MINNESOTA STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL - GENERAL

ANNUAL REPORT

SUPPORTING PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES TO ACHIEVE THEIR EMPLOYMENT GOALS.

PROGRAM YEAR 2017

JULY 1, 2017 - JUNE 30, 2018

FAREWELL MESSAGE FROM KIM PECK

Kim Peck was appointed director of Vocational Rehabilitation Services in May 2005, a particularly challenging time in the VR program's history. In November 2018, Kim retired after a long public service career that included the 13 years of her tenure as VRS director. During that time, Kim always worked closely with the State Rehabilitation Council – not just in her capacity as an ex officio member, but also as a leader who believed that the best work is done via partnership and collaboration. In that spirit, the SRC is providing space in this year's annual report to reproduce a portion of Kim's final "Message from the Director" to all VRS staff – a message that reflects on the challenges that have been faced, and met, on Kim's watch.

Clarity of purpose with a robust and relevant mission and strategic framework. Organizational effectiveness requires clarity of purpose and direction or, as Jim Collins, author of Good to Great, says it: "Greatness is not a function of circumstance. Greatness, it turns out, is largely a matter of conscious choice and discipline." While I won't be so bold as to suggest that VRS has achieved greatness, I believe the direction and strategic priorities set forth in 2006 and updated twice since then have served the organization well. Those priorities—competitive integrated employment outcomes, organizational vitality, strong partnerships, and employer engagement—have been and will continue to be solid cornerstones for our work.

Embracing our leadership role in Minnesota's disability employment services system. As set forth in the VRS Value Proposition, VRS is uniquely positioned to provide leadership for the disability employment services system that results in competitive, integrated employment for people with disabilities. Together, we have recognized that as the steward of public dollars, our responsibilities extend beyond VRS customers and staff. We have a responsibility to promote and support innovation across the entire system. Over the past decade, we have made numerous investments in innovation and promising practices and have demonstrated our commitment to help move the disability employment services system forward to promote better employment outcomes for Minnesotans with disabilities.

Building a culture that values and embraces partnerships. I have long believed that the best work is done via collaboration and partnership. And there is no disputing that the customers served in VRS often have complex needs that we—VRS—cannot fully meet without the help of others. Over the past decade, VRS has come to recognize that our diverse network of community partners are much more than "vendors"; they are essential and trusted members of the "rehab community" whose contributions are critical to our effectiveness and to the success of our customers. In 2005, the prevailing attitude in VRS was one of "us vs. them." Today, the mindset is one of "we"—how can "we" work together to get the job done.

Ready and willing to take on the next challenge. There have been innumerable changes to VRS's work during my tenure and I am immensely grateful and proud to say that staff have consistently responded with a willingness to step up and do what needs to be done. This has been evident in every part of the VRS organization – in all program areas, in administrative services and in field operations. When WIOA was signed into law on July 22, 2014, the public VR program was mandated to make some of the most profound changes experienced in its 94-year history. Once again, staff stepped forward with courage and enthusiasm —"How can I help? This transformational work is the reason I came to VRS." If ever there was a measure of an organization's strength and vitality, it would be its capacity to navigate profound and complex changes without losing sight of its core mission and purpose.

Left to right: Chris Gramentz, Alex Koon, Marcia Colby and Calder Jordan

COLLABORATION BRINGS SUCCESS

VRS, TRAVELERS, LIFEWORKS FORGE INNOVATIVE PARTNERSHIP

In 2016, Travelers, a Fortune 500 company and a leading provider of property casualty insurance for auto, home and business, contacted Vocational Rehabilitation Services and proposed a partnership that could lead to dozens of jobs for people with disabilities.

The collaboration would leverage the expertise of VR counselors and placement specialists to identify qualified VRS participants for eight weeks of training and work experience leading to potential full-time employment. It would also enlist the resources of Lifeworks, a Twin Cities community rehabilitation program, to provide training and job coaching services.

The partnership launched in September 2017. A year later the VRS, Travelers, Lifeworks collaboration had conducted five eight-week training sessions resulting in the hiring of 11 legal operations specialists at Travelers' St. Paul business resource center, and four more individuals were moving into full-time employment. The collaboration provides the opportunity for individuals with disabilities to get a foot in the door with the potential to build a career at Travelers.

