



# Investing in America

2019



## VISION 2020

Leading change. Today. Tomorrow. Together.

Investing in...



## INVESTING IN AMERICA—TODAY, TOMORROW, TOGETHER

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In this edition of *Investing in America*, the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) is pleased to share just a few of our profession's successes from the past year. As you'll find, they share a common theme of innovation through collaboration—a reflection of the principles guiding our continued Vision 2020 initiative.

As we approach the public vocational rehabilitation (VR) program's centennial next year, we know that strong partnerships are critical to improving employment opportunities and outcomes for Americans with disabilities, and to our success as a core component of the nation's public workforce system. We also know that these partnerships must center on serving the needs of both individuals and businesses, because their success is interdependent.

By traversing the issues of disability, workforce development, career readiness and competitive, integrated employment, VR produces significant, and multiple, returns on investment for our nation. Going forward, we are committed to strengthening these yields by:

- › Innovating Solutions
- › Building Careers and Retaining Talent
- › Customizing Services and Expertise
- › Leading and Engaging in Collaborative Strategies

Read on to learn how we're investing in America—**today, tomorrow, together.**



Stephen A. Wooderson  
CEO, CSAVR



## VR is an investment in business.

Using a dual-customer approach, it works to understand the workforce needs of business—meeting them with qualified candidates in addition to no-cost consultation and technical assistance.

### NET BUSINESS OF THE YEAR: WinCo Foods



WinCo Foods is passionate about advancing disability inclusion across its business—and CSAVR's National Employment Team (NET) is supporting it step by step and state by state.

It all started in 2016 when WinCo turned to Texas Workforce Commission-Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VRS) to meet staffing needs at its Denton, Texas distribution center. Through this partnership, the center has hired 19 employees. Key to success is effective job coaching and mentorship. Based on an assessment of WinCo's skill needs, VRS works with Quest Employment to support a trial period during which job candidates learn about and experience the center's environment and processes first-hand. They work side by side with others on a team filling a wide range of positions. This eases the transition to becoming "employee owners," as WinCo staff are known.

The company calls the initiative WinCo "WInS,"—short for "Workforce Inclusion Success"—reflecting its belief that inclusion is indeed a winning proposition. In fact, based on its experience at the distribution center, WinCo decided to expand the initiative to its stores. The store model focuses on work readiness for students with disabilities. These students earn wages through VRS's year-round paid work experience program. To date, 23 people have been trained, with six now working at WinCo. As part of the process, WinCo developed a training area in-house, consulting with other businesses to design a system that was fully accessible to not just candidates with disabilities, but a range of potential employees.

Helping facilitate success is WinCo's commitment to an inclusive workplace culture. The company conducts disability awareness training for leadership and all employee owners, and, like all staff, the students are welcomed into the WinCo family from day one. In fact, several former VRS customers have been nominated to serve on committees to improve safety and the overall work environment.

Today, WinCo regularly participates in VRS events to share its experiences with other Texas employers. But, the multi-state company's commitment extends beyond Texas. In 2018, WinCo reached out to the NET's Utah Business Consultant to explore adapting "WinCo WInS" to meet its retail store staffing needs in the state. Now, the Utah State Office of Rehabilitation is working with WinCo to develop a quality Business Customized Training program that helps VR clients become employee owners. What's more, through its partnership with the NET, the company now plans to bring the "winning" program to Arizona and Idaho.

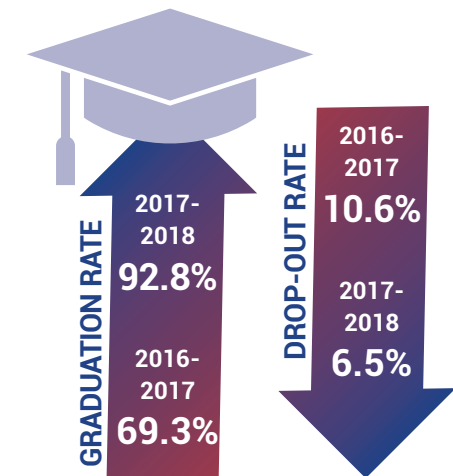


## VR is an investment in **innovation**.

By leading effective partnerships, it is fulfilling the promise of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) by improving access to services, with an emphasis on transitioning youth.

## PROMOTING BRIGHT FUTURES FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN FLORIDA

Through an innovative partnership, Florida Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) has significantly expanded delivery of pre-employment transition services (pre-ETS) to students with disabilities in five counties. Specifically, DVR is collaborating with Jobs for Florida's Graduates (JFG)—a competency-based program providing wraparound services to students with barriers to success—to design and implement a curriculum covering all five pre-ETS services required under WIOA. Through this partnership, which also includes local schools and businesses, JFG is serving 300 students with disabilities, and all early indicators point to significant and positive results. JFG is part of the national Jobs for America's Graduates network, which focuses on helping at-risk youth graduate, a key milestone strongly correlated with significantly higher lifetime earnings.



