

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

2018  
ANNUAL  
REPORT

**Gina M. Raimondo - Governor**  
**Courtney E. Hawkins - 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 Director,

Rhode Island Department of Human Services 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.

Our Office of Rehabilitation Services (ORS) is an integral part of our mission. It is my pleasure to provide you with its Annual Report for Federal Fiscal Year 2018.

ORS is charged with empowering Rhode Islanders with disabilities who 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 a myriad of resources and services which enhance the quality of life for Rhode Islanders with disabilities.

Younger individuals with disabilities and their families work with Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors to

make that important transition from school to post-secondary education and/or careers. The business and labor community depend on ORS for trained, job-ready applicants. Rhode Islanders applying for Social Security disability benefits get accurate and timely decisions; Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired provide services for individuals who have a visual impairment. Personalized services are provided when needed.

In FFY2018, 1,240 persons with disabilities were provided vocational rehabilitation services including training, and employment services provided by ORS-approved vendors. The Disability Determination Services adjudicated 16,654 claims for Social Security disability benefits.

We are proud of the partnerships that our staff has developed with our citizen advisory councils, community partners, and customers, which has improved the quality of life for all Rhode Islanders.



*Courtney Hawkins*

## Message from the Associate Director,

The Office of Rehabilitation Services (ORS) remained invested and passionate for our work, staff and customers in 2018. ORS was able to redefine our delivery model to continue to provide the high-quality services for which we are known.

Throughout the year, we:

- ◆ Wrote new Regulations that replaced our former Policies and Procedures
- ◆ Amended our previous State Plan
- ◆ Wrote a new State Plan, and held two public hearings on it
- ◆ Participated in an on-site monitoring visit (the first since 2012) from our federal partners from the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA)
- ◆ Engaged with our stakeholders numerous times on all of these activities.

The need to implement a wait list for our new applicants for the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program was undoubtedly our biggest challenge, but despite it, we provided services for 1,240 individuals. We also worked to transform our business approach, to incorporate best practices and new business models, and simultaneously increased our collaboration with our valuable community partners. This laid the foundation for us to begin the process of removing individuals from the wait list at the beginning of FFY2019.

I hope you enjoy seeing the difference our dedicated counselors and social workers are making every day to assist Rhode Islanders with disabilities to become employed and live independently. I also want to take this opportunity to thank the State Rehabilitation Council for their commitment and support over the past year. They have been an instrumental partner as we have implemented the Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act (WIOA) and developed new programs and services for transitioning students.

I would also like to acknowledge the commitment, adaptability, and dedication of the ORS team, who provided amazing individualized support to the disabled individuals we serve. Thank you for your hard work, creative approaches to service delivery and most of all, your perseverance. You have made a tremendous difference in the lives of those we serve.



*Ronald Racine*

# 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. Employment being the successful outcome of services provided through the public vocational rehabilitation program. 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.

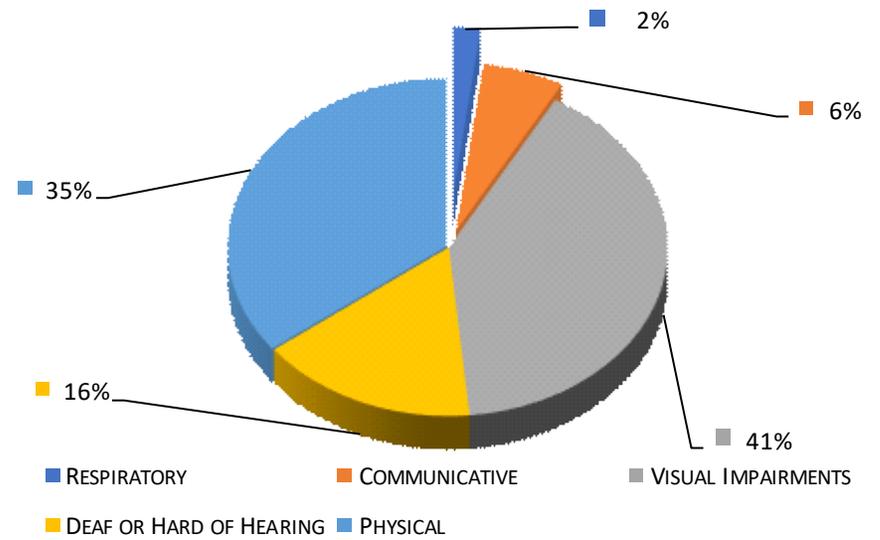
A Masters level Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor works with the individual to develop an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) that includes an employment goal. The time expected for the individual to reach the goal, the services that the individual chooses necessary to reach the employment goal,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

Vocational Rehabilitation services that may be incorporated in an Individualized Plan for Employment include:

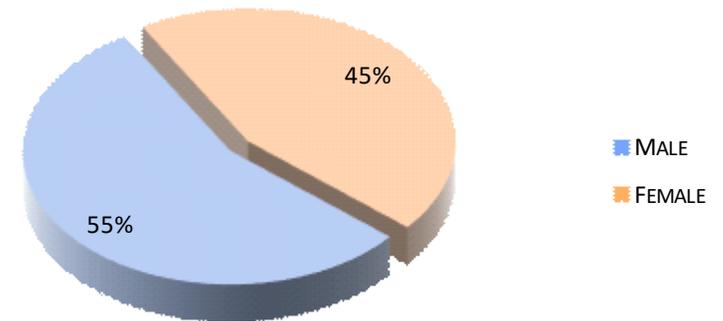
College or Vocational Training; Job Training and Job Supports; Other Goods and Services; Counseling and Guidance; Post-Employment Services; Diagnostic Evaluations; Rehabilitation Technology Services; Housing Modifications; Vehicle Modifications; Job Development & Job Placement Services; and/or Transition & Pre-ETS Services.

