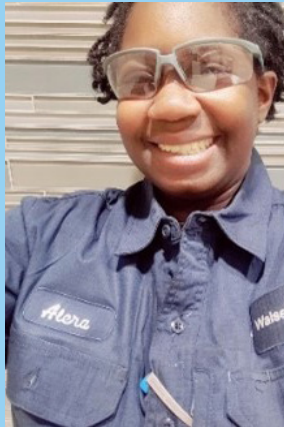




ANNUAL REPORT

PROGRAM YEAR 2023
JULY 1, 2023 TO JUNE 30, 2024



*Enriching Lives Through the Power
of Connection and Collaboration*



ABOUT THE STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL

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

SRC 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. Individuals outside the metro area are strongly encouraged to apply. Monthly meetings are either virtual or hybrid.

For more information about the SRC, contact Karla Eckhoff at [Karla.F. Eckhoff@state.mn.us](mailto:Karla.F.Eckhoff@state.mn.us) or 651-356-5467.

If you're interested in joining the council, apply online at the Office of the Minnesota Secretary of State website: CommissionsandAppointments.sos.state.mn.us/Agency/Details/150



TABLE OF CONTENTS

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

About Vocational Rehabilitation Services	3
Message from the Director.....	4
Small Business / Assistive Technology.....	5
Career Counseling.....	7
Work Experience	9
Long-term Impact.....	11
Education Support.....	13
Data: Program Year 2023 in Review	14
Data: Who We Serve.....	15
Data: Outcomes.....	19
Message from the SRC Co-Chair	21
Minnesota State Rehabilitation Council Members.....	22

ABOUT VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SERVICES

Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VRS) provides employment-related services to Minnesotans with disabilities to find and retain jobs, advance in their careers, and live independently in their communities.

VRS has a “dual customer” approach and assists both:

- Minnesotans with disabilities who face significant barriers to achieving competitive, integrated employment. This includes students and young adults with disabilities who are making the transition from school to work or post-secondary training.
- Employers who seek to hire, support, and retain qualified candidates for job openings.

VRS administers several distinct programs and projects, the largest of which is the public Vocational Rehabilitation program. The division also administers state initiatives such as an Extended Employment program, Independent Living services, Individual Placement and Supports grants, and Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing grants.

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM

The Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program works with individuals with disabilities to explore employment choices (including self-employment), find and retain jobs, and advance in their careers. This is achieved through specialized one-on-one employment services such as job counseling, job search assistance, education and training, assistive technology, and job placement services. The VR program is a federal-state partnership, with most of the funding coming through a federal grant that requires state match. In federal fiscal year 2023, the Minnesota VR program received about 75% of its total funding through a grant from the U.S. Department of Education.

INTRODUCTORY CAREER SERVICES (ICS)

Introductory Career Services (ICS) are services to students who have not yet applied for or been determined eligible for the full VR program. ICS provides Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) and is an important sub-category of the VR program, mandated by the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) of 2014.

WIOA requires the state VR program to reserve at least 15% of its federal appropriation for the provision of Pre-ETS to students ages 14 until 22 who are served through ICS or the full VR program. Pre-ETS includes the following five services: Job exploration counseling, workplace readiness training, work-based learning experiences, counseling on postsecondary training or college opportunities, and instruction in self-advocacy. These services are provided in collaboration with all Minnesota high schools and age 18 to 22 transition programs. VRS also maintains professional and technical contracts with community partners to provide Pre-ETS to students throughout the state.

VRS encourages all students who receive ICS to apply for the full VR program as they get closer to earning their high school diploma so that they can receive comprehensive supports to prepare for, enter, and maintain employment after graduation.



MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

Each year I'm uplifted and inspired by the participants, staff and partners who work together building the dreams of persons with disabilities. I'm pleased to highlight just a few of those dream-building stories in this year's annual report. These stories represent the breadth of our work. From small business consultation, assistive technology, and career counseling to education and first work experience, VRS offers services to support different individuals, wherever they are in their career journey and whatever their disability.

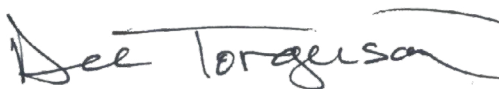
There are three themes that stand out and are consistently reflected in each story.

The first one is **impact**. While proud of their achievements, everyone who shared their story acknowledged the crucial role of VRS. The parents who created a solution for their son Karl to have a meaningful job couldn't have done it without the funding for assistive technology. After three years of stable employment that was his ticket to independence, Jeff wrote about the impact of his VRS team on his life.

Which brings me to the second theme, **teamwork**. When individuals apply to work with VRS, they get more than a counselor, they get a whole team working with them – and they, as participants, are a core part of the team. Families are sometimes part of the team, too. Paige had support from her mom, her counselor, and a career planner from our community partner, Fraser, to get through school and start working in childcare. Financial and customer support technicians help get anything that participants may need for the job interview or the new job, such as tools for Alera to start a career in the automotive industry, after years of unfulfilling work. Without the placement coordinator, a job coach, and the support from the Maple Grove Police Department, Nicole wouldn't have had the opportunity to try out her dream job.

All the participants featured in this report want to **spread the word**, the third theme. When asked if there was anything else they wanted to share in their stories, they all said: "I want to tell everyone to reach out to VRS. Try it out. It works."

That's my message, too. Our dedicated staff and talented partners are poised to assist you or someone you know achieve their dreams for success.



Dee Torgerson
Director, Vocational Rehabilitation Services



Director Dee Torgerson

FUNDING MAKES BEAMS SHINE BRIGHTER



Karl makes candles and wood engravings.

With love, creativity and assistive technology, a young man can pursue his vocation.

Karl was born in Germany on July 14, 2001, part of a loving family with mom Anna, dad Bill and younger sister Else. When he was just shy of turning three, Karl was in a car accident that took his dad's life and left him with a serious traumatic brain injury (TBI). The family was forever changed. What did not change was Karl's spirit, his quick smile and contagious laugh.

Almost 20 years later, Karl completed high school in the North Shore town of Two Harbors, Minnesota, where he and his family have been living since 2016. Like all young people, this milestone meant it was time for new adventures. In Karl's case, it also meant overcoming new challenges.

