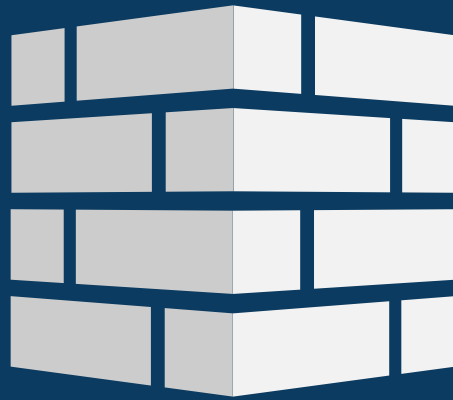


2023

ANNUAL REPORT

October 1, 2022 - September 30, 2023



BUILDING ON A SOLID FOUNDATION

Developed by and for the Statewide Council for Vocational Rehabilitation
in conjunction with the Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation

Kentucky Education and Labor Cabinet • Office of Vocational Rehabilitation
Mayo-Underwood Building, 500 Mero Street, Frankfort, Kentucky 40601

The Kentucky Statewide Council for Vocational Rehabilitation

About Kentucky's State Rehabilitation Council

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, requires that each state establish a State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) that partners and collaborates with the state's vocational rehabilitation agency regarding the delivery of services to individuals with disabilities. In Kentucky, the Statewide Council for Vocational Rehabilitation (SCVR) serves as the state's SRC. The SCVR reviews agency reports and surveys, provides input and makes recommendations to the Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) to ensure the needs of persons with disabilities in the state are met.

SCVR Mission Statement

The Mission of the Statewide Council for Vocational Rehabilitation (SCVR) for the state of Kentucky is to analyze policies, programs and services, make recommendations, and advise/partner with the agency and its stakeholders. The goal of this endeavor is to ensure the services, policies, and programs are consumer-oriented and consumer-driven resulting in meaningful employment, self-sufficiency, and independence.

OVR State Plan Public Forums

SCVR collaborated with OVR in the planning of OVR State Plan Public Forums. The OVR forums were hosted by the SCVR liaison, and staff represented various areas of OVR at each forum. OVR held five public forums, both virtual and hybrid (in-person and virtual) options to provide all Kentuckians an opportunity to comment and provide input on the services delivered to persons with disabilities in our state.

Forums were held at the following locations, dates and times:

- Virtual Public Forum: Sept. 19, 2023, 10 – 11 a.m. EST.
- Virtual Public Forum: Sept. 19, 2023, 6:30 – 7:30 p.m. EST.
- Thelma (in-person and virtual options): Oct. 17, 2023, 6:30 – 7:30 p.m. EST, Carl D. Perkins Vocational Training Center, 5659 Main St., Thelma.
- Louisville (in-person and virtual options): Oct. 24, 2023, 10 – 11 a.m. EST, Charles W. McDowell Center for the Blind, 8412 Westport Road, Louisville.
- Louisville (in-person and virtual options): Oct. 24, 2023, 6:30 – 7:30 p.m. EST, Charles W. McDowell Center for the Blind.

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Letter from the SCVR Chairman

On behalf of the Statewide Council for Vocational Rehabilitation (SCVR), I am pleased to present our annual report for FFY 2023. This year's theme, Building On A Solid Foundation, was chosen to express the magnitude of the long-standing services the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) has provided to people with disabilities throughout our state.

Every quarter, we have listened carefully to reports from each division of OVR relaying both successes and challenges. Often, I could hear excitement from staff providing the reports, but I could also hear frustrations. For some people, this may not seem like progress to discuss; but as a person living with a disability, I view passion in staff particularly important as it directly affects the services provided to consumers. I believe this is an indicator of a healthy and flexible agency that has the capability of building upon its solid foundation year after year.



As I further pondered the theme, I looked across my own journey with OVR. Many years ago, I was introduced to the idea of becoming an advocate by an occupational therapist at Cardinal Hill Rehabilitation Center. While there, the therapist encouraged me to go to college for counseling to be an example for others to reach their highest potential. It was this idea that sparked a change in mindset and set me on the path for advocacy.

My life completely changed once I was introduced to OVR services. I completed my education and received a bachelor's in social work and a master's in vocational rehabilitation from the University of Kentucky. With assistance from OVR, I was able to utilize assistive technologies in order to move about independently and obtain competitive integrated employment for over 20 years in various roles within the Kentucky Community and Technical College System (KCTCS). I have had the opportunity to use my voice and experience to influence and encourage others by serving on various boards, including the Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC) as vice-chair, Protection and Advocacy and currently, the Human Development Institute.

As you read the brief professional bios of the SCVR members, you will learn where each of their passions and/or expertise lie. Together, as members of a consumer-driven council, we continue to look forward to partnering with OVR to ensure the delivery of services are reaching, affecting and aligning with the desires of all Kentuckians with disabilities who want to work.

Our message is to underscore the importance of OVR services, and the tools provided to assist people living with disabilities to become independent in their lives and participate in the workforce. I believe a solid foundation allows movement without collapse, adjustments without cracking, and vision without limits, essentially the hallmark for stability, independence and a path to help others move forward in life.

We thank OVR for providing this foundation to so many who need this support. I am a witness that with a little assistance, we can go far.

Joe Cowan,
Outgoing Chairman

Arthur Campbell, Jr. Advocacy Award

The Arthur Campbell, Jr. Advocacy Award is given annually by the SCVR to a person who has passionately advocated for the rights and equitable treatment of individuals with disabilities, made a significant difference in the quality of life for all individuals with disabilities, and has championed independent living, full inclusion and employment for all.

Rhonda Logsdon was presented the Arthur Campbell, Jr. Advocacy Award during the January SCVR quarterly meeting. Rhonda is the executive director of the Kentucky Special Parent Involvement Network (KY-SPIN), the parent training and information center in the commonwealth. Rhonda was nominated by her colleague for the award because she advocates for equality and inclusion for persons with disabilities through her work and throughout her everyday life.



Rhonda is described as a persistent leader who wears many hats. She serves on several councils while directing the activities of KY-SPIN to provide a voice for individuals with disabilities who may not be able to speak for themselves. She is credited as someone who “walks the walk” and relentlessly works to ensure persons with disabilities are treated equally and fairly.

Based on those reasons that were presented, the council agreed that Rhonda exemplified all the qualities a person should have in order to receive this prestigious award.

Congratulations to Rhonda Logsdon for being a strong advocate for the entire disability community.

Statewide Council for Vocational Rehabilitation (SCVR) Member Profiles

David Allgood, SCVR Vice-Chair

Currently, this is my second term on the council, and I serve on both the Consumer Services and Program Evaluation, and the Public Awareness and Legislative committees. Prior to the merging of OVR and Blind Services, I served two terms on the SCVR. I have worked on numerous councils and boards to use my voice for advocacy, including the Kentucky Spinal Cord and Head Injury Research Board, Kentucky Assistive Technology Services and Kentucky Congress on Spinal Cord Injury. As a previous consumer of OVR services for many years, I strongly believe in advocacy and helping to fulfill the mission and vision of OVR. My hope is to help exponentially increase the number of Kentuckians with disabilities who are competitively and gainfully employed in our commonwealth.

Todd Stephens, Member-At-Large

This is my second term on the SCVR, and I serve on both the Blind Services, and Nominating and Bylaws committees. Prior to the merger of the Kentucky OVR councils, I served as the last chair of the Kentucky Office for the Blind's SRC. My education, personal experience and numerous leadership roles on councils and boards have equipped me for advocating for people with disabilities in various capacities, including business and assistive technologies. As an individual with a disability, I have a vested interest in improving the distribution of services, maximizing the independence of the individuals who have disabilities and expanding the potential of our state agency.

Nicky Wright, Chair of Policy and Planning Committee

I am serving my second term on the SCVR, and I serve on the Policy and Planning committee. Having a family member with a disability gave me insight into the struggles and achievements lived daily by someone with a disability and it sparked an interest that led me to the council. I advocate for people with disabilities by serving in the community and volunteering with organizations such as the Kentucky Nurses

Association for vaccination and testing. My hope is to ensure policies are created to meet the needs of those who are disabled.

Danielle Burton, Chair of Blind Services Committee

I have been the chair of the Blind Services Committee since October 2022, and this is my first term on the council. For many years, I was a consumer of blind services and have advocacy experience particularly in digital accessibility and inclusion for people with disabilities. I serve on various boards including the National Federation of the Blind of Kentucky. I hope to play a role in ensuring consumers receive quality services and their needs are met within our state.

