



**ANNUAL
REPORT**

FFY 2019



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Contents

GREETINGS FROM THE CHAIRPERSON	1
MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR	3
BRS VISION, MISSION, & VALUES	6
IN THE SPOTLIGHT	7
• SAM YEAGER	8
• CHAD FISHER	11
• JACK KELLER	14
• LEZLI JACOB	17
2019 ACCOMPLISHMENTS	19
Pre-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES	20
BUSINESS & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT	22
A NEW LOOK!	26
COMMISSION ACCOMPLISHMENTS	27
EMPLOYMENT FIRST	28
COMPREHENSIVE NEEDS ASSESSMENT	29
VR DATA HIGHLIGHTS	30
“WHY I SERVE ON THE COMMISSION”	31
COMMISSION OUTREACH	32
COMMISSION MEMBERS	33
CONTACT THE COMMISSION	34

GREETINGS FROM THE CHAIRPERSON



GREETINGS FROM THE CHAIRPERSON

It has been a pleasure serving as the Chair of Indiana's Commission on Rehabilitation Services, and most of all, serving alongside so many wonderful dedicated Commission members. I want to take this

opportunity to thank each of the members for their hard work and let them know that all they are doing for those of us working and living in the disability community is greatly appreciated. The membership is comprised of persons with disabilities, former consumers of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR), representatives from various state agencies, and providers of disability services. I also want to thank all of the employees of Vocational Rehabilitation for the work they do every day to enhance the lives of people with disabilities. Many years ago, I was a consumer of Vocational Rehabilitation Services and I attribute a large part of my success in my work life to the encouragement and support I received as a young man with a disability from my Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor.

One of the ways in which our Commission accomplishes our goals is by the larger group breaking into subcommittees. Each subcommittee has a Chair who coordinates activities. Subcommittees consist of Policy and Oversight, Customer Satisfaction, Recruitment and Outreach, Awards Committee, and Employment First. I am pleased to report that the draft Employment First Plan has been completed and has recently been released for public comment. The Employment First Draft Plan is a true collaborative effort by the Employment First Subcommittee, members of the public, and the entirety of the Rehabilitation Commission. A special thank you to the Employment First Committee for the countless hours they have devoted to this project.

GREETINGS FROM THE CHAIRPERSON

As many of you reading this letter know, Indiana's Vocational Rehabilitation Program moved into "Order of Selection" in August of 2017. Order of Selection has led to a number of people with disabilities seeking employment to be placed on a deferred waiting list. The reason for this occurrence is based upon lack of staffing and resources available in the Vocational Rehabilitation Program. As the Chair of the Commission, I want to assure Indiana residents that we as Commission members believe that Order of Selection in the state of Indiana needs to be eliminated. Order of Selection is a common topic in our meetings and we receive regular updates from the leadership at Vocational Rehabilitation as to the steps being made to transition out of this status.

Additionally, we believe that the state of Indiana needs to build the infrastructure to draw down all of the available federal funds that can be allotted to us to better serve those of us living in the disability community. Leaving dollars on the table when the unemployment rate for people with disabilities is at a staggeringly high rate is of concern to us. We are aware that there are necessary steps that have to take place prior to achieving both of these important goals, and we as Commission members are dedicated to being a part of the solution and helping in any way in which we can.

In closing, I want to encourage you to stay involved and seek ways in which we as a community can continue to work together to make a difference in the lives of people with and without disabilities in this wonderful state we call "Indiana". Feel free to reach out to me or other Commission members to share your suggestions, ideas, and concerns. I believe that the best way to effectuate positive change is to work together. Your input is not only welcome, but also greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James Michaels". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

James Michaels, Commission Chair

MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

The year 2019 is one for the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) history books, as the program accomplished several major milestones that will have a lasting impact on improving VR services for many years to come. Key milestones included:

❖ ***Implementation of a new VR case management system***

VR replaced its 20-year legacy case management system, with the rollout of a new system, called 'Aware.' Information technology systems modernization is a major undertaking and we had a dream team in place to ensure the new system was designed to meet the needs of the program, gain efficiencies for VR staff, and improve customer service.

❖ ***Implementing an electronic claims payment process***

The VR Claims Payment System (VR-CPS) Phase 2 was implemented in 2019, helping VR to realize its goal of transitioning from manual claims processing to electronic claims processing. VR-CPS continues to be enhanced to address the needs of VR participants, VR vendors, and VR staff. VR has provided opportunities for feedback from vendors on strategies for further improvement of VR-CPS and will continue with enhancements. Some key benefits of VR-CPS include a significant improvement in the turnaround time for payment to vendors, increased transparency to vendors on the status of authorizations and payments, and added efficiencies for VR staff.

- The Aware and VR-CPS implementation teams were led by Sam Patel, Brittny Downing, Virginia Bates, Karen Smith, and Shelby Jennett who are all superstars!
- We also had numerous end-users devote many hours to testing; data clean up; script writing; developing training materials; planning and delivering training; helpdesk; and a host of other critical tasks to ensure the system implementation was a success. That list of staff is far too lengthy to include here, however I am thrilled to share that we were able to recognize more than 90 staff for their efforts with a spot bonus earlier this year.



MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

- A huge thank you goes to our two Aware and VR-CPS pilot offices, Valparaiso and Clarksville for all of their extra efforts, which involved dual entry into both the legacy system and Aware during the pilot period.

❖ *Adjusting VR Counselor salaries in September, 2019*

VR worked closely with the State Personnel Department to complete a review of Indiana VR Counselor salaries in comparison to average salaries nationwide. As a result of this review, and identification of cost savings from implementation of a new case management system with reduced ongoing maintenance and support costs, VR Counselors received a 10-13% salary increase.

