



# Collaboration Works

## 2016 OVR ANNUAL REPORT

# Welcome from the Governor

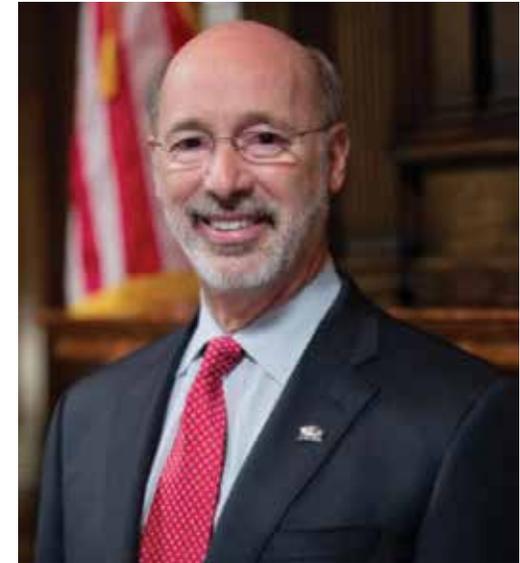
I am so proud of the work accomplished by our state agencies this past year to create and expand training and employment opportunities for residents of Pennsylvania, while also assisting businesses with hiring high-quality, well-trained, problem-solving individuals who happen to have a disability.

Last year, our Office of Vocational Rehabilitation assisted over 8,300 individuals with disabilities in obtaining and maintaining competitive, integrated employment, which resulted in a return of \$77 million in state and federal taxes. Including all individuals strengthens the commonwealth workforce and ensures that jobs that pay remain right here in Pennsylvania.

In March of last year, I issued the Employment First Executive Order. This order and the plan published in September is bringing together state agencies to increase competitive, integrated employment opportunities for Pennsylvanians with disabilities. I also signed Act 26 into law, which will help youth with disabilities access work-based learning experiences before graduation. In 2016, we also awarded over \$2.5 million in Innovation & Expansion Contracts to local providers to help prepare students with disabilities for employment after graduation.

I encourage you to consider collaborating with our team to develop, create and implement programs that will improve the quality of life for all residents of the commonwealth.

Thank you.



Governor Tom Wolf

A handwritten signature of Tom Wolf in black ink. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style, with the first name 'Tom' and the last name 'Wolf' clearly legible.



# Act 26 & The Employment First Executive Order

## **Act 26: Governor Wolf Makes Work Experiences for High School Students with Disabilities a Priority**

Act 26, the Work Experiences for High School Students with Disabilities Act, is all about collaboration — collaboration with local education and public agencies to ensure that students with disabilities are prepared to enter the workforce after graduation. To assist students with disabilities in their transition from high school to competitive, integrated employment, Act 26 charges OVR with providing pre-employment transition services and with facilitating the process of job and career development between local education agencies and public and private employers, focusing on job skills training; job coaching; competitive, integrated work-based learning experiences; and counseling on opportunities for enrollment in post-secondary education programs.

## **The Employment First Executive Order & Plan**

On March 10, 2016, Governor Wolf signed Executive Order 2016-03: Establishing 'Employment First' Policy and Increasing Competitive-Integrated Employment for Pennsylvanians with a Disability. The executive order establishes policy for agencies under the governor's jurisdiction, requiring competitive, integrated employment to be the first consideration and preferred outcome of all publicly-funded education, employment and training, and long-term supports and service programs for working-age Pennsylvanians with a disability. On Sept. 15, 2016, after an interagency workgroup sought stakeholder input on and developed a plan for Employment First, the governor's office issued 69 recommendations in 12 priority areas to implement Employment First in Pennsylvania and to make the commonwealth a model employer for people with disabilities.



Governor Wolf signs Act 26



# Welcome from the Secretary



Above: Secretary Manderino speaking at the Early REACH graduation

Below: David De Notaris, Mary Hartley and Kathy Manderino at PADES



At L&I, we are one team, one mission: jobs that pay for all people of all abilities. In 2016, agencies, advocates, community partners and organizations came together to create opportunities for individuals with disabilities in PA, connecting employers with the talent they need to keep jobs that pay in PA: win-win solutions for all!

We are truly fortunate at L&I to have such wonderful advocates like our friends at #IWantToWork, led by Mary Hartley and Josie Badger. Combined with the efforts of these and other dedicated advocates, the joint leadership across state agencies demonstrated that government does work for people with disabilities in PA, and Governor Wolf's Employment First Executive Order and Act 26 are just two examples of what we can accomplish when we work together: employment opportunities for people with disabilities here in PA and real-life, paid work-based learning experiences for high school students with disabilities, helping them succeed after graduation.

Last year, I was privileged to attend OVR's summer program graduations that are preparing Pennsylvania's future workforce for success. Together with other agencies, bureaus and organizations, these programs are raising expectations for students with disabilities, helping them believe in their own potential and develop the skills and strategies they need to go to college and work! Students with disabilities are not our only focus at L&I/OVR, though. We also have wonderful partnerships with companies like SAP, Weis, Giant Eagle, Fenner Drives and Starbucks, companies that are realizing the untapped potential of people with disabilities and are investing in their own success and future with a diverse workforce.

All of what we do at L&I/OVR would not be possible without our staffs' hard work, passion and dedication. I want to thank each of the employees at OVR for being difference makers in 2016 for individuals with disabilities and for Pennsylvania. When we work together, residents of PA can go to work and Pennsylvania employers and our economy grow strong.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kathy Manderino".



# State Board of Vocational Rehabilitation

The Pennsylvania State Board of Vocational Rehabilitation is authorized by State Act 167 of 1988 and serves as the designated state agency for services provided by OVR. Its members meet quarterly to receive updates and reports, review and vote on policy proposals, engage in discussion, and make recommendations to OVR based on their unique expertise and insights. Members are governor appointed to ensure that the opportunities OVR offers to Pennsylvanians with disabilities are relevant, appropriate and useful. The board's primary function is to review and officially approve OVR's policies, programs and activities.

## Current State Board Members:

M. J. Bartelmay, Jr.; Tom Caulfield; Raymond Hoover; Gail Vasko; John Tague, Jr. and Michael Kiel

## Policy Revisions Reviewed and Approved by the Board in 2016:

- College and Other Post-Secondary Training
- Small Business Ownership as a Vocational Goal for OVR Customers
- On-the-Job Training
- Supported Employment

## #CollaborationWorks:

Throughout last year, state board members collaborated with the Pennsylvania Bureau of Special Education, the Pennsylvania Statewide Independent Living Council, the Pennsylvania Rehabilitation Council, the Client Assistance Program, United Way of Allegheny County, PennDOT, the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services and the Pennsylvania Treasury Department on presentations and discussions regarding Act 26, the Employment First Executive Order, removing barriers to employment, WIOA, the CMS final rule, Able Savings Accounts and Work-Based Learning Assessments.

## LEAD Award

In 2016, OVR and the State Board of Vocational Rehabilitation presented the Inaugural Lifetime Excellence, Achievement and Determination (LEAD) Award to Judith Jobes, former state board member, for her lifelong work of advocacy for individuals with disabilities. Judy's philosophy for life was always "to never look at things and say we can't but to ask: What can we do to participate? What can we do to make this accessible? What can we do to make this better?" A graduate of Gannon University with a degree in social work, Judy worked for Verizon as an operator, where she helped advocate for and test adaptive equipment for directory assistance, and, throughout her lifetime, she served on numerous advocacy committees, boards and commissions.



Shane Burcaw speaking at the State Board meeting in Allentown



# Welcome from the Executive Director

Hello OVR, friends, colleagues and stakeholders. My name is David De Notaris and I am privileged, honored and grateful for the opportunity to serve as Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) within the PA Department of Labor & Industry. There are so many exciting initiatives going on in OVR right now. With the Workforce Innovation & Opportunity Act implementation; with the Governor's Employment First Executive Order; with the many community-based, work-based learning initiatives that we are developing with community partners, we are creating opportunities for our customers to get the education, the independent-living skills and the training that they need to be competitively employed. I truly believe that we have the best mission in state government: to create and maintain employment opportunities for residents of Pennsylvania with disabilities. We have developed so many wonderful partnerships, with the Office of Developmental Programs, the Bureau of Special Education, the Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network, bringing people together to think about how we can create opportunities for our customers. I'm so grateful for all the contacts that our Business Services team has made, working with employers, stretching their imaginations, raising their expectations and improving opportunities for residents of Pennsylvania with disabilities. Did you know that Pennsylvanians with disabilities experienced the biggest job gain in the country of any state last year? We're really proud of that. I want to thank our staff who are possibility thinkers, who help our customers. I want to thank the



Executive Director David J. De Notaris

A handwritten signature of David J. De Notaris in black ink.

customers, for working hard and believing in themselves and doing their best.



