### Report of the Nebraska

# State Rehabilitation Council

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#### **Contact information:**

The State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) values the input and involvement of all citizens in Nebraska regarding rehabilitation services. All SRC meetings are open to the public and are a great opportunity for the public to voice concerns and opinions.

#### Meetings:

Meeting dates, times, and locations are posted on the Nebraska VR website at vr.nebraska.gov

#### Write:

State Rehabilitation Council Chairperson Nebraska Department of Education 500 S. 84th St., 2nd Floor P.O. Box 94987 Lincoln, NE 68509

#### Call:

Angela Fujan 402.679.6298 877.637.3422

#### Fax:

402.471.0788

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#### State Rehabilitation Council

Nebraska Department of Education

December 30, 2024

On behalf of the Nebraska State Rehabilitation Council (SRC), I am pleased to present the 2023-2024 Annual Report. This report reflects the efforts of the partnership between State Rehabilitation Council members and Nebraska VR to ensure Nebraskans with disabilities have access to meaningful employment opportunities.

First, I would like to acknowledge the dedicated Nebraska VR staff who work with clients, students, businesses, and other stakeholders to advance the agency's mission. Next, I would like to show appreciation to my fellow Council members who serve on the SRC and work to ensure Nebraskans with disabilities have access to meaningful employment opportunities.

At each quarterly meeting this year, we heard updates from Nebraska VR Director Lindy Foley and Assistive Technology Partnership Director Tobias Orr. Reports were also provided from the Client Assistance Program, Statewide Independent Living Council, Nebraska Youth Leadership Council, Project SEARCH, and the Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. These reports keep the Council informed and provide opportunities for discussion.

The Transition Services, Employer Services, and Client Services Committees met to discuss Nebraska VR's work. Discussions of specific issues impacting the work of Nebraska VR and the SRC included:

- · The Client Satisfaction Survey.
- · The Disability Employment and Inclusion Awards held each October.
- Strategies to increase the number of students applying for employment services after graduating high school.
- · Senator outreach.

Jeremy Daffern

As always, this Council is committed to working in partnership with Nebraska VR to identify how to better meet the needs of its clients, students, and partners.

Sincerely,

Nebraska State Rehabilitation Council



Lonnie joined the SRC representing business, industry, and labor. He is the franchisee of Wendy's in York, NE.

Lonnie Berger-York



Crystal is a Manager of HR Operations at Ameritas. She represents business, industry, and labor.

Crystal Booker-Lincoln



Jeremy is an Advocacy Specialist for the Nebraska Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing who serves on the Transition Services Committee.

Jeremy Daffern-Omaha



Gloria is the State of Nebraska ADA Coordinator who serves as the SRC Chairperson.

Gloria Eddins-Lincoln



Christine represents the Statewide Independent Living Council. It is a required seat on the SRC.

Christine Gaspari-Kearney



Jason serves as a current or former applicant for or recipient of vocational rehabilitation services.

Jason Gieschen-Ogallala



Catrina serves as a current or former applicant for or recipient of vocational rehabilitation services.

# **SRC Committee Reports**

#### **Transition Services Committee**

Members: Sharon Elliott (Chair), Jeremy Daffern, Gloria Eddins, Jason Gieschen, Catrina Gray, Teresa Hayes with Lupe Stevens as Nebraska VR Advisor.



Transition Services Committee Chairperson

– Sharon Elliott

Sharon works for the Parent Training and Information Center (PTI). PTI Nebraska is a required member of the council.

Sharon Elliott-Omaha

The Transition Services Committee discussions included:

- Review of 2024 School Survey results. With 390 completed surveys, 92.3% of respondents reported they were satisfied with their overall experience.
- Impact of twelve 2024 Summer Transition Programs for students with disabilities ages 14-21 along with 5 Job Expos.
- Explored ways to increase parental involvement. Recommended inviting the student's parent or authorized representative to conversations regarding applying for VR services prior to graduation.
- Strategies to increase invitations to relevant Individual Education Plan (IEP) meetings. Will partner with the Office of Special Education to provide information to schools regarding requirements for transition aged students.
- Explored strategies to connect students who received Pre-Employment
  Transition Services in high school with employment services after
  graduation. Discussed developing a plan to remind former students about
  services after an established time.