**Students with Disabilities in Putnam County, Florida Public Schools**

## INTERWEAVING SERVICES TO INCREASE COMPETITIVE, INTEGRATED EMPLOYMENT IN MISSOURI

Through an innovative approach to cross-agency service delivery, Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) is leading the charge to increase opportunities for competitive, integrated employment for Missourians with developmental and intellectual disabilities, including mental health conditions. The Missouri Service Delivery Braiding Team—which comprises VR, Rehabilitation Services for the Blind (RSB), the Department of Mental Health-Developmental Disabilities Division (DMH-DD), Community Rehabilitation Programs and the state's Developmental Disabilities Council—is working to formally add customized employment to the scope of services available to VR, RSB and DMH-DD consumers. Currently, the program is being piloted in five targeted communities in order to assess strategies and identify areas for improvement before expanding statewide.



# A "PROMISING" APPROACH TO ENGAGING YOUTH AND FAMILIES IN WISCONSIN

Led by the state's Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR), Wisconsin PROMISE—one of six federally funded research demonstration projects around the country—piloted an innovative wraparound case management approach to help teenage recipients of Supplemental Security Income and their families improve education and employment outcomes. The key was highly coordinated service delivery via a partnership between four public entities: the Departments of Workforce Development (of which DVR is a part), Children and Families, Health Services, and Public Instruction. An interagency Management Information System facilitated data sharing, impact assessment and better communication in response to WIOA requirements. At the end of the study, employment rates for youth receiving PROMISE services were not only higher than those in the study's control group (who received usual services), but also on par with Wisconsin's youth without disabilities.

## Wisconsin Youth Employment Rates: July 2017 – June 2018



**43%**  
PROMISE  
Control Group



**53%**  
PROMISE  
Test Group



**53%**  
Youth Without  
Disabilities

# LEVERAGING CROSS-SYSTEM RESOURCES AND EXPERTISE IN GEORGIA

Georgians with disabilities seeking to enter or re-enter the workforce are benefitting from an innovative approach to coordinated service delivery. Using funds from the state's federal Disability Employment Initiative (DEI) grant, a full-time VR counselor was placed within Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency (GVRA) to focus solely on customers co-enrolled under WIOA Title I (Adult, Dislocated Worker, Youth) and IV (VR). This counselor works closely with each of the state's regional DEI Disability Resource Coordinators to organize Integrated Resource Team meetings and effectively map resources, so that customers understand all services available to assist them in reaching their goals. Currently, about 65 percent of job seekers working with Georgia's DEI are co-enrolled in VR, helping maximize positive outcomes for both programs—and, most importantly, their customers.



*Georgia's innovative approach to coordinated service delivery for job seekers with disabilities helped Ronald Whigham, a bookkeeper with the Senior Citizens Council of Greater Augusta, rejoin the workforce.*



## Above all, VR is an investment in America.

Every day, it advances  
our nation's founding  
premise of opportunity  
for all by empowering  
people with disabilities to  
live independent, self-  
directed lives.



### CHRIS HALL

If you're a fan of Mounds or Almond Joys, thank Chris Hall, an industrial manufacturing technician apprentice at the Hershey plant in Stuarts Draft, Virginia, where he works on the iconic candy bars' production line. Chris's path to employment at Hershey's started when he enrolled in the Wilson Workforce and Rehabilitation Center's Manufacturing Technology Training (MTT) program, through which he obtained several industry-recognized credentials. Prior to seeking assistance through Virginia Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services, Chris was unemployed and receiving disability benefits. In fact, his disabilities, including anxiety, depression and ADHD, led him to rarely leave home for nearly 10 years after high school. Supported by Career Pathways for Individuals with Disabilities and Valley to Virginia grants, the MTT program recently earned recognition from the U.S. Department of Labor for meeting the requirements for pre-apprenticeship training.



### BEATRICE STEELE

Beatrice Steele is a service advisor with Prudential, a position she loves but couldn't imagine being in just a few years ago. Prior to joining the Prudential team, the single mother had been out of the labor force since 2011 due to disability. Her return to work was facilitated by Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services (IVRS), which helped her with her job search, including writing her resume and improving her interviewing skills. The preparation clearly paid off—at a Prudential networking event Beatrice attended at the urging of her IVRS counselor, she was encouraged to apply and take required assessment tests. Soon, she was offered the opportunity to work part time. She plans to transition to full time employment, and off of Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI), soon.