Additional accomplishments in 2019 included:

- Entering into a Memorandum of Understanding with Department of Workforce Development (DWD) to provide Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) through increasing the number of students with disabilities participating in the Jobs for America's Program (JAG) program, and enhancing curriculum to include training on self-advocacy and work based learning opportunities. (See page 20 for more information and updates on Pre-ETS)
- Rolling out additional improvements to the VR employment services process, including modifying the funding structure for work experience, streamlining documentation requirements, and training on the availability of VR funded extended services for youth with most significant disabilities.
- Successfully completing a federal corrective action plan after resolving all findings with the Rehabilitation Services Administration.
- Continuing to enhance business engagement efforts including hosting a very successful 'lunch and learn' event with human resource professionals to increase awareness and opportunities for hiring individuals with disabilities. (See more information on page 24)
- Completing a comprehensive statewide needs assessment (CSNA) to evaluate program performance and identify priorities. The CSNA can be viewed at https://www.in.gov/fssa/files/CSNA_plus_survey_2019_final.pdf
- Continuation of Establishment projects with approximately 40 VR employment service providers to improve staff skills and staff capacity for assisting eligible VR participants with achieving employment. Service and employment outcome data from the first two years of the project was analyzed and reflected marked improvements in the provision of supported employment, 90-day retention following stabilization, average weekly work hours, average pay, and an increase in the amount of training that employment service staff receive. (Data highlights can be viewed in the CSNA)

MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

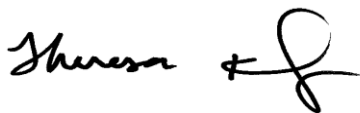
Many of these milestones and accomplishments will 'set the stage' for 2020 and the years to come. My hope is that next year will be another groundbreaking year, and will at minimum, include the following:

- Innovation in increasing employment outcomes for VR participants
- Increased opportunity for collaboration with other state agencies
- Enhanced partnerships at the state and local level
- Ongoing capacity building in order to serve more eligible individuals and improve the customer experience
- 'Outside the box' thinking to improve the quality of services and outcomes
- Opportunities to learn from VR staff superstars, and to help others develop into superstar status

Working with the Commission on Rehabilitation Services this past year has been a privilege and I am happy to say that VR enjoys a great collaborative relationship with the Commission. Their work this past year has been tremendous, particularly around the development of a draft Employment First plan. I want to extend my appreciation to the Commission members and I look forward to our continued partnership in 2020 toward building capacity to provide quality services to all VR eligible individuals and work toward opening all disability priority categories.

I am so pleased that success stories are once again a feature of this annual report, and I hope you learn as much as I did from the individuals and staff who graciously shared their stories with us. I also want to thank all of our staff, Division of Disability and Rehabilitative Services (DDRS) and Family and Social Services Administration (FSSA) leadership, and numerous stakeholders for your ongoing partnership and passion in improving outcomes for Hoosiers with disabilities.

Best wishes in 2020!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Theresa" followed by a stylized flourish.

Theresa Koleszar, Director
Bureau of Rehabilitation Services

BRS VISION, MISSION, & VALUES

BRS VISION, MISSION, & VALUES

The Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS) includes Blind & Visually Impaired Services (BVIS), Deaf & Hard of Hearing Services (DHHS), Centers for Independent Living, and Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VR).

BRS VISION STATEMENT

All Hoosiers are encouraged and empowered to pursue opportunities that promote their independence.

VR VISION STATEMENT

To partner with individuals with disabilities to explore career pathways to achieve their employment success.

VALUES STATEMENT

VR Values:

1. **Quality** – To support an effective, skilled and engaged team as the most valuable asset in achieving person-centered services that produce quality outcomes.
2. **Purposeful** – To engage in thoughtful, intentional actions that drive progress toward each individual's employment success.
3. **Empowerment** – To entrust staff to think and act creatively, foster hope, and empower individuals to take ownership of their path to employment success.
4. **Strengths-Based** – To focus on each individual's unique abilities and interest as the foundation for employment success.
5. **Inclusion** – To uphold the belief that each individual's contributions have value, and with access to a broad range of opportunities and appropriate supports, all Hoosiers can achieve employment success.



In the Spotlight

Each year we focus the spotlight on outstanding individuals who were able to achieve their employment goals with the assistance of VR and other local partners. This year we have four unique stories to share with you.

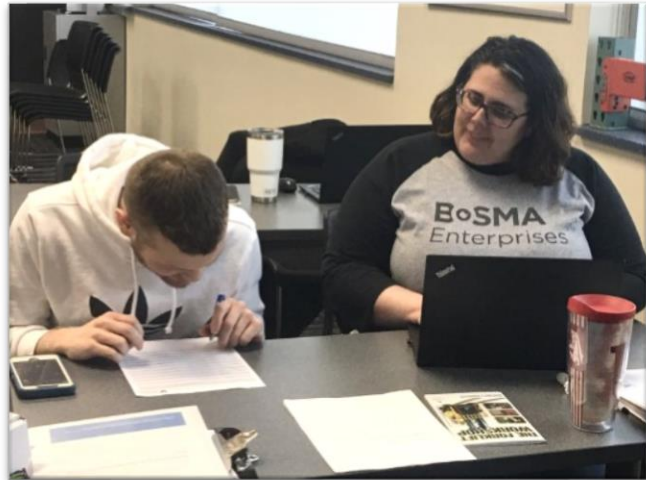
Special thanks to Sam Yeager, Chad Fisher, Jack Keller and Lezli Jacob for allowing us to share their unique stories success!

SAM YEAGER

Story by Natalie Weisenbach
Employment Specialist
BOSMA Enterprises



Navigating Blindness



Pictured: Sam and Employment Specialist Natalie on test day at VULTEC.

One opportunity can be enough to change someone's world.

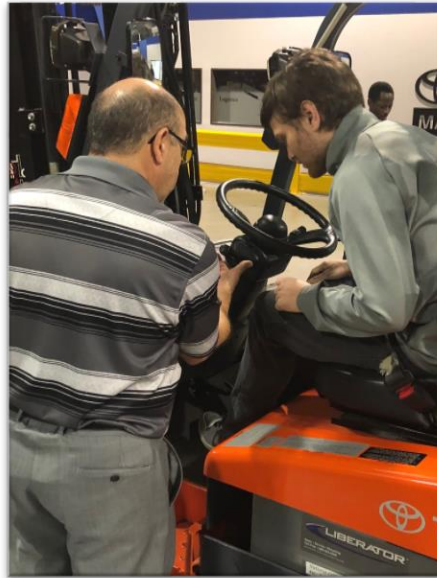
Vincennes University Logistics Training and Education Center (VULTEC) was that opportunity for one of my clients.

I was fortunate to get to work with Sam. He came to Employment Services after earning his Certificate of Completion from Indiana School for the Blind and Visually Impaired where he gained job ready skills while participating in the Student Training and Employment Program (STEP). Part of his learning during STEP took place on the Production Line at Bosma Enterprises. He really liked to work with his hands. Sam is a friendly, happy, and talented young man. When we first met, he talked about his interests in weather, cars, and running. Sam was always open to learning about different places or jobs. He was most interested in learning about jobs at Sam's Club so we took some time to learn what kind of job task took place there.

Then opportunity called. Sam was very fortunate to have Renee Jewell as his Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor. She was always supportive of Sam's goals and believed that he was capable of anything he wanted to do. Renee believes that there are lots of work and training opportunities for someone who is blind or visually impaired. She worked as part of a team with Vincennes University Logistics Training and Education Center (VULTEC) and VR to set up a pilot training program. She immediately called and said she thought Sam would be a great candidate.

