



**OPEN  
FOR BUSINESS**

# STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL

Annual Report

**2021**



VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT FOR AGING  
AND REHABILITATIVE SERVICES

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## From the SRC Chairperson

It is a great honor to present the 2021 Annual Report of the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC). In this report, you will find information on the performance of the vocational rehabilitation (VR) program of the Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS), including the Wilson Workforce and Rehabilitation Center (WWRC).



The theme this year is “Open for Business,” which beautifully captures the fact that, for the first time since 2009, all VR eligibility categories are open. Additionally, following an unpredictable year across the country, all DARS offices are open across the Commonwealth!

I want to take the opportunity to thank the entire SRC for their dedication to supporting VR services. Additionally, I would like to recognize DARS leadership and staff for their adaptability, commitment to client success, and their ability to adapt and provide high quality services across the state in uncertain circumstances.

As you review this report, I ask that you consider sharing this report with your professional and personal networks. Spreading word about DARS, VR and the talented staff can do wonders to help others become more aware of the services offered and increase the number of individuals that can benefit from VR support.

Daniel Irwin  
Chairperson, State Rehabilitation Council

## From the DARS Commissioner

Throughout 2021, I have been amazed to see the resilience of people with disabilities, vocational rehabilitation professionals and employers across Virginia all working together with a singular focus on being open for business.

I am so grateful to our State Rehabilitation Council for their crucial advisory role in the operation of our agency and the vocational rehabilitation services we provide to people with disabilities.



Despite the challenges of the ongoing pandemic, we continue to uphold the mandates of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act. It provides a clear and compelling focus on workforce-driven training – meeting the needs of business while helping our clients earn industry-recognized credentials and measurable skills.

But our charge is more than just engaging business. We are also focused on helping those we serve to obtain the wages that will sustain their lives as they move along pathways to careers, not just jobs.

With the help of the SRC and our workforce partners we have seen some amazing results that are detailed in this report.

I am humbled and gratified not only by the work of the SRC and staff but of the incredible people with disabilities who continue writing our vocational rehabilitation success stories.

Kathy Hayfield  
DARS Commissioner

*“Alone, we can do so little;  
together, we can do so much”*  
– Helen Keller

## VR Consumer & Business Success Story

Helen Keller’s quote is simple yet so profound. It aptly states the power of partnership.

This is a story of how DARS partnered with Anicura Veterinary Center in Manassas, Project SEARCH and Employment Services Organization Didlake, to find the right job candidate and prepare him for a successful career while educating the hospital staff about working with someone who has a disability.

Jacob Cotton was hired by Anicura as a surgical supply assistant, which not only solved its staffing problem, but integrated a talented and highly skilled young man with autism into its workplace.

Jacob participated in Project SEARCH, a 9-month internship program through DARS, the Prince William County school system and Novant/UVA Health Prince William Medical Center. Jacob gained valuable on-the-job experience at the hospital such as transporting patients to and from their hospital rooms to services such as X-ray and lab.

Laurie Qualey, an employment specialist with Didlake, is also the skills trainer for the Project SEARCH program at the Manassas hospital site. Laurie said, “Jacob was one of our standouts this year. He’s such a hard worker and really good listener. He’s a go getter, loves to work, and if you ask him to do something, he says, ‘Yeah, I’ll do it.’”

Anicura Founding President and CEO Cate Lemmond consulted with Nate Mahanes, DARS Business Development Manager, on how DARS could help Anicura develop and recruit for the new position as well as onboarding and training supports for the new employee.

Anicura is a large spay and neuter clinic and the number of surgeries performed has soared in recent years. Anicura faced the challenge of finding a job candidate who could perform repetitive tasks with a high degree of

consistency and concentration while showing care and compassion for their patients.



Nate worked with Melissa Gilligan, Anicura Hospital Administrator, on finding the right job candidate. When Nate reached out to the DARS Manassas office about the job opportunity, the immediate response was, “Oh, we know the perfect candidate.”

Through Project SEARCH, Laurie Qualey knew that Jacob was going to be a great fit for any type of job, but she wanted to make sure he found work that he really enjoyed and found meaningful – and of course she knew that Jacob loved animals.

Laurie helped Jacob with the job application and interview process. She also provided skills training and job coaching during onboarding until Jacob was fully integrated into the job.

Jacob shares, “At my job, I fold surgical towels and also clean the surgical tools or instruments. And I put it away into clean laundry and into some places, like in a kitten cage or in a tub where the dogs are. And stack some boxes and help make e-collars.”

His love of animals combined with his unique ability to concentrate on repetitive tasks made him an excellent match for the job. Melissa said, “He just fit right in. He executes his routine flawlessly. The team relayed that they had the perfect candidate

and they were not kidding.”

Jacob is employed full time at the hospital. When asked about his future career plans he responded, “You know I’ve found my forever job.”



## SRC Members



SRC members outside the front entrance of the DARS central office in Henrico during a break at their August 2021 meeting. *Back row from left to right:* Aaron Bossard, Billie Cook, Joliefawn Liddell, Angie Leonard, Kathy Hayfield, Daniel Irwin and Lauren Roche (staff). *Front row from left to right:* Garrett Brumfield, Justin Spurlock, and Madeline Nunnally.

### 2021 SRC Members

Aaron Bossard - Henrico

Garrett Brumfield - Roanoke

Tammy Burns - Richmond

Pamela Cobler - Martinsville

Billie Cook - Hampton

Brian Evans - Richmond

Linda Garris-Bright - Virginia Beach

Kathryn A. Hayfield - Richmond

Daniel Irwin - Mechanicsville

Angela Leonard - Blue Ridge

Joliefawn Liddell - Richmond

Karen Michalski-Karney - Roanoke

Madeline Nunnally - Richmond

Justin Spurlock - Richmond

Jennifer Witteborg - Rixeyville

## SRC Activities and Recommendations

### SRC Activities for Federal Fiscal Year 2021

The Virginia State Rehabilitation Council successfully held four meetings, as well as an annual retreat during federal fiscal year (FFY) 2021. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting ongoing state of emergency issued by Governor Northam, three quarterly meetings and the annual retreat were held virtually. One in-person meeting with a physical quorum of voting members in attendance was held, once the state of emergency ended.

