



**TN** Department of  
**Human Services**

State Rehabilitation Council  
of Tennessee

# State Rehabilitation Council

2023 Annual Report



# Letter from the State Rehabilitation Council



It is with great confidence I submit to you the 2023 annual report for the Tennessee State Rehabilitation Council (SRC). The SRC partners with the Tennessee Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Program to ensure the highest quality of services and supports are provided to individuals with disabilities who are interested in employment and to businesses interested in hiring qualified staff.

To that end, the SRC serves as the voice of the customer and provides input to VR in a variety of ways. The past year the SRC collaborated to help VR in its mission to provide timely, high-quality support and services to Tennesseans with disabilities. The SRC helped facilitate communication in regard to Community Rehabilitation Provider concerns pertaining to payment rates and contracts which ended with a short and long term solution.

The SRC also worked with VR to address concerns from the low vision/ blindness community and the TBE entrepreneurial program. The Council provided encouragement and participated in town hall meetings in person and virtually to help reach and understand community needs and concerns for this population across the State. Once key concerns were identified particular to Vocational Rehabilitation's services, the Council worked with VR and Synergy Consulting Partners to get an overview of issues and develop a strategic plan to improve services for Tennesseans with low vision and blindness.

Over the fiscal year VR reported to the SRC its improvements in regards to communication with employees, providers, and customers. They reported the continued modernization of systems and processes and the emphasis on training and retention for VR employees. Using reports from our federal partners, Rehabilitation Services Administration, the SRC and VR were able to identify underrepresented populations within the workforce and customer base to create a plan to address barriers, reach the identified populations, and provide services. The SRC is proud to see the proactive approach to serving Tennesseans in typically underserved demographic categories. The SRC DEIA committee plans to continue to monitor this area as a demonstration of the commitment to this initiative.

The SRC had a direct focus on communicating and collaborating with VR staff this past year, acknowledging that the transformation process within VR felt overwhelming for everyone. The SRC spent the last year traveling the State to see VR programs in place and build trust with employees and stakeholders. We visited all three grand regions and several different areas of services. The SRC held a multi-day retreat and the outcome has produced positive results and will continue to foster improvements in the future.

As my time on the SRC comes to a close after serving two terms I hope to leave the lasting impression of passion and the ability to work together with grace for anyone that crossed paths with myself and our team. I was proud to represent Manchester and the program built at the Manchester Coffee County Conference Center in the capacity of one of the Business and Industry Seats. The aim of this report is to inspire you to consider where you can help be part of the change in this crucial time for Vocational Rehabilitation in Tennessee.

**Rebecca M. Bordenet-French | Chair**

# Message from the Assistant Commissioner



Meaningful work in an environment where one's talent is recognized and respected alongside peers earning competitive wages for their work fulfills some of the most basic human needs: sense of belonging, contribution to family and community along with the dignity and respect that comes with it.

At our core, we believe in the power of work with the expectation that everyone who chooses should have the opportunity to work. I am proud to have the privilege of leading a team of dedicated professionals who along with the volunteers of the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) share that basic principle. We see more than the potential value and talent that our customers bring to strengthen the workforce, the economy and community. We work hard every day to provide high quality counseling, guidance, support, goods, and services that help customers realize their own ambitions to earn a living doing the things that they are interested in while developing the skills they need to be successful.

As an organization we not only say that we focus on the customer, both individual and employer businesses, but we put those words to work in our actions everyday by moving beyond the typical transactional approach to "government work" to the development of true transformational partnerships with our customers that fosters real change in their lives and the lives of their families, as well as the employer's bottom line. While this very individualized approach to really understanding our customer's skills, interests and dreams for work is more challenging, it allows us to have more impact and agility, ultimately leading to a stronger, healthier workforce.

As you review the data, stories of success and descriptions of progress of the past year found in this report I hope that you take time to celebrate our and our customer's accomplishments with us, knowing that our collective dedication to the success of our customers will drive our relentless pursuit to continue be the efficient, effective, and responsive program that our customers expect and frankly deserve.

Together we are strengthening Tennessee by strengthening Tennesseans.

**Kevin R. Wright,**

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

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# Vocational Rehabilitation Program Overview

Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) is a joint federal and state program that assists people with disabilities achieve their employment goals. Simultaneously, VR serves employers as they look to diversify their workforce with qualified employees.

Through multiple specialized units, VR helps jobs seekers prepare for, secure, retain, advance in or regain employment. VR also help individuals advocate for employment outcomes that are consistent with their individual strengths, resources, abilities, capabilities, and informed choice. VR provides employment- focused services that are individualized and person-centered.

Services are aimed to help prepare a person for employment in the competitive labor market and to help businesses understand the benefit of a diverse workforce, to include individuals with disabilities.

In Tennessee, the VR program is administered by the Tennessee Department of Human Services (TDHS), Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS).

VR educates, coordinates and collaborates to serve students and job seekers with disabilities as well as the business community.

Master's level VR Counselors are located across the state. They specialize in vocational rehabilitation, provide counseling and guidance to job seekers, and work with customers to put together a plan for employment based on person-centered employment goals. They also coordinate service provision for VR customers, which may include services provided by Community Rehabilitation Providers.

## **VR Services Include:**

- **Counseling and Guidance:** The Vocational Rehabilitation team works as a valuable support network that provides individualized counseling, guidance, and encouragement to each customer. Vocational Rehabilitation participants are empowered to make informed decisions knowing their team is here to help facilitate positive outcomes according to their individual needs and employment goals.
- **Training & Support Services:** When a person becomes a Vocational Rehabilitation customer, their VR Counselor and team will work closely with them to outline and facilitate training and other help needed to achieve the chosen career goal. The services received are based on their plan and could include assistance with postsecondary or workplace readiness training, independent living skills development, assistive technology, transportation, personal care assistance or other supports.
- **Employment and Supported Employment Services:** In addition to training, Vocational Rehabilitation customers may receive employment services such as resume writing, interview training and practice, application assistance, job coaching, and other employment preparation that fits the individual's needs.

- **Pre-Employment Transition Service (Pre-ETS):** Vocational Rehabilitation has focused services for students between the ages of 14-21. Vocational Rehabilitation works in partnership with school systems and community providers to help introduce students to the world of work, identify potential career options, and connect with a VR counselor prior to high school graduation.

