



# 2020 ANNUAL REPORT

**State Rehabilitation Council**

**Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation**

**ADA2020**

CELEBRATING **30** YEARS OF THE  
AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT

**VR100**  
VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION • 1920–2020

50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the  
Developmental  
Disabilities Act



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Iowa  
**Vocational  
Rehabilitation**  
Services

*Finding solutions. Generating success.*

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# SRC Committee Members

\*List includes all individuals who were active SRC members at any time during calendar year 2020

**NICOLE CLEVELAND**

Disability Advocacy  
Woodbury County

**DR. MONALISA MCGEE\***

Disability Advocacy  
Ringgold County

**RANDELL DAVIS\***

Disability Advocacy  
Mahasaka County

**RICHARD PHELAN**

Business, Labor and Industry  
Clinton County

**JOHNNA DEATON-DAVIS**

Disability Advocacy  
Jasper County

**MARI REYNOLDS**

Parent, Training & Information Center of IA  
Polk County

**KIM DREW\***

IA Dept. of Education  
Polk County

**DARYN RICHARDSON**

Community Rehabilitation Program  
Pottawattamie County

**AMY DUTTON, VICE-CHAIR**

Disability Advocacy  
Grundy County

**KYLE ROED**

Business, Labor and Industry  
Black Hawk County

**PAMALA FITZSIMMONS**

Business, Labor and Industry  
Marion County

**LISA SCHNEIDER**

Client Assistance Program  
Dallas County

**KIRSTEN LANE**

IA Dept. of Education  
Polk County

**DEMARCUS THOMAS**

Disability Advocacy  
Pottawattamie County

**JAMES LUTTRELL**

Disability Advocacy  
Mills County

**SCOTT TURCZYNSKI, CHAIR**

Business, Labor and Industry  
Polk County

**SARAH MARTINEZ**

Statewide Independent Living Council  
Johnson County

**BRIAN WARNER**

Vocational Rehab Counselor  
Cerro Gordo County

**GARY MCDERMOTT\***

Statewide Independent Living Council  
Clinton County

**ALEX WATTERS\***

Vocational Rehabilitation Client  
Woodbury County

## From the IVRS Administrator

2020 has been quite a year! I will not try to explain anything further than what I have heard others say in expressing hope that 2021 will lead to different experiences! With that said, however, the work of our State Rehabilitation Council and VR staff have continued.

I am proud of our efforts and the way we live out our mission and vision of employment outcomes in competitive integrated settings and making a positive difference for every person one person at a time.

Within a week in the middle of March 2020, the agency had kept every area office open, transitioned to 95% plus staff teleworking and all services occurring virtually. We did that at a cost of less than \$10,000, expenses were primarily related to increase VPN licensing, expanded bandwidth options for our network and computer software providing additional flexibility in faxing. We continue to operate in somewhat of a hybrid approach with the following main guidelines: keeping staff and our job candidates safe, keeping staff in paid status, and service delivery that supports employment outcomes. All services and offices are open, staff are providing services virtually as a first option, but if that does not work or additional services are required on-site, we can provide those services following the CDC guidelines. Schools and the connection of our students with disabilities remain a challenge, but we have found and continue to implement service practices, which have created efficiencies, connections and value to our business partners and job candidates. Please read about a few of those highlights in our SRC Annual Report.

Our SRC has also transitioned from on-site meetings to ZOOM meetings. It is a change for all, but the work is certainly continuing and our Council Member's efforts, passion and commitment remain steadfast. We revised committee structures and changes in meetings to focus on member engagement, progress related to targeted areas of our comprehensive needs assessment and understanding policy and procedures and how they impact service delivery. We had four new members join us over the past summer and it is exciting and challenging to help on board and assimilate them into on-going work. However, what a great opportunity for expanded feedback and energy. This group specifically has interest in those job candidates being served with autism, deaf or hard of hearing, and our secondary students with disabilities. All key areas of our needs assessment. Please be looking for information on these areas in the Report.

Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services success depends upon the quality of connections with our business partners and our job candidates. Connections and success are shared with our Council Members who dedicate their time and expertise in providing guidance and direction to our work. Work worth celebrating and sharing in our SRC Annual Report. Thanks for reading.

**David Mitchell**  
**IVRS Administrator**



# From the SRC Chair

It has been an honor to serve as an SRC (State Rehabilitation Council) member since 2016 and as SRC Chair this year. As a former client and benefactor of IVRS (Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services) and as an employer looking for dedicated employees, the work done by these organizations is truly extraordinary.

I want to extend my appreciation for fellow SRC members who dedicate their time to participate, be involved, and support the work of the SRC. I would also like to acknowledge the many IVRS representatives who've frequently engaged with the SRC over the past years.

SRC members are committed to serving individuals with disabilities to successfully find employment in integrated and meaningful jobs of their choosing. We will continue to engage all stakeholders to work with us nationally and on the state levels to achieve our shared goals. We are proud to share our Annual Report as an overview of the activities undertaken by the SRC and IVRS during the past year. On behalf of the members of the SRC, we proudly present you with this Annual Report.

While we've done much in the past year, there's still work left to be done, and I know we're excited about this opportunity. Please read and share this report with anyone you think might benefit from it.

## Scott Turczynski SRC Chair



**SRC Committee Members**

# 2021/2022 IVRS State of Iowa Budget Status

IVRS recognizes the challenging budget environment in pandemic times, but IVRS is in a unique position to make the most of state dollars. We match state to federal dollars in a 21.3%-78.7% match. This past year, due to increased federal monies available, we were not able to match the full amount of money that was potentially available to serve lowans with disabilities. Data indicates a positive return on investment at almost 3-1 as individuals return or maintain employment and contribute to the economy.

## Current Needs:

1. We request for three additional FTE positions. This can be done with a status quo budget and the plan is to fill counselor positions to serve individuals who are deaf. This is a priority area as identified by the State Rehabilitation Council and we are in partnership with the University of Iowa developing a career path pipeline.

