STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL

2017 ANNUAL REPORT ON
VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SERVICES

The Virginia Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired

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Commissioner
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Message from the SRC Chairperson

On behalf of the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) for the Virginia Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired (DBVI), I am pleased to present the Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2017 Annual Report on Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Services in Virginia. This report reflects the partnership between the SRC and the DBVI VR Program.

This year, the SRC continued its efforts to increase its level of advisory support to DBVI’s employment and outreach efforts. Council members represented the SRC at public meetings held throughout Virginia, at meetings of other Virginia boards and councils to include the Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS), and at meetings of the National Council of State Agencies for the Blind (NCSAB) and the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR). Council members also met quarterly to conduct reviews of DBVI’s workforce unit and VR programs.

The activities and accomplishments highlighted in this report are the result of the work of DBVI’s highly committed staff and an effective collaboration between the agency and the SRC. Our Council members are looking forward to continued partnership and collaboration with DBVI as the agency continues to evolve to meet the requirements of WIOA and provide comprehensive services and support to ensure that consumers find and maintain meaningful, competitive integrated employment.

I want to thank each member of the SRC for your time, dedication, and service to the Council and to the agency. I would also like to extend a special thank you to those members who completed your terms at the end of FY2017. My term has also come to an end as of September 30, 2017. It has been an honor and a privilege to serve alongside such dedicated and talented members and agency personnel for the last six years. Thank you for all you do to ensure that blind, deafblind, and vision impaired Virginians have the skills, resources, and tools they need to achieve their personal and professional goals.

Rebecca Bridges, FFY2016-2017 SRC Chairperson
Message from the DBVI Commissioner

We thank you for taking a few minutes to read this annual report produced by the State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind and Vision Impaired. Hopefully, as you read this report, you will see how the Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired provided vocational rehabilitation and related services leading to employment of many Virginians who have significant vision impairments. These pages include the success stories of individuals, who are blind or vision impaired and who dared to face the challenges presented by their disabilities, which they overcame to become gainfully employed. The efforts of the Department to fulfill the portion of its mission of providing the needed resources and services, which enable Virginians with blindness and low vision to achieve their goals of employment, education and independence, are described herein.

Please take note of the information regarding the wide array of services and initiatives undertaken by DBVI in 2017. These include partnerships established with Virginia Businesses through our Business Relations team. These ever-expanding efforts resulted in more consumers with significant vision loss being given opportunities to engage in paid and unpaid work experiences, internships, informational interviews and job shadowing to prepare for work in competitive integrated environments. More young adults with vision impairments were provided pre-employment transition services to assist them in acquiring the skills that will facilitate a smooth progression into work and post-secondary training/education. The agency has initiated steps to provide youth with vision disabilities clear pathways to careers and self-sufficiency through the Career Pathways for Individuals with Disabilities project. From the Robotics and Cyber Security Academy funded by this grant to our traditional transition programs, this report highlights the creative and continuously improving programming offered by DBVI to prepare Virginians with vision disabilities for the workplace.

During the past year, the agency promulgated regulations and policies implementing the provisions of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). This Department continued to work with WIOA partner agencies in the Virginia workforce system to assure that job seekers with disabilities have access to quality jobs in the new Virginia economy. The public servants employed by DBVI and elsewhere in the Commonwealth’s workforce development network have actively labored to develop an inclusive system with accessible information, processes, and services.

The ultimate objective of the DBVI Vocational Rehabilitation program is to assist Virginia employers in hiring competent workers based on their abilities and to help its clientele to acquire the skills sought by employers. This report shares information regarding the success of DBVI towards this end. After reading about the activities in this program during last year, you too will appreciate the efforts and commitment of Virginia’s vocational rehabilitation professionals, and the persistence and positive attitudes of our neighbors who go to work without allowing their significant disabilities to deter them.

Raymond E. Hopkins, Commissioner
Vocational Rehabilitation Program

The DBVI Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Program provides necessary services for eligible individuals who are blind, deafblind, or vision impaired that want to achieve successful employment outcomes. Field-based services reach consumers in their homes, at their jobs, and in their schools. These individuals collaborate with VR counselors to develop their own Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE). Teams of VR experts assist consumers to reach gainful employment in accordance with their abilities. DBVI offers these individuals further support via Rehabilitation Technology; Rehabilitation Teaching and Independent Living; the Virginia Rehabilitation Center for the Blind and Vision Impaired; the Randolph-Sheppard program; the Virginia Industries for the Blind; and, services for Education, Orientation and Mobility, and Low Vision.

