

STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL 2024 SRC ANNUAL REPORT

In Partnership with



Opportunities for Independence

**Office of Vocational Rehabilitation
Office of Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind**

2024 SRC ANNUAL REPORT

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MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF
REHABILITATION SERVICES
Opportunities for Independence

WELCOME FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Billy Taylor



***Members of the Mississippi Legislature and
Fellow Mississippians:***

On behalf of the Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services' Office of Workforce Development, I thank you for the opportunity to share highlights of our Offices of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) and Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind (VRB) through our partnership with the State Rehabilitation Council during Federal Fiscal 2024.

The work of our Vocational Rehabilitation teams and the SRC is vital to carrying out our mission of assisting Mississippians with disabilities to gain/retain employment and to provide appropriate and comprehensive services in a timely and effective manner. We are proud to report that our Vocational Rehabilitation Programs assisted over **14,700** Mississippians with disabilities, helped **3,321** become successfully employed, provided Pre-employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) to **2,282** students, and have **17** partnerships with Pre-ETS providers to provide Pre-Employment Transition Services. We held job fairs in which **100** businesses participated and developed or maintained **28** Project SEARCH sites. We partnered with corporate giants such as Sephora, Fastenal, community colleges, and senior colleges for internship programs and to help meet their hiring needs. We assisted individuals with disabilities and participants in Mississippi State University's Access Program and the University of Mississippi RISE Program.

Our success is to be credited to our outstanding statewide staff here at MDRS. They work hard every day to make a difference in the lives of those we serve, and regularly consult with the members of the State Rehabilitation Council as a matter of duty and due diligence.

I thank you for your continued support of our mission and look forward to another year of successful outcomes and life-changing work.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Billy Taylor". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Billy Taylor, Executive Director
Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services



MISSISSIPPI STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL CHAIR LETTER

On behalf of the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC), I am happy to share the annual report of the Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services' Office of Vocational Rehabilitation and Office of Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind (OVR/OVRB).

The SRC is a body mandated by The Rehabilitation Act and its resulting regulations at CFR 361. Members, described in these regulations, represent a broad range of individuals with disabilities across the state, partner agency stakeholders, as well as colleagues from business and industry.

Our mandated functions include:

- Reviewing, analyzing, and advising OVR/OVRB on the performance of their responsibilities related to eligibility and order of selection; the extent, scope, and effectiveness of vocational rehabilitation services; and functions that affect the ability of individuals with disabilities in achieving employment outcomes
- Partnering with OVR/OVRB in developing goals and priorities; and evaluating the effectiveness in obtaining these goals
- Advising OVR/OVRB in the vocational rehabilitation portion of the Unified State Plan
- Conducting a review and analysis of consumer satisfaction
- Submitting this report and making it available to the public
- Coordinating activities with other named Councils within the state
- Performing other relevant functions which the SRC determines appropriate consistent with the purpose of OVR/OVRB

The Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services' OVR/ OVRB has had strong customer satisfaction ratings in the last year for the services that are provided to the citizens of Mississippi who experience disability; as well as the employment outcomes that are achieved after service provision. Strong collaboration with the business and industry community leads to accomplishments for the citizens served – lives are made better with employment. Businesses are made stronger by having a source for qualified and job-matched candidates to fill their labor forces. OVR and OVRB services are a great investment – making the state of Mississippi stronger, where all citizens are included.

We hope you will continue to prioritize strong funding of this agency for the 20% required state match to federal funds so that it will have the funding levels to remain an essential Mississippi resource for citizens with disabilities seeking employment. We hope that you prioritize competitive staff salaries, a frequent discussion of the SRC, to ensure that highly skilled professionals continue to choose MDRS OVR and OVRB as their employer.

The SRC is happy to continue to advise the agency regarding the individual stakeholder groups who we represent.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Donald G. Brown".

Donald G. Brown, Chairman
State Rehabilitation Council

STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL MEMBERSHIP

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The public is always invited to attend the quarterly State Rehabilitation Council Meetings. Meeting locations, dates and times and are posted at www.mdrs.ms.gov and the NFB Newsline.

2024 MISSISSIPPI STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL ACTIVITIES

2024 Mississippi - State Rehabilitation Council Activity Report

The Mississippi State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) held four (4) quarterly meetings for the Federal Fiscal Year **October 1, 2023 – September 30, 2024**. Utilizing in-person meetings, TEAMS and teleconferencing, the members were able to attend quarterly meetings during the continued pandemic era. During each meeting, everyone was welcomed, introductions were made, and guests were recognized. Agenda topics were centered around the SRC Functions and provided by the Offices of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR), Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind (OVRB) and Business Development Services (BDS). The State Rehabilitation Council reviewed and provided input at each meeting on selected topics related to:

- ◆ Reviewing, analyzing, and advising OVR/OVRB/BDS on the performance of their responsibilities related to eligibility and order of selection; the extent, scope, and effectiveness of vocational rehabilitation services; and functions that affect the ability of individuals with disabilities in achieving employment outcomes.
- ◆ Partnering with OVR/OVRB in developing goals and priorities and evaluating the effectiveness in obtaining these goals.
- ◆ Advising OVR/OVRB/BDS in the vocational rehabilitation portion of the Unified State Plan.
- ◆ Conducting a review and analysis of consumer satisfaction, including a quarterly report from the Client Assistance Program (CAP) as well as a report of Due Process Hearings
- ◆ Submitting the SRC Annual Report and making it available to the public.
- ◆ Coordinating activities with other named Councils within the state, with a specific agenda item quarterly for a report from the Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC).
- ◆ Performing other relevant functions, the SRC determines appropriate consistency with the purpose of OVR/OVRB/OBD.
- ◆ The integral responsibility of the Council is to have active participation by responding formally to questionnaires, participating in NCSRC training, asking questions, and providing input reflective of the interest of the stakeholder groups represented.

December 8, 2023 Meeting

SRC Chair: Mr. Brown discussed the VR/VRB Director being **Ex-Officio members** of this council due to a previous discussion. The agency has always had the MDRS Executive Director as the Ex-Officio member, but the law does reference the VR Director and since VR/VRB are separate programs, assumptions would be the inclusion of the VRB Director. This led to inquiries of inclusion of the MDRS Executive Director remaining as Ex-Officio and it remained unclear.

Client Assistance Program: Mr. McGinn provided a summary of the **CAP report** which included attendance at various meetings. The upcoming election was discussed to ensure voting and election facilities were available. Mr. McGinn had two new cases, received an additional client since submission of the quarterly report, and received 115 information & referrals this quarter.

Due Process Hearings last Quarter: None reported.

OVR Program:

- Mr. Fairley presented the **VR Program report** for reporting period of July 1, 2023 through November 30, 2023. A total of 1029 cases were closed rehabilitated which is 43% of their 2,405 goal. There were 1,697 open potentially served cases and the total served was 2,077. There were 1,663 transition cases and the total served was 1,833. There were 2,049 IPEs developed, and the goal was 4,301. An overview of the **Financial Needs Analysis** was provided. Members were informed that it remains suspended regardless of the person's income and it will be a year suspension as of January 2024.

OVRB Program Report: Ms. Young discussed the OVRB 2024 **Overall Goals** and the **Moving the Needle** document for reporting period 07/01/2023-11/30/2023. As of 11/30/2023, OVRB served 1,346 consumers, closed 62 cases with an average hourly rate of \$20.46, 11 are in training and received a Measurable Skills Gains (MSG). Ms. Young discussed 'Moving the Needle' - there are 6 certified alternative method training centers and Mississippi will be the 7th. Tennessee does not have a training center but will refer clients to Mississippi. The **Structured Discovery Center** will not be in competition with the Addie McBryde Center and some services offered at Addie will not be offered at the Structured Discovery Center. Adult Coaching classes and Vocational Evaluations will only be done at the Addie McBryde Center. The capacity at this training center will only be 10 whereas the capacity at Addie is over 26. **New Counselor Mentorship** - OVRB senior counselors are mentoring new counselors.

Consumer Satisfaction Review:

- **Consumer Satisfaction Survey:** Mr. Fairley provided a summary of the report. All questions resulted in ratings ranging from 4.4 through 4.77 with an *overall rating* of 4.75 (with 5 being the highest rating). Included in the summary report was an *Employment Outcome* rating of 4.63.

- **Program Evaluation Survey:** District results were presented for Districts 7 and 8. In District 7, Program Integrity reached 81 of 326 active consumers, of which 10 were in *employed status* (overall satisfaction rating 3.18). In District 8, 150 active consumers were reached out of 551, of which 25 were in *employed status* (overall satisfaction rating 3.06) and clients were satisfied with the services received and appreciated counselors' return calls and follow-up.

Office of Business Development (OBD) Report: Leadership worked to realign the duties of the OBD staff to meet the demands of businesses to better serve counselors, clients, and to better align with the RSA goals. Beginning January 2024, Business Development (BD) representatives will solely focus on outreach, education and marketing the agency. The Career Counselors will assume responsibility for maintaining BD caseloads to allow better communication with the counselor and the BD staff will provide comprehensive outreach. OBD will be working toward becoming a service authorization which will streamline and decrease paperwork.

State Plan – VR Portion Update on 2024-2027: A modification is completed and submitted every three to four years. SRC members will receive the State Plan to provide feedback, and the old state plan will be available for the public to make comments. A hearing will also be held on the state plan (January).

**Additional State Rehabilitation Council Member Activities and Action Items
December 2023 Quarterly Meeting**

Nominations Committee: Nominations were recommended due to **vacancies**. Mr. Brown discussed consideration of another **chairman for the nomination committee**. The Nominations Committee will require a new committee member because Don Brown is now the SRC Chairperson. Members can nominate themselves or other members to serve in this capacity. In reference to **ex-officios**, Ms. Meruvia will also check with the National Coalition of SRC. Further follow-up was requested to research how other states handled if separate VR/VRB programs were applicable and research into specific laws that are applicable.

Budget Committee: Ms. Treadway reported on the travel budget with no expenditures as of this meeting. Contractual budget is \$10,000 with expenditures of \$2,136. Commodity budget is \$1,500 with \$503 spent. The SL&G includes the survey fees and has a \$20,000 budget with \$593 spent. The total of \$32,250 is budgeted for SRC and a total of \$3,232 has been expended.

SRC Orientation Committee: The SRC Orientation Committee presented and surveyed SRC members for feedback. It was also recommended that members visit VR/VRB offices to become acquainted with staff and learn about the operations. The Directors of VR/VRB and SRC Chair should take the lead and plan for orientation with input from Council members. The recommendation was made for a member to attend the National Coalition of the State Rehabilitation Council Training Conference and become the 'trainer' to present to the SRC.

Program Evaluation Survey: Ms. Treadway and Ms. Coon recommended that consumers receive a checklist to help remember the VR process and know what to expect each step.

OBD Program: OBD will provide events happening around the state to the SRC members to give them an opportunity to attend.

Other Action Items: Recommended an increase in the counselor's salary.

❖ Formal SRC Input: Responses to Questionnaires - December 2023 Meeting

Q1: After attending the quarterly SRC meeting, what further input do you have for VR/VRB regarding the extent, scope, effectiveness of services provided; and functions performed by the Designated State Unit (DSU) that affect or potentially affect the ability of individuals with disabilities in achieving employment outcomes?

- *Recommendations – ACRE has a supportive employment, six week online training to become certified in supportive and customized employment. For 5 workers, it cost \$1500.00. I think this could be beneficial for select MDRS staff such as case workers. Better impact individuals with disabilities.*
- *I enjoyed how VR/VRB are increasing wages for the counselors. That will help retain the employees. The knowledge will continue to grow.*
- *I would like the SRC to hold listening sessions with employees of VR and VRB and provide a report to leadership.*
- *The effectiveness of services provided is good. The rate of employment is good.*
- *It was good seeing the Project SEARCH services at Desoto Baptist Hospital in Southaven, MS, the program appears to be very successful based on student/intern placement rate. Project SEARCH counselors should be utilized as a demonstration model to other VR counselors throughout the state.*
- *No response*
- *No*

Q2: Having heard this quarter's report on the results of consumer satisfaction surveys, do you have any comments or recommendations for input into the service delivery process?

- *Lot of positive stats recorded and seeing the positive change for many individuals. Continue growing connections and take step further with provider partnership when communicating with families. The provider usually knows their services best or should have an opportunity to explain before decisions are made.*
- *MDRS has pushed the satisfaction of consumers up over the last 10 years. Also, wages have increased from \$11.00 to \$12.00 per hour.*
- *More up front education and orientation sessions for applicants to understand the VR process.*
- *The delivery of services has improved over time. The satisfaction rating is reflective of the jobs being performed.*
- *It is evident that Project SEARCH consumers (students/interns) are very satisfied with their job placements. This is based on what I saw at both Desoto Baptist Hospital and Jackson Baptist Hospital.*
- *Yes, for the outside person/ Referring entities*
- *No*

Q3: After attending the quarterly SRC meeting, what further input do you have for the State Plan goals and priorities? What further comment(s) do you have in regards to evaluating the effectiveness of the VR/VRB Program in meeting the goals and priorities?

