



Pennsylvania Rehabilitation Council (PaRC)

Annual Report Fiscal Year 2022-2023



The Mission of the Council is to inform and advise the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, the State Board of Vocational Rehabilitation, the Legislature and the Governor on the diverse issues affecting employment of people with disabilities.





This report covers the activities of the Pennsylvania Rehabilitation Council (PaRC) for the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2022 and ending June 30, 2023. Alternate formats and additional copies are available upon request.

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Current and past reports are also available on the PaRC website: <https://parehabilitationcouncil.org/>

Pennsylvania State Law requires the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) publish an annual program report on a different timeline than this product. Therefore, the PaRC reports the most recently available OVR data. For a more detailed OVR report, you may request OVR's Program Report from:

Pennsylvania Office of Vocational Rehabilitation

651 Boas Street Room 700

Harrisburg, PA 17121

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MESSAGE FROM OUR CHAIR

Dear Friends and Fellow Stakeholders,

I would like to thank you for taking the time to review our Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2022-2023. You will find in the following pages information about the work of the Council and highlights of our partnership with the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR).

The Council is looking forward to a very busy 2024. There will be an emphasis on developing new policies that will benefit the employment of Pennsylvanians with disabilities. In addition, we look forward to working with the Shapiro Administration and members of the General Assembly in advancing policy and budgetary priorities that directly impact employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

If you have an interest in our work and want to become involved, I would invite you to visit the PaRC website to apply for membership at <https://parehabilitationcouncil.org/get-involved/become-a-member/>. There are numerous ways you can contribute to the council by being a member. If you have further questions, please refer to the inside front cover page of the report to contact the PaRC Office.

I would be remiss if I did not highlight the efforts of the individuals who not only made this report happen but serve behind the scenes to make sure

the Council functions. United Cerebral Palsy (UCP) of Central PA is contracted by the Commonwealth's Department of Labor and Industry/OVR to provide



logistical support and coordination services to the PaRC. Thank you to our Project Support Staff, Michelle Gerrick and Christopher Todd, for fielding questions and inquiries for the Council and assisting with preparing materials for all meetings & activities and fulfilling our mandated responsibilities.

Finally, as we turn the page on Calendar Year 2023, I would like to invite you to our 2024 Council Meetings. These meetings contain information for people with disabilities not only in the OVR system, but in other disability services areas such as education, transition, and long-term living. Our first meeting of 2024 will be February 15th via zoom. If interested in learning more about the PaRC and joining our meetings, please visit our website at <https://parehabilitationcouncil.org/>.

Have a prosperous 2024!

Paul Fogle
Chair 2022-2023



MESSAGE FROM OUR OVR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The PA Rehabilitation Council (PaRC) is an essential and integral partner of the PA Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR). OVR and PaRC maintain regular and ongoing collaboration across many areas of the vocational rehabilitation service provision and independent living ecosystems. The PaRC's advocacy on services, initiatives, and competitive integrated employment remain top priorities. Throughout 2023, PaRC has been an important part of the update, revision, and implementation of agency policy updates, such as Driving & Vehicle Services, Employment Supports, and the Audiological Services Policy. PaRC's feedback is a necessary component of the policy development process to ensure that the voices of the disability community and the customers that OVR serves are effectively represented.

PaRC has included OVR in advocacy related to broad and specific aspects of independence and community/societal issues impacting the disability community, such as transportation, housing, attendant care, and customer satisfaction of OVR services and efficacy of programs. Looking forward to 2024, PaRC has outlined

the intention to continue strengthening collaboration opportunities with OVR by creating training opportunities between the Council and the State Board of Vocational Rehabilitation. This joint training will define the framework for individual and combined benefits offered to the disability community by the agency, Pennsylvania, and at a national level. This effort will ultimately improve effective decision-making and delivery of meaningful employment services OVR can offer.

OVR is proud to partner with the PaRC to further OVR's mission - to assist individuals with disabilities to secure and maintain employment and independence.

Ryan Hyde
OVR Executive Director 2022-2023



PaRC MEMBERS

Including Category of Representation July 2022 – June 2023



Ryan Hyde, Ex-Officio Member

Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR)
“The knowledge and experience that the PaRC offers ensures that the voices of people with disabilities are heard as the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) makes programmatic decisions that impact the lives of our customers and the services that we offer. The PaRC is mission focused and an essential partner of OVR, supporting the agency, our customers and other stakeholders through their advocacy.”



Jeanette Alexander, Member at Large 2022-2023

Category of Representation: State Department of Education
Committees: Chair of Transition/Education, Legislative/Public Awareness
“I joined PaRC as a representative of the Bureau of Special Education to utilize my knowledge and expertise to support students with disabilities during their transition to adult services and employment.”



Julia Grant Barol

Category of Representation: Community Rehabilitation Provider
Committees: Vice Chair of Governance, Executive, OVR/Policy/State Plan, Legislative/Public Awareness, Transition/Education, HGAC Ad hoc



Lorie Brew

Category of Representation: Parent Training and Information Center (PEAL Center)
Committees: Transition & Education, HGAC Ad hoc
“I joined the Council as a Coordinator of PEAL Center, the Parent Training and Information Center (PTI) of Pennsylvania. I have direct contact with youth and families throughout the state. I help youth and families navigate the system and create vision and possibilities when transitioning from high school to adulthood. My own family’s experience with OVR was their support to my son’s gainful employment. This provided the pathway to a richer, community based, independent life he wanted and deserved.”



PaRC MEMBERS

Including Category of Representation July 2022 - June 2023



Paul Fogle, Council Chair 2022-2023, 2023-2024

Category of Representation: Current/Former OVR Customer

Committees: Chair of Executive Committee and ex-officio member of each standing committee



Joan Goodman

Category of Representation: Business/Labor/Industry

Committees: CareerLink/WIOA, Social Media/Outreach

“Joining PaRC seemed like a match for me. I was disabled as a teen, had positive experiences with OVR services and a career in human resources. It’s time for me to give back.”



Lynn Heitz

Category of Representation: Sensory Disabilities

Committees: Chair of OVR Policy/State Plan/Customer Satisfaction, Executive, Legislative/Public Awareness, Transition/Education, HGAC Ad hoc, IHO/Mediators Ad hoc

“As a person with a disability, I believe strongly in the phrase ‘Nothing About Us Without Us.’ So many times, decisions are made for people with disabilities without their input. I want to be part of this change!”



