

# **Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Unified and Combined State Plan Update**

## **VI. Program-Specific Requirements for Core State Plan Programs VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION**

**Program Years 2024 and 2025**

## A. INPUT OF STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL

### 1. INPUT PROVIDED BY THE STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL, INCLUDING INPUT AND RECOMMENDATIONS ON THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN, RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE COUNCIL'S REPORT, THE REVIEW AND ANALYSIS OF CONSUMER SATISFACTION, AND OTHER COUNCIL REPORTS THAT MAY HAVE BEEN DEVELOPED AS PART OF THE COUNCIL'S FUNCTIONS;

HireAbility has a strong collaborative relationship with the SRC. HireAbility and the SRC worked very closely together to develop the State Plan and in particular, the goals and priorities. The SRC Performance Review subcommittee is charged with reviewing a variety of HireAbility data over the two year period between each State Plan and plan update. Based on this review the subcommittee works in partnership with HireAbility to develop the goals and priorities for the State Plan.

On December 7, 2023, the full SRC reviewed HireAbility's progress towards achieving the goals and priorities for Program Year 2022 and HireAbility's proposed goals and priorities for Program Years 2024 and 2025. Because the SRC has been working on these priorities on an ongoing basis they did not have any major concerns.

SRC members did ask that we change references from "substance use disorder" to "substance misuse disorder". Members noted that many people with chronic health conditions relied on opioids to function, and the old term was stigmatizing to that group.

SRC members were pleased to see the increase in participants enrolling in post-secondary training and education. They wanted to be sure that participants with the most severe disabilities had the supports they need to succeed. Members were pleased to see the partnerships HireAbility has with Community College of Vermont and Vermont State College to embed contracted staff in those institutions to support participants.

### 2. THE DESIGNATED STATE UNIT'S RESPONSE TO THE COUNCIL'S INPUT AND RECOMMENDATIONS; AND

HireAbility accepted all the SRC recommendations.

### 3. THE DESIGNATED STATE UNIT'S EXPLANATIONS FOR REJECTING ANY OF THE COUNCIL'S INPUT OR RECOMMENDATIONS.

Not applicable

## C. COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS WITH AGENCIES NOT CARRYING OUT ACTIVITIES UNDER THE STATEWIDE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM

### 1. FEDERAL, STATE, AND LOCAL AGENCIES AND PROGRAMS;

HireAbility Vermont has a partnership with its Employee Assistance Program (EAP); the Vermont Association of Business, Industry and Rehabilitation (VABIR); and the State of Vermont Office of Child Support (OCS), to serve non-custodial parents with disabilities. The program, called Work4Kids, is offered statewide with designated Vocational Counselors in each region. Vocational Counselors provide a range of services to help Work4Kids participants obtain and sustain employment, so they can consistently meet their child support obligations. These services include vocational and other assessments, creating an individualized plan to address potential barriers to employment, counseling and guidance, and referral to other service providers when appropriate. In

addition, each Vocational Counselor works with an Employment Consultant (VABIR), who provides assistance in work search, job placement and post-employment services. For individuals presenting multiple barriers to employment, an individualized service model is utilized. The approach focuses on progressive steps to employment including company tours, informational interviews, work experiences, community service placements, work assessments, and job shadowing. Many non-custodial parents with disabilities have never been helped in any way by the State. Reaching out to and assisting this population has produced positive outcomes. HireAbility has assisted many Work4Kids participants in securing employment.

HireAbility also serves offenders with disabilities to achieve employment. Employment is a critical component of preventing recidivism and assisting offenders released from prison to successfully reintegrate into their communities. HireAbility has designated Vocational Counselors in each district office to serve as a single point of contact for the Department of Corrections. HireAbility also has one dedicated counselor who is deployed in correctional facilities to help offenders with disabilities engage in services. This counselor conducts initial engagement, determines eligibility, and refers eligible individuals to their local district office.

## 2. STATE PROGRAMS CARRIED OUT UNDER SECTION 4 OF THE ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY ACT OF 1998;

The Vermont Assistive Technology program (VATP), funded by the federal Assistive Technology Act administered by the Administration for Community Living (ACL) in Health and Human Services (HHS), is housed within HireAbility Vermont as part of the Department of Disabilities Aging and Independent Living (DAIL). The VATP staff receive operational and business office support through DAIL and HireAbility. The program maintains a contract, in conjunction with HireAbility, for Assistive Technology (AT) Specialist services currently provided by the University of Vermont. These include AT Core services such as tech demonstrations, loans, information and assistance, and trainings, as well as consultations for HireAbility participants that could benefit from Assistive Technology or devices. The VATP also has three additional AT Specialists on staff. One is funded through the Vermont Career Advancement Project grant, a Work Based Learning Demonstration funded through the US Department of Education. This specialist provides AT services to individuals participating in VCAP. The second AT Specialist provides AT services for HireAbility participants in the eastern corridor of the state. The final specialist is funded by a supplemental grant of the Money Follows the Person program and is responsible for interfacing with aging services providers throughout the state and with Money Follows the Person recipients. The goal is to enhance their understanding of AT and how it can be used to transition individuals from high care facilities to more independent living environments. The VATP constantly searches for new opportunities to collaborate. For example, we have begun a partnership in the last year with the newly established UVM Occupational Therapy Doctoral program to provide learning opportunities for their students. This includes technical assistance in establishing a smart home demo center for both students and the general public. Finally, the VATP partners with Opportunities Credit Union to provide low interest, variable term loans for purchasing AT equipment such as modified vehicles and hearing aids, that would be beyond the reach of some individuals.

## 3. PROGRAMS CARRIED OUT BY THE UNDER SECRETARY FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE;

None

## 4. NON-EDUCATIONAL AGENCIES SERVING OUT-OF-SCHOOL YOUTH; AND

HireAbility has a long-standing agreement with the Department of Mental Health Children's Unit, Department of Corrections, and Department for Children and Families to fund the JOBS program. The JOBS program is a supported employment program serving youth, ages 14 to 24, with emotional behavioral disabilities. The program is funded by Medicaid Global Commitment with the partnering departments providing the required state match. The JOBS programs are housed within the Designated Community Mental Health Agencies within the twelve Agency of Human Services districts.

#### D. COORDINATION WITH EDUCATION OFFICIALS

##### 1. THE DESIGNATED STATE UNIT'S PLANS, POLICIES, AND PROCEDURES FOR COORDINATION WITH EDUCATION OFFICIALS TO FACILITATE THE TRANSITION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES FROM SCHOOL TO THE RECEIPT OF VR SERVICES, INCLUDING PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES, AS WELL AS PROCEDURES FOR THE TIMELY DEVELOPMENT AND APPROVAL OF INDIVIDUALIZED PLANS FOR EMPLOYMENT FOR THE STUDENTS

There is a Transition Program Manager in HireAbility's central office, who supports all transition activities statewide. The Transition Program Manager and HireAbility Director routinely meet with Vermont Agency of Education staff to coordinate services, and include Department of Labor, Developmental Disabilities Services Division, Department of Health, VT Assistive Technology Program, and Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired staff in these meetings.

HireAbility has a long-standing commitment of serving students in transition. With the passage of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) in July 2014, HireAbility built an infrastructure for transition aged youth, to implement Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS). In 2020 HireAbility expanded services provided by Transition Counselors to include serving youth aged 14 to 25. HireAbility currently has 25 Transition Counselors (24 FTE) that serve youth aged 14 to 25, including all in-school students, and provide Pre-Employment Transition Services activities as required in WIOA.

HireAbility Transition Counselors recruit students age 14 to 22 who are eligible for Pre-ETS services, from local school districts and other independent or private secondary educational programs. The Transition Counselors operate out of all twelve HireAbility district offices and cover all Vermont high school districts. Counselors serve as a community resource to the schools, facilitating inter-agency partnerships through routine Core Transition Team meetings in each of the twelve HireAbility districts. The goal of these teams is to share resources, partner to support youth, and act as catalysts for change to improve the transition process for youth with disabilities. The Transition Counselor is required to develop an IPE (Individualized Plan for Employment) for students found eligible for HireAbility services, prior to exit from high school. HireAbility tracks this metric as part of our quality assurance dashboard. The Transition Counselors continue to work with youth after high school exit as they have since 2020, to ensure that students graduating and moving on to either post-secondary education or careers have consistent, seamless support during this important transition.

In the summer of 2021, HireAbility launched the Summer Career Exploration Program (SCEP) that provided paid work experiences for students with disabilities. About 150 students participated in 2021 and the program was run again in 2022 and 2023. Over 350 students have participated in the SCEP program to date and over 100 have gained competitive jobs as a direct result. Also, we have determined that students who participate in the SCEP program are far more likely to continue to engage with HireAbility after they exit high school.

To provide Pre-ETS, HireAbility created the Youth Employment Specialist model, and contracted with the Vermont Association of Business, Industry, and Rehabilitation (VABIR). VABIR provides Youth Employment Specialists (YES) to work one on one with Transition Counselors to support Pre-ETS in all areas of the state. The YES and the Transition Counselor work as a team with each high school, and these teams meet regularly with the Transition Program Director for training and to share best practices.

The Jump on Board for Success (JOBS) program provides supported employment services for out of school youth aged 16-25 with severe emotional and behavioral disabilities. Two designated HireAbility counselors support Transition Counselors and JOBS staff around the state to collaborate and identify youth who are at risk of dropping out of school or are within six months of graduation and may be eligible for JOBS services. The designated JOBS counselors and JOBS staff coordinate with local high schools for services to help youth successfully transition from high school. There are ten JOBS programs around the state and a total of 13 JOBS sites operated by the Designated Agencies.

The Developmental Services (DS) program also works collaboratively with the Transition Counselors to ensure that students who may be both eligible and meet funding priorities for developmental services are referred through the schools to the local Designated Agencies. The Transition Counselors and DS staff coordinate with the local high schools for services to youth exiting high school. There are fifteen DS programs around the state run by Designated Agencies or Specialized Service Agencies.

The Transition Counselors collaborate with the Certified Work Incentive Counselors (CWIC) to provide services to youth and their families in high schools. The VR Benefits CWIC program provides information and resources about state and federal benefits as well as information on Social Security work incentives. It is crucial that students and their families have access to accurate and appropriate information when making informed decisions around employment and education choices.

## 2. INFORMATION ON THE FORMAL INTERAGENCY AGREEMENT WITH THE STATE EDUCATIONAL AGENCY WITH RESPECT TO:

### A. CONSULTATION AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE TO ASSIST EDUCATIONAL AGENCIES IN PLANNING FOR THE TRANSITION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES FROM SCHOOL TO POST-SCHOOL ACTIVITIES, INCLUDING VR SERVICES;

The HireAbility Director, Transition Program Manager, and DS Program Manager meet quarterly with the Special Education Director of the Vermont Agency of Education and AOE Transition staff, to organize the annual Transition Conference, discuss ways to collaboratively improve Indicators 13 and 14, and stay coordinated on other transition issues. AOE Transition staff provide ongoing technical assistance to the HireAbility Transition Counselors, and the Transition Counselors coordinate information and education with schools in their local service areas. AOE and HireAbility have completed a new Interagency Agreement as required under WIOA. The Agreement specifically allows for consultation and technical assistance via alternative means such as video conference and other remote methods.

### B. TRANSITION PLANNING BY PERSONNEL OF THE DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY AND EDUCATIONAL AGENCY THAT FACILITATES THE DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THEIR INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PROGRAMS;

All HireAbility Transition Counselors use resources and trainings within statewide meetings, as well as those offered through George Washington University's Center for Innovative Training in Vocational Rehabilitation grant, NTACT, and Y-TAC, to support strong school relationships and best understand their roles within the implementation of the individualized education program. They also use the internal *Pre-Employment Transition Services Manual* for guidance. There are facilitated "meet and greets" in the fall with school staff to identify specific needs, issues, and obstacles in their schools, and to create a plan to address these needs. Local and State Agency Core Transition Team meetings occur around the state to support Pre-ETS work.

### C. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES, INCLUDING FINANCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES, OF EACH AGENCY, INCLUDING PROVISIONS FOR DETERMINING STATE LEAD AGENCIES AND QUALIFIED PERSONNEL RESPONSIBLE FOR TRANSITION SERVICES;

#### **HireAbility/DBVI Responsibilities**

HireAbility and DBVI are the Designated State Units for the public vocational rehabilitation program in the State of Vermont. In this role HireAbility and DBVI will:

- Provide Local Education Agencies (LEA) with access to Pre-Employment Transition required services for potentially eligible students:
  - Work-based learning experiences which may include in-school or after school opportunities, or experiences outside the traditional school setting
  - Job exploration counseling
  - Workplace readiness training to develop social skills and independent living
  - Counseling on opportunities for enrollment in comprehensive transition or postsecondary educational programs at institutions of higher education
  - Self-advocacy training
- Provide vocational rehabilitation and school-to-work transition services for youth determined eligible for HireAbility or DBVI services with an approved Individual Plan for Employment (IPE), including but not limited to:
  - Vocational assessment
  - Counseling and consultation around the development of the Individual Plan for Employment (IPE) that is coordinated with the IEP or 504 plan
  - Vocational counseling and guidance
  - Job placement services
  - Other paid services that are part of an approved IPE

#### **Financial Responsibility**

##### *HireAbility/DBVI Responsibility*

To the extent funds are available, HireAbility/DBVI are responsible for paying for Pre-Employment Transition Services for potentially eligible students. In addition, and to the extent funds are available, HireAbility/DBVI are responsible for paying for vocational rehabilitation and school-to-work transition services for students and youth determined eligible for HireAbility or DBVI services with an approved Individual Plan for Employment (IPE).

##### *LEA Responsibility*

LEAs are responsible for paying for any transition services that are considered special education or related services necessary for providing a free appropriate public education to students with disabilities.

*Criteria to Determine Which Agency is Responsible to Pay for Similar Services Both Can Provide Under Their Respective Laws*

The following criteria shall be used when determining which entity should pay for a similar service that both entities can provide under their respective laws:

- The Purpose of the Service - Is the purpose of the service primarily related to an educational outcome or an employment outcome?
- Customary Services- Is the service one that the school customarily provides under IDEA part B?
  - For example, if a school ordinarily provides work-based learning experiences for students with disabilities, the fact those services are now authorized under the Rehabilitation Act as Pre-Employment Transition Services does not mean the school should cease providing those services and refer those students to HireAbility or DBVI.

**Eligibility**

Is the student with a disability eligible for transition services under IDEA?

Because the definition of “student with a disability” for the HireAbility and DBVI programs includes an individual with a disability for the purposes of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, it is a broader definition that it is under IDEA. HireAbility and DBVI are authorized to provide transition services for students with disabilities who meet the definition of an individual with a disability for purposes of section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act.

Nothing in this agreement is to be construed as reducing the responsibility of the local educational agencies or any other agencies under IDEA to provide or pay for any transition services that are also considered special education or related services necessary for providing a free appropriate public education to students with disabilities.

Since Vermont does not permit sub-minimum wage employment there was no need to address 511 in this agreement.

**D. PROCEDURES FOR OUTREACH TO AND IDENTIFICATION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES WHO NEED TRANSITION SERVICES.**

The HireAbility Transition Counselors and DBVI counselors will maintain contact with school personnel in each LEA to ensure early identification of students who are in special education or are either receiving or eligible for 504 services. This identification may occur as early as freshman year and includes HireAbility/DBVI involvement in IEP/Transition Team meetings and in 504 plan meetings, as requested by the school staff, student or family. DBVI counselors will also identify potentially eligible students through the Vermont Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired educators located in LEAs statewide. As part of outreach efforts HireAbility and DBVI will provide the following at minimum:

- A description of the purpose of the HireAbility or DBVI program.

- The eligibility requirements for the HireAbility or DBVI program.
- The application procedures.
- Participation in statewide and local youth-focused conferences.
- The scope of services that may be provided.

HireAbility and DBVI will provide brochures and other materials to schools to be shared with students with disabilities and their families. Additionally, local core transition teams and other partners will provide the HireAbility Transition Counselors and DBVI counselors with a forum to discuss the projected number of students who will need transition services from HireAbility and/or DBVI and how best to collaborate and support these students.