The Council continues their efforts to reduce meeting costs when holding physical meetings by meeting in Richmond, the most central location to the membership. At each meeting, Council members individually reported on the activities of the constituency they represent and their advocacy efforts. Members also shared information on successes and obstacles, highlighting those stemming from the ongoing pandemic.

- Immediate Past Chair, Garrett Brumfield, attended the virtual Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation conference in the fall of 2020.
- Approved the annual Memorandum of Agreement between DARS and the SRC regarding the Consumer Satisfaction Survey and approved the Annual Report on Consumer Satisfaction Survey results.
- Formed three subcommittees to carry out business between quarterly meetings in the following areas: nominations for the annual election of officers; development of the Annual Report; and initiating and executing the triennial Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment. Each subcommittee provides a report at the quarterly meetings to ensure sharing of information and appropriate time for input from the full Council.
- Held annual elections for the Executive Committee.

- Accepted and discussed updates on VR performance outcomes, successes, and barriers from the Deputy Commissioner and the Wilson Workforce and Rehabilitation Center Director at each quarterly meeting.
- Received presentations from the Deputy Director of Workforce Programs on current and upcoming initiatives, including the goals, objectives, collaborations, outcomes, and barriers for vocational rehabilitation program initiatives.
- Obtained regular updates in advance, and throughout the process, of VR policy updates and regulatory changes from the Director of Policy and Legislative Affairs for DARS.
- Received updates on the Combined State Plan.
- Membership participated in bi-monthly Zoom trainings held by the National Coalition of State Rehabilitation Councils.
- The Council approved the contract renewal for three vocational rehabilitation Fair Hearing Officers and received a report on the status of consumer appeals during SFY2021.

### SRC Recommendations for VR Program Improvement

The median hourly wage for vocational rehabilitation (VR) consumers for Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2021 was \$11.00, which is a marked improvement from previous years and continues to exceed the minimum wage. The SRC supports DARS in their commitment, in partnership with consumers and their informed choice, to provide services that prepare consumers with career pathways to enter the workforce in sustainable jobs, with livable wages that decrease poverty, improve their economic quality of life and independence, and address their reliance on public benefits. The following SRC recommendations will help further these shared goals.

## SRC Activities and Recommendations *(cont.)*

The SRC requests continued briefings and additional information on Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) performance measures, including the goals and targets established for these measures and DARS achievement towards those goals. In particular, DARS should examine the median wage performance and performance gaps in each district, looking at the demographics of our clients, with the expectation that the median hourly wage increases to \$15.00 to best align with increases to the Federal Minimum Wage and the current economy.

- EQUITY in the provision of VR services is imperative. Equity includes excellence in services all across the Commonwealth. This will be important information for VR employees to have to provide effective services and the SRC also recommends that this information be shared with them. DARS should examine barriers, successes, and service delivery to achieve successful closures in integrated settings with attention to marginalized and underserved populations, as well as aligning efforts with the available data from the Census.
- The SRC recommends that DARS continue collaborative efforts with Centers for Independent Living, as well as other community partners and agencies, to offer financial empowerment education, skill building opportunities, and career pathways education to clients.
- The Council would like DARS to further explore methods to collect data on referrals to other entities.
- The SRC would like DARS, including WWRC, to expand viable virtual programs that deliver VR resources and education to Virginians, including those with significant disabilities, who could benefit from remote learning and services. This expansion should include meaningful professional development for DARS employees.
- The SRC recommends that DARS evaluate the quality and inclusion of career pathways in Individual Plans for Employment and ensure VR Counselors are empowered to advocate for services that assure career pathways are utilized and achieved.
- The SRC would like DARS to continue and increase collaborative efforts with the Virginia Department of Education, specifically with: transition and Pre-ETS services, and broadening the awareness of available resources for students, teachers, and parents; while also furthering relationships and collaboration with school districts across the state.
- Virginians with disabilities do not always know about the services of the VR program. The SRC recommends that targeted strategies be developed to “get the word out” to the general public on these available and valuable resources through various means, including social media.
- The Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment shows an increase, based on the Census Data, of American Indians/Native Americans with a prevalence of disabilities. The SRC encourages DARS to explore creative methods that improve outreach to tribes ensuring they are aware of VR services, while also reducing barriers.
- The Council encourages DARS to examine opportunities for stronger employee diversity through increased recruitment, while also utilizing community partnerships to enhance efforts.
- Examine and evaluate equity in access, including access to native languages and cultural representation.

## VR 2021 Performance Outcomes

In the past year, 2,205 clients with significant, or most significant, disabilities successfully became employed after receiving VR services.

Although the creation of Individualized Plans for Employment (IPE) was impacted by COVID-19, DARS increased the number of IPEs for FFY21 with 4,868 plans compared to 4,321 written in FFY20. DARS improved the timeliness of service for the length of time between application to eligibility. In FFY20 the average time was 33.5 days and is down to 32.5 days in FFY21. The length of time between a plan and successful closure increased slightly. In FFY20 the average time was 22.2 months and was up to 22.8 months in FFY21.

DARS continues to report on the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) performance indicators. This data currently comes from the Virginia Employment Commission and does not include federal employment or employers with five or fewer employees.

DARS operates under an Order of Selection, which requires states to establish priority categories of individuals to serve when they do not have the funding to serve all eligible individuals. This creates a waiting list for services. DARS worked diligently over 2020 to address the waiting list, opening up categories to serve those on the waiting list. COVID-19 slowed services and left additional funding. With these unexpended funds, the VR program was able to offer services to all clients on the wait list in September 2020. The waiting list had not been previously cleared since May 2016. No client was placed on the waiting list in FFY21.

