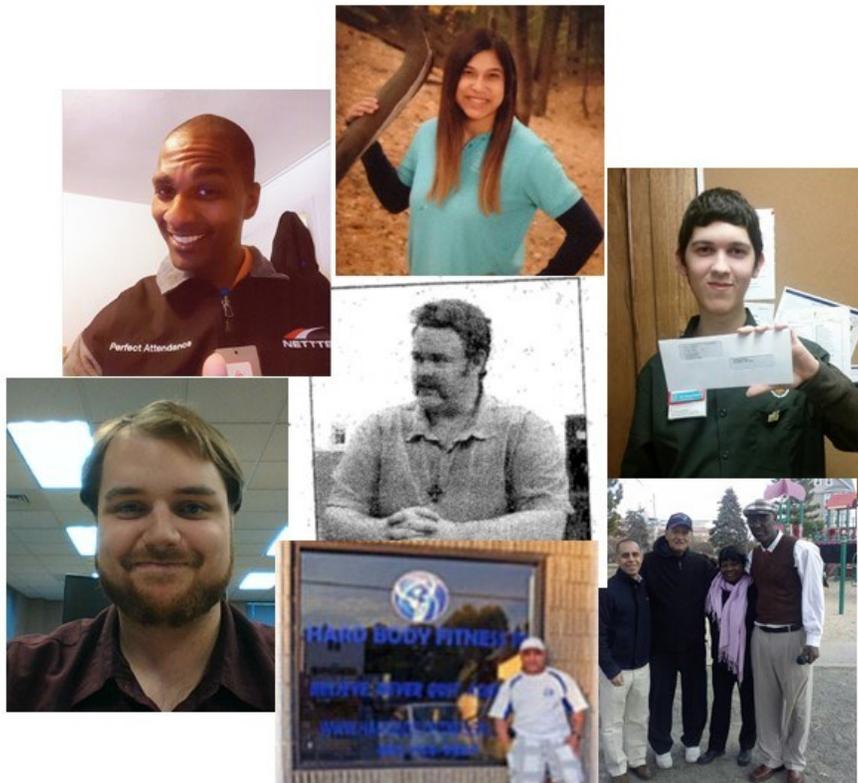


**RHODE ISLAND  
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES /  
OFFICE OF REHABILITATION SERVICES  
AND THE  
STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL**



**2015  
ANNUAL  
REPORT**

**GINA M. RAIMONDO  
GOVERNOR**

**MELBA DEPEÑA AFFIGNE  
DIRECTOR**



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## Message From the Director of Department of Human Services

It is my pleasure to provide you with the Annual Report for Federal Fiscal Year 2015 for the Rhode Island Department of Human Services, Office of Rehabilitation Services (ORS). 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 in order to make that important transition from school to post-secondary education and 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, and Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired provides services for individuals who are blind or have a visual impairment. ORS provides a comprehensive array of personalized services to Rhode Islanders with disabilities.

In FFY2015, ORS provided 5,061 persons with disabilities with vocational rehabilitation, training, and employment services. The Disability Determination Services adjudicated 18,459 claims for social security disability benefits.

We are proud of the partnerships that our staff has developed with our citizen advisory councils, our customers and the community, which has contributed so much to the quality of life for individuals with disabilities in Rhode Island.

*Melba Depeña Affigne*

## Message from the Associate Director

On behalf of the Office of Rehabilitation Services, I am pleased to present to you the 2015 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. As persons with disabilities achieve an employment outcome, they become tax-paying citizens and more than pay back the cost of the program.

In 2015, ORS assisted 643 individuals with disabilities to obtain competitive employment. With an emphasis on serving individuals with the most significant disabilities, ORS is making a real difference in the lives of individuals with disabilities and their families. 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, Statewide Independent Living 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.



*Ronald Racine*

## Message from the SRC Chair

The Rhode Island State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) serves as the consumer voice for the Office of Rehabilitation Services (ORS) program. Participation by the SRC in the state planning process and policy development and revision assures that the consumer's voice will be heard. Only when the consumer's voice is heard will individuals with disabilities accomplish independence, true community integration, and meaningful employment.

The membership of the SRC includes a broad range of stakeholders in order to assure that all individuals with disabilities are adequately represented and have a voice in the operation of ORS. As Chair of the SRC, I am pleased to share the 2015 Annual Report. This report highlights the SRC's activities during FFY2015.

The 2015 SRC Annual Report outlines the changes to the bylaws and subcommittee structure that were implemented at the conclusion of the 2014-2015 program year. As regards subcommittees, all existing subcommittees except the State Plan and Policy Committee and the Leadership Development Committee were dissolved. The State Plan and Policy Committee and the Leadership Development Committee are now identified as standing committees and all members of the SRC now also sit on one of the two standing committees. In the event that another committee is needed to address a particular issue, an ad hoc committee with specific goals, objectives, and timeline would be formed.

During the current program year the Leadership Development Committee has worked to develop comprehensive training materials and protocols to address the issues identified in the previous year's membership survey. A detailed report of this committee's work is included in this report.



The State Plan and Policy Committee has expended most of its efforts at this point on responding to a request for comment on proposed WIOA regulations and recent proposed policy changes within ORS. ORS was not required to develop a state plan for the current program year, but rather has begun to develop the collaborative state plan. As of fall 2015, the SRC has been asked to collaborate with ORS in identifying how ORS will meet the requirements of various components of the state plan. While we have just begun this work, we are hopeful that participation by the SRC in this planning process will result in enhanced services to those with disabilities.

It is a privilege to serve as Chair of the Rhode Island State Rehabilitation Council. The members of the Council are honored to provide leadership and work in partnership with the Office of Rehabilitation Services. This report is submitted to document the important work of the SRC.

Respectfully submitted,

*Gail Lawson*

Gail M Lawson PhD. Chair SRC

## **State Rehabilitation Council - Committee Members**

The membership of the SRC includes a broad range of stakeholders in order to assure that all individuals with disabilities are adequately represented and have a voice in the operation of the Office of Rehabilitation Services.

