



JB Pritzker, Governor

Dulce M. Quintero, Secretary

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DATE: 12/1/2025

## **MEMORANDUM**

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

FROM: Dulce Quintero  
Secretary  
Illinois Department of Human Services  
*Dulce Quintero*  
*by Anushka*

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 2025** 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 **Tereta Love-Rutherford., DRS Policy Advisor** at [Tereta.Love-Rutherford@illinois.gov](mailto:Tereta.Love-Rutherford@illinois.gov), or **217-606-9012**.

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

# 2025 Annual Report

## Division of Rehabilitation Service

Illinois Department of Human Services



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**DIVISION OF  
REHABILITATION  
SERVICES**

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## A Message from the Director of Rehabilitation Services...



2025 marked the 35th anniversary of the Americans with Disability Act (ADA) which was signed into law on July 26, 1990. For the Illinois Department of Human Services, Division Rehabilitation Services (IDHS-DRS), ADA35 served as a reminder of the transformative impact of this landmark civil rights law. It is both a celebration of progress and a recognition of the continued work needed to ensure competitive integrated employment, community belonging, and barrier-free access, nationally and throughout the State of Illinois.

This year, as we reflect on the movement's history, we also pause to honor the memory and immense contributions of two cherished mentors and friends in the disability rights movement who passed away: Tuyet Le and Alice Wong. Their unwavering dedication, fierce advocacy, and profound wisdom continue to inspire our mission daily. We carry their legacy forward in our pursuit of justice and equity for all people with disabilities.

In FY 2025, the Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS) continued advancing its mission of expanding employment, independence, and community inclusion for Illinoisans with disabilities. This year offered new opportunities for innovation and reaffirmed the State's commitment to the principles of equal access and equity. We expanded access to services, strengthened employment pathways, and continued our focus on equity, accessibility, and inclusion.

Each day presents another opportunity for DRS to continue engagement with our community and those we serve to effect positive change in their lives. With the passage of the Dignity in Pay Act, Illinois has taken another historic step toward ensuring that every person with a disability has the opportunity to earn fair wages in competitive, integrated employment. DRS is committed to turning that promise into reality. We will move with purpose and renew our commitment to ourselves and community, tackling our work systematically, one obstacle at a time, until all barriers fall.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Rahnee K. Patrick". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Rahnee K. Patrick, Director  
IDHS Division of Rehabilitation Services

### Key Accomplishments in FY 2025

#### Expanded Outreach and Inclusion

DRS strengthened its statewide outreach, increasing engagement with adults and youth with disabilities — including individuals in underserved communities. Through initiatives such as the **Subminimum Wage to Competitive Integrated Employment (SWTCIE Illinois)** project, DRS supported individuals historically employed under subminimum wage certificates in transitioning to competitive, integrated employment.

#### Opening Access Under Order of Selection

In FY 2025, DRS announced that **all four Order of Selection categories remained open**, ensuring broader access to vocational rehabilitation (VR) services for individuals with the most significant disabilities.

#### Strengthening Employment Pathways

DRS deepened collaborations with education and workforce systems to expand participation in career pathways, technical credential programs, and work-based learning. These efforts align with Illinois' **Employment First** commitment and the State's long-term goals of increasing meaningful, integrated employment for people with disabilities.

#### Enhancing State Workforce & Capacity

Statewide workforce data showed that, as of May 2025, Illinois reached a peak in total State employees, including a **15% increase in direct care workers within IDHS**. While this reflects agency-wide staffing, the growth has supported improved

service delivery and responsiveness benefiting DRS customers.

### Policy and Funding Advances

- DRS secured **approximately \$139.6 million** in its FY 2025 Vocational Rehabilitation Formula Grant.
- The agency also received **about \$1.147 million** for the Independent Living Services for Older Individuals Who Are Blind program.
- Through the SWTCIE initiative, six partner agencies received sub-awards to support transitions away from sub-minimum wage employment.
- **Dignity in Pay Act (2025):** Illinois passed the Dignity in Pay Act, a landmark law strengthening statewide movement toward fully integrated, competitive employment by phasing out the use of sub-minimum wage certificates for people with disabilities. This legislation reinforces and accelerates the goals of SWTCIE and aligns with DRS's mission to support equitable wages, independence, and workplace inclusion.

### Equity, Awareness & Inclusivity

DRS continued efforts to expand access to in-person, virtual, and community-based service options. Customer feedback informed improvements in communication, transparency, and service flexibility.

### Progress Made Towards WIOA Unified State Plan Goals

In FY 24, DRS established new goals in the [WIOA \(Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act\) Unified State Plan](#) that would 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 began our essential work in FY 2025 and made meaningful progress towards these goals. DRS remains committed to fully achieving the goals as outlined below.

#### ACTIVITIES TOWARDS GOALS ONE, TWO, THREE, & FIVE:

##### 1. Development of a System to Obtain Real-Time, Direct Customer Feedback

- DRS is actively developing a system for obtaining real-time customer feedback throughout the vocational rehabilitation process to become a truly customer-driven organization. The agency has already launched a customer satisfaction survey to gather current data and guide future initiatives, using recommendations from a recent comprehensive statewide needs assessment.

##### 2. Accessible Communication and Outreach Plan

- The Division is implementing a comprehensive, accessible communication and outreach plan to educate customers on accessing services regardless of personal barriers.
  - **Community and Teen Outreach:** The Transition and Community Rehabilitation Services (TCRS) arm of DRS holds open office hours for contracted employment service providers to ensure seamless service delivery. Outreach events, such as the *Teen Fair for Deaf and Hard of Hearing*—a partnership with the Chicago Park District, Chicago Public Schools, and suburban schools—have successfully engaged youth across the state, even adapting efforts following natural disasters.
  - **Targeted Information:** DRS increased outreach to transition-age youth, securing grants and providing specific resources, including fact sheets on transition services for youth with disabilities. The agency is developing a specialized brochure aimed at Autistic youth to enhance engagement. The Director has also been involved in strengthening internal communication with staff.

##### 3. Comprehensive Model to Increase and Simplify Customer Access

- DRS has enhanced its service delivery model to increase and simplify customer access, incorporating flexible options and strengthening employer engagement.
  - **Flexible Access Points:** The infrastructure developed during the pandemic is utilized to provide diverse connection options. DRS now offers *community or home-based appointments* and ways to connect *virtually* to meet customers where they are, supported by over 500 field staff in 45 local offices across Illinois.
  - **Dual Customer Focus—Employer Engagement:** As a dual customer organization serving both individuals and employers, DRS has significantly expanded its network of employer partners to

identify job opportunities and promote the hiring of individuals with disabilities. These partnerships include major corporations, local businesses, and public sector entities such as:

- **Healthcare & Large Enterprises:** RUSH University Copley Aurora, Endeavor Health, Advocate Health, Uber Corporate, Abbott, Zebra Technologies, KeHE, and National Tube and Supply.
- **Local & Regional Partners:** iHeart Media Inc., Synergy Home Care, Help at Home, various restaurants (Riviera Maya, Schnucks #178, Thyme Square Café), G and W Electric, Multiplan, FHN, Pace Suburban Bus, and many more local businesses across Illinois.

#### ACTIVITIES TOWARDS GOAL FOUR:

##### 1. DRS initiated and pursued several strategies to address the complex challenge of transportation access throughout Illinois:

- **Assessing Transportation Needs and Formulating Strategies**  
DRS actively collaborated with other state agencies and disability-related organizations to assess the specific transportation needs of persons with disabilities. The agency utilized findings from its comprehensive statewide needs assessment to formulate targeted strategies for mitigating these barriers. This foundational work involved engaging with relevant stakeholders to understand gaps in existing infrastructure and services across different geographic regions of Illinois.
- **Mitigating Transportation Barriers for Customers Seeking Employment**  
DRS implemented multifaceted strategies aimed at improving mobility and access to employment opportunities:
- **Engaging Employers on Transit Routes:** DRS prioritized engagement with employers located on or near existing transit and paratransit routes. This strategic approach involved developing employer partnerships (as noted in Goal 6 accomplishments) with businesses accessible via public transportation, making job opportunities more attainable for individuals relying on these services.
- **Collaborating with Other Providers on Transit Training:** The agency engaged in collaborations with various transportation and disability service providers to offer transit training. These initiatives were designed to empower customers with the skills and confidence needed to use available public and specialized transportation systems effectively and safely.
- **Addressing Staffing Shortages:** DRS took steps to address critical staffing shortages within its specialized roles to ensure quality service delivery:
- **Certified Orientation and Mobility (O&M) Staff:** Efforts were made to recruit and retain certified O&M staff. These specialists are crucial for training individuals who are blind or visually impaired to travel independently, including using various transportation modes.
- **Regional Coordinators of the Deaf:** The agency worked to address shortages among Regional Coordinators of the Deaf, ensuring that communication barriers do not impede customers who are deaf or hard of hearing from accessing transportation resources and employment services.



Picture of the leaders from grantees the Illinois Network of Centers for Independent Living, the Statewide Independent Living Council, and government leadership from the Illinois Department of Transportation, Illinois Department of Aging, the Illinois Council on Developmental Disabilities, and the Behavioral Health and Recovery and Rehabilitation Services, Divisions of the Illinois Department of Human Services and leaders from local organizations and municipalities at Transportation Summit in November 2025.

## ACTIVITIES TOWARDS GOAL SIX:

### 1. Increased Self-Employment Opportunities

- DRS has upgraded its programs and policies to improve self-employment opportunities for customers. These efforts are part of a broader strategy to improve self-employment processes and opportunities to allow individuals with disabilities the chance to achieve economic security through business ownership.

### 2. Promotion of Alternative Business Models (SWTCIE Grant Project)

- DRS has made significant progress in promoting alternative business models for 14(c) certificate holders to reduce subminimum wage work through the federally funded *Subminimum Wage to Competitive Integrated Employment (SWTCIE) grant project*.
- DRS established an innovative and collaborative partnership model with **six 14(c) certificate holders** in geographically diverse areas of Illinois.
- These partners received sub-awards to implement integrated services like supported employment (SE), customized employment (CE), and benefits counseling to support the transition to CIE.
- Illinois has been recognized as "leading the nation in Subminimum Wage to Competitive Integrated Employment placements" through this initiative, which advances the Illinois Dignity in Pay Act.

### 3. Transition of Individuals from 14(c) Employment

- DRS is on track to transition a minimum of 100 individuals per year from 14(c) employment into competitive integrated employment. As of June 2024, 56 participants were already engaged in the SWTCIE project, with 16 competitive job placements already achieved within the pilot agencies, demonstrating strong momentum towards the annual goal.