# Who Are Our Customers?

## Primary Disability of ORS Customers



## Gender of Successfully Employed



# January 2019

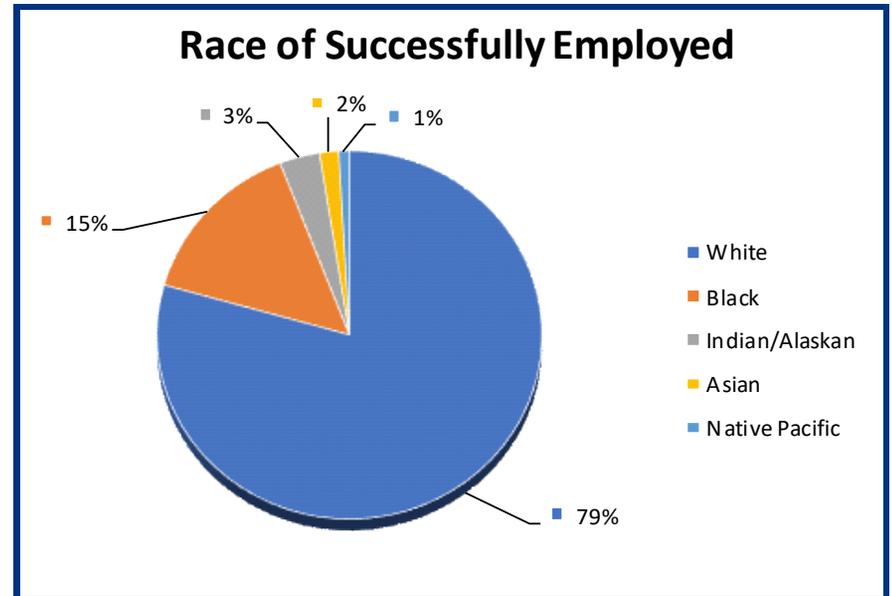
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
		1 New Years Day	2	3	4	5
6	7	8 SRC Executive Leadership Mtg - 4pm	9	10	11	12
13	14	15 SRC Full Council Mtg - 4pm	16	17	18	19
20	21 Martin Luther King Day - Office Closed	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31		

# Vocational Rehabilitation Program

## 2018 Statistics

### 538 Successfully Employed Individuals with Disabilities

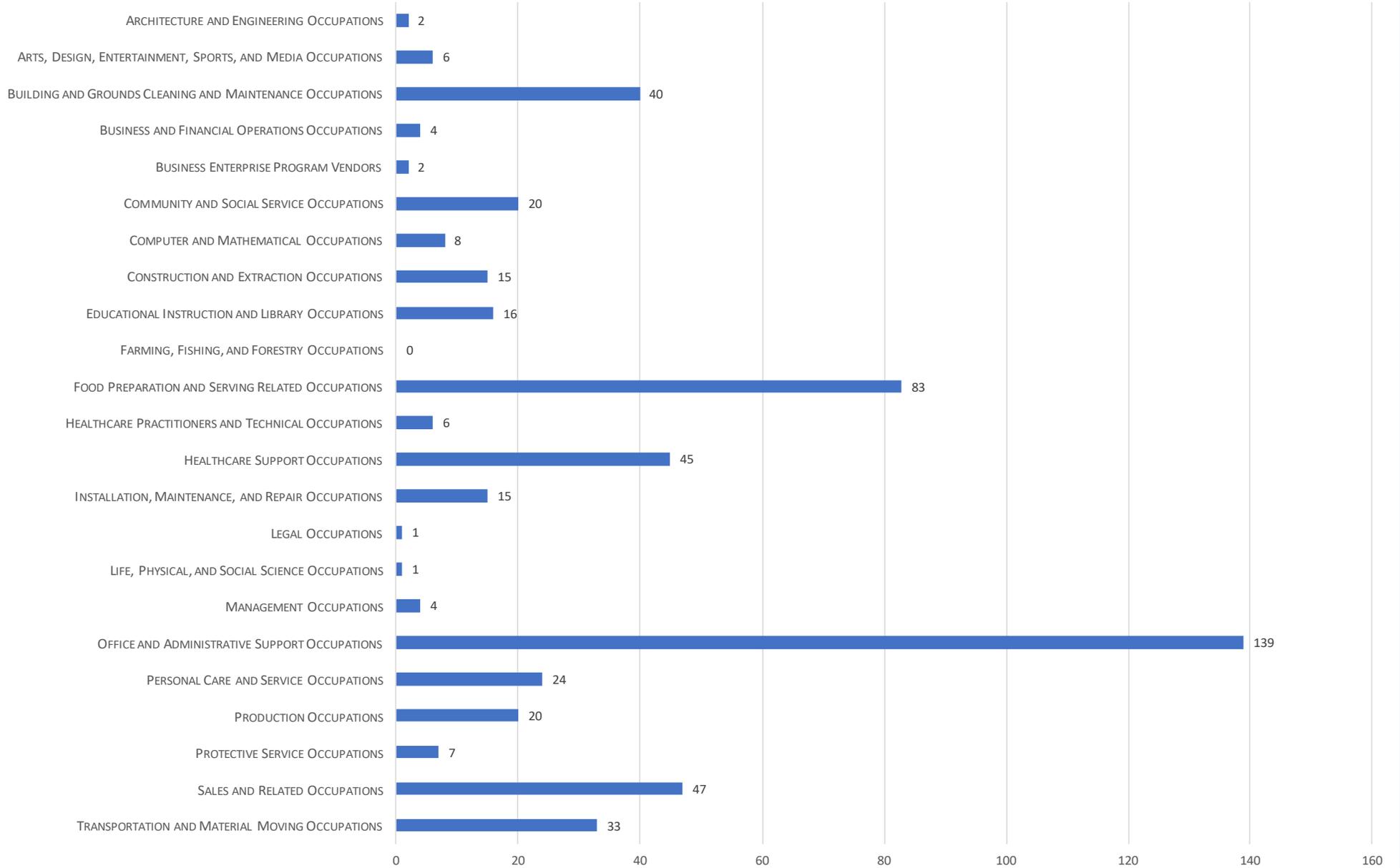
- 1,176** individuals applied for vocational rehabilitation services.
- 1240** individuals received services purchased from vendors. Services ranged from evaluations, medical and psychological therapies, personal assistant services, job placement and training.
- 106** individuals received rehabilitation technology services to assist them to prepare for and to enter employment.
- 417** youth with disabilities ages 14-24 applied for transition services .



# February 2019

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
					1	2 Groundhog Day
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14 <i>Happy Valentine's Day</i>	15	16
17	18 President's Day	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26 SRC Executive Leadership Mtg - 4pm	27	28		

## Primary Occupation of 538 Successfully Employed Individuals with Disabilities



# March 2019

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
					1	2
3	4	5 SRC Full Council Meeting - 4pm	6	7	8	9
10	11 Governor's Advisory Council for the Blind –3pm	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 14 locations throughout the state and are assigned to these locations on the basis of their seniority within the program. Types of facilities range from small snack bars serving light snacks and beverages to 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, which works to

reduce or eliminate barriers that impede access to, and funding for, assistive technology devices and services for individuals with disabilities of all ages.

