so established the Florida Disabled Outdoors Association (FDOA) twenty-five years ago. The mission is to enrich lives through accessible, inclusive recreation for all. Jones knew how physical activity not only increased mobility, but also contributed to mental well-being, which led to more successful employment outcomes.

The FDOA sponsors several statewide projects that contribute to overall wellness — physical, mental, social, and vocational. Projects include the Recreation Activity Program for Adults with Disabilities, ALLOUT Adventure Program, Miracle Sports, Community-based Therapeutic Recreation for People with a Brain or Spinal Cord Injury, and the SportsAbility program. Information about these projects, the Resource Referral Network of accessible inclusive programs, services, products, destinations, and events are available at www.fdoa.org (which now features information in Spanish). David Jones has also offered assistance to many states, as well as local and private organizations, with Americans with Disabilities Act compliance and training programs. The FRC is proud to highlight such a distinguished leader in the State of Florida.
2015-2016 Florida Rehabilitation Council Members

It takes the collective cooperation and meaningful investment of many to advocate for people living with disabilities in the State of Florida and nationally. The investment of time and effort is found in private industry, the federal government, state legislation, VR families and other interested parties. Without these entities and persons, advocacy efforts of the Florida Rehabilitation Council members and staff would be limited. The following FRC members were appointed by the Governor of Florida for the period of July 1, 2015 to June 30, 2016.

1988
The Technology Related Assistance Act (The Tech Act) authorizes funding to state projects to facilitate access to assistive technology.

1990
The Americans with Disabilities Act is signed by President George H.W. Bush as the most sweeping disability rights legislation.

1995
Justice for ALL is organized by Justin Dart and others to advocate against calls to amend or repeal the ADA or IDEA.

1996
The Mental Health Parity Act (MHPA) requires large group health plans not to impose dollar limits on mental health benefits.

1998
President Clinton signs the Rehabilitation Act Amendments including Section 508 requiring access for all to federal information & technology.

2002
The Help America Vote Act (HAV A) becomes law requiring voting systems be accessible for all.

Patrick Cannon, Council Chair
- Hometown: Tallahassee, FL
- Represents current or former applicants for, or recipients of, VR services

Yolanda Herrera, Council 1st Vice-Chair and Planning/Coordination Committee Chair
- Hometown: Miami, FL
- Represents groups and persons with physical, cognitive, sensory, and mental disabilities

Christine Goulbourne, 2nd Vice-Chair and Public Awareness Committee Chair
- Hometown: Trinity, FL
- Represents groups and persons with physical, cognitive, sensory, and mental disabilities

Vincent Cosentino, Planning/Coordination Committee Member
- Hometown: Tampa, FL
- Represents VR Counselors

John-Henry Douglas, Planning/Coordination Committee Member
- Hometown: Lake City, FL
- Represents groups and persons with physical, cognitive, sensory, and mental disabilities

Becki Forsell, Legislative Committee Member
- Hometown: Tampa, FL
- Represents Business, Industry, and Labor

Ben Grzesik, Legislative Committee Member
- Hometown: Winter Park, FL
- Represents CareerSource Florida

Lori Kijanka, Evaluation Committee Member
- Hometown: Ft Lauderdale, FL
- Represents Community Rehabilitation Providers

Aleisa McKinlay, VR Director
- Hometown: Tallahassee, FL
- Represents VR

John Pribanic, Evaluation Committee Chair
- Hometown: Tampa, FL
- Represents Business, Industry, and Labor

Kara Tucker, Committee Chair and Planning/Coordination and Evaluation Committee Member
- Hometown: Neptune Beach, FL
- Represents persons with physical, cognitive, sensory, and mental disabilities

Peter Grzesik, Legislative Committee Member
- Hometown: Winter Park, FL
- Represents Business, Industry, and Labor

Janet Severt, Planning/Coordination Committee Member
- Hometown: Orange City, FL
- Represents Business, Industry, and Labor

and her companion Wyland

Rebecca Witonsky, Evaluation Committee Member
- Hometown: Boca Raton, FL
- Represents groups and persons with physical, cognitive, sensory, and mental disabilities

John Pribanic, Committee Chair
- Hometown: Tampa, FL
- Represents Business, Industry, and Labor

Yolanda Herrera, Past Council Chair and Planning/Coordination and Evaluation Committee Member
- Hometown: Tallahassee, FL
- Represents Client Assistance Program - Disability Rights FL

Justice for ALL is organized by Justin Dart and others to advocate against calls to amend or repeal the ADA or IDEA.

