

State Rehabilitation Council

2024 Annual Report

BREAKING Barriers BUILDING Futures



DARS
VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT FOR AGING
AND REHABILITATIVE SERVICES

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Message from the SRC Chairperson and DARS Commissioner



I am deeply honored to serve as chairperson of the Virginia State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) and to present this year's annual report. As I step into this role, I am excited to work alongside such a dedicated team committed to improving the lives of individuals with disabilities throughout the Commonwealth.

Our theme for this year, "Breaking Barriers: Building Futures," perfectly captures the essence of our mission – ensuring that every individual has the support and resources necessary to overcome obstacles and achieve meaningful, sustainable employment. This past year has been a testament to the strength of our vocational rehabilitation programs, as we have seen countless examples of individuals breaking through barriers and building their futures with confidence and determination.

The Virginia Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS) continues to excel in key areas, including meeting important Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act measures and leading the nation in measurable skills gain. Our collaborative initiatives have expanded career pathways and job opportunities, particularly in high-demand fields like IT, healthcare and registered apprenticeships. These programs reflect our commitment

to empowering individuals with disabilities to not only find jobs but to build lasting careers.

We have also prioritized reaching underserved communities and populations, ensuring that individuals with cognitive, psychosocial and other disabilities have the support they need to succeed. Our partnerships with businesses across Virginia have opened doors for many individuals to secure employment in competitive, integrated settings, further promoting workplace inclusion and diversity.

Looking forward, the SRC will focus on expanding services to more youth through Pre-Employment Transition Services and enhancing career development opportunities. We are also committed to identifying and addressing barriers that prevent individuals from obtaining full-time, sustainable employment, and we will continue to work closely with DARS to ensure that our services meet the evolving needs of the Commonwealth.

I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to my fellow SRC members, the DARS staff and our community partners for their dedication and hard work. Together, we are breaking barriers and building futures, making a profound impact on the lives of individuals with disabilities throughout Virginia.

Brandy Schantz
SRC Chairperson



On behalf of DARS and the SRC, we are pleased to present the 2024 SRC annual report.

This year, our report highlights the unique challenges faced by young people with disabilities and the success they achieve because of specialized

transition services. As per the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, an integral part of state vocational rehabilitation (VR) funding is earmarked for Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS).

Pre-ETS offers students with disabilities an early start at career exploration and preparation for adult life. DARS works with students, their families, their schools and community partners to enrich transition planning and support students with gaining knowledge and experiences necessary so they may make decisions about their future.

DARS has designated countless resources to make these services impactful. Our dedicated counselors provide thousands of hours of mentorship to empower students

to develop essential skills, build self-confidence and envision a future filled with possibility. Working together with schools, businesses and our community partners, we have expanded internship and apprenticeship opportunities, hosted skill-building academies and offered guidance that paves the way for competitive integrated employment.

The two success stories featured on pages 4 and 5 of this report exemplify the hard work on the part of both the counselor and the students with disabilities to ensure successful employment outcomes. These are but two examples of the great work being done across the Commonwealth to prepare youth with disabilities for employment.

I appreciate the dedicated work of the SRC and their commitment to helping DARS provide the highest quality services so that individuals with disabilities can achieve their dreams. Many thanks!

Kathy Hayfield
DARS Commissioner

VR Participant Success Stories

Driven for Caregiving

Destiny Lamb was born prematurely, weighing 2 lbs. and 14 oz., in southwest Virginia. As a result, she developed significant learning disabilities due to the impact of early medical interventions. But she didn't let this stop her from pursuing her dream job.

She came to DARS her junior year of high school in 2021. Both her high school transition specialist and Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Lauren O'Quinn played a crucial role in her career process. Living near the DARS' Abingdon office, Destiny embarked on several Pre-Employment Transition Services activities, starting with career exploration.

Through Wilson Workforce and Rehabilitation Center, Destiny completed a virtual Postsecondary Education Rehabilitation Transition (PERT) program that includes a comprehensive vocational evaluation and instruction on independent living.

Destiny initially took an interest in being either a veterinarian technician or CNA, so she and Lauren researched and narrowed their search to the medical field. Destiny said, "I had several options laid out on the table of what I possibly wanted to do, but when Lauren came in, I narrowed it down to two, and it made it a lot easier because I had kind of like a floor plan to go by."

During her senior year, Destiny enrolled in a class at the local Career Tech Center called Education for Employment, which DARS actively partners with for Pre-ETS activities, including worksite tours and workplace readiness. Then, they found her an 8-week paid work experience at The Natural Tunnel State Park.

It was a team effort. Destiny signed up to volunteer at the Holston Valley Medical Center in Tennessee for several hours, three days a week. Being in another state, the job posed some logistical challenges, including Destiny missing class time and having to make-up schoolwork.



DARS recognized Destiny Lamb as a Champion of Disability Employment in October 2024.

She worked in the transport department and gained experience with the logistics of a hospital during her last six weeks of high school. Destiny used the job readiness skills that she learned through school and DARS to land a full-time job at the hospital, which began shortly after graduation.

(continued on next page)

Cool Beans and VR

Devion James "DJ" of Eastville did not have a clear post-high school plan. After graduating from Northampton High School, he worked at Yuk-Yuk & Joe's restaurant as a kitchen assistant, but he wanted to do more with his life.

His hard work and success recently reaped recognition from the Virginia Division on Career Development and Transition. VADCDT awarded DJ the 2024 "Student of the Year" award.

DJ was nominated by Jan Shea of Virginia Commonwealth University's Center on Transition Innovations program. VCU filmed DJ through its Spotlight Virginians project where he told his story of transitioning to life after high school.

While in high school, DJ began working with the DARS' Onley office. Thanks to guidance from Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Robin Sexauer and the support of Northampton High School and his parents,



(Top) DJ pictured with C&E Farms supervisor. (Bottom) DJ repairing machinery.

DJ found a career pathway through the Wilson Workforce and Rehabilitation Center (WWRC) in Fishersville.

DJ had never travelled away from home, but coming to WWRC was a whole new chapter and chance for him to thrive. "I started making friends that made it seem like home," DJ said. They motivated him to stay – even when he got homesick. "Having the opportunity to explore trades that involve hands-on activities is very beneficial for students," Sexauer said. "DJ got the vocational training he needed to take the next step."

Doing schoolwork and completing assignments was often difficult for DJ because of a learning disability. DARS offers many services and programs to high school students to help transition and plan for their future, such as WWRC's Postsecondary Education Rehabilitation Transition (PERT) program.

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VR Consumer Success Stories

Driven for Caregiving *(continued)*

Destiny shares, “I love my patients. My favorite part of my job is going in and having a patient say, ‘Thanks for coming and sitting with me,’ or ‘Thank you for being a part of my day’ or ‘Thank you for taking care of me.’ That is why I love my job.”