SAM YEAGER

Sam was a little hesitant at first. He was unsure if it was something he really wanted to do or could do. I reassured him that if he got to the program and it was a disaster he did not have to stay and that I would be with him the entire time. VR arranged transportation and accommodations to be ready for the first day. Sam came prepared as well with his own iPad on day one.



Pictured: Sam participating on hands activities with instructor Mike Coyne

Sam paid attention, participated, and stayed focused in the classroom. He excelled when he got out to the warehouse and was able to get hands on experience. He quickly learned how to stack pallets, use the hand scanner, and was able to help others in the class learn as well. Sam was able to learn pick and pull, Pick to Light, and was certified on the powered hand pallet jack.



SAM YEAGER



Pictured: Sam and Instructor Mike Coyne on Graduation Day

Then the time came for the final exam. This is where Sam was most nervous. Sam needed to have his test read to him as an accommodation. We sat together and I reminded him that he was going to do great! And he did! He passed! One of the greatest moments in my career was to see the pride on his face upon completion of this program.

From that one opportunity, came the next, VR's Business & Community Engagement team was able to connect us with the Human Resources Manager at Finish Line. We discussed Sam's skills and an interview was scheduled. The second shift manager, Judy sat

down with Sam and talked to him to get to know him. She talked to him about the job and took us on a tour of the work area. There is nothing better that I get to do in my job then to tell a client that they need to clear their schedule because they got a job!

Sam was hired by Finish Line within six weeks of completing the VULTEC program. Not only does Sam love his job, he is extremely successful. He is always pushing to do better. He works full time, earning more money than he thought possible, and has benefits. He can save towards a car that he wants while working towards becoming a bioptic driver. He can work towards moving out of his parents' house and living on his own if he chooses. All things are possible for him thanks to one opportunity.

FINISH LINE™



Pictured: Finish Line Headquarters

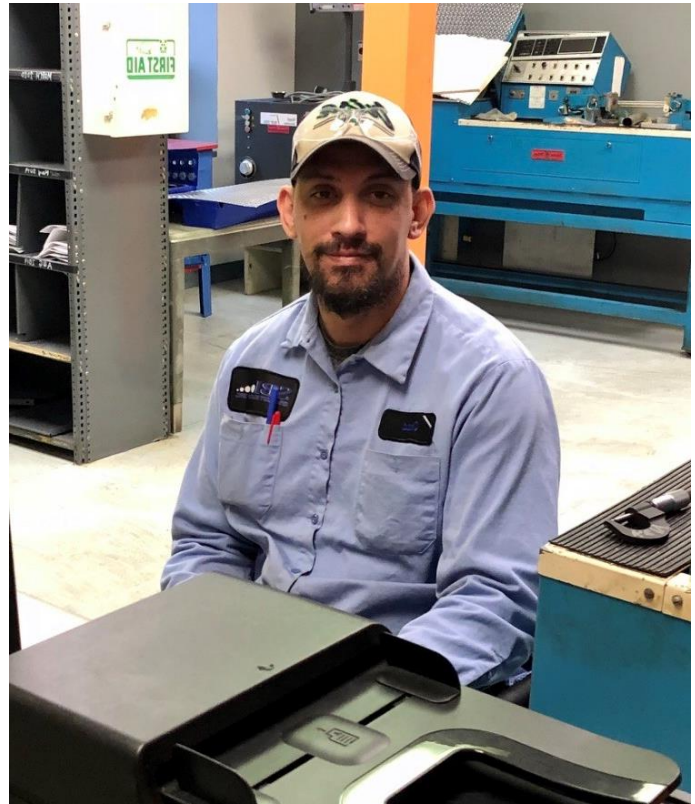
CHAD FISHER

Story by Tina Lambert
Vocational Rehabilitation Services Counselor



Chad Fisher began work at Specialty Rim Supply (SRS) in Terre Haute, Indiana around 5 years ago. This business fabricates metal rims and other items to order. He worked on the factory floor operating machinery until, on December 22nd of 2016, he was in the warehouse attempting to get a metal shipping container down when the wind caught it and it fell on him, crushing his back. He knew right away that the injury was serious as he was unable to move or feel his lower extremities. Chad was taken to Regional Hospital and then airlifted to IU Health Methodist in Indianapolis for surgery, where he spent 7 days in the Neurological Critical Care ICU. He regained some movement, but was released from the hospital utilizing a wheelchair for mobility.

Chad, from day one, remained positive and had no doubt that he would be returning to work. Even with all the changes he was experiencing, he looked to the future and what he could do to move forward. His employer was supportive and, indeed, proactive in assisting Chad with utilizing his Worker's Compensation and coordinating the associated paperwork. Chad's employer assured him from the start that he would have employment with the company once he was ready to return to work, and that it would be worked out in whatever capacity needed at a later date.



Pictured: Chad Fisher sitting at his workstation.

CHAD FISHER

When Chad was released to return to work part time, SRS began discussing the logistics of his return. Things such as how would he get into the building with his wheelchair, what position he would be filling, in what area he would work, and what needed to be done to make that area accessible to him. Accommodations to Chad's work environment were discussed. SRS was totally on board with making any changes needed, to include modifications to his entire environment. Karen Walden, the Human Resources Manager, contacted the Department of Workforce Development and Karen was connected to the Business & Community Engagement Team at Vocational Rehabilitation central office. Karen spearheaded Chad's referral and application to VR and was proactive in assisting in getting records and information to determine eligibility. Karen was a wonderful resource and willing to help in any way she could.



A meeting was held at the business office of SRS to discuss accommodations that Chad might require upon his return to work. A brainstorming session occurred between SRS and VR staff.

This brainstorming session resulted in many ideas for accommodating potential roadblocks to Chad's successful return to work. Things such as, computer use and software that would need to be updated, how to prevent metal shavings from falling on Chad during the metal testing process, office accommodations that might be necessary, and how he would be able to operate machinery requiring the use of foot pedals. It was agreed that a Rehabilitation Technology Evaluation was in order. Easter Seals Crossroads was his vendor of choice. Josh Anderson from Crossroads came and conducted a workplace evaluation.

Results indicated that he needed a software update to communicate with company software, a laptop so that he could work on getting his High School Equivalency, as the company had

CHAD FISHER

indicated that they would like to have him receive training in the future so he could move up within the company.

The evaluation also stated in the recommendations that Chad would benefit from a desk that moved the machine that shaved metal up and down so that the metal shavings would be manageable. This desk could be raised when other employees needed to use it.