Anna and her new husband David embarked on a quest to "help Karl meet the world on his terms." They didn't want Karl to just get a job. They were aware of the lack of vocational options for people with disabilities in their rural area, further limited by their son's significant disabilities. Most importantly, they knew they wanted to support him in pursuing his vocation, to spread joy and hope.

Driven by David and Anna's perseverance, and with support from VRS, Karl's Wheelhouse was established in June of 2023, the 19th anniversary of the accident. At Karl's Wheelhouse, Karl gets to spread joy and hope through handmade candles and wood engravings.

Though the agency has long supported businesses founded by people with disabilities, this was the first time VRS provided funding for a unique business model that defied existing categories. David and Anna manage Karl's Wheelhouse on behalf of Karl and solely for the purpose of providing meaningful work for him. Karl's team had considered other competitive integrated employment options. Northern Minnesota has a limited number of employers and, after an extensive job search, nothing was available. Customized employment was utilized to help uncover and identify areas of interest and ability for Karl.

Cindy Matheson, Karl's rehabilitation counselor, took an innovative approach to secure funding to get the business rolling. The funding helped with the purchase of worktables, a laser printer, beeswax for candles, candle fragrances, and a CO2 laser engraver designed for commercial use.

Karl's work includes picking out fragrances and safely initiating the laser engraver. He also packages orders and does local deliveries. Because his TBI affects his gross and fine motor skills, VRS funded the assistive technology he needed to do his job. Karl worked with VRS assistive technology specialist John Bredehoff and rehabilitation engineer Paul Schwartz, who adapted all the equipment especially for him.



VRS funding was used for adaptive technology for Karl to do his job. He worked with his team to adapt all the equipment.

As is the case for all VRS participants, a whole team worked behind the scenes with Cindy, John and Paul to make things happen. Josh Dean, the VRS small business specialist, provided guidance for the Small Business Program application, as well as consultations on the business plan. Staff from the Northern Lights Special Education co-op serving Two Harbors High School found ways to support the business idea and help bring it to life: Dee LeBlanc, work-based learning coordinator, Jessica Knutson, secondary transition coordinator, and Tina Olson, physical/health disabilities teacher, were all part of monthly calls with VRS staff and Anna and David.

Anna expressed her gratitude saying that VRS staff “represent a niche vocation with an impact not just on Karl, but in the broader community, including anyone who orders from Karl’s Wheelhouse and receives delight from Karl.”



Karl and his team are “eager to create more candles to throw more beams of brightness into the world.”

THE BUSINESS GROWS

Only a year after it was established, Karl’s Wheelhouse is already expanding:

- They hired Grand Marais-based designer Molly Larson to create a new logo and website, twolugsandanutworkshop.com.
- They’re developing new products!
- They purchased a building where they’ll be selling Karl’s Wheelhouse products to the public. The building will be fully accessible.



VOCATION MATTERS

By Anna Madsen, Karl’s mom

Karl was born into a family that cares a lot about the idea of vocation.

Ideally, a person enjoys meaningful work. Sometimes, maybe too often, what should be a vocation is merely a job, a task that gives us an income but no fulfillment. Work becomes a means to an end rather than a means to meaning.

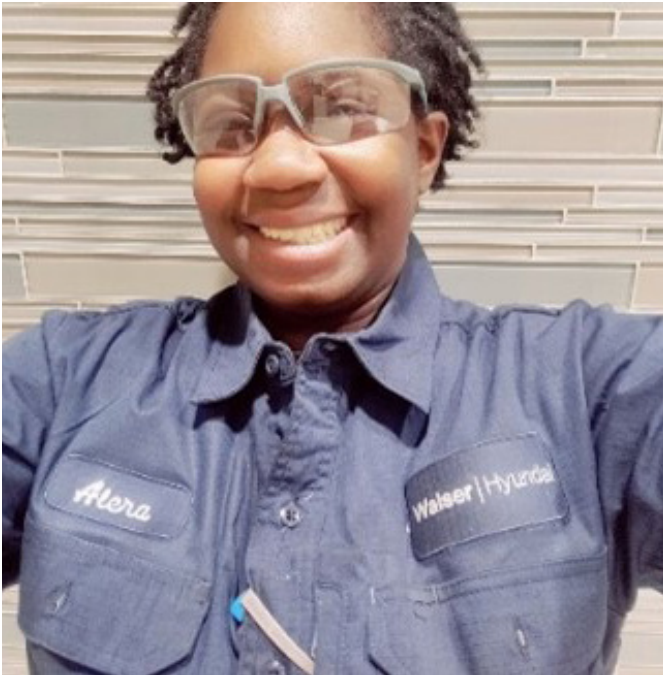
That tends to be the case for people with disabilities, especially those with significant disabilities, who run a risk of landing in jobs rather than vocations. I did not want that to be the case for my son Karl.

Karl has some challenges because of his disability: His speech is thick, his response time is slow, his gross and fine motor skills are in some rough shape, and developmentally, Karl is far younger than his years. But that doesn’t mean he doesn’t have a vocation. Karl’s vocation is to spread joy and hope.

A few years back, we were told that joy and hope aren’t in the wheelhouse of the systems set up to help people like Karl. So we created a new “wheelhouse,” where Karl can fulfill his vocation on his own terms: Karl’s Wheelhouse.

THE RIGHT SUPPORTS LEAD TO A BETTER JOB AND A CAREER PATH

The first Black American female certified automotive technician in Minnesota, Alera's paving the way for other girls and women who may be considering a role in the automotive industry.



Working with VRS, Alera learned valuable job skills and found her career. She had support from VRS counselor Kim Hoffer and her team.

Alera had two goals: To become a carpenter and to gain financial independence. Though she knew that her learning disability made math challenging, she decided to take the math assessment for carpentry, anyway. Discouraged by the low scores, she followed the advice from her VRS counselors and her mom. "I learned that there are plenty of other careers that I could pursue, I just had to look harder," admits Alera.

