



JB Pritzker, Governor

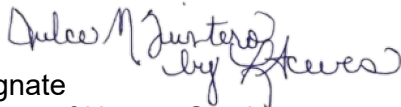
Dulce M. Quintero, Secretary Designate

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DATE: 11/26/2024

MEMORANDUM

TO: The Honorable John F. Curran, Senate Minority Leader
The Honorable Don Harmon, Senate President
The Honorable Tony McCombie, House Minority Leader
The Honorable Emanuel "Chris" Welch, Speaker of the House

FROM: Dulce Quintero 
Secretary Designate
Illinois Department of Human Services

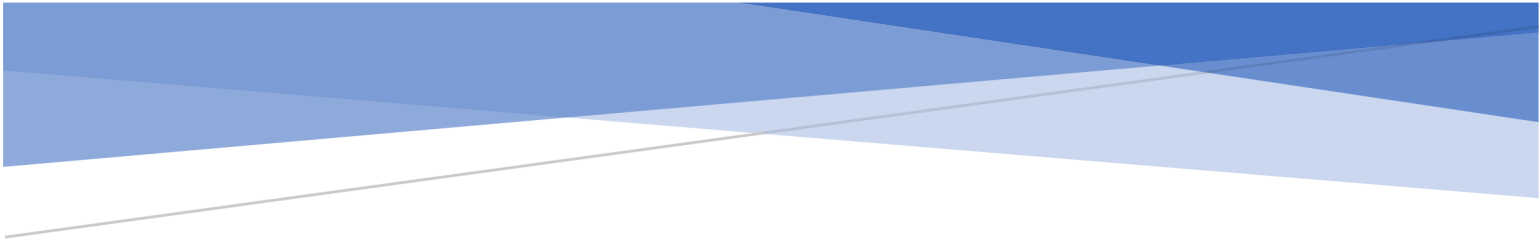
SUBJECT: IDHS-DRS Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities Act Annual Report; IDHS-DRS Bureau for the Blind Act Annual Report; IDHS-DRS State Rehabilitation Council Annual Report

The Illinois Department of Human Services respectfully submits the IDHS Division of Rehabilitation Annual Report 2024 on behalf of the Illinois Department of Human Services-Division of Rehabilitation in order to fulfill the requirements set forth in

1. Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities Public Act 20 ILCS 2405/3.
2. Bureau for the Blind Act 20 ILCS 2410/6.
3. State Rehabilitation Council Annual Report 34 CFR 361.17(h)(5) and 34 CFR 361.29(e).

If you have any questions or comments, please contact Robyn L. Lewis, PhD., DRS Policy Advisor at robyn.lewis@illinois.gov, 217-606-9070.

cc: The Honorable JB Pritzker, Governor
John W. Hollman, Clerk of the House
Tim Anderson, Secretary of the Illinois Senate
Legislative Research Unit
State Government Report Center



2024 Annual Report

Division of Rehabilitation Services

Illinois Department of Human Services



**DIVISION OF
REHABILITATION
SERVICES**

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A Message from the Director of Rehabilitation Services...

On November 21, 2024, Statewide Rehabilitation Council (SRC) member Erin Compton said in her testimony to the Illinois Health and Human Services Senate committee,

“Some people say that having a job isn’t for me because I am not smart enough or good enough to work, but I was given opportunities to work in the community,”

Ben Szalinski of the Capitol News Illinois reported in his article [Bill to Phase Out Subminimum Wage for Workers With Disabilities Clears General Assembly](#).

For many years, Erin has advocated for youth like her, youth with disabilities and people with intellectual disabilities. Erin continues her public service on the SRC, a mandated advisory body to the Division of Rehabilitation Services’ (DRS) vocational rehabilitation services. Her commitment to resolving the disparities in employment for persons with disabilities speaks to the mission of DRS and our commitment to assist people with disabilities in making informed choices to achieve full community participation through employment, education, and independent living.

Last year, DRS committed to **increased equity in employment**. In partnership with the Department of Human Services Secretary Designee Dulce Quintero, my amazing staff, and dedicated community partners, DRS eliminated barriers to employment, closed more service gaps, and worked to balance inequity in pay people with disabilities. Specifically, DRS

- Increased **Customized Employment** contracts by 30%.
- Assisted Illinois citizens with the most significant disabilities served under our **Individual Placement and Support** program in achieving better jobs (22% increase in wages paid over 2023)
- Served **15% more Hispanic, Latino, Latina, LatinX, and/or Latine Illinoisans** with Disabilities.
- Facilitated processes to land the **State of Illinois in the “Top 5 Employers”** of DRS customers.

DRS leaders met with 14c certificate holding organizations who are working toward transforming their business model from paying people with disabilities less than minimum wage.

- DRS **renewed awards to the six (6) Subminimum Wage to Competitive Integrated Employment Demonstration (SWTCIE Illinois) Project agencies**.
- SWTCIE Illinois engaged **more than 75 potentially eligible DRS customers**.
- SWTCIE Illinois **successfully transitioned 34 project participants (48%) from subminimum wage to competitive integrated employment**.

DRS investigated the service gaps in vocational rehabilitation, gauged and responded to the needs of staff by

- Visiting local offices along the Mississippi and in southern Illinois, Chicago and its suburbs.
- Collaborating with state agencies, legislators, and customers to establish a local office in Uptown, Chicago
- Holding an **in-person Director’s Statewide meeting** with more than 1,000 DRS Staff.
- **Filled 258 vacancies** across the DRS, including at the Bureau of Disability Determination Services and Business Enterprise Program for the Blind.

DRS continued to fuel and support its goal to **increase the reach of IDHS-DRS** for adults and the 100,000 youth with disabilities in Illinois. In 2024, DRS

- **Opened all four categories** under the Order of Selection.
- **Served 5% more customers in Vocational Rehabilitation Services**.
- **Increased services to transition age youth with disabilities by 13%**.
- Received a **\$10M Pathways to Partnership DIF grant** to engage transition age youth as young as 10 years old.
- **Finalized an Interagency agreement** with the Illinois State Board of Education

DRS proudly supported the staff and students at the Illinois School for the Visually Impaired to **increase Awareness and Inclusivity**. The student body led a culturally sensitive and inclusive sunset of their Native American headdress mascot and adopted a new logo representative of the school culture and community.

Through leadership and talented local office staff improved critical home services to Illinoisans with disabilities by

- **Allowing** legally responsible individuals, like **spouses, to be customer providers.**
- **Increasing rates for Homemaker services by 4.3% and Adult Day Services by 10%.**
- **Serving 5% more customers within Home and Community Based Supports.**

It's been a joy to hear the good and the need to improve from workers at the Division of Rehabilitation Services who assure people with disabilities achieve independence, education, and employment. DRS continues to partner with people like Erin to make their dreams a reality.

Sincerely,



Rahnee K. Patrick, Director
IDHS Division of Rehabilitation Services

[A Look into the Future](#)

IDHS-DRS made great strides in 2024 and we look forward to providing excellent supports and services to Illinoisans with disabilities in 2025. The new goals established in the WIOA Unified State Plan will span the course of four years and provide an opportunity for the Division to refocus on our mission and modernize our delivery of services, ensuring all Illinoisans with disabilities have the opportunity for equitable employment opportunities. IDHS-DRS adopted the following long-term goals and will begin our essential work in FY 2025:

GOAL 1: Improve access to DRS and methods of communication with agency stakeholders, especially customers, potential customers, and employers.

1. DRS will develop a system to obtain real-time, direct customer feedback throughout the VR process while supporting a range of communication modality preferences.
2. DRS will develop an accessible communication and outreach plan to educate customers and potential customers on how to access DRS offices and services regardless of their personal barriers such as technology, transportation, mode of communication, disability type, race, gender, language, and justice system involvement, to promote growth in the DRS VR program.
3. DRS will develop a comprehensive model to increase and simplify customer access to services such as offering community or home-based appointments, expanded office hours, and ways to connect virtually.

GOAL 2: Increase collaboration and partnership among workforce partners and employment service providers.

1. DRS will participate in WIOA core partners' work toward equity and access to ensure the needs of the disability community are represented and incorporated into plans and programs.
2. DRS will develop an accessible communication plan to expand and build partnerships, through cooperative agreements, contracts, and/or pilot programs, with employment service providers including community rehabilitation providers, Centers for Independent Living, benefits planners, and other providers who support people with disabilities.
3. DRS will increase co-enrollment of VR customers in other WIOA programs.

GOAL 3: Expand and extend engagement with employers.

1. DRS will expand and extend engagement with employers, including:
 - a. Developing an accessible communication plan to educate employers on vital programs offered by DRS.
 - b. Simplifying and communicating how employers can best access and engage DRS offices and services.
 - c. Educating employers on how to increase quality work opportunities for disabled persons through innovative programs, such as “Earn while you learn” opportunities, apprenticeships, paid work-based learning opportunities, and on the job training experiences.

GOAL 4: Address statewide transportation deficits.

1. DRS will work with other State agencies and disability-related organizations to address transportation deficits throughout the state by
 - a. Assess the transportation needs of persons with disabilities.
 - b. Formulate strategies to mitigate transportation barriers for customers seeking employment,
 - i. engaging employers on or near transit routes or paratransit routes,
 - ii. offer incentives to rural transportation providers,
 - iii. collaborate with other providers to offer transit training, and
 - iv. address staffing shortages within DRS certified orientation and mobility staff and Regional Coordinators of the Deaf.

GOAL 5: Develop collaborative partnerships to augment programs for transition age youth and adult workers (> 25).

1. DRS will develop and augment programs to support adult workers (>25) with disabilities in job retention and placement services.
2. DRS will develop collaborative partnerships between VR, State and local educational agencies, and centers for independent living to help individuals with disabilities seamlessly transition to life after high school, preparing them for independent living, competitive integrated employment, and community integration.
 - a. DRS, working in partnership with the ISBE and local education authorities, will ensure that 100,000 students with disabilities engage in Pre-ETS during their time in school.
3. DRS will establish a process for the transfer of individuals completing supported employment through DRS to receive support under the DDD waiver program.

GOAL 6: Upgrade programs and policies to facilitate competitive integrated employment, including self-employment.

1. DRS will upgrade programs and policy to increase Self-employment opportunities for customers.
2. DRS will promote alternative business models for 14(c) certificate holders to reduce Subminimum Wage work and support Competitive Integrated Employment through the Subminimum Wage to Competitive Integrated Employment (SWTCIE) grant project.
3. DRS will transition minimally 100 individuals per year from 14(c) employment into competitive integrated employment.
4. DRS will achieve and exceed 6,000 competitive employment outcomes annually.
5. DRS will increase earnings at case closure and the second quarter follow-up for individuals closed as competitive employment outcomes.

The new goals established in the WIOA Unified State Plan will span the course of four years and provide an opportunity for the Division to refocus on our mission and modernize our delivery of services, ensuring all Illinoisans with disabilities have the opportunity for equitable employment opportunities. Together our efforts will allow all of us at IDHS to work toward equity, dignity, access, and inclusion within all our communities.

Bureau of Customer & Community Services (BCCS)

The Bureau of Customer and Community Services (BCCS), consisting of Field Services and Blind Services, consolidates all the direct field and ancillary support services into one Bureau to provide a holistic approach to the provision of services.

Over 500 field staff working in 45 field offices located throughout the state provide these important services. **DRS staff provided services to over 40,000 customers** in SFY2024 through direct services and contractual partnerships, an increase of 6% over last fiscal year. VR was able to **successfully place 4,228 in competitive, integrated employment** with an **average annual salary of \$26,988 a 10% increase over 2023**. DRS will work to achieve and exceed 6,000 competitive employment outcomes in SFY2025.

Customers Served in 2024

Disability Category	Served	Employment Outcomes	Percent of Outcomes	Percent of Served	Average Hourly Wage	Average Weekly Earnings
Blind-Visually Impaired	1,704	94	2.22%	4.22%	\$20.25	\$651
Deaf and Hard of Hearing	1,617	287	6.79%	4.00%	\$18.92	\$605
Physical Disability	2,145	158	3.74%	5.31%	\$20.76	\$640
Mental Illness	7,397	1,043	24.67%	18.32%	\$16.45	\$460
Intellectual Disability	12,835	1,197	28.32%	31.79%	\$15.68	\$396
Learning Disability	10,035	998	23.61%	24.85%	\$16.35	\$481
Brain Injury	324	38	0.90%	0.80%	\$21.11	\$609
Other Condition	4,240	381	9.01%	10.50%	\$17.95	\$516
VR Total	40,376	4,228			\$16.81	\$519

Top Employers of IDHS-DRS Customers

Industry	Successful Placements
Jewel Osco	185
Wal-Mart	171
McDonald's	99
Goodwill	73
State of Illinois	56
Mariano's	53
Culver's	38
Casey's General Store	35
Amazon	35
Marshall's	29
FedEx	29
UPS	25
Walgreens	24
Dollar General	24
Taco Bell	23

Bureau of Customer & Community Field Services (BCCFS)

The Bureau of Customer and Community Field Services (BCCFS) oversee all Vocational Rehabilitation programs and services. The Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program assists individuals with disabilities in preparing for, obtaining, advancing in, and maintaining quality competitive employment. Our goal is to help our customers find quality employment that pays a living wage and offers a chance for advancement. Services include evaluation, guidance and counseling, education, training, physical and mental restoration, assistive devices, job development, job placement, and post-employment services. The Bureau also provides a wide range of services to individuals with the most significant disabilities to enable them to remain in their homes and live as independently as possible.

FY24 Highlights

- **Successfully placed 4,228 customers in competitive, integrated employment.**
- **Served 40,376** Vocational Rehabilitation customers.
- **Filled 108 field staff vacancies.**
- DRS field office VR staff are actively going into the community to meet with customers, visit employers, work with CRPs, and attend IEPs for youth in area high schools.
- Partnered with the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE), facilitated by the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition at University of North Carolina- Charlotte, to **finalize an interagency agreement** designed to strengthen partnerships between the two agencies and to clearly define roles and responsibilities of each partner **in the provision of transition services to youth with disabilities** throughout the state.
- Circulated The [School-to-Work Transition Guide](#), developed in 2023 in collaboration with the Illinois Center for Transition to Work at the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign, Illinois State Board of Education and local education agencies. The guide provides a **roadmap for** customers, parents/guardians, and others providing **transition services** outlining resources, processes, and roles and responsibilities.
- DRS field staff provided thousands of individuals working in sheltered workshops earning a subminimum wage, with **career counseling and guidance related to obtaining competitive integrated employment** through DRS Vocational Rehabilitation services.
- Continued the \$14M **Subminimum Wage to Competitive Integrated Employment Demonstration (SWTCIE Illinois) Project** funded by U.S. Department of Education — Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA). The pilot year of the project **engaged more than 75 customers** transitioning from or considering subminimum wage employment and **successfully transitioned 34 individuals (48%) to competitive integrated employment.**

BCCFS Vision for 2025

- Increase timeliness of case progression.
- Increase referrals to IDHS-DRS programs, in part, through improvements to our referral process.
- Reduce the number of referrals closed prematurely.
- Provide excellent customer service.
- Increase access to services including face-to-face home and community-based appointments, virtual, and in-office appointments.
- Work with other division bureaus to develop and implement a social media, digital advertising outreach plan.
- Increase engagement with Local Workforce Investment Boards, Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act partners, and the DRS presence and involvement in local OneStop service provision.
- Continue to remove barriers for all customers through the elimination of SSN requirements at time of referral.
- Continue engagement of Williams and Colbert Consent Decree prime mental health agencies.
- Fully execute the MOU with Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) outreaching to more students with disabilities throughout the state of Illinois.
- Expand the Vocational Rehabilitation program by striving to contact up to 100,000 youth with disabilities to share information on DRS services and encourage program enrollment.

