



COLORADO STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL'S

# 2019 Annual Report

Division of Vocational Rehabilitation



**COLORADO**

Department of  
Labor and Employment

Division of Vocational Rehabilitation



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**COLORADO**

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# DVR & SRC Leadership and Contact Information

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### ■ Executive Leadership Team

**Kristin Corash**

Director, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation

**Stacy Evans**

Deputy, Field Services

**Joleen Schaake**

Deputy, Operations Management

### ■ State Rehabilitation Council Officers

**Marilee Boylan, Chair**

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**Katherine Carol, 1st Vice Chair**

[tangoresults@gmail.com](mailto:tangoresults@gmail.com)

**Lee Wheeler-Berliner, 2nd Vice Chair**

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## State Rehabilitation Council

### Vision Statement



The Colorado State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) envisions a day when Coloradans with and without disabilities have the necessary resources to fully participate in all aspects of life; and when rates of employment and economic advancement are comparable regardless of perceived or confirmed disability.

### Mission Statement



The SRC increases opportunities for Coloradans with disabilities to pursue success as they define it. Our members work in service of equality and access to full participation in all aspects of life, by advocating for the budgetary and programmatic integrity of the vocational rehabilitation program in the Centennial State, a resource for increasing employment and economic advancement.

# Purpose of the Council

The Colorado State Rehabilitation Council is established under the authority of Section 105 of the Federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended.

The SRC provides guidance at the systemic and policy level that assures the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation assists Coloradans with disabilities to achieve meaningful employment and maximize individual independence goals. The Council provides DVR with an external, consumer-oriented perspective and advises DVR on the vocational programs, policies, services and other issues that affect Coloradans with disabilities. The SRC provides consumers, business representatives, service providers and other citizens with a formal mechanism to influence the direction of rehabilitation services in Colorado.

## The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) Services

DVR supports individuals with disabilities to prepare for, obtain, advance in, and maintain employment by providing a range of services based on individual employment needs and goals.

Rehabilitation Counselors work closely with each person to determine an employment goal and identify and arrange for the services that will be needed to achieve this goal.

### Services that may be provided through DVR:

- One-on-one vocational rehabilitation counseling and guidance;
- Pre-employment Transition Services to students with disabilities;
- Physical and mental restoration services;
- Training services, including vocational, academic, and personal adjustment;
- Job related services, including, job-seeking skills training, job placement, and job coaching;
- Specialized services for individuals who are blind, deaf, and deaf-blind, including interpreter services, note-taking services, and reader services;
- Rehabilitation technology services, including assistive technology devices, assistive technology services, and rehabilitation engineering services to address barriers encountered with employment;
- Supportive services, such as maintenance, transportation, personal assistance services, and services to family members may also be provided if necessary.



# SRC Responsibilities

The overall purpose of the council is to work in collaboration and partnership with the DVR to review, analyze, and advise the DVR regarding the performance of the agency.

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## The Council shall:

- Review, analyze, and advise DVR regarding the performance of the responsibilities of DVR, particularly responsibilities relating to eligibility (including order of selection).
- In partnership with DVR, develop, agree to and review state goals and priorities as well as evaluate the effectiveness of the DVR and submit reports of progress to the commissioner.
- Assist with the creation of the State Plan.
- When feasible, conduct a review and analysis of the effectiveness of, and consumer satisfaction with:
  - the functions performed by DVR;
  - vocational rehabilitation services provided by DVR and other public and private entities responsible for providing vocational rehabilitation services to individuals with disabilities;
  - employment outcomes achieved by eligible individuals receiving services under this title, including the availability of health and other employment benefits in connection with such employment outcomes.
- Prepare and submit an annual report to the Governor and Commissioner on the status of DVR programs within Colorado and make it available to the public.
- Coordinate activities with the activities of other councils within the State, including:
  - the Statewide Independent Living Council;
  - the advisory panel established under section 612(a)(20) of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act;
  - the State Council on Developmental Disabilities;
  - State mental health planning council;
  - the State workforce development board; and
  - the activities of entities carrying out programs under the Assistive Technology Act of 1998.
- Provide for coordination and the establishment of working relationships between the DVR and the Statewide Independent Living Council and centers for independent living within the State.
- The Council shall prepare, in conjunction with DVR, a plan for the provision of such resources, including such staff and other personnel.
- Perform other functions the SRC determines to be appropriate.



# 2019 SRC Members and Membership Categories

NAME	STATUS		OFFICERS	MEMBERSHIP TYPE
Anna French	Active	Voting member		Client Assistance Program
Beth Schaffner	Active	Voting member		Parent Training & Information Center
Brenda Mosby	Active	Voting member	Chair Customer Satisfaction Committee	Business Industry & Labor
David Noftsker	Active	Voting member	Chair Membership Committee	VR Services
Katherine Carol	Active	Voting member	1st Vice Chair, Co-chair SRC EF committee	Parent or Guardian of a Person with a Disability
Katie Oliver	Active	Voting member		Advisory Panel established under the Individuals with Disabilities Act
Lee Wheeler-Berliner	Active	Voting member	2nd Vice Chair	Colorado Workforce Development Council
Marilee Boylan	Active	Voting member	Chair, Co-chair SRC EF committee	At-Large Representative
Robert Lawhead	Active	Voting member	Co-chair SRC EF committee	Colorado Developmental Disabilities Council
Sheena Bassett	Active	Non-voting	Policy and Education committee Chair	VR Counselors
Stephen Heidenreich	Active	Voting member		State Independent Living Council
Kristin Corash	Active	Non-voting		Director of DVR
Susan Richardson	Active	Voting member		Community Rehabilitation Program
Bobbie Rosa	Active	Voting member		Tribal VR
Julie Corbett	Active	Voting member		Behavioral Health Planning & Advisory Council
Timothy Postlewaite	Active	Voting member		Disability Advocacy Group
Benjamin Wankel	Active	Voting member		Business, Industry, & Labor
	Vacant			Business, Industry, & Labor
	Vacant			Business, Industry, & Labor

# Standing Committees

## MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE:

This committee is responsible for continually working to maintain a full, diverse, and engaged SRC with emphasis on representation from the groups identified by RSA. (see chart on page 4 for required membership categories)

### Current Members

- David Noftsker, Chair
- Katherine Carol
- Stephen Heidenreich

*“It is the most important thing I have ever done.”*

— David, SRC Member



## 2019 Membership Committee Work Summary

### Membership Recruitment

There have been 4 additions to the SRC and a new DVR Director. The following new members have joined in 2019. Representative of Tribal DVR, Representative of Disability Advocacy Group, Business/Industry Representative, and a Representative from the Behavioral Health Planning and Advisory Council.

### SRC Orientation Process

The membership committee is currently drafting an SRC orientation manual to be finalized Spring 2020.



## EMPLOYMENT FIRST COMMITTEE:

Senate Bill 16-077 tasked the SRC with convening the Employment First Advisory Partnership (EFAP) to create a plan to identify barriers to employment and to identify strategies to increase competitive integrated employment outcomes for persons with disabilities throughout the state of Colorado. This committee leads this effort for the council.