### JACOB (JAKE) HESSELMAN

Jake Hesselman is a science teacher at Hempstead High School in Dubuque, Iowa, where he also coaches wrestling and football at other local schools. Coaching Jake—who has no legs and about one-third of his arms due to a congenital condition—along his career journey was Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services (IVRS). Jake's career exploration activities during high school revealed interests in accounting, sports casting and teaching. When he enrolled at the University of Dubuque to pursue the latter, IVRS helped him obtain the assistive technology he needed to succeed. It provided support again when he learned to drive and, on his own initiative, raised funds for a wheelchair-accessible van. Jake was driving independently by the start of his final semester, just in time for his student teaching experience—and transition to the workforce upon graduation.





## JOSEPH HOFFMAN

Joseph Hoffman is a functional movement trainer with Owsley Chiropractic in Bowling Green, Kentucky—a position to which he brings unique experience. Joseph experienced a spinal cord injury following a car accident a few years ago. At the time, he was attending Morehead State University (MSU) on a cheerleading scholarship. With support from Kentucky's Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, he returned to MSU and graduated with a degree in exercise science. Although no longer able to cheer, he stayed active in the sport by coaching at various cheerleading camps during summers. Today, in addition to working at Owsley Chiropractic, he is a certified personal trainer with Bowling Green Athletic Club and volunteer cheerleading coach to children with disabilities. He also continues to excel in sports himself, having recently ranked second place nationally in wheelchair racquetball.



## CRAIG ENGEL

Craig Engel is a welder in Columbus, Nebraska. It's a job he loves but wasn't sure he could do after experiencing a traumatic brain injury from a car accident several years ago. Following his injury, Craig had to relearn how to walk, talk and eat. As he progressed, staff at his rehabilitation center suggested he contact Nebraska Vocational Rehabilitation (VR). He did, and soon Craig and Nebraska VR made a plan to get him back to work. As part of the process, he met with a welding instructor to assess his skills and identify supports he might need, as well as potential employers. Soon after, Craig rejoined the workforce. The key to his success was starting back to work part time, which he did for six weeks before transitioning to full time.



## CATHY WRIGHT

For 19 years, Cathy Wright worked with infants and toddlers. When the job became too physically demanding, she didn't want to leave the workforce, but also wasn't sure what employment options she might be able to pursue. She turned to Nevada Vocational Rehabilitation (VR), which helped her learn the possibilities and prepare for a career change through training and job search assistance. "It was like someone just opened a whole door for me," she says. Today, Cathy is an administrative assistant at Nevada's Division of Public and Behavioral Health, where, like a lot of administrative assistants, she does a little bit of everything. Apparently, she does it very well, so much so that, when another position became open recently, her supervisor turned to VR for assistance again.

"They've given me the skills. They've given me the opportunities to learn everything that I need to learn to make myself a qualified and capable member of the workforce—to be able to get out there and really show myself, improve myself."

- CHRIS HALL

"Getting this opportunity, I'm able to be productive. I don't have to feel like I don't have something to contribute. I have a lot to contribute, and most people do. You have to find that niche for yourself again."

- CATHY WRIGHT

## PREVIOUS NET BUSINESSES OF THE YEAR



CSAVR developed the National Employment Team (NET) in response to a discussion with its business customers, understanding that the development of career strategies that result in the hiring, promotion and retention of people with disabilities depends not only on their vocational goals and interests, but also the employment needs and environment of the business. Based on feedback from business customers, CSAVR structured the NET as cross-state team of Business Relations Representatives who collaborate, but also function as single points of contact for the VR agency at the state level. The NET's infrastructure facilitates a team approach to support individual businesses of all sizes. The goal is to develop ongoing relationships with and provide a variety of services to businesses, in addition to referring and supporting the retention of individuals who acquire disabilities during their employment lifecycle. The CSAVR-NET partnered with disABLEDperson and customers to develop a centralized talent pool of candidates with disabilities, known as the Talent Acquisition Portal (TAP).

## Leading Change Through a Collective Voice

The Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) is a membership organization comprising the 78 chief administrators of the public vocational rehabilitation (VR) agencies that annually serve approximately one million people with disabilities throughout the U.S. These agencies constitute the state partners in the state-federal program of rehabilitation services mandated by the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, with the U.S. Department of Education's Rehabilitation Services Administration serving as the federal partner.

The Vision 2020 initiative represents a reaffirmation on the part of State VR agencies to ensure their programs and services are proactive, respond to the principles of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and serve as models in the disability employment community. It is a strategic planning process through which State VR agency leaders, under the collective umbrella of CSAVR, are working together to assess progress and guide the profession as the system approaches its 100-year anniversary in 2020.

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