Program Services

Competitive Employment

Competitive Integrated Employment is work that is paid at least minimum wage, performed in the community alongside non-disabled workers, and presents opportunities for advancement. Services in support of competitive employment placement generally include:

- Information and Referral
- Counseling and Guidance
- Vocational assessment
- Career development
- Job development and placement
- Job retention and stability
- Job coaching

Customers are provided employment services both directly by vocational rehabilitation counselors and/or through contracted services with community rehabilitation providers. An individual must be stable in a competitive integrated employment placement for a minimum of 90 days before the placement is considered successful.

- FY 24 Customers Closed Successful in Competitive Employment: **4,227**
- Average State Spending per Successful Customer Placement: **\$7,640.42**
- Average Customer Weekly Wages: **\$520**
- Average Customer Yearly Wages: **\$27,016**

Supported Employment

Supported Employment services are ongoing support services needed for individuals with the most significant disabilities to achieve and maintain competitive integrated employment. Services are individualized and customized to be consistent with the individual's unique strengths, abilities, interests, and informed choice. Supported employment are provided on a short-term basis and typically last 24 months after initial job placement; but can be extended as needed.

- FY 24 Customers Closed Successful in Supported Employment: **203**
- Average State Spending per Successful Customer Placement: **\$11,525.79**
- Average Customer Weekly Wages: **\$238**
- Average Customer Yearly Wages: **\$12,361**

Self-Employment

IDHS-DRS can assist customers interested in self-employment. The VR counselor provides counseling and guidance to a customer to explore the possibility of self-employment opportunities consistent with the customer's unique strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, interests and informed choice. The VR counselor assists the customer in connecting with a business mentor to build a business plan. Tools, equipment, supplies and initial stock necessary to begin a specific business may be provided to a customer in order for him or her to obtain a successful employment outcome.

Customized Employment

Customized Employment is competitive integrated employment for an individual with a significant disability that is based on individualized determination of the unique strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, interests, and informed choice. The provision of customized employment takes many months, if not over a year. Discovery with the customer, job development, and then 45 weeks of support on the job, are integral to customer success and the success of the program, yet do not lead to rapid outcomes. Customized Employment is designed to:

- Meet the unmet needs of the employers,
- Match with the skills and interests of the individual,
- Can be carried out through flexible strategies, and
- Services can include job creation, self-employment, and a business within a business.

[Customized Employment for Individuals with Disabilities Act](#) was enacted effective January 1, 2020, and amended May 2024. The amended Act required that IDHS, through its IDHS-DRS:

- Collaborate with the Division of Developmental Disabilities,
- Extend the pilot program for an additional 5-year demonstration project.
- Implementation of CE per best practices outlined by the Workforce Innovation Technical Assistance Center (WINTAC) Essential Elements
- Ensure consistent and standardized service delivery, quality assurance, and reliable support across diverse cases and contexts, ultimately leading to improved outcomes for individuals with disabilities in the job market.
- Realigns the Customized Employment phases and requires a new CE contract framework by July 1, 2025.
- Serve at least 75 individuals in customized employment by July 1, 2027.

IDHS-DRS has **contracted with 18 community providers** statewide to provide Customized Employment services.

- FY 24 Customers Closed Successful in Customized Employment: **74**
- Average State Spending for completion of all phases: **\$11,949**
- Average Customer Weekly Wages: **\$239**
- Average Customer Yearly Wages: **\$12,428**

Individual Placement and Support

IDHS-DRS funds, administers, and provides technical assistance for the **56 Illinois teams** that provide specialized services based on the Individual Placement and Support Model of supported employment (IPS) to thousands of Illinois citizens with most significant disabilities in all parts of the state. IDHS-DRS and Department of Mental Health (DMH) work in partnership to fund and administer an IPS fidelity-based service model that

- Is designed to help people living with behavioral health conditions work at regular jobs of their choosing.
- Places an individual into employment as soon as possible, with less emphasis on the traditional concept of employment “readiness” and more emphasis on the idea that working is therapeutic for many individuals with a serious mental illness and therefore contributes to their recovery.

Average earned wages by customers in the IPS program increased by 22% over 2023.

- FY 24 Customers Closed Successful in Individual Placement and Support: **404**
- Average State Spending per Successful Customer Placement: **\$7,419**
- Average Customer Weekly Wages: **\$475**
- Average Customer Yearly Wages: **\$24,695**

College Training

IDHS-DRS expanded the support of customers pursuing post-secondary education through two-year Associates programs in community colleges, vocational and technical degree or certificate programs, bachelor’s degree awarding colleges and universities, and post-graduate studies. Support services available through programs like these may include tutoring, mentoring, assistance with goal setting, organizational and study skills, structured social gatherings and support groups, counseling services, and possibly occupational or speech therapies.

Training Program	Successful Closures	Average Spending	Average Weekly Wages	Average Yearly Wages
Vocational Training	48	\$10,405	\$700	\$36,400
Community College	552	\$10,997	\$620	\$32,240
University Undergraduate	250	\$32,338	\$786	\$40,872
University Graduate	5	\$49,249	\$1,067	\$55,484

Transition

In FY24 IDHS-DRS **served more than 23,000 students with disabilities, a 13% increase over 2023. Transition age youth served by DRS experienced a 10% average wage increase over those served in 2023.** DRS offers employment age youth with disabilities a continuum of coordinated transition services. Services primarily surround:

- Job Exploration Counseling
- Work-Based Learning Experiences
- Counseling on Post-Secondary Education
- Workplace Readiness Training
- Instruction in Self-Advocacy

In FY 23 a comprehensive [School to Work Transition Guide](#) was drafted for use statewide and widely disseminated in 2024.

- FY 24 Customers Closed Successful in Non-Step Transition Services: **159**
- Average State Spending per Successful Customer Placement: **\$12,761.29**
- Average Customer Weekly Wages: **\$509**
- Average Customer Yearly Wages: **\$26,482**

STEP

Secondary Transitional Experience Program (STEP) is a program of transition services provided through a cooperative agreement of IDHS-DRS and a Local Education Agency, typically high schools. The purpose of this program is to provide pre-employment transition services (PTS) to students with disabilities through contractual arrangements with high schools, school districts, and cooperatives across the state. Local high schools are the largest referral source and are key partners in the coordinated services provided to students. STEP is an assessment and work experience program that helps students with disabilities prepare to transition to employment and community participation during and after high school. Students learn to become productive, self-sufficient adults through a variety of STEP experiences. These experiences assist students in:

- Developing desirable work habits and realistic career goals,
- Opportunities for students to explore career,
- Develop the social and personal skills needed to maintain successful employment, and
- Offer meaningful work experiences in support of the overall goal of achieving competitive integrated employment. Meaningful work experiences can include in-school and work site training options, including internships and apprenticeships.

In FY 2024, IDHS-DRS had contracts with local education entities, many of which are third-party cooperative agreements. Collectively, these arrangements result in provision of pre-employment transition services (PTS) to over 10,000 students each year. As of June 2024, a **total of 19,077 students were enrolled in STEP in 679 schools.**

- FY 24 Customers Closed Successful in STEP Transition Programs: **1,811**
- Average State Spending per Successful Customer Placement: **\$6,729.77**
- Average Customer Weekly Wages: **\$426.61**
- Average Customer Yearly Wages: **\$22,183**

Fast Track Transition

Fast Track Transition is a program that serves students with disabilities who qualify under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) as potentially eligible individuals. These individuals must be at least 14 and not older than 21 years of age; enrolled in an education program; and not already a participant in the IDHS-DRS vocational rehabilitation program. Fast Track transition services provide pre-employment transition services.

- Engaged **nearly 3,000 students.**
- FY Fast Track Transition contracts: **20**
- Fast Track Customers Closed Successful: **35**

Project SEARCH

Project SEARCH prepares young people with significant disabilities for success in competitive integrated employment. The program provides work-based learning experiences, workplace readiness, job exploration and skills training through on-the-job internships. Project SEARCH is a collaboration between the host business, customer/family, school district, the Community Rehabilitation Program, Workforce Investment Board, Developmental Disabilities, and the Division of Rehabilitation Services. **IDHS-DRS works with five (5) Project SEARCH providers.**

BCCFS Success Stories

Competitive Employment



Jelani and his mother, Mars Caulton, sent a note to IDHS-DRS, expressing their gratitude for all the assistance they received from his counselor, LaShawn Sorrell:

“I am so very grateful for your leading him to Search-Inc. It has been an amazing blessing! He works roughly 20 hrs/week and has learned a lot of business skills at Planet Access. He stocks, helps customers, rings up purchases, and even opens and closes the shop.”

Jelani has expressed how happy he is at his new job. He had made friends while at the job and it is evident that they really enjoy working with him. Jelani noted this is the best job he has had so far in life!

Congratulations to Jelani on his success!!!

Customized Employment



Catrina graduated from Crab Orchard High School in 2018, where she was in Special Education while integrated into regular classes. Catrina and her mother learned about DRS during her high school years. Deficits in written expression and math impacted her success in the general education curriculum. Her mother assists her in learning and completing many of her ADLs each day.

In March 2024, Catrina was referred to Centerstone and completed her discovery and plan the following month. In May 2024, she began working as a Kennel Tech for the City of Herrin Illinois Animal Control, working 16 hours a week at \$14 an hour. Her duties include changing and cleaning cat cages, feeding the cats and dogs, cleaning dog kennels, and cleaning the office. When she finishes her tasks, she can interact with the animals to keep them accustomed to human interaction. Occasionally, she also picked up animals reported to Animal Control.

In September, Catrina was offered the full-time position of Animal Control Officer! Catrina is looking forward to having many years of success working in her chosen vocational field. Congratulations Catrina!!!

STEP Transition Program

Mikayla graduated from high school in May 2022. Prior to that, she participated in STEP. She received special education services due to a learning disability in reading comprehension. She also has back pain related to scoliosis. Throughout her life, it was mostly Mikayla and her father. She began taking on household chores and helping at a young age. She has always been motivated to rise above her situation. She is very independent and future focused.

Mikayla chose to become a physical therapy assistant. She received financial aid and supports from DRS. She successfully completed the PTA program and hopes to one day complete her bachelor’s degree to become a physical therapist as well. Congratulations to this determined young lady. May she have much success in all her future endeavors!

IDHS-DRS is in the process of updating Self-Employment Rules. Check out the assistance provided to Sue to help them reach their vocational goals.



In July 2017, Sue (they/them/theirs) came to DRS seeking a career change after being an acupuncturist for some time. Sue determined that a career change was necessary because their physical disabilities prevented them from continuing in the massage therapy field. Sue wanted a new career providing social services, so DRS helped by financially contributing towards their master's degree in social work (MSW) from Loyola University. Sue went on to complete their internship and obtained licensure hours at two different clinics. Finally, Sue has been able to start their own practice and soar as a social worker, and in return, has referred several customers back to IDHS-DRS.

When their vocational counselor reached out to check in on them, Sue noted:

"I have always felt a call to serve my peers in the disabled/chronically ill and neurodivergent communities. When my own disability left me unable to perform my duties as an acupuncturist, DRS supported me through a midlife career change so I could become a licensed clinical social worker. I love being my own boss and every day I wake up excited to meet with my therapy participants! I am so grateful to DRS for helping me get here."

College Training Success Story



In August 2020, Kaitlyn was referred for the Secondary Transitional Experience Program (STEP) at Mt. Vernon Township High School. She has a diagnosis of Cerebral Palsy and was eager to start gaining experience and finding out what her abilities and capabilities were within a job setting.

After completion of high school in 2021, Kaitlyn was eager to further her education to pursue a career in graphic design. With support from DRS, she was able to attend Rend Lake College and receive assistance with tuition, books, supplies, and transportation costs. Also, with the assistance from DRS, she was able to receive assistance with the purchase of an Apple MacBook which is the industry standard computer for graphic design. Kaitlyn graduated with her associate degree in 2024.

Kaitlyn worked with her rehabilitation counselor all throughout her case. She made sure that no question was left unanswered. Life is grand right now as she is enjoying precious moments with her family, and she is looking forward to enjoying many years of success in the graphic design field.

Bureau of Customer & Community Blind Services (BCCBS)

The Bureau of Customer and Community Blind Services (BCCBS) oversees all Vocational Rehabilitation Services for individuals who are blind, low vision, and DeafBlind including the Business Enterprise Program and the Illinois Center for Rehabilitation & Education - Wood. **Our Blind Services staff teams coordinate services from 25 local offices located in communities throughout the state.** Our goal is to help people who are blind or low vision discover, or rediscover, their independence, self-reliance, and employment opportunities.

Vocational Rehabilitation Program

The Bureau of Customer and Community Blind Services (BCCBS) Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Program assists individuals who are blind, low vision, or DeafBlind to prepare for, obtain, advance in, and maintain competitive integrated employment. Various staff and community partners provide a multitude of services to individuals ages 14 and up. Blind service VR counselors, Rehabilitation Instructors (RI), Orientation and Mobility Instructors (O&M), and coordinators assist our customers in achieving their employment goal.

BCCBS staff work with customers on their employment goals, as outlined in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). These services may include, based on the individual customer needs,

- vocational guidance and counseling,
- determining an employment goal,
- pre-employment transition services including job exploration, work-based learning experiences, counseling on post-secondary training, workplace readiness training, and instruction on self-advocacy,
- physical restoration (which may include funding for assistive technology necessary for visual and communication access),
- possible funding for post-secondary training, and
- job placement and follow-up services.

Rehabilitation Instructors provide vision rehabilitation and education services. O&M Specialists provide mobility training. The RI services include use of adaptive communication, Braille, access and assistive technology, indoor orientation and basic mobility techniques, job site modification, and home management and safety skills. The O&M services include white cane techniques, skill development in the areas of environmental awareness using body, senses, and motor skills, using a human guide, crossing streets, and using public transportation.

Business Enterprise Program for the Blind (BEPB)

The Business Enterprise Program for the Blind (BEPB) provides training to blind and visually impaired customers in the BCCBS VR program. Customers are trained in the operations of and provided business ownership opportunities in the professional food service businesses including a variety of high-tech vending machines, customized snack stands, cafeteria management, and sundries/gift shops. Visit the BEPB [website](#) for more information.

Older Individual Blind Grants & DeafBlind Contracts

The Older Individual Blind Grant Program (OIB) provides services for individuals ages 55 or older whose severe visual impairment makes competitive employment difficult to obtain but for whom independent living goals are feasible. These services are open to all citizens of Illinois who meet the criteria; they do not need to be VR customers.

Funds are used to:

- provide independent living services.
- conduct activities that will improve or expand services for individuals.
- conduct activities to improve public understanding of the barriers faced by individuals.
- help the individuals served adjust to their blindness by increasing their ability to care for their individual needs.

The DeafBlind contract is funded through Title XX. Currently the program works with six (6) Qualified Centers for Independent Living Centers throughout the state of Illinois to provide DeafBlind and Sign Language services to the DeafBlind and Deaf population.