## New Monies

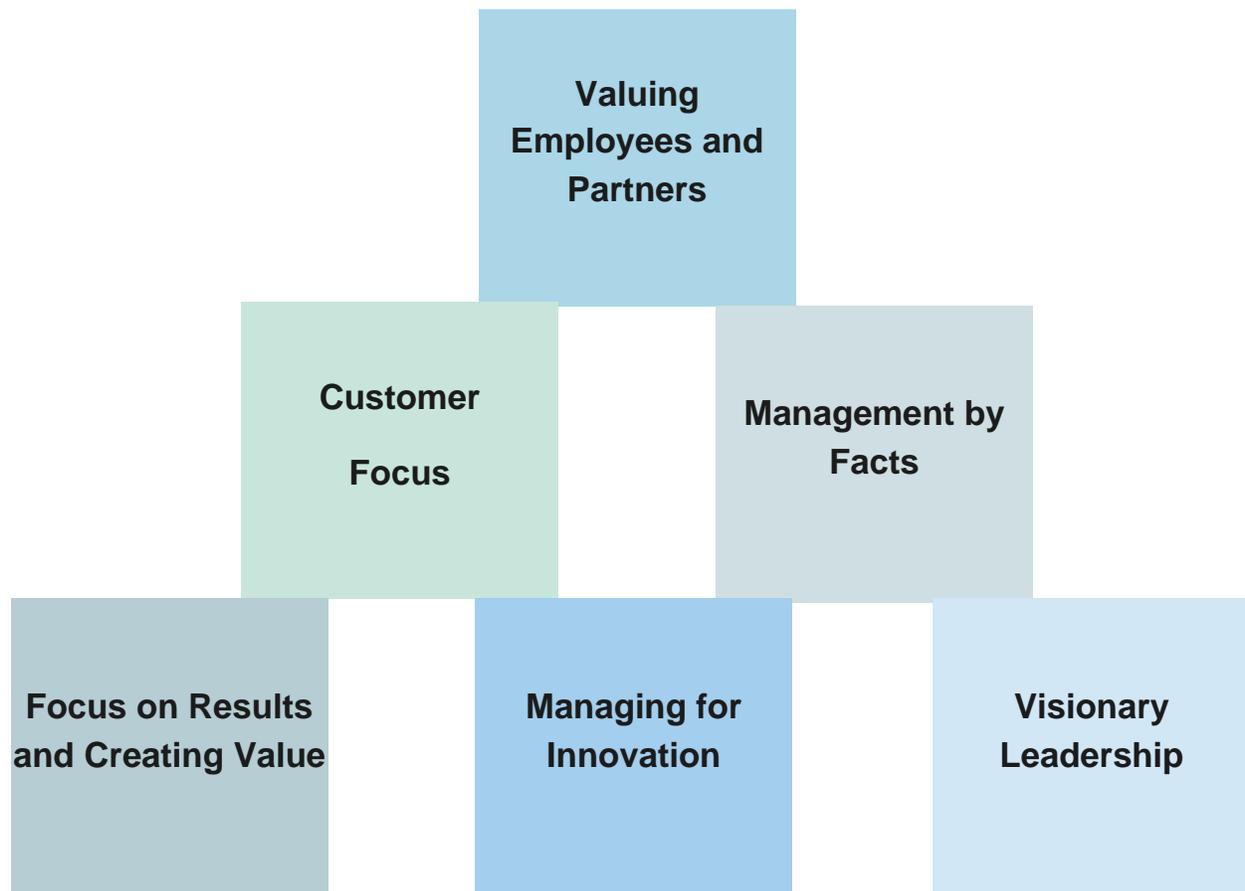
1. Because of changes in the federal appropriation process, we were short approximately \$600,000 this past year in state dollars, which would draw an additional \$2.2 million approximately. We did not have time or resources to pull a plan together to go after this money. The same amount is available this next budget cycle.
2. We request \$250,000 that will also be able to match federal monies and these dollars will be used to expand efforts to positively impact Department of Correction outcomes with our juveniles with disabilities that are being served. Monies would be used for VR to expand contract services with the Juvenile Reentry System, IVRS is already involved in the statewide service planning with system partners, but there is a gap in collaboration and facilitation with families and community resources when it comes time for the juvenile to exit the system and reenter the community. Our services will be utilized to support a minimum of three contract positions with the Division of Criminal and Juvenile Justice Planning to reduce recidivism and promote employment outcomes/independence through existing community resources. The matching dollars allows us to sustain the program. This request also will include a request to expand one FTE position that is used for contract monitoring and accountability for IVRS.
3. IVRS also has developed an internal plan to expand current contract efforts. We are not requesting appropriations for those dollars, but intend to expand our contract efforts with the secondary school system to develop third party cash match programs expanding our current Transition Alliance Programs which is a 50-50 partnership between IVRS and the secondary school district. Because of the pandemic, we have not made progress with the schools and anticipate this most likely won't occur until the fall of 2021 at the earliest. We currently have 16 programs and are trying to expand those efforts. We, however, are at capacity with our ability to monitor and report state/federal compliance with existing staff, thus the request for the additional FTE to help manage this. This is all planned in the expansion of the cash match programs and we are responsible for contract oversight and monitoring as well as directing service priorities consistent with federal regulations.

These employment efforts are integrated into Future Ready Iowa strategies and result in a positive return on investment for lowans. The additional \$250,000 request in state monies results in \$1.1 million in federal dollars and will serve lowans with disabilities across our core partner programs.

