

STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL 2022

In Partnership with



Office of Vocational Rehabilitation

Office of Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind

2022 SRC ANNUAL REPORT

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Welcome from the Executive Director
Chris M. Howard



Dear Governor Reeves, 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 2022.

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 in this FFY, and despite great challenges presented by the pandemic, we served over **11,000** individuals, helped more than **2,100** become successfully employed, provided Pre-employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) to over **2,800** students, developed **4** new partnerships with Community Rehab Partners to provide Pre-Employment Training Services, held job fairs in which over **60** businesses participated, developed or maintained **18** Project SEARCH sites, partnered with corporate giants such as Sephora and Fastenal, expanded our internship programs and assisted in the growth of Mississippi State's ACCESS program. The pages ahead will outline our work in these areas more specifically.

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 "Chris Howard".

Chris M. Howard
Executive Director



MISSISSIPPI

STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL CHAIR LETTER

Dear Governor Reeves and Members of the Mississippi Legislature:

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 State Rehabilitation Council 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.

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, to include the Statewide Independent Living Council
- Performing other relevant functions the SRC determines appropriate consistent with the purpose of OVR/OVRB

The Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services' OVR/ OVRB have continued effective Vocational Rehabilitation Services to Mississippi's citizens who experience disabilities. SRC members, representing a wide stakeholder group of citizens with disabilities, have been excited to hear about and give input on new approaches this year to bring about better results in changing times. Mississippi needs all of our citizens' talents in the workplace, to include our citizens who experience disabilities. Without the support of OVR/OVRB services, this talent would go wasted.

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. The State Rehabilitation Council is happy to continue to advise the agency in regard to the individual stakeholder groups who we represent.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Mary Lundy Meruvia".

Mary Lundy Meruvia, Chairperson
State Rehabilitation Council

STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL MEMBERSHIP

2021-2024

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<p>John McGinn, Director of Client Assistance Program MS Society for Disabilities Inc. P O Box 4958, Jackson, MS 39296-4958 PH: 601-362-2585 or 1-800-962-2400 Email: johnmcginn@msdisabilities.org</p>	<p>Antonio Wright, Director Metro Area Community Empowerment (MACE) 859 Gore Rd. Jackson, MS 39212 PH: 601-918-5830 Email: Antoniovwright@gmail.com</p>

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.



Front row (L to R): Shanda Nash, MDRS OVR Counselor, Supported Employment; Johnny McGinn, Director of Client Assistance Program, MS Society for Disabilities Inc.

Back row (L to R): LaVonda Hart, MDRS OVR Director; Donald Brown, Executive Director, Warren-Yazoo Behavioral Health; Kenneth Hudson, MDRS OVRB Counselor; Mary Meruvia, Program Director, Vocational Rehabilitation Services Program, MS Band of Choctaw Indians; Edwin Butler, Former Executive Developmental Director, MS Council of Developmental Disabilities; Pablo Diaz, President & CEO of Warren County Port Commission; Dorothy Young, MDRS OVRB Director.

Not pictured: Josh Bower, Dean of Agriculture & Transportation, Director of Talent Workforce & Economic Development-Hinds Community College; Sharon S. Coon, Director of Data and Policy - MS. Dept. of Education, Office of Special Education; Leslie Junkin, Project Director-MS Parent Training Information Center, Parents of Children with Disabilities Coalition for Citizens with Disabilities; Scott Mullins, Transition Specialist, USMegaM Institute for Disabilities Studies; C. Hayden Perkins, DMD, The Children's Dental Center; Dorothy Pope, Corporate Human Resources Coordinator, Thomasson Company; Augusta Smith, Executive Director, Life of Mississippi; Rebecca Treadway, Executive Director, The ARC Northwest Mississippi; Troy Wicktom, Facility Manager AbilityWorks Inc.; Antonio Wright, Director, Metro Area Community Empowerment (MACE).

2022 MISSISSIPPI

STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL ACTIVITIES

FFY 2022 Mississippi State Rehabilitation Council Activity Report

The Mississippi State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) held four (4) quarterly meetings for the Federal Fiscal Year **October 1, 2021 – September 30, 2022**. 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 consistent with the purpose of OVR/OVRB/BDS
- ◆ 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 3, 2021 MEETING

Public comments: The Assistant Director of the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs (OFCCP), discussed outreach programs, overview of the DOL agency and the OFCCP, an enforcement program of DOL. OFCCP is responsible for protecting workers by enforcing the legal requirements that federal contractors and subcontractors take affirmative action and provide Equal Employment in the workplace.

In this meeting, discussions were shared regarding the history of the **National Coalition of State Rehabilitation Councils (NCSRC)**, the purpose, how chapters within the country have joined the NCSRC, goals that included educating the SRCs nationwide, and that the NCSRC works closely with CSAVR and RSA. The NCSRC Training Conference upcoming in the Spring 2022 was announced

as well as the bi-monthly training schedule. It was discussed that NCSRC provides important documents, including the SRC Guidebook which is available at NCSRC.net. The Chairperson commented that it is the responsibility of the SRC to participate in NCSRC trainings and learn about active SRC member roles.

The **MDRS Executive Director** provided a report indicating that the **Mississippi Legislature** would convene in January 2022. He announced that the federal government provides 110 monies and the federal portion is 78.7% to the state's 21.3% and that MDRS was on track to receive all requested monies. He added that the **Mississippi State Personnel Board (MSPB)** would be changing PIN classification structures in January 2022. This would provide agency Executive Directors more flexibility with salary structures. Salary caps have impacted the recruitment of qualified employees and the SRC has acknowledged the low starting salaries as being one reason for high staff turnover rate and staff retention. MSPB revisited the restructuring of employees and would be making adjustments in January 2022. **The SRC voted unanimously to support the agency in their efforts to increase salaries and for the SRC to be reactive in the agency's needs of advocacy.**

Client Assistance Program (CAP) – Mr. Johnny McGinn, an advocate in many areas including Project Search, Special Education Advisory Panel, and the Brain Injury Association Meetings, gave a report of contacts since the last quarterly SRC meeting

OVR Program - Ms. Hart, OVR Director, reported on **State Plan requirements**. The Comprehensive Needs Assessment Survey (CNAS) Report is required every three years by RSA to ensure the needs of the state are recognized and CNAS data is used in preparation of the Combined State Plan modification of the current State Plan, which is revised every two years and written every five years. MDRS OVR/OVRB is one of the four State partners involved in the WIOA Combined State Plan. The purpose of the State Plan is to reflect the services provided by MDRS-OVR/OVRB to help individuals with disabilities and helping businesses hire and retain skilled workers. The next revision would be due January 2022. The process of the State Plan modifications was explained including SRC's role regarding their input contributions. OVR appointed staff to be available to answer questions the SRC members had regarding the planned State Plan modifications.

OVRB Program - Ms. Young, OVRB Director, discussed OVRB **Guides Updates** that were provided to managers and counselors, and these were distributed to SRC members. The **'No Contact'** new program survey was implemented to ensure clients are receiving quality and timely services. The **Micro Market** concept and other types of employment was discussed along with a report that several internship VRB clients have been relocated in and out of the state, employed, and living independently. The **Structured Discovery Center** has been identified within the CNAS as the Addie MCBryde Center is not accessible for all of the blind community.

Business Development Services - Josh Woodward reported that a **job fair** was held in Oxford, MS in October 2021 and a second job fair would be held in the upcoming future. Details are in discussion regarding **Toyota Motor Corporation** regarding their interest to establish a recruitment partnership. **Virtual workforce tours** will continue which reflects excellent opportunities. There are 13 **Project SEARCH** sites and the plan is to develop at least 9 more sites with other types of industries and at Air Force Bases within the state.

Ms. Hart, OVR Director, stated the **SRC Annual Report** will be completed before December end and will be sent to RSA and mailed to SRC members.

❖ **Formal SRC Input: *Responses to Questionnaires from December 2021 Meeting***

1. After attending the quarterly SRC meeting, what further input do you have for VR/VRB regarding the eligibility (including Order of Selection-OOS), the extent, scope and 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?

- *NA -still learning the processes.*
- *None at this time.*
- *This is all so new to me I'm not even sure what to ask.*
- *I believe that MDRS is doing well serving OOS. Unlike other states where they have had to cut one or more OOS.*
- *None*
- *After listening to the reports, I believe that the staff is doing a great job in providing reviews regarding eligibility.*
- *It was exciting to hear about the 77 people trained through MDRS services that had a measure skill gain. The successes from training for business enterprise that were placed and living on their own.*
- *The information Sherry Taylor shared about NCSRC was very informative. If resources permitted it may be good to send one of our SRC members to their National Meeting in April to gather information from the 78 SRC groups and models to share with our MS SRC - perhaps a time/day could be set up for training.*
- *Client names should not be mentioned in SRC meetings unless the disclaimer is provided that a signed consent to release information is present for the SRC. No CAP report, nor due process hearings indicate that clients don't have grievances with eligibility or VR services the way it is provided now. Increased onboarding activities for new staff could result in better outcomes. The SRC members voiced support in the meeting to support VR and VRB in any possible way to advocate for staff salary increases to attract and keep good staff.*
- *I think you all are doing a great job in this area.*

