IOWA VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SERVICES

Pre-Employment Transition Services

Serving Iowa Students

| Number of Potentially Eligible Students | 7,825 |
| Number of Students with Disabilities being Served | 3,149 |
| Amount Expended on Post Secondary-Education | $4,046,026.64 |

Summer Program:

During the 2020 summer, IVRS held the IVRS Virtual Pre-ETS Summer Program. This seven-week program ran June 15th through July 30th following the theme of “Me Monday”, “Transition Tuesday”, “Working Wednesday” and “Tour Thursday”. Our local area offices partnered with schools, businesses, post-secondary institutions and other community partners to develop and run activities each week based on different industries such as skilled trades, culinary arts, healthcare, IT, manufacturing and transportation.

Many high school students dream of having a career as a professional athlete, and this year they had an opportunity to interview an Iowa athlete who was the 13th NFL draft pick to the Buccaneers in 2020 before going on to win the Super Bowl in 2021, to learn what it is like!!

Students participating in Ottumwa Area Office Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) had the opportunity to have a “virtual” interview and meet Tristan Wirfs, who grew up in Mount Vernon, Iowa and played for the University of Iowa Hawkeyes. In addition to his football roster of skills, Wirfs also has records in other sports and is a well-rounded athlete in multiple sports arenas.

Ottumwa Area Office Rehabilitation Counselor Patty Galván Ramos, said, “Our students were in awe and happy that Tristan took the time to answer their questions.” The discussion focused on students identifying and working with their own personal team supports, finding their passion and working hard to persevere through the setbacks.

See the interview at this link: https://youtu.be/P0W-cNvKO9Y
Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services (IVRS) is committed to increasing the knowledge and understanding of Social Security Administration (SSA) work incentives to assist job candidates in choosing employment opportunities that will lead to greater self-sufficiency.

Benefits Planning expertise is best learned by layering knowledge through real experiences. Our vision is that all staff will understand the basics but will grow through exposure and training. This may be done in a variety of ways for both the job candidates and IVRS staff through regularly occurring events.

**Friday LIVE**
- 1pm - State wide Work Incentive informational zoom event for job candidates.
- 2pm – Ask the expert your specific questions
- 15-30 minute micro training on specific topics
- 8:30am Check the Training Calendar
- Benefits Planning “the basics”
- Every 4th Thursday afternoon 3-4:30 pm
- Topics presented during local staff meetings

**Tuesday Training**
- **BP 101**
- **5-minute**

**Parent Engagement**
- Parent’s choice of topics
- 6pm – 7pm Every other Thursday

The Virtual Parent Gatherings started in April 2020. Three sessions were designed for students who are Deaf/hard of hearing and their families. The other parent group was started in April, and in May the groups were combined.

Families completed a survey to help IVRS provide training on specific topics. Parents expressed their need for information and guidance that will assist their transition age student’s ability to participate in competitive integrated employment.

The Virtual Parent Gathering resumed in September with the following topics:

- **September 10, 2020 - SSI - The Basics**
- **October 8, 2020 - Reporting Wages to SSA**
- **November 12, 2020 - SSI & 1619b (Continued Medicaid)**
- **December 10, 2020 - SSA Reviews**

Kellee is an SSI recipient who started his work journey at a sheltered workshop. He felt that he learned valuable work skills there, but was determined to move into competitive integrated employment. Kellee was hired for a part-time position at HyVee, where he excelled. Kellee was ready for long term employment, but had questions about how this would affect his benefits. Kellee was provided Benefits Planning services with IVRS in order to learn and understand how he could work more hours and continue his insurance through SSI. With this reassurance, Kellee was able to move to a full-time custodian job at Pekin School, where he receives insurance and IPERS. He no longer receives SSI checks and supports himself through his employment. Kellee has worked hard and is

**Detailed benefits counseling has led to 97 individuals who were on public support for their living expenses now supporting themselves, a savings of $900,276 annually for the state.**
IOWA VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SERVICES

A newsletter brought to you by the State Rehabilitation Council and Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services

JANUARY 2021

WHO WE ARE

Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services (IVRS) is the largest division of the Iowa Department of Education focused on serving individuals with disabilities to optimize competitive integrated employment opportunities and independence. One of our message points for staff is to be at the expanding intersection of disability expertise and business intelligence. We are an integral piece of the labor exchange system and a collaborative partner across state systems improving alignment of employment services and building capacity across programs to meet the needs of eligible Iowans with disabilities.

FUNDING

We receive federal and state funding at a ratio of 78.7% to 21.3%. That means for every one dollar of state monies, we match almost four dollars of federal money.

Our current state budget is $6,006,114. This is made of several appropriations related to Vocational Rehabilitation Services, Entrepreneurs with Disabilities Program, Independent Living and Independent Living Center Grant.