BCCBS FY 24 Program Highlights

Customers receive vocational rehabilitation, rehabilitation instruction, and orientation & mobility services. We are **currently serving 1,341 blind, low vision, and DeafBlind customers** in the vocational rehabilitation program. In FY24, **90 customers with visual impairments were placed in competitive employment, 36 placed by BCCBS**. IDHS-DRS customers with vision impairments **earning an average wage of \$27.06 and working an average of 30.2 hours per week. 28 BCCBS staff positions were filled in FY24.**

BCCBS Program Vision for 2025

- Improve communication with customers, stake holders and community partners by using accessible documents and forms; and
- Collaborate with WIOA and community partners to increase the provision of pre-employment transition services to students who are blind, low vision, and DeafBlind; and
- Increase the number of customer self-employment plans.

BCCBS Program Success Stories

Business Enterprise Program for the Blind (BEPB)

Amanda McKenna began services with the Division of Rehabilitation Services in 2021. Ms. McKenna was diagnosed at birth with Leber hereditary optic neuropathy, which resulted in low vision. Ms. McKenna received Counseling and guidance, along with information and referral. Rehabilitation Instructors provided her with training in the areas of assistive technology to learn how to use JAWS, a screen reader software. After facing various barriers, she remained persistent to obtain gainful employment.

The Business Enterprise Program for the Blind certified Amanda in 2023 and to establish and operate food service businesses in 2024. Starting in February, Amanda worked for another blind vending manager for 12 hours per week. Amanda's skill set and professionalism led to her own vending site in September, achieving her goal of being a licensed vending manager. Ms. McKenna will continue to receive services to assist her in the successful operation of her business as a blind vendor.

Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind

In April 2021, an individual with vision loss was referred to BCCBS services by their new employer for job retention services to assist with orientation and mobility in the workplace and new community. This individual had no vision due to congenital glaucoma and used a white cane and guide dog to ensure safety when walking. This individual moved to the United States in 2014 and completed a master's degree and PhD in another state and was moving to Illinois for employment to start Fall 2021.

With support from BCCBS, he was connected with an orientation and mobility specialist to learn walking routes around the community and employment campus. He learned about digital apps for accessibility. He also was able to learn public transportation options. Customer was able to learn, grow, and expand his confidence with traveling in and around his workplace and community. This ensured continued success in his employment where he continues to remain employed today in Fall 2024.

Customer comments, "I truly appreciate the opportunity to share my experience, especially considering how valuable the orientation and mobility training has been in my journey."

Illinois Center for Rehabilitation and Education - Wood

The Illinois Center for Rehabilitation and Education-Wood (ICRE-Wood) is a facility which provides a concentrated short-term residential and day training commuter program for adults 18 years or older, who are blind, low vision, or DeafBlind. ICRE-Wood is located in Chicago and offers a 15-week vocational and independent skills training program. All services are coordinated to provide an individual with an enhanced opportunity to prepare for employment, school and/or living independently.

Vocational training services	Support services provided by the social worker
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Braille, • computer technology, • health and wellness, • orientation and mobility, and • independent living skills. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • counseling, • housing help, and • employment assistance.

ICRE-Wood Program Highlight

A total of 94 individuals who are blind or visually impaired were provided Rehabilitation Instruction Services and 24 graduates from ICRE-Wood's program.

ICRE-Wood Priorities for FY25

- ICRE-Wood will continue to host monthly meetings with speakers from various agencies and companies to educate customers about job opportunities, services, and resources that are available for blind, low vision and DeafBlind individuals.
- Encourage faculty to continuously stay abreast of new technology and devices to enrich customers knowledge that will boost their confidence to seek competitive employment and/or live a life of independence.
- ICRE-Wood will continue developing a working relationship with community partners to provide additional training to customers to enhance their knowledge and skills for job readiness.
- The recruitment of additional staff would allow ICRE-Wood to provide services and training to more individuals and would lessen the wait time for those anxiously awaiting their opportunity to enter the program.
- The established methods of communication utilized by ICRE-Wood to communicate with agencies and customers are accessible for all and will remain. Those methods are email, telephone calls, video calls via WebEx and Zoom, interpreters for DeafBlind, interpreters for language barriers, and in-person meetings.

ICRE-Wood Success Story

A letter of gratitude from Phyllis Hampton.

I am writing to express my heartfelt appreciation for the incredible work that your teachers and staff members have been doing at the Illinois Center for Rehabilitation and Education (ICRE Woods). Their dedication, professionalism and genuine care for the students have not gone unnoticed. Each member of your team has consistently gone above and beyond to create a supportive, and nurturing learning environment. From the innovative teaching methods to their unwavering commitment to the students' success, it is evident that they are truly passionate about their work.



As an alumnus of ICRE Wood, your teachers and staff have had a personal impact on my academic journey. At a time when I was extremely stressed about an impending graduation examination, you and the staff stepped in to quell my concerns and hold my hand through this process. I would like to amplify the efforts of Robbie Miller, Cassandra Dozier and Ms. Pat. The three of them assisted me in navigating the site needed to take my examination for graduation. Their determination to make sure that I would be able to complete this exam after several failed attempts, due to compatibility issues, was unfaltering. Not to prolong but, from Ms. Cassandra and Ms. Pat offering the use of their sight to help me understand clearly was actually appearing on screen to Mr. Miller allowing me to use his personal computer, words cannot express just how grateful I am. You will be pleased to know that I did graduate from Roosevelt University with a Master's in College Counseling and Student Affairs, and without the diligence of you and your team this exam would have been a barrier to my success.

I wanted to take this opportunity to thank you for leading such a remarkable team and for fostering a culture of excellence and support at the Illinois Center for Rehabilitation and Education. Please extend my gratitude to Mr. Robbie Miller, Ms. Cassandra Dozier and Ms. Pat for their outstanding contributions to the current and past students. Thank you again and have an awesome day.

Bureau of Transition and Community Rehabilitation Services (TCRS)

TCRS monitors and manages statewide Vocational Rehabilitation contracts for job placement services to adults and Transition services to both students and youth with a disability. TCRS is the lead for increasing and ensuring Transition services are being provided statewide. We provide training, technical assistance, and outreach to both DRS Staff and external Vendors. TCRS is engaged with and participates in numerous community and state organizations, boards, and committees. Additionally, TCRS participates in the development of Memorandum of Understandings (MOU) and Interagency Agreements (IGA) that apply to our work.

FY24 Highlights

TCRS continues to make changes that align with our goals. Following the reorganization in FY23, we continued to focus on reimagining our bureau and how to become most efficient in FY24. As staff began to learn and grow in their roles created by the reorganization, this created further reach and an expansion of support from TCRS.

- Development of increased and simplified supports for DRS Field Offices and Providers.
- Advanced planning for effectively supporting services implemented with FY 25 contracts.
- Rethinking TCRS coverage and support throughout the state to fit the need and demand for services in response to Contract Advisor vacancies.
Created a new webpage on the IDHS website for those interested in a [Becoming a New Vocational Rehabilitation Provider](#).
- Streamlining, simplifying, and reviewing our contract process to improve overall efficiency.
- Monitored and managed at least 400 different contracts during the fiscal year.

Vision for 2025

TCRS will continue to grow and improve the services and supports offered to providers and DRS Field Offices. Our goal is to improve the lives of individuals with disabilities through the services provided under the contract. We will continue to be a valued and respected resource to our community and educational partners.

We will accomplish our goals through:

- Improved knowledge of TCRS and Vocational Rehabilitation.
- Consistent engagement and collaboration with Providers, DRS Field Offices, and DRS Leadership.
- Providing well informed guidance and responses, education, and support to all who work with us.

We are successful because of our ability and willingness to adapt to an ever-changing environment.

Bureau of Engagement & Support Services (BESS)

The Bureau of Engagement and Support Services (BESS) administers the workforce development unit and consolidates all specialized field support functions into one Bureau to provide a well-rounded approach to customer engagement that allows for multiple customer touch points. BESS manages and oversees Business Development, Benefits Planning, and Targeted Populations with the mission of building an inclusive workforce through employer engagement.

BESS employs staff dedicated to business services, including the newly created title of business services consultant as well as staff in the titles benefit specialist and program specialist. Members of the team will work in partnership with business services teams organized in each of 22 Local Workforce Innovation Areas (LWIA). The workforce development unit provides information to employers on key issues relating to hiring people with disabilities, reasonable accommodations, hiring incentives and the benefits of VR services. Workforce development staff also communicate with Rehabilitation Counselors about employment opportunities they identify through contacts with employers and business groups.

BESS Program Services

Business Services

IDHS-DRS provides a wide range of services to assist employers with matching the talents found in the disability community with their individual business needs. Some of these services include:

- Disability Awareness Training,
- Assistive Technology Presentations and Assessments,
- Tax Incentives,
- Customized Training Information and Planning,
- Job Analysis,
- Targeted Hiring Events,
- National Employment Team (NET)/Talent Acquisition Portal (TAP),
- Apprenticeships, and
- Interagency Referrals.

The Business Development-Business Services (BST) team hold memberships on local WIOA core partnerships teams across all four core titles, local chambers, and other similar associations. BST staff sit on committees such as

- Access Will County to address transportation issues in Will-Grundy area with representation from PACE, and
- Chicago Alliance’s Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Accessibility Committee, and Safety Committee to discuss Transportation and safe pedestrian travel.

Staff collaborate with workforce partners to plan and execute disability employment related events including job fairs and employer workshops. Events include “Diverse Abilities in the Workforce.” The BST is developing an online directory of service providers working with Hispanic/Latinos with disabilities statewide.

Workforce Development Activities	Number of Contacts
Workforce Partner Engagements	131
Employer Engagements	2,148
Meetings - BST Monthly	55
Meetings – Employer	266
Outreach to Williams and Colbert class members	324
TOTAL CONTACTS	2,924

Activities include support to SWTCIE grant customers who are working under 14C sub-minimum wage agreements. Staff represent BESS statewide in this endeavor. Staff are involved in outreach to at least 324 IPS/Williams and Colbert customers to provide services to customers who have been restricted from employment and now are interested in competitive Integrated Employment (CIE).



Conor Daly, a 21-year-old from Chicago, reached out to DRS for vocational rehabilitation services in 2024 as he explored career options after completing his education. Struggling to find work, he sought assistance to improve his employability. Once his case was opened, a DRS Counselor and an Employment Specialist from the Center for Enriched Living, a DRS Community Partner, worked with Conor to establish employment goals and provide services to prepare him for the workforce.

Through DRS's Workforce Development Unit, Conor was connected to a position with Aramark at North Park University in Chicago. Thanks to the guidance and preparation he received from his counselors, employment specialists, and the support of his family, Conor excelled in his interview and was offered the job immediately. He has now been working there for several months, receiving praise from both his managers and colleagues for his excellent performance.

Inspired by this success, Conor plans to use this experience as a steppingstone in his career. He has begun exploring colleges and universities to pursue a higher degree and advance his professional journey. Grateful for the support and collaboration of DRS and its community partners, Conor is excited about his future education and employment opportunities.

Benefits Planning

In FY24, more than 100 individuals who receive SSI or SSDI contacted a benefits planner to understand how working will affect their benefits. Anyone who is eligible for Social Security disability benefits (SSI or SSDI) and wants to work can receive free benefits planning services. In FY25, the Statewide benefits planning process will be evaluated through the SWTCIE IL demonstration project with the goal of increasing and improving services to customers contemplating competitive employment.

The Illinois Disability Benefits 101 website gives customers and their advocates tools and information on employment, health coverage, and benefits. Customers can plan ahead and learn how work and benefits go together. <https://il.db101.org/>

Our staff can:

- Explain how all of your benefits will be affected if you go to work,
- Give you a written report that show how earnings from your job will change your benefits,
- Tell you about other community services that can help you,
- Be available to answer any questions you have about your benefits, even after you go to work,
- Provide ongoing benefits management, which can include a new analysis if you get a raise, and
- Make a referral to help you resolve any legal barriers related to employment, such as employer accommodations that will help you do your job.
- Connect customers with Work Incentives Planning and Assistance

Work Incentives Planning and Assistance

The goal of the Work Incentives Planning and Assistance (WIPA) program is to enable beneficiaries with disabilities to receive accurate information and use that information to make a successful transition to work. Each WIPA project has Community Work Incentives Coordinators (CWIC) who will provide in-depth counseling about benefits and the effect of work on those benefits.

Services to Targeted Populations

Services for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

BESS also oversees Services for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (SDHH) through Transition Student Job Fairs at Life Center Transitioning Programs. Presentations are provided to school districts about transition services for deaf students. Additionally, brochures are developed which promote programs to help the deaf transition to employment, training and receive accommodations if they have a hearing loss.

Staff attended and participated in the annual WIOA Summit. Two staff attend the National Employment Team Summit in Charlotte, North Carolina. This summit gave staff the ability to connect with their national cohorts on the types of services that are being provided to customers nationally.

The needs of persons in this population are specialized and can be complex. These persons use varying modes of communication depending on individual factors such as the age of hearing loss, the level of language deprivation, the person’s comfort level with equipment, and the individual’s communication preference.

Demographic	Customers Served	% of total Served	Competitive Employment Outcome	% of Total Outcomes
Deaf/Blind/Hard of Hearing	1,617	4.00%	287	6.79%

Hispanic Services

To better serve Spanish-speaking individuals throughout Illinois and address their needs, the Illinois Department of Human Services created the Hispanic Services (April 2023) unit under the Division of Rehabilitation Services (IDHS-DRS), Bureau of Engagement and Support Services (BESS). The mission of the Hispanic Services Unit is to work with and help Hispanic, Latino, Latina, LatinX, and/or Latine Illinoisans with disabilities (ages 16-64) obtain employment, education, training, and access to IDHS-DRS services, including community resources. The Hispanic Services Statewide Specialist (Hispanic Services Unit) has focused on two main areas: Outreach and capacity building. **In FY 24, the Division of Rehabilitation Service (IDHS-DRS) had more than 7,000 Hispanic, Latino, Latina, Latin X, and/or Latine contacts, an increase of 15%. IDHS-DRS assisted 654 Hispanic services to gain competitive employment.**

Demographic	Customers Served	% of total Served	Competitive Employment Outcome	% of Total Outcomes
Hispanic/Combination	7,296	18.07%	654	15.47%

Individual Placement and Support (IPS)

Individual Placement and Support supported employment (IPS) is the only evidence-based practice model of vocational rehabilitation. Studies have shown that persons who received IPS services have quadruple the sustained employment rate, including higher incomes and growth in work careers, when compared to those who received traditional vocational rehabilitation services. DRS works in partnership with the Division of Mental Health to deliver IPS services, including services to Williams and Colbert Class members.

IDHS-DRS is the primary funder of IPS services in Illinois. **In FY24, 404 IPS customers achieved competitive employment earning an average of \$475 per week.**

Check out the success that these young men had working with one of our community partners, Bridgeway.



We want to take a moment to celebrate Daniel’s remarkable achievement of landing his goal job at Schnucks. Daniel’s dedication and hard work has truly paid off, and it’s inspiring to see him excel in a role that aligns perfectly with his passions and skills in customer service. His proactive approach, willingness to learn, and outgoing personality have not only set him apart but have also driven significant improvements within his role and the team at Schnucks.

Working together with his Community Employment Specialist, Diane Robinson, they set clear goals in securing employment and regaining confidence in his professional abilities. They redeveloped his resume and revamped cover letters for each job application, emphasizing Daniel’s enthusiasm and suitability for the roles was applying for. Daniel and Diane worked together to put forth maximum effort to help him reach his vocational goals. All these efforts and more eventually led Daniel to land his goal job!