# Principles of IVRS Strategic Plan

- Innovating solutions
- Build careers build talent
- Customizing services
- Leading and engaging in collaborating strategies

## Building Blocks



# Investing in Iowans

## Program Year 2019

(July 1, 2019 – June 30, 2020)

<b>Vocational Rehabilitation is an investment in Iowa</b>	<b>The Investment Pays Off</b>
<p>* A Total of 1,930 VR Iowans with disabilities obtained employment in the 2019 program year.</p> <p>*Approximately 96.6 percent of successful VR job candidates remain in Iowa – working, paying taxes, and contributing to their communities.</p> <p>*A total of 535 VR job candidates were receiving public support for living expenses (SSI, SSDI, TANF, General Assistance) and after receiving services, they are now employed and of those, 98 now support themselves, a savings of \$734,036 annually for the state.</p>	<p>*Iowans with disabilities served by IVRS in Program Year 2019 have an estimated income of \$42.7 million annually.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This reflects growth of over \$24.89 million from increased employment and over \$7.2 million from increased earnings.</li> </ul> <p>*Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services has a positive impact on linking our youth with disabilities to career pathways! Twenty-nine percent of our referrals come from Iowa School Districts and 827 students were successfully employed, working 31 hours/week with average earnings of \$12.89 / hour.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• \$5.08 million was spent on post-secondary tuition assistance, facilitating educational and occupational skills attainment.</li> </ul>

# Investing in Iowans

## Program Year 2019

Governor's Goals	IVRS Achievements
<b>200,000 new jobs</b>	In PY2019, IVRS placed 1,930 Iowans with disabilities into competitive employment. IVRS assisted 26 entrepreneurs with their Iowa business! Cumulatively from PY2015-2019, 151 businesses were successfully started, expanded or acquired with support from IVRS.
<b>15% Reduction in government</b>	<b>IVRS provides services to individuals with disabilities that span many fields including partnering with the Department of Education, Department of Corrections, Department of Human Services, Department of Veteran Affairs and the Department of Labor. 98 Individuals were on public support for their living expenses and are now supporting themselves, a savings of \$734,036 annually for the state.</b>
<b>25% Increase in family incomes</b>	<b>For those successful IVRS employment outcomes, there was an income increase of \$32.1 million from the time of their application status until their case file closure. This is a 303% increase in their income, as reported at application.</b>
<b>#1 Schools in the nation</b>	<b>29% of our referrals come from Iowa school districts for youth in transition. In PY2019, 827 students were successfully employed working 31 hours a week, with average earnings of \$12.89/hour. Over \$5.08 million was spent on tuition assistance for students in our post-secondary training programs to obtain educational and occupational skills training to help compete in today's labor market.</b>

## Core Partner Activities 2020

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act (WIOA) calls upon IVRS and all the partners of the One-Stop System in Iowa to work collaboratively to provide creative solutions and innovative strategies to open up great opportunities for Iowans with disabilities who wish to work in competitive, integrated employment.

Since I became Bureau Chief of the RSB in January of 2018, I have gone to each of the One-Stop regional centers for joint presentations to Workforce partner staff and IVRS staff to encourage communication, cross-training, and collaboration in all aspects of employment services, with an eye to removing silos and developing the pathways to full integration within the systems. The process of enhancing integration along a continuum in each center is driven by local Core Partner groups and especially by the Disability Access Committees associated with each center, and of which IVRS always takes a leading role. I can report that at the present time, monthly or quarterly core partner and disability access committee meetings are occurring, with planning for integration strategies being implemented, and the local regions will be meeting within the next month or so to begin work on new local service plans. Iowa was recognized for their efforts with the Integration Continuum in a regional conference with our technical assistance partners from WINTAC.



The pandemic has certainly created challenges and opportunities to re-think VR performance. We were making great progress in the areas of integration related to sharing business services information among partners, joint efforts with local businesses, and joint planning and presentation of public events. We were also making strides in joint efforts to plan and carry out summer Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) for high school students building career skills, co-enrollments, and tracking of co-enrollments, not to mention inter-agency trainings and accessibility strategies and services promoting One-Stop system accessibility to Iowans with employment barriers. Many of the strategies have been created in the local regions to address local issues, and thus, “the magic has happened locally.” These strategies have been shared in statewide and national forums. The progress was consistent until March 2020 when COVID-19 issues required the Workforce centers to focus mainly on unemployment insurance claims. Still, in each of our regions, virtual meetings did continue in terms of the integration continuum model, and reports were filed with IVRS and Workforce upper management demonstrating little or only modest growth in overall integration, but suggesting new strategies for continued progress.

In late October of this year, Administrator Mitchell, Bureau Chief Steven Faulkner, and some field staff and resource managers put together a presentation for Director Schultz of the RSA, which was also attended by State VR directors, as well as management personnel from many partner agencies including Iowa Workforce Development and the Iowa Department of Education. In this presentation, IVRS was recognized for the progress that has been made towards integration, placing Iowa near the top nationally in integration strategies and the spirit of collaboration among the partner agencies.

Current and on-going efforts are focused on the statewide Core Partner work group and the regulations to go with it; the state plan work was completed last winter and the regulations this past

Fall. One of the take-aways from this process was that even during the pandemic from March to the present, with the remote working, plant shutdowns, and all the need for virtual strategies for the foreseeable future, IVRS has been able to continue making progress in business services and successful job placements, as well as pre-employment transition services for the transition population in Iowa.

The pandemic has made the future unclear, and yet within just a couple weeks into March, our staff had shifted to about 90% remote working. This significantly shifted office blueprint plans as we were seeing job candidates only virtually, and all meetings were virtual, with outside travel extremely limited. New patterns of service delivery had to be developed to maintain services to both transition and adult job candidates, involving much more flexibility in scheduling JC visits and training or Pre-ETS events. Some of the strategies involving social media have included YouTube recordings of trainings or career development information, the use of text and Facebook messenger to help maintain connections with our job candidates; Zoom has been very popular for IEP meetings, staffings, and virtual client visits. The result has been a reduction in travel time and expenses, and we feel, better overall engagement with our job candidates. We believe there has been an expansion of field office capacity to respond and serve job candidates.

By this past summer, using various social media and Internet strategies, each area office began to realize many benefits in the virtual media they were using. Many staff have reported no negative change in office cohesiveness, and even positive impacts on office capacity, given the reduction in drive time to distant locations. Some staff have expressed more consistent JC attendance patterns, and the Pre-ETS and job club as well as business services virtual strategies proved to be effective and yielded greater participation. Overall, in the past year, our job placements did reduce by perhaps 10% on the average, and Pre-ETS numbers in many offices did decline; however, staff have appreciated the new virtual strategies which may in future days be used when needed to allow for more effective coverage of job candidate service needs.