Outreach activities by HireAbility and DBVI, may include:

- Sharing the HireAbility transition outreach materials or DBVI pamphlet with Special Education staff, students, and their families.
- Conducting HireAbility and DBVI orientation sessions in the school for Special Education staff, students and their families, to explain VR eligibility and services.
- Participation in local Core Transition Teams, in which members of local agencies working with youth collaborate around best practices and share resources.
- Developing ways to identify students at risk for dropping out of school.

#### E. COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS WITH PRIVATE NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

HireAbility maintains Social Security Administration, Ticket to Work cooperative agreements with most of the private non-profit employment service providers in the state. Agreements exist with all community mental health and developmental services agencies. In the spring of 2008, HireAbility negotiated a new Ticket to Work cooperative agreement with the agencies in anticipation of the new regulations published later that year. The new agreement has been in place since July 1, 2008 and has generated significant new revenue for providers that help beneficiaries earn at higher levels.

HireAbility has contractual fee for service agreements with VABIR (primary CRP) to provide job development and job placement services for participants. HireAbility also has a fee for service with VABIR to provide Pre-ETS services for students in coordination with the Transition Counselors. HireAbility contracts with the local community mental health system for supported employment services (JOBS) for youth with severe emotional/behavioral disabilities. JOBS program services are coordinated centrally through two designated HireAbility counselors. While HireAbility no longer contracts with the Community Rehabilitation and Treatment (CRT) program for adults with severe mental illness, they continue to provide additional employment supports including case services, work incentives counseling, and coordination around job development. CRT supported employment services are coordinated by local counselor liaisons.

#### F. ARRANGEMENTS AND COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS FOR THE PROVISION OF SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

HireAbility has a well-established agreement with the Vermont Development Disabilities Services Division (DDSD) to provide extended services for individuals with developmental disabilities. The primary source of funding for extended services for individuals with developmental disabilities is Home and Community Based Medicaid Waiver funds. HireAbility continues to contribute funding



for DS post-secondary options that include Think College, College Steps, Succeed and Project Search, through individual support services. HireAbility is piloting a four-year contract with three Designated Agencies to provide Pre-ETS and Work Based Learning opportunities to transition aged youth so that they exit high school with an established plan of work, training, or education. The HireAbility DS Program Manager and DDS Manager meet regularly to support the training needs of the fifteen Supported Employment providers and HireAbility staff, to identify areas for improvement of services, and to support the DS Post-Secondary Education Consortium in marketing, recruiting, and serving youth.

HireAbility funds supported employment services for youth with emotional/behavioral disabilities in partnership with the Department of Mental Health, Children's Division. The JOBS program is a model for serving this high need and high-risk population. HireAbility provides upfront job placement and support through grants to community agencies. The extended supports are provided through Medicaid Global Commitment funds.

In prior fiscal years, HireAbility also had an agreement with the Department of Mental Health to provide extended services for adults with significant mental illness served through the Community Rehabilitation and Treatment Program (CRT). In July 2015, HireAbility decided to reallocate the funds to Pre-Employment Transition Services in order to meet the federal mandate. The CRT programs continue to provide supported employment services using a Medicaid case rate funding model. HireAbility continues to partner with the CRT programs to provide our services at the local level.

For individuals with other disabilities, no state funding for extended services exists in Vermont. As a result, there are limited options for providing extended services to individuals with brain injuries, sensory disabilities, severe learning disabilities and other disabilities. There are some limited options to use Social Security Administration Impairment Related Work Expenses or Plans to Achieve Self Support, but these are only feasible in a minority of cases. In 2018, HireAbility added job coach positions in every office to support individuals with other disabilities. The job coaches provide tutoring and training at education sites, as well as on the job supports for those who obtain competitive employment. These services only exist for a short period of time however, with a place, train, fade model.

## G. COORDINATION WITH EMPLOYERS

### 1. VR SERVICES; AND DUAL CUSTOMER DESIGN

HireAbility Vermont's dual-customer approach considers both individuals with disabilities and the business community as key customers of the program. To that end, HireAbility has established a cadre of Business Account Managers across the state whose primary responsibilities are to develop and sustain relationships with the businesses in their respective communities. The Business Account Managers also facilitate local employment teams made up of the various employment programs serving Vermonters with disabilities. Employment teams are designed to improve collaboration between programs and streamline employer outreach in order to maximize resources and increase opportunities for candidates served by HireAbility.

In addition to the Business Account Managers, HireAbility has contracted Employment Consultants who provide placement services and assistance to individual candidates, including retention services. These Employment Consultants, in concert with their respective Business Account Managers, are in the community developing contacts and establishing relationships with businesses

of all sizes. Due to the rural nature of Vermont, and the fact that trusting relationships are built over time, Vermont has successfully developed ways to track employer engagement.

#### EMPLOYER DATA

HireAbility tracks employer outreach utilizing Salesforce, a Customer Relations Management (CRM) solution used by many large corporations. All Business Account Managers and Employment Consultants enter information into this system. The information is transparent to everyone and only business information, not participant information, is captured. To track employer engagement, the following information is gathered:

#### **Opportunities:**

Opportunities are defined as any activity, paid or unpaid, offered by a particular business. These activities range from informational interviews and job shadows to short-term work experiences and paid employment. All opportunities are captured for each business.

#### **Contacts:**

Contacts are defined as the individuals in a business with whom Employment Consultants and/or Business Account Managers have developed a relationship. In many cases these contacts are Hiring Managers, Owners, and Supervisors.

#### **Activities:**

Each time an Employment Consultant or Business Account Manager interacts with a business contact, an activity note is entered into Salesforce. This allows all employment team members to see a running history of conversations and activities with that business.

#### **Caseload Driven Outreach:**

Caseload driven outreach is defined as labor market outreach directly related to participants on counselors' current caseloads. Business Account Managers are tasked with directing two-thirds of their activities to caseload needs.

#### IMPLICATIONS FOR HIREABILITY PARTICIPANTS

By developing relationships over time, HireAbility has positioned itself as a staffing service with a variety of options for businesses to consider:

- Coordinated business outreach, captured in Salesforce, allows for greater variety in the kinds of businesses we are meeting, and the concurrent variety in opportunities for HireAbility candidates.
- Gathering information on businesses willing to offer worksite experiences, company tours, and informational interviews, will better support career exploration and skill development for both adults and students.
- Our business partners can support Pre-Employment Transition Services activities in schools, including practice interviews, company tours and overviews, as well as identify summer employment opportunities.
- Business partners can support the work of our in-school Transition Counselors, providing information on industry trends, skill requirements and other factors related to specific employment sectors.
- By engaging businesses in working with students, the students will have a better understanding of their local labor market through work experiences, job shadows and paid

employment. This in turn should prepare them for transition to either post-secondary education or employment.

## 2. TRANSITION SERVICES, INCLUDING PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES, FOR STUDENTS AND YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES.

As noted in the prior section, the Business Account Managers are a major resource to the HireAbility Transition Counselors and Youth Employment Specialists, who work exclusively with students to provide Pre-Employment Transition Services. In particular, the Business Account Managers provide:

- Employer contacts who are willing to provide work-based learning experiences for students.
- Employer contacts who are willing to participate in informational interviews, company tours, practice interviews and other exploratory activities with students.
- Information on industry trends, skill requirements and other factors related to specific employment sectors.
- Identification of summer or part time competitive employment opportunities for students.

The Business Account Managers also convene local employment teams including the Youth Employment Specialists. The local employment teams coordinate outreach to employers across HireAbility programs. This coordinated approach maximizes the impact of HireAbility employer outreach and reduces duplicate contacts with employers.

## H. INTERAGENCY COOPERATION

### 1. THE STATE MEDICAID PLAN UNDER TITLE XIX OF THE SOCIAL SECURITY ACT;

As Divisions within the Department of Disabilities, Aging and Independent Living (DAIL), HireAbility and DBVI have entered an Intergovernmental Agreement with the Department of Vermont Health Access (DVHA). The purpose of the agreement is to describe how Vocational Rehabilitation Title I and Title VI-B funding will be utilized with Medicaid Global Commitment funding to support employment services for the following populations:

- Supported employment services for adults with developmental disabilities served through the Vermont Department of Disabilities, Aging and Independent Living (DAIL) Developmental Disabilities Services Division (DDSD).
- Youth with severe emotional disturbance (SED) served by the Department of Mental Health (DMH), Children's Division through the JOBS programs.
- Adults with psychiatric disabilities served through the Community Rehabilitation and Treatment (CRT) program administered by the Department of Mental Health (DMH).

The agreement sets out the following guiding principles:

DAIL/HireAbility/DBVI and DVHA are committed to implementing employment services through the blending and braiding of VR Title I and Title VI-B funding with DDSD Global Commitment Medicaid funding. The goal is to support a seamless and well-integrated system to provide employment services for individuals with developmental disabilities, youth with SED and adults with psychiatric disabilities through a statewide network of community providers.

The agreement also lays out eligibility criteria for the respective programs and the financial responsibilities of each state unit as follows:

### **Funding of Time-Limited Supported Employment Services**

Except for youth with the most significant disabilities who may also receive extended services, DAIL/HireAbility/DBVI funding of supported employment is time-limited for a period of not more than 24 months unless a determination is made that a longer period is necessary based upon the individual's needs. Funded services must be based on a determination of the needs of an eligible individual, as specified in an Individualized Plan for Employment. DAIL/HireAbility/DBVI will fund the following services with Title I funds prior to placement and with either Title I or Title VI B funds following placement.

- Supported employment assessment services.
- Supported employment job search and placement services.
- Supported employment work supports.
- Customized employment.
- Work incentives counseling.
- Progressive employment.
- Case services for additional work supports such as work clothes and transportation.

### **Funding for Extended Services**

Extended services are the ongoing services that are needed to support and maintain an individual with a most significant disability in supported employment after the individual has made the transition from DAIL/HireAbility/DBVI time-limited services. Extended services can be funded by DAIL/HireAbility/DBVI for youth with the most significant disabilities, until age 25, and for a period not to exceed four years. DAIL/HireAbility/DBVI may not provide extended services to individuals with the most significant disabilities who are not youth with the most significant disabilities.

### **DHVA Global Commitment Funding of Employment Services**

#### *Developmental Services*

Supported employment and extended employment services are funded through Global Commitment, Home and Community Based Medicaid Services (HCBS) for people who meet the DDS eligibility criteria. DAIL/DDSD HCBS funding is individualized and based on the support needs of the participant. If HCBS has a line item for employment, then an employment outcome must be included in the Individualized Support Agreement (ISA). HCBS funding can be used to support short-term assessment, job development, job placement services, and extended services.

#### *JOBS Program*

The JOBS program's supported employment and extended employment services are funded through Global Commitment, Medicaid case rate funding administered by DMH. Funds will be provided through the DA Master Grant Agreements.

#### *CRT Evidence Based Supported Employment Services*

CRT evidence-based supported employment services are funded through the Global Commitment, Medicaid CRT case rate administered by DMH. Funds will be provided through the DA Master Grant Agreements.

## 2. THE STATE AGENCY RESPONSIBLE FOR PROVIDING SERVICES FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES; AND

HireAbility and DBVI are housed within the same department as the Developmental Disabilities Services Division (DDSD). An Intradepartmental Agreement was developed within DAIL to cover the respective responsibilities of the three Divisions. The purpose of this agreement is to describe how HireAbility, DBVI and DDSD will cooperate to implement, expand and improve supported employment services for adults with developmental disabilities in the State of Vermont. Supported employment services for adults with developmental disabilities are provided through a system of approved nonprofit community providers, including the Designated Agencies (DA), the Specialized Service Agencies (SSA) and Independent Service Organizations (ISO). DDSD, HireAbility and DBVI fund supported employment services jointly through grant and contractual relationships with these community providers. The agreement sets out the following guiding principles:

DDSD, HireAbility and DBVI are sister Divisions within DAIL and operate under the direction of the DAIL Commissioner. As such, HireAbility, DBVI and DDSD take a “one agency” approach to the funding and implementation of supported employment services for adults and youth with developmental disabilities.

HireAbility, DBVI and DDSD have collaborated for over thirty years to implement supported employment services for adults with developmental disabilities. HireAbility, DBVI and DDSD are committed to continuing this collaboration based on the following:

- All people with developmental disabilities who want to can work with the appropriate supports.
- Work benefits people with developmental disabilities in the same way it does people without disabilities. Increased income, a sense of contribution, skill acquisition, increased confidence, independence, and social connections all enable people to develop meaningful careers.
- The value of work extends far beyond wages earned. Employers and the community benefit from the social inclusion and diversity people with developmental disabilities bring to the workforce through improved morale, customer loyalty and overall productivity.

The agreement includes an inter-division planning and policy group that will meet at least quarterly and include all the Directors. There is a commitment to joint monitoring of supported employment services and joint training and technical assistance. The agreement also describes the eligibility criteria for each program and lays out the fiscal responsibilities as follows:

### **Joint Responsibilities**

HireAbility, DBVI and DDSD are committed to implementing supported employment services through the blending and braiding of VR Title I and Title VI-B funding with DDSD Global Commitment Medicaid funding. The goal is to support a seamless and well-integrated system to provide supported employment services for individuals with developmental disabilities through a statewide network of community providers.

### **HireAbility and DBVI Responsibilities**

*Funding of Time-Limited Supported Employment Services*

Except for youth with significant disabilities, who may also receive extended services, DAIL/HireAbility/DBVI funding of supported employment is time-limited for a period of not more than 24 months. Funded services must be based on a determination of the needs of an eligible individual, as specified in an individualized plan for employment. DAIL/HireAbility/DBVI will fund:

- Supported employment assessment services.
- Supported employment job search and placement services.
- Supported employment work supports.
- Customized employment.

#### *Funding for Extended Supports*

Extended services are the ongoing services that are needed to support and maintain an individual with a most significant disability in supported employment, after an individual has made the transition from time-limited services. Extended services can be funded by HireAbility and DBVI for youth with the most significant disabilities, for a period not to exceed four years. HireAbility may not provide extended services to individuals with the most significant disabilities who are not youth with the most significant disabilities.

### **DDSD Responsibilities**

#### *Funding for Supported Employment Services and Extended Services*

DDSD will fund supported employment and extended employment through the Global Commitment, Home and Community Based Medicaid Services (HCBS) for people who meet the eligibility criteria for DDS. HCBS funding is individualized based on the support needs of the participant. If HCBS has a line item for employment, then an employment outcome must be included in the Individualized Support Agreement (ISA). HCBS funding can be used to support short-term assessment, job development, job placement services, and extended services.

#### *Availability of Funding*

The DDSD commitment to funding supported employment services is contingent on the availability of state and federal funds. In the event state or federal funds are reduced or eliminated, DDSD may reduce or end funding for supported employment services.

### **3. THE STATE AGENCY RESPONSIBLE FOR PROVIDING MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES.**

HireAbility and DMH have a long history of collaboration around the provision of supported employment services for adults with psychiatric disabilities and youth with severe emotional behavioral disorders. This is reflected in the MOU's overview and purpose as follows:

The purpose of this agreement is to describe how DAIL/HireAbility/DBVI and DMH will cooperate to implement, and improve employment services, supported employment services and evidence based supported employment services for youth and adults with psychiatric disabilities in the State of Vermont. Supported employment and employment services for youth and adults with psychiatric disabilities are provided through a system of approved non-profit community providers, including the Designated Agencies (DAs). DMH and DAIL/HireAbility/DBVI fund supported employment services jointly through grant and contractual relationships with these community providers. There are two primary programs within the DMH system that provide employment services:

- The JOBS Program: JOBS provides supported employment services for youth with Severe Emotional Disturbance (SED).
- The Community Rehabilitation and Treatment (CRT) Program: CRT provides employment services and supported employment for adults with severe psychiatric disabilities.

The agreement sets out the following guiding principles:

DAIL/HireAbility/DBVI/DBVI and DMH have collaborated for over thirty years to implement supported employment services for youth and adults with psychiatric disabilities.

DAIL/HireAbility/DBVI and DMH are committed to continuing this collaboration based on the following:

- All people with psychiatric disabilities who want to can work with the appropriate supports.
- Work benefits people with psychiatric disabilities in the same way it does people without disabilities. Increased income, a sense of contribution, skill acquisition, increased confidence, independence, and social connections all enable people to develop meaningful careers.
- Employment is an essential component of the recovery process for people with psychiatric disabilities.

The agreement forms an interagency planning and policy development group including the HireAbility/DBVI Directors and the DMH Directors of Adult Mental Health and Children's Mental Health and is in effect for five years from date of signature. The agreement also includes a commitment to joint monitoring of the programs and joint training and technical assistance.