Dr. Bea, Alera's mother, had witnessed the positive impact of VRS on families when she had worked as an employment counselor. She wanted her daughter to have the same opportunity and support to achieve stability.

Alera started working with a VRS counselor and a job coach in 2016, while employed with Target. "The job coach was essential to Alera keeping that job for as long as she did," said Bea. "This experience helped her gain confidence and learn how to advocate for herself as she managed her mental health symptoms." A job coach offers personalized support by identifying skills each participant needs to be successful at work. Skills can include anything from communicating with coworkers and supervisors to learning specific job tasks. Alera's coach helped her address employment concerns, such as tardiness, in a supportive way.

Fast forward to 2023 and Alera was ready to take the first steps towards a career and financial independence. Carpentry no longer a viable option, Alera came across a job as a certified automotive technician with Walser while looking for work online. Manual work with advancement opportunities was the perfect fit for Alera.

Thanks to the support from VRS, Alera was able to start the new job right away. Financial and customer support technicians Robin Jendro and Kim Barrowclough used designated funding to help get the tools she needed, so Alera didn't have to worry about the additional upfront cost or having a deduction from her first paycheck.

With a steady income and a promising career ahead of her, Alera no longer needs county housing assistance. The full-time position comes with benefits and "labor hour pay," which means she receives a monetary incentive for each serviced vehicle, on top of her regular hourly pay.

A flexible schedule with a 9:30 a.m. start with Mondays off allows for Alera to manage her mental health symptoms and continue with therapy without having to take time off.

“I love everything about this job. It’s fun, I get to learn new things each and every shift I work, and I like all the guys I work with,” said a proud Alera. “In this career I get to be hands on, and I like that! I also like that I can grow in this field of work. I hope to go to technical college in the near future to learn more about the automotive industry.”

Mother and daughter are both grateful for the development and advancement opportunities available at Walser. They agree that “management at Walser genuinely want their employees to be successful.” They know that this is not just a job, it’s the beginning of Alera’s career path.

They also share their appreciation for VRS and encourage other Minnesotans with disabilities to connect with this free service. Alera’s advice? “Follow the process and let them help you the whole way, even if things aren’t working at the pace you expect. It will work out in the end, once you finally find the job or career you want to pursue.”



At Walser, Alera receives a monetary incentive for each serviced vehicle, on top of her regular hourly pay. She no longer needs county housing assistance!



MISSION: DREAM WORK, ACCOMPLISHED



Nicole's first paid work experience was with the Maple Grove Police Department, a dream-come-true for the young fan of all things law enforcement.

Nicole is a 19-year-old outgoing young lady who loves all things police work. She also happens to have Down syndrome.

Nicole's interest in law enforcement started when she was a young teen. She'd watch Adam-12 and other police shows on TV. She developed a great connection with the police officer assigned to her high school, Kal Norby, which only fueled her interest. Nicole got to help her "partner" in maintaining "basic law and order" at school. "She even dressed up as a police officer for Halloween!" added her mom, Gina.

It came as no surprise when Nicole expressed her desire to become a police officer.

With teamwork a key element of public safety, it was only natural that a team was called in to make this happen. Cue the VRS team.

Rehabilitation counselor Amy Johnson and placement coordinator Frank Herd worked with Nicole to offer the supports she needed to achieve her goal. As is the case for all VRS participants, the focus was on getting a job in the field of interest.

Frank reached out to several police agencies and pitched the idea for a VRS-sponsored paid work experience, something none of the agencies had done before. This piqued the interest of leaders at the Maple Grove Police Department who, through further discussions with VRS, decided to give it a try. Spoiler alert: They were glad they did.

"The job at the Maple Grove Police Department was Nicole's first job," shared Gina, proudly. Nicole was proud too and loved that she was paid for her work.

To ensure a successful first experience in the workforce, new partners joined Nicole's team. VRS recruited a job coach through Illies Consulting, Linda Geers, to help her learn her assignments. Tasks included shredding, document filing, mail distribution, data entry, event preparation and assistance, and other office work. A second job coach, Connie Baesler, encouraged Nicole to work independently, including going to lunch on her own in the staff lunchroom. She honed time management skills and accountability.

Nicole's work contributions had a bigger impact than anyone could have imagined. She got so much done that she freed up time for her colleagues at the Maple Grove Police Department to focus on other work. More importantly, she touched everyone's hearts. Jenny Olson, executive assistant to the chief of police and liaison for VRS said: "Nicole brought new life to our office. She did all her work with a big smile and was part of many a water cooler conversation with officers. Most everyone got to know Nicole!"



Nicole celebrated her graduation with Maple Grove police officers.

Nicole added, “I just loved hanging out with my team.”

There were many occasions for her to shine, connect with the community and celebrate. Nicole participated in Maple Grove’s annual Shop-with-a-Cop event. She helped kids wrap presents, served pizza, and socialized during the gift-wrapping party. She made sure to invite her team to her graduation party in May of 2024. Later in the summer, she reconnected with everyone at National Night Out, a community policing awareness-raising event.

Though the work experience is over, there are many more episodes in Nicole’s story yet to be written. The young honorary officer has been busy volunteering and learning. In the summer of 2024, she participated in Maple Grove’s four-day Teen Academy, geared towards high school youth to learn more about the policing profession. And, in the fall, Nicole started attending a district transition program. She hopes to do the Explorer Program at the Maple Grove Police Department, or a similar program, whatever is the best fit.

Jenny is checking for police-adjacent opportunities, such as municipal government work, and is ready to advocate for Nicole and share about the successful partnership with VRS. Frank is reaching out to other police agencies to try to line up more work experiences for Nicole and other participants interested in the work.



Nicole’s last day at Maple Grove Police Department was only the beginning of the next chapter.

NOT JUST A JOB, A TICKET TO INDEPENDENCE



The job at Cub Foods proved life-changing for Jeff: He can now live independently and manage his own finances.

THE PRODUCTION TEAM

Through direct services and partners, VRS helped Jeff secure a job and kept him motivated to continue the job.

Staff noticed Jeff could benefit from additional work-specific communications skills, and connected Jeff with Start with Me, a course offered through Fraser. The experience was so positive, he chose to use Fraser’s placement services (how he landed the Cub Foods job) and job coaching. For long-term job coaching, Jeff opted to work with Linda Koenig at ProAct.