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

### **Specialized VR Services**

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

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

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

**Community Services Unit (CSU)**, this team is formerly known as the Community Tennessee Rehabilitation Centers (CTRCs). The CSU is part of the Tennessee Facility Network of Vocational Rehabilitation Services, with seventeen CSU teams strategically located throughout the state. The CSUs are community-based resource centers offering community-based employment training, and connecting VR and non-VR customers to education, training, and employment resources. The CSUs are funded with federal and local dollars. The Vocational Rehabilitation Program recently transformed the service delivery model of the 17 CSUs to best meet the needs of individuals served and their communities. CSUs have become community-based person-centered services that prepare and support individuals in going to work. The services are provided within the community with the support of local partners such as businesses, non-profits, city, county, and state agencies, as well as local education agencies.

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

**Tennessee Business Enterprises (TBE)** is a program within Sensory Services, offering vocational training and employment opportunities for individuals who are legally blind. The mission of this program is to provide high quality products and customer service while maximizing employment and economic opportunities for legally blind individuals. Federal and State laws grant TBE a priority to operate vending and food service in federal, state and local government buildings. Tennessee Business Enterprises trains, licenses and places blind individuals in a facility where they function much like an independent business owner. Assistance is provided to these managers by TBE Consultants. Tennessee Business Enterprises currently operates 110 facilities across the state. These facilities generate over \$20 million in sales annually.





# 2023 Key Accomplishments

There were several notable accomplishments by the Vocational Rehabilitation Program in 2023. A few of these accomplishments are highlighted below.

## **Vocational Rehabilitation Able to Serve ALL Eligible Customers**

For several years, the Vocational Rehabilitation program has been under an order of selection due to limited funding to serve all eligible Tennesseans with disabilities seeking employment. There are four priority categories a customer could be assigned depending on the severity of their disability, services needed to achieve their career goal, and estimated amount of time it would take for them to achieve their goals. Over this past year, the Vocational Rehabilitation program implemented a new process for identifying customers in closed priority categories that may begin receiving VR services based on an assessment of active customer data, staffing capacity, and funding availability. As of the end of June 2023, VR no longer has customers in closed priority categories waiting to receive VR services. The process VR implemented allows for timely and continuous review of any customers placed in a closed priority category to be released to receive services. VR is extremely excited about this process as it will allow many more Tennesseans to begin receiving services to assist them in achieving their career goals.

## **Reframing Impact: VR Community Services Unit**

As part of the overall VR transformation to strengthen and support the community-based service delivery model, VR created new position classifications, hired top-notch team members with vision and innovation to fill those positions, reimagined VR offices, and developed or strengthened community partnerships to be a resource for VR and non-VR customers alike to further workforce participation and independence.

In a continued effort to meet our customers where they are, the next step was to align community-based training services within the VR program's other initiatives with a new name. As of January 1, 2023, the "Community Tennessee Rehabilitation Centers" or "CTRC" Network is known as the VR Community Services Unit. This new name better reflects our commitment to the community, our customers, and employers.

## **One DHS Omnichannel Customer Support Model**

In January 2022, Rehabilitation Services launched a new centralized customer service center and on August 10, 2023, the Division was added to the Department of Human Services' One DHS Omnichannel Customer Support Model. This includes Vocational Rehabilitation (VR), Tennessee Technology Assistance Program (TTAP), and Independent Living (IL) Services for individuals with low or no vision.

The division has now joined TDHS in using a modernized, cross-program contact center which fields customer inquiries across multiple supported channels. This model is the next step in providing a truly seamless service experience for customers.

The model supports 4 channels: phone, live chat, email, and web-based forms. Now, customers, providers, and partners have the ability to reach the division using any of these communication channels. The division also added the ability to refer an individual to the VR Program using a web-based form located on the TDHS website at <https://www.tn.gov/humanservices/ds/vocational-rehabilitation.html>. Referrals will continue to be received via phone, in-person, or email, should that be the preferred method.

With these changes, the Division of Rehabilitation Services has a new phone number: 833-772-TDHS (8347).

Below are some of the key features and benefits of the One DHS Customer Support Model.

What are the Key Features of the One DHS Customer Support Model?

- Expansion of the One DHS Contact Center to field general inquiries across DHS
- Simplified customer entry points
- Automation to route customers to the right place
- Ability to serve customers through their preferred channel (including live chat escalation through our AVA chat bot)

What are the benefits of the new Model?

- Drastically simplified and improved customer experience (simple entry points, reduced transfers, higher first call resolution)
- TDHS operational efficiencies in providing customer service

### **Intentional Review of Blind and Low Vision Services**

In 2022, DRS heard from specific advocacy groups, including the SRC, that the current services provided by DRS could be improved to best meet the needs of Tennesseans with low or no vision. DRS wanted to better understand in what way the current delivery of services may be lacking and explore solutions. Also, DRS had interest in understanding how the VR Blind Enterprise Program, Tennessee Business Enterprises (TBE), could be best situated for an ever-changing economy. DRS knew that a thorough review would yield the best results, would require dedicated time and a third-party entity with the right perspective, relevant experience, and necessary expertise to review how things are done today and help reimagine the future.

As a result, DRS contracted with Synergy Consulting Partners. Synergy brought a unique skill set, significant knowledge, and federal and state level experience in implementing innovative approaches to serving Vocational Rehabilitation customers.

The scope of services for the year-long engagement was focused on two primary objectives:

1. Coordinate and facilitate a statewide effort to develop a collaborative vision for rethinking and strategically planning for the provision of VR services for Tennesseans who have low

or no vision by engaging with advocacy organizations, individuals, community members, and other stakeholders across Tennessee.

2. Perform assessments of the current operational efficiency of the VR programs' Tennessee Business Enterprises based on Synergy's national level experience, identified nationally recognized trends, and established industry best practices.

Over the 2023 calendar year, Synergy engaged with community advocates, customers, and DRS staff to gain an understanding of current satisfaction with services for those with low and no vision, including Tennessee Business Enterprises. After engaging the community and gathering feedback using different communication channels over several months, Synergy analyzed feedback, generated a series of reports summarizing findings, and made recommendations for improvement.