Chris White, Chair of Nominating and Bylaws Committee

This is my second term on SCVR, representing Community Rehabilitation Programs, and I serve on both the Nominating and Bylaws, and the Public Awareness and Legislative committees. With my current role in compliance at Goodwill Industries of KY and 15 years of experience in Workforce Development serving individuals with disabilities and other barriers to employment, I feel strongly that everyone should have the access, opportunity and the support needed to obtain work. I've witnessed people's lives changed by the work of OVR. My hope in this role is to continue to share the mission and vision of the agency, and more importantly, help the agency gain even more exposure throughout the state. The support OVR offers is such an important, valuable tool for people, and having an opportunity to play a small role in that work by serving on the SCVR is a great honor.

Briana Sweatt, Chair of Consumer Services and Program Evaluation Committee

This is my first term on the council, and I serve on both the Blind Services, and the Consumer Services and Program Evaluation committees. As someone who has struggled with vision loss and having had the experience of working at the Bluegrass Council for the Blind, I feel very passionate about using my voice and advocating for those with vision impairments and other disabilities. I hope to provide the council with unique and thoughtful recommendations for a more inclusive and supportive environment that ultimately leads to meaningful employment for Kentuckians with disabilities.

Kelly Knoop, Advocate

I am serving my second term on the SCVR and on the Policy and Planning committee. I am proud to have been appointed to the council where I have had the opportunity to learn so much about OVR. As a strong advocate for myself and my community, I am a proud founding member of the Kentucky Self Advocates for Freedom and the Metro Louisville Self Advocates. However, my experience on the Kentucky Assistive Technology Loan Corp. (KATLC) and Kentucky Protection and Advocacy Boards are where I learned, and became, a more active advocate in Frankfort, where it matters most. I hope to better understand SCVR and spread the word of its purpose and availability to everyone in the state that might benefit from the many services offered.

Terrie Terlau, Advocate

This is my first term on the SCVR, and I serve on both Blind Services, and Consumer Services and Program Evaluation committees. I am a joyful senior and have had guide dogs since age 21. As a licensed psychologist having worked many years as a vocational rehabilitation counselor in various areas including mental health, I believe my expertise will add to the council. I've researched and developed products for

visually impaired adults at the American Printing House for the Blind, and I currently serve as the first vice-president of the Kentucky Council of the Blind, president of Guide Dog Users of Kentuckiana, and secretary of Greater Louisville Council of the Blind. I hope to play a meaningful role on the council by providing perspective and a voice for those who may be unable.

Kelly Bass, VR Counselor

I have been a member of SCVR for almost two years, and I serve on both Blind Services, and Public Awareness and Legislative committees. Having consistently worked with individuals with disabilities throughout my vocational rehabilitation counseling career, I believe my education, work experience and community involvement have prepared me to be an asset for the council. My overall hope is that my role will have a positive impact on individuals with disabilities and their access to adequate services and training, leading to greater independence and complete inclusivity in the workforce.

Ben Henderson, Business, Industry and Labor

This is my first term on the council, and I serve the area of Business, Industry and Labor. I have served on the National Federation of the Blind for almost six years, on both a national and state level. My education, advocacy, and business experience in information technology have prepared me to play a role on the SCVR.

Jeff Edwards, Client Assistance Program

This is my first term representing Client Assistance Program (CAP) on the SCVR, and I serve on the Consumer Services and Program Evaluation committee. I have worked at Protection and Advocacy for over 25 years and served as director of the agency for eight years. In this capacity, my advocacy has spanned across multiple networks, boards and councils, including Employment First Council and the National Disability Rights Network.

Executive Director's Office

Letter from the Executive Director

A strong foundation of a building typically means it is solidly anchored to the ground. Foundations matter when adversity comes such as storms and winds that blow against the structure.

OVR's organizational foundation for many years is the belief that employment shall be considered the first and primary option for persons with disabilities of working age who desire to become employed. That belief is the powerful and effective structure that the organization is built upon.

The mission of OVR may have been reworded over the years but foundationally it has always been "To empower Kentuckians with disabilities to maximize independence and economic security through competitive, integrated employment." The organization's clear vision and values provide a common purpose and direction for staff. I consider it a privilege to work with a group of individuals dedicated to serving others.

Across the years, staff have faced challenge after challenge while consistently serving individuals with disabilities. The leadership and staff believe in the OVR vision that "all Kentuckians with disabilities have an opportunity to be an essential part of Kentucky's workforce and their communities," and it is reflected in the work of the organization. This solid foundation gives us the structure needed to create strategies that enhance job retention and career advancement for individuals with disabilities in the commonwealth.

OVR recognizes there are many challenges ahead and there are many emerging service delivery issues that must be addressed as we move forward in 2024. We look forward to working collaboratively with the State Rehabilitation and other partners as we address those challenges.

Cora McNabb,
Executive Director



RETAIN Kentucky

When people leave the labor force because they become sick or have an injury, it can be detrimental—for them, their families, their employers and the economy. But many injured or ill workers could remain in their jobs or the workforce if they received timely, coordinated assistance to navigate stay-at-work/return-to-work (SAW/RTW) services.

Kentucky is proud to be participating in a collaborative initiative designed to address these issues—the Retaining Employment and Talent After Injury/Illness Network (RETAIN). The goal of RETAIN is to help individuals return to the workforce following an injury or illness to reap the benefits of gainful employment.

In April 2021, the U.S. Department of Labor (USDOL) awarded funds to Kentucky and four other states to build upon their work in RETAIN Phase 1. As of Sept. 8, 2023, 5,181 referrals have been made to RETAIN and 1,425 people have enrolled in the program. Enrollment for the program goes through May 2024. Those enrolled in the program will receive services through October 2024.

RETAIN is a federally funded research study awarded to the Kentucky OVR and implemented by the University of Kentucky. It is designed to expand services to help thousands of newly injured and ill employees across the commonwealth stay in the workforce. The free program is open to individuals 18 and older who have non-occupational illnesses or injuries that prevent them from performing their jobs. RETAIN Kentucky helps participants identify their stay-at-work and return-to-work goals and take steps to achieve those goals through the development of an individualized return-to-work plan. RETAIN Kentucky also connects participants to community resources to help with day-to-day challenges and employment support.

The 2023 Retaining Employment and Talent After Injury/Illness Network (RETAIN) Annual Convening

Cora McNabb, executive director of OVR, and Betty Whittaker, staff assistant for RETAIN Kentucky, attended the 2023 RETAIN Annual Convening. This event was for RETAIN Phase 2 states to share their project information and experiences, and learn and enhance state knowledge around SAW/RTW. Participants had opportunities through plenary sessions and small group breakout sessions, to hear from and engage with subject matter experts; other Phase 2 states; the RETAIN technical assistance provider, American Institutes for Research; the RETAIN evaluation lead, Mathematica; and the USDOL Office of Disability Employment Policy.



Photo Info: Back Row (Left to Right) Kimberly Wickert, Director of Organizational Partnerships, RETAIN, University of Kentucky (UK) Human Development Institute (HDI), Derek Vincent, Return to Work Supervisor, RETAIN, UK HDI, Mykal Leslie, Director of Evaluation, RETAIN, UK HDI. Front Row (Left to Right) Betty Whittaker, Staff Assistant for Kentucky RETAIN, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, Amy Rumrill, Assistant Director, RETAIN, UK HDI, Cora McNabb, Executive Director, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, Shirley Kron, Director of Outreach and Engagement, RETAIN, UK HDI, Beth Potter, Division Director, RETAIN, UK HDI, Paola Andujar, Project Manager, Council of State Governments, Johnny Collett, Deputy Director, RETAIN, UK HDI

Employment First Council

The Kentucky Employment First Council was founded on the idea that everyone has a right to work, and it is building momentum across the state for competitive integrated employment to become the primary and first choice for working-age individuals with disabilities.

Effective July 14, 2022, legislation was passed, stating, “the General Assembly finds and declares that it is the policy of the Commonwealth of Kentucky that competitive integrated employment shall be considered the first and primary option for persons with disabilities of working age who desire to become employed.” KRS 151B. 211. By executive order in 2018 and legislation in 2022, the Employment First Council was established to assist the commonwealth with this goal.