#### **Client Services Committee**

Members: Jodi Bodnar (Chair), Matthew Kaslon, Lisa Kent-Scheer, Paulette Monthei, Cindi Walz, Christine Gaspari with Angela Fujan as Nebraska VR Advisor.



Client Services Committee Chairperson

– Jodi Bodnar

A required council member, Jodi is the Director of the Client
Assistance Program.

Jodi Bodnar-Omaha

This year the Client Services Committee continued to review the Client Satisfaction Survey which is completed with clients who closed their case as successfully employed. 92% were still employed and 93.68% respondents said the job met their needs. Respondents were asked which provided services were the most helpful. The top three categories were encouragement, employment services, and assistive technology.

The Client Services Committee discussed reinventing the Client Satisfaction Survey to ensure client feedback is included from all case closure statuses. The goal was to update the survey questions to be client-centered and meaningful for staff and supervisors to train and guide discussions. The committee plans to review the significance of the 90-day timeline after case closure to administer the Client Satisfaction Survey in fiscal year 2025.

Nebraska VR was open to the Committee's Survey recommendations for revising the current Survey. Time will be needed to strategize how and if Nebraska VR staff can implement the additional survey workload. The Committee plans to continue exploring options to make the Survey more accessible for applicants and clients to complete through various methods and at any stage in the VR process.

Committee members contacted Vocational Rehabilitation and Client Assistance Programs in other states to learn more about their survey practices and explore their specific survey questions. The Committee will convene before the next quarterly meeting to expedite the finalization of the Client Satisfaction Survey and begin gathering data for Fiscal Year 2025.

#### **Employer Services Committee**

Members: Jana Egan (Chair), Lonnie Berger, Crystal Booker, Tobias Orr, Todd Ludwig with Mary Matusiak as Nebraska VR Advisor.



In October 2023, the SRC hosted the Disability **Employer Services Committee Chairperson** Jana Egan Jana is an HR Consutant for Mutual of Omaha. She serves on the SRC as a business, industry, and labor representative.

Jana Egan-Omaha

Employment and Inclusion Awards at the Nebraska Department of Education in Lincoln, NE. The event was well attended, in-person, and by Zoom. Those in attendance included guest speakers Nebraska State Governor Jim Pillen and the Nebraska Department of Education Commissioner Brian Maher. Awardee videos were featured at the event for each recipient and shared on social media

Planning for the next award ceremony began at the May meeting where it was determined we would use the same venue for the October 2024 event. An expectation to have each Nebraska VR Service Office submit at least two partner nominations was also instituted. Nominations were reviewed by the Employer Services Committee in July. Those nominated who did not receive an award were recipients of the You Make a Difference certificates.

The Committee had several changes in members over the past year, so much of the conversation was spent in introductions, answering questions. and sharing information.

The Employment Committee thanks Member Lonnie Berger, whose 6-year term has ended, for his faithful service. Nebraska VR and ATP staff members are also appreciated for their contributions to event planning.



Matt serves as a current or former applicant for or recipient of vocational rehabilitation services.

Matt Kaslon-Grand Island



Theresa is an Education Specialist with the Nebraska Department of Education Office of Special Education.

Theresa Hayes-Lincoln



Todd joined the SRC representing business, industry, and labor. He is the Talent Acquisition Manager of the Nebraska Department of Transportation.

Todd Ludwig-Lincoln



Paulette serves as a member at large.

Paulette Monthei-Omaha



Lisa serves as a current or former applicant for or recipient of vocational rehabilitation services.