DAIL/HireAbility/DBVI and DMH support two models of individualized supported employment services in competitive, integrated employment settings. The agreement describes the eligibility criteria for both systems and the service models as follows:

### *JOBS*

The JOBS program is an innovative supported employment and intensive case management service for youth with psychiatric disabilities, who have dropped out or left school. It uses work as the primary means to reach this challenging population. JOBS is a voluntary program where youth, once engaged, are assisted in transitioning from school, prison, or the streets and supported in accessing services to help them reach their individual goals and greater independence.

### *Individualized Placement and Support (IPS): Evidence Based Supported Employment Services*

IPS supported employment is an evidence-based approach to providing vocational services for adults with severe psychiatric disabilities. IPS integrates employment services within community mental health treatment and case management services.

DAIL/HireAbility/DBVI and DMH do not support any type of group or segregated employment service model such as sheltered workshops, work crews, enclave placements or any approach that does not result in competitive, integrated employment. DAIL/HireAbility/DBVI and DMH will promote and support evidence based supported employment as the primary service model, through policy development, contract/grant language, training and technical assistance, and monitoring and quality review.

The agreement describes the fiscal responsibilities of the respective Departments as follows:

## **Joint Responsibilities**

DAIL/HireAbility/DBVI and DMH are committed to implementing supported employment services through the blending and braiding of VR Title I and Title VI-B funding with DMH Global Commitment Medicaid funding. The goal is to support a seamless and well-integrated system to provide supported employment services for adults with psychiatric disabilities and youth with SED through a statewide network of community providers.

## **DAIL/HireAbility/DBVI Responsibilities**

### *Funding for Time Limited Supported Employment Services*

Except for youth with significant disabilities, who may also receive extended services, DAIL/HireAbility/DBVI funding of supported employment is time-limited for a period of not more than 24 months. Funded services must be based on a determination of the needs of an eligible individual, as specified in an Individualized Plan for Employment. DAIL/HireAbility/DBVI will fund:

- Supported employment assessment services Supported employment job search and placement services
- Supported employment work supports
- Customized employment
- Benefits and work incentive counseling
- Progressive employment
- Case services for additional work supports such as work clothes and transportation

### *Funding for Extended Supports*

Extended services are the ongoing services that are needed to support and maintain an individual with a most significant disability in supported employment, after an individual has made the transition from DAIL/HireAbility/DBVI time-limited services. Extended services can be funded by DAIL/HireAbility/DBVI for youth with the most significant disabilities, until age 25, and for a period not to exceed four years. DAIL/HireAbility/DBVI may not provide extended services to individuals with the most significant disabilities who are not youth with the most significant disabilities.

## **DMH Responsibilities**

### *Funding for JOBS*

DMH will fund the JOBS program supported employment services and extended employment services through Global Commitment, Medicaid case rate funding. Funds will be provided through the DA Master Grant Agreements.

### *Funding for IPS Supported Employment Services and Extended Services*

DMH will fund evidence-based supported employment through the Global Commitment, Medicaid CRT case rate. Funds will be provided through the DA Master Grant Agreements.

### *Availability of Funding*

The DMH commitment to funding JOBS and IPS supported employment services is contingent on the availability of state and federal funds. In the event state or federal funds are reduced or eliminated, DMH may reduce funding for supported employment services.



I. COMPREHENSIVE SYSTEM OF PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT; DATA SYSTEM ON PERSONNEL AND PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT

1. SYSTEM ON PERSONNEL AND PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT

A. QUALIFIED PERSONNEL NEEDS

I. THE NUMBER OF PERSONNEL WHO ARE EMPLOYED BY THE STATE AGENCY IN THE PROVISION OF VR SERVICES IN RELATION TO THE NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS SERVED, BROKEN DOWN BY PERSONNEL CATEGORY;

<p>HireAbility has a total of 137 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) staff positions. HireAbility operates using a matrix management structure headed by the Director. The breakdown of staff is as follows: Full Time Equivalents</p>	<p>Position Titles and Functions</p>
1	Director
8	Senior Central Office Managers including the Field Services Managers, Business Legislative & Community Relations Manager, Staff Development and Training Coordinator, Quality Assurance Manager, Deputy Director, Transition Program Manager, Program Director
6	Regional Managers overseeing the 12 district offices
25	Transition Counselors serving student and youth caseload
35	Vocational Counselors serving a general caseload
6	Certified Work Incentive Counselors
2	Rehabilitation Counselors for the Deaf
17	Program Techs and Administrative Support Staff
14.75	Employee Assistance Manager and Specialists
3	Project Coordinators
1	Program Managers
2	Data Management and Program Evaluation Staff
4	Business Account Managers
5.25	Assistive Technology Staff and Manager
2	Miscellaneous Central Office Staff

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II. THE NUMBER OF PERSONNEL CURRENTLY NEEDED BY THE STATE AGENCY TO PROVIDE VR SERVICES, BROKEN DOWN BY PERSONNEL CATEGORY; AND

HireAbility currently has sufficient staff to meet the needs of eligible individuals who have applied for services.

### III. PROJECTIONS OF THE NUMBER OF PERSONNEL, BROKEN DOWN BY PERSONNEL CATEGORY, WHO WILL BE NEEDED BY THE STATE AGENCY TO PROVIDE VR SERVICES IN 5 YEARS BASED ON PROJECTIONS OF THE NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS TO BE SERVED, INCLUDING INDIVIDUALS WITH SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES, THE NUMBER OF PERSONNEL EXPECTED TO RETIRE OR LEAVE THE FIELD, AND OTHER RELEVANT FACTORS.

HireAbility assesses the ability to provide an adequate supply of qualified State rehabilitation and paraprofessional personnel through analyzing participant data collected on a yearly basis and comparing it to staff capacity to provide services adequately. HireAbility collects data related to caseload size, number of referrals received, applications submitted, cases certified, plans created, and training and employment outcomes at individual, district, regional, and statewide levels. This analysis informs the number of positions designated to each geographic area and the design and delivery of services. This analysis and subsequent staffing decisions, related to assurance of adequate personnel development, are completed with the oversight of the HireAbility Senior Management team and the input of the HireAbility Regional Management team.

HireAbility projects the total caseload of participants in the next five years to be between 5,000 and 6,000 per year of which, 80% would be expected to be individuals with significant disabilities. With the current counselor capacity, including rehabilitation counselors for the deaf, this would result in annual caseloads of 60 to 80. Based on this data, we believe we have sufficient counselor capacity to meet the projected need.

In the last two years, HireAbility has hired 25 new counselors, 8 of which are new FTE counselor positions as part of two different grant projects, the Vermont Career Advancement Project (VCAP) with 6 positions and the Opioid Grant Project with 2 positions. The remaining 17 positions replaced staff who moved into new roles within HireAbility (7) staff, retired, or left for other reasons. We project 15-20% turnover of counselors in the next five years which is very manageable.

25 of the total number of HireAbility's counselors are designated Transition Counselors who serve students and youth ages 14 to 24. Each Transition Counselor is paired with a contracted Youth Employment Specialist. These staff provide both Pre-Employment Transition Services and VR services for students and youth.

## B. PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT

### I. A LIST OF THE INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE STATE THAT ARE PREPARING VR PROFESSIONALS, BY TYPE OF PROGRAM;

Vermont has no accredited graduate school offering a master's degree in Rehabilitation Counseling. To meet the comprehensive System for Professional Development (CSPD) standards, a counselor needs either a master's degree in Rehabilitation Counseling or a master's degree in a related field plus completion of four additional core rehabilitation courses. Assumption College, University of Massachusetts, University of Southern Maine, Salve Regina University, and University at Buffalo typically have a range of 35-45 students who graduate with a master's or CAG degree in Rehabilitation Counseling per year. These graduates would be qualified to fill counseling vacancies without additional coursework. New England colleges, which offer degrees in Social Work, Special

Education School Guidance, Mental Health Counseling, or Community Mental Health Services, also produce qualified graduates.

## II. THE NUMBER OF STUDENTS ENROLLED AT EACH OF THOSE INSTITUTIONS, BROKEN DOWN BY TYPE OF PROGRAM; AND

Thirty-two (32) staff are at various stages of their CSPD course work as of the Fall 2023 semester. Seventeen (17) staff are currently pursuing their master's degree in rehabilitation counseling. Six (6) are enrolled at the University of Southern Maine, nine (9) are enrolled at Assumption University, five (5) at Salve Regina University, two (2) at University of Massachusetts Boston, and one (1) each enrolled at the following institutions: University Wisconsin–Stout, West Virginia University and Emporia University.

Ten (10) staff will be enrolling in the Summer or Fall 2024 semesters to begin either their full master's (2 staff) or core class requirements (8 staff). In the future HireAbility will request data on the number of students enrolled in relevant programs for the purpose of recruitment planning.

## III. THE NUMBER OF STUDENTS WHO GRADUATED DURING THE PRIOR YEAR FROM EACH OF THOSE INSTITUTIONS WITH CERTIFICATION OR LICENSURE, OR WITH THE CREDENTIALS FOR CERTIFICATION OR LICENSURE, BROKEN DOWN BY THE PERSONNEL CATEGORY FOR WHICH THEY HAVE RECEIVED, OR HAVE THE CREDENTIALS TO RECEIVE, CERTIFICATION OR LICENSURE.

In the prior year, four (4) staff members met the educational requirements of the CSPD courses through University of Southern Maine and Salve Regina University. In the future HireAbility will request information on the number of students in relevant programs to help inform recruitment efforts.

## 2. PLAN FOR RECRUITMENT, PREPARATION AND RETENTION OF QUALIFIED PERSONNEL

In January 2020 HireAbility established an internship program and entered into Affiliation Agreements with the following schools: George Washington University, University of Vermont, Springfield College, University at Buffalo, the State University of New York, Vermont State University, University of Massachusetts Boston, and the University of Alabama. We have had nine (9) interns who have completed internships and have hired two (2) thus far. We currently have three (3) interns.

HireAbility has established a list of schools to actively recruit qualified personnel. Assumption University, George Washington University, Salve Regina University, University of Southern Maine, University of Wisconsin–Stout, University of Massachusetts Boston, and Springfield College. Our Field Services Managers send out job openings to identified contacts at each school's Master's in Rehabilitation Counseling program so they can share this recruitment information with current students and alumni. These graduates meet the highest standard of education and obtain certification at the highest level for this field. HireAbility also recruits qualified personnel in a related field such as Social Work, Special Education, School Guidance, Mental Health Counseling, or Community Mental Health Services from various New England colleges, by posting positions on internal employment pages of their websites. All these graduates are candidates for counseling vacancies if they are willing to complete the four core rehabilitation courses.

State personnel policies require HireAbility to consider qualified applicants on the Reduction in Force list before other applicants. HireAbility advertises openings through the State recruitment system SuccessFactors Recruiting, which includes added exposure to the State of Vermont Careers page, Indeed.com, and announcements on the Vermont Department of Human Resources Twitter and Facebook pages. HireAbility also advertises through local newspapers (coordinated ad program), on-line on USA Today Job Network, and by listing openings through college placement services. Assumption University, Auburn University, George Washington University, Salve Regina University, University of Southern Maine, University of Wisconsin–Stout, University of Massachusetts Boston and Springfield College advertise counselor openings by forwarding job opportunities to their list of recent graduates.

When recruiting staff to serve a specific population such as the deaf and hard of hearing, additional recruitment efforts are employed to reach professionals within that community and associated training programs. This has included using the Idealist website, posting in the Boston Globe, and connecting with deaf and hard of hearing student organizations at New England based colleges. The State of Vermont is an equal opportunity employer and there is emphasis on recruiting and hiring individuals with disabilities. We encourage HireAbility participants to apply for posted positions and obtain the education necessary to be competitive. HireAbility also promotes working partnerships with the Vermont Center for Independent Living, Designated Mental Health Agencies, the Refugee Resettlement program, Vermont Works for Women, and other organizations who serve people with disabilities and/or are of a minority status.

### 3. PERSONNEL STANDARDS

A. STANDARDS THAT ARE CONSISTENT WITH ANY NATIONAL OR STATE-APPROVED OR -RECOGNIZED CERTIFICATION, LICENSING, REGISTRATION, OR OTHER COMPARABLE REQUIREMENTS THAT APPLY TO THE PROFESSION OR DISCIPLINE IN WHICH SUCH PERSONNEL ARE PROVIDING VR SERVICES; AND

The Division follows standards set forth in the Comprehensive System for Professional Development (CSPD). This prescribes a national standard for vocational rehabilitation counselor qualifications. This standard gives highest priority to counselors with a master's degree in Rehabilitation Counseling. The second level of priority is for counselors with related degrees in Social Work, Psychology, Mental Health Counseling or Special Education. This group must complete four additional courses to meet the standard: Foundations of Rehabilitation, Career Counseling, Vocational Assessment, and Medical and Psychosocial Aspects of Disability. When unable to recruit qualified candidates that meet the two highest levels, HireAbility hires counselors with a master's degree in an unrelated program or a bachelors' degree and supports their graduate training. Though not required by HireAbility or by RSA, some counselors also become Certified Rehabilitation Counselors (CRC) through the Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification. HireAbility supports staff who wish to become CRCs and those who continue to maintain their CRC credentials. Ten (10) staff are currently CRCs with two (2) counselors currently pursuing their CRC credential. HireAbility is an approved Continuing Education Provider for the Commission on Rehabilitation Counseling Certification (CRCC). We actively seek to provide trainings that meet the CRCC guidelines and offer certificates. Training opportunities with CRC certificates are sent out monthly to staff who have their CRCs.

In the future HireAbility may request data from New England college programs about the number of students in relevant programs. We would use this data to plan future recruitment activities. The following is a breakdown of the educational plans for HireAbility staff. These plans fall into a three category system based on the availability of existing financial resources and are consistent with any

national, State-approved, or recognized requirements that apply to the profession or discipline in which personnel are providing VR services:

Category 1: Staff who meet the highest standards for education and/or certification: Staff in this category have completed a master's degree in Rehabilitation Counseling and/or have received certification as a Rehabilitation Counselor.

Category 2: Staff who do not yet meet the highest standards and are currently enrolled in an approved graduate or undergraduate program: Staff in this category are pursuing a master's degree in Rehabilitation Counseling or a related field and have additional supervision and oversight.

Category 3: Staff who have graduate degrees in counseling or a related field and are required to take four core rehabilitation courses to comply with the CSPD requirements.

The percentage of our current counselors who meet the CSPD standard Category 1 is 59.1% (42 counselors out of 71). The remaining 40.9% of staff meet Category 2 or Category 1. Timelines for meeting graduate training requirements are written into the job specifications, which all candidates have access to on the State of Vermont Department of Human Resources website. Counselors are required to meet the standard within five (5) years for a full master's degree and three (3) years for core classes. Staff are encouraged to fill out an Education Plan with their supervisor and submit it to the Staff Development and Training Manager. All training information related to core courses and completion of master's degrees is stored on a Microsoft Teams Channel that all staff who are in the process of completing CSPD coursework are members of. The "posts" section of the channel also allows for cross office discussion and support for staff. A spreadsheet is maintained by HireAbility's Staff Development and Training Manager to track staff throughout the process.

Upon hire, HireAbility staff become members of a New Hire Cohort in Microsoft Teams. They manage a new hire checklist of between 25 and 32 items, depending on their role within HireAbility. Content is delivered in a variety of ways including virtual, recorded, self-paced and in-person by HireAbility's Program Managers, AWARE Trainers, MI Coaches, State of Vermont, contracted trainers, external partners and the HireAbility's Staff Development and Training Manager. The trainings are designed to be delivered in short sessions over the course of the first six (6) months with HireAbility. This delivery model ensures content is delivered for a variety of learning styles and in smaller increments to ensure the material is digestible. The trainings cover HireAbility's Policies and Procedures Manual, the full vocational rehabilitation process from referral to successful closure, effective caseload management, collaboration with partners providing employment services, and other aspects of vocational rehabilitation.

**B. THE ESTABLISHMENT AND MAINTENANCE OF EDUCATION AND EXPERIENCE REQUIREMENTS, IN ACCORDANCE WITH SECTION 101(A)(7)(B)(II) OF THE REHABILITATION ACT, TO ENSURE THAT THE PERSONNEL HAVE A 21ST CENTURY UNDERSTANDING OF THE EVOLVING LABOR FORCE AND THE NEEDS OF INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES.**

See Section A.

