

**Vermont  
State Rehabilitation Council**

**Annual Report  
2022—2023**



**HireAbility**  
VERMONT



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# State Rehabilitation Councils (SRCs)

## Joelle Brouner, Washington State Rehabilitation Council Executive Director, (used with permission)

State Rehabilitation Councils were born out of the tradition of effective advocacy by people with disabilities committed to the success of the publicly- funded Vocational Rehabilitation program. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 was the first disability civil rights law to be enacted in the United States. The victory was marred when the Department of Health, Education and Welfare (HEW) delayed endorsement of the regulations needed to implement the law.

By April of 1977, frustration mounted and disability- rights advocates took direct action by leading sit-ins in Washington, D.C., New York, and San Francisco to pressure HEW to issue the regulations. While the protests in Washington and New York were short- lived, advocates in San Francisco persisted. They occupied the offices of HEW for four weeks. As a consequence, Joseph Califano, the secretary of HEW, endorsed the regulations.

The Rehabilitation Act is the federal law that establishes the publicly-funded Vocational Rehabilitation Program as we know it today.

The advocacy did not end in 1977. Since that time disability-rights advocates have continued work in service of a system that affords opportunities for customers of the Vocational Rehabilitation program to have more choices on their journeys toward employment.

During the reauthorization process of the Rehabilitation Act in 1993, advocates built on their tradition of effectiveness by persuading Congress to create State Rehabilitation Councils (under Title I, section 105) as a mechanism to support people with disabilities receiving vocational rehabilitation services to take an active role in shaping the services they receive.



# The Vermont State Rehabilitation Council

Vermont's State Rehabilitation Council advocates for consumer-directed and effective vocational services and for the creation of resources and services that will result in equal opportunities for Vermonters with disabilities.

Under its mandate in the Rehabilitation Act, it "shall review, analyze and advise the designated state unit regarding the performance of the responsibilities of the unit... particularly responsibilities relating to eligibility (including order of selection); extent, scope and effectiveness of services provided; and functions performed by state agencies that affect or that potentially affect the ability of individuals with disabilities in achieving rehabilitation goals..."

To meet its mission, the Council meets on a bimonthly basis five times a year. (There are no meetings in July or August.) SRC committees meet between full Council meetings to help conduct Council business, For more info visit: [www.src.vermont.gov](http://www.src.vermont.gov)



# From the Chair of the Vermont State Rehabilitation Council

Greetings Friends,

It is with irreplaceable joy that I have the opportunity to present this Annual Report for the Vermont State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) for the year of 2023.

It has been a good, long year. I had the pleasure of serving as Vice Chair of the SRC during the last year of my term. During that time, the SRC continued to do excellent work surrounding education, policy, and public relations. Furthermore, we heard from wonderful guest speakers such as Vermont State Representative Mari Cordes, as well as folks from our own ranks share stories about their respective disabilities. Even I got to share my perspective of living with Tourette Syndrome!

The ever amazing HireAbility continues to impress and inform. Alongside other advocacy organizations, we in the SRC are working together with HireAbility to ensure that more **Vermonters with disabilities are on a level playing field**. Additionally, HireAbility has spearheaded some fantastic

initiatives, including a pilot program to tackle the ongoing opioid epidemic.

Thank you so much to everyone who is involved in the Vermont SRC. You all have incredible spirit, and I was lucky to get to meet some of you in person at our Annual Retreat in Waterbury. What perfect timing, as my terms ends, I finally got to meet some of these dedicated folks in person after seeing them on a screen for years! I look forward to seeing what the SRC does next.

From the Heart,  
Asher Edelson  
Former Chair of the Vermont SRC



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# From the Director of Vermont HireAbility

Dear Reader,  
HireAbility (HA) Vermont continued to reap the benefits of our rebrand. Referrals are up. We identified a few areas of marketing focus for this past year. We developed materials to reach out to Vermonters with chronic health conditions. People who have a chronic health condition often do not consider themselves as having a disability yet they may be eligible for HireAbility services. We obtained the input of health care providers, our community partners and people with chronic health care conditions in our materials and outreach strategies. I am happy to share our video and print materials with anyone who asks.

We are competing in a very tight labor market for the very best VR counselors. We wanted to share what a great place Vermont is to live and that HireAbility is a great place to work. We created a video showcasing actual HA counselors talking about what Vermont has to offer and how much they love working for HireAbility. This video is being shared across many rehabilitation counseling master's programs in New England and beyond.

We are in the second year of our 5-year DIF grant, the Vermont Career Advancement Project (VCAP). This is a system's change grant with the goal of assisting Vermonters

with disabilities to move out of poverty and have choice in their lives. Every HA participant can have a career pathway of their choice leading to credential attainment

and higher wage jobs. Our counselors are becoming Career Pathways Navigators. The grant is in total alignment with our dashboard's lead indicators which in turn are slowly improving our Common Performance Measures.