Lisa Kent-Scheer-Omaha



In his role as Director of Assistive Technology Partnership, Tobias is a provider of community rehabilitation program services.

Tobias Orr-Lincoln



North Platte Nebraska VR Service Office. She serves on the SRC as a qualified vocational rehabilitation counselor.

# Director's Message



Lindy Foley-Director Nebraska VR

As 2024 draws to a close, I reflect on the year's accomplishments and look ahead for new strategies and opportunities to meet the needs of those we serve. Nebraska VR made significant strides in supporting individuals with disabilities to achieve employment while assisting businesses in diversifying their workforce. These efforts were made possible due to the commitment of over 210 Nebraska VR staff members in thirteen Service Offices across the state. These dedicated employees provided services to students and

adults with disabilities, offered support and training to businesses, and strived to leverage community partnerships.

By engaging various stakeholders along with the support of the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC), Nebraska VR identified short- and long-term goals which are now captured in Nebraska's newest Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Combined State Plan. These goals include:

- Increasing effective communication and engagement with clients, businesses, SRC, and staff members;
- Increasing youth with disabilities' awareness of Nebraska VR services;
- Improving processes to ensure unserved and underserved populations have access to Nebraska VR services; and
- Improving quality outcomes for clients receiving supported employment or customized employment.

Alongside other workforce partners, Nebraska VR will dedicate the next four years to advancing these important priorities with the intent to build the state's economy while increasing the number of people with disabilities finding, keeping, and advancing in employment. The future is bright and there will be paths not yet paved - but where we're going, we won't need roads!

Lindy Foley

Nebraska VR Director

# Nebraska VR Funding

Every \$1.00 appropriated
to Nebraska VR from
the State of Nebraska
earns \$3.69 in Federal
Funding for services
to Nebraskans with
disabilities.

# Return on Investment for the Nebraska VR Program

Average Cost of Nebraska VR Services per Person:	\$41,818.38	
Average Annual Earnings after Nebraska VR Services:	\$27,064.05	
Estimated Annual Taxes on Earnings:		
Federal Income Tax	\$1,209.76	
State Income Tax	\$600.82	
Social Security Tax	\$2,070.40	
Average Total Taxes per Year	\$3,880.98	
Average Return to Taxpayers over 30 Remaining		
Years of Employment	\$116,429.40	

On average, a successfully employed person returns \$2.78 to the taxpayers for every \$1 spent through Nebraska VR services.

# Annual Program Costs

Cost of Program
\$5,128,895
Cost of Program
\$15,401,238
\$1,564,470
\$4,637,535
\$28,561,953

#### **Purchased for Clients**

	Cost of Program
Assessment	\$290,959
Pre-Employment Transition Services	\$778,888
Supported Employment	\$3,034,769
Occupational/Vocational Training	\$66,510
Transportation	\$100,743
Maintenance - Increased Living Costs	\$45,343
Benefits Counseling	\$120,870
Rehab Technology	\$1,342,552
Interpreter	\$7,543
Short Term Supports	\$83,693
Diagnosis and Treatment	\$12,538
Junior or Community College Training	\$136,768
Four Year College Training	\$380,141
On-the-Job Training	\$4,875
Miscellaneous Training	\$35,252
Graduate College	\$165,632
Customized Supported Employment	\$15,733
Job Placement Assistance	\$4,148
Disability Related Skills Training	\$13,708
Job Search Assistance	\$1,210,429
Registered Apprenticeship	\$7,491
Home Modification	\$76,480
Extended Services	\$58,824
Other Services	\$37,929
Total	\$8,031,820