Left: Bill Chrisner, Joe Strechay, David De Notaris, Rick Walters, LVCiL Executive Director Amy Beck and Secretary Manderino  
Above: David De Notaris and Coach Franklin at a collaboration meeting

I also want to thank the employers of Pennsylvania who have hired individuals with disabilities, who have realized that people with disabilities are the most un-tapped job resource pool for them to consider. At OVR, we have the most dedicated, hard-working staff and we have customers that are making a positive difference in their communities and in the workforce. I truly believe that when we work together, when we believe in one another, when we focus on our strengths, great things happen. #AccessEqualsSuccess and #CollaborationWorks! When we continue to collaborate and we continue to be possibility-thinkers, great things are going to happen.

The news is good, the future is bright for customers, staff and employers of Pennsylvania because of all the possibility-thinkers: the staff, the customers, the stakeholders of OVR. And, as I like to say: the best is yet to come!



# PA Rehabilitation Council

The Pennsylvania Rehabilitation Council's (PaRC's) mission is to inform and advise the State Board of Vocational Rehabilitation and the governor on the diverse issues affecting vocational rehabilitation. As required by the Rehabilitation Act, a majority of PaRC members are individuals with disabilities and represent 16 categories. The scope of the Council's responsibilities include, but are not limited to, collaborating with OVR in writing the VR portion of the combined state plan, conducting the statewide needs assessment and participating in policy development workgroups. Besides meeting quarterly, the PaRC has seven standing committees whose members work tirelessly on various projects throughout the year. Members of the legislative committee travel to Washington, D.C. and Harrisburg, PA to discuss pending legislation impacting individuals with disabilities and to promote increased funding for OVR.

## PaRC Required Categories of Representation

*as they are named in the Rehabilitation Act\**

### Business/Industry/Labor

Mary Brougher, Donna Partin and  
Frederick Wright  
1 vacancy

### Client Assistance Program

Julia Blackwell

### Cognitive Disabilities

Passle Helminski

### Community Rehabilitation Provider

Robert Mecca

### Current/Former Customer

David Mann

### General Advocacy

Jody Saitsky and  
Mary Anne Cowfer

### Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

Cindy Duch

### Intellectual Disabilities

Pat Leo

### Mental Health

Heidi Tuszynski

### Physical Disabilities

Robert Fox

### Rehabilitation Counselor

Juliet Marsala

### Sensory Disabilities

Bill Chrisner (Visual) and  
Leslie Kelly (Deaf and Hard of  
Hearing)

### PA Statewide Independent Living Council

Matthew R. Seeley, Esq.

### State Department of Education

Lynn Dell

### State Workforce Development Board

1 vacancy

### Young Adult

Claire Senita



Members of the PaRC



*\*Categories awaiting appointment or vacant are not listed.*

# Statewide Independent Living Council

## PA Statewide Independent Living Council

The Pennsylvania Statewide Independent Living Council's (PA SILC's) mission is to use its collective power and legal mandate to develop and secure public policies that ensure civil rights and expand options for all people with disabilities in all aspects of life. SILCs and Centers for Independent Living (CILs) are authorized for 50 states and six U.S. Territories under the Federal Rehabilitation Act. PA SILC is primarily funded through the federal Administration for Community Living, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and collaborates with the 17 PA CILs and other disability organizations across the commonwealth to promote independent living for individuals with disabilities. PA SILC also collaborates on a national level with the National Council on Independent Living.



David De Notaris, DEC Executive Director Melissa Hawkins and PA SILC Executive Director Matt Seeley at the Youth Transition Summit

**Pennsylvania's 17 CILs provide four core services:** Information & Referral when individuals contact CILs for information/disability program referrals; Advocacy for both individual and systemic issues; Peer Support to connect individuals with similar disabilities for support; Independent Living Skills for people who acquire a disability and need to relearn basic life skills; and services that facilitate transition from nursing homes and other institutions to the community, provide assistance to those at risk of entering institutions and facilitate transition of youth to postsecondary life.

## #CollaborationWorks

Last year, PA SILC and the CILs collaborated on initiatives with OVR to empower youth and students with disabilities to access employment opportunities and post-secondary education. At the Early REACH Academy, PA SILC Executive Director Matt Seeley and Disability Empowerment Center (DEC) Executive Director Melissa Hawkins participated on a panel of successfully employed adults who have disabilities. Each of the panel members shared their personal stories, expertise and experiences in an open-ended discussion with students who happen to have disabilities and are preparing to attend college.

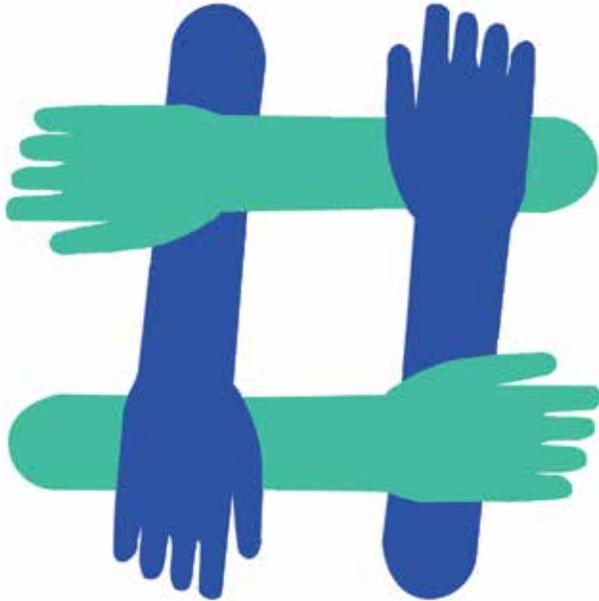


The Early REACH Academy career panel

Last June, PA SILC, OVR and DEC were three of the partners who participated in a Youth Transition Summit at Millersville University, where high school students with disabilities had the opportunity to hear from representatives from the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services, the Arc of Lancaster County, Goodwill Keystone Area, Self-Determination Housing Project of PA, Lebanon Transit, Red Rose Transit Authority, PA SILC, DEC, OVR and local providers about the resources, tools and services available for successful transition to employment and independence.



# WIOA: Communication, Coordination & Collaboration



The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) (P. L. 113-128), signed into law on July 22, 2014, superseded the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 and amended the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, which is contained in Title IV of WIOA. The amendments to the act took effect on the date of enactment (July 22, 2014), unless WIOA specified otherwise. The final implementing regulations for the VR and Supported Employment programs were published in the Federal Register on Aug. 19, 2016 and became effective on Sept. 19, 2016.

WIOA supports innovative strategies to keep pace with changing economic conditions and calls for improved communication, coordination and collaboration among adult education, VR and workforce development agencies, not just at the state and local levels but at the federal level as well. WIOA places emphasis on several key areas, including services to students and youth with disabilities; effective employer engagement; cross-agency collaboration; assistive technology; and competitive, integrated employment with limitations on the use of subminimum wage.

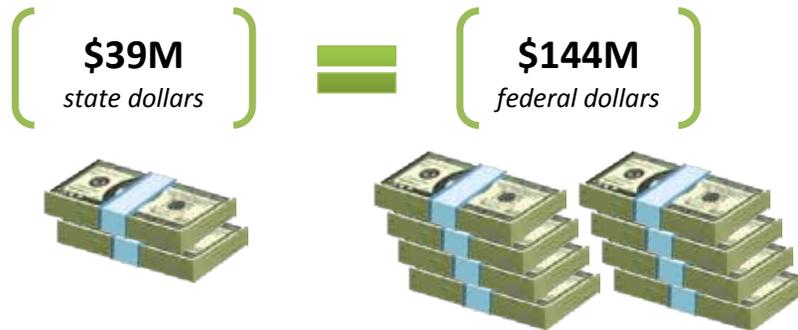
Implementing WIOA is an exciting time for innovation and opportunity that will result in expanded and improved services and outcomes for individuals with disabilities. OVR has increased services to students and youth with disabilities by making pre-employment transition services available to all students with disabilities, as well as setting aside 15 percent of Federal VR program funds to provide the services that will help students with disabilities make the transition from high school to postsecondary education programs and competitive, integrated employment. OVR's increased collaboration with partners in the workforce system and effective engagement and partnerships with local and national businesses and employers will improve and maximize opportunities for individuals with disabilities, including those with the most significant disabilities, to achieve competitive, integrated employment. For individuals with disabilities, Access Equals Success, and assistive technology devices and services are one of the keys that helps unlock potential and allow people to work, attend school, play and live in the community of their choice. When we can assist customers in accessing the same educational, training and independent living opportunities as their classmates, neighbors and peers, we can help them find real jobs with real pay!



# OVR by the Numbers

The Pennsylvania Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) is funded through a combination of state and federal dollars.

For every \$1 in state funds allocated, OVR is able to leverage an additional \$4 from the Federal Department of Education, Rehabilitation Services Administration to invest in employment services for individuals with disabilities.

