

**Rhode Island Department of Human Services
Office of Rehabilitation Services
and
Rhode Island State Rehabilitation Council**

**2021
ANNUAL REPORT**

Daniel J. McKee - Governor



Celia J. Blue - Interim Director

The Mission of the Rhode Island Office of Rehabilitation Services is

“To empower individuals with disabilities to choose, prepare for, obtain, advance in, and maintain employment, economic self-sufficiency, independence and integration into society”



ORS Values

We value the worth, dignity, rights, responsibilities, and empowerment of all persons with disabilities in achieving their individualized goals.

We value staff who reflect pride and commitment to excellence in achieving our mission.

We value a management style that fosters responsibility and accountability while encouraging creativity, initiative, and leadership throughout the organization.

We value community support in achieving the agency’s mission.

We value leadership which promotes clarity of purpose.

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Message from the Interim Director,

The Rhode Island Department of Human Services (DHS) is an organization of opportunity, providing a full continuum of services to the people who need us. We are dedicated to creating an environment where staff and customers have the tools, resources and supports they need to thrive at home, work and in the community. Recognizing the tremendous impact of COVID-19 on vulnerable Rhode Islanders, DHS further stepped up over the past year to do our part and be part of the solution.

Our Office of Rehabilitation Services (ORS), a division of DHS, is an integral part of our mission and response to COVID-19. It is my pleasure to provide you with its Annual Report for Federal Fiscal Year 2021.

ORS is charged with empowering Rhode Islanders who have disabilities and voluntarily wish to obtain and maintain employment, economic self-sufficiency, independence and full integration into society. Vocational Rehabilitation Services; Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired (SBVI); and Disability Determination Services (DDS) provide several resources and services, which enhance the quality of life for Rhode Island residents with disabilities.

Even with the ORS lobby closed for the safety of our customers and staff, the division staff led by Associate Director Ron Racine continued to help and make an impact on those Rhode Islanders with disabilities seeking employment. They adapted and were able to continue to provide many of the services remotely and safely. They were also able to increase their work with Transition Age Youth in secondary education by providing more opportunities for work experiences and work exploration, which is so important for these students' future education and career milestones.

I hope you find this 2021 Annual Report insightful, informative and inspiring. We also commend ORS' commitment to all Rhode Islanders seeking needed support and services — further highlighting the significance of public service in everyday life.



Celia J. Blue

Message from the Associate Director,

On behalf of the Office of Rehabilitation Services, I am pleased to present to you the 2021 Annual Report. The mission of the Office of Rehabilitation Services is to provide customized and comprehensive services to individuals with disabilities that will maximize their quality of life, self-reliance, and economic independence in the community. We have included success stories that reflect the diversity of our customers and their needs. We want to illustrate the partnership between our staff and our customer that makes rehabilitation work. The Vocational Rehabilitation Program increases revenue at all levels of government and decreases the burden of income maintenance programs.

The accomplishments outlined in this annual report reflect favorably on the efforts of the staff who, by hard work and commitment, have continued a long tradition of serving Rhode Islanders with disabilities. We are also indebted to the Rhode Island State Rehabilitation Council, Governor's Advisory Council for the Blind & Visually Impaired, State Committee of Blind Vendors, and Rhode Island Council on Assistive Technology, for their partnership and help in maximizing the potential of persons with disabilities. I also extend my appreciation to our hard-working and capable staff along with our many public and private partners, who have displayed tremendous resiliency in continuing to provide high quality services despite many challenges. It truly reflects the passion, desire, and commitment to help those we serve.

Inside you will read several individual success stories, and I am sure you will be impressed at the accomplishments of some of these amazing individuals. It is these stories, and many more like them that give hope and inspiration to all of us during these challenging times.



Ronald Racine

“The challenges in our lives are there to strengthen our convictions. They are not there to run us over.” – Nick Vujicic

Vocational Rehabilitation

The Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Program is the public state and federally-funded program that assists individuals with disabilities to choose, prepare for, obtain, advance in, and maintain competitive integrated employment with employment being the successful outcome of services provided. It is expected that individuals with disabilities who apply for services are interested in becoming employed and understand that this is the focus of the VR program.

A Masters level Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor works with the individual to develop an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) that includes an employment goal. The time expected for the individual to reach the goal, the services that the individual chooses necessary to reach the employment goal, and how the services will be provided are all tailored to suit the needs of the particular individual.

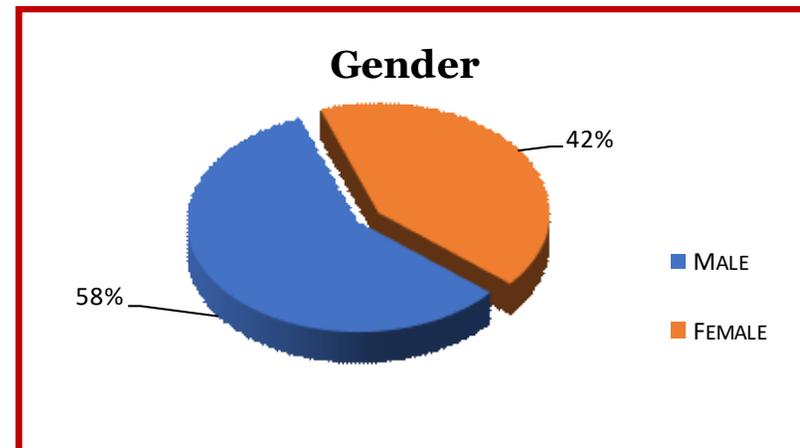
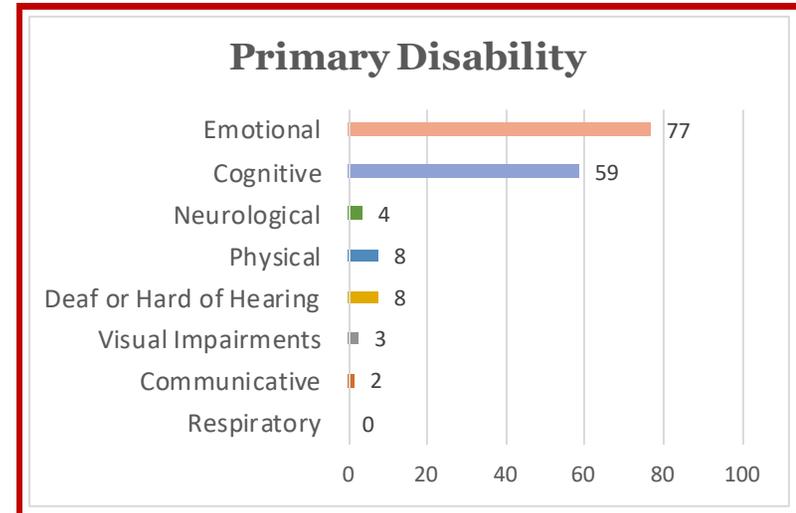
Vocational Rehabilitation services that may be incorporated in an Individualized Plan for Employment include: College or Vocational Training; Job Training and Job Supports; Other Goods and Services; Counseling and Guidance; Post-Employment Services; Diagnostic Evaluations; Rehabilitation Technology Services; Housing Modifications; Vehicle Modifications; Job Development & Job Placement Services; and/or Transition & Pre-ETS Services.

In 2020, due to the COVID-19 virus, contactless service programs were developed and have continued through 2021.

Who Are Our Customers?

Program Year (PY) 2020 (7/1/20—6/30/21)

161 Successfully Employed Individuals with a Disability

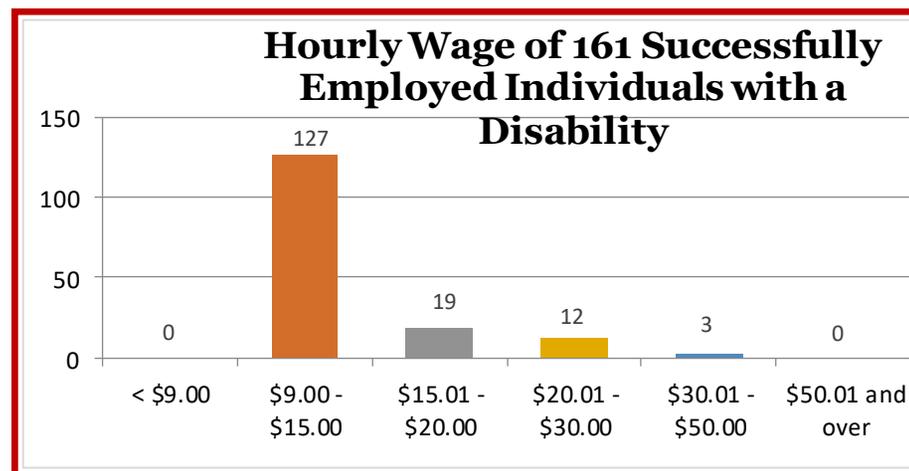


JANUARY 2022

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
						1 New Years Day
2	3 State Offices Closed	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13 State Plan Public Hearing 1:30- 3pm Warwick Public Library	14	15
16 Religious Freedom Day	17 Martin Luther King Day State Offices Closed	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31					