### 4. Achieving and Exceeding Annual Employment Outcomes

- DRS aims to achieve and exceed 6,000 competitive employment outcomes annually. In the prior fiscal year (FY24), DRS successfully closed **4,227 cases** with successful competitive employment outcomes. The agency continues to expand its reach and open all four categories under the Order of Selection to serve more individuals, moving closer to the 6,000 annual target.

### 5. Increased Earnings at Case Closure

- A key accomplishment is the focus on increasing customer earnings. For FY24 closures, the average customer weekly wage was **\$520**, resulting in an average annual wage of **\$27,016**. This data demonstrates a strong commitment to achieving self-sufficient wages for participants, with ongoing efforts to monitor earnings at both case closure and the second-quarter follow-up.

## Looking Ahead: Priorities for FY 2026

In FY 2026, DRS will continue building on the progress achieved this year with a focus on:

- Increasing access and timeliness of VR services, particularly for youth and underserved communities.
- Strengthening partnerships with workforce boards, schools, and community rehabilitation providers to expand career opportunities.
- Supporting full implementation of the **Dignity in Pay Act** by helping providers transition away from sub-minimum wage employment and promoting competitive integrated jobs.
- Embedding equity, accessibility, inclusive design, and customer-centered service delivery across all programs.
- Ensuring responsiveness to federal and state policy changes, maintaining Illinois' leadership in disability services and support.

DRS remains determined to build a future in which every Illinoisan with a disability has meaningful opportunity, choice, and the foundation to thrive.

## 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 600 field staff working in 46 field offices located throughout the state provide these important services. **DRS staff provided services to over 44,000 customers** in SFY2025 through direct services and contractual partnerships, an increase of 8% over last fiscal year. VR was able to **successfully place 4154 in competitive, integrated employment** with an **average annual salary of \$27508 a 2% increase over FY2024**. DRS will work to achieve and exceed 6,000 competitive employment outcomes in SFY2026.

### Customers Served in FY 2025

Disability Category	Served	Employment Outcomes	Percent of Outcomes	Percent of Served	Average Hourly Wage	Average Weekly Earnings
Blind-Visually Impaired	1839	124	2.99%	4.16%	\$24.48	\$776
Deaf and Hard of Hearing	1758	281	6.76%	3.97%	\$19.53	\$617
Physical Disability	2274	184	4.43%	5.14%	\$19.69	\$474
Mental Illness	7883	994	23.93%	14.10%	\$17.22	\$474
Intellectual Disability	14,374	1,191	28.67%	23.24%	\$16.50	\$414
Learning Disability	10673	957	23.04%	24.14%	\$17.31	\$514
Brain Injury	338	28	0.67%	0.77%	\$19.35	\$432
Other Condition	4952	383	9.22%	10.09%	\$18.65	\$533
<b>VR Total</b>	<b>44,091</b>	<b>4,142</b>			<b>\$19.09</b>	<b>\$529</b>

### Top Employers of IDHS-DRS Customers FY 25

Industry	Successful Placements
Walmart	158
Jewel-Osco	127
McDonald's	73
State of Illinois	42
Casey's General Store	42
Mariano's	41
Amazon	39
Schnucks	34
FedEx	31
Culver's	27
Goodwill Industries	25
Walgreens	22
Burger King	22
Dollar General	21
TJ Maxx	20

## 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.

### FY25 Highlights

- **Successfully placed 4,154 customers in competitive, integrated employment.**
- **Served 44,157 Vocational** Rehabilitation customers.
- **Filled 91 field staff vacancies.**
- During FY 2025, DRS partnered with the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE), facilitated by the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition the Collaborative at University of North Carolina- Charlotte (NTACT-C), to review and update 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.
- Worked with ISBE and NTACT-C to develop and implement a new program for providing Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) to students in Illinois Schools. Pre-Employment Career Training (PECT) program began July 1, 2025. In addition, updates were made to several programs and contracts that provide Pre-ETS to students with a disability.
- 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 151 customers** transitioning from or considering subminimum wage employment and **successfully transitioned 40 individuals (48%) to competitive integrated employment.**

### BCCFS Vision for 2026

- 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 One Stop 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 services to youth with disabilities by 12% each year, over the next five years, sharing information on DRS services and encouraging 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 25 Customers Closed Successful in Competitive Employment: **4,154**
- Average State Spending per Successful Customer Placement: **\$8054**
- Average Customer Weekly Wages: **\$494**
- Average Customer Yearly Wages: **\$25,698**

### *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 up to 24 months after initial job placement; but can be extended as needed.

- FY 25 Customers Closed Successful in Supported Employment: **143**
- Average State Spending per Successful Customer Placement: **\$11,751**
- Average Customer Weekly Wages: **\$248**
- Average Customer Yearly Wages: **\$12,896**

### *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 25 Customers Closed Successful in Customized Employment: **71**
- Average State Spending for completion of all phases: **\$11,977**
- Average Customer Weekly Wages: **\$244**
- Average Customer Yearly Wages: **\$12,688**

### *Individual Placement and Support*

IDHS-DRS funds, administers, and provides technical assistance for the **41 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.
- FY 25 Customers Closed Successful in Individual Placement and Support: **378**
- Average State Spending per Successful Customer Placement: **\$8398**
- Average Customer Weekly Wages: **\$481**
- Average Customer Yearly Wages: **\$25,012**

### *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	66	\$9936	\$723	<b>\$37,596</b>
Community College	524	\$12,372	\$640	<b>\$33,280</b>
University Undergraduate	228	\$34,039	\$811	<b>\$42,172</b>
University Graduate	25	\$55,679	\$1099	<b>\$56,992</b>

## Transition

In FY25 IDHS-DRS **served more than 15,500 students with disabilities**. 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 25 Customers Closed Successful in Non-Step Transition Services: **144**
- Average State Spending per Successful Customer Placement: **\$12,319**
- Average Customer Weekly Wages: **\$475**
- Average Customer Yearly Wages: **\$24,700**

## 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 2025, 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 2025, a **total of 14,190 students were enrolled in STEP in 683 schools**.

- FY 25 Customers Closed Successful in STEP Transition Programs: **1783**
- Average State Spending per Successful Customer Placement: **\$6976**
- Average Customer Weekly Wages: **\$452**
- Average Customer Yearly Wages: **\$23,504**

## 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 2100 students**.
- FY Fast Track Transition contracts: **23**
- Fast Track Customers Closed Successful: **26**

## 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

### Milestone



Gabe reached a few major milestones this year. He celebrated 21 years of life. He also celebrated securing successful employment, with the help of his DRS counselor, the community rehabilitation partner (CRP), Challenge Unlimited, his loving family, and a community that adores him. Edwardsville School District knew they hired a gem when they hired Gabe. When Gabe is on his crossing guard post, there is no doubt that the children will safely cross through his intersection every time. He is beloved by the school district and his community. Early each school morning, Gabe shows up with a smile on his face and takes his duties seriously each and every day. His goals and dreams are simple. "Just help others.... just helping kids cross the road is part of that." This local community knows that rain, snow, or sunshine, if Gabe is on the job, they are in good hands. Check out this article to read more about [Gabe's story](#).

### Milestone



Meet Brenda Cooper!

June 2025 marked 90 days of competitive integrated employment for Brenda at Dietrich Community High School. With the help of her DRS counselor, Denice Smith and Community Support Job Coach Amanda Elmore, Brenda can proudly say that she is a valued member of the custodial team. She thoroughly enjoys her job and does it very well. She gets along wonderfully with her co-workers, teachers, and students. Her bosses noted she does a great job and is always willing to help out her co-workers when needed. Brenda is excited to be able to work a job she loves, in an environment she can thrive in. Congratulations, Brenda! DRS wishes you many years full of career success and satisfaction.



### Hooray for Trey!!!

Trey's success story is many, many years in the making. Trey first began working with Rehabilitation Counselor Blake Hegarty over 25 years ago, as a high school student. During high school, Trey received extensive special education services and PECT (formerly STEP) services. Their paths crossed once more in 2022, when Trey again applied for VR services. Trey also received services from vocational workers at Human Resources Center (HRC), a community resource provider in Paris, IL. Trey applied at several places before he was able to land the job that was the perfect fit for him. He takes great pride in his job and is happy that he is able to earn a livable wage. Trey's story is a testament to how far you can go when you decide to take nothing less than success, no matter how long it takes. Way to go, Trey!!!

### Competitive Employment

#### Never Give Up!

Having a few people who can see your potential and past the struggles will make all the difference in the world. Jordan E. certainly is thankful that he had a few people in his corner who never gave up on him. His family, community, and Rehabilitation Counselor Deborah Qualls offered assistance and support just when he needed it and because of that, he has found success in the working world.

He noted having a rough start when he was first hired. Jordan says that he struggled, but his bosses accommodated and supported him through it. Jordan says they told him they knew he had potential, so they didn't want to lose him. He also says because of the help he received from Deborah and others, he learned a lot of new skills that he uses every day. This helped him continue to improve and be a better employee.

Those important people around him never gave up on him so he was encouraged to never give up on himself. Now Jordan is proud to say he employed in a career that he loves! Jordan sent a note to DRS, expressing gratitude for the help he received along the way:

“Thank you guys so much for what you have done to help me and for never giving up on me and seeing my full potential even when I didn't.” Jordan's case is successfully closed, but he still stops by the local DRS office just to say thank you every so often. DRS is grateful to be able to work with him along the way. Congratulations Jordan! You deserve this success and more!

## Project Search



Harrison participated in Project SEARCH during the 2024–2025 school year. He is a kind and funny man with big dreams and a passion for music. Harrison’s long-term goal is to work in entertainment. His employment specialist talked to him about the limited availability of entry-level entertainment jobs in his area. This did not discourage Harrison from being motivated to work in other fields so he could work up to his dreams.

Harrison worked at three different internships in other fields while never letting go of his dream to work in the entertainment industry. One day, Harrison attended a local community expo and job fair. After some prompting and encouragement from his employment specialist, Harrison approached the booth for The Music Connection, a local music studio. Despite being nervous, he used the lessons he learned in a networking class and made the most of an opportunity of a lifetime. A few days later, he was offered an interview and was eventually offered a part time position! Harrison is happy to have found a position in the industry that aligns with his dreams and passions. Congratulations, Harrison!!!

## 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 Rehabilitation Case Coordinators (RCCs) assist our customers in achieving their employment goals.

