



*P*roviding
THE FREEDOM TO LIVE

MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF REHABILITATION SERVICES
2010 ANNUAL REPORT



Ronnie Shade, while repairing a sewer line for the City of Gulfport, was severely injured, having his legs crushed by tires, bottles, cans, etc. when the ground caved in around him. His co-worker was crushed and died as a result, leaving Ronnie to deal with depression from the loss of his legs, his friend, and his job. After surgery, Ronnie received care in a nursing home while his wounds healed enough to get prostheses for his legs. While there, he notes that he did what he could to inspire other residents who were despondent and ready to give up on life. MDRS was able to help Ronnie through the use of a wheelchair to make him ambulatory indoors and also through assistive technology, used to assist Ronnie in driving his own

vehicle. After rebuilding his strength, along with his self confidence, Ronnie was able to obtain a job as cashier for Goodwill Industries. Delinda Hanson, VP of HR for Goodwill, states that she is impressed with Ronnie's work ethic and his positive attitude, which has endeared him to everyone employed there. Ronnie's dreams do not stop there, however. He is now working part-time while pursuing his GED, after which he plans to pursue a degree in Medical Billing and Claims at the MS Gulf Coast Community College. Ronnie has overcome depression by reaching out to others, enriching the lives of those around him. As a result of that attitude, this double amputee continues to move forward, surpassing expectations.

In 2010, the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation Services assisted 21,762 Mississippians with disabilities in receiving 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.

Individuals served by OVR have a wide array of disabilities including: hearing loss or deafness, amputations, mental and emotional disorders, epilepsy, developmental disease and disorders, traumatic brain injuries, orthopedic impairments, residuals from cancer, and speech impairments to name a few.

The total number of successful employment outcomes for our VR consumers in 2010 was 4,557.



William Clark, after undergoing a year of recovery, received a Vocational Evaluation at AbilityWorks of Laurel. A spinal cord injury at the C6 level had resulted in quadriplegia for William, causing him to be initially uncomfortable interacting with others. Angelia Boykin, Job Placement Instructor, helped William develop his job skills and find employment. An interview with ASAP Ambulance Service resulted in the Manager offering trial work to William as a dispatcher. Entering the building was difficult for William,

so Angelia loaned the company a portable ramp to help William access the building. When William began his tryout, he observed a dispatcher at work; but, it was not long before William, a quick learner, was able to assume the duties and work independently. A permanent ramp was designed for William and a special headset purchased for the telephone system so that William could perform more efficiently. He continues to be successfully employed in that position.

AbilityWorks provides vocational assessments, job training, and actual work experience for VR consumers.

In 2010, AbilityWorks served 3,066 consumers resulting in 986 successful employment outcomes.

AbilityWorks has 17 community rehabilitation programs throughout the state.

In 2010, the number of students receiving transition services was 3,057. Successful employment outcomes resulted for 426 students.

Examples of transition services are vocational-technical training, vocational evaluation, work adjustment training, on the job training, job search skills, and work experience programs.

These services may be available to students both on and off campus or at one of the 17 AbilityWorks as a part of their school day.



Kayla King was introduced to MDRS as a 19-year old Transition student with a learning disability. Through the Transition Services Program, the MS Department of Rehabilitation Services

assists eligible secondary school students with disabilities to enable them to make the difficult transition from school to subsequent work environments. Kayla entered the AbilityWorks program after high school with no previous work experience. She knew, however, that her love of animals would enable her to be a good worker for an animal clinic.

Working around her school schedule, Kayla prepared herself for the business world with Job Readiness classes. She regularly attended classes, demonstrating dedication, pride in her work, and enthusiasm. Kayla's case manager kept in mind that Kayla's dream was to work with animals. Therefore, contact was made with a local veterinary clinic, requesting a job tryout. The request was granted, enabling Kayla to begin the career of her dreams. She proved to be a very good worker, reportedly outworking many other employees at the clinic. Kayla, now a full-time employee, has achieved another goal—to purchase her own car, a Ford Mustang.



Maria Penister, a 26-year old graduate of the Mississippi School for the Deaf, uses American Sign Language for communication. With a son in her care, Maria strives hard to be a good role model. In

October 2008, Maria, with no previous work experience, decided to seek assistance through MDRS to find a job in Jackson. Her VR Counselor assisted her in job development, purchasing hearing aids, studying for her driver's test, and interpreting. After completion of training, Maria, with the assistance of a VR staff interpreter, interviewed at Olive Garden and was hired to roll silverware. Maria continues to work at Olive Garden and has been given increased responsibilities. The manager praises Maria for her enthusiasm and eagerness to learn, as well as her great attitude. Maria enjoys her work environment and her co-workers, who strive diligently to communicate with her and include her in all activities. She has proven that, with hard work and the right attitude, success for the hearing impaired is truly possible.

Rehabilitation Counselors for the Deaf (RCDs) possess required communication skills level on the Signed Communication Proficiency Interview (SCPI), an American Sign Language assessment developed by the Rochester Institute of Technology.

This skill, along with other specialized training, has been a vital factor in the successful rehabilitation of 1,361 persons with deafness or significant hearing loss.