Program Year (PY) 2020 (7/1/20 - 6/30/21) Statistics
161 Successfully Employed Individuals with Disabilities
Vocational Rehabilitation Statistics

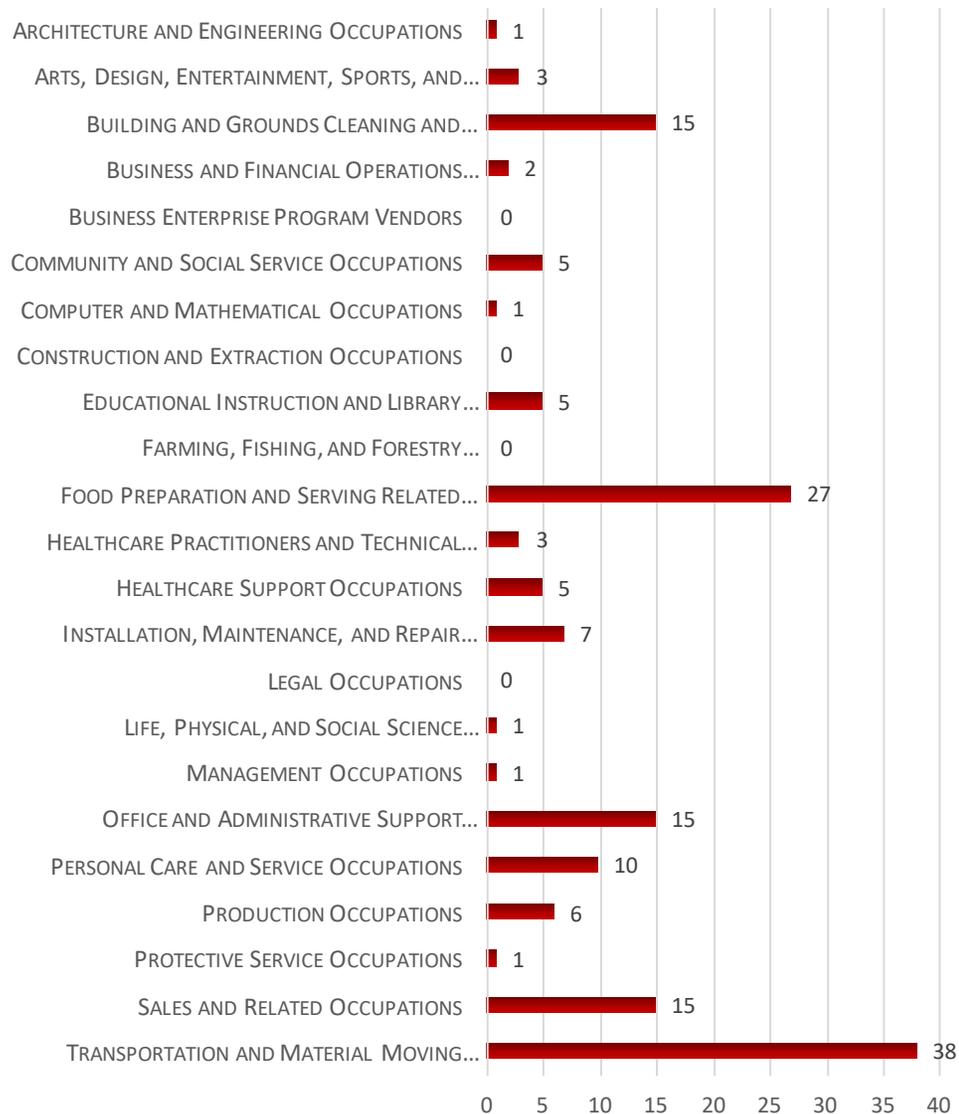
- 448** individuals applied for VR services.
- 2,019** individuals received services purchased from vendors, including evaluations, therapies, personal assistant services, job placement and training.
- 31** individuals received rehabilitation technology services to assist them to prepare for and to enter employment.
- 1,288** students are actively in Pre-ETS services, **780** are potentially eligible students and **580** are eligible students receiving these services.
- 1,222** authorizations were issued for individual Pre-Employment Transition Services to take place. These services include Pre-ETS Job Exploration, Community Based Work Experiences, Tri-Employment, Project Search, Travel Training, and Transition Academies as well as our Virtual Pre-ETS services of Virtual Job Exploration, Virtual Summer Work, Virtual Summer Work Alliance, Virtual Travel Training and Virtual College Summer Work.
- 165** Pre-ETS students applied for VR services.



FEBRUARY 2022

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7 Full SRC Council Meeting 4pm—6pm ORS 1st Floor Conference Room	8	9	10	11	12
13	14 	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28					

Primary Occupation of 161 Successfully Employed Individuals with Disabilities



Virtual Supported Employment and Non-Supported Employment Services

VOCATIONAL EVALUATION (VIRTUAL): Approved for adult vocational evaluations. This is a virtual/remote service that can consist of but is not limited to exploration, interest inventory testing and virtual job shadowing.*

VIRTUAL JOB PREPARATION: Consists of 9 hours per week for 4 weeks; scheduling of classes is up to the Provider at a minimum of 9 hours per week. All other services similar to non-virtual job prep and should include a resume and interviewing skills as part of reporting. *

JOB RETENTION: Service can be provided virtually and would include at least weekly phone calls to check in with the employer (if necessary) and the client. *

JOB COACHING SERVICES: Provided virtually and telephonically.*

VIRTUAL TRAVEL TRAINING: Review travel safety, how to read a bus schedule, YouTube videos on public transportation, social distancing, and Covid-19 safety precautions.

*** Care should be taken to include social distancing and Covid-19 Safety precautions.**

MARCH 2022

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17 	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31		

Supported Employment

The ORS Supported Employment (SE) Services Program assists individuals with the most significant disabilities to acquire the skills and experience, along with the appropriate supports, to obtain and maintain competitive, integrated employment. As a result of the Consent Decree between the Department of Justice (DOJ) and the State of Rhode Island, ORS continues to work with the Department of Behavioral Healthcare, Developmental Disabilities and Hospitals (BHDDH), and Department of Education (RIDE) to develop services to meet the employment needs of individuals of all ages and differing abilities.

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic continues to create a multitude of challenges with providing in-person services to all consumers that receive employment services. ORS worked quickly to move to working remotely, and in-person vocational services were redesigned so that the Developmental Disability organizations would be able to provide virtual services with the goal of keeping individuals engaged and focused on employment. The Provider Agencies were able to provide virtual employment services and have embraced the provision of virtual services. ORS has retained virtual services as an effective means of communication and service delivery to those individuals who are still fearful about returning to in-person services.

For those individuals who have expressed a desire to work at an in-person position in the community, COVID risk discussions and agreements take place and are reviewed and signed by ORS, the Provider Agency staff, the client/guardian, and/or the support team. This is to ensure that the individual has the most up to date information from the CDC to remain safe in their working environment.

ORS and BHDDH have been working together with respective technical support providers to identify how best to meet demand and attempt to overcome staffing shortages as a result of COVID. ORS continues to explore the development of an Integrated Resource Team (IRT) model, which utilizes a full array of available resources in the State. Services are centered around what an individual with multiple needs requires: housing, employment, and mental health. Also, several members of the ORS SE staff participated in fidelity training for the Person-Centered Supported Employment Program (PCSEP) and Customized Employment through Griffin-Hammis being offered by BHDDH for the PCSEP providers.

Additionally, work continues on the *Let's Get to Work Program* -- a collaborative effort with ORS, Department of Labor and Training (DLT), BHDDH, and Department of Human Services (DHS) to work on centralizing specialized units to help individuals with disabilities obtain employment. This is an essential piece of a refreshed *Employment First Initiative* brought to the attention of the Governor's office. Work is being done across several State agencies to highlight the needs of individuals with disabilities. ORS and BHDDH are working with the DLT to ensure that anyone with a disability is provided the same access to any State-sponsored employment programs as those without disabilities.

ORS believes that the collaboration with State Agencies and the Governor's office will help increase employment opportunities for any individual with a disability and especially for those who need supported employment services.

APRIL 2022

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17 	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30

Transition / Pre-Employment Transition Services

The 2020-2021 school year was a challenging year for students, going day-by-day, moving from virtual to in person, with the notion that a return to virtual was possible with the slightest increase in COVID numbers. Despite this year of uncertainty, the Office of Rehabilitation Services continued to provide high quality Pre-Employment Transition Services, as well as collaborated with partners to enhance and develop new services to meet the needs of the mutual students we work with. ORS remained flexible around service delivery, which allowed services to move forward and even reach students who may have not have otherwise participated. For example, services that may have started out in person within a school district virtually were opened up to students in other districts who may not have that program in their area.

The 2020-2021 school year brought brand new Pre-ETS services, including a 9th and 10th grade work readiness program, which prepared younger students to increase their soft skills, employability skills, and job readiness skills, as they begin to move into their community employment placements. ORS added virtual Career Chats in partnership with the West Bay Collaborative to provide a direct connection to individuals in high demand careers, thus allowing students to hear about these occupations and ask pointed questions. This program reached up to 5,000 students statewide.