Since starting her job, Destiny has successfully applied for a loan, purchased a car, and in turn has built up her credit score. “I think personally, I just learn a little bit slower than everybody else, which is not a bad thing, but as far as DARS impacting that, they impacted my opportunity, my want to strive to do better in life.”

Lauren adds, “It was a huge effort to get her successfully placed. Her guidance counselor helped. The teacher helped. I helped. She’s a very good example and a good success story that I always share.”

Listen to Destiny’s story on [VR Workforce Studio](#)

Listen to DJ’s story on [VR Workforce Studio](#)

Cool Beans and VR *(continued)*

At WWRC, DJ completed a vocational evaluation and 6-week workplace readiness program. He was recommended for the auto mechanics program, where he gained the skills and certification needed to become a tire and lube technician and operate a forklift. DJ completed an internship with Interstate Muffler in Staunton and performed so well that he was offered a position as an auto mechanic assistant.

DJ chose to return to Eastville, so Sexauer participated in a local job fair and met staff from C&E Farms, a Cheriton-based company that produces fresh green beans. They were looking for a diesel mechanic and although DJ did not have those specific skills, C&E Farms agreed to an on-the-job training opportunity, arranged through DARS.

C&E Farms trained him and built on the auto mechanics skills that he learned at WWRC. “The opportunity they provided DJ has enhanced his skills, increased his confidence and provided him with a vision for his future,” Sexauer said. “Partnerships with employers like C&E are invaluable to DARS.”

SRC Recommendations

The State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) supports DARS in its commitment, in partnership with consumers and their informed choice, to provide services that prepare consumers through career pathways to enter the workforce in sustainable jobs with livable wages that decrease poverty, improve their economic quality of life and independence, and reduce their reliance on public benefits. The following SRC recommendations will help further these shared goals.

- 1) DARS shall continue to provide updates on Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) performance measures, including the goals and targets established for these measures and DARS’ progress towards those goals. DARS should provide detailed analysis of available data to the council related to outcomes, occupations, and data with the expectation that the median hourly wage increases to \$16.00 per hour (\$17.50 per hour in the Northern district) to best align with increases in the minimum wage and the current economy.
- 2) To address the decreasing number of individuals seeking full-time employment, DARS shall seek to maintain the number of hours worked and full-time employment rate of adults who access DARS services with a goal of ensuring that individuals who receive DARS services understand their options through benefits counselling and are able to make an informed choice regarding their employment. DARS should report on benefits counseling services at the first meeting of 2025, including current data and historical trends.
- 3) Equity in the provision of vocational rehabilitation (VR) services is imperative. In order to achieve successful closures, DARS should examine barriers, successes, and service delivery – paying particular attention to marginalized and underserved populations – as well as aligning efforts with available Census population and workforce participation data. Outreach should be targeted toward marginalized and underserved populations, working consistently toward representative customer demographics – particularly with regard to race/ethnicity, age, and location. DARS should prioritize outcomes and employment in competitive integrated settings for unserved and underserved populations, including individuals transitioning out of subminimum wage or at risk of entering segregated settings, individuals with mental health conditions, and justice-involved individuals. DARS shall report on their assessment and efforts at the second 2025 SRC meeting.

SRC Recommendations

- 4) Increase the number of VR services, including Pre-ETS, provided by Centers for Independent Living across the Commonwealth.
- 5) DARS shall serve more students with disabilities and requests that DARS provides quarterly reports on efforts to serve this population, particularly students with disabilities.
 - a. DARS should continue to increase outreach to local education agencies, families, and students regarding the availability of and access to transition and Pre-ETS services. Increasing collaboration between DARS, the Virginia Department of Education, other community partners including providers, and local education agencies.
 - b. DARS should identify local education agencies in which Pre-ETS is under-utilized and conduct direct outreach.
 - c. Data on types of services utilized, geographic trends, and information on the frequency with which students who receive Pre-ETS services move on to VR services should be evaluated and reported to the SRC.
 - d. DARS should expand work-based learning experiences for transition age youth, preferably while still in school, to improve employment outcomes at graduation.
- 7) DARS shall define its existing workforce and examine opportunities for improved employee diversity with respect to populations served, while also recognizing recruitment and retention challenges among its highly skilled direct service workforce.
- 8) DARS will report on business development efforts including collaboration with ESOs, workforce development partners, and businesses that support the hiring of individuals with disabilities with an emphasis on the practices and procedures to onboard these partners at the first SRC meeting of 2025.

The SRC requests that DARS' updates to the Council on these recommendations include any available data and performance measures that can be meaningfully reported.

SRC Activities

The Virginia State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) held four meetings and an Annual Retreat during Federal Fiscal Year 2024 (October 1, 2023 through September 30, 2024). The Council held its physical meetings at DARS' headquarters in Henrico County, a central location for membership and DARS support staff.

At each meeting, council members reported on the activities of the constituencies they represent and their advocacy efforts. Members also shared information on successes and obstacles and had the opportunity for robust discourse with DARS leadership.

2024 SRC Activity Highlights:

- The SRC held three of its four quarterly meetings and its annual retreat in-person. Quarterly meetings remain an active and invaluable forum for the Council to provide advice, information and support for DARS' vocational rehabilitation and supported employment programs.
- The SRC held one of its four quarterly meetings virtually in September, at which time the Council's Electronic Meeting Policy for the following year was also approved. The Virginia Freedom of Information Act requires boards and councils to adopt their electronic participation policies annually.
- Four SRC subcommittees carried out business outside of full council meetings – a Nominations Subcommittee, an Annual Report Subcommittee, a Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment Subcommittee and a Consumer Satisfaction Survey Subcommittee. Each of these subcommittees provided updates to the full council on its areas of focus.
- The DARS Commissioner, an ex-officio council member, provided the Council with routine agency updates and was pleased to report on visits by state dignitaries to DARS' headquarters in Henrico and Wilson Workforce and Rehabilitation Center in Fishersville.
- Pursuant to the Memorandum of Agreement approved in November 2024, DARS will continue to administer the Consumer Satisfaction Survey on the SRC's behalf into FFY 2025.
- Members of the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA) subcommittee provided valuable input as DARS began their triennial CSNA. DARS provided updates on the CSNA process and sought



Pictured L to R: Ryan Haywood, Kathy Hayfield, Chris Martin, Talisha McAuley-Davis, Marco Callender, Fred Foard, Gayl Brunk, Joliefawn Liddell, Nick Zweerink, Becky Alwood, Brandy Schantz, Ryan Mauzy, Lillian Garland, Travis Staton, Heidi Lawyer.

input from the full Council as well.