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 25 Program Highlights*

Customers received vocational rehabilitation, rehabilitation instruction, and orientation & mobility services. We are currently serving 1,363 blind, low vision, and DeafBlind customers in the vocational rehabilitation program which is a slight increase from last year. In FY25, 137 customers were placed in competitive employment by BCCBS staff which represents an increase over last year. IDHS-DRS customers with vision related disabilities are earning an average wage of \$23.35 and working an average of 30.3 hours per week.

In FY 2025, we have neared the completion of a programmatic handbook to offer to customers entering our VR programs. We have also increased our braille printing capabilities statewide. We have increased accessibility taking part in a statewide JAWS training. We are collaborating to offer training to Rehabilitation Instructors through IATP to offer ongoing assistive technology training in FY 26. Additionally, we've increased our public footprint participating in a number of public events across the state from re-entry summits to job fairs, and upcoming NFB statewide convention.

### *BCCBS Program Vision for 2026*

- Increase BCCBS public partnerships, collaborations, and community engagement endeavors.
- Increase braille printing capabilities statewide.

Increase collaboration and partnership with BEPB through BEPB RSA-TAC to provide BEPV vendors with initial stocks and supplies when moving into new vending facilities.

## BCCBS Program Success Stories

### *Business Enterprise Program for the Blind (BEPB)*



In December 2024, blind manager Daphne Flemming reached a major milestone in her career, securing her first independent vending location at Facility #494 at the Irving Park Processing Center. This well-deserved achievement highlights her years of hard work and perseverance!

Since graduating from the BEPB training program in 2017, Daphne steadily built her expertise by serving as a replacement manager for four other blind managers between 2017 and 2024. Her consistent high performance, reliability, and team-first attitude earned her a strong reputation throughout the program. Daphne's story is a shining example of what is possible in the BEPB. It illustrates the potential for professional growth for blind entrepreneurs, and Daphne's diligence stands as a model for others pursuing a path in the BEPB.

## Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind

CCBS Region 3 has been working with a customer who obtained her degree as a Nurse Practitioner while working with us. Despite having a mini stroke after achieving her degree, she still persevered to achieve her goals. The customer is now currently employed at the Sole Women's Clinic in Galesburg. Recently, following a referral to the Illinois Assistive Technology Program (IATP), she expressed appreciation for the supplies provided to assist her in maintaining patient confidentiality despite her vision impairment. We are so proud of all her accomplishments.

In CCBS Region 4, a customer began his journey with DRS In-House Pre-ETS services prior to graduating High School. BCCBS played a pivotal role in supporting customer's journey towards independence and career readiness as a Heating, Air Conditioning, and Refrigeration Mechanic/Installer. Through comprehensive assistance, BCCBS was able to provide financial assistance that covered tuition, fees, tools, and transportation which allowed the customer to successfully attend a trade school program and earn his certificate in HVAC. The customer was able to secure full-time employment as an HVAC mechanic/installer in his hometown, where he continues to thrive. He has not only found stability in his new role, but he also experiences a deep sense of fulfillment and pride in the work he is doing each day.

In CCBS Region 5, a customer has worked for over 29 years at a not-for-profit center for independent living (CIL) in Indiana, but she was having trouble driving at nighttime, and completing her required job tasks due to age-related cataracts. This customer did not qualify for Medicare or Medicaid, and she was not able to afford private insurance to help cover the cost of the cataract surgery. She reached out to the Bureau of Customer and Community Blind Services, requesting physical restoration services for her cataract surgery. BCCBS was able to provide financial assistance towards her cataract surgery, helping to correct her visual acuity. She was able to maintain her employment working at the CIL and is very grateful for the services that she was able to receive from BCCBS.

## 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"> <li>• Braille,</li> <li>• Assistive Technology</li> <li>• computer technology,</li> <li>• health and wellness,</li> <li>• orientation and mobility, and</li> <li>• independent living skills.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• counseling,</li> <li>• housing help,</li> <li>• employment assistance and</li> <li>• post-secondary education resources.</li> </ul>

## ICRE-Wood Priorities for FY26

- 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 Braille, large print, in-person meetings, email, telephone calls, video calls via WebEx and Zoom, VideoPhone’s, interpreters for DeafBlind, interpreters for language barriers, and in-person meetings.
- ICRE-Wood continues to cultivate partnerships with community organizations, agencies, and businesses to provide supplemental training and job readiness programs, enhancing customers’ skills and increasing their opportunities for successful employment.
- ICRE-Wood will also continue to host monthly meetings featuring speakers from various agencies and companies to educate customers about job opportunities, services, and resources available for individuals who are blind, have low vision, or are DeafBlind.
- Provide training and advocacy support for transit users by offering hands-on instruction to customers in rural areas on how to effectively use ride-hailing services such as Uber, Lyft, and any available paratransit options. Ensure the training is accessible and tailored to the needs of individuals who are blind, low vision, and DeafBlind. Empower customers to become self-advocates by encouraging and supporting their participation in public hearings and transportation planning meetings. Promote civic engagement so residents can voice their transportation needs, influence policy decisions, and help shape more inclusive transit solutions in their communities.
- Provide training and advocacy support for transit users by offering hands-on instruction to customers in rural areas on how to effectively use ride-hailing services such as Uber, Lyft, and any available paratransit options. Ensure the training is accessible and tailored to the needs of individuals who are blind, low vision, and DeafBlind. Empower customers to become self-advocates by encouraging and supporting their participation in public hearings and transportation planning meetings. Promote civic engagement so residents can voice their transportation needs, influence policy decisions, and help shape more inclusive transit solutions in their communities.
- ICRE-Wood will implement Summer Transition Services for youth and young adults who are blind, low vision, and DeafBlind. These services are designed to support the transition from school to employment or postsecondary education through skill-building, career exploration, and community integration activities.
- ICRE-Wood will encourage or recommend customers to attend job fairs

## ICRE-Wood Success Story

### *Robert’s Story*

Robert Middlebrook’s journey with ICRE-Wood started when he came to our center and lived in the dorm in the Fall of 2023. At that time, Robert had no previous experience with blind rehabilitation. He was very passive and relied almost entirely on others to do everything for him.

His training at ICRE featured a comprehensive program which included Orientation and Mobility, Self-Advocacy and Communication, Independent Living Skills, Braille, and Social Services. He was eventually assisted with his transition from the ICRE dorm to an apartment. As a result of his training experience at ICRE, the customer is now able to do many things which he could not do before.

He can now give instructions to his PA to help make his appointments and arrange for transportation services. He can successfully use Paratransit to travel to medical appointments and go shopping. He can tell time using a special pocket clock with different vibrating patterns for hours and minutes. He can take notes using Braille. He is successfully managing his medications by using various tactile labeling systems independently. He can safely take a leisure walk, including street crossing with a communication card. Robert was able to transfer his blind rehab skills to so many areas of life which now enables him to be able to live on his own.

Robert has truly come a long way in terms of independent living and mobility. He is extremely appreciative of the staff at ICRE-Wood. Upon graduation, Robert shared his gratitude and signed, with tears in his eyes, "Thank you so very much, I feel I have a whole new life now. I never dreamed I could be so independent." It has been a pleasure to work with Mr. Middlebrook and we wish him all the best.

## Bureau of Customer and Community Services, Transition and Community Rehabilitation Services (TCRS)

TCRS monitors and manages a variety of statewide Vocational Rehabilitation contracts for adults, students with a disability, and youth with a disability. These include job placement contracts, Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) to students with a disability in school, and services to youth with a disability. TCRS is the lead for increasing and ensuring Pre-ETS are being provided statewide. We provide training, technical assistance, outreach and engagement opportunities for DRS Staff and external Providers. 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.

### *FY25 Highlights*

TCRS continues to make changes that align with federal regulations and the goals of the Division. With additional staff joining TCRS the ability to be more widely accessible to both DRS Staff and Providers for training and technical assistance needs was increased. New staff were paired with a mentor within our Bureau for training. This appeared to be successful with new staff taking on additional duties more quickly than in the past. The second half of the fiscal year, focused on creating, developing, and training for upcoming contract changes in FY26. Trainings were held in April, May, and June for all contract types with changes beginning in FY26. This was a great accomplishment while also continuing to work and provide supports on FY25 issues. We continue to focus on making our Bureau most efficient by reviewing historical data and intertwining it with new ideas.

- Development of increased and simplified supports for DRS Field Offices and Providers.
- Advanced planning for effectively supporting services implemented with FY26 contracts.
- Strengthening and streamlining the processes for services available along with the administrative oversight was the goal.
- Increased presence of information available on public facing sites.
- Monitored and managed at least 380 different contracts during the fiscal year.

### *Vision for 2026*

TCRS will continue to grow and improve the services and supports offered through Providers and DRS Field Offices under the contracts to individuals with a disability. 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 providing business services in the titles of business services consultants. 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. Finally, the team will continue to work with Employee Networks (ENs) – those agencies that were re-structured from 14-C community organizations to perform benefit analysis work for the purpose of helping to place clients in employment opportunities.

### *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.

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.”

#### **Events and Activities:**

1. DRS co-hosted an Apprenticeship Expo in November of 2024 with workforce and community partners to provide access to apprenticeship opportunities for communities including job seekers with Disabilities. The event took place in Chicago, IL and was successfully attended by 200+ members and 17 organizations providing apprenticeship opportunities and applicable resources. **November 2024.**
2. The DRS workforce development unit was welcomed by CVS to participate in a tour and overview of their newly renovated training center providing opportunities to marginalized communities in Illinois, including job seekers with disabilities. **December 2024.**
3. The DRS workforce development unit was instrumental in developing a playbook for business services activities in LWIA7 to serve as a reference for business service professionals and employers that include applicable resources for stakeholders in the area on disability employment in the workplace and services offered by DRS and Workforce Development Unit. **January 2025.**
4. WIOA Webinar lead by DRS workforce development unit and joined by core partners for the following workforce areas: a) Springfield 2/26 b) Jacksonville 2/4 c) Quincy 2/25 d) Metro-East 2/25. These efforts were led by Jenny Reed, BEC of

the Workforce Development Unit and includes resources from the workforce community, including DRS services to employers in those applicable areas. **February 2025.**