Jessica Keogh

Category of Representation: Intellectual Disabilities

Committees: Legislative & Public Awareness, OVR Policy/State Plan/Customer Satisfaction, Transition & Education, IHO/Mediators Ad hoc

PaRC MEMBERS

Including Category of Representation July 2022 – June 2023



Michele Leahy

Category of Representation: Mental Health

Committees: Chair of Social Media/Outreach, Executive, Legislative/Public Awareness, HGAC Ad hoc

“I believe that employment is imperative for people with disabilities to be considered equal in our society. As a person with a disability, it’s important to me for employers and our community in general to realize our ability to contribute through competitive employment. PaRC’s mission truly fits my personal philosophy of saying yes to access.”



Michelle Mitchell, Member at Large 2023-2024

Category of Representation: Rehabilitation Counselor

Committees: Legislative/Public Awareness, Transition & Education

“My lifelong mission to assist folks in ‘Finding Their Own Way’ led me to becoming a Certified Rehabilitation Counselor and opening the doors of access to higher education for ALL individuals as they pursue their training to become who they determine to be.”



Michelle Paonessa

Category of Representation: Sensory Disabilities

Committee: OVR Policy/State Plan/Customer Satisfaction, IHO/Mediators Ad hoc



Andrew Pennington

Category of Representation: Client Assistance Program (CAP)

Committees: Chair of IHO/Mediators Ad hoc, CareerLink/WIOA, Transition/Education



PaRC MEMBERS

Including Category of Representation July 2022 - June 2023



Kara Donatucci Pham

Category of Representation: Business/Industry/Labor
Committee: CareerLink/WIOA

"I joined PaRC because I thought my experience in Human Resources and my experience as a parent of a child with an intellectual disability would complement the mission of the organization. My experience is employment and programs of inclusion would lend insight to other organizations like OVR that support inclusion in the workplace."



Laura Princiotta

Category of Representation: General Advocacy
Committee: Social Media/Outreach

"I joined as a representative of the employment provider community who has worked with OVR for almost 30 years. I've seen the positive impact made when people who are funded through OVR obtain employment, and I want to support the continuation of those positive outcomes."



Susan Tomasic, Vice Chair 2022-2023, 2023-2024

Category of Representation: Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC)
Committee: Chair of Governance, Executive, OVR Policy/State Plan/Customer Satisfaction

"I am the Chair of the PA SILC and serve as the SILC representative on the Council."



William Del Toro Vargas

Category of Representation: Physical Disabilities
Committees: Chair of Legislative/Public Awareness, Chair of HGAC Ad hoc, Executive, Governance, OVR Policy/State Plan/Customer Satisfaction, Social Media/Outreach

PaRC MEMBERS

Including Category of Representation July 2022 – June 2023



Robert Wallington

Category of Representation: Business/Labor/Industry

Committees: Chair of CareerLink/WIOA, Executive

“President Fred Wright of AFSCME Local 1739 informed me of the importance of PaRC and its impact serving people with all disabilities to have a better quality of life. Over 28 years of my introduction professionally to people with disabilities, I believe that everyone, no matter of their ability, should have the right to be treated equally without discrimination or bias. I hope I can serve as well as everyone who have served previously to represent all people with disabilities in their desire for better quality of life.”

Council Openings

The Pennsylvania Rehabilitation Council (PaRC) is accepting applications for candidates to fill the following categories of representation:

- Business/Industry/Labor
- State Department of Education
- State Workforce Development Board
- Veteran
- Young Adult (ages 18 to 26)



As of July 2024 the categories of representation listed below will also be available. PaRC encourages all applicants to apply as early as possible to ensure a timely transition of membership:

- Mental Health
- Sensory Disabilities

Interested in joining the Council?
Visit the following link below or QR code.



<https://parehabilitationcouncil.org/get-involved/become-a-member/>



ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Monitored Order of Selection (OOS) - fully opened on August 8, 2022. As of February 22, 2023, all customers that had been on the OOS waitlist had been moved into Plan status and receiving services, or had their case closed

Reviewed final report from 2019-2022 Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA) from Temple University's Institute on Disabilities and used results with OVR leadership to begin developing the goals and priorities in the WIOA VR Services Portion of the State Plan for 2024-2028

Reviewed and made recommendations on OVR Vehicle and Driving Services Policy, Audiological Services Policy, Employment Supports Policy, Early Reach Policy, Business Enterprise Program (BEP), and On-the-Job Training (OJT) Policy

Conducted review and analysis of the effectiveness of VR services through the Customer Satisfaction & Transition Surveys and discussed ways to increase response rates

Reviewed reports and updates from OVR, PA State Workforce Development and the Office of Equal Opportunity on CareerLink Accessibility Reviews / Certifications for all comprehensive CareerLink locations across the Commonwealth

Reviewed and made recommendations on Act 26 Reports, Pre-ETS services, Youth Ambassador programs, PA Department of Education and Bureau of Special Education Attract and Retain Initiative updates, Act 55 curriculum updates, Transition Employment and Mentor (TEAM) Navigator program

Discussed and provided recommendations on policies, procedures, and processes for recruitment, review, and approval regarding applicants of OVR Impartial Hearing Officers and Mediators

ACCOMPLISHMENTS
Through 4 Public Full Council meetings and 48 committee meetings, members of the PaRC continued to collaborate and facilitate group discussion, share information to help Pennsylvanians with disabilities re-gain/gain meaningful, sustainable, and competitive employment.

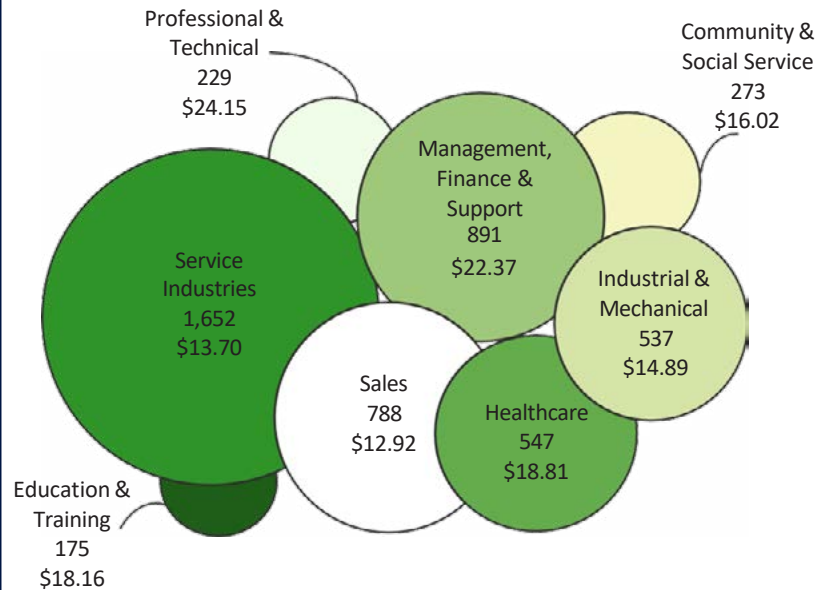
PROGRAM YEAR 2021 VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION HIGHLIGHTS¹

-  **53,721** individuals engaged with OVR²
-  **13,762** new applicants
-  **17,237** students received Pre-Employment Transition Services³
-  **5,374** individuals placed into employment
-  **\$15.34** average hourly wage of individuals employed
-  **\$38.97 M** estimated annual government savings⁴
-  **\$9,116** average per-person cost of services for an employment placement
-  **16.7 months** projected time to recover investment
-  **75%** Hiram G. Andrews Center Employment Rate⁵



Which Occupations Do Our OVR Customers Work In?