**Chairperson, Gail Lawson, PhD.** - Representing a community rehabilitation provider

**Vice Chair, Jeffrey Machado** – Goodwill Industries of Rhode Island, Representing a community rehabilitation program service provider

**Co-Secretary, Lea Colardo** – Sherlock Center, Representing. Education and a community rehabilitation program service provider

**Co-Secretary, Jack Ringland** – Representing the Statewide Independent Living Council (Chair) and individuals with physical disabilities

**Margaret Benz** - Representing business, industry and labor, and current or former applicants for Vocational Rehabilitation services

**Christina Battista** - Representing current or former applicants for, or recipients of Vocational Rehabilitation services

**Christine Botts** - Representing a community rehabilitation service provider and individuals who have difficulty representing themselves

**Rocco Bruno** - Representing business, industry, and labor

**Cynthia Cote** - Representing, business, industry, and labor and community rehabilitation service provider

**Dr. Mona Dorsinville-Phanor** - Representing a community rehabilitation service provider

**Dr. Judith Drew** - Representing business, industry, and labor and a community rehabilitation service provider

**Joan Fino** - Representing a parent training and information center established pursuant to section 671 of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act [20 U.S.C. 1471]

**Elizabeth Graves** - Representing disability advocacy groups representing a cross section of individuals with physical, cognitive, sensory, and mental disabilities

**Dr. Yohann Greaves** - Representing community health and disability advocacy groups representing a cross section of parents, family members, 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

**Maryellen Hagerty** – Sherlock Center, Representing education and community rehabilitation service provider

**Paul Harden** - New England Institute of Technology, Representing business, industry, and labor

## **Committee Members (continued)**

**Barbara Henry** - Representing individuals with physical, cognitive, sensory (blind disabilities), and Statewide Independent Living Council

**Diana Kriner** - Representing a parent training and information center established pursuant to section 671 of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act [20 U.S.C. 1471]

**Lori Norris** – The Center for Excellence and Advocacy, Representing community rehabilitation program service provider and individuals with cognitive, sensory, and mental disabilities

**Daniel Pieroni** – Department of Education, Representing ORS consumers, current or former applicants for, or recipients of Vocational Rehabilitation Services

**Vincent Rossi** – Department of Labor and Training Workforce Development Services, Representing disability advocacy groups representing a cross section of: parents, family members, 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

**Catherine Sansonetti** - Representing the Client Assistance Program established under section 732 of this title under 43 CFR part 370

**Jane Slade** - Representing 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.]

**Willa Truelove** - Representing individuals with disabilities who have difficulty representing themselves and underserved populations

**Marilyn Walaska** - Representing business, industry, and labor

**Mr. Kim Wennermark** – Veterans Administration, Representing ORS consumers, current or former applicants for, or recipients of Vocational Rehabilitation Services

**Diana Marcotte** – ORS Liaison

**Ronald Racine**, Associate Director

**Kathleen Grygiel**, Administrator VR

**Laurie DiOrio**, Administrator of SBVI

**Nancy Baker** - Facilitator/Contact

**2015 Annual Meeting  
May 12, 2015  
Crowne Plaza Hotel, Warwick**



**3rd Row:** Dan Pieroni, Christine Botts, Yohann Greaves, Joan Fino, Linda Deschenes, Ron Racine, Vin Rossi, Lori Norris, Willa Truelove, Rocco Bruno, Nancy Baker

**2nd Row:** Catherine Sansonetti, Jane Slade, JoAnn Nannig, Marilyn Welsaka, Diana Marcotte, Judy Drew, Peggy Benz, Cindy Cote, Diana Kriner, Maryellen Hagarty

**1st Row:** Kelley Conti, Elizabeth Graves, Mona Dorsinville-Phanor, Gail Lawson, Jeff Machado, Lea Colardo, Barbara Henry, Christina Baptista, Jack Ringland

## Membership Training Sub-Committee

This Committee was established this year after the Council's desire to refocus its work. Originally responsible for recruitment and leadership training, the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) voted to fine-tune this Committee's work. Now charged with the interviewing, orientation, and training of new members including disseminating materials and planning an annual training event and establishing, maintaining a mentoring program for new members for their first year on the Council. The Committee established four core goals.

1. **Create an application for the SRC** - After establishing the mission of the Membership Training Sub-committee, we moved forward on the task of revising the old SRC application. The committee reviewed many other state's SRC applications and decided that a new, refined, application would be drafted and presented to the Council.
2. **Establish interview, orientation, and training protocols** – With the establishment of protocols for new member orientation and training, the Committee plans to achieve a smoother transition with less learning time for new members.
3. **Implement a mentoring program** – The Committee has estimated that two or three members, who have been on the Council for several years, will be able to each take on one new member and guide them through the first year on the Council. This is an ambitious endeavor and we are hopeful that it will be accomplished within the next year. The significance of this mentoring system will certainly pay off especially with the State Plan partnership with VR.
4. **Design a membership package** containing all training materials for each member on the Council.

After establishing the mission of the Membership Training committee, both the Chair of the Council and the Chair of this committee attended two separate NCSRC Leadership and Training conferences, and after working with other councils and reviewing materials given out at these conferences, it was decided that the focus of Membership Training committee needed to take precedence over the other goals.

## **Membership Training Sub-Committee (continued)**

The work currently being done is the goal to design a membership package containing training materials. We have met several times via teleconference and will be meeting in December to review training materials from the VR, SRC and the NCSRC. The goal of these meetings is to create a binder with the most up-to-date training materials presented electronically and with hard copies of certain items. This gives the Council the capacity to offer every member their own binder, especially when they are just starting out on the Council. We know it will make it easier for new members to get comfortable with the workings of the Council. We want to have a good mix of materials from VR, the NCSRC, and the RSA to provide the best resources for learning.

Once we have established this important foundation for new members, we will move to complete goals one, two and three; revise our applications, establish the methods for interviewing and orientation for new members, as well as planning for our first annual training event to be held in June of 2016.

We estimate to complete three of the four goals before the fall of 2016. Then the mentoring program will be the main focus for the rest of that year. We hope to get guidance from the RSA and other councils in the Coalition on how to implement the mentoring program.

Respectably Submitted,

*Lea Colardo, Chair*

## State Plan, Policy and Quality Assurance

The State Plan, Policy and Quality Assurance Committee of the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) is charged with advising the agency 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.

In 2015, the SRC Committee provided comment to ORS on proposed changes to eight (8) policies. These were only small changes and the SRC commented both procedurally and substantively on the policies. The agency provided the SRC with a timely response to our concerns and incorporated most into their policy changes.

This year, the SRC did not provide feedback on the ORS proposed State Plan for the upcoming year due to changes in the law around how the agency must prepare and submit a state plan. So that SRC members can learn more about this new process and provide meaningful input, we suggested becoming more involved in the process. An ad hoc committee is being formed to do exactly that. To date, many more members of the Council are becoming more involved with our Committee's work and are interested in learning more about ORS and the changes being implemented with the amendments to the Rehabilitation Act through the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA).

Respectfully Submitted,

*Catherine Sansonetti, Chair*



## 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.

### **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 Americans 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 51 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.

The SRC Chair, Gail Lawson attended the training conferences in, Miami, FL., and Bethesda, MD.

The Chair of the Membership Training Committee, Lea Colardo, attended the Fall training conference in Seattle, Washington.

