Program Year 2019 (July 1, 2019 — June 30, 2020)

# Bureau of Rehabilitation Services Highlights

The Bureau of Rehabilitation Services works to bring about full access to employment, independence and community integration for people with disabilities.





JANET T. MILLS GOVERNOR STATE OF MAINE DEPARTMENT OF LABOR BUREAU OF REHABILITATION SERVICES 150 STATE HOUSE STATION AUGUSTA, MAINE 04333-0054

> LAURA A. FORTMAN COMMISSIONER

### Bureau Director's Message

~ Optimism is the faith that leads to achievement. Nothing can be done without hope and confidence. ~

Helen Keller

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you to the latest edition of *BRS Highlights*! It is hard to believe that we have been sharing the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS) story through this publication for a decade.

This year has many other notable milestones as well, including the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act; the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Vocational Rehabilitation program; and the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Maine's statehood. Also, in 2020, Maine eliminated the use of subminimum wage certificates for workers with disabilities. There is much to be celebrated!

This year has also been marked by many challenges, most notably the COVID-19 pandemic, which has affected the daily lives of every one of us. People with disabilities have been particularly at risk as we deal with an unprecedented situation. With health and safety as the guiding factors, BRS was positioned well with short notice to move a majority of staff to remote work. Our investment in technology over the last few years, including laptops, cell phones, electronic data systems and security protocols, has served us well. Although in-person services were restricted, assistance to job seekers with disabilities, employers and those needing support to live independently continued through virtual vocational guidance and counseling, career exploration, and even orientation and mobility instruction! The creativity and flexibility of our staff during what has also been a personally very challenging time is truly remarkable but epitomizes the commitment and passion that they bring to work every day.

Even during difficult times, Maine is a wonderful place to live and work. The bureau is well placed within the Department of Labor to ensure that citizens with disabilities have access to the same socio-economic opportunities as those who do not have disabilities. Our partnerships with many disability communities, service provider organizations, employers and other state agencies are critical to this success. As people with disabilities thrive in Maine, so will the rest of the state.

The quote above from Helen Keller truly espouses what the Maine Department of Labor's Bureau of Rehabilitation Services is all about. We offer hope to people with disabilities throughout the state. Through that optimism and tangible assistance with the support of many, we instill confidence in the individuals that we serve, resulting in independent living and employment success. Please enjoy this publication – we are very proud of the work that we do!

Karn Frese

Karen Fraser, Bureau Director

 PHONE: (207) 623-7943
 TTY users call Maine Relay 711
 FAX: (207) 287-5292

 The Maine Department of Labor provides equal opportunity in programs, services and employment.

 Auxiliary aids and services are available to individuals with disabilities upon request.

 Programs are provided as a proud partner of the American Job Center network.

## Table of Contents

Bureau of Rehabilitation Services Overview
How We Define Success
Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR)
DVR Initiatives and Innovations
Bureau of Rehabilitation Services Apprenticeship Program
Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired (DBVI)9
DBVI Initiatives and Innovations
Division for the Deaf, Hard of Hearing and Late Deafened (DDHHLD)11
Office of the State Accessibility and Independent Living Coordinator11
Partners in Advocacy, Advisory Boards and Councils12
BRS Office Directory

### Bureau of Rehabilitation Services Overview

The Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS) is comprised of three Divisions – the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR), the Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired (DBVI), and the Division of Systems Improvement and Quality Assurance (SIQA). A total of 150 BRS employees currently deliver public vocational rehabilitation and independent living services to Maine people with disabilities and are co-located at CareerCenters statewide. BRS also houses the Office of the State Accessibility Coordinator, who leads the State's compliance under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 (see page 11).

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) of 2014, establishes program eligibility and the scope of services provided through DVR and DBVI. Included are vocational



counseling and guidance, physical restoration services, education and skills training, and job placement services. DBVI, in conjunction with the Department of Education, also serves all children who are blind in Maine.

This past year, **9,118** Mainers with disabilities received services from BRS; of those participants, **6,719** received services with a plan for employment. Counselors worked with clients who had an employment plan, on average, for 19.9 months. A total of **693** clients were successfully employed earning an average wage of \$485.94 per week.