5. Members of DRS workforce development unit, and field office staff collaborated with the Chicago Park District and several community partners to put together a resource and employment fair for teens with disabilities in Chicago. DRS Bureau of Engagement and Support Services attended as a resource provider. **March 2025.**
6. DRS and the workforce development unit successfully collaborated with community, state, and city partners to co-host several hiring events for job seekers with disabilities. Below are the highlights from **April 2025:**
  - **April 9, 2025** – Employer Networking Event with Ada McKinley and the Mayor’s Office for People with **Disabilities (110 job seekers** attended and 21 organizations participated). Photos and summary posted on ONE NET. [IDHS OneNet: Employment Networking Event - April 9, 2025](#)
  - **April 11, 2025** – D214 Life Program Job Fair, collaboration with District 214 Transition Program, Business and Career Services, Harper College, Little City Foundation and Search INC. Summary and photos shared with DRS leadership team.
7. Several unit members attended the 2025 Workforce Summit this year in Peoria, IL, either virtually or in-person. Two members of the unit, Biswa Phuyal and Jennifer Reed presented on May 8<sup>th</sup> discussing the topic, “Power in Partnerships” with other workforce partners in the Metro-East area. The content of the presentation was shared with DRS internally. **May 2025.**
8. Provided a comprehensive Disability Employment Awareness Training to a manufacturing employer in Waukegan, IL LMT Onsurd on disability employment and inclusion and resources for the employers. The training was done in collaboration with community partner Jewish Children and Family Services (JCFS) and was on-site at the employers manufacturing facility on Monday, **May 12, 2025.** A DRS job seeker was hired for an apprenticeship with assistance from Lake County Workforce partners.
9. Several notable highlights from **June 2025:**
  - Unit Manager along with Bureau Chief and Disability Accessibility Program Manager presented to union leader representing various sectors in Illinois on DRS agency services and more specifically services that the unit provides to employers. The in-person presentation took place at **AFL-CIO** headquarters in **Springfield, IL** on **June 11<sup>th</sup>, 2025.**
  - Several members of the Workforce Development Unit attended the grand opening of the **CVS Health Chicago Workforce Center** ribbon cutting ceremony. DRS was highlighted as a community partner. The event occurred on **June 26, 2025.**
10. DRS workforce development unit collaborated with community organization, **Paul Simon Job Corps**, that provides wrap around services serving youth from underserved and marginalized communities. Kerry went above and beyond to support those individuals when it was determined that the agency will be shutting down due to funding being pulled by the federal government. Recognizing the urgency of the situation, unit member intervened by collaborating with our local DRS field offices to ensure continued access to essential support for those individuals like vocational rehabilitation as well as connecting them to additional community resources.

### *Benefits Planning*

The Benefits Planning Program remains steady in both referrals and services for FY25. The program is focused on providing clients with accurate, up-to-date information regarding their benefits, the advantages of employment, and resources available to support their path toward greater independence.

This includes legal assistance through the Protection and Advocacy for Beneficiaries of Social Security (PABSS), as well as guidance from providers and websites designed to help clients succeed in the workplace.

Clients are given verified and documented reports to help them understand how their benefits and income interact. Ongoing follow-up ensures that clients stay informed about their individual benefit status and are encouraged to ask questions, fostering greater confidence and informed decision-making as they pursue employment and self-sufficiency.

### 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). The word “Deaf” is used as an umbrella term to include those who are culturally Deaf, hard of hearing, late deafened, and DeafBlind. Deaf individuals have varying abilities to communicate using residual hearing and speech. In the case of DeafBlind persons, that includes the ability to use residual vision.

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. Brochures are being developed geared towards specific populations. This includes information for audiology professionals which will be distributed to the audiology clinics we work with throughout the state. This will also be shared with the Illinois Academy of Audiology (IAA). IAA, in turn, will share these with members. One brochure in the final stages of development is geared towards parents and education professionals who work with deaf students. A brochure that focuses on current and prospective employees who have deaf employees is in the early stages of development. This is a collaborative effort between SDHH and Business Development.

SDHH provides support to the local offices throughout the state of Illinois. This includes the provision of virtual and on-site training for Rehabilitation Counselors for the Deaf (RCDs) and their office coordinators. Support is also provided to external stakeholders who work with deaf persons. This includes education professionals, vendors who provide services to this specific population, interpreter referral agencies, and audiology clinics. SDHH also works with national programs that are designed to meet the needs of deaf customers. This includes programs such as Gallaudet University, the Helen Keller National Center, and the National Institute for Technology. Persons who are deaf do not typically attend gatherings unless they know that accommodations are available. SDHH attends conferences and events that will be attended by deaf persons. The services provided by SDHH are an investment in the deaf community.

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

The mission of the Hispanic Services Unit is to work with and assist Hispanic, Latino, Latina, LatinX, and/or Latine Illinoisans with disabilities in obtaining employment, education, training, and access to IDHS-DRS services, including community resources. The

Hispanic Services Unit has focused on three main areas: Outreach, capacity building, and media production.

In FY 25, Outreach focused on both individuals and organizations that serve people with disabilities in Illinois. The Hispanic Services Unit reached out to 1,074 individuals/organizations, either in person or through virtual means, such as webinars. The Hispanic Services Unit also planned and implemented seven capacity- building activities, serving a total of 180 DRS staff. These activities included DRS staff training sessions, establishing a Hispanic Services Advisory Committee, compiling a package of digitally formatted brochures ready for distribution, and arranging for a group of DRS staff to attend professional conferences. Additionally, the Hispanic Services Unit completed over 20 media production projects, including English and Spanish materials such as flyers, brochures, stand-up banners, official.

<b>Hispanic Services Unit</b>	
Activity	Customers Reached
Outreach	1074
Capacity-building	180
Media Production	21

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

## Individual Placement and Support (IPS)

Individual Placement and Support (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. IPS is a model of supported employment for people with serious mental illness. IPS helps people living with behavioral health conditions work at regular jobs of their choosing. Mainstream education and technical training are included as ways to advance career paths. Additionally, IPS is based on eight (8) principles, including competitive employment, systematic job development, rapid job search, clinically integrated services, benefits planning, zero exclusion, time-unlimited support, and worker preferences.

IDHS-DRS is the primary funder of IPS services in Illinois. In FY2025, DRS staff, in collaboration with the Division of Mental Health (DMH) staff, now known as, the Division of Behavioral Health and Recovery, completed **30** two-day IPS Fidelity Reviews of community IPS teams using a scientifically validated IPS Fidelity Scale and review protocols. All agencies who participated ranked from a good to exemplary status.

In FY2025, DRS worked in partnership with DMH to deliver IPS services, including services to Williams and Colbert Class members. Through a DRS Pilot Program called the Williams and **Colbert Class Member contract, five (5) current Certified IPS agencies** are contributing services. **During FY2025, 376 Williams and Colbert Class Members** received Outreach of which **41 found jobs with competitive Integrated employment**. Of those outreached, only 29% expressed they were uninterested in working, with responses of why they were not interested collected. The majority of individuals expressed they are focusing on their health, looking for housing first, retired or would like to continue living on social security benefits.

**In FY2025, DRS had 8,761 IPS customers with 593 achieving competitive employment, earning an average of \$348.00 a month.**

Williams and Colbert Class members.

IDHS-DRS is the primary funder of IPS services in Illinois. **In FY25, 404 IPS customers achieved competitive employment earning an average of \$475 per week.**

## Targeted Populations Success Stories

*Check out the successes of these young ladies receiving IPS Services*



Faith had a hard time finding a job on her own. After joining the Individual Placement and Support Program (IPS) at Chestnut Health Systems and working with an employment specialist and working with her DRS counselor, she was able to find the right opportunity and start a new chapter.

Faith worked closely with staff on refreshing her resume and applying for various jobs in the community. Faith's efforts soon paid off as she landed a job working at the St. Louis Aquarium. She has even worked her way up to a management role!

To everyone having a hard time finding employment, Faith encourages perseverance.

"When I first started working with IPS, I was worried because people kept rejecting me.

But eventually, you find one job that works out, and it can change your life for good."

Everyone deserves the opportunity to work towards their goals and build a better future.

Congratulations, Faith!



LeAnn moved to Illinois from New York City in 2014 where she had previously worked as an actress, a model, and in fashion sales. Upon leaving New York, she was in poor health and initially lived with her mother before moving into her own apartment where she later experienced a relapse. She then stayed at a faith-based transitional home for women to help rebuild their lives through a program focused on sobriety, family restoration, and career development. She also began working with the local IPS service provider and received case management, recovery, and employment services. She later found employment but was ultimately dissatisfied and decided for several personal reasons. In August 2024, she reconnected with IPS eager to find a new job. It took a little while, but she is happy to say that she now has a job that she loves with a great schedule, supportive management, and a positive working environment. LeAnn has proudly celebrated three years of sobriety and is thriving. She is leading a fulfilling life and lives in a nice apartment with her support animal. She attends church and AA meetings regularly. She has the love and support of her family and community. She is profoundly grateful for the support she has received over the years, noting how much it has helped her grow, stay on track, and build a better life.

## 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 25 Highlights*

A total of 36,997 customers were served in the program at an average monthly cost of \$2,329.

Waiver	Number of Customers Served	Average Cost per Month	Total Spending
Persons with Disabilities	33,412	\$2,291	\$918,764,190
Persons with Brain Injury	2,559	\$2,949	\$90,545,223
Persons with HIV/AIDS	1,026	\$1,991	\$24,508,565
<b>Total</b>	<b>36,997</b>	<b>\$2,329</b>	<b>\$1,033,817,978</b>

- 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 5.6% for Homemaker services and 6.7% for Home Delivered Meals** 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 \$1.44 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 101 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.**

*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 sends two mail/email notifications to Individual providers and agencies reminding them of 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 be 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 seeking 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.

Month	2024 Revalidations Due	2024 Revalidations Submitted	2025 Revalidations Due	2025 Revalidations Submitted
Jan	-	-	444	359
Feb	-	-	396	309
Mar	-	-	186	144
Apr	-	-	174	143

May	-	-	795	687
Jun	-	-	4,021	3,491
Jul	-	-	-	-
Aug	-	-	-	-
Sep	-	-	-	-
Oct	-	-	-	-
Nov	-	-	-	-
Dec	1,885	1,542	-	-
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,885</b>	<b>1,542</b>	<b>6,016</b>	<b>5,133</b>

*Automated Compliance*

DRS worked on an automated compliance monitoring system for 16-hour Rule Policy, Legally Responsible Individuals (LRI) Policy, and the HSP Monthly Service Plan Utilization Policy with a launch date of July 1, 2025, along with clear follow-up and intervention policies. This is a key step toward retiring paper timesheets and helps the Division to be good stewards of taxpayer dollars.