The Travelers story shows how collaboration works to the benefit of all involved parties. It also shows how VRS strives to achieve each of the four strategic goals (see Strategic Goals sidebar) that the organization has adopted to define, guide, and measure its work. The State Rehabilitation Council is featuring this story as a way to report on the status of Minnesota's Vocational Rehabilitation program.

VRS STRATEGIC GOALS

Early in 2018 Vocational Rehabilitation Services, with input from the State Rehabilitation Council, began the task of evaluating and refreshing the strategic goals that define, guide, and measure the work of the organization. VRS leadership adopted the following four goals as the strategic framework and guiding principles for all VRS operations.

GOAL 1
Promoting Job Seeker Success: Provide Vocational Rehabilitation program participants with person-centered, quality services that result in competitive, integrated employment for Minnesotans with the most significant disabilities.

GOAL 2
Building Business Relationships: Build long-term, collaborative relationships with business partners to increase competitive, integrated employment for Minnesotans with disabilities.

GOAL 3
Enhancing Organization Vitality: Create an environment for staff to be passionate about their work.

GOAL 4
Leveraging Partnerships: Convene and strengthen collaboration to better serve Minnesotans with disabilities.

Marcia Colby pictured

Promoting Job Seeker Success

Three stories: Alex Koon, Calder Jordan, Marcia Colby

Calder Jordan spent many years earning less than minimum wage. Alex Koon had a degree in psychology but had difficulty finding and keeping a job. Marcia Colby studied graphic design but couldn't find steady work, and was unemployed for more than a year before attending an open house to learn about a possible job in the Travelers Business Resource Center in St. Paul. All three are now working as legal operations specialists, earning well above the minimum wage, plus benefits – enough to achieve the independence that comes from having a regular paycheck.

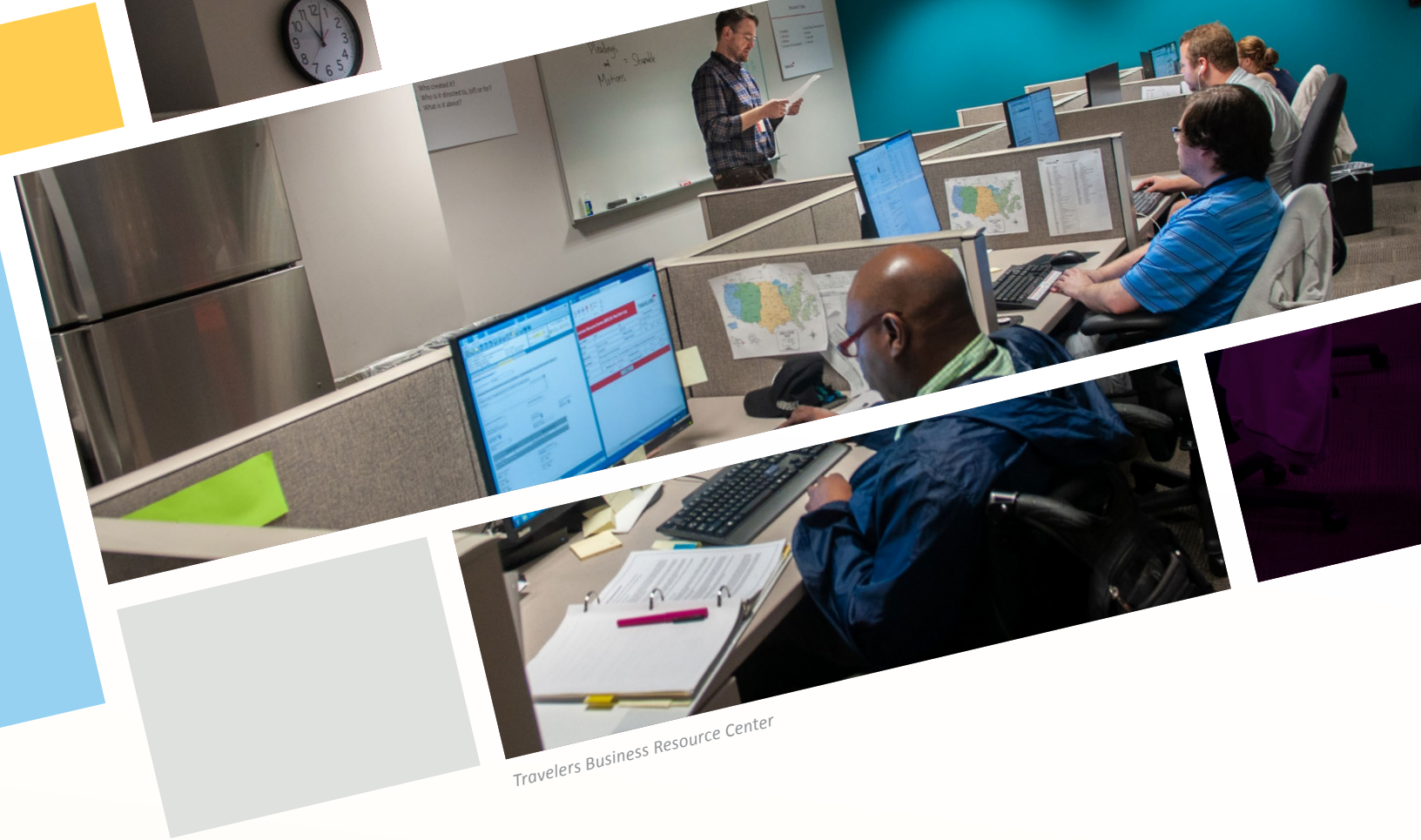
"I was ready to move on, but I needed a stable income to make car payments and rent," says Alex, who at 28 had been living with his parents in Edina. "Now I'm completely independent."