- *I do understand that effective and timely delivery of services to clients/consumers with disabilities is a priority. However, I do feel that effective and timely delivery of services to MDRS employees with disabilities is important too. In order to ensure that MDRS employees are providing the best services to clients, they must be in a position to function at their best in effort of doing this.*
- 2. Having heard this quarter's report on the results of the Consumer Satisfaction Surveys, do you have any comments or recommendations for input into the service delivery process?**
- *Why were some areas not being reported on if it was to be a state review of surveys?*
 - *None at this time.*
 - *This is all so new to me I'm not sure what to ask.*
 - *Glad they got about 20% to reply. Continue to push for more responses.*
 - *No*
 - *Based on the information, it appears that the Consumer Satisfaction Survey reflects that consumers are satisfied with services being provided.*
 - *Transportation issues were mentioned after clients successfully completed the MDRS programs and moved into placement for employment. It sounded like some people cannot afford transportation to their workplace after the MDRS services are no longer available after placement. MDRS may need to address commute before placement to make sure the employment is sustainable do to cost of commute or maybe there is nothing WIOA/non-profit partner that can assist with transportation.*
 - *I like hearing the personal success stories of how life got better for person(s) receiving VR and VRB services from LaVonda (Hart) and Dorothy (Young).. Time permitting perhaps someone could share their story in-person at a meeting.*
 - *Overall Consumer Satisfaction Surveys indicate satisfaction.*
 - *You all are doing well. Communication can always be improved.*
 - *There is always room for improvement. Overall, I think the results of the Consumer Satisfaction Survey was good.*
- 3. After attending this 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?**
- *None at this time*
 - *None at this time.*
 - *I'm glad that counselors are able to work from home. Please have a way for counselors to contact clients while at home. Please don't say at office that counselors will call you back.*
 - *None.*
 - *The State Plan Goals and Priorities appear to be effective.*
 - *I found the presentation by Sherry Taylor, Representative for the National Coalition of State Rehabilitation Councils, interesting about their work in West Virginia and sharing best practices/outreach*

- *Since I am a new SRC member I am still in the learning process; too soon to comment. Am reading the material given regarding Goals and Priorities.*
- *The state plan process was shared. This was good for SRC members who do not work in the process day-to-day. Please share VR and VRB plans early for ample time for SRC members to have input.*
- *I don't have any further input.*
- *I feel that if every member of the program is doing their job at full potential and is working as a team, then the goals and priorities of VR/VRB program will improve.*

4. Do you have any comments or recommendations concerning the presentation on the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation?

- *Continue to emphasize communication.*
- *None at this time.*
- *No.*
- *I appreciate the dedication of the staff that provided the presentations. They had the data readily available.*
- *The MDRS team is doing a great job updating the SRC.*
- *VR Counselors are the heart of service deliveries. There appears to be a high rate of turnover in professional counselors which leads to many problems. What can be done to improve VR Counselor recruitment and retention? How does MS compare with other southern states in counselor pay and incentives? What can we do? Thanks for all the material given at the meeting. I do plan to read and study to be an informed SRC member. The meeting was well organized. Don Brown always makes a positive contribution with his humor and group dynamic skills. What coordination exists with other councils/organizations relative to the VR SRC? Who are the other councils and organizations?*
- *The concerns brought forward by CAP in the October meeting had a great deal of focus and emphasis during the December meeting. No agency can achieve perfection, only strive for it. Neither should staff feel negative and defensive; but instead see the input as a positive place to improve services to people with disabilities.*
- *Keep up the great work!*
- *The agency's turnover of VR staff should be looked into further. Although the pay/salary is a huge factor, there may be some other underlying factors as well. Referrals are low due to COVID. Suggest recommendations from field staff/offices on how to increase numbers.*

**Additional State Rehabilitation Council Member Activities
December 2021 Quarterly Meeting**

Budget Committee - Ms. Treadway discussed budget updates. A budget was developed for the year and as of this meeting, no expenses were submitted. Expenses to be deducted will be for the September 2021 meeting. Volunteers are needed to serve on the Budget Committee.

In addition, Mr. Howard added that the State of Mississippi breaks down a budget year into two allotments, June of SFY and January of SFY.

Nomination Committee - Mr. Brown reported updates on the Nomination Committee. Professional certificates, confirming the current Council members that were in attendance, were sent from Governor Tate Reeves' office. Certificates were distributed among the Council members. The Council has an open position on the board. The Business, Industry and Labor requires four to serve on the SRC and is short by one. Members were encouraged to submit a nomination.

MARCH 2022 MEETING

The training video, developed by **VRTAC-QM** (Vocational Rehabilitation Technical Assistance Center for Quality Management), was presented on the *Historical Perspectives State Rehabilitation Council*. The **National Coalition of State Rehabilitation Councils (NCSRC)** planned to host a virtual Spring Conference April 12-14, 2022. No public comments were made.

MDRS Executive Director Reporting included discussions of the current **Legislative Session** including Workforce Bill HB1388 which would streamline the career technical and coaching program; SB2810 which addressed teleworking; and HB1612 which is the appropriations for MDRS. January 1, 2022, **MSPB** issued realignments in job titles to employees (not all employees received realignments). The **Project SEARCH** Director shared that 13 sites were set up with participating schools with five future sites being planned. 45 interns were currently participating in Project SEARCH sites across the state.

The first quarter 2021-2022 **VR Consumer Satisfaction Survey Report** (*rating scale of 1–5 scale with 5 excellent*) was reviewed. Overall results for both non-blind and blind cases rate was at 4.66 average mean and above on the various questions with employment benefits continually rating lower. The Program Integrity Unit conducted the **Consumer Satisfaction Survey** on open and active VR cases (*four Level Likert scale: 1-4 with 4=very satisfied*). Results for District 5/6 overall results reflected the majority of consumers were satisfied with services. The employment section's overall composite weighted averages indicated the majority of employed consumers were satisfied.

The **Client Assistance Program** reported the concerns of clients not being aware of who their counselor was due to continual vacancies, divided caseloads, and transfers between multiple counselors until a new counselor was hired and trained.

The OVR Director reported no **Due Process Hearings** for the last quarter December 2021, January 2022, and February 2022.

OVR Program - Ms. Hart, OVR Director, reported data from the VR Management Reports, Successful Rehabs by Districts and Potentially Eligible, Transition Students, the Summary of VR

Participants and Numbers Served Report, Closed Rehabilitated Numbers, and the Measurable Skills Gain (MSG) rate as well as the PY 2022 VR Goal. The OVR Director stated that the PY 2022–2023 (modification to 2020-2023) **State Plan** was updated after SRC review and the **State Plan and Policy Manual Hearing** was held on February 25, 2022 with SRC in attendance. All modifications were reviewed and explained to the Council with any questions being answered.

OVRB Program – Ms. Young, OVRB Director, discussed the monthly “No Contact” list created to reflect clients not contacted in ninety days and a **pilot project** was implemented to improve client contact. An effort to inform county supervisors of the lack of **transportation**, which is vital to clients, was reported as ‘underway’. The **Micro Market System** was reported as doing well at MDRS. Reporting was shared regarding active cases, clients served, and Transition clients. The **Randolph Sheppard Mentoring Program**, a new initiative, was started and approved by the Committee of Blind Vendors. Progress was reported on **Structured Discovery**.

Office of Business Development (OBD) held **virtual workforce tours** for counselors to see businesses which are open to hiring clients. Several **job fairs** were held with additional job fairs planned for April 2022 (USM and William Carey College). A **pilot** was held at the University of Mississippi. **Goals** announced were to launch five to six job fairs per year with colleges and community-based job fairs. The project with **Toyota Motor Corporation** was in the works and with hiring initiatives for work-based learning using a three-tiered approach (which begins with basic assembly to advanced job production). Tupelo has a **transportation system** within the city and Toyota’s goal is to provide transportation for after hours and weekends. **Future endeavors** in the Delta area are businesses Viking and Baxter.

❖ **Formal SRC Input: *Responses to Questionnaires from March 2022 Meeting***

1. After attending the quarterly SRC meeting, what further input do you have for VR/VRB regarding the eligibility (including Order of Selection-OOS), the extent, scope and 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?
 - *None at this time.*
 - *No input.*
 - *None.*
 - *It was great to hear about the new possible partnership with Toyota. It is wonderful to see new employment opportunities for MDRS clients.*
 - *I would love to see the VR and VRB counselors trained on the advocacy efforts in the disability community.*
 - *I would like to see Business Development coordinate with Pre-ETS for career exploration and preparation services to students with disabilities. Project SEARCH should continue and be expanded.*
 - *I was not able to attend the last meeting due to technology-based concerns. - after reading over the report no further questions.*

- *In June 2021, MDRS contracted with the Public Consulting Group (PCG) to conduct a statewide needs assessment report. Numerous recommendations and call for actions given, e.g., “rethinking OVR’s approach to service delivery”; “facility based training does not align with evidence-based practices”. PCG recommends that OVR assess and revise service delivery models. How has MDRS-OVR/OVRB addressed recommendations by PCG?*
 - *Overall VR/VRB does a great job with OOS. The issues come when a counselor understands how to explain services clients. The counselor becomes overloaded with clients or leaves the agency.*
 - *No additional input.*
 - *I am amazed at the services provided to determine eligibility.*
- 2. Having heard this quarters report on the results of the consumer satisfaction surveys, do you have any comments or recommendations for input into the service delivery process?**
- *Not at this time.*
 - *None.*
 - *No.*
 - *The state of Mississippi needs the OVR B Community Rehabilitation Program to fill the gap of clients leaving the state for Structured Discovery. Having the program in our state is better for the clients.*
 - *No.*
 - *Satisfaction remains high. I would like to see the instrument used for interim satisfaction measurement and the instrument used after case closure be the same one for comparison.*
 - *Not at this time*
 - *Like the strategy of counselors carving out “catch-up” days to return calls with people seeking help. This should help with the communication problems. Reported by CAP, Johnny McGinn.*
 - *We need to hear more about potential transportation strategies. Mr. Don Brown has been a lead person in the state serving on many transportation boards/planning groups. Perhaps he could provide transportation strategies we can advocate.*
 - *No additional input.*
 - *The delivery of service process is excellent. I have no suggestions.*
- 3. After attending this 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?**
- *None at this time.*
 - *None.*
 - *None.*
 - *We need more counselors across the state to meet the needs of our clients. Counselors and their support staff need to be paid a more competitive wage.*

- *The staff seem to work hard, and some mistakes are made due to lack of experience.*
- *It would be great if each VR and VRB department could invite SRC members to see services provided first-hand for improved input.*
- *NA.*
- *Based on the information provided by Mr. Josh Woodward and Ms. Faye Culpepper the demand for good workers/employers is at an all-time high because of present socio-economic conditions. It appears MDRS/OVR is positioned to have the best year(s) in job placement throughout Mississippi.*
- *Information provided about Project SEARCH was what we needed to hear – 100 recent graduates with 64 people working. The SRC members need to hear about community positive outcomes.*
- *I wish counselors could have more training or back to basics. Because the counselors over the last 3 years have not really had the training they need.*
- *No additional input.*
- *The State Plans Goals and Priorities are very realistic.*

4. Do you have any comments or recommendations concerning the presentation on the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation?