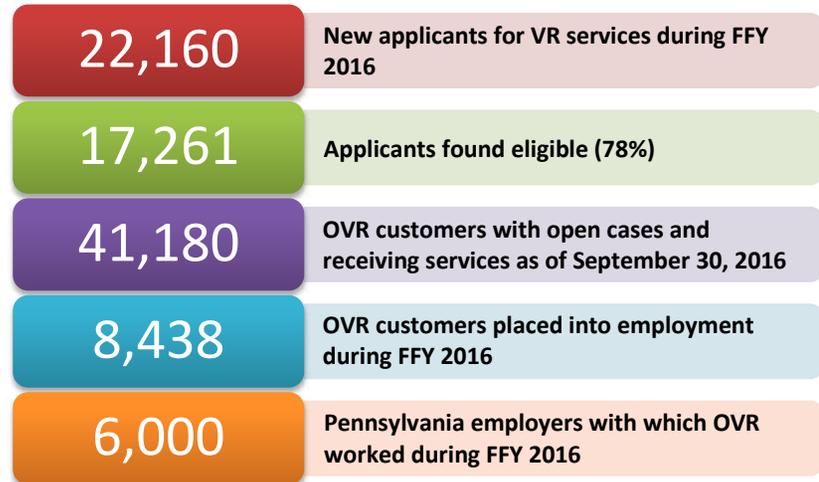


During 2016, OVR and our partner providers delivered an extensive array of **pre-employment transition services to students with disabilities** across Pennsylvania. OVR also provided **Early Reach services to over 31,000 students, parents and professionals** during the year.

Pre-Employment Transition Services	Students Served
Workplace Readiness Training	1,487
Instruction in Self-Advocacy	822
Job Exploration Counseling	472
Work-Based Learning Experience	288
Counseling on Postsecondary Training Opportunities	284
Independent Living Skills Training	255
Job Shadowing	105

## Early Reach Services and Attendees

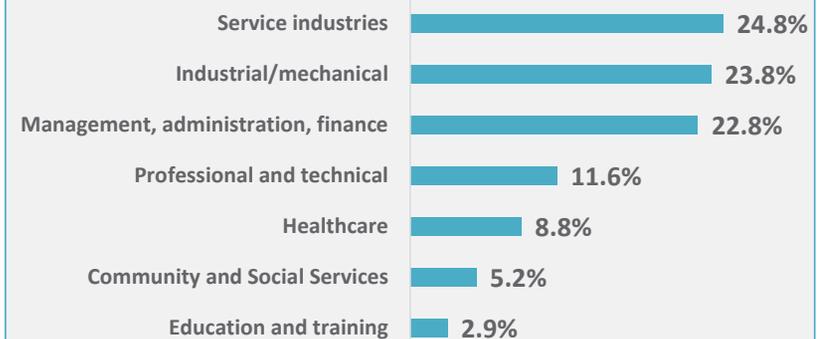
Total Number of Early Reach Events	2,673
Number of Student & Youth Attendees	18,094
Number of Parent, Professional and Other Attendees	13,366



## Top 5 VR Service Categories FFY 2016

Top 5 VR Service Categories FFY 2016	Expenditures (in millions)
Rehabilitation Technology	\$11.7
Diagnosis and Treatment of Impairments	\$9.9
Four-Year College or University Training	\$8.1
On-the-Job Supports	\$7.3
Occupational or Vocational Training	\$5.9

## 2016 Occupational Categories



# April 2017

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# Pittsburgh #MYWork Initiative: Building Futures, Strengthening Communities



Above: Students working for the McKeesport Department of Public Works

Below left: Students working for Braddock Borough

Below right: A student working for the McKeesport Department of Public Works



"If OVR reaches out to any other entities that have an opportunity to take part in this type of summer employment...I fully endorse the program. I really, without any question whatsoever, would highly recommend for them to do so because it's very fulfilling because of the impact we're making on the young adults. But, more importantly, they've made a tremendous impact on our city and some of the services that we provide to our residents as well"  
– Michael Cherepko, Mayor of the City of McKeesport.

"I think the program has had a huge impact on the kids. Just seeing them come back into the school this year, it seems like they had a new sense of confidence. It seemed like they were happier. They felt like they've accomplished something over the summer.. It just seemed like they had a whole new kind of stride about them, and they felt good about themselves"  
– Andrea Morobitto, Transition Coordinator, Clairton High School.

Last summer, the Pittsburgh Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (BVRs) rolled out the #MYWork Initiative: Municipalities & Youth Summer Employment Program, a pilot program that matches high school students with disabilities to paid, summer work experiences in their communities. During the program, 50 students gained real-life work experience, exploring different jobs at 10 municipalities and earning a paycheck, 100% of which was funded by OVR. Landscaping; administrative duties, including filing and preparing notes for council meetings; community beautification projects, such as gardening and cleaning up abandoned lots; and summer playground program monitoring were just a few of the jobs that these students worked this summer in their communities. Thank you to all of the municipalities who participated for believing in the potential of individuals with disabilities and for investing in the future of these students and your communities! For more information about the Pittsburgh #MYWork Initiative, please contact the Pittsburgh BVRs office at: 412-392-4950.



# May 2017

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# Early REACH Academy: The Future is Now!



Top: A student navigating the ropes course  
Left middle: Students during recreation, learning teambuilding  
Bottom left: Students learning AT

The Early REACH Academy is a two-week, college preparatory program at Penn State Harrisburg designed to enhance the independent living skills of high school students with disabilities transitioning to post-secondary education.

Because the focus of this program is to prepare students to go to college and, ultimately, work it includes opportunities for them to invest their time in job exploration activities, including discussions with a panel of successfully employed adults who happen to have disabilities, mock interviews and career interest inventories to help them choose their career paths.



Through OVR's collaboration with North Museum of Nature and Science, students were able to explore the STEAM fields last year: Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Math, which involved hands-on, interactive classes in fields such as biology and chemistry.

In the classroom, lessons focus on enhancing students' skills in daily living, self-advocacy, financial literacy and assistive technology, as well as building on their social skills. During last year's Academy, students even had the opportunity to attend a PSU college course, Chemistry with Dr. Gruber, Biology with Dr. Rudrabhatla or Speech with Dr. Morrow, among others.



At Roundtop Mountain Resort, the message conveyed to the students was simple, but powerful: If you can zip line, climb a rock wall or navigate a high ropes course, often times at over 30 feet in the air, you can overcome any challenge or obstacle to go to college and work. Students didn't just build their confidence on the ropes courses, though. Teambuilding Olympics, Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu and yoga were just some of the other activities that helped them realize their potential, as well as develop leadership qualities and teambuilding strategies.

Thank you to the following partners at Penn State Harrisburg for believing in the potential of students with disabilities: Library staff, Housing & Food Services, Continuing Education, the Office of Disability Services, Campus Police, Admissions, Career Services and all the PSU professors who allowed our students to audit their classes.



# June 2017

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# STEM Weekend at Summer Academy



Research has demonstrated that only 2 percent of individuals with disabilities are currently working in the Science, Technology, Engineering & Math (STEM) fields. Meet Science-U, a weekend experience last year during the Summer Academy for Students who are Blind or Visually Impaired, working to change that statistic.

A collaboration between Penn State Eberly College of Science's Science-U, the Materials Research Science and Engineering Center (MRSEC), and OVR's Bureau of Blindness & Visual Services (BBVS), the STEM weekend offered students at the Summer Academy the opportunity to explore first-hand how careers in the STEM field can be accessible to people with disabilities. Using assistive technology and tactile strategies, these students, many of whom had never fully participated in a science class before, analyzed evidence in a lab, testing for blood, deciphering torn notes, and examining soil and fabric to solve a mock crime at Spruce Cottage. At the end of the day, this experience, according to Student Engagement Network Director Mike Zeman, aimed to "promote accessibility in STEM career pathways" and help the students "start to think about science and the opportunities they have to have access to science and science education at the college level." Thank you to our partners at Science-U and MRSEC for collaborating to create opportunities, stretch imaginations and raise expectations regarding the potential of students with disabilities! Next year, Summer Academy will include a week-long STEM experience, giving students the opportunity to explore additional STEM fields, including fuel chemistry and electricity generation.



Photos of students during STEM weekend, courtesy of Penn State Science Outreach



The Summer Academy for Students who are Blind or Visually Impaired is a three-week program designed to prepare students for success in college and employment. The program takes place at Penn State University, University Park, and is offered by OVR/BBVS, in partnership with the Pennsylvania Department of Education, Bureau of Special Education's Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network and Penn State University. The Academy's courses are designed to build students' social, daily living, independent travel, self-advocacy, networking and assistive technology skills, while also assisting them with developing a career path. It is available at no cost to eligible students enrolled in grades 9 through 12.



# July 2017

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# NEPA CIL & OVR: Together Independence & Employment are Possible



Above: Maria training on the driving simulator  
Below: Maria learning cooking skills in the industrial kitchen



*"This place has definitely taught me to have a little more responsibility... and also to have good skills on the job because that's what this place is here for. This place is here to build up that momentum: to be able to drive, get a job, pay your bills"*

*– Maria, current Transition Skills Center student.*

With over 300 students served in 15 school districts across four counties, Wilkes-Barre Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (BVRs), led by District Administrator Heather Nelson, and the Northeast Pennsylvania Center for Independent Living (NEPA CIL), led by Executive Director Tim Moran, are demonstrating that collaboration works to better the lives of individuals with disabilities in Northeast Pennsylvania. Since the summer of 2016, NEPA CIL has been one of Wilkes-Barre BVRs' most prominent partners in providing group services to students and youth with disabilities. Joe Ross, Director of Independent Living at NEPA CIL, and Mike Williams, Outreach Coordinator at NEPA CIL, created a Work Readiness curriculum and have been teaching this curriculum across Lackawanna, Luzerne and Susquehanna counties. NEPA CIL also recently built a state-of-the-art Transitional Skills Center that provides pre-vocational training for high school and college-age individuals, empowering them to go to work and live independently in their communities. This positive and supportive environment, complete with a driving simulator, counseling session rooms, wellness/recreation spaces, a sensory room and an apartment setting with a kitchen, living room, dining room, bedroom and laundry room, gives students the opportunity to learn the necessary life skills they need to live independently and complete daily tasks such as laundry, cooking, driving and paying bills.