### Current Members

- Bob Lawhead, Co-Chair
- Katherine Carole, Co-Chair
- Marilee Boylan, Co-Chair
- Katie Oliver
- Stephen Heidenreich
- Beth Schaffner



*“Perhaps one of life’s greatest accomplishments is when good people create great opportunities working together in common cause. The collaborative efforts of the EFAP have been exceptional.”*

*— Katherine, SRC & EFAP Member*





# 2019 Employment First Advisory Partnership Committee Work Summary

## EFAP IDENTIFIED THE FOLLOWING PRIORITIES FOR 2019:

### 1 Office of Employment First

Create an office of Employment First to implement, in consultation with the State Rehabilitation Council and the Governor's office, a cross departmental process within EFAP agency partners to identify state policy, regulation and practice within the five state partner agencies that present barriers to Employment First implementation and develop strategies to remove those barriers and align policy, regulation and practice between EFAP Agency Partners.

### 2 Model Employer

Support Colorado's efforts to become a model employer for people with disabilities through:

- a. increasing the number of people with disabilities through use of a process modeled after the federal government affirmative action program in response to section 501 of the Rehabilitation Act 1973 (goals of having 12% of its workforce be people with disabilities).
- b. 2% be with targeted disabilities).
- c. consider implementation of a non-competitive hiring process modeled after the federal "Schedule A" hiring authority for people with "an intellectual disability, severe physical disability, or psychiatric disability.

### 3 Benefits Planning

Increase access to high quality benefits planning through cross-departmental collaboration to produce initiatives such as Disability Benefits 101 (an online benefits calculator) and increase Community Work Incentives Coordinator availability.

### 4 System Capacity Expansion

Create funding structures that allow for capacity expansion consistent with successful recruitment efforts to fill current and future staffing needs as Employment First efforts expand. Work with the Community College Systems Office, Talent FOUND Gateway, media outlets via PSAs, social media and other methods highlighting the benefits of working as an employment support professional.

### 5 Family and Individual Information & Training

Develop a plan for community-based stakeholder information and training sessions for families, youth and adults with disabilities, professionals and community members to inform them of employment first initiative for promoting best practices and to mobilize support implementation within the community.

### 6 Website & Messaging

Develop an Employment First website to provide youth, adults and families needed resources on navigating the system which would be person-centered and fully accessible, mirroring the discovery process based on the interests of individuals and families. Such a website would also be a clearing house of information for professionals and educators to access needed resources and information on Employment First efforts. Develop a professionally designed logo, fact sheet, presentation and social media platforms to create a consistent message to reach out to job seekers and families promoting the concept and value of competitive integrated employment, including benefits planning information in a variety of accessible formats.

### 7 Sustainable Funding: Office of Employment First

Obtain additional resources for the Office of Employment First through grant-writing and public/private partnerships.

### 8 Sustainable Funding: DVR

DVR Federal Match Expand matching funds for the Colorado Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) through Long Bill authorization to access the 21.3% state fund to 78.7% federal fund.

# Office of Employment First

The State of Colorado appropriated the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation funding to create an Office of Employment First in partnership with a University Center of Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDD). UCEDDs are nationally designated centers focusing on research, training, outreach, and clinical services for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Colorado's UCEDD is JFK Partners located in the Department of Pediatrics of the University of Colorado School of Medicine. The Office of Employment First was created to make Colorado a national leader in cross-disability Employment First programs. **Its functions will include:**

## TRAINING AND EDUCATION:

- Become the statewide training agency for Employment First policy and practice.
- Develop and deliver Employment First curriculum for individuals with disabilities, families, state agencies, educators, employers, service providers, potential service providers and communities to include options for pursuing Competitive Integrated Employment and supported employment mechanisms.
- Coordinate the provision of training that leads to required certification for supported employment service providers pursuant to SB18-145.
- Develop and deliver disability benefits counseling curriculum for individuals and families.

## TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE:

- Provide technical assistance to employers and state agencies for developing and implementing supported employment models that may be replicated across business communities.

## COMMUNICATIONS:

- Be the focal point for Employment First communications to local, state and national audiences through print, social media, website and broadcast services.

## SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT PILOT PROGRAM:

- A pilot program will be created that provides additional payments to employment service providers when supported employment outcomes have been successfully achieved.

## CUSTOMIZED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES EXPANSION:

- Staff funded through this program will help to ensure the effective implementation of customized employment programs throughout Colorado.

## POLICY, PROCEDURE AND STATE PLAN COMMITTEE:

This committee is responsible for assisting in the development of the state plan, working with DVR to set up public meetings, reviewing relevant reports and advising on policy and procedure.

### Current Members

- Sheena Bassett – Chair
- Anna French
- Bob Lawhead
- Lee Wheeler-Berliner



# 2019 Policy, Procedure and State Plan Committee Work Summary

In 2019, the Policy Committee convened to review draft policy changes (related to self-employment and vehicle modifications) and provided feedback to DVR on said changes. Additionally, the committee met to review the following SRC recommendations for the 2020 State Plan and worked to solicit and incorporate feedback from the full SRC:

**1** The SRC recommends DVR increase the number of individuals served from rural areas and culturally and socioeconomically diverse communities. This will be done by encouraging and welcoming new applicants with disabilities that are in need of services in order to obtain employment. DVR will work to ensure offices are open and friendly, with staff who are culturally competent. Additionally, SRC recommends that new materials be developed for each targeted audience that focus on the successes of DVR; and the website should also reflect this. Based on information from the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Analysis (CSNA), SRC believes that DVR should target unserved and underserved populations including justice involved individuals; individuals with limited education; people with behavioral health conditions; those experiencing homelessness; individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities; those with multiple disabilities; and others. Outreach and education to community partners, including workforce centers, employers, educators, parents, and others to generate referrals will be crucial. As outreach is provided, technical assistance should be given to educate all communities about the Colorado Division of Vocational Rehabilitation.

**2** SRC recommends DVR continue to focus on increasing high quality employment outcomes for individuals with significant and most significant disabilities. SRC would like to receive quarterly updates on successful employment closures, median earnings from employment, and employment in the second and fourth quarter following exit from the program in order to evaluate and provide input on employment outcomes for individuals with significant and most significant disabilities.



**3** The SRC recommends all DVR staff receive ongoing training in order to provide effective and high quality services to all customers. An interdisciplinary approach may be employed where counselors and others with expertise work with staff to build skills. The SRC recognizes a need for training in these areas; excellent customer service skills for office staff; Customized Employment targeted to Business Outreach Specialists to support effective outreach to businesses on behalf of all customers; counseling and guidance, including the effective use of labor market information; effectively working with specific disability groups, including accessing community resources available to support their unique needs; available work incentives; assessment, including “Discovery”; cultural competence; job development; and the use of assistive technology to increase employment options. SRC suggests training also include best practices for implementing key elements of WIOA, including supported self employment, customized employment, using “discovery” as part of the assessment process. DVR will ensure those providing this training have completed nationally recognized training and/or maintain nationally recognized certification in the topic area.