DRS reviewed the findings and recommendations, and prioritized proposed recommendations. Synergy coordinated an in-person 2-day meeting between DRS staff and key stakeholders. During the meeting with key stakeholders, community feedback was shared, priorities were reviewed and discussed, stakeholders and staff shared ideas for improving services, the objectives, and key results (OKRs) methodology was explained, and workgroups were formed to turn ideas into objectives using the OKRs methodology.

As a collective group that included a diverse set of stakeholders, DRS staff and active participation by the TBE Committee of Blind Vendors (CBV), three priorities were recommended:

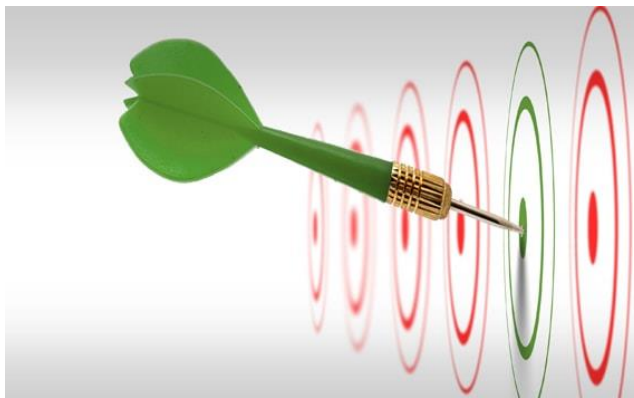
1. Develop a seamless, coordinated system of blind services; strengthen the workforce and improve workforce management; and improve operational efficiency and user-friendly VR process;
2. Increased collaboration with the workgroups will explore innovative TBE expansion and business opportunities; and
3. Rebuilding trust and improve communication with the blind community. Synergy will compile all the feedback and OKRs into a comprehensive strategic plan for DRS and the workgroups to implement in the coming months.

# Vocational Rehabilitation Program Outcomes

The tables and figures included below offer additional information regarding the performance of the VR program.

Year Name	Start Date	End Date
State Fiscal Year 2022 (SFY23)	July 1, 2022	June 30, 2023

## Results Driven:



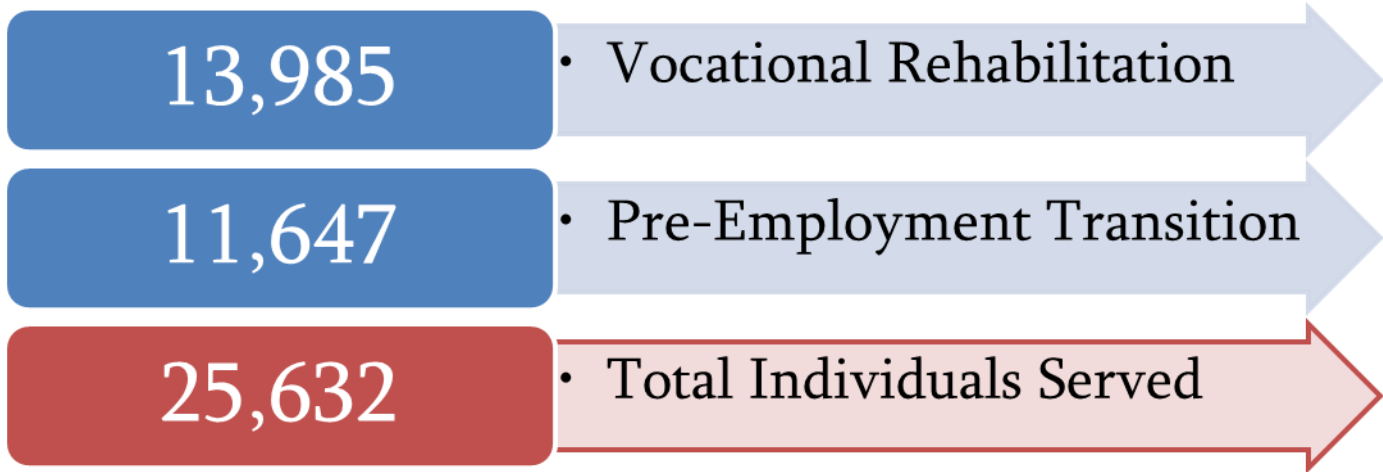
**7,336** VR referrals received  
**5,161** VR applications taken  
**1,209** customers achieved their employment goals with at least 90 days of competitive, integrated employment  
**3,858** services provided to businesses  
**243** students served by the Tennessee Rehabilitation Center at Smyrna

## Rehabilitation by the Numbers (SFY23)

The top 5 services in FY 2023 were:

- Training-related Transportation, Meals, and Housing
- Supported Employment Career Stabilization
- Workplace Readiness Training – Project Search
- Supported Employment Career Consultation
- Job Readiness Training

Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) exists to help individuals with disabilities find competitive and integrated employment in the community.



The chart below provides a sampling of data that the VR program has collected over the last year related to active cases, most commonly reported disabilities, and information related to employment outcomes.

Parameters	SFY 2023
<b>Most Commonly Reported Disabilities</b>	Psychological/ Psychosocial Disabilities Physical Disabilities Visual Disabilities Auditory/ Communicative
<b>Statewide Average: Hourly Wages at Closure</b>	\$14.46
<b>Statewide Average: Hours Worked at Closure</b>	28.8

**Supporting Customers with Timely Decision Making (SFY23)**

A key metric in enhancing the customer experience is the speed with which customers are engaged in their individual plan for employment. Over the last year, VR set a goal to complete the Individual Plan for Employment (IPE) in 56 days – that is 34 days faster than the federal regulations require. This ensures that VR customers are engaged more rapidly in the pursuit of their employment goals. In its focus on serving the customer, over the last year VR not only met, but exceeded this goal ending the year with a cumulative average of 46 days from eligibility to signed Individual Plan for Employment.

46

## Average Number of Days from Eligibility Determination to Signed IPE

### Preparing Students with Disabilities for Life After High School

In the past year, the Vocational Rehabilitation Program provided pre-employment transition services (Pre-ETS) to 11,647 students during the school year (August 2022 to June 2023).