Congratulations on this well-deserved success. IDHS-DRS is excited to see all the wonderful things he will accomplish next.



Meet Jason!

Jason started using Bridgeway’s Community Employment Services in March 2024. He was paired with Employment Specialist, Juanita Seiboldt, to begin his journey on finding the job that was best for him. Jason and Juanita began building a resume and looked at various jobs within the community. Juanita shares that she enjoyed working with Jason because he was open to doing any job that was hiring!

Jason wants others to know to take advantage of Bridgeway’s Community Support Services because, “they make sure they get you going in the right direction.”

Congratulations Jason!

Bureau of Home & Community Based Supports (BHCBS)

BHCBS distinguishes the role of the former “Home Services Central Office” into a Bureau that provides technical support, management, and oversight over the provision of the Home and Community-Based waivers for persons with disabilities, brain injuries, and HIV/AIDS. BHCBS provides oversight for the Independent Living Unit.

Home Services Program

The Home Services Program (HSP) was established in December 1979, to prevent the premature or unnecessary institutionalization of individuals with disabilities by providing services in the home that do not exceed the cost of comparable services in a nursing facility. The program is dedicated to promoting customer independence, their choice, and their control of services. The program's goals support the desires and abilities of individuals with disabilities by enabling them:

- to remain at home rather than in a nursing facility with real choices and options for quality care,
- to retain control over the services they receive, and
- to live self-directed lives that enable them to actively participate at home and in the community.

HSP is designed to allow eligible individuals in need of long-term care and who meet the criteria for disability as defined by the Social Security Act, to receive any or all the following services to remain in their homes:

1. personal assistant services
2. homemaker services
3. home health services
4. home-delivered meals
5. electronic home response
6. adult day care services
7. specialized services for customers in the brain injury waiver
8. home modification and/or assistive equipment
9. and other specialized services

FY 24 Highlights

A total of 35,629 customers were served in the program at an average monthly cost of \$2,222.

Waiver	Number of Customers Served	Average Cost per Month	Total Spending
Persons with Disabilities	31,949	\$2,302	\$836,642,163
Persons with Brain Injury	2,639	\$2,812	\$89,051,768
Persons with HIV/AIDS	1,041	\$1,894	\$23,662,318
Total	35,629	\$2,222	\$949,356,249

- HSP increased rates for agency providers to ensure these rates are competitive with market standards ensuring HSP customers have access to a robust network of agency provider agencies. **Rates were increased by 4.3% for Homemaker services and 10% for Adult Day Services** to ensure provider capacity exists to meet the thousands of HSP customer who rely on these services.
- Identified and initiated the **recovery of more than \$1.64 million in overpayment** for a total of 821 cases. Through restitution and repayment agreements, the State will largely be made whole for these overpayments.
- **Terminated a total of 53 providers in connection with provider fraud, or due to the abuse, neglect or exploitation** of a person with a disability as determined through an Adult Protective Services investigation.

Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA)

The Home Services Program (HSP) / Central Management Services (CMS) worked together with Service Employees International Union (SEIU) to negotiate a new Collective Bargaining agreement for the year 2023-2027. Few highlights of the negotiations are as below.

Effective July 1, 2024

- 1) **Paid Leave** - 16 hours of Paid Sick Time will be replaced with 40 hours of Paid Time Off (PTO). Any unused sick time an IP currently has will roll into a PTO bank. PTO will be capped at 40 hours per year. IPs can accrue 1 hour PTO per every 40 hours worked, up to a maximum of 40 hours paid leave in a calendar year. Any unused PTO hours at the end of the year will be carried over to the next year, with a maximum of 40 hours rolling over. IPs' paychecks will have information about PTO usage and balances. PTO must be utilized in increments of no less than two (2) hours per day.
- 2) **Overtime Policy** – The Overtime (OT) policy has been changed to shorten the ineligibility (suspension) period following a fourth occurrence of unauthorized overtime, from 3 months to 1 month.
- 3) **IP Training Requirements**
 - a. **New IPs** – New IPs (Approved by HSP to work for a customer) hired on or after 07/01/2024, who are within their 1st year working or returning to work are required to attend the SEIU paid **New IP Training within 1 month of their hire date**. If an IP fails to attend the orientation within one month of commencing services, the State shall provide notice to the IP that they must complete the orientation within six months, after such time they will be temporarily ineligible for funding from the Home Services Program until such time as they complete the orientation.
 - b. **Existing IP's** – IP hired prior to 7/1/2024 are required to attend the SEIU paid **Annual Mandatory training within 60 days of their annual hiring date**. If an IP fails to complete the annual mandatory training within 60 days of their annual hire date, the State shall provide notice to the IP that they must complete training within six months, after such time they will become temporarily ineligible for payment for any services they provide until they finish the training.
 - c. **Training Curriculum** – HSP and SEIU's joint committee will work on improving the training materials as needed.
- 4) **Timesheet Submission** – IPs can submit timesheets to the field office through Email, Fax, USPS mail, Drop Box and in-person. Each office has a dedicated email inbox for sending timesheets. Please refer to DHS webpage <https://bit.ly/Submit-HSP-TS> for more information.

Effective July 1, 2025

- 1) **Seniority Pay** – IPs who reach seniority milestones based on their cumulative total work hours since their hire date will be paid a seniority increase to their hourly rate, as follows:

Milestones	Additional Pay Per Hour
10,000 hours	\$1.00
20,000 hours	\$2.00
30,000 hours	\$4.00

Over the next year, HSP will work with SEIU to calculate IP's cumulative hours. Additional information will be shared.

- 2) **IP Training Requirements**
 - a. **New IPs** – New IPs hired on or after 07/01/2025 are required to attend the SEIU paid **New IP Training within 1 month of their hire date**. If an IP fails to attend the orientation within 1 month of commencing services, the State shall provide notice to the IP that they must complete the orientation within 60 days, after such time they **will be temporarily ineligible for funding from the Home Services Program** until such time as they complete the orientation.
 - b. **Existing IPs** – Existing IPs hired prior to 07/01/2025 who have worked 1 year, or more are required to attend the SEIU paid Annual Mandatory training within **60 days of their annual hiring date**. If an IP fails to complete the annual mandatory training within 60 days of their annual hire date, the State shall provide notice to the IP that they must complete training within 60 days, after such time they will **become temporarily ineligible for payment for any services** they provide until they finish the training.

IP Retirement - The Union and the State will establish a Joint Committee on Retirement Benefits to discuss the feasibility and explore possible options for establishing a retirement benefit for IPs covered under this agreement. We will communicate to you any finalized improvements after these discussions.

Wages - Pay rates for Personal Assistants and Maintenance Home Health Providers will increase per the pay chart below. The rate increases **shall be paid effective the dates mentioned below or upon federal approval, whichever is later.**

Personal Assistants

Service	8/1/2024	1/1/2025	7/1/2025	1/1/2026	7/1/2026	1/1/2027
PA	\$17.75	\$18.25	\$18.75	\$19.50	\$20.00	\$20.75

Maintenance Home Health Providers (Nursing Providers)

Service	8/1/2024	1/1/2025	7/1/2025	1/1/2026	7/1/2026	1/1/2027
CNA	\$20.75	\$21.25	\$21.75	\$22.50	\$23.00	\$23.75
LPN	\$27.75	\$28.25	\$28.75	\$29.50	\$30.00	\$30.75
RN	\$34.50	\$35.00	\$35.50	\$36.25	\$36.75	\$37.50
PT, ST, OT	*	*	*	*	*	*

Program Services

HSP services are designed to preserve the dignity of individuals with disabilities, as well as to provide options that reflect their personal needs and preferences. Over 98% of HSP customers utilize Personal Assistant, Homemaker and/or Home Health services. Other program services are used either alone or as a supplement to these services to address the customer's unique needs. Brief descriptions of all available services follow below:

Personal Assistant (PA) Services:

Services provided by individuals who are selected, employed, trained, and supervised by the customer. These individuals may assist with household tasks, personal care and, with the permission of a physician, perform certain health care procedures. In order to use PA services, the customer or representative must be able to appropriately supervise a PA. This service has a uniform reimbursement rate statewide per a labor agreement with Service Employees International Union (SEIU).

Homemaker Services:

Personal care and household tasks provided by trained and professionally supervised staff employed by homemaker agencies. Instruction and assistance in household management and self-care are also available. This service has a uniform reimbursement rate statewide that is provided under a rate agreement with HSP. Homemaker services are used by customers who are unable to direct a PA, who have not found a PA, or who do not wish to direct a PA.

Home Health Services:

Home health services include services prescribed by a physician that are provided by a registered or licensed practical nurse, home health aide or certified nurse assistant, or physical, occupational or speech therapist. HSP home health services are beyond the scope of services covered under the Medicaid State Plan or private health insurance. These services must be provided in the customer's home and may be provided through an agency or by private individuals who are appropriately credentialed. The private individuals who provide this service have a uniform reimbursement rate statewide per a labor agreement with Service Employees International Union (SEIU).

Home-Delivered Meals:

One or more ready-to-eat hot meals per day which are delivered to the home. This service is provided to individuals who can feed themselves but are unable to prepare a meal and is more cost effective than personal assistant services.

Emergency Home Response:

A signaling device that provides 24-hour emergency alerting coverage for medical, fire or other emergencies. The device may be worn in a variety of ways and may have a variety of mechanisms to signal an emergency need. This service has uniform rates statewide and is provided under a rate agreement with HSP.

Adult Day Care:

The direct care and supervision of customers provided in a location outside the home by a community-based organization to promote social, physical and emotional well-being. This service has a uniform reimbursement rate statewide and is provided under a rate agreement with HSP. Transportation to adult day care may also be provided, if needed.

Brain Injury Services:

Specialized Services for customers receiving services through the Brain Injury Waiver which include day habilitation, pre-vocational services, supported employment, and behavioral services.

Home Modifications & Assistive Equipment:

Devices, equipment and/or home modifications that increase an individual's independence and capability to perform household or personal care tasks safely in the home. Must be able to reduce the need for another service or address a health or safety need. Respite Services: Intermittent care for adults and children with disabilities designed to relieve caregiver stress.

Background Screening:

Background screenings are now provided through the Department of Healthcare and Family Services (HFS) Illinois Medicaid Program Advanced Cloud Technology (IMPACT) program on all Medicaid providers including PAs and agency providers to ensure the safety of the customer and the suitability of the potential employee.

Providers of HSP have their background screening when they first enroll into IMPACT to provide services to HSP and during revalidation period which is every 5 years after their first enrollment date.

The background screening looks for criminal convictions listed in [CBA \(Collective Bargaining Agreement\)](#). Provider has an opportunity to review the background screening findings and can dispute or agree with the findings. If provider disputes the findings, then HSP staff will review the dispute and use a second background screening system to verify the results.

There are two types of convictions:

- Waivable convictions (CBA Section B/G) - **Customer must consent to receiving services** from the provider.
- Non-Waivable Convictions (CBA Section F) - **OIG (Office of Inspector General) are responsible to review the nature of the offense and determine the IP's eligibility** to serve as a Medicaid provider.

Providers have the right to appeal on OIG's decision following their appeal process. The appeals process is handles by HFS OIG and not by HSP.

Case Management:

The Division utilizes Case Management Agencies to provide targeted services to Customers eligible for the Medicaid Waivers it administers who have either HIV/AIDS or Brain Injury to assist with the management, monitoring, and follow-up of these specialized cases.

Prescreening:

Prescreening of individuals conducted prior to nursing facility admission to ensure they receive the same minimum Determination of Need (DON) score required for eligibility for the HSP or the Department on Aging Community Care Program (DoA CCP), and to ensure they are offered the option of receiving home care. The screening of individuals coming from hospitals to nursing facilities is performed for both programs by community-based Case Coordination Units. Prescreening for individuals under age 60 who are going from home to nursing facility may be conducted by either CCU or HSP staff.

Special Services:

Home Services also provides specialized services for people with HIV/AIDS and/or Brain Injuries.

The Home Care Ombudsman Program helps customers of the Home Services Program receive quality services by advocating for their interests and helping them identify resources, understand procedures, resolve problems, and protect their rights. You can learn more about the Home Care Ombudsman Program by visiting the Illinois Department on Aging's [Long Term Care Ombudsman Program](#) website.

Type of Services	Number of Customers	Total Spending
Personal Assistant	32,634	\$886,539,296
CNA	120	\$2,894,659
LPN	29	\$1,050,373
RN	25	\$823,962
Homemaker	2,451	\$50,016,464
Maintenance Home Health	19	\$135,196
Home-Delivered Meals	639	\$1,351,801
Electronic Home Response (duplicated Count)	1,832	\$360,840
Adult Day Care (duplicated count)	37	\$441,552
Brain Injury Services (duplicated count)	23	\$181,490
Home Remodeling	157	\$1,785,522
Assistive Equipment	39	\$74,752
Background Checks	308	\$11,160
Case Management Services	2,767	\$3,489,830
Other Misc. Services (duplicated count)	286	\$32,800
Prescreening	1,152	\$166,551
Total (with Prescreening)	35,629	\$949,356,249

Program Eligibility Determination and Service Planning

Prospective customers, or those representing them, may request services by contacting any one of the Division of Rehabilitation offices around the state, or they may submit a request via a web-based referral for services on the Department of Human Services (DHS) website at <http://www.dhs.state.il.us>.

A counselor or case management representative will assess the individual in his or her home and administer the Determination of Need (DON) tool to determine program eligibility. The tool evaluates an individual's care needs and identifies an individual's available resources for meeting those needs.

Based on the results of the DON, a service plan is developed jointly with the customer to address their unmet needs and to assist the customer in coordinating safe, quality, consumer-directed (when possible) services that are also cost-effective. In order to be eligible to receive HSP services, an individual must:

- Be **under age 60** at time of application unless applying for the HIV/AIDS or Brain Injury Waiver Programs.
- Have a severe disability lasting at least 12 months or for the duration of life.
- Be **at imminent risk of nursing facility placement** as indicated by receiving a minimum of 29 points on the Determination of Need (DON) eligibility determination tool, with at least 15 points in the "Need for Care" category.
- Require services whose **cost will not exceed that of nursing or other health care facility services**.
- For customers aged 18 or older, have less than \$17,500 in non-exempt personal assets; for customers under age 18, have less than \$35,000 in family **assets**.
- Apply for **Medicaid** and cooperate with the application process.
- Be a **resident of Illinois and a U.S. Citizen or legal resident**.

DON Score	Number of Customers	Percent of Customers	Total Spending	Percent of Spending	Average Monthly Cost
Under 29	363	1.02%	\$1,839,066	0.2%	\$791
29-32	5,029	14.2%	\$82,266,228	8.7%	\$1,363
33-40	8,120	22.9%	\$167,390,978	17.6%	\$1,718
41-49	7,434	21.0%	\$181,116,844	19.1%	\$2,030
50-59	6,220	17.5%	\$180,085,238	19.0%	\$2,413
60-69	4,155	11.7%	\$146,224,212	15.4%	\$2,933
70-79	2,746	7.7%	\$113,923,169	12.0%	\$3,457
80-100	1,562	4.4%	\$76,510,514	8.1%	\$4,082
Total	35,629		\$949,356,249		\$2,222

The average Don Score is 46.7

Additionally, given the multiple Medicaid Waiver programs in Illinois, including those through the Department's Division of Developmental Disabilities; individuals who are eligible for more than one waiver are evaluated and assisted in making an informed choice as to which waiver most appropriately meets their needs.