Throughout the year, the Employment First Council has been diligently defining, shaping and building strategies to propel the movement of competitive integrated employment for individuals with disabilities across the state. Through various initiatives and collaborations, the 28-member council is positioned to strategically answer the assignment and underscore the significance of this policy.

Earlier this year, through the implementation of the USDOL’s Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP), the Employment First Council was chosen to participate in the National Expansion on Employment Opportunities Network (NEON). According to the USDOL’s Office of Disability Employment Policy, Project NEON is “an initiative to collaborate with national provider organizations (NPOs) to develop strategic plans for increasing competitive integrated employment opportunities for the individuals they serve, including those with significant disabilities and those who have faced barriers to employment. NEON currently provides technical assistance to five NPOs using a pool of national subject matter experts (SMEs) who serve as peer mentors in provider transformation and customized employment.”

In Kentucky, Project NEON allows agencies to review policy in order for them to align with

Kentucky’s definition of competitive integrated employment.

On Aug. 21, 2023, Kentucky hosted a “Best Practice Day” as a result of participating in Project NEON. SMEs from across the country came to Frankfort to assist the Employment First Council with their committee work. Nearly 50 people attended the event.

Recently, the Employment First Council developed and accepted its first, three-year strategic plan that includes a vision, mission and core value statement. In addition, goals, objectives and measures were carefully considered throughout this process. In the next three years, the council and staff will continue to work together to remove barriers to employment of individuals with disabilities and to promote competitive integrated employment across the commonwealth.

State Plan Collaborations

OVR collaborated with agencies across the Department of Workforce Development for state plan activities. The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) four-year state plan provides a comprehensive analysis of Kentucky’s workforce and details key programs that facilitate the needs of both employers and employees in the state. Additionally, the plan outlines the four-year goals, priorities and strategies of each core program based on the needs of the current program administration. The plan is a massive undertaking that requires collaborative activities to ensure a cohesive and complete plan.

For this requirement, the Kentucky Workforce Innovation Board (KWIB) proposed an Interagency Team to meet regularly to facilitate activities that promote collaborations between agencies to create a more aligned state plan for 2024. This idea requires commitment from leaders representing the core programs and other partner agencies to engage in the following activities: participating in local listening sessions; writing and assisting in gathering core portions of the plan; supporting stakeholder engagements; and attending interagency meetings.

An OVR Team, consisting of the executive director, administrator and SCVR liaison, and regional program managers within the Division of Field Services, participated in the Interagency Team activities. From June through October 2023, the OVR Team attended meetings, traveled across the 10 local workforce development areas (LWA) and engaged in various listening sessions to represent the agency in these efforts. The collaborative efforts are ongoing and will complete once the state plan has been finalized and submitted.

Program Policy and Support Branch

The Program Policy and Support (PPS) Branch is housed within the Executive Director's office. The branch ensures processes align with federal and state requirements, and oversees several federally required programmatic and financial functions. The branch has two sections, Systems Support and Grants Management, in addition to program support staff. Over the past year, staff in the PPS branch has enhanced many programmatic areas, supports, data reporting and training with a focus on internal controls to reinforce the agency's foundation. While addressing critical priorities within the agency's strategic planning goals, the branch developed and updated processes to ensure a strong system response to agency and consumer needs.

The Systems Support Section is responsible for systems programming, technology support, federal data reporting, and internal data requests, and has played a major role in the development of the case management system (CMS). Over the past year, a team of OVR employees worked with Geographic Solutions, Inc. Business Analysts to identify gaps in their system and determine changes to the system configuration to meet OVR needs. In addition, a field team continually tested the system, changes and data migration to the new system. Staff also provided oversight to phone and technology upgrades; the Semi-Autonomous Research Assistant (SARA) program, a case management tool that assists counselors and increases communication with consumers; DocuSign; and other programs that help staff and consumers attain their goals.

The Grants Management Section oversees agency spending, including contract development, monitoring, auditing and reimbursement activities. The team grew substantially last year to ensure that the agency was able to monitor contracts, vendor attainment, authorizations and reimbursements to adhere to federal and state financial guidelines. Staff completed monitoring visits on all contracted entities last year. The team enhanced the rate-setting process to ensure that rates are competitive and reviewed on a regular basis. The new process bases determinations on fiscal components for more internal controls and justification in changing rates. The team clarified the vendor onboarding and retention process to ensure vendors would adhere to federal and state guidelines and complete an annual renewal.

The additional program staff oversees work in many areas, including the SCVR, coordination of the annual report, submission of the state plan, completion of Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment and Consumer Satisfaction Survey, obtaining and retraining mentors through the mentor program, records retention and destruction process in compliance with state regulations, and fulfilling open records requests. The staff assisted with consumer employment needs (background checks, wage checks, etc.), internal case reviews, social media to increase public awareness and collaboration, and coordination of accessible work products such as forms, documents, policies and procedures.

Staff also enhanced the self-employment program to provide more supports and training to consumers wanting to start a business. One of the biggest projects staff has focused on is overhauling the agency's internal case review process to give a more in-depth look at case statuses, data reporting, supports to counselors, and training opportunities around policies and procedures, as well as best practice. Following a pilot project, the new process will be rolled out statewide in January 2024. Additional staff will be hired to review, train and report data outcome. Staff also has been developing and updating policies and procedures for the agency to provide more written guidance on processes, internal controls and state and federal compliance.

Division of Field Services

The Division of Field Services is responsible for providing direct services to consumers across the Commonwealth. The Regional Program services are denoted by five regions across the state with representation on the states 10 Local Workforce Development Areas (LWDA). The service regions and their respective LWDAs are below.

Services Region	Local Workforce Development Area
West Region	Green River and Western KY
West Central Region	Kentuckiana Works and Lincoln Trail
East Central Region	Northern KY and Bluegrass
South Region	South Central and Cumberland
East Region	Ten County Area (TENCO) and Eastern KY Concentrated Employment Program (EK-CEP)

The Division of Field Services has 17 districts throughout the service regions and also includes the following administrative branches and positions:

- The Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services Branch
- The Supported Employment/Community Rehabilitation Program
- The Rehabilitation Technology Branch
- The Employer Services Branch
- The Transitions Services Branch
- Social Security/Program Coordinator

The division provides numerous services to help individuals reach their vocational goals including: Pre-Employment Training Services; counseling and guidance; vocational and other training services; supported employment; personal assistance; interpreter and notetaking

services; telecommunications, sensory and other technological aids and devices; rehabilitation technology; job placement and job retention services; employment follow-up and post-employment services; the Coordinating and Assisting the Reuse of Assistive Technology (CARAT) Project; the Kentucky Assistive Technology Loan Corp. (KATLC); and the Kentucky Assistive Technology Services (KATS) Network.

Expanded Core Curriculum Week

Kentucky DeafBlind Project - *by Corrine Miller*



Every year the Kentucky DeafBlind Project (KDBP) hosts its summer Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC) Week for transition-age youth ages 14 through 22 who are registered with the program.

During ECC Week the young adults develop friendships, had social interactions, explored the community for employment as well as recreation, and began learning the necessary skills for the upcoming transition from high school to postsecondary education, vocational training or the workforce.

This year's ECC Week in Bowling Green gave them hands-on experiences as they explored agriculture, cooking, animal care and jobs. Each experience weaved in the skills they will need to make a successful transition to adulthood.

During the week, they visited New Beginnings Therapeutic Riding where they learned about the proper care of horses, from grooming to equipment to riding safety. They also learned how to mount and ride the horses.

The group went to the Western Kentucky University (WKU) Agricultural Expo where they learned about herbs and in-season produce,

and got their hands dirty picking and preparing the vegetables for their farm-to-table cooking experience at WKU the next day. Each participant was in charge of choosing an Italian recipe that incorporated some of the vegetables and making a grocery list for the other ingredients. They shopped for the items on their list, purchased them and cooked the dishes for a dinner with their families and a local fire department.

They also had a hands-on job experience at Feeders Pet Supply store where they worked on the delivery truck to fill carts and baskets to restock the inventory, and learned about caring for animals.

The various skills they learned will have a lasting impact on the participants as they prepare for their next steps after high school.

Jobs for Kentucky's Graduates State Career Development Conference Works with Students to Showcase Career Skills



Potentially eligible OVR students from across the commonwealth participated in the Jobs for Kentucky's Graduates (JAG-KY) State Career Development Conference (CDC) on March 21, 2023, to competitively showcase their professional career development skills.