VCAP has enrolled 239 participants in the grant to date, half of whom are actively engaging in education towards their career goal including registered apprenticeships with 52 completed degrees, certificates, or credentials. By the end of the grant, HireAbility will have developed a system of Earn-and-Learn opportunities and best practices for supporting participants and meeting the needs of the business customer. The results of this effort will lead to increased use of apprenticeship programs, credentials held by working Vermonters, and partnerships with business customers, education and training providers, and community partners.



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# From the Director of Vermont HireAbility, Continued

HireAbility is entering year two of our commitment to Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Access. We have written an implementation plan with four main objectives:

- Develop a workforce that reflects the diverse populations we serve.
- Effectively reach all populations that are eligible for our services.
- Ensure staff have access to the tools and knowledge and feel competent to serve all participants in a culturally appropriate way.
- Strengthening our existing communication loops to ensure staff are informed and can contribute.

A stakeholder has been formed for each goal area to include HA staff and subject matter experts. Each group will complete an action plan with accountability measures and do the work.

HireAbility remains in a strong fiscal position drawing down significant reallocation funds for the third year. We have fully expended our award each year by investing in Vermonters with disabilities in a variety of creative ways with our community partners. Allowing HireAbility to assist Vermonters with disabilities to advance in their chosen career pathway.

As always, I look forward to continuing our robust and productive partnership with the Vermont State Rehabilitation Council.

Diane P. Dalmasse, Director, HireAbility VT



## Division Philosophy

The Division of HireAbility Vermont has a mission is to help Vermonters with disabilities prepare for, obtain, and maintain meaningful careers, and to help employers recruit, train, and retain employees with disabilities. Consumer choice and self-direction are core values that drive HA's approach to providing services and developing new programs. HA's ability to help jobseekers succeed also depends on clearly understanding the needs of our other customers: em-

ployers. To better reach both our consumers and employers, HA rebranded as HireAbility in SFY 2022 and launched a marketing campaign to promote our services for both audiences. The HireAbility rebranding also reinforces our commitment to helping consumers access high wage and high-quality careers through training and education. It also communicates our goal of being a source of motivated and trained employees for Vermont employers.

# The Year in Review- Summary SRC Committee Reports

## Advocacy, Outreach, and Education Committee

### Cari Kelley, Chair

Greetings!

The Advocacy, Outreach and Education Committee (AOE) has been hard at work getting the word out about the work of HireAbility and how it makes a difference in the lives of so many Vermonters. I am honored to have been Chair of this dynamic and engaged group and I am pleased to report on our work on the Committee's behalf.

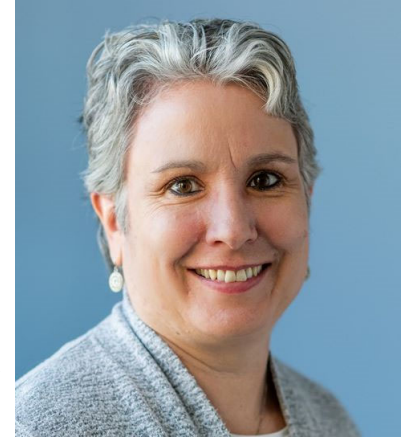
Transportation is a key issue when it comes to connecting people with disabilities with meaningful employment opportunities. In a rural state like Vermont, the lack of public transportation is felt in every part of the state making it even more difficult to land jobs in a desired field. We attended a number of meetings with the Vermont Department of Transportation to hear ideas of how to provide services to people throughout the state and hear about current projects. The state is putting effort into figuring out rural transportation, but there is a lot of work to do. The infrastructure is not there at the level that we need, but we will take every win as a step forward to bringing Vermont into the future.

We had a very successful event at the Vermont Statehouse in early Spring in what we call, "the Card Room," which is a space des-

ignated for non-profit organizations to educate legislators about their work.

We had a number of legislators stop by throughout the day to ask questions, hear stories, start to understand our work, and grab one of our freshly baked cookies (generously donated by a HireAbility staff member). This event gave us hope that lawmakers understand that the connection between meaningful employment and a person's ability is a critical piece of the fabric of our state and we look forward to continuing our Advocacy work in the upcoming legislative session.

We had a number of guest presenters at our meetings, too. We had a current legislator come in and give us ideas on how to communicate with legislators about our work, we had direct conversations with the Vermont Department of Transportation, we invited organizations in to educate us on their work and how we can partner in the future, and much more.



