Success Stories

Jane is a kitchen manager in a local elementary school earning a competitive wage. She loves working with children and preparing food.

Jane was adopted from a Romanian orphanage at age 4. Due to her multiple disabilities, she experiences limitations with her communication and interpersonal skills, mobility, self-care and demonstrating consistent work habits. She applied for services from Oklahoma Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) at age 17 while a student at Moore High School.

Oklahoma VR provided counseling and guidance, assistive technology assessments, job readiness training, paid work experience, driver’s education, and Supported Employment services. She participated in a summer work experience in which she learned employability, social, independent living, and self-advocacy skills.

Jane lives in a group home and receives SSI. She has a huge heart and supportive family.

Kelly Woodruff is employed full time as a Special Education instructor making an annual salary of $40,000 with benefits. She had experienced numerous job losses as a result of not wanting to disclose her multiple disabilities (mental and physical) or ask for accommodations for fear of being labeled.

Kelly received intensive services from her America Job Center (AJC) through the University Career Switchers Program. The AJC referred her to the Virginia Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) counselor, Deborah Holliday, who facilitated coordination with AJC, the local university, public schools and Title 1 services available through the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act to braid and leverage funding and resources. VR provided counseling/guidance, ADA self-advocacy training, certification for paratransit, assistive technology evaluation services and referral to mental health resources. VR researched and helped Kelly access a scholarship to complete special education certification classes. She obtained a provisional license to complete the required job experience.

It took the coordinated efforts of Kelly and the entire cross agency team to help her achieve her career objective.
Shelby Kennedy is now an Operations Specialist with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services. She experiences Moebius Syndrome, a neurological condition that affects the muscles that control facial expression and eye movement, and can include bone irregularities in the hands.

Shelby struggled to find gainful employment, despite having a college degree and work experience. Maryland Vocational Rehabilitation counselor Seth Masley and business relations specialist Nancy Forsythe began working with Shelby in the fall of 2014. “Once I met Nancy, I felt like all the pieces fell into place.” Seth agrees that Shelby’s partnership with Nancy was key to her job search success. “Nancy taught her how to ‘own the room’ on an interview.”

The VR services provided increased her pre-application preparation, interview skills and job search.

Shelby says about her job, “It’s amazing! I have never felt so respected or so equal!”

CVSHealth is the fastest growing healthcare provider in the U.S. Based in Rhode Island, CVSHealth has operations across the country including their retail operations, pharmacy, health care clinics and in-home services. They incorporate disability into their diversity vision, understanding that their workforce must reflect their customer base. The CVS partnership with VR and the NET is longstanding. The CVS team provided input in building the National Employment Team, including the infrastructure, strategies and services to business. The NET/VR partnership has included building a talent pipeline and meeting CVS employment needs through the training, support and retention of candidates with disabilities, including Veterans.

CVS has a long-term commitment to partnerships with VR from their retail hires, to distribution centers and their Pharmacy Tech training program. The commitment to a diverse workforce, including employees with disabilities, is evident across the company.

The CSAVR-NET is proud to recognize CVSHealth as the 2016 NET Business of the Year.
Microsoft Partners to Hire from the Neurodiverse Talent Pool

Specialisterne, founded in Denmark, developed an innovative approach to integrating individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) into the workplace. The model provides support to candidates while also providing valuable on-site services to the employer. Specialisterne has worked with VR and community partners across the country.

The Microsoft Corporation, known for their commitment to hiring from diverse talent pools which includes individuals with disabilities, is the first business partner in the Pacific Northwest. Specialisterne contacted CSAVR’s National Employment Team (NET) to connect with the VR partners in Washington State. The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) partnered with PROVAIL, a Seattle based community partner.

DVR worked with PROVAIL to refer, screen, assess and prepare the candidates with ASD to work in positions in various engineering business groups, including Microsoft Developer Division, Microsoft Cloud & Enterprise, Microsoft Xbox, Microsoft Office and Microsoft Windows were identified.

Preferred qualifications included a Bachelor’s degree, previous experience or working knowledge in a technical area such as: computer science, electrical engineering, or physics; extensive experience in programming and familiarity with Microsoft products and technologies. Microsoft has hired 11 employees from the first two classes. The NET and PROVAIL are now working to expand recruitment nationally.

Katie Hart, a candidate referred by DVR, participated in the first class. She began the program in May 2015. Over the next month the Employment Services Manager for PROVAIL introduced Katie and other candidates to business concepts including The SCRUM Agile Methodology, programing techniques, quality assurance testing, and presentation skills. Katie had an opportunity to work with LEGO Education Mindstorm Robots and Visual Studios doing programming and coding for various projects. Hiring managers from Microsoft visited demonstrations at the end of each week. In her off hours, Katie learned more about Agile Business Models and Scrum Meetings/Project Management. At the end of week 4, a Business Profile highlighting competencies and strengths was prepared for Katie. She also received a job offer.

June 15, 2015 was Katie’s first official day of work as a Lab Engineer for Microsoft. She has received excellent feedback from everyone on her team. Her quality assurance is highly praised and she brings a new perspective to her team that is valued by her manager and other teammates. She has also taken part in a week-long “Neuroversity Hackathon” that helped design game ideas, apps and programs to help people with Autism develop career skills (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2T4C_uLMplo)
Hiring for Creativity

Crayola’s statement of corporate values includes a commitment to include social priorities and practices into the Crayola brand, their products and relationships with customers, vendors, consumers and employees.