Placements and Average Hourly Wage Per Sector



OVR Staff Attended 3,141 Individualized Education Plan Meetings.

OVR Provided \$18,363,237 in Financial Aid to 1,868 Students for Post-Secondary Training or Education.

OVR Staff Conducted 4,494 Individual Section 511 Counseling Sessions.

325 Youth Gained Paid Work Experience Through “MY Work” in the Summer of 2022.

OVR Spent 70,789 Staff Hours Providing and Arranging Pre-Employment Transition Services.

¹ Program Year (PY) 2021 began 7/1/2021 and ended 6/30/2022.

² Number of OVR customers who had an open VR case as of June 30, 2022, or had their case closed during the Program Year 2021.

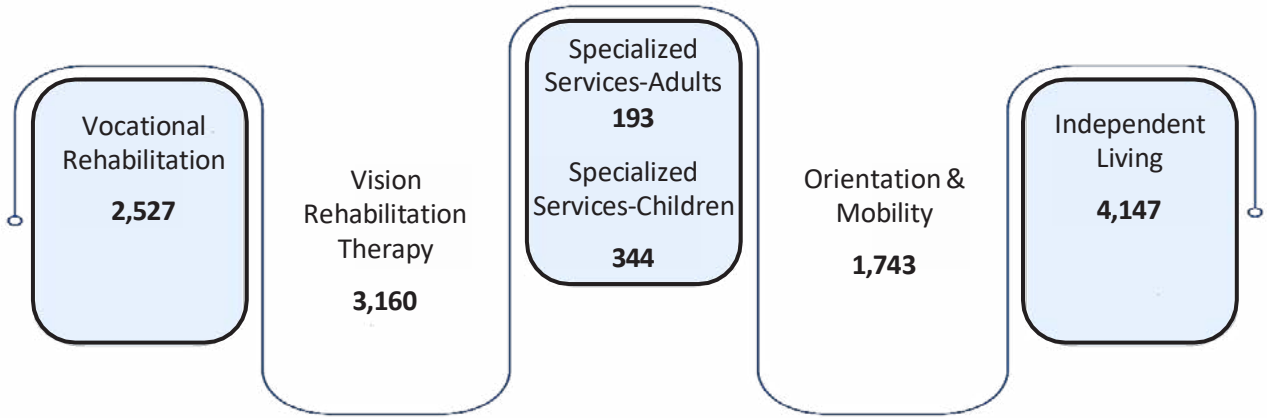
³ Includes potentially eligible students and students with OVR cases, and both purchased and staff-provided services.

⁴ Based on estimated income taxes, total average annual SSA reimbursement and SSA benefits that may decrease or end due to employed individuals achieving SGA levels established by the SSA.

⁵ Six-year running average of program graduate employment.



Bureau of Blindness and Visual Services (BBVS)

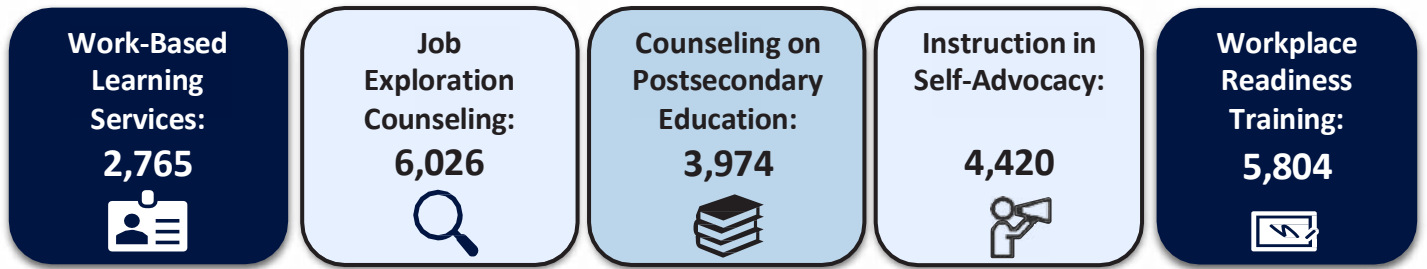


The Business Enterprise Program (BEP)

supported 19 blind vendors and monitored 315 vending and snack bar locations throughout the Commonwealth at commercial, industrial or government locations.