### Barriers for Clients Served in FFY21

Barrier	Number of clients open	% of all clients served
No fixed address at nighttime	n=184	.9%
Nighttime place to stay only	n=179	.9%
In foster care	n=382	1.9%
Migrant farm workers	n=139	.7%
Ex-offenders	n=2,130	12.7%

1. Percentage of program participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the 2nd quarter after exit from the VR program. *(Information is for cases closed after plan 07/01/2019 - 06/30/2020)*

DARS Goal: 47%  
DARS Achievement: 50.3%

2. Percentage of program participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the 4th quarter after exit from the VR program. *(Information is for cases closed after plan (01/01/2019 - 12/31/2019.)*

DARS Goal: 45%  
DARS Achievement: 47.2%

3. Median earnings of program participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the 2nd quarter after exit from the VR program. *(Information is for cases closed after plan 07/01/2019 -06/30/2020)*

DARS Goal: \$3,200  
DARS Achievement: \$3,177.61

4. Percentage of program participants who obtain a recognized post-secondary credential, or secondary school diploma or its equivalent during participation or 1 year from exit. *(Credential attainment rate is for cases served 01/01/2019 - 12/31/2019 w/employment or post-secondary within a year)*

DARS Goal: 32%  
DARS Achievement: 16.1%

5. Percentage of program participants who during a program year are in an education or training program that will lead to a recognized postsecondary credential or employment and who are achieving measurable skills gains towards a credential or employment. *(Measurable Skill Gain Attainment Rate is for cases served 07/01/2020 - 06/30/2021.)*

DARS Goal: 32%  
DARS Achievement: 80.2%

## **Rehabilitation Services Administration Disability Innovation Fund Grant (RSADIF)**

DARS received a \$9.2 million grant from the Rehabilitation Services Administration. The project, named “Pathways to Careers Using Partnerships, Apprenticeships and Equity,” will serve at least 750 Virginians with disabilities to acquire skills-based training and registered apprenticeships in high-wage, high-demand fields, including STEM and state government.

In this five-year project, DARS will collaborate with multiple workforce agencies in Virginia, including the Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired (DBVI), Department of Human Resource Management (DHRM) and Department of Labor and Industry (DOLI).

The initiative capitalizes on recent state legislation that facilitates the alternate state job application process for eligible individuals with disabilities and increases diversity, equity and inclusion opportunities. It also includes the creation of two DARS staff positions embedded at DOLI and DHRM to develop cross-agency policy and practices to increase recruiting, hiring, retaining and promoting individuals with disabilities in government jobs.

Examples of outreach include targeting traditionally unserved and underserved groups, sharing best practices for training, credentials and education, and activities leading to apprenticeship opportunities. This project will also serve to cement best practices from the Career Pathways for Individuals with Disabilities (CPID) grant and make them available statewide. Included in this project will be opportunities for DARS staff and community rehabilitation programs to develop skills to further facilitate the development of effective services for unserved and underserved populations.

## **Council of State Governments Public Sector Apprenticeship Consortium**

DARS successfully applied to participate in this opportunity sponsored by the Council of State Governments and the Urban Institute. The goal of this consortium was to bring state agency staff together to develop action plans to increase opportunities for public sector apprenticeships.

The application from DARS focused on increasing opportunities in this area for people with disabilities. Monthly meetings began in August and included staff from DOLI, DHRM, DBVI, Virginia Department of Transportation and the Virginia Community College System. Virginia was one of six states selected to participate along with Michigan, California, Maine, Colorado and Idaho.

The project has provided DARS with access to research, best practices from other states and technical assistance to create additional employment opportunities in this sector. It has allowed DARS to collaborate with the Partnership for Inclusive Apprenticeship and receive assistance with the development of outreach materials that will highlight former DARS clients who have entered into registered apprenticeships.

The consortium included a one-day in-person meeting where an action plan was developed for the next year that will increase our collaboration across state agencies and directly inform the work of the DARS Pathways grant. The in person event began with a session titled “Overcoming Challenges to Hiring Civic Sector Apprentices” and Virginia DARS and DOLI staff led the opening presentation with highlights of the work being done in the commonwealth.

## **Good Life CAFÉ grant**

DARS collaborated with the National Disability Institute (NDI) on a National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research (NIDILRR) grant. The GoodLife CAFÉ (Community Access, Financial Empowerment) project was designed to study the impact of hands-on financial coaching and how the utilization of ABLE accounts may increase the community engagement for transition age youth who receive Social Security benefits.

ABLE Accounts are tax advantaged savings accounts for people with disabilities that are designed to house significant sums of money without jeopardizing the individual’s eligibility for Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Medicaid, and other resource restricted programs.

The financial literacy coaching uses elements from the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau’s “Your Money, Your Goals” curriculum, Financial Social

Work, NextGen Personal Finance, and Positive Psychology, which are incorporated into the Charting the LifeCourse (CtLC) framework. CtLC, which is currently being incorporated into DARS' Pre-ETS service provision through a peer ambassador program, intends to personalize a participant's understanding of their individual strengths and available supports, as well as identifying their goals to help them achieve their personalized vision of a good life.

The GoodLife CAFÉ project was originally envisioned as an in-person, classroom-style intervention that would encourage participants to create a community of support within their cohort, as well as encouraging them to become more directly engaged in their communities. During the pandemic, the project pivoted to an online delivery model with an altered definition of community engagement. The project is currently recruiting participants statewide for the intervention group, in hopes of providing coaching and instruction to 125 DARS clients, distributed across multiple cohorts for the next two years.

### **Windmills Trainings**

The DARS Business Services Team with the assistance of DARS Assistive Technology staff presented Windmills Training to state agencies, businesses and community partners throughout year. The group offered 34 trainings throughout 2021 to approximately 1717 individuals. This program has been extremely successful and six DARS staff have been certified to provide these trainings.

In 1982, The California Governor's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities identified employer's attitudes and misconceptions as major barriers to increasing the employment rate of people with disabilities. With the support of a grant from the California Employment Development Department, the California Governor's Committee developed the concept of Windmills.

Windmills is designed to increase awareness of the role that attitudes play in the employment of people with disabilities. The modules presented were:

#### **Pick a Disability/Profiles**

- This examines the stereotypes associated with common disabilities that can impact employment decisions. It explores assumptions about "good" and "bad" jobs for certain disabilities and demystifies myths regarding people with disabilities in the workplace.

#### **Fact or Fiction**

- This teaches participants to anticipate situations that might occur in the workplace with people with disabilities. It also familiarize individuals on the basics of disability law.

#### **Whose Fault**

- This exercise improves participants awareness of the different players and roles in a successful business program employing persons with disabilities and identifies more ways to effectively communicate with one another and resolve conflict

#### **Assistive Technology and Reasonable Accommodations**

- This exercise acquaints participants with the creative process in identifying possible reasonable accommodations.