<b>Number of Students Served</b>	<b>11,648</b>
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<b>Pre-ETS Service Type</b>	<b>Units (15 min. increments)</b>
Counseling in Post-Secondary Education	10,982
Career Exploration	18,671
Self-Advocacy	24,742
Workplace Readiness	31,049
Work-based Learning	8,879

## Vocational Rehabilitation's Customer Focused Government Goal

In the past year, the Vocational Rehabilitation Program set a goal to decrease the percentage of customers who exit the VR program without employment after an Individualized Plan for Employment has been developed. The SFY 2023 target goal was 30%. Through improved engagement with VR customers, the target goal was exceeded.

**26.52%**

**Percentage of  
Customers  
Exiting after IPE  
without  
Employment**



## TDHS Celebrates Disability Employment Awareness in October and Year-Round!

By [Proclamation 2542](#), Governor Lee declared October 2023 as Tennessee Disability Employment Awareness Month in support of National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM). In our state, the Division of Rehabilitation Services' Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program at the Tennessee Department of Human Services (TDHS) consistently works to ensure Tennesseans of all abilities have the opportunity to reach their full potential as members of the state's community, workforce and economy. To commemorate and celebrate the contributions of workers with disabilities, the TDHS VR team hosted and joined several NDEAM events that took place across the state. One NDEAM event we would like to highlight from this year is the Project SEARCH 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary and Knoxville Area Employment Consortium Breakfast.

In Tennessee, Project SEARCH is now funded and facilitated by the Tennessee Department of Human Services, Vocational Rehabilitation program. Project SEARCH has seen tremendous growth and expansion over the past 10 years with 17 active sites in hospitals, hotels, higher education, and large corporate offices. A true testament to the statewide impact Project SEARCH has had through Tennessee VR is that more than 700 VR customers interns have completed the program with an 85 percent employment rate. Ongoing efforts and outreach continue to promote the growth, reach, and impact of Project SEARCH for new school systems, counties, businesses, and VR customers.

During the NDEAM event on Thursday, October 19, 2023, TDHS celebrated the 10-year anniversary of Project SEARCH. TDHS is filled with everyday heroes and recently, Director of Strategic Business Solutions, Amy Rader received the Hero Award at the 10th Anniversary celebration of Project SEARCH Knoxville for her dedication and the integral role she played in getting Project SEARCH off the ground in Tennessee. Director Rader is valued for her focus on solutions and support of those served through Vocational Rehabilitation programs like Project Search. She and other "Heroes" were honored in Knoxville by the Knoxville Area Employment Consortium. Susie Rutkowski, Co-Founder of Project SEARCH and Kevin Wright, TDHS Assistant Commissioner, Division of Rehabilitation Services were featured speakers at the breakfast event moderated by local TV newscaster Lori Tucker from WATE.

### **Vocational Rehabilitation: Where Ability Means Employability Year -Round!**

Although NDEAM is a great time to raise awareness about the value workers with disabilities bring to the employment sphere, the Vocational Rehabilitation program at the Tennessee Department of Human Services works year-round to support Tennessee workers with



disabilities. VR offers counseling, guidance, training, employment, support and pre-employment transition services and has resources to assist Tennesseans with low and no vision, who are deaf, deaf-blind or hard of hearing and other individuals who have disabilities that are physical or intellectual. Details about the VR program can be found on the [TDHS website](#) and Tennesseans can call 833-772-8347 to speak to an agent about disability employment resources and services. VR is able to offer these options and connect Tennesseans with disabilities, their advocates, and potential employers with resources that pave pathways to employment and elevated levels of independence through the work of dedicated team members.

### **A Team That Supports Disability Employment Every Day**



***Pictured above is VR Counselor, Dr. Laura Payne.***



***Pictured above is VR Counselor, Greyson Jennings.***

Two disability employment professionals that exemplify the spirit of NDEAM each day in their work at the Tennessee Department of Human Services are Roane County Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Dr. Laura Payne and Johnson City Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Greyson Jennings. Dr. Payne paved the way for individuals with disabilities to receive a public-school education and demonstrated that students with disabilities can participate in regular educational settings and graduate from a public school just as their peers without disabilities. On July 26, 2023, Dr. Payne received the Jordan R. Hiles Achievement in Advocacy award at the Disability Resource Center's 33rd ADA anniversary and 50th anniversary of the 1973 Rehabilitation Act celebration. Her work set an example for professionals like Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Greyson Jennings to follow.

In May 2023, Mr. Jennings received the Self-Determination Award from The Arc® Tennessee for being an outstanding self-advocate and role model for others. Mr. Jennings brings many great attributes to the VR team such as passion, perseverance, and dedication to serving others. In addition to participating in NDEAM events, TDHS is proud to celebrate the work of Mr. Jennings and Dr. Payne and other dedicated team members who contribute their time and talents to help Tennesseans with disabilities find independence through employment.

# Success Stories: Jesse Wood



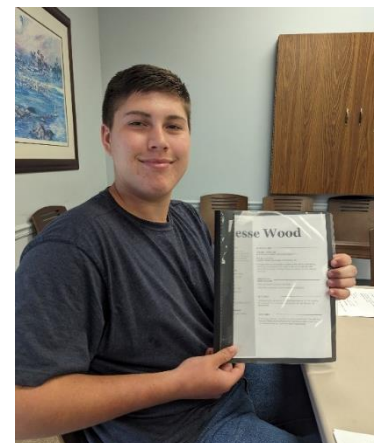
Jesse Wood's story, championed by his mother, highlights the impact of Vocational Rehabilitation, and serves as a testament to our commitment to helping individuals achieve independence and success in any career path they pursue.

Jesse Wood is a remarkable individual. He is 17 years old, gentle, kind, and has a passion for fishing and hunting. The VR team had the pleasure and opportunity to assist Jesse with various career readiness services such as crafting a resume, cover letter, references, and mock interview training. We also worked together to compile a dedicated folder containing all this material to present to potential employers during the interview process.

Following his successful application for a loader/operator position at the Academy Sports Distribution Center in Cookeville, Tennessee, Jesse received an email from the human resources department expressing their interest in conducting a phone interview. The day prior to this interview, we designed a mock interview scenario. We positioned ourselves in separate rooms, with Mario Ashley personally calling Jesse to pose interview questions, while Anthony was there with Jesse to provide guidance if needed. This practical experience had a profound impact. On our initial call, Jesse's nervousness was evident, but after the first phone call interview, we regrouped and repeated the process two more times. With each subsequent phone call, Jesse's performance improved significantly. On the day of the actual phone interview, he exuded confidence and sounded like a seasoned professional.