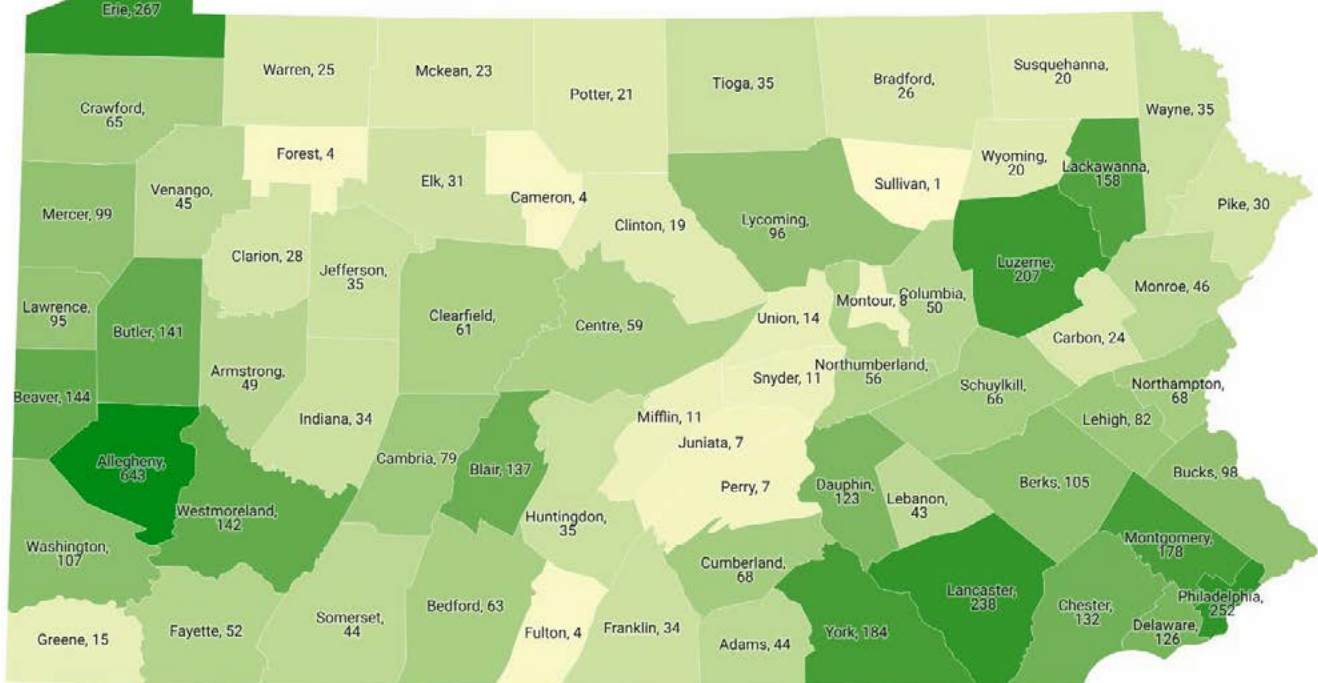


Students Who Received Pre-Employment Transition Services From OVR



Where Are OVR Customers Working?

SFY 2021 Employment by County



The 36 CFR 361 regulations implementing the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) require that the employment outcomes satisfy the following criteria under the Vocational Rehabilitation program: (1) competitive earnings, (2) integrated location and (3) opportunities for advancement.

PROJECT CAREER LAUNCH

THE FOLLOWING SUCCESS STORY IS FROM
OVR'S FIRST PUBLICATION OF "THE STORY"

PaRC members in partnership with OVR, collaborated on several programs and service efforts for young people with disabilities including the need for Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre ETS).

Project SEARCH has proven to be so successful locally that the school district, in collaboration with the same partners as Project SEARCH, has added another program, Project Career Launch, with a site at Drexel University and one at a Community College of Philadelphia campus. Each site has between 10-12 students, and the program's goal is to assist students who do not have an intellectual disability diagnosis but still need hands-on support to be successful in finding employment.



PHILLIP LEE

Attended: Science Leadership Academy
Internship: Phillip works at the School District of Philadelphia, sorting, moving, casing and repairing Chromebooks.

Internship Highlight: Phillip shared that the connections the internship has given him have been the best benefit.

Advice to Employers on Hiring People with Disabilities: "Make sure to look at the big picture...Keep it in mind that they might be a very, very good worker. They might be very unique and be able to add something that nobody else was able to in the workforce."



MATHEU DAVENPORT

Matheu, an individual with a learning disability and ADHD, began working with our Williamsport BVRs office while still in high school. During those years, OVR helped him access a work-based learning experience and driver's training, both of which he excelled in.

After high school, with tuition assistance from OVR, he attended Penn College to pursue an associate degree in their Engineering CAD Technology Program. After successful completion of that program, he applied to and was accepted into the college's Bachelor of Science Engineering Design Program, graduating with a B.S. in Engineering Design in May 2021.

After college, Matheu found employment at Andritz in Muncy, Pa, as a mechanical drafter. When asked about what he likes best in this role, Matheu said, "it's nice being able to do something that I went to school for. It's not a complete different world from the classroom."

Matheu credits his success at overcoming barriers to his mother who, he shared, "pushes me to grow and try my best. She helped me overcome most barriers I've faced."

Matheu's advice for other students with disabilities is that "though it may be difficult initially, this get[s] more doable and understandable. Make sure to take your time and ask for help."



PaRC MEMBER STORY



JULIA BAROL, MED, CESP

Julia Barol has worked in the field in the early 90s. She began as a job coach and job developer and graduated to program director. In 2001, Julia was part of the roll out of the Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act (TWWIIA), certified as a benefits counselor, she worked with many individuals counseling on the impact of work on their Social Security benefits so that people could maximize their earnings and make informed decision about their employment options.

She went on to work for a training organization, training on issues around Social Security benefits and work as well as other topics. In 2010, Julia went back to school and earned a Masters in Secondary Special Education and Transition from the George Washington University on a Fellowship from the US Department of Education. In 2014, Julia began Transition Consults, a consulting organization and in 2017 added the Medicaid Waiver service Supports Brokering to the services provided. Julia wanted to support employment from a different angle. Oftentimes people chose segregated settings because it works best for the family. With Supports Brokering and self direction, an individual can work in the community and have wrap around services before and after work so that they can be fully integrated into the fabric of their community.

Julia has been President of the PA Chapter of APSE (Association of People Supporting EmploymentFirst), a national membership organization focusing on employment equity for people with disabilities. From 2017 to 2023, Julia served as the MidAtlantic Delegate on the National Board of APSE. In Addition, Julia has been on the National Advisory Board of the College of Employment Services, a Direct Course subsidiary that provides training of evidence-based practice on Employment of people with disabilities. Julia was appointed to the PA Rehab Council in 2022 and represents provider organizations. She is serving as the Chair of the Transition and Education Committee. She was appointed to the PA Employment First Oversight Commission in 2022 and currently serves as its Vice Chair.

Julia lives in Philadelphia and Pike County with her husband and two furry friends.





Pennsylvania Rehabilitation Council (PaRC) 2023 - 2024 Federal Position Paper

The Council is mandated by statute with informing and advising the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, the State Board of Vocational Rehabilitation, the Legislature, and the Governor in PA on the diverse issues affecting employment of people with disabilities. This document summarizes the Council's position on key federal laws and policy issues.

The Rehabilitation Act, as amended by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) provides for programs that help people with disabilities achieve employment and independence, such as vocational rehabilitation (VR). In order to access federal funding for these programs, states must appropriate some funding. This investment is good for taxpayers, for example, VR customers in PA who found competitive employment in state fiscal year 2021-2022 generated \$38,970,000 in savings, both from taxes paid and fewer benefits used.

WIOA can be strengthened if you support certain policy positions:

- Keep VR a mandatory program with single source funding.
- Increase funding substantially for providing VR services to veterans with disabilities returning to civilian life as well as continuing to screen injured veterans for traumatic brain injury and post-traumatic stress disorder.