Additional modules will be used in the future along with pre-recorded "elevator pitches" for current DARS clients who are job ready to further emphasize our mission of employing people with disabilities. The DARS team regularly contributes to the quarterly community of practice meetings that includes state vocational rehabilitation agency business services staff from across the country. The DARS Business Services team is often sought out for help and assistance from other certified Windmills trainers.

### **DARS Assistive Technology Highlights**

DARS assistive technology (AT) professionals continued to provide dynamic and customized AT services throughout the Commonwealth. Agency clients require timely and effective AT services to obtain credentials, prepare for, secure, and/or retain employment. DARS AT professionals from DRS' Rehabilitation Technology Services, Wilson Workforce and Rehabilitation Center (WWRC) and the Virginia Assistive Technology System (VATS) collaborated to provide innovative approaches to service delivery to include the following:

## VR 2021 Highlights *(cont.)*

- Weekly AT communication calls to coordinate service delivery, equipment and project needs.
- Furthered development and implementation of tele-rehabilitation services for AT consultations and assessment (virtual AT, home and vehicle modification assessments with clients and vendors).
- Expanded the capacity of virtual AT services to include individual and group training sessions (college prep training, virtual shop tours and time management programs).
- Addressed the sensory needs of individuals through new approaches and technologies.
- Updated online group services to include sensory and organizational aspects related to dealing with COVID-19 stressors.
- Rehabilitation engineering staff provided custom fabrication services to design, modify and develop ergonomic tools and equipment for individuals to improve productivity and reach employment goals.
- Marketed the capacity of AT services to provide services, tips and resources to remove programmatic and architectural barriers to support client goals through monthly newsletters and virtual services.
- Collaborated with DARS Business Development managers to provide Windmills Training, highlighting the benefits of AT.
- VATS supported DARS/VDH vaccination site at the DARS Greater Richmond Office. VATS staff were on site and provided a variety of AT devices for use/demonstration and information on VATS and Virginia No Wrong Door services. VATS shared information on AT devices and services with vaccine customers and site coordinators.
- VATS DME adult reuse partner provided VDEM with manual wheelchairs at state run COVID-19 vaccination clinics.

DARS AT staff provided significant virtual services to meet the safety and individual needs of DARS clients. AT staff collaborated to provide multiple sessions of Time Management (clients and staff), College Preparation, AT Lab and Rehabilitation Engineering “Shop Tours”, and Windmills trainings. Additionally, AT staff provided support to several Project SEARCH sites to ensure access and accessibility of students with disabilities.

AT professionals from WWRC, DRS and VATS were an integral part of the success of the state’s Career Pathways for Individuals with Disabilities (CPID) and Disability Employment Initiative (DEI) grants. Both of these grants concluded late 2020/early 2021 and were successful in helping individuals with disabilities obtain credentials for success in high pay, high demand careers. AT staff provided individual and programmatic assessment and improved access to AT equipment, all necessary to help individuals reach their employment dreams.

VATS collaborated with Virginia’s No Wrong Door (NWD) to expand the capacity of the NWD system to improve access to and acquisition of AT devices and services. Through its partnership with NWD, VATS received sub-grant from the CARES Act and the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021. The purpose of the grants is to address the health and safety needs of older adults and individuals with disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic. VATS collaborated with NWD to create and market three Assistive Technology Kits: Social Health Kit, Emergency Preparedness Kit, and Training Videos Kit. These kits have been distributed to NWD partners (AAAs and CILs) to make them available statewide for local/regional trainings and informational sessions with constituents.

DARS/VATS collaborated with its community durable medical equipment (DME) reuse contracted partners to improve access and acquisition of AT devices for Afghan refugees displaced at Virginia military installations. VATS partners have been communicating with the Virginia Department of Emergency Management (VDEM), the Department of Defense, and the State Department to address the mobility needs of Afghan refugees currently housed at Fort Lee, Fort Pickett and Quantico. VATS and its partners coordinated deliveries of DME, which included walkers, wheelchairs, canes and crutches. In September 2021, the Foundation for Rehabilitation Equipment and Endowment (F.R.E.E.), VATS and DARS coordinated multiple efforts to place needed DME at military installations. Both VATS and F.R.E.E. participate regularly with VDEM’s Access and Functional Needs Advisory Committee (AFNAC) to share information and address needs of Virginians with disabilities in emergency planning and response. Additionally, F.R.E.E.

## VR 2021 Highlights *(cont.)*

participates in weekly calls with VDEM staff, community-based groups and representatives from Fort Lee, Fort Pickett and Quantico to address ongoing equipment needs.

F.R.E.E., VDEM and VATS have a MOA in place to address DME access needs during natural disasters. The MOA is helping to streamline the process of storing/having DME readily available in preparation for and in response to natural disasters. The MOA will provide ready-to-deploy DME to address the mobility need of Virginians during statewide emergencies. This is positive example of how the state's AT Act program, in collaboration with non-profits, state agencies and federal government organizations, is helping to improve the quality of life of Virginians with disabilities, as well as our welcomed guests.

### **DARS Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) 2021 Summer Work Experience Program**

In the summer of 2021, Virginia DARS supported over 300 students with disabilities ages 16-21 to participate in paid and unpaid work experiences throughout the Commonwealth. These opportunities consisted of 3-8 week on-the-job experiences in which those students were able to explore careers and gain valuable skills for employment within a host business. This effort was assisted by a network of Pre-ETS vendors who provided skills trainers to support many individuals in their work experiences. In addition to being a memorable experience, there are several examples of work experiences turning into employment for students. Virginia DARS will continue to create opportunities for students to have authentic work experiences which raise their expectations for pursuing competitive integrated employment when they graduate and transition from secondary education into adult life.



Army National Guard soldiers at Fort Pickett unload wheelchairs for Afghans with mobility needs.



Wheelchairs outside of F.R.E.E. Foundation location before being taken to refugees with mobility needs at Fort Pickett.

## Business Services

At work, it's what people can do that matters. Our workforce specialists focus on business needs to connect employers with the right person for the right job.

DARS partners with employers across Virginia to provide them with qualified, dependable employees. Between 3,000-4,000 DARS clients become successfully employed each year.

Our business development managers are a business' one-stop resource, whether they need help recruiting qualified job candidates, disability awareness training, job accommodation solutions or information on Virginia's labor market and workforce trends.