Marcia, Alex, and Calder each participated in the unique partnership under the red umbrella that is Travelers' distinctive logo. All have a disability or disabilities that led them to seek employment-related services from Minnesota's Vocational Rehabilitation program.

"I don't know if I'd even have a job if it wasn't for this," says Marcia. "I'm happy here. I like the people. I can see myself staying and building a career here."

The work involves categorizing and cataloging hundreds of legal documents each day – everything from lawyers' briefs, motions, and pleadings to discovery and trial documents – for all of the company's legal offices west of the Mississippi River.

"At first I had no idea what it was. It sounded pretty boring," Calder admits. "But I wanted to work on a computer, and when I started here I said, 'Wow! This is perfect.'"



Travelers Business Resource Center

"It's not a typical data entry job," says Josh Mathiowetz, a job coach who works closely with the employees. "There's a ton of gray area, and it takes judgment and discernment."

Most of the individuals who now work in the Business Resource Center were identified and screened by VRS counselors and placement staff. The success in helping to create the recruitment and training program, and to place participants into quality jobs with long-term advancement potential, illustrates the VRS commitment to the first of its four strategic goals: promoting job seeker success.

Building Business Relationships

Success for the business and for the individuals who are employed there

The second VRS strategic goal is building business relationships. Marci Jasper, a VRS Program Specialist in Placement, says that "Travelers identified a specific business need and found a way to create a project that met its demand for skilled and specialized employees. The company also decided to be inclusive in its recruiting, training, and hiring practices."

Marci worked closely with Travelers and Lifeworks, a Twin Cities community rehabilitation program, to create a recruitment and training initiative that matched qualified VRS job seekers with competitive, integrated employment opportunities and helped Travelers develop best practices for recruitment and retention of individuals with disabilities.

Jim McMahon is Travelers' director of inclusive talent acquisition in Hartford, Connecticut. He traveled to Minnesota last summer to tell his story to the State Rehabilitation Council. His advice to other businesses who might be considering a similar project: "It's not as hard as you think it is. There will be speed bumps, but

Alex Koon pictured

don't worry; keep your solutions simple. Don't overthink things. Have fun while you're doing it.

Chris Gramentz, manager of the Business Resource Center, has a strong professional relationship with Marci, the VRS Program Specialist in Placement, and Josh, the Lifeworks job coach. They share a commitment to a long-term relationship that leads to the recruitment, training, and retention of individuals who can thrive and advance in their careers at Travelers. Alex Koon, one of the first recruits, has already reached a point where he can step in and cover training of new employees when Chris is unable to be there.