**Social Services Program...** Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired coordinates a federal comprehensive service program which focuses primarily on children from birth 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.

# April 2019

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
	1 April Fools Day	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14 Palm Sunday	15 Tax Day	16	17	18	19 Good Friday	20 
21 	22	23 SRC Executive Leadership Mtg - 4pm	24 Administrative Professionals Day	25	26	27
28	29	30				

# SBVI Statistics

## Business Enterprises Program

**14** Vending facilities were supported by the Randolph-Sheppard Business Enterprises Program (BEP) at Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired. Though most locations are single operators, these 14 facilities collectively also provide employment for numerous individuals around the state.

**1** site was renovated.

**\$19,270** Average net earnings (profit to vendor after expenses) across all sites

**\$36,751** Highest reported net earnings by a vendor

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

**434** 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:

- ◆ **37%** of individuals who engaged with the program received assistive technology services and training - of which **77%** reported improvement in their abilities in this area.
- ◆ **45%** of individuals served received daily living skills services to enhance or maintain independence at

home, and of those, **87%** reported that they feel in greater control and are more confident in their ability to live independently in the community after receiving services.

- ◆ **80%** of individuals receiving services from the Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist reported functional gains and increase independence in their ability to safely travel and navigate their homes and communities.

## Assistive Technology Access Partnership (ATAP)

**509** individuals are registered for NEWSLINE, a newspaper reading service provided by the National Federation of the Blind (NFB), and funded by SBVI.

**1,948** individuals received information from Assistive Technology Access Partnership (ATAP) Resource Centers about assistive technology (AT) and funding options.

**2,195** individuals received AT training, demonstration, loans, or assistance with recycled AT devices.

**199** individuals were provided specialized equipment through the ATEL (Adaptive Telephone Equipment Loan) Program.

**84** Presentations were made on Assistive Technology devices and services.

# May 2019

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
			1	2	3	4
5 	6 Ramadan Starts	7 SRC Breakfast/Full Council Mtg - 8am	8	9	10	11
12 Mother's Day	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27 Memorial Day—State Offices Closed	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 16,654 disability cases this year. We anticipate processing about the same number in FFY19.

RI DDS continues to roll out the new computer system that SSA is developing. The system is referred to as DCPS (Disability Case Processing System). We started the roll out in March of 2017. We currently have 70% of the staff using the system and plan to have all users on by early 2019. 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. By the end of 2019, all case types will be supported in the new system.

SSA has been working diligently to get all the Continuing Disability Reviews (CDR) up to date. This has resulted in an increase in CDR’s over the past couple of years. In FFY18, we processed 4,507 CDR’s. The nation, as well as RI, has reached currency. In FFY19, we have a goal of 3,250. We had to reorganize staff and train Hearing Officers in order to keep pace with this increasing workload over the past couple of years. In FFY18, we reduced the pending hearings in the office from 140 to 41.

Despite all the changes in the method that claims are processed, while processing 16,654 claims the RI DDS has been able to maintain excellent accuracy ratings of 96.1% . We have faced some challenges keeping pace with this workload, due to the federal hiring freeze that has been in place since 2016. We received limited help from other states with our medical reviews and assistance processing cases from the Regional Case Processing Unit. We were able to reduce aged cases and our Processing Time, which resulted in more timely accurate service to the citizens of RI. We ended FFY18 with an overall processing time of 98.4, which is below the national threshold of 111 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.

# June 2019

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10 Governor's Advisory Council for the Blind –3pm	11	12	13	14	15
16 Father's Day	17	18	19	20	21 	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30						

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

6<sup>th</sup> floor

Providence, RI 02903

1-877-402-0808

# July 2019

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
	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

## Statistics

<u>16,636</u>	Total cases were received by the Disability Determination Services (DDS).
<u>16,654</u>	Claims were processed by the DDS
<u>8,358</u>	Initial claims were filed
<u>8,451</u>	Initial claims were processed
<u>4507</u>	Continuing Disability Review cases were completed
<u>454</u>	Pre-Hearing Cases were processed, resulting in 401 Disability Hearing decisions
<u>4726</u>	Consultative Exams were purchased
<u>14,244</u>	Medical Evidence Records were purchased
<u>\$1,520,848</u>	Total Medical Costs with Total DDS Budget of <u>\$9,773,622</u>
<u>\$586.86</u>	Cost per case

# August 2019

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12 Victory Day- State Offices Closed	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

# Success Stories

## Project Search Expansion Brings Skills Training to Adults with Developmental Disabilities

After five years of success with its three youth locations, the Office of Rehabilitation Services (ORS), a division of the Department of Human Services (DHS), expanded its partnership with others to open a new site for adults with disabilities ages 21 to 30. Project Search is a training program for people living with developmental disabilities that helps prepare them for competitive employment. As part of the expansion, eight interns started in the school-to-work program at Rhode Island Hospital on October 15, 2018. This addition is a collaboration between DHS, Rhode Island Hospital, the Department of Behavioral Healthcare, Developmental Disabilities and Hospitals (BHDDH), the Department of Labor and Training (DLT), and Goodwill Industries.

“All Rhode Islanders should have an opportunity to meaningfully engage in their communities,” said Executive Office of Health and Human Services Secretary Eric J. Beane. “It is fitting that we are celebrating the expansion of Project Search during National Disability Employment Awareness Month, which highlights the important contributions people with disabilities make every day to our workforce and state. We’ve made important progress in connecting people of all ability levels with training and employment opportunities; this program is an important part of the equation. Congratulations to all involved in making this expansion possible and ensuring more people have the opportunity to realize their goals and find jobs in the community.”

Project Search started in Cincinnati in 1996, and it has since spread internationally. Rhode Island’s three youth sites, funded by a federal grant and partner investments, are at Miriam Hospital, Blue Cross Blue Shield, and Newport Hospital. There have been 57 graduates total, with 77.2 percent successfully finding employment upon completion. “It is extremely rewarding to see students gain confidence throughout the school year; it empowers them to showcase their skills, talents, and abilities as they move into the workforce as young adults,” said ORS Associate Director Ron Racine.

Said DHS Director Courtney E. Hawkins, “We all get dignity from the opportunity to work. Creating employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities through Project Search ensures they have the opportunity to experience that feeling of dignity as well. Getting all who can work to work is also important for the State’s future, and through Governor Raimondo’s leadership, we plan to not leave anyone behind.”