The purpose of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) of 2014 is to increase access to and opportunities for employment, education, and support services for individuals with disabilities so they can enter the labor market and be competitive in a highly automated global economy. This is also in direct alignment with Governor McAuliffe’s workforce priorities in the new Virginia economy, which strive to ensure that Virginia’s workforce, including individuals served by DBVI, meet current and anticipated economic development needs by making sure that these individuals have the requisite skills and credentials to become members of a highly qualified and relevant workforce. Priority alignment also includes addressing in-demand skill sets associated with economic growth and prosperity of workers and employers to support growth in the public and private sectors.

Regional Offices

DBVI has six regional offices strategically situated throughout the Commonwealth located in Bristol, Fairfax, Norfolk, Richmond, Roanoke, and Staunton. Each office staffed qualified professionals who provide vocational rehabilitation, education, independent living, orientation and mobility, low vision, rehabilitation technology and deafblind services. In preparation for the 2017 Annual Report, the Regional Office Managers summarized key program activities and accomplishments in response to the following questions:

1. Can you describe one or two of your greatest accomplishments this year?
2. What were these accomplishments and what makes each of these stand out?
3. What innovative activities or practices did you try that had a positive impact on staff or clients?
4. What are you most looking forward to next year?

Accomplishments and Innovative Activities

The Bristol office highlighted an activity at the Bristol Motor Speedway targeting VR transition students and age-appropriate students from the Education Services. This well-attended event gave participants opportunities to walk the racetrack and visit Victory Lane, and sign their names at the finish line. This experience was paired with a discussion of volunteer and career opportunities at the Bristol Motor Speedway. Caren Phipps, DBVI’s Director of Services for Children and Youth, extended these options by presenting information about the Career Pathways program and summer opportunities at VRCBVI. In addition to special events, the Bristol office team is making an effort to meet the needs of transition students by adjusting their work hours to accommodate student schedules. They are committed to ensuring that each student gets the full extent of services at an earlier age to better prepare them for independence.

A partnership with Virginia’s Department for Aging and Rehabilitation Services (DARS) was one of the Fairfax office’s ventures this year. The intra-agency collaboration on job clubs and the Federal Hiring
Initiative allowed for greater exposure to employers resulting in a significant increase in successful placements over the past two years. In addition, one of the VR teachers facilitates a monthly “Empowerment Group” which focuses on discussion topics such as “Stay Active and Play,” “Family and Friends,” and “Difficult Situations.” Other office accomplishments included the participation of three staff members in the DBVI Robot Cyber Academy in June and increasing instruction and use of assistive technology devices.

The Norfolk office was pleased to report success with over twenty-five internships or work experiences over the past year. A technology training event in June and a First Aid - CPR Certification class were program offerings during the year. The three-day technology training offered students a chance to work with a tutor and acquire skills with assistive technology that will augment their productivity in school or the workplace. Also, the VR counselors implemented homework activities to assist clients in becoming more independent. Assignments consisted of job search activities, putting in job applications, and increasing communication with their counselors and potential employers.

The Richmond office’s proximity to the main DBVI campus invited involvement in planning and participation in several agency activities. Staff contributed to planning and implementation of the Take Action and Take Charge programs. As described by other regional offices, clients were encouraged to participate in job clubs and homework activities.

A ribbon cutting in March heralded the opening of a new site location for the Roanoke office. The new space enabled the staff to try new things, such as hosting community partner meetings and collaboration with the Virginia Employment Commission (VEC). Working with VEC increased clients' participation in job searching techniques and brought about an awareness of job searching tools and availability of resources. Also, a low vision Technology Expo was staged in Lynchburg and included transition students among the attendees. For employees, the upheaval of moving was exacerbated by multiple changes in the staff resulting from a new hire, retirement, and promotion. At times, this situation necessitated caseload management changes. Despite the challenges, clients were served effectively and twenty-four adult cases were closed successfully.

Transition events were spotlighted by the Staunton office in 2017. Partnership with various agencies provided students an opportunity to learn about educational and vocational options. In addition, DBVI partnered with the Virginia School for the Deaf and Blind (VSDB) to offer an audible aster egg hunt for children and families. During the year, Staunton office staff integrated three new staff members into their eleven-member team to address increasing service demands.