16 Hour Rule Policy - No PA shall be reimbursed by DHS-DRS for services rendered to one or more HSP customers for more than 16 hours in a 24-hour period. The counselor may grant an exception should an emergency occur that results in the loss of a paid or unpaid primary caregiver who resides with the customer, and there is imminent danger to the health, safety, and well-being of the customer. When this occurs, the additional hours may not exceed the annual service cost maximum (SCM). The 16-hour limitation does not apply to PAs providing respite services.

LRI Policy – A legally responsible individual (LRI) is defined as a customer's spouse; a parent, stepparent, or foster parent of a customer who is under age 18; or a legal guardian of a customer who is under age 18. The LRI can be paid to provide personal care services when they meet the definition of extraordinary care. Personal care services that meet the definition of extraordinary care:

- Eating
- Bathing
- Grooming
- Dressing
- Transferring
- Incontinence Care
- Routine Health
- Special Health

HSP Monthly Service Plan Utilization Policy - An HSP Customer may not authorize an Individual Providers (IP) to provide HSP services totaling more than what are listed on the Customer's approved Service Plan. HSP Customers who hire IPs are responsible for monitoring the work hours and certifying the accuracy of their time sheets. IPs must be paid for time worked, even hours exceeding those allowed by the Customer's Service Plan, if the time is approved by the Customer through a time sheet and/or Electronic Visit Verification (EVV). HSP staff should not reduce hours or return the timesheet to the Customer or IP to reducing hours. A Counselor or MCO Care Coordinator may grant an exception for services or may rescind an occurrence when appropriate.

*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 Hour	\$1.00
20,000 Hours	\$2.00
30,000 Hours	\$4.00

HSP worked with SEIU to calculate IPs' cumulative hours. We worked to implement seniority pay with an effective date of July 1, 2025.

### *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 \(Collective Bargaining Agreement\)](#). Providers have an opportunity to review the background screening findings and can dispute or agree with the findings. If a 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) – **HFS OIG (Office of Inspector General) is responsible to review the nature of the offense and to determine the IP's eligibility** to serve as a Medicaid provider.

Providers have the right to appeal the OIG's decision. The appeals process is handled 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.

**BHCS Program Spending**

Type of Services	Number of Customers	Total Spending
Personal Assistant	33,840	\$959,270,514
CNA	114	\$2,583,948
LPN	26	\$985,574
RN	21	\$1,024,737
Homemaker	2695	\$60,847,294

Maintenance Home Health	7	\$42,317
Home-Delivered Meals	774	\$1,843,659
Electronic Home Response (duplicated Count)	2,297	\$444,962
Adult Day Care (duplicated count)	42	\$425,790
Brain Injury Services (duplicated count)	22	\$171,898
Home Remodeling	204	\$2,360,094
Assistive Equipment	24	\$73,231
Background Checks	216	\$8,130
Case Management Services	1,834	\$3,530,870
Other Misc. Services (duplicated count)	264	\$31,472
Prescreening	1204	173,488
<b>Total (with Prescreening)</b>	<b>36,997</b>	<b>\$1,033,817,978</b>

### Program Eligibility Determination and Service Planning

Prospective customers, or those representing them, may request services by contacting any one of the Division of Rehabilitation Services 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 their 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	259	0.70%	\$929,012	0.1%	\$726
29-32	5,379	14.5%	\$92,820,238	9.0%	\$1,438
33-40	8,496	23.0%	\$184,067,431	17.8%	\$1,805
41-49	7,843	21.2%	\$198,927,136	19.2%	\$2,114
50-59	6,410	17.3%	\$196,426,675	19.0%	\$2,554
60-69	4,272	11.5%	\$158,577,288	15.3%	\$3,093
70-79	2,792	7.5%	\$121,492,735	11.8%	\$3,626

80-100	1,546	4.2 %	\$80,577,463	7.8%	\$4,343
<b>Total</b>	<b>36,997</b>		<b>\$1,033,817,978</b>		<b>\$2,329</b>

**The average DON Score is 46.6**

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	FY25 Spending
<b>Program Administration</b>	<b>\$36,626,665</b>
<b>Other Provider Costs &amp; Benefits</b>	<b>\$134,448,934</b>
<b>Total Waiver Services</b>	<b>\$1,033,817,978</b>
Persons with Disabilities	\$918,764,190
Persons with Brain Injury	\$90,545,223
Persons with HIV/AIDS	\$24,508,565
<b>Total Spending</b>	<b>\$1,204,893,576</b>
Percent Administration to Total Spending	3.04%

**Looking Ahead...FY26**

In FY 2026, 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.

*EVV (Electronic Visit Verification)*

HSP is working through the procurement process for a new long-term Contract.

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

**Home Services Success Story**

*Customer*

One of the Program's customers reached out to express gratitude for the program and for her Personal Assistant who goes above and beyond when help is needed. She commented that HSP has changed her life and is vital to her ability to remain in her home.

"The Home Services Program has been invaluable to me. As I get older, my ability to handle all of the things I need to do to care for myself and my home has gotten progressively more difficult. Having a PA come in to assist me regularly has made it possible for me to not only live and thrive in my own home but also to participate in other activities that are important to me and that contribute to my community. I am someone who has always been very independent and stubborn, so asking for help has always been difficult. My PA is always there to assist without being pushy, which makes it easier for me to reach out."

## Independent Living Unit

### *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 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 FY25, 324 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 25 Highlights*

CILs service all of Illinois' 102 counties. **Services were provided to over 67,000 individuals regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, or disability, a decrease of 4% over FY24.**

Core Service	Number of Customers Served
Information and referral services	44,150
Independent Living/Life Skills Training Services:	46,200
Peer Counseling	32,485
Individual System Advocacy	22,468
Transition Services	22,731
Fast Track	22,746

## 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 for CILs to lead outreach efforts to educate the public about the need for PAs, to educate potential providers about the profession, and to 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 to 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), out of a total of 22, CILs 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 from 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

### *Reintegration*

When an adult with disabilities loses the mother who cared for them, extended family may feel ill-equipped to take on a caregiving role. That was the situation Colleen was in when CIL staff met her. Colleen's cousin contacted the Regional Access and Mobilization Project (RAMP) looking for a nursing home that would admit this young woman. The family wasn't quite clear on

what Colleen's disabilities were, but they were convinced that she could not take care of herself, and they could not take on her care either. The CIL staff questioned Colleen's need for a nursing home without knowing her disabilities. A later phone call revealed that Colleen had cognitive disabilities and some health concerns. When staff met with Colleen and her cousin, they explained what the independent living philosophy is and identified areas in which Colleen needed some training. Budgeting was a necessary focus, as Colleen's mom had always been in charge of her finances. Colleen didn't realize that her Uber bill was taking a large amount of her income due to the rides she was paying for to get to medical appointments—appointments that were taking place across the street from her apartment. Staff worked with her and helped her cross the street repeatedly until she was comfortable getting to the hospital for her appointments.

Over time, Colleen and CIL staff switched her utilities into her name and set her up with home internet so she could drop her expensive cable bill. With guidance, Colleen used paratransit and knows it's an option, but she prefers to use Uber. As an independent adult, Colleen could choose to use Uber for her grocery trips and keep her budget right where she wants it because she has the freedom to walk to local places now that she can cross that busy street. It was a joy to show Colleen's cousin the minimal amount of support Colleen requires to live an independent life!

### *Home Modification*

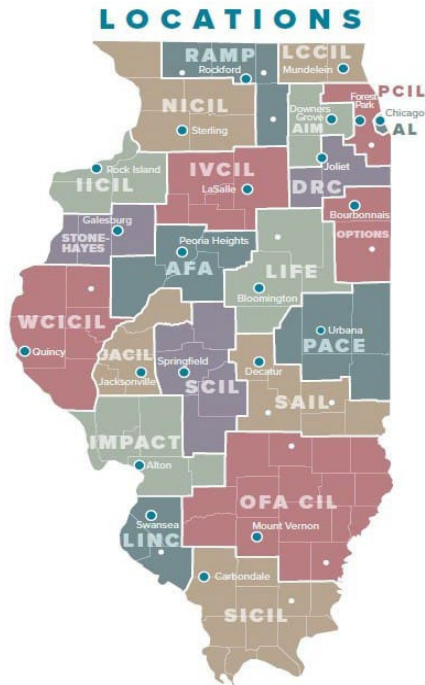


In May 2024, Pat reached out to the RAMP program, expressing the challenges she was facing due to her disabilities. She shared that the steps in her home were too difficult for her to navigate, and to access her basement, she had to walk out to her garage, get in her car, and drive around the house to a side door. This routine had become increasingly strenuous, and Pat was determined to regain her independence.

She inquired about the possibility of installing a stairlift to make accessing her basement easier. At that time, the home modification program was just launching, and she was informed that the process could take some time. Despite the wait, Pat was patient and understanding, knowing that the end result would greatly improve her quality of life. After several months of persistence and coordination, Pat was able to receive her stairlift in January 2025.

Pat was absolutely ecstatic about the outcome, sharing her gratitude with a heartfelt message: "Thank you so much for all your hard work in getting the chairlift installed. I love it. Brightest blessings, Pat!"

## 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 extracurricular 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. 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 25 Students Served
Birth to 3	48
Residential	87
Day	61
TOTAL*	196

\* average attendance based on reported monthly totals

### *FY 25 Highlights*

#### **Staffing**

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

#### **Community Relations and Outreach**

EVENT	Totals
Community Sign language classes in the Fall and Spring	49 participants
Online presentations and conferences	2119 participants
Training events	22
Conference Attendance	2
Exhibitions	6
Advocacy and Consultation Sessions	72

#### **Elementary Programs (K-6<sup>th</sup>)**

- 58 students enrolled, 16 new students for the 23-24 SY.
- 17 achieved 95% or better attendance records.
- 7 achieved 6<sup>th</sup> 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:** 31% met established growth target; 73% improved overall scores from spring to fall
- **Language:** 50% met established growth target; 64% showed improved scores from spring to fall
- **Math:** 46% of students met their growth target, exceeding the established goal and 90% of students improved from fall to spring

Students participated in English literacy lessons using Cued American English during reading and/or language instruction. American Sign Language and cultural awareness was enhanced through participation in Deaf cultural events, such as the annual ASL Celebration, and through related services that provided 1-1 instruction in ASL. 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 25-26 School Year** include increasing student achievement in the core subject areas of reading, language, and mathematics.

### Junior Senior High School (7<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup>)

- 91 enrolled in 7<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade at the start of the year.
- 11 enrolled in the Transitional Living Program (TLP) for students 18-22 years old.
- Of the 13 seniors, 4 accepted their high school diploma and 8 will continue in ISD's TLP. One student is attending a transition program in their home school district.