- *No.*
- *None.*
- *No.*
- *No.*
- *The high number of resignations and retirement of seasoned staff should be explored by an external evaluator. Much talent and history of the agency seems to be exiting. Salary and other factors of job satisfaction should be evaluated and problem areas should be identified, and solutions used for personnel retention.*
- *NA.*
- *Working lunch presentation was very informative and a good use of time. An important part of our meeting is hearing about employment outcomes of people with disabilities serviced and employed in community jobs. This is reported near the end of each meeting, time is limited for Ms. Hart and Ms. Young, and they have to rush through. It may be worth considering allowing them to present earlier first.*
- *Would like to hear more about evidence based practices similar to the Indiana model that Josh Woodard reported on with Toyota. The MDRS VR/VRB Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment Report of June 2021 recommended that MDRS explore best practices /evidence based vesture that other states were doing to support employment for people with disabilities.*
- *No additional input.*
- *The presentations were very informative with valid information.*

***Additional State Rehabilitation Council Member Activities
March 2022 Quarterly Meeting***

Chair Selection - In January of 2022, a survey was created and sent to all SRC members to open the floor for nominations for the Council Chairperson. There were three nominations. Nominees were contacted and two declined the nomination. A second survey was sent to council members to vote on the remaining nomination. Ten votes were cast for Mary Meruvia to continue as chairperson for 2022 with no votes casted in opposition.

Nomination Committee - SRC Appointment certificates were distributed to the members that were present. The remaining certificates were mailed. Mr. Brown reminded all members that the SRC was still seeking a fourth representative for Business, Industry and Labor.

Statewide Independent Living Council Report (SILC) indicated awaiting appointments from the Governor with two vacancies to replace on the council.

Budget Committee Report - was reviewed and distributed reflecting itemized expenditures and remaining balances of the categories.

JUNE 3, 2022 MEETING

The MDRS Executive Director reported the **Project Search** graduation updates and sites planned for the upcoming school year.

The 2nd quarter 2021-2022 **VR Consumer Satisfaction Survey Report** (*Rated 1-5, with 5 being excellent*), was presented. The survey was divided into two sections of the non-blind clients and blind clients. Overall results for both non-blind and blind cases rated at 4.79 average mean and above on the various questions with employment benefits continually rated lower. The Program Integrity Unit conducted the **Consumer Satisfaction Surveys** on all open and active VR cases (*Level Likert scale 1-4 with 4 =very satisfied*). Survey results from this quarter's survey was conducted in two OVR Districts and results indicated District 7 was satisfied with services and District 8 showed extremely satisfied with services.

Client Assistance Program (CAP), Mr. McGinn, commented that **documentation** by Counselors and Assistants is significant in the Automated Accessible Case Environment (**AACE**). Caseloads have increased due to staff turnover.

The OVR Director added no **Due Process Hearings** were reported for the last quarter (March, April, and May 2022).

OVR Program – Ms. Hart, OVR Director, discussed the **VR Management Reports**, Successful Rehabilitations by Districts, Potentially Eligible, Transition Students, and the Summary of VR Participants and Numbers Served reporting through May 31, 2022. VR goals and rates were reflected on reporting. Measurable Skills Gain (MSG) rate, IPE Goal, IPEs developed to-date, and Closed Rehab figures were provided. OVR reported there have been several **Policy and Procedure**

Casework Guidances (CG) issued this Program Year that included *Verification of Employment Start Date and Hourly Wage at exit* plus discussion of verification of *Comparable Services and Benefits*. The **Policy Manual Plan Hearing** for the OVR/OVRB Policy Manual revisions has been scheduled for June 10, 2022 with the purpose of explanations of changes in the OVR/OVRB Policy. The **State Plan timeline** for approval by RSA was reviewed and the **State Plan** is under final review with additional corrections sent May 31, 2022.

OVRB Program reported updates on the **Transportation Committee Meeting** held on March 2022 involving routes for the blind and visually impaired. The Work Incentives Planning and Assistance (**WIPA**) **grant** was reported to have been awarded funding to the Community Work Incentives Coordinators (CWICS) Program (the Independent Living for the Blind (ILB) Program work the WIPA Grant). Counselor Assistants have been provided to each OVRB Counselor to enable more efficient consumer contact. The "**No Contact**" report has increased contact with consumers. The Addie McBryde Center (**AMBC**) construction project was nearing completion. The **Adult Coaching Program** was discussed. Measurable Skill Gains (**MSG**) **trainings** have been ongoing. The **Structured Discovery Center** was reported to be progressing and a meeting was held April 2022 to discuss accessibility and location.

The **VR Consumer Satisfaction Survey Report**, 2nd quarter 2021-2022 (scale 1-5, with 5 being excellent), was presented. The survey is divided into two sections of the non-blind clients and blind clients. Overall results for both non-blind and blind cases rated at 4.79 average mean and above on the various questions with employment benefits continually rated lower. The Program Integrity Unit - **Consumer Satisfaction Survey** conducted surveys on all open and active VR cases via telephone (Level Likert scale 1-4 with 4 Very Satisfied). Survey results from this quarter's survey was conducted in two OVR Districts and results indicated District 7 was satisfied with services and District 8 showed extremely satisfied with services.

Office of Business Development (OBD) reported that the **Summer Internship Program** would begin soon for high school and college students. Internship positions will be placed throughout the state. Soft skill and hard skills have been a major focal point. Staff have been working on breaking down barriers to those with disabilities for employers. Vacancies are in OBD.

The next **SRC meeting** was announced to be held in conjunction with the Rehabilitation Association of Mississippi (RAM) State Conference September 14, 2022, in Oxford, Mississippi. This will enable SRC members to attend this training conference.

❖ **Formal SRC Input: *Responses to SRC Questionnaires from June 2022 Meeting***

1. **After attending the quarterly SRC meeting, what further input do you have for VR/VRB regarding the eligibility (including Order of Selection-OOS), the extent, scope and 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?**
 - *OOS in Mississippi is still serving all (3) levels and I believe the state units are being used.*
 - *Recruiting and retaining OVR/OVRB Counselors is a high priority for MDRS. This is good. Consider to involve MRPEA (Retiree Association) and PERS (Public Employees). Both groups support recruitment and retention of state workers.*
 - *None. You all are doing an outstanding job!*
 - *No additional input.*
 - *VR and VRB services are extensive to meet the needs of citizens who experience a disability. It appears that leadership staff are mindful of any concerns brought forward by CAP regarding counselor timely contact with clients and have made steps to correct any issues or barriers.*
 - *I think the services and information discussed are well planned and should be effective.*
 - *All priority categories are open meaning even those applicants who are determined to be eligible can be provided services to achieve their chosen employment goal even those determined to have a non-significant disability. No input for VR/VRB regarding eligibility or order of selection at this time.*
 - *I am still learning about all the different MDRS processes, but it seems most of the targets for most of the programs are being met. I have no new recommendations at this time. Our program is starting our Summer Enrichment Academy training for individuals with a disability through PRE-ETS employment services. They will be provided an opportunity to work for an educational experience virtually or work in- person in a community supported internship.*
 - *The report given was very thorough and reflected the effectiveness of the services provided.*
2. **Having heard this quarter's report on the results of the Consumer Satisfaction Surveys, do you have any comments or recommendations for input into the service delivery process?**
 - *In my opinion, this past quarter of MDRS has done a much better job of calling clients back on a timely matter appropriately.*
 - *Thanks for the detailed handouts and information provided. Well planned SRC Meetings. Thanks.*
 - *Everything was good, even satisfaction with benefits.*
 - *No additional input.*
 - *It would be helpful to use the same instrument for measuring client satisfaction during services and after case closure.*
 - *Not at this time.*
 - *Not at this time.*

- *After hearing the report on the Consumer Satisfaction Survey, most consumers were satisfied with the services they were provided. It appears that VR/VRB is doing a fine job serving their consumers.*
 - *The information provided in the report reflected how effective the counselors are in providing the needed services.*
- 3. After attending this 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?**
- *Keep on the path of this past quarter. Moving forward in a positive and growing direction.*
 - *Would like to hear how other councils/organizations coordinate with OVR/OVRB in supporting people with disabilities/developmental disabilities to obtain jobs in the community. What strategies are in play to enable council/organizations to network? Is creating a plan for councils/organization to network a function of the Statewide Independent Living Councils (SILC) role as a member of the SRC? We could network with them. Can we hear from them?*
 - *I think you all are covering all the bases.*
 - *No additional input.*
 - *Staff vacancies by long term and trained staff are leaving a void of institutional knowledge.*
 - *Not at this time.*
 - *According to the reports of VR/VRB, VR/VRB is on track to meet their goals. No complaints regarding the state plan.*
 - *Not at this time.*
 - *The goals and priorities outlines appear to be effective.*
- 4. Do you have any comments or recommendations concerning the presentation on the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation?**
- *Keep up the callbacks every 30/60 days showing clients the care MDRS counselors has for the client.*
 - *Keep up the great work. The state of Mississippi is benefitting greatly from your work.*
 - *No additional input.*
 - *Documents to be reviewed during the short SRC meetings should be provided to members at least a week prior to meetings to allow members to adequately give comment after review. Some members need documents presented in an accessible format; virtual attendees cannot access documents passed out during the meeting. The casework guidance is positive and I look forward to seeing how this is compiled for staff to use.*
 - *No.*
 - *No comment on the casework guidance updates.*
 - *It was given straight and direct, but not the most engaging conversation as it could have been.*
 - *The presentations were very informative. It was obvious that they had prepared for the meeting.*

***Additional State Rehabilitation Council Member Activities
June 2022 Quarterly Meeting***

Ms. Meruvia, SRC Chairperson, shared the **NCSRC Training** dates which were open to SRC members. The next training date was scheduled for June 8, 2022.