# Individuals Served by Nebraska VR

#### Clients Served by County

County Total	County Total
CountyTotal	CountyTotal
Adams141	Jefferson5
Antelope3	Johnson2
Arthur0	Kearney7
Banner1	Keith8
Blaine0	Keya Paha0
Boone8	Kimball5
Box Butte21	Knox12
Boyd0	Lancaster522
Brown2	Lincoln 134
Buffalo143	Logan1
Burt10	Loup0
Butler 18	Madison147
Cass25	McPherson0
Cedar9	Merrick20
Chase3	Morrill10
Cherry5	Nance5
Cheyenne16	Nemaha7
Clay14	Nuckolls3
Colfax7	Otoe18
Cuming18	Pawnee1
Custer14	Perkins3
Dakota 17	Phelps12
Dawes13	Pierce4
Dawson57	Platte 119
Deuel0	Polk7
Dixon5	Red Willow26
Dodge84	Richardson4
Douglas755	Rock3
Dundy1	Saline19
Fillmore5	Sarpy 194
Franklin1	Saunders19
Frontier3	Scotts Bluff 139
Furnas1	Seward17
Gage40	Sheridan7
Garden1	Sherman3
Garfield0	Sioux0
Gosper8	Stanton7
Grant0	Thayer3
Greeley0	Thomas1
Hall241	Thurston3
Hamilton20	Valley5
Harlan2	
	Washington28
Hayes2	Wayne7
Hitchcock5	Webster3
Holt23	Wheeler 10
Hooker2	York36
Howard12	Total Served 3332

#### 2024 Nebraska VR Employment Program

Applied for Services	2279
Received Services	1617
Successfully Employed	683

#### Successfully Employed Nebraska VR Clients



45% of clients are employed full-time.

Average hourly wage for 2024 is \$17.37

#### 2024 Occupation & Earnings for Competitively Employed Clients

Occupations	Percent	Average Hourly Earnings
Service	30%	\$13.32
Professional	19%	\$22.46
Sales	12%	\$15.91
Transportation & Material Moving	12%	\$14.98
Office Support	10%	\$16.84
Production	6%	\$16.61
Construction & Extraction	4%	\$25.72
Management, Business, & Finance	4%	\$27.89
Installation, Maintenance, & Repairs	2%	\$22.25
Farming, Fishing, & Forestry	1%	\$16.61

### **Transition Works**

Nebraska VR Pre-Employment Transition Services Coordinators work with schools and other organizations across the state to help students, aged 14 to 21, plan for the future and prepare for careers that match their skills, abilities, and interests. The scope of Nebraska VR Pre-Employment Transition Services is to provide students with exposure to various jobs and career paths through exploration activities. In coordination with your school and businesses in your community, you will gain skills and abilities to be successful after high school.

#### Learning to Earn

Taylor O'Neil, a Blair High School student, is interested and excited to gain more skills and try new work options. She was introduced to Nebraska VR Pre-Employment Transition Services Coordinator Aubrey Gutierrez in 2023 during her sophomore year. The benefit of Pre-Employment Transition Services is to help students explore different jobs as a high school student. She had a good first impression, found the experience very helpful, and says she wishes she would have started working with Nebraska VR earlier in school. Taylor experiences a learning disability that sometimes makes it difficult to understand what is expected in social settings and in the workplace.

While participating in several Pre-Employment Transition Services activities during school, Taylor received job exploration counseling from her Coordinator. Activities to understand her work interests, skills, and abilities helped her learn more about herself. Discussions and practice exercises helped her learn when and who to ask for help in a job setting. She also worked to build skills in completing job applications, writing résumés and cover letters, choosing reliable references, and using good manners in a business setting. They also completed mock interviews.

Out in the community, Taylor visited several businesses to learn and explore more about specific jobs and to be introduced to a variety of workplaces. She toured Pizza Hut, Subway, Jeanette's Animal Shelter, and Little Blossoms Daycare and Pre-School. During the summer of 2023, she participated in a work-based learning experience (WBLE) at Goodwill in Blair. This was one of ten innovative short-term Transition Summer Programs available across the state that year. During the experience, she helped in salvaging, separating, and sorting of donated items. Taylor liked the work environment and job duties. She gained real work experience and confidence. She also shared she thought her supervisor would say she was hard working, reliable, and on time for work.