Pictured: Chad and his Supervisor Justin

The foot pedals were a more perplexing problem, as there was nothing in existence that would work, per Josh's evaluation. He would need to fabricate something for this accommodation. VR authorized for a Home Depot card to purchase the raw materials. In the meantime, Chad's employer had built a device that worked perfectly for him, so, even though the custom fabrication that Josh made worked, it was not needed. He was able to return the items and refund the money back to VR. Chad's office environment was not something that VR needed to modify, as the company had done that on their own, also. SRS stood beside Chad during this whole process

from the initial injury to his final return to work. He had complete support and never had to worry about his care or his return to work. As a VR Counselor, I have never worked with an employer that was more supportive. Chad is lucky to work for such an exceptional employer and SRS is lucky to have a dedicated, unwavering, enthusiastic employee in Chad.



JACK KELLER



Story by Katie Harris
Director, Graphic Design & Communication
Easterseals Crossroads

Pictured: Jack working on a laptop.

Behind the scenes with Jack

Elementary school was hard for Jack; he achieved all the developmental milestones, but he was very anxious. Professionals arrived at an autism diagnosis in the early school years.

As Jack transitioned to high school, his anxiety continued and his family worked with their school to identify resources. "Sometimes I would be so out of control that they had to remove me from class. I hated to go to lunch; I yelled at people to stay away from my table," said Jack.

"Easterseals Crossroads' Autism Services began working with Jack in high school. He and his therapist Brooke Bastin have a theme of *getting comfortable with being uncomfortable*," said Kim. "When I first started coming here, Brooke would ask me to do something that seemed impossible and I would tell her no. She kept pushing me and well, here we are," said Jack.

JACK KELLER

Career Coach Karen Papp began working with Jack during his sophomore year of high school, and continued to provide Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) through a contract funded by VR until he graduated from high school in 2019. When Karen first met Jack, he was reluctant to meet with her because it disrupted his schedule. In order to meet, Karen initially needed to give him advance notice and have both his parents and his teacher remind him well ahead of time that she was coming to his school. Over time, Jack became more accepting of the change in routine and was able to become more flexible about meeting with her. In individual sessions, Karen and Jack focused on job exploration and workplace readiness skills such as how to interview for a job.

Jack participated in volunteer work experiences for two consecutive summers. The first summer, he volunteered at the Greenfield Public Library. He completed a variety of clerical tasks such as folding brochures, collating, and placing stickers on library books. The following summer, Jack volunteered at the Goodwill Store, where his primary task was purging items from the shelves according to the colored tags. In both of these settings, Karen and Jack were able to address workplace skills such as attendance and punctuality, appropriate dress and grooming, and persistence in completing non-preferred tasks. Jack was able to increase his work tolerance and attention span.

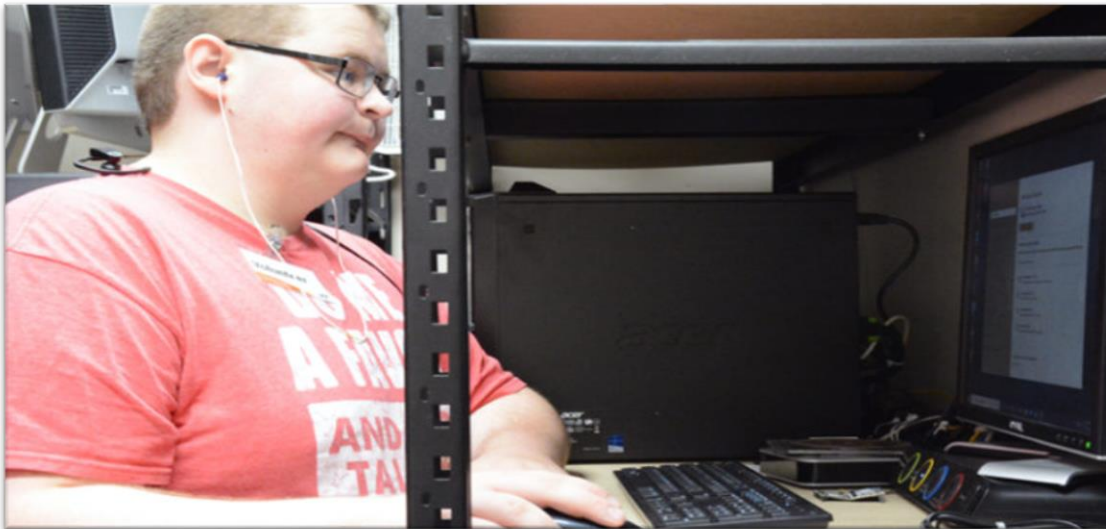
Additionally, Jack participated in workplace tours such as Kroger and Keihin Corporation. He also took a tour of the Erskine Green Training Institute and participated in their Career Sampling Sessions in order to try out various jobs. Jack graduated with the Core 40 diploma and he received an award at the end of the school year for working hard to achieve his good grades and cope positively with the school environment. He adapted to the point where he could eat lunch with other students.

Finally, Karen coordinated with the school to make sure that Jack was referred to Vocational Rehabilitation for additional services to meet his needs.

“To think of Jack as that little first grader who was too afraid to come out from under his desk to seeing him walk across the graduation stage and give a big fist pump – that was huge.” said mom Kim.

JACK KELLER

Jack continues to work with staff at Easterseals Crossroads to discover opportunities for his future, through VR funded Discovery activities. He recently started volunteering in Crossroads' INDATA Depot, which is a program that accepts donated computers to refurbish and give to people with disabilities in our community. Jack checks monitors and power boxes, and he removes old hard drives; he works alongside others each day.



Pictured: Jack working on a desktop computer.

Jack's experiences have helped him gain confidence, create coping mechanisms and develop work skills. His family is thrilled with all of his progress and look forward to his continued success. Because of Easterseals Crossroads and VR programs such as Pre-ETS, Jack is learning to be comfortable with being uncomfortable.

You can see a video of Jack by clicking [\[here\]](#)





LEZLI JACOB

Story by: Stephanie Whelchel
Vocational Rehabilitation
Counselor



Lezli Jacob came to Vocational Rehabilitation in 2014 looking for assistance with employment with the interest of becoming a massage therapist. She had a recent diagnosis of depression and struggled with employment due to challenges with interactions with co-workers and supervisors and other social skills. VR assisted Lezli with counseling sessions to give her the tools to cope with her current stressors contributing to her depression and to give her the tools for managing her depression in the future.