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# Summary SRC Committee Reports, Continued

## Advocacy, Outreach, and Education Committee, Continued

As a group, we are very excited about the future of HireAbility and helping them spread the word throughout the state. I am very pleased to turn the reigns of the AOE over to Courtney Blasius, who has served on the SRC for the past few years, and will continue our work into the future.

I want to thank everyone who has helped the AOE with Advocacy, Outreach and Education and helping us to move the needle of the work of HireAbility.

With Gratitude,

Cari Kelley

AOE Chair



### **HireAbility Overview**

HireAbility serves people with disabilities in Vermont who face barriers to employment. We help HireAbility consumers figure out what types of career pathways will work for them, through assessment, counseling, and guidance. We use our extensive networks in the employer community to create job opportunities, match employer needs with jobseeker skills, and help employers retain staff with disabilities. We also invest heavily in post-secondary training and education to help our consumers gain credentials that will lead to high wage and high-quality employment.

# Summary SRC Committee Reports, Continued

## Performance Review Committee

### Dominick Caputo, Chair

The Vermont State Rehabilitation Council's Performance Review Committee (PRC) is responsible for reviewing, analyzing, and advising HireAbility on its performance in fulfilling its mission and responsibilities.

This year the PRC reviewed, made recommendations, and provided input on a range of topics affecting HireAbility's effectiveness, including the following:

#### Services to People with Social Emotional Disorders

The PRC reviewed how HireAbility is serving this population and what factors led to successful outcomes. HireAbility found that this disability group is more likely to be successful if clients are provided with appropriate accommodations, receive wrap-around services (e.g., education and workforce training, health and mental health services, supplemental food assistance, housing, transportation, childcare, mentoring, and counseling), and are engaged with progressive employment.

Progressive employment is a coordinated set of experiences that may begin with volunteering and gradually progress to competitive employment for individuals for whom employment has not otherwise occurred. Progressive employment combines several placement strategies like job shadowing, informational interviews, short-term training assignments, on-the-job training, and volunteer work.

The main issues that we identified are the short-

age of mental health providers and the high bar placed on eligibility for the Community Rehabilitation and Treatment (CRT) Program.

#### Comprehensive Needs Assessment

The SRC plays a role in developing summary findings of the Needs Assessment. To assist the SRC in developing these findings the PRC reviewed several pieces of data that relate to:

- HireAbility services to individuals with disabilities as a whole
- Youth and students with disabilities
- Other populations

Overall, the numbers show that the effect of COVID is still being felt with the FY22 data showing fewer closures for all but the under 25 age group, and fewer persons served. However, the most recent data shows this trend is starting to move towards pre-Covid numbers.

#### The Work Ahead

As we move toward 2024, the PRC will continue our work on the Needs Assessment and will start our review of the State Plan. We have also developed a significant list of goals and priorities which will explore additional avenues to serve consumers of HireAbility. We look forward to the upcoming year and to serving the people of the State of Vermont.



# Summary SRC Committee Reports, Continued

## Policy and Procedures Committee

### Sherrie Brunelle, Chair

At the close of 2023, the Policies and Procedures Committee (Committee) worked on multiple policies with significant impact on HireAbility Vermont participants. That said, it is important to note that:

- The policy review and revision process has been impacted by a determination by the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) following the recent audit of HireAbility Vermont's policies, procedures, and practices. RSA now requires HireAbility Vermont to submit all proposed policy revisions for its review before putting them out for public comment as required by the WIOA (Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act) and Vermont law. This review will delay final approval of proposed policy changes. To minimize the likelihood of RSA objection to a proposed policy revision, HireAbility Vermont is using the resources of VR-TAC, a federal technical assistance resource available to State vocational rehabilitation agencies and others.
- The chapters reviewed this year have required more in-depth discussion than other chapters the Committee has reviewed.
- The RSA audit significantly impacted the time and work required of HireAbility Vermont as the state designated unit.

#### Committee Work

##### Chapter 205, Post Employment Services

The Committee reviewed this chapter to con-

sider a new RSA guidance regarding post-employment services.. Historically, based on its interpretation of the regulations, Hire-

Ability Vermont has reopened a past participant's closed case for the purpose of providing time limited post-employment services. RSA interprets the regulations to require HireAbility to open a new case when a past participant seeks post-employment services.

Given RSA's new interpretation of the regulations, the committee supported HireAbility Vermont's proposed plan to allow provision of post-employment services using non-RSA State funds set aside for this purpose.

##### Chapter 311, Post Secondary Education & Training and Chapter 310, Supported Employment.

The Committee recommended HireAbility Vermont provide greater clarity and guidance as to the distinctions between "job coaching" under the progressive training services detailed in Chapter 311 and the employment support provided under Chapter 310. This guidance will be provided to counselors.