BHCS Operational Spending Overview

Category	FY24 Spending
Program Administration	\$30,770,661
Other Provider Costs & Benefits	\$141,105,338
Total Waiver Services	\$949,356,249
Persons with Disabilities	\$836,642,163
Persons with Brain Injury	\$89,051,768
Persons with HIV/AIDS	\$23,662,318
Total Spending	\$1,121,232,248
Percent Administration to Total Spending	2.74%

Looking Ahead...FY25

In FY 2025, our goal is to ensure the continued growth of the Home Services Program to help individuals achieve and maintain their independence, to maintain timeliness of required assessments, to achieve long-term integration of select pandemic era policies and further invest in modernizing the program.

IMPACT Revalidation

CMS/HFS requires all state Operating agencies to revalidate all actively enrolled Medicaid providers at least every five years. This requirement is for all Medicaid providers, including Individual providers, Homemaker/Home health and other agencies.

HSP will send two mail / email notifications to Individual providers and agencies reminding their upcoming Revalidation due date. The first notice will be sent 90 calendar days prior to the Revalidation Cycle end date and the second notice will be distributed 45 calendar days prior to the Revalidation Cycle end date. Providers providing multiple services (PA, LPN, CNA, RN) must revalidate each of their enrollment Separately.

Providers who fail to send documentation for revalidation prior to the Revalidation due date will end dated in IMPACT and they will become ineligible to work and for payment after this date.

HSP has taken this project forward by automating the entire process as much as possible to complete the revalidations on time. The first round of 90-day / 45-day letters have been sent out to providers reminding them of their due dates and seek completed documentation for Revalidation.

Background screening will also be done for the providers as per the CBA Screening policy that are very similar to new enrollments.

EVV (Electronic Visit Verification)

Current contract with existing HSP EVV Vendor is coming to an end. HSP is working with DHS and State procurement on an RFP Contract. HSP is on their final steps to finalize the RFP before it can be published on BidBuy for vendors to bid.

Sandata Mobile connect (SMC) is a mobile application that can be used by providers to clock-in and clock-out to track their time providing services to a HSP customer. In order to make HSP providers more electronic, HSP will take action to encourage SMC application across all providers. To start with we are planning to send out promotional fliers to encourage them to opt-in to use the mobile application.

As a Medicaid operating agency (OA) HSP has to send visits data of all Individual providers/Agency providers to HFS (State Medicaid Agency) Aggregator. HSP is currently working with HFS to finalize and Agency compliance policy to enforce agencies to send visits data to HSP's aggregator in regular frequencies.

Home Services Success Story

Personal Assistants

A customer's mother expressed her deepest gratitude for the outstanding service and care provided by their Home Services Program counselor, Mrs. Alicia Meeks.

The customer was involved in a life-altering car accident, which resulted in a severe brain injury. The mother became overwhelmed trying to juggle the responsibilities of work, care for the customer, and navigating the complex process of getting the help they so desperately needed.

After a while, the customer was connected with Mrs. Meeks and everything changed for the better. Mrs. Meeks went above and beyond, extending her assistance in every way possible to ensure the customer and his family received the support they needed. A profound impact was made in the lives of this customer and his mother. DHS-DRS home services program will continue to strive to provide exceptional services to all HSP customers.

The dedication and empathy showed by Mrs. Meeks to this customer and mother stands out as a shining example of what it means to truly care for our customers.

Personal Assistant

Sometimes a customer's very existence depends on their ability to successfully navigate the landscape of social services. A customer's family shared these kind words about their counselor, Angela Dean, and assistance provided to them while they were in need:

"I wish everyone at DORs and in the world that is supposed to help disabled folks and their families were like her. Her understanding and empathy are obvious. Her ability to not criticize and find positive solutions to resolve problems is commendable. I feel when I interact with her, she cares and wants to ease the burden I live with."

It is important to that each customer knows they truly matter to IDHS-DRS. The compassion shown to this customer and other like them is very much needed and appreciated.

Independent Living Unit

Many individuals in Illinois nursing facilities have the capability to live independently within the community. For over two (2) decades, Centers for Independent Living (CIL) have worked to move individuals with disabilities out of nursing facilities and other institutions and back into community-based independent living situations of their choice. CILs provide the necessary resources to offer the start-up essentials (i.e., 1st month's rent, furniture, cooking equipment, peer support) to help individuals successfully transition into the community. **In FY24, 224 individuals were transitioned into the community.**

A Center for Independent Living (CIL) is a private, non-residential, community-based, not-for-profit, consumer-controlled organization that is mandated to provide five (5) core services:

- Advocacy,
- Peer Support,
- Independent Living Skills Development,
- Information and Referral, and
- Transition.

Independent Living means different things to different people. For those involved in the Independent Living movement, it means having control of one's life. Living independently does not mean doing everything for oneself. Rather, it means being in control of decisions made about oneself. This is the foundation upon which Centers for Independent Living are built. **Consumer control exists on every level, where at least 51% of staff, management staff, and the Board of Directors must be individuals with disabilities.**

Staff serve as role models, demonstrating that individuals with disabilities can be independent and productive. Their knowledge, support, and guidance help to create informed choice options that give consumers the confidence to pursue their own independence and to realize their dreams and aspirations. Attitudes are perhaps the most challenging barrier for individuals with disabilities to overcome. CILs work to dismantle this barrier by:

- advocating for changes in legislation,
- providing disability awareness-related activities,
- developing technical assistance initiatives regarding the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and
- working in a committed fashion to deinstitutionalize individuals with disabilities who can and want to live independently.

The work of CILs is guided by a federally approved State Plan for Independent Living that is written in collaboration with the Division, Center for Independent Living, and the Statewide Independent Living Council. The current plan can be at [SILC of Illinois](#).

FY 24 Highlights

CILs service all of Illinois' 102 counties. **Services were provided to over 70,000 individuals regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, or disability, an increase of 8% over FY23.**

Core Service	Number of Customers Served
Information and referral services	49,480
Independent Living/Life Skills Training Services:	4,606
Peer Counseling	3,424
Individual System Advocacy	2,141
Transition Services	2,735
Fast Track	2,436

Program Services

Personal Assistant Training

To help meet the growing need for personal assistants (PA), the Home Services Program partnered with the Illinois Network of Centers for Independent Living (INCIL) and targeted CILs throughout the state to recruit and train individuals wishing to work as a PA for individuals with disabilities. Upon completion of the training, PAs are added to a registry that is available to individuals with disabilities in the community who need assistance.

INCIL uses a toll-free help line, 1-800-587-1227, during normal business hours to assist customers with identifying potential providers. INCIL subcontracts with CILs lead outreach efforts to educate the public about the need for PAs, educate potential providers about the profession, and provide mentoring with individuals in the community to assist them with the development of better skills toward managing their care.

Employment and Transition Services

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) of 2014 made significant changes to the Rehabilitation Act which governs CILs, including their provision of vocational services. Across the state, the Division partnered with 18 CILs to provide employment services to individuals with disabilities in a variety of ways. There are programs that teach independent living skills for those who wish to enter the workforce and programs that work statewide with youth within the schools.

CILs also work with individuals statewide on career exploration, workplace readiness, self-advocacy skills, outreach, job development, pre-employment services, and assistance with job placement to youth with disabilities.

In an effort to better prepare youth for transitioning into employment after high school, many of the CILs attend Individual Education Plan meetings within the schools to advocate for the student and the family in obtaining needed services.

Independent Living Services for Individuals who are Blind and DeafBlind

The Older Blind Program is awarded through a competitive process to eligible service providers statewide. Eight (8) CILs, of a total of 12, were awarded funding to provide services to individuals who are age 55 and older and who have severe visual impairments which makes it difficult to obtain competitive employment.

Individuals benefit from independent living services provided by CILs, which include:

- outreach services,
- braille instruction,
- guide services,
- reader services,
- transportation,
- supportive services, and
- rehabilitation teaching services.

Separate of the support offered through the Older Blind Program, funding is allocated to provide specialized services to individuals who are DeafBlind and to increase public awareness activities of available services and supports offered.

Independent Living Success Stories

Center for Independent Living

When a CIL and DRS works together, amazing things can happen for those who need services the most. In October 2024, a young man contacted his local CIL noting he wanted to leave the hospital setting to be closer to his family. It was his heart's desire to spend as much time as possible with his loved ones and everyone involved in his case did everything within their power to make that happen. Quick action from DRS and the CIL ensured that necessary services were provided expeditiously. As a result, he was able to return to his home and spend that time **with** his loved ones as he so desired. The call to serve was answered and because of the exceptional working relationship between the CIL and DRS, they will continue to answer the call for years to come.

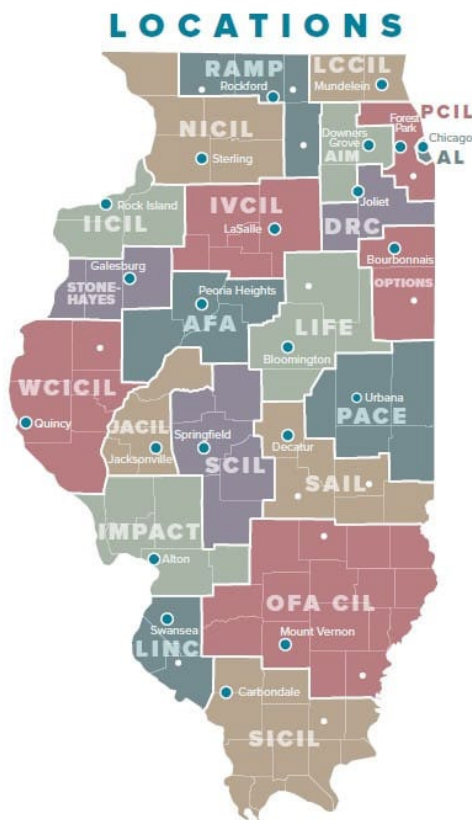
Home Modification



“We can’t say enough about our walk-in shower. Our daughter has had three strokes since birth and the last one left her unable to walk. We could no longer get her in the bathtub. With the assistance of DHRS, we were able to have the walk-in shower installed. We are so happy to be able to give our daughter a proper shower and she loves the water splashing down on her. That smile she gives is the best of all. To say the least, is simply every breath we take. Thank you SO much to DHRS”.

-The Coit Family

Independent Living Network



AL (Access Living of Metropolitan Chicago)

AFA (Advocates for Access)

AIM (Achieving Independence and Mobility)

DRC (Disability Resource Center)

IVCIL (Illinois Valley CIL)

IICIL (Illinois/Iowa CIL)

IMPACT CIL

JACIL (Jacksonville Area CIL)

LCCIL (Lake County CIL)

LIFE (Living Independence for Everyone)

LINC (Living Independently Now Center)

NICIL (Northwestern Illinois CIL)

OFA CIL (Opportunities for Access CIL)

OPTIONS

PACE (Persons Assuming Control of their Environment)

PCIL (Progress CIL)

RAMP (Regional Access and Mobilization Project)

SICIL (Southern Illinois CIL)

SAIL (Soyland Access for Independent Living)

SCIL (Springfield CIL)

STONE-HAYES CIL

WCICIL (West Central Illinois CIL)

Educational and Training Services

The Illinois Division of Rehabilitation Services offers three residential education and outreach programs for children with disabilities. Our Next Steps program trains parents to plan, advocate, and identify resources for their child with a disability. Any Illinois resident who meets the age and disability criteria can attend the residential schools.

Our educational programming includes extra-curricular activities, vocational rehabilitation and transition services, vocational education classes, training in daily living skills, orientation and mobility skills, and independent living skills.

Any Illinois resident whose child has a disability can participate in Next Steps. Local school districts, professionals and parents can make referrals for children to attend.

- **Illinois School for the Deaf (ISD)**, located in Jacksonville, serves students from birth to 22 who are deaf or hard of hearing.
- **Illinois School for the Visually Impaired (ISVI)**, located in Jacksonville, serves students from birth to 22 who are blind or visually impaired.
- **Illinois Center for Rehabilitation & Education-Roosevelt (ICRE-R)**, located in Chicago, serves students ages 5-22 with severe physical disabilities.

Illinois School for the Deaf (ISD)

The Illinois School for the Deaf (ISD) was founded in 1839 and is in Jacksonville, Illinois on a 50-acre campus in central Illinois. The school offers accredited educational services for children from ages three to twenty-two, who are deaf or hard of hearing and live more than 25 miles from Jacksonville, and day programming for students who live within 25 miles of Jacksonville.

The vision of the Illinois School for the Deaf is to provide an environment in which students will thrive and succeed to their optimal potential. The mission is to engage students in a supportive, safe, and nurturing environment to achieve personal excellence academically, socially, physically, and emotionally.

Services are free and available to parents, students, teachers, and educational personnel who work with children who are deaf or hard of hearing in Illinois including training on:

- Topics associated with hearing loss.
- Conferences for parents
- Assessments to identify educational and vocational needs.
- Annual conferences for educational personnel
- Cochlear Implant support.

Program	FY 24 Students Served
Birth to 3	63
Residential	81
Day	54
TOTAL*	198

*average attendance based on reported monthly totals

FY 24 Highlights

Staffing

ISD was able to fill 22 staff vacancies in the 2024-2025 SY.

Community Relations and Outreach

EVENT	Totals
Community Sign language classes in the Fall and Spring	49 participants
Online presentations and conferences	725 participants
Training events	38
Conference Attendance	4
Exhibitions	6
Advocacy and Consultation Sessions	72

Elementary Programs (K-6th)

- 54 students enrolled, 16 new students for the 23-24 SY.
- 12 achieved 95% or better attendance records.
- 14 achieved 6th grade promotion

Elementary student progress is evaluated through the Northwest Evaluation Association Measures of Academic Progress (NWEA MAP), with an overall goal of at least 50% of students reach their growth target.

- **Reading:** 43% met established growth target; 73% improved overall scores from spring to fall
- **Language:** 45% met established growth target; 64% showed improved scores from spring to fall
- **Math:** 63% of students met their growth target, exceeding the established goal and 90% of students improved from fall to spring

Students participated in American Sign Language Literacy using Cued American English during reading and/or language instruction, participating in sign language and cultural awareness through 1-1 tutoring and the ASL celebration. Students engaged in many other activities throughout the year to promote positive behavior such as Lunch with Principal and Lunch with a Cop.

Goals for the 24-25 SY include increasing student achievement, continue a Writer’s workshop, and math binders for students to track their progress.

Junior Senior High School (7th-12th)

- 67 enrolled in 7th-12th grade at the start of the year.
- 29 enrolled in the Transitional Living Program (TLP) for students 18-22years old.
- Of the 6 seniors, one will accept the students accepted their high school diploma the other 5 will continue in the TLP.

Student progress is evaluated through the Northwest Evaluation Association Measures of Academic Progress (NWEA MAP), with an overall goal of at least 50% of students reach their growth target.

- **Reading:** 51% of students in grades 7-12 met or exceeded their growth projections
- **Math:** 45% of students in grades 7-12 met or exceeded their growth projections

ISD collaborated with area high schools and Lincoln Land Community College to provide additional course opportunities for students engaged in positive behavior programs such as monthly drawings of prizes, Annual awards ceremony to celebrate academic success, and participated in professional development for teachers/staff.