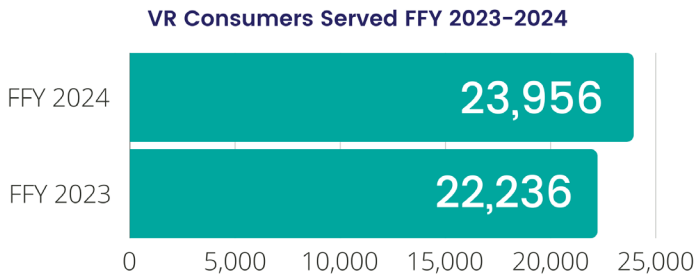
- The Council welcomed many new gubernatorial appointees, who quickly got to work on Council business.
- Executive committee elections were held in September 2024, with the new chair and vice chair poised to lead the committee and council in these roles for the year.
- Updates on DARS' Division of Rehabilitative Services performance outcomes, successes, and barriers were provided regularly by the Deputy Commissioner of DRS and the Director of the Wilson Workforce and Rehabilitation Center (or their designees).
- The SRC kept up with significant developments and highlights in DARS' VR programs, including Field Rehabilitative Services, Workforce Programs, and Employment Services and Special Programs with presentations from program directors.
- DARS' Director of Policy and Legislative Affairs provided the Council with updates and sought input on policy and regulatory changes.
- The contracts for three fair hearing officers were renewed in FFY 2024, with the selection of two additional hearing officers planned for FFY 2025. Two Council members have been appointed to assist in the selection process.

VR Performance Outcomes

DARS served 23,956 vocational rehabilitation (VR) participants in FFY 2024, an 8 percent increase or 1,720 more individuals than the previous year.

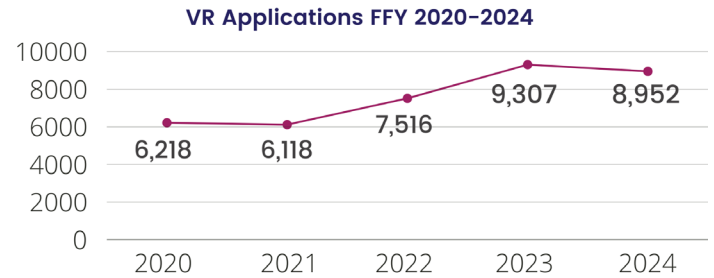
Several factors impacted the number of participants served in FFY 2024.

- New focus on increasing applications
- FFY 2024 started with more cases open due to increased applications from 2023

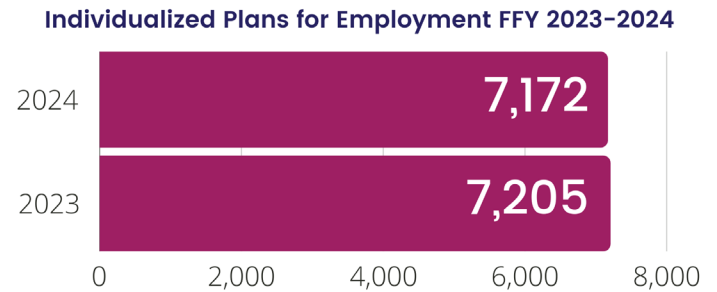


DARS found employment for 2,832 Virginians with disabilities after receiving VR services in FFY 2024, achieving 93 percent of its statewide annual goal of 3,056. This was an increase of 16 percent from 2023.

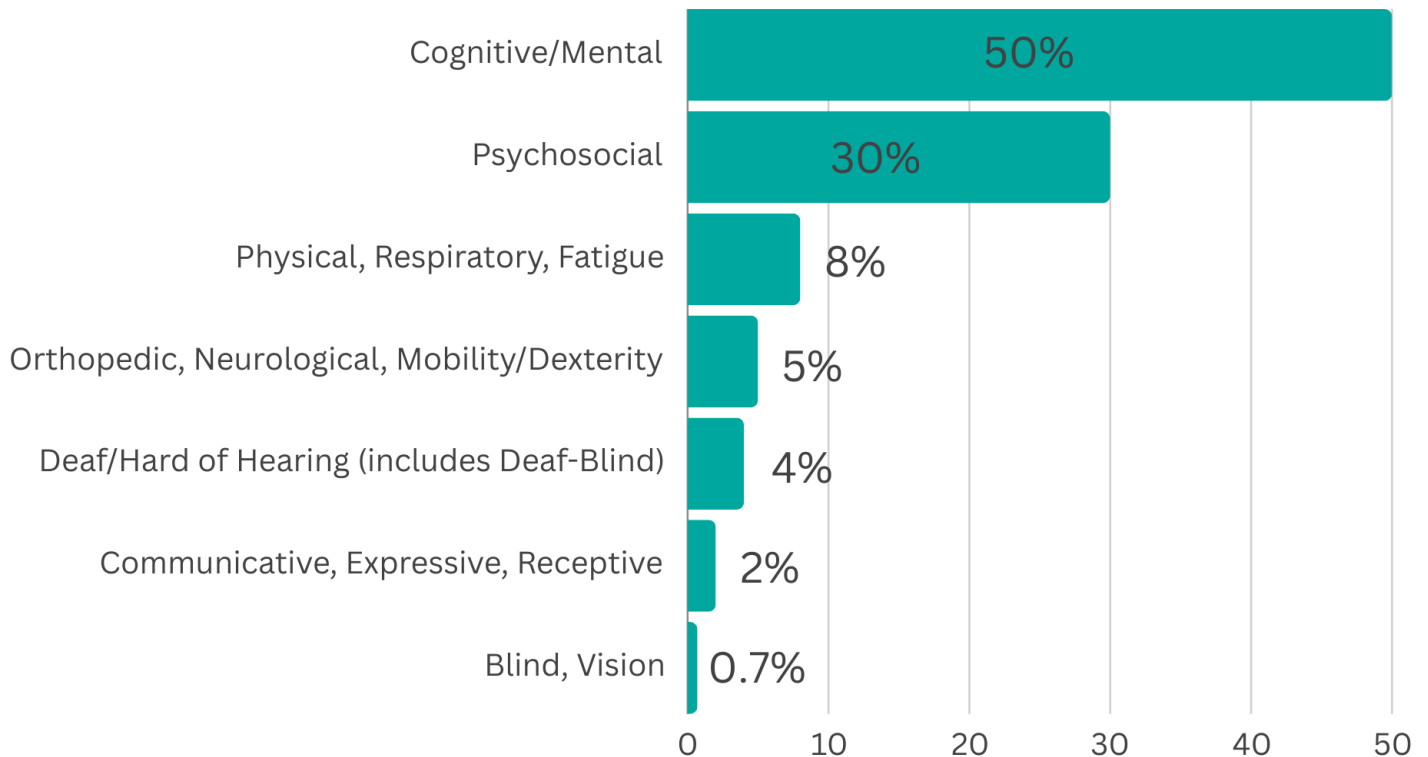
The number of VR applications to DARS' VR program decreased slightly in 2024 with 3.8 percent or 355 fewer applications than in 2023.