Looking Ahead

There was consensus among the regional offices in considering their future perspectives. Office managers expressed a commitment to implementing WIOA’s common performance measures and continuing to pursue and increase relationships with area businesses. In addition, regional offices plan to encourage clients to utilize DBVI’s resources and training options. Specifically, regional offices are anxious to take advantage of the VR experiences provided through VRCBVI, including summer offerings for pre-employment transition students (LIFE and LEAP) along with the Career Pathways for Individuals with Disabilities (CPID) program opportunities for staff and clients.

Individual offices discussed organizational or programming goals for the coming year. After an unsettled year, the Roanoke office looks forward to a stable team providing continuity and consistency in caseload management. The Bristol office is already putting together a schedule of transition events. They are arranging a tour and presentation with the Southwest Virginia Alliance for Manufacturing Center of
Excellence and CPID. Another event in April 2018, Take Our Daughters and Sons to Work Day, is intended to encourage career exploration.

Employment Statistics
In FY2017, the DBVI VR Program served 1,578 individuals statewide. Of these, 173 individuals successfully achieved their employment goals.

Table 1: FFY2016 and FFY2017 Comparison

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>FFY2016</th>
<th>FFY2017</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Persons Served</td>
<td>1710</td>
<td>1578</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Successful Closures</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>178</td>
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<tr>
<td>Average Cost of VR Services per Individual</td>
<td>$11,525.86</td>
<td>$11,804.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Length of Case</td>
<td>32 months</td>
<td>32 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Age</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Weekly Hours of Employment</td>
<td>29 hours</td>
<td>30 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Hourly Wage</td>
<td>$16.21</td>
<td>$16.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Weekly Earnings</td>
<td>$508.20</td>
<td>$555.59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the 173 individuals who were competitively employed:

- Ten individuals were self-employed (average hourly wage of $19.74).
- Nine individuals used Supported Employment Services (average hourly wage of $8.69).
- The remaining 154 individuals were in private and public sector employment.

Career Pathways for Individuals with Disabilities
The Career Pathways for Individuals with Disabilities (CPID) grant was awarded to Virginia Departments for Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS) and DBVI in 2015. Specific goals of the project include:

- Help individuals with disabilities acquire marketable skills and credentials that enable them to secure competitive integrated employment in high-demand, high-quality occupations
- Enhance the capacity of existing career pathways programs in Virginia to effectively serve individuals with disabilities
- Enhance access to and use of existing career pathways in selected occupational clusters (including advanced manufacturing) by individuals with disabilities
- Strengthen the alignment of Virginia’s VR programs with the other core programs authorized by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act and other Federally-funded career pathways initiatives
- Disseminate project findings and knowledge gained from the project evaluation

Building upon the work completed in the initial implementation of the grant, DBVI continued to collaborate with business and community partners to identify gaps and opportunities for individuals with disabilities in accessing services and career pathways. Partner meetings were held in Northern Virginia and Mount Rodgers/New River to add to the work in progress from 2016 in the Shenandoah Valley and South Central areas. Outcomes of these meetings included a better understanding of eligibility for
programs, smoother co-enrollment process, and less duplication of efforts in areas of testing, assessment and paperwork.

A key component of CPID is to develop career maps or pathways for in-demand jobs. These activities assist counselors in identifying credentials needed to enter in-demand jobs. This year, team member Tish Harris developed an entry-level career pathway map for Manufacturing Production in the Shenandoah Valley, which can be used as a template for other areas where a map may be needed. Northern Virginia Community College and their partners also developed a new IT career pathway map, which will be used by CPID. Additionally, DBVI and DARS staff, and potential trainees participated in tours of companies including New World Pasta, Home Depot Distribution Center, Cardinal Homes, Dollar General Distribution Center, Northern Virginia Community College Help Desk, and Somic American in order to get a first-hand look at jobs within the manufacturing, logistics, and IT career pathways.