Enhancing Organizational Vitality

Person-centered approach brings results and satisfaction

The third strategic goal is enhancing organizational vitality to create an environment for VRS staff to be passionate about their work. In the past few years, VRS has been aggressive in enculturating counselors, managers, and staff in person-centered thinking and practices – an organized process of discovery and action that identifies what is important both to and for an individual."

LeAnn Kleaver, VRS counselor who serves on the State Rehabilitation Council, says, "It is exciting to have Travelers as a partner that provides an opportunity to develop a set of skills that will foster future professional growth for the individuals we serve. This is a great opportunity for everyone involved."

Heather Felderman, the VRS counselor who worked with Alex Koon, says, "I appreciate the value of the 'Teaming Approach' in the work that we do in VRS and with partners. Alex benefited from a team of people, including Marci and Josh, while he was in training. They saw the abilities and talents Alex contributes to his job. They also provided insight and support to his supervisor Chris on communication strategies with Alex."

Rachel Fitzgerald, the VRS counselor who worked with Calder Jordan, adds that training in person-centered thinking and motivational interviewing were valuable tools: "With the support I provided, Calder's motivation grew and seemed to unfold before my eyes. He had a commitment to working in competitive, integrated employment. He wanted to earn money. He wanted his own place, he wanted to support himself and not be dependent on his family. Calder went from saying 'Who would want me?' to 'They want me!'"

Leveraging Partnerships

Collaboration with community partners and business crucial to success

The Travelers project provides a near-perfect example of leveraging partnerships. Travelers had a desired business outcome, recruiting skilled workers, and VRS had a mission to provide counseling services and job placement for individuals with disabilities. But to make the project work, another component was crucial: training, job coaching, and long-term support for individuals on the job. Lifeworks, which already had a 20-year relationship with Travelers, filled that gap.

Josh Mathiowetz working with Calder Jordan

Through the partnership, VRS and Lifeworks identify and screen potential candidates for a position at Travelers and also participate in the job interview process. Lifeworks is the employer of record for an eight-week training period and also provides a full-time job coach for the first couple of weeks of training. VRS funds paid internships for the first four weeks and Travelers reimburses Lifeworks for all wages paid in weeks five through eight.

Over time the job coach gradually steps back to a part-time role. Josh Mathiowetz, the Lifeworks job coach, describes his role as providing "just a little bit of extra guidance" to help people succeed and attain a measure of professionalism on the job. "That's the word I use all the time," he says. "How can we be professional in a professional environment?"

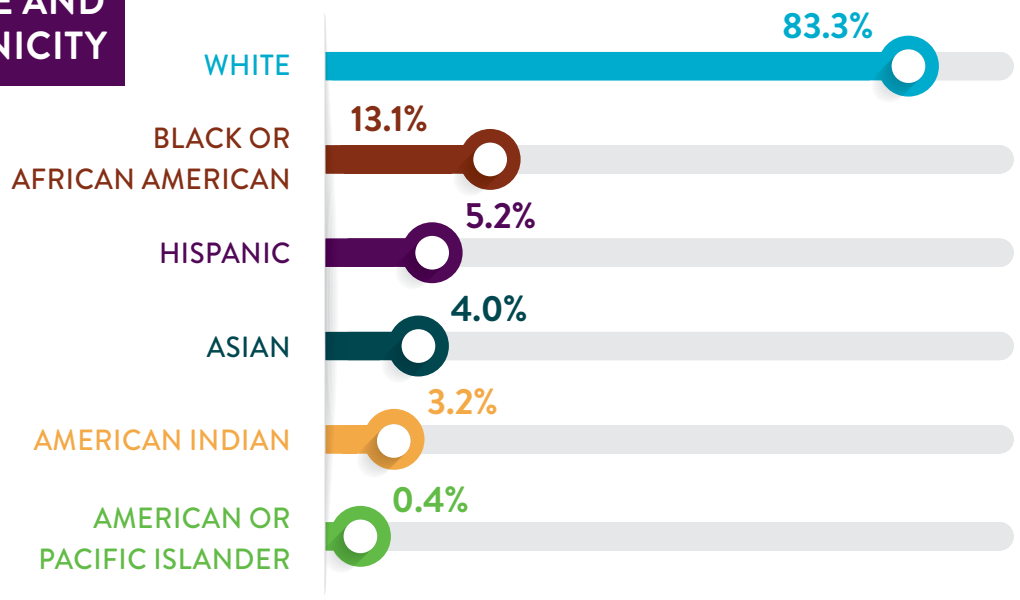
Marci Jasper, the VRS Program Specialist in Placement, continues to participate in regular meetings with Chris and Josh and says: "This only works because of the strong and durable partnership, led by the business and supported by VRS and Lifeworks."