The creation of Individual Plans for Employment (IPE) remains steady with 7,172 written in FFY 2024. This achieved 120 percent of the new statewide goal of 5,989.



Primary Disabilities of VR Participants Served in FFY 2024



VR Consumer Satisfaction Survey

Respondents were questioned as to whether the counselor and participant were in agreement with plans for reaching the individual’s employment goal (chart 1).

Over the past four years, the percentage of respondents who answered “yes” ranged between 64 percent and 67 percent. For FFY 2024, 66 percent indicated that they were satisfied with the plans they established with their counselor.

Chart 1

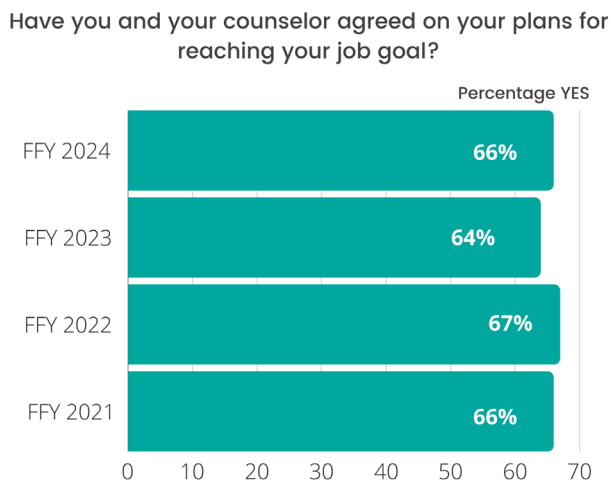
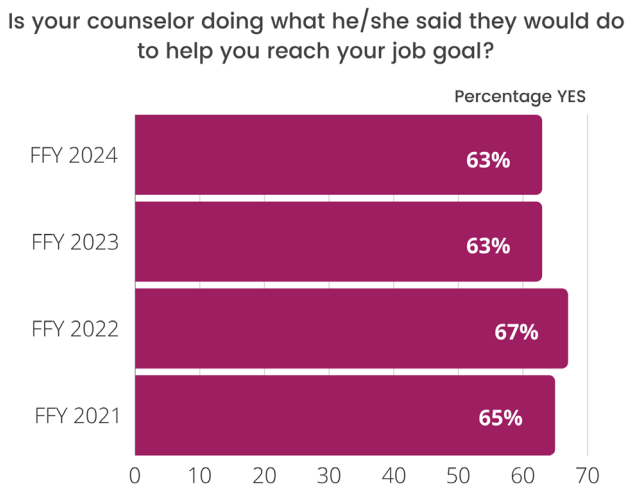


Chart 2 shows the percentage of respondents who agree that their counselor is doing what they said they would do to help them reach their job goal. Results over the previous four years ranged between 63 percent and 67 agreement, with 63 percent of clients agreeing to this question in FFY 2024.

Chart 2



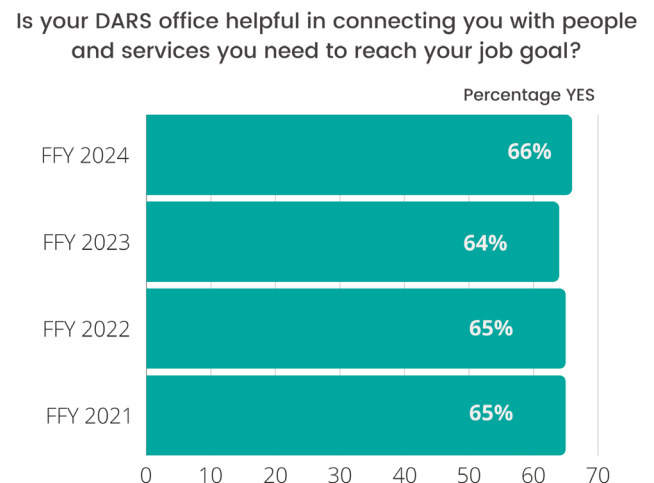
The State Rehabilitation Council partners with DARS to assess satisfaction with services received through the Division of Rehabilitative Services (DRS). The satisfaction survey captures feedback from participants during service delivery (post Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) but prior to employment), allowing for a “real time” assessment which helps identify and address issues earlier in the VR process.

For FFY 2024, a total of 386 surveys were completed out of the 2,854 distributed, resulting in a 13.5 percent response rate. This reflects a decline from the 20 percent response rate observed in FFY 2023. Power analysis indicates that the achieved sample is sufficient for statistical hypothesis testing at a 95 percent confidence level and a 5 percent margin of error.

The graphs below indicate the rates of agreement to the corresponding survey questions from FFY 2021 through FFY 2024. Analysis indicates a statistically significant decline over time in the proportion of clients indicating their DARS office has kept in regular contact with them. No other statistically significant relationships were identified in the data.

Chart 3 shows the rate at which respondents find DARS to be helpful in connecting them to the appropriate people and services they need. Percentages have remained steady, hitting 66 percent agreement in FFY 2024.

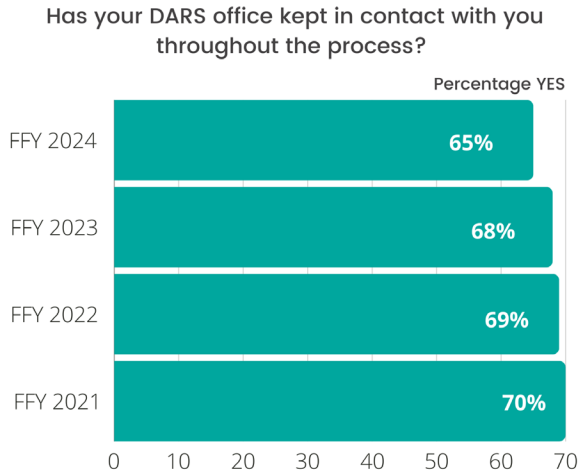
Chart 3



VR Consumer Satisfaction Survey

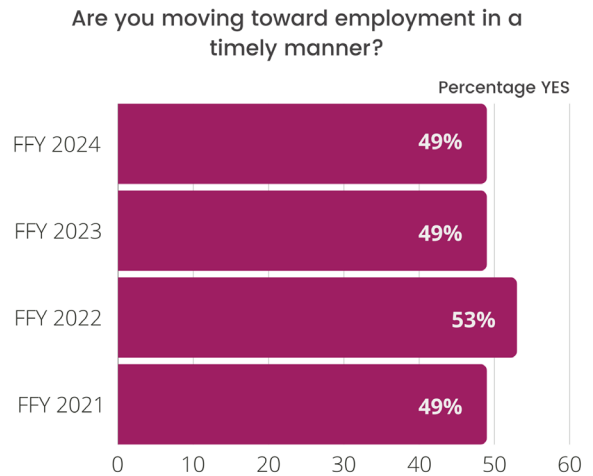
Reported consumer satisfaction with the level of contact they have had with the DARS office has continued to decrease (chart 4). In FFY 2021, 70 percent of clients indicated that their office has kept in regular contact. This has decreased to 65 percent in FFY 2024. A linear-by-linear association test indicates that this decline over time is statistically significant.