This year, CPID developed a Logistics credential training in partnership with Blue Ridge Community College (BRCC). DBVI took the lead on recruitment for both the Demand and the Supply side, which included bringing in area Logistics employers to the BRCC to discuss national credentials for Certified Logistics Associate and Certified Logistics Technician, the customized training that would be required for logistics employees at their companies, and to highlight the capabilities of the program graduates. A total of 18 companies were represented, including major/national companies such as McKee Foods, Miller Coors, Sysco, George’s Foods, Best Buy and Nibco, along with medium and small locally-owned businesses such as Dynamic Aviation, Creative Cause Solutions, Burris Logistics, Houff Transport, and IDM. With demand identified, BRCC and CPID worked with Adult Education to create the curriculum for a cohort to begin in September. To recruit individuals to take the training, a Supply side meeting was held with workforce partners, non-profits, local and state agencies and other partners to explain the credentials, the logistics workplace and who would be a successful candidate, and the fully supported and accessible curriculum. A total of 36 attended this Supply Side meeting, resulting in a cohort of 7 identified students for the training which began September 25, 2017. CPID is also working to identify entry level IT credentials and classes in Northern Virginia, and manufacturing training candidates to attend Wilson Workforce and Rehabilitation Center for Manufacturing Technician credentials.

Hands-on career exploration through Dream it. Do it. Virginia academies were expanded this year under CPID, moving from two sponsored academies last year to eight this year. DBVI took the lead on creating a residential Robotics and Cyber Academy at their Azalea Avenue campus in Richmond, which brought together 25 students from DBVI and DARS to build Parallax robots, install accessories, and learn to code accessories for a finished product with sound and movement capabilities. Curriculum used in Virginia for public school IT camps from the National Integrated Cyber Education Research Center was made fully accessible, with an emphasis on nonvisual teaching. During the academy, our Assistive Technology experts were on hand to provide supports such as headphones for students who were noise sensitive and an online translation program for a deaf student. Professionals from the IT field, including a network engineer, software developer, accessibility auditor, and an IT marketing and branding manager joined students for lunch each day to share how they got involved in IT, what their job duties are, and credentials needed to perform their jobs. Robotics and Cyber academy finished the week with a Robot Rally where students explained and demonstrated a coding piece added to their robots to a room full of spectators, and then an awards lunch for parents and students. Adult academies were also piloted this year, with a three-day adult 3-D Printing Academy held in the Shenandoah Valley and a Manufacturing Overview/ Light Saber Academy held in Abingdon.

CPID continued to offer professional development opportunities for staff centered on Motivational Interviewing. Fifteen DBVI staff members participated in the two cohorts of Motivational Interviewing
during 2017 presented by certified Motivational Interviewing (MI) trainers. The MI training has been helpful to staff when working with individuals who are ambivalent about joining the workforce or returning to work.

CPIP staff from Virginia joined Career Pathways projects from Nebraska, Tennessee, Kentucky and Georgia for a two-day roundtable meeting in Staunton, Virginia to share best practices and grant updates from all states. The round table included a day at WWRC with presentations on 503C from Kathy West Evans and a tour of the WWRC campus, with a special emphasis on the Manufacturing Technician Training area. Additionally, CPIP has continued to perform outreach to workforce partners, presenting at Collaborations, the Virginia CTE group, Workforce Professionals Conference and other venues. CPIP was chosen to present at the National Career Pathways conference in St. Louis in October, 2017 and at the Higher Education conference in December, 2017.

**Services for Children and Youth**

DBVI provides services for children age birth through high school who are blind, deafblind, and vision impaired. Currently Education Services has 2,388 children and students open and of these, 165 are between the ages of 0 to 3. Three full-time and three part-time Education Coordinators who serve all of the six regional offices provide education Services. The Education Coordinators provide the following services for children and students:

- Perform functional vision assessments for children and students who do not attend public schools;
- Support parents and professionals who are involved in homeschooling children and students;
- Attend IEP/IFSP/Eligibility meetings upon request;
- Facilitate access to adaptive developmental /educational materials through the Library and Resource Center (LRC); and
- Provide training and consultative services for parents, Teachers for the Vision Impaired, and other stakeholders.

In July of 2017 in collaboration with the Virginia Department of Education (DOE), DBVI hosted a week-long training on Technical and Math Unified English Braille (UEB) for staff and Teachers of the Vision Impaired. Additionally, the Director of Services and the Education Coordinators partnered with the Virginia School for the Deaf and Blind, the Virginia Project for Children, and Young Adults with Deaf-Blindness through the Partnership for People with Disabilities at Virginia Commonwealth University, Virginia Department of Education (DOE), and various community partners and parent networks, to provide educational and entertaining outreach activities in order to inform families about services that are available through DBVI. Examples of outreach efforts in 2017 for children age 13 and younger and their families include:

- Audible Easter Egg Hunts in five of the six regions;
- Two Sounds of the James River nature programs;
- Science programs offered by Jefferson Lab in three regions;
- Hands-on STEM event at the NASA Air and Space Center in Hampton, VA;
- Adaptive sports program;
- Assistive Technology demonstrations; and
- Community Resource Fairs.