Throughout the year, students build critical skills in interviewing, prepared speaking, career preparation, creative decision making, employable skills, business planning, financial literacy and other professional skills categories. This conference afforded them the opportunity to highlight their accomplishments and meet other students. Outcomes from the event are listed below:

- 83 of the 199 student participants were potentially eligible for OVR services;
- 69 schools competed with potentially eligible students representing all competitive categories; and
- 26 schools competed as individuals or teams.

Overall, the students were well represented and successful in the competitive programs. This serves as an example that students, particularly those who struggle economically, educationally and personally, can learn major life and career development skills to compete and succeed in the world. Preparing youth for Kentucky's workforce through engagement during middle and high school encourages confidence and the ability and desire to graduate as they look toward their careers.

Pre-Employment Transition Services Gives Students Opportunities to Achieve

Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) are short-term services that provide students with disabilities a head start at exploring career interests and prepares them to make better decisions about transitioning from secondary education to postsecondary education and training. The continuum of services are most beneficial to students in the first two years of secondary education beginning at age 14.

The following five activities are directed at students who are potentially eligible for OVR services:

- Job exploration counseling;
- Counseling on postsecondary training opportunities;
- Work-based learning experiences;
- Workplace readiness skills including independent living and social skills; and
- Self-advocacy including peer mentoring.

For more information on Pre-ETS, please contact the OVR at (800) 372-7172 or by email at WFD.VOCREHAB@ky.gov.

Summer Leadership Experience Camp 2023 Helps Students Decide Future After High School - by Teresa Belluscio



“What comes next after you graduate high school?” can be one of the most difficult questions for seniors.

The University of Kentucky (UK) Human Development Institute’s Summer Leadership Experience Camp is designed to help make decisions after high school less intimidating for students. The camp makes it easier to adjust to the next step in the educational process, which may lead to a career. Camp speakers talk to the young adults about finding the right choice for the next stage in their lives, taking advantage of available accessibility resources and academic accommodations, and pushing beyond challenges like dealing with social stigma.

July 2023 was the seventh time the camp has been held. This year’s speakers included a perennial favorite, Cody Clark, a magician with autism who did a special show one day, and a presentation on resilience the following day. Another highlight included a panel of college disability service representatives who addressed accessing vital accommodations, support and resources.

Another speaker was Travis Freeman, a Kentucky pastor who in high school became the first blind football player in America and was the inspiration for the film 23 Blast.

Camper Isaiah Jones said he enjoyed the experience.

“It was great,” he said. “The speakers are really helpful because they get to tell you what career you get to choose, how you can get help from your disability center, and what majors to expect you can take.”

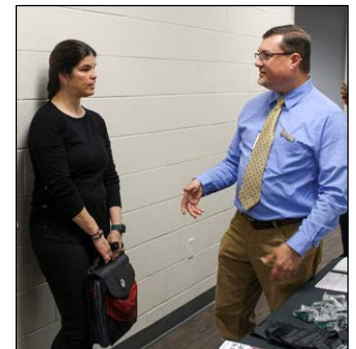
Jones will be attending UK as a freshman soon and felt that he especially benefitted from learning to navigate the campus. It also was useful to get a glimpse of the college experience including living in a dorm with a roommate.

The camp can be a powerful experience for students and gives them the opportunity to see a potentially great future for themselves.

To learn more about the Summer Leadership Experience, contact Teresa.Belluscio@uky.edu.

2023 Hispanic Resource Fair

Southcentral Kentucky Community and Technical College (SKCTC) hosted its third Annual Hispanic Resource Fair on March 29, 2023. More than 20 groups and organizations including OVR and Kentucky Adult Education gathered at SKYCTC to provide information in Spanish or from a Spanish-speaking representative.



Jason Herron and Chad Hunt with OVR were onsite to answer questions and hand out information regarding available services from the agency.

With a growing Latino population at the college, Latino Outreach Specialist Addi Hernandez said that SKCTC’s Hispanic Resource Fair is an opportunity to bring the community together to improve communication and access to resources.

“One of the significant barriers that the local Latino community currently faces is knowing to whom to go to for help. Additionally,

understanding the legal system and accessing medical care can, at times, be impossible for those who do not speak the English language,” said Hernandez.

Consumer Stories of Success

Aleric’s Story

Aleric was graduating high school when he started receiving services in 2010 from the Office for the Blind. Aleric, who is deafblind, had many hurdles along the way, including accessibility issues with various classes at Bluegrass Community and Technical



College, eye surgeries, declined hearing, and COVID-19. Through it all, Aleric maintained great communication with his vocational rehabilitation counselor Laura and stayed the course of seeking competitive-integrated employment.

Aleric received services from rehabilitation technologists, orientation and mobility specialists, an independent living counselor, McDowell Center staff, Helen Keller National Center (HKNC) staff and the Community Rehabilitation Program (CRP) while figuring out his vocational path. While the plan changed many times, with extensive vocational guidance and counseling, Aleric was always learning what worked, and what didn’t work, for him.

“He never took a stopping point as the end, but rather a learning experience to use to move forward in his employment search. One such stopping point was when he was receiving in-person services at Helen Keller and participating in an internship program. Aleric had finally decided to take the plunge and go to Helen Keller in Sands Point, New York, for vocational rehabilitation services, only for COVID-19 to hit the state hard and close the center down immediately for an extended period,” Laura said. “Instead of quitting, Aleric used this time at home in Kentucky to sharpen his skills, keep in great communication with Helen Keller staff and OVR staff, and was ready to return to New York

as soon as in-person services opened.”

Currently, Aleric lives in Lexington and is employed by Amazon and as a contractor with Helen Keller’s iCanConnect Program. Aleric used his self-advocacy skills to communicate with Amazon’s Accessibility Services Team to get everything he needs to be successful in this role.

“His confidence has soared during this time as well, even offering assistance for other consumers within OVR to become employed with Amazon. Through his self-advocacy skills, he has made sure he has everything needed to be safe and successful on the job site,” Laura said.

In addition, while working with the iCanConnect program, Aleric is using his technology skills to help assess and train other individuals who are deafblind to make sure they have the technology they need to achieve their goals of independence and/or employment.

“Aleric has truly grown up while receiving OVR services,” Laura said. “He has gained true independence by moving out on his own, navigating paratransit and public transit services, and becoming employed in competitive-integrated employment, all while finding his voice to help himself and others.”

Bradley’s Journey

When Bradley applied for OVR services on Aug. 5, 2020, he had what seemed like insurmountable hurdles to overcome to get a job.



“I don’t know if you can help me, but I need a job. I have trouble with my reading, writing, spelling and math. I am a convicted felon and I have hearing loss, depression and anxiety,” he told OVR counselor Ricky.

In addition, Bradley would be on probation for two years, had not been employed since 2012 and did not have a driver’s license. He and his three children live with his mother.

“I assured Bradley that we would find him a job and work to fit the pieces of the puzzle together. We discussed some options, such as

adult education, and he decided Supported Employment may work best,” Ricky said.

“I asked him to try and remember his job history and what he believed his job skills were that he could use for a job. Living in a small town with few jobs, I explained to Bradley that he would have to search for jobs daily. In the meantime, I referred him to Lifeskills, and his employment specialist was amazing as she worked on his anger management, social skills and even helped with his interview skills,” he said.

After several attempts, Bradley got a job in March 2022 with the city of Scottsville. He works on the lawn crew for the cemeteries and on the trash truck when needed. He did so well on the job that the mayor took him off his 90-day probation early.

In the beginning, Bradley made \$10 an hour, 40 hours per week, and now makes \$14 an hour. He also receives health insurance, life insurance and paid uniforms. Bradley does not receive government assistance since he is receiving a livable wage and benefits from his employer. In addition, Bradley pays for health insurance for his three children through his employer.

The Employment Specialist Kelly asked for his supervisor’s honest opinion of Bradley and if he had any problems or concerns. He responded, “We need 10 more just like Bradley. He is a good worker, and he deserves to be here.”

“Bradley is a perfect example of our goal as vocational rehabilitation counselors,” Ricky said. “This young man has arisen from doubt to confidence and continues to flourish as this was a life changing event in his life. Perseverance, hope, hard work and determination have guided him to be successful and a hero for his children.”

