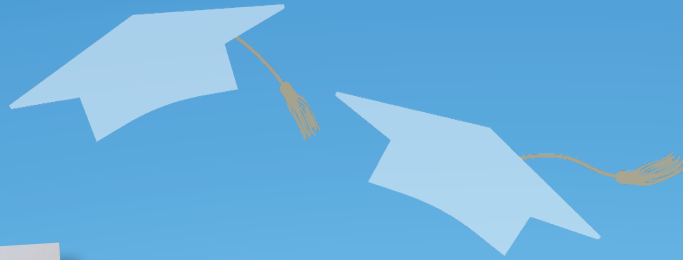


*The Sky is the Limit...*



# State Rehabilitation Council

## 2023 Annual Report



VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT FOR AGING  
AND REHABILITATIVE SERVICES

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# Message from the SRC Chairperson and DARS Commissioner



I am once again honored to present to you the annual report for the Virginia State Rehabilitation Council (SRC). In this report, you will find vital information and resources on the current status of vocational rehabilitation services offered within the commonwealth and on

the FFY 2023 performance of the Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS), which includes the Wilson Workforce and Rehabilitation Center (WWRC). As a council, we were able to tour the WWRC facility in November 2023, and had the opportunity to see firsthand the operations from both a student and an administrative perspective.

This year's theme is "The Sky is the Limit." This report highlights the achievements of persons with disabilities, employers of persons with disabilities in the vocational rehabilitation program, and the limitless possibilities for employment, independence and success of persons with disabilities.

Last year I served my first full term as elected chairperson, and I was honored to be re-elected to the role again this year. During the past year, I gained a more robust understanding of the responsibilities of the council and agency, due in large part to the continued support I have received from my fellow council members and our DARS support staff. I would personally like to thank them for the continued success of the Virginia State Rehabilitation Council.

The SRC is always engaged in recruitment for any interested individuals who meet the criteria for appointment. In particular, the experiences of current and former vocational rehabilitation clients, such as myself, are an invaluable asset to the council's advisory role to Virginia DARS. We ask that you share this report with your professional and personal networks.

Optimizing DARS' presence and visibility in Virginia helps the agency to successfully engage and serve individuals with disabilities and employers, thereby assisting individuals with disabilities to achieve employment outcomes in high-demand and rewarding careers in the competitive labor market.

Let's turn disabilities into abilities!

Justin M. Spurlock  
SRC Chairperson



I am grateful for the opportunity to work with Virginia's State Rehabilitation Council and the contributions they have made to support Virginia's Vocational Rehabilitation Program and the thousands of people with disabilities seeking assistance to obtain or

maintain employment. This year, the SRC's theme for the annual report is "The Sky is the Limit," which signifies the boundless potential and possibilities for those who dare to dream.

This past year, we have witnessed an increase in the number of applications received, youth and adults served, and individual plans for employment written as individuals receive vocational training and find sustainable employment. These success stories (see p. 4) are not only a testament to the resilience and determination of individuals with disabilities, but also a reflection of the invaluable partnerships forged with employers across the Commonwealth.

DARS also played a crucial role in the national celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. The Rehabilitation Services Administration invited DARS to speak on a panel about vocational rehabilitation (VR). As pictured on page 4, myself, and VR client Khalil Watson attended to share our stories about the impact of VR services – in Virginia as well as nationally.

As outlined in this report, through our innovative training programs and partnerships, we continue to provide individuals with disabilities the tools they need to succeed in a competitive job market. We have expanded our vocational training programs, which offer a wide range of technical skills and life skills, tailored to individual needs as well as those of Virginia's workforce.

In closing, I extend my heartfelt gratitude to the State Rehabilitation Council for their continued support. Let us embrace the theme of "The Sky is the Limit," with the mission to uplift individuals with disabilities, and not only enrich their lives but also nurture a Commonwealth that embraces the many gifts and talents they bring to the workforce.

Kathy Hayfield  
DARS Commissioner

# VR Consumer Success Stories

## Making Strides

Just weeks before his high school graduation in 2016, Khalil Watson was robbed and shot – becoming paralyzed from the chest down. He defied the odds and made literal strides, by not only pursuing a college education, but by walking across the stage with the help of a robotic exoskeleton to receive his diploma from Reynolds Community College.



Attending college was no small feat. Without an accessible vehicle, Khalil relied on public transportation to get back and forth to school. At times, he would miss the bus and ride his chair an hour each way. Khalil said, “I was left with two options: either go home and miss class or get to school the best way I could. So I did just that.”

DARS is assisting Khalil with his continued educational and vocational journey. Initially, DARS’ assistive technology specialists set up Khalil with a laptop, trackball mouse and voice-to-text software. Addressing his biggest barrier, transportation, VR counselor Kendra Johnson helped him get a driving evaluation at WWRC and set him up with behind-the-wheel training.

Khalil, along with DARS Commissioner Kathy Hayfield, recently spoke at the White House Forum on Disability Rights, commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. They served on a panel discussion (photo below) on vocational rehabilitation, where Khalil described how VR has positively impacted individuals with disabilities.



Khalil is now pursuing a degree in social work from Virginia Commonwealth University. He says he is passionate about helping others, especially after what he has experienced. “The reason why I was able to keep going is that I know things can always be worse than what they are, and I’ve made too much progress to quit now, which is why I decided to keep persevering.”

Listen to Khalil’s story on [VR Workforce Studio](#)  
Watch Khalil at the [White House Disability Forum](#)

Listen to Kaleb’s story on [VR Workforce Studio](#)  
Read Kaleb’s story in [Your Electric Cooperative Living magazine](#)

## Aiming High



Kaleb Jeffries has always dreamed of being a meteorologist. In fact, he met his idol, Jim Cantore from the Weather Channel, when Cantore visited the Eastern Shore. Kaleb grew up in Chincoteague watching rocket launches at NASA’s Wallops Island which in turn influenced his passion for weather events.

While charming and historic, this secluded peninsula has limited career opportunities. Kaleb met DARS Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Robin Sexauer while a Chincoteague High School student. Diagnosed with autism and ADHD, Kaleb attended Wilson Workforce and Rehabilitation Center for its PERT program, which included life skills training and a vocational evaluation where he excelled at electrical wiring.

Robin saw a spark in Kaleb that ignited after he attended the drone academy she developed with Eastern Shore Community College and Sentinel Robotics Solutions. “Sentinel Robotics was so impressed with Kaleb’s enthusiasm and persistence and wanting to learn that they offered him an internship,” Robin said.



The 10-day internship included a large-scale emergency response simulation at the Port of Virginia. Kaleb did set up, forecasting and monitoring with a weather balloon that morning, which was essential for the drone surveillance.