Chart 4

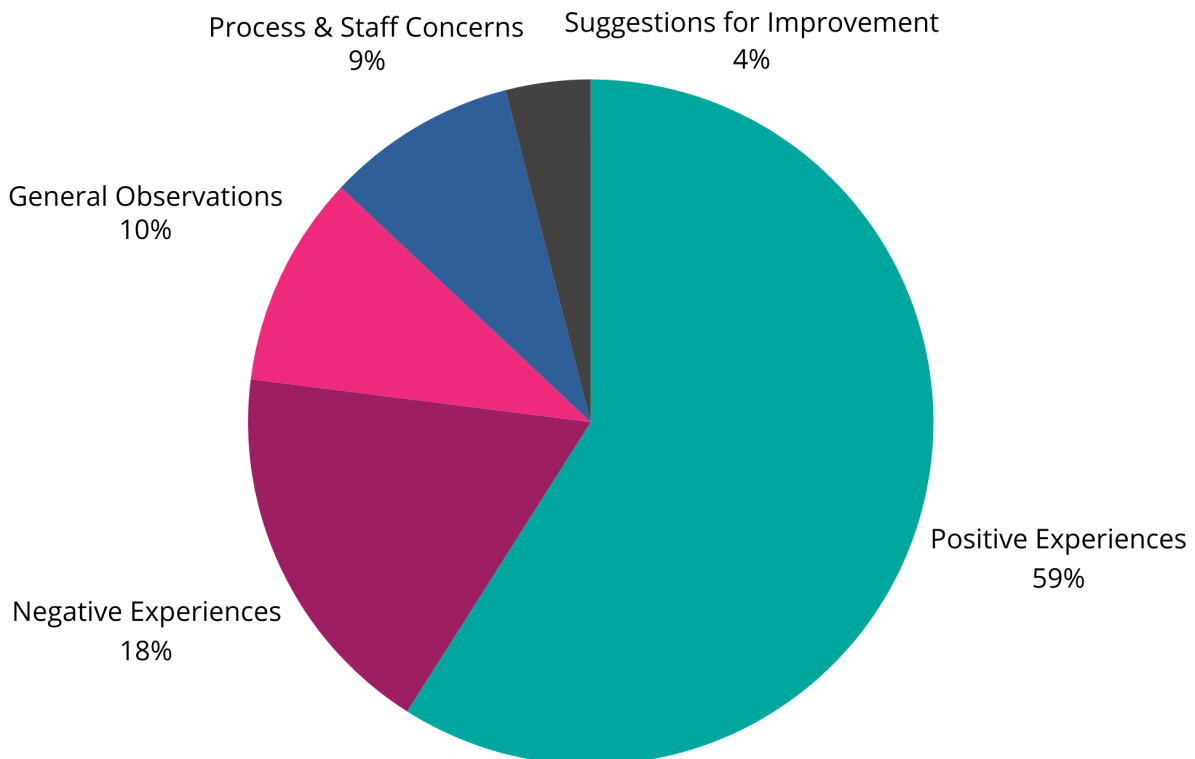


The question related to moving toward employment in a timely manner (chart 5) has consistently been the lowest rated question on the survey. In FFY 2021, 49 percent of respondents felt optimistic about their path to employment, compared to 53 percent in 2022 and 49 percent in 2023 and 2024.

Chart 5



What would you like to tell us about your DARS office?



VR Program Highlights

We are VR – FRS Year in Review

The Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS), Field Rehabilitation Services' department (FRS) ensures statewide vocational rehabilitation (VR) services through 30 DAR/DRS field offices.

The 2024 program year brought continued expansion of DARS' presence throughout local communities targeting traditionally underserved populations.

Community Academies, hosted by the DRS Pathways team, brought together a wide variety of community partners with the goal of expanding services to people with disabilities, increasing referrals, and creating Integrated Resource Teams to work in collaboration for greater customer outcomes. A recent event held in Petersburg, Va. (*photo below*) was attended by over 20 partners. It focused on helping citizens returning to the community after incarceration to find essential services and resources. The National Disability Institute facilitated the discussions.



These events expanded outreach in each local DRS office as well as contributed to successful performance outcomes across the state.

- 8,411 applications for service were processed (111% of goal)
- 3,602 Potentially Eligible (PE) applications were received for students with disabilities (200% of goal)
- 6,713 Individual Plans for Employment (IPE) were developed (112% of goal)
- 2,557 individuals successfully closed their case with employment (84% of goal)

DRS field offices exceeded Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act performance measures in three areas:

- 2nd quarter employed at 56%
- 4th quarter employed at 54%
- Median earnings 2nd quarter after close (\$4,200)

Pre-ETS Service Delivery Highlight: DARS Lynchburg

DARS' Lynchburg office is setting a high standard for inclusive, community-based Pre-Employment and Transition Services (Pre-ETS) that provide robust and experiential opportunities for students engaged in these services. DARS' staff in partnership with local businesses and educational partners have created events that are engaging and well attended by local youth.



- Eighty students from Amherst High School (*photo above*) in partnership with Employment Services Organization RSVP and DARS staff participated in a Financial Day at Liberty University School of Business with Liberty Office of Disability and Accommodation. Students received guidance and counseling on post-secondary education, self-advocacy and financial literacy. Students were invited to have lunch at the football stadium where they received free tickets and parking vouchers for their families to attend a Liberty University football game.



- One of 60 students (*photo left*) from Lynchburg City Schools attended a job shadow event with Sam's Club to expose them to café, produce, bakery, online orders and cash register occupations.

FRS continued to focus efforts on successful onboarding and training of new VR counselors. The redesign of the New Counselor Skills Training (NCST) is in its second year of implementation. VR counselors report increased functional skills and policy understanding as well as ability to facilitate caseload management that allows more time for participant interaction which positively impacts staff morale. Providing comprehensive and thorough training for all VR staff will remain a key priority for addressing staff recruitment and retention.

VR Program Highlights

Pathways to Careers

Partnerships. Apprenticeships. Equity.

RSA Pathways Grant

As of October 2024, approximately 600 persons are participating in the Pathways grant, with approximately 115 individuals from DARS closed successfully in competitive integrated employment.

