

MINNESOTA STATE  
REHABILITATION COUNCIL-GENERAL

# ANNUAL REPORT

PROGRAM YEAR 2020  
JULY 1, 2020 TO JUNE 30, 2021



*Minnesota's Recovery Powered by Inclusion*

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

The State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) is required to report on the status of the Vocational Rehabilitation Program to the federal Rehabilitation Services Administration and the Governor annually. We hope this report includes content which is of interest to all.

## WHAT'S VRS ALL ABOUT?

If you are new to Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VRS), be sure to read the **Introduction to Vocational Rehabilitation Services**. You will also find a **statewide map** on page 4 that shows the number of VRS participants served in each office during program year 2020 (July 1, 2020 to June 30, 2021).

Vocational rehabilitation services are available to individuals with disabilities throughout their careers. Learn about council member **Del Bahtuoh's return to VRS** after several years of employment to advance his career.

## CLIMBING THE CAREER LADDER

## EMPLOYERS HIRING INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES

If you are an employer, discover one way the VRS dual-customer model can help you meet your hiring needs through a series of informative **bite-sized learning modules for business**.

Read one **employer's approach to hiring individuals with disabilities**. HyVee, one of Minnesota's top employers of VRS participants, hires "people into the jobs that fit best for them, and that meet HyVee's needs."

## IMPORTANCE OF YOUTH

There is more focus on providing services to youth since the passage of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act (WIOA) in 2016. The importance of connecting with youth early in their job trajectory is highlighted in **Uyen's inspiring story** on page 10.

VRS assists all Minnesotans with disabilities find and keep employment at competitive earnings in integrated settings. On page 18, learn how a collaboration between organizations has successfully helped individuals with significant disabilities **transition away from subminimum wage employment**.

## COMPETITIVE WAGES FOR ALL

## BE YOUR OWN BOSS!

Self-employment is customized employment at its best! Individuals are able to pursue a job that best meets their interests and abilities by becoming their own boss. Read **Cindy's inspiring story of entrepreneurship** on page 20.

If numbers are your thing, we have data for Program Year 2020 and comparisons to previous years that will interest you. See **Who VR Serves** (demographic data) on page 12. **VRS Participant Employment Outcome** data starts on page 15.

## DATA BY THE NUMBERS

Finally, check out **VRS Director Dee Torgerson's message** about struggles during the previous two years and hope for the future of VRS and employment for all Minnesotans with disabilities who want to work.

## ABOUT VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SERVICES

Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VRS), a division of the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development, empowers Minnesotans with disabilities to achieve their goals for competitive, integrated employment and career development.

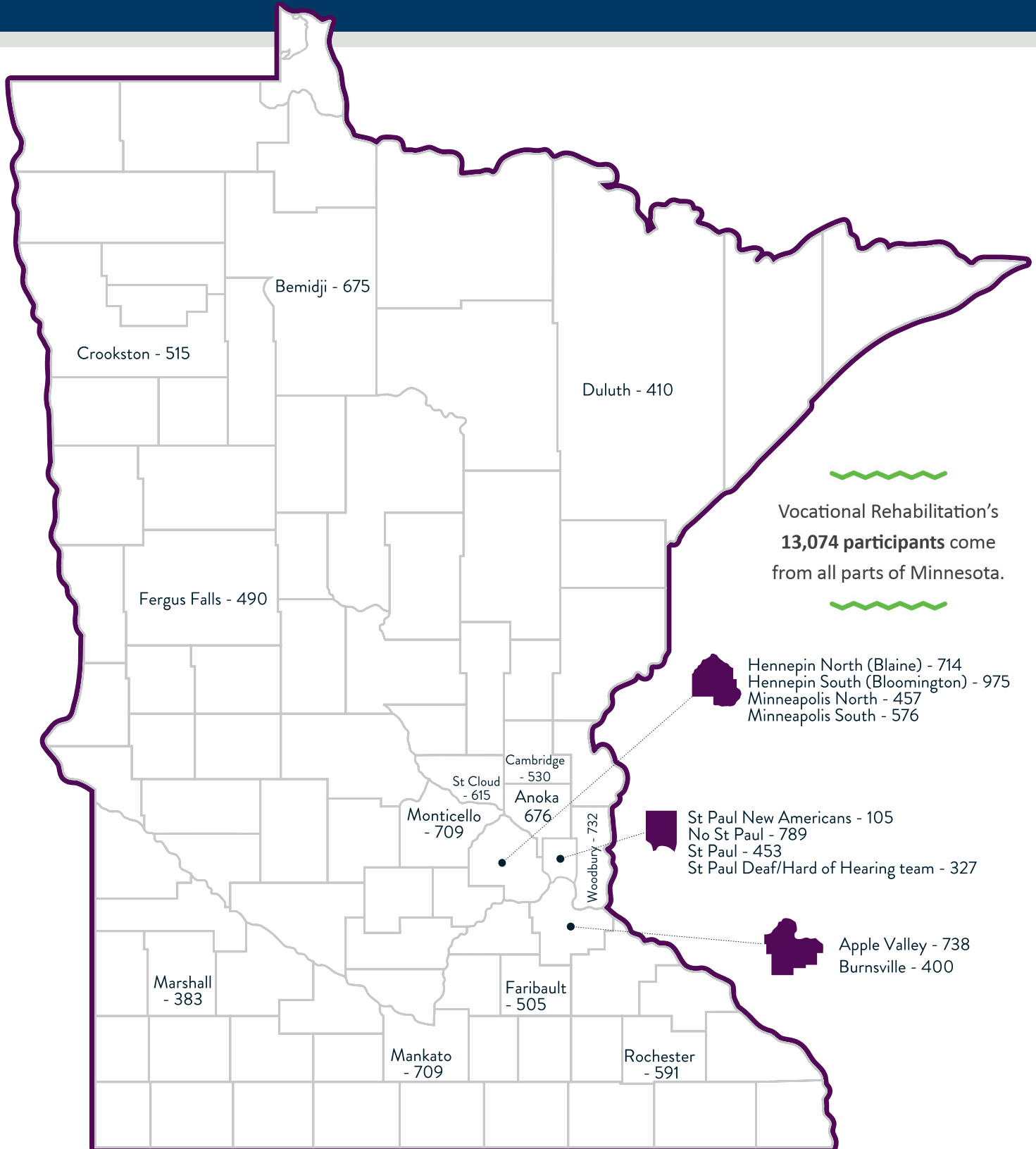
The division administers several programs and projects, the largest of which is the **Vocational Rehabilitation** program, with an annual budget of nearly \$60 million and more than 350 staff. The VR program uses a dual-customer approach to meet the needs of the business community while providing specialized, one-on-one employment services for individuals with disabilities. These services, which vary by individual needs, could include job counseling, job search assistance, training, and job placement services. VR services continue for as long as individuals are making progress toward employment goals and provides for follow-up services to maintain, regain or advance in employment consistent with the person's interests, strengths, resources, and priorities.