VRS helped Jeff make informed decisions about his job and finances, and how to navigate benefits. “Thanks to VRS, I learned all the things that someone with job experience should know – how to talk to managers, about benefits of union versus non-union jobs. Alex helped get all my service providers on the same page. I’m totally grateful for VRS and all the support I received. I look on those days fondly.”

The services VRS provides are meant to have life-long impact. We typically hear from participants when they first achieve their goals. In this case, we have the rest of the story, years after Jeff got his life-changing job.

Jeff is the ultimate movie buff. Want to know what films have won the coveted Oscar? Jeff can tell you. Want a good movie recommendation? Jeff has a few. One could say his journey with VRS unfolded a bit like a movie – one with a happy ending and with him as the star and director.

It was 2015, his senior year in high school, when Jeff first heard of VRS. From the way it was pitched to him, it seemed like yet another school program, something he wasn’t interested in. A couple of years later, while participating in the Focus Beyond transition program, he learned that VRS was a lot more. What he didn’t know yet was how much connecting with his VRS counselor, Alex Breiland, would change his life.

Jeff shares that he “was barely verbal” when he first met Alex, which is hard to believe when you meet him now, a gregarious and expressive young man. “Alex knew just how to talk with me. She helped me in every single way I needed to be able to get a job and live independently.”

It’s worth highlighting that Jeff makes sure to slow down for the credits. He’s had a solid supporting cast. Alex is quick to point out that Jeff was a participant who achieved so much because he participated in the process, showing up to all meetings, despite the added stressors of the COVID pandemic and other challenges. He was perfect in his lead role.

Looking for a job is always intimidating, especially the first time. Now, add benefits analyses, stress, anxiety and a global pandemic. Enter the rest of Jeff’s team, this story’s cast.

Alex reached out to Work Incentives Connection (a program of Goodwill Easter Seals) to consult with experts in benefits analysis and determine the best options for Jeff. Karen Manion, a VRS financial and customer support technician, went shopping with Jeff so he could have the right outfit for a successful interview. This is yet another service available for VRS participants. Jeff got his first paid job, which helped build skills and his resume.

“It wasn’t the best job for me,” admits Jeff. “There were too many unknowns, including the schedule and even my job.” Though the outcome wasn’t what anyone hoped, it was a great way to learn what type of job would be the best fit for him.

With a positive, can-do attitude, and a team to keep him motivated, Jeff got his current job with Cub Foods. He makes competitive wages, gets benefits and is part of a union. “I get paid vacation time!” declares Jeff with a big smile. More than three years later, Jeff is thriving at his job, and still receives support from Linda, his current job coach.

This is more than a job for Jeff. It was his ticket to “freedom, financial independence, and alleviation of my mental stress.” Jeff can manage his finances, and he has his own place and a Blu-ray DVD collection (of course!). In his own words, “I can live my life.”

What’s next for Jeff? Watching more movies and spreading the word about VRS. If he’s ever in the market for a new job, he knows he can rely on VRS to support his efforts again. And he recommends others do too: “Just go for it. It can be confusing, especially if you’re young. People at VRS are amazing. They are insanely knowledgeable. They have your best interest in mind.”



With a positive, can-do attitude, and a team to keep him motivated, Jeff got his current job with Cub Foods. He makes competitive wages, gets benefits and is part of a union.

JEFF’S UPDATE

“I just wanted to send an email to update you about myself and to thank you for all that you’ve done for me. I’m doing phenomenally well. Since I last talked to most of you all, I’ve found my own apartment and have been living independently for the first time ever for over a year now.

I’ve been able to improve on a lot of things because of this. I’ve been working at Cub Foods for almost three years now. And while I do have some issues still, I have been able to navigate those issues well. I feel I’m also more social, and I go to movies every chance I get. I’m also building an extensive Blu-Ray collection of movies that are important to me.

I have a good network of providers that I meet with consistently. I also have full control over my finances.

I want to say again thank you for all that you’ve done to support me. I know some of you have reached out over the years, and while I haven’t gotten back to most of you, I just wanted you to know that I have thought of you during many of my major milestones over the past few years.”

PAIGE 2.0, IN HER OWN WORDS



During her time with VRS, Paige not only met her educational and employment goals, she learned skills that will serve her the rest of her life.

Paige achieved a great deal in a short period of time and has a bright future in Early Childhood education. She lives with autism, an intellectual disability and anxiety.

My name is Paige and I'm a proud graduate of Dakota County Technical College with an Early Childhood Education Certificate. I'm also a graduate from Eastview High school and from Transition Plus.

I like to spend my free time with friends and family. My friends and I like to hang out and go to dances. My family enjoys watching movies, at home or at the theater, and eating out. We also go camping and to events and enjoy nice relaxing weekends. I also enjoy alone time coloring adult coloring books and listening to music.

I met my VRS counselor Anne Tacl when I was at Transition Plus in 2019. She said she would support me as I worked towards my goals of getting a job in early childhood and growing into adult responsibilities. And to achieve this, she put together a team. My mom, of course, was part of the team.

Anne connected me with Julie McKibbins, a career planning and employment assistant program manager at Fraser. Julie and I did a lot of college preparation. There were lots of forms to fill out – college applications and financial aid forms. Together, we found our way around campus and planned out my

schedule. Julie guided me when enrolling in classes, meeting the teachers, and signing up for TRIO disability services . She made sure I knew how to study and had the tools to be successful in school.

I had to learn how to write emails and how to decode some of what my instructors would respond. My mom helped a lot with this.

Anne and I worked together to figure out the financial aid billing and my class schedule. She helped get the books that I needed for the classes, with money from VRS. She helped me learn how to problem-solve and how to reach out to her with the forms that she needed from me. Julie helped me learn how to use transportation, including reserving my Lyft rides, and get money to pay for it from my county case manager.

My first job was at Day by Day Child Development Center. This center ended up closing due to short staffing, so I had to start a new job search. Julie and I updated my resume, references, and cover letter.