At little or no cost, businesses can benefit from working with our business services team who:

- Work with organizations to set up job internships, unpaid work experiences or on-the-job training to make sure the employee is a good fit
- Arrange job fairs or hiring events so employers can preview multiple candidates at one time
- Guide employers about job accommodations and assistive technology
- Partner with job coaches to guide clients hired who need extra support services
- Advise on financial incentives and tax incentives, including Work Opportunity Tax Credit and Federal Bonding Program
- Conduct Windmills Training workshops for disability sensitivity in the workplace (see p.10 for more information)

# Put Ability to Work

## BUSINESS SERVICES



DARS' Business Services Team *Back row left to right*: Director of Workforce Programs David Leon, Business Development Manager Nate Mahanes. *Front row left to right*: Business Development Managers Wes Seaton, LaPearl Smith, Beth Groff, Melissa Edmonds (*far right*) and Deputy Commissioner Dale Batten (*second from right*). *Missing*: Kate Kaegi, Career Pathways and Business Specialist.

The Wilson Workforce and Rehabilitation Center, located in Fishersville, is a key resource for DARS, providing comprehensive vocational rehabilitation services to consumers with disabilities to prepare for gainful employment. Below are some highlights of the excellent work taking place at WWRC during SFY21.

Some major changes occurred in 2020 and 2021 for WWRC. Dealing with the pandemic safely and quickly and readjusting to determine how to provide services to our consumers became paramount to our success. Without meeting with clients face-to-face, changes have occurred at the division level in response to changes in focus and mission within WWRC. The pandemic and social distancing requirements drastically inhibited the ability to provide in-person service delivery.

Also, in 2020 and 2021, our clients with cognitive and social disabilities continued to increase, while clients with physical disabilities continued to decline.

The adjustment needed in response to COVID, and the inability to see clients face-to-face, resulted in the quick development of virtual services. Virtual services, or “telehealth” in some therapy settings, was something already being used in the community, but not at WWRC. Therapists quickly put together a virtual format for services such as OT, speech, PT, AT assessments and driving-related services. Some services are better suited for virtual delivery than others, but the outcomes have been positive for staff and clients. Virtual services are likely to remain even after COVID, and WWRC has now expanded virtual services to other departments/programs such as PERT, vocational evaluation and vocational training.

WWRC supports WIOA and DARS performance measures, especially those involving workforce credentials, measurable skills gains and business engagement. WWRC has evolved WIOA-recognized workforce credentials in every training program. This ensures close alignment with WIOA. WWRC continues to focus on helping consumers find a career pathway, through Pre-ETS, that leads to employment that is retained over time with advancement and good wages.

The second quarter median earnings for vocational training graduates, closed by DARS in SFY2020 was \$4,928.81. This number is approximately \$1,000 more than the previous year’s earnings. In addition to the increase in earnings, WWRC expects to more than double the SFY2021 number of WIOA-recognized credentials in SFY2022. This was a very positive achievement during a pandemic.

WWRC also focused on increased rigor in our curriculum in order to enhance our clients’ ability to earn WIOA credentials. This focus will allow our current and future clients to enter the workforce with greater skills which will enhance their employability. These positive changes are reflected in our increase in median earnings.

The following are the number of consumers served by service area during SFY 2021:

**Vocational Evaluation: 444**

- ♦ Vocational evaluation (non-PERT): 192
- ♦ PERT: 252

**Vocational Training Graduates: 37**

- ♦ Pre-Employment Readiness Education Program: 155
- ♦ Supported Work Readiness Services\*: 188

**Driving Services: 288**

- ♦ Learner’s permits: 24
- ♦ Driver’s Licenses : 8

*\*This consists of support ancillary services from one or more of the following areas: occupational therapy, physical therapy, speech therapy, nursing, or assistive technology services. These services are pivotal in addressing work readiness/preparedness for clients that have issues in areas such as personal care, independent living, mobility/physical skills, communication skills, or medication/health management. Examples of assistive technology include wheelchair/seating equipment, communication devices, assistive computer technology, and many other general low tech devices to aid personal independence.*

## WWRC 2021 Highlights *(cont.)*

### Postsecondary Education/Rehabilitation Transition (PERT) Credentialing Week

During July 2021, eight PERT students at WWRC participated in an innovative credentialing week where they obtained a National Retail Federation (NRF) Customer Service and Sales (CSC) credentials. Five out of eight students (63%) passed the exam and are now certified in this customer service credential.

The following data also emerged from the student exit surveys:

- 88.9% of students stated that they felt they had a better understanding of customer service
- 66.7% stated that what they learned in this course would help them in their future employment
- 77.8% stated they would recommend this program to others
- 100% were glad they attended and felt there was adequate support from staff

The main goal of this new PERT initiative was to support the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) Career and Technical Education (CTE) credential graduation requirement for a standard diploma, in addition to providing innovative Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS).

The second goal was to support the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission (JLARC) report on Virginia's K-12 Special Education Services, released in December 2020. A significant portion of the information shared by JLARC focused on aspects of special education related to the transition of students with disabilities to post-secondary opportunities.

This interagency collaboration between DARS and VDOE supports the SRC's recommendations for VR program improvement for FFY21.

WWRC's Education Support Services Provides Transition Training for VDOE

In April 2021, WWRC staff met via Zoom with approximately 40 participants from high schools to provide a training to facilitate transitional services for students across Virginia. This training was attended by special education

teachers/coordinators, career and technical education teachers, career and technical education curriculum supervisors/coordinators, transition coordinators at the high school level and the VDOE, instructional specialists in middle/secondary transition at VDOE.

The presentation covered WWRC's business processes utilized to facilitate student's attaining a National Career Readiness Certificate (CRC) and National Retail Federation's Customer Service and Sales Credential (CSC). Recommendations were shared for curriculum for both credentials that count as the Career and Technical Education credential required for high school graduation.

In addition to sharing curriculum resources the following information was shared:

- Specific details about testing
- How to set up a testing center
- How to determine what test accommodations are appropriate
- How to apply for testing accommodations
- Lessons learned at WWRC

This is the second training session offered to the VDOE as a result of a grant provided to PERT to enhance transitional services for youth throughout the commonwealth. This summer approximately 15 PERT students will participate in NRF Customer Service and Sales instruction and testing through WWRC.