DBVI also continues to provide Sensory Quilts to every family of a child age 0-3 during the home visit in order to assist in developing rapport and to provide the family with a tangible reminder of our commitment to assist them in accessing resources. DBVI delivered over 40 Tactile Quilts to families.
An increasingly popular program is the Super Summer Camp offered by DBVI’s Education Services. In 2017, DBVI sponsored 57 campers. An Open House conducted on the first day of camp allowed participants and families to get acquainted with the staff and facilities before camp started. In addition, volunteer and paid Counselor in Training positions provided opportunities for older students to gain mentoring skills and work experience.

Pre-Employment Transition Services

WIOA amends the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and requires Vocational Rehabilitation agencies to set aside 15% of their federal funds to provide Pre-Employment Transition Services to students with disabilities who are eligible or potentially eligible for Vocational Rehabilitation services. These five required services are designed to assist students in attaining the education, skills, and credentials that will facilitate their transition into competitive integrated employment and are as follows:

- Job exploration counseling;
- Counseling on opportunities for enrollment in comprehensive transition or post-secondary programs at institutions of higher education;
- Workplace readiness training;
- Work-based learning experiences; and
- Instruction in self-advocacy.

DBVI is currently providing Pre-Employment Transition Services to approximately 330 students.

DBVI also provides transition Services through the Vocational Rehabilitation Program including training, counseling, and support services to eligible individuals age 14 and older to assist the individual in skills attainment leading to employment. Vocational Rehabilitation Services can provide services including, but not limited to, assistive technology, transportation, tuition, books, supplies, and room and board, which cannot be provided through Pre-Employment Transition Services. DBVI served more than 1,700 youths and adults in FY 2017. Note this number also includes the 330 students currently being served through Pre-Employment Transition Services.

DBVI has three full-time Vocational Rehabilitation Transition Counselors and five Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors with combined Transition and Adult caseloads. In collaboration with the Regional Workforce Specialists, Education Coordinators, Orientation and Mobility Specialists and other professionals, they are providing the services cited above. DBVI has also contracted with the Rehabilitation, Research and Training Center (RRTC) at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) and with The Choice Group to assist in the provision of these services.

DBVI has also sponsored regional transition activities and events, which have included:

- Pre-Employment Transition Services activities connected to Goal-Ball events at the Virginia Rehabilitation Center for the Blind and Vision Impaired in Richmond;
- Activity where students rode the Metro, planned a meal with a budget and shopped at Trader Joe’s then walked to the Arlington Independent Living Center where they cooked lunch. During the activity, they learned how to travel independently, how to better advocate for themselves, shop within a budget, and safe food preparation and cooking techniques. They also received information on different careers in the Culinary field;
- Regional workshops related to career exploration and job seeking skills;
- Tours at community colleges and universities to learn about academic options including Certificate programs and advocacy for accommodations;
• Career and employment information event at the Bristol Motor Speedway;
• Event at the NASA Air and Space Center in Hampton focusing on hands-on science activities and a discussion on postsecondary options for training in the areas of Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) from a Certificate, community college and four-year college perspective and career related paths;
• Audio described play at the Barter Theatre in Abingdon, a post-play tour of the theatre, and a discussion about different careers in the field of Theatre and what training and experience is required.

As a continuum of services in the area of Pre-Employment Transition services, the Virginia Rehabilitation Center for the Blind and Vision Impaired (VRCBVI) offers two residential summer programs for students. LEAP (Learning Excellence in Academics Program) is a 5-week collaborative program with Virginia Commonwealth University that focuses on assessing the college-readiness skills of high school juniors and seniors. Classes are taught by college professors and/or graduate students and are graded according to collegiate standards. This program enhances awareness of the academic and blindness-related demands of college and gives students the opportunity to evaluate their ability to manage time and priorities. This year eight students participated in the LEAP program.