My 5-year-old brother goes to New Horizon Academy. I decided to give it a try and was confident enough to talk to the director by myself to see if they were hiring. Julie and I worked together to fill out the job application, but I did the interviews by myself, and I was the one to accept the job offer. As of Thursday, May 16th, 2024, I'm a teacher aide at New Horizon Academy.

I couldn't have done any of this without my mom, Anne and Julie right by my side. I feel like I have come a long way in my life, working and reaching all my goals, with my team's help to get this far.

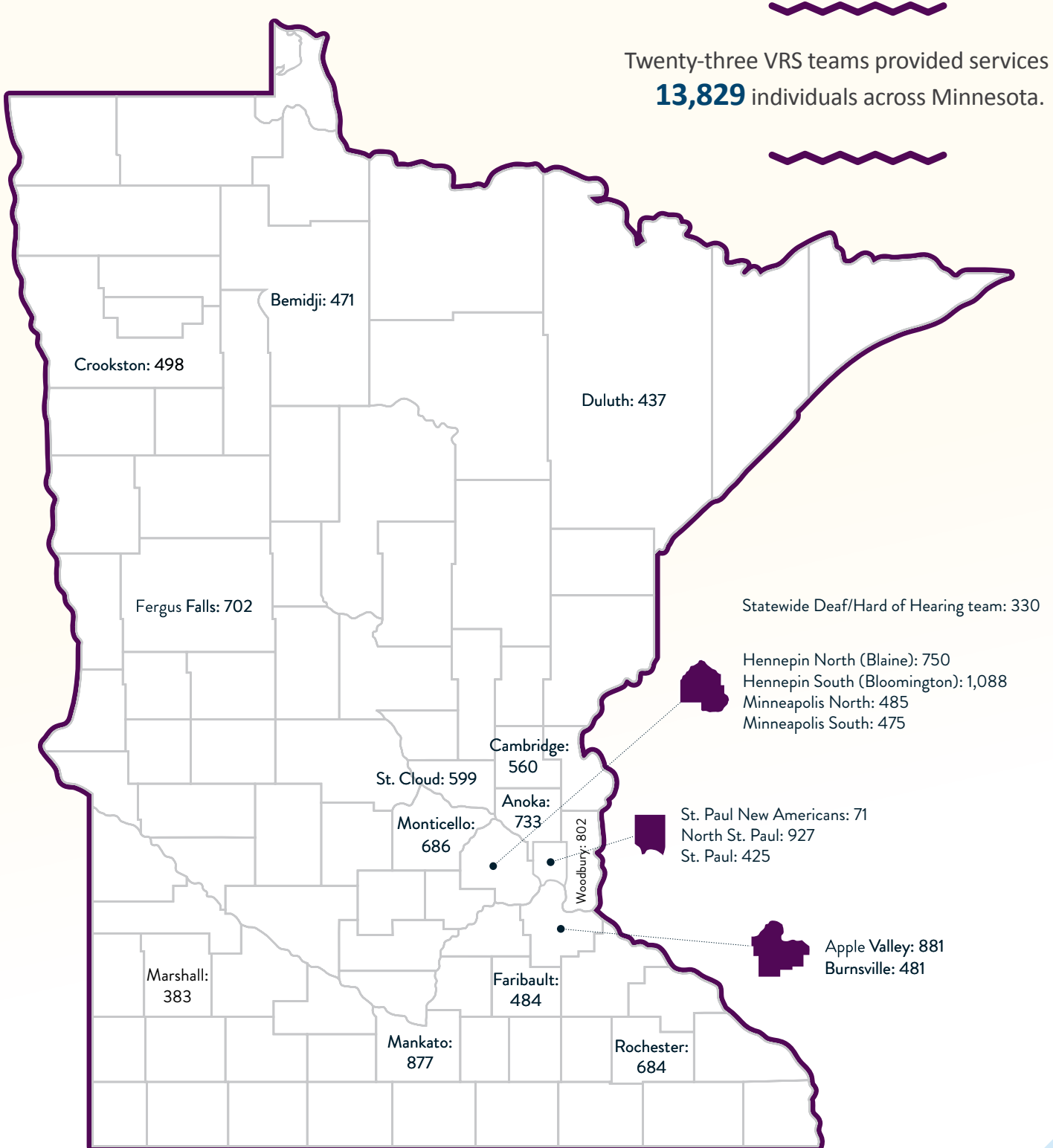
The old Paige couldn't open a Word document or upload important files. The advanced Paige can now create a Word document, upload important files, reach out to her team with questions... and write her own story.

The old Paige has left the building.

¹TRIO is a tutoring program funded by the US federal government, designed to help students overcome barriers to higher education.

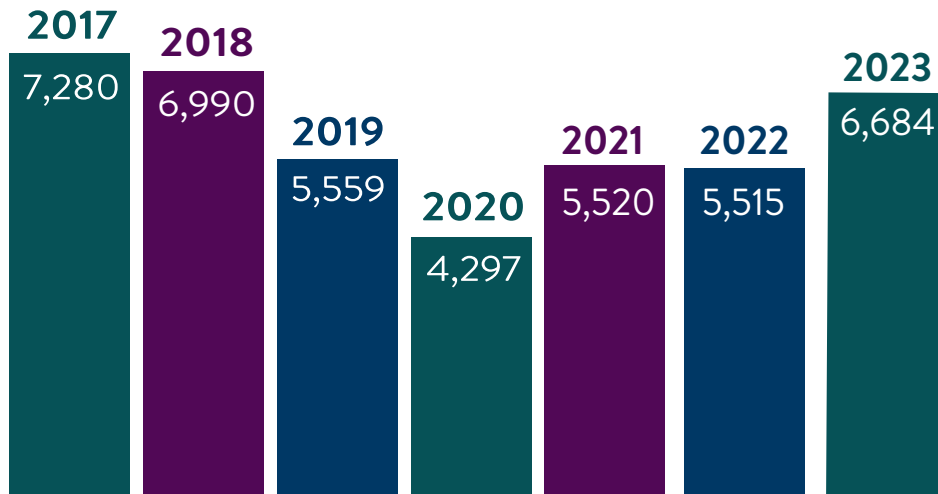
VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SERVICES TEAMS

Twenty-three VRS teams provided services to **13,829** individuals across Minnesota.