The VR Program is a federal-state partnership, with most of the funding coming through a federal grant that requires a state match. For federal fiscal year 2021, the total amount of grant funds is \$43,301,913. The state match is a \$14.3 million appropriation from the State of Minnesota.

**Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS)** is an important sub-category of the VR program, mandated by the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) of 2014. The act requires the state VR program to reserve at least 15 percent of its federal appropriation for the provision of services to students age 14-21. In federal fiscal year 2021, the total amount of federal grant funds used for these services was \$6,495,287 and the state match appropriation was \$1,757,937, for a total just over \$8.25 million.

WIOA requires the VR program to provide early career preparation for students with disabilities who are potentially eligible for the VR services. The law prescribes a narrowly defined set of services for a population that has traditionally not received these services from the VR program. Over the past two years VRS has created a number of new staff positions dedicated solely to the provision of Pre-ETS to students in every Minnesota school.

# NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS BY OFFICE LOCATION



To find the Vocational Rehabilitation Services office nearest you, go to [mn.gov/deed/job-seekers/disabilities/find-vrs](http://mn.gov/deed/job-seekers/disabilities/find-vrs) or call 1-800-328-9095.



## DEL BAHTUOH: SRC MEMBER COMES BACK TO VR FOR CAREER ADVANCEMENT

The Minnesota State Rehabilitation Council's annual report in 2007 featured a story about Del Bahtuoh, who with assistance from VRS, had found employment as a retiree planning associate with Wells Fargo in Roseville.

Some 15 years later, things have come full circle. Del earned a promotion and is still successfully employed as a retirement business consultant at Wells Fargo. He's also back for a second time with the VR program to receive additional services as he seeks to advance further in his career.

And he is now serving in his first three-year appointment to the same SRC that first told his story. Full circle indeed.

When Del first came to VRS nearly two decades ago, VRS supported him with books, an adapted computer, and a short-term exam and education at both Normandale Community College and Minneapolis Community and Technical College, as well as the University of Minnesota from which he graduated.

Now Del has returned to VR in a career move that he hopes will not only increase his income, but also raise his impact on Minnesotans. A passion for financial planning motivated him to return to school, and to VRS, and he is now preparing to take the licensure exam for financial planning. His VRS counselor, Christine Paul, has assisted with tuition and books, a study guide and a specially adapted computer equipped to allow for online course work.

The many disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic in at least one way proved to be a benefit for Del. Online and virtual platforms allowed him to live, work, and take his course work safely from home, insulated from the risks of the coronavirus. In the autumn of 2021, Del had successfully completed the course work portion of his education and was preparing to take the exam. He expects to succeed.

Del's division at Wells Fargo was recently acquired by an out-of-state company that does not currently have financial planning territory within Minnesota. That puts Del back into a job search. He is working with Eric Miller, a former VRS placement coordinator, who offers weekly virtual appointments, to help find employment.

Del hopes to land a job with a company that allows him to grow as a financial planner, while building a book of business. Building a book of business is the process of gaining customers, earning their trust, and eventually managing their money should he decide to break out on his own.

Del laughs as he expresses his desire to make more money. But it's not only the money that inspires him: it's the prospect of making a better life together with his wife and their young daughter.

# DISABILITY INCLUSION BITE SIZED LEARNING MODULES FOR EMPLOYERS

Now more than ever, businesses are finding it difficult to hire talented workers. Hiring individuals with disabilities can help employers expand their talent pool to meet their workforce needs, while creating an inclusive culture.

To assist employers with finding and hiring talent, VRS worked with MaxAbility, a group of employers and service providers in Southeast Minnesota with the common goal of advancing employment opportunities for people with disabilities, to develop short learning modules for employers.

The effort, spearheaded by Dawn Kirchner, Mayo Clinic, who is the Chair of MaxAbility, resulted in a series of short video modules, each of 10-20 minutes, designed to be delivered at a team meeting or huddle. The modules also have take-away cards with activities to further engage the learners and continue the conversation in the workplace. Five modules have been developed so far and are on the [CareerForce website](#). These modules can be delivered via the recordings or SSB/VRS/community providers could deliver the training live in person or virtually as well.

- 1 **Defining Disability and the Americans with Disabilities Act**
- 2 **Recognizing and Implementing a Request for Reasonable Accommodations**
- 3 **Self ID: Building a More Inclusive Culture**
- 4 **Inclusive Communication**
- 5 **Mental Health Matters: Let's Talk**



**DISABILITY INCLUSION:**  
Bite-Sized Learning for Employers

**Defining Disability and the ADA**

**Disability Rights are Civil Rights**

CareerForce



TOP EMPLOYERS

Employer Name	Number of Placements
Wal-Mart (includes Sam's Club)	81
Hy-Vee	58
Cub Foods	49
Goodwill	35
McDonald's	31
Home Depot	22
Kwik Trip	22
State of Minnesota	20
Target	20
Coborn's Grocery Store	14
Menards	14
TJ Maxx	14
Culver's	13
Fulfillment Distribution Center	12
Mayo Clinic	12
Sam's Club	12
Fleet Farm	11
Home Goods	11
Marshalls	11
Fedex	10

# AT HYVEE A PERSON WITH A DISABILITY IS THE SAME AS EVERYONE ELSE



Photo of Ben Wolfe

**There was no corporate policy decision, no big strategic decision or official directive, and no PR hype. It was really pretty simple, says Ben Wolfe, Northern Regional Recruiter for the HyVee chain of grocery stores.**

“Nobody ever said, ‘We need to hire people with disabilities.’ It happened organically. We hire because we have needs,” Wolfe says. “A person with a disability is the same person as everyone else. What I’ve seen in every HyVee store is that our approach is to hire people into the jobs that fit best for them, and that meet HyVee’s needs.”