Goals for 24-25 include 55% or more students in grades 7-12 meet or exceed NWEA MAP growth projection on reading, language, and math subtests, reduce chronically truant students by 5%, and increase positive parent contacts.

Career and Technical Education Center/Transition Services

73% junior high school, high school, and Transitional Living Program (TLP) students participated in various career and technical education programs.

79% students participated in CTE programming. CTE Improvement grant funds used to purchase work related equipment and machines, supplies and materials and to fund professional development for the CTE Principal and educators.

Student Work Experience

Student Work Experience (SWE) program provides students over age 16 with job site placements to develop appropriate employability skills. Students work with a program coordinator, job coaches, and onsite supervisors to set realistic career goals.

Activity	Number of Students
1 st Semester Enrollment	40
2 nd Semester Enrollment	52
Career Safe 10 Hour OSHA Safety Credential	10
Food Handlers Credential	7
On Campus Jobs (school-day)	4
Off Campus Jobs (school-day)	21
On Campus Jobs (after school)	2
Off Campus Jobs (after School)	24

Transition Services included “Meet your counselor” appointments to connect students with IDHS-DRS Rehab counselors for the deaf and 11 in-person Transition presentations and one virtual presentation reaching 105 students.

Transitional Living Program (TLP) and Functional Life Skills (FLS)

- 29 Students enrolled.
- 15 accepted diplomas throughout 23-24 SY
- participated in a variety of employment, independent living and academic opportunities, volunteer experiences and recreational activities.

Goals for 2025 all students will receive opportunities for academic, career and technical literacy and life skills, ISD will maintain community relationships with local business and educational institutions and implement at least one team based CTE challenge.

ISD Success Story



Isaac Richard along with colleagues from Illinois Electric Cooperative (IEC) presented about the danger of downed power lines and how to stay safe to ISD Driver Education students. They presented the information to students and then gave a demonstration of the information. Isaac attended ISD for a few years when he was younger, so it was great to welcome him back as an electrical lineman with IEC!

Illinois School for the Visually Impaired (ISVI)

The vision of the Illinois School for the Visually Impaired is to provide a quality, comprehensive education and serve as a statewide resource to students in Illinois with visual impairments, assisting them in becoming personally productive and self-sufficient citizens.

The Illinois School for the Visually Impaired (ISVI), established in 1849, is a residential/day school for students who are blind or visually impaired. Located in Jacksonville, ISVI provides accredited educational and related services for children who are blind or visually impaired from birth to 22 years of age through preschool, elementary and high school.

Educational services are provided at no cost to parents. Personal belongings, health care, and spending money are the responsibility of the parents. The home schools are responsible for transportation cost for home-going breaks and personal assistants. Students can be referred for enrollment by their parents or their local education agency. **Students served in FY 24 increased 10.5% over FY 23.**

Program	FY 24 Students Served
Birth to 3	81
School age	58
TOTAL	139

FY 24 Highlights

- **Hired 23 staff members.**
- **Increased enrollment by 10.5%.**
- Offered the STRIVE Expanded Core Curricula, **increasing ECC engagement time by 57%** in-class time on skills such as service learning, money skills, self-advocacy, social skills, telephone skills, food prep, and independent health skills.
- Students enjoy a variety of extracurricular and dormitory activities, including track, cheerleading, swimming, wrestling, goalball, bowling, forensics, yearbook, student council, and choir.
- **91% of the students who were new to sports had never competed in organized sporting activities.**
- Five students took classes at Lincoln Land Community College, earning credits toward an industry recognized credential.
- Celebrated the highest number of families in attendance at Opening Doors. We had 26 families in attendance and the campus was babies, babies, babies!
- ISVI has an outreach program that offers conferences for parents and educators across the state, training in assessments, and a Braille Challenge annually.

ISVI progress toward IDSH-DRS goals:

Goal #1: Students will improve/increase self-advocacy skills.

ACHIEVED: The transition specialist and our school to work coordinator worked with **every child 14.5 and above** to set personal goals using the PACE rubric. We also completed SEL screeners and are working with Regional Office of Education #1 to set SEL goals and WIG's in the Leader in Me program.

Goal #2: Schools will increase student enrollment.

ACHIEVED: ISVI began the journey of the 175 years celebration in FY23. Activities resulted in an increase in activities open to the public, items that are streamed, and work done in conjunction with alumni, outside

stakeholders and our Parent-Teacher Organization. These types of events will increase awareness and support parents to make informed decision on all the services that ISVI offers as services to the State of Illinois.

Activities attributing to increased enrollment:

- ISVI promote themselves in a positive light on social media (Facebook) and school and Sports Booster websites to encourage student enrollment.
- Live Streaming almost every sporting and fine arts events.
- Adding audio descriptions to many of the school's extracurricular events making them more accessible in real time.
- Recognition from Alumni and followers from across the United States on the audio description supporting their enjoyment of watching sports such as goalball.

Vision for FY 25

Goal #1: In FY 24, 100% of ISVI students in 5th grade and above will set personal self-advocacy goals using the new PACE rubrics.

- Educators and/or Transition specialist will work with students individually to set personal goals exploring self-advocacy skills.
- Student's data on self-advocacy skills will be collected at the beginning of the school year and additionally at **various times during the school year to compare the rate of growth.**

Goal #2: In FY 24 ISVI will increase enrollment for on campus services and 0-3 programs by 10% given increased social media presence, in person services, and in person outreach events.

- Schools will promote themselves in a positive light on social media and school websites to encourage student enrollment.
- Keep social media and websites up to date with school events and activities.
- Schools will work with school districts to encourage IEP placement in an IDHS-DRS school.
- IEP team meetings

ISVI Success Story



In FY 24 ISVI adopted a new logo. It was an amazing experience and process to go through with our students and stakeholders. We really centered all discussions around the student's voice and how they viewed culture sensitivity and how they identified as a person with low vision and or blindness. They led the charge in becoming the best Warriors we can be, and our future looks bright! Check out student [David Blanchette's Article](#) on the adoption of the new logo!

We completed the yearlong celebrations of our 175th anniversary and capped the ending with an adult and student Gala. The Gala attracted over 200 ticket sales and was so much fun! We had readings from students, alumni, and our entertainment was provided by our own jazz musician Robert Sampson. This was a night that will be remembered for some time to come.

Illinois Center for Rehabilitation and Education- Roosevelt (ICRE-R)

Illinois Center for Rehabilitation and Education- Roosevelt (ICRE-R) provides a comprehensive transition program for students with physical disabilities and other health impairments who have completed their high school education but have deferred their high school diplomas. The program is four (4) years in length and is available to students for four (4) years or until they reach 22 years of age, whichever comes first.

ICRE-R works with students, parent/guardian, local education, and community agencies to assist with coordinating services from high school to adult living. Students may attend ICRE-R as a residential student in the dormitories or attend the day program Monday - Thursday, as a day student. Each student's program is tailored to his/her individual needs, skills, and interests and each have the opportunity to learn.

FY24 Highlights

- **ICRE-R hired nine (9) staff vacancies.**
- ICRE-R provided educational instruction to **32 transition students and 6 Pre-Employment Preparation students.**
- Six students were able to **live independently in their own community apartments with support** from skills learned from the ICRE transition program.
- Students participated in the Mobility Access Program (IMAP) whereby, through the efforts of a mobility trainer, **students learned independent mobility** throughout the entire Chicagoland area.
- Successfully **expanded** our **culinary arts program** to include a pop-up kitchen and coffee shop.
- Education Department restructured and implemented **new assessment tool** to measure student progress in the program.
- Collaborated with the University of Illinois Chicago (UIC) to **Implement ICRE-R Self Employment program.**

Vision for FY25

Our FY25 vision for ICRE-R is to establish a winning program in all areas of transition, which encompass the following four key areas:

- **Post-Secondary Education and Training:** Activities and skills related to instruction or learning situations that prepare students for life after graduation.
- **Employment:** Activities and skills necessary for developing work-related behaviors, as well as obtaining and retaining a job.
- **Independent Living:** Activities and skills related to the actions that adults undertake occasionally or regularly in their daily lives.
- **Community Participation:** Activities and skills that help students develop interests outside of school, preparing them to engage with their community.

Introducing the **W.I.N. Initiative**

Work, Innovation, and Networking (W.I.N.). These principles are central to our mission at ICRE-R. We will actively pursue **WORK** opportunities and job training for our students, empowering them to achieve their goals. By fostering a culture of **INNOVATIVE** thinking, we will continuously explore new adaptive equipment and technology tailored to their needs. Through **NETWORKING**, we will embrace diverse perspectives and experiences, creating collaborations that inspire creativity and drive progress. Regardless of whether a student is interested in seeking employment, pursuing entrepreneurship, enrolling in post-secondary education, or finding an apartment in the community, we will adopt a W.I.N. approach to support them in achieving these goals.

We are also pleased to announce the formation of our ICRE-R Alumni Group. This group aims to strengthen connections and foster a supportive community among our alumni and students, serving as a valuable networking resource for both groups.

ICRE-Roosevelt Success Story



Daequan, a 2024 graduate of ICRE-R has achieved an exciting milestone by securing an office assistant position at Salesforce, a leading cloud-based software company renowned for its commitment to inclusivity and diversity. Since starting on April 6, 2023, Daequan has become part of Salesforce's dedicated program that focuses on hiring individuals with disabilities, showcasing the company's proactive approach to fostering a diverse workplace.

To enhance his independence, Daequan completed travel training at ICRE-R, enabling him to navigate transportation for his daily commute. This employment opportunity not only brings financial benefits but also significantly boosts his self-esteem and confidence, making a meaningful impact as he embarks on his professional journey.

Bureau of Planning and Strategic Management (BPSM)

The Bureau of Planning and Strategic Management (BPSM) is one of six Bureaus within the Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS). BPSM consolidates mandated administrative and reporting requirements of all employment and independent living related programs, to ensure the expectations of customers are met and the internal goals and guiding principles of the Division are maintained.

BPSM has four units under its umbrella: Audit, Data Analysis, Quality Assurance (QA), and Assistive & Information Technology Support (AITS). This particular Bureau provides support and direction to central office staff within the Division, in particular, employees working directly with our customers.

Program Services

Audit responds to state and federal accountability standards through transparency. Audit provides a coordinated and formal response to how dollars are spent, and how other resources are allocated. When needed, Audit works with other departments to formulate and report any corrective action to our agency stakeholders.

Data Analysis is responsible for guiding the Division driven by data and logic. Data Analysis determines through quantitative data how the Division is doing in reaching identified goals. Data Analysis works closely with Quality Assurance. Together, the two units combine quantitative and qualitative data to provide a complete picture of the Division's progress and performance.

Quality Assurance ensures that policies and rules for providing services to our customers are done with excellence and within the parameters of directives and regulations. The Quality Assurance unit monitors and assesses the provision of services to our customers in both the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) and Home Services Program (HSP). In contrast to Data Analysis's quantitative evaluation, Quality Assurance takes a more qualitative approach to auditing the scope of the services provided.

Assistive and Information Technology Support unit works with field and central office staff by coordinating the technology used within the Division. Thus, supporting DRS' employees in performing their jobs. Assistive and Information Technology Support is the first stop for those in this Division needing to fix and refresh malfunctioning hardware and software.

FY 24 Program Highlights

Over the past fiscal year, BPSM:

- Worked across the different Bureaus to coordinate the Rehabilitation Services Administration’s Monitoring and Technical Assistance onsite visit.
- Audit team collaborated with other units in VR, HSP, and Central Office to respond to Compliance, Fiscal and Single Audits.
- Data Analysis provided data support and technical assistance to numerous reporting projects and programs including Subminimum Wage to Competitive Integrated Employment (SWTCIE); Illinois Pathways to Partnership Project (IPPP); Equity and Racial Justice Act (ERJA); an array of state and federal reporting.
- Data Analysis worked on updates to policies with DHS Legal allowing DRS customers to Opt-In to mass texts. These blasts would provide timely notification of emergency notifications, job openings, and opportunities to respond to customer satisfaction surveys through a modern modality.
- Quality Assurance provided both quarterly and annual audit summaries of audits conducted in the HSP and VR programs. In FY 24, QA was asked to work in tandem with the Transition and Community Resource Services (TCRS) Unit to ensure audit findings were corrected by the specific VR field offices undergoing the review.
- AITS initiated its plan to refresh staff laptops and cell phones.

Goals for FY25

In FY25, BPSM’s will

- Develop corrective Action plans in response to the 2024 RSA Monitoring recommendations.
- Coordinate the corrective actions approved by the RSA to maintain ongoing compliance with the federal program.
- Enhance DRS process and procedures by
 - Improving the referral process,
 - Updating QA’s auditing tool, and
 - Updating and developing standard operating procedures (SOPs).

BPSM Success Stories



Florine is a teacher at an after-school program in the Chicagoland area.

She has had difficulty with her vision her whole life, but it is not until her 40s that she received a diagnosis. Her vision had recently worsened, and while on medical leave, she sought help from IATP.

In a short amount of time, IATP provided Florine with a laptop computer and screen reading software, a large print keyboard, a portable OCR scanner, and a desktop magnifier. The evaluator and Florine met with her employer to ensure she could access this equipment while at work and received training on her new equipment from a rehabilitation instructor.

Florine was brought to tears when she received the much-needed equipment. This equipment helped her access all the required teaching curriculum and give her more day-to-day independence. She felt confident enough to return to teaching after receiving the recommended assistive technology from IATP. Florine was a beloved teacher and co-worker, and the collaboration between IATP and her employer allowed for a seamless transition while she returned to work.

Bureau of Support Services (BSS)

Bureau of Support Services (BSS) realigns the Operational Support functions in the Division focusing on budget, fiscal analysis and payment management, ensuring operational efficiency and oversight of funding, contracts, and expenditures.

FY24 Highlights

The BSS operated for another successful year, bringing in \$9.7M in program income, while timely processing vouchers and contracts for the Division. The unit's staff provided significant support to other areas of the Agency, with multiple team members serving temporary assignments with other units in need of assistance.

Vision for FY25

The unit will continue to seek out efficiencies in the contract and voucher processing within the SAP accounting system. As well the program income unit within the Bureau will be working with Employment Networks and other areas of the division to increase cooperation under the Ticket to Work program, hopefully resulting in increased program income, more benefit planning for Social Security eligible customers, and transitions for customers to Employment network post employment.