SUPPORT: [H.R.1263](#) and [S.533](#) *Transformation to Competitive Integrated Employment Act*, [H.R.2708](#) *Latonya Reeves Freedom Act of 2023*, [S.100](#) and [H.R.547](#) *Better Care Better Jobs Act*, [H.R.1616](#) and [S.801](#) *CARE for Long COVID Act*, [H.R. 2840](#) *AID Youth Employment Act*, [H.R.2941](#) *Recognizing the Role of Direct Support Professionals Act*, [H.R.4889](#) and [S.2488](#) *Raise the Wage Act of 2023*, [H.R.5408](#) and [S.2767](#) *SSI Savings Penalty Elimination Act*.

- Require all commercial health insurance providers to cover brain injury rehabilitation.
- Promote career development and job advancement by expanding the definition of post-employment services to include training and other services necessary for career advancement.
- Increase funds for the Older Blind Program to better service the growing aging, blind population.

Transportation

Accessible, affordable, and safe public transportation is critical for ensuring that people with disabilities can participate in the workforce. Unfortunately, many communities (especially rural ones) lack disability-friendly and accessible public transportation options, even when states are required by law to provide them. Consequently, we encourage you to support changes to the public transportation system that promote and enforce equal access for people with disabilities.

The Achieving a Better Life Experience (Able) Act provides for the creation of savings accounts for those who experience a significant disability before age 26. Money in these accounts can pay for disability related expenses and are not subject to taxes or considered for means-tested benefits. We encourage you to support an amendment to the Able Act that would allow all people with significant disabilities (regardless of onset age) to have such accounts.

COVID-19

The lasting impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic combined with the Great Resignation have resulted in significant changes to our economy, employment, and workforce. Full Funding of OVR will allow for the expansion of programs to maximize opportunity to support our businesses and meet workforce needs through the successful employment of people with disabilities. Furthermore, we have learned that flexibility in relation to the location of a workplace is possible for all Pennsylvanians, especially those with a disability, with so many opportunities to work remotely.





Pennsylvania Rehabilitation Council (PaRC) 2023-2024 State Position Paper

The Pennsylvania Rehabilitation Council (PaRC) is mandated by the Rehabilitation Act of 1998, as amended by Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) 2014, to review, analyze, and advise the Pennsylvania Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) regarding the performance of its responsibilities, particularly those related to eligibility (including order of selection); the extent, scope and effectiveness of services provided; and the functions performed by State agencies that affect the ability of individuals with disabilities in achieving employment outcomes under Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) services. The PaRC's Legislative Committee respectfully submits, with approval by Executive Committee and/or Full Council, the following Position Paper for your review and consideration:

Sustain Full Funding for OVR Services to match all available Federal Funds

Action Requested:

- *Funding for the "Transfer to the Vocational Rehabilitation Fund" needs to be at least \$50 million for non-profit commonwealth organizations especially since the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) requires that 15% of funds must be spent on Pre-Employment Transition Services. This will allow OVR's level of funding to remain constant with previous years and ensure that OVR is able to draw down all available Federal funds.*
- *Additionally, lasting impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic combined with the Great Resignation have resulted in significant changes to our economy, employment, and workforce. Full Funding of OVR will allow for the expansion of programs to maximize opportunity to support our businesses and meet workforce needs through the successful employment of people with disabilities. Furthermore, we have learned that flexibility in relation to the location of a workplace is possible for all Pennsylvanians, especially those with a disability, with so many opportunities to work remotely.*

Expedited Employment

Action Requested:

The PaRC recommends, through legislation or regulatory action, for the State to establish an Expedited Hiring System so that people with disabilities in Civil Service, Non-Civil Service, and State Contractor hiring positions have an alternative path to employment similar to Schedule A on the Federal level.

Collaboration of Services for Persons with Neurological Injuries in Pennsylvania

Action Requested:

Collaboration is needed between all state agencies working with persons with neurological injuries to ensure that there is no break in services from in home services to employment services. Additional dedicated funding is needed for this population.

Adequate Funding of the Office of Deaf and Hard of Hearing (ODHH)

Action Requested:

The PaRC agrees with the Disability Budget Coalition's recommendation as follows: To the extent feasible, increase the state appropriation for the ODHH to \$650,000; authorize ODHH to increase its staff for all its offices or its contracting, or both, at its discretion, within the increased budgetary allocation; move ODHH's budget from the Labor and Industry General Government Operations line item to a separate line item within the overall Labor and Industry budget

PaRC supports the following regarding Centers for Independent Living (CILs)

Action Requested:

Line item appropriation of \$2.7 million which will enable the CILs to: maintain quality staff and a stable location, effectively deliver services that facilitate transition from nursing homes and other institutions to the community, provide assistance to those at risk of entering institutions, and facilitate transition of youth to postsecondary life (the fifth IL Core service) and provide reasonable benefits; increase the number of individuals served; and lower the cost per individual.

Transportation

Action Requested:

Transportation Network Providers, like Uber and Lyft as well as all taxi service providers must be required to provide accessible vehicles on demand to people with disabilities. In addition, they should likewise be required to show that all drivers have been educated/trained on the requirements of the Pennsylvania Human Relations Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act; especially with respect to the provision of service to individuals who use service or guide dogs. The State must work with Amtrak and the Federal Government to ensure that all train stations in the Commonwealth are physically and programmatically accessible, which is not the case today. Providers of the Rural Shared Ride System should work jointly and collaboratively with Fixed Ride and Commuter Ride Systems to maximize transportation resources for individuals with disabilities. The Rural Shared Ride System should be regionalized to enable transportation providers to cross County lines to assist people with disabilities who use these rides to obtain, maintain, and/or regain employment.

Disability Caucus

Action Requested:

The PaRC encourages both the House and Senate to establish a bi-partisan and bi-cameral caucus to review and support legislation that would enable people with disabilities to have equal opportunity in all aspects of their lives and to be productive and contributing members of their communities.



Employment First Oversight Commission (EFOC)

Act 36 of 2018 or the [Employment First Act](#) was enacted June 19, 2018. Employment First requires any group receiving public funding to ensure that competitive integrated employment is the main focus for education, training, or support services for anyone with a disability who is eligible to work. The Employment First Oversight Commission will establish measurable goals and objectives to guide agencies and report annual progress.

The Pennsylvania Rehabilitation Council's Legislative and Public Awareness Committee support the following State Bills:

[HB151](#) An Act amending the act of March 4, 1971 (P.L.6, No.2), known as the Tax Reform Code of 1971, in tax credit and tax benefit administration, further providing for definitions and for application and administration.

[HB181](#) An Act establishing the Family and Medical Leave Insurance Program and the Family and Medical Leave Insurance Fund; conferring powers and imposing duties on the Department of Labor and Industry; and imposing penalties.