But now, as we move forward into the new normal, the focus for the RSB will be how we can have the flexibility to apply these new strategies and collaborate to help us accomplish all the goals and requirements of WIOA in a way that is manageable for our field staff in the coming months and years. I and the supervisors will be looking more at positive growth trends than at the raw numbers when evaluating performance in the field, and we will be looking at more flexibility in assignments where possible so that staff can work more to their passions.

## Agency-wide Statistics for Program Years 2015-2019

PY	Potentially Eligible Students Served	Job Candidates Served	Total Job Candidates Served	Closed, Rehabilitated	Hours Worked per Week	Average Hourly Wage
2019	7,825	16,518	24,343	1,930	29	\$13.43
2018	7,149	16,805	23,954	2,110	28	\$12.45
2017	4,726	17,514	22,240	2,090	29	\$12.09
2016	1,918	17,779	19,697	2,230	30	\$12.03
2015	222	17,654	17,876	2,283	31	\$11.84

# SRC Highlights

During the past two years, the SRC has identified underserved populations which needed more outreach, and these have been incorporated into our State Plan. These areas of emphasis include: individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing, those with autism, those with mental illness, and those with developmental disabilities.

Iowa has been a system leader in Employment First since 2011. Employment First is a belief that all individuals can work with the right services and the right supports. Our goal is competitive community integrated employment at a minimum wage or above. We are learning through an approach integrating Customized Employment strategies and Discovery, that all individuals can have employment success. The Iowa Developmental Disabilities Council has provided training and guidance along with financial assistance in this effort. Historically, many Iowans with the most significant employment barriers have only had sheltered work outcomes to look forward to, but under WIOA and in collaboration with our great partners, this has now changed! In the NDEAM virtual celebration of National Disability Employment Awareness Month, four very successful job candidates with significant barriers were highlighted including a business owner (customized self-employment), a grocery store worker and a full time position with benefits at Mercy One in Mason City. We will continue to partner with our Workforce partners and the community rehabilitation programs in creative ways to help make the dream of employment success a reality for anyone who wants to work.

The Iowa Developmental Disabilities Council has been a key and critical partner in these efforts helping to support pilot projects that are implementing these employment strategies and pushing systemic change for individuals with disabilities. One of these pilots includes the new Discovery pilot for Dubuque, Ames, Cedar Rapids, and Des Moines regions. This involves new referrals and job candidates participating in the pilot project in these selected regions, with new funding and service expectations, operating under a national Fidelity Scale provided through Griffin-Hammis. Technical assistance will continue to be provided by Subject Matter experts and we will continue to identify and track individual progress as well as collective system impact. In a statewide presentation on November 12, 2020, staff from our Ames Area office highlighted several occupational outcomes that the counselor stated “were above and beyond the JC’s expectations, one being a welding position.

Another focus area were job candidates with mental illness. We have an innovative pilot in several of our counties called the Individual Placement with Supports project, partnering with Medicaid, DHS, local community rehabilitation programs, and local mental health centers in order to support rapid placement of individuals with significant mental illness. This IPS movement, as it is called, is demonstrating encouraging outcomes nationwide, and our hope is to see these strategies grow in Iowa leading to improved employment outcomes with the correct supports for those in Iowa who have mental illness.

827 STUDENTS PARTICIPATING IN  
TRANSITION SERVICES WERE  
SUCCESSFULLY EMPLOYED WORKING  
FOR AN AVERAGE WAGE OF \$12.89 PER  
HOUR.

For those who have autism, we have developed a statewide Autism Advisory Team, partnering up with national and private community resources, and the goal of this group will be to improve the level of understanding of the needs and effective job readiness, counseling and job placement strategies for our job candidates whom we serve who are on the spectrum. We also have established a partnership and technical assistance opportunities with Autism Speaks.

The deaf and hard of hearing population has also been a focus area. We have several strategies currently in progress to improve our outreach, visibility and services to this community. This past year, we hired our first rehabilitation counselor to serve primarily the deaf population, and have identified four other counselors with special training and skills to serve a total of three of our regions, Ottumwa, Des Moines, and Council Bluffs, including the Iowa School for the Deaf. We also are hoping to have three more FTEs approved in the coming years to hire counselors who can work primarily with our deaf job candidates, and supporting this concept, we are working cooperatively with the University of Iowa College of Education, Rehabilitation Counselor training program to train new counselors to be able to use ASL and to understand deaf culture, with intern possibilities in our field offices. This will favorably impact future hiring of counselors who have the skills to more effectively work with our deaf and hard of hearing population. We also have established a Deaf Services Advisory Team made up of our staff who are working with deaf candidates, as well as professionals representing deaf services from the Department of Human Rights and the Department of Education in Iowa

## SRC Customer Satisfaction Survey

Overall, IVRS has seen improvements across the board in most areas. As an agency, IVRS continues to review policies, procedures, processes and regulations regularly to seek out strategies to improve the job candidate experience with IVRS. Some of the highlights:

- Successful Closure satisfaction rates are averaging over 90%.
- Unsuccessful Closure satisfaction rates are averaging 70%.
- Motivational Interviewing continues to be a focus.
- Benefits planning services continue to improve as IVRS has invested in a personnel position in this area.
- Restructuring the Resource Team to focus on specialty areas that allows for expertise and consistent messaging.
- Expanded Business Services by adding personal positions in Cedar Rapids and Des Moines.
- Expanded rehabilitation technology services through utilization of the 2 Assistive Technology Specialists to help decrease barriers and challenges to employment.
- Expanded education of field staff for serving the Deaf and Hard of Hearing population.
- Collaborated with the Helen Keller Center to work with the Deaf/Blind population