This interagency collaboration between DARS and the VDOE also supports the SRC's Recommendations for VR program improvement for FFY21.

### Certified Logistics Associate (CLA) Credential Implementation

One of the values of the Career and Workforce Development Division is innovation. The Materials Handling program within the Vocational Training Department exemplified this value through their Certified Logistic Associate (CLA) career pathway.

Six students entered as a cohort who received instruction for the CLA credential exam. This was a unique model as students:

- Entered as a cohort, so students started as a group and finished as a group. This helped the students form a “learning community” where they were able to discuss what they observe at their worksites, ask questions about their classroom content which helped form a certain amount of workplace camaraderie.
- Participated in CLA instruction after returning from Work Based Learning for CLA Class. This format added relevancy to instruction as students were in the community seeing docking plates, Warehouse Management Systems, how materials handling staff are organized into work teams, etc.

The results attained are as follows:

- Five out of six students sat for the CLA test. The student who did not qualify for testing participated in classes and study groups right up to test day.
- Three out of the five students passed on the first attempt at the CLA test. The two who did not pass were close to a passing score.
- One of the students who sat for testing declined the opportunity to extend his program for a week due to the required wait time prior to re-testing.
- One of the students who did not pass on the 1st attempt will be re-testing June 10.
- All students who sat for testing still at WWRC have now moved onto the Certified Logistics Technicians (CLT) test prep classes to prepare for the next level of certification.

These results prove that with appropriately high expectations, quality instruction and solid supports, WWRC students can attain the workforce credentials and work based learning experiences for integrated competitive employment.

## WWRC 2021 Highlights *(cont.)*

### Lead Virginia Tour

In August 2021, more than 50 business leaders from Lead Virginia, representing a multitude of businesses across the Commonwealth, toured WWRC. Lead Virginia is a leadership academy that offers an unparalleled opportunity for a select group of leaders to surround themselves with the Commonwealth’s most experienced and talented professionals.



Modeled on the theory of social capital, this nonprofit and non-partisan organization immerses participants in the distinct regions of the Commonwealth. Lead Virginia attracts senior level professionals who seek a deeper understanding of the issues and opportunities facing Virginia. Participants interact directly with local and state leaders to examine each region’s unique responses to the issues of Economy, Education, and Health.

The goal of the tour was to show the business leaders that WWRC is a modern workforce center in addition to being a VDOE state operated program educational facility that meets the needs of businesses using its workforce driven curriculum. Many facets of the workforce center were shared such as the wrap around Occupational Therapy (OT) and Physical Therapy (PT) supports, Vocational Evaluation (VE), educational and assistive technology (AT) accommodations, and the obtainment of hundreds of WIOA industry-recognized credentials.

Lastly, to enhance the relevance of the tour, the students from Food Service, along with instructors Sue Britt and A.D. Strickland, prepared a catered meal for the Lead Virginia participants.

## WWRC Performance Outcomes

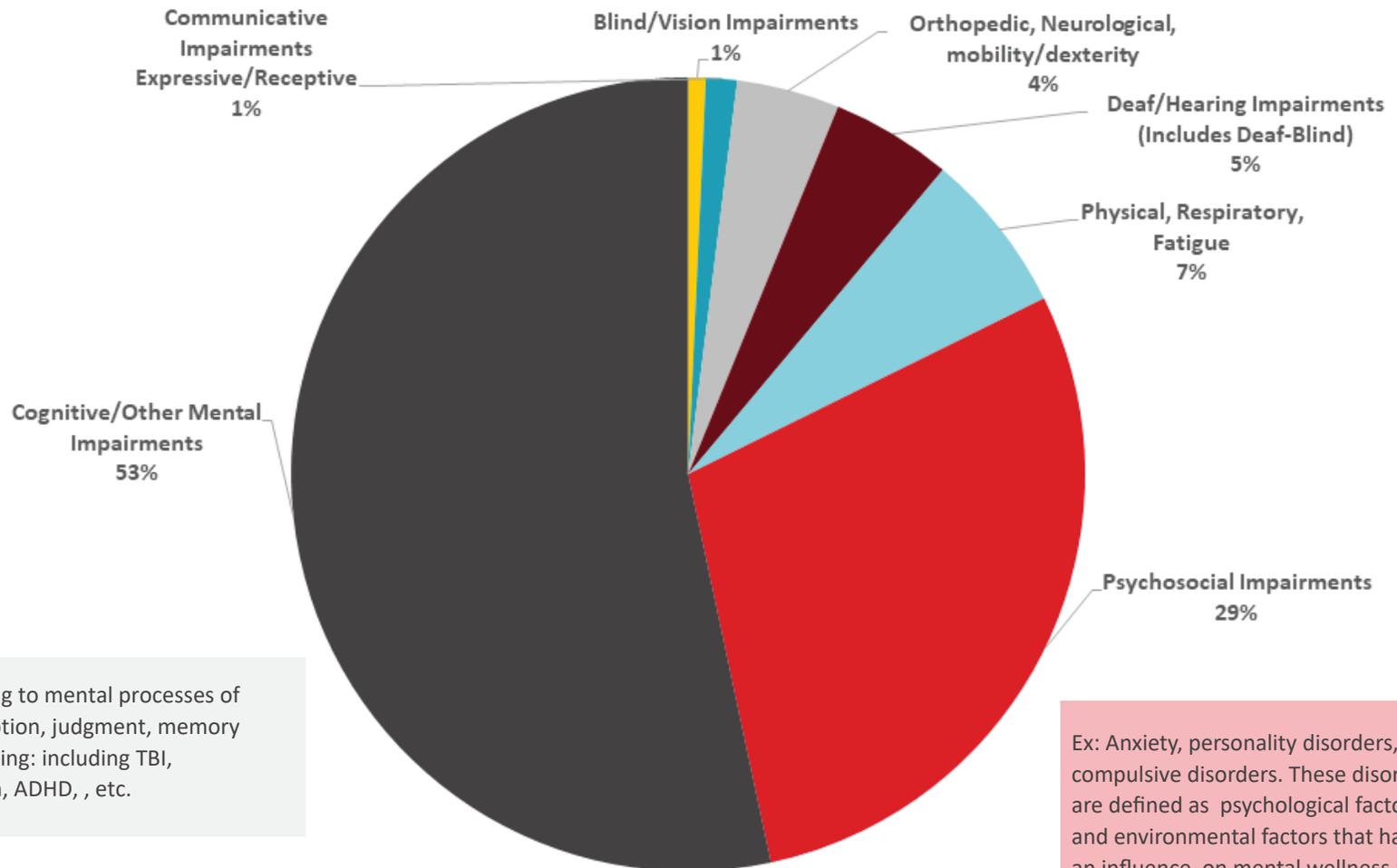
### SFY2021 Other Credentials/Certifications Obtained