# September 2019

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1	2 Labor Day State Offices Closed	3	4	5	6	7
8	9 Governor's Advisory Council for the Blind –3pm	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17 SRC Executive Leadership Mtg - 4pm	18	19	20	21
22	23 	24	25	26	27	28
29	30					

Antonio Piccirillo began working with his ORS counselor during his high school years. Antonio was referred by his Special Education Team at his high school, where he received services under an IEP. He applied for services with ORS in 2014 and was found eligible.

Antonio felt he could benefit from ORS services to explore jobs and help him narrow down his vocational interests and goals. He was also interested in getting his drivers license. During high school, he took part in a job exploration service where he was introduced to community work. Antonio also took part in a driving evaluation to determine if he could benefit from drivers training. He obtained his driver's permit, and ORS was able to provide driving training to assist him with successfully getting his license.

Antonio went on to complete a year at the Rhode Island Transition Academy after his senior year in high school. He was able to take part in job preparation skills and further internships during that year. Around this time, Antonio also found a part-time job at a market, however, he felt that he was underemployed there. Although he knew he wanted a job with more responsibility, he was still unsure what type of job he wanted.

After his year of transition, his VR counselor continued to meet with him frequently to discuss options with him. Various employment training opportunities were reviewed with him, and training facilities were toured, as well.

Eventually, Antonio decided on taking part in a Certified Protection Officer training that his VRC had informed him about.

Antonio loved the training and excelled at learning all the coursework in a setting that allowed him to work at his pace.

After successful completion of this training program, along with job development and placement support, Antonio was able to obtain employment as a security officer at Securitas, and maintain this job for over a year now.

He was thrilled to move on from his market job into a job with more responsibilities.

Antonio loves his job where he works hard to adhere to Securitas mission and core values of "Integrity, Vigilance, and Helpfulness".

**Client:**  
**Antonio Piccirillo**

**Counselor:**  
**Nicole Crossett**

**Occupation:**  
**Security Officer**

**Employer:**  
**Securitas**



# October 2019

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
		1 SRC Full Council Meeting - 4pm	2	3	4	5
6	7 Child Health Day	8	9 Yom Kippur	10	11	12
13	14 Columbus Day - State Offices Closed	15 White Cane Safety Day	16 Boss's Day	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29 SRC Executive Leadership Mtg - 4pm	30	31 		

Carlos V. was recently hired at Aramark as a food service worker but his story begins two years ago. Carlos graduated from Cranston High School East. He then had the opportunity to explore his vocational interests at the Cranston Transitional Program, where he identified his job goal to work in the food service industry. Carlos applied for and was accepted into the Project Search program for his final year of school.

Project Search is a program collaborated by ORS, BHDDH, Cranston School District, Blue Cross/Blue Shield of Rhode Island, and a supporting ORS vendor that is unique, business-led, 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 instruction, career exploration, and relevant job-skills training through three strategically designed internships.

Carlos graduated from Project Search, as well as Cranston school district in 2017. Upon graduation from Project Search, Carlos was supported with ORS and BHDDH funding to work with West Bay Collaborative to find and maintain employment. Carlos was hired at Aramark in his identified interest in food service. While at Project Search, Carlos was able to work in the kitchen and obtain relevant job skills, such as his ServSafe certificate and experience.

Carlos now works in a supported environment for Aramark at Cranston High School West. Carlos, who is often soft spoken, told his job supports after work one day ...

***“I got this! I like working independently!  
I like working here!  
(meaning Aramark)”***

***Client:***  
**Carlos Velasquez**

***Counselor:***  
**Laura Allbee**

***Occupation:***  
**Food Service Worker**

***Employer:***  
**Aramark**

# November 2019

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11 Veteran's Day— State Offices	12 SRC Full Council Meeting -4pm	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28 	29	30

James contacted ORS/Services for the Blind after being diagnosed legally blind and leaving his employment as a warehouse attendant. Although James had an extensive work history in warehouse and retail, at that point in his life he was not sure what he could do because of his vision loss.

ORS assisted James by identifying appropriate visual aids, such as lighting and magnification, providing information about community resources, and vocational counseling and guidance. In addition, ORS provided orientation and mobility to increase his safe and independent travel, identified transferable skills, and funded a community work experience, where he was able to trial his skills with appropriate accommodations. ORS services provided James with the necessary supports, confidence, and motivation to return to the workforce.

James has been successfully employed as a stock clerk at Ocean State Job Lot for over a year. He states that he is very happy at his job. He has since been promoted to department head and was given two raises in one year. He feels that his supervisor is supportive and is willing to provide accommodations when needed.

James stated that they work well as a team. He has the satisfaction of using his skills and knowledge to continue to work in a field he enjoys.

***Client:***  
**James Gallogly**

***Counselor:***  
**Grace Pires**

***Occupation:***  
**Stock Clerk**

***Employer:***  
**Ocean State Job Lot**



# December 2019

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9 Governor's Advisory Council for the Blind —3pm	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21 
22	23	24	25 	26	27	28
29	30	31 				

The mission of the American with Disabilities Act and ensuing Rehabilitation Acts is not only to obtain employment for individuals who have disabilities, but also to assist those who need VR services to maintain current employment. Such was the case for Timothy (Tim) Cox.

Tim is a professor of Graphic Arts and Print Design who moved from Arkansas to RI in 2016 to teach at Johnson & Wales University (JWU). He uses a wheelchair for mobility due to a surgical procedure, Bilateral Above the Knee Amputations with Hip Disarticulation. When researching options for obtaining a permanent, safe ramp, up to ADA specs, Tim was referred to the Office of Rehabilitation Services (ORS) by an outside agency. He applied to receive VR services in September of 2017.

Tim relocated from Arkansas the previous summer, and therefore, had not experienced a New England winter with the accompanying climate demands, prior to arriving. Living in a private residence with his wife and two dependent children, he found difficulties due to his limited mobility and independence placed undue stress upon the family and upon his own safety. To assure transportation to and from his workplace, Johnson & Wales University, each day Tim's wife was required to push his chair up and down a rented ramp, a steep 45 ° angle structure with no platform for his wheelchair to rest, which was non-compliant with ADA standards. In inclement weather, particularly, this placed both individuals at risk for injury. Since Tim and his wife have two children, when she was called upon for school responsibilities or tasks, Tim had to wait in his vehicle after work until her return to assist him back into the house.