[HB185](#) An Act amending Title 75 (Vehicles) of the Pennsylvania Consolidated Statutes, in registration of vehicles, further providing for person with disability plate and placard; in fees, further providing for exemption of persons, entities and vehicles from fees; and, in powers of department and local authorities, further providing for specific powers of department and local authorities.

[HB342](#) An Act amending the act of March 10, 1949 (P.L.30, No.14), known as the Public-School Code of 1949, providing for students with disabilities at institutions of higher education.

[HB348](#) An Act amending Title 71 (State Government) of the Pennsylvania Consolidated Statutes, in civil service reform, providing for excepted service hiring and promotion authority; and imposing duties on the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation.

[HB661](#) An Act amending the act of June 13, 1967 (P.L.31, No.21), known as the Human Services Code, in public assistance, providing for intellectual disability and autism fee schedule rates.

[HB1135](#) An Act amending the act of January 17, 1968 (P.L.11, No.5), known as The Minimum Wage Act of 1968, further providing for definitions and for minimum wages; providing for gratuities; further providing for enforcement and rules and regulations, for penalties and for civil actions; repealing provisions relating to preemption; and providing for taxpayer savings and reinvestment.

[SB189](#) An Act amending Title 51 (Military Affairs) of the Pennsylvania Consolidated Statutes, in veterans' pensions and benefits, further providing for blind veteran's pension and for amputee and paralyzed veteran's pension.

[SB451](#) An Act amending Title 71 (State Government) of the Pennsylvania Consolidated Statutes, in selection of employees for entrance to or promotion in classified service, providing for additional points in grading civil service examinations of applicants with disabilities.

[SB452](#) An Act relating to the delivery of services and programs to individuals with disabilities; conferring powers and duties on the Office of the Governor; establishing the Office for Individuals with Disabilities and the Advisory Committee for Individuals with Disabilities; and providing for the powers and duties of the office and the committee and for funding of the office and the committee.

[SB438](#) An Act amending Title 51 (Military Affairs) of the Pennsylvania Consolidated Statutes, in veteran-owned small businesses, further providing for definitions; providing for miscellaneous provisions; and imposing a penalty.

For additional information or questions, please contact PaRC's support staff via email at parc@parehabilitationcouncil.org



ADVOCACY EFFORTS TO IMPROVE AND EXPAND EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL PENNSYLVANIANS

LEGISLATIVE MEETINGS

Held 37 bi-partisan meetings with State legislators & their staff to inform and educate about OVR and the importance of full funding, MAWD, Employment First, waiver services, ADA compliance, accessibility, public transportation, wages regarding employment services, strengthening disability advocacy within the Governor's Office, long term effects of COVID-19 on employment, education and transition services, potential benefits of statewide transportation study to resolve issues preventing accessible transportation, and benefits of phasing out 14(c) Certificates / Subminimum Wage Workshops

PUBLICATIONS

Highlighted the important work of OVR and the Council through the PaRC website, PaRC Bi-monthly Newsletter, social media pages, and other communications

OUTREACH

Continued to increase a network of vital advocates that share in the same mission by sending requests to sign up for the PaRC newsletter

CONFERENCES

Participated in the 2023 PA Department of Education (PDE) Conference, Council of State Administrators of Vocation Rehabilitation (CSAVR) Spring 2023 Conference, National Coalition of State Rehabilitation Councils (NCSRC) 2023 Spring Conference, PA Community of Practice Transition 2023 Conference and Expo

TOURS

Toured the Commonwealth Technical Institute (CTI) at Hiram G Andrews Center (HGAC) in Johnstown, PA

Sign up to receive the PaRC Bi-Monthly Newsletter!

Send us an email at parc@parehabilitationcouncil.org
or

Fill out the PaRC contact form at <https://parehabilitationcouncil.org/contact/>



THE FOLLOWING SUCCESS STORY IS FROM OVR'S FIRST PUBLICATION OF "THE STORY"

Through yearly advocacy with State and Federal Legislators and staff, the PaRC demonstrated the imperative nature of full funding for OVR needs to support programs and services such as On-The-Job training!

SETH FENNER

Through a partnership with our Erie BVRS office, Confections of a Cake Lover and IU5, Seth was able to access an On-the-Job Training (OJT) opportunity that provided wage reimbursement for his employer.

This collaboration also included partnering to coordinate ASL interpreting for Seth, an individual who has Auditory Processing Disorder, to succeed. Seth shared that the biggest challenge for him was to stay on tasks or complete the tasks in order. He produces quality work at a fast pace; however, he struggled to move onto the next task or find something else to do, like clean up his workstation, sweep or wash dishes. The Confections of a Cake Lover team came up with a picture checklist for him. Once he completed his tasks, he could see what he needed to do next.

Communication was the next challenge, and, to overcome this challenge, his employer and coworkers have all started to learn ASL to communicate with him.

Because of his success in his OJT, Seth became a permanent employee at Confections of a Cake lover as a cookie maker. One of Seth's most recent accomplishments was making 1,000 cookies in one shift, an accomplishment he shared he was both proud of and also surprised to have reached. What's his favorite task at work? "My favorite thing to make are the cookies," he shared, "and to taste test them!"

Seth said he enjoys his coworkers and the customers he sees daily. He stated that he also really enjoys getting a paycheck. His employer shared that "he is a valued employee, and we love him here!"



THE FOLLOWING SUCCESS STORY IS FROM OVR'S FIRST PUBLICATION OF "THE STORY"

ZANE FULTON

Meet Zane, an 18-year-old senior at Marion Center High School who has a learning disability.

Through our Johnstown BVRS office, Zane was able to access a paid work experience and On-the-Job Training at Point Spring and Driveshaft in Indiana, Pa. The experience has been going so well that Zane is anticipated to remain a permanent employee following his graduation from high school this June.

Through this job, Zane has become more outgoing and developed greater confidence in himself and his abilities. Some of Zane's favorite work tasks include sorting and stocking parts and preparing boxes and pallets for recycling. He is also learning to run the forklift so that he can load and unload trucks. Mike Wolfe, the store manager, shared that Zane has been an asset to the company. The experience has been overwhelmingly positive for all involved and Zane fits in with the other employees in the shop.

Susan Bauer, Life Skills Support at Marion Center High School shared that "this job has made such a positive impact on Zane. He smiles all the time! The folks at Point Spring have given Zane a huge shot of confidence that has carried over into his school life. For someone who found it difficult to talk with adults, he was just gushing! He wanted to tell me all about the new things he was learning at work. He was excited to tell me that he might learn how to use the forklift. He has also learned how to advocate for himself...As a senior at Marion Center High School, Zane is focused on his future, and it is bright!"





