

# South Dakota

2024 Annual  
Report

Board of Vocational Rehabilitation Services



Picture of South Dakota's State Capitol - Credit: Photo by Travel South Dakota

# Letter from the Board of Vocational Rehabilitation Chairperson

Honorable Kristi Noem  
500 East Capitol Avenue  
Pierre, SD 57501

Dear Governor Noem:

On behalf of the Board of Vocational Rehabilitation, South Dakota's State Rehabilitation Council (SRC), I am pleased to present to you the 2024 Annual Report.

This report highlights the activities of the Board during the past year and highlights from the SD Division of Rehabilitation Services. The report includes information of individuals with disabilities who utilized vocational rehabilitation services to achieve their goal of competitive, integrated employment.

The report also includes photos of the 2024 Governors Awards recipients. The information highlights the resilience and determination of South Dakotans in overcoming barriers to achieve greater independence in their lives and work.

We look forward to working with the SD Division of Rehabilitation Services and Department of Human Services in the coming year to advocate and assist South Dakotans with disabilities to obtain competitive integrated employment.

Respectfully,

*Jonathan Englund*

Jonathan Englund  
Chairperson

CC: Board Members  
Lisa Burton, RSA's SRC Liaison (Email Copy)  
Jason Hunter, RSA's SRC Liaison (Email Copy)

# About the Board

The State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) is known in South Dakota as the Board of Vocational Rehabilitation (BVR). The BVR collaborates with the Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS) in administering the vocational rehabilitation (VR) program. Among its responsibilities, the Board reviews, evaluates, and advises the VR agency regarding its performance and effectiveness in delivering services, including the effect of service provision on the achievement of employment outcomes by individuals with disabilities.

Board composition and responsibilities are specified in Section 105 of the Rehabilitation Act and 34 CFR Sections 361.16 and 361.17. A majority of Board members must be individuals with disabilities who meet federal requirements and are not employed by the VR agency. The Governor appoints all Board members.

The Board seeks input from individuals with disabilities, community advocates, business and industry leaders, and disability groups, as agencies develop and implement policies and procedures that directly impact individuals served by VR.

VR services are designed to support individuals with disabilities to reach their career goals in successful integrated employment in communities throughout South Dakota.

## Board Membership

Cole Uecker, Pierre  
Betsy Drew, Sioux Falls  
Chris Olson, Madison  
Jennifer Trenhaile, Yankton  
Sherry Van Liere, Wentworth  
Brooke Lusk, Pierre  
Kara Schweitzer, Sioux Falls  
Kevin Barber, Sioux Falls

Eric Larson, Menno  
Jolleen Laverdure, Lower Brule  
Vicki Stewart, Sioux Falls  
Jonathan Englund, Piedmont  
Michael Kokesh, Sioux Falls  
Eric Weiss, Pierre  
Shawn Lyons, Pierre

## Quarterly Meetings

December 5, 2023

March 6, 2024

June 25, 2024

September 18, 2024

# Board Meetings

The Board held four quarterly meetings during the Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) time period of October 1, 2023 – September 30, 2024. All meetings were held in compliance with federal and state open meeting laws. A “public comment” period was incorporated into each meeting agenda. The meeting dates were determined by the Board; and meeting related information was posted to the South Dakota Boards and Commissions Portal located at: <https://boardsandcommissions.sd.gov/>.

The Board conducted its meetings utilizing ZOOM which provided multiple means of access (computer, phone, support for closed captioning). A physical location was also offered for individuals to attend in person who wanted to participate in the virtual meeting. The meetings were publicly announced, open and accessible to the public.

Each meeting contained standing agenda items such as the Director’s Report, Quarterly Data Updates, Vocational Rehabilitation Program Initiatives, Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC) Report, and a Board Staff Report.

## Functions of the Board

- ✓ Review, analyze, and advise the VR agency on the performance of their responsibilities related to eligibility and order of selection; the extent, scope, and effectiveness of vocational rehabilitation services; functions that affect the ability of individuals with disabilities in achieving employment outcomes.
- ✓ Partner with the VR agency in developing goals and priorities and evaluating the effectiveness in obtaining these goals.
- ✓ Advise the VR agency in the vocational rehabilitation portion of the Unified State Plan.
- ✓ Conduct a review and analysis of consumer satisfaction.
- ✓ Submit this report and make it public.
- ✓ Coordinate activities with other named Councils within the state, to include the Statewide Independent Living Council.
- ✓ Perform other relevant functions that the Board determines appropriate and consistent with the purpose of the VR agency.

# Board Business

The Board and its committees conducted business utilizing Zoom this reporting period. The Board has continued to meet virtually, which has resulted in increased meeting attendance. The Board was successful in continuing its mission and partnering with the VR agency.

## Meeting Highlights & Activities

- ❖ The Board received quarterly updates on case services, including total applications, eligibilities, number of consumers served, and closed cases. VR outreach efforts have led to steady growth since COVID.
- ❖ A young adult shared his experiences with the VR Project Skills Program, Project SEARCH and the Youth Leadership Forum (YLF), and how these opportunities helped him meet peers, form friendships, and stay connected with delegates.
- ❖ The Board received updates on the Division's Performance Measures, established with the Rehabilitation Services Administration. The Division exceeded negotiated levels in all areas except credential attainment. Discussions have centered on improvement strategies.
- ❖ The Board received updates on the Division's outreach campaign aimed at increasing awareness of the VR program. A marketing agency was selected to analyze current market data and identify trends among people with disabilities. Members were asked for feedback on creative concepts, campaign imagery, and placement strategies. Additional deliverables will include materials, testimonials, and key messaging for social media.
- ❖ Over the past year, the Board's Consumer Services Committee worked with Division staff to develop the State Plan, including its goals and priorities. Public comments/input was solicited before submittal.
- ❖ The Board received an update on the 2023 Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre ETS) initiatives, which included thirteen summer transition camps with 136 student participants. These initiatives offered job exploration, workplace readiness training, development of social skills development, independent living, self-advocacy, college preparation, and information about VR services.
- ❖ Orientation was held for new and recently appointed members. Topics included overviews of RSA, DHS, DRS, the role of the Board and its relationship with other state entities and boards/councils.