Challenges in performing his job included accommodating travel to Johnson & Wales campus and keeping a full-time teaching schedule. Tim had to synchronize his children's school schedules and family demands, as well as his departure from home, and subsequently, the classes he teaches. If the weather caused frost or ice to form on the rented ramp, the effect was that of a ski ramp. His

***Client:***

**Timothy Cox**

***Counselor:***

**Paula Cardi Berard**

***Occupation:***

**Professor**

***Employer:***

**Johnson & Wales University**



independence, employment, and safety were all placed in jeopardy. Through the ORS, Tim received assistance with the purchase of a portable metal mesh ramp, within ADA standards, which is expected to last thirty years.

Paula Cardi Berard, Tim's VR Counselor, performed due diligence: First, this VRC and client investigated his health insurance through his employer to see if, and what type, of durable medical equipment insurance would cover. Then, it was determined that a portable ramp, rather than a permanent structure, was more cost effective and required far less "red tape" and labor to install.

Equipped with this information, multiple bids were put out and proposals for the product, service, and installation of the portable ramp were obtained. A mesh grid surface was chosen to allow for traction and accelerated melting of frost, snow, and ice. Both client and the ORS decided upon AMRAMP, which provided the best bid and could ensure quick provision of materials and installation of the ADA compliant ramp.

The following is an excerpt from an email which Tim posted:

*"Thank you so much. People take it for granted, being able to leave your house. This is amazing... When we moved here we knew we would have to build a ramp for the house. We thought that would be a lot easier than it was... Thus, started the red tape. We were going to have a friend, a woodworker, make the ramp, but first had to get a building*

*permit, and to get that we would have to submit architectural drawings, elevation information, material lists and our friend would have had to be a licensed contractor (he was not) ... A*

*permanent ramp would have to be wood, so it would eventually have to be replaced. Meanwhile, I couldn't get into or out of the house unless (my wife) was here to push me up or pull me down the 45-degree angle on the portable ramp... I looked into a government organization called the RI Office of Rehabilitation Services. They want to make sure there is nothing keeping the disabled from being able to work... Five months later, a very good office representative (Paula), lots of forms, and an approval process, and, thankfully, today the ramp was installed! I am thankful for a section of the government that is looking to help the disabled be able to be in the workforce and participate fully in life."*

Within a day of installation, Tim enthusiastically stated that the ramp already changed his life and made him more independent. Currently, this vocational rehabilitation client has maintained his job at Johnson & Wales University and experienced increased independence and self-sufficiency. He is also able to more easily participate in campus and community events, as necessary for his job, make active contributions to the support and well-being of his community and family, as well as pay taxes as the fully employed citizen he is. Tim reports that he enjoys being more productive and independent and is very happy to have options for work and recreation open to him without having to depend upon others, the goal of the ADA and Rehabilitation Acts.

Wesley started working with ORS in the fall of 2014, when he was in his sophomore year at URI where he was considering a career in Chemistry. He wanted assistance in career exploration and identifying possible assistive technology. Wesley was connected with the disability service office at URI and received extra time and a separate location for testing to support memory, fatigue, and stress tolerance. With the guidance and counseling, information and referral, and assessment that he received from ORS, Wesley decided that he was going to continue to work toward his BS degree while learning more about hands-on careers.

In May of 2016 Wesley underwent laser ablation treatment to help stabilize his seizures. After he saw a significant reduction in his seizures (20 a day down to a few), he wanted to discuss the possibilities of a welding career. Following medical clearance and labor market research, Wesley's career goal of welding was agreed upon and approved.

**"My job is awesome, I've learned so much, everyday has been interesting and I still love my trade"**

Wesley was awarded an ORS training grant in the winter of 2017, and completed the welding training at Thielsch Engineering. With his certification and license, Wesley was ready to start his new career.

Wesley was referred to job development services during the spring of 2017, where he received assistance with his resume, cover letter, and a better understanding of the labor market. He also received guidance on disability disclosure and accommodations.

Wesley accepted a job as a full-time Structural Welder at Electric Boat in Groton, CT in July of 2017. He started his job in August, and he became eligible for benefits after working there for 90 days.

**Client:**  
**Wesley Gwaltney**

**Counselor:**  
**Kathleen Neun**

**Occupation:**  
**Structural Welder**

**Employer:**  
**Electric Boat**



Christine Sweeney started working with Emilee O'Connor at ORS in April of 2017. She applied for services because she was interested in pursuing more integrated employment than what she was currently doing.

Christine receives BHDDH funding for day supports which are provided by Avatar Residential Services. When she applied for ORS services, she was working four hours per week as a laundry aide/janitor for Avatar. She desired employment that was more community based and that could give her more hours.

In September of 2017, with assistance from Avatar, Christine got a job at Babies R Us as a janitor working 15-20 hours per week. She enjoyed this job and was successful, but unfortunately she was laid off once it was announced that the store was closing in March of 2018.

Christine continued to work with the job developer at Avatar and was able to secure new employment in September of 2018. She is currently working for Cartridge World in East Greenwich 20 hours per week. Her responsibilities include packaging and labeling products and printing labels. When asked what her favorite part of her job was, she responded, "Everything!"

She is now only at the Avatar day program two days per week, and she says that she enjoys being out in the community more often now. She utilizes Ride transportation independently to get to and from work.

Her goals as she becomes more financially independent are to get her own place, go on vacation, and buy her own coffee. Christine is an example of an individual whose experience out in the community had been limited, but knew she wanted more; and even after losing her first job, she persevered on and is now happily employed doing a job that she loves.

**Client:**

**Christine Sweeney**

**Counselor:**

**Emilee O'Connor**

**Occupation:**

**Cartridge Packer**

**Employer:**

**Cartridge World**



David Barrie is an individual diagnosed with a progressive visual impairment. David began thinking that he needed to explore another profession other than his employment as a Production Mechanic at a local packaging company. David was responsible for the maintenance of the production lines, which became increasingly difficult for him. David applied for the Vocational Rehabilitation Program and began exploring his transferrable skills and other job markets with his Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor.

David was accepted into the Business Enterprise Program (BEP) where he trained to become an owner/operator of his own coffee shop. David exerted much effort in being accepted into the Business Enterprise Program including obtaining a ServSafe Food Manager License and Department of Health Food Manager License. The next step was to familiarize David with the Randolph-Sheppard Act, legality of running your own business and being a food manager, and specifically running a Business Enterprise Program vending facility; so he completed online training and then hands on training at *Coffee Plus* for approximately 3 months.