The Transitional Skills Center is also the location of a new culinary program made possible by the partnership of OVR, NEPA CIL, Lackawanna College and local school districts. This program is designed to help students prepare for a career in the culinary arts through education in industry standards for food safety and sanitation and training geared towards developing the skills required for entry level positions in the commercial culinary industry. A Work-Based Learning Experience for each individual is anticipated at the conclusion of this program.



# August 2017

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# Ben Parto's Story

Meet Ben Parto, a farmer who raises cattle and boards horses for a living at Saddle Creek Farm. Ben also happens to have multiple sclerosis, and some of the challenges he faced as his condition progressed included maneuvering around his farm in his wheelchair so he could check on the cattle, operating a tractor so he could bale hay, and driving a truck with a hitch for a trailer so he could transport cattle and hay. When Ben's independence decreased and his job was in jeopardy, AgrAbility for Pennsylvanians referred him to the Reading Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (BVRV) to assist him in maintaining his livelihood of farming.

AgrAbility is a technical assistance project, made possible by the collaboration of the Penn State Extension and UCP Central PA and funded through the U.S. Department of Agriculture - National Institute of Food and Agriculture. It is designed to assist farmers and other agricultural workers with disabilities or long-term health conditions by providing the resources and support they need to live independently and continue in production agriculture. OVR partnered with AgrAbility to determine what assistive technology and modifications would increase Ben's independence and allow him to continue farming. As a result of multiple evaluations, OVR was able to assist in purchasing Ben an Action

Track Chair that allows him to safely and efficiently maneuver his farm and take care of the horses and cattle. A lift and hand controls were purchased to give Ben the ability to access his tractor and drive it. OVR also worked closely with a vehicle modification provider and Good Shepherd Rehabilitation Hospital to successfully modify Ben's 2015 Chevrolet Silverado 3500, allowing him to attach a trailer to the hitch of his truck and transport cattle and hay.



Left: Ben using his Action Track Chair



Ben Parto

*"I was always the type of person that would never ask for help. And, when I got to the point when I could no longer do that, it was very frustrating..."*

*"With OVR's help, I'm able to at least be productive in a sense that I feel like I have some self-worth"*

*- Ben Parto.*



# September 2017

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# National Disability Employment Awareness Month



Top: A student practicing her interviewing skills during Disability Mentoring Day Below: Pam Miller, Banquet Culinarian for Omni William Penn Hotel, at the Expo



October 2016 was National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM), and, in celebration of the theme #InclusionWorks, OVR District Offices hosted events across the state, assisting individuals with disabilities in maximizing their resources, skills and abilities for success in post-secondary education, employment and life, while also continuing to raise awareness for the need to increase employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities.

## Disability Mentoring Days

Deloitte, Point Park University and the PA Department of Labor & Industry (L&I) were just a few of the employers who partnered with OVR last October for Disability Mentoring Days. At Deloitte, in partnership with the York and Harrisburg Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (BVRs), students learned about careers in IT, attended workshops on interviewing strategies/techniques and resume writing, and practiced what they learned in mock interviews. Olympic gold medalist and world champion sled hockey player Dan McCoy spoke to 40 high school students about his experience transitioning from high school to college at Point Park University's Mentoring Day, co-hosted by Pittsburgh BVRs. Self-advocacy, skill development and effective strategies for requesting accommodations in college were other topics in sessions throughout the day. At L&I and the Bureau of Blindness & Visual Services (BBVS) Central Office Mentoring Days, students learned about careers in state government and about assistive technology available to enable people with disabilities to achieve and maintain employment.

## Vision for Work Expo

Pittsburgh BBVS hosted the Vision for Work Expo last October to stretch imaginations and raise expectations that students, teachers, parents and employers have regarding the potential of people who are blind or visually impaired. Throughout the day, attendees had the opportunity to network with successful individuals who happen to be blind or visually impaired, including Ken Silberman, NASA Engineer; Pam Miller, Banquet Culinarian for Omni William Penn Hotel; and Brett Humphrey, Program Manager at Microsoft.



# October 2017

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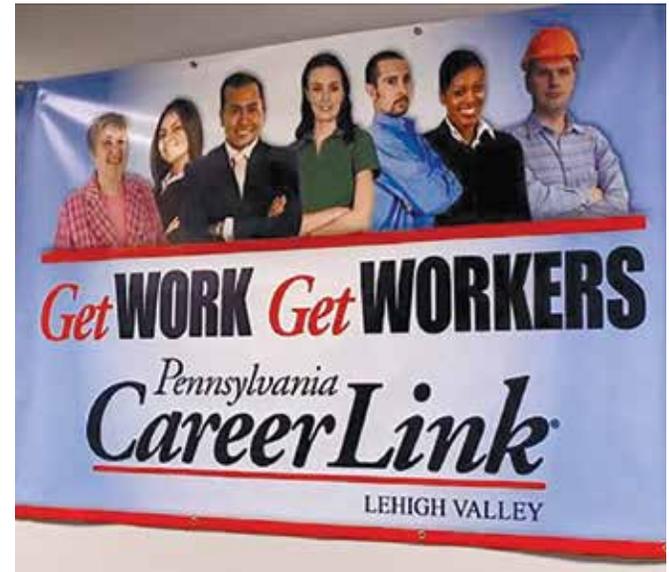
# PA CareerLink® Lehigh Valley & Allentown BVRs: Together We are Stronger!

What has made the collaboration between the Allentown Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (BVRs) and the PA CareerLink® Lehigh Valley so successful? Customer-oriented service, communication and coordination that focuses on both meeting the needs of employers in the Lehigh Valley and facilitating access to employment opportunities for people of all abilities. Because of the great partnership that exists between BVRs and CareerLink®, Allentown OVR customers are educated about and have access to, among other services, the CareerLink®'s job skills workshops, the Job Gateway system and job fairs. Similarly, CareerLink® connects job seekers with disabilities to OVR services that can help them obtain and maintain employment and independence.

To help employers find the talent they need, the Allentown BVRs Business Services team meets with CareerLink® staff on a monthly basis, reviewing job leads, employer updates, hiring events and labor market information. Because of this collaboration, when businesses come to the CareerLink® for their hiring needs, they have access to the most untapped talent pool for them to consider: job seekers with disabilities. In addition, BVRs participates in the quarterly industry partnership meetings with the CareerLink®, engaging employers in targeted industries and educating them about OVR and the no-cost services we provide to businesses.

Allentown BVRs and PA CareerLink® of Lehigh Valley also partner to improve services to veterans in the Lehigh Valley. OVR's veteran's counselor and the veteran's representative from CareerLink® have forged a great working relationship with a number of mutual clients in services and referrals for additional resources, and they frequently collaborate on outreach and presentations to the community.

OVR is proud to be one of the partners in the PA CareerLink® of Lehigh Valley's one-stop service delivery system that enables job seekers who enter the CareerLink® to have access to all the tools, resources and services they need to enter the workforce, while also creating a pipeline of talent for the over 15K employers in the Lehigh Valley.



Stephen Marth, PA CareerLink® customer



# November 2017

SUNDAY

MONDAY

TUESDAY

WEDNESDAY

THURSDAY

FRIDAY

SATURDAY

			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11 <b>Veterans Day</b>
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23 <b>Thanksgiving</b>	24	25
26	27	28	29	30		

# Experience the Employment Connection: Leveraging Resources, Strengthening Partnerships, Creating Opportunities

## State Agencies Come Together to Improve Services for People with Disabilities

*"I am going to be a bridge instead of a barrier"*

*- a participant expressing how the trainings helped them change their perspective.*

In 2016, the Department of Labor & Industry's Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) partnered with the Department of Human Services' Office of Developmental Programs (ODP), including the Bureau of Autism Services, and the Department of Education's Bureau of Special Education (BSE) to deliver 15 statewide trainings that helped participants develop a new and positive perspective on the power and potential of interagency collaboration to assist people with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities in gaining competitive, integrated employment.

**Experience the Employment Connection: Possibilities in Action** were full-day trainings attended by over 1,600 professionals from OVR, BSE, ODP, and key advocacy and provider partners. At the trainings, which Suasion, LLC helped to coordinate, OVR Training Director Sara Gales and her team guided participants through group discussions and dynamic presentations that helped them to realize both the importance of collaborating to enhance service delivery and the common mission our agencies share: employment and independence for the people we serve.