# SRC Focus Areas:

## Mental Illness

### Number of cases closed with Psychiatric Disorders/Mental Illness (primary & secondary disability)

State Performance FFY2013-FFY2020 (10/01/19 to 09/30/20)

Federal Fiscal Year	Closures	Rehabilitation Rate	Average Wage Earned	Average Hours Worked Per Week
FFY2020	825	41.62%	\$ 12.53	28
FFY2019	1097	45.54%	\$ 11.94	28
FFY2018	1009	41.88%	\$ 11.53	27
FFY2017	937	40.46%	\$ 11.46	29
FFY2016	999	43.10%	\$ 11.50	28
FFY2015	1090	48.94%	\$ 11.08	30
FFY2014	983	50.36%	\$ 11.20	30



Patience is a 22-year female who has co-occurring disorders -- a condition in which an individual has co-existing mental illness and substance use disorder. Her drug of choice is meth. Each day is different and Patience described it as, one day you are feeling good and the next day you have to struggle through just to survive. Since starting with Individual Placement and Support (IPS) Patience has had four jobs and is currently working at Taco Johns as a Drive-Thru Attendant.

During that time IPS worked with a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor to establish funding, purchase

clothing, develop job leads and work closely with the IPS Specialist to support Patience. Throughout the process Patience was homeless on two occasions, arrested for theft, relapsed, hospitalized twice for depression and had one attempted suicide. She was out of work for no longer than seven days during that period of time. A Natural Support was also established to support Patience.

Patience is currently being considered for a Supervisory Position, attends AA/NA meetings regularly, attends therapy and communicates often with her IPS Specialist.

Through the work of IPS partners; Hope Haven Rock Valley, IVRS and Amerigroup were able to help decrease healthcare and social costs due to emergency hospitalizations, homelessness, and arrest. Patience work with IPS has seen the following outcomes:

- She got a job and she no longer went to the E.R. or was hospitalized.
- She was able to purchase a vehicle and is no longer homeless.
- She is being considered for a supervisory position.
- She attends AA/NA meetings and mental health therapy regularly.
- She is self-accountable when she stumbles, which would have never happened in the past.
- She is building healthy relationship with her family.
- She is enjoying life and is a much happier person.

**Individual Placement and Support (IPS) is a science based employment model backed by integrated services from IVRS, IME, mental health providers, and employment support providers.**

- Benefits planning
- Zero **exclusion**
- Competitive integrative employment
- Systematic job development
- Rapid job search and placement
- Worker preferences
- Time-unlimited supports

## Deaf and Hard of Hearing (Primary & Secondary Impairment)

State Performance 2014-2020 FFY (Federal Fiscal Year)

Federal Fiscal Year	Number of Active Clients In Active Status Served from Deaf and Hard of Hearing	Current Fiscal Year Successful Closure 26	Rehabilitation Rate	Average Wage Earned	Average Hours Worked Per Week
FFY2020	554	165	<b>72.69%</b>	\$ 17.57	35
FFY2019	639	171	<b>68.40%</b>	\$ 17.43	34
FFY2018	596	149	<b>63.68%</b>	\$ 16.47	34
FFY2017	612	135	<b>61.36%</b>	\$ 15.51	35
FFY2016	804	175	<b>71.43%</b>	\$ 14.58	34
FFY2015	679	186	<b>75.92%</b>	\$ 14.43	35
FFY2014	985	195	<b>77.69%</b>	\$ 14.69	34



Patricia Thomas (left), who is Deaf joined Bemis, an employer in Centerville Iowa, after her vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Jaime Claywell-Herrera referred her for employment. Patricia was seeking a full time position that would allow her to live independently.

Patricia works in a manufacturing setting. After training, her employer said very few

accommodations were needed to help her be successful. Flashing lights were added to the alarm system and human resources said it was a valuable safety addition for all employees because the loud noise in the plant might prevent anyone from hearing alarms going off.

Patricia has been a valuable addition to the staff at Bemis, and Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services helped to make the connection to full time employment.

## Intellectual Disability (Primary & Secondary Impairment)

State Performance FFY2016-FFY2020 (10/01/19 to 09/30/20)



Federal Fiscal Year	Closures	Rehabilitation Rate	Average Wage Earned	Average Hours Worked Per Week
FFY2020	274	45.67%	\$ 10.35	20
FFY2019	386	47.60%	\$ 9.89	18
FFY2018	414	49.23%	\$ 9.38	19
FFY2017	413	51.43%	\$ 9.32	21
FFY2016	427	54.95%	\$ 9.23	22
FFY2015	388	60.34%	\$ 8.93	24
FFY2014	333	60.88%	\$ 8.71	25



Hi, my name is JD Bumgarner and I have Cerebral Palsy and a learning disability, but that has not stopped me from finding my passion, which is being creative. I have always been interested in designing and drawing things. Even when I was little, I would help my Dad put things together without having to look at the directions, which is a good thing since I have trouble reading. School and learning, especially math, reading and writing have always been hard for me because of my Cerebral Palsy, which is a brain injury. Cerebral Palsy, because it is a

brain injury, makes it harder for me to process information quickly, which is why my favorite types of classes have always been art classes, where I get to use my creativity. I enjoy finding new ways of being creative and was excited to discover welding.

I started to weld as part of the 4H Bucket of Junk Challenge a few years ago. The first piece I created was one that I called "Herky or Cy?". My parents were in awe of what I created out of a bucket of junk. The next year, I created a Beagle

and a bunny. And most recently, I created a tractor from the bucket of junk.

My parents already knew that I was very creative and good at designing things on paper, but now I had a new way to be creative through welding. I have learned that my brain works differently, which isn't a bad thing because it helps me see and create art out of buckets of junk. I like to think that I am giving new life to junk that would have been thrown away.

My parents bought me a welder and welding equipment for Christmas, which I started to use right away. Once Covid-19 hit and schools were cancelled, I started welding even more. I took one of my first pieces, the "Iron Indian", to the high school art show at Arts on Grand and it won the "Curator's Choice Award" and was the first piece of art that I sold. I am blessed to have supportive parents who encourage and help me use my creativity.