Over the past few years HyVee has crept into the top tier of companies that hire people with disabilities who have received employment services through Minnesota’s VRS program. Last year alone, the company hired 59 VRS participants in its Minnesota stores. Clerks, cashiers, stockers, baggers, courtesy clerks, customer service reps, baristas, and a sushi chef – these and others are all positions that VRS participants now hold.

Michelle Chmielewski, a VRS placement specialist in Brooklyn Park, began to develop a relationship with HyVee in about 2016, not long after the grocery chain began its aggressive expansion into Minnesota from its home base in Iowa. Since then, she says, “HyVee has been a very robust partner, and we’re seeing the results of that through time. HyVee has created an inclusive environment for VRS candidates to be successful . . . And the relationship goes beyond just VRS to schools and community rehabilitation programs throughout the state.”

Ben Thelen, for example, had been working closely with Mary Peratt, a VRS placement coordinator in Apple Valley, and in 2019, she helped him find a job at the HyVee fulfillment center in Eagan, where he received initial training and specific one-to-one training. Last year, when that center closed, Hy-Vee found a new greeter/sanitizer position for him at the Lakeville store. Ben quickly established a routine to sanitize the most important parts of the store – the new pony ride in the candy aisle, cart and basket handles, and door pulls – to “keep everyone safe.” Along the way Ben greets customers and co-workers with a confident and friendly, “Hello, howdy, aloha – and welcome to Hy-Vee!”

Mary says that Ben’s future includes more change as HyVee intends to promote his interest in working in the bakery department. It will combine Ben’s interest and skills where he can assemble, sort, package, and label tasty items.

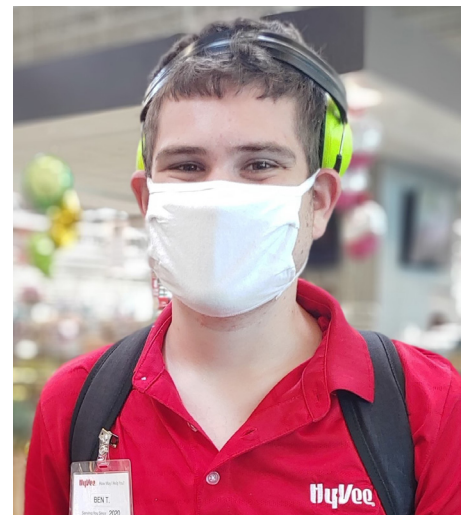


Photo of Ben Thelen





That fits with Ben Wolfe’s observation that HyVee offers opportunities for growth and career development. “There’s an opportunity for people to change up their jobs every day,” he says, “and we’ve found that people with disabilities can fill a lot of those jobs just as well as anyone else, sometimes with accommodations and supports, but often without.”

Another example: Ron Adams, a VRS placement coordinator in the St. Paul office who frequently works with people who are deaf, said that HyVee often provides tours and learning opportunities for youth who are deaf or hard-of-hearing to explore and learn about various careers. The company provides American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters for people who use ASL, and in many of its stores there are posters to show basic signs that show hearing employees how to communicate with new employees who use ASL.



## UYEN TRUONG: A PEDIATRICIAN FOR KIDS WITH COMPLEX DISABILITIES

Until very recently, a portrait of Uyen Truong hung prominently near a main entrance at Burnsville High School. It's from 2010, the year Uyen graduated as valedictorian, and it was displayed along portraits of other BHS valedictorians from years past. But the portrait came down this year when the school removed the pre-2011 valedictorians to make space for more recent graduates.

From top student at BHS, Uyen embarked on a years-long journey in which Vocational Rehabilitation Services was to play a significant role. Today, she's a doctor at Dell Children's Medical Foundation in Austin, Texas, providing complex care pediatrics for kids with disabilities.

"You guys got me through," Uyen says. "I don't think I could have done it without VRS."

Uyen has a condition called osteopetrosis, a rare disease that makes bones abnormally dense and prone to breakage. While it's clear that her disability created certain obstacles for Uyen, it became even more clear that there was very little that would deter her from pursuing her goals.

She came to VRS while still in high school and began receiving services from a pair of counselors on the VRS Burnsville team – first Abbie Wells-Herzog and then LeAnn Kleaver – who helped her make the transition from high school to whatever came next. Those services would continue over several years and include counseling and guidance, job placement and follow-up, an assortment of assistive technologies (adaptive stethoscope, wheelchair, van modification), driving lessons, and assistance with university tuition.

Uyen graduated from the University of Minnesota in 2014 with a degree in biomedical engineering. What followed was a busy time for the young doctor-to-be. She obtained a clinical research internship at Gillette Children's Specialty Healthcare and simultaneously enrolled in the U of M medical school, choosing pediatrics as her specialty. She was the first student in medical school history to use a wheelchair, a sort of ironic novelty requiring the institution to provide several accessibility accommodations.

During her final year of medical school, Uyen began to apply and interview for a medical residency program. The highly competitive process required her to travel to hospitals and compete for a limited number of residency internships.

She traveled coast to coast with her father and interviewed at 11 different hospitals and medical institutions before finally securing her first-choice residency in Texas. She remembers the competitive interviewing process as “nerve-racking,” but also “so much fun.” As a person with a disability, she had never traveled much, mostly because of the physical barriers to travel: “So yes, it was nerve-racking, but I got to travel a bunch, all over the country. It was a great time.”

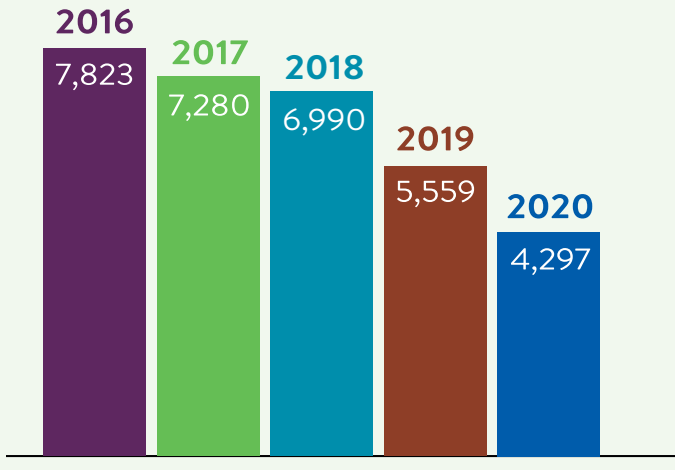
She started her residency in January 2019 and in 2022 will be one of four chief residents at the hospital. Then she’ll begin applying for a permanent position. Quite possibly she’ll remain in Texas, but she hasn’t ruled out a return to Minnesota, possibly even to Gillette Children’s. Among other factors, she’s taking things like climate and accessibility into account during her search. “There are a lot of wonderful opportunities in places that are more difficult to live than others and I always try to keep that in mind.”