**4** The SRC recommends DVR ensure access to high quality supported employment services by actively seeking to increase capacity through outreach, training, and rate structure evaluation. DVR will utilize the newly funded Supported Employment Trainer/Coordinator positions to improve internal expertise among DVR staff, including Business Outreach Specialists, in utilizing evidence-based and promising supported employment practices (e.g., Individualized Placement & Supports (IPS) and Customized Employment). DVR staff responsible for providing training and technical assistance must have the requisite knowledge, including completing the respective nationally recognized training and/or certification(s). SRC recommends DVR continue to promote and assist supported employment providers to meet the requirement to complete nationally recognized training or certification by June 30, 2024, as required by Senate Bill 18-145. SRC would like to see DVR promote an early adoption of the requirements of Senate Bill 18-145 by encouraging supported employment providers to develop an implementation plan that should be submitted to DVR by January, 2021.

SRC recommends DVR lead, or engage in efforts led by partners, to explore and resolve the systematic issues limiting capacity to provide supported employment services, particularly related to the rate structures many providers cite as a limiting factor in their ability to expand services leading to competitive integrated employment for individuals with the most significant disabilities. Vendors working with DVR must receive training so that they have a clear understanding of the rehabilitation process and will be effective and qualified to work with both counselors and the individual’s they serve for the customers’ success. Training topics should include specifics on the rehabilitation process, increased cultural competence, clear understanding of disability issues, supported employment, use of interpreter and translation services among others. Training may also include best practices for implementation of the key elements of WIOA, including customized employment, using “discovery” as part of the assessment process, and person-centered planning practices.

**5** The SRC recommends DVR consistently recognize assistive technology as a critical strategy for improving access to competitive integrated employment for individuals with significant disabilities. DVR should ensure counselors have opportunities for frequent and ongoing training in rehabilitation technology, improving counselors’ ability to identify when and how assistive and universal technology can expand opportunities for competitive integrated employment. SRC recommends DVR explore opportunities to partner with the technology sector to identify new and developing technologies that may further improve accessibility and broaden opportunities for employment, as well as ensure a variety of qualified vendors to improve access to assistive technology.

**6** Despite ongoing efforts to improve and expand transition services, families and students still express difficulty accessing DVR services early enough to support an effective transition from secondary education. SRC recommends DVR create and implement an active plan to provide innovative and effective transition services to youth with disabilities, including those with the most significant disabilities, across the state of Colorado. To be as effective as possible, these strategies will need to include working with all stakeholders including

the Colorado Department of Education, special education teachers, parents, workforce centers, and youth with disabilities. It is critical these stakeholders have a clear understanding of DVR's role, including DVR participation in Individual Education Program (IEP) meetings for transition age students. SRC recommends transition services through DVR align with Employment First principles, including assessments such as Discovery, Project SEARCH, and Customized Employment to support the success of students with the most significant disabilities. DVR should continue to collaborate with schools and workforce centers to provide pre-employment transition services to younger youth prior to their referral to vocational rehabilitation. SRC recommends including the provision of informational sessions coordinated with DVR's school partners to increase awareness of youth services and provide materials to transition youth and their families about the availability of services and supports through DVR.

**7** While DVR has successfully obtained sufficient non-Federal dollars to fully access the available Federal funds through the Rehabilitation Services Administration, SRC recommends DVR continue to actively work with the executive and legislative branches of Colorado government to ensure the stability of this funding moving forward. In order to create effective and far reaching success in the employment of people with disabilities in Colorado, it is critical the full allotment of Federal funds continues to be available and DVR minimize any risk of potential Maintenance of Effort penalties due to reduction in State funds. Ongoing communication with the legislature will need to focus on the success that DVR is having in all areas of operation.

**8** As DVR leads the effort for the Colorado Department of Labor and Employment and the State of Colorado to be a model employer, SRC recommends DVR explore the feasibility of establishing a Project SEARCH site within state government. Such an effort would demonstrate to business the benefits of inclusive work environments, while supporting the vocational training and employment of youth with significant disabilities.

**9** The SRC recommends DVR continue to emphasize a dual customer approach, ensuring quality services to business partners to support the employment of individuals with disabilities, including significant disabilities. Through outreach, training, and ongoing support, DVR can gain an understanding of the business community's need for qualified employees and assist businesses to find motivated and skilled workers by drawing upon highly talented and diverse workforces, inclusive of people with disabilities. Thus, helping both the customers of DVR and the businesses where they will work.



*“Why are we passionate about employment? Employment is one of the greatest vehicles for equity!”*  
— Marilee, SRC & EFAP Member



## CUSTOMER SATISFACTION AND PROGRAM EVALUATION COMMITTEE:

This committee is responsible for reviewing program and performance data, developing questions regarding program and performance data to ask for DVR, analyze program and performance data, bring forward recommendations from the Committee to the full Council regarding issues illuminated by program and performance data, and collaborate with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation in conducting and analyzing findings from a comprehensive statewide needs assessment on the cycle defined by the US Department of Education, Rehabilitation Services Administration.

### Current Members

- Brenda Mosby, Chair
- Sue Richardson
- Katie Oliver
- Timothy Postlewaite

# 2019 Customer Satisfaction and Program Evaluation Committee Work Summary

The Customer Satisfaction and Program Evaluation Committee focused their work on creating questions to develop an external customer satisfaction survey to be sent by the SRC to DVR customers in 2020.



# How many Coloradans access support from the DVR each year?

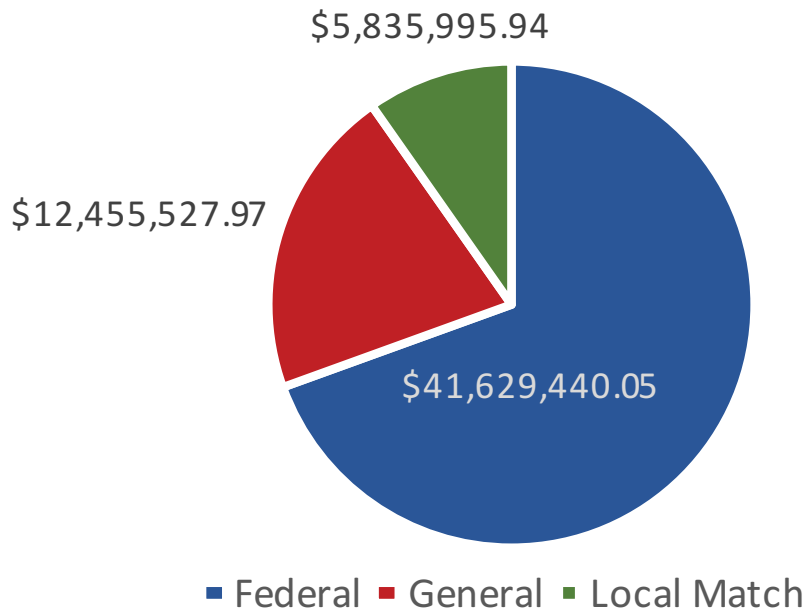
	2017	2018	2019
Total Individuals Served	12,169	15,687	16,246
Applicants and Eligible Individuals Served	12,169	14,437	14,424
New Applications to DVR	7279	5937	6122
Potentially Eligible Students Served	—	1250	1822