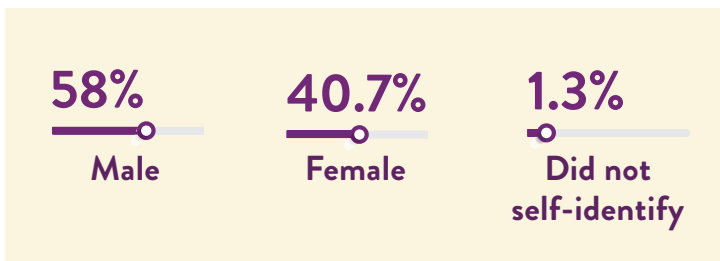


APPLICATIONS PER FEDERAL PROGRAM YEAR

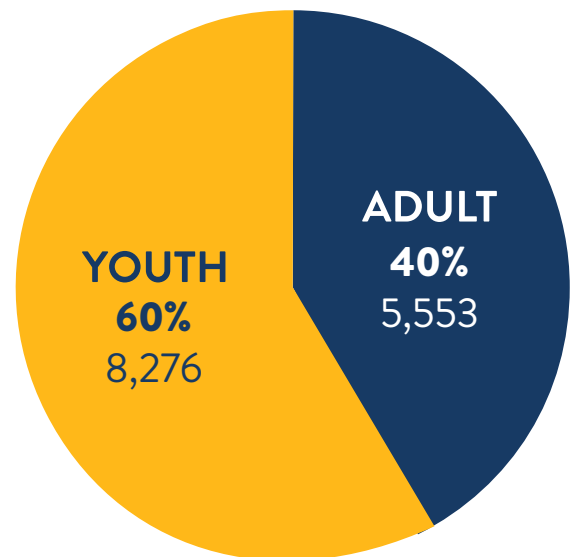
The number of applications to VRS increased in PY2023, nearing pre-pandemic numbers.



GENDER



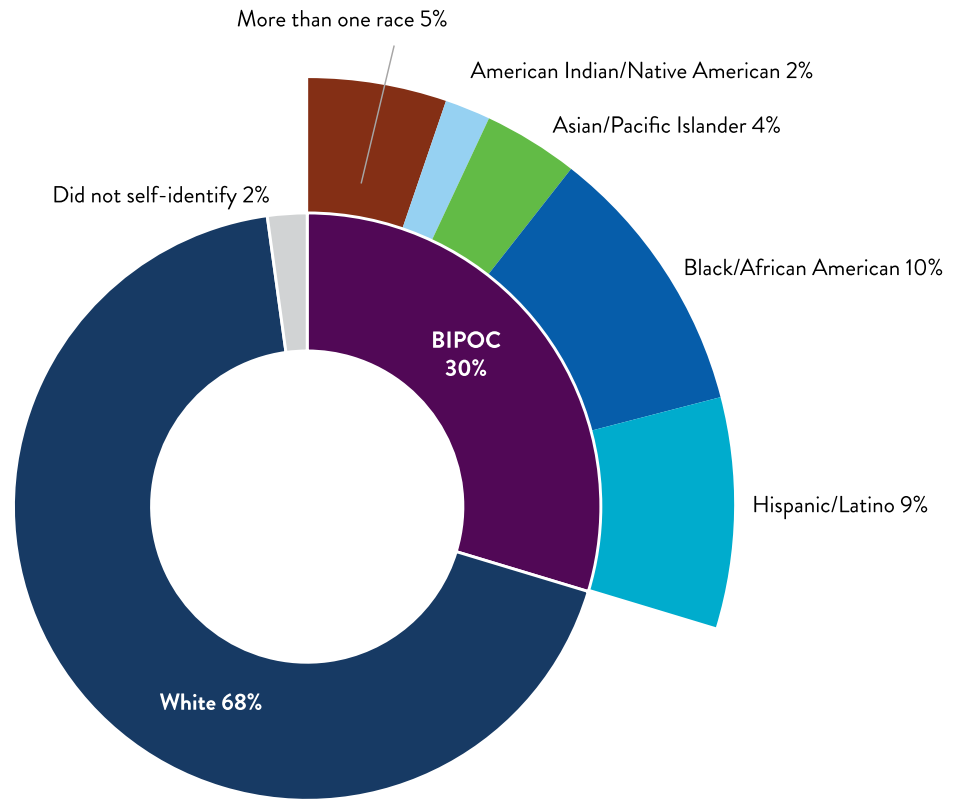
AGE AT EMPLOYMENT PLAN



Youth ages 14-24 • Adult ages 25+

RACE & ETHNICITY

Overall, VRS participants closely reflect the census-defined racial and ethnic demographics of Minnesotans with Disabilities.