A facility became available at the Naval Undersea Warfare College in Middletown, and with assistance from the Administrator for SBVI, BEP Supervisor Melanie Sbardella, Senior Food Service Administrator Lina Agresti, and Food Service Administrator Michael Souza, the facility was prepared for business. This included updating equipment, creating a menu, locating vendors, and hiring staff. David has many job functions at *David's Coffee Plus* including managing the operation, purchasing and preparing food, working with vendors, stocking the ten vending machines, and completes business management duties. Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Glenn Lanoue assisted David with trainings including organization skills and the creation of large print laminated signs and labels for stocking, coffee, and register areas.

David employs 3 individuals, and his facility is staffed from 6AM to 4PM on Monday through Friday. One of David's hires is Joanne Ellis, who is Legally Blind and is a

**Client:**

**David Barrie**

**Counselor:**

**Glenn Lanoue**

**Occupation:**

**Owner/Operator - Coffee Plus**

**Employer:**

**Naval Undersea Warfare College**



*Shown above: Joanne Ellis, David Barrie*

success story in her own right. Joanne is employed for 30 hours per week and is responsible for stocking items, maintaining the coffee area, food prep, making sandwiches, working the register, and washing the dishes. Joanne had explored the BEP Program, but decided that she was more suited to be a food service employee rather than a manager.

The grand opening for David's Coffee Plus (shown below) was held on July 31<sup>st</sup>, 2018 and was attended by ORS, SBVI, and Naval base staff. Currently, the facility is operating successfully and receives great reviews from patrons. A great collaboration between David, his vocational staff, and business enterprise who assisted David with his stated goal of locating a position where he would be earning more money, control his employment, and remain until he retires.



*Shown in picture: Capt. Michael Coughlin, Mark Carlson, Joanne Ellis, David Barrie, Melanie Sbardella*

Marcus applied to ORS in July 2017 at the age of 26 with a goal of obtaining competitive employment, as he had several impairments including physical and cognitive. Marcus spent most of his time in a day program but was ready for more independence.

Once Marcus was deemed eligible, Marcus and his Rehabilitation Counselor developed an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE). His IPE included a vocational evaluation, a community-based work experience, benefits planning, and travel training. Marcus expressed interest in a retail setting, and through a vocational evaluation, guidance and counseling, and supported employment, he was given an opportunity to explore this vocation. At the end of the assessment, Marcus was sure that he wanted to pursue a career in this field, however his Rehabilitation Counselor wanted to further challenge Marcus. He then participated in a community-based work experience to see if he felt the same about this vocation at a different location. As time passed, Marcus's tasks increased, and he was honored to take on more responsibility. Marcus was always friendly and would help customers in the store, whether it was reaching an item or helping to locate an item.

At the conclusion, Marcus shared that really enjoyed this line of work, and it showed. Upon completion of his second assessment, Marcus and his job coach were approached by Management who encouraged Marcus to apply for the open stock clerk position. Marcus applied, interviewed, and received the great news that he just obtained a part-time job! It was now time for Marcus to participate in travel training. Marcus worked very hard with a vendor to master the RIDE program, and is now scheduling his own transportation.

In June 2018, Marcus was promoted to Lead Grocery Stock Clerk. Marcus reports he enjoys his job and looks forward to seeing what the future brings.

***Client:***

**Marcus**

***Counselor:***

**Kelley Conti**

***Occupation:***

**Lead Grocery Clerk**

***Employer:***

**Big Lots**



# Rhode Island State Rehabilitation Council Annual Meeting May 8, 2018



*Back Row: Joan Fino, Willa Truelove, Christine Yankee, Gail Lawson, Linda Deschenes, Natalia Montoya, Anne Fartura, Ron Racine, Jane Slade, John Valentine, Rocco Bruno, Judi Drew, Sergio Lopez-Ruiz, Peggy Benz, Nancy Baker, Nina Fiasconaro*

*Front Row: Maryellen Hagerty, Elizabeth Graves, Lea Colardo, Catherine Sansonetti, Christina Battista, Jack Ringland*

# Message from the State Rehabilitation Council Chair

## Highlights 2018



*Dr. Judith Drew, SRC Chair*

### **Dear Consumers, Families, Friends, Partners and Stakeholders:**

As the Chair of the Rhode Island State Rehabilitation Council (SRC), I am pleased to report that the SRC has had a very successful year meeting its goals and energizing the membership to fully meet its mandated responsibilities. In this report, you will be provided with an overview of our accomplishments of the past year along with the projects we will work on in 2019. In addition, detailed reports from the subcommittees that do the work of the Council, and a list of SRC members with brief biographies of those members and the constituency each member represents are included.

It is my hope that this report will energize the SRC membership and our community as we reflect on the work we have done in the past year. We are looking forward to 2019 and a renewed partnership with the Office of Rehabilitation Services (ORS) to provide consultation and advice to help them achieve their goals. I hope that this report will encourage other community partners to join the SRC to provide feedback and help improve the work of ORS in helping all Rhode Islanders find meaningful employment.

### **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 State Rehabilitation Council is charged with meeting the following goals:

- ◆ Review, analyze, and advise the Office of Rehabilitation Services regarding the performance of the responsibilities of the Agency 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 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 and centers for independent living within the State.
- ◆ Perform such other functions as the Council deems appropriate and that are comparable to the other functions performed by the Council.
- ◆ Prepare and submit an Annual Report to the Governor and the Rehabilitation Services Administration.

### **Our Accomplishments:**

A significant responsibility of the SRC is to work collaboratively with ORS in the design and completion of the Comprehensive Needs Assessment, the Consumer Satisfaction Survey, and revisions to the State Policy Plan.

The State Plan, Policy and Quality Assurance Committee had a respite during 2018 after their hard work and collaboration with ORS to provide advice and assistance in the development of the 2017 State Plan Revisions and the Comprehensive Needs Assessment.

To acknowledge the work of outstanding individuals or organizations in providing services to those with disabilities within the State of Rhode Island, the SRC established an SRC Outstanding Service Award in 2017. In the spring of 2018 it was awarded posthumously to Tom Nerney. Tom's career led him to work regionally and nationally from 1966 to 2018 as an advocate for the right to self-determination for people with developmental disabilities. Largely because of his work, the self-determination movement has become a best practice in working with this population. Kevin Nerney, his son and the Director of RI's Developmental Disability Council, accepted the award on behalf of his father.

Catherine Sansonetti received a special award for her years of service with the State Rehabilitation Council. During her tenure with the SRC she has served in a variety of capacities including secretary and chaired the SRC Policy committee for many years. We are looking forward to her continued contributions and input in our future work.