# What are the outcomes for individuals accessing support from DVR each year?

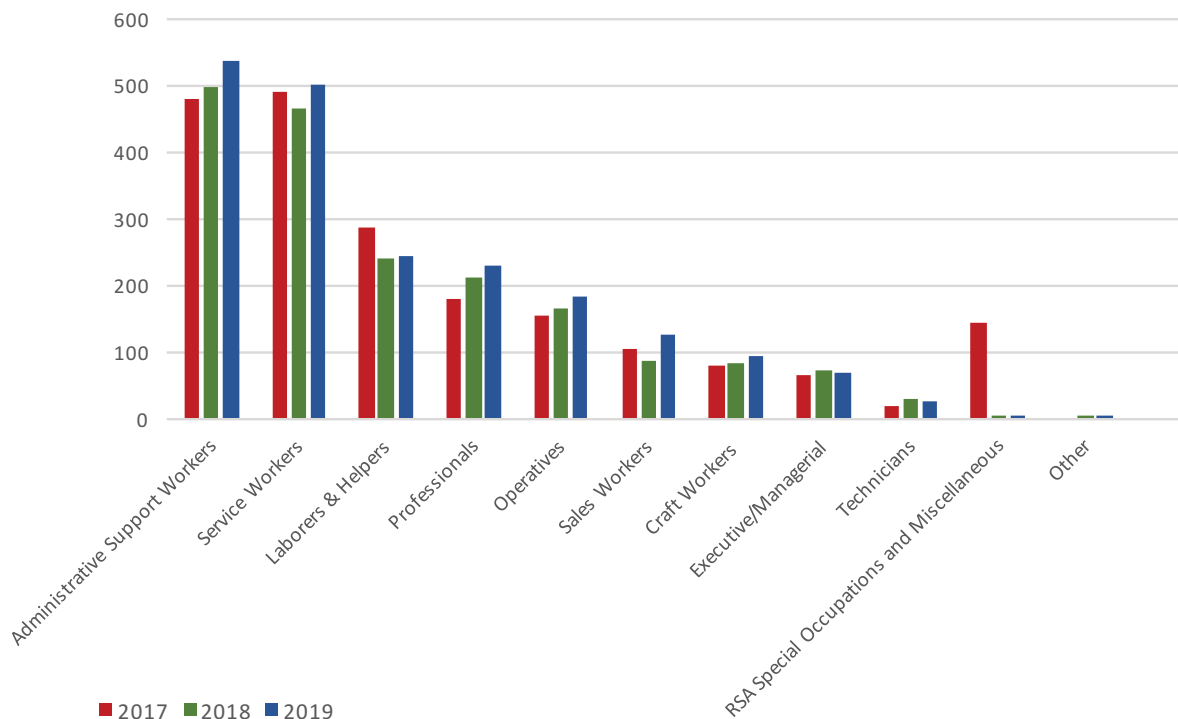
	2017	2018	2019
<b>Employment Reported at Plan</b>			
Average Hourly Wage	\$1.01	\$1.91	\$1.88
Average Hours Worked Per Week	2.2	3.3	3.5
Average Weekly Salary	\$31.98	\$59.17	\$58.00
Estimated Average Annual Salary	\$1,623	\$3,077	\$3,016
Estimated Total Earnings	\$7.2 Mill	\$11 Mill	\$12.1 Mill
<b>Employment Outcomes Achieved</b>			
Average Hourly Wage	\$12.66	\$13.62	\$14.69
Average Hours Worked Per Week	27.4	28.4	28.3
Average Weekly Salary	\$369.00	\$412.65	\$437.83
Estimated Average Annual Salary	\$19,212	\$21,458	\$22,767
Estimated Total Earnings	\$41.4 Million	39.8 Million	\$45.4 Million
Participants* Who Achieved an Employment Outcome	58.36%	53.24%	57.65%
Employment in the 4th Quarter after Exit	60.44%	56.58%	55.70%
Change in Average Weekly Earnings	814.78%	317.34%	292.69%
SSI/SSDI Benefits Reported at Application	2,222	1,970	2,053
SSI/SSDI Benefits Reported at Successful Close	762	568	639