Through Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act funding, DARS set-up Kaleb with on-the-job training at Sentinel Robotics as an engineering technician, which began in October 2023. On Oct. 31, Kaleb took the commercial drone pilot license exam after two prior attempts and passed! He is an officially licensed drone operator by the Federal Aviation Administration. The sky is the limit for Kaleb!

# SRC Recommendations

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The SRC supports DARS in its commitment, in partnership with consumers and their informed choice, to provide services that prepare consumers through career pathways to enter the workforce in sustainable jobs with livable wages that decrease poverty, improve their economic quality of life and independence, and reduce their reliance on public benefits. The following SRC recommendations will help further these shared goals.

- 1) The SRC requests continued updates on WIOA performance measures, including the goals and targets established for these measures and DARS' progress towards those goals. In particular, DARS should examine median wage performance and performance gaps in each district with the expectation that the median hourly wage increases to \$15.00 per hour (\$17.50 per hour in the Northern district) to best align with increases in the minimum wage and the current economy. The SRC would also like DARS to:
  - a. Evaluate barriers that may exist to individuals with disabilities obtaining full-time employment.
  - b. Report on job placement and outcomes sorted by career sector, particularly those covered by the Pathways grant.
- 2) Equity in the provision of VR services is imperative. In order to achieve successful closures, DARS should examine barriers, successes, and service delivery—paying particular attention to marginalized and underserved populations-- as well as aligning efforts with available Census population and workforce participation data. DARS should:
  - a. Target outreach toward marginalized and underserved populations, working consistently toward representative customer demographics— particularly with regard to race/ethnicity, age, and location. The SRC requests that DARS analyzes its 55+ client population, including the prison re-entry population, being served.
  - b. Prioritize outcomes and employment in competitive integrated settings for unserved and underserved populations, including individuals transitioning out of subminimum wage or at risk of entering segregated settings, individuals with mental health conditions, and justice-involved individuals.
  - c. Support and grow innovative career pipelines through the Pathways project, apprenticeships, and the Commonwealth's Alternative Hiring Process and provide the SRC with regular updates on their impact on the employment of individuals with disabilities.
  - d. Offer access and clear pathways to skills, training, and credentials that support good jobs in the community with family-sustaining wages.
- 3) The SRC recommends that DARS continue collaborative efforts with Centers for Independent Living, as well as other community partners and agencies, to provide services and supports leading to expanded education, training, and employment opportunities for VR consumers, as well as identifying and implementing effective means to ensure seamless service delivery among community partners.
- 4) The SRC would like DARS, including WWRC, to continue to expand virtual programs that deliver VR resources and education to those who can benefit from remote learning and services, while identifying and addressing access challenges (including technological literacy) that may prevent some Virginians from fully utilizing these options.
- 5) The SRC encourages DARS to serve more transition age youth and requests that DARS provides quarterly reports on efforts to serve this population, particularly students with disabilities, through the Pre-ETS corrective action plan.
  - a. DARS should continue to increase outreach to local education agencies, families, and students regarding the availability of and access to transition and Pre-ETS services. This should include collaboration between DARS, the Virginia Department of Education, other community partners, and local education agencies.
  - b. DARS should identify local education agencies in which Pre-ETS is under-utilized and conduct direct outreach.
  - c. Data on referral sources to DARS (i.e., school or parent) for Pre-ETS or other transition services, types of services utilized, geographic trends, and information on the frequency with which students who receive Pre-ETS services move on to VR services should be evaluated and reported to the SRC.
  - d. DARS should work toward expanding work experiences for transition age youth, preferably while still in school, to improve employment outcomes at graduation.

## SRC Recommendations

- e. DARS should provide regular updates on meeting the components of this recommendation, including progress in meeting the requirements of the Pre-ETS corrective action plan.
- 6) The SRC encourages DARS to define its existing workforce and examine opportunities for improved employee diversity with respect to populations served, while also recognizing recruitment and retention challenges among its highly skilled direct service workforce.
- 7) The SRC asks that DARS works collaboratively with business and workforce development partners to identify the hiring needs of employers and match those needs with the knowledge, skills, and abilities of VR consumers. The SRC would like DARS to discover and create new opportunities that expand employment options for VR consumers and that are more effective in meeting the Commonwealth's workforce demand.
- 8) The SRC requests that DARS' workforce requirements and training ensure that personnel have specialized training and experience that enables them to work effectively with individuals with disabilities, particularly individuals whose disabilities may require specialized services such as those with cognitive or psychosocial impairments.

The SRC requests that DARS' updates to the council on these recommendations include any available data and performance measures that can be meaningfully reported.

## SRC Activities

During Federal Fiscal Year 2023 (October 1, 2022 through September 30, 2023), the Virginia State Rehabilitation Council held four meetings and an annual retreat. The council held its physical meetings at DARS' headquarters in Henrico County, a central location for membership and DARS support staff. At each meeting, council members reported on the activities of the constituencies they represent and their advocacy efforts. Members also shared information on successes and obstacles, and had the opportunity for robust discourse with DARS leadership.

Of additional note, in November 2023 (i.e., into FFY 2024), the council held its meeting and annual retreat at the Wilson Workforce Rehabilitation Center (WWRC) in Fishersville. The council had requested its November 2023 meetings be held at WWRC, the comprehensive vocational-education facility operated under the scope and mission of DARS. While on campus, the council was provided with a facility tour and gained insight into the comprehensive wraparound services provided to assist consumers with their goals. WWRC offers services to students in a residential campus setting to allow them to gain independent living skills that many desire to transition back to their home community.

### 2023 SRC Activity Highlights:

- The SRC held all four of its quarterly meetings and its annual retreat in-person. Quarterly meetings remain an active and invaluable forum for the council to provide advice, information, and support for Virginia DARS' vocational rehabilitation and supported employment programs.