Wherever she ends up, she hopes to continue practicing complex care pediatrics with kids with disabilities. She says: “As I have trained, and from my own personal experience, I really feel a connection to this population and can empathize with them on their own journey. It really makes me happy to see them thrive and do things that families could never have imagined.”



“  
You guys got me through . . .  
I don’t think I could have  
done it without VRS.”

## APPLICATIONS PER FEDERAL PROGRAM YEAR

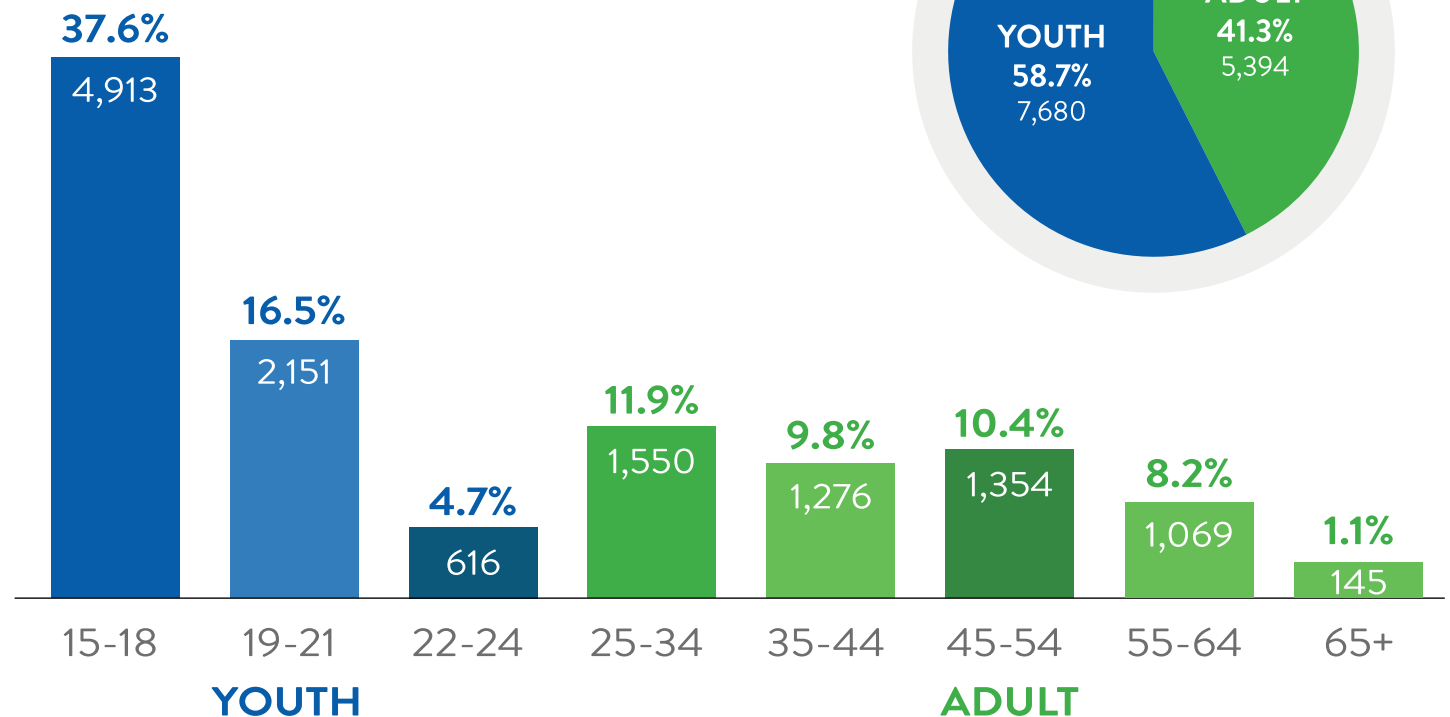


### VRS REOPENED SERVICE CATEGORIES - CLOSED SINCE 2014

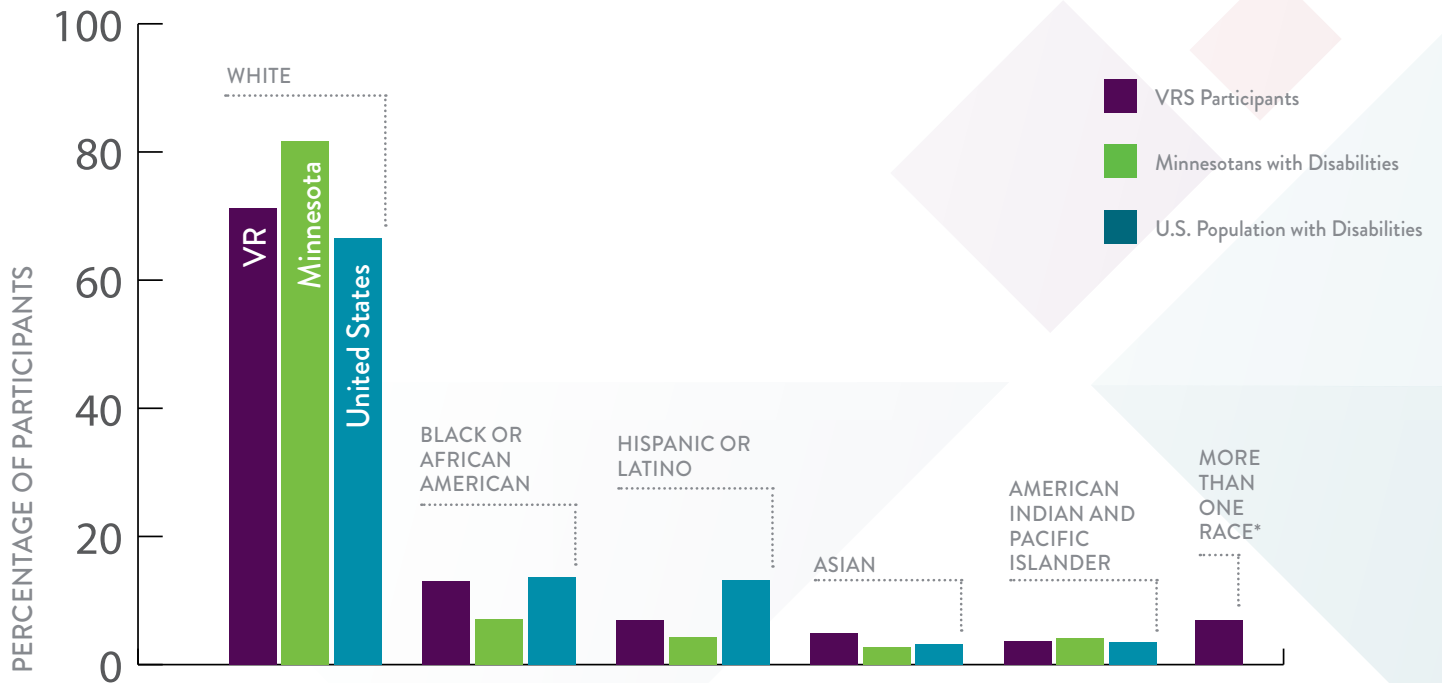
Owing to a combination of stable revenue streams and significantly reduced spending, caused in part by the COVID-19 pandemic disruptions and a trending decline in new applications, Vocational Rehabilitation Services reopened all “priority for service” categories that had been closed since the fall of 2014. In November 2020 VRS began taking individuals off the waiting list, by category and by date of application, and was able to offer services to thousands of Minnesotans who had been forced to wait, sometimes for several years.