- ❖ The Board, SILC, and Board of Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired (B/SBVI) convened a NDEAM Debriefing with the local community planners of the 2023 events. Fourteen communities conducted events with an estimated number of 1,664 attendees. Dialogue included what went well, what could be improved upon, and how to better engage employers.
- ❖ Division staff updated the Board on staff training initiatives and employer outreach efforts. Members were introduced to E-Trac, an online curriculum designed to enhance soft skill development, used by VR counselors, teachers, and family members working with youth with disabilities.
- ❖ The Board and Statewide Independent Living Council conducted a statewide solicitation for nominations in January to fill upcoming vacancies. Information was forwarded to the Governor's office in April for review and consideration.
- ❖ An update was provided to the Board on the work involved to finalize a Memorandum of Understanding between DHS and the Department of Education which outlined procedures for sharing data between entities.
- ❖ The Division completed work to update a new payroll service for students with disabilities participating in Project Skills. The new system will allow biweekly pay periods for students and provide access to different forms, e.g., I-9, W-4s, selective service, and direct deposit.
- ❖ The Division updated members on the Project SEARCH sites in Brookings, Rapid City and Sioux Falls. In the fall of 2024, a site was launched in Yankton, involving the school district, Mount Marty University and Avera Sacred Heart Hospital. These services help to fulfil the VR agencies' requirement to allocate 15% of federal funds to the provision of pre-employment services to students with disabilities.
- ❖ Updates were provided on several completed projects, including revising the Service Description for Providers document and the VR counselor manual, distributing a quarterly e-newsletter, conducting ongoing staff training on performance indicators, and implementing new payroll services for students with disabilities participating in Project Skills.
- ❖ The Board approved a draft program guide "VR Applicants and Individuals Being Served by Multiple State Public VR Agencies" enabling the Division to finalize it.
- ❖ The Board received updates on the business specialist's activities, including outreach, workforce support, collaboration with two business-led organizations, training, resource development, and a business satisfaction survey. Additionally, the five-year contracts with these organizations were negotiated and finalized.

- ❖ The Board approved financial support for the activities planned for the 2024 National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM).
- ❖ Elections were held for officer positions during the June meeting, and a member completing their term was honored for their dedication of time and service.
- ❖ The Division updated members on plans to offer testing for providers to become “Certified Employment Support Professionals,” as such testing is currently unavailable in the state. The number of certified providers has declined, and the Division intends to make testing available annually to recruit more providers.
- ❖ An update was given on the Youth Leadership Forum held in June, which saw forty-four students with disabilities attend as delegates. Additionally, more students and adults with disabilities participated as team leaders, assistant team leaders, mentors, and MCs.
- ❖ Division staff updated members on the number of employees with disabilities working at subminimum wage and the need for annual reviews (Section 511). In SY2017 there were 916 employees working at subminimal wage, whereas currently, that number has dropped to 36.
- ❖ The Division shared the results of its case file review with the Board. The review ensures quality assurance and offers opportunities to discuss improvement in services, clarify policies, address training needs, and identify best practices. It also aims to enhance casework and promote consistency in service delivery.
- ❖ An update was provided on the Ticket to Work program, which allows eligible beneficiaries to assign their ticket to an employment network or state VR agency. The Social Security Administration compensates the VR agency when beneficiaries secure employment at designated earning levels. Part of the funds support the Benefit Specialists Network and Independent Living services.
- ❖ A presentation was given on the Post Secondary Outcomes Survey/Indicator 14. The data collected from the 2022 high school graduates identifies what the student is doing one year after leaving high school, e.g., going to post-secondary school, working competitively, who sought other training or employment (work on a farm), and who was not engaged at all after leaving high school.
- ❖ The Transition Services Liaison Project provided updates on past and upcoming events. TSLP provides support and technical assistance to students, families, local education agencies, while fostering connections with families, teachers, disability coordinators, and other providers. Events included YLF, Catch the College Wave, Transition Forums, Let’s Talk Work, Monthly Transition Roundups, IEP workshops, Monitoring Indicator 13 Reviews, and the Transition Summer Institute.

- ❖ Support services for the Board and SILC is provided through an agreement with Black Hills Special Services Cooperative. Staff is supervised and evaluated by Board and SILC leadership. The agreement was renegotiated for the current year, ending December 30<sup>th</sup>. The Division issued an RFP in August, and the anticipated award decision will be made in October.

## Summary of Board Input/Recommendations

- ✓ Reviewed and approved VR related draft program guides and policies.
- ✓ Reviewed and approved State Plan related information.
- ✓ Provided recommendations on the selection of the Governor's Awards recipients.
- ✓ Reviewed and analyzed the Client Satisfaction Survey results.
- ✓ Approved financial support for the Governor's Awards Ceremony and NDEAM events.
- ✓ Reviewed and provided recommendations on the Division's Outreach Campaign strategies and related information.
- ✓ Endorsed strategies to increase awareness and access to VR services.
- ✓ Endorsed efforts to engage youth with disabilities (YLF, Summer Transition Programs, TSLP activities).

### State Plan Goals

**Goal 1.** Implement strategies to increase awareness and access to services/resources.

**Goal 2.** Identify and support students and youth with disabilities with making informed choices for successful daily living and participation in education/training leading to career pathways through the provision of individualized services.