Funding, Allocation, and Spending

Total All Funds Allocation & Spending

\$ in thousands

Funding	Final Enacted	Final Spending
Federal	\$366,776.1	\$220,070.4
General Revenue & Other State	\$1,207,677.5	\$1,176,095.5
Total	\$1,574,453.6	\$1,396,165.9

Federal Allocation & Spending

Appropriation/Program Name	Final Enacted	Final Spending
Total Federal Allocation & Spending	\$366,776.1	\$220,070.4
Disability Determination Services	\$119,341.8	\$71,735.6
Personal Services	\$41,041.1	\$25,991.6
Retirement	\$21,751.8	\$13,704.1
Social Security	\$3,318.9	\$2,085.4
Group Insurance	\$12,661.8	\$7,726.2
Contractual Services	\$11,601.8	\$5,917.4
Travel	\$198.0	\$5.1
Commodities	\$379.1	\$84.1
Printing	\$384.0	\$199.0
Equipment	\$1,600.9	\$112.2

Telecommunications	\$1,404.7	\$365.4
Operation of Auto Equipment	\$0.1	\$0.0
Services to Disabled Individuals	\$25,000.0	\$15,545.1
Vocational Rehabilitation Program & Related	\$211,029.4	\$128,598.0
Personal Services	\$45,287.4	\$35,682.0
Retirement	\$24,002.4	\$18,794.3
Social Security	\$3,511.8	\$2,653.3
Group Insurance	\$15,105.5	\$9,692.7
Contractual Services	\$12,000.0	\$5,270.1
Travel	\$1,455.9	\$196.1
Commodities	\$313.2	\$80.8
Printing	\$150.1	\$4.3
Equipment	\$1,669.9	\$224.5
Telecommunications	\$1,493.2	\$655.6
Operation of Auto Equipment	\$40.0	\$10.3
Federal Vocational Rehabilitation programs and related costs, including Case Services	\$85,000.0	\$43,047.9
Supportive Employment	\$7,000.0	\$2,301.1
Federal Assistive Technology Act Services	\$9,000.0	\$7,980.0
Business Enterprise Program for the Blind	\$5,000.00	\$2,005.0
Educational & Training Facilities	\$2,370.0	\$1,448.5
Federally Assisted Programs	\$2,000.0	\$1,191.6
Vocational Programming	\$200.0	\$110.4
Vocational Programming	\$50.0	\$42.4
Vocational Programming	\$120.0	\$104.0
Independent Living & Related	\$9,545.5	\$5,837.3
Independent Living Centers	\$6,500.0	\$4,252.7
Independent Living Older Blind	\$3,045.5	\$1,584.6
Indirect Program & Administrative Support	\$18,996.5	\$12,080.3
Personal Services	\$5,398.4	\$3,792.2
Retirement	\$2,861.2	\$1,999.9
Social Security	\$413.0	\$278.2
Group Insurance	\$1,798.1	\$936.3
Contractual Services	\$1,500.0	\$0.0
Leased Property Management	\$5,076.2	\$5,073.7
Travel	\$136.0	\$0.0
Commodities	\$136.5	\$0.0
Printing	\$87.0	\$0.0
Equipment	\$298.6	\$0.0

Telecommunications	\$1,226.5	\$0.4
Operation of Auto Equipment	\$50.0	\$0.0
Tort Claims	\$10.0	\$0.0
Refunds-Vocational Rehabilitation Fund	\$5.0	\$0.0
Indirect/Direct Management Information Systems	\$5,492.9	\$370.8
Personal Services	\$482.7	\$201.8
Retirement	\$255.8	\$106.4
Social Security	\$36.9.	\$14.8
Group Insurance	\$82.6	\$47.7
Contractual Services	\$705.0	\$0.0
Contractual Services IT Management	\$2,280.7	\$0.0
Travel	\$10.0	\$0.0
Commodities	\$30.6	\$0.0
Printing	\$5.8	\$0.0
Equipment	\$50.0	\$0.0
Telecommunications	\$1,550.0	\$0.0
Operation of Auto Equipment	\$2.8	\$0.0

General Revenue & Other State Allocation & Spending

Appropriation/Program Name	Final Enacted	Final Spending
Total State Allocation & Spending	\$1,207,677.5	\$1,176,095.5
Home Services Program	\$1,142,149.3	\$1,115,010.6
Personal Services	\$1,459.4	\$1,415.3
Social Security	\$117.5	\$103.4
Home Services Program	\$884,572.4	\$884,551.5
Home Services Program	\$256,000.0	\$228,940.6
Vocational Rehabilitation Program & Related	\$21,423.8	\$19,351.7
Supported Employment Programs	\$90.0	\$57.4
State Match to Supports for Federal Vocational Rehabilitation programs, Incl Case Services	\$21,333.8	\$19,294.3
Educational & Training Facilities (ISD, ISVI, ICRE-W, ICRE-R)	\$37,599.4	\$35,228.3
Illinois School for the Deaf (ISD)	\$19,748.4	\$18,530.0
Personal Services	\$16,046.8	\$15,330.9
Student Member/Inmate Compensation	\$18.2	\$14.6
Social Security	\$1,177.3	\$853.0
Contractual Services	\$1,549.3	\$1,498.3
Travel	\$24.5	\$20.1

Commodities	\$339.3	\$329.6
Printing	\$2.8	\$2.75
Equipment	\$389.2	\$322.7
Telecommunications	\$110.7	\$76.8
Operation Of Auto Equipment	\$90.3	\$81.3
Illinois School for the Visually Impaired (ISVI)	\$10,889.0	\$10,249.0
Personal Services	\$9,043.7	\$8,672.0
Student Member/Inmate Compensation	\$14.6	\$10.7
Social Security	\$586.0	\$460.0
Contractual Services	\$850.1	\$714.2
Travel	\$6.9	\$6.9
Commodities	\$218.3	\$217.0
Printing	\$2.3	\$2.3
Equipment	\$71.4	\$70.9
Telecommunications	\$49.2	\$48.9
Operation Of Auto Equipment	\$46.6	\$46.1
Illinois School for Rehabilitation & Education - Wood (ICRE-W)	\$1,375.3	\$1,100.4
Personal Services	\$1,224.2	\$978.1
Social Security	\$93.7	\$72.58
Contractual Services	\$57.4	\$49.7
Illinois School for Rehabilitation & Education - Roosevelt (ICRE-R)	\$5,586.7	\$5,349.0
Personal Services	\$4,110.7	\$4,026.9
Student Member/Inmate Compensation	\$1.8	\$0.0
Social Security	\$373.8	\$272.3
Contractual Services	\$888.7	\$855.3
Travel	\$1.7	\$1.1
Commodities	\$54.4	\$49.8
Printing	\$2.1	\$1.9
Equipment	\$63.6	\$62.3
Telecommunications	\$85.0	\$76.8
Operation Of Auto Equipment	\$4.9	\$2.6
Independent Living & Related	\$6,505.0	\$6,505.0
Independent Living Centers	\$6,358.9	\$6,358.9
Independent Living Older Blind	\$146.1	\$146.1

Federal enacted allocations represent the authority to spend. Final federal spending represents the cash available. The authority is set higher than the actual federal cash to allow for changes in federal funding that may occur after the budget is enacted.

Division of Rehabilitation Services Support and Oversight

Client Assistance Program

The Illinois Client Assistance Program (CAP), established as part of the Federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by the Workforce and Innovation and Opportunity Act, is a federally funded program designed to help persons with disabilities in understanding and using rehabilitation services. The CAP program was redesignated to EFE effective June 30, 2022.

EFE was founded in 1985 and serves as an independent not-for-profit corporation and the protection and advocacy (P&A) agency in Illinois. EFE's mission is to protect the rights and interests of persons with all types of disabilities, including intellectual and/or developmental disabilities, mental illness, and physical disabilities.

Program Highlights

IDHS-DRS worked closely with EFE to assist in a smooth transition and orientation as EFE assumed the responsibilities for managing CAP. CAP provides DRS customers with assistance in helping persons with disabilities understand and utilize rehabilitation services.

Summary of CAP Closures (10/1/23 – 9/30/24)	Customers	% of Total
All issues resolved in Customer's favor	32	32%
Some Issues resolved in Customer's favor	34	33%
Customer unresponsive/ uncooperative	15	15%
Case lacks Merit for CAP intervention	0	0%
Other	16	16%
Withdraw complaint/no further intervention needed	2	2%
VR Decision Determined Appropriate	2	2%
TOTAL	101	100%

Vision for FY25

The CAP program focus in FY2025 will be to grow the program by:

Continue to build Independent CAP

- Serving individual customers, with targeted outreach to underserved populations,
- Engaging in strategic planning,
- Continuing to build up our website, materials, and resources, and
- Continuing to collaborate with DRS leadership to identify how CAP and DRS can best serve customers.

Goals for Effectively Serving Individual VR Customers and CIL Consumers

- Serve 50+ individuals under the CAP program,
- Collaborate with DRS on goals such as expanding transportation access and improving communication between DRS and employers,
- Identify trends from our individual representation and bring them to the attention of DRS leadership for discussion, including trends related to communication access, and
- Continue efforts to identify and address barriers to services faced by underserved communities.

Creating Self-Advocacy Materials

- Create and publish additional fact sheets on issues including VR services, effective self-advocacy, employment rights under the Title I of the ADA, and transition-related issues.

Outreach/training, including Priority Populations

- Expand outreach efforts to WIPAs and other benefits counselors who work with SII and SSDI,
- Develop and provide training to DRS offices focused on issues that frequently arise in CAP cases,
- Continue trainings about topics including VR services, effective self-advocacy, employment rights under the Title I of the ADA, transition-related issues, and
- Target specific populations for outreach, including:
 - Court-Involved Youth
 - Individuals with IDD, including individuals living in Community Integrated Living Arrangements (CILAs) or State Operated Developmental Centers (SODCs)
 - Individuals with mental health diagnosis

Disability Determination Services

The evaluation of claims for the federal disability program is administered through the Illinois Bureau of Disability Determination Services (BDDS), which determines the eligibility of Illinois citizens to receive benefits under the Social Security Administration's (SSA) disability programs. The BDDS' budget is **100% federally funded** by the SSA. Employees at BDDS understand these benefits are crucial for Illinoisans looking to build a secure foundation for their lives.

In FY24, IL BDDS received an **Associate Commissioner Citation for the Top-Quality Achievement Award in Recognition of Sustained Outstanding Quality Performance over four consecutive fiscal years, from 2021-2024.**

Each claim received by the IL BDDS is subject to strict Social Security Administration (SSA) requirements for quality control, accuracy measures, confidentiality, and processing time parameters. IL BDDS **ranked 7th in the nation** and is considered a large state for their Quality. Quality is Social Security Administration's highest level of review and is as critical to the integrity of the claim. This achievement is a testament to the unwavering commitment to excellence demonstrated by the staff of the IL BDDS.

QA Initial Performance Accuracy Rate for Federal Fiscal Year 24

National Rate	Regional Rate	Illinois Rate
95.2%	95%	96.9%

The mission of the Illinois Bureau of Disability Determination Services (BDDS) is to make accurate, timely disability decisions based on objective medical documentation, and as appropriate, consideration of vocational history, including age, education, and previous work experience. The final decision on disability is made based on objective evidence by highly trained adjudicators in collaboration with a professional medical consultant.

Initial claims were assigned to examiners 63% faster in FY24, reducing the average number of days IL citizens waited for their initial claims from 212 days to 78 days. Meaning IL Citizens will be receiving their decisions in a timelier manner. In FY25, BDDS intends to extend their Inquiry **Line** to answer claimant and advocate calls coming into the toll-free number in a more expeditious manner providing case status.

In FY24, BDDS cleared 118,896 applicants, a 16% increase over FY23.

Case Type	FY 2023 Actual Clearances	FY 2024 Actual Clearances	FY24 % of target
Initials	54,459	84,549	94%
Reconsiderations	15,445	15,490	104%
Continuing Disability Reviews	21,838	14,406	95%*
Other	8,169	4,451	57%
Total:	99,911	118,896	93%

The IL DDS strives daily to make both accurate and timely decisions for all IL citizens who apply. Each disability application received by the BDDS is thoroughly reviewed employing precise SSA requirements and the disability determination is made utilizing objective evidence coupled with information received from the applicants and those who know them. **In FY25 BDDS aims to increase their case reviews by 10% and serve more than 130,000 applicants.**

Case Type	Service Goal FY 2025
Initials	93,575
Reconsiderations	15,724
Continuing Disability Reviews	15,430
Other Case Types	5,690

Recruitment and retention of qualified case reviewers is essential to the work of the BDDS. **In FY 24, the SSA funded nine (9) hires with seven (7) being examiners in training and two (2) clericals.**

With SSA Hiring Authority, BDDS intends to bring on at least 45 Trainees in FY25 in order to adjudicate disability cases for IL Citizens in an efficient manner. New trainees will allow BDDS to develop their workforce capacity and

- Continue robust training programs to provide refresher training, supplemental trainings, training on the new case processing system, and soft skills such as writing, organization, intuitive thinking.
- Continue the one-on-one mentorship program.
- Develop the New Adjudication Section of specialized staff who adjudicate special claim types and adjudicate abandoned backlogs. Within the Adjudication Section, two units will work with examiners who are struggling to meet goals to provide intensive review of casework and provide intensive training. BDDS aims to develop and **create life-long DHS employees.**

In FY24, BDDS held an **Annual Appreciation Reception** recognizing staff with bountiful awards and Kudos (pictured below). Other efforts to ensure staff retention included monthly communication newsletters, suggestion boxes, and the formation of special workgroups to address employee concerns.



BDDS Success Story

A claimant called our IL DDS 800 number asking if there was any way his case could be expedited due to the severity of his medical condition. He was told that his case would not be assigned for several more months as there were hundreds of claims already ahead of him. Upon talking to the claimant, we were able to quickly determine he had cancer that had spread to several lymph nodes.

We were able to review our listing criteria for his specific cancer while he was on the phone and determine that his condition met our criteria for disability. We also did a quick review of the case and determined that he had unresolved work activity that needed to be clarified for onset purposes, which is part of policy and procedure.

BDDS was able to obtain all details regarding his current medical care for his stage IV cancer and resolve his work activity details for potential onset purposes on one phone call. All necessary medical records were already in the electronic file. We quickly reviewed medical records, prepared an assessment form, obtained a doctor's signature, and **finalized the claim the following day.**

The claimant and his wife called back in the following weeks and were extremely appreciative of the expediency and care that this claim was handled. Extraordinary teamwork of multiple BDDS staff (operator, section chief, and medical contractor) made this one-day case processing time possible. These moments that we can see and hear what a difference we make in the lives of those we serve makes me very proud to be part of IL DDS.

Statewide Rehabilitation Council

The State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) advises the Secretary of the Department of Human Services and the Director of the Division of Rehabilitation Services in matters concerning individuals with disabilities and the provision of rehabilitation services. The SRC provides true customer input into the current and future VR process. [Read the Message from the SRC Chair.](#)

SRC's specific federal mandates include:

- Reviewing, analyzing, and advising IDHS-DRS regarding its performance
- Advising and assisting in the development of the State Plan for VR services
- Reviewing and evaluating customer satisfaction
- Coordinating activities with other councils
- Identifying, jointly developing, and reviewing VR goals and priorities
- Jointly selecting Impartial Hearing Officers with IDHS-DRS

FY 24 Highlights

- Finalized goals for the Vocational Rehabilitation of the WIOA Unified State Plan
- Collaborated with IDHS-DRS to implement objectives outlined in the State Plan goals and in advocacy of the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment results,
- Filled critical board vacancies,
- Resumed in-person, Statewide council meetings, and
- Provided Statewide presence by holding meetings in geographically diverse locations around the State.

Vision for 2025

- Begin plans to facilitate the next federally mandated Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment
- Participate in strategic planning efforts to guide the work of the SRC,
- Explore ways to incorporate promising practices from the [Illinois Work & Wellbeing Model](#)
- Update brochures and communication materials, and
- Revise By-laws and Orientation and Policy Manuals to allow for hybrid attendance.

Membership

SRC members are appointed by the Governor with the majority having a disability. Membership includes representatives from:

- Disability and Advocacy Organizations
- Business, Industry, and Labor
- Community Rehabilitation Service Providers
- Client Assistance Program
- Secondary or Higher Education
- Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor
- Current or Former Customer of VR Services
- Parent Training Information Centers
- State Board of Education
- State Workforce Innovation Board
- Blind Services Planning Council
- Statewide Independent Living Council
- Director of IDHS-DRS

Current members are listed at: [State Rehabilitation Council Members](#)

To apply to become a Statewide Rehabilitation Councilmember, please visit the appointments [website](#).