# By The Numbers

## DVR FUNDING STATE FISCAL YEAR 2019

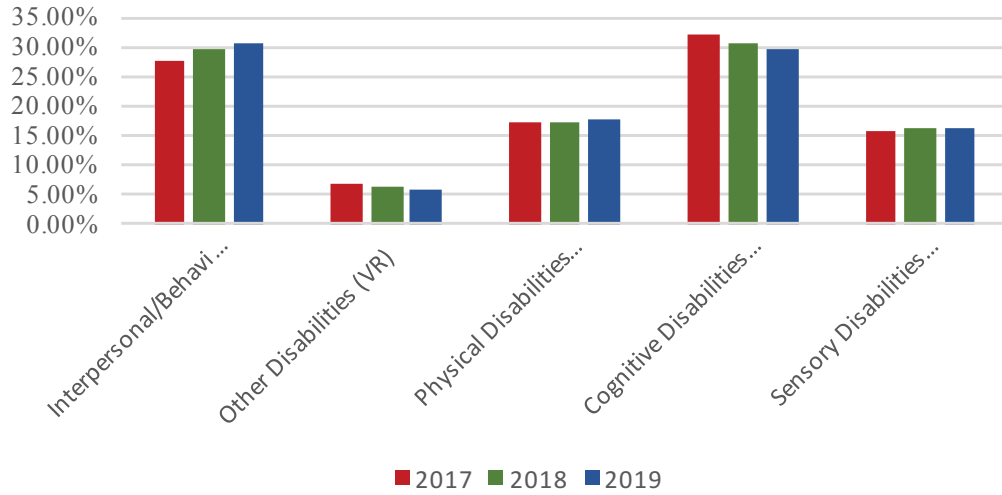


### OCCUPATIONS OF SUCCESSFULLY REHABILITATED INDIVIDUALS

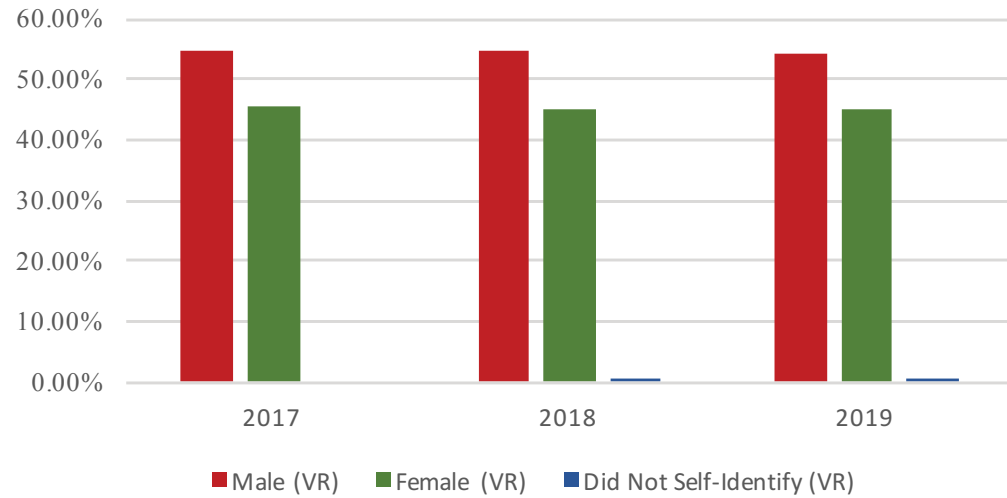




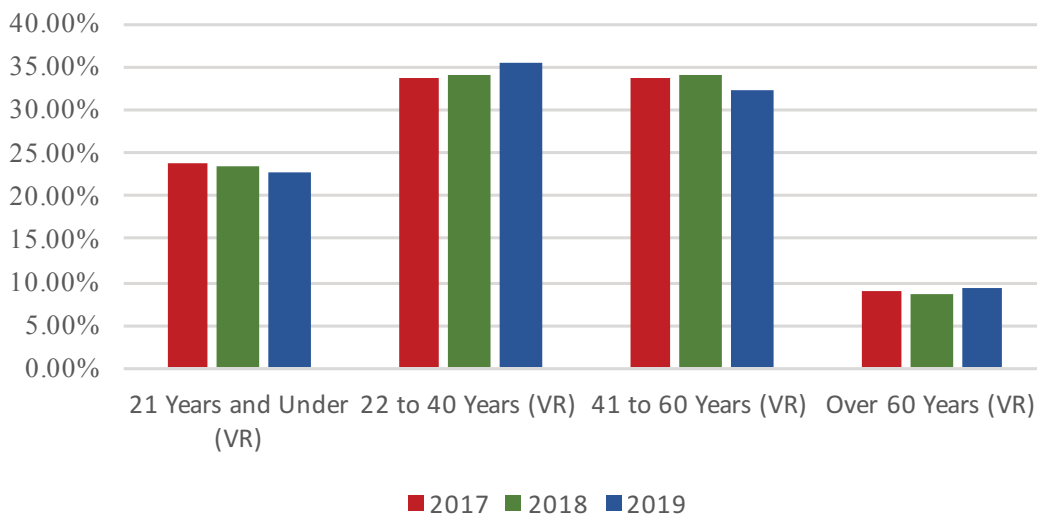
## PRIMARY DISABILITY OF INDIVIDUALS SERVED BY DVR



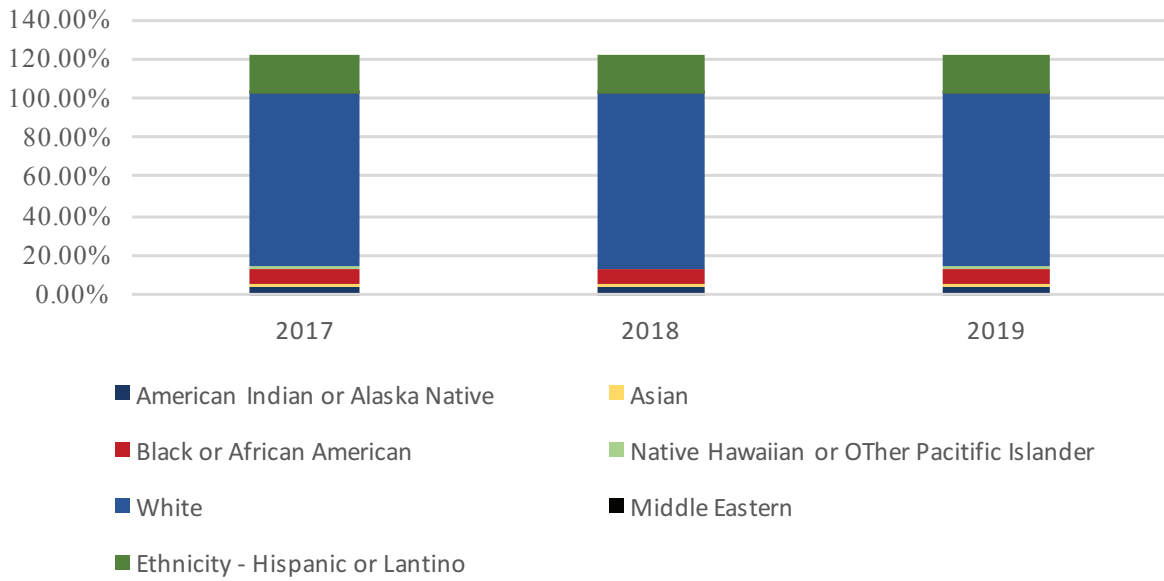
## GENDER OF INDIVIDUALS SERVED BY DVR



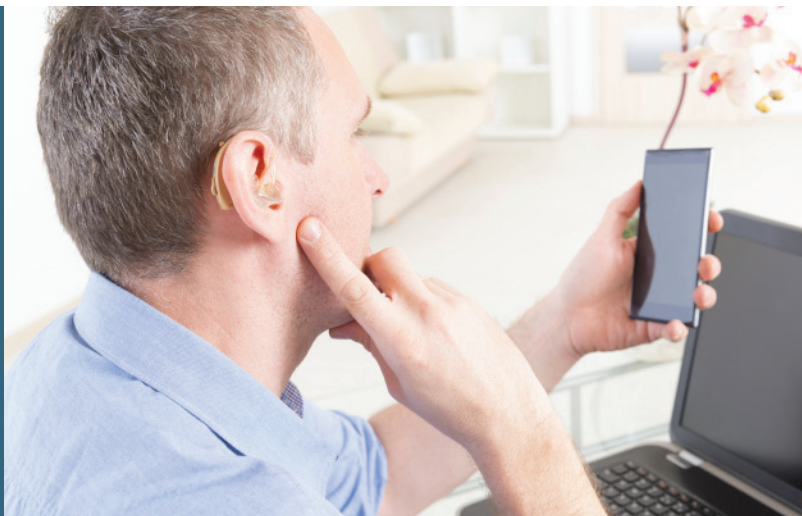
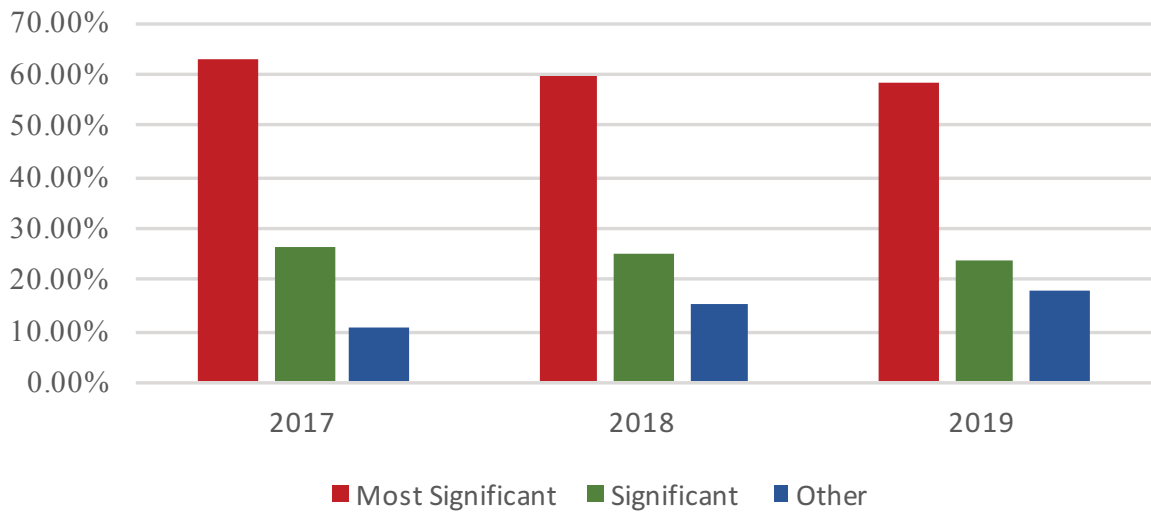
## AGES OF INDIVIDUALS SERVED BY DVR