State Plan Attachment (2020 – 2024)

The Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Services Portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan must include the following descriptions and estimates, as required by section 101(a) of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by WIOA:

(a) Input of State Rehabilitation Council.

All agencies, except for those that are independent consumer-controlled commissions, must describe the following:

- (1) *input provided by the State Rehabilitation Council, including input and recommendations on the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan, recommendations from the Council's report, the review and analysis of consumer satisfaction, and other Council reports that may have been developed as part of the Council's functions;*
- (2) *the Designated State unit's response to the Council's input and recommendations; and*
- (3) *the designated State unit's explanations for rejecting any of the Council's input or recommendations.*

The Pennsylvania Rehabilitation Council (PaRC) used the following sources to develop its recommendations to the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR):

1. the PaRC annual report (Federal Fiscal Year 2018 - 2019);
2. OVR Customer Satisfaction Surveys;
3. review of items in 2018 State Plan Attachment (description a);
4. comments received at 2018 and 2019 Public State Plan Meetings;
5. participation in the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) monitoring (2019);
6. Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA) FFY 2016 - 2018 OVR/Institute on Disabilities at Temple University;
7. local Citizen Advisory Committees (CAC) meetings and/or minutes; and
8. quarterly reports received from OVR at PaRC Council meetings.

Commendation: The Council supports OVR in their efforts to open the order of selection as soon as possible for the benefit of Pennsylvanians with disabilities seeking employment services through OVR.

1. The Closure of the Order of Selection (OOS) for All Categories

Issue: The closure of the Order of Selection (OOS) for all categories represents a significant challenge to people with disabilities having access to employment services when they are needed. OVR must develop appropriate internal controls and other adjustments in order to re-open the OOS as soon as possible and update the PaRC regarding progress on at least a quarterly basis.

RECOMMENDATIONS/MEASURABLE GOALS:

OVR provides quarterly reports (at a minimum) to the PaRC on how many people were added to and removed from the waiting list in each category each quarter.



- A. OVR provides quarterly reports (at a minimum) to the PaRC and the State VR Board on new application response times.
- B. OVR establishes a clear deadline for reopening the OOS with intermediate steps and goals to re-open the OOS on time. OVR provides quarterly reports (at a minimum) to the PaRC on progress and factors affecting progress toward achieving the goal of re-opening the OOS on a permanent basis by the deadline.
- C. Identify resources and opportunities outside of OVR for organizations to provide employment services to OVR customers on the waitlist.

2. Hiram G. Andrews Center (HGAC)

Issue: OVR’s current fiscal problems require a review of HGAC’s return on investment.

RECOMMENDATIONS/MEASURABLE GOALS:

- A. OVR should conduct a study at a minimum of every 3 years and report on the return on investment (compared to community-based VR services) for students attending HGAC. HGAC’s yearly budget averages approximately \$23 million, which includes staff, operations, brick and mortar and other costs. Overall, the cost per customer is reported as significantly higher at HGAC than that of non-HGAC customers. The report must include:
 - (1) an analysis on return on investment.
 - (2) an impact statement on customer choice.
 - (3) a review of the extent to which its programs are provided in an integrated setting.
 - (4) an assessment of the availability of HGAC programs in the community; and
 - (5) a determination of what other partners like the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) should be paying/contributing.

- 3. Conduct a review of OVR’s statutory and regulatory obligations to obtain public comment and/or consult with stakeholders, providers, VR staff, and individuals with disabilities in the development, implementation, and amendment of OVR’s policies and procedures.

Issue: Pursuant to 34 CFR 361.20, OVR is required to solicit public participation when it proposes to develop, amend, or otherwise modify substantive policies/procedures affecting OVR services.

RECOMMENDATIONS/MEASURABLE GOALS:

- A. OVR should provide quarterly information on the number and names of new/amended policies, such as a college policy or vehicle modification policy, being developed or in consideration for future development/modification, including how they differ from any existing policy and the potential number of customers impacted by the policy.
- B. Inclusion of the Council in the development/amendment of the policy/procedure, the proposed timeline of implementation, including schedule of public comments and plans to educate stakeholders on the new/amended policy/procedure.

4. Strengthen Collaboration and Partnerships with Stakeholders

Issue: OVR has made significant changes to services without including key stakeholders throughout the change development process. OVR needs to make sure that those changes will not unnecessarily reduce the achievement of outcomes in terms of quantity and quality.



RECOMMENDATIONS/MEASURABLE GOALS:

- A. Before OVR makes any substantive changes, the PaRC will be informed of what needs to change and why, and what affected stakeholder representatives are being included in the change development process.
- B. OVR provides (at a minimum) quarterly reports to the PaRC on all substantive changes either anticipated or currently in development with information on progress, including key stakeholder representative involvement and contributions to the process.
- C. OVR provides annual reports (at a minimum) on feedback survey information from key partners.
- D. OVR provides quarterly progress reports with measures of quality and quantity of outcomes for partnerships, programs, and services including pre-employment transition services, local workforce development boards, supported and customized employment, business services and PA CareerLinks®.

5. Review of OVR Policies and Procedures

Issue: Clarification is required regarding public participation in the adoption or amendment of OVR policy, and OVR’s obligation to consult with the PaRC, among others, on matters of general policy arising in the administration of the VR services portion of the State Plan.

RECOMMENDATIONS/MEASURABLE GOALS:

- A. OVR reports to the PaRC on a quarterly basis substantive policies and procedures under review which are subject to public meetings, non-substantive administrative changes, and policies on matters of general administration of the VR program which require consultation. Additionally, include quarterly reports on workgroups.



TOGETHER WE CAN DO MORE!

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THE FOLLOWING SUCCESS STORIES ARE FROM 2022 OVR ANNUAL REPORT

Thank you for the invitation to tour the Commonwealth Technical Institute (CTI) at Hiram G. Andrews Center (HGAC). PaRC members were impressed with the welcoming, inclusive, and accessible campus and commended the staff on their commitment to the students.

We look forward to further collaboration with HGAC and increasing public awareness.



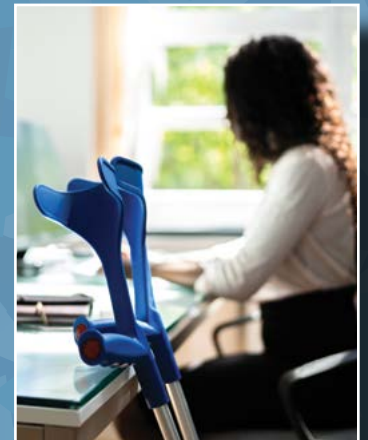
MATTHEW CHRISTLEY

Matthew, an individual who happens to have autism, expressive language disorder and an intellectual disability, began working with our Williamsport BVRs office in high school. Our team at Williamsport was able to connect him to job shadowing opportunities and paid work experiences, as well as job readiness and independent living skills training. He also received resume assistance, attended mock interviews and participated in job exploration.