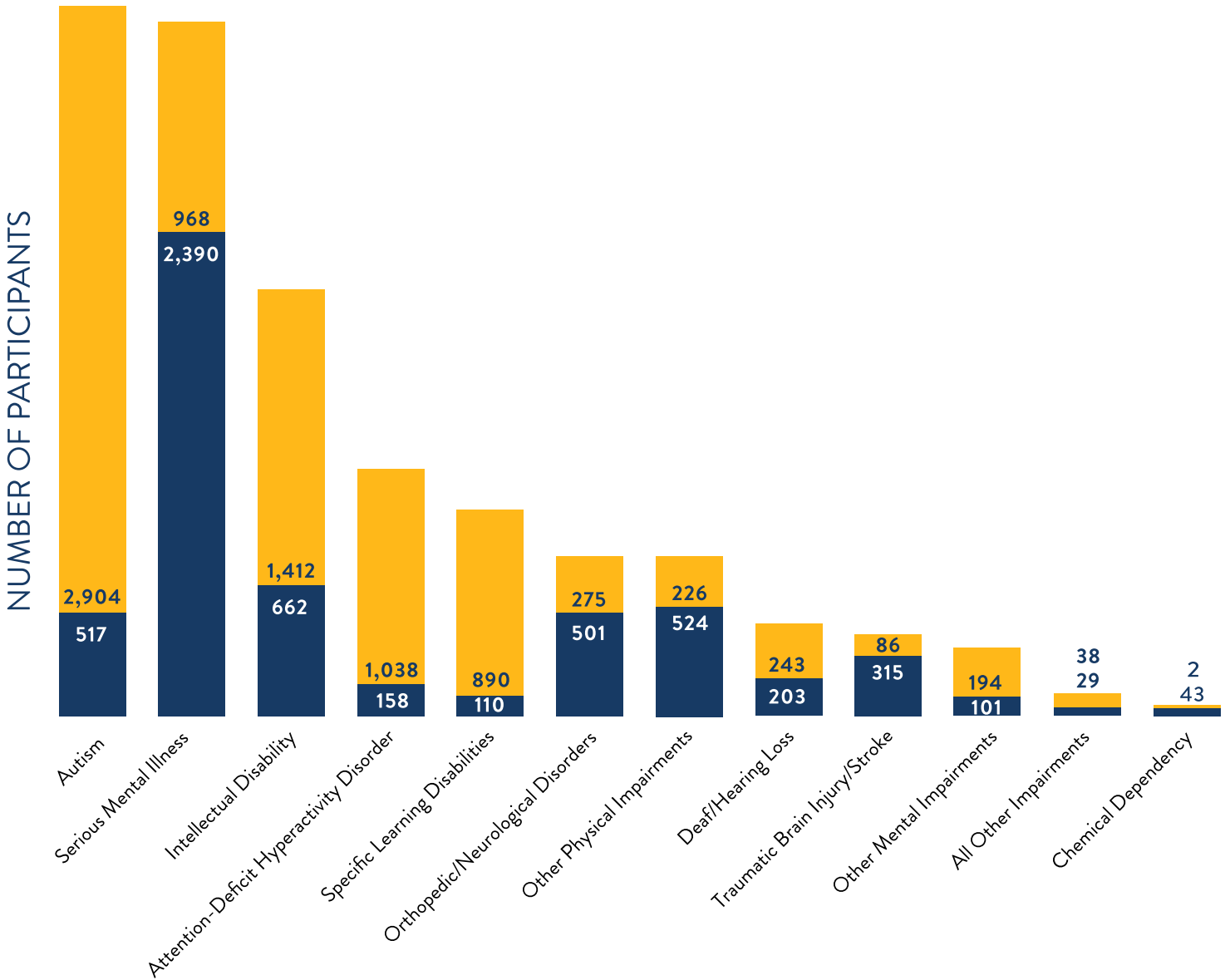


Race and Ethnicity	Participants Served	Youth	Adult	VRS Total	Minnesotans with Disabilities**
Asian/Pacific Islander Only, non-Hispanic	499	4.2%	2.8%	3.6%	4.5%
Black/African American Only, non-Hispanic	1,435	10.2%	10.7%	10.4%	8.6%
Hispanic/Latino	1,204	10.8%	5.6%	8.7%	5.0%
Other*	1,266	10.0%	8.0%	9.2%	8.3%
White Only, non-Hispanic	9,425	64.9%	73.0%	68.2%	73.3%
BIPOC	4,103	32.9%	24.9%	29.7%	26.7%
Total Participants Served	13,829	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

*The Annual Disability Statistics Compendium groups American Indian/Native American individuals and individuals who identify as more than one race in the "Other" category. The number of VRS participants who identify as American Indian/Native American only or another race was 580. VRS participant data has been combined accordingly to allow for comparison to the state population.

**Citation: Thomas, N., Bach, S., & Houtenville, A. (2024). Annual Disability Statistics Compendium: 2022 (Custom Table). Durham, NH: University of New Hampshire, Institute on Disability.

PRIMARY DISABILITY GROUPS



■ Youth
Ages 14-24

■ Adult
Ages 25+

Grand Total: 13,829

Youth: 8,276

Adult: 5,553

NEW STUDENTS SERVED BY PROGRAM YEAR

Case Type	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Introductory Career Services (ICS)*	530	729	906	389	842	1,013	1,386
Participant	2,210	2,036	1,779	1,554	1,863	1,711	1,838

*ICS include services to students who have not yet applied for or been determined eligible for the full VR program. Participants have applied for and receive full VR services.

INTRODUCTORY CAREER SERVICES

Introductory Career Service Category	Participants	Introductory Career Services	Total Students Served	Percentage of Students Served
Work-Based Learning	2,088	1,405	3,427	67%
Job Exploration Counseling	1,556	1,585	3,104	61%
Workplace Readiness Training	1,317	1,670	2,949	58%
Post Secondary Counseling	1,062	1,012	2,043	40%
Instruction in Self-Advocacy	605	1,154	1,739	34%
Totals	3,056	2,155	5,118	100%

Note: Table includes high school and post-secondary students age 14 until age 22 at the time of ICS service.

HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

	Students	Percentage of High School Students
All High School Students Enrolled	6,318	100%
Received Pre-Employment Transition Services	4,603	73%
Students Receiving Introductory Career Services	2,610	41%
Students who are Black, Indigenous, or Persons of Color	2,351	37%
Participated in Paid Work Experience	2,269	36%
Received Counseling on Post Secondary Opportunities	1,713	27%

Note: High School Students table includes ONLY high school students age 14 until age 22 at the time of ICS service.