Lezli was very motivated but she had no experience or education in this field. She quickly researched what she needed to achieve her employment goal. I met with Lezli and we put together a plan for employment and discussed how VR could assist with tuition, textbooks and transportation. Lezli enrolled for classes at the Alexandria School of Scientific Therapeutics and earned her massage therapy license in February 2016. Upon earning her license, she moved into the next phase of her services with VR and began creating a business plan to establish herself as a small business. This is a long process but she worked closely with VR and Portals in order to prepare to present her business plan and gain approval to receive VR support to open

LEZLI JACOB

her own business, Lezli's Tailored Therapeutic Massage. This opened the door for additional assistance of equipment and supplies needed for startup of her now successful business.

VR assisted with a massage table, washer and dryer, an iPad and several supplies needed for her to be a professional massage therapist. VR also assisted with the first year of accounting services that helped her in keeping track of her financials.

Lezli has a home based business and this helps her keep her costs low. She has created a peaceful and relaxing environment that keeps her clients coming back. This business model has given Lezli the freedom to travel with her business and she has discussed possible relocation in the future.

Lezli was featured in a Portals spotlight flyer in 2019. She has continued to sustain her business after successful closure with VR in July 2019 and has a strong customer base which has allowed her to earn the income she needs to maintain her home and business needs comfortably. She is earning \$60 per hour and is working at least 20 or more hours per week.



2019 ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Pre-Employment Transition Services

Business & Community Engagement

Commission Accomplishments

Employment First

Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment

PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES

Pre-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES

Pre-employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) are available to students with disabilities age 14-22 who are eligible or potentially eligible for VR services. Pre-ETS activities include job exploration counseling; work based learning experiences; counseling on enrollment in post-secondary training opportunities; workplace readiness training to develop social skills and independent living; and instruction in self-advocacy, including peer mentoring.



Pictured: Students working on computers receiving assistance from their teacher.

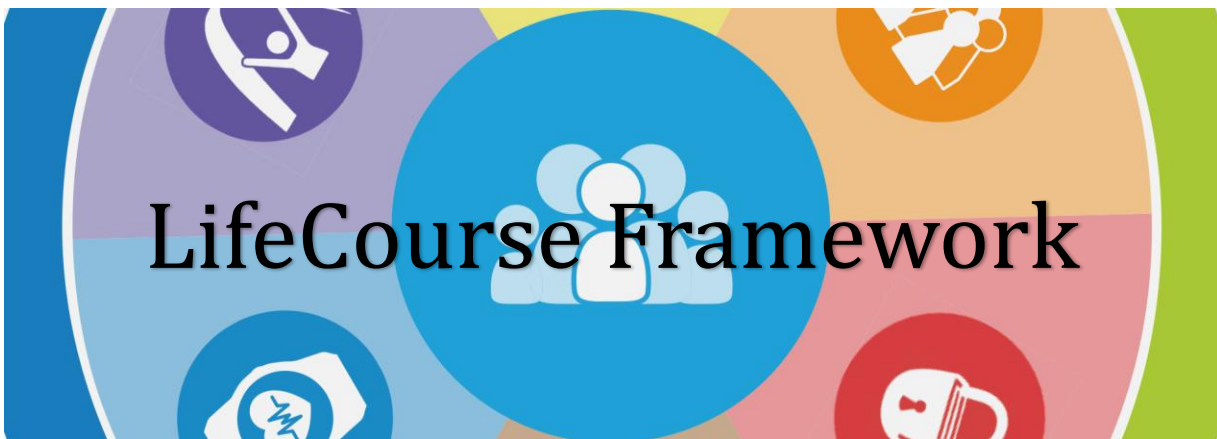
Pre-ETS are available in all 92 counties statewide. BRS continues to carry out services through both VR staff and contractors, and is active in almost 400 schools statewide serving over 7,000 students. Services are provided during the school day, after school, and during the summer, and may be provided one-on-one or in a group setting. More information can be found by visiting our webpage: <https://www.in.gov/fssa/ddrs/5474.htm>

This year, VR created a VR Youth Counselor positions and has hired eight of the ten available positions, with the two remaining positions to be filled in early 2020. Youth counselors work in their respective regions throughout the state assisting with transition and Pre-ETS activities. They have begun working on needs assessments with VR area offices, school systems and Pre-ETS providers and have already introduced many positive changes. They have helped to strengthen the referral process and communication in general with VR and many school systems, assisted providers in accessing schools that were without Pre-ETS programs, and provided numerous trainings and technical assistance to Pre-ETS and transition stakeholders.

PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES



VR continues to collaborate with our fellow state agencies, the Department of Workforce Development (DWD) and the Department of Education (DOE). We have increased our Pre-ETS funding for DWD's JAG (Jobs for America's Graduates) program, which will allow a greater number of students with disabilities to benefit from JAG, as well as strengthening their instruction in self-advocacy and availability of work-based learning activities. VR is working on a number of pilot projects with DOE including increasing communication and information sharing between Pre-ETS providers and local education agencies and collaborating on the new DOE portfolio and graduation pathway requirements.



VR is very excited to have completed five trainings throughout the state of Indiana on the LifeCourse Framework and how it intersects with Pre-ETS. Pre-ETS career coaches received training on the LifeCourse Framework and many have begun to incorporate this framework into their Pre-ETS activities.

For more information about Pre-ETS, visit our webpage:

<https://www.in.gov/fssa/ddrs/5474.htm>

BUSINESS & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

2019 was a busy year for the Business & Community Engagement Team.

The VR Business & Community Engagement Team provides services and resources to employers that will assist them with their disability hiring initiatives. Disability etiquette training and disability awareness programs are a popular request from employers.

FINISH LINE March Disability Awareness Event
Finish Line Corporate Headquarters, Indianapolis

The Business & Community Engagement Team collaborated with Finish Line, an American retail chain that sells athletic shoes and apparel and Dr. Chuck Dietzen, a pediatric rehabilitation expert to host a Disability Awareness & Etiquette training for frontline supervisors and management. The presentation highlighted why inclusion is important in the workplace and celebrated the success of one of his former patients, Kaycee Ann Marshall. Kaycee provided input on her personal experience about living and working as a person with a disability. She shared a video of her recent appearance on the TODAY show and spoke about the recognition she received for her adaptive clothing line.

Career Expo – Celebrating Five Year Partnership

For the past five years, the Business & Community Engagement team collaborated with several organizations for the Career Expo event. This Expo gives employers the opportunity to meet with hundreds of applicants with disabilities who are seeking competitive and integrated employment.



BUSINESS & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Diversify Your Workforce *Addressing Myths and Barriers to Employment*



October National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM)

In honor of NDEAM the Indiana Business & Community Engagement team along with partners held a lunch and learn *Diversify Your Workforce -Addressing Myths and Barriers to Employment*. (See article on page 24) This was a collaborative event to educate HR professionals on looking at untapped labor pools of candidates who may have barriers to employment and how those barriers can be addressed.