BRS receives most of its funding from federal grants, some of which require matching state funds. The largest (one administered by DVR and one administered by DBVI) are from the Department of Education's Title I grant program for vocational rehabilitation services.



Special Revenue income is received from the Business Enterprise Program (*see page 10*) managed by DBVI, from the Worker's Compensation Board through a memorandum of understanding with DVR (*see page 7*), and from the Public Utilities Commission for telecommunications managed by the Division for the Deaf, Hard of Hearing and Late Deafened (*see page 11*). The use of the Special Revenue funds is restricted for these specific purposes.

### How We Define Success...



"Jeff", a young man with a diagnosis of a significant mental illness, came to VR as a high school senior. Living in a group home and attending a special purpose private school, Jeff was very withdrawn and had difficulty with communication. Jeff's VR counselor told him about Progressive Employment. After referral, he participated in two paid work experiences – and out of the second was offered a job with a large pharmacy chain! His VR counselor saw him start to smile more and share his sense of humor with his coworkers. He also learned to ride the Metro bus to work!

"Bob", a man with a history of failed employment attempts, worked with his VR counselor and a Community Rehabilitation Provider to find employment that fit his needs. He grew in his ability to accept constructive feedback and now has great relationships with his boss and coworkers. He recently told his VR counselor, "I'm not miserable anymore."

Working with a Rehabilitation Counselor for the Deaf, "Fatima", was able to finish her social work degree and to retain her employment as a Bereavement Support Counselor.



"Marie-Josee", came to DBVI struggling to find employment after becoming unable to drive due to vision loss. With her VR counselor's support, she was able to find employment with a federal agency working from home. Her new job provided the financial security she needed to pay her mortgage and support her family.

With VR support, "Tyrone", completed a college degree in Environmental Science. Shortly before graduation, he was hired by an environmental research company based in California. He now earns \$35 per hour working as an environmental researcher!



# Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR)

Maine's DVR assists eligible individuals with disabilities who wish to achieve or retain employment in the community. Any individual who is committed to work and has a disability that creates a barrier to employment is encouraged to apply. Once determined eligible, individuals develop a plan for employment, which outlines the services needed to successfully achieve their employment goal.

### **Contributing to the Maine Economy**

While maintaining a wait list for services, DVR assisted **668** people to find employment success. This resulted in these individuals earning a total of **\$16,677,214.84** in annual wages. Across the state and across industry sectors, DVR clients are joining or rejoining the workforce in such jobs as:

Accountant and Auditor	Counselor	Hairdresser
Administrative Services Manager	Customer Service Representative	Healthcare Support Worker
Automotive Service Technician	Dental Assistant	Janitor
Building Cleaning Worker	Dishwasher	Laborer
Bus Driver	Electrician	Licensed Practical Nurse
Carpenter	Elementary School Teacher	Machinist
Cashier	Emergency Medical Technician	Material Moving Worker
Chief Executive	Executive Secretary	Medical Assistant
Childcare Worker	Farmer and Rancher	Mental Health Counselor
Clergy	Financial Manager	Office Clerk
Community Health Worker	Firefighter	Production Worker
Computer Network Support Specialist	First-Line Supervisor	Registered Nurse
Construction Laborer	Food Preparation Worker	Retail Salesperson
Cook	General and Operations Manager	Welder

#### **Individuals Served**

- 2,702 New Applicants
- 6,423 Received Services through Employment Plans
- 668 Individuals Placed in Competitive Employment





#### **Education Level at Closure**



### **DVR Initiatives and Innovations**

**NEW! Virtual Career Exploration Workshop (CEW)** Series, developed by DVR and partners, is designed to introduce participants to the world of work through activities that uncover skills and identify career interests. CEW is now available in a new virtual format for increased access – in addition to three existing versions: Adult, Transition, and Bridge – Pathways to Employment. The CEW series utilizes flexible modules making it ideal for delivery in schools and provider agencies, as well as CareerCenters around the state. The Virtual CEW allows access via Zoom and other distance learning platforms – bringing the CEW right to each participant! Using the online tool, **Virtual Job Shadow**, job seekers are able to explore careers and learn about labor market information as they prepare for employment!