Budget Committee Report: The budget documents distributed were reviewed and discussed. The reports reflected itemized expenditures and remaining balances in all categories.

The reformation of a **Bylaws Committee** was discussed to address changes, incorporation of virtual meeting attendances and, due to the **Rehabilitation Act** being up for reauthorization soon. Records retention, recordings, etc. will be addressed. The Bylaws Committee is in need of **volunteers**. MDRS was asked to supply an agency representative to be the **legal advisor** for the Bylaws Committee.

State Employee Classifications and Compensation Initiative (SEC2) and Internal Auditing was reviewed and were discussed at the May District Meetings. **Recruitment** had become a focus item due to the loss of MDRS employees across the state. Hiring processes have been streamlined for faster hiring and MDRS has worked on plans to retain new and current employees.

SEPTEMBER 14, 2022 MEETING

Ms. Meruvia, SRC Chair, reported that the **National Coalition for the State Rehabilitation Council** (NCSRC) provides monthly trainings by computer webinar. Trainings are scheduled for October and December 2022 and a link was provided. The Mississippi SRC is a member of NCSRC. No Public Comments were provided.

MDRS Executive Director, Mr. Howard, informed everyone that counselors and counselor assistants were given a 5% **salary** raise in July. Due to high turnover, it was addressed by increasing salaries and telework days. **Project Search** had 13 sites and have doubled in children with nearly 100 young adults participating in those programs. Mr. Howard attended the **Accelerate MS Conference** at the Refuge in Pearl. Governor Reeves also attended. The **Workforce** partners signed the plan to show they were unified. PDDs had been placing **Job Coaches** in schools with an effort to increase referrals. Paid internships and increasing these internships across the state were occurring.

The **2022 VR Consumer Survey Report (3rd quarter 2021-2022)** was reported by Mr. Fairley, Client Services Director. The report addressed the results for blind consumers and non-blind consumers. Overall rating of services was 4.77 with the lowest rating being employment benefits. The Program Integrity Unit conducted the **Consumer Satisfaction Survey** on all open and active VR cases. This quarter's survey was conducted on two OVR districts (nine and ten). Regarding the employment sections, the overall composite weighted averages indicated that the employed consumers were overall satisfied with employment. The survey indicated a significant number of consumers in both

districts were satisfied with services. The question relating to benefits and health insurance was always the lowest.

Client Assistance Program (CAP), Mr. McGinn, distributed brochures, information, and referrals this quarter. CAP attended the **National Disability Rights Network (NDRN) Yearly Conference** in Virginia to continue education, attended the **United Spinal Association's Roll on Capitol Hill** to help educate their representatives in Mississippi and Arkansas. Mr. McGinn traveled by airlines and discussed how airlines treat durable medical equipment and expressed being interested in getting **terminology** added to insurance policies because they haven't changed since the early 70s. CAP attended **Mississippi's Mega Conference**, joined **MDRS Districts** monthly meetings, attended SEAP meetings and **MSBIA** meetings, **Trans-Con Regional Meeting**, **SILC Board Meeting**, and the **ADA Council Meeting**.

Ms. Meruvia commented there were no **Due Process Hearings** during the last quarter.

OVR Program - Ms. Hart, OVR Director, shared the overview of their role this year is to increase closed rehabilitation goals and all other goals. They identified the areas where goals were not met. **OVR statistical data** was provided in detail for the VR Northern and VR Southern Regions for July 1, 2021 through June 30, 2022. Data consisted of closed rehabilitations, new IPEs, new applications, total served statewide, OVR PE Case type. Secondly, statistics were provided for the period of July 1, 2022 through August 31, 2022 which consisted of the summary of VR participants and numbers served, MSG rate, new applications, new IPEs, closed rehabilitation cases, and total served individuals. The goals for supported employment have increased. Ms. Hart discussed activities to ensure clients receive proper assessment to identify an appropriate employment goal. In addition, the **The State Plan** was announced as being available on the website and one of the main functions of the SRC is to help staff set goals and priorities based on the advice from the stakeholder groups each SRC member represents.

OVRB Program – Ms. Young, OVRB Director, discussed the topic of the **Establishment Authority Planning Document** that was approved by Rehabilitative Services Administration (RSA). Based upon the law, it was discussed, as it states, that if services are to expand, improve, or added in a Community Rehabilitation Program (CRP), an Establishment Authority Planning document must be submitted to RSA to ensure federal guidelines are followed for a CRP and represents the policy and procedures. **Structured Discovery** training was completed. It was discussed that one or more VR services had to be provided and be geared toward maximizing employment or career advancement. Discussions included that it will be a state operated center, operated by OVR and the OVRB staff; located on the Mississippi Gulf Coast; will be CARF approved with certification in Structured Discovery. Ms. Young commented on the Counselor Letter, a reminder for clients to send documentation of hire date, pay stub(s) and/or letter from their employer so that their VRB case can be closed. Ms. Young discussed the proposal of **EV charging** stations be in rest areas which are operated by blind vendors; therefore, a letter was submitted to commissioners informing them of how it would help the blind program. A response was received from Commissioner Caldwell and they will hopefully include them in rest areas which would increase blind vendors' income.

Office of Business Development (OBD) - In October 2022, **training** was scheduled to include staff, which now includes career counselors, as well as business development personnel to streamline and create a singular process that can be utilized statewide. Emphasis is focused on training development skill sets. Late October, OBD will have their first **job fair** for this fiscal year at the Ag Museum in Jackson, MS. OBD is planning a **reverse job fair** at one of the AbilityWorks facilities in the Southern Region and working with **JSU** to plan '*lunch and learn*' opportunities. OBD's last pilot was working towards a **video resume**. Year end numbers were provided for last fiscal year and (OBD) contacted around **10,000 individual businesses**. OBD is on track with their **Job-a-palooza** events and transition events.

Ms. Meruvia announced the next meeting will be on December 2, 2022.

❖ **Formal SRC Input: *Responses to SRC Questionnaires from September 2022 Meeting***

1. **After attending the quarterly SRC meetings, 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?**
 - *I believe the services provided are great and I definitely believe the added facility on the coast will be a great asset to Mississippi.*
 - *Training for new hires needs to be improved as it is often delayed due to significant reasons such as not enough staff to provide training or training staff being busy with other tasks in order to provide timely training to the new hire. Many times, new hires do not receive appropriate training and eventually leave the agency. One of the goals of VR is never to set a client up for failure, however, often times, the decisions made by counselors, managers, and upper management do just that. In addition, information in the training manual and resource guide can be contradicting or confusing. Some information is self-explanatory though. There needs to be a training on professionalism in the workplace. Communication among co-workers in workplace need improvement. This can cause tension and stress throughout the workday among employees which may affect your delivery of services to the clients. Professionalism and integrity should be maintained otherwise; the agency's morale will plummet.*
 - *None.*
 - *The addition of the Structured Discovery services for individuals with visual impairments will offer a variety of choices for Mississippians who experience visual impairments.*
 - *The effectiveness of VR/VRB and the functions of the Designated State Unit seem to be mostly successful with helping people with disabilities to achieve an employment outcome. Improvement is always desirable.*

- 2. 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?**
- It appears that the consumers are pleased with the delivery of services they receive.*
 - Training for new hires needs to be improved as it is often delayed due to significant reasons such as not enough staff to provide training or training staff being busy with other tasks in order to provide timely training. Many times, new hires do not receive appropriate training and eventually leave the agency. One of the goals of VR is never to set a client up for failure, however, often times, the decisions made by counselors, managers, and upper management do just that. In addition, information in the training manual and resource guide can be contradicting or confusing. Some information is self-explanatory though. There needs to be a training on professionalism in the workplace. Communication among co-workers in the workplace need improvement. This can cause tension and stress throughout the workday among employees which may affect your delivery of services to the clients. Professionalism and integrity should be maintained otherwise; the agency's morale will plummet.*
 - No.*
 - Consumer Satisfaction Surveys indicate overall satisfaction. I am happy that staff read over each and every comment; passing them along to front line staff; and seek out ways to achieve higher satisfaction.*
 - According to the Consumer Satisfaction Survey, the process of delivering services were mostly favorable. The consumers seem to be least satisfied with the benefits provided through their employers.*
- 3. After attending the quarterly SRC meetings, 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?**
- The plans and priorities set by the State Plan will be very effective. I know you have to increase the goals to improve services to more clients.*
 - None at this time.*
 - None.*
 - The WIPA services being provided by blindness and low vision specialists is not an effective arrangement in my opinion. The staff workload is excessive and varied, leaving staff little time for the highly individualized benefits planning services needed. Generalized services are not enough for individuals seeking to truly manage their benefits while attempting work.*
 - The state plan goals and priorities seem to be reasonable. Evaluating the goals and priorities can be done during the quarterly meetings.*
- 4. The following question concerns the Presentation of Information on Policy. Do you have any comments or recommendations concerning the presentation on the Financial Needs Analysis or Structured Discovery?**
- The Presentation of the Financial Needs Analysis was presented well and in a format that was easy to understand.*

- No.
- No.
- *The financial needs analysis topic was tabled until 12/2/22 after members requested more time for consideration. My generalized opinion is that that VR is not a needs-based program; that individuals with disabilities should be supported and have encouragement to meet their highest earning potential without fear of losing crucial support services needed throughout their life time; but that funding can be limited. I believe the order of selection implementation following the Act's guidance to serve those with the most significant disabilities as first priority is a more judicious use of limited funds rather than a financial needs analysis. The use of all available comparable benefits should be fully required by front line staff prior to expending agency funding. Moreover, many states are turning in federal funds unspent. The SRC should assist in locating non-federal funds to match federal funds bringing more funding into the state if all eligible individuals cannot be served.*
- No Comments.