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# Summary SRC Committee Reports, Continued

## Policy & Procedures Committee, Continued

### Chapter 306, Rehabilitation Technology & Chapter 315, Home Modifications.

The Committee continued to work on revisions to Chapter 306. After much discussion, the Committee decided to separate rehabilitation (assistive) technology from home modifications. A new Chapter 315 will be created to address home modifications. The committee will continue to work on Chapters 310 and 315 in the coming year.

The Committee also shared concern with administrative staff regarding volunteer use to complete home modifications under Chapter 315. Of particular concern was HireAbility Vermont's potential liability for such things as defective or incomplete work or injuries sustained by volunteers. Revisions to eliminate this provision are underway and the Committee will continue to work on this chapter in the coming year.

### Chapter 101, Confidentiality.

The Committee continued discussion of Chapter 101 with particular concern about the lack of a clearly defined procedure for filing a complaint when a participant or their representative believes that the participant's confidentiality has been breached. Concerns were also raised regarding the process for deci-

sion making when counselor participation in administrative or court proceedings he requested. The Committee will continue to work on this chapter in the coming year.

### Chapter 302, Health Services.

The Committee worked on revisions to Chapter 302. Revisions to update the spending guidelines to be more reflective of increasing health care costs were recommended. Revisions to this chapter were impacted by a finding from the RSA audit that HireAbility Vermont needs to use clearly recognizable standards when setting for specific services provided by HireAbility Vermont, including health services. RSA also found that HireAbility Vermont needs to develop a rate setting procedure. The Committee will continue to work on this policy in the coming year.

### Chapter 308, Self-Employment

A core group including HAVT staff, and the Committee Chair have worked on revisions to this chapter for several years. Dissatisfied with the outcome of that work, the group sought input from the Committee.

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# Summary SRC Committee Reports, Continued

## Policy & Procedures Committee, Continued

The Committee recommended that HireAbility Vermont solicit help from Griffin Hammis Associates (GHA), internationally recognized experts in the areas of self-employment and customized employment. GHA is helping HireAbility Vermont, and the Committee is working on revisions to this policy. As part of that process, HireAbility Vermont appointed a program manager to support the work with GHA. The program manager is and will be working closely with GHA to:

- Develop a revised policy that aligns with the WIOA regulations and goals of HireAbility Vermont to offer participants greater opportunities for employment and career pathways;
- Develop training for all staff regarding self-employment;
- Develop more extensive training for select counselors who want to be regional experts in self-employment;

- Develop guidance manuals for staff for ongoing reference post training; and
- Develop guidance manuals for participants interested in self-employment.

HireAbility Vermont and the Committee see this work as a potential national model for implementing self-employment policy and services. It is also seen as an invaluable path out of poverty for participants.

### Case Service Rates.

Based on the RSA audit findings, HireAbility Vermont is working to develop a rate setting procedure and establish specific rates for the services it provides to participants. This will result in the development of a new chapter in the Policies and Procedures Manual in the coming year.

As Chair, I am immensely proud of the work the Committee undertook in the past year. I am even more proud of and grateful for the commitment, knowledge, and contributions of the committee members. I look forward to working with them in the coming year.

Respectfully,  
Sherrie Brunelle, Chair



# Vermont State Rehabilitation Council Members 2023-2024

## Steering Committee

Asher Edelson, *SRC Chair*  
Sherrie Brunelle, *Policy and Procedures Committee Chair*  
Nick Caputo, *Performance Review Committee Chair*  
Gina D'Ambrosio, *SRC Vice Chair*  
Cari Kelley, *Advocacy, Outreach and Education Committee Chair*  
Diane Dalmasse, *HireAbility Vermont Director*

## Advocacy, Outreach & Education Committee

Cari Kelley, *Chair*  
Courtney Blasius  
Sherrie Brunelle  
Asher Edelson  
Helena Kehne  
Ana Russo  
Sarah Launderville  
Bill Meirs  
Calla Papademas  
Nancy Richards  
Cara Sachs  
Laura Siegel  
Diane Dalmasse, *SRC Liaison*

## Performance Review Committee

Nick Caputo, *Chair*  
Sherrie Brunelle  
Gina D'Ambrosio  
Laura Flint  
Marlena Hughes  
Robin Ingenthron  
Bill Meirs  
Amanda Arnold, *SRC Liaison*

## Policy & Procedures Committee

Sherrie Brunelle, *Chair*  
Andrea Bacchi  
Rocko Gieselman  
Helena Kehne  
Cari Kelley  
Calla Papademas  
Laura Siegel  
Sarah Sterling  
James Smith, *SRC Liaison*