For 2022/2023 we have approximately an additional $2.2 million federal dollars available to bring into the State of Iowa if we could provide match of an additional $600,000. IVRS is planning cash match programs with our school districts to cover approximately $300,000 of these unmet monies, but an additional $250,000 targeted for the Juvenile Re-Entry System program (JRES) would match $924,000 federal monies and the $50,000 identified for technology enhancement will match an additional $185,000 for a total of $1.1 million additional federal monies. The JRES efforts will positively impact outcomes for Juveniles coming from the Department of Correction programs.

NEED

Everyone is going to experience disability at some point.

National data has demonstrated businesses that reflect inclusion have a better bottom line.

The pandemic has revealed a developing revolution in thinking of what employment looks like and will be. This impacts the largest targeted group of individuals of any category – people with disabilities.

IVRS and employment services positively impact both of these statements through our dual customer approach with individuals who have disabilities and our business partners.
Due to the pandemic, our State Rehabilitation Council will not host an on-site legislative reception this year, so instead we will be sending weekly flyers focused on information pertaining to our budget and service delivery for the next six weeks. We will also archive this information at our legislative 2021 link to our IVRS website. We hope you take a minute or two and scan the information and learn about how we are using state and federal monies to effectively serve Iowans with disabilities. Please remember, we are available for outreach and questions and can be a resource for your constituents on disability, employment and business needs.

"I support VR/IVRS because everyone deserves an opportunity to use their abilities to do meaningful work. Employers also benefit from the diverse gifts of our job seekers."

Amy R. Dutton, Regional Director
America’s SBDC - Iowa
University of Northern Iowa
SRC Member

Visit our website at www.ivrs.iowa.gov
This newsletter highlights our partnership with Juvenile ReEntry Systems (JReS) and provides additional information behind the IVRS budget request for an additional $250,000. This money will match federal dollars in the amount of almost $1 million dollars. Our plan is to partner with JReS to create three contracted positions that will directly expand the capacity to improve transition and community integration as individuals exit the institutional setting and return to their local communities. These positions will help meet gaps in the current delivery of services and assist individual job candidates in follow-along services integrating them into existing community resources and services. The goal is to connect individuals into career pathway and support systems reducing recidivism and expanding access in obtaining financial independence through competitive integrated employment. The targeted population would be individuals eligible for vocational rehabilitation services - individuals with disabilities having dual barriers of their juvenile correction experience. This is a population at high risk needing expanded connections and ongoing supports. IVRS will provide 100% of the monies to fund the three positions and provide contract oversight to the process ensuring compliance with the expenditure of federal and state monies, the positions will be integrated into the JReS system providing effective use of already established promising practices and improving collaboration and coordination. We will pilot the project for three years, monitoring data and quality, to determine sustainability of the program.

What is JReS?
The Iowa Department of Human Rights (DHR), Division of Criminal and Juvenile Justice Planning (CJJP) oversees the Juvenile Reentry Task Force (JRTF) in the development and implementation of juvenile justice reentry systems and supports. Multiple state agency partners are assisting with standardization and/or development of policy, procedure, and structural elements of Iowa’s Juvenile Reentry Systems (JReS). The goal of JReS is to reduce recidivism rates and to improve other youth outcomes through implementation of comprehensive system-wide reforms to juvenile
reentry policies and processes which include: enhanced cross-system coordination, utilization of quality and effective programming, and prioritization of resources.

In particular, the JReS effort seeks to increase family engagement, and improve/intensify case management.

Consultants from the National Reentry Resource Center and the Center for Juvenile Justice Reform are presently administering an assessment/survey to staff working at Juvenile Court Services (JCS) and in group care facilities and the Boys State Training School (STS) to identify strengths and challenges in those agencies effort to engage families and provide case management.

WHY THE WORK IS IMPORTANT

One main goal of reentry is to reduce recidivism for youth returning from group care facilities. Data compiled for the past five fiscal years shows recidivism is 57.8% for youth returning from group care and 68.8% for those discharging from the boys State Training School (STS).

There is not currently a standardized reentry process in Iowa’s juvenile justice system. JCS offices in Iowa’s eight judicial districts, STS, and group care facilities operate with some level of autonomy in regards to program and service provision to juvenile offenders. As a result, the availability and dissemination of reentry services and subsequent experiences of youth reentering from group care and STS varies.

COVID-19 has affected the overall functioning and service provision for youth in Iowa’s juvenile justice (JJ) system. JCS and the facilities have found new ways to serve youth through technology and innovation. A recent survey was conducted to generalize responses on “what’s working”.