In collaboration with Pennsylvania OVR, Crayola has hired candidates to work in a variety of employment settings. These employees include, a young adult man who works as a custodian with job coaching support; a young woman who interacts with guests at Crayola Experience; and a high school student who gained valuable experience as a summer intern in Attractions at Crayola Experience.

These are all competitive, integrated jobs in a business well-known for creativity. To facilitate the employment of these individuals, OVR’s assistance has included services such as community-based work assessment, direct referrals, job coaching (when needed) and counseling/guidance regarding career paths.

Crayola has also worked with the Bethlehem School District to employ students in a Life Skills class as production workers. The schools provide job coaching support.

OVR’s Business Services Team has collaborated with Crayola in a “Lunch & Learn” session with the Human Resources Department and their recruiters to learn more about OVR services and disability awareness.

Starbucks – NET Connection: Job Driven Training Models

The Nevada VR team worked with the Starbucks’ Roasting Plant in Carson Valley to develop a business based training model called the Starbucks Inclusion Academy. Participates of the Academy are individuals with disabilities with career objectives in food manufacturing and distribution. In the last year, Nevada VR supported 5 classes with a total of 28 students, 23 graduates and 21 hires. Starbucks has hired a total of 14 Academy participants and other businesses have hired 7 participants.

In June 2015, the Inclusion Academy Model was shared with the Pennsylvania – VR team and replicated at the York Starbucks Roasting Plant. The 6-week Academy includes:

- Customized classroom instruction for the first four weeks
- A final two-week internship in the Starbucks facility
- Disability etiquette training for Starbucks team members, trainers and partners.

The York Inclusion Academy successfully graduated the first class in September 2015. Of the 6 original participants, 4 successfully graduated from the York Inclusion Academy and all 4 were offered jobs at Starbucks. These new Starbucks Partners earn competitive hourly pay and great benefits like health care, stock in the form of equity and more.

The NET and Starbucks are now focusing on developing a strategic plan for expanding this model to other select locations nation-wide, in partnership with VR training centers and community partners.
Haworth, Inc., a global furniture manufacturer headquartered in Holland, MI, had a significant increase in orders during 2015. However, as they attempted to build their manufacturing team to meet demand, they faced stiff competition in hiring skilled workers.

“We experienced a technical talent drought,” said Haworth Recruitment Manager Cassandra Volkers. “It was a challenge.” To help meet that challenge, Haworth tapped the state VR program’s technical training center, MCTI, located in nearby Plainwell, MI. MCTI prepares young people with disabilities for a host of vocational opportunities. The two organizations formed a close collaborative team.

Haworth and MCTI share similar values and objectives. As a result, the collaboration has been a terrific success! MRS-MCTI has to date filled 11 machine operator positions at Haworth.

“All of our MCTI trainees are well prepared,” said Eric Eldridge, Haworth plant manager. “They also demonstrate a tremendous work ethic.” The partnership continues to grow stronger.

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) was created to provide state and local areas the flexibility to collaborate across systems in an effort to better address the employment and skills needs of the workforce. WIOA will ensure access for all individuals, including individuals with the most significant disabilities of every skill level, the opportunity to obtain competitive employment. State Vocational Rehabilitation Agencies view WIOA as an opportunity to engage workforce and other core partners in more collaborative partnerships to increase training and competitive employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities. In the spirit of WIOA, we are highlighting some of these State VR Agency partnerships.

**NEBRASKA—GENERAL:** Expanded employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities in Information Technology, Manufacturing, Transportation, Distribution, and Logistics career pathways.

- Launched its Upskill/Backfill program under a grant by contacting 1,200 previously placed VR consumers to offer them career advancement support, thereby opening entry-level positions for other individuals with disabilities. Established key partnerships with the University of Nebraska – Omaha, Metropolitan Community College and the Nebraska Department of Labor.
- Created tutoring programs for participants and designated career pathways training for school counselors, VR transition counselors, and Department of Labor staff.

**CALIFORNIA:** Utilized the “Employment First” policy to make employment in an integrated setting, at a competitive wage, for individuals with intellectual disabilities and developmental disabilities (ID/DD) its highest priority.

- Partnered with the California Department of Human Resources, State Personnel Board, labor groups, and Association of California State Employees with Disabilities in an effort to promote the hiring of persons with disabilities in state service.
- Included financial literacy and benefits planning in its core services to demonstrate the effectiveness of work incentive planning among consumers receiving Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) and Supplemental Security Income (SSI).

**SOUTH CAROLINA:** Partnered with the Spartanburg School District 6 and the local Workforce Investment Board to establish the first Project SEARCH training site. All seven first year students served under the project have moved into competitive employment.

**NEW YORK:** Created the ACCES-VR Statewide Transition and Youth Services Team within ACCES-VR. Since the team’s launch, the percentage of youth (defined as under age 25 at application) served by ACCES-VR has increased to 49% of the caseload. This percentage translates to nearly a 10% increase in one year alone.

**OKLAHOMA:** Utilizes its ADA Coordinator to provide consultation, technical assistance, and site reviews to identify accessibility issues to all workforce system partners and other agencies, businesses and employers.