## 2023 SRC Members

Bacchi, Andrea  
Blasius, Courtney  
Brunelle, Sherrie  
Caputo Nick  
Dalmasse, Diane, (ex-officio, non-voting)  
D'Ambrosio, Gina  
Edelson, Asher  
Flint, Laura  
Gieselman, Rocko, (ex-officio, non-voting)  
Hughes, Marlena  
Ingenthron, Robin  
Kehne, Helena  
Kelley, Cari  
Launderville, Sarah  
Meirs, Bill  
Papademas, Calla  
Rhim, Abby  
Richards, Nancy  
Russo, Ana  
Sachs, Cara  
Siegel, Laura  
Sterling, Sarah

# HireAbility's Core Services

**HireAbility Core Services:** HireAbility (HA) services for jobseekers are tailored to the person and driven by his or her own interests, job goals, and needs. Each person meets regularly with his or her counselor, who helps develop an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) and manages the services and supports needed to realize the person's career goals. The core services of vocational assessment, counseling and guidance, job training, and job placement provided by HA staff and partners, are enhanced with a range of purchased services and supports.

**HireAbility Placement Services:** HireAbility has an ongoing partnership with the Vermont Association of Business, Industry, and Rehabilitation (VABIR) to provide employment services. HA customers and counselors benefit from dedicated employment consultants who provide job development, job placement, and workplace supports to help people find and keep jobs.

**Creative Workforce Solutions (CWS):** CWS is the employer outreach arm of the HA program. HA oversees 12 Business Account Managers (BAMs) who have active relationships with 2,500 employers statewide. The BAMs convene local teams of Agency of Human Service providers who deliver employment services across multiple populations. These CWS teams coordinate local employer outreach across programs to better serve employers.

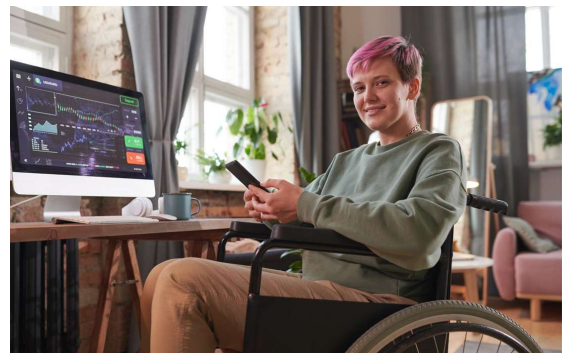
**Jump on Board for Success (JOBS):** The JOBS program is a HireAbility partnership with the Department of Mental Health. JOBS provides employment and mental health case management services for youth with severe emotional/behavioral disabilities.

**Benefits Counseling Program:** HA benefits counselors provide information and expertise to Social Security disability program beneficiaries about the impact employment will have on their benefits.

**Employee Assistance Program (EAP):** EAP has offered comprehensive Employee Assistance Program (EAP) services since 1986. EAP provides short-term counseling and referral, management consultation, wellness workshops, and resource information.

**Rehabilitation Counselor for the Deaf (RCD):** RCDs provide a wide range of services for Vermonters who are Deaf, hard of hearing, or late deafened.

**Assistive Technology Program:** The AT program helps individuals of all ages find accessible solutions to overcome disability and aging related barriers at home, work, and in the community.



# HireAbility Developments and Accomplishments

## Improving Consumer Outcomes Across Measures:

In 2014 the US Congress reauthorized the Rehabilitation Act via the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). WIOA introduced new Common Performance Measures (CPM) that core partners including HireAbility are evaluated on. The measures are:

- Job retention six months post program exit.
- Job retention twelve months post program exit.
- Median earnings six months post program exit.
- Credential attainment.
- Measurable skill gains.
- Employer satisfaction.

Prior to WIOA, HireAbility was measured primarily on how many people the program assisted in getting a job. This change from quantitative to qualitative measures required a major paradigm shift in our service delivery system. HireAbility implemented the Careers Initiative, a series of strategies to align program services with the new Common Performance Measures.

HireAbility tracks the Careers Initiative strategies through a Performance Dashboard. The Dashboard provides staff and managers with real-time information at the counselor, district, and statewide level. It also serves as a frame of reference to judge how they are doing and show them what they need to focus on to achieve the

desired outcomes.

State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2022 Dashboard data indicates HireAbility's Careers Initiative has had a positive impact on practices, services, and outcomes:

- An 18 percentage-point increase in HireAbility consumers participating in career assessment within 180 days of application.
- A 4 percentage-point increase in HireAbility consumers with higher wage employment plan goals.
- A 3 percentage-point increase in HireAbility consumers earning over 125% of minimum wage at program exit.
- A post-pandemic rebound in services, with a 70% increase in applications taken and 77% increase in plans initiated, resulting in an overall 7% increase in the overall caseload.

We are also seeing a positive impact on the Common Performance Measures themselves with gains across all 5 measures in SFY 22.