Although the call was brief, it marked the transition to the next phase of the interview process: an in-person interview. Jesse decided to inform the hiring manager of his accommodation needs, and the response was exceptionally understanding. Meanwhile, we arranged for Jesse to enroll in a forklift operator course at Goodwill in Cookeville later that month. We believed this valuable addition to his skill set would enhance his resume and further qualify him for the position at the Academy Sports Distribution Center.

In the weeks leading up to his interview, we maintained regular meetings with Jesse to thoroughly prepare him for the upcoming interview. Our discussions covered various interview scenarios he might encounter. We emphasized the significance of making a strong first impression, delved into potential interview questions, and addressed the importance of effective non-verbal communication, including maintaining eye contact, projecting confidence, and honing active listening skills. Additionally, we provided guidance on appropriate attire and grooming recommendations. As part of his homework, we tasked Jesse with researching ten (10) key facts about the company.





In our subsequent meeting, Jesse presented his research findings, sharing intriguing and pertinent information about the company.

On the day of the interview, Jesse arrived dressed impeccably, demonstrating his commitment to making a positive impression. He also took the initiative to independently research and verify the interview location well in advance, ensuring he wouldn't encounter any issues on the day of the interview.

Following the interview, Kent Ashburn, the Recruiting Specialist for Academy Sports, reached out to us via email to provide feedback on Jesse's performance. Here's what he had to say:

*We wanted to reach out and let you know how outstanding the interview with Jesse went. He came dressed to impress, something you just do not see these days. He was on time, asked good questions and seemed to have a good understanding on how an interview should flow. We talked through what his role would look like here at Academy, which he seemed very excited about.*

*During the interview process we were able to work out a schedule that fits both our needs. When asking about his work history, he did a great job talking me through his previous employment and what had brought him to Academy. He even sent a "Thank you" follow up email after the interview. I think Jesse would be a great fit here at Academy.*

*With all that being said, Jesse has been offered the job!*

### **-Kent Ashburn**

After the interview, Gina, Jesse's mother, called VR with immense joy and pride. She expressed her deep gratitude for the assistance we provided to Jesse and her immense pride in her son's achievements. Throughout our collaboration with Jesse, Mrs. Wood has become a passionate advocate for Vocational Rehabilitation. She even posted a heartfelt message about Jesse's positive experience with VR on social media, which is something she admitted she rarely does. As a result of that post, VR received five referrals.



On August 31, 2023, during a presentation titled "Why Hire Individuals With Disabilities" at the Putnam County Library, Mrs. Wood delivered a moving testimony about her son's journey with VR. Like any parent, she admitted to the initial worry that her son might never achieve independence. She mentioned her fear of passing away without her son being self-sufficient. However, she followed by expressing her newfound confidence that her son will indeed achieve independence one day. Her testimony deeply resonated with the audience and served as a powerful reminder of why we are so dedicated to supporting our customers.

In the coming months, we intend to offer ongoing follow-up services to monitor Jesse's progress. We have complete confidence that Jesse will excel in his new position at Academy Sports. He is aware that should he ever require assistance, we are just a phone call away.

# Success Stories: Latoya Webster



Latoya Webster applied for Vocational Rehabilitation services in June of 2021. Her goal had been to become a commercial truck driver, but she has had difficulty getting her commercial driver's license permit (CDL) due to a learning disability. To her credit, Latoya has always fought hard not to let her disability hold her back. Prior to applying to VR, she was an aid on the Maury County School's special needs bus. With the loving support of her mother and her twin sister, Latoya decided she wanted to obtain her CDLs and either drive a school bus or possibly drive for another company. So, she and her VR Counselor, Jacson Chapman, began working toward her career goal to become a commercial truck driver.

To start training, she needed to first pass the written driving test to obtain her permit. Latoya studied with Jane Childress, the VR Community Services Unit's (CSU) VR Career Training Specialist, for a few months preparing for the test. To best assist Latoya with passing her test, Ms. Childress visited with the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) to see about arranging accommodations for Latoya to take the test. Accommodations were put in place and Latoya successfully passed the CDL licensure test and received her permit.

After passing the written test and obtaining her permit, Latoya started vocational training in commercial truck driving with Superior Trucking Company. To ensure her success, her VR Counselor, shared that they met with the school and discussed accommodations for her classes and testing. As a result, the school agreed to provide accommodations for her, and she was able to successfully complete her CDL training program.

In addition to the assistance, Latoya also received help from her VR CSU team on job readiness skills, interviewing skills, and strengthening of her resume. Upon obtaining her permit, she began working with the VR Business Services Unit to find a job. Working closely with Latoya, Andrea Peyton, her VR Business Employment Consultant, was able to help her find employment working as a truck driver for the company, Waste Management. She travelled to Florida for orientation and training with the company. Latoya is very happy with her job, and she is now

making \$22 per hour with full benefits. We are very excited for Latoya and wish her the best throughout her career!

## Success Stories: Josh Dorey



**Pictured left to right, ES Tina Spears, VR Counselor Tana Register, Josh Dorey, Exceptional Educator Koye H. Cooper and ES Jeremy Fleenor**

Josh Dorey was in his senior year at Cookeville High School when he began working with Vocational Rehabilitation for employment services. Josh shared that he has high functioning Autism. However, he faced various obstacles such as finding it hard to say how he feels, finding it hard to understand what others are thinking or feeling, and getting very anxious in situations when there are changes to the normal routine. To help Josh prepare for employment, Josh participated in pre-employment transition services during his senior year and graduated from Cookeville High School in May 2023.

Josh met with his VR counselor, Tana Register, at Cookeville High School in April 2023 for his intake and politely asked if VR would help him with finding a job after high school. Of course, the answer was yes!

Josh and his VR counselor worked together to identify his career interests and services he needed to achieve his career goal.

Supported Employment (SE) services were chosen to help minimize Josh's disability related barriers to employment, enabling him to successfully prepare for, obtain and maintain employment in his chosen field. Josh was referred to Employment Specialist Jeremy Fleenor at Access Academy for Supported Employment Consult and Meeting.

This is the point in the story when a timeline is the best way to impress the many ways the team came together to provide for Josh's employment needs.