**Workers' Compensation Board's Memorandum of Understanding** with DVR has meant a number of injured Maine workers have been able to return to employment. Through participation in VR services, these individuals received the supports and resources they needed to return to the Maine workforce.

**DVR Continues Strong Partnership with the Maine Department of Education (MDOE) and Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS)** through joint planning, service delivery and regional and statewide staff training opportunities. With these partners, DVR is actively involved in Maine's Employment First initiatives, career planning program for individuals with significant disabilities, and development of a youth advisory group. These shared efforts and many others promote stronger transition planning for youth and employment outcomes for all of those with disabilities served by each of the agencies.

**Progressive Employment – A Business Relations Activity** is a DVR initiative to introduce employers in southern Maine to the next generation of workers. Launched as a pilot in 2015 in the Maine Division for Rehabilitation Services (DVR) Portland and Lewiston offices, Progressive Employment has now spread, thanks to the Transition Work-Based Learning Grant, to Augusta and Bangor. Across the state, youth and young adults engaged in Progressive Employment have completed hundreds of Progressive Employment activities where they are matched to area employers through activities, such as: Job Tours, Interviews, Job Shadows, Work Experience, and On-the-Job Training.



**Transition Work-Based Learning Model Demonstration (TWBL)** grant is a partnership with Jobs for Maine Graduates (JMG), the Institute for Community Inclusion (ICI) at the University of Massachusetts Boston, American Institutes for Research (AIR), and the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR). This project uses a quasi-experimental design to conduct rigorous evaluation of two innovative interventions, Enhanced JMG and Progressive Employment. These interventions will serve at least 200 students with disabilities, who are within two years of graduation from high school, to test whether a model of work-based learning improves attainment of competitive integrated post-secondary employment and education outcomes. Maine DVR expects that the TWBL Model Demonstration will enhance statewide collaboration that facilitates the transition process from secondary and postsecondary schools to competitive integrated employment at or above minimum wage. Within one year after graduation, at least 90% of study participants will enter postsecondary education or competitive integrated employment.

**DVR/Corrections Workgroup** is a partnership to better support the re-entry of individuals with disabilities who are exiting incarceration – or other involvement with the corrections system – and entering employment. Through development of policies and procedures and corrections liaisons in each VR office, the partnership is leading to stronger collaboration and innovative pilots to increase employment outcomes and reduce recidivism.

### Bureau of Rehabilitation Services Apprenticeship Program

In March 2019, the Maine Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS) partnered with the Workforce Innovation and Technical Assistance Center (WINTAC), the Bureau of Employment Services (BES), and the Maine Apprenticeship Program (MAP) to increase exposure and use of apprenticeship in BRS when engaging our clients in career pathways. Several State Vocational Rehabilitation offices with existing apprenticeship programs, including Pennsylvania, Iowa, Vermont, and Missouri, shared information regarding best practices from which to model. In July 2019, an apprenticeship pilot kicked off in Androscoggin County with a focus on hospitality and food service. Key deliverables of the pilot included establishing goals and expectations, defining roles both within and external to BRS, identifying resources, engaging employers, and developing a procedural directive to help guide counselors.

Today, the BRS apprenticeship model has expanded state-wide and is engaging multiple WIOA partners, including Eastern Maine Development Corporation, Coastal County Workforce Development, Western Maine Community Action Program, and the Maine Department of Health and Human Services. BRS now has several individuals in the pipeline set to enter apprenticeships and has expanded their business partnerships outside of the Hospitality and Food Service Industry to include bridge construction, videography, and welding.

Some of the key elements of apprenticeship include:

#### Mentoring

Participating Registered Apprenticeship Sponsors provide on-site mentors as a requirement of apprenticeship.

#### Flexibility

Apprenticeships vary in duration (generally 1 to 4 years), are offered by both small and large businesses, and are tailored to meet the needs of the employer.

