

**Department of Employment, Training and Rehabilitation (DETR)
Rehabilitation Division, Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program
Biennial Report for SFY 2019 and 2020
Shelley Hendren, Administrator**

Purpose: The Rehabilitation Division is primarily responsible to address the assessment, education, training, job placement and job retention needs of Nevadans with disabilities. The Division places emphasis on providing necessary goods and services that remove barriers for individuals with disabilities leading to competitive, integrated employment and self-sufficiency.

Organizational Structure: The Division is comprised of three bureaus and one program:

Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation (BVR)
Bureau of Services to Persons who are Blind or Visually Impaired (BSBVI)
Bureau of Disability Adjudication (BDA)
Blind Business Enterprise of Nevada (BEN) Program

Activities of the service bureaus and operational units are directed and supported by Division Administration, which consists of 12 FTEs, including the Administrator and two Deputy Administrators.

Statutory Authority:	NRS 232.910, NRS 426.550, NRS 426.640, NRS 615.190
Number of Employees:	302 FTE/2021
Telephone:	775.687.6880
Website Address:	www.detr.nv.gov and www.vrnevada.org

This report, as mandated in NRS 615.180, includes the accomplishments of the Division’s Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation (BVR) and Bureau of Services to Persons who are Blind or Visually Impaired (BSBVI), jointly referred to as the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program.

VR Key Objectives/Accomplishments:

Objective: Enhance the economic benefits to the State and the community through successful long-term competitive, integrated employment, increased income, and reduced public support for individuals with disabilities in Nevada.

Accomplishments: VR placed 718 individuals with disabilities into competitive, integrated employment in SFY 2019, with an average wage of \$13.11/hour. For SFY 2020, including 6 months of the pandemic/state of emergency, 529 individuals with disabilities successfully achieved competitive, integrated employment, with an average wage of \$13.40/hour. Wages each year exceeded performance goals for people with disabilities with multiple barriers to employment. Over the biennium, 453 individuals who reported receiving public support at application (including TANF, SSI/SSDI, worker’s compensation, veteran’s administration and other benefits), no longer required public support at case closure. Additionally, 44% added *private* medical insurance at successful case closure, likely eliminating prior *public* medical insurance like Medicaid and Medicare.

Objective: Eliminate duplication of services through collaborative ventures with community partners, State agencies, and local and non-profit organizations, to develop systematic approaches for shared information, client services, and applicable resources.

Accomplishments: VR has interlocal contracts with government agencies: Nevada Division of Public and Behavioral Health, Division of Welfare & Supportive Services, Aging and Disabilities Services Division, Employment Security Division, Regional Transportation Commission, and the Nevada System of Higher Education (NSHE) and its member colleges and universities. Nevada VR was the first to develop and execute quality agreements with the state's Department of Education (DOE) and 16 local school districts (with high schools), that captured the requirements and intent of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). VR continues its productive relationships with education.

VR also holds interlocal contracts with WIOA Section 121 Native American agencies, known as the Moapa Band of Paiutes, the Fort Mojave Indian Tribe, the Shoshone Paiute Tribe of the Duck Valley and a working agreement with the Fallon Paiute Shoshone Tribe. VR additionally partners with the Battle Mountain Band of the Te-Moak Tribe of Western Shoshone. VR contracts with community rehabilitation partners: Capability Health & Human Services (formerly Easterseals Nevada), Goodwill of Southern Nevada, Opportunity Village, Best Buddies, United Cerebral Palsy of Nevada and High Sierra Industries. Additionally, VR has service agreements in place with 106 independent service providers ranging from medical service providers to job coaching, job development and interpreter services.

VR staff are co-located within all JobConnect offices statewide (American Job Center of Nevada affiliate sites), and work collaboratively with Title I, Title II and Title III workforce partners.

Objective: Maintain a comprehensive system of personnel development to ensure staff are qualified professionals with a 21st century understanding of the needs of individuals with disabilities and the needs of businesses in the local economy.

Accomplishments: VR hired its first FTE Training Officer in September 2018, as approved through the 2017 legislative process. The training officer took over responsibility from VR's Quality Assurance (QA) unit to deliver existing training to staff, and additionally develop new training curricula. VR's training officer delivered over 50 training sessions to staff over the biennium, including on the following topics: AWARE electronic case management system (launched in April 2019), Ethics for Job Developers and Coaches, Resolving Single Audit Review Exceptions, New Counselor Academy, Job Development for Counselors, Ethics for Counselors, Disability Awareness (offered to VR and American Job Center staff), Measurable Skill Gains/Credentials, Effective Communication (ADA), 9 Point Case Closure, Semi-Autonomous Research Assistant (SARA) Functionality (basic and advanced) and ODIN (On-Demand Interview Network), which is a new videoconferencing tool developed as part of SARA.