LIFE (Learning Independence, Feeling Empowered) is a five-week training program for high school age youth focusing on enhancing capabilities, learning independent living skills, identifying options after high school, and developing self-advocacy skills. The program assists students in exploring careers by providing opportunities to gain work readiness skills and then participate in a work experience. The last three weeks of LIFE students are placed in unpaid integrated and competitive work experiences in the community. They also have the opportunity to participate in cultural and recreational activities. This year twenty students participated in the LIFE program.

**DBVI Success Story**

Brian began his journey at the Virginia Rehabilitation Center (VRC) as a freshman in high school and had goals of going to college to get a degree in finance. He was accepted to Marshall University and received support from DBVI for many school-related costs. He was consistently on the Dean's List and was awarded the Who's Who in American Colleges and Universities. He graduated Summa Cum Laude with a Major in Finance and a Minor in Economics. His hard work paid off and after a few internships following graduation, Brian was offered and accepted a full time position as a Budget Analyst with the Federal Bureau of Labor Statistics in Washington, D.C. Brian is happy with his job and is grateful for the support he was provided by DBVI that afforded him the opportunity to succeed as a college student.
DBVI Collaboration Model

During the past year, the ongoing work of the VRCBVI Learning Collaboration Project transitioned to a more comprehensive agency-wide paradigm. In July, the Commissioner’s Forum presented information to staff that was intended to communicate the design, message, impact, and transition plan for the Collaboration Model. Staff from VRCBVI and regional offices were involved in the presentation and attendance.

An advisory team was formed to facilitate this initiative. It is envisioned that this group will review priorities for implementation of the Collaboration Model efforts. The structure of the team includes representatives from VRCBVI instructors and VR field staff; the DBVI executive team; program directors; regional managers; and the policy, planning and evaluation team. An initial meeting is planned for the advisory team during the first quarter of 2018.

Ongoing priorities for this group include:

- Expand and build on the plan for integration of employment focus in all areas of training and skill development at VRCBVI.
- Expand employment experience training to all adult students at VRCBVI. This will allow students to have real world competitive integrated work opportunities. These experiences put into practice the skills they learned at a job site while at VRCBVI.
- Develop and review the VRCBVI policy and procedure manual so it aligns with the VR policy manual and includes identified collaboration points.

**DBVI Success Story**

Farris has lived life with more than one disability. In college, he majored in Music with the Visual Performance Arts Department at Longwood University. After graduating in December 2016, Farris opted to attend the VRCBVI Adjustment to Blindness Training Program. He took advantage of many of the opportunities provided here, such as getting résumé help and interview prep. The support provided by these programs led Farris to even greater success after he connected with the Business Relations Specialist in his regional office. This past summer, he accepted an internship position with the Franklin Arts Center, and uses his gifts as an accomplished pianist and vocalist. Farris thinks of DBVI as an anchor to his success.
Program Assessment –Consumer Satisfaction Evaluation

Each year, DBVI conducts a Consumer Satisfaction Survey (CSS) among individuals who were eligible to receive VR services through the agency and were either employed or not employed at the time of case closure. The survey provides a systematic method of obtaining critical feedback from individuals served by the VR program and is one of a number of indicators of program effectiveness and quality of service. The surveys are administered quarterly. The survey questions are designed to inquire about consumers’ satisfaction with services received, VR staff, and various aspects of the VR process. Reports of survey results are created annually and upon request. All individuals with an eligible VR case closure are provided an opportunity to complete an on-line, mail, or telephone survey to express their satisfaction with the VR program, services and service providers.

In FFY 2016, 409 consumers were eligible to receive the VR consumer satisfaction survey. Forty-one individuals were unreachable due to relocation, incorrect contact information, or were deceased. Of the 368 contactable individuals, an overall response rate of 27.2% (n=100) was received with the on-line response rate of 34% (n=34), telephone response rate of 16% (n=16) and mail response rate of 50% (n=50). This is a 7-point increase in the overall response rate for FFY15, which was 20.5%.

FFY 2016 CSS responses indicated:

- Individuals with employment outcomes continue to report overall satisfaction with the VR program within 3 basis points from the agency’s 2011 established baseline score of 86.29.
- A majority of all respondents, sixty-three percent (n=63), reported being “Very Satisfied” or “Satisfied” with the VR services received from DBVI.
- The overall Satisfaction for FFY2016 is 73.66, which is less than the 2011 baseline score of 86.29.