Pathways is partnering with WWRC and Mountain Gateway Community College (MGCC) to pilot an innovative partnership for a pre-apprenticeship in Building Trades.

Students will be transported to MGCC three times a week to obtain their NCCER Core (basic construction trades) Certification. Students entering into the corresponding WWRC program will have stronger basic skills and additional opportunities for training and preparation.

[Watch this video](#) about WWRC's Building Trades program.



WINDMILLS
HARNESS THE POWER OF INCLUSION

Windmills Training

The DARS Workforce Programs team presented Windmills Employment Disability Inclusion training to over 1,780 individuals with public agencies, businesses and community partners through the end of September 2024. Additionally, DARS has increased our number of Windmills trainers throughout the state.

Good Life Café

In FFY 2024, DARS completed the intervention and data collection portion of the GoodLife CAFÉ (Community Access, Financial Empowerment) project, a National Institute on Disability, Independent Living and Rehabilitation Research (NIDILRR) grant designed to study the impact of financial coaching and how ABLE accounts may increase community engagement for transition-age youth who receive Social Security benefits.

Participants were empowered to increase their financial independence, with a positive correlation also anticipated between financial empowerment coaching and community participation.

Another part of the project, the "Survey Exploring my Life and Future" (SELF), was a voluntary survey for adult DARS participants-- with nearly one thousand respondents. The survey was focused on participant goals, supports, decision making processes, and community participation, with researchers excited to further explore the impact of financial literacy for people with disabilities.

Pre-Employment Transition Services

Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) represents the earliest set of services available for students with disabilities who are eligible or potentially eligible for VR services. Pre-ETS provide a meaningful way to enhance the development of a student's career direction and prepares students to become engaged in their own transition and vocational planning. DARS continues to focus on providing Pre-ETS, with 5,187 students receiving Pre-ETS in FFY Q4 2023 (an increase from 4,586 in Q4 2022).

DARS has also focused on increasing Pre-ETS providers across the state, which allows for more students with disabilities and schools to receive services consistently.

In 2024:

- Six existing providers expanded their service offerings and catchment areas.
- Five additional new providers are being onboarded, with a new provider onboarded to serve underserved areas of Southwest Virginia.
- Fourteen Centers for Independent Living (CILs) are now providing Pre-ETS across the state.

With regard to deaf and hard of hearing students, DARS is increasing partnerships and networking opportunities with educational and community providers to grow awareness of DARS and expand referral potential for these students. These partnerships further the collaborative provision of Pre-ETS for students who are deaf and hard of hearing.

- DARS Rehabilitation Counselors for the Deaf (RCDs) participated in a Back-to-School Registration Day at Virginia School for the Deaf and Blind (VSDB). The event hosted students and parents as they kicked off the start of the school year. Counselors fielded questions from parents and shared upcoming Pre-ETS opportunities, and new referrals were identified because of DARS participation.
- Collaborative opportunities between VSDB and WWRC's Postsecondary Education Rehabilitation Transition (PERT) program increased student access to Pre-ETS.
- DARS collaborated with area mainstreamed high schools to create job shadowing events for students who are deaf and hard of hearing.
- DARS continues to provide particularized support to its RCDs in order to enhance awareness of local partners and develop meaningful working relationships.

VR Program Highlights

Assistive Technology Services

DARS' Virginia Assistive Technology System (VATS) provides dynamic and customized AT services throughout Virginia. AT professionals provide an array of services including assessment, training, custom fabrication, equipment demonstration and equipment loans to remove barriers and improve functional abilities that support work and independence.

VATS continues to partner with Virginia No Wrong Door (NWD) to expand access to and acquisition of AT devices and services for older adults and Virginians with disabilities. In addition to emergency preparedness, sensory regulation, and falls prevention kits, VATS worked with NWD partners to improve access to recreation equipment with its partnership with Sheltering Arms Institute and Sportable, Inc., providing adaptive gaming equipment and a youth-sized recreational wheelchair for adaptive sporting events. VATS is in the process of developing a cognitive health kit to help individuals, caregivers and families address wandering and supportive safety needs.

Rehab Engineering staff worked with a DARS participant and their vocational rehabilitation counselor to identify access and productivity needs of a farmer with a disability.

DARS purchased and installed an additional lowered footstep and a small grab bar on the fender of the participant's tractor (*see photo below left*).

The step and grab bar provides a safer solution when getting on and off this tractor and allows this individual to continue in their desired farming profession.



Green foot plate and small grab bar installed on the fender of a tractor to improve safety getting on and off farm equipment.



The F.R.E.E. Foundation prepares to send a wheelchair to Bristol for an individual who lost their equipment due to Hurricane Helene.

VATS, the Virginia Department of Emergency Management (VDEM), and the Foundation for Rehabilitation Equipment and Endowment (F.R.E.E.) continue to collaborate to distribute gently used durable medical equipment (DME) to statewide disaster shelters in the event of natural disasters and or emergencies. These shelter kits include wheelchairs, walkers, rollators, canes, bedside toilets, and crutches. VDEM stores the equipment in its Richmond warehouse and will transport to shelters as needed during a declared disaster.

After Hurricane Helene hit Southwest Virginia in September 2024, VATS staff went into action to help distribute additional DME shelter kits to areas hit hardest (*see photo below right*). VATS has a dedicated volunteer liaison officer with VDEM's Virginia Emergency Support Team (VEST). This person sits on the Access and Functional Needs calls to identify the greatest needs and respond quickly.

Real Pay for Real Jobs EPIC Grant

The Real Pay for Real Jobs Education and Outreach, Partnership Development, Provisions of Individualized Services, and Capacity Building (EPIC) grant began year three in October 2024. During year two, DARS completed the hiring and onboarding of the full team. This team, in collaboration with project partners, worked to build recruitment of both adult and youth populations either currently participating in non-competitive facility-based work or at risk for such employment.



The project continues to develop processes to assist these individuals in making the transition to competitive integrated employment and is providing services to facilitate these transitions. These services include:

- Mentoring participants and families from individuals and family members with lived experience
- Providing paid work experience to adult populations
- Forming integrated resource teams to support individuals in pursuing employment

Training regarding these processes and services was then provided to VR staff working with participants. To compliment these services, VR staff, as well as a wide variety of stakeholders were also provided professional development on person centered employment practices through both webinars and web-based courses.

WWRC Program Highlights

Wilson Workforce and Rehabilitation Center (WWRC), located in Fishersville, Virginia, plays a vital role in providing vocational rehabilitation services to individuals with disabilities, helping them prepare for gainful employment. In both state and federal fiscal years 2023-2024, WWRC has made significant strides in supporting the growing neurodiverse student population, particularly through a partnership with Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU).