In late April 2023, Koye H. Cooper an Exceptional Educator with Cookeville High School, learned that Josh was responsible for finding his own place to live soon after graduating from Cookeville High School so finding a source of income became an immediate priority. Mrs. H, as her students call her, immediately informed VR counselor Tana Register of this update. This information was provided to the Employment Specialist (ES) Jeremy Fleenor as it was relevant to the SE Consult and Meeting and later to SE job development and placement.

On April 25, ES Jeremy Fleenor spoke with Josh who stated that he would like to work at Tennessee Tech University in the cafeteria. Jeremy put in a phone call to the head chef of Chartwells Tennessee Tech University (TTU) Catering Department. On April 25 ES Jeremy assisted

Josh in putting in an application for Chartwells Catering. On May 2, ES Jeremy spoke with Victor Kline who is the Director of Catering for Chartwells and set up an interview for May 3. Victor Kline is a natural support and has hired 6 customers through the VR Program.

Jeremy spoke with Josh's teacher, who stated she could make sure that Josh had a ride to the interview. Jeremy also spoke with Josh who stated he was excited for his interview. On May 3 Jeremy met Josh at Chartwells for his interview with Head Chef Victor. Josh did very well in the interview and was hired. Upon learning of Josh's job offer, Josh's teacher made arrangements to provide work pants and boots for Josh to wear on the job.



On May 19, Josh started working at Chartwells as a Catering Specialist. Josh was scheduled to work 32 - 36 hours per week but was told summertime is the down season for Chartwells at TTU. Josh was told he could expect his work hours to increase starting in the Fall. Jeremy provided SE Career Stabilization and Maintenance for 30 days. Jeremy discussed the customer's performance on his job as catering specialist at Chartwell's with customer's supervisor, Viktor. Viktor said Josh is reliable and is doing a great job. Jeremy discussed the job with Josh, who shared that he is happy and satisfied with this job.

On July 10, MRC Tana Register spoke with Josh via text which is his preferred method for communication. During this texting conversation, Josh confirmed that he enjoys his job at Chartwells. Josh said that "communication can sometimes be challenging but that is not the fault of the employees it is just the nature of this business."

During this text, Josh confirmed that he had moved into his own efficiency apartment, and it was within walking distance of the TTU campus! Josh also said that his coworkers are very considerate and have offered to pick him up and take him home from work if it is raining or cold outside. Josh reached his 60-day stabilization mark on August 7. ES Tina Spears spoke with customer's direct supervisor who reported customer is doing a great job.



Pictured above: Josh working a tea station at a catering event.



Pictured above: Josh with his coworkers and Head Chef Victor Kline

As you can see, Josh loves his career and is having a great time working for Chartwell's TTU Catering as a Food Server. Josh is working full time averaging 30-40 hours a week and is earning an hourly wage of \$14. We congratulate Josh on overcoming obstacles and achieving his career goal!

# Success Stories: Karrie Gilbert



Karrie Gilbert began working with Vocational Rehabilitation when she was in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade and TRC Vocational Adjustment was provided. Karrie utilized resource classes for math and reading. Karrie stated that she knew going to college would be a struggle due to her disability and finances.

Karrie's individualized plan for employment was written for nursing. Karrie thought becoming an RN and working in the NICU with babies might be a good idea. Everyone told Karrie that nurses made good money, but Karrie was not just about the money. Karrie did start out attending Northeast State Community College (NESCC) right after high school. Karrie started out full-time until she faced barriers, and she dropped down to part-time and eventually quit altogether due to some issues.

However, she did not give up, Karrie completed NESCC with an Associates Degree in Business. Karrie found a couple of jobs working for others, but over time she realized that working for others and running

their business was not what she wanted to do. Karrie finally told herself she wanted to run her own business and work for herself.

Karrie has worked hard to be able to own her own business. She went back to school for Business Management at King University. Karrie knew this educational goal would help her further her knowledge and help her become her own boss! Karrie spoke to her previous VR Counselor about self-employment (SE) and the VR process for SE was communicated to Karrie. Karrie, through the process, was provided with ongoing support by her VR Counselor and the agency's Business Employment Consultant (BEC), C-Ann Chapman.

A review team was assembled to discuss the business plan and help Karrie revise the plan so it could be submitted to the VR Director. The review team consisted of her VR Counselor, BEC, VR Field Supervisor, Regional Supervisor and the Policy Coordinator. The team offered her suggestions throughout the process. The business plan was approved in February of 2022 and VR assisted Karrie in purchasing items for the start-up of her business. Karrie encountered some challenges along the way in getting her insurance and contractor's license, but with support and her motivation to start the business, she succeeded and began taking contracts for work in December 2022. Karrie's business has remained successful, and her VR case has been successfully closed in March 2023.



Karrie stated that she was proud to have overcome all the obstacles in her life. Karrie also indicated that she is glad she kept a positive attitude and did not listen to other people's negative comments. Karrie is also proud to be a woman working in a dominantly male field. Karrie sees her business being successful in the future. Karrie can see herself having several crews that work under her, and that will also provide her with more jobs which will help bring in more income.

Karrie stated that VR has helped make her dream come true and that she is beyond thankful for the help and support from all the VR workers. Karrie also thanked her VR counselor for being with her throughout her journey and for all the support and encouragement that she gave her since high school.

Karrie said if she had one thing to tell others, is that "you could do anything if you set your mind to it. Don't give up no matter what others say. Make sure you ask for help from whomever you need help from. Do not be prideful; everyone has to start somewhere. Make friends everywhere you go because you never know what connections you will make. Lastly, make sure you are willing to be fair and help others. You are just as good as anyone else and find something you can do that makes you happy doing it!"

## Success Stories: Bob Kanish



Bob was born blind and had never used VR services before coming to Jackson TN. Bob stated that he knew how to find a full-time job, but did not know how to find a part-time job that was a good match for what he wanted. Bob and his VR counselor looked at several jobs, including visiting the PBS station in Martin, TN. Bob impressed the staff at the PBS station, but they did not have anything part-time or remote. Bob has a Bachelor's Degree in Communications, extensive work history with KPBS in San Diego (20 years), but he was looking for something part-time.