# HireAbility Developments and Accomplishments, *Continued*

**A Second Successful Year of the Summer Career Exploration Program (SCEP):** In 2022, HIREABILITY completed the second year of the Summer Career Exploration Program (SCEP). The SCEP was designed to provide high school students with disabilities paid summer work experiences combined with a career exploration curriculum. Local VR district teams partnered with local employers to provide meaningful real life work experiences for students with disabilities. Also, lessons learned from last year were documented in a SCEP Manual to improve implementation across the state. The following is a brief summary of the outcomes for year 2:

- 127 students successfully completed a paid work experience with a local employer.
- SCEP engaged 89 employers in providing work experiences for students.
- SCEP included all students with disabilities, regardless of the level of support required for them to be successful.
- 33 students were offered competitive employment after completing the SCEP program (26% of participants).

HireAbility also measured the outcomes for those who participated in SCEP during Year 1. The following is a summary one year post SCEP participation:

- 34 students participated in a additional employment experiences post SCEP during the school year.
- 41 students are currently employed in competitive jobs or were employed at the time

they closed their case with HireAbility.

- 81% (116) of students from Year 1 are still engaged with HireAbility.

**Helping SSI/SSDI Beneficiaries Achieve Financial Independence through the Kessler Foundation Grant/WorkVT2.0:** HIREABILITY was selected by the Kessler Foundation to receive a grant designed to improve employment prospects for HireAbility consumers who receive Social Security disability benefits (SSI and SSDI). Vermont was one of only 6 projects to be selected out of over 70 applications. The WorkVT2.0 project provides an innovative combination of services and financial incentives to help beneficiaries obtain income enough to end their benefits. The project has four sites, one each in Burlington, Rutland, Newport and Barre HireAbility offices.

Recruitment began in March 2021 after a one-year delay due to COVID. As of September 30, 2022, over 140 beneficiaries have signed up to receive WorkVT2.0 services. The project is already showing some early successes with sixty-eight participants working of which twenty-one are working full time. Twenty-six participants are enrolled in post-secondary education. The project provides up to three achievement payments for participants if they hit specific earning benchmarks. Forty-two participants have earned at least one achievement payment. Twelve have worked their way off benefits and earned all three achievement payments.



# HireAbility Developments and Accomplishments, *Continued*

**The Rebranding of HA to HireAbility:** We have long received feedback from both consumers and employers that the name “vocational rehabilitation” is off-putting to some participants, referral sources and employers. Also, the old name did not speak to the new mission of the Division as a career pathways and workforce development program.

To update the brand of the program, HireAbility used one-time excess federal funds to contract with the Place Creative. After, extensive input from staff and stakeholders the Place Creative came up with the HireAbility brand.

They also worked with HA to create:

- A modern and clean look and feel for all HireAbility materials
- Marketing materials targeted specifically to different stakeholders; students/youth,



adults, employers, parents/families and referral sources

- Video content in long and short form for television, social media and other forums

HireAbility was launched in the spring of 2022 with a marketing campaign on multiple platforms. We have received overwhelmingly positive feedback on the change from stakeholders.



# HireAbility's New Initiatives

**The Vermont Career Advancement Project (VCAP):** HireAbility (HA) was awarded a \$6.5 million grant from the US Department of Education to support the Vermont Career Advancement Project (VCAP). VCAP will establish a robust partnership between HA, the Vermont Department of Labor (VDOL), the Community College of Vermont (CCV), Vermont Technical College (VTC), and secondary Career and Technical Education Centers (CTEs), to build on-ramps enabling individuals with disabilities to pursue high quality, good paying careers. The project will embed dedicated Career Pathways Student Advisors in these post-secondary programs to provide intensive support for VCAP participants. VCAP will also partner with other work force development organizations to expand paid, credentialed, occupational training programs in response to employer needs.

Utilizing the best available employment projections for high quality, high wage career pathway opportunities in Vermont, HA identified the following five career sectors for the project: Advanced Manufacturing, Financial Services, Healthcare, Skilled Construction Trades, and Information Technology. VCAP will utilize its extensive network of employer contacts through its Business Account

Managers to engage employers in offering opportunities in these sectors. CCV and VTC,

which have program development experience and expertise, will provide the required Related Instruction for apprenticeships and other credentialed programs. These programs will be linked directly to secondary and adult programs offered through the State's 17 Career and Technical Education (CTE) centers. The project will enroll 500 participants, with 375 earning Industry Recognized Credentials and 75 enrolling in Registered Apprenticeships. 75% of participants will exit their training programs employed and earning at least 150% of the state's minimum wage.

HireAbility started enrollment in VCAP in August 2022. To date 70 individuals have been enrolled in the program.