#### **4. STAFF DEVELOPMENT**

**A. A SYSTEM OF STAFF DEVELOPMENT FOR PROFESSIONALS AND PARAPROFESSIONALS WITHIN THE DESIGNATED STATE UNIT, PARTICULARLY WITH RESPECT TO ASSESSMENT, VOCATIONAL COUNSELING, JOB PLACEMENT, AND REHABILITATION TECHNOLOGY, INCLUDING TRAINING**

IMPLEMENTED IN COORDINATION WITH ENTITIES CARRYING OUT STATE PROGRAMS UNDER SECTION 4 OF THE ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY ACT OF 1998; AND

Beginning in January 2024 HireAbility will contract with a cloud-based training platform called YesLMS which provides a library of high-quality courses written by experienced vocational rehabilitation professionals. These trainings can be customized and edited specifically for HireAbility Vermont. The library of available trainings is designed specifically for VR practitioners and is delivered in an accessible and engaging format. The library currently consists of 124 courses that can be taken at any time. The topics range from ethics and leadership to disability specific education and Motivational Interviewing. Courses can be bundled to create different learning paths for staff based on their roles, interests or familiarity with a subject.

Staff development opportunities are provided annually to ensure all personnel receive appropriate and adequate training in multiple categories that include assessment, vocational counseling, job placement, and rehabilitation technology. HireAbility staff receive training related to assessment through webinars and in-person training offered by the Staff Development and Training Manager, Program Managers, external partners, contracted trainers, and the Career Counseling and Assessment Specialist team. The Career Counseling and Assessment Specialist team is comprised of staff who are trained and knowledgeable about the administration, interpretation, and application of various vocational assessments. This team also reviews assessment tools to identify those that are no longer relevant or those that need to be included in HireAbility's Career Assessment Inventory, which is a selection of assessment tools used to assess a person's interests, values, aptitudes, and skills. Skillful interviewing also serves as a form of assessment and HireAbility staff and contracted partners receive introductory and advanced training in Motivational Interviewing to enhance this skill set.

Motivational Interviewing (MI) training was introduced to HireAbility in 2014 with comprehensive training for all staff. A statewide cadre of internal MI Coaches provide monthly coaching circles for district staff to practice MI skills. Statewide introductory MI trainings are offered three times a year for all new HireAbility staff. New staff are also supported by their district's MI Coach. All HireAbility staff are expected to attend an annual MI training that focuses on a new area, role, or topic. Motivational Interviewing is a counseling approach that enhances counseling skills in many arenas and is an especially good fit for vocational rehabilitation counseling. Nationally, Motivational Interviewing is being used by many State Vocational Rehabilitation Agencies/Departments to provide services and effectively engage participants in making changes that improve their lives. MI is a person-centered approach with a focus on client choice, self-efficacy, and autonomy. This practice is especially useful for individuals with disabilities. There are well-established results available regarding its effectiveness with those who experience substance misuse issues. A high number of HireAbility participants struggle with substance and alcohol addiction, which reinforces the relevance of having staff trained in MI techniques and practices. Sustainability of this initiative occurs through ongoing development of the internal HireAbility MI Coaches and contracted external trainers to ensure training is available to all staff and meets the training requirements of those providing direct service. The internal HireAbility MI Coaches have already received additional MI focused facilitation training and one-on-one coaching with a contracted external MI trainer. This allows the MI Coaches to evaluate staff levels of proficiency in using MI skills and strategies in the vocational counseling process with fidelity to the model/approach, and design training and support that responds to the areas needing development. In 2023 we focused on MI Training that was role specific. Our internal MI Coaches each took on a specific role within HireAbility to lead coaching circles that were specific to our Administrative Team, Business Account Managers, Program and

Senior Managers, etc. We have also contracted with an external MI trainer to deliver trainings such as Employer as the Customer, MI for Supervision and Leadership, and MI and Ethics.

Staff development related to job placement is provided through several venues. HireAbility is working with ICI Boston and Cornell University to develop on-line trainings for newly hired contracted staff who provide placement services. Regularly scheduled meetings hosted by the HireAbility funded Business Account Managers ensure development of knowledge related to the labor market and effective job placement. One such meeting that specifically promotes cooperative job placement and employer relationships, is comprised of district HireAbility contracted employment staff and staff from local Agency of Human Services funded employment programs.

Training related to rehabilitation technology is provided initially through the HireAbility services training program for new hires. Additional training and staff development are provided in collaboration with the Assistive Technology Program through on-site, video conferencing, and webinar-based trainings, information sessions, and regularly scheduled staff meetings.

A specific HireAbility staff group, the Certified Work Incentive Counselors, receive specialized training to ensure the provision of quality services in working with participants who receive monetary or medical benefits. Ongoing training and support are provided by a HireAbility Project Manager and Senior Work Incentives Counselor. The local Social Security Administration (SSA) Area Work Incentives Coordinator provides quarterly trainings to the Work Incentives Counselors on a variety of SSA Work Incentives issues. SSA also provides training and technical assistance for Work Incentives Counselors through contracts with Cornell and Virginia Commonwealth University. HireAbility is a Work Incentives Planning and Assistance (WIPA) provider offering work incentives counseling to Vermonters. The six Work Incentives Counselors and Program Manager are certified by SSA as Certified Work Incentive Counselors (CWIC). To achieve certification, these staff must attend online or in person training and complete a comprehensive "take home" assignment that is evaluated by Virginia Commonwealth University. To maintain CWIC credentials, WICs must complete annual continuing education requirements through VCU.

The State of Vermont Assistive Technology Program (ATP) is housed within HireAbility. The ATP has 5.25 state staff classified as Assistive Technology Specialists and contracts with the University of Vermont for two additional Assistive Technology Specialists. HireAbility counselors routinely refer participants to the ATP for consultations. The ATP specialists have twice monthly professional development days to keep abreast of the latest advancements in AT services. AT vendors are regularly invited to ATP staff meetings to present the latest technology. Staff also attend national and regional AT conferences and training events.

#### **B. PROCEDURES FOR THE ACQUISITION AND DISSEMINATION OF SIGNIFICANT KNOWLEDGE FROM RESEARCH AND OTHER SOURCES TO DESIGNATED STATE UNIT PROFESSIONALS AND PARAPROFESSIONALS.**

The HireAbility Staff Development and Training Manager is the primary point of contact for dissemination of research and training resources to field staff. A monthly training calendar is produced and sent out to all staff with upcoming training opportunities on a variety of topics from professional development, continuing education, ethics, and wellness. Program managers, including the Transition Program Manager, the Business Legislative & Community Relations Manager, and the Work Incentives Program Coordinator collect and disseminate information from local and national resources. Program managers and staff are encouraged to become members of national organizations in their fields. Organizations like the National Skills Coalition or the National

Association of Benefits Planning and Work Incentives Specialists (NABWIS) are excellent resources for managers and frontline staff.

## 5. PERSONNEL TO ADDRESS INDIVIDUAL COMMUNICATION NEEDS

The Agency of Human Services has contracts with the Association of Africans Living in VT for in-person translation services, the U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants' Vermont Field Office for in-person, telephonic, and audio-visual interpretation services, as well as three other providers for telephonic interpretation and translation services (Propio., Worldwide Interpreters, Inc., and Language Link).

The Agency of Human Services has a contract with Vancro Integrated Interpreting Services for American Sign Language interpreters. HireAbility utilizes a variety of assistive technology tools to help participants who are deaf or hard of hearing communicate with HireAbility staff, other service providers and employers. This includes video phones, the telephone relay service, and other tools. HireAbility also has two Rehabilitation Counselors for the Deaf who are fluent in ASL and serve an exclusively deaf and hard of hearing caseload. HireAbility consults extensively with DBVI around assistive technology and other tools to support participants who are blind and visually impaired. This includes use of Dragon and other voice activated tools. HireAbility can also access specialized ASL interpreters through the interpreter contract to translate for participants who are deaf.

## 6. COORDINATION OF PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT UNDER THE INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES EDUCATION ACT

The HireAbility Director and other senior managers meet quarterly with the Deputy Commissioner of the Agency of Education (AOE) and the Special Education Director to coordinate activities and trainings, especially around transition issues. HireAbility and AOE have a long history of co-sponsoring trainings and conferences for frontline staff.

The Transition Program Manager regularly reviews and shares training provided by the technical assistance centers, such as George Washington University's Center for Innovative Training in Vocational Rehabilitation (CIT-VR) and the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition (NTACT), to ensure that staff are aware of the most recent and relevant information. The Post-Secondary Transition Coordinator from the VT Agency of Education (AOE) attends an annual HireAbility Transition Counselor meeting to provide information as needed around IDEA and Transition Planning specific to Vermont schools.

HireAbility, in collaboration with the AOE and other core partners who provide services to students, puts on an annual Inter-agency Core Team event with workshops and content specific to best serving youth in VT. This conference supports the work that is happening locally across the state with Transition Core Teams. The goal is to effectively collaborate around services and provide both trainings and information about resources available to support youth in their post-secondary and career planning process.

## J. STATEWIDE ASSESSMENT

1. PROVIDE AN ASSESSMENT OF THE REHABILITATION NEEDS OF INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES RESIDING WITHIN THE STATE, PARTICULARLY THE VR SERVICES NEEDS OF THOSE:



## A. WITH THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES, INCLUDING THEIR NEED FOR SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES;

The most recent Statewide Needs Assessment was conducted in 2023. The Rehabilitation Act (1973) requires the Vermont Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) and the Vermont State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) to jointly conduct a needs assessment every three years. The assessment is intended to form the basis for the the annual State Plan and strategic planning activities. The 2023 Needs Assessment focused particularly on the service needs of the following populations:

Individuals with the most significant disabilities, particularly their need for supported employment;

Individuals with disabilities who are minorities, including refugees;

Individuals who have been unserved or underserved by HireAbility;

individuals with disabilities served through the statewide Workforce Investment System; and

Individuals who are youth with disabilities and students with disabilities, including, as appropriate, their need for Pre-Employment Transition Services or other transition services.

A comprehensive report of the results of the HireAbility Vermont and SRC Needs Assessment was submitted in 2023. The report includes data from a variety of sources, including HireAbility's Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) reporting database, the United States Census Bureau, the American Community Survey, as well as surveys conducted by HireAbility. Although not specifically designed to assess unmet needs, these surveys assisted HireAbility in determining ways to better serve individuals with disabilities, thereby making its services more accessible and welcoming to populations that may not be currently served.

### **Major Findings**

After reviewing the data in the Needs Assessment, HireAbility and the SRC have identified seven primary findings. These findings are intended to help guide HireAbility's goals and priorities in the State Plan.

#### **1: THE NEED TO INCREASE POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION AND TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL HIREABILITY PARTICIPANTS**

Individuals with disabilities are much less likely than their peers without disabilities to enter and/or complete post-secondary education programs. Post-secondary education and credentialed training programs are essential for most participants to access high wage employment. Therefore, HireAbility needs to implement strategies to increase participation in these programs across all participants served. Creating an array of options, including "earn and learn" options such as apprenticeship, pre-apprenticeship programs, and paid work experiences will provide onramps for participants to engage in education and training programs that fit their needs. Short-term credentialed programs, such as LNA, are often the starting point of high wage career ladders. Additionally, HireAbility might need to be flexible about what counts as a credential. Some credentials such as ServSafe do not count as a credential under the Common Performance Measures but will provide participants with marketable skills. HireAbility might also need to provide assistive technology, tutoring, and other strategies to help participants succeed in post-secondary programs. Increasing these post-secondary options and providing the appropriate supports will assist participants in achieving long-term career success in quality employment.

## **2: THE NEED TO CONTINUE FINDING INNOVATIVE WAYS TO SERVE MIDDLE AGE AND OLDER PARTICIPANTS**

The HireAbility caseload has become significantly younger. About 50% of the caseload is under the age of 25. This is the result of the WIOA mandate to reserve 15% of funding to serve high school students with disabilities and is a trend that has been seen nationally in VR programs.

Whenever a federal mandate requires a program to reassign resources and capacity from one age group to another, there is inevitably an impact on the group losing resources. HireAbility currently has about 25% less counselor capacity to serve participants over 25 than we did in 2015. While HireAbility cannot change this, we can look for more effective and efficient ways to meet the needs of individuals with disabilities who are over the age of 25. This might include:

- Expanding partnerships with other workforce programs to serve some individuals who need fewer or less intensive services.
- Effective management of caseloads so services are targeted at individuals who are engaged in services and are most in need.
- Supporting adults achieving higher quality and more stable employment so they do not need to reapply for HireAbility services later.
- Building on the experience of remote services to serve individuals more efficiently.
- Developing new services and tools that meet the needs of HireAbility participants over the age of 25 such as “earn and learn” opportunities and access to non-traditional education that will better prepare participants to enter the workforce.

## **3: THE NEED TO IMPLEMENT STRATEGIES THAT ENSURE CULTURAL RESPONSIVENESS OF HIREABILITY STAFF**

The demographics of Vermont are changing and the population is becoming more ethnically and racially diverse. These trends emphasize the need for HireAbility staff training around racial justice and cultural responsiveness. HireAbility has contracted with Social Contract, a systems change vendor, and Karen Proctor, a subject matter expert in social change related to diversity, equity and inclusion. HireAbility will need to continue to implement strategies and invest in staff training that increases responsiveness.

## **4: THE NEED TO IMPROVE OUTCOMES FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH PSYCHIATRIC DISABILITIES**

HireAbility has long recognized that individuals with psychiatric disabilities often face substantial barriers to employment. In addition to their disabilities, there is the stigma of mental illness, combined with the fact that their conditions are invisible to others. The barriers are even greater for individuals with psychiatric disabilities who are offenders. National data suggests that at least 20% of incarcerated offenders have psychiatric disabilities.

HireAbility has historically taken the lead in promoting employment for people with psychiatric disabilities. HireAbility was instrumental in bringing the Individual Placement and Support (IPS) model to Vermont. IPS is the most widely accepted evidence-based approach to employment services for individuals with psychiatric disabilities. Unfortunately, IPS is only available to a subset of individuals served through the community mental health system CRT Program. It does not include individuals served through outpatient mental health services.

HireAbility needs to continue to explore opportunities to expand employment services for this population, in partnership with the community mental health system and the Department of Mental Health. The availability of reallocation funding may offer opportunities to try out new approaches or expand existing promising programs.

## **5: THE NEED TO PREPARE HIREABILITY PARTICIPANTS TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF CAREER LADDERS**

Entry level employment is often a very important first step for HireAbility participants. This is especially true for high school students and youth with disabilities. However, entry level employment should not be the end goal for most HireAbility participants. HireAbility is developing strategies to help participants move beyond entry level employment. Supporting participants to engage in career assessments is one tool HireAbility staff are employing to help participants think more broadly about career paths and opportunities. Expanding access to post-secondary training and education options is another strategy that HireAbility will need to continue to focus on to create opportunities for career growth. Consistent follow-up with employed participants post placement is another important piece to this puzzle. By following up with participants once they are employed, HireAbility can help these participants identify potential career ladders in their current jobs or explore other possibilities.

## **6: THE NEED TO IMPROVE SERVICES AND OUTCOMES FOR PARTICIPANTS WITH OPIOID USE DISORDERS**

Vermont has seen a dramatic increase in the number of opioid related deaths since the beginning of 2020. HireAbility needs to continue to develop outreach systems and teams for participants with opioid misuse disorder to engage them in employment as part of their recovery effort. A pilot program is currently underway with sites in the Northeast Kingdom and Chittenden County, to increase the number of participants with substance misuse disorder that HireAbility is serving. The pilot has already had great success so it will be important for HireAbility to secure funding streams that allow for the expansion of these services statewide.

## **7: THE NEED TO ENGAGE EMPLOYERS AROUND THE POTENTIAL FOR HIREABILITY PARTICIPANTS TO FILL HIGHER SKILL, HIGHER WAGE POSITIONS**

HireAbility has excellent employer outreach through the Workforce Development teams. Currently, HireAbility has active relationships with about 2,500 employers statewide. As HireAbility supports more individuals pursuing higher wage and higher skilled employment, it is important that employers see the agency as a source of higher skilled employees. One avenue HireAbility is investing significant resources in is “earn and learn” options such as apprenticeship or pre-apprenticeship programs. HireAbility, partnering with other workforce agencies, may need to develop specific training programs in response to the workforce needs of a specific sector. Business Account Managers will need to work with employers to identify career ladders within their organizations. HireAbility can support participants to climb these career ladders by providing tailored training and supports.