For more information about the NCSRC, please go to <http://www.ncsrc.net/node/21>

## Success Stories

**CLIENT:** Alvin Torres  
**OCCUPATION:** Personal Trainer  
**EMPLOYER:** Self Employed  
**COUNSELOR:** Jeff Milette

Alvin Torres opened his case with ORS in 2013. He had been taking seminars and classes on health and athletic training and was looking to improve his knowledge and skills to become a personal trainer. He had attracted some customers informally and hoped to build a career as a personal trainer. He developed kidney disease, which then motivated him further towards well-ness in order to be around for his family. Alvin needed the backing of ORS to support his goal of becoming a personal trainer.

ORS gave him resources to explore, suggesting MTTI, and helped guide him through the process of applying to the program, applying for financial aid, and suggestions on how to maintain his life while going through school. He was accepted into MTTI's personal trainer program and completed top in his class. He developed plans to open his own fitness studio and began renting a store front. ORS and his Gateway support staff assisted him with developing his business plan. This plan included projecting the number of clients per week he could work with and still maintain emotional balance / well-being and not over-work himself. He began using his studio space right away.

ORS assisted him in obtaining gym equipment in order to be able to enhance and expand his opportunity to train people. Alvin has a unique perspective in the market of personal trainers. Not only does he provide one-on-one training for individuals who may feel uncomfortable in a large gym environment, but he is also more sensitive to working with those who have disabilities given his own health and medical issues. Alvin states he learned a lot beyond personal training working with ORS, such as how to organize and plan to build a business. He feels he is a better person and has more dignity and respect for himself. He wants to give back and help others feel the same.



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# January 2016

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 SRC Mtg	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31						

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**CLIENT:** Emily Schwegler  
**OCCUPATION:** Teaching Assistant  
**EMPLOYER:** The Children's Workshop  
**COUNSELOR:** Paul Hughett

## *In Her Own Words...*



My name is Emily Schwegler, and I am 20 years old. Ever since I was diagnosed with Stargardts Disease in the 3rd grade I have faced many challenges. Graduating from North Smithfield High School in 2014 was a big milestone in my life.

My goal after high school was to find a job in child care. In April of my senior year high school, ORS/SBVI referred me to Good Will Industries of R.I. to set up a vocational evaluation. Before I began my evaluation ORS/SBVI provided me with the appropriate assistive technology for me to complete daily tasks on the job.

One of the most important tools ORS/SBVI provided me with is called the Ruby. This is an electronic hand held magnification device that is used to enlarge printed materials. After a successful vocational evaluation ORS/SBVI also referred me to the Summer Work Program at Good Will.

This was a 4 week internship program that I completed at a day care known as The Children's Workshop. My biggest barrier to finding employment was proving myself to employers and coworkers and showing them that just because I am visually impaired does not mean I am incapable of completing the same tasks that are expected of any other employee. I overcame this barrier by using my Ruby to read daily paper work, and showing my supervisors how well I work with children.

They must have been impressed because at the end of my 4 weeks, The Children's Workshop offered me a full time job as a Teaching Assistant.

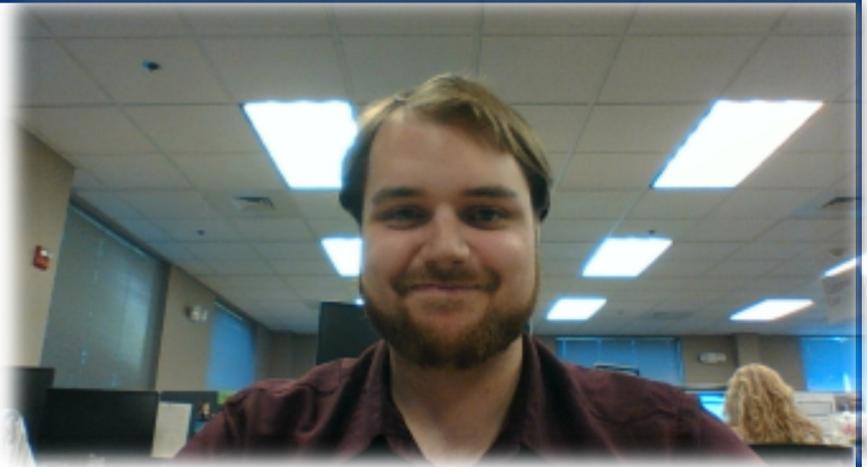
This is another accomplishment that I am proud of. This is why I always try to tell people "Don't let your visual impairment control you, let you control it."

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# February 2016

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
	1	2	3	4 State Plan Public Hearing 2:00 pm Warwick Public Library	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					

**CLIENT:** Matt Pereira  
**OCCUPATION:** Software Engineer  
**EMPLOYER:** Critical Mix  
**COUNSELOR:** Teresa O'Brien



Matt was referred to the Office of Rehabilitation Services by Chariho High School. In February 2010, Matt and his mother met with Teresa O'Brien, Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor, to review the orientation checklist, to sign release forms, and to speak about vocational goals.

Matt received services under a 504 and was very interested in pursuing post-secondary educational opportunities. Upon conclusion of the orientation, Matt took home an application and within days returned it to ORS to begin his vocational journey. A vocational evaluation and an Assistive Technology evaluation were the first two services Matt received. It was discovered during eligibility determination that he needed assistance with communication and work skills.

Teresa, Matt, and Matt's mother reviewed the data from the vocational evaluation, assistive technology evaluation, and the school referral prior to determining Matt's individualized plan for employment (IPE) goals. Through Matt's IPE, he received information and referrals, guidance and counseling, educational funding, and assistive technology and devices to assist him with obtaining a Bachelors degree of Science in Microbiology with a minor in Computer Science.

Matt graduated in four years and gained a full-time job as a software engineer, where he ensures quality and assurance testing. Matt has thanked Teresa for *"all the help you've given me. I hope they'll give you proper credit for a job well done."*

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# March 2016

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

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**CLIENT:** Randall Redd  
**OCCUPATION:** Tractor Trailer Truck Driver  
**EMPLOYER:** Perkins  
**COUNSELOR:** John Valentine

## In His Own Words...



“Randall received services from ORS, which assisted him in securing full-time employment with benefits for himself and his children. He was diagnosed with learning disabilities and interpersonal issues. Once upon a time, as a young man, he spent some time away (prison). During that time, Randall rehabilitated his thinking and his lifestyle.

Randall understood and realized that he would have to maintain his seriousness and due diligence in order to change his life around and never look back. With that change and his favorite quote, *“A man who is on time, is a man who is 15 minutes early”*, Randall was able to get a part-time job at Stop & Shop in Massachusetts and applied for ORS services. With pay stub in hand and steadily working without missing days, he demonstrated to ORS and other agencies his obligation to follow through consistently with his job.