### Training Takeaways:

"I made a number of new, meaningful connections with those I can work with in the future." - **629 attendees** indicated they now have a contact list they will use to collaborate with those in other agencies.

"I realized there are numerous opportunities for collaboration." - **596 attendees** indicated they will use the contacts and knowledge gained from this training to collaborate more with other agencies.

"I loved learning about other agencies and their resources." - **393 attendees** indicated they are better equipped to collaborate with other agencies since they have a better understanding of the resources available.

"I experienced a feeling that 'we're all in this together.'" - **244 attendees** indicated that the most impactful moment of trainings were the collective sentiment of teamwork, positivity, opportunities for collaboration and the feeling of 'we're all in this together'.



Above: Sara Gales presenting at EEC  
Below: David De Notaris speaking to participants at EEC



# December 2017

SUNDAY

MONDAY

TUESDAY

WEDNESDAY

THURSDAY

FRIDAY

SATURDAY

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3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
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24	25 Christmas	26	27	28	29	30
31						

# PA Disability Employment and Empowerment Summit



Above: Mary Hartley and David De Notaris at PADES Right: 3D printed objects from the Fab Lab

This past year, the Governor's Cabinet for People with Disabilities, the PA Department of Human Services and the PA Department of Labor & Industry, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation brought together employers, government agencies, service providers, advocates and people with disabilities at the PA Disability Employment and Empowerment Summit (PADES) to discuss opportunities, successful models of collaboration that have created employment opportunities for people with disabilities in Pennsylvania, advancements in adaptive technology, suggestions for system improvements and the importance of employment for people of all abilities. Sessions covered topics such as job demands and talent needs, preparing students for STEM careers, pre-employment transition services and Employment First, to name a few. Attendees at the conference had the privileged to hear from advocates, like #IWantToWork on the topic of Education and Advocacy for an Employment First State, and from leaders in state government who are champions of employment for people with disabilities, including Pennsylvania Secretary of Labor & Industry Kathy Manderino, Executive Director of the Governor's Cabinet and Advisory Committee for People with Disabilities Devon Grant and former Pennsylvania Senator Sean Wiley. Highlights from the two-day conference in Erie, Pa. included an interactive and engaging presentation by Josh Davies, the Center for Work Ethic Development CEO, on the signs of work habits in youth: building work ethic. He defined work ethic as a series of behaviors that can be taught and demonstrated the need for a better definition of work ethic for the next generation entering the workforce. Carnegie Mellon Science Center's Mobile Fab Lab was another highlight at the conference. Using 3D printers, laser and vinyl cutters, a ShopBot and more, the mobile lab gave participants the opportunity to experience the 3D printing revolution! For job seekers with disabilities, the Monday afternoon job fair was a resounding success. Over 40 employers participated, including Starbucks, the Department of Veteran Affairs, local PA CareerLinks®, Lowe's, PA State Police, Job Corps, Aetna, Erie Insurance and Allegheny Health Network. Hear Devon Grant talk about collaboration in the QR code on the right.



# January 2018

SUNDAY

MONDAY

TUESDAY

WEDNESDAY

THURSDAY

FRIDAY

SATURDAY

	1 New Year's Day	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15 Martin Luther King Jr. Day	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

# Dance Happy - Julia Tyler's Story

Meet Julia Tyler: a sales associate at Compendium Boutique, Lead Designer/Co-Owner of the Brand Dance Happy and a recent high school graduate who happens to have Down syndrome and an intellectual disability. Julia's journey to employment began in her last year at Strath Haven High School. Because Wallingford-Swarthmore School District staff are possibility thinkers, they authorized an extended school year for Julia. OVR was then able to assist her in accessing a Work-Based Learning Experience (WBLE) at Compendium Boutique in Swarthmore, PA. A WBLE is a temporary, paid work experience, which may include in-school or after-school employment



Above: Emily and Julia; Right: Liv, Julia and Emily

or employment outside the traditional school setting (including internships), that takes place in an integrated setting in the community. Not only do WBLEs help students with disabilities build their resumes, but they can also potentially turn into permanent employment opportunities. The Norristown Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (BVRS) partnered with Community Integrated Services (CIS), a job search and support agency, and Compendium to make Julia's WBLE happen. At Compendium, Julia unloaded inventory, prepared it to be sold in the store and also assisted with greeting customers. She was so successful at her job that, at the end of the WBLE, she was offered a position to continue working at the Boutique! After Julia's 90 days of successful employment, the Office of Developmental Programs joined the partnership to provide continued job coaching and follow along support services for Julia.



Because Julia connected so well with her employer, Emily, and job coach, Liv, the three of them began Dance Happy, a design brand that offers handmade bags, totes, table runners and other unique screen printed items that are sold at Compendium. Julia uses her creativity to design patterns, choose colors and assist with transferring patterns to screen print. At Dance Happy Design, Julia, Emily and Liv believe that everyone deserves the opportunity to have a fulfilling life. While strengths and abilities may vary, the founders believe that each person is capable of forging a meaningful, satisfying career. Congrats Julia!



# February 2018

SUNDAY

MONDAY

TUESDAY

WEDNESDAY

THURSDAY

FRIDAY

SATURDAY

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11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19 <b>President's Day</b>	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28			

# #AccessEqualsSuccess

"I believe Access Equals Success. When we help students with disabilities access the same information as their classmates, neighbors and peers, they can get the same education, training opportunities and jobs.

Growing up, my parents, teachers and coaches believed in me and gave me the chance to work hard and succeed. Did you know that students with disabilities who have summer, weekend or evening jobs are 2 ½ times more likely to be successful and find work after high school than those who don't?

Today, after a lot of hard work and dedication and because my family, teachers and coaches gave me a chance, I have a great job and am a leader in my community. How about your group, company or organization give a student who happens to have a disability a chance with a summer, weekend or evening job?"

- Connor Barwin, former Defensive End for the Philadelphia Eagles and current Linebacker for the LA Rams who also happens to have a disability, hearing loss, in our #AccessEqualsSuccess campaign video!



Connor Barwin

Watch the full clip via the QR code below and join the conversation on social media using #AccessEqualsSuccess to share thoughts, ideas and success stories re: helping individuals with disabilities access the same information, resources and opportunities for training, education and employment as their peers!



# March 2018

SUNDAY

MONDAY

TUESDAY

WEDNESDAY

THURSDAY

FRIDAY

SATURDAY

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# Fenner Drives



The York Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (BVRs), Fenner Drives, Manheim Central School District, PeopleShare and Lancaster-Lebanon IU13 collaborate to help students with disabilities access real-life, paid work-based learning experiences!

The partnership with Fenner Drives is designed to give high school students who are 18 years or older the opportunity to work competitively in the local community. Lasting approximately five months, with the students working two days per week from 9 a.m. – noon, the work experience is integrated into the students' curriculum and schedule at school. Because of this work-based learning experience, students are able to apply what they learn in the classroom at their job in the community, and their experience becomes part of their grade at the end of the year. Throughout the work experience, students complete basic, light industrial manufacturing tasks; increase their interpersonal skills to better prepare them for future competitive, integrated employment; build their confidence and self-esteem; and develop relationships with co-workers and supervisors in a real work setting. Students are matched with a current Fenner Drives employee while on the job and a job coach is also onsite to assist as needed. From manufacturing to marketing, the students learn the Fenner Drives operation and gain hands-on experience at a real job, preparing them to enter the workforce after graduation.



Combining on-the-job training with job coaching, this partnership simultaneously meets the business needs of Fenner Drives, who had vacancies in the manufacturing department, and enables students with disabilities to access a paid work experience in the community. Students were hired as employees of PeopleShare, Inc., an employment agency, and OVR utilized Youth On-the-Job Training funds to reimburse 90 percent of the paid wages during the five months. OVR also assisted with purchasing steel-toed shoes for the students and provided disability etiquette/awareness training to Fenner Drives staff.

Above left and right: Students working at Fenner Drives  
Left: A student preparing for his job interview at Fenner Drives



# April 2018

SUNDAY

MONDAY

TUESDAY

WEDNESDAY

THURSDAY

FRIDAY

SATURDAY

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# Ryan Wasko's Story

Ryan Wasko is a student at Graham Academy; an active volunteer at his local fire department; a member of a local children's theatre group; and an individual with Down syndrome, autism and a physical impairment, who, last year, went to work! Because of the collaboration of the Wilkes-Barre Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (BVRs), the Office of Developmental Programs (ODP) and Fire & Ice restaurant, Ryan is participating in a Work-Based Learning Experience (WBLE), earning a paycheck and gaining real-life work experience.

Ryan's journey to employment began with his mother, Barbara, asking Fire & Ice to give her son a chance: a chance to work, learn job skills and use his abilities to help out at the restaurant. Gary Edwards, Executive Chef/Co-Owner of Fire & Ice, agreed, and BVRs Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Stephanie Lynch and her Supervisor, Kristen Leary, set up the WBLE through the chosen provider Step-by-Step. A WBLE is a temporary, paid work experience, which may include in-school or after-school employment or employment outside the traditional school setting (including internships), that takes place in an integrated setting in the community. Not only do WBLEs help students with disabilities build their resumes, but they can also potentially turn into permanent employment opportunities. Ryan is connected with his local ODP office, Luzerne-Wyoming Mental Health/Developmental Services, for support coordination services throughout his WBLE.