- *Sounds like all are moving forward to make better for the consumers being served.*
- *Continue to focus on staff training and increase staff salary.*
- *No further input. The goals and priorities are effective.*
- *I will read the 2023 SRC Annual Report and State Plan update for response at the next meeting. All SRC committees should be as responsible as the SRC New Member Orientation 3 person committee as we were asked to provide suggestions for the nomination committee that Don Brown asked for volunteers to replace him. May I suggest a (3) three person co-chair committee representative of areas of the State (North, Centra & Southern Regions). The 3 person committee could seek out SRC representatives to present to the full SRC membership and the person in the Governor's office who approves the appointment. Please consider VR counselors to participate as nomination committee members including Shanda Nash in the North, Kenneth Hudson in the Central and/or South. Johnny McGinn could serve as chair of the committee. These 3 people have been present and active participants at every SRC meeting.*
- *Not at this time*
- *None*

Presentation of Information on Policy

Q4: Do you have any comments or recommendations concerning the presentation of the Financial Needs Analysis?

- *N/A*
- *No response*
- *The financial Needs Analysis was not discussed this quarter. I agree for this suspension to continue if there is no order of selection in place.*
- *Suspended*
- *It appears there is unspent money based on the quarterly report. It might be worth considering sending one of our SRC members to the National SRC Technical Training meetings to gather information and share it with all MS SRC members.*
- *N/A*
- *No*

CONTINUED, 2024 MISSISSIPPI - STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL ACTIVITIES

What further input do you have for the establishment of the Community Rehabilitation Program (CRP) for the blind?

- *I am excited for your continued success at your new facility in Long Beach and look forward to touring it one day.*
- *No response*
- *I am happy to see it open. I look forward to it serving more people.*
- *There is a definite need to establish the CRP program for the blind.*
- *I'm looking forward to our next SRC visit in Long Beach, MS to see our new VRB Training Center. It is very helpful for SRC members to see MDRS services throughout the State*
- *Open House hard date, this way we who want to visit can schedule*
- *None*
- *I really enjoyed the project SEARCH tour. It was very educational.*
- *I would like to express appreciation to Ms. Excellanxt Woodard for her sufficient help and support to me and all SRC members in planning SRC quarterly meeting. Thank you Excellanxt.*

March 15, 2024 Meeting:

SRC Chairman: Mr. Brown presented Ms. Meruvia with a plaque, on behalf of OVR/OVRB and the SRC, for Ms. Meruvia's 8 years of service and over 30 years of service to the State of Mississippi.

MDRS Executive Director: Mr. Howard discussed the Appropriation Bill, **HB 1809**, voted on by the House and is currently being transmitted to the Senate. The anticipated increase is about \$47,000 to the health insurance plan which is 1.5 million short of the objective. Mr. Howard stated they will attempt to get the 1.5 million put back into the budget. **House Bill 1662** is in reference to the internship language and will allow MDRS to pay for the junior and senior year of college for individuals who want to become a counselor or an examiner. For every semester the agency pays for, the person must give the agency one year of service. It is in hopes that this goes through the Senate. Mr. Howard announced his **retirement**, which will be the end of the session to ensure the agency gets through the budget process. Mr. Howard served the state of Mississippi for 34 years, with 24 years of service at our agency.

Client Assistance Program (CAP): Mr. McGinn provided a summary of the **CAP report** which included attendance at various meetings as well as a visit to Addie McBryde to discuss providing the **CAP brochures** in braille and large print. CAP has opened 3 new **cases** this quarter and had 170 **information & referrals** this quarter.

Due Process Hearing decisions last quarter: Ms. Hart stated there were **no due process hearings**. Mrs. Hart discussed how they **changed the process** when an individual wants to request a review, it goes to the counselor and the counselor informs the district manager. The request is now sent to an email address that is handled at the state office and contact is made with the consumer to determine if they want an informal review or if it is something that can be handled without a review. She explained the timeline for the due process hearing, from the time of the appeal is 60 days.

OVR Program: Ms. Hart presented the **OVR Management Report** that covered the reporting period July 1, 2023 through February 29, 2024. 72% of the successful rehabilitated goal was met and closed successfully rehabilitated. The Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) Annual Goal was met with 74% IPEs developed. The total number of potentially eligible served was 2,306 and the total number of transition students served was 2,115. During the first quarter the MSG was 9.5 and 34.9 in the second quarter. The negotiated rate, which has been met every year, is on target this year. The **Comprehensive State Needs Assessment (CSNA)** must be completed every three years.

CONTINUED, 2024 MISSISSIPPI - STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL ACTIVITIES

Berry Dunn submitted an RFQ and won the contract. The data used in the last state plan was derived from the 2021 CSNA report. The current CSNA is being completed by Berry Dunn and will be completed in January 2025. More providers have come on board to provide **PreETS**, and we have spent 12% of the 15% that is required.

OVRB Program Report: Ms. Young provided an update on the **EMERGE** center ('Encouraging Mississippians with Employment Resilience, Growth and Empowerment'). The grand opening was held on March 1, 2024.

Consumer Satisfaction Review:

- **Consumer Satisfaction Survey:** Mr. Fairley provided a summary of the Consumer Satisfaction Survey for the non-blind consumers results. Ratings are from 1 to 5, with 5 being very good. Various results ranged from 4.78 to 4.85 with '*Overall services received*' with the highest rating of 4.85.
- **Program Evaluation Survey:** Presented ratings on two districts (9/10). Ratings for district 9 '*overall satisfaction*' of 3.54 and overall composite for '*employment*' weighted average of 3.75. District 10 '*overall satisfaction*' of 3.02 and overall composite for the '*employment*' weighted average of 3.00. In October 2023, the **feedback forums** were implemented. Once ten districts are completed, they can decide if this program is beneficial. An **invitation will be sent to the SRC members** to attend the next forum.

Office of Business Development (OBD) Program Report: Mr. Woodward shared discussions of some **procedural changes** to 'spread out' duties. The OBD representatives are specifically geared toward business outreach, community outreach, and community education. From a national perspective, OBD operates internally whereas other agencies have external VR placement services to a third-party organization. **Career Counselors** will help with placement and management of the client caseload so the BD reps can spend more time providing outreach in the community. The Career Counselors will be working with the clients as they are referred to Business Development. **Job Extravaganzas** are being held and working to meet with ten approved vendors.

State Plan Update: Ms. Hart shared the update on the 2024-2027 VR Portion of State Plan. Attendees received a draft copy of the state plan that is in the Federal review. The plan is not approved yet because the feds have until June to review. When the final state plan is received, it will be posted to the website. There were no significant changes to the state plan. She explained the new form, **General Education Provision Act** (GEPA 427 form: Equity for students, educators, and other program beneficiaries. The document is available on the **NFB Newslines** and will be available in large print and braille.

Additional State Rehabilitation Council Member Activities and Action Items March 2024 Quarterly Meeting

Nominations Committee: Mr. Brown discussed member **vacancies** and provided the Nomination application to the group for nomination submissions. Several members' terms are expiring June 2024 and new nominations will be needed. Members can serve two consecutive terms. At this time, nominations are needed for a VR Counselor, a Community Rehabilitation Program (CRP) member, and a Business Industry Labor position.

Consumer Satisfaction Survey Committee: Ms. Meruvia discussed **Wolf Gang Frese and the uncertainty** of continuing with completing the surveys. Their contract was renewed but there may be **changes in the future**. Ms. Meruvia said they are partnering with the Social Service Research Lab to do their surveys.

CONTINUED, 2024 MISSISSIPPI - STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL ACTIVITIES

Budget Committee: The **SRC Budget report** as of the March meeting: Travel for agency employees is budgeted at \$750.00 with nothing expended; contractual category has a budget of \$10,000 and \$5,326.12 was expended; commodities category has a \$1,500.00 cap and \$1,438.82 was spent; SL&G category, which includes the survey fees, has a \$20,000 budget of which \$16,468.32 was spent; and the total SRC budget is \$32,250.00 and \$23,233.26 was spent. It was discussed to increase the commodity category. The **travel category** was discussed, and the employees' travel does not come out of the SRC budget. Ms. Treadway made a motion to move the \$750.00 designated for employees' 'travel' to 'commodities'.

Bylaws Committee: Mr. Diaz shared an update on the bylaws and state they still need draft language for the bylaws. The Bylaws Committee will review the draft language before it is brought before the council for consideration. A **follow-up meeting** is needed.

SRC Orientation Committee: Mr. Butler referred attendees to the **presentation** in reference to what the orientation should entail and which documents new members should receive. Some of the feedback was on *how* to customize training for new members. Mr. Brown inquired about how to move forward with **disseminating the information**. Ms. Meruvia discussed completing a **pilot project** of the orientation to determine what needs to be **amended** before new members begin their term. The **National Coalition of SRC** has a video series that SRC members can utilize.

❖ Formal SRC Input: Responses to Questionnaires - March 2024 Meeting

Q1: After attending the quarterly SRC meeting, what further input do you have for VR/VRB regarding the extent, scope, effectiveness of services provided; and functions performed by the Designated State Unit (DSU) that affect or potentially affect the ability of individuals with disabilities in achieving employment outcomes?

- *The need for customer service training to MDRS employees was discussed in a previous SRC meeting due to consumers complaints. This training has not yet been provided, but just briefly discussed at each state District Meeting by Kevin Bishop. In my opinion, just as Managers go through these type trainings, the staff should receive the same. I would recommend this being a quarterly training or every 6 month training. Everyone does not possess quality customer service skills. This could affect the way services are provided.*
- *None*
- *According to the client satisfaction survey, The extent, scope, and the effectiveness of services provided by VR and VRB are mostly suitable. The functions performed by the Designated State Unit that affect or potentially affect the ability of individuals with disabilities in achieving employment outcomes seem to be suitable as well.*
- *More outreach to let Mississippians know that the EMERGE Center is open!*
- *Please continue to support all strategies to recruit and retain VR/VRB counselors who are the core of successful outcomes in service delivery.*
- *I believe what is being done is moving all in the correct direction.*
- *N/A*
- *The Mississippi EMERGE Center is amazing! Great work by Dorothy and her team. So many people now have a change of a better life right here in Mississippi.*

CONTINUED, 2024 MISSISSIPPI - STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL ACTIVITIES

Q2: Having heard this quarter's report on the results of consumer satisfaction surveys, do you have any comments or recommendations for input into the service delivery process?

- *No*
- *None*
- *No comment*
- *The committee should review the questions, the methods, and the contractor to determine if change is needed.*
- *If a consumer satisfaction review committee is formed, please consider including representatives of VR counselors and Client Assistance Program, e.g. Johnny McGinn, Shanda Nash and Kenneth Hudson.*
- *I like the improvement that was talked about with the results of the survey.*
- *N/A*
- *I am excited for our committee on consumer satisfaction to work on reviewing and improving our processes. Surveys reviewed, in this session, looked great.*

Q3: After attending the quarterly SRC meeting, what further input do you have for the State Plan goals and priorities? What further comment(s) do you have in regard to evaluating the effectiveness of the VR/VRB Program in meeting the goals and priorities?

- *Feedback from MDRS external and internal stakeholders is valuable. Consistent and effective evaluation tools are necessary to determine the effectiveness of the VR/VRB Program in helping to meet goals and priorities.*
- *None.*
- *No Comment.*
- *Continues Pre-ETS beginning in middle school – continues strong focus on Transition Services. Open up Project Search for all age groups. Good Job VR!*
- *I will review all handouts provided.*
- *I would like to the introduction and guidance for new members on the SRC.*
- *No.*
- *We would benefit from more counselors. They need continued training and support to achieve their best results for the people we are to serve.*

Presentation of Information on Policy

Q4: What further input do you have for the establishment of the Community Rehabilitation Program (CRP) for the blind?

- *None at this time*
- *None*
- *The establishment of a structured, discovery program for the blind in the state of Mississippi will give blind consumers a choice in the types of training that may be more suitable to their needs. If structured, discovery training is a blind consumer's choice, the consumer will not have to travel out of the state of Mississippi to get the training of their choice.*
- *Contact all partners to get the word out about this marvelous new service for visually impaired citizens. Good job VRB!*
- *I enjoyed visiting the Structured Discovery Center in Long Beach. Good hearing from the 1st EMERGE Center Staff (Charlie Davidson, Andy Wheler, and Edna Cornette). Very enlightening to hear the presentation from Dr. Fredric Schroeder. Very true statement he made "It is easy to teach a person who is blind to work but hard to break social barriers to get them hired."*

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- *I would like to get data on the success of the clients/consumers next meeting.*
- *No response*
- *The building and staff are wonderful. I am so proud to have this amazing resource in our state.*

Additional Comments/Questionnaire: Accessibility of materials to SRC members is a priority. Travel accessibility was a concern this time. Have a way for clients and staff to give truly anonymous feedback to leadership without fear of reprisal.

June 21, 2024 Meeting:

OVR Program Report: The Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) reporting reflects each district's goal and achievement. VR is continuing to work on increasing potentially eligible numbers to serve more students with disabilities. **Vacancies** have made it difficult to build relationships and be consistent in the school districts and until the vacancies are filled, they will have some areas that will need improvement.