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:** 34% 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
- **Language:** 47% 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, an annual awards ceremony to celebrate academic success, and participated in professional development for teachers/staff.

**Goals for 25-26 SY** include increasing the number of students in grades 7-12 who meet or exceed NWEA MAP growth projection on reading, language, and math subtests, reduce chronically absent students, and increasing the depth and breadth of parent contacts.

### Career and Technical Education Center/Transition Services

52% junior high school, high school, and Transitional Living Program (TLP) students participated in various career and technical education programs.

CTE Improvement & Perkins grant funds were used to purchase CTE related equipment and machines, supplies, and materials and to fund professional development for the CTE Principal and educators.

### Student Work Experience

The 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 <sup>st</sup> Semester Enrollment	27
2 <sup>nd</sup> Semester Enrollment	38
Career Safe 10 Hour OSHA Safety Credential	0
Food Handlers Credential	11
On Campus Jobs (school-day)	6
Off Campus Jobs (school-day)	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)

- 14 Students enrolled.
- 8 accepted diplomas throughout 24-25 SY
- participated in a variety of employment, independent living and academic opportunities, volunteer experiences and recreational activities.

**Goals for 2026**

During the 2025-2026 school year, maintain community relationships with at least four local organizations such as Nestle, Lincoln Land Community College, the Illinois School for the Visually Impaired, the Jacksonville Area Center for Independent Living, Kiwanis, and Midwest Youth Services to provide educational and transition opportunities to ISD students and parents.

During the 2025-2026 school year, implement one new CTE course option as well as promote the current CTE course options to increase participation in CTE to at least 60% of junior high school, high school, & TLP students. During the 2025-2026 school year, at least 13 students will obtain the Food Handler Credential and/or the OSHA 10 Hour General Industry credential.

**Illinois School for the Deaf FY 25 Highlights**

**\*Average attendance based on reported monthly totals**

Program	FY 25 Students Served
Birth to 3	48
Residential	87
Day	61
TOTAL*	196

**\*Community Relations and Outreach**

EVENT	Totals
Community Sign language classes in the Fall and Spring	49 participants
Online presentations and conferences	2119 participants
Training events	22
Conference Hosted	2
Exhibitions	6
Advocacy and Consultation Sessions	72

**\*Student Work Experience Activity Status**

Activity	Number of Students
1st Semester Enrollment	27
2nd Semester Enrollment	38
Career Safe 10 Hour OSHA Safety Credential	0
Food Handlers Credential	11
On Campus Jobs	6
Off Campus Jobs	24

## ISD Success Story



Look out world! Here comes ISD's Class of 2025!!!

Check out this great video featuring and celebrating this amazing group of young people. Congratulations, Class of 2025! IDHS-DRS is excited to see all the wonderful things you will accomplish next.

[ISD Class of 2025 Graduation Video](#)

## 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.

Program	FY 24 Students Served
Birth to 3	81
School age	58
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>139</b>

### ISVI progress toward IDHS-DRS goals FY 25:

#### **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. ISVI is no longer a Leader in Me school due to lack of accessibility to new LIM products. ISVI has adopted a peer reviewed curricula to support career search and training from Mississippi State University.

#### **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. ISVI continued to work with PTO, Illinois Vision Leadership Council, The American Printing House, CATT (Center for Assistive Technology and Training), to support a workshop for teacher across the state.

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. ISVI has over 1900 followers to date.
- Live Streaming almost every sporting and fine arts events. ISVI has added audio description to most LIVE events and have seen a significant increase in LIVE viewers.
- Recognition from Alumni and followers from across the United States on the audio description supporting their enjoyment of watching sports such as goalball.
- Adding Student and Staff highlights to boost personal interest stories. ISVI has seen a 15% increase in enrollment since 2023.

ISVI was once again accredited by COGNIA in November of 2024.

### *Vision for FY 26*

**Goal #1: In FY 26, 100% of ISVI students in 5<sup>th</sup> 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.**
- The PACE rubric was revisited this summer to better support the younger population. STRIVE Expanded Core activities are increased to better meet these goals as well.

**Goal #2: In FY 26, 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.
- ISVI will present at local, statewide, and nationwide conferences to support growth and learning.

### *ISVI Success Story*



During her time at ISVI, Alexea participated in the SWTCIE program, through which she completed four college-level courses: Psychology, Sociology, Chemistry, and Statistics — all while still in high school. Her hard work and determination have truly set her apart.

Alexea is also the first student to graduate from ISVI wearing honor cords, awarded for earning 12 or more college credits from Lincoln Land Community College. She graduated with an impressive 14 college credits already under her belt!

To top it all off, Alexea graduated as Valedictorian of her class — a testament to her academic excellence, leadership, and dedication.

Please congratulate Alexea on her historic and inspiring achievements. Her future is bright, and we can't wait to see where her journey leads next!

## 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.

### *FY25 Highlights*

- ICRE-R filled FOUR (4) staff vacancies.
- ICRE-R provided educational instruction to 31 transition students and 8 Pre-Employment Preparation students.
- Three 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). Students learned independent mobility throughout the entire Chicagoland area.
- Successful launch of the ICRE-R Alumni Group. And Newsletter.

### *Vision for FY26*

Our FY26 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.

### **W.I.N. Initiative: One Year of Progress and Going for More W.I.N.s in FY26**

One year after launching the **Work, Innovation, and Networking (W.I.N.) Initiative**, we are proud to share the meaningful strides we've made at ICRE-R in aligning our programs with these core principles.

- **WORK** – We made progress in identifying potential job training opportunities and began developing partnerships with local employers. We are actively working with SWTCIE Illinois to strengthen our internship framework and better align opportunities with student goals. We're also pleased to share that we secured internship placements with UIC, Alden Health, and Waterford Care Centers. These are important steps toward building a sustainable pipeline of real-world experience for our students. Looking ahead.
- **INNOVATION** – We have introduced new adaptive technologies and equipment designed to enhance independence and support individualized learning and career development. In addition, we are actively exploring the use of artificial intelligence (AI) and its potential to further assist our students, opening new possibilities for personalized support, skill development, and greater access to information and resources.
- **NETWORKING** – We've facilitated meaningful connections through community events, virtual meetups, and collaborative projects. These opportunities have helped students build confidence, exchange ideas, and connect with

mentors, peers, and professionals in their areas of interest. This year, we established new connections with Access Living's YIELD Program, Lutheran Social Services, Revolution Workshop, The Good Law Group, Pilsen Wellness, and Sunshine Psychiatry, broadening the network of support and resources available to our students.

Whether a student's goal is employment, entrepreneurship, higher education, or independent living, the W.I.N. approach has become an essential part of how we support and empower everyone on their journey.

### *ICRE-Roosevelt Success Story*



Khailon is a shining example of what is possible. He is an inspiration to all he come in contact with. Khailon went through the ICRE-R program and has taken advantage of every opportunity presented to him.

He now has his own apartment. He is employed at Cubs Park as a Security Service Ambassador. He is also an entrepreneur and the founder of a clothing brand that reflects his mindset and represents self-care and confidence.

“Growing up with a disability, people were not always nice to me. I felt discouraged and didn't know how to love myself. I also knew many people with disabilities who were going through depression and being bullied. Focus on yourself and believe that you can achieve anything in the world you put your mind to. I am alive and blessed to be able to work and help other people, either on the job or through my brand.” Congratulations, Khailon! You are indeed an inspiration.

## **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 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 federal and state codes, directives, policies, 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. Formerly known as Rehabilitation Technology or Rehab Tech, Assistive and Information Technology Support (AITS) is the first stop for those in this Division needing to fix and refresh malfunctioning hardware and software.

### *FY 25 Program Highlights*

Over the past fiscal year, BPSM:

- Successfully completed all internal and external compliance, financial, and single audits within required timeframes, demonstrating our commitment to accountability and operational excellence. Notably, DRS achieved a **reduction in audit findings** compared to FY24 and **no DRS** findings were reported in the FY23 Single Audit. These achievements reflect strengthened internal controls, improved coordination with program areas, and enhanced communication across the agency.
- AITS collaborated with other Bureaus to provide trainings for those using accessible software, a technology refresh of laptops and cell phones amongst DRS employees, rollout of credential uploads at all field offices throughout the state and exploring the development of DRS' Call Center.
- Data Analysis provided support to DRS Bureaus in conducting customer satisfaction surveys and information blasts, assessing effective service delivery to customers who received services out of the Williams-Colbert class action and underserved populations, monthly dashboard reporting of metrics to administrators in DHS and DRS.
- QA committed to reviewing 10% of all HSP and VR cases annually, conducted special audits requested internally, and re-initiated quarterly hard case file reviews.

### *Goals for FY26*

In FY26, BPSM's will

- Guide DRS in the implementation and reporting of the corrective action plan (CAP) approved by the RSA, resulting from the FY24 onsite audit.
- Update and maintain the **OneNet page** to provide staff with readily available resources and reference materials.
- **Facilitate quarterly meetings** with managers, supervisors, and administrators to discuss audit outcomes, best practices, and opportunities for improvement.
- Increase internal communication and accessibility to audit information to strengthen understanding of compliance expectations.
- **Collaborate with DRS Bureaus and program leadership** to reduce potential audit findings, enhance procedures, and support the effective delivery of compliant HR services.
- **Support DRS** in developing and executing CAPs and in evaluating the effectiveness of internal controls.
- Continue to **demonstrate compliance with state and federal regulations** through a measurable reduction in repeat findings.
- Strengthen accountability mechanisms to ensure that program operations reflect best practices in employment services, fiscal management, and workforce collaboration.

Evaluate and improve procedures and communication channels to identify and mitigate internal barriers that may impact service delivery, including those related to operational efficiency and accessibility.

*BPSM Success Story*



Matthew, an aspiring attorney, was referred to IATP by his DRS counselor after graduating from high school. Matthew participated in an evaluation to identify assistive technology that could help him become as independent as possible.

After the evaluation, he was provided several pieces of technology, including speech recognition and dictation software, a portable microphone, and a lightweight computer. An occupational therapist from IATP’s Makers Program also participated in his evaluation to provide valuable input on additional support that would help Matthew independently manage his new technology and equipment.

Matthew was excited and felt prepared for college because of IATP’s programs and services. IATP wishes him the best of luck on his journey!