Ryan Wasko

Ryan currently works at Fire & Ice on Toby Creek in Shavertown, PA every Friday, 10 a.m. – noon, setting up tables, wrapping silverware, cleaning the menus and completing minor outdoor maintenance, like clearing the sidewalks with the leaf blower. Gary Edwards has been extremely impressed with Ryan, who has "become part of the family" and has recently discussed increasing some of his responsibilities, to possibly include basic kitchen assistance/food prep.



Gary Edwards and Ryan

When Ryan first started work, his mother told OVR that she only thought about the positive outcomes for him: gaining work experience, earning money, etc. She has been surprised to see the affect Ryan has had on those he works with and believes that, because he is working, he is opening up doors for others, demonstrating the potential of people with disabilities!

*"I'm glad that OVR has given Ryan the opportunity to become part of our team. I think we've become a better business by having him here"*

*– Gary Edwards, Executive Chef/  
Co-Owner of Fire & Ice Restaurant.*



# SAP & OVR: Collaboration at Work



Top left and bottom left:  
Students presenting their  
empathic design projects  
Right: SAP Autism at  
Work Enterprise  
Readiness Training  
Program graduation



Understand the need, imagine solutions and implement design! This was the theme of the empathic design projects last summer for the SAP Autism at Work Enterprise Readiness Training Program, where 10 university students and four graduates completed a six-week paid summer apprenticeship. Their on-the-job training involved using their skills in IT, teamwork and innovation to design a better pill bottle that met the specific needs of a customer. Solutions the participants presented at graduation included adding fingerprint authentication to pill bottles to increase security and adding electronic reminders and assistive devices to the bottles for ease of opening.

Throughout this apprenticeship program at SAP's headquarters in Newtown Square, made possible by the collaboration of The Arc of Philadelphia, SAP and OVR, participants, all of whom happen to have autism, learned the skills and strategies they need to be successfully employed at an international corporate enterprise, like SAP. In addition to solving a business problem, the apprenticeship also consisted of lessons in time management, productivity, effective communication, social skill development, the job application process, interviewing and job retention.

SAP's groundbreaking Autism at Work program, launched in May 2013, integrates individuals who happen to have autism into the workforce. With a corporate goal of employing 650 individuals with autism by 2020, SAP is a world leader in diversity. From recreating the interview process to establishing internal mentorships for employees with disabilities, SAP is rethinking and redefining inclusion. Currently, their initiative, which is active in nine countries, includes nearly 120 colleagues with autism, filling over 20 different positions. Hear from some of these employees via the QR code on the right.



# Project SEARCH @ Drexel University

Project SEARCH at Drexel University is a one-year, school-to-work program that is made possible by the partnership of the Philadelphia Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (BVRs), the A.J. Drexel Autism Institute, Community Integrated Services, Philadelphia's Department of Behavioral Health and Intellectual Disability Services, Drexel University and the School District of Philadelphia. The program, that takes place entirely on Drexel University's campus, provides students who happen to have autism and/or developmental disabilities with classroom instruction, career exploration and relevant job skill training with the goal of preparing these students to go to work! Students spend one hour daily in the classroom receiving employability and functional skills training as they learn effective communication, teamwork, interviewing and resume writing techniques, and critical thinking strategies. For the remainder of the day, students complete internships on campus at eight different sites, including the Barnes and Nobles bookstore, Drexel's Dragon Card office and Drexel's Student Center. Throughout the internship, job coaches support the students as they develop marketable and transferable skills that will empower them to access competitive, integrated employment within the community. Project SEARCH at Drexel University serves students who are between the ages of 18 to 21, have an IEP and are enrolled in their last year of high school eligibility.



Far left:  
Students in  
classroom  
training  
at Project  
SEARCH  
Two left:  
Students  
working in  
their  
internships  
at Drexel



# Michael Bastin's Story

Allegheny Garden Supply Hydroponics sells a large range of indoor and outdoor garden supply products, including grow lamps, hydroponic systems, fertilizers and starter kits in New Kensington, PA. How did this successful small business get started? Meet the owner, Michael Bastin, who has years of experience both working in and studying gardening and who also happens to be visually impaired.

When Michael first began losing his vision, he explains it as a very difficult time in his life. He wasn't even able to get out of bed for weeks. Opening his own business gave him hope; work gave him purpose.

Michael was very motivated to start his own hydroponics business. When he approached his Pittsburgh Bureau of Blindness & Visual Services (BBVS) counselor, he had the building purchased, the occupancy permits secured, a license with name registration, insurance for the building, and vendor partnerships established for securing merchandise. Michael and his counselor worked on developing a business plan, and Duquesne Small Business Development Center was available for consultation, assisting with market analysis and data projections for the plan.

Because of the hard work and investments Michael put into his business, in addition to the strategic business plan he developed, Pittsburgh BBVS was able to provide the start-up support he needed to get his business on its feet, helping purchase inventory, including displays, and assisting with advertising the new business in local papers. BBVS also provided Michael with assistive technology, including the KNFB reader for accessing printed text and ZoomText software for enlarging and enhancing displays on his computer screen, enabling him to successfully run his business.

This past October, Michael saw his life come full circle. He participated in the BBVS Vision for Work Expo, mentoring youth and students who are blind or visually impaired, stretching their imaginations and raising their expectations regarding their potential. The message he brought to the participants: Yes, people who are blind or visually impaired can be independent, run their own successful businesses and earn a living!



Top: Michael Bastin showing David De Notaris his hydroponics system at the Vision for Work Expo  
Bottom: Michael's store



# Gabby Barone's Story

Gabby Barone is a freshman at Penn State University, studying communications/journalism; works at the Daily Collegian, writing feature articles and covering woman's volleyball; and also happens to have a visual impairment.

The Altoona Bureau of Blindness & Visual Services (BBVS) has been working with Gabby since 2002. To assist her in her transition from high school to college, Altoona BBVS provided Gabby with rehabilitation teaching to help her gain the skills needed to live independently; assistive technology training to enable her to have equal access to the same information as her classmates; orientation and mobility lessons to assist her in navigating campus; low vision services for her to access print materials; and counseling and guidance support, helping her adjust to college life. Gabby credits using resources like Bookshare and her hard work and determination for her success in college as a student with a disability. One of the ways that she has overcome the challenges she faces is by reading books about individuals who have had similar obstacles in their lives and have come to terms with their disability. One of her favorite books? *Now I See You* by Nicole Kear. When Gabby graduates, she hopes to become an editor or journalist and is currently applying for internships in those fields.

What advice does Gabby have for high school students with disabilities pursuing college? "Check out the resources that your colleges offer...Walk around campus. Make sure you can access everything, get to where you need to go."



Left: BBVS VRC Caitlin Rabold and Gabby  
Right: Gabby working at the Daily Collegian



# Pennsylvania Randolph Sheppard Program

## The Pennsylvania Business Enterprise Program

The vending facility program authorized by the Randolph-Sheppard Act provides persons who are blind with employment and self-support through the operation of vending facilities on federal or state properties. The program, enacted into law in 1936, was intended to enhance employment opportunities for trained, licensed individuals who are blind to operate facilities. The law was subsequently amended in 1954 and again in 1974 to ultimately ensure individuals who are blind a priority in the operation of vending facilities, which include cafeterias, snack bars and automatic vending machines that are on federal property. The program has broadened through the Little Randolph Sheppard Act to include state, county, municipal and private locations as well. Under the Randolph Sheppard program, state licensing agencies recruit, train, license and place individuals who are blind as operators of vending facilities ([www2.ed.gov](http://www2.ed.gov)).

## Tyrone Small

Tyrone Small owns and operates Ty's Snack Bar at the Veterans Affairs facility in Philadelphia. According to Tyrone, who lost his vision at the age of 17, the Bureau of Blindness & Visual Services' Business Enterprise Program (BEP) has given him the opportunity to earn a living, support his family and save for retirement. The assistive technology that he uses, such as the built-in accessibility features on his iPhone, a talking register and a Braille typewriter, has leveled the playing field, empowering him to successfully run his own business independently. With 41 years in the program, Tyrone believes that BEP is one of the best opportunities available for Pennsylvanians who are blind. As for the future? He hopes to mentor new licensees entering the program, educating them about the opportunities in BEP and the potential of people who are blind.

*"OVR has been a big factor in my life... Gave me a chance really to do things I thought I would never ever have the opportunity to do"*  
- Tyrone Small.



Top: Tyrone operating the cash register at his snack bar  
Bottom: Tyrone stocking his vending machines



# Sarah Ferreira's Story



Sarah Ferreira graduated on August 22, 2016 from the Hiram G. Andrews Center (HGAC) Commonwealth Technical Institute's (CTI's) Dental Laboratory Technology Program with an Associate in Specialized Technology degree. By Sept. 6, she was working as a dental lab technician for Thayer Dental Laboratory, Inc. in Mechanicsburg, PA.