OVRB Program Report - Ms. Young provided an update on the establishment Community Rehabilitation Program. OVRB reported there was 1,630 total served. Ms. Young highlighted the Pre-Employment Transition services (PreETS) that are provided by the **National Federation of the Blind**. On June 28, parents and students will meet at Madison State Office to cover 'how to' navigate through an airport and training on orientation and mobility (O&M). Discussions of **Moving the Needle** were shared which helps clients to earn a better living wage. The first clients will start at the **MS EMERGE** Center on July 15, 2024.

Due Process Hearing Decisions last quarter: There was one request for a hearing, but it was resolved without a hearing.

Consumer Satisfaction Review:

- **Consumer Satisfaction Survey:** Ms. Young reported on the Consumer Satisfaction Survey on Mr. Fairley's behalf. The results from the non-blind consumers for ten districts were summarized. The 2nd quarter 2023-2024 report was provided to all attendees.
- **Program Evaluation Survey:** Ms. Shake shared results for the **OVRB Northern and Southern Region**. The service section composite average indicated an overall satisfaction of 3.41 in the North and 3.00 in the South with a composite weighted average in the *employment section of* 3.58 in the North and 3.00 in the South. An update on the **feedback forum** was shared whereas Program Integrity has been working with VR and Ms. Rushing will meet with the two auditors who have been working on those feedback forums to obtain an update and discuss what adjustments are needed. Ms. Rushing believes the forums have been completed in every district.

Office of Business Development (OBD) Report: Ms. Parrish provided an update on behalf of Mr. Woodward. The **job fair** will be held in August 2024 which is a partnership with the governor's job fair – MDES and the Employability Job Fair, held in Tupelo, in June 2024. The first solo job fair was held in April 2024 at the Greenwood Civic Center. OBD is working with the communications department to update their **marketing material**. Ms. Parish wanted to have **Disability & Etiquette** training for businesses or a nonprofit but waiting on the Office of Communications to finalize. BD representatives do not have a **booklet** to leave with businesses and this is pending development. A **Push Card brochure** needs to be finalized to inform people or an organization that OBD can come in at no charge and present a Disability & Etiquette training. An **OBD Services brochure** has been recommended so referring clients will be informed of services available. OBD is still running the **workforce videos and training videos** and have done one of their **job extravaganzas** with more job extravaganza planned in the future for PreETS. **Future projects** in the fall include visiting colleges, ADA Coordinators and spotlight luncheons, inviting registered students to come during lunch, more speaking engagements, and inviting two businesses based on what the study discipline and career goals so students can learn about different career goals.

State Plan - VR Portion of State Plan 2024-2027 update: Mrs. Hart and Ms. Young had already completed the plan and submitted it. The feds reviewed it and returned for minor edits that were outlined to update where referenced fiscal year to amend it to program year. Edits were made and RSA accepted it on June 10, 2024. The revised final plan is posted on the website. Ms. Young added how instrumental the SRC is to the VR/VRB program, and it is the first part of the State Plan to ensure the SRC is a functioning SRC. She discussed when they contact SRC they need to mention that they have a functioning SRC, they are succession planning and will have a succession training that will be held for the new members, their training will be provided by the current members, and the new members would be mentored.

Additional State Rehabilitation Council Member Activities and Action Items June 2024 Quarterly Meeting

Nominations Committee: Nomination applications distributed to members to make nominations. Some members' terms will expire on June 30, 2024. Members were informed of the need for a nominations chair to fill the vacancy. The bylaws were referenced regarding members serving two 3-year terms, and they can return to the council after a one-year layoff. For those who have served a one-year term and would prefer to serve another term, Jennifer Millsaps can submit their names to the governor for consideration for reappointment. Mr. Bullock was not listed on the governor's list; however, Mr. Bullock confirmed that he did receive the certificate from the governor's office which was presented at the SRC meeting held at the RAM conference in 2023. Mr. Brown discussed inquiring with the governor to determine if he would agree or give permission for members, whose terms end June 2024, to continue with their terms. He discussed they will also need to send it to the Nationals to make an exception to the rules for members to serve as voting members. Mr. Brown discussed that Ms. Millsaps has been in communication with the governor's office and they appear to be receptive. Mr. Brown also asked members to look for a replacement when their terms end. All attendees agreed with serving another term.

Consumer Satisfaction Survey Committee: Ms. Junkin discussed **self-advocacy** and its **representation**. Ms. Junkin shared concerns of hearing families who have received services and do not understand the services. The concern is - *Are the surveyors really getting what they need from the consumers to complete the survey?* She recommended the committee meetings should entail *what can we do and what should be done*. Ms. Junkin discussed parental consent for students with disabilities and if it was explained in such a way that they understood what they consented to. She also discussed how to find the missing component to ensure individuals the system failed but they were afraid to say anything or did not know how to reach out.

Budget Committee: Ms. Treadway was not in attendance but provided the budget report which covered July 2023 – June 2024. There were no recommendations based on the reporting.

Bylaws Committee: Mr. Diaz was not in attendance. A bylaws meeting was previously held to discuss some changes. There have not been any agreements to complete the changes. Mr. Brown discussed whether there may have been some editorial changes and in addition, they tried to reformat some of the sections to insert more common information in the same section. The bylaws committee needs to receive the draft prior to being submitted to the council for consideration. It was mentioned that VRB was not listed in the bylaws and the virtual meeting reference were omitted.

SRC Orientation Committee: Ms. Young also discussed the orientation committee. Ms. Meruvia said they need to review having VR/VRB staff that are not already overloaded to assist with the committee to ensure things do not fall through the cracks.

❖ **Formal SRC Input: Responses to Questionnaires – June 2024 Meeting**

Q1: After attending the quarterly SRC meeting, what further input do you have for VR/VRB regarding the extent, scope, effectiveness of services provided; and functions performed by the Designated State Unit (DSU) that affect or potentially affect the ability of individuals with disabilities in achieving employment outcomes?

- *Families across the state still don't know enough about MDRS and how their youth or young adult can access, use and benefit from using services [provided by MDRS.*
- *Great idea regarding the customer service and conflict resolution training for staff.*
- *Presently the three (3) year VR Needs Assessment is in progress. Information obtained must be shared with SRC members as a focal print service delivery.*

Q2: Having heard this quarter's report on the results of consumer satisfaction surveys, do you have any comments or recommendations for input into the service delivery process?

- *Continued work to ensure that consumers are understanding the surveys and questions asked.*
- *The process needs to be revived by the SRC committee for any possible changes.*
- *Research and review what other state rehabilitation councils are doing to measure consumer satisfaction and how we might use proven methods (evidence based) to measure satisfaction.*

Q3: After attending the quarterly SRC meeting, what further input do you have for the State Plan goals and priorities? What further comment(s) do you have in regard to evaluating the effectiveness of the VR/VRB Program in meeting the goals and priorities?

- *None at this time*
- *The SRC looks forward to hearing the results of the needs assessment. Staff training and staff retention activities should remain a focus.*
- *Developing state goals and priorities should be in part based on needs assessments – utilize the studies to improve services which is stated in the Rehab Act.*

Presentation of Information on Policy

Q4: What further input do you have for the establishment of the Community Rehabilitation Program (CRP) for the blind?

- *None at this time*
- *Glad to hear the update. Please distribute the forms and marketing materials to SRC for distribution to our stakeholder groups to market this great new services provider.*
- *Looking forward to seeing how the incoming administration will utilize Needs Assessments we are paying for.*

October 2, 2024 Meeting

MDRS Executive Director Comments. Mr. Taylor discussed the changes with the Client Assistance Program (CAP). The governor decided where the CAP program was housed, and the decision was formerly with the Mississippi Society for Disabilities (MSD) with Johnny McGinn as the MS CAP Director for many decades. There have been some changes with the MSD board. MDRS was working with the governor's office, RSA (Rehabilitation Services Administration), and Mr. McGinn to look at a different entity to house the CAP. Mr. Taylor mentioned the regulations require public notice and a public comment period so they hosted different public comments periods and gathered feedback for the governor to make the decision on where the best entity is to house CAP and after considering the

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comments and doing his own due diligence, it was decided to redesignate the CAP in Mississippi to the Mississippi Coalition for Citizens with Disabilities (MCCD). In discussion with Pam Dollar at MCCD, they are ready to perform this function. Pshon Barrett, an attorney retired from the U.S. Attorney General's Office, will also be working with CAP. Ms. Dollar also provided brochures which includes their contact information.

Client Assistance Program (CAP) Report (MCCD): Ms. Meruvia inquired if the phones or mail could be transferred to MCCD to ensure there are not any gaps during the transition. It was determined that there is no way to transfer the phones or forward the mail. Pam Dollar w/MCCD discussed during the legal transfer, there was no one at the agency to sign the paperwork that RSA required to move CAP from one organization to another, so they just put out a statement about the move. Ms. Meruvia discussed there might need to be some extra campaigning to ensure the CAP information is provided. It was discussed that an agency wide email will be sent out to the staff to inform. It was determined that Pam Dollar or her designee can represent CAP in the SRC meetings. Mr. Taylor said Jennifer Millsaps is working on our literature that has the e-mail and phone number on all the applications and some of the internal documents.

Due Process Hearing decisions last quarter: No hearings last quarter.

Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC) Report: Mr. Bullock discussed that they are under transition and almost complete. Ms. Augusta Smith retired and he has been elected to be the **Executive Director** position. He hired someone for the Indianola Office and it will be reopened October 9, 2024. Mr. Bullock shared the hiring data for a new youth Independent Living (**IL Specialist**) at their Tupelo MS office, hired a new IL Specialist for the Jackson, MS office, and has hired someone to take over his previous position. The Biloxi Office was moved to Gulfport and is located in the Arc Building.

Due Process Hearing decisions last quarter: No hearings last quarter.

OVR Program Report: The **VR management reports** were discussed. Districts should be at least 25% by the end of September 30, 2024 and currently, individual districts are meeting their goal with the exception of two (D5/D7). Since all other districts met or exceeded the goals, it made up for the districts that did not. The overall goal was 33%. To date 2,023 potentially eligible have been served and 2,095 transition students. The Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) by report shows districts are on target with the exception of D7. The other districts are above the 25% goal. **Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA):** Ms. Young informed attendees the CSNA remains ongoing and are still gathering data. They wanted to ensure they received feedback and gave ample time for clients to complete the surveys. VR/VRB had focus groups at different locations. They also had provider focus groups. Meetings with BerryDunn are held every two weeks. It is scheduled to be completed in January 2025.

OVRB Program Report: Ms. Young provided an update on the establishment **Community Rehabilitation Program** and discussed the **MS EMERGE Center Community Rehab Program**. Transportation is provided. There are two drivers and additional staff have been added. Ms. Young also discussed the **OVRB Performance Overview**. VRB is currently serving over 1,200 consumers throughout the state. Ms. Young has developed her own **satisfaction survey** to measure her staff's satisfaction. She did a 90-day review and statistics on all of her counselors

Consumer Satisfaction Review:

- **Consumer Satisfaction Survey:** The consumer satisfaction survey and ratings were shared with the group, ratings were above a 4.0 with the exception of the lowest rating of 4.35 in reference to *employment benefits provided by the employer*. In regard to the blind consumers, the rating responses were 4.0 and above.

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- **Program Evaluation Survey:** Ms. Rushing reported on OVR districts 1 and 2. Surveys are conducted on all open cases that have an IPE or are in employed status. Program Evaluation was able to reach 39% for D1 and 31% for D2. The service section composite rated an overall satisfaction for District 1 of 3.06 and 3.27 in District 2 and the *employment section*, the overall composite averages were 3.27 in District 1 and 3.62 in District 2.

Office of Business Development (OBD) Program Report : Mr. Woodward has been focused on holding **job fairs** to various communities with the goal of having a job fair in every district and a goal of holding a governmental agency job fair. Mr. Woodward is also working with the Mississippi Law Enforcement Officers Training Academy (**MLEOTA**), which is the police training academy in Pearl to possibly get clients hired and trained. To recruit businesses for the job fairs, OBD staff are out day-to-day soliciting, and they also utilize an email list at times. For the **Job Extravaganzas**, OBD offers to help the vendors if they need help with recruitment but typically locate the businesses since they are contracted with the agency. Mr. Mullins mentioned they are traveling to different businesses explaining who they are and what they do.

Project Search: Ms. Culpepper provided an update and an overview of Project SEARCH. Project SEARCH is a nine-month preparation employment program that provides work experience and training to individuals with disabilities. There are over 25 site locations throughout the state and over 70% or more of sites are student based and are mostly healthcare based.

State Plan Update: State Plan - 2024 – 2027 VR Portion: An update was provided. The plan was approved and published the last week in September 2024.

Additional State Rehabilitation Council Member Activities and Action Items October 2024 Quarterly Meeting

Nominations Committee: Nominations were submitted. The **Nominations Form was updated** to list Anna Tucker as the contact. Some of the SRC members' terms were scheduled to end June 30 and they asked the governor to make an **exception**. Mrs. Millsaps helped with this process with Mr. Taylor's approval. The governor agreed and approved these members to continue to serve. Mr. Taylor consolidated the point of contact for all the various councils to Anna Tucker. This ensures that various people are not contacting the governor's office for each council. This will streamline the process. Mr. Brown will send an **updated membership list** with new terms, term end dates, and vacancies.