Social Media – YOU LIKE US!

The VR Facebook and Twitter accounts continue to see growth. These platforms are used to share stories of success, interesting articles that promote disability awareness, and opportunities for employment for job seekers.



facebook.com/INVocationalRehabilitation



[@IndianaVR](https://twitter.com/IndianaVR)

Employer Tours

The VR Business & Community Engagement team continues to connect with employers who are looking to identify ways to be innovative in their disability inclusion efforts. Conversations address best practices, identify educational opportunities and address concerns around disability hiring. This year over a dozen new employers worked with the team to increase the employment opportunities for adults and youth with disabilities.



Collins Aerospace





Diversify Your Workforce

Addressing Myths and Barriers to Employment

In recognition of National Disability Employment Awareness Month, Indiana Vocational Rehabilitation collaborated with Vincennes University Logistics Training and Education Center and other community stakeholders to hold a lunch and learn for human resource professionals working in the fields of warehousing, logistics and distribution. The purpose of the event was to highlight the relatively untapped labor pools of individuals with disabilities and/or individuals who are justice involved. The event addressed the perceived barriers and dispelled the myths HR professionals often think are preventing them from hiring individuals from these groups.

A moderated panel of subject matter experts included: an attorney who specializes in the American with Disabilities Act (ADA); a representative from the State of Indiana Vocational Rehabilitation program; the Department of Workforce Development and the Department of Corrections. Panelists shared their knowledge around topics of interviewing, disclosing and asking about a disability and/or a criminal background, reasonable accommodations, and other state resources available to employers. There was in-depth discussion with the panelists and attendees.

BUSINESS & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Approximately 44 people attended the event most of whom were Human Resources professionals who had the opportunity to earn 1.5 SHRM continuing education credits.

Planning partners included:
Vincennes University Logistics Training and Education Center, Easterseals Crossroads, Bosma Enterprises, Hendricks Logistics Sector Partnership, Tangram, Melanie Wells, ProLogistix, Toyota Industrial Equipment, Ennis Fabrics.



Pictured: panelist L-R Allison Bertl, Jeff Russell, Carrie Heck and Kevin Stella

Resource Tables: Tangram, Sycamore Services, the US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, Adult and Child Health, Luna Language Services, Easterseals Crossroads: INdata project, BOSMA Enterprises, PACE Indy (Public Advocates in Community Re-Entry), Hendricks Logistics Sector Partnership.

Professional Development

The Employment Services team at Bosma, VR's leadership team and the Business & Community Engagement team attended a three day training on "Improving Business Development Skills" presented by Mississippi State University. The training focused on the importance of business development and recommended approaches to building partnerships with employers.



Pictured are some of the "Improving Business Development Skills" instructors and attendees.

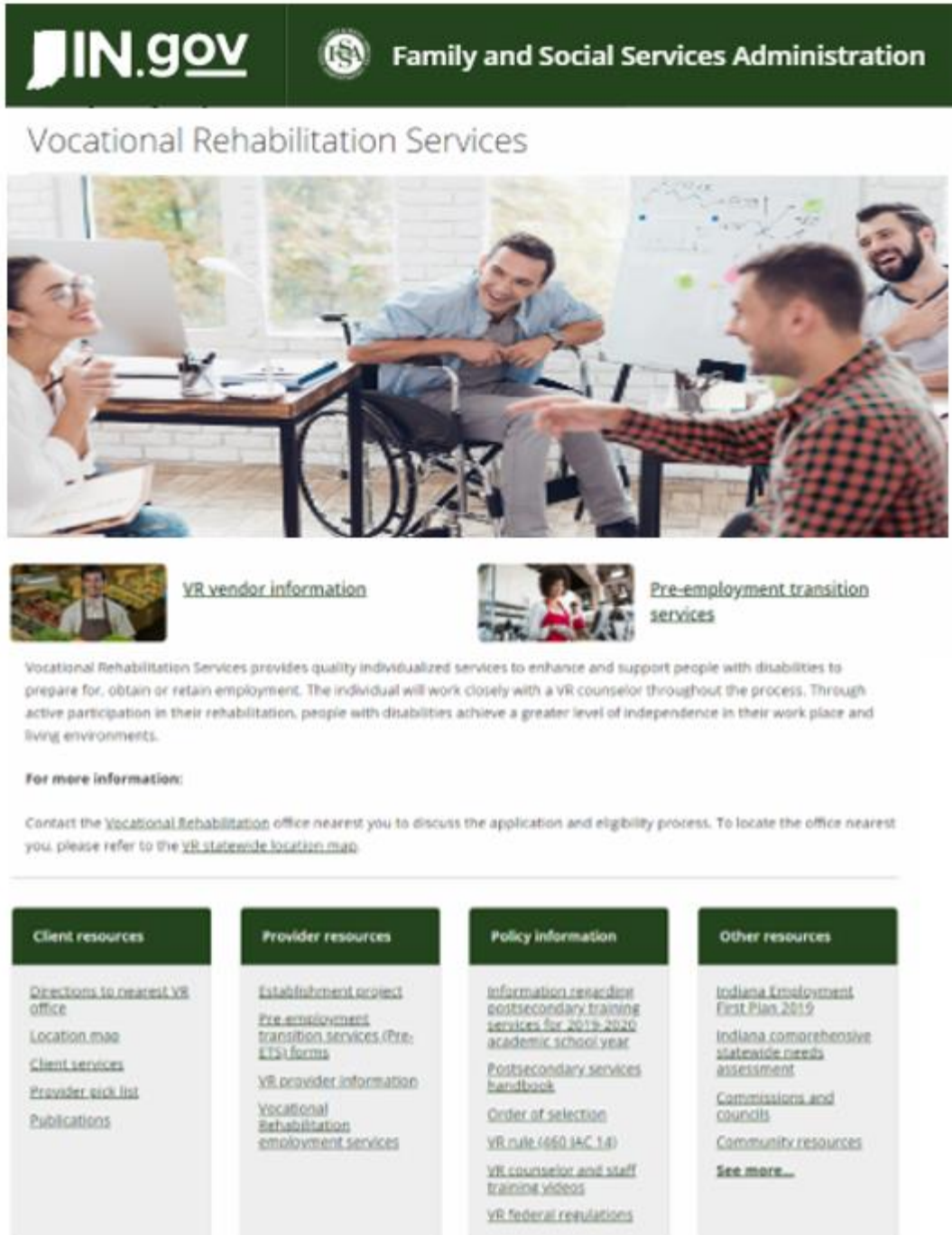
A NEW LOOK!