Sarah's leadership abilities, dedication and perseverance, combined with her experience at HGAC, has helped her to succeed in life as someone who happens to live with Crohn's Disease. Sarah described her disability as "a big part of my life and it made me struggle with school." According to her, though, being at HGAC, taught her that despite her challenges, "I can still work hard. I have seen that people work hard to accomplish their dreams and they don't let anything bring them down. I'm now working as hard as I can to become me."

While at CTI@HGAC, Sarah had the opportunity to participate in an externship at Somerset Dental Associates, gaining the real life experience she needed to transition to employment. And, last year, she was honored to present at the PA Communities on Transition Conference. It is experiences like these that Sarah attributes to helping build her self-confidence and develop her self-advocacy skills.

Thayer Dental Laboratory also employs another of CTI@HGAC's recent Dental Laboratory Technology Program graduates. Regarding hiring Sarah, her Supervisor Denise DeLuca says that it worked out perfectly, describing Sarah as "enthusiastic, dependable, conscientious, very particular about her work. Which is hard to find, I think, these days, especially in young kids. And, she's so eager to learn."

Congratulations Sarah and thank you Thayer Dental Laboratory for demonstrating that #CollaborationWorks for both businesses and students with disabilities in Pennsylvania!



Above: Sarah at CTI@HGAC

Inset: Sarah at Thayer Dental Laboratory

# Office for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

The Office for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (ODHH) is a key provider of advocacy, information and referral services for Pennsylvanians who are deaf or hard of hearing.

## **ODHH:**

- Serves all Pennsylvanians in all 67 counties
- Operates three offices in Allentown, Harrisburg and Johnstown
- Has no eligibility requirements or fees for services
- Maintains a database of registered sign language interpreters

## **ODHH can assist you by:**

- Answering your questions and providing you with resources regarding hearing aids, sign language laws and technology
- Offering tailored trainings for your organization
- Clarifying laws and providing legal resources regarding accommodations
- Advocating for equal access at appointments, meetings or in school

## **Last year:**

ODHH coordinated a two-day Hearing Loss Expo in Harrisburg where over 90 exhibitors were on-hand to share information about their services for individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing. At the Expo, attendees could participate in hearing screenings, assistive technology demos and educational presentations, among many other activities. OVR's Rehabilitation Counselors for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, in collaboration with ODHH, the Bureau of Special Education and the Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network, facilitated a "Day of Discovery" at the expo for 27 high school students who are deaf, deafblind or hard of hearing. The day was designed to empower, educate and promote self-advocacy for students transitioning from high school to post-secondary education through interactive assignments, including gathering information and resources from exhibitors, interviewing companies and organizations attending and reporting back on what they learned.

## **Contact ODHH at:**

800-233-3008 v/tty (PA only) | 717-783-4912 v/tty | 717-831-1928 videophone |  
odhh@pa.gov | [www.dli.pa.gov/ODHH](http://www.dli.pa.gov/ODHH)

Connect with ODHH on Facebook @PAODHH.

## **The Advisory Council for the Deaf & Hard of Hearing (ACDHH)**

ACDHH was established by Act 1997-37. The Council, which is comprised of 17 members, provides recommendations to public and private agencies, advocates for services and is a resource for information.



RCDs at the Hearing Loss Expo



# What Can PA Businesses Do to Help?

## Partnership Opportunities

### On-the-Job Training (OJT)

OJTs enable OVR customers to enter into employment by creating paid work opportunities with business partners, while, at the same time, assisting the employer in acquiring skilled employees capable of satisfying the specific hiring needs of that business. One benefit of the OJT for employers is that it provides a reimbursement for a percentage of the customer's wages, as they are onboarding a new employee.

### Work-Based Learning Experiences (WBLEs)

A WBLE is a temporary, paid work experience for students with disabilities, which may include in-school or after-school employment or employment outside the traditional school setting (including internships), that takes place in an integrated setting in the community. OVR funds the students' wages, allowing employers to simultaneously meet temporary staffing needs and assist a student with a disability in obtaining a real-life work experience in the community.

### OVR's No-Cost Business Services

OVR offers no-cost business solutions and consultation services to employers in Pennsylvania, including helping employers access the most untapped talent pool for them to consider: people with disabilities.

### Staffing Services

- Pre-screened candidates, who have the appropriate skills, abilities, training and qualifications to perform essential job duties
- Consultation services to help retain current employees
- Accommodation solutions to allow new or current employees to achieve or maintain productive employment

### Accessibility Analysis

- Job analysis and worksite modification consultation
- Reasonable accommodations consultation
- Information about assistive technology and available resources

### Disability Awareness

- Sensitivity and disability etiquette training
- Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) consultation



Top: Julia Tyler and Liv (success story on page 30)  
Bottom: Gary Edwards and Ryan Wasko (success story on page 36)



# Advice from Employers Who Happen to Have a Disability



**James Lee**

"If you're an employer...please consider partnering with the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation. They're very responsive to the needs of employers and it's important that we utilize all the different types of labor that are available to us. Everyone has a wonderful gift to give. It's important that we find those gifts in the hearts of people, not withstanding any disability that people have. I'm proud to work with the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation." – James Lee, President & Founder of Susquehanna Polling & Research/Voter Survey Service, author of the children's book *The Dog Who Lost His Sniffer* and an individual who happens to have a disability, hearing loss, in a message he filmed with OVR. Watch the full clip via the QR code on the right.



**John Elder Robison**

"One of the things I'd say to the voc. rehab community is what you need are community partners...So our students can take part in real world activities and when we teach them, we are teaching them in real work places. I think that it's really important that more people join with educational institutions, voc. rehab groups and other agencies to teach these kind of skills and be mentors and then help young people find their way" – John Elder Robison, owner of J. E. Robison Services, a successful independent automobile repair business; *New York Times* best-selling author and an advocate who happens to have autism, in an interview with OVR. Listen to the full interview via the QR code on the right.



# #ILoveMyJobPA

## How you can become a part of our success stories:

It is because of our talented and dedicated team of professionals across the commonwealth that we are able to assist residents of Pennsylvania who have disabilities in finding employment and independence. These professionals include:

- Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Interns
- Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors
- Rehabilitation Counselors for Deaf & Hard of Hearing Interns
- Rehabilitation Counselors for the Deaf & Hard of Hearing
- Orientation & Mobility Specialist Interns
- Orientation & Mobility Specialists
- Vision Rehabilitation Therapist Interns
- Vision Rehabilitation Therapists



Hattie  
McCarter

OVR recruits from geographically-diverse states and universities across the country to attract professionals to Pennsylvania. Our employees have opportunities to grow personally and professionally through numerous trainings and outlets for development to ensure that they are continually strengthening their skill set and developing as individuals and professionals. Our employees also enjoy competitive pay and excellent benefits, along with a positive work environment built on mutual respect and professionalism. OVR is a recognized leader in the field of Vocational Rehabilitation nationally and is known as a VR agency that is forward-thinking, creative and committed to continuing to improve the quality of life for the individuals we serve. At OVR, we know that it is in our diversity that we are strong, and as a lead agency on inclusion and employment for people with disabilities, we have a great appreciation and respect for the variety of backgrounds and characteristics that make our staff unique and, in turn, our agency successful.

## **SMART (Social Media Alternative Recruitment Tool) Campaign: #ILoveMyJobPA**

The SMART Campaign was established in 2016 to illustrate the diversity, visibility and success of our VR professionals, as well as share the exciting employment opportunities that are available at OVR. As part of this campaign, several of our staff have taken the time to share, in short video clips, their journey: how they started their career in vocational rehabilitation, their employment experience with OVR and how they are making a positive difference helping customers reach their academic, independent living and employment goals!

For further information on our employment opportunities, please contact:

Hattie McCarter, OVR Recruitment Specialist

Office: 717-787-2521

Email: hmccarter@pa.gov



# Connect with OVR on Social Media!



Above: David De Notaris and Governor Tom Wolf  
Below: Charlie Cox, Gerald Kitzhoffer and Joe Strechay



## OVR's Top 2016 Posts

1. Connor Barwin films a message for OVR on #AccessEqualsSuccess.  
**Post reach: 45,275**
2. In February, Governor Wolf announced \$1.2 million in Transition Service contracts to help prepare students with disabilities for successful transition to employment after graduation.  
**Post reach: 7,824**
3. Governor Wolf and David De Notaris speak about #AccessEqualsSuccess in one of OVR's 2015 annual report videos.  
**Post reach: 7,475**
4. "Successequalspreparationplusopportunity" – actor Charlie Cox, sharing a teacher's advice to him while speaking with Bureau of Blindness & Visual Services Director Joe Strechay and Overbrook CEO Gerald Kitzhoffer to Overbrook School for the Blind students in February.  
**Post reach: 6,534**
5. "Summer Academy has proved and solidified in my mind that I can be an independent person in anything I put my mind to" – a student speech excerpt from the Summer Academy graduation post.  
**Post reach: 5,481**



@PAVocRehab



@PA\_OVR



PA OVR



# PA Makes the News for the Most People with Disabilities Entering the Workforce in 2016

"Pennsylvania, where jobs for people with disabilities is a key part of the state's workforce development strategies, had 13,187 disabled individuals enter the workforce in the last year— the largest of any state in the nation." Grace Donnelly, *See How Your State Ranks In Employment Among Workers with Disabilities*, Fortune.com (Feb. 27, 2017), <http://fortune.com/2017/02/28/disability-employment-rank>.