Consumer Satisfaction Survey Committee: Ms. Junkin shared **concerns regarding the survey and communications**. How do you survey persons with intellectual disability and know they are giving the right information? Family members or the person that supports them can answer the questions, but they are not the ones who is working. Parents meet through MS Parent Training and Information Center (**MSPTI**) and their agency will ask if they talked to VR or the parents will tell them that they called and was informed the agency could not assist them. She mentioned MDRS may not be able to assist but set up an appointment to discuss it and provide the scope of services to determine if the agency can help or point them in the right direction to someone who could assist them. She also mentioned providing them with resources. The response was that *everyone gets an application*. Most counselors are not invited to the meetings, so how do you connect those families with the resources? She discussed their **RSAPTI project**, and they created tip sheets. There are 10 questions for the parents and 10 questions for the youth so they will know what to ask on their first visit with the VR Counselor. She discussed where is the capacity for not just the student but for the person who is supporting the student? How do you connect the dots so when you get the survey, you might get a more favorable outcome if it was someone led through the process. Counselors can talk to the Special Education Directors (SPED), but the parents must invite outside parties to the **IEP meetings**. Mr. Brown inquired about the counselors asserting themselves to contact the Special Education Directors or school counselors. Ms. Junkin also mentioned the schools have also had 46 new sped directors in the last few years. MSPTI could

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record their **transition boot camps** and let Ms. Nash join to discuss how to connect and find an office in their area. Ms. Junkin discussed the challenge of - the professionals are not connecting with the parents. Mr. Butler discussed you could probably use a **tool to come up with a conclusion**. There are ways that you can get the **responses from that target group**, but the tool will need to be for an individualized group.

Budget Committee: Ms. Treadway presented the budget report which showed the completed year 2023-2024 of \$29,273.79 total expended. SRC stopped moving the travel category for staff since staff's travel was not being used in this category. There was a travel expenditure of \$107 that should not have been charged but will be corrected. In contractual, this fiscal year, they have only spent \$668.33 out of \$10,000; commodities, \$425.16 of the \$2250.00 has been spent; and SL&G, \$144.72 has been spent out of the \$20,000.00 budgeted.

SRC Orientation Committee: Mr. Butler, Ms. Pope, and Mr. Fontaine – Followed-up on items to determine what the members want to see done:

- Individualized orientation
- Mentors
- Acronyms readily available on computer
- Dorothy – suggestion of new ideas for orientation
- Ms. Meruvia suggested having someone dedicated to the SRC that has the time to do logistics, folders, coordination, meeting setups and virtual setups, membership update/term list (REF*duties of MDRS personnel duties for SRC Board last page of the SRC Activities)
- Ms. Meruvia recommended they have the National Coalition of SRC, and someone needs to be a liaison because they send an email every Monday just to be up to date on what is going on nationally.
- Ms. Young discussed looking at other SRC councils in other states to determine what other job duties are assigned to their liaison.
- Mr. Mullins mentioned having everything strictly structured under Teams so that everyone who is added to the Teams can locate the information easily.
- He discussed SRC benefiting from having their own Teams and all documents can be uploaded to this Teams
- Newly appointed SRC members are to receive a binder, but updated information needs to be included for new members. When there is an updated for everyone, updates can be distributed at meetings (already hole punched for easy entry into binder). (Note: a membership list with names, addresses, contact information, position category on SRC, etc.)

Other comments: Ms. Meruvia requested that Accelerate Mississippi be invited to present.

❖ **Formal SRC Input: Responses to SRC Questionnaires – October 2024 Mtg.**

Q1: After attending the quarterly SRC meeting, what further input do you have for VR/VRB regarding the extent, scope, effectiveness of services provided; and functions performed by the Designated State Unit (DSU) that affect or potentially affect the ability of individuals with disabilities in achieving employment outcomes?

- *Thank you, Mr. Billy Taylor, for the supportive comments referring SRC. Thanks for the good discussion of updating all the necessary information SRC members need, updated membership list, 2024 VR portion of the state Plan, 2024-7 Need Assessment Survey and other needed documents. This is needed for both new and current members of SRC.*
- *Some stated below. I do like having the presentations on various services and business walk-through's in the future like Project SEARCH. Still interested Sephora.*
- *Customer service training as a whole should be encouraged throughout the agency. We should be the best not only in numbers per reports but number one in how we communicate with and to Consumers as well.*
- *Project SEARCH seems to be an effective service that needs continuation.*
- *I think everyone is doing a great job. I say keep up the great work!*
- *According to reports presented during the SRC meeting, VR, VRB, & DSU functions are mostly effective with providing individuals with disabilities the ability to achieve an employment outcome.*

Q2: Having heard this quarter's report on the results of consumer satisfaction surveys, do you have any comments or recommendations for input into the service delivery process?

- *Could the Client Assistance Program (CAP) have a major role developing and administering satisfaction surveys? The new MS CAP brochure refers to helping individuals in VR & VRB; supporting individual goals, resolving problems, providing answers to question, planning school to work, addressing systematic problems. It appears CAP could play a vital role in measuring consumer satisfaction.*
- *All the data looks good and presented clearly.*
- *Focus needs to be placed on those negative or unsatisfactory responses from Consumers who did not receive quality services so that improvements can be made in whatever area of complaint there was in future references.*
- *I look forward the SRC Committee working on the satisfaction survey's results complete their work. Their ideas to gain all input is valuable.*
- *The satisfaction survey results were good.*
- *No comment*

Q3: After attending the quarterly SRC meeting, what further input do you have for the State Plan goals and priorities? What further comment(s) do you have in regard to evaluating the effectiveness of the VR/VRB Program in meeting the goals and priorities?

- *We have been discussing Bylaws changes for a year or more. This is an easy fix. There are a relatively few changes that need to be addressed. The committee needs to complete this task. We need active SRC member participation. It does look like we are moving the nomination and selection of a full board as stated in the law. Let's also look at members who are not attending meetings. Perhaps they*

Do not have the time to attend and participate. "We can give them an easy way out." By law, the SRC is to seek opportunities to "partner" with other state, local and non-profits who support Employment strategies for people with disabilities. In the last meeting we acknowledged the need for developing strategies to coordinate with other councils/organizations. Let's continue to look for ways to coordinate with others, e.g., identifying who the others are; perhaps developing communication about what we offer and ways we could partner, etc.

- *As stated, consider creating a Microsoft Teams group for the SRC to upload all documents and updates for easy access and better accessible to easy find documents. Will be speaking with Director about inviting SRC members to a Job Extravaganza in near future. There are some Pre-ETS/counselor concerns within the Hancock County taking longer for authorizations to come through if any. Copiah and Forrest Counties, there are no issues so shouldn't be that different from both locations.*
- *Quality of service(s) over quantity served should be a major focus. Oftentimes, quality of services from the referral forward, needs to be improved agency-wide. As an employee of MDRS, pride should be in providing quality and effective customer service. Belief in going over and beyond to help a consumer should be propagated.*
- *Our Bylaws, and the Law and Regulations charge us with "after consulting with the State Workforce Development Board"... advise VR and VRB on a number of functions; but also coordinate with the activities of other councils to avoid duplication of efforts. While one of our SRC members is a member of the SWIB, it would be good to hear quarterly from first, Accelerate MS, and then quarterly from other members of the State's Workforce system, to gain the comprehensive knowledge necessary to best carry out the SRC advisory role.*
- *There were discussions on making some satisfaction surveys more individualized. That will be pursued*
- *No comment*

Presentation of Information on Policy

Q4: What further input do you have for the establishment of the Community Rehabilitation Program (CRP) for the blind?

- *N/A*
- *None at this time*
- *I look forward to the word getting out and more people signing up for the excellent services. I appreciated the staff doing the presentation. It will take time, but the word will get out how valuable this service is. Keep up the good work!*
- *The VRB is doing a great job. Great developments at the training site on the coast.*
- *No comment*

Additional State Rehabilitation Council Member Activities in Partnership with the Offices of Vocational Rehabilitation and Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind

OVR and OVRB are advocates of the State Rehabilitation Council’s mission and assist the SRC with its responsibilities. The offices of OVR and OVRB provide liaison support as well as administrative, technical assistance, and coordination in support of the SRC’s responsibilities.

Support is provided by MDRS-OVR/OVRB to coordinate activities, provide administrative support, and when necessary, to facilitate the work of the SRC and, as requested, to assist the SRC members with specific mandated duties.

Administrative, Technical, and Liaison Support offer the following services:

- ❖ **In-Person Meetings** – coordinate dates, times, location, distribute communications, and handouts to SRC Council members and attendees.
- ❖ **Virtual Meetings** – provide virtual meeting communications and reference handouts to SRC Council Members and attendees
- ❖ **Meals/Refreshments** – coordination of meal selection, deliveries, and location
- ❖ **Communications/Bulletins** – communications are distributed to members regarding quarterly meetings, special meetings, agendas, and follow up agenda items.
- ❖ **Minutes** – meetings recordings, preparation of the official legal record of the council meetings, and coordinate amendments to previous minutes.
- ❖ **Technical Support** – technical assistance is provided during meeting for presentations, etc. and coordination of technical equipment availability
- ❖ **Website** – preparation and coordination through MDRS personnel for SRC communication uploads to the MDRS website
- ❖ **SRC Annual Report** – prepare the SRC Annual Report; coordinate SRC Annual Report upload to the MDRS website; submissions to the SRC, to the RSA contact(s), to the Governor and members of the Mississippi Legislature.

Office of Vocation Rehabilitation (OVR)

Office of Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind (OVRB)

CONSUMER SATISFACTION SURVEY – 2024

Results for Closed Ended Questions

The ratings for the various services consumers received are presented below using the average (mean) score given to each item by all respondents interviewed. If an item did not apply to a particular respondent or if the consumer did not know or refused to rate an item, the consumer’s response is not included in calculating the average score for that item. The seven items rated are in Table 1 (for verbiage, reference questionnaire.) Chart 1 is included for an easy visual comparison. The respondents were asked to rate the items (Questions Q1 to Q4 and questions Q7 to Q9) on a scale of 1 to 5, with ‘1’ being *very bad* and ‘5’ being *very good*. Thus, a high score indicates that the service was *good* and a low score indicates that it was *bad*.

Table 1 - Service Ratings by Consumer

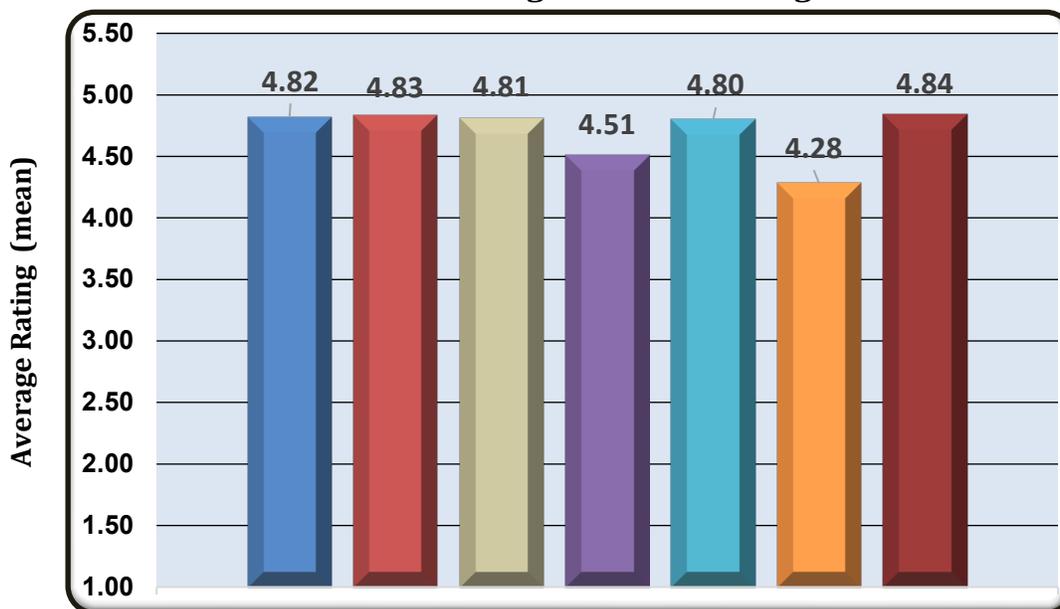
Rate the following items on a scale of ‘1 to 5’, with ‘1’ being very bad and ‘5’ being very good.

	# of Consumers	Average Rating (mean)
Q1 The help the VR staff provided at the time you applied for VR services.	1023	4.82
Q2 The help from the VR staff during the planning of your services.	1023	4.83
Q3 The help from the VR staff when you were receiving your VR Services.	1021	4.81
Q4 The help you received from other agencies or service providers.	190	4.51
Q7 Your employment outcome.	915	4.80
Q8 Employment benefits provided by your new employer.	579	4.28
Q9 Overall, how do you rate the services you received?	1019	4.84

...