#### Earn While You Learn

Apprentices are employees at the inception of the training and, as such, are paid employees from the first day of the apprenticeship.

### 

#### **National Occupation Credential**

Upon completion of an apprenticeship, the apprentice is awarded a nationally recognized, portable credential.

#### **Participating Businesses**

HospitalityMaine, Hilton Garden Inn Riverwatch, Military Talent Source, Reed & Reed, Northern Light Health, Associated General Contractors, Destination Occupation, and Homestead Restaurant.

For more information, contact Peter Diplock at: Peter.D.Diplock@maine.gov or call 207-215-3580.

### Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired (DBVI)

Maine's DBVI provides a continuum of rehabilitation services to individuals who are blind or have low vision. Services may include individual counseling and guidance related to employment and adjustment to blindness issues, use of adaptive technology, low vision therapy, alternative skill training in communication (such as braille), instruction to develop independent travel skills (orientation and mobility), and instruction of daily living skills geared to being more self-sufficient. These services are provided through various programs, including:

**Vocational Rehabilitation Program** is primarily for working-age adults who seek competitive, integrated employment. Services may include individual vocational counseling and guidance, vocational assessment, orientation and mobility instruction, low vision services, independent living services (vision rehabilitation therapy), and more.

**Business Enterprise Program (BEP)** provides training and support to 7 licensed managers who operate snack bars, cafeterias, micro markets and vending machines at 21 sites on state, federal and municipal properties across Maine. BEP also provides employment to many other individuals with disabilities.

**Independent Living Services (IL)** provides training in adaptive skills and alternative techniques for accomplishing daily tasks that enable approximately 400 individuals who are older and blind to be more self-sufficient each year.

**Education Services for Children Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired** provides adaptive instruction services or consultation to approximately 300 students annually in home or at local schools related to academics and independence.



### **DBVI Initiatives and Innovations**

**Maine's Business Enterprise Program (BEP)** continues to evolve to keep pace with changing work environments, to meet customer needs and preferences, and to provide meaningful self-employment opportunities for individuals who are blind and visually impaired. One of the fastest growing types of vending service is the Micro Market. These are self-service convenience stores in secure buildings, which provide fresh food options, hot and cold beverages, and other odds and ends that customers may want to have available 24/7. The BEP places a very high priority on working with new and existing facilities and providing the type of vending service that best suits each location with all of its employees and customers. In addition to providing these valuable entrepreneurial experiences for BEP managers, employment opportunities are available for other citizens of Maine, with and without disabilities, as a result of being hired by managers as employees at these locations.

**Living on Your Own (LOYO)** is a five-day overnight experience for high school students who are blind and visually impaired. The focus of LOYO is to expose teens to real-life experiences of living on their own in a safe and supportive environment. Teens are required to utilize problem solving skills that can be transferred to home, school, and work environments. The program is designed to develop skills and self-confidence necessary as they transition into work, social settings, and living independently. Teens work on socialization, group dynamics, self-awareness, personal strengths, peer relationships, decision making, personal safety, home safety, and home management. Importantly, teens gain skills that prepare them for future meaningful employment. Throughout the five days, there are many opportunities for LOYO participants to develop and practice skills that transfer to the work place and community. The Pre-employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) are an important focus for the LOYO participants as self-advocacy, work readiness training, independent living skills, "soft" skills, and orientation and mobility skills are woven throughout the program. LOYO also encourages parent involvement in identifying their son's or daughter's level of independence within their home, school and community, as well as any fears, concerns or needs to be addressed during and after the program. Parents participate in four hours of programming during the LOYO programs to facilitate discussion around independence and future goals. Parents also witness their child's progress through the LOYO program via social media as students set up a Facebook page to help communicate their experiences.