One major accomplishment this year was the addition of new members who come from more diverse backgrounds than in the past. We are pleased that our membership now includes additional representation from the community including another parent of a child with a disability, new members from the RI Parent Information Network, and a representative from the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation Vocational Resources program. Our ongoing goal is to increase the diversity of our membership by recruiting persons and organizations that expand the voices of people with disabilities on the Council.

Finally, I want to thank Dr. Gail Lawson who served as the Chair of the Council for the past three years. During her tenure she led the Council during some busy and challenging times, including the development and implementation of the Comprehensive Needs Assessment, the State Plan revisions, and preparation for the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) site visit in 2018. Under her leadership the members of the Executive Committee and sub-committees worked together to support the mission of the Council and the work of ORS. Our thanks to her and best wishes for her next adventures in community service.

### **Looking Ahead:**

As we approach our new program year, we look forward to continuing to provide advice to ORS as it develops and implements the Consumer Satisfaction Survey (CSS). ORS has committed to surveying those clients whose cases are still active with the goal to revise/redesign the survey to improve client participation. The CSS's will be designed to determine clients' perceptions of the quality and timeliness of the services ORS provides. Once these data are collected, they will be analyzed, and the results will be presented to the Council. The next phase will be to assist ORS in identifying and implementing strategies to improve their performance in this area.

As with the previous years, the Council will continue to monitor 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 with ORS making strides in increasing supported employment opportunities for individuals with significant disabilities. The Council will continue to request updates on the status of individuals covered under the Consent Decree. In addition, the Council will continue to monitor those served by the Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) program to ensure they receive the services needed under funding for that program and to monitor the movement on the waitlist, as well.

Another important project in 2019 will be to review the report from of the RSA site visit to determine what concerns or issues may have been identified. The Council will work closely with ORS to develop strategies to meet those concerns.

During this program year, the Council Chair will be working with ORS to fully implement the requested program budget that was submitted last year to support the work of the Council. The program budget included personnel costs, training for new members, rental of space for meetings, equipment purchase/or rental, travel and copier costs, telephone, and general office supplies.

In 2019, the SRC will continue to focus on membership recruitment. Several individuals who have provided significant service to the SRC will be leaving the Council at the conclusion of this program year. Our increased membership over 2018 was a wonderful start. However, our goal will be to recruit more community providers and individuals representing constituencies we have yet to reach. Specifically, we will be actively recruiting from programs that provide services to populations who are under-represented in ORS's client pool and on the Council.

As a final note, I look forward to another active year as we continue to advocate 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

# 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 Associate 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.

**Margaret 'Peggy' Benz** is the Vice-chair of the Council and a member of the Membership Training Committee. She sits on the Council, representing Business, Industry and Labor, and current or former applicants for Vocational Rehabilitation Services. Peggy currently is employed at the University of Rhode Island. With a deep commitment to people with disabilities, she is dedicated to empowering and improving the lives of people so that all people with disabilities are treated equally, as active members of every community.

**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. Jack is also a Commissioner on the Governor's Commission on Disabilities and Chairperson of the Accessibility Committee.

**Lea Colardo** is the Co-Chair of the Membership Training Committee. 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 has been an Educational Advocate for twelve years at The Paul V. Sherlock Center on Disabilities at Rhode Island College, where she is also a member of the Leadership Team and the Transition to Life ad hoc Team Leader. She is appointed by the Rhode Island Department of Education to make

educational decisions on behalf of students that are in the care of the Rhode Island Department of Youth, Children and Families.

**Maryellen T. Hagerty** is Co-Chair of the Membership Training Committee. She sits on the Council representing Education and Disability Advocacy Groups, which are comprised of a cross section of parents, family members, guardians, advocates, or authorized representatives of individuals with disabilities. Maryellen is an Educational Advocate at The Paul V. Sherlock Center on Disabilities at Rhode Island College. She has held the position of Educational Advocate for the past twenty-four years, first at the Office of the Child Advocate and for the past thirteen years at the Sherlock Center on Disabilities at Rhode Island College. Maryellen is a member of the Leadership team at the Sherlock Center. She has been a member of the State Rehabilitation Council for five years and is part of the Leadership of the Council.

**Gail M. Lawson, PhD**, is the Co-Chair of the State Plan, Policy and Quality Assurance Committee. She sits on the Council Representing a Community Rehabilitation Provider. She is the former Chair of the Council and prior to that, she served as Co-Chair for one year and Secretary for two years. Professionally Dr. Lawson has held a variety of positions in the mental health and education fields during her professional career. Prior to her retirement in 2014, she served as the chief executive officer of a community mental health agency for nine years and as director of administrative services for public school districts for thirteen years. Prior to those positions, she served as faculty at Rhode Island College, a program administrator at Community College of Rhode Island, and adjunct faculty at University of Rhode Island. Dr. Lawson is a certified school psychologist. Currently she is adjunct

faculty at Salve Regina University in the Rehabilitation Counseling program.

**Sergio Lopez-Ruiz** is a member of the State Plan, Policy and Quality Assurance Committee. He sits on the Council representing a Community Rehabilitation Service Provider. Sergio is a current graduate student at Salve Regina University studying Clinical Rehabilitation and Mental Health Counseling. Sergio is also a Family Clinician and Behavior Specialist at the North American Family Institute.

**Joan Fino** is a Co-Chair of the State Plan, Policy and Quality Assurance Committee. She sits on the Council representing a Parent Training and Information Center established pursuant to Section 1431(e)(1) of Title 20. Ms. Fino has been a family leader for twenty years advocating for her own children's needs and navigating many systems, which include Special Education, Mental Health, Child Welfare, Office of Rehabilitation, and social service systems. Professionally, Joan has been in the behavioral health field and working one-on-one with families.

**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 others on what it is like to live with a rare physical disability in order to help break down any preconceived notions of those living with a physical disability.

**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.

**Rocco Bruno** is a member of the Membership Training Committee. He sits on the Council representing Business, Industry, and Labor. Rocco was the Manager of the Provider Audit and Reimbursement Department for the Medicare Program. He is responsible for updating the Council on the NCSRC events and meetings, as well as to help mentor new members and plan for the training events.

**Melissa D. Brusso** 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 twelve 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 has recently returned to the Sherlock Center on Disabilities, where she is appointed by the

RI Department of Education to make educational decisions for children and youth throughout Rhode Island.