Taylor O'Neill Blair High School Student

Taylor helped with childcare and activities at another WBLE in the summer of 2024. The experience was hosted by Little Blossoms Daycare and Pre-School in Blair. Taylor's Coordinator Aubrey shared, "Working in childcare was not even a consideration until touring the day care. Because of that experience, Taylor was able to see she was interested in the work and she was willing to explore this specific job."

Taylor's parents are appreciative of the information and guidance available to help their daughter succeed. Nikki O'Neil, Taylor's Mom, had positive things to share about the activities and services available through Nebraska VR to her daughter. Nikki said, "My daughter participated in this program last summer and came out of this program with more confidence and better self-esteem. She made some friends along the way. These are opportunities that you, as a parent, need to take advantage of. These work experiences helped my daughter mature and grow into an adult and to learn more about what is expected of her in the workforce."

# Nebraska VR Successful People

The Nebraska State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) honored five Nebraska VR partners for their role in creating inclusive workplaces and advocacy for disability employment during the October 2023 Disability Employment and Inclusion Award Ceremony.

Disability Employment and Inclusion Entrepreneur Award - Josh Beck, Countryside Gunsmithing LLC - Lincoln, Nebraska

Josh Beck wanted to supplement his family's income and fill a niche in the market where he could balance the needs of his family and his teaching position at Southeast Community College – Milford. Since 2021, he has operated his business, Countryside Gunsmithing

LLC, in Lincoln during the summer, on nights and weekends, and during school breaks throughout the academic year. As a United States Marine Armorer who served in five countries, he received training and certification in repairing firearms but shattered his knee in the line of duty. Because his injuries made it difficult and painful to stand for long periods of time, Nebraska VR Self-Employment Statewide Coordinator Julie Shively planned a consultation with Nebraska Assistive Technology Specialist David Altman to understand his workspace. With a small investment in anti-fatigue mats and technology combined with his skills and commitment to quality service, he has become a popular and trusted craftsman. He has exceeded his business plan's net income goal by 32%.

Josh's long-term goal is to operate Countryside Gunsmithing LLC as a full-time venture.



Josh Beck Countryside Gunsmithing

#### New Business Partner Recognition Award - CVS Health - Lincoln, Nebraska

CVS Health is a well-known nationwide business with a commitment to support inclusive work environments. Three Lincoln area





Melanie Kramer & Marques Hancock CVS Health

locations are no exception to this commitment as they have been generous hosts of work-based learning experiences, worksite tours, on-the-job training experiences, and job shadows. Local Store Manager Steve Andrews has welcomed students and adult clients by providing opportunities to explore both retail and pharmacy tech positions. The collaboration has also included presentations from corporate CVS Workforce Initiative Managers Melanie Kramer and Marques Hancock with Nebraska VR staff about their inclusive initiatives and tips for supporting clients in applying, completing the required questionnaire, and interviewing for available positions. Both local and corporate managers are known to provide individualized support when needed and have consistently been open to discovering new ways to grow the partnership.

#### New Business Partner Recognition Award - Pioneer Animal Clinic - Scottsbluff, Nebraska

Pioneer Animal Clinic began their partnership by hosting business tours for students interested in working in the veterinary field. They continued to partner by providing students and adult clients with work-based learning experiences, conducting mock job interviews, and participating in the Business Meet and Greet at ESU 13's Annual Job Expo. Since the first contact with Office Manager Elsa Hazlitt, the clinic has embraced developing a working relationship to provide a positive environment and great communication where students and job seekers gain valuable experience.



Pioneer Animal Clinic



Becky Maser Alliance Grocery Kart

#### Small Business Partner Recognition Award - Alliance Grocery Kart - Alliance, Nebraska

The Alliance Grocery Kart is a full-service grocery store serving Alliance and is a staple in the surrounding communities. The location has 48 full- and part-time employees and welcomes providing opportunities for Nebraska VR clients and students to learn about working in the grocery and retail field. Manager and Co-Owner Becky Maser values inclusion and works to ensure both students and clients have the support they need to have a successful on-the-job training or work-based learning experience.