In November 2022, his VR Counselor sent Bob a lead for a job that was a great match with his skills and with his desire to work part-time. Due to delays from an outside vendor to the employer, the employer was not able to offer Bob a position until the vendor had fulfilled their commitment. In January 2023 Bob signed an acceptance offer from the employer and he began work.

Bob completed his 90 days of employment with University of Memphis, Technical Support department. He has learned to program the chat bot to make his, and his colleagues, job easier. Bob truly enjoys his job and it is exactly what he was looking for. Bob now has a permanent position with University of Memphis. has gotten positive feedback from his superiors about his work.

# Success Stories: Tarrington Hord

Tarrington Hord is a considerate young man with a jovial smile and warm personality who lives in Shelbyville, Tennessee. He is family oriented and loves baseball and basketball. In addition, his favorite basketball team is the San Antonio Spurs and Tim Duncan is his favorite player. He is often found in his room watching the Spurs play and/or watching them with his grandmother.

Tarrington's mother (Ms. Hord) stated, *"Despite his kind and compassionate demeanor; he has experienced constant bullying and harassment over the years;"* which she believes contributed to his limited ability to verbally communicate. She also stated, *"I personally witnessed how the bullying has changed his overall demeanor."* As a result, *"he developed a new fear/reservation of speaking in public, at school, and even with family."* In an attempt to regain her son's joy, warm personality, and youthful exuberance, they have attended numerous speech therapy groups and Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) training at his local school and Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU) in Murfreesboro. However, they only yielded minor to little improvement in his speech and overall emotional state of mind.

Tarrington graduated high school in November 2022 and joined the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) family. Jacson Chapman, Master Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor referred Tarrington to the Community Services Unit in Shelbyville to participate in various VR services in preparation for joining the workforce. Tarrington remained resistive and anxious due to his limited verbal abilities. During a training session, Vanessa Knapp, VR Career Training Coordinator suggested contacting the STAR Center to inquire about potential assistive



technology to help Tarrington with communication. Jacson contacted the STAR Center and scheduled an assistive technology evaluation. STAR Center's hands-on assessments found Tarrington's ability to text enabled him to use text to speech software for enhanced communication. Jacson conducted the research and submitted all the required documents to provide the recommended assistive technology and software.



**Mike Davis, Tarrington Hord, Tracey Hord, and Vanessa Knapp**

Tarrington currently works with Mike Davis, VR Career Training Specialist on work-based scenarios and personal life skills in conjunction with the text/speech device. His excitement and love for his newfound voice led to him naming the device after himself and selecting a voice depiction that he believes sounds like he would if he communicated more verbally.

Ms. Hord stated, "[I] am overwhelmed with joy and thankful to VR, STAR Technology, and everyone that made this day possible!" She also stated, "[We] have encountered years of stress and heartaches and now after all these years; his nervousness, fears, and sadness has evanesced!"

Tarrington's restored smile, happiness, and confidence are developing through his newfound independence and ability to self-advocate. The next steps for him include submitting a WIOA Summer Work Program packet and joining the workforce in the near future.

## Success Stories: Riley Locke



Mr. Locke began his journey with VR in November of 2021 to find part-time employment. He worked with his VR counselor to identify potential careers he might be interested in obtaining. Initially, Mr. Locke sought a career in fast food. Additionally, Mr. Locke's VR counselor arranged benefits counseling and arranged for him to work with the local VR business employment consultant (BEC). After engaging with his VR counselor and BEC about potential opportunities in his home town, he learned of a career opportunity at Freed-Hardeman University as a janitor.

They talked about the type of work that he enjoyed and Riley said that he enjoyed working as a janitor. He proceeded to tell them all the different types of floors and floor maintenance equipment he could operate. They asked him if he would be willing to apply to Freed-Hardeman University. He said it would be perfect because it was just around the corner from him. Riley decided to move forward with applying

for the janitor position and became employed with Freed-Hardeman in August, 2022. He loves his job and successfully achieved competitive integrated employment on January 24, 2023. We are excited for Riley and wish him the best in his career!

# Success Stories: Yussef Fulton



Yussef was referred by his VR counselor to the VR Community Services Unit in Greeneville in September 2022 and participated in Career Readiness Services.

Career Training Specialist Shiree Brown provided the following Career Readiness trainings: Conflict Resolution, Job Coaching, Job Interview Class, Mock Interviews, On-Boarding, Organizational Skills, Personal Life Skills, Resume Writing, Self-Advocacy, Attitude and Work Ethic, Discovery Activities, Job Interview Class, Personal Life Skills, and Resume Writing. Yussef was also provided with the Jobs4TN

websites to register for American Job Center services. Yussef worked with BEC Mike Hutchinson who helped complete mock interviewing and provided job leads. The CSU Career Specialist and Career Coordinator also provided multiple job leads to Yussef.

Yussef accepted a job offer with Piedmont Airlines in Alcoa, TN as a part-time Ramp Agent earning \$15.25 per hour. His job duties include unloading luggage to aircraft loading and unloading luggage from ramp, driving luggage to aircraft, backing aircraft out from air breezeway as well as steering aircraft into the air bridgeway. Based on person-centered services provided by the CSU and the Business Services Unit, Yussef achieved his desired employment goal.

Yussef has been very pleased with the services he has received from CSU Career Readiness services. Yussef stated that his learning and understanding of the STAR method behavioral interview questions has been helpful for him. Shiree, a Career Training Specialist, assisted Yussef in updating his resume and creating a cover letter and Yussef expressed appreciation of the assistance Shiree provided.

When Shiree Brown spoke with Yussef, he stated that his Ramp Agent job was hard but that he wanted to continue working for the airline company since American Airlines is one of top airline companies to work for. Yussef stated he is happy he has flying perks with his job. Yussef added that he purchased a new car and is happy about his future.

## Success Stories: Jaden Beck



Jaden Beck is one of 1,209 Tennesseans who achieved their employment goals with the support of the Vocational Rehabilitation program during the last year. A recent high school graduate living in east Tennessee, Jaden had never been employed before her Employment Specialist (ES) at Frontier Health referred her to the VR program as part of Jaden's Individual Placement and Support (IPS) plan, a service available to individuals experiencing behavioral health issues. Jaden started her partnership with VR on February 2, 2023 and began working to achieve her employment goals with support from her ES and VR Counselor.