A NEW LOOK!

The VR Services website has a new look.

The agency is committed to excellent customer service, and users should find it easier to navigate and locate information.


Visit us at:
VRS.IN.GOV



The screenshot shows the homepage of the Vocational Rehabilitation Services website. At the top, there is a dark green header with the 'IN.gov' logo on the left and the 'Family and Social Services Administration' logo and name on the right. Below the header, the main heading reads 'Vocational Rehabilitation Services'. A large photograph depicts a group of people in a meeting; one man is in a wheelchair, and they appear to be discussing documents. Below this image are two smaller images with text: 'VR vendor information' (with a photo of a person in a kitchen) and 'Pre-employment transition services' (with a photo of a person in a red shirt). A paragraph of text describes the services provided. Below this is a section titled 'For more information:' which includes contact information and a link to a 'VR statewide location map'. At the bottom, there are four columns of resource links under the headings: 'Client resources', 'Provider resources', 'Policy information', and 'Other resources'.

IN.gov Family and Social Services Administration

Vocational Rehabilitation Services



[VR vendor information](#)

[Pre-employment transition services](#)

Vocational Rehabilitation Services provides quality individualized services to enhance and support people with disabilities to prepare for, obtain or retain employment. The individual will work closely with a VR counselor throughout the process. Through active participation in their rehabilitation, people with disabilities achieve a greater level of independence in their work place and living environments.

For more information:

Contact the [Vocational Rehabilitation office](#) nearest you to discuss the application and eligibility process. To locate the office nearest you, please refer to the [VR statewide location map](#).

Client resources	Provider resources	Policy information	Other resources
Directions to nearest VR office	Establishment profile	Information regarding postsecondary training services for 2019-2020 academic school year	Indiana Employment First Plan 2019
Location map	Pre-employment transition services (Pre-ETS) forms	Postsecondary services handbook	Indiana comprehensive statewide needs assessment
Client services	VR provider information	Order of selection	Commissions and councils
Provider sick list	Vocational Rehabilitation employment services	VR rule (660 IAC 14)	Community resources
Publications		VR counselor and staff training videos	See more...
		VR federal regulations	

COMMISSION ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The following accomplishments were achieved by the Commission during 2019:

- Election of new VR Commission Officers;
 - James Michaels, *Commission Chairperson*
 - David Spradley, *Vice-Chairperson*
 - Karen Rusk, *Secretary*
- Reviewed committee descriptions and realigned committee responsibilities and membership to be more effective;
- Identified guest presentations for meetings as a mechanism for increased knowledge, collaboration, or outreach to expand statewide awareness of the Commission;
- Worked with state government leaders in an effort to ensure that the Commission's membership was in compliance with state and federal mandates;
- Conducted two extra meetings to provide feedback and forward progress on new requirements outlined in Indiana's Employment First Act; and
- Completed a draft Employment First Plan and posted the draft for public comments.

EMPLOYMENT FIRST

With the implementation of Employment First legislation in 2017, the responsibilities of the Indiana Commission on Rehabilitation Services were expanded. A new responsibility of the Commission is to provide recommendations concerning the implementation and progress toward advancing competitive, integrated employment for individuals with disabilities as described in IC 22-9-11.(5).

In 2018, the Commission on Rehabilitation Services established an Employment First Committee and identified several stakeholders, including both appointed Commission members and non-members, to serve on this committee. The committee was very active throughout 2018 and 2019, conducting numerous meetings throughout the year as a committee and adding two additional full Commission meetings to focus on development of a draft Employment First plan. The Draft plan was completed in November 2019 and was posted for public comment. The Commission will review public comments and finalize the plan in early 2020.

The Draft Employment First State Plan can be viewed at:

<https://www.in.gov/fssa/ddrs/4205.htm>

BRS would like to extend our appreciation to the Commission and all members of the Employment First Committee for all of their continued efforts in 2019 to improve employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities.

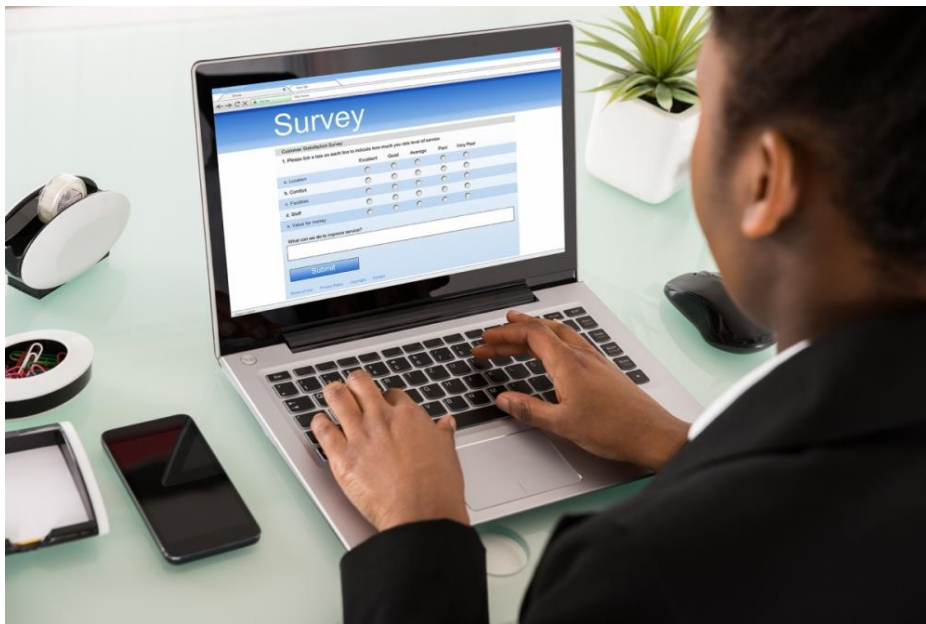
COMPREHENSIVE NEEDS ASSESSMENT

COMPREHENSIVE NEEDS ASSESSMENT

THE RESULTS ARE IN!

Vocational Rehabilitation asked for feedback on the need for services or gaps in services for individuals with disabilities, including those with the most significant disabilities and those who are unserved or underserved.

While Indiana's formal comprehensive statewide needs assessment is conducted every three years, data is gathered continuously. The triennial comprehensive statewide needs assessment is a joint effort of VR and the Commission on Rehabilitative Services. The results are in and the 2019 comprehensive statewide needs assessment is now available. [Click here](#) to view the results.