**LOYO On The Go** is similar to the LOYO program, but with more focus on travel skills. Students practice some independent living skills, but spend a good deal of time learning and/or practicing the orientation and mobility skills needed to live and work in the community. Development of these "work readiness" skills is an important component of the Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) for students who are blind and visually impaired. Students learn to plan and walk routes, how to use public transportation and ride share programs (Uber/Lyft), safely cross streets, and problem solve travel issues. Students participate in planning, shopping and preparing meals. Students use assistive technology to access and process common consumer tasks, such as making (secure) online

purchases, billing, paying and banking. Throughout the program, students are encouraged to practice self-advocacy and to develop their social skills. Students travel to a CareerCenter and meet with a Vocational Rehabilitation counselor to discuss interests, goals, strengths and needs relevant to employment. They meet with several successfully employed people who are blind and visually impaired. Pre-ETS is an important focus for the LOYO participants in both programs. There are many opportunities for participants to develop and practice skills that transfer to the work place and community, such as self-advocacy, work readiness training, independent living skills, "soft" skills and peer mentoring.

**DBVI College Prep** is a five-week college preparation program designed for high school students who are blind or visually impaired. The students take an entry-level college course at the University of Maine in Orono, live in the dorms, and eat at the cafeteria. They also participate in daily learning labs related to success in college as a student who is blind or visually impaired. In addition to the college course and daily learning labs, participants learn how to integrate their current assistive technology to meet the pace of reading, notetaking, and studying requirements at the college level, and receive training in a variety of blindness-specific skills geared toward enhancing success while at college. The students are also provided an opportunity to do an on-campus work experience and to participate in community service projects and recreational activities during the program.

## Division for the Deaf, Hard of Hearing and Late Deafened (DDHHLD)

The Division for the Deaf, Hard of Hearing and Late Deafened (DDHHLD) provides information and referrals for resources of interest to people who have hearing loss throughout the state. This includes such things as interpreting services, hearing aids, and advocacy but also new legislation like the hearing aid insurance coverage law that went into effect in January 2020. DDHHLD helped provide information by inviting the Bureau of Insurance to a Commission for the Deaf, Hard of Hearing and Late Deafened (CDHHLD) meeting and further disseminated information, including interviews with various members of the Deaf and hard-of-hearing communities, through *Maine-Lines*, the Division's newsletter, which was published four times this past year. The CDHHLD created and actively works on an ongoing Five-Year Plan, which can be found at <a href="https://www.maine.gov/rehab/dod/index.shtml">https://www.maine.gov/rehab/dod/index.shtml</a>.

Other accomplishments of the Division included issuing approximately 365 Deaf identification cards and vehicle placards and providing Deaf Awareness training to a wide range of audiences, including E911 dispatchers, the Bureau of Motor Vehicles and Community Rehabilitation Providers. Each year the Division and Commission also organize the Annual Deaf Culture Tea Awards ceremony in the Hall of Flags, which approximately 100 people attend. Awards are presented to active community members following a welcome from the Commissioner of the Department of Labor and a keynote address. This past year, the Tea was honored with the presence of Governor Janet Mills. The Division has also been involved with the National Deaf Center (NDC), which focuses on the needs of Deaf and hard-of-hearing transition students. Maine's NDC team includes the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, Maine Education Center for Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Maine Behavioral Health, Disability Rights Maine, and the Department of Education. The priority that Maine's NDC team chose to focus on is *Leveraging Community Resources and Promoting Higher Expectations*.

### Office of the State Accessibility and Independent Living Coordinator

#### State ADA Accessibility Highlights

The Accessibility Coordinator leads the State's compliance under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504. The Coordinator works with State agencies to develop and carry out policies and practices regarding services, facilities, web design, and communication. The Coordinator works with departments to resolve any disability-based discrimination complaints. Current initiatives include:

- The Digital Accessibility and Usability Policy, issued by the Office of Information Technology (OIT) and its IT Accessibility Committee (ITAC), requires access to all State services, programs, and communications using the Internet.
- Developing a training program with ITAC to be delivered to all departments about digital document accessibility.
- Revising the Accessibility Guide that will be posted anew to the web.
- Developing trail standards for accessibility and reviews local projects funded by the Recreational Trails Program.