**Goal 3.** Provide services and supports to assist individuals with disabilities with making informed choices regarding employment, money management, and personal and work relationships, to live as independently as possible.

**Goal 4.** Facilitate the delivery of VR services to enhance earnings, employee benefits, retention, and career advancement for clients.

**Goal 5.** Facilitate the development of a strong statewide community partnering with workforce systems, businesses, State Government, tribal systems, service providers and service organizations to enhance services to individuals with disabilities eligible for services.



# Division of Rehabilitation Services

## Program Year 2023 - July 1, 2023 – June 30, 2024

### A Year in Review

#### Program Overview

The Division serves thousands of individuals with disabilities statewide by helping them reach their vocational goals. Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) services include the provision of individualized services to employers and people with disabilities, developing career pathways that link qualified employees to jobs, resulting in greater independence and more inclusive workplaces.

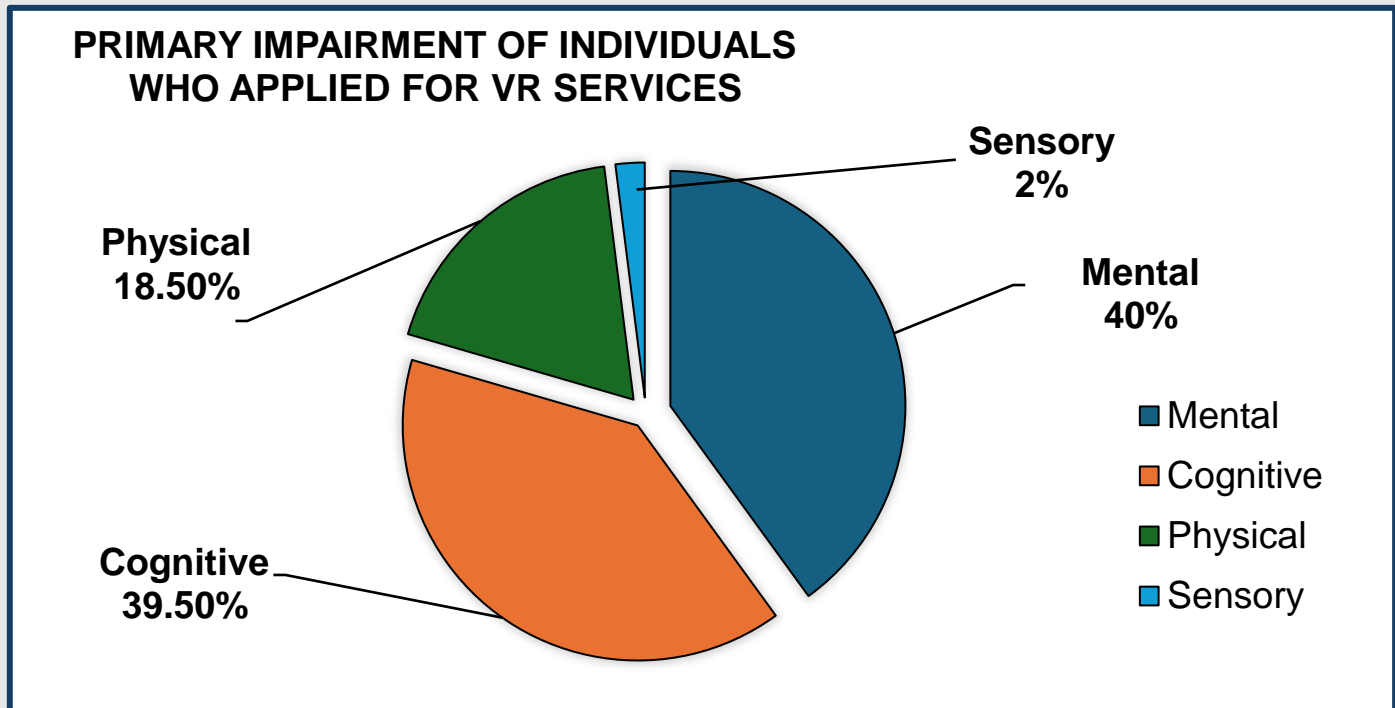
- A total of 1,863 applications were received for services, with 1,730 found eligible. A total of 1,750 applications were received the previous year.
- A total of 2,821 people with disabilities received services; an increase of 285 served compared to the previous year.
- The Division completed 3,385 plans for employment.
- The average age of the person served was 32.8 years old.
- Average weekly earnings after rehabilitation was \$392.86.
- The average work hours weekly: 25 hours/weekly.
- The average hourly wage was \$14.96.

The Division had a total of 456 Successful Employment Closures Between July 1, 2023 – June 30, 2024

Largest Reported Barriers to Employment	Percent of Yes Responses on Initial IPE
No Barrier Identified	34%
Low Income	24%
Basic Skills Deficient/Low Levels of Literacy	13%
Long Term Unemployment	12%
Ex-offender	6%
Exhausting TANF within 2 years	5%
Single Parent	3%
Homeless	3%
Each category less than 1%; Foster Care, English Language Learner, Displaced Homemaker, Migrant Season Farmworker	>1%

# Primary Impairment of Individuals Who Applied for VR Services

The chart below reflects the primary impairment (disability categories) of individuals who applied for VR services and identified as eligible for services.



**Pie Chart Indicates:** Primary Impairment of Individuals Who Applied for VR services:  
Cognitive Impairments 39.50%  
Mental Impairments 40%  
Physical impairments 18.50%  
Sensory Impairments 2%

## Disability/Impairment Categories include:

**Cognitive Impairments:** intellectual disabilities, specific learning disabilities, borderline intellectual functioning, ADHD, Autism, Congenital Condition or Birth Injury, TBI.