The Americans with Disabilities Act is signed by President George H.W. Bush as the most sweeping disability rights legislation.

American with Disabilities Act (ADA) is passed.

President Clinton signs the Rehabilitation Act Amendments including Section 508 requiring access for all to federal information & technology.

Justice for ALL is organized by Justin Dart and others to advocate against calls to amend or repeal the ADA or IDEA.

The Americans with Disabilities Act is signed by President George H.W. Bush as the most sweeping disability rights legislation.

The Technology Related Assistance Act (The Tech Act) authorizes funding to state projects to facilitate access to assistive technology.

President Clinton signs the Rehabilitation Act Amendments including Section 508 requiring access for all to federal information & technology.

The Help America Vote Act (HAV A) becomes law requiring voting systems be accessible for all.
The ADA Amendments Act clarifies that impairments become law, broadening the scope of who is considered disabled and clarifies that impairments that are transitory.

The Council wishes to thank Andrea Schwendinger for creating the FRC Annual Report.

Meet the FRC Staff

Please contact us if we may be of assistance:

- Roy Cosgrove (Left) – Program Administrator
  Responsibilities include managing all FRC programs and staffing the Evaluation, Business, and Executive Committees.
  (850) 245-3317
  roy.cosgrove@vr.fldoe.org

- Andrea Schwendinger (Center) – Analyst
  Responsibilities include the development and creation of the Annual Report, facilitating discussion and reviewing the State Plan, and staffing the Legislative, Public Awareness, and Planning/Coordination Committees.
  (850) 245-3319
  andrea.schwendinger@vr.fldoe.org

- Rasheeda Snell (Right) – Administrative Assistant
  Responsibilities include creating and tracking fiscally related activities (purchasing and contract payments), council travel, and program support.
  (850) 245-3287
  rasheeda.snell@vr.fldoe.org

You may wish to nominate yourself or others for FRC membership. All nominations should reflect a commitment to regularly attend meetings and be an active FRC member. The nomination form may be found at www.flgov.com/appointments/

Council Recruitment

The FRC, a State Rehabilitation Council (SRC), is seeking nominations for membership on the Council to fill current vacancies. The SRC consists of up to twenty-five (25) members, appointed by the Governor as mandated in the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1998, with the majority being individuals or representatives of persons with disabilities. The meetings are conducted four (4) times a year. Committee meetings and conference calls are scheduled as needed. Members are reimbursed for their mileage, food, and lodging (if overnights are required), as well as reasonable accommodations and other necessary expenses for attending meetings. A term of appointment to the Council is three (3) years, and council members may not serve more than two (2) consecutive terms. The SRC works in conjunction with VR to:

- Review, analyze, and advise VR regarding its performance as outlined under Title I of the Rehabilitation Act
- Advise and assist in the preparation of the State Plan, the Strategic Plan, reports, and evaluations under Title I of the Act
- Conduct a review and analysis of consumer satisfaction, the effectiveness of functions performed by VR and by private entities providing rehabilitation services
- Prepare and submit an annual report on the status of statewide vocational rehabilitation programs to the Governor, the Commissioner of the Rehabilitation Services Administration, other primary stakeholders, and the public

You may wish to nominate yourself or others for FRC membership. All nominations should reflect a commitment to regularly attend meetings and be an active FRC member. The nomination form may be found at www.flgov.com/appointments/
The FRC Mission is to increase employment, enhance independence and improve the quality of life for Floridians with disabilities.

Some industries hiring in the State of Florida include:
- Aerospace
- Agriculture
- Environmental Conservation
- Forestry
- Historical Preservation
- Hospitality
- Information Technology
- Manufacturing
- Tourism
- Wildlife Management

Help us expand this list. Become a partner and help us employ others!