The partnership didn't happen overnight, and it took a lot of planning to bring it all together. But after two years the project is clicking along – a national model of how to make collaboration work.

"This only works because of the strong and durable partnership, led by the business and supported by VRS and Lifeworks."

WHO VR SERVES

RACE AND ETHNICITY



GENDER

57.1% Male

42.8% Female

0.1% Did Not Self-Identify

AGE AT APPLICATION

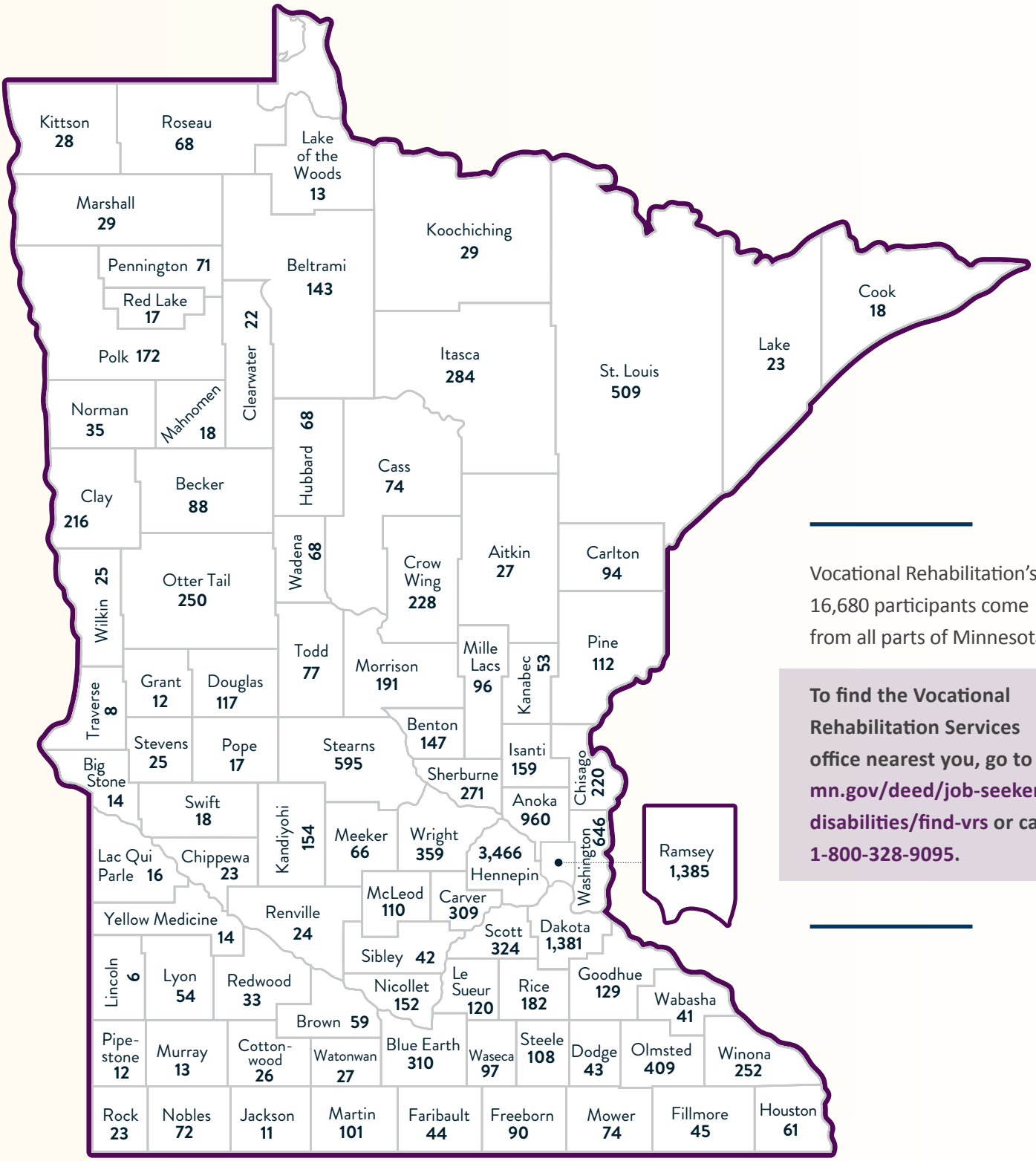
AGE GROUP	# SERVED IN PY2013	# SERVED IN PY2015	% CHANGE PY13 TO PY15	# SERVED IN PY2017	% CHANGE PY15 TO PY17
14-18	5,095	5,371	5.4%	5,750	7.1%
19-21	1,658	1,812	9.3%	2,513	38.7%
22-24	713	723	1.4%	803	11.1%
25-64	7,928	7,734	-2.4%	7,471	-3.4%
65+	58	93	60.3%	143	53.8%
Total	15,452	15,733	1.8%	16,680	6.0%