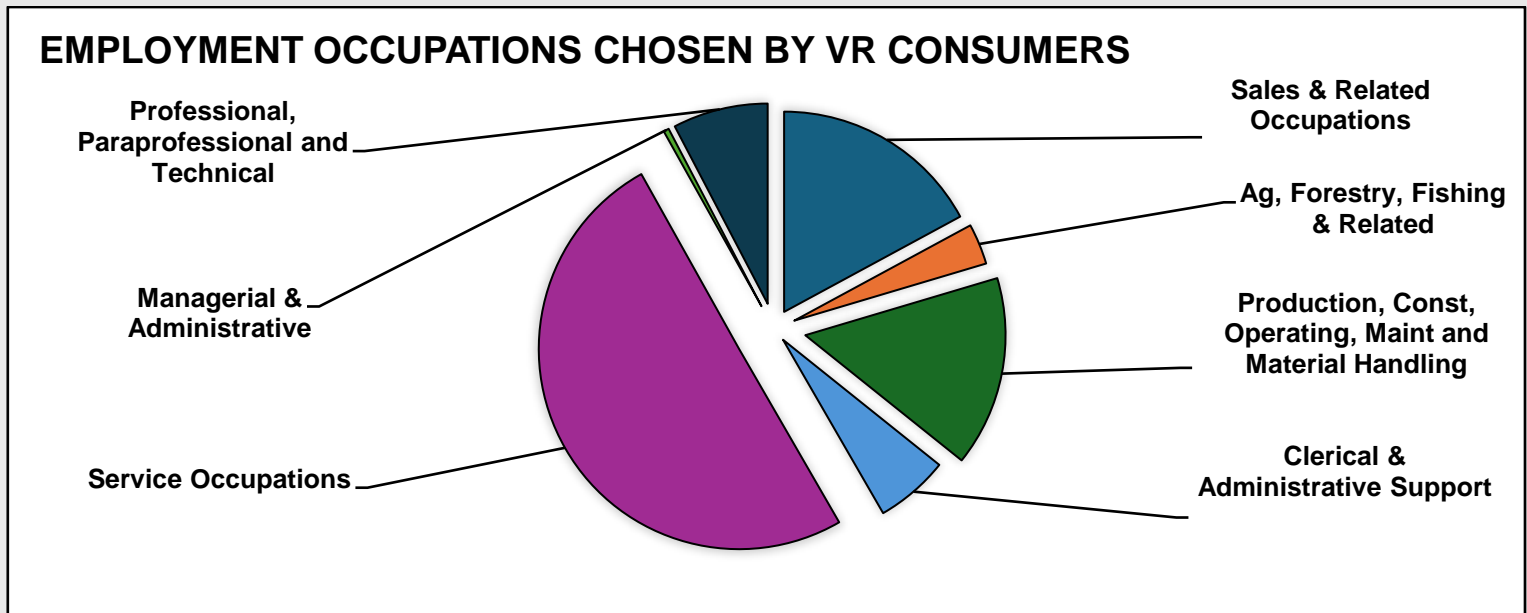
**Mental Impairments:** depression and other mood disorders, anxiety disorders, schizophrenia and other psychotic disorders, personality disorders, ADHD, Mental Illness not listed elsewhere.

**Physical Impairments:** Physical disorders/conditions not listed elsewhere, accident/injury (other than TBI), Arthritis and Rheumatism, cause unknown, epilepsy, diabetes mellitus, cerebral palsy, stroke.

**Sensory Impairments:** cause unknown, congenital condition or birth injury, physical disorders/conditions not listed elsewhere, and stroke.

# Occupational Categories of Individuals Achieving Employment

Types of employment occupations chosen by individuals served by the Division of Rehabilitation Services.



**Pie Chart Indicates:** Employment Occupations Chosen by VR Consumers:

Service Occupations – 229

Sales & Related Occupations – 78

Production, Construction, Operating, Maintenance & Material Handling – 70

Professional, Paraprofessional and Technical – 35

Clerical and Administrative Support – 27

Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Related – 15

Managerial and Administrative – 2

The Division has twelve offices statewide, providing individualized services to individuals with significant disabilities to help them secure and maintain compatible employment. Those who receive VR services and achieve their employment goals report increased independence and reduced reliance on other support. The table below compares individuals' primary support at application and at closure.

Type of Support	Percentage at Application	Percentage at Closure
Personal Income	20%	67%
Public Support	40%	26%
Family and Friends	37%	6%
All other sources	3%	1%

# Snapshot of Individuals Receiving Services

Race/Ethnicity of those who applied for VR services between July 1, 2023 -June 30, 2024

Race/Ethnicity of VR Applicants	Percent of Applicants
White	70%
American Indian or Alaska Native	15%
Other Race/Ethnicity	7%
Black or African American	4%
White & American Indian or Alaska Native	2%
White & Hispanic	2%

## Medical Insurance – Another positive impact for individuals with disabilities who applied for VR Services

- ✓ **The percentage of individuals with disabilities who applied for VR services with no insurance was 20%. This was reduced to 11% at the time of closure.**
- ✓ **Approximately 4% of individuals with disabilities had private insurance through an employer at the time they applied for VR services; those with private insurance at the time of closure increased to 16%.**

### Scope of VR Services:

Counseling and Guidance: assists the individual to develop decision making and self-advocacy skills; to make career choices consistent with their identified strengths, resources, abilities and environmental realities, and help the individual to better understand their disability, and exercise informed choice.