Additional State Rehabilitation Council Member Activities September 2022 Quarterly Meeting

Nominations Committee – Ms. Meruvia discussed nominations and commented that the last update was following up on the nomination process to ensure the letter was sent to Governor Reeves' office for nomination of the recommended individual and SRC should receive feedback soon.

The **Financial Needs Analysis** document will be provided at the December SRC meeting and will be included as an agenda item for SRC member to provide input.

Budget Committee Report – Ms. Hart, OVR Director, reported that Mr. Howard had budgeted \$20,000.00 for the SRC for this coming year and in December 2022. Ms. Treadway can report on the expenditures from the previous year.

Bylaws Committee Report – Ms. Meruvia, SRC Chair, discussed the reestablishment of the Bylaws Committee and believes the bylaws were last changed in 2018. Since then, there has been discussion regarding the need to update the Bylaws due to some changing processes of functioning that happened during COVID. The current Bylaws do not address the virtual meetings, records management, and record keeping; therefore, there is a need to review the current bylaws. Due to the upcoming reauthorization of the Rehabilitation Act, the SRC should ensure that the SRC bylaws reflect the Act and the regulations from the Act. Mr. Pablo Diaz volunteered to chair that committee and stated a copy of the bylaws has been received and shared it with other committee members. The bylaws are short and Mr. Diaz understands that they have requested support from a legal point of view so they can commence review and potentially bring recommendations to the rest of the board. Hopefully, by the next meeting, a draft will be available for approval at the next meeting. Ms. Meruvia requested a staff person to be appointed to work with the committee and be a technical expert on law and regulation. Ms. Hart, OVR Director, requested for Pam Hall to work with her in addition to Ms. Young. Ms. Meruvia stated, for the minutes, Ms. Hart, Ms. Young,

and Ms. Hall will be invited along with the additional person that will be a part of the bylaws committee as it goes forward in its work.

SRC Annual Report – Ms. Meruvia, SRC Chair, asked everyone to review the last fiscal year report and if they have comments on the report format, content, omissions, etc. to submit comments via email to them in the next two weeks. September 30th was the deadline for that input so that the staff that support the SRC in developing that report can have their input prior to them getting too far into the development of that report. Emails could be sent to Mary Meruvia or other individuals where addresses are available.

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:

- ❖ 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 – meeting recordings, preparation of the official legal record of the council meetings, and coordinate amendments to previous minutes
- ❖ Technical Support – technical assistance is provided during meetings 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 Vocational Rehabilitation and (OVR)

Office of Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind (OVRB)

CONSUMER SATISFACTION SURVEY - 2022

Results for the 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 poor* and '5' being *very good*. Thus, a high score indicates that the service was *very good*, and a low score indicates a rating of *very poor*.

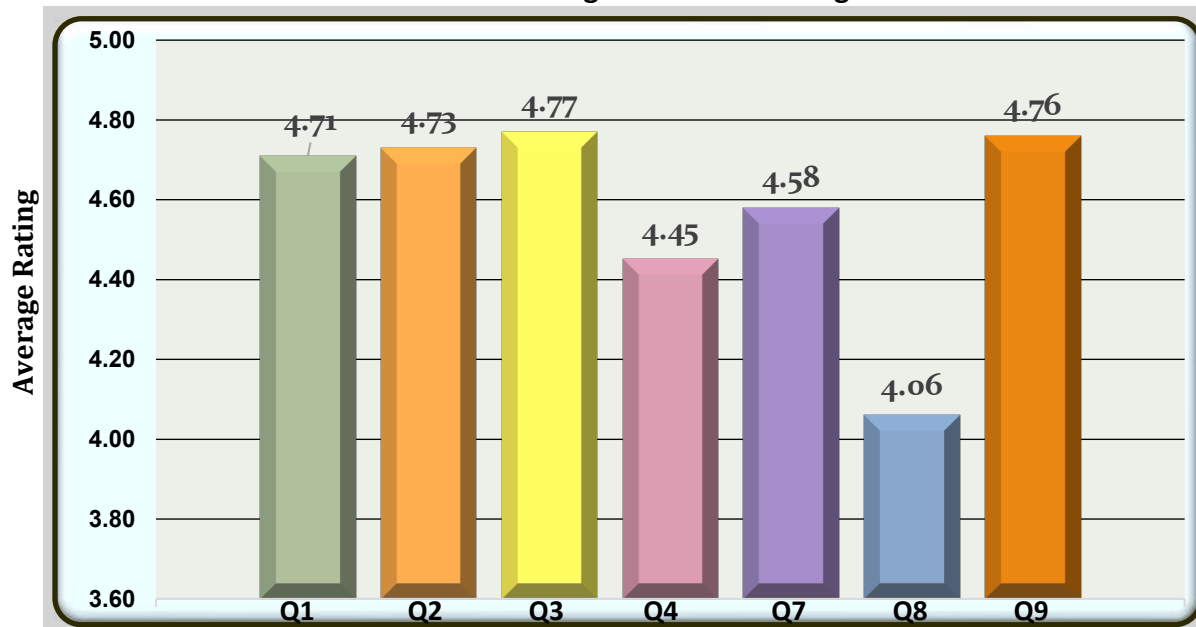
Table 1 - Service Ratings by Consumer

Rate the following items on a scale of '1 to 5', with '1' being very poor and '5' being very good.

	# of Consumers	Average Rating Mean
Q1 The help the OVR staff provided at the time you applied for VR services	1003	4.71
Q2 The help from the OVR staff during the planning of your services	1000	4.73
Q3 The help from the OVR staff when you were receiving your VR Services	991	4.77
Q4 The help you received from other agencies or service providers	195	4.45
Q7 Your employment outcome	536	4.58
Q8 Employment benefits provided by your new employer	318	4.06
Q9 Overall, how do you rate the services you received?	996	4.76

Note: The questions in the Questionnaire in Table 1 and Chart 1 are labeled Q1 to Q4 and Q7 to Q9.

Chart 1 - Average Consumer Ratings





LaVonda Hart
Director, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation

Dear Fellow Mississippians:

The Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) provided services to over **11,000** individuals with disabilities in 2022. OVR's concentration on servicing students with disabilities has developed into progressive relationships with schools, private providers, and community rehabilitation programs throughout the state of Mississippi. These working relationships have helped the educational community gain an understanding of Pre-Employment Transition Services. Pre-Employment Transition Services are designed to assist potentially eligible and eligible students with disabilities services that will provide an understanding and increase their knowledge of career paths, career decision making and career opportunities to explore. After these services, students are ready to make an informed decision regarding post-secondary education training and employment opportunities.

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) also provided Mississippi VR an opportunity to rethink and refocus VR services to not only students with disabilities, but adults with disabilities by creating a focus on increasing skills, providing counseling and guidance that will assist all eligible consumers with career information and assist them in developing a better understanding of their employment factors.

We are pleased to have the Mississippi State Rehabilitation Council as an important partner in the success of the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation in Mississippi and the consumers we serve. We appreciate the continued support of our MDRS Executive Director as we continue our mission to provide exceptional vocational rehabilitation services. We look forward to the continued partnership and support as we provide eligible individuals with disabilities with quality VR services that will lead to competitive integrated employment.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'LaVonda C. Hart'.

LaVonda C. Hart, MS, CRC
Director, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation
Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services

Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR)

2022 PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

In PY 2021, **11,689** 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 **2,059** 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 2021 was **2,110**.

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, the **11,689** 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 PY 2021 (July 1, 2021 through June 30, 2022) indicated the following:

- **Employment Rate - 2nd Quarter After Exit: 55.3%** - 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: 52.3%** - 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: 31.9%** - 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: 72.1%** - 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.
- **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. (*Data is not available yet*)

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 pre-requisite 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 SFY 2022, Deaf Services were provided to **2,957** Mississippians resulting in **1,067** 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 SFY 2022, **AbilityWorks** served a total of **1,374 individuals** with disabilities. AbilityWorks establishes cooperative agreements with local businesses to provide community-based work experience, customized training and on-the-job training.

OVR: SERVING MISSISSIPPI STUDENTS & YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES

Pre-Employment Transition Services:

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.

- ❖ 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 MSU, USM and NEMCC, and EMCC.

Transition & Youth Career Services

We work 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 2022, the number of students receiving transition services was **2,835** potentially eligible and **141** Transition Youth students found employment. Services may be provided to students both on and off campus or at one of the **15** AbilityWorks as a part of their school day.

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 SFY 2022, **616** individuals received Supported Employment services, **70** 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-living skills to help young people with significant disabilities make successful transitions to productive adult life.

Project SEARCH Mississippi Success: **141** individuals with disabilities have graduated from Project SEARCH Mississippi since Project SEARCH UMMC launched in August 2018. **97** of those individuals have gained employment. The job search continues for graduates. **73** interns will be participating in Project SEARCH across the state and will graduate in May, 2023.

What does a good Project Search Candidate look like?