ORS had a successful year with a pilot collaboration with The University of RI's STARTURI program. This program is designed to foster and create a college community, promote academic achievement, and advance retention by offering intentional and structured support to 10 first-year students with Autism. This partnership also

offers students a work experience in their chosen field of study after the completion of their first college year. Another new service added this year was Interview Skill Builder, a service to prepare students for that first interaction with employers, and how to answer the tough questions that go along with securing employment.

ORS provided a total of 987 Pre-ETS services this past school year and 235 Pre-ETS virtual services. Through collaborations with CRP's ORS has introduced Pre-ETS services to well over 5,000 students through Virtual Career Chats and Middle School programming which is available to students as young as 14. Despite COVID, ORS was still able to get students out into the community to participate in community-based employment activities. This was done through strict adherence of state COVID guidelines in partnership with the CRP's who educated students and families around safety in the community and workplace. Services that continued to take place in the community included Project Search, Tri-Employment programs, Summer Work Experience, Summer Employment Alliance, and Pre-ETS Community-Based Work Experiences.

New for 2021-2022 is a collaboration with the Regional Transition Center, BHDDH, three school districts, and Griffin and Hammis on a school-to-work pilot for students with significant disabilities to focus on starting Discovery and Customized Employment while the student is still in high school. This will improve community connections and employment outcomes, as well as develop a consistent process across Transition and Adult Service regarding person-centered employment programming.

MAY 2022

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
1	2 SRC Annual Meeting 9am-11am Location: TBA	3	4	5 	6	7
8 	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30 	31				

Services for the Blind & Visually Impaired (SBVI)

Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired (SBVI) offers a wide array of services to eligible individuals who are blind or visually impaired through its Vocational Rehabilitation Unit, Business Enterprises Program, and Social Services Program. The various services offered by these programs are designed to help individuals of all ages achieve independence at home, in the community, and in the workplace.

Vocational Rehabilitation Program... A Federal/State Program created to assist people who are blind or visually impaired to obtain or maintain employment. Services provided include: evaluation, orientation, mobility training, rehabilitation technology, guidance and counseling, career assessment, educational planning, vocational training, provision of adaptive equipment, job development, job placement, and follow-up services.

Business Enterprises Program... A Federal/State Program which establishes vending facilities in state, federal, or private buildings for operation by persons who are legally blind. Licensed blind vendors operate vending facilities at 10 locations throughout the state and are assigned to these locations based on their seniority within the program. Types of facilities include vending machines, micro markets, small coffee shops, larger food service sites serving hot and cold entrees prepared on-site. All operate under the name of "Coffee Plus".

Assistive Technology Access Partnership (ATAP)...The Office of Rehabilitation Services is the lead Agency for the Rhode Island Assistive Technology Access Partnership (ATAP). ATAP is a statewide program funded under the Assistive Technology Act of 1998. The Rhode Island Assistive Technology Access Partnership (ATAP) is designed as a

statewide partnership of organizations, each with a targeted assistive technology focus, working together to improve access to and acquisition of assistive technology for individuals with disabilities.

Social Services Program... Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired coordinates a federal comprehensive service program which focuses primarily on children from age 3 through age 14, elderly individuals, and individuals for whom a vocational goal is not feasible.

Children's Case Management Services include family casework, coordination with Early Intervention Programs, educational guidance, summer camp for youths, arrangement of ophthalmologist and low vision evaluations, and information and referral to appropriate community programs.

Independent Living for Older Blind Program provides case management services, along with ancillary services for mobility and orientation, rehabilitation teaching for skills training in activities of daily living, management of low vision, provisions of adaptive equipment, and information and referral to support groups and appropriate community services.

Adaptive Telephone Equipment Loan Program (ATEL)... The ATEL Program loans telephone equipment to residents of the State of Rhode Island who have hearing, speech, or neuro-muscular (unable to dial or hold a receiver) impairments and have a signed certificate of disability. Equipment is issued on a first-come, first-serve basis.

JUNE 2022

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14 Flag Day	15	16	17	18
19 Juneteenth Fathers Day	20 Juneteenth observed	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30		

SBVI Statistics

Business Enterprises Program

- **10** Vending facilities were supported by the Randolph-Sheppard Business Enterprises Program (BEP) at Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired. These 10 facilities collectively also provided employment for numerous individuals around the state. Multiple operators have a second location they managed.
- Average reported net earnings by a vendor: **\$41,400**
- Highest reported net earnings by a vendor: **\$138,000**
- Permanent shields were placed in Coffee Plus locations. Some facilities made a transition from coffee shops to 24-hour Micro Markets and vending only machines that serve items such as hot beverages.

Independent Living Services for Older Individuals Who Are Blind (OIB)

- **290** older individuals who are blind or visually impaired (over age 55) received services from the Independent Living for Older Blind Program. Annual statistics show that:
- **89%** of individuals over age 55, served reported feeling that they are in greater control and are more confident in their ability to maintain their current living situation as a result of services they received.
- **97%** of individuals receiving AT (assistive technology) services and training maintained or improved functional abilities that were previously lost or diminished as a result of vision.

Social Services for the Blind

SBVI staff continued to provide critical services in 2021; resuming in-person service delivery in addition to virtual, telephonic, or remote instruction.

The ATAP and ATEL Programs reached out to various agencies to provide technical assistance and information and guidance to assist with tele-support and Assistive Technology plans for the individuals that they provide supports too.

Children's Services

RISBVI continues its role of supporting parents through advocacy and service coordination for children with severe visual impairments.

SBVI Administrator and staff are appointed to serve on the Rhode Island Vision Education Services Program Advisory Board to monitor, review, and update the RIVESP work plan, in order to assure the future of quality educational services to visually impaired children in school/educational settings in Rhode Island

Newsline

- No. of individuals that are registered for this newspaper reading service provided by the National Federation of the Blind (NFB), and funded by SBVI: **527**

Assistive Technology Access Partnership (ATAP)

- No. of individuals that received information from Assistive Technology Access Partnership (ATAP) Resource Centers about assistive technology (AT) and funding options: **1,048**
- No. of individuals that received Demonstrations: **143**
- No. of participants that received Training: **1,609**
- No. of individuals that received Device Loan: **88**
- No. of individuals that received Reused Devices: **25**

Adaptive Telephone Equipment Loan Program (ATEL)

- No. of individuals provided with specialized equipment through the ATEL (Adaptive Telephone Equipment Loan) Program: **150**

JULY 2022

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
					1	2
3	4 	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31						

Disability Determination Services

The Rhode Island Disability Determination Services (RI DDS) is a unit within the Office of Rehabilitation Services, which operates under a “state-federal” partnership. The function of the RI DDS is to make determinations as to the medical eligibility of adults and children with physical and/or mental impairments who have applied for Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) and/or Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits. The RI DDS is assigned a budgeted workload under a regulatory agreement with the Social Security Administration (SSA). The RI DDS is 100 percent financed by SSA to adjudicate initial disability applications, appeals of cases initially denied, and continuing disability reviews. The RI DDS also performs disability hearings on cases in which benefits have been terminated. In total, the RI DDS processed 13,118 disability cases this year. Based on increased staffing and an expected increase in intake, RI DDS anticipates processing approximately 14,000 cases in FFY2021. COVID-19 continued to detrimentally impact case receipts and clearances and most all aspects of case processing during FFY2021.

RI DDS has completed the transition to the new computer system that SSA has developed. The system is referred to as DCPS (Disability Case Processing System). We started the roll out in March of 2017. We currently have 100% of the staff using the system. SSA is constantly improving the software and tools that the examiners use in their daily functions to enhance timely and accurate decisions and make the system more functional for

users. Users are no longer working in dual environments. We turned off the Legacy system in June of 2020 when the contract was up. Not all case types are supported in the new system at this time. However, DCPS has monthly enhancement releases which are improving functionality and striving to meet the required software tools of the DDS.

In late 2020, the federal hiring freeze that had been in place since 2016 came to an end. RI DDS was able to post and fill all vacancies, as well as 7 newly created, 100 percent federally-funded full-time positions. These new hires began onboarding in September 2020 with the final 4 positions coming onboard in January 2021. This increase in staffing has helped us increase productivity while decreasing processing time in FFY21. COVID-19 caused disruption in our case processing because in-person medical appointments were halted, and face-to-face consultative examinations were suspended. Work on Continuing Disability Reviews (CDRs), prehearings, and hearings were suspended per SSA directives from April 2020 – August 2020.

COVID-19 related policies precluded any claims from being denied for failure to cooperate or insufficient evidence during this same timeframe. This resulted in a slower processing time. We have not yet resumed face-to-face hearings. We have completed phone hearings for claimants that agree to this format. We expect to begin video hearings in the near future. Despite the case

AUGUST 2022

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8 State Offices Closed - Victory Day	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

processing challenges related to COVID-19, the RI DDS processed 13,118 disability claims. The RI DDS has been able to maintain excellent accuracy ratings of 98.3%. We ended FFY19 with an overall processing time of 116.9, which is below the national threshold of 171 days.