Over the biennium, VR contracted to update and enhance its on-line training modules called "eRehab" into a new Learning Management System (LMS). eRehab consists of 9 training modules that focus on best practices that enable vocational rehabilitation counselors to provide the most effective services to persons with disabilities leading to employment. eRehab allows new counselors to access training early in the onboarding process, providing guidance, and clarity on VR policy and procedures to help improve service delivery to VR participants.

Objective: Provide faster, more efficient and accessible services using the Internet and other technologies.

Accomplishments: After a 19-month implementation period, VR went live with its new cloud-based case management system called, “AWARE VR” in April 2019. With this new system, VR is fully compliant with federal and state program processing and reporting requirements. The AWARE VR case management system has also reduced staff time and costs while improving functionality and efficiency for the VR program.

In response to the pandemic and Declaration of Emergency on March 12, 2020, the skilled and dedicated staff in DETR’s IT Division developed a cloud solution that allowed staff access to DETR’s network from their homes. With the ability to telework, VR staff resumed service delivery to Nevadans with disabilities, of a limited scope, in early April 2020. Emergency, priority services offered by VR at that time included: counseling and guidance, online Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) curriculums, pre-paid phones, internet access, assistive technology, goods (like work clothing), virtual assistance with on-line trainings and/or assessments, telehealth mental health counseling and assessments, and medical remediation when there was imminent need. Additionally, for clients who deemed it necessary to seek work, VR provided job development including leads on hot jobs, and assistance with advocacy, applications, resumes and mock interviews.

VR determined to serve Nevadans with disabilities using all the technology and tools at its disposal. VR was able to launch DocuSign, which streamlined the signature process on service contracts and on client documents like the Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE). The process to fully execute documents dropped from weeks to mere days, and 74% of documents sent through DocuSign were signed and returned the same day. Nevada VR also created an online application process allowing potential clients to fully apply to the program using technology. Nevada VR is the first VR program in the nation to offer a complete, integrated online application process to clients. The VR orientation video is available online, and VR instituted a shared, interactive calendar for scheduling of all intakes statewide. While a variety of platforms exist to connect VR to participants, the addition of ODIN as part of the ever-expanding SARA virtual assistant will revolutionize VR’s ability to meet clients where they are and deliver counseling and guidance and other services virtually. SARA’s expansion during the pandemic also included the ability to share information between partner agencies. A release of information was created, and The Career Index (architects of SARA), programmed the product to give the partners the ability to opt-in to information sharing if a release of information was on file with any partner entity. Now VR staff may add the release into SARA and attach it to notifications to partners when there is a client in common.

Objective: Provide comprehensive rehabilitation services, including Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) for successful transition from secondary school to employment and/or postsecondary education for students with disabilities.

Accomplishments: 2,168 transition-age students with disabilities were served by VR over the biennium. VR has seen an increase in its student cases of 47% since the passage of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) were provided to a total of 2,816 students with disabilities statewide. This is a slight increase over the total number served in the prior biennium, despite COVID-19 challenges. Pre-ETS includes career counseling, counseling on postsecondary education, self-advocacy training, work readiness

training and work-based learning. 69% of those students served Pre-ETS, or 1,944 students with disabilities were “potentially eligible” and did not have open cases with VR. Overall, Pre-ETS service delivery increased 13% in SFY 2020 over SFY 2019.

Over the biennium, VR collaborated with several non-profit organizations, higher education institutions, local school districts, and charter schools to support and sponsor 22 work-based learning and experiential camps statewide, designed to provide Pre-ETS to students with disabilities ages 16-22. Each of the camps was unique and offered students opportunities to learn new skills, explore the world of work, be introduced to new career fields and explore college campuses and their own communities. 303 students with disabilities participated in these summer camps statewide. The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in 9 of the scheduled camps being cancelled and a projected 150 students with disabilities missing out on the opportunity to attend these camps in SFY 2020.

Over the biennium, Project SEARCH, a collaborative program between VR and Clark County School District (CCSD) that provides work experiences for CCSD students with disabilities, continued to work with four long-time partner/employer work sites including: Sunrise Hospital, Regional Transportation Commission, Mountain View Hospital and Southern Hills Hospital. The Project SEARCH site developed with the Washoe County School District (WCSD) in 2018 at the Renaissance Reno Downtown Hotel & Spa, ultimately closed in 2020 due to a funding decision by the WCSD.

To better serve students and youth with disabilities, and to leverage unmatched federal funding, VR continued its Third-Party Cooperative Arrangements (“Arrangements”) over the biennium. VR had Arrangements with CCSD, WCSD, Western Nevada College (WNC) and Truckee Meadows Community College (TMCC). However, budget reductions forced the elimination of three of these programs at the end of SFY 2020, and with CCSD at the end of SFY 2021. Although they are valued partners delivering valued services to joint participants of the VR program, an in-depth evaluation of the cost of these programs was undertaken. The cost per student in an Arrangement was dramatically higher (367% to 628% higher) than the cost per student in the general VR program. VR is working to develop other collaborations which will provide similar wrap around services to support Nevada’s students and youth with disabilities in a more cost-effective manner.