Credential Type	Number
Driver's License	8
CRC - Platinum	2
CRC - Gold	3
CRC - Silver	6
CRC - Bronze	6
ServSafe Food Handler	6
Learners Permit	24
CPR and First Aid	8
OSHA10	11
WWRC FAA-Certified Drone Pilot	2
NRF Customer Service and Sales - Other	1
Microsoft Office Specialist (MOS)	5
Total	82

### SFY2021 WIOA Credentials Obtained

Credential Type	Number
CNA	5
Certified Logistics Associate (CLA)	5
A+	4
Manufacturing Specialist	7
Manufacturing Technician 1	7
MSI Credential - Business Certificate in MTT	5
Microsoft Office Suite	7
Total	40

## Primary Disabilities of VR Clients FFY2021



## Consumer Satisfaction Survey

The State Rehabilitation Council works in partnership with DARS to assess satisfaction with services received through the Division of Rehabilitative Services (DRS). Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2020 was the seventh year of assessing satisfaction for consumers in service delivery (post Individualized Plan for Employment but prior to employment).

A different approach was taken in examining survey responses from the FFY20 survey. In addition to the normal overall survey responses, consumer responses were examined by their current status as of available data (April 30, 2021). This view provided more of a utility tool for the survey.

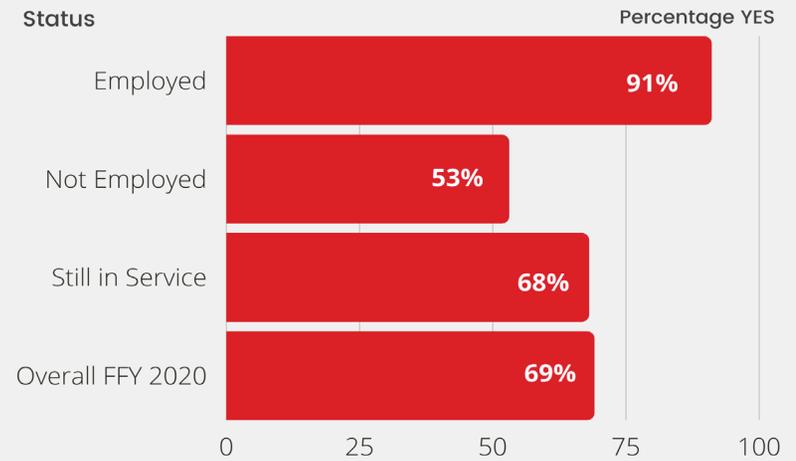
Based on available data as of April 30, 2021, 14% (n=57) of the 421 consumers who participated in the FFY20 survey during service delivery had closed in employment, 15% (n=63) had closed without employment, and 71% (n=301) were still “in service” status.\*

While percentages for agreement on various aspects of service are low among consumers who closed without employment, closure reasons point primarily to: Unable to Locate or Contact, Moved (32%) or Refused Services/No longer interested in services (43%).

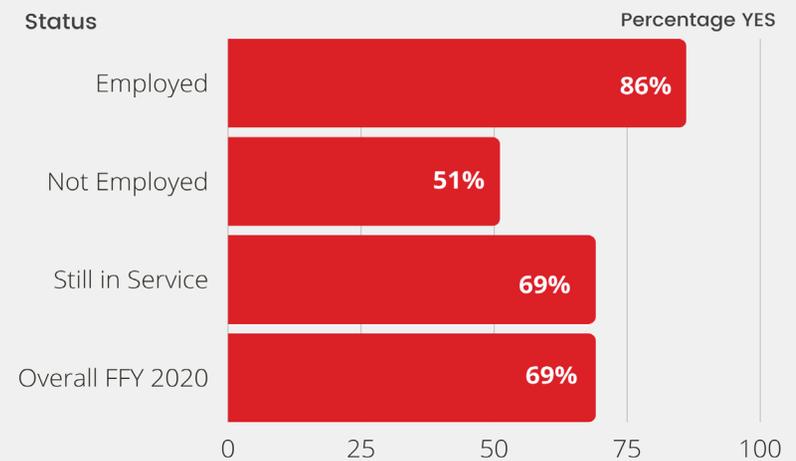
Perception of maintaining contact was slightly above the prior six year average (73% of all FFY20 responses).