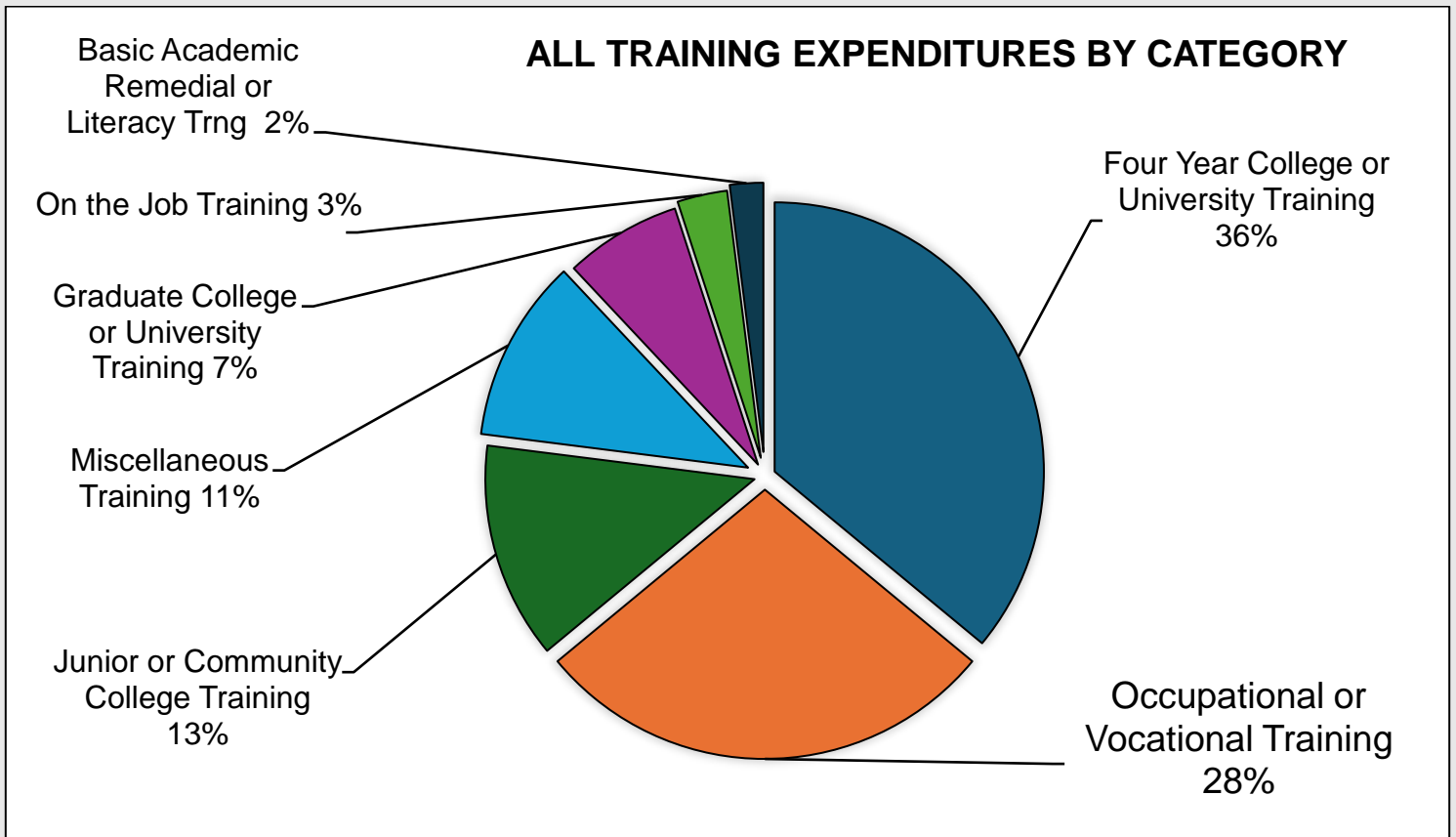
Employment: assist the individual to prepare for, gain, keep or advance in employment.

Accommodations: explore solutions for adaptive aids, technology, accessibility, and worksite assessments to assist in achieving the individual's employment goal.

Training: to assist with meeting the career goals through various options which may include on the job experiences, internships, job mentoring, job coaching and training.

Job Placement: assists the individual with resume writing skills, interview strategies and job referrals.

# Case Service Expenditures

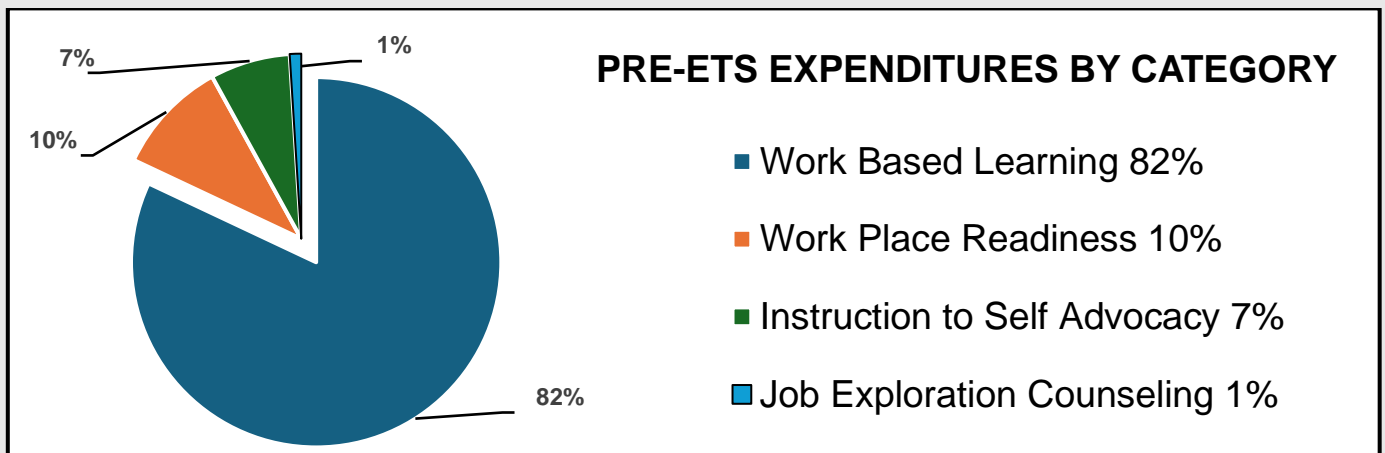


**Pie Chart Indicates:** All Training Expenditures by Category

- Four Year College or University Training – 36%
- Occupation or Vocational Training – 28%
- Junior or Community College Training – 13%
- Miscellaneous Training – 11%
- Graduate College or University Training – 7%
- On the Job Training – 3%
- Basic Academic Remedial or Literacy Training – 2%