HOW IT ASSISTS WITH TRANSITIONING YOUTH FROM AN INSTITUTION INTO THE COMMUNITY

By coordinating services and agencies through JReS, we can:

- Advance efforts to capture quality data and better understand the breadth of programming/contacts in planning for youth reentry from placements.
- Increase quality contacts and connections between service providers, youth, and families in planning for reentry and providing extensive aftercare support.
- Ensure standardized reentry practices that lead to positive outcomes for youth.

Visit our website at www.ivrs.iowa.gov
The Dual Customer: Individuals with Disabilities and Business

Successful outcome for BOTH customers out of Mount Pleasant, Iowa

"Each and everyone of us has a purpose in life. Our goal is to be a part of Sarah’s journey towards hers. She takes pride in making sure all of her tasks are completed. The impact of Sarah’s attitude is felt not only by our customers, but employers as well. How can you not smile when greeted with true enthusiasm? It’s impossible."

- Deina Merschbrock, Owner of Sonny’s Supermarket

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“I am really lucky to have Hope Haven, VR, and my parents to support me. I am really glad I got hired at Sonny’s. I am getting out of the house more and I have a really good support team”

- Sarah, Job Candidate

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Ashlee Cummings, the business specialist from Des Moines plays a big role in the hiring and training at LaQuinta Altoona. Ashlee is at LaQuinta regularly introducing candidates to the work in hospitality. You might catch her giving tours, helping complete applications, training new employees, identifying and implementing accommodations and making a warm handoff of our job candidates to the hiring manager.

Brian (general manager): “IVRS has brought value to LaQuinta by providing us qualified candidates for our open positions. IVRS has assisted us in diversifying our workforce and I have seen the positive impact it has made on my staff’s morale.”

Tressa (job candidate): “I am excited to get back because I love the customer side of my job. I enjoy helping and interacting with the customers, my co-workers and especially my boss who has been awesome!”
Council Bluffs

Tammy (Ameristar HR Business partner): “Partnering with IVRS and TAP (Transition Alliance Program) has been a breath of fresh air for Ameristar. We are proud to support both organizations while paving the way for employment opportunities for local students.”

Melissa Stevans Shudak: “Tammy Really is one of the most amazing managers I’ve worked with and can’t say thank you enough to her.”

Davenport

“IVRS staff has provided great services to facilitate and meet our business needs, while showing great compassion regarding the needs of their individual clients. For example, we had a successful match that resulted in Katun hiring one of their clients; that person has already been promoted twice within our facility due to their outstanding performance, attitude and productivity. They started with us as a person with a disability; now, due to the program, they don’t consider themselves as having a disability at all.

“The program’s staff helps coach both sides of the placement; they help their clients understand the directions and the work environment demands, while assisting the employer in finding a suitable employee that meets their business needs. We are pleased to be part of such a life-changing program and emphatically support and endorse the Vocational Rehabilitation Program.”

Sondra Meyers — Human Resources Manager — Katun Corporation

Des Moines

“IVRS is amazing! IVRS allows us to further our mission. We are grateful for the opportunity to provide opportunities to individuals experiencing employment barriers. They make us a better team, ensure our employees represent our patient population and inspire us every day.” Dan Tallon Market Director of Human Services, MercyOne.

Business Services moved to a Virtual Platform

As Covid hit, IVRS business services, with the help of our business partners, was able to shift all services to virtual. The team implemented and delivered a customer service academy to help prepare our applicants for work serving others, our “job clubs” also went virtual. 6 different businesses join us and our candidates each month to discuss their needs and we provide virtual networking to allow our candidate to build rapport with hiring managers of businesses in their goal areas.

Visit our website at www.ivrs.iowa.gov
Meet JD!!

This talented young man is a senior in high school. He has participated in IVRS Pre-Employment Transition Services since he was in 9th grade. He also receives assistance from our Making the Grade (MTG) grant which has helped JD and his family explore his career options and develop skills that will help him in whatever career path he chooses – things such as interpersonal skills, job search skills, self advocacy learning how to speak up for himself.

One of those options was a job as a dishwasher at a local country club. In this role JD recently helped train a new dishwasher and not only taught him the job but also taught the person about looking for other things to do when you are not busy washing dishes.

JD is particularly interested in training for a career in welding. He combines this skill with his passion for art, and has built a truly unique business called JDs Creations.

Currently JD is exploring the option of self-employment through his business with his Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Kara Merchant-Bartholomew and Ryan Jenness, Transition Specialist with Making the Grade — Hope Haven.

JD’s mother is enthusiastic about the new endeavor.

“Ryan has encouraged us to move forward with creating a business for JD — for example, setting up the Facebook page for JD’s Creations.” she said. “Ryan helped come up with ideas for JD’s business, such as getting shirts and hats. MTG helped JD create a video pamphlet that we posted on his Facebook page.”