OVR is grateful for the opportunity and so proud to be a part of the success of Pennsylvania, as our state continues to be a national leader in employment of people with disabilities. Thank you to our leaders in state government, Governor Wolf and L&I Secretary Kathy Manderino, for making employment of individuals with disabilities a priority in Pennsylvania! Thank you to our staff, who are possibility thinkers, who help our customers achieve their independent living and employment goals. Thank you to our customers for working hard, believing in themselves and doing their best. And, thank you to the employers of Pennsylvania who have hired individuals with disabilities and who have realized that people with disabilities are the most untapped talent resource pool for them to consider.



# OVR Directors

## Central Operations



**Ryan Hyde**  
Director

OVR's Central Operations in Harrisburg coordinates the policies, funding and resources that make it possible to simultaneously serve both Pennsylvanians with disabilities, helping them lead productive, independent lives, and the employers of Pennsylvania, helping them meet their workforce needs.

For more information, please contact us at 717-787-5244 or [ovrco@pa.gov](mailto:ovrco@pa.gov).



## Vocational Rehabilitation Services



**Denise Verchimak**  
Director

We provide services to help individuals with disabilities achieve their employment and/or independent living goals. Individual personalized services include job counseling and placement, assessment services, job training, entrepreneurial assistance and referral services.

For more information, contact us at 717-787-5244 or [bvrs@pa.gov](mailto:bvrs@pa.gov).



## Hiram G. Andrews Center



**Jill Moriconi**  
Director

Established in 1959, HGAC is one of the world's first and largest comprehensive rehabilitation facilities. HGAC offers a wealth of individualized services, including counseling, evaluation, physical restoration and on-site education at the Commonwealth Technical Institute (CTI).

For more information, please contact us at 814-255-8200 or [hgac@pa.gov](mailto:hgac@pa.gov).



## Blindness & Visual Services



**Joe Strechay**  
Director

We help Pennsylvanians who are blind or visually impaired gain the skills they need to live and work independently in their communities. Services include job placement, orientation and mobility training, rehabilitation teaching and independent living skills training.

For more information, contact us at 717-787-5244 or [bbvs@pa.gov](mailto:bbvs@pa.gov).



# The Client Assistance Program

- The Pennsylvania Client Assistance Program (CAP) is dedicated to ensuring that the rehabilitation system in Pennsylvania is open and responsive to the needs of Pennsylvanians.
- CAP is an advocacy program for people with disabilities administered by the Center for Disability Law & Policy.
- CAP helps people who are seeking services from the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR), Centers for Independent Living and other programs funded under federal law.
- CAP assistance is provided at no charge, regardless of income.

## #CollaborationWorks

Last August, CAP Executive Director Steve Pennington and his staff met with OVR executive staff and Labor & Industry Deputy Chief Counsel Cathy Lantzy in Philadelphia to discuss opportunities for OVR and CAP to continue to improve services for individuals with disabilities in Pennsylvania under the Workforce Innovation & Opportunity Act.

## Contact CAP

1515 Market Street  
Suite 1300  
Philadelphia, PA 19102  
Toll Free: 888-745-2357  
Voice/TTY: 215-557-7112

## Staff

Executive Director: Stephen S. Pennington, Esq.  
Senior Advocate: Margaret Passio-McKenna  
Case Manager/Advocate: Lannette D. Suarez  
Advocate: Julia Blackwell  
Office Manager: Francella Porter



CAP and OVR staff during the August collaboration meeting



# Contact the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation

<p><b>OVR Central Office</b> 1521 N. 6th Street Harrisburg, PA 17102 Local Voice: 717-787-5244 Toll-free Voice: 800-442-6351</p>	<p><b>Allentown</b> 45 N. Fourth Street Allentown, PA 18102 Local Voice: 610-821-6441 Toll-free Voice: 800-922-9536</p>	<p><b>Altoona BVRS</b> 1130 12th Ave., Suite 500 Altoona, PA 16601 Local Voice: 814-946-7240 Toll-free Voice: 800-442-6343</p>	<p><b>Altoona BBVS</b> 1130 12th Ave., Suite 300 Altoona, PA 16601 Local Voice: 814-946-7330 Toll-free Voice: 866-695-7673</p>
<p><b>DuBois</b> 199 Beaver Drive Dubois, PA 15801 Local Voice: 814-371-7340 Toll-free Voice: 800-922-4017</p>	<p><b>Erie BVRS</b> 3200 Lovell Place Erie, PA 16503 Local Voice: 814-871-4551 Toll-free Voice: 800-541-0721</p>	<p><b>Erie BBVS</b> 4200 Lovell Place Erie, PA 16503 Local Voice: 814-871-4401 Toll-free Voice: 866-521-5073</p>	<p><b>Harrisburg BVRS</b> Forum Place 555 Walnut Street, 8th Floor Harrisburg PA 17101 Local Voice: 717-787-7834 Toll-free Voice: 800-442-6352</p>
<p><b>Harrisburg BBVS</b> Forum Place 555 Walnut Street, 8th Floor Harrisburg PA 17101 Local Voice: 717-787-7500 Toll-free Voice: 866-375-8264</p>	<p><b>Johnstown</b> 727 Goucher Street Section 10 Johnstown, PA 15905 Local Voice: 814-255-6771 Toll-free Voice: 800-762-4223</p>	<p><b>New Castle</b> 100 Margaret Street New Castle, PA 16101 Local Voice: 724-656-3070 Toll-free Voice: 800-442-6379</p>	<p><b>Norristown</b> 1875 New Hope Street Norristown, PA 19401 Local Voice: 484-250-4340 Toll-free Voice: 800-221-1042</p>
<p><b>Philadelphia BVRS</b> 444 N. 3rd Street, 5th Floor Philadelphia, PA 19123 Local Voice: 215-560-1900 Toll-free Voice: 800-442-6381</p>	<p><b>Philadelphia BBVS</b> 444 N. 3rd Street, 5th Floor Philadelphia, PA 19123 Local Voice: 215-560-5700 Toll-free Voice: 866-631-3892</p>	<p><b>Pittsburgh BVRS</b> 531 Penn Avenue Pittsburgh, PA 15222 Local Voice: 412-392-4950 Toll-free Voice: 800-442-6371</p>	<p><b>Pittsburgh BBVS</b> 531 Penn Avenue Pittsburgh, PA 15222 Local Voice: 412-565-5240 Toll-free Voice: 866-412-4072</p>
<p><b>Reading</b> 3602 Kutztown Road, Suite 200 Reading, PA 19605 Local Voice: 610-621-5800 Toll-free Voice: 800-442-0949</p>	<p><b>Washington</b> 201 W. Wheeling Street Washington, PA 15301 Local Voice: 724-223-4430 Toll-free Voice: 800-442-6367</p>	<p><b>Wilkes-Barre BVRS</b> 300 G Laird Street Wilkes-Barre, PA 18702 Local Voice: 570-826-2011 Toll-free Voice: 800-634-2060</p>	<p><b>Wilkes-Barre BBVS</b> 300 G Laird Street Wilkes-Barre, PA 18702 Local Voice: 570-826-2361 Toll-free Voice: 866-227-4163</p>
<p><b>Williamsport</b> The Grit Building, Suite 102 208 W. 3rd Street Williamsport, PA 17701 Local Voice: 570-327-3600 Toll-free Voice: 800-442-6359</p>	<p><b>York</b> 2550 Kingston Road, Suite 101 York, PA 17402 Local Voice: 717-771-4407 Toll-free Voice: 800-762-6306</p>	<p><b>Hiram G. Andrews Center</b> 727 Goucher Street Johnstown, PA 15905 Local Voice: 814-255-8200 Toll-free Voice: 800-762-4211</p>	<p><b>Office for the Deaf &amp; Hard of Hearing</b> 1521 N. 6th Street Harrisburg, PA 17102 Voice/TTY: 717-783-4912 Videophone: 717-831-1928</p>

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## THANK YOU AND QR CODE INFORMATION

OVR's mission has always been to assist Pennsylvanians with disabilities to secure and maintain employment and independence. We would like to thank our stakeholders, partners and staff for helping to keep that mission alive!

Throughout this annual report you will find QR Codes that link to success stories and videos that spotlight a few of OVR's successful customers, proud partnerships and additional resources.

From your mobile device you can download a free QR Code Reader app that can be used to scan our QR Codes.

If you do not have a QR Code Reader app, go to the App Store or Marketplace on your mobile device and search for "QR Code Reader". There are many free options that will allow you to access all of the content that we are proud to share with you!

Once you have a QR Code Reader app installed, use it to scan a QR Code like the one you see above, which links to our Office of Vocational Rehabilitation website!



*Auxiliary aids and services are available upon request to individuals with disabilities.  
Equal opportunity employer/program*