# HireAbility's New Initiatives, *Continued*

## **Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Access**

**(DEIA):** In 2021 Governor Scott announced the following proclamation “Vermont seeks to achieve equality and equity and to create a culture in which racial, ethnic and other cultural disparities are openly acknowledged and addressed and where no one person is more likely to experience society’s benefits or burdens than any other person.”

**Farm First:** Farm First provides Vermont’s farmer’s and their families with support, re-

sources, and information to reduce stress and improve emotional well-being. We do this by having a Resource Coordinator to respond to outreach and establish a plan for each farmer – the plan may include up to 12 counseling sessions with an Employee Assistance Program counselor or an affiliate, a referral for Hire Ability services and/or other supports such as business advising, agricultural mediation, etc. The program was initially started to serve dairy farmers but at this time we are serving all farmers with approximately 50% of these farmers being primarily focused in dairy.



# HireAbility's Contribution to Vermonters and Their Communities

## Results (how much, how well, better off)

### Number of People Served:

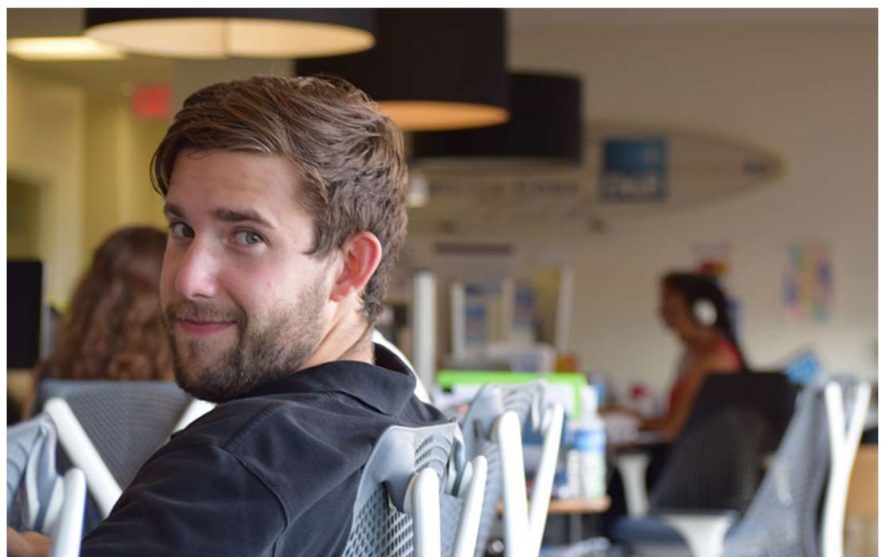
- A total of 5,871 individuals were served in SFY 2022. 5,606 were served in SFY 2021.
- 5,234 people were served in the core HA program in SFY 2022. 4,957 were served in SFY 2021.
- 1,281 high school students were served through the Pre-Employment Transition Services program in SFY 2022. 1,189 were served in SFY 2021.

**How Well We Served Them:** The HA Consumer Experience Survey is conducted every two years to determine consumers' overall satisfaction with the program. The survey is conducted by a third-party research firm, Market Decisions Research (MDR), who has an extensive background working with VR agencies nationwide. Six hundred forty-six consumers were contacted for our 2022 survey. This survey was the first conducted post-COVID and has provided the Division with valuable information regarding consumers' reactions to remote and hybrid services.

The following are highlights from the 2022 results:

- 81% of consumers reported they were satisfied or very satisfied with HA.

- 93% said that they would recommend that their friends or family members seek help from HA.
- 90% of consumers responded that they are satisfied with their experience working with HA staff and HA counselors. This is a two percent increase from our 2016 survey.
- 97% felt they were treated by HA staff with dignity and respect.
- 77% of consumers reported that it was very easy or somewhat easy to connect with their Counselor, even during the times where services were being delivered entirely remotely
- 63% of consumers reported that they would like to continue to receive services from VR remotely



# HireAbility's Contribution to Vermonters and Their Communities, *Continued*

## **Employer Satisfaction with HireAbility (HA) Creative Workforce Solutions (CWS):**

In 2022 HA contracted with MDR to develop a survey that would determine employer satisfaction with HA services. Between February and May 2022, MDR surveyed 72 employers that had contact with a HireAbility team member(s) within the last 18 months. The survey found that 93% of employers were satisfied with CWS services, up from 77% in 2019, and 100% of employers would be open to working with CWS again in the future, up from 94% in 2022. One area of improvement that was identified, is that employers would like to be contacted more frequently.

Another focus of the survey this year was apprenticeship and internship opportunities. Of the employers surveyed 60% do not currently have any apprenticeship or internship opportunities, however 76% are interested in partnering with HA to create these opportunities in the future.

The survey results provided invaluable information that will help us continue to improve our services to employers, develop more connections, and better serve HA customers.