The data remained consistent on individual perception of VR staff and service delivery. FFY 2016 survey highlights are provided below:

- 78 percent (n=78) of individuals agreed their VR counselor was respectful, resulting in a weighted score of 83.71, 71 percent (n=71) agreed their VR counselor initiated phone and in person contact as needed for a score of 76.57, and 70 percent (n=70) agreed their VR counselor responded to questions and concerns in a timely manner for a score of 77.97.
- Individuals believed their VR counselor was sensitive to their needs, scoring 77.96 (71 percent, n=71) and delivered services and service items in a timely manner, scoring 77.73 (69 percent, n=69).
- 70 percent (n=70) of individuals agreed their counselor was knowledgeable about their disability, scoring 78.59, and 63 percent (n=63) agreed their VR counselor collaborated with them in choosing services, scoring 73.63.

Table 2 provides a comparison of FFY2016 survey results to those in previous years.
The open-ended responses included numerous encouraging comments from consumers regarding their positive experiences with the agency and their satisfaction with their VR counselors and trainers. One respondent noted, “I was very impressed with my VR Counselor. She provided me with all of the visual aids that I needed and with all of the recommended technology by VRCBVI teachers.” Another respondent commented, “My counselor is TOP NOTCH in her field! She was always eager to help and answer any & all questions I had! She is a valuable asset to your organization.”

One notable area of improvement noted by some respondents was access to reliable transportation, particularly in rural areas with limited public transportation options. Access to reliable transportation is instrumental in identifying and maintaining employment.

The perspective of one young respondent summarized the experience of a client who was referred to DBVI in high school and followed through to employment. “I think it is a wonderful program and agency that is absolutely beneficial to anyone who is struggling with vision loss. I started with my counselor in high school, and stayed with her all the way until my employment was more stable. It helped greatly to have the same person to go to through all the ups and downs of schools and paperwork and IEP's etc.”

DBVI decision makers and the SRC in the continued development and implementation of the 2018 Combined Virginia State Plan and WIOA implementation use the results of this consumer satisfaction survey. The feedback and insights gleaned from survey participants are rich in content and contribute to recommendations for enhancement of VR services.

### DBVI Success Story

*Diagnosed with Retinitis Pigmentosa as a college student, Jimmy taught himself how to adapt and survive despite visual impairment over the past 20 years. He joined the DBVI community in 2015 as a member of the immersion program. He states that this was the “most significant step taken so far in my long journey to accept my fears of blindness.” Thanks to his Orientation and Mobility instructor and through unlocking the power of his White Cane, he “restored a sense of freedom that [he] had lost so many years ago,” and that he couldn’t possibly put into words. After gaining that freedom, he began to pursue a new employment opportunity through a renewed desire to help other people. He earned a master’s in Guidance Counseling with a concentration in Orientation and Mobility at Louisiana Tech University this past August. Jimmy has truly come full circle, now providing services to others that he once received himself.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Respectful</th>
<th>Knowledgeable about your disability</th>
<th>Sensitive to your needs</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FFY2011</td>
<td>91.59</td>
<td>90.14</td>
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<td>FFY2013</td>
<td>87.65</td>
<td>87.88</td>
<td>86.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FFY2014</td>
<td>86.20</td>
<td>85.43</td>
<td>82.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FFY2015</td>
<td>91.73</td>
<td>90.26</td>
<td>90.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FFY2016</td>
<td>83.71</td>
<td>78.59</td>
<td>77.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td><strong>88.176</strong></td>
<td><strong>86.46</strong></td>
<td><strong>85.532</strong></td>
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</table>
The Randolph Sheppard Program – Business Enterprise Program

The Business and Enterprise Program experienced a year of challenges and rewards.

After more than fifteen years of service to the troops, the military feeding contract at Fort Lee was terminated. The Safety Equipment Inspection Services (SEIS) program was added as a new business offering. The first client for SEIS was Virginia Commonwealth University. Micro Markets continue to expand with the addition of three new sites including the National Science Foundation building, the Federal Building conversion from a cafe, and the Customs and Borders location. Sales were up seven percent as vendors continued to grow their business and meet customers’ needs. Highway vendor profits increased seventeen percent ($707,348). Ten new vending sites were added. Forty-four vendors are active in the program and participated in continuing education opportunities. The Annual Meeting was moved to Virginia Beach and focused on transition to the new business model.