FIVE-YEAR TRENDS IN ACTIVITY INDICATORS BY PROGRAM YEAR 2019-2023

Indicator	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Percentage Change from 2022
Applications	5,559	4,297	5,520	5,516	6,684	21.2%
Eligibility Completed	5,410	3,886	5,133	5,217	6,272	20.2%
Plans Completed	4,753	3,395	4,268	4,601	5,449	18.4%
Employment Outcomes	2,290	1,505	1,935	1,873	1,898	1.3%
Introductory Career Service Referrals	1,108	552	1,099	1,098	1,531	39.4%
Participants Served	15,012	13,074	13,257	12,919	13,829	7.0%
Employment Outcome Rate	42.9%	36.8%	39.2%	41.3%	41.7%	0.0%

EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES BY PLACEMENT TYPE

Employment Type	Empl Outcomes	Avg Hourly Wage	Avg Hours per Week	Avg Weekly Earnings	Avg Monthly Earnings
Competitive Integrated Employment	1,536	\$16.69	25	\$440	\$1,906
Supported Employment in Competitive Integrated Setting	357	\$14.61	18	\$269	\$1,168
Self-Employment	5	\$41.06	23	\$762	\$3,303
Grand Total	1,898	\$16.37	23	\$409	\$1,771

EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES BY AGE

Age at Start of Employment Plan	Empl Outcomes	Avg Hourly Wage	Avg Monthly Earnings
14-18	453	\$16.02	\$1,897
19-21	315	\$14.85	\$1,474
22-24	133	\$15.96	\$1,829
25-34	362	\$16.80	\$1,803
35-44	243	\$17.08	\$1,769
45-54	194	\$16.98	\$1,811
55-64	166	\$17.50	\$1,828
65+	32	\$17.91	\$1,764
Grand Total	1,898	\$16.37	\$1,771

PLACEMENT BY OCCUPATION

O*NET Occupational Groups*	Number of Placements	Average Monthly Earnings
Transportation and Material Moving	379	\$1,564
Food Preparation and Serving-Related	329	\$1,213
Sales and Related	231	\$1,379
Building and Grounds Cleaning and Maintenance	225	\$1,238
Production	151	\$2,211
Office and Administrative Support	145	\$2,070
Personal Care and Service	101	\$1,299
Education, Training, and Library	55	\$2,959
Healthcare Support	54	\$1,949
Healthcare Practitioners and Technical	35	\$3,403
Community and Social Services	35	\$3,191
Installation, Maintenance, and Repair	33	\$3,108
Business and Financial Operations	26	\$3,452
Protective Service	22	\$2,355
Computer and Mathematical	17	\$4,213
Management	17	\$3,464
Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports, and Media	16	\$1,857
Construction and Extraction	9	\$3,917
Life, Physical, and Social Science	8	\$3,737
Architecture and Engineering	6	\$5,158
Farming, Fishing, and Forestry	4	\$1,902

*The O*NET (Occupational Information Network) system is maintained by a regularly updated database of occupational characteristics and worker requirements information across the U.S. economy. It describes occupations in terms of the knowledge, skills, and abilities required as well as how the work is performed in terms of tasks, work activities, and other descriptors.



Co-chair Michael Etten

MESSAGE FROM SRC CO-CHAIR

As co-chair of the Minnesota SRC, along with Trevor Turner, I've had the pleasure to be a part of a vibrant, exciting team of people from across the state who work together to ensure that the people, policies, procedures, and companies that work with VRS participants are the best that they can be. Do we have more work to do? Absolutely. However, we also need to recognize all that has been accomplished as well. This report gives a recap of what was done and who we served this past year.

One thing that helps the SRC focus on delivering results and helping to ensure the best things are implemented for Minnesota, is how we start our meetings: After a little bit of housekeeping, we listen to a story. Often, these are live conversations with the participant and their VR counselor. The participant tells the SRC how VRS helped them prepare for and find employment.

I first heard from Jeff (p.11) and Paige (p.13) when they presented at SRC meetings. They shared their experience with VRS and the positive impact of services on their lives. We heard about what went well and where there are opportunities for improvement. These stories are the foundation of what we, as an SRC, want to ensure happens. These stories energize us and help us stay focused on what is important: The people VRS serves.

It's worth mentioning that both Trevor and I are former recipients of services from VRS. Not only does the SRC encourage those with disabilities to apply to be on the council, the SRC also seeks to get those with disabilities into leadership positions. Supports are provided as necessary to ensure that everyone is successful and that the meetings are productive.

This past year we had discussions about implementing a customer satisfaction survey, ensuring that all populations are served equally, suspending consumer financial participation, and continuing to work with the legislature to eliminate sub-minimum wage employment in Minnesota. We even had our first in-person meeting since 2020. It was a great year to be a part of the SRC!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Michael Etten', written over a white background.

Michael Etten
Co-Chair, Minnesota State Rehabilitation Council

SRC MEMBERS, PROGRAM YEAR 2023

BUSINESS, INDUSTRY OR LABOR REPRESENTATIVES

Scott Berscheid – Mayer
Ben Coady - Rochester
Jim Houston - Burnsville
Jim Ross – Red Wing

CLIENT ASSISTANCE PROJECT REPRESENTATIVE

Anne Robertson – Minneapolis

COMMUNITY REHABILITATION PROVIDER REPRESENTATIVE

One vacant seat

CURRENT OR FORMER RECIPIENTS OF VR SERVICES

Michael Etten – Shoreview
Nick Holzthum - Minneapolis
Katie Legrid - Richfield
Trevor Turner - Minneapolis

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION REPRESENTATIVE

Thomas Delaney - Roseville

DISABILITY ADVOCACY GROUPS REPRESENTATIVES

Crystal Hellekson – East Grand Forks
Two vacant seats

GOVERNOR’S WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD REPRESENTATIVE

Kyle Van Acker – Ham Lake

PACER REPRESENTATIVE

Deanne Curran - Farmington

STATEWIDE INDEPENDENT LIVING COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVE

Deborah Gleason - Minnetonka

TRIBAL VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SERVICES PROGRAM REPRESENTATIVES

Connie Berg – Red Lake
Shelly Weaver – Naytahwaush

VRS COUNSELOR REPRESENTATIVE (NON-VOTING MEMBER)

Mike Windsperger - Mankato

VRS DIRECTOR (NON-VOTING MEMBER)

Dee Torgerson – St. Paul





Upon request, this information can be made available in alternate formats for individuals with disabilities by calling **651-356-5467** or emailing Karla.F.Eckhoff@state.mn.us.



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

The VR program received 78.70% of federal fiscal year 2024 funding through grants from the U.S. Department of Education. The federal fiscal year 2024 grants totaled \$52,850,455. The required state match for these funds is \$14,299,999. The state of Minnesota appropriated \$14.3 million to meet the match requirement.