Rhode Island continues to operate a CDI Unit (Cooperative Disability Investigations) to help combat fraud in the program. This unit investigates fraud at initial and reconsideration applications, prior to claimants being put in pay status. Recently, they have been able to work fraud cases for individuals already in pay status. The referrals come from the field offices, DDS, and the public. The CDI unit consists of a DDS examiner, a field office representative, two investigators from the Attorney General's office, and a Special Agent. SSA continues to put a high emphasis on combatting fraud in the program.

Local Social Security Field Offices

30 Quaker Lane, 1st Floor
Warwick, RI 02886-0111
1-866-964-2038

4 Pleasant Street
Pawtucket, RI 02860
1-866-931-7079

Pavilion Plaza
2168 Diamond Hill Road
Woonsocket, RI 02895
1-877-229-3542

130 Bellevue Avenue
Newport, RI 02840
1-866-253-5607

1 Empire Plaza, 6th floor
Providence, RI 02903
1-877-402-0808

Disability Determination Services

Statistics

13,351	Total cases were received by the Disability Determination Services (DDS)
13,118	Claims were processed by the DDS
6,234	Initial claims were filed
6,545	Initial claims were processed
4,158	Continuing Disability Review cases were completed
262	Pre-Hearing Cases were processed, resulting in 154 Disability Hearing decisions
3,528	Consultative Exams were purchased
11,467	Medical Evidence Records were purchased
\$1,114,724	Total Medical Costs with Total DDS Budget of \$ 10,210,338

SEPTEMBER 2022

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
				1	2	3
4	5 Labor Day State Offices Closed	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22 	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	

Success Stories

Nikolas Simijis

Stock Clerk - Amazon/Whole Foods

Counselor: Laura Allbee

This is Nikolas.

Nikolas Simijis is currently employed at Whole Foods, but his story begins several years earlier.

Nikolas was a student at Cranston High School East. He was very unsure what he was going to do after high school.

Nikolas participated in some exploration services through ORS. Nikolas applied twice to Project Search and was admitted the second time. Project Search is a program which is a collaboration between the Office of Rehabilitation Services, Department of Behavioral Health, Developmental Disabilities,



and Hospitals (BHDDH), Cranston School Department, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Rhode Island, and supporting ORS vendor, Perspectives.

Project Search is a unique business-lead one-year school-to-work program that takes place entirely at the workplace. Students are called interns and are completely immersed in the workplace. The program allows for a combination of classroom instructions, career exploration, and relevant jobs skills training through three strategically designed internships.

Through Project Search Nikolas was further able to build his vocational skills and find employment. During Project Search he was determined eligible for BHDDH services, and together the team assisted him finding employment.

Nikolas has been employed by Amazon at Whole Foods since February 2020. Nikolas receives long-term supports from ORS and BHDDH and remains happily employed.

In his free time Nikolas enjoys engaging in anything that has to do with sports.

OCTOBER 2022

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10 Columbus Day State Offices Closed	11	12	13	14	15 White Cane Safety Day
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31 					

BEST - Business Engagement Specialist Team

Since 2019, a group comprised of Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors (VRC's) with guidance from Regional Supervisors, Assistant Administrator for Vendor Affairs & Workforce Development, and the Administrator of Vocational Rehabilitation began to meet regularly with the intention of formally establishing a Business Engagement Specialist Team (BEST). Part of this was driven by the VRC's recognition that there is a critical lack of awareness of the agency and the services in the business community. Many VRC's found out in reaching out to businesses there was no organized procedure in place to do so. Additionally, WIOA federal regulations mandate that state Vocational Rehabilitation agencies consider businesses as a secondary VR customer. The need to engage with the business community is a critical piece of WIOA to develop work-based learning for students and youth with disabilities and employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities, including those with the most significant disabilities.

The BEST unit is a specialized unit that markets ORS's services to the business community by educating businesses about the role of ORS. The team also supports businesses' staffing needs, including screening and identifying qualified job applicants, dispelling myths around employing individuals with disabilities through education, and educating Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors and job seekers about labor market demand. This group saw an opportunity to formally establish themselves within the agency and began meeting



regularly to work diligently with technical assistance from WINTAC (now VRTAC.)

As a result of the BEST Team's efforts and the number of requests from the business community to partner, ORS decided to expand BEST by assigning additional counselors to the team to ensure that ORS can deliver the same level of support and services to current and future community business partners. Each region of ORS is now represented by at least one counselor, with most having two representatives. The BEST Team will continue to meet on a weekly basis to discuss job openings, new partnerships, training ideas, job fairs, and any other business-related information. The information discussed is then presented to each region by their respective representative, so that it is reaching the entire agency.

NOVEMBER 2022

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8 Election Day State Offices Closed	9	10	11 Veteran's Day State Offices Closed	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24 	25	26
27	28	29	30			

Additionally, BEST has collaborated with BHDDH and the Governor's Workforce Board to align practices and ensure First Point of Contact process is in place.

Some of the consulting services the BEST team offers include the following: Talent acquisition, Customized employee training strategies, Customized comprehensive task analysis, Assistive Technology, Job Accommodations Training, Disability etiquette, Referral services for current employees, Diversity in the workplace training, Information on Federal Tax Credit Incentives, Support in marketing and advertising for talent, and Worksite ergonomic evaluations. (Trainings in any of these areas could be tailored to one's specific business needs.)

Some highlights of what this team has already accomplished include forming working partnerships with larger companies like Sodexo, IGT, Blue Cross/Blue Shield, and CVS to help diversify and support their workforce; engaging regularly with other State agencies (i.e. DLT, BHDDH) to work together, collaboratively, with the business community and the consumers we serve; actively pursuing and increased their online and social media presence by creating platforms such as (Linked In and Facebook) to reach consumers and businesses alike; and moving forward will continue to explore other innovative ways to reach out to employers.

What this team has accomplished in the short amount of time they have been together, amidst the hurdles and complications of working remotely during this pandemic, is a true testament to the dedication and resiliency of this agency.

Bruce Chance

Lot Attendant - Home Depot

Counselor: Emilee O'Connor

Bruce applied for ORS services in June of 2020 right in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite everything that was going on, he wanted to obtain employment.

He was placed on the waitlist until August of 2020, at which point his employment plan was developed. Since Bruce already had extensive experience as a bagger and cart attendant at previous jobs, he was able to move right into job development and job placement services.

In August 2020, Bruce was hired at Home Depot in Johnston as a lot attendant.

ORS was able to assist him with clothing for his job, benefits planning, and job coaching.

Bruce has worked continuously through the pandemic and is an asset to his company.



DECEMBER 2022

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
				1	2	3 Intl. Day of Persons With Disabilities
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21 	22	23	24
25 	26 Christmas Day observed	27	28	29	30	31 

Franklin Okunola

Office Production - Thielsch Engineering

Counselor: Gina Albanese

Franklin has been involved with ORS on and off since 2016. He is a friendly, motivated 29-year-old gentleman. Franklin is involved with the Department of Justice (DOJ) caseload and has been successfully employed since June 2021 at Thielsch Engineering.



Franklin and Stephen

Franklin's current duties include: paperwork and shredding. He thoroughly enjoys his job!

Franklin was hired by Thielsch Engineering in Cranston, RI for office production. He was recruited by Stephen Dolinich, a former supervisor from a past job, now currently at Thielsch Engineering. This supervisor was impressed with Franklin's work ethic and asked if he would be interested in working for Thielsch Engineering.

Franklin is very motivated, and he will be working on expanding his work skills to include scanning.

In addition, he is currently looking into assistive technology to help better assist him with reminders/tasks.

He has been assisted by ORS and Easter Seals with supported employment job development, job placement, and job retention. Franklin is currently working eight hours per week and is an integral part of the Thielsch Engineering company.



Kimberly Testa

Sales Associate– Marshall’s

Counselor: Paul Hughett

An acoustic neuroma (vestibular schwannoma) is a benign tumor that develops on the balance (vestibular) and hearing, or auditory (cochlear) nerves leading from your inner ear to the brain.

When Kim was diagnosed with the acoustic neuroma in 2019, she was both relieved to discover that the balance and hearing problems she had been experiencing had a well-defined cause, and also apprehensive about the treatment.

In Kim’s case, Gamma Knife Radiation procedures were only partially successful. She underwent a Craniotomy that rid her of the tumor, but also left her balance impaired and led to significant loss of hearing in her left ear.

Extensive physical therapy allowed Kim to manage her balance issue, but no amount of physical therapy would restore the hearing in her left ear.

Single-sided Deafness may sound like a relatively minor inconvenience, but for Kim, already struggling to regain her balance, the inability to locate the direction of sound was bewildering.

In 2020 Kim applied to the Office of Rehabilitation Services Deaf and Hard of Hearing unit for assistance.

Kim’s Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor at ORS consulted her Audiologists report and reviewed her Audiologists recommendation for a “CROS” Hearing Aid System

Contralateral Routing of Signal (CROS) aids and assists the wearer in locating the source and direction of sound, as well as providing amplification to the ear with the impairment.