- | | |
|--|--|
| ◆ Must have a strong desire to work. | ◆ Basic reading and writing skills |
| ◆ Meet all their high school credit requirements for graduation, certification or completion | ◆ Able to manage their own self-care skills |
| ◆ Must be 18-21 years old and eligible for Special Education Services | ◆ Good attendance record |
| ◆ Must be eligible for Vocational Rehabilitation | ◆ Able to pass drug test and background check |
| ◆ Basic and effective communication skills | ◆ Ability to understand safety & take directions |
| | ◆ Maintain appropriate behavior in the workplace |

Project Search - Current Sites/Participating Schools

<p>University Medical Center–Jackson Rankin County School District / Pearl School District / MS School for Deaf-Blind</p> <p>Baptist Hospital–Jackson Clinton Public School District / Jackson Public School District / Madison County School District</p> <p>Forrest General–Hattiesburg Hattiesburg, Petal and Lamar County School District</p> <p>North Mississippi Medical Center-Tupelo School District / Lee County School District / Nettleton School District</p> <p>South Central Regional Medical Center–Laurel Jones County School District / Laurel School District</p> <p>Merit Health River Region-Vicksburg / Vicksburg–Warren School District</p> <p>Merit Health-Natchez / Natchez-Adams School District</p> <p>Columbus Air Force Base / Lowndes County School District</p>	<p>Singing River Hospital / Pascagoula-Gautier School District</p> <p>King Daughters Hospital – Brookhaven / Lincoln County School District</p> <p>Singing River Hospital-Ocean Springs / Ocean Springs School District / Jackson County School District</p> <p>Neshoba General Hospital–Philadelphia/ Neshoba County School District / Philadelphia School District</p> <p>Baptist Memorial Hospital–Oxford Lafayette School District / Oxford School District</p> <p>Baptist Memorial Hospital–Olive Branch/ DeSoto County 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 Viking Range–Greenwood / Leflore Christian School / JZ George High School /MS Delta Comm. College</p>
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OVR: DISTRICTS SERVED

District I

Kenisha Black, District Manager

(Calhoun, Coahoma, Desoto, Lafayette, Marshall, Panola, Tate, Tunica, Quitman, Yalobusha)
51 County Road 166
Oxford, MS 38655
(662) 234-3171

District II

Keely Green, District Manager

(Alcorn, Benton, Itawamba, Lee, Pontotoc, Prentiss, Tippah, Tishomingo, Union)
2620 Traceland Drive
Tupelo, MS 38801
(662) 842-1010

District III

Kristin Brock, District Manager

(Bolivar, Carroll, Grenada, Holmes, Humphreys, Issaquena, Leflore, Sharkey, Sunflower, Tallahatchie, Washington, Yazoo)
104 Professional Plaza
Greenwood, MS 38930
(662) 453-6172

District IV

James Oswalt, District Manager

(Clay, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Lowndes, Monroe, Montgomery, Oktibbeha, Webster)
207 Industrial Park Road
Starkville, MS 39759
(662) 323-9594

District V

Janet Darden, District Manager

(Hinds, Warren)
3895 Beasley Road
Jackson, MS 39213
(601) 898-7004

District VI

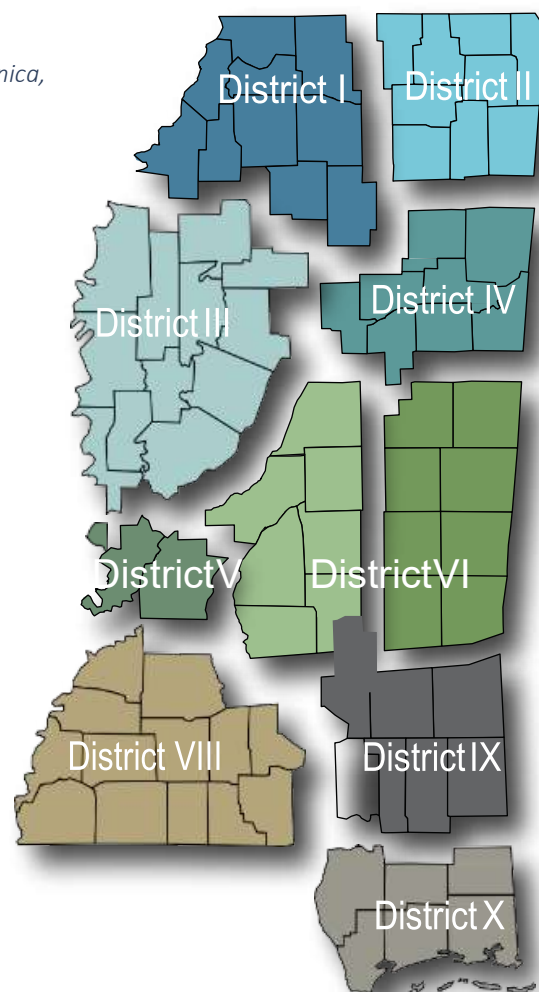
Jennifer Christmas, District Manager

(Attala, Leake, Madison, Rankin, Scott, Simpson, Smith)
1032 Center Pointe Blvd.
Pearl, MS 39208
(601) 706-5600

District VII

Sandra Sanders, District Manager

(Clarke, Jasper, Kemper, Lauderdale, Neshoba, Newton, Noxubee, Winston)
1003 College Drive
Meridian, MS 39304
(601) 483-3881



District VIII

Karen Brooks, District Manager

(Adams, Amite, Claiborne, Copiah, Franklin, Jefferson, Jefferson Davis, Lincoln, Lawrence, Marion, Pike, Walthall, Wilkinson)
1221 Parklane Road, NE McComb, MS 39648
(601) 249-2498

District IX

***Vacant*, District Manager**

(Covington, Forrest, Greene, Jones, Lamar, Perry, Wayne)
17 J.M. Tatum Industrial Drive, Suite 130 Hattiesburg, MS 39401
(601) 545-5619

District X

Tiffani Dailey, District Manager

(George, Hancock, Harrison, Jackson, Pearl River, Stone)
13486 Fastway Lane
Gulfport, MS 39503
(228) 575-3789

Dorothy Young
Director, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind



Greetings Friends and Colleagues,

On behalf of Chris Howard, MDRS Executive Director, we are privileged to present to our fellow Mississippians highlights of success from the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind (OVRB). OVRB continues to stand on its goal to provide timely vital vocational rehabilitation services to the communities of the blind.

During PY 2022, OVRB focused on “Moving the Needle,” providing more opportunities to gain skills, credentials and vocational training that will provide better careers for financial sustainability, verses just a job that minimally meets a living wage.

This year our division served over 1,900 Mississippians living with blindness and visual impairment. Moreover, 352 of those individuals closed successfully in Competitive Integrated Employment.

At our core, OVRB believe in the abilities of each person living with blindness. Our OVRB staff have the opportunity to determine how work changes lives. When connected to the right career, so many of the other goals we have for our lives become all that much easier to accomplish.

In line with our annual reports, we are honored to feature our fellow Mississippians who have achieved competitive success in this years’ report. Thank you to all OVRB consumers for helping to articulate the importance of employment for all, including those who just happen to have disabilities, by sharing some of your experiences.

Together OVRB continues to “Move the Needle,” in careers, training, skills and credentials, and most importantly OVRB’s impact in transforming lives, businesses, and communities. Thank you also to our staff, leadership, stakeholders, and members of the commission of rehabilitation services for your continued partnership. I look forward to working with you in 2023!

Happy new year!

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Dorothy L. Young".

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

OVRB: PROGRAM SERVICES & 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. Of the **1,902** successful employment outcomes by MDRS, **352** were achieved through Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind. VRB provided the 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 SFY 2022 was **1,902**. In preparation for the 2022 SRC Annual Report, the Regional Office Managers summarized key programs activities and accomplishments in addressing employment and independence.

Business Enterprise Program (BEP)

The Business Enterprise Program 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 2022, **37** individuals operated successful businesses.

Without Military Bases	2020-2021	2021-2022
Total Sales	\$879,534.15	\$1,326,223.13
Sales Tax Paid	\$40,822.00	\$65,103.00
Wages Paid	\$55,383.98	\$122,666.94
Without Military Bases	2020-2021	2021-2022
Total Sales	\$14,791,047.15	\$15,237,736.13
Sales Tax Paid	\$40,822.00	\$65,103.00
Wages Paid	\$9,107,480.98	\$9,174,763.94

(military bases **do not** report their sales tax to us)

Addie McBryde Rehabilitation Center for the Blind

The Addie McBryde Rehabilitation Center for the Blind provides traditional intensive evaluation, training, and adjustment services on the campus of the University of Mississippi Medical Center. In SFY 2022, the Addie McBryde Center provided training to **94** consumers.

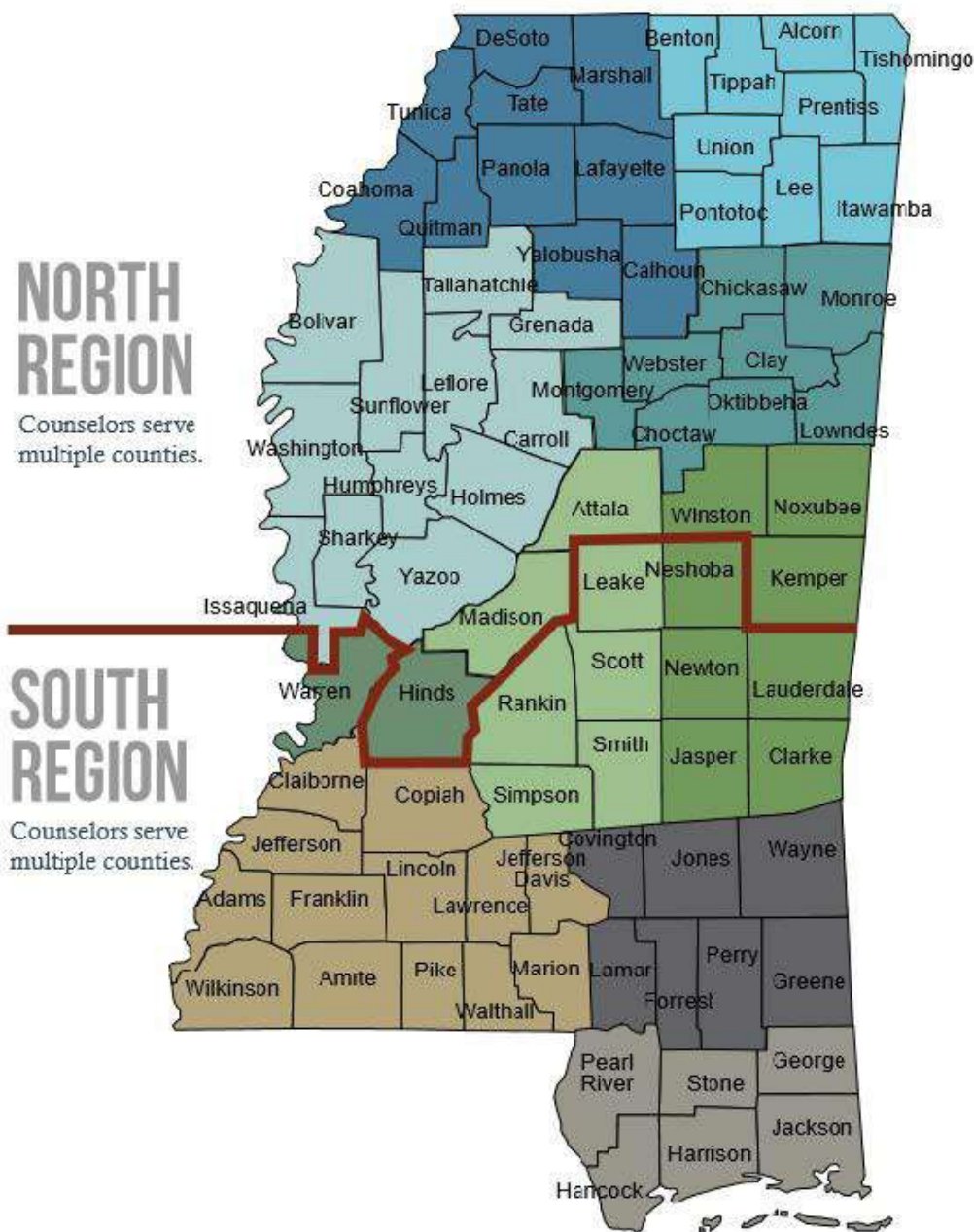
Independent Living Services for the Blind (ILB)