In November 2023, WWRC began collaborating with VCU to conduct a needs analysis, review policies, and develop staff training tailored to the needs of neurodiverse students, including those with autism. As a result, over 80 percent of WWRC staff have received foundational training in working with these populations, equipping them with the skills to better support students with diverse learning needs.

Following the training, VCU's team conducted further observations and interviews, leading to key modifications in Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) offered at WWRC. Notably, updates were made to the Postsecondary Education Rehabilitation Transition (PERT) program materials, ensuring they are more accessible and aligned with the needs of neurodiverse students. These updated materials, along with enhanced career exploration opportunities, will be disseminated to schools across Virginia starting in the new calendar year.



To ensure ongoing staff development, the partnership has also launched a dedicated online portal for continuous training opportunities. This portal includes training modules aimed at providing certifications at beginner and intermediate levels. The system is designed to be self-sustaining, with experienced staff members qualified to mentor and support the development of new team members in the future.

Through these efforts, WWRC continues to enhance its capacity to serve individuals with disabilities, fostering an inclusive environment that promotes meaningful vocational opportunities.

Supported Work Readiness Division

Throughout SFY 2023-2024, the center's Supported Work Readiness Division (SWRD) focused on enhancing access to its services, aiming to make them more accessible and effective for consumers. A key challenge for many individuals with disabilities is transportation, which can often serve as a significant barrier to achieving competitive, integrated employment.

To address this, the SWRD's driving program has consistently received requests from the DARS field offices for learner's permit study resources. These requests come from both adult participants and high school students, highlighting the need for accessible and flexible driving instruction.



WWRC Program Highlights

Given that WWRC's driving programs typically face waitlists of 3-9 months, a new initiative was launched in late October 2023: A virtual learner's permit course pilot. This pilot aimed to streamline access to the program by offering a facilitated study group in a virtual format. WWRC partnered with a DARS field office and a local high school to create a collaborative pilot program, selecting six students for the study group. The students were identified in cooperation with the high school, the DARS counselor, and WWRC.

The virtual course utilized WWRC's Canvas learning management system (LMS), a widely used platform in both K-12 and postsecondary educational environments. The course consisted of two instructor-led, synchronous virtual sessions each week for six weeks, using the Virginia DMV manual as the primary textbook. In addition to the manual, the course provided supplementary study materials and assignments designed to enhance learning. Each week, formative assessments were integrated into the curriculum, helping instructors gauge progress and adjust instruction for the following sessions.

The results of this pilot program will be closely analyzed to evaluate its effectiveness. Based on these findings, the training model will be refined, and a statewide implementation plan will be developed to make the Learner's Permit study course more widely available to students and adults across Virginia. This innovative approach represents a significant step forward in making driving education more accessible, thereby helping remove a critical employment barrier for many individuals with disabilities.

Vocational Training Department

In addition to the SWRD Learner's Permit program, the center expanded its use of the Canvas learning management system (LMS) through its vocational training department. This initiative is part of WWRC's ongoing effort to integrate technology into its services and improve access to vocational training resources for individuals with disabilities.

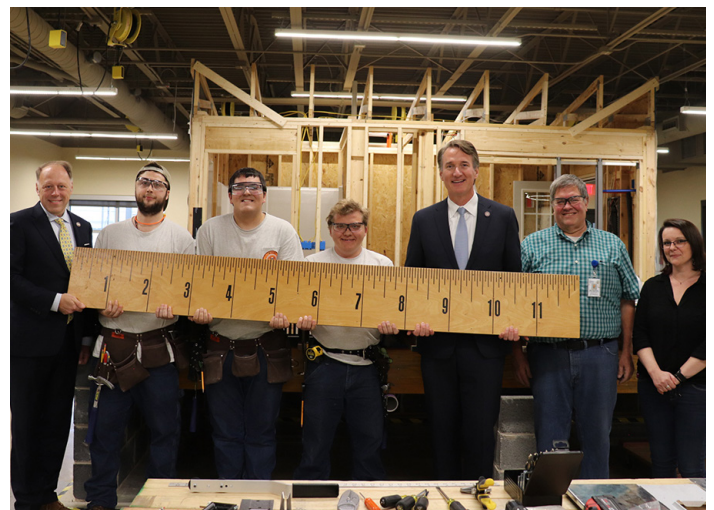
In May 2024, WWRC partnered with the Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center (VALRC) at VCU to provide specialized Canvas training for its staff. Canvas is a robust, web-based platform that is widely used in educational institutions to manage digital learning. It allows educators to create and deliver online courses, present learning materials, assess student progress, and provide feedback.

For students, Canvas offers a seamless experience for engaging with course content and tracking their own skill development and learning outcomes.

The Canvas training at WWRC was led by a team from VCU, including Katie Bratisax, Senior Instructional Technology Specialist, Dr. Kate Rolander, Director of Literacy Programming, and Hali Massey, ESOL Specialist. These experts provided valuable insights and hands-on training to WWRC staff, enabling them to effectively use the platform in their vocational programs. This training equips WWRC educators with the tools to create dynamic, interactive online courses that can better support the skill-building and learning needs of students, particularly those with disabilities.

By leveraging Canvas, WWRC enhances its ability to provide flexible, accessible, and comprehensive vocational training, ensuring that individuals with disabilities have the opportunity to develop skills at their own pace while receiving the necessary support and feedback. This initiative is a significant step forward in modernizing the center's vocational training offerings and improving overall educational outcomes for its participants.

On February 2, 2024, Governor Glenn Youngkin and Secretary of Health and Human Resources John Littel visited the center for a comprehensive tour. The tour showcased the broad range of services available at WWRC to support individuals with disabilities in preparing for competitive and integrated employment in the community.



Gov. Youngkin and Sec. Littel toured WWRC in Feb. 2024. Shown above with Building Trades and Manufacturing Technology Training students and instructors.

WWRC Performance Outcomes

FFY 2024 Consumers Served by Service Area	
Postsecondary Rehabilitation Transition (PERT) Program	670
Driving Services	570
Vocational Evaluation	502
Workplace Readiness (WRP) Program*	348
Vocational Training served**	331
Vocational Training Graduates	145
*Program began in April 2023	
** Represents all individuals served and will include individuals still being served in FFY2025	

PERT Services Received	Number
Comprehensive Evaluations and Youth in Transition	388
Virtual Program	131
Career Day/Career Seminar	83
Credential week	35
Transition Academy	23
Mobile Independent Living Skills Readiness, etc.	9
Situational Assessments	1
Total explorations SFY 2024	670

FFY 2024 WIOA Credentials Obtained	Number
Manufacturing Specialist	25
Manufacturing Skills Institute (MSI)	20
Manufacturing Technician 1	17
NRF Warehouse, Inventory & Logistics	12
ASE Maintenance & Light Repair	11
NRF Customer Service and Sales	6
Microsoft Office Expert	5
Certified Nursing Aide (CNA)	3
Microsoft Office Suite (3 exams)	2
ASE Service & Technology	1
Microsoft Office Expert	1
Total	98

FFY 2024 Other Credentials/ Certifications Obtained	Number
Clorox Pro Health Clean	127
Driver's License	68
OSHA10	97
Learner's Permit	43
ServSafe Food Handler	41
PERT NRF Retail Fundamentals	26
Microsoft Office Specialist	9
CPR and First Aid	7
Virginia Pre-Service Training for Child Care	6
Virginia DOE Child Abuse and Neglect	6
FAA-Certified Drone Pilot	6
PERT NRF Fundamentals	2
NRF Customer Service and Sales	1
Total	439

SRC Information

Our Mission

The mission of the Virginia State Rehabilitation Council, in partnership with the Virginia Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services, and in collaboration with advocacy groups, consumers and their families, is to ensure that Virginians with disabilities receive quality services while seeking to achieve meaningful employment, self-sufficiency, and independence.