Note: The items in Table 1 and Chart 1 are labeled Q1 to Q4 and Q7 to Q9, these are the names of the questions in the above questionnaire.

Chart 1 - Average Consumer Ratings



Data obtained from Wolfgang Frese Survey Research Laboratory/SSRC/MSU report dated October 2024.



Jennifer Jackson, Ed.D.
Director, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation

Dear Fellow Mississippians:

In 2024, the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation provided services to over 14,700 individuals with disabilities. Our dedicated focus on supporting students with disabilities has fostered progressive relationships with schools, private providers, and community rehabilitation programs throughout Mississippi. These collaborations have strengthened the educational community’s understanding of Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS). These essential services are designed to assist both potentially eligible and eligible students with disabilities in exploring career paths, enhancing career decision-making skills, and understanding diverse employment opportunities. Through Pre-ETS, students gain the knowledge and confidence needed to make informed decisions about post-secondary education, training, and employment.

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) has further enabled Mississippi Vocational Rehabilitation to expand and refocus its services. While maintaining a strong emphasis on supporting students with disabilities, OVR has also enhanced its services for adults with disabilities. By providing comprehensive counseling, skill development, and guidance, we equip all eligible consumers with the resources necessary to better understand their employment factors and achieve their maximum vocational potential.

We are proud to recognize the Mississippi State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) as a vital partner in the success of the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation and the individuals we serve. The SRC’s collaboration and insight are instrumental in guiding our mission to provide exceptional vocational rehabilitation services. Additionally, we extend our gratitude to the Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services (MDRS) Executive Director for his unwavering support and leadership.

As we look ahead, we remain steadfast in our commitment to delivering high-quality VR services that empower individuals with disabilities to achieve competitive integrated employment. We value the continued partnership and support of all stakeholders in making our shared vision a reality.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jennifer Jackson".

Jennifer Jackson, Ed. D.
Director, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation Mississippi
Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services

OVR: PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

In PY 2023, **14,776** Mississippians with disabilities received services including, but not limited to counseling and guidance in adjustment to disability, vocational exploration, physical and mental restoration, job training, assistive technology, and job placement.

VR also assisted **2,618** (PY 2023) potentially eligible students with disabilities. Individuals served by VR have a wide array of disabilities including, but not limited to hearing loss or deafness, amputations, mental and emotional disorders, epilepsy, developmental disorders, traumatic brain injuries, orthopedic impairments, speech impairments, etc. The total number of VR consumers that obtained competitive integrated employment in PY 2023 was **2,416**.

OVR services are provided through the federal grant (78.7 percent) through Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA), our federal partner, which is state matched with appropriation (21.3 percent) from the Mississippi Legislature. Without these funds, Mississippians with disabilities in need of services would not have had access to VR services. Under Section 116(b)(2)(A) of WIOA, there are six Primary Indicators of Performance.

OVR will continue to submit quarterly 911 data in order to establish baseline information for our common performance measures. OVR received data on the WIOA new performance indicators from the quarterly data dashboard report from the RSA Dashboard. The RSA Dashboard, 1st quarter through 4th quarter data for period PY 2023 (*July 1, 2023 through June 30, 2024*) indicated the following:

- **Employment Rate - 2nd Quarter After Exit: 61.2%** - The percentage of participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the second quarter after exit from the program (for Title I Youth, the indicator is the percentage of participants in education or training activities, or in unsubsidized employment during the second quarter after exit);
- **Employment Rate – 4th Quarter After Exit: 57.7%** - The percentage of participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the fourth quarter after exit from the program (for Title I Youth, the indicator is the percentage of participants in education or training activities, or in unsubsidized employment during the fourth quarter after exit);
- **Credential Attainment: 45.3%** - The percentage of those participants enrolled in an education or training program (excluding those in on-the-job training (OJT) and customized training) who attain a recognized postsecondary credential or a secondary school diploma, or its recognized equivalent, during participation in or within one year after exit from the program;
- **Measurable Skill Gains: 70.9%** - The percentage of program participants who, during a program year, are in an education or training program that leads to a recognized postsecondary credential or employment and who are achieving measurable skill gains, defined as documented academic, technical, occupational, or other forms of progress, towards such a credential or employment.

CONTINUED, OVR: PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

- **Effectiveness in Serving Employers:** WIOA Sec. 116(b)(2)(A)(i)(VI) requires the Departments to establish a primary indicator of performance for effectiveness in serving employers. The departments are piloting three approaches designed to gauge three critical workforce needs of the business community.

PROGRAM YEAR 2023 - (From 7/1/23 – 6/30/24)		
State: Mississippi - REPORTING AGENCY: MDRS		
EFFECTIVENESS IN SERVING EMPLOYERS		
Employer Services	Establishment Count	
Employer Information and Support Services	15,540	
Workforce Recruitment Assistance	6,340	
Engaged in Strategic Planning/Economic Development	783	
Accessing Untapped Labor Pools	1,876	
Training Services	219	
Incumbent Worker Training Services	63	
Rapid Response/Business Downsizing Assistance	2	
Planning Layoff Response	6	
Pilot Approaches	Numerator	Rate
	Denominator	
Retention with Same Employer in the 2nd and 4th Quarters After Exit Rate	2,036	47
	4,325	
Employer Penetration Rate	16,402	19
	88,075	
Repeat Business Customers Rate	12,420	76
	16,417	

OVR: PROGRAM SERVICES & HIGHLIGHTS

- **Deaf Services** assists individuals who are **Deaf, Hard of Hearing, or Deaf Blind or Late Deafened** find employment, attend education and training programs, and learn more about their community resources. The MDRS Deaf Services Program continues to promote excellence by striving to assist new RCD's (Rehabilitation Counselors for the Deaf) to reach the required communications skills level on the Signed Communication Proficiency Interview, an American Sign Language assessment developed by the Rochester Institute of Technology. Adequate communication skills are a prerequisite to meaningful counseling and guidance with people who are Deaf and use manual communication. This skill, along with other specialized training, has been a vital factor in the successful rehabilitation of individuals with deafness or significant hearing loss. In PY 2023, Deaf Services were provided to **4,039** Mississippians resulting in **1,901** successful rehabilitations.
- **15 Community Rehabilitation Programs (CRPs) known as AbilityWorks are operated by MDRS.** **AbilityWorks** provides vocational assessment and work adjustment training for individuals with disabilities. This is possible through a wide array of contract and subcontract services provided to local business and industry.
- During PY 2023, **AbilityWorks** served a total of **1,936** individuals with disabilities (VR/VRB). **AbilityWorks** establishes cooperative agreements with local businesses to provide community-based work experience, customized training, and on-the-job training.

OVR: SERVING MISSISSIPPI STUDENTS AND YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES

Pre-Employment Transition Services:

VR works with potentially eligible students with disabilities ages of 14 through 21 to provide Pre-Employment Transition Services, as well as our eligible secondary school students with disabilities, their families, and school personnel, to assure there is an integrated program of education and vocational training available to begin to build a foundation for a career pathway, and then to help provide a seamless transition from school to work. In SFY 2024 (July 2023-June 2024), the number of students that received Pre-Employment Transition Services was **2,282**.

Students with disabilities, ages 14-21, receive the Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) listed below (as needed) to help prepare for post-secondary education such as college, vocational schools, etc. Pre-Employment Transition Services are:

- ❖ Counseling on opportunities for post-secondary education such as college, vocational schools, etc.;
- ❖ Work-Based Learning Experiences, including internships and On-the-Job Training;
- ❖ Training in self-advocacy and social skills; and/or
- ❖ Peer Mentoring Programs at JSU, MSU, USM and NEMCC.

Supported Employment:

We assist individuals with the most significant disabilities who require intensive support services to prepare for, secure, retain, or regain employment. Each MDRS district has a Supported Employment Team consisting of a specialized VR/SE counselor, and a Vocational Training Instructor who oversees the work of Job Trainers working on site with our consumers. During PY 2023, **626** individuals received Supported Employment services, **71** resulting in successful employments.

Project Search: Project SEARCH Mississippi is administered by the Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services and is a joint partnership between MDRS, a business and a school district.



The Project SEARCH Program is a unique, business-led, nine-month employment preparation program that takes place entirely at the workplace. Up to 12 students with disabilities experience total workplace immersion, classroom instruction, career exploration, and hands-on training through three different worksite rotations. The goal for each participant is competitive employment. To reach that goal, the program provides real-life work experience combined with training in employability and independent-livingskills to help young people with significant disabilities make successful transitions to productive adult life.

Project Search Mississippi Success: **274** individuals with disabilities have graduated from Project SEARCH Mississippi since Project SEARCH UMMC launched in August 2018. 167 of those individuals have gained employment. There are **53** graduates currently seeking employment. Mississippi currently has **28** Project SEARCH sites across the state. Over **200** interns will be participating in Project SEARCH beginning in August 2024.

What does a good Project SEARCH Candidate look like?

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Must have a strong desire to work. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Able to manage their own self-care skills.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meet all their high school credit requirements for graduation, certification, or completion. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good attendance record.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Must be 18-21(Transition site), 18-30 (Adult site) years old. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Able to pass drug test and background check.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Must be eligible for Vocational Rehabilitation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to understand safety.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Basic and effective communication skills. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to take directions.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Basic reading and writing skills. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain appropriate behavior in the workplace.

Project Search - Current Sites/Participating Schools

<p>University Medical Center–Jackson Rankin County School District Pearl School District</p> <p>Siemens - Richland Rankin County School District Pearl School District</p> <p>Forrest General–Hattiesburg Hattiesburg County School District Petal County School District Lamar County School District</p> <p>South Central Regional Medical Center–Laurel Jones County School District Laurel School District</p> <p>King Daughters Hospital–Brookhaven Lincoln County School District Brookhaven School District</p> <p>Singing River Health–Ocean Springs Ocean Springs School District Jackson County School District</p> <p>Merit Health-Natchez Natchez-Adams School District</p> <p>Singing River Health-Pascagoula Pascagoula-Gautier School District</p> <p>Baptist Medical Center-Kosciusko Kosciusko / Attala School District</p> <p>Keesler Air Force Base Biloxi Public School District</p> <p>Ochsner Rush Health Lauderdale County School District Meridian School District</p> <p>Singing River Health-Gulfport Long Beach School District Gulfport School District</p> <p>Neshoba General Hospital–Philadelphia Neshoba County School District Philadelphia School District</p> <p>St. Dominic Hospital - Jackson Adult Site</p>	<p>Viking Range–Greenwood Leflore Christian School</p> <p>Merit Health River Region-Vicksburg Vicksburg–Warren School District</p> <p>Baptist Memorial Hospital–Oxford Lafayette School District Oxford School District</p> <p>Columbus Air Force Base Lowndes County School District</p> <p>Baptist Memorial Hospital–Olive Branch DeSoto County School District</p> <p>Baptist Hospital–Jackson Clinton Public School District Jackson Public School District Madison County School District</p> <p>North Mississippi Medical Center–Tupelo Tupelo School District Lee County School District Nettleton School District Itawamba County Schools Pontotoc County Schools</p> <p>North Mississippi Health Services-Eupora Adult site</p> <p>Milwaukee Tools-Jackson Adult site</p> <p>OCH-Regional Medical Center-Starkville Starkville Public School District</p> <p>Southwest Regional Medical Center - McComb North Pike School District South Pike School District McComb High School</p> <p>Division of Medicaid - Jackson Jackson Public School</p> <p>Jay Allen Toyota - Gulfport Adult Site</p> <p>Baptist Memorial - Calhoun Calhoun County School District</p> 
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Business Services

Our Business Development Department partnered with several colleges across Mississippi to host *Employer Spotlight Luncheons* for students registered with their respective ADA offices. These events were held at Jackson State University, Meridian Community College, Mississippi Valley State University, and the University of Mississippi. Additional luncheons are already planned for both spring and fall of 2025, allowing more students to connect with employers and learn about workplace opportunities tailored to individuals with disabilities.

Community Outreach and Disability Etiquette Training

The Business Development team also engaged with various civic and community clubs statewide, including Rotary, Lions, Civitan, and Exchange Clubs. Through these presentations, our staff provided insights into the services offered by MDRS, highlighted the importance of inclusive hiring practices, and conducted disability etiquette training. This outreach reinforces our commitment to fostering inclusive workplaces and increasing awareness among local businesses.

Marketing Initiatives

Our marketing projects for the year have focused on creating new materials to support business development initiatives. These include:

- **Business Services Brochures:** Comprehensive brochures outlining MDRS services for businesses, helping them better understand the benefits of partnering with us.
- **Success Stories/Information Booklet:** A compilation of success stories, featuring individuals from our VRB and VR programs who have excelled in their careers, along with a spotlight on a successful partnership with Meridian Community College.

Industry Tours and Workforce Market Insights

To gain deeper insights into Mississippi's workforce needs, the OBD team has participated in tours at several prominent businesses, including the Shuckers Baseball Team, Jackson International Airport, and Fastenal. Additionally, we have a tour scheduled for December 2024 at the Nissan plant in Canton, Mississippi which will provide valuable exposure to large-scale industrial operations.