Randall also demonstrated a great deal of interest in improving his life and building a stronger career. With ORS support, Randall enrolled at NETTTS, New England Tractor Trailer Training School, and focused very hard on the training. He passed all his written and driving tests while maintaining a 3.8 GPA. Still working, he remained active and involved with ORS, and finished the NETTTS program with perfect attendance. The lead instructor of the training program wrote a letter to ORS stating that he had become an inspiration to the other participants in the program, helping them stay focused and live a clean life.

Randall hopes that his success story will become an inspiration to his family, as well as others who have been in trouble or headed for trouble, or facing any type of adversity. Within three months of graduating from NETTTS, he had multiple job offers. Perhaps one day he may even become a driving instructor. He stated he knows it is all about giving back in life. Randall loves his job and is quite happy with his success and financial independence. His life at home with his wife (congratulations on his recent marriage) and son is going well, and he always seems to be in a great mood no matter what day it is. He states to those who have past or present issues who are in critical need of turning their life around: *“If you can stay focused while you’re driving in life, then you can be successful without ever looking over your shoulder. Also when climbing into a truck you will notice there is no rear view mirror. That’s telling you it’s not time to look back at your past, but grab the steering wheel of life, put your seat belt on, and let’s be safe driving toward your future goals.”* His positive attitude, motivation, and success are an empowering testament to what an individual can achieve in life.”

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# April 2016

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

**CLIENT:** Gregory Townes  
**OCCUPATION:** Self-employed Business Owner  
**EMPLOYER:** RGT Fluid Change  
**COUNSELOR:** Jennifer Fiske/Jessica Palumbo

Gregory was 48 years old when he applied for services with ORS in 2013. Two years later, he became the proud owner of RGT Fluid Change. His mobile business brings auto services, such as fluid changes, auto detailing, and pressure washing, right to his customers.

When he was found eligible for services with ORS, he had the beginnings of an idea to start his own business. He met with his Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Counselor to develop his Individualized Plan for Employment, which outlined the agreed upon services needed to help him reach his vocational goal. Benefits Counseling was also provided to help Gregory understand his benefits, and the potential impact of employment on those benefits so he could make an informed choice about work. Through working with his ORS VR Counselor, he received an array of services that helped him make this dream a reality.

Some of the services he received were critical in his success. Gregory completed a functional appraisal to assist with determining his areas of strength, and his capability to run a business. He worked with a self-employment/business committee member and counselor to develop a comprehensive business plan. Gregory was tasked with gathering relevant information and performing thorough research to help develop this business plan. He attended small business classes, and developed his marketing materials such as his brochure and business cards. Through his diligent work, and with guidance from his ORS VR Counselor, he was able to complete a working business plan. With this approved business plan, ORS was able to purchase some of the necessary tools to allow him to put his business plan into action. Gregory is currently working full-time hours operating his own business, and is beginning to show a profit. He is thrilled to be running his own business successfully.



*Providence Mayor Elorza, R.I. Senator Metts, Councilwoman Harris, Owner Gregory Townes*

# May 2016

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10 Annual SRC Breakfast Mtg	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

**CLIENT:** Caleb Pion  
**OCCUPATION:** Truck Driver  
**EMPLOYER:** J and B Elite Transport  
**COUNSELOR:** Jeff Milette



Caleb Pion was referred to ORS by Andjela Kaur of Project Riral in Woonsocket, RI. At our first meeting, Caleb was beaming with energy and focus. He was working part time at Price Rite for many years and had not bothered to get his GED. At this point in his life, he wanted to make a change and make something of his life. Unfortunately, that meant confronting a subject that was somewhat difficult for him: Math.

In the fall of 2013, there was pressure to pass the GED by the end of the year due to changes in the GED process that would have made it more difficult for him to obtain his GED. Caleb wanted to move quickly. Project Riral and ORS jumped right in to help. Caleb enrolled in GED classes at Project Riral while Andjela assisted with coordinating and connecting him to one of Project Riral's math tutors (Lynn). ORS funded a learning evaluation which clarified that he had a learning disability and needed accommodations for testing. ORS provided funding to support the necessary accommodation. All of this support made the difference, and he was awarded a GED diploma December 7, 2013.

Next was training. Caleb wanted to become a Truck Driver and enrolled in New England Tractor Trailer Training School, immediately. He went on to obtain his CDL license in April 2014. He met with ORS and was anxious to start his job search. Within two weeks he had obtained his first trucking job.

Caleb was excited as ever and thanked ORS and others endlessly for support. He sent a letter to this ORS counselor. An excerpt is as follows: ***"I am very grateful. I am a busy man now, working very hard. Thanks to you... I hope this inspires everyone who has troubles and despair. Keep the faith, take one step at a time."***

Caleb has invited his counselor to meet for coffee sometime in the future. Jeff added ***"It has been an honor to meet with someone so inspiring"***.

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# June 2016

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 SRC Full Council Mtg on Strategic Plan	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30		

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**Client :** Angelina Storti  
**Occupation:** Designer  
**Employer :** Custom Designs, Inc.  
**Counselor :** Paula Berard

Angelina is a twenty-three year old woman who became involved with Paula Cardi Berard, a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor (VRC) from the Office of Rehabilitation Services (ORS) while she was in high school. Angelina was born with profound bilateral sensorineural hearing loss, which basically means that while she had some residual hearing, and was determined to be functionally deaf. She was diagnosed at seventeen months of age, used hearing aids to augment her hearing, and then was implanted with a right-sided cochlear implant (CI) right before she turned five.

A cochlear implant is a small electronic device which bypasses damaged portions of the ear and directly stimulates the auditory nerve. The CI consists of an external portion that sits behind the ear (transmitter) and a second portion that is surgically placed under the skin (receiver). Signals generated by the implant are sent by way of the auditory nerve to the brain, which recognizes the signals as sound to provide a sense of sound to the person who is profoundly deaf or severely hard-of-hearing. Mapping is the term used for programming a cochlear implant to assist an individual to “hear” the sounds and for the brain to make sense of the impulses. The mapping process will need to occur many times over the first years and users will still require a “tune-up” consistently throughout the use of the CI. Hearing through a cochlear implant is different from normal hearing and takes time to learn or relearn.

Angelina performed well with the CI, but still had challenges in the classroom which were resolved with the use of school and learning supports, preferential seating, written instructions and



notes, as well as trialing different forms of AT. In 2009, when she was a high school senior, Angelina approached the ORS in regard to obtaining tuition assistance and supports as she entered into post-secondary training. She had been accepted at the Massachusetts College of Art & Design (MassArt) in Industrial Design, where she was also to live on campus. Since this college did not yet have an Office of Disabilities, one of the first orders of business was to establish communication with appropriate personnel in order to set up safety and classroom accommodations. Angelina’s VR Counselor, Paula Cardi Berard, along with an audiologist from Boston’s Children’s Hospital, designed a list of safety equipment, protocol, and class room interventions which could be implemented. Among those identified were flashing lights for fire drills and fire alarms, an assigned person to alert Angelina at night if there was a fire, a sonic boom/ flashing alarm clock, and classroom accommodations, such as preferential seating, FM equipment, written instructions, and classroom checks for information. Angelina, at her VRC’s instruction and encouragement, practiced self-advocacy in asking for reframing of assignments, providing for unanticipated needs, and to identify when she needed “listening breaks”, as “hearing” takes much energy and can be fatiguing. Additionally, Angelina and her VR counselor met regularly between semesters and during the summer to review the previous school year and discuss the coming semesters.