### **B. WHO ARE MINORITIES;**

The ACS provides data on disability and race by state. Overall, 3.71% of Vermonters are from an ethnic minority. The following table shows the ACS estimates of the incidence of disability by race.

#### **Incidence of Disability by Race to Adults Ages 18 to 64**

<b>Total Number of Working Age Participants</b>	<b>Percentage Reporting a Disability</b>	<b>Estimated Potential VR Eligible</b>
White- 356,313	13.5%	48,161
Black/African Americans- 5,133	11.4%	586

Asian-7,540

4.2%

313

The disability rates for African Americans and Asians in Vermont are much lower than the national average. However, the estimates for the Vermont non-white populations with disabilities are from sample sizes of less than 40 people and too small to be statistically reliable. As a result, this data may substantially understate the actual rate of disability in these groups.

HireAbility closures for individuals from an ethnic minority increased from 8% in 2019 to 12% in 2022. Developing better cultural responsiveness for all HireAbility staff is a top priority to improve service delivery to this portion of the population and in turn, decrease the closure rate.

#### C. WHO HAVE BEEN SERVED THROUGH OTHER COMPONENTS OF THE STATEWIDE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM; AND

HireAbility and DOL have a strong history of collaboration around serving individuals with disabilities. HireAbility and DOL cooperate at the local level to serve individuals on mutual caseloads, and in some districts, HireAbility and DOL are co-located. HireAbility Regional Managers routinely meet with their local DOL counterparts. DOL staff sit on HireAbility-led Workforce Development teams that coordinate outreach to local employers. HireAbility counselors and DOL staff frequently share the cost of training programs and other return-to-work activities for individual participants. DOL staff have also consulted with HireAbility and the state Assistive Technology Program about accessibility for DOL programs and services.

#### D. WHO ARE YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES AND STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES, INCLUDING, AS APPROPRIATE, THEIR NEED FOR PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES OR OTHER TRANSITION SERVICES.

##### HireAbility Pre-Employment Transition Services

Once the Pre-ETS requirement was announced in October 2014, Vermont HireAbility moved quickly to come into compliance. To meet the new mandate, HireAbility created a cadre of HireAbility counselors who work exclusively with high school students. Currently, HireAbility has 23 full time Transition Counselors, and two half time Transition Counselors for a total of 25 employees/positions or 24 FTEs, out of a total of 69 FTE counselors across the entire organization. This is approximately 36% of HireAbility's counselor capacity.

HireAbility Transition Counselors providing Pre-ETS are deployed statewide to serve all 60 supervisory unions in the state. HireAbility Transition Counselors are outposted to an average of five high schools each, to ensure statewide access for eligible students. The daily presence of counselors in local high schools allows them to build strong working relationships and coordinate services with school staff.

HireAbility also contracts with our primary CRP, VABIR, to support 26 Youth Employment Specialists to provide Pre-ETS. The school-based counselors and Youth Employment Specialists essentially work as a team. The focus of the Youth Employment Specialists is workplace readiness training, arranging for work-based learning experiences and instruction in self-advocacy. HireAbility constantly evaluates the effectiveness of our program to ensure it provides high quality services to our participants.

As part of HireAbility’s ongoing review and evaluation, it came to our attention that the attrition rate for youth exiting high school was much higher than older participants. The service model was set up so that youth in high school shifted from working with a Transition Counselor while they were in high school, to an Adult Counselor at high school exit. This shift from one counselor to another seemed to result in a disproportionate number of youth disengaging from the program at graduation. In an effort to reduce this number, HireAbility shifted the service delivery model in 2021, to allow Transition Counselors to keep youth on their caseloads through high school exit and up to age 25. Students who graduated in June 2021 were among the first to remain working with their Transition Counselors post-graduation.

### The Number and Proportion of Students Receiving Pre-ETS Services and/or HireAbility Services

The number of students receiving Pre-ETS and/or HireAbility services saw a steady increase from SFY 2016 to SFY 2019, then a significant drop in SFY 2020 as seen in Table 9. We attribute this sharp decline in students served almost entirely to the pandemic. Schools were closed and Transition Counselors had an extremely difficult time getting in contact with students and school staff alike.

### Students with Disabilities Served, Age 14 through 21 at Referral

Period	Students Served
SFY 2016	1,672
SFY 2019	2,348
SFY 2020	1,723
SFY 2021	1,288
SFY 2022	1,421

During the 2021/2022 school year, 1,421 students with disabilities were enrolled in Pre-ETS and/or HireAbility services out of a potentially eligible population of 6,423. This means 22.1% of potentially eligible students were receiving Pre-ETS and/or HireAbility services during the school year.

### Pre-ETS Services by Category (SFY 2022)

Pre-ETS Service	Number of Students Receiving Service
Career Exploration	1,081
Post-Secondary Enrollment Assistance	912
Self-Advocacy Skills Training	183
Work Based Learning	242
Workplace Readiness Training	465

We believe the above table significantly underreports the actual services provided because of the challenges involved in collecting this data in the AWARE case management system. HireAbility has already made a shift in its data reporting and collection methodology and will continue to monitor and improve data collection to develop a more accurate picture of services provided.

### Supported Employment Services for Youth

In addition to core HireAbility services, HireAbility partners with other state agencies to fund the JOBS program. The JOBS Program is an innovative supported employment and intensive case

management service for youth with SED (Serious Emotional Disturbance) who have left or dropped out of school. The program is voluntary and uses work as the primary means to reach this challenging population. Once engaged, youth are assisted in transitioning from school, prison, or the streets and supported in accessing services to help them reach their individual goals and achieve greater independence. The funding comes from a combination of state funds and Medicaid match from HireAbility, Mental Health, Corrections, and the Department for Children and Families. In addition to community and state partners, JOBS programs involve employers in meeting the needs of youth through intensive job development, placement, and on and off-site training support. Employment is a non-stigmatizing service that youth want and need. JOBS programs differ from other traditional employment models by providing intensive case management services to assist with other areas of need including legal issues, benefits counseling, homelessness, drug/alcohol misuse, and probation and parole.

### Supported Employment for Youth with Developmental Disabilities

Vermont has a very strong supported employment infrastructure for youth with developmental disabilities that has been recognized both nationally and internationally. Employment retention for eligible students who exit high school with a job is a priority for the Developmental Disabilities Services Division (DDSD) and is included in their System of Care Plan. This creates a strong incentive for schools and HireAbility to help youth with developmental disabilities find employment before they exit high school.

HireAbility and DDSD collaborate to identify students who have a developmental disability and are likely to graduate. The June Graduates survey assists DDSD and HireAbility to effectively plan for transitioning students district by district. It also allows DDSD to predict caseload funding needs statewide.

HireAbility has also partnered with DDSD to provide post-secondary education options for individuals with developmental disabilities. Vermont has four post-secondary programs for individuals with developmental disabilities including Project Search, SUCCEED, Think College and College Steps. In general, HireAbility funds tuition and ancillary supports and DDSD funds staffing costs.

### The Number and Proportion of Youth Receiving HireAbility Services

Transition and Pre-ETS naturally overlap to a significant degree. As noted, the HireAbility Transition Counselors have shifted to serving youth in high school and after graduation up to age 25 in partnership with the contracted VABIR Youth Employment Specialists. Table 11 shows the trends in the number of youth with disabilities served between SFY 2018 and SFY 2022. The total number of youth served by HireAbility has decreased significantly since 2018, which again is mainly attributed to the impacts of the pandemic.

Youth with Disabilities Served, Age 14 through 24 at Referral

Period	Persons Served
SFY 2018	3,721
SFY 2019	3,726
SFY 2020	3,109
SFY 2021	2,667
SFY 2022	2,878

Based on the ACS data, HireAbility estimates there were 12,991 youth with disabilities between the ages of 14 and 25 in the state of Vermont in 2022. HireAbility served 2,878 youth with disabilities during SFY 2022. This suggests that HireAbility is serving up to 22% of the eligible population. HireAbility coordinates services with services provided under IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) at both the state and local level.

#### STATE LEVEL

The Vermont Agency of Education (AOE) and HireAbility have agreed to meet quarterly to discuss the coordination of services within local school districts. In general, those meetings include the following:

- The HireAbility Director.
- The HireAbility Transition Program Manager.
- The AOE Special Education Director.
- The AOE Postsecondary and Transition Coordinator.

In addition to the above, HireAbility and AOE have frequent ad hoc meetings related to transition services and to plan joint initiatives.

#### LOCAL LEVEL

A primary responsibility of the HireAbility Transition Counselor is to coordinate services with the schools. HireAbility Transition Counselors spend the bulk of their time in schools, working directly with special education staff and teachers to provide services to students. This strong on-the-ground presence allows HireAbility Transition Counselors and school staff to build close and collaborative working relationships.

In order to improve transition outcomes for students, HireAbility took the lead in forming core transition teams in all twelve districts in 2016. The purpose of the core transition team is to bring HireAbility, schools, and community agencies together to improve collaboration around services for transitioning students. The core teams include:

- Local school staff.
- HireAbility.
- Developmental services providers.
- Children's and adult mental health providers.
- The Department of Labor youth staff.
- Other youth programs.

The core transition teams are well established in all twelve HireAbility districts and meet at least quarterly. HireAbility, AOE, and DOL also sponsor an annual core team event pulling together schools, community agencies, and state staff to focus on improving transition services. In 2023, over 250 people attended the event.

#### SUMMARY FINDINGS

##### Strengths of the Vermont System

- Overall, the number of youth with disabilities accessing HireAbility services appears to be rebounding post-pandemic. Transition teams have returned to serving youth in person, in schools which we know makes a huge difference in the quality of service delivery.

- HireAbility has a strong collaborative partnership with AOE at the state level. At the local level, almost all Vermont high schools are working in partnership with HireAbility to facilitate the provision of and access to Pre-ETS and transition services.
- Vermont has a good infrastructure to provide supported employment for youth with developmental disabilities and emotional/behavioral disabilities.
- Vermont has well-established core transition teams in all twelve HireAbility districts to facilitate local coordination of transition services.

#### Areas for Development in the Vermont System

- Increasing the number of eligible youth served to pre-pandemic rates is a huge focus for HireAbility in the coming years. The earlier HireAbility can engage with these students, the more likely they are to engage in work-based learning activities which are shown to significantly increase the likelihood of youth entering competitive integrated employment post-high school.
- Post-secondary education and training opportunities are key for students and youth with disabilities to access higher wage jobs and develop long-term career opportunities. Despite this fact, only 24% of out of school youth are participating in such programs. HireAbility should develop strategies to expand opportunities for youth.
- Related to the above area of need, very few youth served by HireAbility access apprenticeship or other “earn and learn” programs leading to credentials. Apprenticeship and similar programs have an excellent track record of helping youth achieve higher wage employment.

#### 2. IDENTIFY THE NEED TO ESTABLISH, DEVELOP, OR IMPROVE COMMUNITY REHABILITATION PROGRAMS WITHIN THE STATE; AND

Because of the small population and rural nature of Vermont, there are very few CRPs in the state. VABIR (the Vermont Association of Business, Industry and Rehabilitation) is the primary CRP for the HireAbility program, except for supported employment. VABIR has capacity to serve HireAbility participants statewide and has an excellent track record. VABIR also serves individuals without disabilities through the state TANF program.

HireAbility provides grants to Vermont’s Designated Agencies for employment services for individuals with developmental disabilities and individuals with severe and persistent psychiatric disabilities. Easter Seals also has a small presence in Vermont. While HireAbility is open to supporting the development of new CRPs as well as established CRPs who come to Vermont, there is limited funding available to support multiple agencies.

HireAbility partnered with other state agencies, VABIR, and the Designated Agencies, to create an online training program for CRP staff hosted by Community College of Vermont. The program allows cohorts of employment staff to access training statewide. The content is modified to the specific populations served. In addition, HireAbility is exploring other training providers that offer curriculum that will support CRT staff in understanding disabilities and feeling confident in connecting with the labor market to create opportunities for participants,

#### 3. INCLUDE AN ASSESSMENT OF THE NEEDS OF INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES FOR TRANSITION CAREER SERVICES AND PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES, AND THE



EXTENT TO WHICH SUCH SERVICES ARE COORDINATED WITH TRANSITION SERVICES PROVIDED UNDER THE INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES EDUCATION ACT

The number of students receiving Pre-ETS and/or HireAbility services saw a steady increase from SFY 2016 to SFY 2019, then a significant drop in SFY 2020 as seen in Table 9. We attribute this sharp decline in students served almost entirely to the pandemic. Schools were closed and Transition Counselors had an extremely difficult time getting in contact with students and school staff alike.

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Workplace Readiness Training	465

We believe the above table significantly underreports the actual services provided because of the challenges involved in collecting this data in the AWARE case management system. HireAbility has already made a shift in its data reporting and collection methodology and will continue to monitor and improve data collection to develop a more accurate picture of services provided.

K. ANNUAL ESTIMATES

1. THE NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS IN THE STATE WHO ARE ELIGIBLE FOR SERVICES

In 2022 HireAbility estimated that there were 54,710 Vermonters between the ages of 16 and 64 with a disability based on the American Community Survey (ACS). These people are potentially eligible for services under this Plan. Based on current trends, we estimate 6,657 individuals will be eligible or found eligible in FFY 24.

2. THE NUMBER OF ELIGIBLE INDIVIDUALS WHO WILL RECEIVE SERVICES UNDER:

A. THE VR PROGRAM;

We estimate 5,647 individuals will receive HireAbility services in FFY 25 with funds provided under Part B of Title I.

## B. THE SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM; AND

For FFY 25 we estimate that 349 individuals will receive supported employment services through HireAbility. This number does not include individuals receiving extended supported employment services funded through Medicaid and other non-VR funding sources.

## C. EACH PRIORITY CATEGORY, IF UNDER AN ORDER OF SELECTION

On July 1, 2016, HireAbility transitioned to a new Order of Selection with four categories instead of three. Under the order of selection, we estimate that in FFY 24:

- 4,346 Priority Category 1 participants will be served;
- 1,152 Priority Category 2 participants;
- 144 Priority Category 3 participants; and
- 4 Priority Category 4 participants.

As of July 1, 2024, we expect to exit an order of selection and open all categories.

## 3. THE NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE ELIGIBLE FOR VR SERVICES, BUT ARE NOT RECEIVING SUCH SERVICES DUE TO AN ORDER OF SELECTION; AND

Under the Order of Selection, we anticipate that individuals in Category 4 will be put on a waiting list for the program. We estimate 2 individuals will be found eligible under this category in FFY 25.

## 4. THE COST OF SERVICES FOR THE NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS ESTIMATED TO BE ELIGIBLE FOR SERVICES. IF UNDER AN ORDER OF SELECTION, IDENTIFY THE COST OF SERVICES FOR EACH PRIORITY CATEGORY

Total costs to serve individuals in all four categories for FFY 24 will be approximately \$16,264,944. Estimated costs of services for each category are:

- Priority Category 1: \$13,011,955
- Priority Category 2: \$2,882,650
- Priority Category 3: \$360,331
- Priority Category 4: \$10,008

## L. STATE GOALS AND PRIORITIES

### 1. IDENTIFY IF THE GOALS AND PRIORITIES WERE JOINTLY DEVELOPED AND AGREED TO BY THE STATE VR AGENCY AND THE STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL, IF THE STATE HAS A COUNCIL, AND JOINTLY AGREED TO ANY REVISIONS

HireAbility and the SRC have established goals and priorities, as well as targets, for Program Years 2024 and 2025. These are based on the HireAbility/SRC Needs Assessment completed in 2023, and in response requirements included in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act (WIOA), particularly the Common Performance Measures. All HireAbility goals and priorities are established within the Division's long-established strategic themes:

- Organizational Effectiveness
- Valued and Empowered Employees
- Prepared Job Seekers
- Collaborative Partnerships

## Program Year 2024 Goals and Priorities

### 1. HireAbility will continue to align services to support participants in achieving the WIOA Common Performance Outcome Measures.