*\*Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding in Excel.*

### Have you and your counselor agreed on your plans for reaching your job goal?

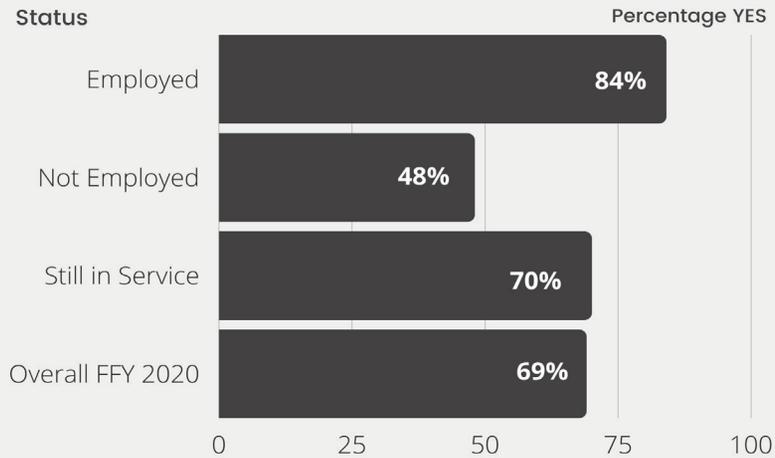


### Is your counselor doing what he/she said they would do to help you reach your job goal?

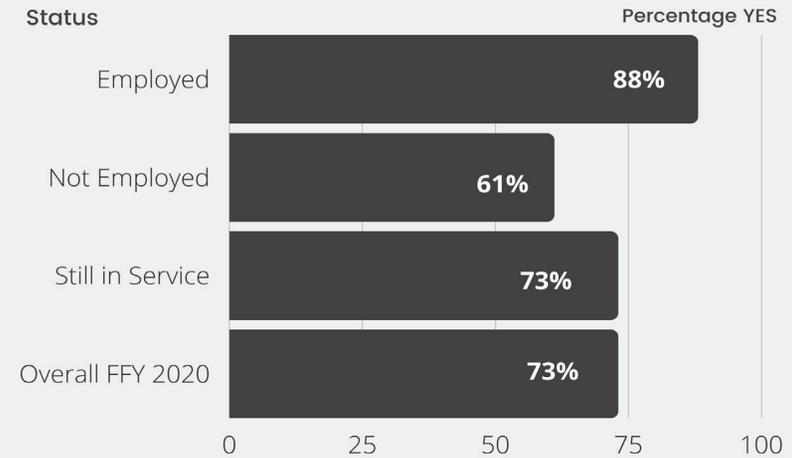


## Consumer Satisfaction Survey (cont.)

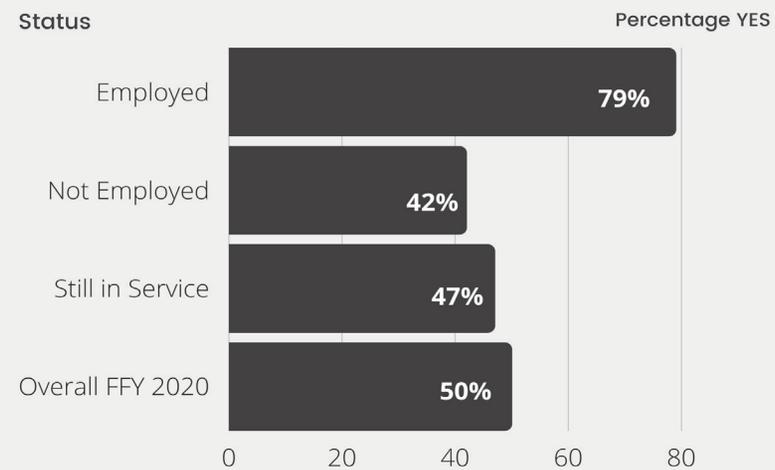
Is your DARS office helpful in connecting you with people and services you need to reach your job goal?



Has your DARS office kept in contact with you throughout the process?



Are you moving toward employment in a timely manner?



## Consumer Satisfaction Survey (cont.)

### Best thing that has happened to help consumers move towards job goal

Of 373 responses, 23 percent were related to consumers' positive outlook (hope, confidence, expectation, things being accomplished) and 18 percent were job related.

Seventeen percent were related to helpfulness (responses describing elements of guidance, support, provision, connections, and positive things done by staff or others).

	FFY 2020 Overall	Closed with Employment	Closed with No Employment	Still in Service
Number of Responses	N=373	n=56	n=54	n=263
Job Related	18%	18%	22%	17%
Helpfulness	17%	23%	11%	17%
Miscellaneous	18%	13%	26%	18%
Post-secondary/Training*	9%	5%	4%	11%
Nothing/DK/NA	14%	4%	24%	14%
Positive Outlook	23%	38%	13%	22%

*The post-sec or training category includes comments related to both general and vocational training. Percentages are based on number of responses since some consumers mentioned more than one thing in their responses.*

	FFY 2020 Overall	Closed with Employment	Closed with No Employment	Still in Service
Number of Responses	N=375	n=48	n=54	n=273
Job Related	25%	21%	28%	25%
Helpfulness	12%	6%	13%	13%
Miscellaneous	34%	31%	35%	34%
Post-secondary/Training*	12%	8%	11%	13%
Nothing/DK/NA	8%	10%	7%	7%
Positive Outlook	10%	23%	6%	9%

### Things that would help consumers move closer to job goal

Of 375 responses, 25 percent were job related and 12 percent were related to helpfulness. Twelve percent were related to Post-secondary/Training.

Overall, comments related to positive outlook were mentioned less frequently in terms of things that would help consumers move closer to their job goal.

## SRC Mission, Contact Information

### Our Mission

The mission of the Virginia State Rehabilitation Council, in partnership with the Virginia Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services, and in collaboration with advocacy groups, consumers and their families, is to ensure that Virginians with disabilities receive quality services while seeking to achieve meaningful employment, self-sufficiency and independence.

### Our Vision

All Virginians with disabilities will have access to quality services leading to meaningful employment, self-sufficiency and independence.

### Attend a Meeting

The quarterly SRC meetings are open to the public. Meeting locations, dates and times are posted at:

[www.va-src.org](http://www.va-src.org)

<https://commonwealthcalendar.virginia.gov>

### Call

Voice: (800) 552-5019 | (804) 662-7000

Videophone: (804) 325-1316

Fax: (804) 662-7663

### Write

Chair, State Rehabilitation Council  
Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services  
8004 Franklin Farms Drive  
Henrico, VA 23229

To request this report in Spanish or another language contact

[Lauren.Roche@dars.virginia.gov](mailto:Lauren.Roche@dars.virginia.gov)

(804) 663-7817

Lauren Roche

DARS/State Rehabilitation Council

8004 Franklin Farms Drive

Henrico, VA 23229

## Membership Application

If you are interested in a gubernatorial appointment to the Council, you may begin the application process with this form by indicating your:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Please email, fax or mail this form to the SRC Administrator at:

Lauren Roche  
DARS/State Rehabilitation Council  
8004 Franklin Farms Drive  
Henrico, VA 23229

[Lauren.Roche@dars.virginia.gov](mailto:Lauren.Roche@dars.virginia.gov)  
(804) 663-7817

Upon receipt, someone from the SRC will contact you to discuss your interest. However, to officially apply for this appointment, you must contact the Secretary of the Commonwealth's Office. You may obtain information about the formal application process by calling the Secretary's office at (804) 786-2441 or applying [online](#).

**Thank you for your interest in the SRC.**





VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT FOR AGING  
AND REHABILITATIVE SERVICES

[www.vadars.org](http://www.vadars.org)

804.662.7000