*Pictured left to right: Talisha McAuley-Davis, Chesterfield; Madeline Nunnally, Henrico; Frederick Foard, Virginia Beach; Joliefawn Liddell, Norfolk; Heidi Lawyer, Henrico; and Justin Spurlock, Aylett.*

# SRC Activities

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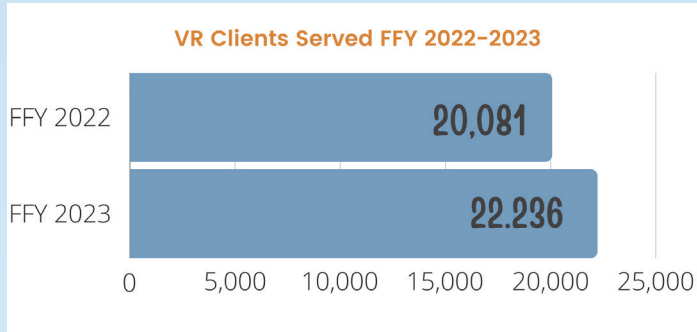
- Three SRC subcommittees carried out business outside of full council meetings—a Nominations Subcommittee, an Annual Report Subcommittee, and a Hearing Officer Subcommittee. Each of these subcommittees provided updates to the full council on their areas of focus. The Hearing Officer Subcommittee is a joint collaboration between the State Rehabilitation Councils for DARS and for the Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired.
- The DARS commissioner provided the council with routine agency updates, including an update at the conclusion of the 2023 Virginia General Assembly session on encouraging progress toward the elimination of subminimum wage in the Commonwealth.
- Pursuant to the Memorandum of Agreement approved in November 2023, DARS will continue to administer the Consumer Satisfaction Survey on the SRCs behalf into FFY 2024.
- Executive committee elections were held on October 1, 2022, with the chair and vice chair poised to lead the committee and council in these roles for the year.
- Updates on DARS Division for Rehabilitative Services performance outcomes, successes, and barriers were provided by the deputy commissioner of DRS and the director of the Wilson Workforce and Rehabilitation Center (or their designees) at each quarterly meeting.
- The SRC kept up with significant developments and highlights in DARS' VR Programs, including Field Rehabilitative Services, Workforce Programs, and Employment Services and Special Programs with presentations from program directors.
- DARS' director of policy and legislative affairs provided the council with quarterly updates on policy changes and legislative matters.
- Information was presented to the council on the development of the VR sections of the Combined State Plan. In particular, SRC members received an extensive briefing on the drafted goals/priorities and strategies to be included. The council provided its feedback, which was accepted by the agency and will be reflected in the final version of the Combined State Plan.
- The contracts for two fair hearing officers renewed, a new hearing officer was contracted, and the council received a Fair Hearings Report from the VR appeals coordinator.

# VR Performance Outcomes

In FFY 2023, DARS saw an 11 percent increase in the number of clients served the past year or 2,155 more individuals.

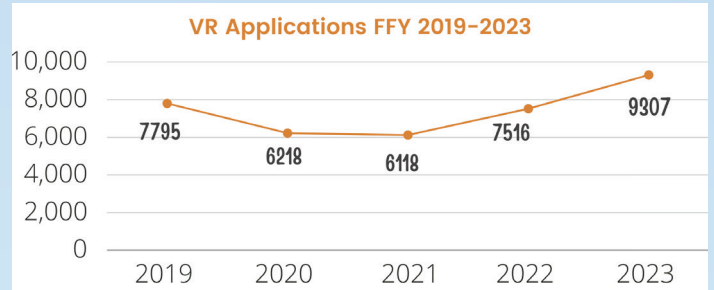
Several factors impacted the number of clients served in 2023.

- New focus on applications
- 2023 began with more cases open due to increased applications from 2022

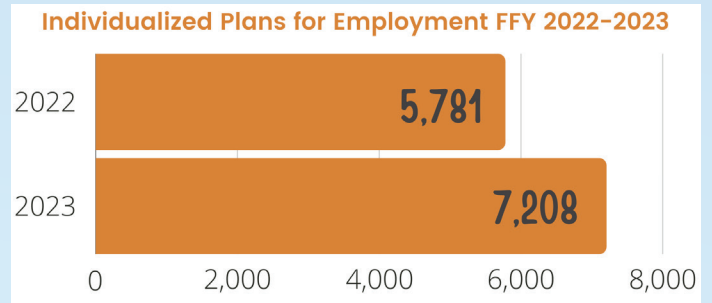


DARS assisted 2,437 Virginians with disabilities in finding employment after receiving VR services, achieving 81 percent of its statewide annual goal of 3,015.

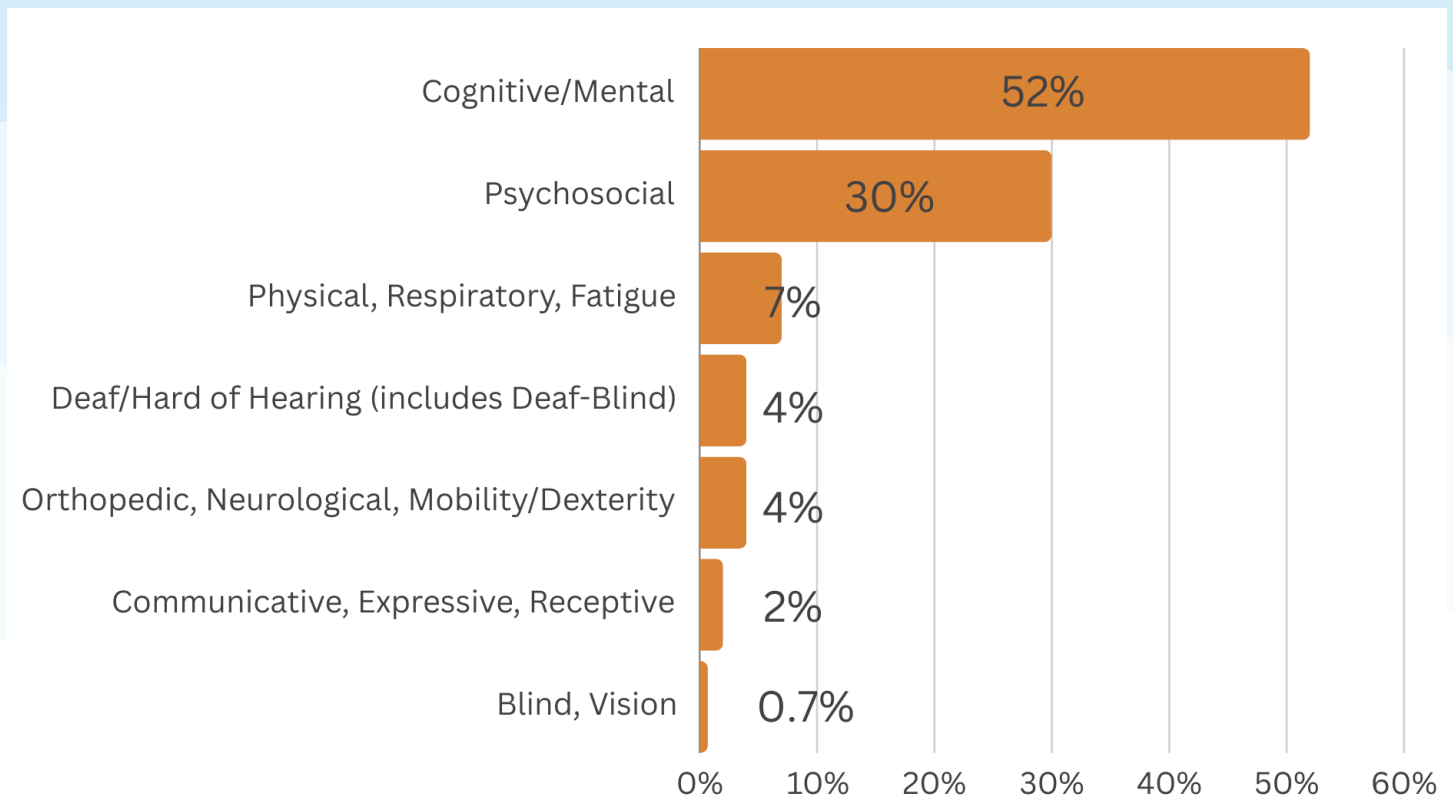
The number of VR applications received increased 24 percent from 2022 to 2023, equaling 1,791 more applications.