Outlook for 2018

Development in the past months brought the program many new ideas and goals. The New Business Model stresses more independence and all vendors will be on-board by January 1, 2018. The program is looking forward to opening a new cafeteria at National Guard Center in Arlington, Virginia. The growth the SEIS program will be a priority in 2018 focusing on higher education institutions. Committees are meeting to discuss training, new business development, and changes to the administrative code, as well as the vendor’s agreement.

DBVI Success Story

Dreama has had both vision and hearing impairments since birth. She doesn’t let her disabilities hold her back though, owning and operating one of the last few floral shops in Pulaski, Virginia. While her disabilities present challenges communicating with customers and suppliers, both of which are critical to her business, she uses technology to address these challenges. She worked with DBVI to identify the areas that were causing issues through an assessment Rehabilitation Engineer. She now uses hearing aids, and other assistive technologies that allow her to communicate with her clients via phone and e-mail. Thanks to the services provided by DBVI, she can now operate her business more independently and efficiently.
### About DBVI and the SRC

The mission of DBVI is to provide services and resources which empower individuals who are blind, vision impaired or deafblind to achieve their desired levels of employment, education, and personal independence.

The SRC’s core responsibility is to review, analyze and advise DBVI on its Vocational Rehabilitation program, policies, and practices. Further collaborations include the State Plan, needs assessments, consumer satisfaction surveys, training, and employment opportunities. Table 3 includes the SRC roster as of September 30, 2017.

The majority of Council members are blind or vision impaired. Members serve a governor appointed three-year term, and may be reappointed for a second three-year term. The membership includes parent groups, the Client Assistance Program, Vocational Rehabilitation Program, disability advocacy groups, business, industry, labor, and either current or former consumers of VR services. The SRC meets quarterly, on Fridays, at the DBVI Headquarters Office in Richmond. The public is welcome to attend SRC meetings and offer their comments. To learn more about our work or becoming a member of the Council, please contact Justin Graves at justin08@vt.edu.

### Table 3: SRC Membership Roster

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Seat Requirements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chair</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justin Graves</td>
<td>Fairfax, VA</td>
<td>Representative of Business, Industry, and Labor 34 CFR §361.17 (b)(1)(vi)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vice-Chair</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christine Appert</td>
<td>Charlottesville, VA</td>
<td>Former or Current Recipient of Vocational Rehabilitation Services 34 CFR §361.17 (b)(1)(B)(viii)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenny McKenzie</td>
<td>Roanoke, VA</td>
<td>Representative of Business, Industry, and Labor 34 CFR §361.17 (b)(1)(vi)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W. Chris Martin</td>
<td>Ashland, VA</td>
<td>Representative of Business, Industry, and Labor 34 CFR §361.17 (b)(1)(vi)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ken Jessup</td>
<td>Virginia Beach, VA</td>
<td>Representative of Disability Advocacy Group 34 CFR §361.17 (b)(3)(ii)(A)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Megan O’Toole</td>
<td>Montpelier, VA</td>
<td>Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor-Ex-Officio, Non-Voting Member 34 CFR §361.17 (b)(1)(iv)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>City, State</td>
<td>Role Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen Walker</td>
<td>Ashland, VA</td>
<td>Representative of the Statewide Independent Living Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raymond Hopkins</td>
<td>Richmond, VA</td>
<td>The Director of the designated Statue Unit DBVI as an ex-officio, non-voting member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wanda Council</td>
<td>Newport News, VA</td>
<td>Representative of Department of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Larysa Kautz</td>
<td>Alexandria, VA</td>
<td>Representative of Community Rehabilitation Services Program Provider</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jill A. Nerby</td>
<td>Charlottesville, VA</td>
<td>Former or Current Recipient of Vocational Rehabilitation Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark W. Roane</td>
<td>Richmond, VA</td>
<td>Former or Current Recipient of Vocational Rehabilitation Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeanne S. Armentrout</td>
<td>Roanoke, VA</td>
<td>Representative of the Virginia Workforce Board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irene M. Conlin</td>
<td>Virginia Beach, VA</td>
<td>Representative of an Individual who is blind, has multiple disabilities, and has difficulty representing him or herself or is unable due to disabilities to represent him or herself.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nichole Drummond</td>
<td>Springfield, VA</td>
<td>Representative of a Parent Training and Information Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shelesha Taylor</td>
<td>Richmond, VA</td>
<td>Representative of Client Assistance Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VACANT</td>
<td></td>
<td>Representative of Business, Industry, and Labor</td>
</tr>
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