Our Vision

All Virginians with disabilities will have access to quality services leading to meaningful employment, self-sufficiency, and independence.

Attend a Meeting

The quarterly SRC meetings are open to the public. Meeting locations, dates and times are posted at these websites:

www.va-src.virginia.gov

<https://commonwealthcalendar.virginia.gov>

SRC Membership Application

If you are interested in a gubernatorial appointment to the council, you may begin the application process with this form by indicating your:

Name: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Address: _____

Please email, fax or mail this form to the SRC Administrator:

Meghan Cox
DARS/State Rehabilitation Council
8004 Franklin Farms Drive
Henrico, VA 23229

Questions? Contact Meghan.Cox@dars.virginia.gov

Upon receipt, someone from the SRC will contact you to discuss your interest. However, to officially apply for this appointment, you must contact the Secretary of the Commonwealth's Office. You may obtain information about the formal application process by calling the Secretary's office at (804) 786-2441 or applying online at <https://solutions.virginia.gov/BoardAppointments>.

Thank you for your interest in the Virginia State Rehabilitation Council.

Call

Voice: (800) 552-5019 | (804) 662-7000

Videophone: (804) 325-1316

Fax: (804) 662-7663

Write

Chair, State Rehabilitation Council
Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services
8004 Franklin Farms Drive
Henrico, VA 23229

To request this report in Spanish or another language contact:

Meghan Cox
DARS/State Rehabilitation Council
8004 Franklin Farms Drive
Henrico, VA 23229
Meghan.Cox@dars.virginia.gov

Point your phone camera at this image and click to visit the SRC website.

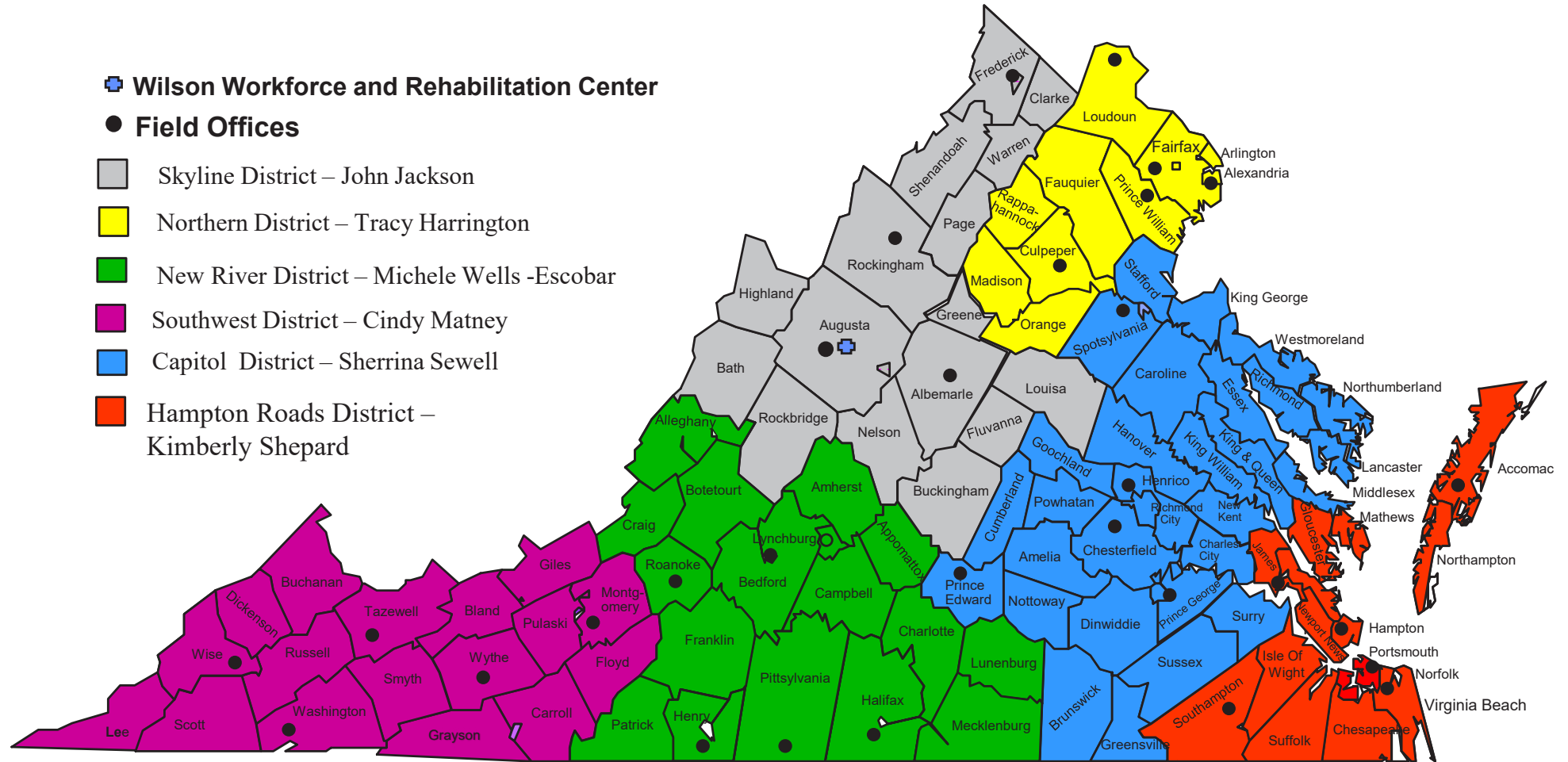


DRS Office Locations

Click on link or map below to view directory of DRS field offices: <https://www.dars.virginia.gov/drs/drsoffices.htm>



Virginia Dept. for Aging and Rehabilitative Services Division of Rehabilitative Services





VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT FOR AGING
AND REHABILITATIVE SERVICES



www.dars.virginia.gov/drs