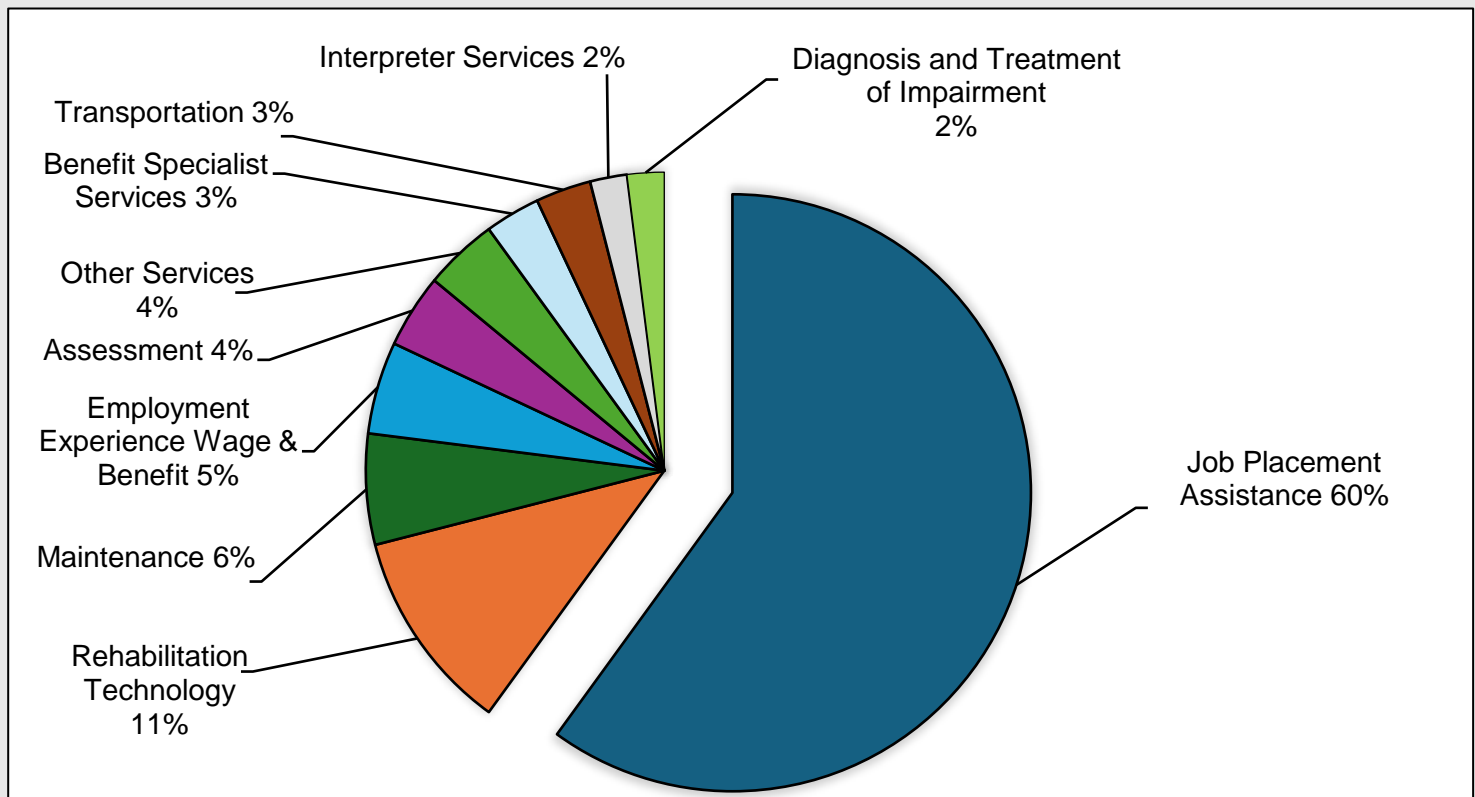
**Pie Chart Below Indicates:** Pre-ETS Expenditures by Category:

- Work based learning – 82%
- Work Place Readiness – 10%
- Instruction to Self-Advocacy – 7%
- Job Exploration Counseling – 1%



# Case Service Expenditures

## Job Placement & Case Service Expenditures by Category



### Pie Chart Indicates: Job Placement & Case Service Expenditures by Category

Job Placement Assistance	60%
Rehabilitation Technology	11%
Maintenance	6%
Employment Experience Wage & Benefits	5%
Assessment	4%
Other Services*	4%
Benefits Specialist Services	3%
Transportation	3%
Diagnosis and Treatment of Impairment	2%
Interpreter Services	2%

\*Other Services include services needed during the rehabilitation process as well as, technical assistance, personal attendant services, job search assistance and Customized employment services

Benefits Specialists offer guidance through the following services: information and referral, benefits analysis, work incentives planning, and benefits management.

Customized Employment is discovering what work is the best fit for the person with a disability. It identifies opportunities for creating or individualizing jobs that benefit both the local business and the job seeker.