Kim was skeptical initially, however after being fitted with the CROS system she became a believer in the benefit of sound location in aiding her mind and body to maintain balance

Kim’s ORS Counselor approved payment for Kim’s CROS Hearing system, and as a direct result Kim was able to successfully return to work as a sales associate at Marshalls in the Spring of 2021!



Jamie Garris-Butler

Dog Groomer—Village Paws/All 4 Paws

Counselor: Kathleen Jones

Jamie started working with ORS in the winter of 2017 when she was in her junior year of high school. She was looking to receive transition services to assist her in narrowing down a career path to work toward after high school.

Jamie was referred for job exploration services, where she participated in interest testing and a work experience at a local doggie daycare/groomer. At that site she was able to observe and assist with the general duties of the business, as well as the dog groomers.

Jamie was then referred to ORS' Summer Work Program, where she learned how to take public transportation and prepared for her work placement with the doggie daycare.

With the additional guidance and counseling, and information and referral Jamie received through ORS, she was able to graduate from high school employed as a kennel attendant/pet bather.

In early 2019, Jamie contacted her ORS counselor and expressed that she would like to become certified as a dog

groomer to make herself more marketable within her job field. In the Spring of 2019 Jamie was awarded an ORS training grant

and completed the dog grooming training online with the Animal Behavioral College (ABC).

With her certification, Jamie was ready to start her career.

Jamie remained working as a kennel attendant/bather until June of 2021, when she accepted a job as a Dog

Groomer at two locations under the same ownership. Jamie has also done in-home grooming for her clients.



Joshua Conti

Independent Living Specialist—Transition Ocean State Center for Independent Living (OSCIL)

Counselor: Amanda Marcaccio

Josh started working with ORS in February of 2016, shortly after recovering from a Spinal Cord Injury. He came to ORS motivated to pursue his career and worked hard over the years to achieve his goals.

After completing a Vocational Evaluation and a Situational Assessment, Josh decided to pursue a career as an Occupational Therapist. Josh did the research and enrolled in the Occupational Therapy Assistant (OTA) program at the Community College of Rhode Island (CCRI).

During his time at CCRI, ORS provided Josh with an adaptive driving evaluation, lessons, as well as adaptive equipment to use in his car so he can independently transport himself to and from school. ORS also assisted with tuition support, OTA licensing fees, and benefits counseling.

Recently Josh graduated from CCRI with his OTA degree and has been hired as an Independent Living Specialist at Ocean State Center for Independent Living (OSCIL).

Josh's responsibilities include helping youth with disabilities transition to community independence by providing daily living skills training to assist with independence in the home and community.

With ORS's help, Josh has achieved his goals and is now giving back to the disability community through his work with OSCIL.



Brianna

Cashier-Walmart

Counselor: Karen Russell

Brianna had received services from ORS in the past, and her case had closed successfully as she had obtained employment. However, after losing that job, Brianna re-applied for services in March 2020 seeking assistance to find a new one.

At the time of application, Brianna's case was placed on the wait list. It was not until June 2020 that Brianna started working with her Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor, Karen Russell, towards finding employment. After completing a couple of evaluations to learn about Brianna's learning style, as well as for preparation for employment, Brianna was referred to Career Construction for job development and placement services.

With the assistance of her job developer, Brianna prepared for an interview, and she was hired on the spot. In November 2020 Brianna obtained a part-time, seasonal cashier position at Walmart. Although she was hired on temporary basis, she

demonstrated excellent self-advocacy skills, and flexibility working additional hours.

At one point during the season Brianna inquired about permanent employment, and the position transitioned to a permanent job where Brianna was working an average of 34+ hours weekly.

In addition to Job Development and Placement services, Brianna received retention services to ensure that she continued to do well on the job, as well as to continue to work on her self-advocacy skills. As of this date Brianna is still a full-time employee at Walmart.

Brianna's success story with ORS is only a snapshot of what could be accomplished when working together with the client, counselor, vendor, and employer.

Brianna is successfully employed and happy with her job.



“John Doe” - Lawyer

Counselor: Valerie Williams

This individual applied to ORS in July 2008 after receiving his high school diploma from Cranston High School West. He was assigned ORS counselor Valerie Williams and for the next several years, they worked together to develop an employment goal. Through guidance and counseling, they explored a couple different areas of vocational interest, and he was able to narrow down an employment goal.

His passion for the law was ignited the summer between his junior and senior years of high school when he engaged in a summer internship with the Rhode Island Superior Court Clerk’s office. He had the opportunity to follow various criminal and civil cases, learn the inner workings of the clerk’s office, and became familiarized with the Rhode Island legal system.

Through ORS, he was chosen for a Mary Brennan Public Policy Fellowship by the Governor’s Commission on Disabilities and worked closely with various state agencies and vendors to arrange statewide forums to address and identify the concerns of Rhode Island citizens with disabilities and their families. From these forums, state agencies were to develop public policy to address those concerns. ORS also helped him participate in summer college internships through Robert Gemma and the

State of Rhode Island. Through the state internship program, he undertook summer internships at the International Institute of Rhode Island and Department of Behavioral Healthcare, Developmental Disabilities, and Hospitals (BHDDH), where he worked closely with their legal departments to gain insight into the variety of legal practice areas. Naturally, his interest in pursuing a legal career grew.

He attended University of Rhode Island and graduated with a bachelor’s degree in political science, and then attended Roger Williams University (RWU) to obtain his Law Degree. While at RWU, his ORS counselor, Valerie Williams, supported his employment goal of lawyer. Some of the services he received while in college included assistive technology, assessment and equipment, tuition assistance, books and supplies, and room and board.

When he graduated from RWU, he began the long process of studying for, taking, and passing the Bar Exam. During this time, he again worked together with his ORS counselor to put the services in place that he needed to pass exam, such as the bar preparatory program and cost of exams. His perseverance paid off, and he passed the bar. He is currently employed as a practicing litigation attorney - working full-time, receiving medical benefits, and enjoying vacation time. He and his ORS counselor have maintained a relationship for many years to provide supports and encouragement that guided him from high school to adulthood. His determination, hard work, and personalized support received from collaboration with his ORS counselor helped him achieve his employment goal of becoming a lawyer.

John “Jack” Caron

Prep Cook - Island Deli

Counselor: Natalia Montoya

Jack is a 20-year-old young male who applied for VR services, as he needed assistance in obtaining and retaining gainful employment.

During his first meeting with his counselor, Jack, a quiet and polite individual, expressed his desire to work. Jack has not had any long-term previous work history. He had, however, completed a couple of internships while he was in high school, and

“I find myself to be happy in my current work environment and all my coworkers are incredibly welcoming, friendly, and willing to lend me a hand at a moment's notice.”

he had a summer/seasonal job working in retail. But that was about it.

When asked if he had any limitations while working, he stated that when working he needs clear directions and having multi-step directions be broken down into simple one- to two-step instructions. He also stated he had difficulties with his organizational skills; however, when he is focused on the task at hand, he is very organized.

Jack's Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor asked him about his vocational interests and leisure time activities. He stated that he enjoys playing music, video games, and cooking. Jack was offered vocational counseling and guidance, and his VR

Counselor made a recommendation for Jack to complete a vocational evaluation with the Holistic Development Center to learn more about his skills and abilities as they pertained to employment.

At the completion of the vocational evaluation, it was recommended that Jack participate in their Job Club to learn and practice soft

skills, social skills, and basic job-seeking skills. Jack completed the program successfully, and it was then recommended that he take part in a Community Based Work Experience as a Prep Cook at the Island Deli in Wakefield. Jack agreed and loved the idea of completing the hands-on assessment. While the assessment was in progress, Mike -- the owner of the Deli -- saw Jack's potential in the kitchen and offered him a part-time job.

Since Jack wanted to accept the job offer, his VR Counselor referred him for Benefits Counseling so he would have a better understanding of his SSI benefits and the impact of employment on them. Jack accepted the offer, and he has been employed and successfully working at the Island Deli since then.



“I want to thank all of you who helped me achieve this job because now I have something that is fulfilling as well as something to look forward to every week.”

2021 White Cane Awareness Day

October 15, 2021



On Friday, October 15 Rhode Island celebrated 2021 White Cane Awareness Day.

The event was hosted by IN-SIGHT and included hands-on demonstrations, live music, guest speakers, sweet treats, awesome giveaways and much more!

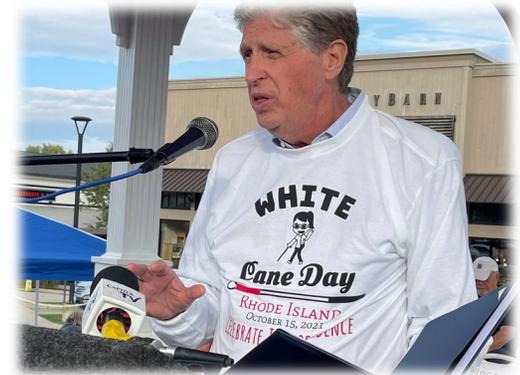
What is White Cane Awareness and why is it important? The white cane is a powerful symbol of independence for people living with visual impairments. Yet very few people understand the importance of this valuable tool.