HireAbility is a strong supporter of the WIOA Common Performance Measures. We believe the measures support participants in their career goals and promote higher wages and more sustainable employment. However, the WIOA measures are extremely lagging, meaning most of the desired outcomes occur well after services end. For example, the measure of median earnings occurs two full quarters after case closure. As a result, the measures are not very useful in guiding the work of frontline staff on a day-to-day basis. Therefore, in 2020 HireAbility established leading measures expected to improve the longer-term WIOA outcome measures. These measures are visible to all staff in real time through a Dashboard. Since the implementation of the Dashboard HireAbility has seen considerable improvement in both the leading measures and the Common Performance Measures. In 2023, HireAbility updated the leading measures based on field experience and made the targets more ambitious and aspirational. We also included some intermediate performance outcome targets. The following is a list of the leading measures and outcome targets and how they are expected to positively impact the lagging outcome measures:

#### The Leading Measures

*Sustained Teaming:* The involvement of other team members (employment placement staff, Certified Work Incentive Counselors, and others) over the life of the case strengthens participant engagement in completing their employment goals. This measure assesses whether multiple team member are engaged with the participant throughout the life of the case.

**Target: 30% of all cases will show sustained teaming. This measure was set at a relatively low level for PY 24 because it is new. We expect to increase it as we collect data on the state averages.**

*Career Assessments:* The use of career assessment tools supports exploration and better matches between participants and higher wage and higher skill employment options. High quality career assessment tools can help participants identify meaningful career pathways.

**Target: 50% of participants will receive career assessments**

*Credential Focused Education and Training:* Education and training are the best options we can provide to help participants achieve high wage and high-quality careers. Even relatively short-term training programs can dramatically increase a participant's earning levels.

**Target: 35% of participants will enroll in credential focused education and training**

*Work-Based Learning Experiences:* Paid work experiences are often a highly effective way of introducing participants with little or no work experience to employment. This includes students and youth as well as adults who have been out of the workforce for extended periods of time. Paid Work Experiences offer a low-risk way for participants to take the first step towards competitive employment. Paid Work Experiences can also be an effective way for participants to explore new career pathways before they commit to credentialed training. For example, a participant interested in HVAC training might use a work experience to determine if it is a good career match.

**Target: 25% of participants will engage in Paid Work Experiences**

*High Wage Plan Goals:* The participant and the counselor set the employment goal in the plan. Participants sometimes have low expectations of what is possible or have never considered higher wage career goals. Vocational counselors encourage participants to consider higher wage plan goals in occupations they may have never considered.

**Target: 50% of participants will have higher wage plan goals. Higher wages are defined as 150% of minimum wage or better**

*Sustained Follow Up:* Continued support and encouragement after job placement results in better job retention and career advancement.

**Target: 50% of participants will receive sustained follow up after job placement**

#### Intermediate Outcome Targets

The following intermediate target outcomes help the counselor and HA management determine if the leading measures are resulting in improvements.

*Credentials Earned:* What percentage of participants who were enrolled in a credentialed training program achieved one or more related credentials.

**Target: 50% of participants enrolled will achieve a credential**

*Rehabilitation Rate:* This is the percentage of cases closed with an employment outcome compared to cases closed with no verified employment outcome.

**Target: 55% of participants will achieve an employment outcome**

*Participants Earning 150% of Minimum Wage or better:* This is the percentage of participants who were closed with an employment outcome who are earning 150% of minimum wage or better.

**Target: 35% of participants closed with an employment outcome will earn 150% of minimum wage or better**

- 2. HireAbility will increase participant opportunities to engage in post-secondary education and training and gain industry recognized credentials.**

Post-secondary credentials are a proven mechanism for participants to access higher wage employment and meaningful careers. In Program Year 2021, 559 participants were enrolled in programs potentially leading to a credential, and 121 participants completed a program and earned a credential. In Program Year 2022, 626 participants were enrolled in programs potentially leading to a credential, and 156 participants completed a program and earned a credential. HireAbility seeks to continue to increase participation in Program Years 2024 and 2025.

#### Targets

Program Year 2024 Target: 700 HireAbility participants will enroll in training leading to a credential and 170 HireAbility participants will achieve a credential.

Program Year 2025 Target: 800 HireAbility participants will enroll in training leading to a credential and 200 HireAbility participants will achieve a credential.

### **3. HireAbility will expand opportunities for participants to enroll in Registered Apprenticeships.**

Registered Apprenticeships are a proven strategy for job seekers to enter and succeed in high wage and high demand fields. Registered Apprenticeships also pay a wage to enrollees while they get trained. However, HireAbility participants have not enrolled in apprenticeship programs historically. HireAbility will be implementing several strategies to increase participant enrollment in apprenticeship programs. Because we are starting from a low baseline, the targets for PY 24 and PY 25 are relatively modest.

#### Targets

PY 2024 Target: 10 HireAbility participants will be enrolled in Registered Apprenticeships

PY 2025 Target: 20 HireAbility participants will be enrolled in Registered Apprenticeships

### **4. HireAbility will improve outcomes for students and youth with emotional/behavioral disabilities served through the JOBS Supported Employment Program.**

The JOBS program was first launched in one site in 1993. Between 1993 and 2005 HireAbility, in partnership with the Department of Mental Health (DMH), expanded the JOBS model statewide. However, in recent years HireAbility and DMH have observed a decline in program services and outcomes with some of the programs. To address this decline HireAbility has or will be implementing the following strategies:

- **Fee for Benchmark Contracting:** A new fee for benchmark contract structure that funds the program based on outcomes versus services. Such “value based” contracting has been demonstrated to improve outcomes and increase program accountability.
- **Centralized Case Management:** HireAbility has observed substantial inconsistencies in how designated vocational counselors manage the JOBS caseloads. This has affected participant services, data quality and program accountability. To address this HireAbility has implemented centralized case management with two Senior Vocational Counselors managing the caseload statewide.

- **JOB Dashboard:** The JOB Dashboard will be developed to support the JOB program staff in tracking their activities and work with HireAbility participants. It will be a tool to help the vocational counselors and JOB staff monitor outcomes and assist with reporting and fee for benchmark invoicing. Using real-time data from Aware case management system records, the JOB Dashboard will display only the most relevant JOB program information in a concise and easy-to-use way. It will be designed to streamline effective coordination of JOB program services, enhance case management between partners, and facilitate complete and accurate data collection.

Targets for PY 2024 and PY 2025

Because HireAbility has radically changed the program outcome measures as defined in the fee for benchmark contract we do not have historic data to set targets. Therefore PY 24 and PY 25 will be baseline years to collect benchmark data. The fee for benchmark measures are as follows:

- Completion of career assessment.
- Participation in Paid Work Experiences (PWE).
- Placement in competitive employment.
- Supported employment post placement\Employment stabilization.
- Supported employment closure and earnings level at closure.
- Extended Employment post closure.

**5. HireAbility will continue to expand efforts to effectively serve employers under our new branding.**

Employer engagement continues to be a critical activity to ensure participants have access to employment opportunities and careers. Creative Workforce Solutions (CWS) was the employer engagement and marketing arm under our old name of Vocational Rehabilitation. In 2021 we implemented a rebranding that pulled all our marketing under a single name, HireAbility. This involved a redesign of all our marketing materials including those for employers. It also included a media campaign using television, radio, and social media. The HireAbility branding has been very well received by the employer community.

The Business Account Managers (BAMS) are the primary employer engagement staff for HireAbility. They are deployed in all 12 district offices. HireAbility measures employer engagement through the following metrics:

- **New Employer Contacts:** These are defined as new contacts with employers who have never engaged with HireAbility.
- **Employer Activities:** These are defined as engagement activities with employers who have an ongoing relationship with HireAbility.
- **Employer Opportunities:** These are defined as specific participant opportunities such as a job opening, training opportunity, work-based learning opportunity, company tour or informational interview.
- **Caseload Driven Outreach:** Caseload driven outreach is defined as labor market outreach directly related to participants on counselors' current caseloads. Business

Account Managers are tasked with directing two-thirds of their activities to caseload needs.

In Program Year 2022, the counts for the above activities were as follows:

- New Employer Contacts: 1,573
- Employer Activities: 3,587
- Employer Opportunities: 2,194
- Caseload Driven Outreach: 776

The annual targets for these activities for Program Years 2024 and 2025 are as follows:

- New Employer Contacts: 1,600
- Employer Activities: 3,700 distinct engagement activities
- Employer Opportunities: 2,400 discrete participant opportunities developed
- Caseload Driven Outreach: 900 distinct participant opportunities developed

**6. HireAbility will continue to seek opportunities to expand and/or improve services for underserved populations including individuals who need supported employment.**

HireAbility recognizes that there continue to be Vermont populations with disabilities that are unserved or underserved. These include, but are not limited to:

- Individuals with severe disabilities who need supported employment services are not eligible for long term supports through the Division of Developmental Services or the Department of Mental Health.
- Individuals with disabilities who are offenders and are transitioning into the community.
- Individuals with substance misuse disorders.
- Survivors of traumatic brain injuries.

As it has nationally, the opioid crisis has greatly impacted Vermont communities. HireAbility was successful in getting state funding to implement two pilots to serve individuals in recovery from substance misuse disorders. It is still early but the pilots have shown great promise. HireAbility continues to partner with the Department of Corrections to serve offenders with disabilities. We have a dedicated counselor who works with individuals in the facilities prior to release. Eligible individuals are then referred to designated counselors in their home communities.

**7. HireAbility will continue to track participant satisfaction with the program's services through the bi-annual consumer satisfaction survey.**

Participant satisfaction is a critically important metric for HireAbility. The HireAbility Consumer Experience Survey is conducted every two years to determine participants' overall satisfaction with the program. The survey is conducted by a third-party research firm, Market Decisions Research (MDR), which has an extensive background working with VR agencies nationwide. 646 participants were contacted for our 2022 survey. The results have provided HireAbility with valuable information regarding participants' reactions to remote and hybrid services. The following are highlights from the 2022 results:

- 81% of participants reported they were satisfied or very satisfied with HireAbility.
- 93% said that they would recommend that their friends or family members seek help from HireAbility.
- 90% of participants responded that they are satisfied with their experiences working with HireAbility staff and counselors. This is a two percent increase from our 2016 survey.
- 97% felt they were treated by staff with dignity and respect.
- 77% of participants reported that it was very easy or somewhat easy to connect with their counselor, even during the times where services were being delivered entirely remotely.
- 63% of participants reported that they would like to continue to receive services remotely.

HireAbility will continue to track participant satisfaction every two years to observe trends and identify areas for improvement. HireAbility will conduct a survey in PY 25.

Targets for PY 25:

- At least 96% of participants will report they would recommend HireAbility to family and friends.
- At least 90% will report they were satisfied or very satisfied with their experience working with HireAbility staff and counselors.

**8. HireAbility will become an organization where; All staff and participants have a sense of belonging & feel welcomed here at HireAbility. Our diverse staff reflect the communities that we serve. Our strong connections with multicultural communities and community partners ensures engagement, successful outcomes, and career pathway opportunities for participants from diverse backgrounds.**

The above statement is our vision for HireAbility and our commitment to Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility (DEIA). To make this vision a reality, HireAbility worked with a consultant to conduct a needs assessment to identify areas of opportunity and growth. Based on the results, we have identified four areas of focus, and have formed four charter groups made up of diverse cross-sections of staff to do this work in PY 24 and PY 25. The work of each charter groups is as follows:

- Develop a workforce that reflects the diverse populations we serve.
- Effectively reach all populations that are eligible for our services.
- Ensure staff have access to the tools and knowledge and feel able to serve all participants in a culturally responsive way.
- Strengthen our existing communication loops to ensure staff are informed and can contribute.

The charter groups will be charged with developing strategies to move HireAbility forward in these areas. They will also help identify metrics for success that are meaningful and measurable.



## 2. IDENTIFY THE GOALS AND PRIORITIES IN CARRYING OUT THE VR AND SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS

HireAbility has developed a major plan for improvement of the JOBS program as outlined in Goal and Priority 5.

### 3. ENSURE THAT THE GOALS AND PRIORITIES ARE BASED ON AN ANALYSIS OF THE FOLLOWING AREAS:

#### A. THE MOST RECENT COMPREHENSIVE STATEWIDE ASSESSMENT, INCLUDING ANY UPDATES;

The goals and priorities outlined in the prior sections are based on the HireAbility and SRC Needs Assessment outlined in Section J. After reviewing the data from the 2022 Needs Assessment, HireAbility and the SRC identified seven major findings. These findings are intended to help guide HireAbility's goals and priorities in the State Plan.

#### **1: THE NEED TO INCREASE POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION AND TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL HIREABILITY PARTICIPANTS**

Individuals with disabilities are much less likely than their peers without disabilities to enter and/or complete post-secondary education programs. Post-secondary education and credentialed training programs are essential for most participants to access high wage employment. Therefore, HireAbility needs to implement strategies to increase participation in these programs across all participants served. Creating an array of options, including "earn and learn" options such as apprenticeship, pre-apprenticeship programs, and paid work experiences will provide onramps for participants to engage in education and training programs that fit their needs. Short-term credentialed programs, such as LNA, are often the starting point of high wage career ladders. Additionally, HireAbility might need to be flexible about what counts as a credential. Some credentials such as ServSafe do not count as a credential under the Common Performance Measures but will provide participants with marketable skills. HireAbility might also need to provide assistive technology, tutoring, and other strategies to help participants succeed in post-secondary programs. Increasing these post-secondary options and providing the appropriate supports will assist participants in achieving long-term career success in quality employment.

#### **2: THE NEED TO CONTINUE FINDING INNOVATIVE WAYS TO SERVE MIDDLE AGE AND OLDER PARTICIPANTS**

The HireAbility caseload has become significantly younger. About 50% of the caseload is under the age of 25. This is the result of the WIOA mandate to reserve 15% of funding to serve high school students with disabilities and is a trend that has been seen nationally in VR programs.

Whenever a federal mandate requires a program to reassign resources and capacity from one age group to another, there is inevitably an impact on the group losing resources. HireAbility currently has about 25% less counselor capacity to serve participants over 25 than we did in 2015. While HireAbility cannot change this, we can look for more effective and efficient ways to meet the needs of individuals with disabilities who are over the age of 25. This might include:

- Expanding partnerships with other workforce programs to serve some individuals who need fewer or less intensive services.

- Effective management of caseloads so services are targeted at individuals who are engaged in services and are most in need.
- Supporting adults achieving higher quality and more stable employment so they do not need to reapply for HireAbility services later.
- Building on the experience of remote services to serve individuals more efficiently.
- Developing new services and tools that meet the needs of HireAbility participants over the age of 25 such as “earn and learn” opportunities and access to non-traditional education that will better prepare participants to enter the workforce.

### **3: THE NEED TO IMPLEMENT STRATEGIES THAT ENSURE CULTURAL RESPONSIVENESS OF HIREABILITY STAFF**

The demographics of Vermont are changing and the population is becoming more ethnically and racially diverse. These trends emphasize the need for HireAbility staff training around racial justice and cultural responsiveness. HireAbility has contracted with Social Contract, a systems change vendor, and Karen Proctor, a subject matter expert in social change related to diversity, equity and inclusion. HireAbility will need to continue to implement strategies and invest in staff training that increases responsiveness.

### **4: THE NEED TO IMPROVE OUTCOMES FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH PSYCHIATRIC DISABILITIES**

HireAbility has long recognized that individuals with psychiatric disabilities often face substantial barriers to employment. In addition to their disabilities, there is the stigma of mental illness, combined with the fact that their conditions are invisible to others. The barriers are even greater for individuals with psychiatric disabilities who are offenders. National data suggests that at least 20% of incarcerated offenders have psychiatric disabilities.

HireAbility has historically taken the lead in promoting employment for people with psychiatric disabilities. HireAbility was instrumental in bringing the Individual Placement and Support (IPS) model to Vermont. IPS is the most widely accepted evidence-based approach to employment services for individuals with psychiatric disabilities. Unfortunately, IPS is only available to a subset of individuals served through the community mental health system CRT Program. It does not include individuals served through outpatient mental health services.

HireAbility needs to continue to explore opportunities to expand employment services for this population, in partnership with the community mental health system and the Department of Mental Health. The availability of reallocation funding may offer opportunities to try out new approaches or expand existing promising programs.