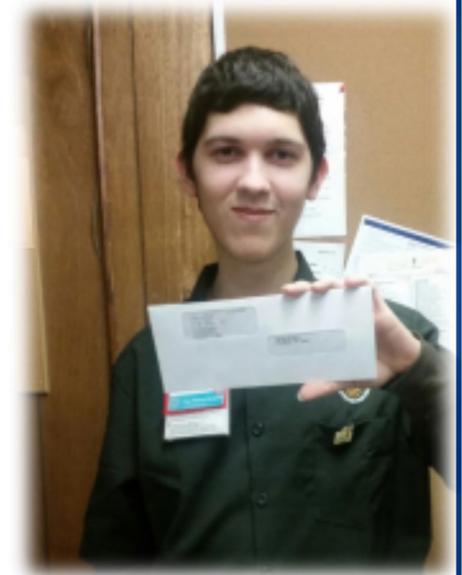
# July 2016

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In June of 2014, Angelina graduated from MassArt with a Bachelor's Degree in Industrial Design. Angelina was very excited to start a job the following autumn with a small family-owned company for whom she designs and customizes advertising displays using graphic arts technology, such as for Stop & Shop, Gucci, Tiffany, and RayBan. Angelina was able to use VR services to provide the supports she needed to obtain an education, to make choices and to contribute to her own life, as well as to give back to the community. She provides a great example of determination and success.

*Angelina is a true success!*

**Client :** Joshua Montero  
**Occupation:** ESD worker (maintenance)  
**Employer :** Miriam Hospital  
**Counselor :** Teresa Scaramuzzo-DiMattia



Joshua is a 20-year old young man, who attended Mount Pleasant High School in 2012 and then transitioned to a Providence Public School Department (PPSD) program in 2013. He has barriers to employment secondary to a learning disability. He began working with the Office of Rehabilitation Services in 2012, while he was still attending Mount Pleasant High School. During his school years, Joshua did not have any vocational experience in the community. Upon meeting with his counselor Joshua was very shy and did not speak much at all even when asked questions. He was, however, very interested in ORS services and wanted to work. He expressed that clearly at his initial meeting with ORS. He began the ORS process and went out into the community to complete his vocational assessment and loved it!

The following year as Joshua transitioned to this program, Joshua's ORS Counselor attended his yearly IEP meeting and explained the Project Search Program to him. As a team all parties, including his parents, were very excited for Joshua to be able to interview and take part in this great program upon acceptance. Joshua was accepted and began his last year of high school by attending the Project Search program which was new at Miriam Hospital. Joshua was able to experience three different job rotations within the hospital departments, and he would have 45 minutes in the morning of class time to prepare for his day and 45 minutes in the afternoon in order to debrief on how his day went with his teacher and job coach.

While attending the Providence Public School Department (PPSD) program, Joshua learned how to take the bus. Joshua used the bus independently to and from Miriam Hospital. Once he began this program there was a big change in Joshua, he was happy to be participating in this program in order to gain work experience. Miriam Hospital, with the help of ORS, gave Joshua a uniform so he would fit right in with all the staff at the hospital. He was much more talkative, and he addressed everyone who spoke to him with a smile and appropriate greetings. He had grown so much since the first time his counselor had met him back in 2012. He was so much happier. Joshua felt that he had achieved all his academic requirements and was ready for work. He has very supportive parents, and they wanted the same for him.

His first rotation in the Hospital was in the ESD department. This is the Environmental Services Department, also known as the maintenance department. He did a great job initially in this department, and he could independently complete all job tasks for this position.

# August 2016

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After completing his rotation in ESD, Joshua was offered a job by the Miriam Hospital. He started working part time, and is now working 40 hours a week, making the minimum wage per hour.

Joshua's ORS Counselor went to visit and congratulate him upon receiving the great news. Joshua was just beaming with excitement of finally getting a check and being able to help his family. When asked what he was going to do with his first check, he stated that he would keep some money for himself and give the rest to his parents in order to help with the household expenses.

He has been working successfully at the Miriam Hospital for over a year, and as you can see from the above picture, he was very excited to receive his very first check!!!!

***Congratulations to Joshua!***

## Targeted Goals

Each year counselors and regions are tasked with achieving set goals in three different areas - Number of Applications Received, Number of Individualized Plan's for Employment (IPE's) Developed, and Number of Successful Closures.

For FFY 2015, the following Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors achieved all three of these goals:

Carolyn Blessing (Reg 4)  
 Nicole Crossett (Reg 2)  
 Teresa DiMattia (Reg 1)  
 Rebecca Dines-Nyeswa (Reg 1)  
 Karen Dougherty (Reg 1)  
 Dorian Havers (Reg 3)  
 Kristen Livesey (Reg 2)  
 Sheridan Lomax (Reg 1)  
 Michael Lombardi (Reg 3)  
 Diana Marcotte (Reg 1)  
 Jeffrey Milette (Reg 3)  
 Sheila Moffat (Reg 2)  
 Natalia Montoya (Reg 2)  
 Kathleen Neun (Reg 4)  
 Teresa O'Brien (Reg 4)  
 Karen Russell (Reg 4)

Both Region I and Region II met all three of these goals as well.



*Region 1*



*Region 3*

Counselor who met their goals for Number of Applications and Successful Closures included:  
 Bonnie Flanagan

Counselors who met their goals for IPE's Developed included:  
 Alica Dimasi  
 Emilee O'Conner

Counselors who met their goals for Number of Applications and IPE's Developed included:  
 Avis Gunther-Rosenberg  
 Sandra Perez  
 Manuel Carbuccia



*Region 2*



*Region 4*

Counselors who met their goals for Number of IPE's Developed and Successful Closures included:  
 Paula Berard  
 Cynthia Hebert

Counselors who met their goals for Number of Successful Closures include:  
 Michaela Stannard  
 John Valentine  
 Armanda Marcaccio

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# September 2016

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## 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.

### **Teresa Scaramuzzo-DiMattia - 2014**

On Friday, January 16th, 2015, Teresa, a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor II, was presented with the 4th Annual Raymond A. Carroll Award while attending the 2014-2015 Annual Strategic Planning Day held at Save the Bay. Teresa began her career at Office of Rehabilitation Services as a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor I in November, 2003. In September, 2009, Teresa was promoted to the VRC II position, where she currently works with students in the Providence Public School System.