Brodie Finds a Path Forward with Supported Employment Services

Since applying for vocational rehabilitation services in December 2021, Brodie has achieved one milestone after another and distinguished himself by attaining employee of the month at his new job.



After graduating from the Academy for Individual Excellence in Louisville in May 2022, OVR connected Brodie with Path Forward for supported employment services and an employment specialist who helped him explore career options.

In August 2022, Brodie completed a person-centered employment plan (PCEP) and decided to pursue a United Parcel Service (UPS) package handler career through the UPS Transitional Learning Center (TLC) program. He successfully completed the program and started as a package handler on Oct. 1, 2022, working Monday through Friday, 20 hours per week and earning \$20 per hour.

Brodie has mastered a variety of skills at UPS including unloading, sorting, scanning and moving packages. He volunteers to arrive early or stay late to help reach production goals and was awarded employee of the month in February 2023.

Brodie continues to overcome many challenges to become more independent and employable. One of those challenges is driving. Although he failed the driver’s permit test three times, he did not give up on his goal of getting his license. He was evaluated and qualified for a virtual driver’s permit class through OVR’s Carl D. Perkins Vocational Training Center and successfully obtained his permit in October 2022.

Having attained that goal, OVR referred Brodie to the University of Louisville Health - Frazier Rehabilitation Institute where he took extensive driver’s training and earned his driver’s license this year. Prior to getting his license, Brodie depended

on his family to take him places because Oldham County where he lives does not have public transportation. Now he can drive himself.

Health insurance also has been a challenge for Brodie. Since he does not receive Social Security Insurance or Social Security Disability Insurance, he is covered under his parents' health insurance, but his new job will make him eligible for UPS health insurance after nine months of employment. OVR also gave him information on long-term daily living supports and other contacts for services if he needs additional assistance.

Brodie's team reports he has grown so much personally and professionally since graduating from AIE, starting his career at UPS, and attaining his driver's license. Brodie's hard work and perseverance, family support and continuing services offered by OVR have led to his progress and success. Brodie's mom, Path Forward, and UPS all report his job is going very well and he looks forward to a long-term career at UPS.

Success Just a Phone Call Away for Daniel Frazee

Daniel Frazee says that the phone call he made to the Kentucky OVR drastically changed his life for the better. He had suffered from a degenerative hip condition called Perthes disease that limited his mobility since the age of 12.



"As you may imagine, this led to some issues with my self-confidence and led me to believe I didn't have a lot to offer in the workforce. So, I lived most of my adult life being financially dependent on my family. I do not drive so I became dependent on them for transportation, also. Living in a very rural area didn't help," Frazee said.

During most of his life, Frazee was not employed but he did volunteer work. He applied for Social Security Disability Insurance but was denied. As his mother got older, he became her caregiver and she provided for his basic needs and gave him a small stipend.

"After my Mom's passing in 2022, I felt overwhelmed on how to move forward with my life. With my very limited work history I had a lot of fear of entering the job market. Then, I made the best phone call of my life," Frazee said. "I phoned my regional Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation. My case worker Kelly Mooney met with me and assessed my abilities and best fit for joining the workforce. She then, eventually, sent me to meet with Cody Lucas of the Employment Connection through Communicare."

Lucas met with Frazee several times and assessed his best fit for jobs. "My meetings with Cody helped me gain self-confidence and after we had met for 10 hours, we developed a plan for which jobs I should apply. Cody wrote a very nice resumé for me. He would send links to jobs, and I would search job listings and apply, as well," Frazee said.

Two months into his job search, Frazee applied, interviewed and was offered a job as a telephone attendant at the Louisville Marriott Hotel Downtown. The next day, he was approved for a terrific apartment within walking distance of his job, he said.

"I have now been with The Marriott for two months and I love my job. The managers are very supportive and are praising my work. I couldn't have hoped to find a better situation. There is a lot of opportunity for advancement at my workplace and I'm looking forward to growing into my job and hopefully, be promoted in due time," Frazee said.

"To say I'm thankful to Kelly and Cody would be a major understatement. This one phone call changed my life drastically for the better."

OVR is Great Teammate for Mason Gooch

Mason Gooch has played football and been around the game his entire life but his passion is strength and conditioning and helping other people reach their potential on the field. Although he was born profoundly deaf and received cochlear implants when he was 20 months old, he has not let that keep him from making his mark in school, football or his career.



Gooch is well on his way to attaining his goal of becoming a strength coach and he says OVR has supported him during his academic career at Gallaudet University and graduate school at East Tennessee State University (ETSU), as he pursues his dreams.

“I played football for 19 years and read lips all the way up to high school. My dad was my head football coach in high school and my strength coach. I liked the off season and looked forward to the workouts even better than playing sometimes,” he said.

Gooch played football all four years at Gallaudet University where he learned American Sign Language. His last two years, he interned for the strength and conditioning department and knew then that he wanted to become a strength coach.

He went to ETSU and earned his master’s degree in sports medicine and worked as a graduate assistant for the strength and conditioning department for the football team. His last month at ETSU he received a call from the Baltimore Ravens and worked for them for six months in the off season in organized team activities and during training camp in the strength and conditioning department.

“I love being behind the scenes, where nobody sees the athletes putting in the work. I love developing athletes and building the foundation in the weight room, off-season workouts, field

work and seeing them take that to the field and succeed. I saw what it did for me and how it helped me physically and mentally. I wanted to invest into this profession that I love,” he said.

Gooch noted several accomplishments during his academic years, and said OVR has supported him throughout school and as he pursues his career.

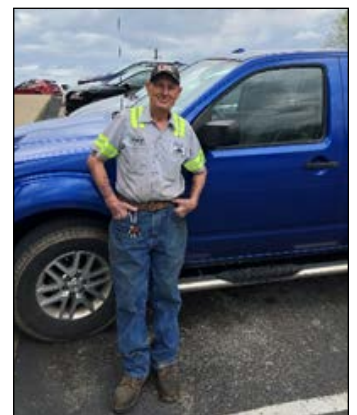
“Some of my accomplishments for football include first team all-state in high school and first team all-conference in college. In strength and conditioning I was on the power lifting team in high school where I set personal records and helped the team win power lifting meets,” he said.

“In college, I was a National Strength and Conditioning Association (NSCA) strength and conditioning all American. As a coach, I have had great experience the last five years and obtained my master’s in sports science. I recently won the Lance Vermeil Award for young strength coaches in the profession. My plan is to get certified and be around more strength coaches in the profession to learn more,” he said.

“OVR has always made it possible in every aspect that I have wanted to pursue with my career and education. OVR has supported me, helped me pursue my certification, and helped support me to go to the strength and conditioning conference to network and meet other strength coaches. My determination and drive have helped me overcome any obstacles along the way,” Gooch said.

Romal’s Story and the Impact of OVR

At 81 years old, Romal was referred to the OVR because his learning disorder and hearing impairment significantly impacted his ability to obtain and maintain permanent employment as a maintenance diesel mechanic and a heavy equipment repairer for the Ohio County Road Department.



Without formal schooling, Romal has trouble reading, writing and performing basic arithmetic without the help of others. He came to OVR for a psychological evaluation to provide insight into his ability to take and pass the GED exam so that he could meet the minimum requirement for a permanent job with the road department. Without a GED or high school diploma he could only qualify for seasonal work.

In addition, Romal's lack of a formal education and limited reading skills made it extremely difficult to achieve a high enough score on the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE), a requirement to determine the areas a student needs to study to pass the GED. The TABE is also used by local employers to test for educational aptitude of prospective employees in math computation, applied mathematics and reading before he can be considered for employment.

The psychological evaluation confirmed that he had an intellectual disability and would need accommodations. Although Romal diligently attempted to prepare for the GED, he needed a greater level of OVR intervention to obtain and maintain full-time employment. Romal's vocational rehabilitation counselor Lisa, wrote a letter on his behalf to the Ohio County Road Department explaining that even when a high school diploma is required for a job, an individual who did not graduate from high school because of a disability may be entitled, as a reasonable accommodation, to demonstrate the ability to do the job by some means other than producing a high school diploma or GED.

Eventually the OVR branch manager and Lisa were invited to present to the judge executive and the magistrates on behalf of Romal concerning his disability, how it impacts him, and legislation that supports individuals with disabilities in employment. This eventually allowed Romal to be hired full-time with the road department where he earns \$16.96 hourly for a minimum of 40 hours weekly with full benefits. At this time, OVR continues to work with Romal, providing guidance and counseling while he is adjusting to his new hearing devices and participating in retention and follow-up services.