I came to live with my Mom and Dad when I was 27 months old as part of the foster care system. My biological sister, Chloe and I were adopted by them a few years later. I also have a younger brother, Nate and two beagles at home. My entire family enjoys helping me with my welding. My Mom created a Facebook page called JD's Creations and posts and sells my pieces there. Both my Mom and Dad help me polish and clean the pieces of junk before and after I weld them. I've even taught my Mom, younger sister and brother to weld. I really enjoy working with my family on my different projects - it has brought us all closer together. I am very blessed and thankful that I get to do what I love.

Visit JD's Facebook page at: <https://www.facebook.com/JDs-Creations-109117357472200/>

## Autism (Primary & Secondary Disability)

State Performance FFY2014 - FFY2020 (10/01/19 To 09/30/20)

Federal Fiscal Year	Employment Outcomes	Rehabilitation Rate	Average Wage Earned	Average Hours Worked Per Week
FFY2020	163	51.75%	\$ 11.59	24
FFY2019	207	54.91%	\$ 10.56	23
FFY2018	176	52.69%	\$ 10.60	24
FFY2017	140	54.05%	\$ 10.12	23
FFY2016	114	55.61%	\$ 10.12	23
FFY2015	107	58.79%	\$ 9.77	27
FFY2014	91	62.76%	\$ 9.00	25

## Iowa Self Employment Sparks Business Venture

This Iowa owned business is growing like wildfire.

JT FireStarters is a business started by an entrepreneur named Daniel, with help from Iowa Self-Employment (ISE), a program through Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services. During 2019 ISE helped 26 Iowa businesses achieve success! Cumulatively from 2015-2018, 125 businesses were successfully started, expanded or acquired with support from IVRS bringing new jobs to the Iowa Economy.

ISE Business Development Specialist Kochell Ricklefs said, "I have been involved with Daniel since the beginning. It is exciting to see this business still allowing him to do what he enjoys."

JT Firestarters is located in Bellevue, Iowa where the firestarters are produced. JT Firestarters are a great way to light a fire in a fireplace, grill, wood stove, chiminea, home firepit or campfire!

Already the business is expanding into new territory. During this year's camping season the crew headed out to campgrounds to hand out free samples in Wisconsin. JT FireStarters then sold 48 cases in 16 campgrounds. In 2019, the business sold a total of 294 cases.

The business plans to grow even more in the coming year.

You can learn more about Daniel and order your own fire starters at: <http://www.justtoops.com/>



# Iowa Self-Employment Program

We have amended the policies governing our Iowa Self-Employment (ISE) program, which can now accommodate supported self-employment, or small business endeavors with the needed supports. There are a handful of these small businesses currently operating in Iowa with growing success, and we anticipate more in the future.



**THERE WERE 92 REFERRALS TO THE SELF EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM FROM NOVEMBER 1, 2019 THROUGH NOVEMBER 1, 2020**

Additionally, an effort has been made to make our process more understandable for our ISE job candidates, with revisions to forms and business plan expectations, allowing for service options that better fit each individual. An example would be our work with farm businesses. We have strengthened our partnership with the Iowa Easter Seals Rural Solutions program, and have separated out the assistive technology services so that Assistive Technology (AT) costs are not deducted from the overall small business financial assistance totals. This should, and we believe has, strengthened the ability of our farm businesses to be successful, allowing the AT services to be provided without taking away from the vital small business funding available to the individual, and allowing the right services to be provided at the right time for our job candidates. Additionally, we have recently organized a small business advisory committee made up of field counselors who work with the small business programs, in order to help improve our local understanding of the program, and to suggest areas needing improvement so that field staff and their job candidates can better comprehend and utilize our program.

In October, the ISE team, and a couple of rehabilitation counselors who have been leaders in their area offices had the opportunity to present a webinar hosted by the non-profit disability advocacy organization called Respectability. Over 500 business and agency representatives from around the nation either participated in the webinar or viewed it through Facebook connections. Iowa was invited to present in this venue because we are nationally recognized for our self-employment programming, so we were able to demonstrate how our program works, and also to highlight several really exciting success stories, both non-customized and customized programs. In the aftermath of this event, at least two other state rehabilitation agencies contacted us for more information.

Below are some statistics from our Iowa Self-Employment program for the past year:

## **Program Year July 1, 2019 to July 1, 2020**

**Full ISE Program Participants 206**

**Microenterprise Participants 39**

**42 Successful Iowa Businesses have been started since July 1, 2019 through the Iowa Self Employment Program**

# Transition Students



Pre-employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) provides services to high school students seeking employment following graduation. In April 2020, IVRS made the decision to hold our Pre-ETS summer programming virtually. Our Transition Action Team (TAT) immediately began meeting to develop what this programming would look like as this had never been done in this format previously. From these discussions, the IVRS Virtual Pre-ETS Summer Program was developed. This seven-week program ran June 15<sup>th</sup> through July 30<sup>th</sup> and was held twice a day (one morning session and one afternoon session). Area offices partnered together to develop and run activities each week based on different industries. Below outlines these industry areas:

- Week 1: June 15-18 Skilled Trades Week
- Week 2: June 22-25 Transportation/Logistics Week
- Week 3: June 29-July 2 Culinary Week
- Week 4: July 6-9 Healthcare Week
- Week 5: July 13-16 Service Industry Week
- Week 6: July 20-23 IT/Creative Tech Week
- Week 7: July 27-30 Manufacturing Week

**10,974 Transition Students in Iowa were served in the 2019 program year**

TAT developed the theme of “Me Monday”, “Transition Tuesday”, “Working Wednesday” and “Tour Thursday” for the virtual program. Local area office staff developed fun and engaging activities following each of these themes and ran the same sessions twice a day. Staff also collaborated with our contracted transition programs, businesses, post-secondary programs and other community partners so students could make connections and have opportunities to ask questions and engage with these partners. The IVRS Virtual Pre-ETS Summer Program was open to potentially eligible and IVRS eligible students across the state. Registration was posted on our website and shared out with school staff and partners to assist with getting students signed up for the program. On average, 53 students participated each day during the seven-week program.