“To blind people, the white cane is an essential tool that gives the ability to achieve a full and independent life. It allows us to move freely and safely from place to place — whether it’s at work, at school, or around our neighborhoods. White Cane Awareness Day is our way of emphasizing the critical role that this tool plays in living the lives we

want and informing the public about its true significance.” — NFB President Mark A. Riccobono

The event was held at the Garden City Gazebo in Cranston and drew dozens of people, including Rhode Island Governor Dan McKee, Treasurer Seth Magaziner, and House Speaker Joseph Shekarchi.

Several agencies helped sponsor the event including IN-SIGHT, the Rhode Island Lions Sight Foundation, the Providence Veterans Administration Vision Program, Rhode Island Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired, and the National Federation of the Blind Rhode Island Chapter.



Raymond A. Carroll Award

The Raymond A. Carroll Award is given to an individual who exemplifies the same dedication in serving individuals with disabilities as Mr. Carroll had during his forty-two years of state service.

Raymond Carroll began his career at the Office of Rehabilitation Services in 1966 and retired in 2008. During that time, he demonstrated his awareness of the needs of individuals with disabilities and was a dedicated and effective advocate for improving the standards set for programs providing services for those individuals with disabilities.

Michelle DeVita was awarded the 2020 Raymond A. Carroll Award on March 25, 2021. Michelle began her employment at the Office of Rehabilitation Services in September, 2017 as a Sr. Word Processing Typist, where she provided support for several regions.

Throughout 2020 after the COVID-19 pandemic arrived, Michelle DeVita worked in the office everyday throughout the pandemic. Michelle is always there and willing to help out when needed. She never says “no” to any request of her, and she does so with a smile on her face. She works efficiently and consistently.

This award is to recognize her hard work. Congratulations Michelle!



Past Recipients

2011 - Sharon DiPinto

Sr. Human Services Policy & Systems Specialist

2012 - Kathy McCabe

Sr. Rehabilitation Counselor

2013 - Sherry Olink

Jr. Resource Specialist

2014 - Teresa Scaramuzzo-DiMattia

Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor II

2015 - Rosemary Feeney

Sr. Human Services Business Officer

2016 - Paula Stachelek

Word Processing Typist

2017 - Sheridan Lomax

Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor

2018 - Rosemarie Aponte

Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor

2019 - Karen Davis

Asst. Administrator - Supported Employment

What Are The State Rehabilitation Councils?

The State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) is the consumer voice for the VR program. Federally-mandated membership requirements include a broad range of stakeholders to ensure that various constituencies have a voice in the conduct of the VR agency. This consumer voice is absolutely necessary for the VR program to partner with individuals with disabilities to jointly facilitate the accomplishment of their dreams of independence, full community integration, and employment.

SRC members represent the state agency to a broad array of partners such as employers, parents, educators, community rehabilitation programs, and other stakeholders in the VR program. They reinforce the value that individuals with disabilities are able to achieve quality employment outcomes and become contributing members of society.

Though mandated by federal law, the partnership between SRCs and VR extends beyond the shared accomplishment of mandated tasks. Specifically, the partnership is a call to action to advocate for and to hear the voices of the people served by VR. The partnership must be a commitment and priority for the partners in order to make the VR system a change agent whose goal is to assist people with disabilities to become employed in integrated, competitive employment!

(McGuire-Kuletz, M., Tomlinson, P., & Hurley, K.B. 2019). McGuire-Kuletz, M., Tomlinson, P., & Hurley, K.B. page 1 (2019).

The State Rehabilitation Council – vocational rehabilitation partnership under WIOA - Washington, DC: The George Washington University, Center for Rehabilitation Counseling Research and Education.

The Council's Mission

To work with ORS assuring that all Rhode Islanders with disabilities are able to obtain and keep meaningful and satisfying employment.

Our Vision

The SRC is an independent body of diverse members that works together to insure continuous improvement in ORS employment outcomes;

- *Enhances communication among all people and groups committed to increase opportunity for people with disabilities;
- *Increases employer awareness of people with disabilities as a productive human resource pool; and
- *Has the respect of decision-makers in the allocation of resources.
- *Conduct a review and analysis of the effectiveness of consumer satisfaction with the functions and activities of the State Agency as they relate to employment outcomes.

How to Become a RISRC Member: The Governor appoints members. As SRC members and VR advocates, we work in strategic partnership to increase the employment of people with disabilities in competitive, integrated jobs of their choice and in keeping with their skills and abilities. Federal law governing membership requires that certain categories be represented on the council (e.g., businesses, community rehabilitation providers, disability groups), and these category assignments are made by the Governor's office, in light of applicant experience and expressed representational preferences. If you are interested or want more information about the RISRC, please contact us at riscrc@cox.net.

Message from the State Rehabilitation Council Chair

Highlights 2020-2021



*Dr. Judith Drew,
SRC Chair*

Dear Consumers, Families, Friends, Partners and Stakeholders:

The Rhode Island State Rehabilitation Council had a successful year supporting ORS in its work on behalf of people with disabilities in R.I. In the Annual Report, you will be provided with an overview of our activities of the past year along with future goals for 2022. Detailed reports from the subcommittees that do the work of the Council, and a list of Council members with brief biographies of those members and the constituency each member represents are included, as well.

We have an engaged and energized Council membership who actively participated in our work on behalf our community. COVID-19 continued to create challenges for us, so we went about our work thru virtual sessions. We found that virtual meetings increased access for those who have difficulty traveling to in-person meetings or need to be socially distanced due to medical issues.

We congratulate the ORS counselors and their vendors for keeping the momentum going with transition activities, career exploration, and virtual career events during the pandemic. It has taken perseverance and hard work. The ORS counselors used this time to continue their innovative and engaging approach to employer outreach, which is poised to develop greater partnerships with employers in the coming years. In addition, we encouraged training on vocational evaluations and person-centered planning for vendors during 2020-2021 if they were able to participate.

The “Let’s Get to Work” initiative continued during 2020-2021. Although placements slowed, the Council was pleased to see that placements were happening and that the waitlist was being reduced as people were receiving services that would eventually lead to an employment plan. The SRC and ORS’ community partners continue to be thankful for their creativity and drive to keep their partnerships strong and successful for the benefit of our consumers.

Our Partners

Office of Rehabilitation Services (ORS); Rhode Island State Independent Living Council; Governor’s Workforce Board; Governor’s Commission on Disabilities.

Goals of the Council

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act charges the State Rehabilitation Council with meeting the following goals:

- ◆ Review, analyze, and advise ORS regarding the performance of their responsibilities in planning, developing, and implementing services to persons with disabilities in order to affect competitive employment outcomes,
- ◆ Advise and assist in the application of the State Plan, strategic plans, reports, needs assessments, and evaluations required under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended,
- ◆ Conduct a review and analysis of the effectiveness of consumer satisfaction with the functions and activities of the State Agency as they relate to employment outcomes,
- ◆ Advise the State Agency and provide for working relationships between the State Agency and the Statewide Independent Living Council,
- ◆ Perform such other functions as the Council deems appropriate and that are comparable to the other functions performed by the Council, and
- ◆ Prepare and submit an Annual Report to the Governor and the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA).

Our 2021 Activities

In 2021, members of the Council assisted ORS in finalizing the Consumer Needs Assessment (CNA). We were pleased with the vendor organization's responses and the outcomes they reported, since many providers and their leadership were furloughed during 2020-2021.

The Council continued its ongoing mission to monitor ORS' Order of Selection (OOS) and Waitlist to determine how quickly individuals were being moved off the Waitlist and into employment services. This year saw a reduction in the numbers in the OOS for the second year. ORS continued to move people off the Waitlist as openings occurred on caseloads and was engaged in outreach to those needed services but were discouraged by the long waitlist in the past. It is the SRC's desire that individuals who apply for services will no longer have to wait to receive them in 2022.

Acknowledgments

Every year the Council acknowledges the work of outstanding individuals or organizations in providing or advocating for services to those with disabilities within the State of Rhode Island. During our May meeting we agreed to postpone the annual meeting and the individual recognitions to the fall of 2021 to have an in-person event as the state reopened. Co-chairs and vice-chair were elected for next year, along with the Secretary of the Council, all of whom will be voted on at the fall meeting.

We want to thank ORS and their vendors publicly for their contributions to the growth of our consumers and to let you know your voices and enthusiasm continue to exemplify the best of vocational rehabilitation work in R.I.

Membership

The Membership Committee continues to be very engaged in recruiting new members. They are working on developing a mentorship program for new members that will go into effect in 2021-2022. We will use this program to acquaint new members with the work of the SRC and to assist them in becoming fully engaged in our committee work through advocacy in their communities and support of ORS' initiatives. Our ongoing commitment is to continually increase the diversity of our membership to be more representative of the people we support, and who ORS serves. We will welcome new members in 2021-2022 who are committed to the rights of all people with disabilities, who will share their perspectives on the state of disability rights and needs for employment in R.I., and who will be vocal advocates for employment based on choice.