David's Success Story

David met with Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Megan on May 5, 2022, and applied for services, after he lost his job as a mail carrier and became homeless because he could not perform his job duties.

David had suffered leg, hip and knee injuries that significantly limited his mobility and prevented him from standing all day. Megan was able to accept David's case and complete his plan within five days of intake, which is exceptional.

Megan provided extensive guidance and counseling and helped David choose an appropriate vocational goal in relation to his interests, strengths, limitations and work history. She also ensured that David continued to receive proper treatment for his medical conditions at the Veterans Administration (VA) Hospital.

Supported employment services were provided, and David gained employment as a full-time taxi driver. He earns \$8 per hour, works 40 hours per week and receives VA benefits. This job was a perfect fit for him because he could sit most of the day. As a result of help from OVR, David now has his own apartment and is more independent than before. He loves his job and is very appreciative of the services he received through OVR.



Agency Statistics

Consumer Satisfaction Survey

The most recent Consumer Satisfaction Survey (CSS) was completed and submitted to the Statewide Council for Vocational Rehabilitation (SCVR) on April 24, 2023. A stratified random sample of consumers, who were closed during FFY 2022, were surveyed regarding consumer satisfaction.

A total of 1,042 individuals participated in the survey, which was available as both a telephone

and online survey, with responses included from each of the districts. An integral part of this survey seeks to determine the satisfaction level of consumers. The average overall satisfaction level for all respondent groups was 3.49 out of a possible 4 points (4 = very good).

Overall, 88.8% of survey participants indicated that services were good or very good. Those consumers who had cases closed Successful in Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE) were most satisfied (mean = 3.74). As we have seen over the history of this survey, those closed Successful in CIE were more satisfied and experienced better outcomes in virtually all areas. As is typically found, those whose cases were closed Successful in CIE were also slightly more satisfied with their jobs and pay received. Regardless of case closure status, 92.4% of people indicated that they would return to the OVR if they needed to in the future.

Customer Demographics

Based on Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2023

Demographics of Individuals Served

• Gender	
Male:	50.34%
Female:	49.22%
Not specified	0.43%
• Race	
White:	86.94%
Black:	10.32%
Others:	2.74%
• Disability Type	
Sensory:	32.19%
Physical:	15.38%
Cognitive:	22.15%
Psychological/mental:	30.27%

Return on Investment and Financial Impact

4,661 individuals with disabilities obtained or maintained employment after receiving services from OVR in FFY 2023.

Facts about these individuals:

- As a group, the 4,661 individuals increased their tax payments by an estimated \$15.04 million.
- Federal income tax payments increased by about \$5.59 million.
- State income tax payment increased by about \$2.33 million.
- Social Security/Medicare tax payments increased by about \$7.12 million (including employer contributions).

Applications, Referrals and Successful Closures

Personal Income and Insurance Benefits

When they applied for OVR services, 2,884 (61.9%) consumers reported that their primary source of support was their earnings from employment.

At closure, 4,115 (88.3%) individuals listed employment earnings as their primary source of support for an increase of 1,231 (26.4% points).

Consumer’s weekly income rose an average of 33% from \$575.42 at application to \$767.52 after employment, when their case was closed. This represents an average increase of \$192.09 in weekly income. As a result, successful consumers increased their income by an average of about \$9,989.

At case closure, 2,964 consumers (63.6%) were receiving or eligible to receive private or employer-sponsored health insurance benefits.

Community Engagement

In Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2023, the OVR purchased \$33,529,500.20 in case services for its consumers. These expenditures went to more than 13,888 individuals, businesses, agencies and organizations in communities all across the commonwealth.

Type of Service and Amount Expended for Consumer Services (not including contracted services)

Pre-ETS	\$250,903.96
Assessment	\$3,359,206.49
Diagnosis & Treatment	\$3,113,447.71
Training	\$16,040,441.21
Job Placement	\$574,062.50
Rehabilitation Technology	\$8,774,330.38
Maintenance	\$370,282.34
Transportation	\$116,539.46
Self-Employment	\$29,420.22
Assistive Services	\$145,084.99
Other Services	\$755,780.95
Sum	\$33,529,500.20

An additional \$6,268,870.89 of contracted pre-ETS services were expended.

Social Security Update

For FFY 2023, 518 Social Security disability recipients obtained employment after receiving services from the OVR. Social Security reimbursed OVR for 365 claims totaling \$4,234,941.60. This is the first time Kentucky OVR has surpassed \$4 million in reimbursements. These funds are used to supplement federal funds in providing direct services for consumers.

To better serve OVR consumers receiving disability benefits from Social Security, a team of Social Security specialists was organized with representatives from each district. These

staff members are encouraged to participate in quarterly Ticket to Work Partnership Plus meetings and report back to their respective districts.

Competitive Integrated Employment Outcomes (CIEO)

Consumer counties and number of CIEOs *

ADAIR	64
ALLEN.....	23
ANDERSON	43
BALLARD	*
BARREN	102
BATH.....	20
BELL.....	23
BOONE.....	67
BOURBON.....	46
BOYD.....	76
BOYLE	45
BRACKEN	16
BREATHITT.....	*
BRECKINRIDGE.....	12
BULLITT	25
BUTLER.....	10
CALDWELL.....	*
CALLOWAY	10
CAMPBELL	33
CARLISLE.....	*
CARROLL.....	*
CARTER.....	43
CASEY	27
CHRISTIAN.....	21
CLARK	53
CLAY	22
CLINTON	14
CRITTENDEN.....	*
CUMBERLAND	*
DAVISS.....	129
EDMONSON	13

ELLIOTT	*
ESTILL.....	20
FAYETTE	517
FLEMING.....	33
FLOYD	80
FRANKLIN.....	100
FULTON.....	*
GALLATIN	*
GARRARD.....	20
GRANT	10
GRAVES	13
GRAYSON.....	26
GREEN.....	35
GREENUP	75
HANCOCK.....	11
HARDIN.....	60
HARLAN.....	49
HARRISON	16
HART.....	33
HENDERSON.....	43
HENRY.....	*
HICKMAN	*
HOPKINS	20
JACKSON	10
JEFFERSON	307
JESSAMINE.....	80
JOHNSON.....	42
KENTON.....	106
KNOTT.....	22
KNOX.....	44
LARUE	13
LAUREL	94
LAWRENCE	23
LEE	*
LESLIE.....	*
LETCHER	52
LEWIS	24
LINCOLN.....	30

LIVINGSTON.....	*
LOGAN	15
LYON.....	*
MADISON	168
MAGOFFIN	*
MARION	41
MARSHALL.....	*
MARTIN	15
MASON	32
MCCRACKEN.....	39
MCCREARY	10
MCLEAN	*
MEADE	12
MENIFEE	*
MERCER.....	33
METCALFE	33
MONROE	*
MONTGOMERY.....	68
MORGAN	26
MUHLENBERG	11
NELSON.....	25
NICHOLAS	*
OHIO.....	16
OLDHAM	29
OWEN.....	*
OWSLEY	*
PENDLETON.....	*
PERRY.....	50
PIKE	150
POWELL.....	13
PULASKI.....	124
ROBERTSON	*
ROCKCASTLE.....	12
ROWAN	46
RUSSELL.....	60
SCOTT	92
SHELBY.....	20
SIMPSON.....	*

SPENCER.....*	WASHINGTON.....36
TAYLOR.....97	WAYNE.....51
TODD.....*	WEBSTER.....*
TRIGG.....*	WHITLEY.....40
TRIMBLE.....*	WOLFE.....*
UNION.....*	WOODFORD.....43
WARREN.....111	Out of State.....28
	TOTAL.....4,661

* CEOs in groups smaller than 10 have been redacted to preserve confidentiality.