Job Fairs and Employment Events

Throughout the year, MDRS partnered with the Mississippi Department of Employment Security (MDES) to host job fairs statewide, as well as independent events solely organized by MDRS. Locations included Southaven, Jackson, Brookhaven, Tupelo, Greenwood, and Hattiesburg, with a final event planned in Pearl in December 2024. These fairs have provided a vital link between job seekers and employers, particularly for those looking to hire individuals with disabilities.

Job Extravaganza Program Expansion

Our *Job Extravaganza* initiative continues to grow, now reaching more schools throughout Mississippi. Additionally, we maintain close collaboration with the MSU Access and USM RISE programs, working together to expand opportunities and support for students with disabilities as they transition into the workforce.

OVR: DISTRICT MAP

District I

(Calhoun, Coahoma, Desoto, Lafayette, Marshall, Panola, Tate, Tunica, Quitman, Yalobusha)
51 County Road 166
Oxford, MS 38655
(866) 358-6960

District II

(Alcorn, Benton, Itawamba, Lee, Pontotoc, Prentiss, Tippah, Tishomingo, Union)
2620 Traceland Drive
Tupelo, MS 38801
(877) 367-4598

District III

(Bolivar, Carroll, Grenada, Holmes, Humphreys, Issaquena, Leflore, Sharkey, Sunflower, Tallahatchie, Washington, Yazoo)
104 Professional Plaza
Greenwood, MS 38930
(833) 607-1900

District IV

(Clay, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Lowndes, Monroe, Montgomery, Oktibbeha, Webster)
317 Industrial Park Road
Starkville, MS 39759
(800) 796-8672

District V

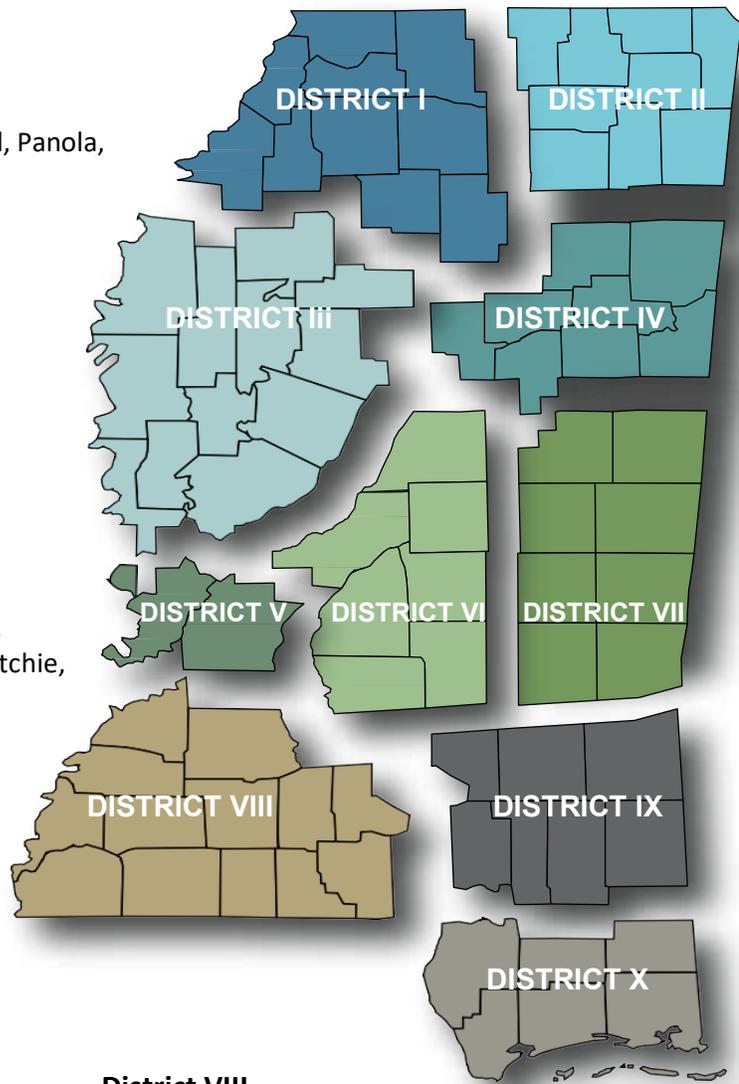
(Hinds, Warren)
3895 Beasley Road
Jackson, MS 39213
(800) 805-3199

District VI

(Attala, Leake, Madison, Rankin, Scott, Simpson, Smith)
1032 Center Pointe Blvd.
Pearl, MS 39208
(833) 355-5602

District VII

(Clarke, Jasper, Kemper, Lauderdale, Neshoba, Newton, Noxubee, Winston)
1003 College Drive
Meridian, MS 39304
(866) 689-7926



District VIII

(Adams, Amite, Claiborne, Copiah, Franklin, Jefferson, Jefferson Davis, Lawrence, Lincoln, Marion, Pike, Walthall, Wilkinson)
1221 Parklane Road
McComb, MS 39649
(800) 378-6259
(866) 689-7926

District IX

(Covington, Forrest, Greene, Jones, Lamar, Perry, Wayne)
#17 J.M. Tatum Industrial Drive
Hattiesburg, MS 39404
(800) 711-4588

District X

(George, Hancock, Harrison, Jackson, Pearl River, Stone)
13486 Fastway Lane
Gulfport, MS 39503
(877) 367-4603



Dorothy Young
Director, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind

Greeting Friends and Colleagues,

Billy Taylor, MDRS Executive Director and I, are privileged to present to our fellow Mississippians highlights from the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind (OVRB). OVRB provided vital vocational rehabilitation services in 2024 to the communities of the blind.

For the last twelve years, OVRB has exceeded our goals of excellence and realized our theme is "Moving the Needle" for fellow Mississippians living with blindness. Our ninety-plus member team focused on one Mississippian at a time. We increased living wages, credentials, training, and other individualized services. We are thankful to each team member, especially our Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors for the Blind for their commitment to this community.

Now for PY24, our agency increased Vocational Rehabilitation Services for the Blind. Now our citizens do not have to leave our great state to receive the alternative training method (Structured Discovery). Our state now offers specialized blindness training. The traditional method will remain at our Addie McBryde Center on the University of Mississippi Medical Center campus. The non-traditional method provides housing and training services at the Vocational Training site in Long Beach, Mississippi. Our first class was in July 2024.

A special thank you to our Executive and Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA), who believed our state could offer the non-traditional method. This year our division served over **1,600** Mississippians with blindness and low vision and **308** of those individuals successfully participated in Competitive Integrated Employment.

At our core, OVRB believes in the abilities of each person with blindness to succeed. Our OVRB staff worked hard to impact this community. When individuals are connected to the right career, their career paths and lives become much easier.

In line with our annual reports, we are honored to feature our fellow Mississippians who have achieved competitive success in this year's report. We appreciate OVRB consumers who helped articulate the importance of employment, including those with disabilities by sharing their experiences.

Together, OVRB continues to "Move the Needle 2.0" in careers, training, skills, credentials, and most importantly, OVRB's impact in transforming lives, businesses, and communities. We thank our staff, leadership, stakeholders, and members of the Rehabilitation Services Commission for your continued partnership. I look forward to collaborating with you in 2025!

Dorothy L. Young, M.S., C.V.S.
Director, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind

OVRB: PROGRAM SERVICES AND HIGHLIGHTS

The **Office of Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind** is divided into two regions located in the North and South. Each region is staffed with qualified professionals who provide vocational rehabilitation counseling, education, independent living skills, orientation and mobility training, low vision rehabilitation technology and Deafblind services for eligible Mississippians. Each client works with their OVRB Counselor to develop their Individualized Plan of Services (IPE) to mirror their strengths, abilities, and capabilities for successful employment outcomes.

We specialize in working with individuals who are blind or visually impaired to ensure opportunities for inclusion into the workforce, community, and home. There were **346** consumers who achieved a successful employment outcome through the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind (VRB). VRB provided consumer services such as counseling and guidance in adjustment to disability, vocational exploration, orientation and mobility training, job training, and assistive technology. The total number Of Mississippians with disabilities served by VRB during PY2023 was **1692**.

Business Enterprise Program (BEP)

-31 Successful BEP Entrepreneurs-

The **Business Enterprise Program (BEP)** provides support for self-employment opportunities in the food service industry for Mississippians who are legally blind. These BEP entrepreneurs operate a variety of businesses including vending machine routes, snack bars and cafeterias on military bases. In SFY 2024, **31 individuals** operated successful businesses as BEP vendors.

Without Military Bases	2024
Total Sales	\$1,402,268.86
Sales Tax Paid	\$61,418.00
Wages Paid	\$20,544.80
With Military Bases	2024
Total Sales	\$17,100,430.86
Sales Tax Paid	\$61,418.00
Wages Paid	\$10,077,326.80

Addie McBryde Memorial Rehabilitation Center for the Blind

*-Provided training for **82** consumers-*

The **Addie McBryde Memorial Rehabilitation Center for the Blind** provided **189** services to **82** clients from around our great state. These services included evaluation, training, and adjustment services on the campus of the University of Mississippi Medical Center.

Independent Living Services for the Blind (ILB)

*-Provided services to over **200** consumers-*

We serve individuals who are legally blind and either over the age of 55 or have a significant secondary disability by providing a variety of independent living services. In SFY 2024, Independent Living Services (ILB) served over **200+** consumers through indirect services such as health fairs, vision screening, peer groups, and outreach. ILB provided direct services to **120** consumers in Part B and **281** in Older Blind.

Itinerant Teacher Program

*-Provided services to **8** consumers-*

Itinerant teachers work closely with VRB counselors to coordinate services, evaluate client needs, develop living-needs plans and instructional materials, and provide on-site training for consumers who are blind or visually impaired. In 2024, the Itinerant Teacher Program provided services for **8 VRB consumers**.

Mississippi Partners for Informed Choice (M-PIC)

*-**670** consumers referred for WIPA-*

Community Work Incentive Coordinators (CWICs) provide benefits planning and assistance to SSI/SSDI beneficiaries between the ages of 14 to 64 with an employment goal. Services are coordinated through referrals from VR/VRB counselors, school counselors, the Ticket-to-Work helpline, mental health counselors, and other service entities that have direct contact with this underserved population. **670 consumers** were referred for **Work Incentives Planning and Assistance (WIPA)** services in FFY 2024.

CONTINUED, OVRB: PROGRAM SERVICES & HIGHLIGHTS

***OVRB Structured Discovery Center Moving the Needle 2.0
Mississippi EMERGE Center
Long Beach, Mississippi***

The total served at the Mississippi EMERGE Center is 14 clients from various counties throughout our great state which include but are not limited to Hinds, Harrison and Lee Counties. The four main instruction areas are Orientation and Mobility, Technology, Home Management and Braille. Training is also provided in Apartment Living Independently,

Moving the Needle 2.0

Total Consumers Served, Employment Outcomes and Average Hourly Wage Data – OVRB Accomplishments

SFY 2025

SFY Year	Consumers	Employment Outcome	Average Hourly Wage	Training (MSG)
07/01/2024 - 12/12/2024	1363	116	\$18.56	5
07/01/2023 – 06/30/2024	1,471	308	\$20.24	66
07/01/2022 – 06/30/2023	1,745	388	\$17.88	68
07/01/2021 – 06/30/2022	1,901	352	\$17.91	70
07/01/2020 – 06/30/2021	1,786	239	\$16.75	77
07/01/2019 – 06/30/2020	1,638	352	\$15.02	77
07/01/2018 – 06/30/2019	1,609	350	\$15.65	32
07/01/2017 – 06/30/2018	1,436	371	\$14.24	13
07/01/2016 – 06/30/2017	1,521	462	\$12.85	12
07/01/2015 – 06/30/2016	1,605	486	\$12.02	5
07/01/2014 – 06/30/2015	1,783	544	\$12.13	3
07/01/2013 – 06/30/2014	1,868	585	\$11.33	1
07/01/2012 – 06/30/2013	2,027	574	\$11.43	0
Total	9,665	5,127	\$15.08	429