Looking Ahead to What's Next

The Council will continue to fulfill its role by monitoring the progress the State of Rhode Island and ORS are making in fulfilling its responsibilities under the Rhode Island Supported Employment and Integrated Day Service Consent Decree. The Consent Decree continues to be enforced in RI, and ORS has made strides in increasing supported employment opportunities for individuals with significant disabilities due to the reduction of the OOS waitlist. We look forward to supporting them in this work in 2021-2022.

The Council will continue to receive updates regularly on the status of individuals covered under the Consent Decree. In addition, the Council will monitor those served by the Pre-ETS program to ensure they receive the services needed to successfully transition into employment services, especially since the program has been hard hit by the COVID-19 pandemic. Also, the Council will continue to monitor the use of the Supported Decision-Making model with students in transition as required by the Act.

With the beginning of the new initiative "Let's Get to Work" in 2020, the Council was pleased to provide support and guidance as it was implemented and will look to increased employment outcomes in 2021-2022.

We look forward to supporting ORS as it creates new opportunities to meet the employment needs of Rhode Islanders with disabilities. Also, we will be engaging in collaboration with ORS as they create new opportunities through their Business Engagement Specialist Team and DLT for collaboration with their providers to increase employment outcomes.

With our vibrant and engaged community of State Council members, providers, and ORS counselors, we will continue our advocacy for the needs of all people with disabilities to have the opportunity to fully participate in the community through community-based employment and independent living.

Respectfully Submitted,

Judith L. Drew, PhD - SRC Chairperson

Membership Training Sub-Committee

The Membership Training Sub-Committee is charged with the interviewing, orientation, and training of new members including disseminating new materials and providing an annual training event in partnership with ORS. A mentoring program is available to new members for their first year on the Council.

The Committee maintains four core goals:

- * Maintaining an annual training event - Ensure that all new and existing members have participated in the annual training seminar.
- * Disseminate a membership package - All members are offered a binder that clearly states the SRC mission, vision, responsibilities and contact information along with other relevant materials.
- * Sustaining ongoing efforts toward active recruitment of qualified individuals to its membership. Candidates must represent the interests of the stakeholders and represent a

diverse composition that reflects the needs of the populations served, while meeting the federal requirements. SRC members represent people with disabilities, advocates and family members, employers, and rehabilitation and education professionals. Recruitment of new members is an ongoing, shared responsibility of ALL council members.

- * Implement a mentoring program - The committee will pair new members with experienced members to answer any questions and clarify responsibilities and expectations of the council for at least one year.

Committee accomplishments:

- * Due to Covid-19 restrictions, the Committee did not hold a large training event this year.
- * The mentoring program is available to all new members.
- * The responsibility of current SRC members and especially the training Committee is to recruit new members.

Respectfully Submitted,

*Melissa Brusso, Chair
Membership Training Committee*

State Plan, Policy, and Quality Assurance Committee

The State Plan, Policy and Quality Assurance Committee of the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) is responsible for helping the entire SRC membership to provide feedback to ORS about its plans and policies in accordance with the Rehabilitation Act. The committee also participates in reviewing the quality of service delivery to ORS customers and continuous quality improvement.

During the last few years, the committee's focus was working with ORS to produce a monthly survey to consumers. We worked with ORS to ensure its survey to consumers was updated and reflective of the current data collection needs of the agency. Our work resulted in the agency producing both an English and Spanish survey to ensure the participation of underserved and unserved consumers. Through the COVID-19 pandemic, the committee continued working on the surveys remotely through a series of meetings on the Zoom platform to revise new surveys and increase the response rate. ORS reported a very strong response rate to surveys and would likely produce good data. This data was used as part of ORS's Comprehensive Needs Assessment and will be incorporated into the State Plan update next year.

Respectfully Submitted,

Catherine Sansonetti, Chair

State Plan, Policy, and Quality Assurance Committee

In the later part of this year, the SRC received the ORS State Plan updates. We began to plan our process to comment on the work. This process is being revised to engage more council members to participate in the work of the State Plan to capture the many diverse voices that could bring different perspectives and provide meaningful feedback to ORS. The initial stages of planning are underway and we have received the updates from ORS. We requested that ORS meet with the members of our council to explain the changes in each section. ORS did meet with us virtually and provided a helpful framework and highlighted important issues. The council found this to be very helpful. Our work will continue into FY2022.

In addition to the work on the surveys, Comprehensive Needs Assessment, and State Plan updates, the Committee also prepared comments on the State's Open Meetings Act to advocate for continuation of virtual meetings post-pandemic, as that option had expired in the Summer of 2021. Unfortunately, the virtual meetings were not extended. The council is concerned with membership attendance due to the pandemic without a virtual option, but we hope we can continue to engage members to work on important SRC business especially the State Plan.

State Rehabilitation Council Members

Judith L. Drew, Ph.D., CRC, is the Chairperson of the Council. Dr. Drew is the president of VocWorks in Cumberland, RI. She has been in private practice for over twenty-five years and focuses on career and rehabilitation counseling, school to work transition assessments, vocational expert testimony, vocational assessment, and staff development and training for profit and non-profit settings.

Dr. Drew obtained her Ph.D. from The Ohio State University. She has been teaching Rehabilitation Counseling courses in higher education institutions for over twenty years. Currently, she is an Assistant Professor at Salve Regina University where she is the Program Director for the MA degrees and CAGS in Rehabilitation Counseling and Clinical Rehabilitation and Mental Health Counseling.

In addition, she frequently has been a speaker for regional, national and international conferences on vocational assessment practice and transition issues for youth. Dr. Drew's research and writing interests include evidence-based practice models for vocational assessment, career counseling with underserved populations, and the intersection between governmental disability employment policies and the real-world implementation and application of those policies.

Catherine Sansonetti, Esq., is the Vice-Chair of the Council and the Chair of the State Plan, Policy and Quality Assurance Committee. She sits on the Council as the current designee for Morna Murray, Executive Director of Disability Rights Rhode Island, representing the Client Assistance Program established under section 732 of this title under 43 CFR part 370. Catherine is an Attorney and the Director of Intake Advocacy at Disability Rights Rhode Island and has been on Council for four terms. She brings over twenty years of experience as an advocate for people with disabilities to her work on the Council. During her tenor, she also served as Secretary of the Council, and was on the Transportation ad hoc Committee. She has been the driving force behind the State Plan, Policy and Quality Assurance Committee for all the years of her service on the Council. Catherine actively works on the Consumer Satisfaction Surveys and the Comprehensive Needs Assessments, and on the State Plan and other policy matters.

Jack Ringland is the Secretary of the Council and a member of the Membership Training Committee, State Plan, Policy and Quality Assurance Committee, and is the Chair of the SRC Awards ad-hoc Committee. He sits on the Council representing individuals with physical disabilities. Jack has been disabled since 2008. He assists in coordinating the Cross Disability Coalition meetings as part of the Developmental Disabilities Council and he sits on the Policy Advisory Committee of that council. Jack is also a Commissioner on the Governor's Commission on Disabilities, and sits on the Legislative Committee for GCD and is the Chairperson of the Accessibility Committee.

Melissa D. Brusso is on of the upcoming Co-Chairpersons of the Council. She sits on the Council as a representative of a Disability Advocacy Group representing individuals with physical, cognitive, sensory, or mental disabilities who have difficulty in representing themselves or are unable due to their disabilities to represent themselves. She is an Educational Advocate at the Paul V. Sherlock Center on Disabilities at Rhode Island College. She has worked in educational advocacy for a total of thirteen years, first with the Office of the Child Advocate and the Paul V. Sherlock Center on Disabilities, and later with Justice Resource Institute in Massachusetts. She has worked in adult education and ESL at Dorcas International Institute of RI, helping recently resettled refugee students and other newcomers through the process of beginning their English education. She is appointed by the RI Department of Education to make educational decisions for children and youth throughout Rhode Island.

Christina Battista is a member of the Membership Training Committee. She sits on the Council, representing current or former applicants for, or recipients of Vocational Rehabilitation Services; and representative of the Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC) established under Section 796(d) of this Title, which representative may be Chairperson or other designee of the Council. Christina is a graduate of Salve Regina University in the Vocational Rehabilitation Counseling program. Christina is a motivational speaker educating on what it is like to live with a rare physical disability to help breakdown any preconceived notions of those living with a physical disability. She has accepted a position at Skills For Rhode Island's Future as the Supported Employment Coordinator in March of 2021.

Christine Botts is a member of the State Plan, Policy and Quality Assurance Committee. She sits on the Council representing a Community Rehabilitation Service Provider and individuals who have difficulty representing themselves. Christine has over ten years' experience as an Administrator for the State of Rhode Island, specializing in employment programs for individuals with developmental disabilities and behavioral health issues. Most recently, she has served on the State Committee for the Consent Decree. This committee is responsible for developing employment policies and procedures for individuals with developmental disabilities and ensuring they are employed in the most integrated setting making at least minimum wage.