**Cynthia M. Cote** is a member of the Membership Training Committee. She sits on the Council representing Business, Industry, and Labor. Cynthia is employed at Lifespan on the Rhode Island Hospital Campus. She is a Registered Nurse with experiences in Coronary Care, Intensive Care, and Medical-Surgical Nursing. Cynthia is a Certified Senior Clinical Documentation Specialist with the Department of Clinical Documentation Integrity. Her other experiences include Corporate Compliance Auditor for the Lifespan Department of Internal Audit/Corporate Compliance and over nine years of employment regarding the Federal Medicare Program in the areas of Medical Review and Provider Education and Training.

**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, RI College Special Education Advisory Committee, and the State Rehabilitation Council.

**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 six million dollar budget for respite programs in Westchester NY. Professionally, she is the Director of Social Media and 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.

**Elizabeth Graves** is a member of the State Plan, Policy and Quality Assurance Committee. She sits on the Council representing a Disability Advocacy Group representing individuals with physical, cognitive, sensory, or mental disabilities. “Liz” is a retired Special Education Teacher. She is a member of the Governor’s Advisory

Council for the Blind and Visually Impaired, and a former member of the Statewide Independence Living Council. She has been an advocate for the elderly and blind for many years, focusing on independent living and ADA rights.

**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 former Director of Transportation Technology at the New England Institute of

Technology and currently is consulting on workforce development and economic development.

**Daniel C. Pieroni** is a member of the State Plan, Policy and Quality Assurance Committee. He sits on the Council representing a current or former applicants for, or recipients of, Vocational Rehabilitation Services. Dan currently works as a substitute teacher for the Smithfield School Department and previously served the Scituate School Department in the same capacity. He is very active in serving youth in transition as a member of the Southern Rhode Island Transition Center’s traveling student panel. In the past, he has lent his time and talent to worthy causes like the Rhode Island Youth Leadership Forum, and the Rhode Island Committee for Assistive Technology (RICAT).

**Nicole Rico Serrano** is a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor 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. Nicole is a Narragansett tribal member and is committed to advocating on behalf of the tribal communities to bring cultural sensitivity 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. This will be her first year serving on the SRC.

**Vincent Rossi** is a member of the Membership Training Committee. He sits on the Council as a representative of Disability Advocacy Group representing parents, family, guardians, advocates or authorized representatives of individuals with disabilities who have difficulty in representing themselves or are unable due to their disabilities to represent themselves. Vincent is a Statewide

Coordinator of Employment and Training Programs at the Department of Labor and Training. Vincent is dedicated to educating, advocating and raising awareness of the abilities and challenges of the disability population on a local and State level. Vincent participates in several local organizations helping to spread disability awareness and create change within the community.

**Catherine Sansonetti** is a member of the State Plan, Policy and Quality Assurance Committee. She sits on the Council as the current designee for Raymond Bandusky representing the Client Assistance Program established under section 732 of this title under 43 CFR part 370. Catherine is a Staff Attorney at the Rhode Island Disability Law Center and has been on Council for four terms. During her tenor, she 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.

**Jane Slade, MA, CRC**, is 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 and oversight; IDEA State Performance Plan Indicators; Liaison to School Support System visits; State Councils and RIDE-wide developmental work. Ms. Slade's additional focus area of responsibilities include Secondary Transition; Secondary Reform/PBGR; Post-secondary Outcomes; Interagency/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-three 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, RI Department of Adult Education Learning Disability Advisory, and is the Board President of Rhode Island Rehabilitation Association (RIRA).

### **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 I and has been working for the Office of Rehabilitation Services since 2014 serving the mental health population and youth in transition. In addition to her work with the Council, she is also the liaison to Gateway Mental Health Services of Johnston/Cranston, and Johnston High School.

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

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

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

**Linda Deschenes**, Assistant Administrator of Operations

**John Valentine**, Strategic Planning Supervisor

**Nancy Baker**, SRC Facilitator/Contact

# 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:

- ◆ Annual training will be scheduled within the upcoming year, new members will receive a binder that includes bylaws, the role of the SRC and our duties as members, WIOA mandates in relation to the SRC's responsibility to state policies, and finally, procedures for ORS. The presentation by the Training Committee reviews the history of disability, vocational rehabilitation, and the role of the SRC. John Valentine from ORS will provide valuable information to new members concerning the ORS application process, new eligibility criteria, and address the order of selection. The "Employment Can Work for You" video will be viewed by new members to highlight the positive impact of employment of people with disabilities on businesses and on the employee with a disability. The PowerPoints and videos can be viewed independent of the training. Please contact us at [risrc@cox.net](mailto:risrc@cox.net) for provided materials.
- ◆ The application to the SRC was reviewed with minor changes made.
- ◆ A recruitment/members wanted flyer is being offered to public and private businesses and institutions throughout the state to increase membership and fill upcoming vacancies.
- ◆ 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.

- ◆ The SRC has secured five new members, Melissa Brusso, Anne Fartura, Nina Fiasconaro, Natalia Montoya, and Nicole Rico Serrano.

### **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 [risrc@cox.net](mailto:risrc@cox.net).

Respectfully Submitted

Maryellen Hagerty & Lea Colardo, Co-chairs

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 the Office of Rehabilitation Services (ORS) about its plans and policies in accordance with the Rehabilitation Act. The committee also participates in reviewing the quality of services delivery to ORS customers and continuous quality improvement.

During this program year Catherine Sansonetti, Esquire stepped down as Chair of this committee. Ms. Sansonetti had served as chair and provided exemplary leadership for this committee for many years. Gail Lawson, PhD and Joan Fino volunteered to serve as Co-chairs for this committee.

Respectfully Submitted,

Gail Lawson, Co-Chair  
Joan Fino, Co-Chair  
State Plan, Policy and Quality Assurance Committee

During this program year, there were no requests to review proposed policies since ORS was in the process of revising/simplifying the regulations that govern the operation of ORS. Copies of the proposed changes were sent to all State Plan, Policy and Quality Assurance members.

The Chair and Ms. Sansonetti attended meetings addressing the proposed changes, and both the Chair and Ms. Sansonetti expressed concern about both the review process and some of the proposed changes. ORS responded to the expressed concerns in a timely manner.



## **National Coalition of State Rehabilitation Councils, Inc.**

The State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) for the Office of Rehabilitation Services (ORS) 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.

### **STRATEGIC PLAN:**

**GOAL 1:** Increase the capacity of SRCs through education & training.

**GOAL 2:** Enhance the NCSRC infrastructure at regional and national levels.

**GOAL 3:** Establish partnerships which build a stronger alliance, while advocating on behalf of the public vocational rehabilitation system.

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 <http://www.ncsrc.net>

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