OVRB: District Counselors MAP

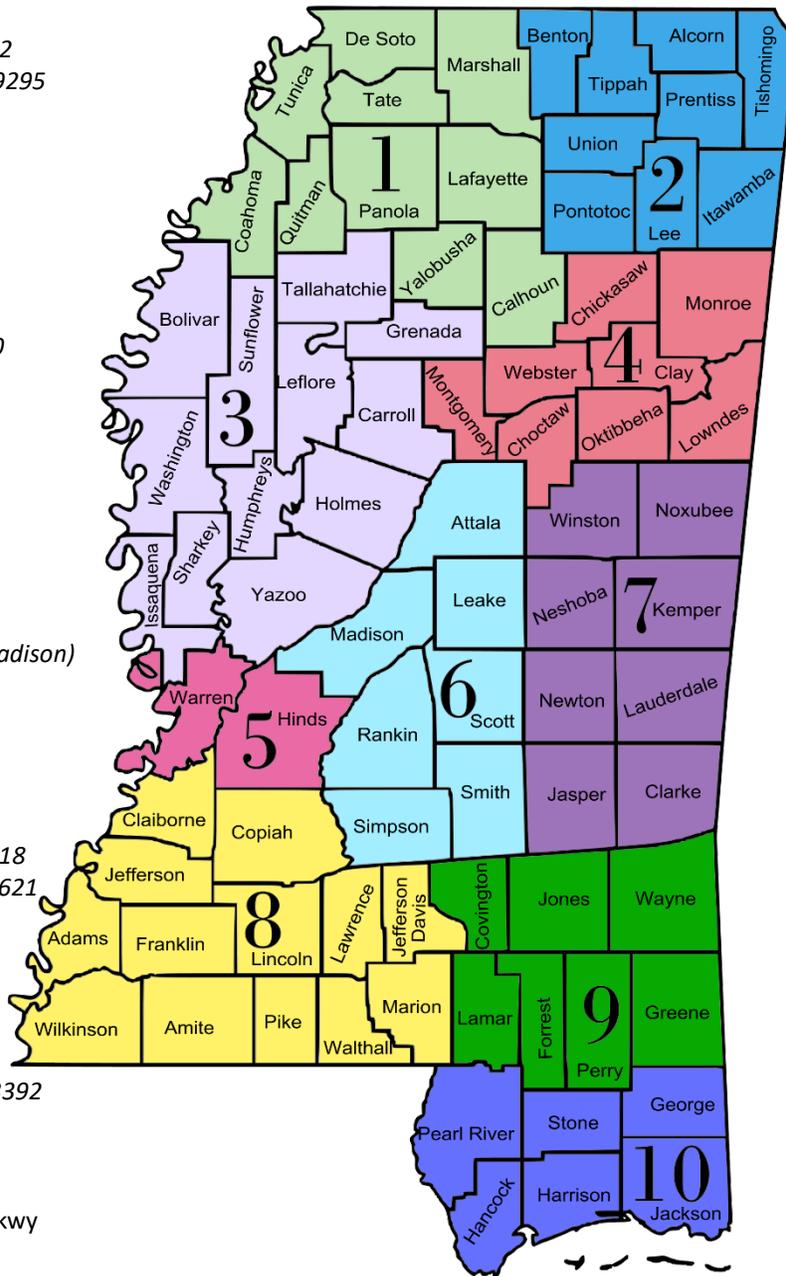
District 1 – Oxford
 Paula Braxton (662)-234-6182
 Destiny Williams (662)-842-9295
 51 County Road 166
 Oxford, MS 38655-9721

District 3 – Greenwood
 Meghin Neal (662)-477-1880
 104 Professional Plaza
 Greenwood, MS 38930
 Keena Morris (662)-378-0920
 800 Martin Luther King Blvd
 Greenville, MS 38701

District 5 – Jackson
 (601) 987-7403
 Kenneth Hudson, (A-M)
 LaCrystal Bryant, (N-Z)
 Lauralee Moore (Hinds)
 Samatha Ashmore (Hinds, Madison)
 2550 Peachtree St. Ext.
 P.O. Box 5314
 Jackson, MS 39296

District 6 – Pearl
 Myiada Jenkins (601)-709-5618
 Vanessa Watson (601) 709-5621
 1032 Center Point Blvd
 Pearl, MS 39208

District 8 – McComb
 Meredith McGee (601)-684-3392
 1221 Parkland Road
 McComb, MS 39648
 Pauline Sims (601) 442-7322
 105 Col. Johnson Pitchford Pkwy
 Natchez, MS 39120



District 2 – Tupelo
 Tina Johnson (662)844-5830
 613 Pegram Dr.
 Tupelo, MS 38801

District 4 – Starkville
 Shundra Johnson (662) 370-1353
 921 Alabama Street
 Columbus, MS 39702

District 7 – Meridian
 Chasnice Evans (601) 483-5391
 1003 College Drive
 Meridian, MS 39307

District 9 – Hattiesburg
 Tabitha Popwell (601)736-5685
 710 Broad Street
 Columbia, MS 39429

District 10 – Gulfport
 Pamela Harris (228) 575-3788
 13486 Fastway Lane
 Gulfport, MS 39503-4609

REGIONAL MANAGERS:

District I, II, III, IV, V – Northern
 Bryce Upshaw -Regional Manager
 (601) 987-7408 bupshaw@mdrs.ms.gov
 Amanda Matthes (662) 241-4122
 Deputy Regional Manager

District VI, VII, VIII, IX and X – Southern
 Laurie Coffey – Regional Manager
 (601) 442-3026 lcoffey@mdrs.ms.gov
 Brandy Rogers (601) 442-7422
 Administrative Assistant

OVR/OVRB PROGRAM FUNDING AND SERVICES (SUMMARIES)

OVR/OVRB: CLIENTS SERVED SUMMARY

- Clients Served.....14,776
- Clients Potentially Eligible 2,618
- Successfully Employed..... 3,321
- Individualized Plans for Employment Written.....5,422

OVR/OVRB: PROGRAM FUNDING

2024 – Section 110 Amounts

Figures below are based on FFY 2024 (October 1, 2023 – September 30, 2024)

Federal Share:	\$64,834,816	(78.7%)
State Match	<u>\$17,547,415</u>	<u>(21.3%)</u>
Total:	\$82,382,231	(100%)

OVR / OVRB

EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES – CONSUMERS 2024

EMPLOYMENT IN INTEGRATED SETTINGS

Top 10 Occupations of VR and VRB Consumers and the number of Clients that were employed in these occupations:

OCCUPATIONS – CLOSED REHAB (VR/VRBS) <i>(Top Ten Occupations listed)</i>	# CLIENTS <i>(Top Ten listed)</i>	% to <u>TOP TEN</u> OCCUPATIONS (CLOSED REHAB)	% to <u>TOTAL OF</u> <u>ALL</u> OCCUPATIONS (CLOSED REHAB)
Office and Administrative Support	366	17.96%	11.02%
Management Occupations	347	17.03%	10.45%
Skilled Craft	216	10.60%	6.50%
Transportation and Material Moving	204	10.01%	6.14%
Healthcare Practitioners and Technical	187	9.18%	5.63%
Education, Training and Library	166	8.15%	5.00%
Production	150	7.36%	4.52%
Sales and Related	145	7.11%	4.37%
Construction and Extraction	132	6.48%	3.97%
Community and Social Service	125	6.13%	3.76%

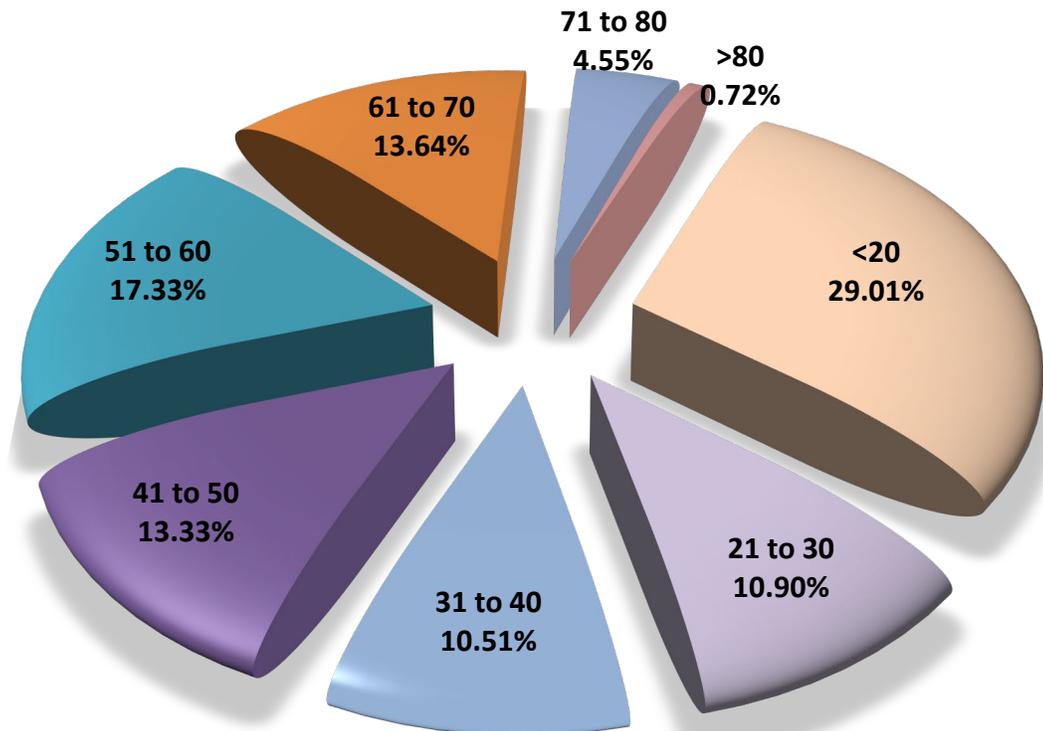
OVR / OVRB DEMOGRAPHICS – CLIENTS SERVED 2024 ETHNICITY / RACE

ETHNICITY/RACE	CLIENTS	% to Total
White	8928	59.07%
Black or African American	5741	37.98%
Hispanic or Latino	193	1.28%
Asian	84	.56%
American Indian or Alaskan Native	83	.55%
Participant did not self-identify	52	.34%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	22	.15%
Not Completed	11	.07%

OVR/OVRB DEMOGRAPHICS – CLIENTS SERVED 2024 AGE RANGE

AGE RANGE	CLIENTS	% to Total
<20	4286	29.01%
21 to 30	1611	10.90%
31 to 40	1553	10.51%
41 to 50	1970	13.33%
51 to 60	2560	17.33%
61 to 70	2016	13.64%
71 to 80	673	4.55%
>80	107	.72%

VR/VRB (Combined) – AGE RANGE



OVR Success Stories – Client Spotlight



Toyota Mississippi Success Stories

Toyota Mississippi and The Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services have recently joined forces for a Vocational Rehabilitation partnership, and neither are looking back. “Toyota opened their doors to us from the beginning, giving us the chance to share our message, so in turn they could and did understand our mission and truly believe in what we stand for,” shares Tracy Hester, Northern Regional Manager for AbilityWorks at MDRS. Currently, Toyota employs three MDRS clients with disabilities. MDRS Office of Vocational Rehabilitation assisted in recommending accommodations for Toyota to help set the individuals up for success in their job placements. “Toyota’s name is synonymous with success and doing things right and their dedication to continuous improvement is clear,” states Heather Collums, Program Coordinator for Business Relations at MDRS.

Aaron Foster, Vice President of Manufacturing at Toyota Mississippi, shares, “When you find a partner that shares your vision, motivation, and commitment, everything falls into place. MDRS was that partner. We felt a responsibility to give back and knew there was an untapped workforce out there. MDRS not only understood this but came to the table with collaboration and resources. We couldn’t be more pleased.”

“We learned about the concept of *kaizen*, the Japanese philosophy of improvement. Their culture is all about asking, ‘How can we make this better for everyone?’ It’s inspiring and makes working with them easy,” adds Heather.

Despite having one arm, Toby Mayhall, an MDRS client working in Toyota’s Body Weld Department, is well able to keep up with the demands of his role. After losing his arm at age three in a lawnmower accident, his family taught him to see himself not as limited but as capable. “It’s amazing to have a job I can depend on, just as they rely on me. The sky’s the limit—I don’t plan on stopping.”

“Learning to ride a bike was a lesson in resilience,” says Toby. “My family would tell me to keep going until I got it right. Every time I fell, they told me to get back up and go again. There was never any ‘maybe you can’t’—only ‘you will do it.’”



Toby’s MDRS Vocational Rehabilitation counselor, Amanda Moore, shares, “He’s surprising upper management that might have misinterpreted his abilities as well, because they might not be familiar with the disability. And in Toby’s eyes, he doesn’t have a disability. And that’s my goal as a counselor. In advocating for anybody, for any of my clients I just ask everyone to not focus on the disability, but look at their abilities, because they can do a lot more than what you think, if you just give them time.”

Aaron adds, “Toby was unique. We had experience with employees with hearing impairments, but Toby presented a different challenge. We didn’t want him restricted to one role; we wanted him to have a rotation like everyone else. Some tasks require both hands, but our team, with MDRS, found ways to make it work. It’s moving to see how our team listened, supported, and created tools so Toby could work seamlessly.” Michael Hudson, Group Leader in Toyota’s Talent Development, describes Toby as “a motivated and consistent team

member who shows up every day ready to give his best.”

Another MDRS client, Collin Ellzy, who has been deaf since birth, expresses his appreciation for Toyota’s inclusivity. “Everyone here has been patient with me, and most people understand me. I can voice a bit and use pen and paper or gestures to communicate. It’s how we connect, and it works well.” Collin feels grateful for his role at Toyota. “This is a fantastic company—a Fortune 500 company with great people, teams, and resources. I’m truly thankful for all the support that helped me get here.”

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Michael Hudson notes, “Collin’s group leader wishes he had ten more like him. He’s focused, excellent at his job, and always eager to learn.”

A third MDRS client Degentry Jenkins, and a rocker operator, uses text messaging to communicate with his team. “It’s a deaf-friendly environment, absolutely. We text to stay in touch, and that keeps communication clear with my team, managers, and coworkers. My team lead doesn’t sign but is great at texting, so we have no issues.” Degentry was born deaf due to his mother contracting measles during pregnancy, and he appreciates his team’s efforts to learn about him and communicate effectively.