### **Rosemary Feeney - 2015**

On Friday, November 13th, 2015 Rosemary was presented with the 5th Annual Raymond A. Carroll Award at the 2015-2016 Annual Strategic Planning day. Rosemary began her career at the Office of Rehabilitation Services as a receptionist in 1998. In 2009, Rosemary was promoted to the Fiscal Clerk position for the Vocational Rehabilitation Unit. Rosemary is currently working as the Human Services Business Officer for the Services for the Blind & Visually Impaired Unit at the Office of Rehabilitation Services.



### **Past Recipients include:**

Sharon DiPinto - Sr. HSPSS - 2011  
Kathy McCabe - Sr. Rehabilitation Counselor - 2012  
Sherry Olink - Jr. Resource Specialist - 2013

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# October 2016

National Disability Employment Awareness Month

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## Standard 1 Employment Outcomes

Indicator	FY 2010	FY 2011	FY 2012	FY 2013	FY 2014	FY 2015
Indicator 1.1 - Number of Employment Outcomes - Federal Standard Equal to or greater than prior year	188 less	159 greater	116 less	1 greater	5 greater	35 greater
Indicator 1.2 - The percentage of individuals who exited the VR Program after receiving services who achieved an employment outcome. (Federal Standard - 55.8%)	40.72%	60.18%	28.80%	58.90%	59.60%	69.2
Indicator 1.3 - The percentage of individuals who achieved an employment outcome and are earning at least the minimum wage. (Federal Standard - 72.6%)	97.89%	97.52%	99.20%	99.80%	99.3%	99.7%
Indicator 1.4 -Competitively Employed (minimum wage or higher) who have a Significant Disability Federal Standard - 62.40%	100%	98.31%	98.80%	100%	100%	100%
Indicator 1.5 -Earnings Ratio of Minimum Wage or higher for ORS vs. State Average Federal Standard - Ratio of .52	.540	.500	.500	.500	.500	.510
Indicator 1.6 - Self-Support (report own income at closure vs. own income at application) Federal Standard 53% mathematical difference	62.95%	67.28%	70.10%	64.10%	64.40%	64.30%
<b>Standard 2 Minority Ratio Equal Access to Services</b> Federal Standard Ratio of .80 for n=100+	.890	.910	.730	.840	.799	.840

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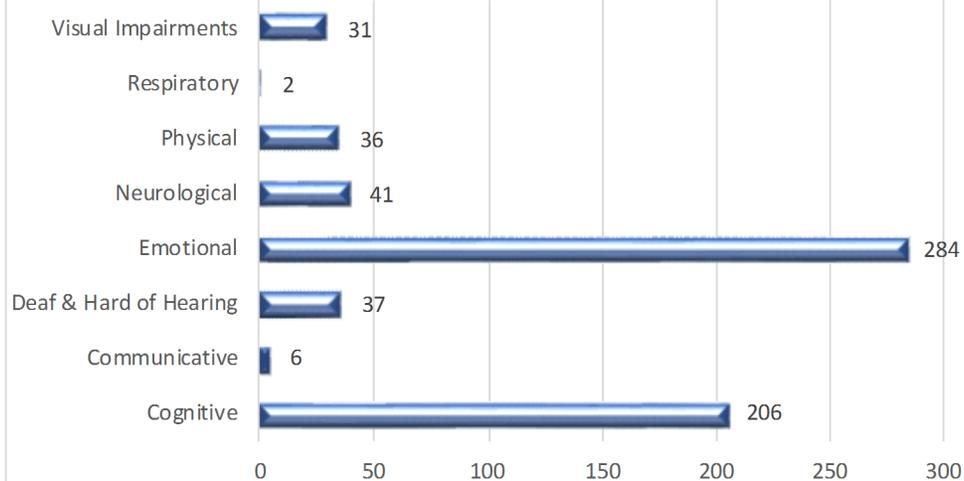
# November 2016

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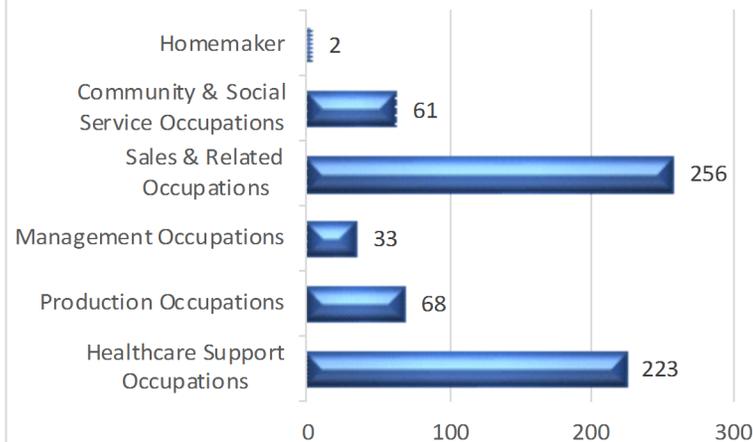
## Hourly Wage of 643 Successfully Employed Individuals with Disabilities



### Primary Disability of 643 Persons Successfully Employed



### Primary Occupation of 643 Individuals with Disabilities Successfully Employed



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# December 2016

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## Program Highlights – Federal Fiscal Year 2015 October 1, 2014 – September 30, 2015

### Vocational Rehabilitation Program

**643 individuals were successfully employed**

- 2,460 individuals applied for vocational rehabilitation services.
- 5,061 individuals with disabilities were provided vocational rehabilitation services.
- 1,557 individuals worked with a vocational rehabilitation counselor to develop a new Individualized Plan for Employment [IPE].
- 4,524 individuals received services purchased from vendors. Services ranged from evaluations, medical and psychological therapies, personal assistant services, job placement and training.
- 179 individuals received rehabilitation technology services to assist them to prepare for and to enter employment.
- 1,629 youth with disabilities ages 14-24 received transition services of which 500 are currently in high school.
- 1,404 individuals received information from Assistive Technology Access Partnership (ATAP) Resource Centers about assistive technology (AT) and funding options.
- 1,799 individuals received AT training, demonstration, loans or assistance with recycled AT devices.
- 339 individuals were provided specialized equipment through the ATEL (Adaptive Telephone Equipment Loan) Program.
- 8,130 Presentations were made on Assistive Technology devices and services.
- 26,902 AT Newsletters were distributed via mail and email.

## Services for the Blind & Visually Impaired (SBVI)

12 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 12 facilities collectively also provide employment for 16 individuals around the state. Two (2) new vendors graduated the full training program, were licensed and are currently operating vending facilities in Providence and in Newport RI. RI BEP gross sales totaled approximately \$ 1.4 million in FFY2015 with an average net vendor earnings of \$28,000.