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

PRIMARY DISABILITY GROUPS

PRIMARY DISABILITY GROUP	# SERVED IN PY2013	# SERVED IN PY2015	% CHANGE PY13 TO PY15	# SERVED IN PY2017	% CHANGE PY15 TO PY17
Intellectual Disability	1,107	1,363	23.1%	2,168	59.1%
Autism	1,568	2,008	28.1%	2,810	39.9%
Traumatic Brain Injury/Stroke	543	541	-0.4%	580	7.2%
Serious Mental Illness	4,913	5,241	6.7%	5,360	2.3%
Other Mental Impairments	386	361	-6.5%	352	-2.5%
Other Physical Impairments	1,219	1,034	-15.2%	919	-11.1%
Orthopedic/Neurological Disorders	1,415	1,241	-12.3%	1,100	-11.4%
Learning Disabilities	3,264	3,011	-7.8%	2,659	-11.7%
Deaf/Hearing Loss	686	674	-1.7%	539	-20.0%
Chemical Dependency	208	147	-28.3%	106	-27.9%
All Other Impairments	143	112	-21.7%	87	-22.3%
Total	15,452	15,733	1.80%	16,680	6.00%

The population VRS serves has become more complex since the passage of WIOA, specifically the implementation of Section 511 requirements. Section 511 places limitations on the payment of subminimum wages to ensure that individuals with disabilities have access to information and services that will enable them to achieve competitive integrated employment. Individuals who may previous been "tracked" into subminimum wage situations are now seeking competitive integrated employment through VR services.



Vocational Rehabilitation's 16,680 participants come from all parts of Minnesota.