In response to Degentry’s reliability, Harry Jackson, Group Leader in Production Control at Toyota, states, “His attention to detail and dedication to doing his job right makes him an outstanding employee.”

“When Collin and DeGentry tell others in the deaf community that they work at Toyota, or when they go into a store and their shirt says their name with the Toyota symbol, it just makes them feel like they made it,” Amanda adds. “Working at Toyota, in their eyes, is big time. You’ve made it somewhere. You are somebody. When the deaf community gets together, and when they see that, and they know that they work there, it gives them hope. But also, it gives them confidence that they can find a workplace that won’t discriminate against them as well.”

Reflecting on the impact of this partnership, Aaron shares, “Of all I’ve done here since day one, this is where we truly start changing lives. It takes many people to make this happen, and I’m immensely proud of our team and leaders. They accept everyone, helping them grow just like anyone else, and that’s why I love working at Toyota Mississippi.”



Randi’s Story – The possibilities are endless.

Randi’s life changed in a single, moment. It happened when an 18-wheeler clipped the side of her SUV, causing a catastrophic accident that sent her world spinning—both literally and figuratively. In a split second, everything shifted. Her leg flew out through the sunroof first, and then the car came crashing down on top of it. Moments later, she was ejected from the vehicle entirely.

She knew her leg was broken, but the severity of her injuries hadn’t hit her yet. “I didn’t realize just how bad things were,” Randi recalls. Paramedics told her, “You’ve lost a lot of blood,” emphasizing the trauma she was facing.

But Randi wasn’t thinking about herself. As they prepared to transport her, she had one demand. “I know I have a right to refuse treatment,” she told the medical team. “If you don’t put my husband in the vehicle, I’m not going.” Her instincts were right, the doctors discovered that her husband was critically injured. A CT scan revealed he had only 45 minutes to live. If Randi hadn’t insisted, he come with her, he wouldn’t have survived. Randi’s battle was just beginning, though. When she was stabilized and alone in her hospital room, she reached for the phone and called her grandmother. “Mama,” she said softly, “they’re going to take my leg.”

Her grandmother’s response was immediate disbelief. “No, they’re not,” she replied. But the doctors had already made their case. Dr. McIntyre said, “I’m going to save that leg.”

Randi recalls, “We did everything we could to save my leg. After 32 surgeries, it was clear that nothing more could be done. I did everything correct.”

Medical professionals gave her three options. “We can take it now and you can move forward. Or, we can try to let it sit, but if the infection spreads, it could enter your bloodstream, and you could die. The last option is to try and clean it out, but with it already affecting the bone, there’s only a 3% chance it’ll work.” Three days later, they amputated her leg.

But this wasn’t the end of Randi’s story—it was the beginning of a new one. Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services (MDRS) stepped in, helping her adjust to her new life. She credits all help to Assistive Technology and Vocational Rehabilitation. She now gets around with a prosthetic leg. MDRS transformed her bathroom, widening the doors, removing vanities, and making the bathroom accessible, and installed a shower she could use—a luxury she hadn’t imagined having again.

Continued, OVR Success Stories – Client Spotlight

“I never thought I’d be able to take a shower on my own,” Randi says. “This has given me purpose. It’s given me hope.”

Lisa Whittington, Randi’s Mother-in-Law, explains “Randi is a shining example of what happens when you give somebody back their life. Because she was only existing prior to that. Had it not been for MDRS to be there for her, I’m scared she might not be here today.”

Randi credits the accident—what most would consider a tragedy—as a hidden blessing. “It made me stop and realize what’s important in life,” she says. “The possibilities are endless.”



Mississippi Audiologist and Lucedale Native Paying MDRS Services Forward

By Andy Kanengiser



Dr. Carrie Tilley Snyder is a Mississippi audiologist and owner of Home Hearing Healthcare. Carrie knows from experience what challenges her patients face daily, she was in high school when she began confronting hearing issues. She lets patients know her compelling story.

“When I was in the eighth grade, my teachers noticed more and more that my whisper wasn’t truly a whisper,” says Carrie. “They told my mom, and I failed a couple of hearing tests. A battery of audiological test were completed and I was diagnosed with a mild sensorineural hearing loss and needed hearing aids.”

Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services staff- serving from the agency’s Lucedale office -deserve much of the credit for helping Dr. Snyder overcome obstacles. Carrie thanks them for helping her gain access to vital hearing aid technology and for much needed assistance in covering the cost of tuition. MDRS Vocational Rehabilitation counselors also offered assistance, such as counseling and guidance, to ensure that Carrie excelled in college.

“Without the services provided by the Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services, I don’t know if I would have made it this far,” Dr. Snyder said. “With their support, I was able to maintain proper hearing technology to hear the best I could.” Hearing issues are a major concern. About 15 percent of American adults (37.5 million people) ages 18 and older report some trouble hearing. About one of every three people in the United States, between ages 65 and 74, experiences hearing loss. Nearly half of those older than 75 have difficulty hearing. Audiology specialists play a significant role serving people with major hearing needs.

“There is so much that goes on with hearing aids that some do not realize. As a young adult, who was extremely active, having advanced hearing aid technology was very important to hear the best in all the different listening situations I was in,” the Mississippian said. “The more advanced the hearing technology, the more expensive the hearing aids are. I would have never been able to afford the technology I truly needed while in college.”

Each semester, an MDRS vocational rehabilitation counselor met with Carrie to ensure she was successful in college. Her college grades were excellent, so Carrie earned a spot in the Doctor of Audiology program at the University of Southern Mississippi. The Southern Miss alumna never forgets the support she received from MDRS Vocational Rehabilitation services geared to individuals with disabilities. “It’s just life changing to be able to not have to worry about what I was going to do, how I was going to pay for these hearing aids,” says Carrie. “I feel like it’s my job as an audiologist, as someone who has utilized MDRS services, to be an advocate for the program to let others know about it. I am proud I can help give back what they gave me.”

Continued, OVR Success Stories – Client Spotlight

When she started her first job at the Jackson Ear Clinic, Carrie made sure patients utilized vocational rehabilitation services where they could. Home Hearing Healthcare is Mississippi's first and fully patient centered mobile audiology clinic. Founded by Dr. Snyder, the business maintains mobile locations in Madison, Lexington, Oxford and Lucedale.

She launched the Mississippi company when discovering several patients lacked the time or accessibility to travel to a hearing services clinic. Her Home Hearing Healthcare business seeks to make hearing health more accessible to patients across the Magnolia State. Patients can go to the clinic in George County or get help at their homes.

People without adequate hearing will have a hard time understanding conversations. They may have problems following a doctor's advice, responding to emergency warnings, or hearing phones, doorbells and smoke alarms. Worldwide, there are 466 million people experiencing disabling hearing loss. While hearing loss is a major disability for so many, Dr. Carrie Snyder always goes to work with a smile on her face and a compassionate heart. Raised in Lucedale, Carrie has lived in metro Jackson and has been helping patients hear better for more than a decade.

Patients appreciate the first-rate services and acts of kindness of Dr. Carrie Tilley Snyder. They are "happy to hear about the support they can get through MDRS," Dr. Snyder said. Patients like Charlie Agent, a retiree from George County, sing her praises, "Dr. Snyder knows what she's doing. She knows her job."

Agent worked as a mechanic for years at a Mississippi Power Company plant in Jackson County and that led to hearing issues. "I was around loud machinery," he said. After getting help at a rehabilitation center in George County, Charlie now wears a hearing aid. Agent notices a big difference – he can hear birds chirping near his house. Agent looks forward to his next appointment with Dr. Snyder in July. "She's real friendly," says Charlie.

Being a certified vendor who provides services to MDRS clients helps Vocational Rehabilitation clients achieve their employment goals. "I knew I always wanted to partner with Voc Rehab, just from everything they did for me. The credentialing process was very quick and very easy, and once I received my confirmation we were ready to go and I began seeing patients," Dr. Snyder shares. "It's very full circle. I understand the struggle of not being able to hear and afford help and I think that understanding that and knowing how important it is to hear, being able to give back to these patients so they can have the same experiences I had is extremely important."

OVRB Success Stories – Client Spotlight



Inspiring Joy at Work: Joyanna Davis

Joyanna Davis has overcome life's challenges because of an attitude that broke barriers and led her to open the doors which allow her to live out her dream.

Learning was a challenge at every stage of life. She was born with the genetic eye condition, Ocular albinism (OA). The disease reduces pigmentation in the eyes, resulting in vision impairment requiring specialized glasses at a young age. But Joyanna pushed through the difficult years choosing not to listen to those who told her she couldn't achieve her goals.

"Growing up in my environment, I remember people saying that not only I would not be successful because of my visual impairment. But I said I will do it, and I did!" said Joyanna.

"I've always wanted to be a forensic scientist. When I was growing up, we didn't have the funds like most people do to have cable television, so we could only get a few channels. All I watched was NCIS and I was so drawn to this forensic scientist on that show named, Abby. I'm like, I want to be Abby when I grow up. I want to be in a lab. And so, once I figured out what the title of that job was, I made it my goal to become a forensic scientist," said Joyanna.

With support from the Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services (MDRS) Joyanna attended Mississippi State University, graduating with a degree in biochemistry with a concentration in forensics. MDRS assisted her in paying for her dorm, her meal plan, books and tuition. The agency also supplied the specialized glasses that allow her to drive.

She is now a forensic chemist trainee in the crime lab at the Columbus, Mississippi police department.

Columbus Chief of Police, Joseph M. Daughtry, Sr. was impressed with Joyanna's attitude and her determination to overcome her challenges.

"She had incredible focus and a great attitude. In the interview process she made it clear that she did not want us to disqualify her because of her disability. She wanted us to know that she was qualified, she was educated, and she could do the job. Joyanna has been a trailblazer for people with disabilities, and for the Columbus Police Department. She's proven that even though she has a disability; she can stand here with the best of them and do what needs to be done, and she does it with a smile," said Chief Daughtry Sr.



Joyanna's Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind (VRB) counselors helped her get the assistance she needed from MDRS to complete her education and gain employment at the Columbus Police Department.

"As a senior in high school, she had big dreams, and she knew what she wanted to do. She just needed a little push and just a little assistance. And I mean, she did the rest. But you don't often get to see a client from day one blossom into what Joyanna has blossomed into," said Amanda Matthes, Deputy Regional Manager, Northern District, VRB, MDRS.

Amanda worked with MDRS business relations representatives to make the connection with the Columbus Crime Lab for Joyanna, which resulted in her eventual employment.

Joyanna's mom, Callie Davis watched her daughter struggle throughout her young years. She helped her learn to read and write and worked with her to overcome the daily challenges of being visually impaired. She is amazed and grateful for how Joyanna has achieved her dreams.

Continued, OVRB Success Stories – Client Spotlight

“She would not be where she is if it hadn't been for the Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services and the people who have helped her along the way,” said Joyanna’s mom, Callie.

Joyanna said, “I am thankful for MDRS. I sometimes sit and think about how I would not have gotten to where I am today if it had not been for the Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind program at MDRS. I am so very grateful and so thankful to be a part of MDRS.

Vision of Success: Sharron Guild's Journey

Sharron Guild's story is one of determination, resilience, and achievement. Facing significant challenges due to a visual impairment, Sharron sought assistance from the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind (VRB) with the goal of improving her financial situation and enhancing her quality of life.

At the time of her application, Sharron had been diagnosed with degenerative progressive high myopia, resulting in a visual acuity of 20/150 in her left eye and total blindness in her right eye. She was unemployed and relied on Social Security Income (SSI) and child support to provide for her three children, whose ages ranged from college to kindergarten. Despite her circumstances, Sharron held a Nursing Degree from the University of Mississippi Medical Center and had previously worked as a Registered Nurse. However, she doubted her ability to return to her profession due to her visual impairment.



To support Sharron in achieving her employment goal, VRB developed an Individualized Plan for Employment tailored to her needs. She underwent comprehensive training at the Addie McBryde Rehabilitation Center for the Blind, which focused on personal adjustment to blindness, orientation and mobility, and advanced communication skills, including assistive technology. These services were designed to ensure she could live independently and acquire the skills necessary for sustainable employment. After completing her training, Sharron secured competitive and integrated employment as a call center agent with the Mississippi Industries for the Blind. She was also provided with low vision aids to help her perform her job tasks effectively. Her employment stabilized, marking a significant milestone in her journey.

Building on her success, VRB facilitated bioptic driver training for Sharron, enabling her to obtain a bioptic driver’s license. This achievement profoundly enhanced her independence, allowing her to safely drive herself and her family and eliminating her reliance on others for transportation.

Through VRB’s support, Sharron achieved her employment goal, significantly improved her financial stability, and gained greater independence within her community. Her journey exemplifies how tailored rehabilitation services can transform lives, not only for individuals but also for their families. Sharron's case was officially closed as rehabilitated in June, a testament to her perseverance and success.



MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF
REHABILITATION SERVICES

Opportunities for Independence

Your perspective is extremely valuable, and we greatly appreciate all feedback.

Please send direct comments or questions to:

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