# Pre-Employment Transition Services

## Working with Students

Services provided to students with disabilities ages 14-21.

### Job exploration counseling

- Job shadowing
- Situational assessment
- Identify employment and/or independent living services options
- Investigate training requirements

### Work based learning experiences

- Workplace tours/field trips
- Employer presentations
- Career fairs, business mentorships
- Soft Skills training
- Job shadowing/volunteering

### Counseling on Post- Secondary Education

- Explore information on careers, degree programs and training paths
- Referrals to college resources and supports
- Prepare for college or training programs

### Workplace readiness training

- Financial training and independence
- Understand what is required at work
- Peer mentoring and group activities
- Independent living and community living skills

### Instruction in self-advocacy

- Teach self-advocacy class in school
- Encourage application and participation at YLF
- Utilize Person Centered Tools
- Learn about student rights and expectations

## Accomplishments Include:

**Five (5) Project SEARCH Sites are operational in the state.**

Brookings – South Dakota State University  
Rapid City – Monument Health  
Sioux Falls/Teachwell Solutions – Avera McKennan  
Sioux Falls School District – Dow Rummel Village  
Yankton – Avera Sacred Heart & Mount Marty University.

**Project Skills** – a cooperative arrangement between VR and local school. VR funds wages, worker's compensation and FICA and the schools provide job development, job coaching and follow along services for the student.

October 1, 2023 – September 30, 2024

- ❖ 372 Student participants
- ❖ 94 Schools participating

✓ **Youth Leadership Forum** has been held annually since 1999.

✓ **19 Summer Transition Programs** were held across the state, with a total of **112** student participants.

### Serving Youth with Disabilities

A total of 812 youth applications were received by the Division between July 1, 2023, and June 30, 2024.

VR served a total of 1,723 youth with disabilities and completed 1,943 plans for employment for youth with disabilities.

# 2024 Governor's Awards

The Governor's Awards celebrate the achievements of businesses, individuals with disabilities, and South Dakotans for their contributions toward ensuring those with disabilities have equal opportunities to employment.

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## Outstanding Employee with a Disability

**Michael Svatos (Mitchell)** is an employee who consistently maintains a positive attitude and excels in a manufacturing setting, with his focus on routine and precise execution contributing to his success.



Upon finishing high school, Michael moved to Mitchell with assistance from his family and LifeQuest, a community support provider. He established himself in an apartment and began working full-time at AKG, a company that designs custom air-cooled heat exchangers for construction and farm equipment. With over 13 years of experience at AKG, he plays a key role in training new employees, demonstrating meticulous attention to detail and a strong commitment to following directions.

Michael's impact also extends beyond the workplace. His dedication to living independently and pursuing his dreams are commendable. Michael is pictured with DHS Secretary Rechtenbaugh and Governor Noem.

## Outstanding Individual with a Disability

**Justin Minnaert (Madison)** an American Motorcyclist Association Flat Track racing competitor, experienced a life-changing event in July 2020. He was involved in an accident that left him paralyzed from the upper chest down. After leaving Craig Hospital, Justin returned and resumed working on the land where he had grown up alongside his father and grandfather.

His full-time work involves field preparation, soybean and corn harvesting, commodity handling, and everyday farm maintenance. What sets Justin apart is his creative adaptation of technology for independence. He manufactures or adapts lifts and remote devices, and he navigates his home and farm implements with remarkable ingenuity. Justin is pictured with DHS Secretary Rechtenbaugh and Governor Noem. Learn more about Justin on page 20.





## Outstanding Private Employer (Small Employer)



**Dakota Fluid Power (Rapid City)** is an exemplary organization, which embodies excellence, compassion, and innovation. This smaller company prioritizes employee well-being through flexibility and personalized attention.

Dakota Fluid Power's management team understands the unique capacities and needs of each employee. Task assignments and work environments are carefully tailored to align with individual strengths, resulting in increased productivity and overall success for the company.

Dakota Fluid Power actively shares its best practices with other businesses, spreading awareness and encouraging a broader impact on the employment landscape for individuals with disabilities. Quinten Shultz, Branch Operations Manager is pictured with DHS Secretary Rechtenbaugh and Governor Noem.

## Outstanding Private Employer (Large Employer)

**Compass One Healthcare (Rapid City)** offers specialized support services and protocols in almost 3,000 hospital and health system locations in 46 states. The branded sectors, Morrison Healthcare (food and nutrition services) and Crothall Healthcare (support services) are nationally recognized for employee engagement and training programs.

They offer diverse career opportunities in specialized areas, including food and nutrition, environmental services, patient transportation, healthcare technology solutions, facilities management, laundry and linen, sterile processing, and ambulatory services.

Compass One Healthcare collaborates with local community agencies to hire excellent candidates. They provide accommodations such as flexible work arrangements, job carving, and workload distribution. Compass One Healthcare exemplifies how business should be conducted – by promoting diversity, fostering inclusion, and ensuring all employees' talents are valued and utilized to their fullest extent. Pictured are DHS Secretary Rechtenbaugh, Cody Brown, Pete McQuiston, and Governor Noem.



## Outstanding Public Employer



**Prairie Lakes Wellness Center (Watertown)** was recognized for enhancing employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities. Their commitment to diversity goes beyond words – it is ingrained in their culture.

Each employee's unique abilities are celebrated, and all are valued for the distinctive contributions they bring to the table. Through a culture of respect and support fostered by management, Prairie Lakes creates an environment where all can flourish.

Their partnership with local service providers underscores their dedication. By collaborating with organizations like the Human Service Agency and Vocational Rehabilitation, Prairie Lakes identifies and supports potential employees, including high school students, through programs like Project Skills.