The creation of Individual Plans for Employment (IEP) increased 25 percent in 2023 with 7,208 plans compared to 5,781 written in 2022. This achieved 107 percent of the statewide goal of 6,738.



## Primary Disabilities of VR Clients Served in FFY 2023





# VR Consumer Satisfaction Survey

The State Rehabilitation Council partners with DARS to assess satisfaction with services received through the Division of Rehabilitative Services (DRS). The DARS Consumer Service Satisfaction Survey from FFY2000 through FFY2013 collected data on closed cases. Beginning in FFY 2014, the consumer satisfaction survey captured feedback from clients during service delivery [post Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) but prior to Employment]. The purpose in the change of the methodology was to assess satisfaction in real time. In addition, this methodology allows for identification of issues early in the VR process so that any needed adjustments in the clients' experience at DARS may be implemented.

The response rate for the FFY2022 survey was higher than in FFY2021. A total of 876 surveys were completed out of 2,933 surveys mailed or emailed. The response rate was 30 percent in FFY22 compared to a response rate of 21 percent in FFY21.

The graphs here include rates of agreement ("yes") to the corresponding queries from FFY2019 through FFY2022. There were no statistically significant decreases in percentage of agreement from FFY2021 to FFY 2022.

Respondents were questioned as to whether the counselor and client were in agreement with plans for reaching the client's employment goal (Chart 1). The highest percentage of respondents answered "yes" in FFY19 with 76 percent of the respondents believing that they and the counselor were in agreement on the plan goals for employment. Rates of agreement with this statement fell in FFY20 to 69 percent. The rate of agreement continued to decrease in FFY21 (68%) and in FFY22 (66%).

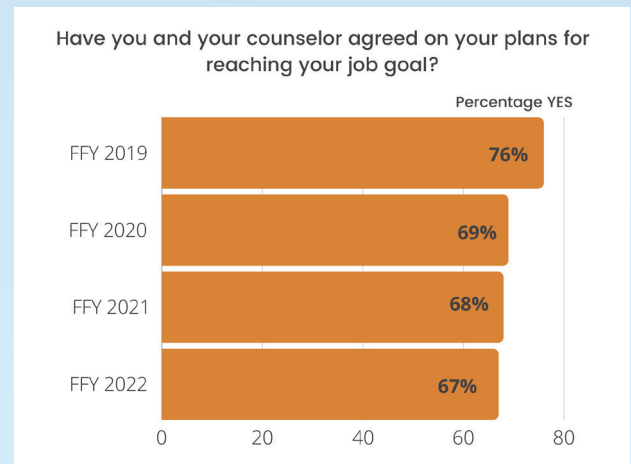


Chart 1

Chart 2 shows the results of agreement with the question of whether the counselor is doing what he/she said they would do to help reach the job goal. The highest rate of agreement was in FFY19 at 74 percent followed by a decrease in FFY20 to 69 percent, FFY21 to 67 percent with a rebound in FFY22 to 69 percent.

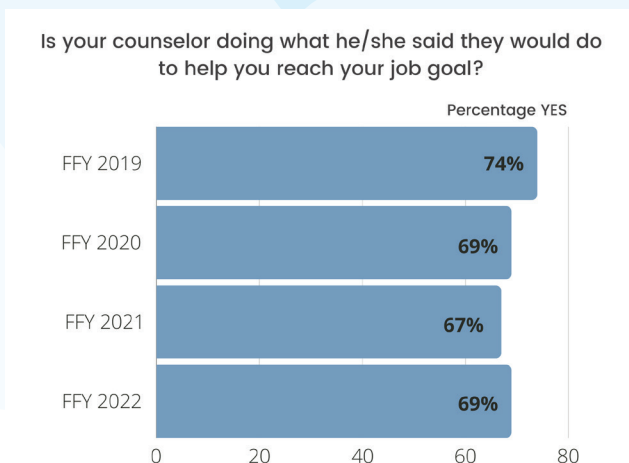


Chart 2

Chart 3 shows agreement with the question of whether the counselor is connecting the client with services needed to reach their job goals. Rates of agreement have continually decreased from 71 percent in FFY19 to 69 percent in FFY20, FFY21 of 68 percent and to a low of 65 percent in FFY22.

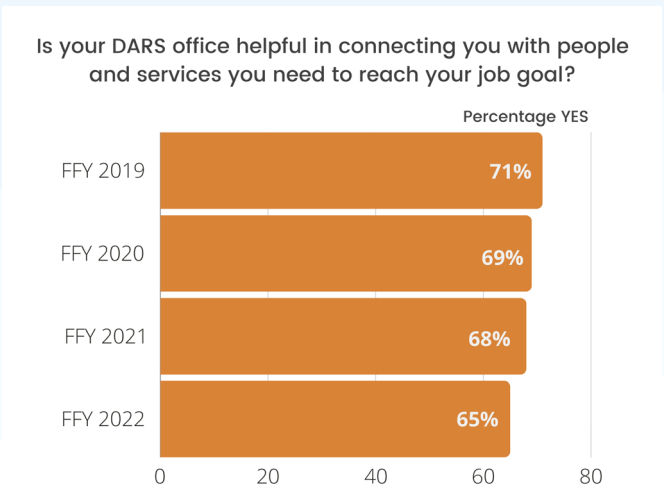


Chart 3

# VR Consumer Satisfaction Survey

Clients' satisfaction with the level of contact they had with the DARS office continued to decline (Chart 4). DARS highest level of respondents stating they had satisfactory contact with the offices was in FFY20 with 73 percent of respondents stating they were pleased with the contact. The percentage decreased to 71 percent in FFY21 and further decreased to 69 percent in FFY22.