## AGE AT EMPLOYMENT PLAN

There have been considerable changes in the population VRS serves since the implementation of the unfunded mandates put forth by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), enacted in Program Year 2015. Most notably there has been a significant increase in the number of youth being served and the complexity of cases.



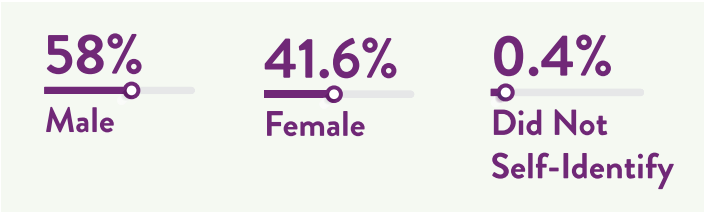
RACE & ETHNICITY



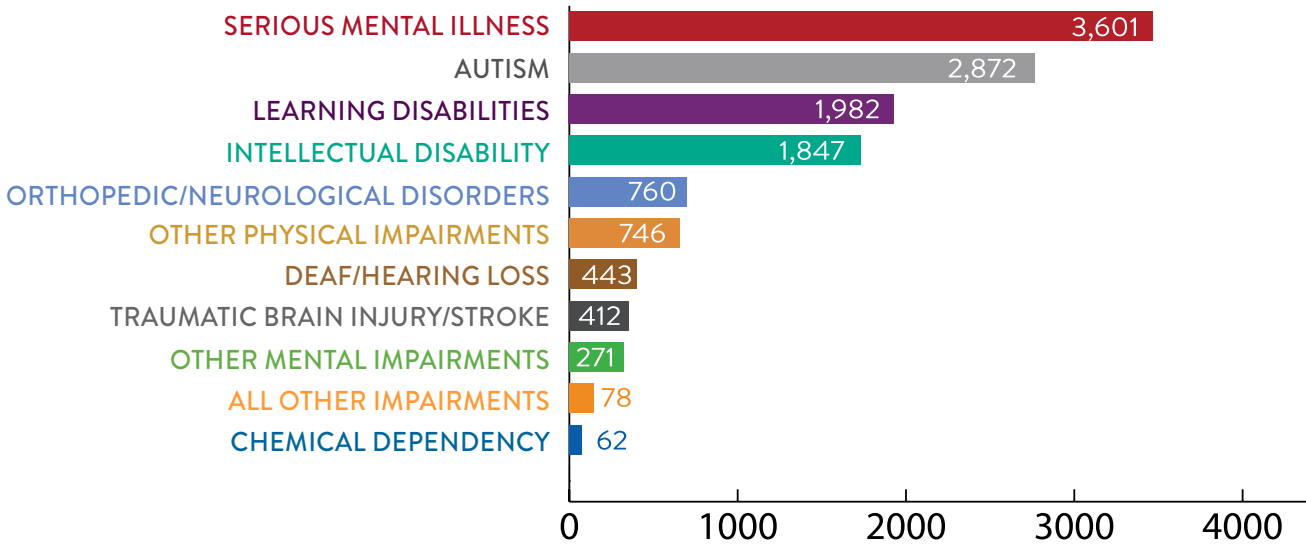
\*Participants who identify more than one race are included in all identified races as well as the “More than One Race” category.  
 Paul, S., Rafal, M., & Houtenville, A. (2020). Annual Disability Statistics Supplement: 2020. Durham, NH: University of New Hampshire, Institute on Disability.

## GENDER

The Minnesota State Rehabilitation Council - General has raised concerns regarding limitations of gender reporting practices under the federal reporting guidelines and recommend changes to ensure that the response to gender identity fosters an environment that is inclusive of all types of people and ensures the most accessible and positive outcomes for all job seekers.



## PRIMARY DISABILITY GROUPS



## EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES BY RACE

Race/Ethnicity	Employment Outcomes	Hourly Wage	Weekly Hours	Monthly Earnings
American Indian	36	\$12.93	22	\$1,371
Asian	62	\$13.96	28	\$1,804
Black or African American	150	\$13.91	25	\$1,595
Hispanic or Latino (all races)	82	\$13.48	27	\$1,689
More than One Race*	74	\$13.28	25	\$1,530
Not Identified	6	\$14.33	30	\$2,022
White Only Non Hispanic	1,177	\$14.01	25	\$1,667
<b>Totals</b>	<b>1,505</b>	<b>\$13.95</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>\$1,661</b>

\*Participants who identify more than one race are included in all identified races as well as the "More than One Race" category.