Due to COVID-19, many Pre-ETS activities continue to be provided virtually across the state. IVRS staff learned many strategies delivering Pre-ETS virtually over this past summer that are being used currently in service delivery. Staff have been provided with various resources available and continue to use their own creativity to develop virtual activities to use with students with disabilities across the state. Various virtual platforms, such as Zoom and Google Classroom, are being used to connect with students. IVRS anticipates even after COVID-19 has passed and more in-person activities resume that virtual activities will continue as a method for service delivery to students across the state.

# IVRS Staff Training

Staff training, like all other areas, needed to shift amidst the pandemic to a virtual platform to continue staff development and enrichment. Through the shift we made several discoveries on what worked and what did not work well and continue to evolve as we move forward. A few of the lessons we have learned are; in a virtual delivery method more conscious efforts need to be made to shorten training time and allow more time for breaks. Engagement reduces after a shorter period of time so activities and discussion need to take place more often. We also early on trained staff on the use of virtual platforms so that they had a good understanding of how to access training moving forward.



In August 2020 we had planned for our all staff conference however we had to shift plans to make this event virtual. The conference team shifted gears quickly and all presenters were contacted. We switched the majority of presentations to 1/2 hour pre-recorded segments that were played on a live virtual platform. All sessions were closed captioned for accessibility and presenters were live in chat whenever possible. We broke the 2 day event into 5 1/2 days to avoid Zoom fatigue. The only segments that went over the 1/2 hour mark were our keynote presentations which were done as completely live sessions with different speakers and short clips to keep the audience engaged. We had great attendance given the fact that the derecho came through during the conference. In the end we were all very grateful for the pre-recorded sessions that allowed staff to watch their sessions at alternative times for those affected by the storm who were not able to make the live sessions.

In June of 2020 we started virtual All Staff Meetings. These meetings were designed to allow for consistent messaging across the state on changes and trainings. All of our area offices were holding staff meetings at different times and this effort was made to make two hours of that time originally devoted toward area office meetings to allow for statewide initiative discussions. The topics discussed vary depending on the hot topics that need to be addressed. This also allowed for consistent messaging on COVID measures and how our agency is moving forward. We have had best practices shared by field staff, training by administration, success stories shared from across the state, and policy updates during these monthly meetings.

Staff hiring continues as usual. This means we had to adjust our new staff training across the state. Supervisors are finding ways to pair staff up with mentors virtually and continue training in the same virtual means. Both Zoom and Google Meets are platforms that are used for this training. The new staff are trained right away on the virtual platform use (how to access and use). All New Staff are now taking a virtual new staff training. This is done on a quarterly basis. The change in structure was made similar to other training, shortening time for the training and allowing more independent learning experiences and group discussion to review material. Some of the independent study is done through recorded sessions while others are through reading of policy and procedures followed by discussion. In times where additional instruction is needed the Training Resource Manager may meet one on one or with the Supervisor and staff member to ensure understanding of material as all staff have different learning style and need for different ways of communication.

Training will continue in any environment to ensure that our staff have the material and information that they need to be successful in the environment that we are operating in and done in a way that ensures their safety.

# IVRS POLICY

## *2020: Positive Changes to Policies and the Policy Process*

### THE IMPACT TEAM WAS BORN

As with many aspects of life in 2020, IVRS policy has seen some big changes. Luckily, these have all been positive ones!

The biggest update to the policy process this year was the transition from the Coordinating Council to the IMPACT Team. The Coordinating Council had the sole focus of updating policy. This Council was very instrumental in making policy changes, however, the process wasn't working effectively for a few reasons. One of these reasons was that members felt they didn't understand enough of the

"why" behind policy changes. They didn't have enough information about where regulations come from or how that process worked. This resulted in a lot of time spent in meetings with suggestions that were not allowable by our regulations.

The members of the Council were also selected by their supervisors. This created an environment where some members did not have an interest in policy. This is not helpful in a policy group!

After attending regional meetings with other VR state agencies, IVRS learned about a number of promising practices other states were taking to lead to better policy. Members of the IVRS Planning and Development Team (PDT) then got together to review what was learned, brainstorm innovative ideas for policy, and rethink IVRS performance. From these discussions, the IMPACT team was born.

IMPACT stands for "innovation; mission focused; policy driven; action oriented; customer centered; and transparent leadership". The intent of the group is so much more than policy. It combines leadership skills with training on the "big picture" of how IVRS fits into the larger system. Members receive training in many aspects of the agency and learn about the regulations, state plan, and other aspects of IVRS.

The result is a team of individuals who know the "why" behind policy changes and who have the skills and knowledge to make informed and unique ideas about how to improve policies for the better. Team members also serve as a conduit between IVRS management and their local offices which leads to more consistency across the state.



# SRC IS INSTRUMENTAL

IVRS is extremely grateful for the input and suggestions SRC members provide on policies, both in the large group as well as in the VR Service Delivery Committee. This is no easy task: in the last year, IVRS has presented over 26 policies, or approximately 120 pages, for SRC to review and discuss! IVRS values this input and works actively to incorporate all SRC suggestions into policy.

The VR Service Delivery Committee has focused on a number of areas within the VR system they wanted to see improvement on. One of these areas was improving the process from referral to eligibility.