The question related to moving toward employment in a timely manner has consistently been our lowest rated question (Chart 5). In FFY2019, 58 percent of the respondents stated we were moving in a timely manner compared to 53 percent in FFY22. There was a one percentage drop in this question from FFY21 to FFY22.

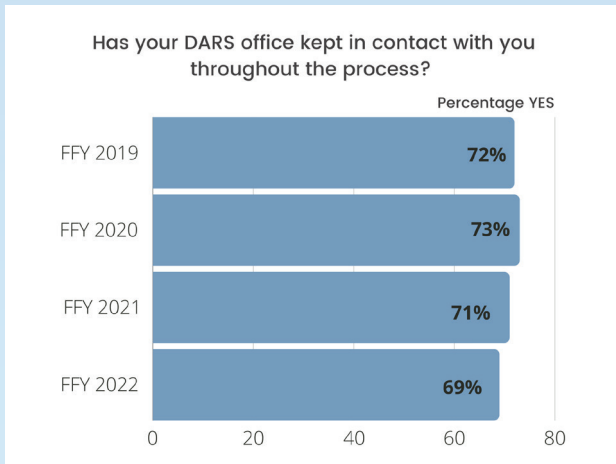


Chart 4

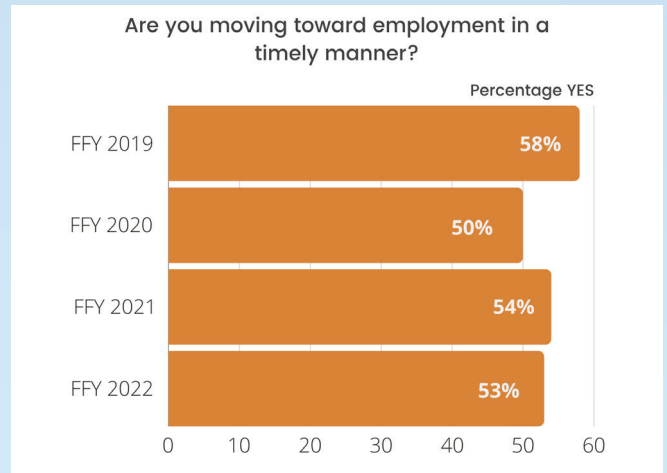
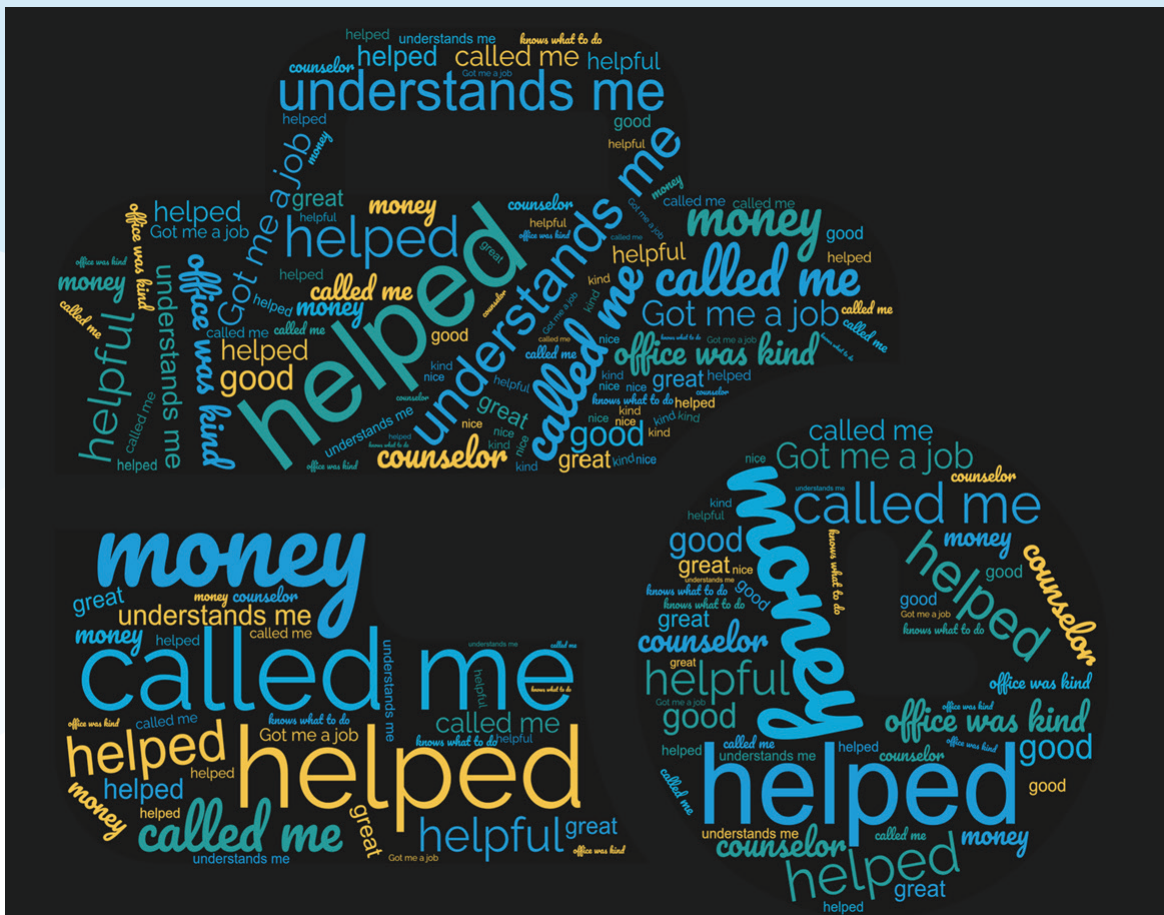


Chart 5

The word cloud summarizes the open ended questions and remarks.



# VR Program Highlights

## We are VR – FRS Year in Review

Field Rehabilitation Services (FRS) covers 30 full-service offices statewide and had a year of growth and expansion.

Staff increased DARS' visibility and presence in local communities targeting under served populations as well as an intense focus on building and sustaining community partnerships.

- This increased community focus resulted in 9,307 applications for VR services, an increase of 2,300 applications over 2022 (23.8 percent increase).
- DARS served 22,236 consumers, an increase of 2155 people with disabilities engaging in services.
- 64.5 percent of those consumers who found employment maintained that employment in the 4th quarter after program exit.