### **5: THE NEED TO PREPARE HIREABILITY PARTICIPANTS TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF CAREER LADDERS**

Entry level employment is often a very important first step for HireAbility participants. This is especially true for high school students and youth with disabilities. However, entry level employment should not be the end goal for most HireAbility participants. HireAbility is developing strategies to help participants move beyond entry level employment. Supporting participants to engage in career assessments is one tool HireAbility staff are employing to help participants think more broadly about career paths and opportunities. Expanding access to post-secondary training and education options is another strategy that HireAbility will need to continue to focus on to create

opportunities for career growth. Consistent follow-up with employed participants post placement is another important piece to this puzzle. By following up with participants once they are employed, HireAbility can help these participants identify potential career ladders in their current jobs or explore other possibilities.

#### **6: THE NEED TO IMPROVE SERVICES AND OUTCOMES FOR PARTICIPANTS WITH OPIOID USE DISORDERS**

Vermont has seen a dramatic increase in the number of opioid related deaths since the beginning of 2020. HireAbility needs to continue to develop outreach systems and teams for participants with opioid misuse disorder to engage them in employment as part of their recovery effort. A pilot program is currently underway with sites in the Northeast Kingdom and Chittenden County, to increase the number of participants with substance misuse disorder that HireAbility is serving. The pilot has already had great success so it will be important for HireAbility to secure funding streams that allow for the expansion of these services statewide.

#### **7: THE NEED TO ENGAGE EMPLOYERS AROUND THE POTENTIAL FOR HIREABILITY PARTICIPANTS TO FILL HIGHER SKILL, HIGHER WAGE POSITIONS**

HireAbility has excellent employer outreach through the Workforce Development teams. Currently, HireAbility has active relationships with about 2,500 employers statewide. As HireAbility supports more individuals pursuing higher wage and higher skilled employment, it is important that employers see the agency as a source of higher skilled employees. One avenue HireAbility is investing significant resources in is “earn and learn” options such as apprenticeship or pre-apprenticeship programs. HireAbility, partnering with other workforce agencies, may need to develop specific training programs in response to the workforce needs of a specific sector. Business Account Managers will need to work with employers to identify career ladders within their organizations. HireAbility can support participants to climb these career ladders by providing tailored training and supports.

#### **B. THE STATE’S PERFORMANCE UNDER THE PERFORMANCE ACCOUNTABILITY MEASURES OF SECTION 116 OF WIOA; AND**

HireAbility, has consistently performed above the national average across measures. Also, we have seen the agency improve performance each year. We believe this is because of the strategic alignment of our services as outlined in our Goals and Priorities in our State Plans since WIOA.

MEASURE	NATIONAL AVERAGE SFY 20	VERMONT RESULTS SFY 20	NATIONAL AVERAGE SFY 21	VERMONT RESULTS SFY 21	NATIONAL AVERAGE SFY 22	VERMONT RESULTS SFY 22	NATIONAL AVERAGE SFY 23	VERMONT RESULTS SFY 23
MEASURABLE SKILLS GAINS	31.4%	49.3%	43.3%	49.0%	43.0%	57.3%	48.7%	56.7%
EMPLOYMENT RATE 2 QUARTERS POST EXIT	51.3%	51.1%	48.6%	53.3%	52.5%	53.3%	56.2%	56.0%
EMPLOYMENT RATE 4 QUARTERS POST EXIT	43.6%	49.7%	44.0%	48.3%	48.0%	52.0%	52.8%	55.4%
MEDIAN EARNINGS 2 QUARTERS POST EXIT	\$4,005	\$3,901	\$4,280	\$4,630	\$4,776	\$5,213	\$5,130	\$6,153
CREDENTIAL ATTAINMENT	NA	NA	23.2%	42.5%	30.8%	42.5%	37.6%	53.2%

C. OTHER AVAILABLE INFORMATION ON THE OPERATION AND EFFECTIVENESS OF THE VR PROGRAM, INCLUDING ANY REPORTS RECEIVED FROM THE STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL AND FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM MONITORING ACTIVITIES CONDUCTED UNDER SECTION 107.

Not applicable.

M. ORDER OF SELECTION

1. WHETHER THE DESIGNATED STATE UNIT WILL IMPLEMENT AND ORDER OF SELECTION. IF SO, DESCRIBE:

A. THE ORDER TO BE FOLLOWED IN SELECTING ELIGIBLE INDIVIDUALS TO BE PROVIDED VR SERVICES

HireAbility is proposing to exit an order of selection effective July 1, 2024.

HireAbility will continue to categorize applications based on the criteria below which were approved by the SRC in 2017. We will keep this data to inform any future decisions regarding the need for an order of selection.

**Category I:** Individuals who have been determined by HireAbility to have a physical or mental impairment that constitutes or results in a substantial impediment to employment and that seriously limits function in four or more areas of functional capacity (mobility, communication, work tolerance, work skills, self-care, self-direction, interpersonal skills, dexterity/coordination), requiring multiple services over a period of six months or more.

**Category 2:** Individuals who have been determined by HireAbility to have a physical or mental impairment that constitutes or results in a substantial impediment to employment and that seriously limits function in two to three areas of functional capacity (mobility, communication, work tolerance, work skills, self-care, self-direction, interpersonal skills, dexterity/coordination), requiring multiple services over a period of six months or more.

**Category 3:** Individuals who have been determined by HireAbility to have a physical or mental impairment that constitutes or results in a substantial impediment to employment and that seriously limits function in one area of functional capacity (mobility, communication, work tolerance, work skills, self-care, self-direction, interpersonal skills, dexterity/coordination), requiring multiple services over a period of six months or more.

**Category 4:** Individuals who have been determined by HireAbility to have a physical or mental impairment that constitutes or results in a substantial impediment to employment and that seriously limits function in one area of functional capacity (mobility, communication, work tolerance, work skills, self-care, self-direction, interpersonal skills, dexterity/coordination), requiring multiple services over a period of less than six months.

#### B. THE JUSTIFICATION FOR THE ORDER

For FFY 24 HireAbility projects a budget of \$16,264,944 for VR services.

#### C. THE SERVICE AND OUTCOME GOALS

For FFY 24 HireAbility expects to serve the following number of individuals in each category:

Category 1: 4,346

Category 2: 1,152

Category 3: 144

Category 4: 4

HireAbility projects the following rehabilitation outcomes for the individuals found eligible under the Order of Selection. These are the projected outcomes for the lifetime of the case.

Category 1: 1,521

Category 2: 403

Category 3: 45

Category 4: 2

#### D. TIME WITHIN WHICH THESE GOALS MAY BE ACHIEVED FOR INDIVIDUALS IN EACH PRIORITY CATEGORY WITHIN THE ORDER; AND

Individuals found eligible under Categories 1, 2 and 3 are expected to require at least six months of services from the development of the plan to the achievement of the employment goal. The actual amount of time needed will vary widely depending on the goals and needs of the individual. In Vermont it takes 16 months on average from application to successful employment outcome for individuals in the above categories. Individuals found eligible under Category 4 will be expected to achieve their employment goal within six months of plan development.

## E. HOW INDIVIDUALS WITH THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES ARE SELECTED FOR SERVICES BEFORE ALL OTHER INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES

In Vermont services for Category 1 eligible individuals are never delayed (as long as they are available for services) when eligible individuals in Priority Categories 2, 3 or 4 are open for services. This assumes all other variables are equal such as application date, IPE date and the individual's availability for services at any given time.

## 2. IF THE DESIGNATED STATE UNIT HAS ELECTED TO SERVE ELIGIBLE INDIVIDUALS, REGARDLESS OF ANY ESTABLISHED ORDER OF SELECTION, WHO REQUIRE SPECIFIC SERVICES OR EQUIPMENT TO MAINTAIN EMPLOYMENT

HireAbility has elected to serve eligible individuals, regardless of the order of selection, who require specific services or equipment to maintain employment.

## N. GOALS AND PLANS FOR DISTRIBUTION OF TITLE VI FUNDS

### 1. SPECIFY THE STATE'S GOALS AND PRIORITIES FOR FUNDS RECEIVED UNDER SECTION 603 OF THE REHABILITATION ACT FOR THE PROVISION OF SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

These funds will be directed to the JOBS supported employment program serving youth ages 16 to 22, individuals with developmental disabilities (youth and adults) served through the State Division of Developmental Services supported employment programs, and adults with psychiatric disabilities served through the State Community Rehabilitation and Treatment programs.

### 2. DESCRIBE THE ACTIVITIES TO BE CONDUCTED, WITH FUNDS RESERVED PURSUANT TO SECTION 603(D), FOR YOUTH WITH THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES, INCLUDING: A. THE PROVISION OF EXTENDED SERVICES FOR A PERIOD NOT TO EXCEED 4 YEARS; AND

HireAbility has committed VI-B funding for youth to the JOBS program, because that program is specifically designed to serve eligible youth with the most severe disabilities. HireAbility counselors will authorize the use of funds for extended services through the JOBS program until the youth reaches age 25, and for up to the maximum of four years. The HireAbility contractual agreements for JOBS include Title I and Title VI-B funds and set clear parameters for the use of each funding source. Title I funds are only used for initial upfront assessment, and job development services. Title VI-B funds are only used for post placement supports for employed participants. A description of the JOBS program is as follows:

The JOBS program is an innovative supported employment and intensive case management service for youth with emotional and behavioral disturbances (EBD) that uses work as the primary to reach this challenging population. As a result of a unique partnership between the Department of Mental Health's Child, Adolescent and Family Unit (CAFU), the Department for Children and Families, the Department of Corrections, HireAbility, and contract agencies, the JOBS program is operational in twelve sites across the state. The JOBS program is funded through a combination of Medicaid Global Commitment funds and HireAbility grant funds.

JOBS involves employers and the business community in meeting the needs of youth through intensive job development, placement, and on and off-site training support. JOBS differs from other traditional employment models by providing intensive case management services to assist young people in meeting other areas of need in their lives (e.g., dealing with legal issues, homelessness, drug/alcohol misuse, transportation and probation and parole). Within this model, HireAbility Title

I funds are used to provide the employment focus and upfront employment assessment, education or training, and placement services. Title VI B funds are used for post placement supported employment services and extended services. The case management and ongoing support is provided through state general funds, (contributed by the different state departments noted above) which are matched to Medicaid through a fee for service arrangement with DMH.

HireAbility counselors will also be able to use VI-B funds to support extended services for youth not served by the JOBS programs. These services will be funded on a case-by-case basis for youth with developmental disabilities who have exited school but have not yet met eligibility or system of care priorities for the developmental services program.

#### **B. HOW THE STATE WILL LEVERAGE OTHER PUBLIC AND PRIVATE FUNDS TO INCREASE RESOURCES FOR EXTENDED SERVICES AND EXPANDED SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUTH WITH THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES**

As noted in Section (F), HireAbility has a partnership with the Department of Mental Health (DMH) to provide extended services for youth and adults with psychiatric disabilities. In most cases the JOBS program uses Medicaid Global Commitment funds to provide extended supports post closure. In addition, the adult mental health program can provide ongoing supports through the Medicaid case rate for individuals eligible for the Community Rehabilitation and Treatment (CRT) program or outpatient Medicaid Case Management services. If these funding sources are not available HireAbility will use Title I or Title VI-B for extended services for youth.

Also as noted in Section (F), HireAbility has a partnership with the Vermont Development Disabilities Services Division (DDSD) to provide extended services for individuals with developmental disabilities. The primary source of funding for extended services for individuals with developmental disabilities is Home and Community Based Medicaid Waiver funds. As noted, HireAbility can also use Title I and Title VI-B to provide funds for youth with the most significant disabilities for extended services, until the youth reach age 25, and for a period not to exceed four years.

#### **O. STATE'S STRATEGIES**

##### **1. THE METHODS TO BE USED TO EXPAND AND IMPROVE SERVICES TO INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES**

In Section L. of the State Plan, HireAbility outlined its goals and priorities for Program Years 2024 and 2025. The eight strategic goals established by HireAbility and the SRC are as follows:

1. HireAbility will continue to align services to support participants in achieving the WIOA Common Performance Outcome Measures.
2. HireAbility will increase participant opportunities to engage in post-secondary education and training and gain industry recognized credentials.
3. HireAbility will expand opportunities for participants to enroll in Registered Apprenticeships.
4. HireAbility will improve outcomes for students and youth with emotional/behavioral disabilities served through the JOBS Supported Employment Program.

5. HireAbility will continue to expand efforts to effectively serve employers under our new branding.
6. HireAbility will continue to seek opportunities to expand and/or improve services for underserved populations including individuals who need supported employment.
7. HireAbility will continue to track participant satisfaction with the program's services through the bi-annual consumer satisfaction survey.
8. HireAbility will become an organization where; All staff and participants have a sense of belonging & feel welcomed here at HireAbility. Our diverse staff reflect the communities that we serve. Our strong connections with multicultural communities and community partners ensures engagement, successful outcomes, and career pathway opportunities for participants from diverse backgrounds.

**Strategy 1: HireAbility will implement a series of initiatives to realign staff practices, services, and assignment of resources to meet the WIOA Common Performance Measures. Goals 1, 2, 3, 4 and 7.**

In order to maximize HireAbility outcomes under the WIOA Common Performance Measures, HireAbility will implement or continue to implement the following:

HireAbility will utilize the its Dashboard to track leading case practice indicators that we believe will result in improved outcomes. The five primary lead indicators are:

- Sustained teaming cases with other staff and partners.
- Participation in career assessments.
- Participation in credentialed post-secondary education and training.
- Participation in paid work experiences
- Setting higher wage career goals.
- Sustained follow up post-employment.

HireAbility will also track intermediate measures of progress including:

- Percentage of participants enrolled in a post-secondary program who achieve a credential.
- Percentage of participants who achieve a successful employment outcome at closure.
- Percentage of participants earning 150% of minimum wage at closure.

Managers will use the dashboard data to inform their supervision of staff. It will help direct training and support efforts. We also expect the dashboard data to be included in staff evaluations.

Moving forward, every step of the rehabilitation process will message and support the HireAbility commitment to careers. HireAbility casework practices will support serving participants more than once, or for a longer period, as they embark on their journey towards a sustainable career. HireAbility will continue to implement a follow up system for reaching out to participants after job placement, to offer support and assistance with opportunities for promotion or additional education and training.

- All staff will be trained to support long term career goals and HireAbility counselors will provide long term aspirational career counseling.



- Motivational Interviewing (MI) coaches will facilitate coaching circles that support counseling using MI strategies.
- All HireAbility staff will be trained to interpret the results of vocational and career assessments and tie the results to the trends in their local labor market.
- All staff will be familiar with education and training providers in their communities, as well as what career pathways and stackable credentials are offered. Counselors will be able to speak to participants about possible career paths, based on assessments.
- BAMs (Business Account Managers) will understand the career paths in the businesses they serve.
- BAMs will understand the needs of the local labor market and communicate them back to HireAbility staff so that counselors can help participants choose career goals that are in-demand in their communities.

**Strategy 2: Expand post-secondary training and education opportunities that result in higher wage job opportunities for HireAbility participants through partnerships with providers, financial support, and the Disability Innovation Fund (DIF) Grant, Vermont Career Advancement Project (VCAP). Goals 1, 2, 3 and 5.**

High-wage, high-demand employment opportunities often require some type of post-secondary credential. Ensuring that these types of post-secondary training and education opportunities are available and accessible to HireAbility participants is incredibly important. However, we know that a high proportion of HireAbility participants come to the program initially unwilling or unable to pursue post-secondary training or education. Often this is because they need to work due to financial necessity. They may also have had bad experiences in school and feel they are not able to succeed in those settings. HireAbility is and will continue to implement the following strategies to increase participation in post-secondary education and training:

- *Providing financial support:* Most HireAbility participants are low income. Many cannot stop working to participate in education and training programs. Therefore, HireAbility will provide financial support for participants while they are enrolled in post-secondary programs. Based on our experience to date this additional support is helping more HireAbility participants enroll in credentialed programs.
- *Partnership with training and education providers:* HireAbility participants often need greater support than participants without disabilities in completing credentialed programs. To support HireAbility participants, we must have strong partnerships with the local workforce providers including the State College and Community College systems. Through our DIF funded Vermont Career Advancement Project (VCAP), we have formalized our partnerships with the major workforce training providers in the state. This includes funding training cohorts of HireAbility participants. It also includes embedding contracted staff within the Community College of Vermont (CCV) and Vermont State College (VSC) who will provide a supportive on ramp into programming for HireAbility participants.
- *Using the VCAP Grant as catalyst for systems change:* Promoting post-secondary training and education across the HireAbility program requires both a change in practice and culture. VCAP is designed to be a practice laboratory for counselors to implement a new approach to their work. In 2021 VCAP deployed six Career Pathway Navigators to implement a set of practices focused on helping participants access and succeed in post-secondary programs. In 2022 we expanded the number of Career Pathway Navigators to 14 to integrate the new practice into all offices. By the end of the VCAP we expect all vocational counselors will have integrated this new approach into their practices.