The Office of Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind - Independent Living for the Blind Program (ILB) serves 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. ILB serves consumers through indirect services such as health fairs, vision screening, peer groups, and outreach. The eligibility requirements for the **Older Blind Program** are age 55+ and legal blindness. The Part B eligibility requirements are legal blindness and a significant secondary disability. For both programs, gainful employment may not be feasible but independent living goals are feasible. ILB provided services to **486** Older Blind and **178** Part B.

Itinerant Teacher Program

Itinerant teachers work closely with VRB Counselors to coordinate services, evaluate clients' needs, develop living needs plans and instructional materials, and provide on-site training for consumers who are blind or visually impaired. In 2022, the Itinerant Teacher Program served 12 consumers.

OVRB: REGIONAL MAP



NORTH REGIONAL MANAGER

Bryce Upshaw
PO Box 5314
Jackson, MS 39296
(601)-987-7407
1-800-443-1000 (State Office)

SOUTH REGIONAL MANAGER

Frank Edgar
#17 JM Tatum Industrial Drive
Suite 130
Hattiesburg, MS 39401
(601)-545-1673
1-800-443-1000 (State Office)

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION FOR THE BLIND

OVR / OVRB

PROGRAM FUNDING AND SERVICES SUMMARIES

OVR / OVRB – Clients Served Summary

- Clients Served 13,591
- Clients Potentially Eligible 2,061
- Successfully Employed 2,462
- Individualized Plans for Employment Written 4,509

OVR / OVRB Program Funding

2022 – Section 110 Amounts

Federal Share:	\$49,922,356	(78.7%)
State Match:	<u>\$13,511,387</u>	<u>(21.3%)</u>
Total Funding	\$63,433,743	

OVR / OVRB

EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES – CONSUMERS 2022

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/VRB) <i>(Top Ten Occupations listed)</i>	# CLIENTS <i>(Top Ten listed)</i>	% to <u>TOP TEN</u> OCCUPATIONS (CLOSED REHAB)	% to <u>TOTAL</u> OCCUPATIONS (CLOSED REHAB)
Office and Administrative Support	296	19.33%	12.02%
Management	245	16.00%	9.95%
Transportation and Material Moving	168	10.97%	6.82%
Skilled Craft	143	9.34%	5.81%
Sales and Related	125	8.16%	5.08%
Production	116	7.58%	4.71%
Education, Training and Library	115	7.51%	4.67%
Healthcare Practitioners and Technical	114	7.45%	4.63%
Personal Care and Service	106	6.92%	4.31%
Food Preparation and Serving Related	103	6.73%	4.18%

OVR / OVRB

DEMOGRAPHICS - CLIENTS SERVED 2022

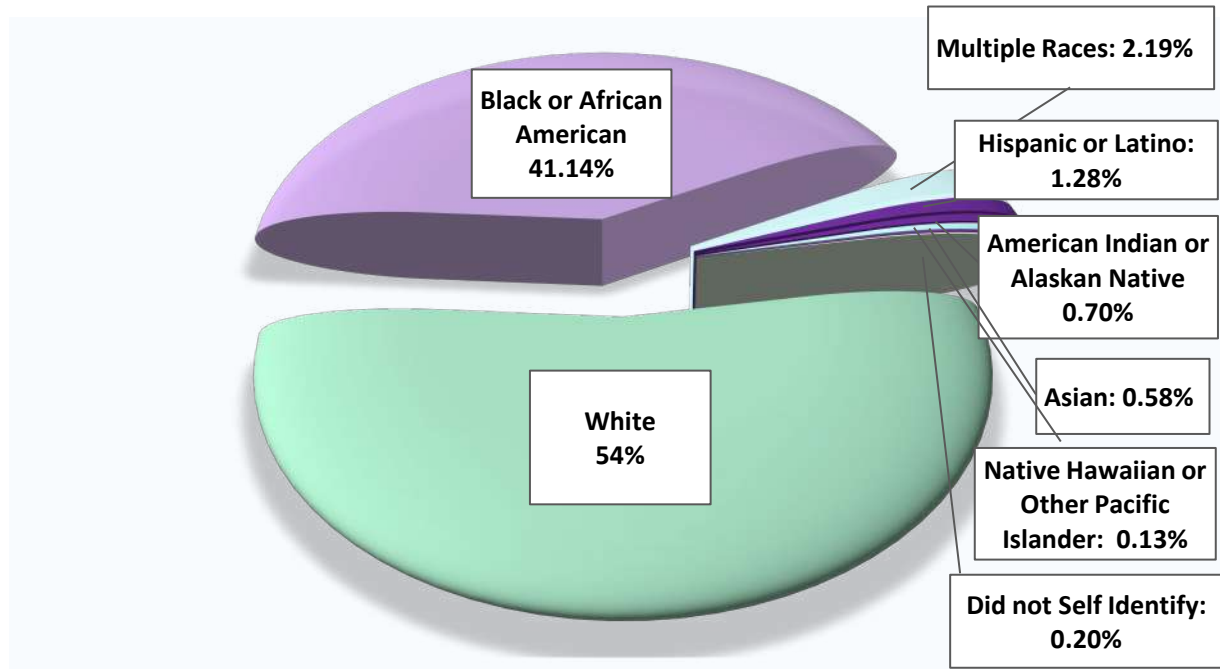
ETHNICITY / RACE

ETHNICITY / RACE	CLIENTS	%
White or Caucasian	7,641	53.76%
Black or African American	5,845	41.12%
Multiple Races	311	2.19%
Hispanic or Latino	182	1.28%
American Indian or Alaskan Native	99	0.70%
Asian	82	0.58%
Does not wish to Self-Identify	28	0.20%
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	19	.13%
Not Completed	6	.04%
TOTAL	14,213	

(Clients can choose more than one race)

VR-Ethnicity/Race Statistics includes Potentially Eligible

VR & VRB – ETHNICITY / RACE



OVR / OVRB

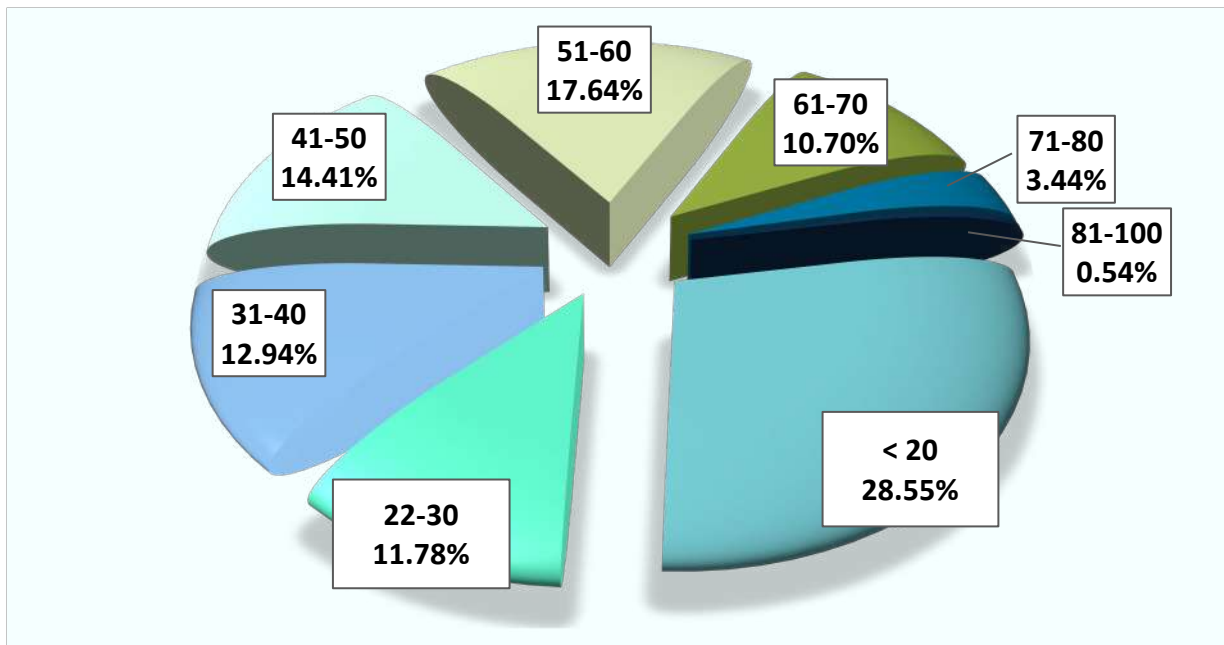
DEMOGRAPHICS - CLIENTS SERVED 2022

AGE RANGE

AGE RANGE	# CLIENTS	%
< 20	3,937	28.55%
21-30	1,624	11.78%
31-40	1,785	12.94%
41-50	1,987	14.41%
51-60	2,433	17.64%
61-70	1,475	10.70%
71-80	475	3.44%
81-100	75	.54%
TOTAL	13,791	

VR-Age Range Statistics includes Potentially Eligible

VR / VRB (Combined) – AGE RANGE



OVR Success Stories – *Client Spotlight*

Dominique Mayes: Determined and Persistent Success

Dominique Mayes is perhaps the most determined and persistent person you will ever meet. There is no challenge she won't meet head on and certainly never takes no for an answer. Malinda Wimbs, Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor, says, "She does not hear the word no. She's polite about it, but she doesn't stop. She'll say okay thank you, and she'll hang up and call somebody else."