You can visit the Facebook page and view JD’s artwork at https://www.facebook.com/JDs-Creations-109117357472200/

After working with JD, Ryan is impressed with this high school senior’s dedication and ability. “JD is awesome in everything that he does!” he said.

See his story in his own words on the next page.
Hi, my name is JD Bumgarner and I have Cerebral Palsy and a learning disability, but that has not stopped me from finding my passion, which is being creative.

I have always been interested in designing and drawing things. Even when I was little, I would help my Dad put things together without having to look at the directions, which is a good thing since I have trouble reading. School and learning, especially math, reading and writing have always been hard for me because of my Cerebral Palsy, which is a brain injury. Cerebral Palsy, because it is a brain injury, makes it harder for me to process information quickly, which is why my favorite types of classes have always been art classes, where I get to use my creativity. I enjoy finding new ways of being creative and was excited to discover welding.

I started to weld as part of the 4H Bucket of Junk Challenge a few years ago. The first piece I created was one that I called “Herky or Cy?”. My parents were in awe of what I created out of a bucket of junk.

The next year, I created a Beagle and a bunny. And most recently, I created a tractor from the bucket of junk.

My parents already knew that I was very creative and good at designing things on paper, but now I had a new way to be creative through welding. I have learned that my brain works differently, which isn’t a bad thing because it helps me see and create art out of buckets of junk. I like to think that I am giving new life to junk that would have been thrown away.

My parents bought me a welder and welding equipment for Christmas, which I started to use right away. Once Covid 19 hit and schools were cancelled, I started welding even more. I took one of my first pieces, the “Iron Indian”, to the high school art show at Arts on Grand and it won the “Curator’s Choice Award” and was the first piece of art that I sold. I am blessed to have supportive parents who encourage and help me use my creativity.

I came to live with my Mom and Dad when I was 27 months old as part of the foster care system. My biological sister, Chloe and I were adopted by them a few years later. I also have a younger brother, Nate and two beagles at home. My entire family enjoys helping me with my welding. My Mom created a Facebook page called JD’s Creations and posts and sells my pieces there. Both my Mom and Dad help me polish and clean the pieces of junk before and after I weld them. I’ve even taught my Mom, younger sister and brother to weld. I really enjoy working with my family on my different projects - it has brought us all closer together. I am very blessed and thankful that I get to do what I love.
BUSINESS SERVICES EVENTS
MARCH 2021

2:00PM - 4:00PM
Customer Service Academy*
REGISTRATION CLOSES FEBRUARY 24TH

TUES
MAR 1-5

1:00PM - 2:00PM
Job Search Focus Group
United States Postal Service

REGISTER HERE

WED
MAR 23

1:00PM - 2:00PM
Career Connections
Groundskeeping, Landscaping and Nursery/Greenhouse

REGISTER HERE

MON
MAR 8

1:00PM - 2:00PM
Virtual Meet & Greet Pre-Class
Hy-Vee *MUST ATTEND FOR MARCH 11TH EVENT*

REGISTER HERE

TUES
MAR 9

1:00PM - 2:00PM
Job Search Focus Group
Vigilant Home Inspection

REGISTER HERE

THUR
MAR 11

1:00PM-3:00PM
Virtual Meet & Greet
Hy-Vee

LINK TO JOIN WILL BE SHARED AT PRE-CLASS ON 3/8

TUES
MAR 16

1:00PM - 2:00PM
Job Search Focus Group
G4S

REGISTER HERE

WED
MAR 17

1:00PM - 2:00PM
Career Connections
Groundskeeping, Landscaping and Nursery/Greenhouse

REGISTER HERE

TUES
MAR 23

1:00PM - 2:00PM
Job Search Focus Group
Walgreens

REGISTER HERE

TUES
MAR 30

1:00PM - 2:00PM
Job Search Focus Group
Veridian Credit Union

REGISTER HERE

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<th>JOB SEARCH FOCUS GROUP</th>
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<td>Join us for a weekly web based employment workshop. Our team will help prepare job seekers, connect with employers, and provide vocational counseling.</td>
<td>Attend interactive virtual workshops. We may cover multiple facets of your job search based on specific industries including: Labor Market Information, Resume/ Cover Letter, Work Readiness Skills, Online Networking, Business Tours/ Job Shadows, Employer Panels, Mock Interviews.</td>
<td>Join us for this week long training to learn the importance of customer service and to become comfortable talking to and interacting with customers. Skills taught include; greeting customers, handling difficult questions, assisting customers and handling phone calls.</td>
<td>Join IVRS business services for a virtual event. An overview of the business will be followed by breakout rooms with a recruiter from your area. This will be an opportunity to sell yourself and show why YOU are the best candidate. This MAY lead to a virtual interview on the spot. Pre-class is mandatory.</td>
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*This is meant for adult job candidates in the State of Iowa.*