FRS operated with three main priorities this year:

- Grow community partnership and visibility for VR programs
- Increase client access to VR services
- Enhance skill development for Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors and staff with comprehensive training redesign

## Growing community partnerships and visibility

Every FRS office across the state increased its visibility in the community by working with numerous partners that provide wrap around services for people with disabilities. Examples include: Presentations and attendance at resource fairs, schools, transition events, addiction recovery and mental health practices, resource access networks for employers, as well as community based events targeted toward people with disabilities. We cultivated partnerships with the Office of Disabilities at Virginia Tech, Liberty University, James Madison University and many community colleges across the Commonwealth. A noteworthy partnership occurred with Eastern Shore Community College and led to the creation of the Drone Academy which was well attended by enthusiastic participants.

## Increased client access to services

FRS made a commitment in 2023 to “meet our customers in the time frames they need us to meet them.” This commitment led to same day/walk-in services being offered in many locations across the commonwealth.

These walk-in days not only offer clients immediate access to the eligibility process, but also offer a wide range of skill assessments, job clubs and career readiness activities to encourage immediate engagement in services. These days

are ‘all hands on deck’ for FRS staff who have appreciated the ability to collaborate together, provide services and work towards a common goal of meeting the immediate needs of our customers. Many of our offices reported upwards of thirty people coming to access services on these dedicated days.

In addition to walk-in eligibility days, offices in Northern Virginia created a month-long calendar of employability/soft skill/job club and career readiness skill classes that are available to all DARS clients. DARS expects this practice to be duplicated in offices around the state in 2024.



Students learned the basics of drone operation in a summer academy sponsored by DARS' Pre-Employment Transition Services. Julie Young (in pink dress) with Virginia Peninsula Community College led the camp. Each student earned a drone to take home and a TRUST certificate so they can be FAA-certified recreational pilots.

## Enhanced skill development of VR counselors and staff

August 2023 launched the comprehensive redesign of our internal New Counselor Skills Training course. This program is four, week-long, cohort classes focused on technical skill development as well as includes learning collaboratives, mentoring and individualized support for our counseling, job placement and support staff. Taught by field leadership and supported in local offices, the evaluations of this re-designed program have been outstanding.

DARS increased individual training opportunities as well offered classes for Certified Rehabilitation Counselor (CRC) credit. These classes are recorded and hosted on the DARS intranet.

The focus of FRS continues to be: service excellence, increasing visibility of VR in local communities, and retaining an outcome driven, technically proficient workforce that provides outstanding customer and quality service and supports to participants.

# VR Program Highlights

## RSA Pathways Grant Pathways to Careers

Year two of the Pathways to Careers grant saw expansion to 15 DARS offices. The team is actively working with 200 DARS candidates. Pathways continues to work with the Virginia Department of Human Resource Management (DHRM) on the state Alternative Hiring Process and June saw growth to current state employees.

Partnerships. Apprenticeships. Equity.



Project staff and researchers meet regularly to generate qualitative data around the efficacy of the project materials for a broad audience, strategies for providing interventions to diverse populations with a variety of disabilities and interests.

Pathways responded to 1,083 requests for certificates of disability and issued 399. Additionally, 255 of those requests were referred to 20 different local DRS offices for VR services.

## Windmills Training

The DARS Business Services team and select placement counselors, vocational evaluators, and assistive technology staff presented 52 Windmills trainings to over 1751 individuals with public agencies, businesses, and community partners through the end of September 2023.



**WINDMILLS**  
HARNESS THE POWER OF INCLUSION

Windmills is designed to increase awareness of the role that attitudes play in the employment of people with disabilities. The team added a module this year, "Taking Emotions out of Emotional Disabilities," which explores the effects of employers' reactions to emotional disabilities and how employers can offer reasonable accommodations to create an emotionally neutral environment. Windmills training is actively promoted by DHRM and the WIOA accessibility task force to increase employer proficiency in working with individuals with disabilities.

## Good Life Café

DARS received a no-cost, year-six extension on the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living and Rehabilitation Research grant. The GoodLife CAFE (Community Access, Financial Empowerment) project is designed to study the impact of financial coaching and how ABLE accounts may increase community engagement for transition-age youth who receive Social Security benefits.

Researchers are studying additional data from the project, including the role of supports (family or paid) in participants' successes, guidance on how to navigate potentially complicated conversations with family as it relates to finances, and case studies to document how the project and participants successfully pivoted project protocols during a global pandemic.

## Project SEARCH

DARS along with the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) continues to develop Project SEARCH programs across the commonwealth. Current strategies focus on developing programs with Virginia military installations. Joint Base Langley/Fort Eustis was the first program in Virginia to host a Project SEARCH program. In September 2021, Naval Air Station Oceana Project SEARCH began working with 10 students from the local school district. U.S. Army Garrison at Fort Gregg-Adams began in August 2022 and is the third military installation project in Virginia.



Student interns at Bon Secours St. Mary's Hospital Project SEARCH receive their completion certificates in June 2023. DARS administers 19 Project SEARCH locations in Virginia. Many interns are hired full time.

## Start on Success

DARS has expanded the number of Start on Success Programs in Virginia. There are currently eight programs and Virginia is expected to have nine programs in the 2023-2024 academic year. DARS counselors work closely with all projects and provides wage reimbursement for the first three years of each project.

## Real Pay for Real Jobs EPIC Grant

The Real Pay for Real Jobs Education and Outreach, Partnership Development, Provisions of Individualized Services, and Capacity Building (RPRJ EPIC) Project is tasked with creating sustainable services and supports to assist individuals who are currently being compensated subminimum wages under a 14(c) certificate and those who are at risk of entering subminimum wage to engage in services that result in competitive integrated



# VR Program Highlights

employment (CIE). Over the course of five years, the project plans to serve 600 VR-eligible individuals.

Changes to state law have altered the landscape of subminimum wage employment in Virginia. These changes prevent individuals from entering subminimum wage employment, disallow new 14(c) certificates from being issued and invalidate current 14(c) certificates after July 1, 2030. This has resulted in several 14(c) employers discontinuing this programming and/or to adapting programming to meet minimum wage standards within non-integrated settings.

## **Supported Employment (SE) and Customized Employment (CE)**

Technical Assistance partners have initiated needs assessments with 14 (c) partners to begin training, but some of these organizations are electing not to engage in CE services at this time. Other Employment Services Organizations have also expressed experiencing challenges with CE services and RPRJ EPIC leadership has engaged in listening sessions with current CE our Customized Employment TA partner to explore how to alleviate these challenges.

## **Individual Placement and Support (IPS) Services**

To support and expand competitive integrated employment for people with mental health conditions, the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) launched the Advancing State Policy Integration for Recovery and Employment (ASPIRE) initiative. ASPIRE provides selected states tailored and targeted technical assistance to integrate state policy, program, and funding infrastructures to expand evidence-based employment services for people with a disability resulting from mental health conditions. Emphasis is placed on expanding best practices such as the Individual Placement and Support (IPS) model of Supported Employment.