In addition, 6 staff interpreters are available to assist consumers and staff members and use American Sign Language to insure maximum accessibility throughout the rehabilitation process.



A m a n d a
L u n s f o r d ,
who came to
S u p p o r t e d
E m p l o y m e n t
in June of 2009 as
a referral from
her Transition
C o u n s e l o r ,
was lacking

in self confidence and socially
inactive. She was only comfortable
around family members, so the
development of her social skills was
the first goal. Amanda was taught
the expectations of an employer
and how to dress appropriately on
the job. This effort began in January
2010, and a big change was seen by
June in her self confidence and ability
to interact with others. In August,
she was placed with a job coach at
Valley Foods at Meridian Community
College. Now, Amanda is working
on her own, and her manager states
that he is very happy with both her
job skills and her interaction with
other workers.

**The Supported Employment
Program serves 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 2010, 842 individuals
received Supported Employment
services, 94 resulting in successful
employment.**

In June 2006, Wiley King sought services from MDRS after undergoing several surgeries to remove a tumor from his brain near an optic nerve, which left him visually impaired. At 17, a senior in high school, Wiley was apprehensive about adapting to a new lifestyle with his vision loss. Wiley had concerns that he might not be accepted socially or find suitable employment. In 2007, he began his adjustment process by participating in blindness services at Addie McBryde Rehabilitation Services for the Blind. He became a beneficiary of the Make A Wish Foundation and began services with St. Jude Hospital, where he participated in designing car art for NASCAR events. He was thrilled when his artwork was displayed on the winning car and was interviewed on ESPN as a result.

All who came in contact with Wiley were immediately impressed by his undaunted spirit and ability to engage easily in conversation. It was obvious that Wiley had a propensity to shine in the spotlight, so St. Jude decided to do a syndicated television program, 3 Wide Life, with Wiley as a reporter interviewing the NASCAR elite. His parents built an office for Wiley, and MDRS provided the necessary equipment for his work in posting blog entries and interview videos on the accompanying website. He has completed his first full NASCAR season and is signing sponsors for the next season. He also makes public appearances for St. Jude charity events and does radio interviews for Make A Wish. His story exemplifies “Attitude Over Adversity”, the fuel necessary to win any race.



**Through the increasing equipment loan program, Project
START loaned 645 pieces of equipment to schools,
individuals with disabilities, and organizations for people
with disabilities.**

**In State Fiscal Year 2010, Project START sub grants
provided over fifteen hundred demonstrations for assistive
technology services and devices.**

In 2010, OVRB served 2,040 consumers who received services such as counseling and guidance in adjustment to disability, vocational exploration, orientation and mobility training, job training, and assistive technology.

In 2010, the Independent Living Program for the Blind provided services to 795 consumers.

In 2010, Itinerant Teachers were provided for 195 consumers.

In 2010, thirty seven (37) individuals operated successful businesses as BEP vendors.

In 2010, the Addie McBryde Center provided training to 142 consumers. REACH Center for the Blind provided training to 39 consumers.



Floyd Austin is an inspiration to every entrepreneur! He first became a BEP vendor in 1991 at the Gentry Gallery Snack Bar in the furniture factory in Ripley, MS, serving between 350 to 500 employees. In 1993, he moved to the Quartet Mfg. Cafeteria in Booneville, serving 1200 employees and servicing 100 vending machines at 18 locations in the factory. In 1997,

Floyd was selected as the BEP vendor at Keesler AFB in Biloxi and is now in his third 5-year term as sole operator there. Using Air Force standards, Keesler has received efficiency ratings ranging from 4.96 to 4.99 out of 5.00. As a result of Keesler accomplishments, he now operates 6 other military installations in 4 states as a partner/mentor for other blind vendors. In 2004, the Keesler AFB food service was recognized as the top food service worldwide when, for the first time, it won the Air Force's coveted Hennessy Award. Floyd won the Hennessy again in 2008 for his food service at Tyndall AFB, Panama City, FL. His third Hennessy Award was in 2010, again at Keesler. Doing business as Austin & Associates, he now employs over 1200 people.



Demetric Cotton, born with cerebral palsy, experienced difficulties in the use of her hands and ability to walk. She relies upon a communication device to make her needs and wants known. Despite the limitations, she obtained her GED and then earned an Associate of Arts degree at Meridian Community College. Continuing her studies at Mississippi State University-Meridian (MSU), she earned a Bachelors degree in Social Work. Demetric is now studying to become a Licensed Social Worker.

In 2006, Demetric sought assistance from the Independent Living (IL) Waiver program in the completion of her activities of daily living. She was approved for a personal care attendant (PCA) for 4 hours a day, 7 days a week. Demetric lived at home with her mother and sisters but wanted to live more independently as she pursued job leads in Social Work. So, Demetric's IL Counselor, Sabrina Singleton, assisted her in the location of an apartment that was handicap accessible, increasing her PCA hours from 4 to 8 hours/day, 7 days/week. She now works with Project START to educate others about the use of her communication device and demonstrate its capabilities. Since the age of 16, Demetric has had several communication devices and is quick to note that her current device enabled her to obtain her degree from MSU-Meridian. With Demetric's determination and great attitude, she is sure to be a success in life.