481 individuals were registered for NEWSLINE, a newspaper reading service of which 8 recently signed up.

450 elderly individuals who are blind or visually impaired received services from the Independent Living for Older Blind Program. Services included: 100% low vision aids, 64% rehab teaching appointments, 51% mobility services, and 100% service coordinations.

62% of this group reported that they feel more confident in their independent living after receiving services, and 27% indicated they had considered nursing home placement prior to services, but were able to remain in their own homes.

## Disability Determination Services (DDS)

<u>17,819</u>	total cases were received by the Disability Determination Services (DDS).
<u>18,459</u>	claims were successfully processed by the DDS.
<u>10,100</u>	initial claims were filed.
<u>3,865</u>	Continuing Disabilities Review cases were completed.
<u>360</u>	Pre-Hearing Cases were processed, resulting in <u>291</u> Disability Hearing Unit decisions.
<u>6,032</u>	cases with Consultative Examinations were purchased.
<u>15,497</u>	cases with Medical Evidence of Record were purchased.
<u>\$1,788,923</u>	total Medical Costs with a Total Budget of <u>\$9,012,118</u> .
<u>\$482.71</u>	cost per case.

Production Per Work Year (PPWY) efficiency rate was 392.2. The national rate was 314.7. The performance accuracy rate for RI was 96.1%. The net accuracy was 96.8%. The national rates was 95.5%. The regulatory standard is 90.4%.

*\*Based on the Monthly Obligation Report for 9/2015.*

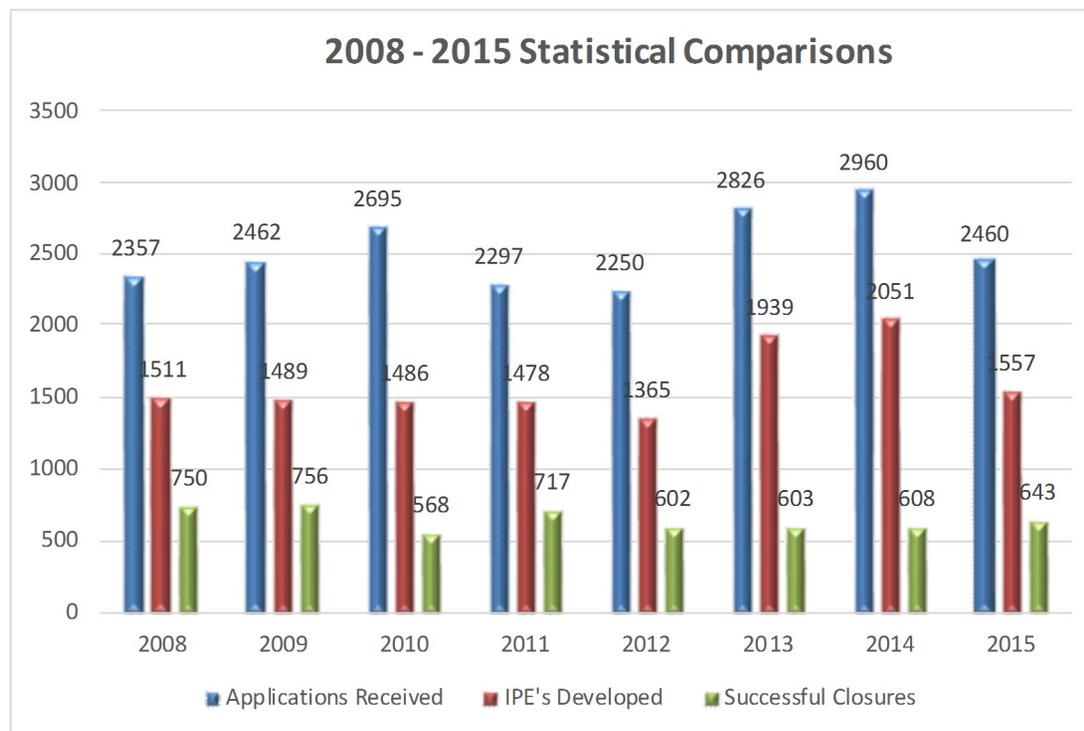
## Vocational Rehabilitation

The Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Program is the public State and Federally funded-program that assists individuals with disabilities to choose, prepare for, obtain, and maintain employment. Employment in an integrated, competitive setting at or above minimum wage 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 Qualified 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 as 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 Employment Plan include:

- Assistive Technology Services
- College or Vocational Training
- Counseling and Guidance
- Diagnostic Evaluations
- Housing Modifications
- Job Development and Placement Services
- Job Training and Job Supports
- Other Goods and Services
- Post-Employment Services
- Rehabilitation Technology Services
- Transition Services from School to Career
- Vehicle Modifications



### **Deaf Services...**

The Office of Rehabilitation Services (ORS) helps individuals who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing obtain the services necessary to reach an employment goal, provides counseling and guidance to help plan vocational goals and services, and assists the individual to obtain employment. They serve as a resource to professionals, state agencies, community organizations, and the public providing information related to employment, training, and accommodations for individuals with a hearing loss.

### **Independent Living Services...**

The Office of Rehabilitation Services (ORS) purchases assessments and independent living services from the Ocean State Center for Independent Living (OSCIL) as part of preparing individuals with significant disabilities for employment.

### **Supported Employment...**

The ORS Supported Employment 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. Over the past year, as a result of the Department of Justice investigation and settlement, ORS has participated, along with Department of Behavioral Healthcare, Developmental Disabilities and Hospitals (BHDDH) & Department of Education (RIDE), in organizing and coordinating a service-delivery system that is intended to ensure adults and youth with significant intellectual disabilities have access to the opportunity to experience employment in real jobs at or above minimum wage, with wages paid by an employer, not a provider.

The State of RI agreed to embrace Employment First philosophy that emphasizes that all individuals with a disability, including individuals with significant intellectual disabilities, have the right to an opportunity to experience real employment with commensurate wages as the outcome of services provided. Therefore, in practice and philosophy, services to individuals with intellectual/developmental disabilities must be based on the premise that all, given the right supports, are capable of working in integrated real jobs and participating in integrated community activities.

ORS assisted 759 adults with intellectual/developmental disabilities (116 were new applicants) of which 59 obtained integrated competitive employment. In addition, 21 youths with intellectual disabilities obtained employment in FFY2015. ORS is

continuing this successful collaboration with other state partners to ensure seamless service delivery from high school through adulthood.

#### **Adaptive Telephone Equipment Loan (ATEL) Program...**

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.

#### **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.

#### **Home Modification Program...**

The Office of Rehabilitation Services administers federal and state independent living funds which provide home accessibility and adaptive equipment for individuals who are significantly disabled, to enable them to meet independent living goals in their homes and communities.