CIEOs by Standard Occupational Classification (SOC)

Occupational Group	Number of Cases	Median Hourly Wage
Management	423	\$20.00
Business and Financial Operations	143	\$24.04
Computer and Mathematical	48	\$30.00
Architecture and Engineering	66	\$35.00
Life, Physical, and Social Science	51	\$26.00
Community and Social Service Occupations	231	\$17.50
Legal	35	\$22.75
Educational Instruction and Library	299	\$20.90
Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports, and Media	63	\$15.41
Healthcare Practitioners and Technical	394	\$29.61
Healthcare Support	152	\$15.91
Protective Service	72	\$17.00
Food Preparation and Serving Related	228	\$11.00
Building and Grounds Cleaning and Maintenance	202	\$12.08
Personal Care and Service	166	\$13.00
Sales and Related	264	\$13.00
Office and Administrative Support	613	\$15.67
Farming, Fishing, and Forestry	28	\$14.48
Construction and Extraction	173	\$20.60
Installation, Maintenance, and Repair	206	\$20.55
Production	295	\$18.00
Transportation and Material Moving	506	\$16.25
Military Specific	1	\$60.00
Other	2	\$20.50

Division of Blind Services

The Division of Blind Services provides individuals with visual disabilities the resources and tools they need to become more independent throughout their lives.

The programs offered by the division include the following:

The Charles W. McDowell Rehabilitation

Center for the Blind offers training in low-vision and blindness skills. The McDowell Center provides high-quality services and resources to Kentuckians who are blind or visually impaired to prepare them for employment, economic self-sufficiency and independence with complete integration into society.

Independent Living and Older Blind Program

provides a broad range of individualized services enabling individuals with vision impairments to achieve their maximum level of independence within the home, community and/or workplace. Together with each program participant, Independent Living Services works toward solutions that are unique to an individual's situation. The Older Individuals Who Are Blind Program offers opportunities to learn independence skills for individuals aged 55 and older.

Orientation and Mobility Services teaches individuals with visual impairments how to navigate safely in a variety of environments. Certified Orientation and Mobility specialists tailor training to the individual's specific travel needs. They teach lessons individually in the participant's home community or at the Charles McDowell Center in Louisville.

DeafBlind Program through OVR includes providing assistive technology, employment services and specialized training to help people who are DeafBlind improve the quality and ease of their everyday lives. The DeafBlind Program coordinates these services to individuals who have been identified as having a combination of significant hearing and vision loss.

Bioptic Driving Program helps people who are visually impaired explore driving as an option for people who meet the criteria. Each individual is unique, and there are multiple issues involved with safe driving besides vision.

McDowell Center Open House

The Charles W. McDowell Center for the Blind was built in 1994 to provide a state-of-art training facility and to house vocational rehabilitation counseling and support staff. The McDowell Center training center is in the Blind Services Division in the OVR.

The residential part of the center closed in March 2020 because of the COVID pandemic. Since that time, the center has repaired the plumbing and heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) systems, and renovated and updated the dorm space to enhance comfort and safety features for consumers. Renovations cost about \$655,000 and were paid for with federal and state government funds.

On July 26, 2023, the center celebrated with an open house and tours of the renovated 14 dormitory rooms, one apartment and the new Recreational Therapy Office and Dormitory Computer Lab. Tours also included the existing patio and garden area displaying an array of herbs that are cared for



and used by students and staff. Information tables provided the public with valuable materials to better understand services offered at McDowell and OVR. More importantly, the public learned how people who are blind or visually impaired rely on and utilize the resources provided at the center to help prepare for and maintain independence.

McDowell Center White Cane Day Celebration

The McDowell Center celebrated White Cane Day on Oct. 12, 2023. The independence that the white cane provides to people who are blind or have low vision called for a day of gathering, sharing resources and having a good time. The center had tables with vendors and community partners and had a host of educational and fun activities.



Photo of several people walking in front of tables set up with vendors and community partners seated behind them.



Photo of set up for White Cane Day with four people carrying a partially open tent near a banner that says White Cane Day in front of the McDowell Center.



Erin Sigmund of APH gesturing as she is giving a talk behind a podium. Two audience members are in the foreground.



Community partners KSB Foundation and Bennett & Bloom Eye Centers tables with two people standing in front and three people behind the tables.

Carl D. Perkins Vocational Training Center

The Carl D. Perkins Vocational Training Center is a division of the Kentucky OVR in Johnson County that has been in operation since 1973. The center serves individuals with many types of disabilities, including learning disabilities, autism spectrum disorders, traumatic brain injury, intellectual disability, deaf/hard of hearing and physical disabilities. The vast majority of its consumers are referred to the center by OVR counselors from across the commonwealth.

The center was created to give Kentuckians with disabilities access to all of the services they need to become employed in one location. It currently operates several programs and services that enable consumers to achieve their vocational goals and become independent.

Perkins Center Graduates 129 Students

On June 16, the Perkins Center hosted its 2023 annual commencement with 71 of the school's 129 eligible students participating in the graduation ceremony. The graduates earned 101 industry credentials, and represented all programs at the center, including custodial/building maintenance, childcare and GED. The ceremony and reception hosted more than 400 family members and guests.



A Quick Glance at the Perkins Center

Referral Information *

The center has received 272 consumer referrals through Aug. 31, 2023. Following are the breakdown of districts and the number of referrals each has sent.

Ashland	18
Bluegrass	30
Bowling Green	*
Covington	*
Danville	24
Deaf Services	*
East Blind	*
East Jefferson	*
Elizabethtown	*
Florence	19
Hazard	*
Lexington	13
Louisville	*
Owensboro	16
Paducah	*
Prestonsburg	50
Somerset	17
West Central Blind	*

* Referrals in groups smaller than 10 have been redacted to preserve confidentiality.

Certifications, Credentials, and Skill Gains

Since Jan. 1, 2023, consumers have earned the following certifications, credentials and skill gains:

Credentials	90
Driver Licenses	6
Driver Permits	39

Persons Served

The center has served 369 OVR consumers since Jan. 1, 2023. Consumers served come from 85 of the 120 counties in Kentucky.

Overall Completion Information

Life Skills Enhancement	12
Program Completions	319

Tour Information

Number of Tours YTD	92
Number of Participants	682

2023 Annual Meeting: National Consortium of Vocational Rehabilitation Training Centers

The Perkins Center was excited to host this year's National Consortium of Vocational Rehabilitation Training Centers (NC-VRTC) September 13-15, 2023. The consortium includes the eight rehabilitation centers operated by the vocational rehabilitation agency in its respective state. The centers provide comprehensive rehabilitation services including training and employment services. The Perkins Center is Kentucky's representative center.

Other representative centers of the NC-VRTC are:

- Virginia – Wilson Workforce & Rehabilitation Center
- Georgia – Roosevelt Warm Springs Institute for Rehabilitation
- Maryland – Workforce & Technology Center
- Pennsylvania – Commonwealth Technical Institute at the Hiram G. Andrews Center
- Michigan – Career & Technical Institute
- Arkansas – Career & Development Center
- Tennessee – The Tennessee Rehabilitation Center

Perkins Center Celebrates 50 Years



On Sept. 14, 2023, the Perkins Center celebrated 50 years of providing comprehensive services to Kentuckians with disabilities. Carroll Burchett, the first director of the center addressed the more than 250 persons who came out to celebrate the milestone.

Ben's Success Story

Ben Catron was referred to the Perkins Center in July 2022, by Danita, a vocational rehabilitation counselor from the Prestonsburg district. After taking a Comprehensive Vocational Evaluation from Sept. 13-16, 2022, at the center, Ben started with the recommended Job Readiness Training Program in January 2023.



He successfully completed the program in March 2023, and enrolled in the Perkins' Food Service Training Program. He was a hard worker and displayed a desire to work. He also followed instructions well and maintained a positive attitude in his program.

Ben completed his Food Service training in May 2023, and earned the ServSafe general industry certification. When he returned home, Ben started a job Aug. 1, 2023, with a local school system working seven hours per day, five days a week using the skills that he learned at the center.

Kentucky Business Enterprise

Kentucky Business Enterprise (KBE) trains and certifies Kentuckians who are legally blind and licenses them to operate food service operations, snack bars, dining facilities and automated vending facilities in public and private locations. The program provides these individuals with full-time employment and career opportunities while providing high-quality vending and food services for government agencies and businesses. Vendors own the businesses and receive income from the net profits. Costs of initial stock, the first year's liability insurance, equipment, and repair are provided by OVR, and the titles for these items remain with the state.

Each facility is stocked from the first day of operation, offering a large selection of quality products at competitive prices. When possible, products are purchased from local wholesalers, allowing the vendor to secure each customer's product preferences.

Dedication to customer satisfaction is one of the main reasons for KBE's success. Each service location is designed to provide the products customers want in an attractive setting.