Prairie Lakes exemplifies their spirit of leadership. Employees feel valued, respected, and integral to the community they serve. Pictured are DHS Secretary Rechtenbaugh Theresa Hillis, Randy Sadergaski and Governor Noem.

## Outstanding Transition Services Award



**Cherie Hill (Onida)** has been a cornerstone in the educational landscape of central South Dakota for 34 years, impacting multiple school districts from the Pierre Indian Learning Center to TF Riggs High School, and Sully Buttes School District in Onida.

She has championed efforts in preparing middle and high school students with disabilities to transition from school to adulthood. At the heart of Cherie's approach is the belief that preparing for life after school begins long before graduation day. She invests in each student's journey, taking the time to understand their individual strengths, interests, and needs. Beyond academics, Cherie teaches vital life and social skills, fosters self-advocacy, and guides students in understanding their disabilities.

Cherie actively participates in local, state, and national conferences to enhance her skills and to bring innovative practices back to her community. Her creativity, resourcefulness, and unwavering dedication has touched countless lives and shaped futures. Pictured are DHS Secretary Rechtenbaugh Cherie Hill and Governor Noem.

## Distinguished Service Award

**Arlene Poncelet (Ft. Pierre)** has had over 30 years of service to the South Dakota Council on Developmental Disabilities. She has shaped and elevated the landscape of support for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

During her tenure, Arlene catalyzed positive changes. Collaborating with organizations across the state, she paved the way for essential training and professional development opportunities. She encouraged and supported initiatives which empowered individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families to navigate challenges and strive for greater independence.

Her commitment extended to raising disability awareness among first responders and law enforcement, ensuring equitable treatment for all community members. Arlene's legacy is not about services; her legacy is about enriching communities to be fully inclusive for all individuals. Pictured are DHS Secretary Rechtenbaugh, Arlene Poncelet, and Governor Noem.



### **2024 Governor's Awards Recipients**

Front Row: DHS Secretary Rechtenbaugh, Arlene Poncelet, Cherie Hill, Justin Minnaert, and Governor Noem

Back Row: Quinten Shultz (Dakota Fluid Power), Michael Svatos, Randy Sadergaski (Prairie Lakes Wellness Center), and Cody Brown (Compass One Healthcare)

**These awards recognize South Dakota businesses, individuals with disabilities, and other South Dakotans for their contributions toward the employment of people with disabilities.**

# Justin Minnaert - The Story Continues

After the accident Justin spent two weeks at Sanford Hospital stabilizing his condition, followed by seven weeks at Craig Hospital in Colorado for aggressive spinal cord rehabilitation. Treatment helped him gain independence and prepare for his return home.

Farming was Justin's lifelong dream, and he remained focused on getting back to the field for harvest during his recovery. His resilience and positive outlook drove his return to farming. Just one day after leaving Craig Hospital, he resumed work on the land where he grew up alongside his father and grandfather.

Justin utilized VR services to get back to work. VR assisted with the purchase of adaptive equipment. Below is a picture of the *LifeLyft* on his truck. Hand controls and power transfer were also installed providing him the ability to independently operate machinery.



(LifeLyft installed on Justins pickup)

*LifeLyfts* Flatbed Pilot Lift example pictured below: lift capacity of 350 lbs., 12 ft maximum height and 14-foot maximum reach.

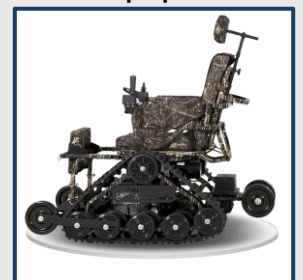


Justin operates the *LifeLyft* by remote control. The lift assists him with getting into and out of farm equipment e.g., tractor, skid steer and a semi-truck.

Justin utilizes a *Firefly* wheelchair attachment. It's a battery powered wheel that attaches to his wheelchair so he doesn't have to push it manually.



Another item he utilizes for off roading around the farm and to work on equipment includes the *Action Trackstander*.



Below is a picture of Justin in a standing position working on the semi-trailer.



Determined to pursue his lifelong dream:  
To Farm!

# Scope of Services Provided to Businesses

The Division has a Business Specialist who provides individualized assistance and support to eligible South Dakotans with disabilities as they prepare for employment opportunities. Staff serves as the single point of contact for businesses throughout the state and provides no cost technical assistance to employees with disabilities.

Staff can provide information and resources regarding disability, e.g., disability etiquette, workplace accommodations, service animals), provide employee recruitment assistance, and offer in person training to Human Resource personnel or managers/supervisors on topics regarding disabilities.

Staff is WINDMILLS certified. Staff partners with the two business led organizations to provide education, awareness, resources, and training on hiring and/or retaining employees with disabilities.

## How to Provide Input to the Board

The Board is committed to hearing from the public on matters relating to the provision of vocational rehabilitation services in South Dakota under the Division of Rehabilitation Services. Consequently, all regular and special Board meetings are announced in advance, open and accessible to the public.

The Board also holds public hearings and forums as they deem them necessary. These, too, are announced in advance, open and accessible to the public.

All meetings are called by the Board Chairperson, in cooperation with DRS and Board staff, as stipulated in the bylaws.

If you wish to let the Board know your thoughts on the provision of vocational rehabilitation services, you may reach them in the following ways:

Phone: 605.494.3613

Write: Board of Vocational Rehabilitation  
221 South Central Ave, Ste 33  
Pierre, South Dakota 57501

Attend: Meetings – copies of agendas can be obtained by contacting Board staff at the above phone number or by going to the State of South Dakota Boards and Commissions portal at: <https://boardsandcommissions.sd.gov/>

You may also access additional Board information such as member listing, past meeting minutes and agendas on the portal.