Jennifer Doucette sits on the Council representing a Community Rehabilitation Provider. She is the Regional Transition Coordinator for the Northern Region of Rhode Island and her Center of Excellence is the transition to employment for youth in transition. Additionally, Jennifer is the Director of Regional Transition at West Bay Collaborative, overseeing transition and vocational programming for the Northern region. Prior to her role as Regional Transition Coordinator, she was the Vocational Services Coordinator and Vocational Evaluator at West Bay Collaborative where she provided a variety of ORS-funded services to youth in transition and young adults including Pre-Employment Transition Services. Jennifer has a Master's degree in Rehabilitation Counseling from Salve Regina University.

Anne Fartura is on the State Plan, Policy, and Quality Assurance Committee. She sits on the Council representing the Parent Training and Information Center established pursuant to Section 1431(e)(1) of Title 20. Anne joined the RI Parent Information Network (RIPIN) team in 2010, and serves as a program supervisor. Much of her work is in the area of students with disabilities transitioning from school to adulthood. Her committee work includes representing RIPIN at Rhode Island's Regional Transition Coordinators meetings, State Transition Council, and the State Rehabilitation Council.

Barbara Fernandez is upcoming Secretary of the Council and sits on the State Plan, Policy and Quality Assurance Committee. She is a bilingual legal advocate at Disability Rights Rhode Island. She works primarily on the Client Assistance Program (CAP) and on Protection and Advocacy for Voting Access (PAVA). Barbara also assists in the Rep Payee Review program and is PABSS program trained. Before joining DRRI, Barbara worked as a paralegal in consumer litigation and as a residential manager for individuals with developmental disabilities. A Providence native, Barbara has a strong connection to the community and aims to educate and provide assistance to the underserved through advocacy.

Nina Fiasconaro is on the State Plan, Policy, and Quality Assurance Committee. She sits on the Council representing a parent of a highly involved child with disabilities. She started advocating for the disabled and sitting on various committees at Jawanio, which was the UCP of Rockland NY and CPW, which was the UCP for Westchester NY. From 2010 to 2016, she sat on the Board of Directors and was the Director of Development for The Miracle League of Westchester helping develop and run after school programs for children with disabilities. Also, during that period, she sat on the Family Support Services Advisory Council of Westchester NY and was instrumental in overseeing a \$6 million dollar budget for respite programs in Westchester NY.

Professionally she is the Director of Social Media & Public Relations for Wind & Fire Jewelry, her family business. Part of her responsibilities is working with our charity partners developing jewelry representing the different agencies working with their development teams and donating a portion of the profits from the sales to the various agencies. Currently she is the founder of 401 A League of Our Own, an adaptive Buddy Ball League in Rhode Island.

Joan Fino sits on the State Plan, Policy, and Quality Assurance Committee. She has been a family leader for twenty years advocating for children and families, navigating many systems, which include Special Education, Mental Health, Child Welfare, Office of Rehabilitation, and social service systems. Professionally, Joan now works as a Social Work Liaison at RIPCCP in the behavioral Health Department.

Paul Harden is a member of the State Plan, Policy and Quality Assurance Committee. He sits on the Council as a representative of Business, Industry, and Labor. Paul is the Director for the Greater Newport Region for the Small Business Development Center of RI.

Nicole Rico Serrano is a member of the State Plan, Policy and Quality Assurance Committee. She sits on the Council representing American Indian VR program. She is the new Project Director for the Mashantucket Tribal Nation Rehabilitation Program in Mashantucket, CT. She has worked in the tribal communities of RI and CT for the past eleven years as a vocational rehabilitation counselor for Mashantucket. Nicole is a Narragansett tribal member and is committed to advocating on behalf of the tribal communities to bring cultural awareness and indigenous representation to both RI and CT. She has a bachelor's degree in International Relations and Spanish and a Master's degree in Elementary Education.

Jane Slade, MA, CRC, is one of the upcoming Co-Chairpersons of the Council, She is a a member of the State Plan, Policy and Quality Assurance Committee. She sits on the Council as a representative of the State Educational Agency responsible for the public education of students with disabilities who are eligible to receive services under this subchapter and part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. [20 U.S.C. 1411 et seq.] Jane has been employed as the State Transition Coordinator with the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE), Office of Student, Community and Academic Supports (OSCAS) since June 2011.

Core functions of this office include Special Education policy/ program development & oversight; IDEA State Performance Plan Indicators; Liaison to School Support System visits; State Councils and RIDE statewide developmental work. Ms. Slade's additional focus area of responsibilities include Secondary Transition; Secondary Reform/PBGR; Post-secondary Outcomes; Inter-agency/Adult Services, and she is the Chair of the Rhode Island Transition Council. She is also a Certified Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor.

Christine Yankee is a member of the State Plan, Policy and Quality Assurance Committee. She sits on the Council representing a Community Rehabilitation Program Service Provider and individuals with barriers to employment. Christine is the Vice President of Program Services at Goodwill of Southern New England. She brings over twenty-five years' experience in the areas of workforce development, adult education, and transition services for youth and adults with and without disabilities. Her committee work includes representing (Goodwill) at the RI Workforce Alliance Meeting, and as a Rhode Island Rehabilitation Association (RIRA) board member.

Vocational Rehabilitation Services

Natalia Montoya, M.A., CRC, is a member of the State Plan, Policy and Quality Assurance Committee. She sits on the Council as Liaison for the Office of Rehabilitation Services as a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor with knowledge of and experience with Vocational Programs and community services for ORS participants. Natalia is a VRC II in the South County Region and has been working for the Office of Rehabilitation Services since 2014 serving the adult population and youth in transition. In addition to her work with the Council, she is also the liaison to North Kingstown High School, South Kingstown High School, Bradley School South County, South County Chamber of Commerce, Galilee Mission Liaison, College Unbound Liaison, South Shore Mental Health, and South County Mental Health clients.

Ex-officio **Ronald Racine**, Associate Director

Ex-officio **Joseph Murphy**, Administrator, Vocational Rehabilitation (VR)

Laurie DiOrio, Administrator of Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired

Linda Deschenes, Assistant Administrator of Operations

John Valentine, Strategic Planning Supervisor

Nancy Baker, SRC Facilitator/Contact



RISRC Partnership with National Coalition of State Rehabilitation Councils

The State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) is an active long-time member of the National Coalition of State Rehabilitation Councils (NCSRC). The NCSRC strives to

cultivate the strengths and necessary expertise of local SRCs, Increase the capacity of SRCs through education & training to become effective partners in the vocational rehabilitation (VR) program. As each SRC maintains their respective individuality, the NCSRC provides a national resource to those Councils who may need to connect with a peer state on issues along with providing a mechanism for training with subject matter experts.

NCSRC Mission

On behalf of people with disabilities, our national membership coalition will advocate for and work in partnership with the national public vocational rehabilitation system's continual quest for excellence.

NCSRC Vision

NCSRC will be the premiere national organization of the consumer voice to enhance the employment opportunities of persons with disabilities through the public vocational rehabilitation system.

NCSRC Core Values

Integrity - We are honest and straightforward in all that we do. We treat everyone with dignity and respect. We act responsibly with resources entrusted to us. We are accountable and act in accordance with these values.

Commitment - We support the full implementation and enforcement of disability non-discrimination laws, particularly the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended and the American with Disabilities Act of 1990.

Excellence - We trust that customers of public vocational rehabilitation will be empowered to make choices which lead to ultimate independence.

Advocacy - We will work to educate and inform the public and government policy makers regarding issues affecting people with disabilities

Diversity - We will uphold a broad definition of diversity that honors and appreciates disability alongside race, ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation, and religion as an integral part of the human experience.

Leadership - We will foster leadership among people with disabilities that upholds excellence, quality and inclusive opportunities.

Partnership - We will promote a positive collaboration with state and non-governmental agencies to enhance meaningful and sustainable employment for people with disabilities.

Teamwork - We are committed to a partnership based on a spirit of trust and cooperation with Vocational Rehabilitation Administrators and staff so that collaborative efforts will benefit from the NCSRC customer voice.

Culture - We support a public vocational rehabilitation service system that is structured in a manner that reflects the social, political, historic, and economic experience of disability.

Communication - We value effective communication through appropriate formats.

The NCSRC currently consists of 53 SRCs of states and territories that provide public VR services. In addition to conference calls every two months, the NCSRC hosts two training conferences each year that coincide with the national meetings of the Council of State Administrators for Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) in collaboration with the Rehabilitation Services.

For more information about the NCSRC, please go to <https://ncsrc.net>.

DHS does not discriminate against any person on the basis of race, color, national origin, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, age, religion or sex in acceptance for or provision of services, employment or treatment in its educational and other programs and activities.



Department of Human Services
Office of Rehabilitation Services

40 Fountain Street
Providence RI 02903

Tel 401.421.7005

Spanish 401.462.7791

Fax 401.222.3574

www.ors.ri.gov

Available in alternate formats by calling 401.462.7818