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

Out of State . . . . . 58 **State Total 16,680**

PY 2017 EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES BY AGE

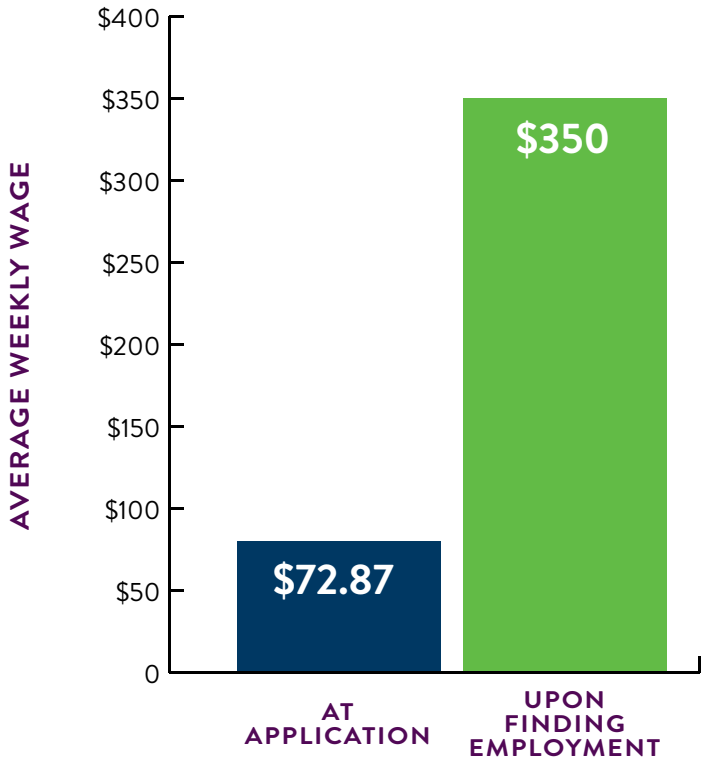
AGE AT EXIT	# PARTICIPANTS	AVERAGE NUMBER OF HOURS WORKED PER WEEK	AVERAGE HOURLY WAGE	AVERAGE WEEKLY EARNINGS
14-18	57	29.7	$11.45	$349.89
19-21	598	28.8	$11.34	$337.80
22-24	378	25.9	$11.77	$325.76
25+	1,668	25.6	$13.12	$359.18
Grand Total	2,701	26.5	$12.50	$349.58

PY 2017 EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES BY PLACEMENT TYPE

PLACEMENT BY TYPE OF EMPLOYMENT	# PARTICIPANTS	% OF PLACEMENTS	AVG HOURLY WAGES	AVG WEEKLY HOURS	WEEKLY EARNINGS
Competitive Integrated Employment	2172	80.4%	$12.68	27.5	$368.00
Self-Employment	22	0.8%	$18.75	18.1	$345.00
Supported Employment in Competitive Integrated Setting	507	18.8%	$11.93	23.1	$299.45
Total	2,701	100.0%	$12.50	26.5	$350.00

COMPARISON OF EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES BY PROGRAM YEAR

PY	EMPLOYEE OUTCOMES	AVG HRLY WAGE	AVG WKLY HOURS	MONTHLY EARNINGS
2012	2,752	$10.96	28.3	$325
2013	2,873	$10.95	28.3	$321
2014	2,944	$11.33	27.9	$330
2015	2,947	$12.00	27.8	$349
2016	2,807	$12.41	27.2	$354
2017	**2,701**	**$12.50**	**26.5**	**$350**



VR PARTICIPANTS SEE RESULTS

This year, **2,701 people found work** through VR. Upon finding employment, **wages increased an average of 380%**.

JOB PLACEMENTS BY BROAD CATEGORY[1]

JOB CATEGORY	# OF PARTICIPANTS	AVG HOURS	HOURLY WAGE	AVG WEEKLY
Office and Administrative Support	462	26.5	$12.01	$331.00
Food Preparation and Serving-Related	420	22.4	$10.41	$236.94
Human Services	354	32.1	$17.15	$1,354.53
Sales and Related	341	24	$10.62	$259.99
Professional	274	37.0	$19.30	$464.04
Building and Grounds Cleaning and Maintenance	268	22.1	$11.23	$257.73
Transportation and Material Moving	243	26.8	$12.33	$344.34
Production	225	31.7	$12.65	$415.50
Other	114	35.9	$14.66	$538.33
Total	**2,701**	**26.5**	**$12.50**	**$350.00**

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

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

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

For more information, please contact Karla Eckhoff at Karla.F.Eckhoff@state.mn.us or 651-259-7364.

You may apply online by using the Online Application:
commissionsandappointments.sos.state.mn.us/Position

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EMPLOYMENT AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SERVICES

The Department of Employment and Economic Development is an equal opportunity employer and service provider. Upon request, this information can be made available in alternate formats for individuals with disabilities by calling **651-259-7364** or emailing **Karla.F.Eckhoff@state.mn.us**.

The VR program receives 74.05 percent of its funding through a grant from the U.S. Department of Education. For federal fiscal year 2019, the total amount of grant funds awarded were $41,796,129. The remaining 25.5 percent of the costs ($14,300,000) were funded by Minnesota state appropriations.