Objective: Provide convenient, accessible and equitable services and opportunities to Nevada businesses and job-seeking individuals with disabilities.

Accomplishments: VR continued its public relations and marketing outreach over the biennium with Nevada businesses and people with disabilities as its two target audiences. A new television commercial was created which focused on mental health issues and how VR Nevada can help individuals with mental health disabilities to prepare for and return to work. Four “Coping with Stress” YouTube videos were created in SFY 2020 to help to address the unprecedented mental health toll on Nevadans as a result of the global pandemic. VR’s social media sites continue to be an active part in promoting the services of Vocational Rehabilitation and educating clients and potential clients on VR-connected issues, VR services and pandemic-related information, services and resources. The sites include YouTube, LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter. To date, 64 videos, including success story vignettes, have been created and aired on VR’s YouTube channel, which has had 14,596 views to date. The videos feature employers talking about their positive experiences with VR clients that they hired. Additionally, since the

campaign's inception, VR's combined social media outlets have reached over 293,000 individuals and had over half a million media impressions. VR has 439 Twitter followers and 5,229 Facebook followers.

VR considers Nevada businesses as its consumers to the same degree as its job-seeking consumers with disabilities. VR therefore created and expanded upon its own business services team, which provides recruitment and retention services to Nevada businesses, consultation and training on workplace accessibility and other disability related issues, and education/information on financial incentives and other advantages of using VR program services and hiring individuals with disabilities. The team reaches out to businesses through contacts developed jointly with DETR's Employment Security Division. The team also participates in job fairs, expositions, the economic development forums, local and state workforce development boards, human resource associations, regional workforce consortia, chambers of commerce membership/participation events, and statewide economic development efforts.

VR, through its business services team, has had a long-standing, successful relationship with the Sephora Distribution Center in North Las Vegas, where a work-readiness, on-the-job training program was created for VR clients. The Sephora program provides 40 hours of classroom training and 360 hours of hands-on job skills training 5 days per week for 8 weeks. VR's regional partner, Capability Health & Human Services (formerly "Easterseals Nevada") provides the training and expertise when participants are working/learning hands-on in the distribution center. They also are providing the in-person soft skills training. Sephora completed its first year of training in October 2020. To date, 29 VR clients with disabilities who graduated from the Sephora training program have been hired by Sephora, with a starting wage of \$14.00/hour with full benefits.

Another program that has had great success in training and hiring individuals with disabilities is at the Amazon Prime Center and Amazon Distribution Center in Las Vegas. The joint training program is administered by Pride Industries with VR providing the work-ready clients. Pride Industries provides a mock workplace for training of VR participants. The Amazon training program started in the spring of 2020. To date, 45 VR clients with disabilities have been hired in the Amazon Centers, with a starting wage of \$15.00/hour with full benefits.

Additional Key Long-Term Objectives:

1. Increase the number of Nevadans with disabilities who become successfully employed at a competitive rate in an integrated setting.
2. Implement a statewide supported employment model to meet the vocational needs of people with the most significant disabilities to successfully achieve competitive, integrated employment at an increased rate.
3. Provide appropriate goods, services and training to VR clients that prepares them for Nevada's in-demand jobs.
4. Promote the State as a model employer.
5. Ensure the statewide provision of Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) to all eligible and potentially eligible students with disabilities in need of these services.

Significant Legislation or Executive Action Affecting the Agency:

SB50: Bill sponsored by VR in the 2019 legislative session, which made changes to the 700-Hour program within NRS 284.327. VR certifies individuals with disabilities for qualification on state job recruitments through the 700-Hour program. Individuals with disabilities on 700-Hour recruitment lists are equally qualified for the positions for which they are competing. The nature of this program is to allow state agencies to make temporary appointments of up to 700 hours from these recruitment lists to VR qualified persons with disabilities. The 700 hours helps to ensure a good fit, and to allow the individual to learn the job on-the-job with VR support, if needed.

In the 2017 legislative session, AB192 became law. AB192 made utilization of the 700-Hour list a *requirement* for state agencies as a first step in the recruitment process. As approved in the 2019 legislative session, SB50 added “reasonable” in front of “accommodation” to match language within the Americans with Disabilities Act that requires “reasonable” accommodations for people with disabilities in the workplace, if needed. Additionally, language was removed that was unnecessary and unclear. Use of the term “benefit,” not defined in law, eliminated the ability for certain agencies to hire from the 700-Hour recruitment lists who are highly motivated to do so, such as VR and the Welfare Division. This was an unintended consequence of changes to NRS 284.327 from AB192 in the 2017 legislative session. Language already existed in the law that allowed appointing authorities latitude if they determined use of the 700-Hour lists “would create an actual or potential conflict of interest.” That protection already existed and did not require the further limitations imposed by the word “benefit.”