The TDHS Division of Rehabilitation Services and its VR program take a holistic approach to help Tennesseans with disabilities reach their employment goals. During her time with VR, Jaden received diagnostic and evaluation services that allowed her to work with her ES and VR Counselor to develop her career profile and receive ongoing counseling and guidance. Recognizing her love for conversing, Jaden felt she'd be comfortable interacting with customers and thought working in fast food would be a great entry to the work force. She chose an employment goal of combined food preparation and serving that included fast food. This was added to her plan for employment which she completed on March 3, 2023.

Through the Employment Career Match and Hire service, Jaden's Frontier Health ES and her VR Counselor collaborated to assist her with job pre/readiness, job search and placement services and on April 10, 2023, she found employment as a Crew Member working for Kentucky Fried Chicken in Rogersville, Tennessee. Her initial duties included taking customers' orders and payments, cleaning up the front of the restaurant area and getting to go orders ready. Individual Placement and Support / Supported Employment services helped Jaden maintain her employment and by May 11, 2023, she achieved employment stability and expressed positive feelings on getting her first job and a good start to work life. During her 90-day successful employment meeting, Jaden reiterated that she still really loved her job, felt there were no pressing issues and shared her intention to continue her job until she believes she has enough work experience to move to a new employment goal.

Although Jaden will remain connected to her Frontier Health ES and VR Counselor, she achieved 90 days of successful employment on August 2, 2023. This transitioned her to the last services provided as part of the IPS Supported Employment Successful Employment Outcome.

Jaden is proud of herself for obtaining employment in her desired field of employment. Her experience with her employment and employers has been positive. In fact, she received praise on doing such a great job during a quality control inspection that she received a gift card of congratulations from Kentucky Fried Chicken's corporate office. Jaden is thankful for the support of VR and Frontier Health teams during her employment journey and states that she'd

recommend VR to anyone with disabilities who is ready to find employment. For many Tennesseans who receive VR services at no cost, just finding employment and being successful at a job is an outcome that could easily be missed. The work of the Tennessee Department of Human Services remains centered on making the state stronger by providing services that strengthen Tennesseans like Jaden.



# State Rehabilitation Council

## ▶ **Mission**

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

## ▶ **Vision**

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

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

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

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## ▶ **Responsibilities and Functions**

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

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

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

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

## ► **Membership**

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

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

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## ▶ 2023 Officers

### Chair

**Rebecca French**

*Business, Industry, and Labor*

**From:** Manchester

**Tennessee Region:** Middle

### Secretary

**Josh Harper**

*Current/Former VR applicant/Recipient*

**From:** Nashville

**Tennessee Region:** Middle

### Vice Chair

**Christina Clift**

*Representative of Disability Groups*

**From:** Millington

**Tennessee Region:** West

### Immediate Past Chair

**Christina Clift**

*Representative of Disability Groups*

**From:** Millington

**Tennessee Region:** West

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

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### *SRC Council Members Engaging with Community Partners*



## ▶ 2023 Members

**Rebecca Bordenet-French**  
*Business, Industry and Labor*  
From: Manchester  
Tennessee Region: Middle

**Christina Clift**  
*Representative of Disability Group*  
From: Millington  
Tennessee Region: West

**Lisa Gosnell**  
*Parent Training and Information Center*  
From: Jonesborough  
Tennessee Region: East

**Vacant**  
*Business, Industry, and Labor*  
From:  
Tennessee Region:

**Keith Tackett**  
*Business, Industry, and Labor*  
From: Memphis  
Tennessee Region: West

**Josh Harper**  
*Current/Former VR Applicant/Recipient*  
From: Nashville  
Tennessee Region: Middle

**Tiffany Ramsey**  
*Director of VR Program*  
From: Nashville  
Tennessee Region: Middle

**Martina Stump**  
*State Education Agency*  
From: Nashville  
Tennessee Region: Middle

**Denice Thomas**  
*State Workforce Boards*  
From: Nashville  
Tennessee Region: Middle

**Rhonda Crenshaw**  
*State Independent Living Council (SILC)*  
From: Cordova  
Tennessee Region: West

**Nathan Walsh**  
*Client Assistance Program*  
From: Nashville  
Tennessee Region: Middle

**Alicia Cone**  
*Representative of Disability Group*  
From: Nashville  
VR Region: Middle

**Troy Allen**  
*Representative of Community  
Rehabilitation Provider*  
From: Memphis  
VR Region: Middle

**Tyler Samuels**  
*Representative of Disability Group*  
From: Nashville  
VR Region: Middle

**Vacant**  
*Current/Former VR Applicant/Recipient*  
From: Knoxville  
Tennessee Region: East

**Jason Fox**  
*Business, Industry, and Labor*  
From: Rockford  
Tennessee Region: East

## ▶ 2023 Accomplishments



- Held four SRC quarterly meetings to conduct SRC business. Meetings were held in four different locations across the state with the intent of sharing local community success stories and meeting community partners.
- Held multiple conference calls to conduct SRC committee business and to prepare for quarterly meetings.
- Prepared Annual Report with the TDHS Division of Rehabilitation Services.
- Continued participation in the National Coalition of State Rehabilitation Councils (NCSRC) via participation in national quarterly conference calls and sent two representatives to the National meetings in Savannah, Georgia.
- Participated in the Tennessee Disability Mega Conference. Three SRC Council Members attended and shared a booth with the VR team to share information about VR and the SRC.
- Increased Board participation and engagement.
- Continued focus on Order of Selection and exploring ways to open priority categories to serve more Tennesseans. We are excited to report Tennessee was able to serve all eligible VR customers and does not have anyone on a waitlist.
- SRC Chair and three other members of the SRC participated in Disability Day on the Hill.
- DRC Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility (DEIA) committee provided VR team member training recommendations to the department to ensure knowledge in this area.
- Focus areas of interest this year were services provided to the blindness community, diversity equity inclusion and accessibility training for VR team members and expanding awareness of the VR program.
- Contacted the Office of Governor Lee via TDHS to monitor the appointment of previously nominated SRC membership positions which were subsequently appointed.

## ▶ **2024 SRC Quarterly Meeting Schedule**

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

- March 28, 2024
- June 27, 2024
- September 26, 2024
- November 14, 2024

## ▶ **Join the SRC**

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