To learn more about upcoming or previous meetings visit the [SRC website](#).

Committees

Executive Committee consists of five (5) elected officers - Chair, Vice-Chair, Secretary, Fiscal Officer, and Member-at-Large. The Committee is responsible for ensuring the Council acts in accordance with federal and state statutes; manages the affairs of the Council in the interim between meetings; reviews the appointment categories the Council will need to fill in conjunction with the Membership Recruitment Committee; maintains a list of potential candidates to fill vacancies; and submits selected candidates for the following year to the Governor's Office of Executive Appointments for consideration.

Operations Committee consists of all Standing Committee Chairs and is responsible for developing an overall management plan for the Council and the Annual Report. With the assistance of other Committees, the Operations Committee shall identify the Council's goals and priorities for the year and shall identify the appropriate level of resources needed to accomplish the Council's tasks. Operations, procedures and policies will be developed and maintained in The Council's Orientation Manual, to be reviewed annually. The Committee shall also be responsible for reviewing the bylaws and submitting revisions to the Council. The bylaws shall be reviewed annually, and the Committee may make revisions as provided in Article VIII.

Policy/Legislative Committee is responsible for monitoring legislation that will have an impact on individuals with disabilities and on the operations of the Division of Rehabilitation Services. This shall include matters that affect and concern the Division's budget period. The Committee will make recommendations to the full Council with regard to positions on legislation and on the Division's budget. The Committee is also responsible for reviewing proposed changes to administrative rules and preparing a response to such changes on behalf of the Council.

Member Engagement Committee is responsible for interviewing each potential individual to ensure requirements of the category opening and other statute criteria.; appropriate approval and forwarding with the SRC recommendation to the Governor’s Office and maintains a list of potential candidates to fill current and future vacancies.

Blind Services Planning Council

The Illinois Blind Services Planning Council (BSPC) reviews actions of the Illinois Department of Human Services (DHS) Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS) Bureau of Customer and Community Blind Services (BCCBS). BCCBS facilitates communication and cooperation between agencies responsible for services to people who are blind and visually impaired. BSPC also identifies the needs and problems facing the blind community and makes recommendations to the Bureau Chief of BCCBS, Director of IDHS-DRS, Secretary of IDHS, and the Governor of Illinois.

FY 24 Highlights:

The Blind Services Planning Council

- participated in the hiring process of the new IDHS-DRS Bureau Chief for Customer and Community Blind Services, Andrew Webb.
- hosted quarterly meetings, where members reviewed reports from BCCBS as well as from representatives of various community providers and stakeholders who share information regarding services to the blind and visually impaired citizens of the State of Illinois.
- Agencies and stakeholders involved with BSPC are members of the American Council of the Blind, Illinois Council of the Blind, National Federation of the Blind, Illinois Committee of Blind Vendors, Centers for Independent Living, Illinois State University, and BCCBS staff.

Vision for FY 25:

The Blind Services Planning Council will

- Improve Blind Services through recommendations to the State.
- Address Council member shortages
- Continue participating in other statewide councils such as the State Rehabilitation Council, to ensure the needs of the blind community are heard.

Membership

Eleven members are appointed by the Governor. BSPC currently has nine members. The Council elects a Chairperson and a Recording Secretary from its members. Membership terms are three years, and members may serve a maximum of two terms. At least six members must be blind.

To apply to become a Blind Services Planning Councilmember, please visit the appointments [website](#).

Statewide Independent Living Council

Vision

We see an Illinois where persons with disabilities are independent, in control of their lives, and free from barriers to full participation in society.

Mission

To provide leadership, research, planning, and education required to support independent living services in Illinois. We achieve our mission by:

- Identifying and reaching out to persons currently un-served and underserved by Centers for Independent Living.
- Increasing awareness of independent living services and the independent living philosophy.
- Helping existing CILs to better serve persons with disabilities; and
- Promoting the development of new CILs.

SILC's Activities

- Sponsoring public hearings, public meetings, policy summits, and other educational and outreach efforts.
- Providing information to public officials, state agencies and local organizations, and individuals; and
- Conducting studies, training, and research.

FY 24 Highlights

- Hosted the Annual Transportation Meeting. Human Services Transportation Plan (HSTP) Coordinators, representatives from Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT), Department of Human Services (DHS), Statewide Rehabilitation Council (SRC), Transportation providers, along with CIL staff were in attendance.
- Continued tracking transportation complaints that are reported to the CILs. If you are experiencing problems with transportation, you may file your transportation complaint here: [Transportation Complaint Form](#)
- Delivered 10 online trainings in partnership with Illinois Assistive Technology Program's (IATP) Work Incentives Planning and Assistance (WIPA) program.
- Hosted a Lunch and Learn Webinar "**People with Disabilities: Bringing Diverse Skills to the Workforce**". Our featured panelists were Robin Jones from Great Lakes ADA, Stephanie Lipe and Kerri Obrist from DRS Workforce Development Unit, and Chris Dillon from Walgreens.
- Presented trainings along with Advocates for Access to educate CILs on partnering with Emergency Management agencies before, during, and after emergencies.
- Completed and submitted the next three-year State Plan for Independent Living, which has been approved by the Administration for Community Living.

Vision for 2025

- SILC will continue our work on transportation issues across the state and host another annual transportation meeting to foster productive relationships between CIL staff and transportation providers.
- SILC will continue to Partner with Great Lakes ADA and DRS Workforce Development Unit to present the Webinar "**People with Disabilities: Bringing Diverse Skills to the Workforce**", to potential employers. We will also be adding CEUs for those who wish to receive them.
- SILC will present trainings on various subjects surrounding employment readiness and will continue to partner with IATP for WIPA trainings.
- SILC will continue collaborative relationships with other groups and organizations to help bring positive change across both our state and the nation.

Membership

[SILC's board](#) is made up of 18 volunteers appointed by the Governor. A majority of voting members must be persons with disabilities who do not work for state agencies or Centers for Independent Living. Members are from all regions of the state, represent a broad range of disabilities, and are knowledgeable about the Centers for Independent Living and independent living services.

Voting members include

- persons with disabilities,
- parents,
- advocates, and
- representatives from private businesses,
- organizations serving persons with disabilities, and
- CILs.

SILC has five (5) non-voting members who represent state agencies providing services to persons with disabilities.

[Statewide Independent Living Council of Illinois | Since 1993 \(silcofillinois.org\)](#)

Disability Innovation Fund Grant Projects

The Illinois Department of Human Services- Division of Rehabilitation are recipients of two Disability Innovation Fund federal grants. The purpose of the Disability Innovation Fund (DIF) Program, as provided by the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2022 (Pub. L. 117-103), is to support innovative (as defined in the notice) activities aimed at increasing competitive integrated employment (CIE) as defined in section 7 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Rehabilitation Act) (29 U.S.C. 705(5)), for youth and other individuals with disabilities.

Subminimum Wage to Competitive Integrated Employment (SWTCIE) Illinois

Illinois Department of Human Services- Division of Rehabilitation (IDHS-DRS) received notification of the SWTCIE \$14M DIF Award (H421D220009) from the U.S. Department of Education-Rehabilitation Services Administration in the fall of 2022, a contract with the project evaluator, University of Illinois- Urbana-Champaign, was executed March 15, 2023. The SWTCIE Illinois achieved much during year two, the pilot year of the grant period.

The two major performance measures the Project expects to accomplish are:

1. the percentage of program participants who transition from sub-minimum wage employment to competitive integrated employment and
2. the percentage of program participants who are contemplating sub-minimum wage employment and are redirected to competitive integrated employment.

To meet the program measures, the SWTCIE IL Project created an innovative and collaborative partnership model with six (6) 14c certificate holders in geographically diverse areas of Illinois and provide them with integrated services to promote CIE. The Division of Rehabilitation Services posted a Notice of Funding Opportunity, and the six agencies were selected through a Merit Based Review process. Each agency received a \$125,000 sub-award for SFY 24, with the option to renew FY 25-FY27.

The following entities were selected to participate in the SWTCIE Grant Project:

- [The Workshop, Galena, IL](#)
- [Kreider Services, Dixon, IL](#)
- [CTF Illinois, Crestwood, IL](#)
- [Association for Independent Development, Aurora, IL](#)
- [Human Support Services, Waterloo, IL](#)
- [Centerstone, West Frankfort, IL](#)

During FY24, the SWTCIE Illinois Project has cultivated a solid collaboration between the Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS) and the University of Illinois Urbana/Champaign (UIUC), selecting individuals from each entity to serve as Project Managers. Further, the process continues to hire key staff to enrich the performance and evaluation pieces of the Project both internally and with Virginia Commonwealth University. Individuals from these entities will test the project’s effectiveness and provide staff development and technical assistance to agency staff. Further, the Project has made significant outreach to stakeholders, not only touting the benefits of the Project, but to engage in significant relationships which will continue through the life of the project.

The SWTCIE Illinois Project worked to meet the following goals in FY 24. The percentage of completion is at the end of each goal listed:

1. Hire and onboard various key personnel to implement and oversee the SWTCIE Illinois Project (100%).
2. Provide technical support and training to six selected agencies and begin to change their business model (100%).
3. Maintain a SWTCIE Illinois Project website and social media platform (100%).
4. Provide training and ACRE certification to at least 12 employment specialists and participating 14C project staff (100%).
5. Expand a SWTCIE Illinois Project workgroup comprised of project partners (100%).
6. Collect and secure ongoing project related data (80%).
7. Engage a total of 48 project participants (eight participants from each project site) (100%).

Participants	Total Engaged	Youth	Adults	Transitioned to Competitive Integrated Employment	% Transitioned to Competitive Integrated Employment
Subminimum Wage Workers	47	14	33	27	57%
Contemplators of Subminimum Wage Work	24	11	13	7	29%
Totals	71	25	46	34	48%

Contributions to research, knowledge, practice, or policy:

Research. The evaluation team has collected data and reported findings for constructs of focus in the areas of interagency collaboration (interaction & relationship quality), implementation (training and development, technical assistance, and outreach [TDTAO]), sustainability (transformative business model), and vocational rehabilitation (VR) services. The team has presented at a variety of project functions to communicate the importance of evaluation and research in this project and provide transparency in their purpose.

Knowledge. Robust training and technical support continue to be provided to SWTCIE Illinois staff. Virginia consultants and community research specialists meet virtually on a regular basis with agency employment specialists on supported and customized employment topics as well as project issues. Further, they make in person visits to the agencies on a every other month basis to provide support. Monthly communities of practices are conducted for field staff as well as quarterly events for agency executive staff. A SWTCIE Annual Meeting was held to disseminate project information and celebrate success. ACRE certification training is offered to all SWTCIE, agency, and DRS staff. An Employment Specialist Roundtable event is held quarterly to help develop best practices within the project.

A SWTCIE Illinois website and social media platforms continue to be populated with educational links, event promotion, agency updates, etc. Monthly SWTCIE Connect newsletters highlight project topics are areas of interest.

Practice. Robust training and technical support continue to be provided to SWTCIE Illinois staff. Virginia consultants and community research specialists meet virtually on a regular basis with agency employment specialists on supported and customized employment topics as well as project issues. This is done to change the way employment specialists work with customers in job development and cultivate relationships with employers in their catchment areas. The Project began assisting the 6 agencies as they think about ways to change their business models and moving away from subminimum wage employment.

Policy. SWTCIE Illinois activities, methods, and practices are being monitored on a state and federal level as legislation is pending to phase out subminimum wage employment in Illinois. The SWTCIE Illinois Project is being viewed as a potential model to roll out statewide in working with individuals transitioning from subminimum wage to competitive integrated employment.

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Pathways to Partnership Grant Project

The Illinois Pathways to Partnerships Project (IPPP) aims to improve transition, competitive integrated employment (CIE), and independent living (IL) outcomes for students with disabilities ages 10- 24 across Illinois. To that end, the project will develop a replicable and scalable innovative service delivery model that builds a seamless, cohesive, and effective partnership among State Vocational Rehabilitation Agency (SVRA), State Education Agency (SEA), local educational agency (LEA), centers for independent living (CILs) and university partners. Our innovative IPPP model will deliver Pre-Employment Transition Services (pre-ETS) to improve postsecondary outcomes for students with disabilities, particularly students who are members of oppressed populations.

The innovative IPPP model program will employ a comprehensive system of integrated resources, training, technical assistance, and supports utilizing coordinated expertise from all four partners that will focus on the following three major domain areas: (1) pre-ETS to CIE, (2) IL, and (3) professional development. The Project will also work with high-demand employers and other community and state agencies to maximize the implementation of the statewide model and build statewide capacity and partnerships to support CIE and IL for Illinois students with disabilities and their families. Key project performance measures are relative to the percentage of program participants who transition to postsecondary education or competitive integrated employment.

FY24 Highlights

Project objectives worked on during this reporting period are:

1. Develop a replicable and scalable innovative service delivery model that builds a seamless, cohesive, and effective partnership among SVRA, SEA, LEA, and CILs. (100% complete)
2. Establish partnerships with at least eight geographically diverse LEAs (88% complete)
3. Develop an Advisory Committee with at least 10% of the committee being comprised of children and youth with disabilities and their support systems (90%)
4. Develop modules related to financial literacy and economic independence (95% complete)
5. Identify potential wraparound services and technical assistance/trainings for any individual and organization served by IPPP. (50% complete).

The following measurable outcomes are supported by the work completed during this reporting period:

1. Key stakeholders across Illinois who are dedicated to transition outcomes for youth and adults with disabilities have created partnerships to ensure the sustainability of the project.
2. At least eight LEAs will develop strong transition programs with the support of UIUC and IIT training and technical assistance,
3. Increased community integration among IPPP participants through comprehensive transition services.
4. A project Advisory Committee has been established.
5. Development of evidence-based practices that promote successful transition outcomes including participation in appropriate post-secondary training, CIE, and IL.

During FY24, IPPP cultivated partnerships with 8 Centers for Independent Living and 8 local education agencies (two of the original LEAs elected not to participate in the program, one has been replaced by two districts and the other new district has not yet finalized their involvement). MOUs are currently in development for the newly committed LEAs and the rest have been fully signed. The Centers for Independent Living began developing the curricula that will be used when CIL staff enter schools to teach program participants. It is anticipated that the modules will be fully developed no later than 12/01/2024. The CILs have been given a list of key topics that must be covered in the curricula and the partners are currently working through issues related to implementation mechanics.

Technical assistance partners have begun developing trainings/assembling resources for project participants, with IIT focusing primarily on services to children/youth and their support systems and UIUC offering resources to educators such as career assessments and other materials to facilitate transition. CILs have begun developing partnerships with employers in their areas, with some noting that they have been able to garner commitments from employers to have internship/apprenticeship pipelines. Initial intake paperwork has been developed and schools are poised to being recruiting participants Several partners have hired key project staff. UIUC has developed a webpage for IPPP (<https://iirer.ahs.illinois.edu/ipp/>).

Contributions to Research and Practice.

Research. The Evaluation Framework has been developed (please see attached). Project specific releases of information and consent forms have been developed for IPPP participants.

Practice. Community of Practice meetings are held to share best practices and problem solve in curriculum development and other aspects. These are moving to monthly.

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