IPS Services are provided as a collaboration between local DARS offices and Community Services Boards (CSBs). The two current sites are in the Chesterfield and Fairfax/Alexandria areas. These two sites have served 139 individuals, resulting in 98 job starts working an average of 21 hours per week and earning an average wage of \$15.50 per hour.

A second round of the ASPIRE Initiative continuing through July 2024 will provide Virginia with subject-matter expertise for strategic planning that employs mental/behavioral health, Medicaid, vocational rehabilitation, and

workforce and education systems to deliver results and gives state and federal agencies, mental health service providers and other stakeholders a forum to explore policies and practices for implementing evidence-based models aimed at increasing competitive integrated employment for people with mental health conditions.

## **Assistive Technology Services**

DARS' assistive technology (AT) professionals provide dynamic and customized AT services throughout the Commonwealth. Agency clients require timely and effective AT services to obtain credentials, and prepare for, secure, or retain employment. Some innovative approaches to service delivery include: expansion of telerehabilitation services; individual and group AT training; custom fabrication services; emergency AT services; client AT training in time management and sensory processing; and internships for higher education students pursuing occupational therapy degrees.

VATS has been a partner with Virginia No Wrong Door (NWD) since 2019. The partnership has helped VATS and NWD to expand their mission, and to improve access to and acquisition of AT devices and services for older adults and Virginians with disabilities. Though this partnership, VATS has forged stronger relationships and developed innovative programs with area agencies on aging (AAAs), centers for independent living (CILs), other NWD partner agencies, and non-profits that serve Virginians. VATS worked with NWD to develop and expand several AT kits to engage with community members. These kits include equipment for emergency preparedness, social health, sensory regulation, falls prevention, and adaptive gaming. VATS prioritized recreation equipment this year, providing a therapeutic recreation aqua bike at Wilson Workforce and Rehabilitation Center as well as one youth-sized recreation wheelchair at NWD partner, Sportable, Inc. Additionally, VATS has been working with NWD and AAAs on a community wellness and a cognitive health AT kit.

VATS, the Virginia Department of Emergency Management (VDEM), and the Foundation for Rehabilitation Equipment and Endowment (F.R.E.E.) continue to collaborate to distribute gently used durable medical equipment (DME) to statewide disaster shelters in the event of natural disasters and or emergencies. These shelter kits include wheelchairs, walkers, rollators, canes, bedside toilets, and crutches. VDEM stores the equipment in its Richmond warehouse and will transport to shelters as needed during a declared disaster.

# WWRC Program Highlights

Wilson Workforce and Rehabilitation Center (WWRC) is located in Fishersville, Virginia. The center is a key resource for DARS, providing comprehensive vocational rehabilitation services to eligible consumers with disabilities to prepare for gainful employment. Here are some highlights for state fiscal year (July 1, 2022 - June 30, 2023) and federal fiscal year (FFY) 2023.

In August 2022, WWRC piloted a new semester system. The planned semesters included a fall 18-week semester, spring 18-week semester and a six-week summer semester. Upon completion of the first semester (December 2022), an analysis of the change was conducted.

Based on the analysis, the center leveraged the models' strengths by expanding the integration of ancillary services within the student body and reducing the impact on classroom disruptions.

Additionally, changes were made to the scheduling of class intakes from once every 18 weeks to once every six weeks. This enabled the center to increase its ability to meet the demand and reduce wait times for its vocational training services. This was all done with no degradation to the quality of instruction.

## Supported Work Readiness Division

Through this past SFY, WWRC's Supported Work Readiness Division (SWRD) has continued to find innovative methods to break down students' barriers to employment. The SWRD expanded its ability to provide physical fitness training and education, enabling students to perform more physically demanding jobs and reduce risk of injuries. Incorporating physical fitness activities has shown to improve students' physical wellbeing as well. The division will continue to evaluate its programming to increase its potential to instill healthy lifelong habits.

The center's driving programs led by the SWRD continue to be popular and are proven to reduce transportation as a barrier to WWRC students' employment. Innovative staffing processes have enabled the center to meet the ever-increasing demand for this service while not impacting the divisions responsibilities to other occupational therapy-led services.

## Workplace Readiness Program

In April, the Workplace Readiness Program (WRP) officially launched. The program focuses on 13 workplace readiness behaviors and "soft skills" used at WWRC and identified as critical workplace behaviors. WRP continues to be marketed and reviewed to ensure maximum utilization and



FFY 2023 Vocational Training Graduates	Number
External Training Option	33
Materials Handling	36
Manufacturing Technology Training	19
Food Service	20
Auto Mechanics	12
Business	10
Health Occupations	7
Information Technology	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>141</b>



FFY 2023 Consumers Served by Service Area	
Postsecondary Rehabilitation Transition (PERT) Program	578
Driving Services	448
Vocational Evaluation	404
Workplace Readiness (WRP)* Program	149
Vocational Training Graduates	141
<i>*program began in April 2023</i>	

# WWRC Performance Outcomes

effectiveness in preparing students for WWRC training programs and employment. The initial capacity was 30 consumers and has now expanded to 45 consumers. Consumers will experience both classroom and lab instruction to learn and apply the 13 workplace readiness behaviors.

## Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act

WWRC continues to support WIOA and DARS performance measures, especially those aligning with workforce credentials, measurable skills gains, and business engagement. The center has evolved WIOA-recognized workforce credentials in every training program and continues to focus on helping consumers find a career pathway. Pre-employment training services (Pre-ETS) leads consumers to employment that is retained over time with advancement and increased wages. However, this year there was a slight decline in the second quarter median earnings for vocational training graduates. The five-year average (July 1, 2017 – June 30, 2022) was \$4,535.54.

## Postsecondary Education/Rehabilitation Transition Program

PERT is a program for students transitioning from high school to adult life and assists youth in discovering their options. DARS clients who qualify are referred through their VR counselor. During FFY 2023, 578 explorations (up from 533 in SFY 2022) were performed for youth with disabilities through the PERT program, both on campus and in the community.