## SRC Positively Impacted the Following Polices Resulting in a Smoother Intake Process:

- Status 00-0: Referral
- Status 02-0: Application
- Eligibility
- Status 04-0: Waiting List

### POLICIES CHANGED THIS YEAR THROUGH THE SRC:

- Authorizations and Billings Authority for Release of Information
- Appearance as a Witness
- Confidentiality and Release
- Background Checks
- Status 24-0
- Status 20-0
- Status 28-0
- Status 22-0
- Status 26-0
- Purchase Principles
- Personal Assistance Services
- Serving Students in Transition
- OJT and Externships
- Rehabilitation Technology
- Status 14-0
- Status 16-0
- Informed Choice
- Individualized Plan for Employment
- Status 10-\_\_
- Performance Measures
- Comparable Services and Benefits

Throughout the prior year, IVRS worked with the VR Service Delivery Subcommittee to gather thoughts, suggestions, and ideas. As a result, IVRS was able to make major changes to the policies listed below. The end result was policies that were separated out in a more logical manner, with content that made sense for applicants as well as IVRS staff. It also clearly defined the expectations for IVRS staff to assure the intake process was a smooth and efficient process for the individual with a disability.

Another focus area of the SRC VR Service Delivery Committee was the Deaf and Hard of Hearing population. In the area of policy, SRC discussions were instrumental in updating the Rehabilitation Technology policy. The input from the SRC assisted IVRS in narrowing the policy and removing redundancies, clarifying the purchase of hearing aids, and understanding the process of Assistive Technology.

Overall, the SRC is a very critical part of the policy process. Gathering input from the Council allows IVRS to be aware of areas of policy that weren't explained or defined appropriately. The relationship with the SRC also generates valuable discussions to assist IVRS in writing policies that work for everyone and are easier to understand.

# IVRS Business Services

IVRS has developed a business services team with representation in every area office. The business service team is designed to provide resources and service alignment to serve our dual customer base, businesses as well as our job candidates.

2020 has been a unique year as we respond to the business impact of the pandemic. Although industries and the types of employment opportunities are changing, there is still hiring being done. Our job candidates are challenged in not only how to safely conduct their business tasks in the pandemic, but in many cases how to navigate a virtual world.

IVRS Business Services Team developed a Virtual Customer Service Academy, an opportunity for IVRS Job Candidates to learn the importance of customer service and become comfortable talking to and interacting with customers. By working with our Business Partners like CVS Pharmacy we were able to take their request and build this program. Offered for the first time in October, we were able to provide the training to over 100 Job Candidates and have presented 50 participants with a certificate upon completion.

IVRS will continue to offer the Customer Service Academy virtually to our Job Candidates across the state as feedback from participants was incredibly positive.

- **“I really enjoyed the customer service academy! Having years of experience in the customer service industry, it was great to get fresh knowledge of the things that can often be forgotten. Thanks for the opportunity”.—Chloe**
- **“I LOVE the customer service academy. The presenters are doing a fantastic job and I hate for it to end. Thank you”--Carrie**

**“Experience, knowledge and empathy are key when dealing with customers in a fast paced retail environment. Prep programs like the one Iowa VR has built for roles in a customer service file can be the key difference between candidates during the application and interview process. Equipping candidates with a customer service foundation prior to hire generally results in more engaged and prepared employees.”**

**– CVS Pharmacy**



IVRS Business Service Specialists are also hosting six virtual job clubs a month statewide. These job clubs are providing virtual tours, meet and greets with business partners as well as informational sessions for job candidate to learn more about an occupation. As we adjust to the changes of 2020, we continue to be innovative and learned how to better serve our partners.

**87% approval rating from our Job Candidates**

# IVRS Benefits Planning

The virtual world has become how we provide benefits counseling to job candidates. Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation (IVRS) continues to provide detailed, critical information for job candidates who receives Social Security (SSA) disability benefits. Our dedicated team of benefits planners provides individual benefits counseling starting at intake so that our job candidates will have the information they need as they create their employment plan. The lack of understanding about how working will affect Social Security benefits leads to job candidates limiting their income in order to remain connected to SSA which can lead to financial insecurity and lifelong dependence on public support.

**Detailed benefits counseling has led to 97 individuals who were on public support for their living expenses now supporting themselves, a savings of \$900,276 annually for the state.**

Friday's LIVE is a weekly virtual event for job candidates who have recently enrolled in IVRS services. We provide a flyer at intake and encourage job candidates to attend. This informative event provides general information about a variety of work incentives that provides safety nets so they can transition off benefits or supplement SSA benefits with work.

The Virtual Parent Gatherings are an evening event that is offered once a month for any parents of students and youth with disabilities. Initially a survey was sent to interested parents so that they could choose topics of interest. These events started in April 2020 and attendance has ranged from 15-60 parents. We recently changed the format so that we can better meet the needs of the parents who join the zoom. We do a poll at the beginning to determine hot topics. These topics can include: Social Security questions, Guardianship, Medicaid and Parent's choice. Each family is on their own unique path and often it is difficult to get the answers they need or to even know what questions to ask. Some parents who join are further down the road and can offer great insights to those still in the transition between school and adult services.



**IVRS Benefits Planning Cadre**

## Learn More

### **IVRS JOB CANDIDATE APPLICATION**

[ivrs.iowa.gov/agency-services/apply-services](http://ivrs.iowa.gov/agency-services/apply-services)

### **IVRS BUSINESS SERVICES**

[ivrs.iowa.gov/business-services](http://ivrs.iowa.gov/business-services)

### **STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL**

[ivrs.iowa.gov/partners/state-rehabilitation-council](http://ivrs.iowa.gov/partners/state-rehabilitation-council)

### **WORKFORCE INNOVATION AND OPPORTUNITIES ACT**

[www.doleta.gov/wioa/](http://www.doleta.gov/wioa/)

### **REHABILITATION SERVICES ADMINISTRATION**

[rsa.ed.gov/](http://rsa.ed.gov/)

### **NATIONAL COALITION OF STATE REHABILITATION COUNCILS**

[www.ncsrc.net/](http://www.ncsrc.net/)

## Contact SRC

### **CONTACT US**

CALL: 515-281-6731

E-MAIL: [lori.buske@iowa.gov](mailto:lori.buske@iowa.gov)

### **ATTEND A MEETING SRC**

Meetings are open to the public, with schedules available at: <https://www.iowa.gov/general/publicmeetings>

### **BECOME A MEMBER**

Contact us for more information or complete an application at: <https://talentbank.iowa.gov/>

## State Rehabilitation Council

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