## RACE & ETHNICITY OF INDIVIDUALS SERVED BY DVR



## SIGNIFICANCE OF DISABILITY OF INDIVIDUALS SERVED BY DVR



## Field Services

Colorado's Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) works in partnership with Coloradans to provide individualized services leading to sustained employment for people with various types and degrees of physical and mental disabilities. Professional staff and extensively trained Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Counselors are strategically located in offices and local communities throughout Colorado, traveling when necessary to serve the entire state.

DVR's staff is highly committed to excellent customer service and assists individuals with disabilities to obtain vocational success and increased self-sufficiency through individual assessment & evaluation, vocational counseling and guidance, holistic planning, and provision of many other services necessary to become successful in employment. Approximately 125 VR Counselors across the state provide individualized vocational rehabilitation services during this process and assist customers to address employment barriers and realize their career goals. To meet the needs of a diverse population, DVR has ensured that there are VR Counselors who are knowledgeable about a variety of disabilities and employment industries throughout the state. All VR Counselors hold a Master's Degree in Rehabilitation Counseling or a closely related field, participate in an extensive DVR Training Academy upon hire, and have opportunities for a variety of continuing education necessary to ensure their ongoing professional development. DVR also has several staff around the state who are fluent in American Sign Language and Spanish; other language needs are met through use interpreting services to ensure effective communication.

Each of DVR's field offices has a supervisor who, in addition to providing leadership, coaching and guidance to the staff, takes the lead in cultivating partnerships with area employers, workforce centers, schools, and other public and private service agencies within the community. DVR works in partnership with the business community to provide services to employers such as disability awareness training, on-site job assessments, referral and support of qualified employees, and professional consultation.

When working with customers across the state who are seeking successful employment, DVR staff continually strive to **provide an environment that is welcoming, respectful, and responsive** to the needs of Colorado's citizens. DVR has continued to focus on developing a variety of strategic partnerships to build the infrastructure necessary to effectively serve individuals with the most significant disabilities. Colorado's Employment First Advisory Partnership (EFAP) has been instrumental in identifying the gaps within systems, services, and training for partners that make up an individual's service team.



Approximately 125 VR Counselors across the state provide individualized vocational rehabilitation services

*“Over the three years I was a client of CO DVR, I received the utmost professional guidance. To anyone in need of their services, know that you are in good hands.”*

*— Cody Smith, DVR client*

# Youth Services and Transition

The Youth Services and Transition Unit (YSTU) leads DVR to coordinate effective and efficient pre-employment transition services (Pre-ETS) and transition services for students and youth with disabilities. Regional Lead Counselors serve as trainers and mentors for all counselors providing services to students and youth with disabilities. These Lead Counselors provide training regarding policies, procedures, practices, and processes around transition. This team also ensures community partners and other relevant audiences have access to necessary training and information about the transition services available to students and youth through DVR. DVR continues to explore more strategic approaches to outreach and service delivery to support better access.

In collaboration with local education agencies, DVR continues to explore a variety of modalities to prepare students for work activities, including: developing business enterprises that provide exposure to self-employment; “boot camps” focused on developing work readiness skills; exposure to emerging industries; opportunities to explore and learn how to navigate a college campus; and multiple work based learning experiences. These activities are designed to connect back to each student’s Individual Education Program and/or Individual Career and Academic Planning to ensure coordinated transition planning for each student. DVR is currently developing guidelines for DVR staff and students to assist in identifying current vocational awareness and skill, and outline needed skill development as each student builds a career pathway. The model will also incorporate tools and resources for each skill area. Similarly, the YSTU is exploring the use of various media, such as podcasts to deliver content relevant to each of the five Pre-ETS.

## THE SCHOOL TO WORK ALLIANCE PROGRAM (SWAP)

is a collaborative partnership between DVR and local school districts or BOCES, with support from the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) and administered by YSTU. SWAP assists young adults in making the transition from school to work, through increased community linkages and new patterns of service leading to successful employment outcomes. SWAP served over 5,000 young adults with disabilities experiencing mild to moderate barriers to employment between July 1, 2018 and June 30, 2019. These youth improved work skills, explored their career interests, and obtained work experience leading to competitive integrated employment.

## THE PROJECT SEARCH HIGH SCHOOL TRANSITION PROGRAM

is a unique business-led school-to-work program that takes place entirely at the workplace, facilitating a seamless combination of classroom instruction, career exploration, and job-skills training.

**At the completion of the program, students with significant intellectual disabilities are employed in complex and rewarding jobs with a 75% success rate.**

Moreover, the program has brought about changes in business culture that have far-reaching positive effects on attitudes about hiring people with disabilities and the range of jobs in which they can be successful. This multi-agency partnership includes local employers, school districts, and community service providers, including community centered boards, along with YSTU. Colorado currently has 3 Project SEARCH sites and is exploring growing these partnerships.

DVR also partners with CDE under the guidance of the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition (NTACT) to implement capacity building plans. This interdisciplinary team is focused on creating common messaging to promote effective practices and predictors of in-school and post school success, leading to higher paying jobs upon graduation. Goals this year include creating a partnership between CDE’s Exceptional Student Services Unit to create a



pipeline to career readiness success for students with disabilities engaged in Career Technical Education (CTE) programming statewide, with special attention to rural and under-served geographic areas of Colorado. The team has also identified a need to increase dissemination methods to families of transition education and service provision information.

Through our combined efforts we are envisioning beginning to shift the annual Transition Leadership Institute over the next 5 years to a statewide transition conference to eventually include all transition partners across disciplines, beginning with the inclusion of relevant DVR staff to the Education Teams.