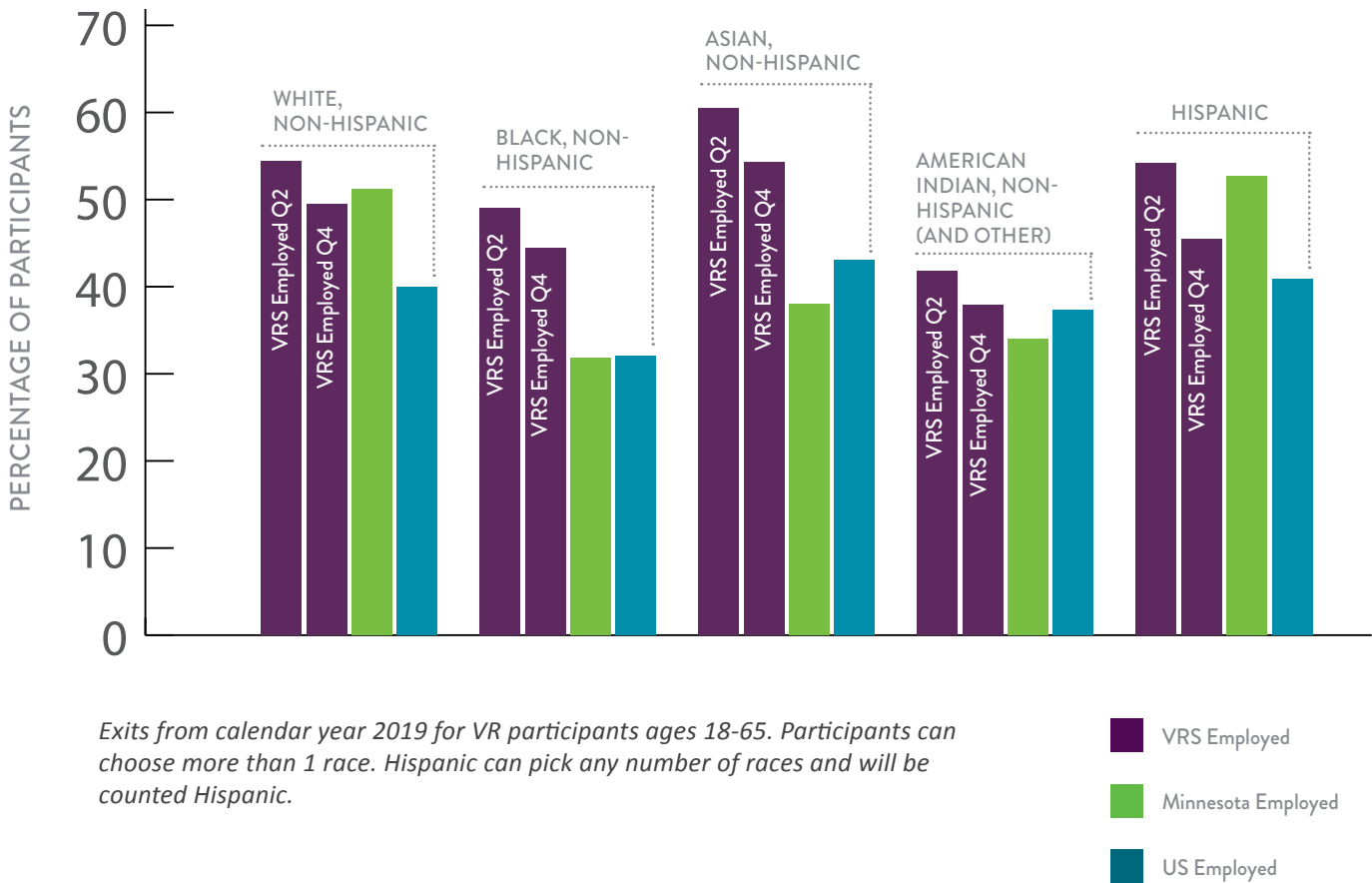
## EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES BY AGE

Age	Employment Outcomes	Hourly Wage	Weekly Hours	Monthly Earnings
14-18	369	\$13.49	29	\$1,775
19-21	228	\$12.90	25	\$1,486
22-24	100	\$12.91	25	\$1,535
25-64	792	\$14.51	24	\$1,673
65+	16	\$18.58	20	\$1,691
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>1,505</b>	<b>\$13.95</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>\$1,661</b>

## JOB STABILITY

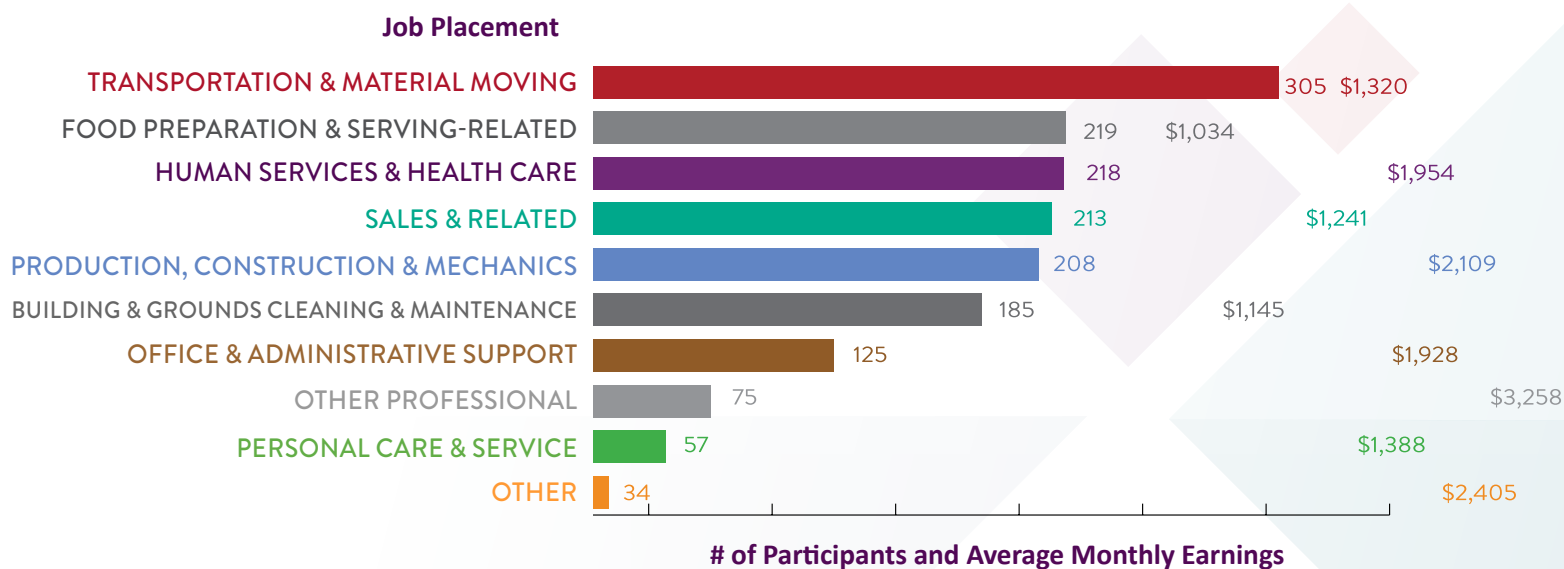
VRS is required to report the number of participants who exited with employment and are still employed 2 and 4 quarters after they have exited as a measure of stability.