Dominique has overcome many challenges. Born premature with cerebral palsy, cysts on her brain and seriously impaired vision, she has relied on a wheelchair since birth. But the encouragement and can-do attitude of her mom, her biggest cheerleader and advocate, has taught Dominique to never let anything hold her back.

Dominique says, "Don't let the world tell you what you can do. You know what your limits are but don't let those limits put you in a box. Do what you can do and speak out loud, that's my motto. Speak out loud. If you can speak out loud you have nothing to worry about and don't let your disability define you, none of that. Because I always tell people this chair, yeah it's my legs but it doesn't define where I can go."

Two days a week Dominique goes to work as a food service worker at the armed forces retirement home in Biloxi. It's a job she loves and just like all working people she has goals to buy a reliable car and do something fun for her family.

"My two goals is to get a better car for transportation and I am working towards that. And take my family somewhere. We have not been to any amusement parks. We have not been to any anywhere. I just want to be able to have financial freedom to show my mom appreciation for all the times that she's been there. Because when nobody else has been there that woman's been there," says Dominique. Dominique also glows when she talks about her professional family at the Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services who have helped her navigate so much red tape when it comes to securing services and creating opportunities.



She calls her Vocation Counselor, Malinda Wimbs, and Lisa Ladner, her Community Work Incentives Coordinator, her team.

"If my mother can't step in, they can step in and

o things that my mother possibly couldn't get done. So that's why every company or every program that I work with out here they my team to me," says Dominique.

Malinda Wimbs became Dominique's Counselor in 2018 and quickly realized she was extremely visually impaired. Wimbs says despite receiving a completion certificate from high school Dominique could only read at a first or second grade level because of her vision. Wimbs helped Dominique enroll at a learning center which has helped her learn to read at a higher level with assistive technology.

Malinda Wimbs says, "This machine has helped her be able to see the actual words that she's learning to spell and read. Now she sees them and she's now at a seventh grade level. The goal is to get her to the point of taking her GED because she wants to go to the college to get those courses to be that pastry chef that she wants to be.

Lisa Ladner says, "I'm very proud of her. I couldn't be more proud of her, seriously as if she'd have been my own child. Because she has come a long way, long way."

Dominique mayes has never let her disability define who she is. At 30 years old she is just getting started to hopefully one day become that pastry chef. But what is most important to her whether it's financial security or the guidance provided by MDRS, it's to let her mom know she's going to be ok.

"And I just want her to know when she's laid to rest in this world she has nothing to worry about because I'll be set. And I'll have the mindset to be able to do things on my own when she's no longer here," says Dominique.

A fitting tribute to the woman who blessed her with that determination.

OVR Success Stories – Client Spotlight

THS graduate learns job skills at Dossett Big 4 internship through MDRS

written by Blake Alsup (Published in the Daily Journal on July 21, 2022: [*THS graduate learns job skills at Dossett Big 4 internship through MDRS*](#) / Local News / [djournal.com](#))

A recent Tupelo High School graduate spent the last month learning job skills at Dossett Big 4 through a Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services (MDRS) program.

Jorden Daniel, 18, has used a wheelchair for as long as he can remember. He was diagnosed with cancer, which damaged his spinal cord, at 4 months old.

The Tupelo native graduated from THS, where he was a member of the school's fishing team, in May 2022.



Pictured: Jorden Daniel, from left, chats with Bubba Franks and Rudy Dossett III as Daniel completes an internship with Dossett Big 4 House of Honda in Tupelo as part of an internship through the Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services. The internship is Daniel's second through the statewide program.

Daniel still isn't entirely sure what he wants his career to be, but this internship, along with a previous MDRS internship at Midway Marine in Fulton last summer, has helped him develop skills and discover his strengths.

MDRS is a state agency that provides resources to help Mississippians with disabilities find new careers, live more independently, overcome obstacles and face new challenges. The agency's Office of Business Development seeks to support employers like Dossett Big 4 in sourcing, hiring and retaining qualified candidates with disabilities.

"We are so thankful that Jorden is a great fit as an intern at Dossett," MDRS executive director Chris Howard said. "Our Office of Business Development works hard to give employers quality job candidates, and Jorden is a really great example of what we do."

Daniel is currently wrapping up his final week as an intern at the car dealership, where he works with customers from start to finish, getting their vehicles the repairs they need. The teen writes repair orders for customers, enters them into the company's computer system, sends them to technicians and closes the order once the work is complete.

Bubba Franks, service manager for Dossett Big 4 House of Honda, has worked closely with Daniel throughout the internship. "Jorden's got great computer skills, a great personality and works with customers well," Franks said.

It's amazing, Franks said, how many times he's heard "Hey Jorden!" as people who know him have stopped by to have their car serviced.

"He's well known in Tupelo for sure," Franks said. And Daniel's aptitude for working with computers surprised even himself. "He's run through this program pretty quick," Franks added. "Within a day's time, he was running the entire program from start to finish."

At the conclusion of the MDRS program, Daniel plans to seek full-time employment. He hopes to find work similar to what he's done at Dossett Big 4. Without it, Daniel said, it would've been much more difficult to find work that suited him.

OVRB Northern– *Client Spotlight*

Sharron Guild

Sharron Guild was a client of Vocational Rehabilitation For The Blind with a visual impairment who applied for VRB services for assistance with achieving and employment goal to improve her financial situation for her family, and after receiving services from VRB, Sharron achieved her chosen employment goal. At the time of the determination of Sharron's eligibility, according to documents received from the University Of Mississippi Medical Center Ophthalmology, Sharron had been diagnosed with degenerative progressive high myopia having a visual acuity of 20/150 with her left eye and being totally blind with her right eye. Sharron was unemployed and her primary source of financial support was her SSI monthly cash benefits and child support she was receiving from her ex-husband. At the time of Sharron's determination of eligibility, Sharron had 3 children. One of Sharron's children was in college. Sharron's other 2 children were living at home. One child being school age and the other being 5 years old. Sharron's primary source of transportation was her family and friends. Sharron had a Nursing Degree from the University Of Mississippi Medical Center. Sharron's last place of employment before her case was opened with VRB was with a county hospital as a Registered Nurse, and because of her visual impairment, Sharron did not believe that she could see well enough to return to work as a Registered Nurse.

An Individualized Plan Of Employment was developed for Sharron to provide services to her to improve her financial situation, to help her to become more independent, and to improve the quality of life for Sharron and her children. Sharron was planned and provided services for training at the Addie McBryde Rehabilitation Center For The Blind. The training services were personal adjustment to blindness training to ensure that Sharron had the independent living skills needed for her to be able to obtain and maintain employment, orientation & mobility training to ensure that Sharron had the traveling and wayfinding skills needed to obtain and maintain employment, and advanced communications training to ensure that Sharron had the assistive technology skills needed for her to obtain and maintain employment. Sharron successfully completed her training at the Addie McBryde Center and obtained competitive, integrated employment as a Call Center Agent with the Mississippi Industries For The Blind. Sharron was planned and provided services for low vision aids to assist her with performing her work tasks as a Call Center Agent. Sharron's employment became stable and Sharron's case status was changed to employed.

After Sharron's case status was changed to employed, Sharron was planned and provided services for bioptic driver training and bioptic lenses for the training. Sharron completed her bioptic driver training and obtained her bioptic driver's license enhancing her independence within her community. Using her bioptic lenses, Sharron was able to safely drive herself and her family where they had to go and not have to depend on family and friends for her transportation. Services provided to Sharron by VRB enable her to achieve her chosen employment goal, improved her financial situation, and enhanced her independence within her community improving the quality of life for Sharron and her children. Sharron's case was closed rehabilitated in June of 2022.

Business Enterprise Program (BEP) - *Spotlight*



Andre Baskin

Currently, Andre Baskin is the Blind Manager within Business Enterprise Program of Mississippi. Andre began his journey with Business Enterprise in 2019 where he received his license as a Blind Vendor for the State of Mississippi on September 18, 2021. After receiving his license, Andre was awarded his first Vending Location on October 21, 2021, at the Walter Siller's Building.

Andre's vending pursuits have been a bright spot for this young man who now has his focus on operating the café at Siller's which he calls "HOUR CAFÉ".

Andre credits his work ethic from his days as a high school wrestler to push through until the end despite any obstacle he faces. His hobbies include spending time with family, fishing, and cooking.



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

Please send direct comments or questions to:

**Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services
VR Program Specialist-SRC Liaison
Post Office Box 1698
Jackson, Mississippi 39215-1698
1.800.443.1000
www.mdrs.ms.gov**

(A digital copy of this report is available at www.mdrs.ms.gov)