## **ASPIRE (ACHIEVING SUCCESS BY PROMOTING READINESS FOR EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT)**

was a model demonstration project and part of a six state consortium implementing the US Department of Education's PROMISE (Promoting Readiness of Minors in Supplemental Security Income) initiative, with the goal of increasing employment, education, and self-sufficiency of youth with disabilities who receive Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and their families.

**Statewide, ASPIRE Colorado served over 200 youth** with disabilities using a holistic approach in working with the whole family to change their perspective on education, employment, and independent living.

As the grant came to an end in June 2019, Colorado concluded with youth participants and their family members by providing a summary report of their progress and milestones achieved such as graduation from high school and technical school, and obtaining employment. Families also received information about local resources to continue to access for continued support.



**ASPIRE Colorado served  
over 200 youth**



**Colorado currently has 3 Project SEARCH sites and is exploring growing these partnerships.**

# Blind and Low Vision Services

Blind and Low Vision Services (BLVS) unit manages vocational rehabilitation services for individuals who are blind/vision impaired; the Business Enterprise Program authorized by the Randolph-Sheppard Act; the Personal Adjustment Training program; and the Independent Living for Older Individuals who are Blind services grant for the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation.

**83 individuals** who are blind, visually impaired, or deaf-blind **became competitively employed across the state**

as a result of the services received from DVR. The wages earned by these individuals ranged from \$10.20 to \$84.13 per hour, with an average wage of \$19.22 per hour. Participants are working in a wide variety of careers including management, professional services, engineering, technical, health care, education, social services, clerical/office support and customer service. During the National Federation for the Blind state convention, BLVS hosted training on how to explore the labor market and preparing for a successful job interview.

## THE PERSONAL ADJUSTMENT TRAINING (PAT) PROGRAM

teaches blind, visually impaired, and deaf-blind participants how to travel and live independently, access resources in college, orient to a job site, and use assistive and adaptive technology for success with employment. The PAT instructors have expanded youth services to provide training modules on volunteer work-based learning experiences, career exploration, daily living skills, independent travel, and have started a job club. Vision Expos hosted by PAT bring together a wide variety of blind/low vision resources for the community in an easy to access location.



## THE BUSINESS ENTERPRISE PROGRAM (BEP)

BEP oversees the training and licensing of blind operators and manages the operation of federal, state, and private vending, snack bars, cafeterias, convenience stores, and military dining locations across the state. The number of licensed blind operators has increased from 21 last year to 22 over the past year, due to the excellent communication and collaboration between the vocational rehabilitation counselors, the BEP trainer, Program Manager, and continued support and active participation provided by the committee of blind vendors. The BEP training curriculum has been strengthened to better prepare blind participants to be successful with operating their business locations. A priority of the Business Enterprise Program is to ensure that locations provide opportunity for blind operators to earn living incomes and grow their businesses.

For blind and visually impaired Colorado residents who are age 55 or older and whose primary goal is to maintain independence in their own home, BLVS provides services through contracts with six providers across the state. Consumers received services that include learning how to live with low vision, independent living skills, participating in support groups, accessing and learning how to use assistive technology, and learning how to travel independently. In addition to the individual consumers, the providers have also completed outreach to many more consumers with information and referral resources.

Finally, BLVS manages the Howard Fund, a fund that provides grants to individuals and organizations in Colorado to help them acquire equipment and services directly related to blindness and vision impairment. **This past year, the Howard Fund board has approved 11 grants that have included the purchase of assistive technology, low vision aids, adaptive equipment and training.**

# Supported Employment

## Office of Community Living (OCL), Colorado Department of Healthcare Policy & Financing, and Community Centered Boards (CCB)

CCBs serving persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) are critical partners in DVR's effort to assure the availability of quality vocational rehabilitation services throughout the state.

Many strides have been made to more effectively sequence and coordinate services between DVR and the multiple partners involved in the provision of supported employment services. DVR recently added a new I/DD Supported Employment Coordinator/Trainer to support DVR staff to effectively implement Employment First principles to individuals with I/DD.

DVR & OCL partner each year providing training and facilitating opportunities for partnership across agencies and community organizations. In partnership with OCL, DVR also participates in the State Employment Leadership Network (SELN) to identify strategies to increase opportunities for supported employment for individuals with I/DD. Over the past year, DVR partnered closely with OCL on the implementation of Senate Bill 18-145, addressing the minimum qualifications of providers of supported employment services.

### DVR has developed a **Customized Employment pilot team** to create a strategy to implement this needed service delivery model in Colorado.

Through partnership with various State agencies, local service providers, and stakeholders, as well as national technical assistance centers, a pilot has been developed to serve individuals with the most significant disabilities transition from non-integrated work settings to integrated work settings by identifying specific tasks the individual can perform, allowing one to work within their strengths. A key component of the pilot is identifying sustainable training approaches for DVR staff and service providers to ensure effective implementation of Customized Employment statewide.



IPS is the most researched, evidence based practice in the behavioral health industry

## Office of Behavioral Health (OBH), Colorado Department of Human Services

OBH and DVR has developed the Mental Health Supported Employment Program that operates under a formalized interagency agreement, providing access to supported employment services to individuals with significant behavioral health disorders. This partnership involves local agreements with twelve Community Mental Health Centers, one non-profit organization, and two private vendors throughout the State to provide supported employment services, including job development, job seeking skills, job coaching, and ongoing support. The program has resulted in increased competitive integrated employment opportunities for these individuals.

OBH and DVR are members of the Individual Placement and Support (IPS) International Learning Community and provide training and support to providers statewide. IPS is the most researched evidence based practice in the behavioral health industry and leads to higher competitive integrated employment outcomes and is cost effective. The IPS practice principles focus on rapid engagement, integrated team approaches, benefits planning, long term support, and competitive integrated outcomes. IPS also focuses on servicing youth with mental health disabilities in employment and education. Through this partnership, DVR & OBH facilitate mentoring and training through the Mental Health Consortium Group and DVR's Supported Employment Steering Committee for Mental Health, in addition to hosting an annual IPS conference. DVR also participates in monthly technical assistance calls as part of the International IPS Learning Community and the Colorado IPS Leadership Team.



Significant work has been completed to restructure the DVR Self-Employment Program to improve processes.

## Self-Employment

Colorado has a thriving entrepreneurial economy, ranked 5th in the country for start-ups, and self-employment can offer a pathway to economic independence and self-sufficiency for individuals with disabilities. The Self-Employment Training Guide developed by the Research and Training Center on Disability in Rural Communities (RTC): Rural and the University of Montana has been a helpful resource for Rehabilitation Counselors for Entrepreneurship (RCE) to assist DVR clients in learning about self-employment.

Significant work has been completed to restructure the DVR Self-Employment Program to improve processes. Stakeholder meetings were held across the state as well as surveys, gathering information from DVR counselors, stakeholders, and current and past clients and vendors. A new training and procedural manual, revisions to DVR Service Delivery Policy, updated Fee Schedule, more opportunities for youth and supported self-employment, and a streamlined process for review of business plans are expected to be implemented in late 2019, resulting in improved service delivery for individuals pursuing self-employment. Clients will also be involved in the review of their proposed business plans, allowing for direct feedback and client voice.