**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.

*FY25 Highlights*

The BSS operated for another successful year. During the year, we received \$5.6M in Ticket-to-Work payments and \$1.5M in Cost reimbursements for a total of \$7.1M in Program Income. We timely processed 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 FY26*

The unit will continue to seek out efficiencies in the contract and voucher processing within the SAP accounting system create a simple but comprehensive fiscal reporting model tool and develop ways to diversify the match portfolio for non-federal funds. The program income unit within the Bureau will work 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*

<b>Funding</b>	<b>Final Enacted</b>	<b>Final Spending</b>
Federal	\$410,925.0	\$248,019.2
General Revenue & Other State	\$1,343,324.9	\$1,276,654.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$1,754,249.9</b>	<b>\$1,524,673.3</b>

*Federal Allocation & Spending*

<b>Appropriation/Program Name</b>	<b>Final Enacted</b>	<b>Final Spending</b>
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<b>Total Federal Allocation &amp; Spending</b>	<b>\$410,925.0</b>	<b>\$247,805.1</b>
<b>Disability Determination Services</b>	<b>\$129,300.2</b>	<b>\$75,132.4</b>
Personal Services	\$43,536.0	\$25,748.0
Retirement	\$23,088.0	\$13,199.7
Social Security	\$3,332.6	\$2,070.2
Group Insurance	\$18,775.0	\$8,925.3
Contractual Services	\$11,601.8	\$6,093.0
Travel	\$198.0	\$6.3
Commodities	\$379.1	\$67.5
Printing	\$384.0	\$217.5
Equipment	\$1,600.9	\$19.6
Telecommunications	\$1,404.7	\$326.6
Operation of Auto Equipment	\$0.1	\$0.0
Services to Disabled Individuals	\$25,000.0	\$18,458.8
<b>Vocational Rehabilitation Program &amp; Related</b>	<b>\$231,911.0</b>	<b>\$151,837.1</b>
Personal Services	\$51,825.0	\$40,376.4
Retirement	\$27,467.7	\$20,702.4
Social Security	\$4,097.5	\$2,993.0
Group Insurance	\$22,399.4	\$11,860.2
Contractual Services	\$12,000.0	\$6,308.4
Travel	\$1,455.9	\$319.8
Commodities	\$313.2	\$88.7
Printing	\$150.1	\$3.8
Equipment	\$1,669.0	\$61.3
Telecommunications	\$1,493.2	\$631.7
Operation of Auto Equipment	\$40.0	\$12.9
Federal Vocational Rehabilitation programs and related costs, including Case Services	\$85,000.0	\$53,931.5
Supportive Employment	\$8,000.0	\$3,480.2
Federal Assistive Technology Act Services	\$11,000.0	\$8,568.4
Business Enterprise Program for the Blind	\$5,000.0	\$2,498.4
<b>Educational &amp; Training Facilities</b>	<b>\$2,370.0</b>	<b>\$1,687.2</b>
Federally Assisted Programs	\$2,000.0	\$1,438.9
Vocational Programming	\$200.0	\$108.4
Vocational Programming	\$50.0	\$49.1
Vocational Programming	\$120.0	\$90.8
<b>Independent Living &amp; Related</b>	<b>\$9,545.5</b>	<b>\$5,682.8</b>
Independent Living Centers	\$6,500.0	\$4,051.4
Independent Living Older Blind	\$3,045.5	\$1,631.4

<b>Indirect Program &amp; Administrative Support</b>	<b>\$32,305.4</b>	<b>\$13,465.6</b>
Personal Services	\$6,303.5	\$4,502.2
Retirement	\$3,340.9	\$2,308.6
Social Security	\$482.2	\$329.9
Group Insurance	\$2,653.0	\$1,243.7
Contractual Services	\$1,500.0	\$0.0
Leased Property Management	\$5,076.2	\$5,074.4
Travel	\$136.0	\$0.0
Commodities	\$136.5	\$0.0
Printing	\$87.0	\$0.0
Equipment	\$293.6	\$0.0
Telecommunications	\$12,226.5	\$0.0
Operation of Auto Equipment	\$50.0	\$0.0
Tort Claims	\$10.0	\$0.0
Refunds-Vocational Rehabilitation Fund	\$10.0	\$6.8
<b>Indirect/Direct Management Information Systems</b>	<b>\$5,492.9</b>	<b>\$370.8</b>
Personal Services	\$482.7	\$0.0
Retirement	\$255.8	\$0.0
Social Security	\$36.9	\$0.0
Group Insurance	\$82.6	\$0.0
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*

<b>Appropriation/Program Name</b>	<b>Final Enacted</b>	<b>Final Spending</b>
<b>Total State Allocation &amp; Spending</b>	<b>\$1,343,324.9</b>	<b>\$1,276,654.1</b>
<b>Home Services Program</b>	<b>\$1,266,696.9</b>	<b>\$1,205,244.3</b>
Personal Services	\$394.3	\$326.6
Social Security	\$30.2	\$23.9
Home Services Program	\$1,010,272.4	\$1,004,996.3
Home Services Program	\$256,000.0	\$199,897.5
<b>Vocational Rehabilitation Program &amp; Related</b>	<b>\$21,423.8</b>	<b>\$19,351.7</b>

Supported Employment Programs	\$90.0	\$53.6
State Match to Supports for Federal Vocational Rehabilitation programs, Incl Case Services	\$21,333.8	\$18,804.8
<b>Educational &amp; Training Facilities (ISD, ISVI, ICRE-W, ICRE-R)</b>	<b>\$48,853.4</b>	<b>\$46,189.8</b>
<b>Illinois School for the Deaf (ISD)</b>	<b>\$22,838.9</b>	<b>\$19,477.9</b>
Personal Services	\$18,713.6	\$16,326.8
Student Member/Inmate Compensation	\$18.2	\$7.4
Social Security	\$1,445.2	\$561.7
Contractual Services	\$1,549.3	\$1,498.3
Travel	\$24.5	\$20.1
Commodities	\$372.0	\$363.1
Printing	\$402.9	\$8.4
Equipment	\$65.6	\$399.5
Telecommunications	\$73.4	\$61.3
Operation Of Auto Equipment	\$8.4	\$71.1
<b>Illinois School for the Visually Impaired (ISVI)</b>	<b>\$12,241.2</b>	<b>\$11,164.2</b>
Personal Services	\$10,272.7	\$9,496.8
Student Member/Inmate Compensation	\$14.6	\$20.7
Social Security	\$785.9	\$484.3
Contractual Services	\$752.6	\$759.4
Travel	\$11.3	\$5.2
Commodities	\$202.9	\$141.0
Printing	\$2.0	\$2.2
Equipment	\$41.3	\$154.8
Telecommunications	\$48.1	\$4.3
Operation Of Auto Equipment	\$59.8	\$46.5
<b>Illinois School for Rehabilitation &amp; Education - Wood (ICRE-W)</b>	<b>\$1,705.7</b>	<b>\$1,252.0</b>
Personal Services	\$1,531.2	\$1,117.3
Social Security	\$117.1	\$82.5
Contractual Services	\$57.4	\$52.2
<b>Illinois School for Rehabilitation &amp; Education - Roosevelt (ICRE-R)</b>	<b>\$6,788.1</b>	<b>\$5,765.1</b>
Personal Services	\$5,305.8	\$4,414.7
Student Member/Inmate Compensation	\$1.8	\$0.0
Social Security	\$406.9	\$292.9
Contractual Services	\$883.0	\$874.6
Travel	\$0.0	\$0.0
Commodities	\$66.9	\$65.9
Printing	\$2.1	\$1.7
Equipment	\$22.9	\$21.8

Telecommunications	\$77.1	\$76.5
Operation Of Auto Equipment	\$21.6	\$17.0
<b>Independent Living &amp; Related</b>	<b>\$6,505.0</b>	<b>\$6,469.9</b>
Independent Living Centers	\$6,358.9	\$6,323.8
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 (10/1/24 – 9/30/25)	Customers	% of Total
All issues resolved in Customer's favor	61	34 %
Some Issues resolved in Customer's favor	66	37%
Customer unresponsive/ uncooperative	12	7%
Case lacks Merit for CAP intervention	3	2 %
Other or unknown	16	9%
Withdraw complaint/no further intervention needed	2	1%
VR Decision Determined Appropriate	0	0%
Issue not resolved in Customer's favor	4	2%
Customer chose alternative representation	1	1%
CAP unable to take case due to lack of resources	13	7%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>178</b>	<b>100%</b>

### Vision for FY26

The CAP program focus in FY2026 will be to grow the program by:

- Serving individual customers, with targeted outreach strategies to reach individuals who do not know about DRS VR program and/or CAP,
- Engaging in strategic planning to develop priorities for individual and systemic advocacy,
- Continuing to develop materials and resources that are useful and accessible to individual customers, advocates, and

other stakeholders, 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 improving communication between DRS and customers and expanding service access across the state,
- Identify trends from our individual representation and bring them to the attention of DRS leadership for discussion, including trends related to accessibility of dispute resolution processes, and
- Continue efforts to identify and address barriers to services faced by underserved communities.

#### Creating Self-Advocacy Materials

- Create and publish additional fact sheets and templates 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 Centers for Independent Living (CILs) to strengthen partnerships and learn from CIL advocates about issues impacting their consumers,
- Develop and provide regional trainings to DRS offices focused on issues that frequently arise in CAP cases,
- Continue leading 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 and adults,
  - Individuals with I/DD, including individuals living in Community Integrated Living Arrangements (CILAs) or State Operated Developmental Centers (SODCs), and
  - 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.

#### QA Initial Performance Accuracy Rate for Federal Fiscal Year 25

National Rate	Regional Rate	Illinois Rate
95.3%	95.2%	95.2%

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 FY 25**, reducing the average number of days IL citizens waited for their initial claims from 110 days to 51 days. Meaning IL Citizens will be receiving their decisions in a timelier manner.

In FY25, BDDS cleared 134,269 applicants, a 13 % increase over FY24.

Case Type	FY 2024 Actual Clearances	FY 2025 Actual Clearances	FY25 % of target
Initials	84,549	89,034	100.7%
Reconsiderations	15,490	24,483	116.7%
Continuing Disability Reviews	14,406	16,056	100.1 %*
Other	4,451	4,696	119.6 %
<b>Total:</b>	<b>118,896</b>	<b>135,269</b>	<b>103.8 %</b>

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.