#### Independent Living Highlights

The State Independent Living (IL) Coordinator oversees the contracts with the Independent Living Services Program and the Maine Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC), which provide opportunities for improved community and housing access for people with disabilities. The IL Coordinator works on several boards, including the Kim Wallace Adaptive Equipment Loan Program, Maine's flexible loan program for assistive technology; the Travel Helpers Training Program; the Assistive Technology Consortia; and others. The IL Coordinator works with Alpha One for Pre-Employment Transition Services in high schools; and provides technical assistance and training for Maine businesses and individuals about use of service animals and about disability rights in public accommodations and housing.

Contact:Eric Dibner, ADA Accessibility and IL CoordinatorTel:207-623-7950 (Voice)TTY:Maine Relay 7-1-1Fax:(207) 287-5292E-mail:Eric.Dibner@maine.govWebsite:https://www.maine.gov/rehab/ada



### Partners in Advocacy, Advisory Boards and Councils

**Client Assistance Program**, operated by Disability Rights Maine, provides information, advice, advocacy, and (if determined necessary) legal representation to persons who have concerns about the rehabilitation services they receive from DVR and DBVI. Website: <u>https://drme.org/client-assistance-program</u>

**Commission for the Deaf, Hard of Hearing and Late Deafened** is an advisory council that provides a review of the status of services to deaf and hard-of-hearing persons, recommends priorities for development, evaluates the progress made as a result of recommendations, and sets goals for activities of the division to carry out its obligations and responsibilities to the deaf and hard-of-hearing communities. Website: <u>https://www.maine.gov/rehab/advisory\_councils/dod</u>



**Commission on Disability and Employment (CDE)** is a subcommittee of the State Workforce Board. The commission fosters workforce development in Maine that includes meaningful employment and equal opportunity for people with disabilities and promotes collaboration to increase public awareness and influence public policy. Website: <u>https://www.maine.gov/swb/committees/disability\_employment/index.shtml</u>

**DBVI State Rehabilitation Council (SRC)** is a diverse group of people concerned with the quality of vocational rehabilitation services provided to blind Maine citizens. The SRC's core functions are to review, analyze and advise on the policies and other related entities involved with the employment of people who are blind or have vision impairments. Website: <u>https://maine-src-dbvi.org</u>

**DVR State Rehabilitation Council (SRC)** serves its mission to partner with DVR in developing state goals, priorities, policy and practice, as well as to review and analyze DVR's results and performance in support of securing and maintaining employment through a process of informed choice for individuals with disabilities. Website: <u>https://mainesrc.org</u>

**State Independent Living Council (SILC)** promotes a philosophy of independent living, which encompasses consumer control, peer support, self-help, self-determination and equal access, as well as individual and system advocacy to maximize the leadership, empowerment, independence and productivity of individuals with significant disabilities. Website: <u>http://mainesilc.org</u>

## **BRS Office Directory**

### **Central Administrative Office**

Bureau of Rehabilitation Services 150 State House Station, Augusta, ME 04333 Tel: 207-623-6799

### Augusta CareerCenter

45 Commerce Drive, Augusta, ME 04333 Tel: 207-624-5120 or 1-800-760-1573

#### Bangor CareerCenter 45 Oak Street, Suite 1, Bangor, ME 04401

Tel: 207-561-4000 or 1-888-545-8811

#### Hinckley CareerCenter

23 Stanley Road, PO Box 15, Hinckley, ME 04944 Tel: 207-474-4958 or 1-800-760-1572

### **Houlton DVR Office**

DHHS, 11 High Street, Houlton, ME 04730 Tel: 207-532-5019 or 1-800-432-7338



From any location, TTY users call Maine Relay 711

#### Lewiston CareerCenter

5 Mollison Way, Lewiston, ME 04240 Tel: 207-753-9000 or 1-800-741-2991

**Machias CareerCenter** 53 Prescott Drive, Suite 2, Machias, ME 04654 Tel: 207-255-1926 or 1-800-770-7774

**Greater Portland CareerCenter** 151 Jetport Boulevard, Portland, ME 04102 Tel: 207-822-3300 or 1-877-594-5627

#### Presque Isle CareerCenter

66 Spruce Street, Suite 3, Presque Isle, ME 04769 Tel: 207-768-6835 or 207-768-6847 or 1-800-635-0357