Five Lead Counselors for Entrepreneurship who have extensive expertise in self-employment assist with training RCEs across the state on topics related to successful entrepreneurship, such as Social Security Administration work incentives, marketing plans, business plan structure, tax requirements, digital and social media presence, and AgrAbility.

**Fifty new business plans were considered over the past year, with thirty-five moving forward in the self-employment process.**

DVR supported clients to develop successful businesses in a variety of markets, including: plant care, fishing lures and spinners, drone photography, videography, hair product line, mobile dog grooming, Santa, lawn care (2 business plans with supported self-employment clients), life coaching and job placement, carpentry/re-modeling, healthcare consulting, bath bombs and more.



# Business Outreach Services

DVR's Business Outreach Specialist (BOS) Team focuses on connecting businesses with qualified individuals with a variety of disabilities. This team offers a unique set of services for employers, including employee recruitment and candidate screening, ADA consultation, disability etiquette and awareness trainings, retention services for existing employees, and the Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs (OFCCP) compliance. The team also works with employers to arrange internships, paid work experiences, job tours, and informational interviews. They share real-time local and national labor market information with DVR counselors and clients to assist in crafting appropriate employment goals. Our team is regularly partnering with other community job developers to increase the placement opportunities for our clients. Meeting with a broad set of community stakeholders is also key to ensuring that our clients and counselors are connected to the most up-to-date career resources possible.

The BOS Team actively participates in sector partnerships across the state, and is represented on the Colorado Workforce Development Council's State Technical Assistance Team (STAT) for sector partnerships. The BOS team is integrated into local Workforce Center Business Services Teams, partnering to develop employment opportunities in the community, attending job fairs with Workforce Center partners, and serving on the Statewide Business Services Committee.

In the past year, the team outreached to 2370 targeted employers and on average 195 DVR clients were hired within these businesses throughout the year. **They also provided 369 disability awareness trainings and presentations regarding DVR at no cost to these employers, often helping businesses to meet mandatory diversity requirements.** The Business Outreach Specialist team is broadening the reach of CO DVR by engaging with over 989 partners over the last year, including the School to Work Alliance Program, local community mental health employment specialists, local Workforce Centers, Department of Corrections, sector initiatives, Community Centered Boards, Independent Living Centers, School Districts, Economic Development, Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) members, county commissioners, Chambers of Commerce, and more!



The team outreached to 2370 targeted employers and on average 195 DVR clients were hired within these businesses throughout the year.



# Office of Independent Living Services

The Office of Independent Living Services (the Office) was established to oversee the contracts the State has with nine Centers for Independent Living serving people with disabilities in all 64 counties. Additionally, the Office serves as the fiscal sponsor of the Statewide Independent Living Council. All three partners make up the Colorado Center for Independent Living (CIL) network. The Colorado CIL network works collaboratively to provide an array of Independent Living services supporting individuals with disabilities living independently in their community of choice.

## The Office aims to:

- Increase the visibility and understanding of the core services delivered by the Colorado CILs.
- Develop partnerships between federal agencies, state agencies, advisory councils, community-based service networks, and CILs.
- Partner with the CILs to build service capacity and ensure contract funding follows federal and state fiscal requirements.
- Partner to develop and monitor the State Plan for Independent Living (SPIL) In State Fiscal Year 2019, CILs provided 45,876 distinct services that empowered 16,754 individuals to achieve self-directed goals and maintain independence. Of these, 1645 were new customers served by Centers for Independent Living network Colorado SILC (Statewide Independent Living Council).

The Colorado SILC is a Governor-appointed 15 member council with the majority being people living with disabilities. The SILC's major task is to develop and monitor the State Plan for Independent Living (SPIL). The SPIL is an important tool used to identify the needs of people with disabilities across the state and demonstrate how the CIL network aims to ensure access to services and support for living well in their communities with maximum independence. In 2019, the federal agency overseeing the nation's CIL Network, Administration for Community Living, began the process to change the requirements relating to the SPIL. The SPIL not only sets priorities for meeting the needs of Coloradans with disabilities, but also is the mechanism that ensures Colorado receives federal funding to support the Colorado SILC and CIL network in Colorado.

A large achievement of the SILC during 2019 was hosting and sponsoring the second annual Colorado Youth Leadership Forum (YLF). The Colorado YLF is an innovative event for Colorado high school juniors, seniors, and other young adults under age 26 with disabilities. Youth serve as delegates from their communities and are given the opportunity to cultivate their leadership, citizenship, and social skills. The YLF is designed to foster young adult personal growth through self-discovery and experiential learning opportunities to identify and embrace their strengths while planning for their future.

► For more information about the Colorado SILC, go to <http://coloradosilc.org/>





During National Disability Employment Awareness Month, DVR recognizes the “Shining Stars of VR”.



## Celebrating Success

During National Disability Employment Awareness Month, DVR recognizes the “Shining Stars of VR”. These awards are presented to individuals with disabilities, business partners, and service providers or other community partners who exemplify the best of vocational rehabilitation in enhancing competitive integrated employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities.

T was one of the individuals with a disability who was awarded for 2019. T started working with the School to Work Alliance Program (SWAP) and DVR during the Fall of 2017. At that time, she shared her passion for animals and her desire to work as a veterinary

technician. T completed a paid work experience that summer. This work experience has helped her to develop confidence and necessary work skills to work in a veterinarian clinic. As she prepared to graduate from high school, T expressed interest in completing another paid work experience, this time in a more advanced position to further prepare her for employment. As she completed this second, paid work experience, she was offered a full-time permanent position. She continues to build skills and gain the experience necessary for her to continue to progress along this career path, while providing great care to the animals treated at the clinic.

**Cody Smith also found success through his work with DVR and shared the following testimonial:**

*Hello, my name is Cody Smith — a 28 year old software engineer working in Silicon Valley. I have a genetic condition known as albinism which affects my skin, eyes and nervous system. I am considered significantly visually impaired, borderline legally blind. Colorado DVR helped me obtain my bachelors degree at CU Denver in Computer Science, helped me get behind the wheel of a vehicle, being one of the only persons to attain a fully unrestricted driver's license in Colorado. They helped me choose a career path that made sense given both my strengths and weaknesses.*

*Over the three years I was a client of CO DVR, I received the utmost professional guidance. To*

*anyone in need of their services, know that you are in good hands.*

*After completing my under-graduate degree I was able to attend a postgraduate program in Electrical and Computer Engineering at Carnegie Mellon's Silicon Valley campus. CO DVR helped me transition to California's DoR and continued to stay with me throughout my postgraduate program. Coming out of CMU I was able to land a six figure job working in the Bay Area. I now live a full life, I work, I drive, I have a girlfriend, I pay my student debt and save for the future. I can't thank you enough CO DVR! You've really made a difference in my life. — Cody*



**COLORADO**

**Department of  
Labor and Employment**

Division of Vocational Rehabilitation

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