It was in high school that Matthew became interested in welding after taking shop class. He attended OVR's Commonwealth Technical Institute at the Hiram G. Andrews Center (CTI at HGAC) for welding, graduating at the top of his class and receiving a diploma in Welding Technology in August of 2022. While attending CTI at HGAC, the Center shared that he was a model student, polite, hardworking, worked well with others and maintained good attendance.

Prior to graduation, Matthew worked with his OVR and CTI at HGAC VR Counselors to apply to three businesses. Within several weeks of returning home after graduation, he was working a full-time, entry-level welding position at Gehman Iron Inc. in Knoxville, PA.

Matthew enjoys the hands-on work at Gehman Iron, Inc. In November of 2022, he was awarded Employee of the Month and he also recently received a raise. Matthew's self-discipline and hard work helped him to reach his goal of becoming a welder. He said that his parents, the welding training at CTI at HGAC and his OVR VR Counselor Faylyn also helped him succeed. Matthew's advice for other individuals with disabilities is that you can accomplish anything as long as you put your mind to it.





LUKE LEIBY

Luke began working with our Harrisburg Bureau of Blindness & Visual Services (BBVS) office when he was eight years old. At 15, he started vocational rehabilitation services to help prepare for success in college and work. In high school, he attended many of OVR's college-prep programs, including Project PAS: Promoting Academic Success and our Summer Academy for Students who are Blind or Visually Impaired.

“Pursue opportunities in environments that allow you to be the best version of you. Success isn't about doing everything on your own; it's about knowing when to seek guidance and support from those around you.” – Luke

After graduation, Luke went to Rider University to pursue a degree as a music director. He later changed his major to computer programming and transferred to the University of Pittsburgh.

College wasn't without its challenges, and Luke had to overcome many barriers. Luke's VR Counselor encouraged him to not give up, and BBVS helped him with the assistive technology he needed, including JAWS and a Notetaker. BBVS staff also provided Orientation & Mobility instruction so Luke could travel independently. His hard work and perseverance paid off, and, in August of 2022, Luke graduated with honors from the University of Pittsburgh. In 2018, while in college, Luke was hired as an intern at Penn-DOT through the OVR & Office of Administration State Employment Summer Internship Program. One of the projects he worked on as an intern was developing an Amazon Alexa Skill for citizens to report problems with traffic lights. In 2019, he accepted an opportunity through OVR to work as an intern at Deloitte. The Center for Independent Living of Central PA partnered with us to provide transportation for Luke to commute to and from work since there were no bus stops within safe walking distance. It was this internship at Deloitte that helped Luke realize he had chosen the right career path as a computer programmer.

After graduating from the University of Pittsburgh, Luke worked for Deloitte and then transferred to Prime Access Consulting (PAC) where he is now a Junior Software Developer. What he loves about his career at PAC is “knowing that the work I do has real-world effects on the lives of those with disabilities. I contribute to developing software that enables folks to interact with public spaces like museums, universities, etc. Our mantra is ‘it is that environments are disabling, not that people are disabled.’”

MANY SPECIAL THANKS!

We express our sincere appreciation for all that made the sharing of OVR's success stories possible!

We especially thank Phillip, Matheu, Seth, Zane, Matthew, and Luke for sharing their experiences.

In short, this is what it's all about.



Would you like to help support the Pennsylvania Rehabilitation Council (PaRC) fulfill its mission?

Sign up to receive the PaRC Newsletter and invite others to as well! The PaRC Newsletter is intended to broaden the conversation about the diverse issues affecting employment of people with disabilities. Please send an email to parc@parehabilitationcouncil.org with your contact info or fill out the contact form provided on the PaRC website at the following link: <https://parehabilitationcouncil.org/contact/>

Are you interested in learning more about the work of the Council or other disability related resources?

Check out our website at the following link <https://parehabilitationcouncil.org/>! The PaRC News page is full of great content including past newsletters, OVR publications, success stories, and much more. PaRC's Disability Related Resources page is also full of helpful information and links to State and National organizations on everything from Advocacy to Veteran Resources.

If you are interested in learning more about Benefits Counseling, please visit PaRC's Benefits Corner webpage for a list of helpful resources of both benefits and counseling topics and OVR Services. Benefits Counseling can be one of the most important tools for the successful attainment and maintaining of employment of individuals with a disability.

How can you show your support and share your success?

The PaRC has continued to expand its Social Media outreach as part of fulfilling its mission to inform and educate on the diverse issues affecting employment of people with disabilities. Please show your support by following us on Instagram, LinkedIn, and Facebook.

The PaRC would like to continue to highlight additional OVR Employment Success Stories on the PaRC website, social media, Annual Report, and other communications. Such achievements may include attaining a dream job, a promotion, an important anniversary of successful integrated competitive employment, or other successes.

If you or someone you know would be interested in sharing an important employment related milestone achieved with the assistance of OVR services, please send your information, questions, or comments to parc@parehabilitationcouncil.org.

Spotlighting the important work and successful attainment of employment that is made possible through OVR services is the foremost mechanism for the PaRC to fulfill its mission!





Full Council Meeting Schedule for Calendar Year 2024

- Wednesday, February 14, 2024
- Wednesday, May 15, 2024
- Wednesday, August 14, 2024
- Wednesday, November 13, 2024

All PaRC meetings are open to the public. Meetings in February and November are conducted virtually through Zoom and meetings in May and August are held in a hybrid format with the option to attend either virtually or in-person in Harrisburg, PA.

For more information on joining meetings or for persons who require reasonable accommodations including a sign language interpreter, real time captioning, or alternate format, please contact the PaRC Office at:

Phone: (888) 250-5175

TTY: (717) 737-0158

Email: parc@parehabilitationcouncil.org



The PaRC is a member of the National Coalition of State Rehabilitation Councils, Incorporated (NCSRC).

Submitted To:
The Citizens of Pennsylvania
The Pennsylvania Legislature
The Rehabilitation Services Administration
Josh Shapiro, Governor of Pennsylvania
The State Board of Vocational Rehabilitation
The Pennsylvania Workforce Development Board
The Pennsylvania Department of Education
In compliance with the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 as
amended by WIOA 2014.

Production of the Annual Report is supported by the
Pennsylvania Department of Labor & Industry, Office of
Vocational Rehabilitation, Contract #4400027911.



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