KBE FFY23 Review

The KBE Blind Vendor Program continued to recover in FFY23 but has not returned to pre-pandemic sales. Although state and federal employees have returned to their buildings, most work hybrid schedules with only a few days per week in the office.



Catering for the Kentucky Fatherhood Summit

While KBE may never achieve the traditional vending sales they had prior to the pandemic, they are pursuing new locations and opportunities to build vendors' incomes and help offset losses.

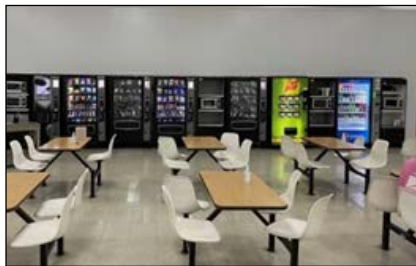
Staffing issues have continued to plague the 23 KBE vendors. To help alleviate the situation, KBE installed six new micromarkets this year. These

unmanned markets save vendors from recruiting staff and paying wages and payroll taxes, which increases vendor revenue. The self-service markets provide users with a 24-hour convenience store experience with a wide variety of prices, and food and beverage options such as fresh fruits, salads and frozen food. The custom designed micromarkets have self-checkout kiosks that accept various payment options. This new trend is meeting customer needs and helping KBE vendors succeed.



Customers at the newest micromarket at one of Jefferson County Public Schools' administration buildings

KBE has installed vending at nine new locations and has reopened the vending in one facility that had been closed since March 2019. Two KBE vendors branched out to take on several large catering jobs for conferences and meetings within their buildings, which added significantly to their income.



Breakroom vending at a Louisville post office

This year, 110 state-of-the-art vending machines with the technology to accept credit cards, Apple Pay and Google Pay were purchased and are being installed at vendor locations throughout the commonwealth. Having these additional forms of payment available to customers has increased sales and helped boost vendor income.

KBE increased its staff this year to provide more extensive services to the blind vendors. In addition to general support, the new food operations evaluator assists vendors who have food service operations to learn to figure food costs and efficient menu planning and pricing. The evaluator helps vendors build more revenue and cut waste by providing advice on catering for meetings and conferences in their buildings.

A full-time electronic technician joined KBE to coordinate and deliver more timely equipment repair. A second assistant director was added to oversee the food service program and work with military dining contracts at Fort Campbell and the Wendell H. Ford Regional Training Center. This position also will develop new opportunities outside state and federal government facilities.

Vendors elected a new 11-member Committee of Blind Vendors (CBV) to serve until January 2025. In cooperation with KBE, the CBV revised their



In-house Blind Vendor Training

bylaws and worked with KBE to actively participate in revamping the admission process and training program for new blind vendor candidates. This year, they began using the nationally recognized Lighthouse of Chicago Randolph Sheppard online training program. One candidate completed the program and became licensed. Two more are currently working to complete the training.

This year, KBE staff and vendors attended several upward mobility trainings. These included in-house trainings, as well as national events such as the National Association of Blind Merchants (NABM) BLAST in person and virtual trainings, the Vistar Show, the National Automated Merchandising



Two KBE vendors at the 2023 National Restaurant Show in Chicago.

Association (NAMA) conference and the National Restaurant Association conference. Staff attended the virtual American Council of the Blind Sagebrush conference and the National Council of State Agencies for the Blind (NCSAB) annual fiscal training with members of the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) Randolph-Sheppard team, as well as their fall conference, which had a full day of Randolph-

Sheppard training. The electronic technician attended a weeklong training provided by U-Select-It, the maker of KBE's vending machines. The training focused on learning to repair the most common equipment issues.

In addition, a KBE vendor was selected as one of only 12 vendors in the United States to attend the NABM Emerging Leaders Program in Nashville.

This year, KBE was requested to administer the \$20,000 Coca-Cola scholarship for legally blind students. It is funded as part of the state soft drink contract. The scholarship applicants must be legally blind, OVR consumers, enrolled in an accredited educational program and meet other established criteria such as grade point average and recommendations from teachers or employers, and their vocational rehabilitation counselor. They must submit an essay based on their vocational goal. There were four \$5,000 winners this year, including two bachelor's degree students, a master's degree student and a student in medical school.

Kentucky Business Enterprise Spotlights Lynn Florence

Kentucky Business Enterprise's (KBE) blind vendor Lynn Florence is a one-woman operation at the American Printing House for the Blind (APH) in Louisville.

After receiving her license in 2015, Florence was awarded the operation at APH. Prior to becoming licensed, Florence worked for the previous APH vendor for eight years and became invested in the operation and the people there. Since taking over as vendor, she has run Lynn's Café, as well as the vending in the building, and she manages the vending at LC Industries, which provides employment for blind individuals.

Florence has cultivated a very dedicated following for her business. Last year, APH began developing plans for an extensive building renovation that will close her café for the next two years. Once completed, she will have

a modern two-level café that will serve staff and the public, and can be used by the APH for public and private events. The completed building also will have a museum and visitor tours of the APH.

While Florence anticipates that customer traffic at her café will increase significantly when the modernized APH building opens, she was concerned about losing her income and connections to customers during the renovation. KBE worked with APH and Florence to develop a micromarket to serve the APH staff and construction crew during the renovation. Since she is a coffee connoisseur, a coffee bar was designed specifically for her location. Normally, a micromarket is an unmanned operation, but Florence is so invested in her business and the people at APH, she goes to her facility every day to make sure everything stays stocked and she can keep up to date with her customers.

"I love working at APH because they employ many visually impaired individuals, and being visually impaired myself, it's important to me to help other visually impaired people. I've tried to make the most of my micromarket space by making it attractive and welcoming to my customers. I still greet them with a smile every morning, just as I did in the café," she said.

In addition to her business, Florence is very active with the KBE elected Committee of Blind Vendors where she is in her second term as vice chair. She is the first female to occupy a leadership role on the committee. She is a member of the National Federation of the Blind's (NABM) Women's Initiative Supporting Entrepreneurship (WISE) and was selected and attended the NABM Emerging Leaders program in 2018. She also has served as the blind vendors' representative on the Kentucky State Council of Vocational Rehabilitation.

This year, Florence attended the 2023 National Restaurant Association Show in Chicago. She said she was amazed by it all. She was able to network and met a representative from a software company. She spoke to him about developing software for micromarket kiosks that would include a speech reader that would make them accessible to the blind.



Florence said, “The show was unreal! From the floor to the ceiling, they had every product and food that a restaurant would need. I would recommend that anyone in the food service industry attend that show at least once. It was amazing!”

Florence lives in Louisville with her husband, Ottis. They have three adult children and two grandchildren.

Are You Interested in Joining The Kentucky Statewide Council for Vocational Rehabilitation (SCVR)?

The council is comprised of 19-23 members with both voting and non-voting (ex-officio) status. The majority of SCVR members must self-identify as having a disability or represent someone with a disability who meets the requirements of 34 CFR 361.5(c)(28). Members of the council are appointed by the governor.

In accordance with KRS 151B.245, the membership must include representatives from the following:

- Statewide Independent Living Council
- Parent Training and Information Center
- Client Assistance Program
- Community Rehabilitation Service Provider
- Business, Industry and Labor – Four Representatives
- Representatives of a disability group
- Current or former applicant or recipient of vocational rehabilitation services
- Executive Director of OVR
- State Educational Agency
- State Workforce Innovation Board
- Kentucky Council for the Blind
- National Federation for the Blind
- Bluegrass Council of the Blind
- Representative of a disability group, including individuals who have difficulty representing themselves
- State Committee of Blind Vendors
- Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor

The SCVR meetings are held four times per year on a quarterly basis. The council encompasses six standing committees, which are Executive, Blind Services, Policy and Planning, Consumer Services and Program Evaluation, Public Awareness and Legislative, and Nominating and Bylaws. The committees meet once between each full council quarterly meeting and may require additional time spent on the specific function of a committee.

Interested citizens should consider the time required to participate on the council. It is suggested that potential candidates for appointment attend at least one full council meeting to understand more about OVR and the SCVR before applying for a position.

If you are interested in learning more about the council or joining the SCVR guest listserv, please visit our web page at [Statewide Council for Vocational Rehabilitation - Kentucky Career Center](#) for more information. If you would like to apply for membership with the SCVR, you may apply directly at the Boards and Commissions website at [Kentucky Boards and Commissions Application](#).