#### Large Business Partner Recognition Award - Nebraska Department of Transportation - Lincoln, Nebraska

The Nebraska Department of Transportation (NDOT) has partnered with Nebraska VR since 2017 hosting on-the-job evaluations and

work-based learning experiences; however, the partnership has grown exponentially over the past year into a true collaboration. Talent Acquisition Manager Todd Ludwig, Highway Accident Records Supervisor Carole Gasper, and others at NDOT work to provide opportunities for all abilities and backgrounds for adults and students. As active members of EmployLNK meetings, they are known as great communicators with a full understanding of skill assessments and accommodations in discussions regarding job openings and applicants. Going forward, they will begin hosting monthly lunch and learn events with NDOT supervisors where Nebraska VR Business Account Managers provide disability awareness activity modules known as Windmills Training. NDOT has referred staff members who needed accommodations to continue to be successful employees and have hired three Nebraska VR clients from the Lincoln area in the past year.





Todd Ludwig and Carole Gasper Nebraska Department of Transportation

#### **Office Locations**

Columbus serves counties:
Butler, Colfax, Nance, Platte and Polk
3100 23rd St., Suite 5
Columbus, NE 68601
(402) 562-8065, (877) 505-0866
VR.InfoColumbus@nebraska.gov

Fremont serves counties:
Dodge and Washington
1730 E. 23rd Ave. N
Fremont, NE 68025
(402) 727-2900, (888) 585-5439
VR.InfoFremont@nebraska.gov

Grand Island serves counties:
Fillmore, Greeley, Hall, Hamilton, Howard, Merrick, Nuckolls, Thayer and York
203 E. Stolley Park Road, Suite B
Grand Island, NE 68801
(308) 385-6200, (800) 862-3382
VR.InfoGrandIsland@nebraska.gov

Hastings serves counties: Adams, Clay and Webster 2727 W. 2nd St., Suite 326 Hastings, NE 68901-4683 402-462-0160, 800-852-3382 VR.InfoHastings@nebraska.gov

Kearney serves counties:
Blaine, Buffalo, Custer, Franklin, Furnas, Garfield,
Harlan, Kearney, Loup, Phelps, Sherman and Valley
315 W. 60th St., Suite 400
Kearney, NE 68845
(308) 865-5343, (800) 262-3382
VR.InfoKearney@nebraska.gov

Lincoln serves counties:
Gage, Jefferson, Johnson, Lancaster, Nemaha, Otoe,
Pawnee, Richardson, Saline, Saunders and Seward
500 S. 84th St.
Lincoln, NE 68510-2611
(402) 471-3231,(800) 472-3382
VR.InfoLincoln@nebraska.gov

Norfolk serves counties:
Antelope, Boone, Boyd, Brown, Burt, Cedar, Cuming, Dixon, Holt, Keya Paha, Knox, Madison, Pierce, Rock, Stanton, Wayne and Wheeler
1212 W. Benjamin Ave.
Norfolk, NE 68701
(402) 370-3200, (800) 442-3382
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North Platte serves counties:
Arthur, Chase, Cherry, Dawson, Dundy, Frontier, Gosper, Grant, Hayes, Hitchcock, Hooker, Keith, Lincoln, Logan, McPherson, Perkins, Red Willow and Thomas 200 S. Silber, Bldg. 2
North Platte, NE 69101
(308) 535-8100, (800) 272-3382
VR.InfoNorthPlatte@nebraska.gov

Omaha-Downtown serves counties:
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Omaha-West serves counties: Douglas 12011 Q St. Omaha, NE 68137 (402) 595-1212, (877) 240-4445 VR.InfoOmahaWest@nebraska.gov

Scottsbluff serves counties:
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South Sioux City serves counties:
Dakota and Thurston
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