### ADULT LABOR FORCE BY RACE & ETHNICITY





## PLACEMENT BY OCCUPATION



## EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES BY PLACEMENT TYPE

All VR placements are competitive (pay minimum wage or higher and at a rate comparable to non-disabled workers performing the same tasks) and integrated (at a location where the employee interacts with individuals without disabilities to the same extent that nondisabled workers do in a comparable position).

Employment Type	Employment Outcomes	Hourly Wage	Weekly Hours	Monthly Earnings
Competitive Integrated Employment	1,253	\$14.09	26	\$1,753
Supported Employment - Integrated Setting	230	\$12.46	21	\$1,202
Self-Employment	11	\$30.09	9	\$876
Supported Employment - Short-Term	11	\$12.91	26	\$1,531
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>1,505</b>	<b>\$13.95</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>\$1,661</b>

# A COLLABORATIVE SUCCESS IN ADA

In rural northwestern Minnesota, a forward-looking partnership between Vocational Rehabilitation Services and the Norman County Day Activity Center (DAC) has found ways to achieve the vision of a “DAC without walls.”



It’s a concept that Deb Huot, a VRS counselor in the Crookston office, had been thinking about for a long time. Deb started her career as a program coordinator for a DAC before becoming a special education teacher. For nearly three decades she struggled with the realities of a system where young people with significant disabilities went into segregated work settings that paid people with disabilities less than the minimum wage after finishing school.

These were often the only option available to individuals with significant disabilities – many of whom have spent 25 years earning subminimum wages.

Deb remembers her years working in special education: “School staff would work to fully integrate special education students, taking classes, eating lunch, and actively participating with their fellow students, only to graduate them into a 100 percent segregated environment.”

Today, because of changing public priorities, most students have a choice about employment. Many still choose segregated employment, but under the mandates of the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) subminimum earners must now be asked every year if they might like to work in competitive, integrated employment.

If their answer is “Yes,” that’s when partnerships like the one in Norman County can kick in. Here’s a real-life example. When staff from Freedom Resource Center, the Independent Living Center in that region, engaged subminimum wage earners from the Norman County DAC, five people said yes – they’d like to work in competitive, integrated employment. They were then referred to VRS: to Deb Huot.



**Photo (L to R):** Michael Hill, Garen Moen, Greg Joop, Joel Todd and Michael Vilmo – all of these individuals have held community employment positions and/or gotten their drivers permits.

Deb knew that she'd need to assemble a team: "including the person being served, their guardian, the case manager from Norman County, and a vendor for services."

The Norman County DAC, in the small city of Ada, was already an employment service provider, and its enthusiastic director, Hiliary Chisholm, agreed to do job development, employer support, job coaching, paperwork, and follow-up. Norman county case managers approved long-term employment supports. All five of the people who said "Yes" and got connected with VRS services to move forward with their job search.

One of the five is now working at a local fitness center. Two are regularly working at West Main Pizza, a popular community hangout, and the other two are now city employees, working as custodians in city-owned buildings. All are now employed in their community, earning competitive wages, and contributing in ways that fuel Ada's recovery following the disruptions of the pandemic.

The Northwest VRS team serves Norman and Polk counties, covering a large area dotted with small towns like Ada, where they've found ways to collaborate and partner with other local and regional service providers to realize the vision of a DAC without walls – and new opportunities for people with disabilities to achieve competitive, integrated employment.



**Photo:** Rachel Nantt is a social worker who works with individuals at the Norman County DAC who are interested in competitive integrated employment



**Photo of Hiliary Chisholm**



## CINDY ROBIDEAU'S UTTER DE-CLUTTER

Weary from the work-related stresses of hotel management and denied Social Security disability income, Cindy Robideau in February 2019 turned to Brittany Thiele, a VRS counselor in St. Paul, to help her find work. Determined to do something she loves, Cindy hoped to start a business organizing and decluttering homes. She was inexperienced in business, and unsure where to begin or how to proceed. But with help from Ed Clayton, a VRS small business specialist, Cindy wrote a successful business plan in just three days.

"I helped her with a few startup concerns: licensing, legal filings, setting up her books, and the taxes," Ed remembers. "After that, Cindy launched her business, like she had been born to it. It was truly gratifying to watch someone follow their dream with so much gusto and enthusiasm."

Utter Declutter MN is a sole proprietorship that specializes in organizing and decluttering private homes. Cindy opened her business on September 5, 2019, and her clientele quickly grew to 13 weekly and 80 monthly utterly satisfied customers. Then COVID-19 shut her down for six weeks without income. Despite the struggle, Cindy battled back, closing out 2020 with returning customers, new clients, and a paycheck.

"I am currently helping a woman whose life stopped when she lost her husband four years ago," Cindy says. "Now, it's as if she awoke and wants to attack projects that she didn't have the energy for before. That's how my work helps people, and it makes me smile that she is able to see a new future."

Cindy obviously takes pride in more than just the work.

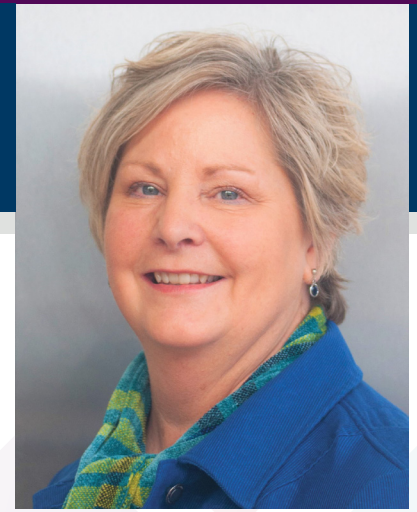
Business is booming – Cindy regularly books customers about three weeks out – and she recently hired her first two employees, one to clean and the other to help organize and de-clutter additional homes. Even with a workforce of three, she says, her business is exhausting. Some days, she goes to bed right after work, but sometimes has to undertake the time-consuming task of scheduling employees and getting invoices out in a timely way. That's the hardest part, making the time for the administrative tasks. When asked if she might bring on yet another employee, Cindy appeared hopeful but said that she is happy to be a thriving business and enjoys doing it at a manageable pace.