Case Type	Service Goal FY 2026
Initials	86,006
Reconsiderations	24,483
Continuing Disability Reviews	21,215
Other Case Types	4,696

**Recruitment and retention** of qualified case reviewers is essential to the work of the BDDS. **In FY 25, the SSA funded seventeen (17) hires to begin examiner training.**

BDDS continues to develop their workforce despite not having knowledge of hiring authority in FY 26. BDDS will

- 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.
- The New adjudication section of specialized staff who adjudicate special claim types and adjudicate abandoned backlogs started earlier in FY 25. Within this Adjudication Section, two units are working with floor examiners who are struggling to meet goals to provide intensive review of casework and provide intensive training in addition to working on Quick Decision Disability Claims, for those IL citizens who have a terminally ill diagnosis... BDDS continues to develop and **create life-long DHS employees.**

New Retention Committee: During the entire FY 25-year Retention activities have been going strong. Illinois Chapter of Adjudication Disability Examiners, (IADE), revived their chapter and members of the BDDS Retention Committee joined IADE to provide social and philanthropic activities for employees, both past and present of the BDDS. This past year Christmas presents were provided to Angel Tree for students that attend the Illinois School for the Blind and the Illinois School for the Deaf, celebrated National Superhero Day-making their own cape activity, and highlighted a blood drive at the local blood bank, provided thank you cards and snacks for everyone in the bureau during Professional’s month, promoted and attended a Springfield Lucy Horseshoe baseball game, had a fundraiser for the YNOT tragedy (local tragedy in a nearby town), celebrated National Friendship Day-with a Friendship Wall where everyone should share kind words and memories, and for the last several months have encouraged monthly gatherings at local restaurants where current and former BDDS employees are invited to socialize and play fun games such as DDS Pictionary, along with a costume contest for Halloween for both tele-working and in-office staff.

*DDS Success Story*

DDS received a claim of an individual alleging kidney failure but did not indicate he was on dialysis. The Unit Supervisor took action to expedite this claim by contacting the claimant to inquire about dialysis and the treatment facility. Once obtained, the adjudicator assigned to the claim called the dialysis center and obtained their fax number to expedite processing of the medical record request. When the facility did not return the records immediately, the adjudicator and clerical staff worked together to make frequent follow up calls. When this was not successful, the adjudicator contacted the claimant’s third-party source,

hoping to gain some assistance obtaining the necessary paperwork, and provided the third party with detailed information of what was needed. Once the information was received, the adjudicator noted a discrepancy in the onset of disability. The adjudicator quickly contacted the local SSA field office asking for clarification on the claimant's past self-employment to find the claimant disabled with an earlier onset. The adjudicator's extra step resulted in the claimant receiving an onset of disability earlier than she had alleged. The persistence of the adjudicator resulted in the most positive outcome possible and was expedited throughout. This level of commitment, teamwork and timeliness ensures that our most vulnerable population receives appropriate determinations promptly, which is critical to our mission.

### *Statewide Rehabilitation Council (SRC)*

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 25 Highlights*

- Continued statewide presence by holding meetings in geographically diverse locations around the State.
- Continued building and strengthening the working relationship with DHS-DRS.
- Championed the passage of the Dignity in Pay Act.
- Elected new Executive Committee leaders.

### *Vision for 2026*

- Continue collaborating with the Governor's Office to fill all board vacancies to have a fully appointed board.
- Continue facilitation of the most recent federally mandated Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment.
- 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

### *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

To learn more about current members and upcoming or previous meetings, visit the [State Rehabilitation Council \(SRC\)](#) website.

To apply to become a Statewide Rehabilitation Councilmember, please visit the following [Submit an Application - Appointments](#) website

During fiscal year 2025, the SRC consisted of the following committees:

**Executive Committee** consists of five (5) 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.

**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.

**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.

**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 (BSPC)

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 25 Highlights:*

The Blind Services Planning Council

- 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 26:*

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 Council member, please visit the appointments [website](#).

BSPC has added four members to our roster but will lose at least one (probably two) at end of calendar year 2025. One member may agree to become the BSPC representative to SRC.

## 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 25 Highlights*

- Hosted the Annual Transportation Meeting on September 7<sup>th</sup>. This was attended by approx. 70 people including representatives from the Governor's office. Human Services Transportation Plan (HSTP) Coordinators, representatives from Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT), Department of Human Services (DHS), Statewide Rehabilitation Council (SRC), Transportation providers, CIL staff and other interested parties, agencies, and working groups.
- 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](#). SILC has continued to partner with other transportation groups both across Illinois and nationally.
- Assisted in working on the transportation bill to be presented in the October Veto session.
- 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**” In September. This was well attended with 42 participants. Our featured panelists were Robin Jones from Great Lakes ADA, Stephanie Lipe and Rebecah Cross from DRS Workforce Development Unit.

#### *Vision for 2026*

- 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.
- We will continue to work with other transportation working groups as well as assist the Governor’s office with any information about transportation issues across the state that we can provide.
- SILC will be collaborating between CILs, HSTP Coordinators, Transportation Providers, IDOT, and other stakeholders to improve transportation options across Illinois.
- 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*

The Illinois Department of Human Services - Division of Rehabilitation Services (IDHS-DRS) received notification of the Subminimum Wage to Competitive Integrated Employment (SWTCIE) Disability Innovation Fund (DIF) Award from the United States Department of Education - Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) in the fall of 2022, a contract with the project evaluator, University of Illinois - Urbana-Champaign (UIUC). The contract was executed on March 15, 2023. The SWTCIE Illinois Project achieved notable achievements during Year 3, the first demonstration 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.

The following entities were selected:

- [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](#)

Each agency received sub-award of \$125,000 for SFY 2025, with the option to renew for SFY 2026 and SFY 2027.

During this reporting period, the SWTCIE Illinois Project continues to cultivate a solid working relationship between IDHS-DRS and UIUC. Additionally, a new project manager was appointed after the departure of the previous project manager.

Further, the Project continues to hire key staff to enrich the performance and evaluation pieces of the Project, both internally and with Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU). Individuals from these entities will test the project's effectiveness and provide staff development and technical assistance to agency staff.

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 SFY 2025:

1. Grantee will work to ensure the retention of key personnel and evaluate additional personnel needs to implement and oversee the SWTCIE Illinois Project. **MET**
2. Grantee will provide technical support and training to 6 selected agencies and begin to change their business model. **MET**
3. Grantee will maintain the SWTCIE Illinois Project website and social media platform. **MET**
4. Grantee will provide training and ACRE certification to participating 14C project staff and interested school personnel. **MET**
5. Grantee will maintain a SWTCIE Illinois Project workgroup comprised of project partners. **MET**
6. Grantee will work with DRS and 14c agencies to collect and secure ongoing project related data. **UNMET**

### **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, quality of life, vocational rehabilitation, implementation, knowledge translation, and sustainability. This data collection and research is from SWTCIE Illinois Project participants, DRS personnel, and 14c grantees as well as other stakeholder feedback (i.e., parents, families, advocates, CIE employers, etc.) Findings are reported regularly to the RSA and Mathematica. 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 Project staff and employment specialists of the selected 14c facilities. VCU 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 periodic in person visits to the agencies to provide support and gauge implementation of evidence based supported employment practices. Monthly communities of practices are conducted for field staff as well as quarterly events for agency executive staff. Quarterly in-person employment specialist round tables are held to engage staff in discussion and case studies. A SWTCIE Annual Meeting is held to disseminate project information and celebrate success. ACRE certification training is offered to all SWTCIE agencies, DRS staff, and school staff.

A [SWTCIE Illinois Project website](#) and social media platforms continue to be populated with educational links, event promotion, agency updates, etc. Monthly SWTCIE Connect and Momentum 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 six agencies as they think about ways to change their business models and moving away from subminimum wage employment.

**Policy**

The Dignity in Pay (DIP) Act was passed in January 2025 which abolishes subminimum wage practices in Illinois by the end of 2029. 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 and is working directly with the Governor’s office to establish policy on how to implement DIP.

**Data Privacy and Security Measures Certification:**

IDHS-DRS is aware of, and in compliance with, all Federal and State laws and regulations regarding system security and the protection of personally identifiable information, as supported by Personal Information Protection Act, 815 ILCS § 530 et. seq. and Illinois Secretary of State Security policies.

[www.ilsos.gov/publications/pdf\\_publications/it\\_sec6.pdf](http://www.ilsos.gov/publications/pdf_publications/it_sec6.pdf)

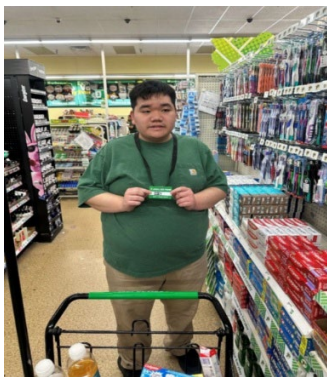
Participants	Total Enrolled	Transitioned to Competitive Integrated Employment	% Transitioned to Competitive Integrated Employment	DRS Successful Case Closures	Successful Case Closure Rate (aka, Rehab. Rate)
Subminimum Wage Workers	69	42	61%	12/19	63%
Contemplators of Subminimum Wage Work	82	27	33%	8/23	35%

<b>Youth</b>	67	24	36%	5/17	29%
<b>Adults</b>	84	45	54%	15/25	60%
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>151</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>46%</b>	<b>40/84</b>	<b>48%</b>

[For more information visit our Website.](#)

[Join our mailing list for monthly updates.](#)

### SWTCIE Success Story



Thanks to the support of Association for Individual Development (AID) and the SWTCIE program, Cody successfully obtained his job at Dollar Tree and continues to receive ongoing assistance from his Employment Specialist.

Cody has been thriving in his role at Dollar Tree, where his attention to detail and friendly personality have truly shined! He takes pride in helping customers find what they need and keeping the shelves neat and organized. His manager shared how impressed she is with Cody's work ethic and positive attitude.

Cody has also grown more independent, now traveling to work on his own using Ride in Kane. With the continued support of his Employment Specialist, he's building confidence, consistency, and valuable work skills.

We're so proud of Cody's progress and the incredible partnership between AID, Dollar Tree, and the SWTCIE program that helped make this success possible!

### 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.

## *FY25 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 (100% 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 (100% complete)
5. Identify potential wraparound services and technical assistance/trainings for any individual and organization served by IPPP. (95% 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 have continued to strengthen their 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 FY25, IPPP strengthened partnerships with 8 Centers for Independent Living and 8 local education agencies. The Centers for Independent Living developed the curricula and entered schools to teach program participants. Following feedback from the CILs and LEAs we have begun the process of adding different access points to the curriculum 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. Several partners have hired project staff. UIUC has hired 3 Community Support Specialists, which has garnered the ability to do more hands-on technical assistance. UIUC also developed a webpage for IPPP.

[\(https://iirer.ahs.illinois.edu/ippp/\)](https://iirer.ahs.illinois.edu/ippp/).