#### **State PCA Program...**

The Office of Rehabilitation Services has contracted with Ocean State Center for Independent Living (OSCIL) to be the fiscal agent for the State Personal Care Assistance program for individuals who were not eligible for Medicaid-funded waivers. Through this program, individuals were able to continue living in the community rather than in a nursing home.

**Transition...** The Office of Rehabilitation Services (ORS) has a strong commitment to assisting students with disabilities in transition planning to adult life. ORS Rehabilitation Counselors assist all school districts, students with disabilities, and their families to plan services to help students reach career goals.

In FFY2015 ORS worked in collaboration with Rhode Island schools on the following pilot projects:

**Miriam Hospital Project Search:** ORS has led the steering committee and obtained and funded the license to bring Project Search to Rhode Island. We have partnered with the Providence School Department and the Miriam Hospital to run a successful site this year. We are providing services to **8 students** in the protected class. Two students have been hired by the Miriam Hospital. The others are participating in job development.

**Blue Cross Project Search:** ORS led the expansion to open our second Project Search site in September 2015. This is a collaboration with the Cranston School Department. ORS applied for the license and arranged technical assistance. ORS is currently working with several medical companies and school systems with the hope of opening two new sites in 2016.

**Summer Employment Alliance/Cumberland:** ORS developed a Service Agreement with Cumberland High School and Northern Rhode Island Collaborative to offer a paid integrated summer work experience for students with ID/DD as part of the extended school year program. Cumberland staff provided job coaching. ORS provided funding to the Northern Rhode Island Collaborative for wages and technical assistance. The Northern Collaborative provided the technical assistance to insure integrated community job placements based on the interests/aptitudes of each participant. Students work for 4 weeks at summer positions. The Project is expected to serve **8 students**

**Pilgrim Employment Pilot:** ORS has partnered with Pilgrim High School and West Bay Collaborative in order to provide 100 hours individualized paid internships in the community along with weekly job readiness training for **10 students** with disabilities in their junior or senior year of high school.

**Central Falls Tri-employment Program:** ORS has partnered with Central Falls High School and Goodwill Industries to provide 100 hours of individualized paid internships in the community along with weekly work readiness training for **10 students** with disabilities in their junior or senior year of high school.

**NorthWest Pilot:** ORS partnered with Northern Rhode Island Collaborative to provide comprehensive employment services to **15 students** in this rural community. The pilot enables services to be provided in the students' home community. Services include vocational evaluations, community based work experiences, summer work, job development and placement.

**Planning for the Future:** DLT/ORS Pilot is a joint project to collaboratively utilize each agencies funding to provide two years of services to **6 students** at North Kingstown High school. ORS funded the first year of summer work. DLT provided job readiness and summer work for the second year of services. ORS and DLT are exploring expansion of the project to South Kingstown and Northern Rhode Island.

ORS has been funding and coordinating summer work program for in-school and out-of-school youth in the community since 2010. Last year ORS funded summer work experiences to **335 students** with a range of disabilities. Eleven ORS approved agencies assisted in developing independent community employment sites where participants received stipends for their work.

In addition to the above activities, ORS also assisted youth with disabilities to experience the World of Work by sponsoring a summer work experience for **335 students** with special needs. ORS collaborated with 11 service agencies to develop integrated work sites in the community and fund for students (at minimum wage) to work for 80 hours over a four week period. Four of the agencies work specifically with students with ID/D.



JoAnn Nannig (ORS), Jeni Mowry (Miriam Hospital), Monica Dzialo (ORS), Crystal

Jeni Mowry was presented with a Certificate of Appreciation from ORS and the SRC and recognized as a key partner at Miriam Hospital for PROJECT SEARCH. Jeni has set high standards for these students, but has always made it possible for them to achieve. She believes in them and instills that belief in her staff. The hospital greets the students by name, which shows how well it is integrated. The program has truly made a difference in these student's lives, helping them achieve independence through respect. Currently, Jeni is also helping ORS establish the program in other businesses, one being Memorial Hospital. Jeni was honored for her commitment and dedication she has shown.

## **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, 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 16 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".

## **Services for the Blind & Visually Impaired (SBVI) (continued)**

### **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 ophthalmological 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.

## **Disability Determination Services (DDS)**

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 RIDDS also performs disability hearings on cases in which benefits have been terminated. In total, the RI DDS processed 18,459 disability cases this year. We anticipate processing about the same number in FFY2016.

SSA has engaged in a major retooling of the disability adjudication process with the intention of improving upon the delivery of high quality, citizen-centered service to the applicants. The foundation for the future was established with the migration from a paper-based product to a predominantly electronic process (eDib). Although hardware and software enhancements are an ongoing process, the RI DDS is now processing the majority of cases electronically. SSA has developed eCAT, which is Electronic Case Analysis Tool. To date we are processing most claim types using this adjudicative tool. The expansion of the electronic case system has allowed the RI DDS to participate in an emerging claims processing methodology, the Electronic Case Analysis Tool (eCAT). This is a systematic, template approach to claim adjudication. eCAT provides intelligent pathing to reach the adjudicative decision in accordance with the SSA sequential evaluation process. The result is supportable determinations, which have greater accuracy and consistency. SSA is constantly improving the software and tools that the examiners use in their daily functions. In the coming years, there will be additional advances as the office becomes more “connected” with the medical community and healthcare vendors. The RI DDS is constantly expanding the network of the outside offices with which communication is completed in a fully paperless format (i.e. requests for documents are electronically faxed to providers and their replies are directly and seamlessly downloaded into an electronic folder). SSA is currently working on a new Disability Case Processing System (DCPS). There have been some delays in getting this system rolled out. In the next few years, the country is expected to all be using this program.

Despite all the changes in the method that claims are processed, the RI DDS has been able to maintain excellent accuracy ratings of 96.8% while processing 18,459 claims. We have faced some challenges keeping pace with this workload. We had to seek assistance from other states to complete our medical reviews due to a shortage of in house medical consults. This is a cumbersome process to transfer and track all of the claims being worked on throughout the country. We also have had to work with diminished staff throughout the year. A by-product of this is a longer wait time for Rhode Islanders to receive information as to the outcome of their disability applications. We continue to maximize all available resources to provide quality, timely, and accurate service to the citizens of RI.

Rhode Island opened a CDI Unit (Cooperative Disability Investigations) in January of this year to help combat fraud in the program. This unit investigates fraud in initial and reconsideration applications prior to claimants being put in pay status. In FFY2015, the CDI Unit had 78 referrals which resulted in investigations. 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**

380 Westminster Mall, Room 318  
Providence, RI 02903  
1-877-402-0808

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



***“Helping individuals with disabilities to  
choose, find and keep employment”***



**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**

Available in alternate formats by calling 401.462.7818

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.

For further information about this policy, contact: the Community Relations  
Liaison Office, 401.462.2130 or TDD (hearing impaired) 401.462.6239.