VR DATA HIGHLIGHTS

- Indiana VR continued to operate under an order of selection in FFY19 with one 'open' disability priority category (priority category 1 – eligible individuals with a most significant disability), and two 'closed' priority categories (priority category 2 – eligible individuals with a significant disability; and priority category 3 – all other eligible individuals). Eligible individuals assigned to an 'open' priority category receive VR services without delay, while those assigned to a 'closed' priority category are deferred for services. Information about organizations and resources that may be able to assist individuals with their employment needs is shared during intake, and during a semi-annual mailing to individuals in deferred services status. Information about these other organizations and resources is also posted on the VR website, including local resource guides developed by each VR area office.
- VR served more individuals than projected in the most recent state plan. State plan estimates outlined a projected 13,400 individuals to be served each year; however, VR served nearly 14,000 individuals in FFY19.
- Additionally, less individuals were deferred for services than projected. State plan estimates outlined a projected 1600 individuals to be deferred annually, however only 859 eligible individuals were deferred for services during FFY19.
- As of the end of FFY19, the total number of individuals who had been deferred for services since the order of selection was implemented in August 2017 was 2,637.
- The percent of individuals served by VR who have a most significant disability continues to increase. 78% of VR participants served during FFY19 were in priority category 1, compared to 62% in FFY18 and 45% in FFY17.
- Similarly, the employment outcomes by disability priority category continue to shift with a higher portion of outcomes achieved by individuals with a most significant disability. In FFY19, of the 2,160 VR participants who achieved employment outcomes, 72% were individuals with a most significant disability compared to only 41% in FFY18, and 32% in FFY17.
- In federal fiscal year 2019, average hourly wages of individuals achieving an employment outcome was \$11.48.

“WHY I SERVE ON THE COMMISSION”

“WHY I SERVE ON THE COMMISSION”



James Michaels – Commission Chair

“I am participating on the Rehabilitation Commission because I am a former consumer of VR services and I attribute much of my success to the wonderful services I received and support from my VR Counselor. It is my sincere desire to be a part of ensuring that others with disabilities have the same opportunities that was afforded to me.”

Donna Elbrecht - Commission Member

I serve on the Commission because over my career I have seen the importance of employment choices for people with disabilities and overall well-being. Having a family member that is blind, I know firsthand the importance work plays in overall health, self-confidence and sense of purpose. My personal and professional experience drives my passion for continued innovation and employment choices for Hoosier’s with disabilities.



Michelle Oja – Commission Member

I serve on the Commission because over the course of my life I have grown up with, worked with, and worked for people with disabilities. My aunt has Down’s syndrome, and I have seen firsthand how much being employed means to her. As a special educator working with high school students, I have seen how school influences their ability to access the adult world later on in life. As a person with a chronic illness, I am a person with a physical disability. VR may be an important part of my life at some point, and I want to ensure people served by VR receive the services they need.



COMMISSION OUTREACH

The Commission on Rehabilitation Services recognizes the importance of outreach activities throughout the state, which have included networking with governor-appointed boards, councils, and commissions, as well as other agencies and organizations. Appropriate steps were taken to ensure Commission member representation at conferences throughout the year. Each year the Commission develops a new work plan for outreach, which includes the identification of major training events.

The Commission on Rehabilitation Services welcomes your opinion about how BRS is meeting your needs and employment goals. The information collected will help the Commission and BRS to improve services and expand employment opportunities for all Hoosiers with disabilities.

- Please contact us if you would like to:
 - Learn more about the Commission
 - Share your ideas
 - Attend a Commission meeting
 - Be considered for appointment to the Commission



COMMISSION MEMBERS

The Rehabilitation Act requires the State VR Agency to establish a State Rehabilitation Council (SRC). Council members are appointed by the governor and serve no more than two consecutive full terms. No terms can exceed three years. Indiana's Commission on Rehabilitation Services is comprised of the following individuals representing specific categories outlined in the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Section 361.17. The following individuals were appointed members during federal fiscal year 2019.

There are several additional pending membership appointments, including representation from the Client Assistance Program, INSOURCE, and additional representation from business.

Christine Dahlberg, Indiana Governor's Council for People with Disabilities

Danie'l Mize, Self-Advocates of Indiana

David Spradley, National Alliance on Mental Illness

Traci Taylor, Independent Living Center of Eastern Indiana

Frederick Vaiana, State Independent Living Council

Donna Elbrecht, Easterseals Arc of Northeast Indiana

Scott Beauchamp, Indianapolis Yellow Cab

Sarah Chestnut, INARF

Theresa Koleszar, Vocational Rehabilitation Services

Rebecca McCuaig, Governor's Workforce Cabinet

Michelle Oja, Department of Education

Eric Heeter, Division of Mental Health and Addiction

Richard Propes, Bureau of Developmental Disability Services

CONTACT THE COMMISSION



Indiana's Commission on Rehabilitation Services

About the Commission

Appointed by the Governor, members of Indiana's Commission on Rehabilitation Services are knowledgeable of and have concern for rehabilitation and disability issues. A majority of the members are people with disabilities.

Commission members represent the disability community in matters pertaining to the quality and effectiveness of Indiana's Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VR). Serving in an advisory capacity, the Commission provides oversight of VR programs, policies and procedures by:

- Partnering with VR to develop goals and priorities,
- Making recommendations on program policies,
- Reviewing and providing comments on the State Plan for VR,
- Collaborating with other Governor appointed councils,
- Increasing public awareness of disability issues such as employment, education, and independent living in the community,
- Assisting VR staff in the administration of a consumer satisfaction survey,
- Monitoring and evaluating the VR program,
- Producing an annual report that addresses the effectiveness of VR services.



Get Involved

- Attend Commission meetings and share your views.
- Ask a member to contact you so that you can share your views.
- Tell a member that you would like to join the Commission.
- Share information about the Commission with others.

Commission Meetings

The Commission has at least four business meetings each year. We invite you to share your comments about VR services during the open forum which is scheduled during each meeting. If you would like information about the meeting dates, times, and locations, please contact us or visit our website.

You may also request that a Commission member contact you. Your name and contact information will be forwarded to a Commission member in your area upon your request.



Indiana
**VOCATIONAL
REHABILITATION**
Empowering People. Changing Lives.

Contact us

- **Mail to:**
Indiana Commission on
Rehabilitation Services
c/o Vocational Rehabilitation Services
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PO Box 7083
Indianapolis, IN 46207-7083
- **Email:**
VRCommission.VR@fssa.IN.gov
- **Telephone:**
Toll free: 800-545-7763
VP to VP: 317-542-3449 or 317-542-3324
- **Online:**
<https://www.VRS.IN.gov>