**How People are Better Off:** The most apparent measure of successful consumer outcomes is their employment status when they leave the program. In State Fiscal Year

(SFY) 2022, 435 individuals closed their HA cases with successful employment. This means they met their individual employment goals and were stably employed for at least 90 days. In addition, 237 of these individuals or 54%, had a wage above 125% of minimum wage.

Vermont's VR programs also received data for the second time on all five WIOA Common Performance Measures. The SFY 2022 results data shows Vermont VR consumers are achieving outcomes at a higher rate than the national average on all five performance measures. Additionally, Vermont's VR programs improved on all five performance measures in SFY 2022 compared to our SFY 2021 outcomes.

The employment rate four quarters post exit continues to improve, starting at 46.7% in SFY 2020, increasing to 48.3% in SFY 2021 and increasing again in SFY 2022 to 52.5%. Vermont's median earnings two quarters post exit jumped from \$3,901 in SFY 2020, which was below the national average, to \$4,630 in SFY 2021 and then \$5,213 in SFY 2022, both above the national average for those years.



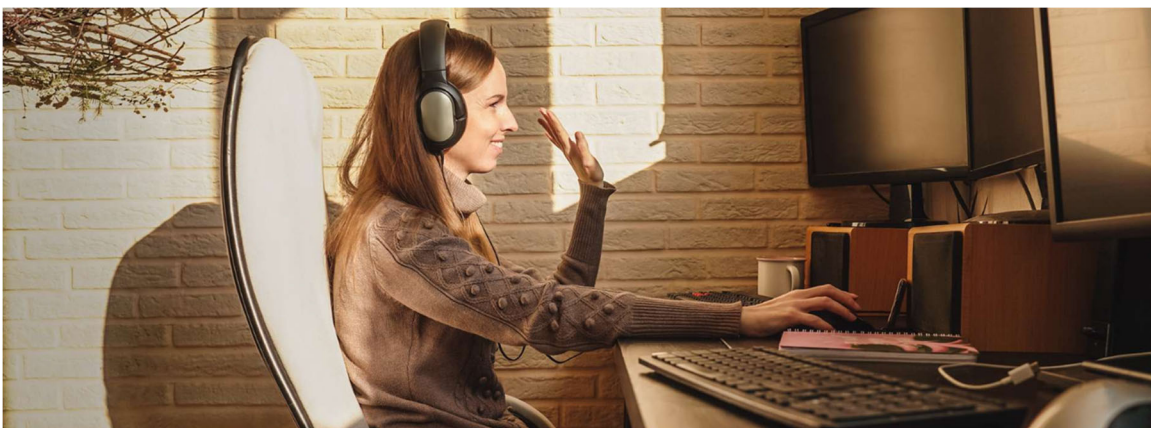
# History of State Vocational Rehabilitation Councils

When the Rehabilitation Act Amendments were being considered by the 102nd Congress in 1992, disability rights activism had increased and recommended changes to the Rehabilitation Act that included persons with disabilities be at the table. As a result, Revisions to the act included individual dignity, self-determination, inclusion and full participation of persons with disabilities. In addition, this included the establishment of a State Rehabilitation Advisory Council (SRC) with a majority of the members (51%) being persons with disabilities.

By the 1998 Amendments, SRC's role and empowerment were recognized and strengthened. The name and role of the body of advocates was changed from the State Rehabilitation Advisory Council to the State Rehabilitation Council. The role changed from being advisory, to being involved in developing policies, planning activities, evaluation the program effectiveness and carrying out other functions related to the vocational rehabilitation program. This also included that the SRC, in conjunction with the State VR agency, jointly con-

duct the comprehensive needs assessment of individuals with disabilities in the state, develop (and agree to) the State's annual goals and priorities, and evaluate the VR performance toward the goals annually. The role of the SRC changed from advisory to working in partnership with the State VR agency.

Section 105 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (as amended) requires consumers, advocates and other representatives of individuals with disabilities to participate in the administration and oversight of a state's VR program. The SRC fulfills this mandate in all states and territories. This is required in order for Vocational Rehabilitation programs to be eligible for and maintain federal VR funds. The SRC must consist of at least fifteen (15) members. They cannot have less unless they are a commission. There is not a maximum number of members unless Council Bylaws note otherwise. Members are appointed by the Governor, representing a variety of perspectives from the VR program and disability community as outlined in the legislation.





# HireAbility

## VERMONT

The Vermont State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) is appointed by the Governor. We frequently new members who have a widerange of interests and talents to help improve the services offered by HireAbility to Vermonters with disabilities. If you are interested in applying to become a member of the SRC, please contact Janice Leonard, Coordinator:  
janice.leonard@vermont.gov

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