She manages the flow partly through a website called Thumbtack that can be turned on and off, like a faucet, as she takes on new customers. Among 53 online reviews, Utter Declutter MN is a five-star business.

It is clear that Cindy is a rising star, and she cannot help smiling as she talks about her success. She feels so grateful for the various services she has received, saying she could not have done it without all the help she received from VRS.

Here's a link to the Utter Declutter MN website, [utterdecluttermn.com](https://utterdecluttermn.com).

## MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR



# IN A TIME LIKE NO OTHER, IT'S TIME TO CHANGE AND ADAPT

The public Vocational Rehabilitation program experienced massive upheaval and disruption in recent years. Any starting point is arbitrary, but a good place to begin is 2014, with the passage of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). It was a jolt that set the VR program on a new and previously unexplored path. WIOA disrupted our world in ways that, seven years later, we are still trying to resolve. It forced rapid change and adaptation in what perhaps could have been described as a complacent and tradition-bound system. WIOA reimagined what America's workforce development system, including the public VR system, could look like, and enforced that vision with a series of mandates on how, when, where, and to whom services must be provided. This was good, necessary, and healthy disruption – but it wasn't easy, and the effects and consequences still linger.

In early 2020 we, along with the rest of the world, experienced a second major jolt to the system: the global COVID-19 pandemic. This disruption was even more profound. For the public VR program, the pandemic shut-downs, closures, quarantines, fears, and isolation forced a near-total rethink of how we could even continue to provide services. The challenges at times seemed insurmountable to many of us; they forced rapid adaptation, creative problem-solving, unaccustomed agility, technological creativity, and human resourcefulness.

We see these two extravagant jolts to the VR system as an opportunity. Taken together, the mandates of WIOA and the massive disruptions of COVID-19 could very easily have wrecked the system. Perhaps the public VR program was ill-prepared for much of what transpired over the past seven years, but we believe the system can and will emerge stronger, healthier, more relevant, and more effective than before – but only if we continue to rethink and change our approach. We now know, if we didn't before, that we can no longer be complacent and bound to tradition. We've been forced to adapt to unprecedented challenges and find creative new approaches to our work, compelled to learn how to use technology and become much more flexible in all that we do.

*Minnesota's Recovery: Powered by Inclusion* is the theme that the State Rehabilitation Council selected for this year's annual report – a theme that's particularly resonant in these extraordinarily challenging and disruptive times. The recovery is by no means complete. Even as Minnesota and the world approach the two-year milestone of the global pandemic, we're experiencing yet another surge in COVID-19 infections. We live and work in a time like no other. It's a time that makes the imperative to rethink, adapt, and change our approach more urgent than ever.

Minnesota's Vocational Rehabilitation program is taking meaningful steps to meet these challenges, as I think you'll see reflected in the stories, articles, and data that are shared in this report.

DEE TORGERSON

The State Rehabilitation Council is a citizen council whose members provide counsel and guidance to Minnesota's Vocational Rehabilitation program. Council members play an active role in making program performance and policy decisions. They collaborate with VR leadership and staff to shape priorities, assess needs, measure customer satisfaction, and produce this annual report on the status of the VR program.

Members come from many walks of life and represent diverse parts of the state. If you care about the issue of employment for people with disabilities and want to make a difference, please consider applying for this council.

**For more information, please contact Karla Eckhoff at [Karla.F.Eckhoff@state.mn.us](mailto:Karla.F.Eckhoff@state.mn.us) or 651-259-7364.**



You may apply online by using the Online Application:

**<https://commissionsandappointments.sos.state.mn.us/Agency/Details/150>**



# 2021 STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL MEMBERS

## **BUSINESS, INDUSTRY OR LABOR REPRESENTATIVES**

Thomas DeVita – St. Paul

Chase Foreman – Minneapolis

Karen Leddy – Mound

Tyler Sadek – Minneapolis

## **CLIENT ASSISTANCE PROJECT REPRESENTATIVE**

Anne Robertson – Minneapolis

## **COMMUNITY REHABILITATION PROVIDER REPRESENTATIVE**

Lisa Parteh - Cambridge

## **CURRENT OR FORMER RECIPIENTS OF VR SERVICES**

Delawoe Bahtuoh – Brooklyn Park

Michael Etten – Shoreview

## **DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION REPRESENTATIVE**

Lindsey Horowitz – Roseville

## **REPRESENTATIVE OF AMERICAN INDIAN VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SERVICES PROGRAM FUNDED UNDER SECTION 121 OF THE ACT**

Shelly Weaver – Naytahwaush

## **DISABILITY ADVOCACY GROUPS REPRESENTATIVES**

Jillian Nelson – St. Paul

Rebecca Puchtel – Elk River

Addyson Moore – Apple Valley

## **GOVERNOR'S WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD REPRESENTATIVE**

Vacant seat

## **PACER REPRESENTATIVE**

Barb Ziemke – Minneapolis

## **STATEWIDE INDEPENDENT LIVING COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVE**

Linda Lingen – St. Paul

## **VR COUNSELOR REPRESENTATIVE (NON-VOTING MEMBER)**

LeAnn Kleaver

## **VRS DIRECTOR (NON-VOTING MEMBER)**

Dee Torgerson



The Department of Employment and Economic Development is an equal opportunity employer and service provider.

Upon request, this information can be made available in alternate formats for individuals with disabilities by calling **651-259-7364** or emailing [Karla.F.Eckhoff@state.mn.us](mailto:Karla.F.Eckhoff@state.mn.us).

The VR program received 74.9 percent of its funding through a grant from the U.S. Department of Education. For federal fiscal year 2020, the total amount of grant funds is \$42,740,250. The required state match for these funds is \$11,514,652. The state of Minnesota has appropriated \$14.3 million – 25.1 percent of the total – to exceed the matching requirement.