*\*The change in fiscal year processes was made to be consistent with the additional data monitoring period (FFY vice SFY) provided in this report.*

PERT Services Received	Number
Comprehensive Evaluations and Youth in Transition	328
Virtual Program	115
Career Day/Career Seminar	82
Credential week	30
Credential week and Youth in Transition	1
Transition Academy	19
Situational Assessments	3
<b>Total explorations SFY 2022</b>	<b>578</b>

FFY 2023 WIOA Credentials Obtained	Number
Manufacturing Specialist	16
Manufacturing Technician 1	15
Manufacturing Skills Institute (MSI)	12
NRF Customer Service and Sales	12
Microsoft Office Suite (3 exams)	8
ASE Maintenance & Light Repair	7
NRF Warehouse, Inventory & Logistics	6
Microsoft Office Expert	5
Certified Logistics Associate (CLA)	3
Certified Nursing Aide (CNA)	3
Microsoft Office Master Certification	3
A+	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>91</b>

FFY 2023 Other Credentials/Certifications Obtained	Number
OSHA10	69
Driver's License	49
Learner's Permit	40
ServSafe Food Handler	33
PERT NRF Retail Fundamentals	27
CPR and First Aid	20
Clorox Pro Health Clean	16
Virginia Pre-Service Training for Child Care	13
Virginia DOE Child Abuse and Neglect	12
FAA-Certified Drone Pilot	6
Career Readiness Certificate (CRC)	4
NRF Customer Service and Sales	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>290</b>

# SRC Information

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## Our Mission

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

## Our Vision

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

## Attend a Meeting

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

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

<https://commonwealthcalendar.virginia.gov>

# SRC Membership Application

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

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

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

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

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

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

Meghan Cox  
DARS/State Rehabilitation Council  
8004 Franklin Farms Drive  
Henrico, VA 23229

Questions? Contact [Meghan.Cox@dars.virginia.gov](mailto:Meghan.Cox@dars.virginia.gov)

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

**Thank you for your interest in the Virginia State Rehabilitation Council.**

## Call

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

Videophone: (804) 325-1316

Fax: (804) 662-7663

## Write

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

To request this report in Spanish or another language contact:

Meghan Cox  
DARS/State Rehabilitation Council  
8004 Franklin Farms Drive  
Henrico, VA 23229  
[Meghan.Cox@dars.virginia.gov](mailto:Meghan.Cox@dars.virginia.gov)

Point your phone camera at this image and click to visit the SRC website.





# DRS Office Locations

Click on link or map below to view directory of DRS field offices: <https://www.dars.virginia.gov/drs/drsoffices.htm>

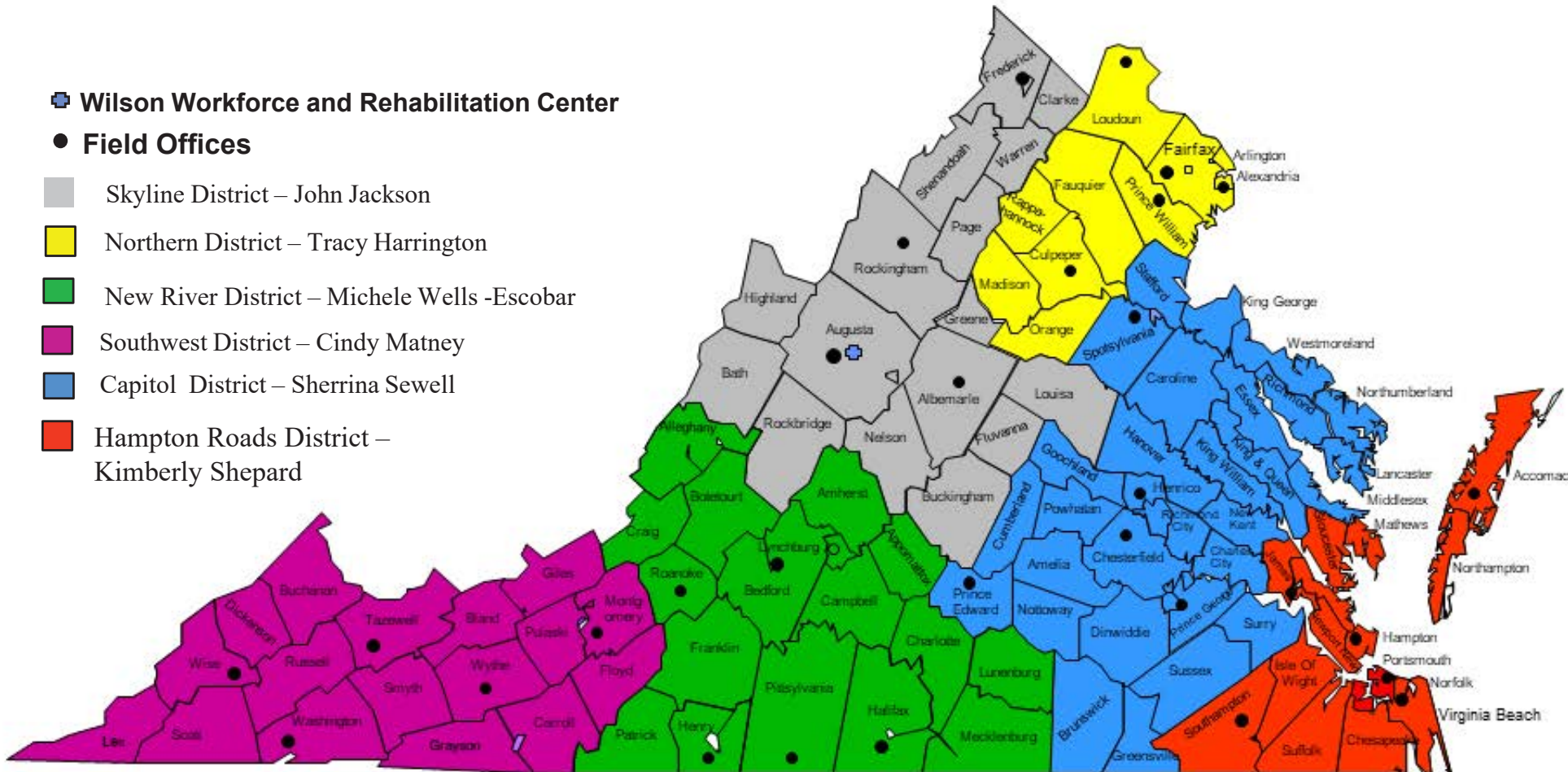


## Virginia Dept. for Aging and Rehabilitative Services Division of Rehabilitative Services

🏠 **Wilson Workforce and Rehabilitation Center**

● **Field Offices**

- Skyline District – John Jackson
- Northern District – Tracy Harrington
- New River District – Michele Wells -Escobar
- Southwest District – Cindy Matney
- Capitol District – Sherrina Sewell
- Hampton Roads District – Kimberly Shepard





VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT FOR AGING  
AND REHABILITATIVE SERVICES



[www.dars.virginia.gov/drs](http://www.dars.virginia.gov/drs)