During 2010, the Office of Special Disability Programs provided independent living services for 4,331 individuals with significant (severe) disabilities.

Donald Myers, who suffers from seizures, was referred to M-PIC by a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor. Donald, a recipient of Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Medicaid, was fearful of losing those benefits if he went to work. He had been misinformed about the effect working would have on his SSI benefits. Therefore, Mylinda Dempsey, Community Work Incentives Coordinator, contacted him to explain the SSI work incentives, including the continuation of Medicaid eligibility. She informed him about Medicaid coverage through the 1619(b) provision and the Medicaid for the Working Disabled Program. This was the encouragement he needed to seek employment, which he found the next week with McDonald's. Mylinda, by the use of SSI calculation sheets, was able to show Donald that he would make more money through working, even though his SSI cash benefit would be reduced. He was also taught how to report his wages monthly to the Social Security Administration and has been faithful in doing so on the 10th of each month. As a result, he has done well as a part-time employee of McDonald's. He calls M-PIC weekly with updates and continues to impress his managers and co-workers with his work ethic and ever-present smile. As a result, he has done well as a part-time employee of McDonald's.



The Mississippi Disability Determination Services (DDS) continues to demonstrate leadership in its efforts to meet regional and national demands. In 2010, Mississippi DDS exceeded our overall budgeted workload by 8.3% and our Continuing Disability Review (CDR) workload by 7%, taking on 400 additional cases to ensure the Region met its targeted goals. Despite the heavy workload, we exceeded many other goals as well, including exceeding our Initial Claims goal by 2% and our Recon Claims goal by 13.5%; and, we did this while maintaining an accuracy rate of 97.1% and the lowest Cost per Case in the Region.

In 2009, Mississippi became one of only four states across the nation chosen as an EST (Extended Service Team) site for DDS. On April 5, 2010, with a total staff of 58, including 39 Examiners, the Mississippi EST became active in assisting Georgia with Initial and Reconsideration Claims. From April 2010 to August 2010, the Mississippi DDS helped Georgia reduce their number of backlogged cases from 15,892 to 10,720.

The leadership and dedication of the Mississippi DDS is reflected in our willingness to participate in new endeavors and work with other organizations in a cooperative spirit. The Mississippi DDS is the best in the nation and exemplifies our dedication to public service.

2010 DDS PROGRAM INFORMATION

- **Title II Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) Beneficiaries** **160,392**
- **Title XVI Supplement Security Income (SSI) Disabled Recipients** **113,495**
- **The DDS demonstrated outstanding and balanced performance in FY 2010, with processing time and productivity significantly better than Regional and National averages.**
- **2010 was especially significant in that MS established the Extended Service Team (EST) to provide assistance to other states. Still managing to process 9.4% more cases than in 2009 while maintaining its stellar service to Mississippians.**
- **MS DDS performance in the area of production, processing time, and cost per case continues to be below Regional and National averages.**

Without a doubt, one's life can change in the 'twinkling of an eye' or, in one case, the bite of a tiny mosquito. For Leann Hines, that life-changing event occurred in August 2007 when she became paralyzed due to the West Nile Virus. Her hopes and dreams for the future began fading away. Leann, who was quite a horsewoman and farmer, was in the midst of restoring her grandparents' farm operation by training young horses, teaching horseback riding, operating an English riding shop, and farming the land. Over the years, the farm had become a financial drain; but, with Leann's Midas touch and determination, the farm was beginning to show a profit. Leann inherited a passion for this land and its horses, and she was actively putting that passion into building her future. Now, her whole world was in jeopardy, and she began to question what the future held for her. With a willpower that seems almost commonplace



among Mississippi farmers, Leann resolved to carry on somehow. Although difficult for her, she was unwavering in her desire to continue her duties. But, in order to mow and maintain her pasture, someone had to literally drag her onto her tractor.

It was at this point that Leann sought the assistance of MDRS. Her vocational rehabilitation counselor, Amber Brower Weaver of Greenwood, began immediately to develop an aggressive plan to enable Leann to regain her personal and vocational independence. Services--ramps and bathroom modifications--were begun, and Leann was referred to Assistive Technology Services to improve her methods of performing farm chores, such as gaining access to her tractor to swap out implements. AT

Technologist Kris Geroux and Jimmy McDaniel teamed with a therapist from the TK Martin Center, an Agriculture Engineer from MSU, and an Industrial Engineer from Indiana. This team of experts joined Amber in an effort to "make a difference" in Leann's life, recommending a custom-designed tractor lift and hitch system for Leann to operate independently while working alone on the farm. She was also provided instruction in accessible farming and safety awareness. Armed with these new tools, Leann has now returned to her farming duties, including operating her tractor, cutting her pastures, planting rye grass, and caring for her horses. Although an assistant has been hired to help her with the riding lessons and camps she sponsors, Leann has added a new venture--raising New Hampshire Red chickens and selling their eggs, plus her farm-grown vegetables, at the local Farmer's Market--just for the love of it. MDRS, by empowering Leann to live a productive, independent life, is definitely making a difference!

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