**Strategy 3: Coordinate efforts with the Agency of Education (AOE) and the Vermont Department of Labor (VDOL) to ensure individuals with disabilities have access to other components of the workforce system. Goals 1, 2, 3, 4 and 6.**

HireAbility will continue to work closely with VDOL and AOE to ensure HireAbility participants have access to all the workforce development opportunities available in their communities. HireAbility will be implementing several strategies to make this happen including the following:

HireAbility and VDOL Regional Managers will continue to have joint meetings at the statewide level and local level to facilitate coordination of services.

- HireAbility, AOE and VDOL will implement systems to track and manage co-enrollment in each program.
- HireAbility, will pursue actual or virtual co-location of HireAbility and VDOL staff.
- HireAbility, with the support of AOE, will develop stronger partnerships with the local Technical Educational Centers and Adult Basic Education programs.

**Strategy 4: Expand employer outreach and engagement efforts through our new branding to effectively meet the needs of employers. Goals 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 7.**

In order to help participants connect with employment opportunities that meet their career goals, engaging businesses in the local labor market is a top priority of HireAbility. The HireAbility branding has been very well received by employers. The Business Account Managers are HireAbility's primary connection to the business community. They lead employment teams in each district that are designed to coordinate employer engagement. We will use the following strategies to maintain and expand on our employer relationships:

- Targeted HireAbility marketing through social media and traditional media.
- Seeking opportunities to coordinate employer engagement with the Vermont Department of Labor.
- Analyzing Salesforce account management data to determine if there are industry sectors that are underrepresented.
- Increasing engagement of underrepresented sectors in partnership with local employers.
- Building on and expanding employer events such as job fairs, employer breakfasts and business recognition events designed to engage employers.
- Identifying training opportunities that meet the needs of local employers and can be offered to HireAbility participants.
- Utilizing local pipeline reports to do caseload driven outreach that will better connect employers and participants.

**Strategy 5: Develop and implement strategies to increase the number of participants enrolled in Registered Apprenticeship Programs (RAP). Goals 1,2,3, 5 and 7.**

HireAbility has made a major commitment to expanding RAP opportunities for participants as part of the VCAP. RAPs are a highly effective mechanism to support participants in achieving industry recognized credentials while employed. They also lead to high wage and high quality careers. To make RAPs accessible, HireAbility is or will be implementing the following strategies:

- Formalize our partnership with VDOL, the state RAP agency, to facilitate the development of new RAPs outside the traditional trades.
- Become a formal RAP Intermediary to support the establishment of RAPs by employers. Businesses, especially smaller ones, are often concerned with the paperwork and rules around RAPs. Intermediaries, can take care of much of the paperwork and make it much easier for employers to participate.
- Develop our partnerships with the organizations that provide the required related instruction for RAPs. These include the Career and Technical Education Centers (CTE), VSC, and CCV.
- Develop guidance and how-to tools for HireAbility staff and BAMs around setting up RAPs with local employers.
- Develop a support infrastructure for staff around setting up and implementing RAPs.

**Strategy 6. Continue to explore ways to develop and expand services for underserved populations including individuals who require supported employment through partnerships and grant and funding opportunities. Goals 6, 7 and 8.**

HireAbility will be implementing the following strategies to meet the needs of underserved populations.

*Individuals with Opioid Misuse Disorders*

Vermont, like many states has been hit hard by the opioid epidemic. In response, HireAbility launched two pilots to specifically serve individuals in recovery from opioid misuse disorders. The State legislature provided funding to support the pilots for two years. In recognition of the complexity involved in serving individuals with opioid dependence disorders, the pilot uses a wraparound approach designed to address all the barriers that can undermine employment. The core members of the team are as follows:

- The Vocational Counselor (VC): The VC is the lead case manager for the team. The VC works with the participants to assess their skills and interests and develop an Individual Plan for Employment (IPE). The VC will support the participant in exploring career pathways beyond entry level employment. The VC has a case service budget that can be used to pay for credentialed training and education, transportation, work clothes and other support needs. The VCs working on this project have backgrounds in substance misuse disorders including lived experience.
- The Employee Assistance Program (EAP) Clinician: The EAP clinician's role is to help the participant address all the issues that might undermine their employment goals. Examples are lack of stable housing, access to treatment, strategies to avoid relapse, and dealing with legal issues.
- The Employment Consultant (EC): The EC provides direct support to the participant in their job search. They are employees of VABIR, the community agency supported through an HA contract. ECs can contact employers directly on the participant's behalf or help the participant make those connections themselves. They can help with resume development and interview preparation. They are also there to support the participant through decisions about whether to disclose the substance misuse disorder or other disabilities.

It is our hope that the pilots will produce outcomes to support continuation and replication across the state. This will be the focus of our efforts in PY 24 and PY 25.

*High school students with developmental disabilities who need supported employment*

The State of Vermont Developmental Services System has a robust program that guarantees students who exit with employment will receive supported employment services. However, many students with developmental disabilities exit high school without employment. As a result, they are placed in community-based services and do not have the opportunity to go to work. To address this issue, HireAbility is using reallocation funding to support four in-school pilots serving students with developmental disabilities. The intent is to provide early work experiences and competitive supported employment opportunities for students while they are in school. The goal is to make sure students exit high school, employed. The provider agencies are the designated developmental services providers. This will facilitate a smooth transition to ongoing supported employment services after high school exit.

*Adults with psychiatric disabilities who need supported employment services*

The Vermont Department of Mental Health funded supported employment services are likely to go through a major transition in PY 24 and PY 25. Historically the programs have not served adult outpatient participants who often require supported employment services. Our hope is that this will change in the transition. This will allow HireAbility to partner with DMH and the provider agencies to provide supported employment to this underserved population.

**Strategy 7. Four HireAbility charter groups will develop specific strategies to meet our DEIA vision. Goal 7 and 8.**

Our Vision Statement is: HireAbility will become an organization where; All staff and participants have a sense of belonging & feel welcomed here at HireAbility. Our diverse staff reflect the communities that we serve. Our strong connections with multicultural communities and community partners ensures engagement, successful outcomes, and career pathway opportunities for participants from diverse backgrounds.

To make this vision a reality, HireAbility worked with a consultant to conduct a needs assessment to identify areas of opportunity to grow. Based on the results, we have identified four areas of focus, and have formed four charter groups made up of diverse cross-sections of staff to do this work in PY 24 and PY 25. The goals of each charter groups are as follows:

- Develop a workforce that reflects the diverse populations we serve.
- Effectively reach all populations that are eligible for our services.
- Ensure staff have access to the tools and knowledge and feel able to serve all participants in a culturally responsive way
- Strengthen our existing communication loops to ensure staff are informed and can contribute.

The charter groups will be charged with developing strategies to move the agency forward in these areas. HireAbility is working with a consultant, Karen Proctor, to help us create and support a culture that is diverse and welcoming to all. This work is expected to be ongoing.

**Strategy 8. HireAbility will implement a series of strategies to improve services and outcomes through the JOBS supported employment programs: Goals 4, 7 and 8.**

HireAbility is implementing a major program improvement effort for the JOBS programs. The JOBS program was first launched in one site in 1993. Between 1993 and 2005 HireAbility, in partnership with the Department of Mental Health (DMH), expanded the JOBS model statewide. However, in recent years HireAbility and DMH have observed a decline in program services and outcomes with some of the programs. To address this decline HireAbility has or will be implementing the following strategies:

- Fee for Benchmark Contracting: Implementing a new fee for benchmark contract structure that will fund the program based on outcomes versus services. Such “value based” contracting has been demonstrated to improve outcomes and increase program accountability.
- Centralized Case Management: HireAbility has observed substantial inconsistencies in how designated vocational counselors manage the JOBS caseloads. This has affected participant services, data quality and program accountability. To address this HireAbility has implemented centralized case management with two Senior Vocational Counselors managing the caseload statewide.
- JOBS Dashboard: The JOBS Dashboard will be developed to support the JOBS program staff in tracking their activities and work with HireAbility participants. It will be a tool to help the vocational counselors and JOBS staff monitor outcomes and assist with reporting and fee for benchmark invoicing. Using real-time data from Aware case management system records, the JOBS Dashboard will display only the most relevant JOBS program information in a concise and easy-to-use way. It will be designed to streamline effective coordination of JOBS program services, enhance case management between partners, and facilitate complete and accurate data collection.

## 2. HOW A BROAD RANGE OF ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY SERVICES AND DEVICES WILL BE PROVIDED TO INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES AT EACH STAGE OF THE REHABILITATION PROCESS AND ON A STATEWIDE BASIS

The Vermont Assistive Technology program (VATP), funded by the federal Assistive Technology Act administered by the Administration for Community Living (ACL) in Health and Human Services (HHS), is housed within HireAbility Vermont as part of the Department of Disabilities Aging and Independent Living (DAIL). The VATP staff receive operational and business office support through DAIL and HireAbility. The program maintains a contract, in conjunction with HireAbility, for Assistive Technology (AT) Specialist services currently provided by the University of Vermont. These include AT Core services such as tech demonstrations, loans, information and assistance, and trainings, as well as consultations for HireAbility participants that could benefit from Assistive Technology or devices. The VATP also has three additional AT Specialists on staff. One is funded through the Vermont Career Advancement Project grant, a Work Based Learning Demonstration funded through the US Department of Education. This specialist provides AT services to individuals participating in VCAP. The second AT Specialist provides AT services for HireAbility participants in the eastern corridor of the state. The final specialist is funded by a supplemental grant of the Money Follows the Person program and is responsible for interfacing with aging services providers throughout the state and with Money Follows the Person recipients. The goal is to enhance their understanding of AT and how it can be used to transition individuals from high care facilities to more independent living environments. The VATP constantly searches for new collaboration opportunities. For example, we have begun a partnership in the last year with the newly established UVM Occupational Therapy Doctoral program to provide learning opportunities for their students. This includes technical assistance in establishing a smart home demo center for both students and the general public. Finally, the VATP partners with Opportunities Credit Union to

provide low interest, variable term loans for purchasing AT equipment such as modified vehicles and hearing aids, that would be beyond the reach of some participants.

### 3. THE OUTREACH PROCEDURES THAT WILL BE USED TO IDENTIFY AND SERVE INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES WHO ARE MINORITIES, INCLUDING THOSE WITH THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES, AS WELL AS THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN UNSERVED OR UNDERSERVED BY THE VR PROGRAM

See Strategy 7.

### 4. THE METHODS TO BE USED TO IMPROVE AND EXPAND VR SERVICES FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES, INCLUDING THE COORDINATION OF SERVICES DESIGNED TO FACILITATE THE TRANSITION OF SUCH STUDENTS FROM SCHOOL TO POSTSECONDARY LIFE (INCLUDING THE RECEIPT OF VR SERVICES, POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT, AND PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES)

HireAbility Vermont developed a comprehensive strategy to implement Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) and put it into operation in the spring of 2015. HireAbility continues to implement highly effective Pre-ETS for students statewide using the following primary activities:

- HireAbility redesigned the Transition Counselor position to carry both a student and youth caseload (14 to 24). This allows students enrolled in HireAbility in high school to retain their assigned counselors as they transition into young adulthood.
- HireAbility expanded the number of Transition Counselors from 14 to 24 to reflect the fact that about 50% of total caseload is now youth ages 14 to 24.
- In PY 21 HireAbility launched the Summer Career Exploration Project (SCEP) to provide students with paid summer work experiences and a work based learning curriculum. Over 130 students participated in PY 21 and the program was replicated in PY 22 and PY 23. SCEP has proven very successful in helping engage and retain students in HireAbility services.

### 5. STRATEGIES FOR ASSISTING OTHER COMPONENTS OF THE STATEWIDE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM IN ASSISTING INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES

HireAbility was closely involved in the development the overall vision for the Unified Plan in the PY 24. HireAbility along with VDOL and AOE placed strong emphasis on serving all Vermonters including people with disabilities. This is reflected in the Unified Plan vision and goals as follows:

Vermont's employment demands will be met through a statewide, coordinated, and integrated system of workforce education, training, and development where all Vermonters can connect to robust career pathways, advance along career ladders, and new Vermonters can quickly secure employment with a Vermont employer.

Goal 1: Connect Vermonters to the education, training, and supportive services needed to enter and advance along a career pathway that leads to greater financial independence.

Goal 2: Increase the number of women, minorities, people with disabilities, and other underrepresented people employed in the skilled trades, science, technology, engineering, and mathematics fields, advanced manufacturing, and other priority industry sectors in Vermont.

Goal 3: Increase the number of Vermonters with barriers to employment who complete high school, earn a post-secondary credential, including an industry-recognized certificate, registered apprenticeship, or post-secondary degree program, and become employed in occupations that align with the needs of Vermont employers.

Goal 4: Improve Vermont's workforce development system by continuously aligning, adapting, and integrating workforce education and training programs and career and supportive services to meet the needs of all customers.

Goal 5: Expand Vermont's labor force by helping more Vermonters enter the labor market and assist out-of-state workers in securing employment with Vermont employers and relocating to Vermont.

As outlined in this plan, HireAbility's Goals and Priorities are directly aligned with the Unified Plan Goals, allowing for close cooperation across programs.

HireAbility will use the following strategies to support our workforce partners serving adults with disabilities:

Workforce Partners such as VDOL, local training providers, schools, and community rehabilitation providers will continue to participate in the local HireAbility teams to coordinate outreach to employers. HireAbility Business Account Managers convene the teams and use Salesforce to track employer engagement.

HireAbility and VDOL will strengthen their collaboration at state and local levels. Most HireAbility and VDOL offices are in the same building or in close proximity allowing for easier coordination. HireAbility and VDOL staff will have joint staff meetings to share information and plan joint activities such as job fairs. At the state level the HireAbility Director and VDOL Workforce Director currently convene joint meetings with the local managers to facilitate collaboration. These efforts will continue for this State Plan period.

HireAbility will routinely provide training to workforce partners to support their efforts in serving people with disabilities including, work incentives and benefits counseling, assistive technology, and disability etiquette.

#### 6. HOW THE AGENCY'S STRATEGIES WILL BE USED TO:

##### A. ACHIEVE GOALS AND PRIORITIES BY THE STATE, CONSISTENT WITH THE COMPREHENSIVE NEEDS ASSESSMENT;

As noted earlier in this section, each strategy is linked back to at least one goal and priority established by HireAbility and the SRC consistent with the Needs Assessment.

##### B. SUPPORT INNOVATION AND EXPANSION ACTIVITIES; AND

The strategies for innovation and expansion have been laid out by HireAbility and the SRC under Strategies to Achieve the Goals and Priorities. Innovation and expansion funds support the SRC's work in supporting and advising HireAbility around implementation of these strategies.

The SRC has a strong role in advising and monitoring the roll out of these strategies. The SRC Performance Review Subcommittee is charged with this task and works with HireAbility's Quality

Assurance Manager and Program Evaluation Unit to get timely data and reports on the progress of these innovation and expansion activities.

### C. OVERCOME IDENTIFIED BARRIERS RELATING TO EQUITABLE ACCESS TO AND PARTICIPATION OF INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES IN THE STATE VR SERVICES PROGRAM AND THE STATE SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES PROGRAM.

As noted earlier under strategy 7, HireAbility has established a vision to become a truly diverse and welcoming environment for participants, staff, and partners.

### P. EVALUATION AND REPORTS OF PROGRESS: VR AND SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT GOALS

1. AN EVALUATION OF THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE VR PROGRAM GOALS DESCRIBED IN THE APPROVED VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN FOR THE MOST RECENTLY COMPLETED PROGRAM YEAR WERE ACHIEVED. THE EVALUATION MUST:

#### A. IDENTIFY THE STRATEGIES THAT CONTRIBUTED TO THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE GOALS

The following items were the Goals and Priorities identified in the 2022 State Plan Update.

1. HireAbility will align services to support participants in achieving the WIOA Common Performance Outcome Measures.
2. HireAbility will increase the percentage of participants earning more than Vermont minimum wage at closure.
3. HireAbility will increase participant opportunities to engage in post-secondary education and training and gain industry recognized credentials.
4. HireAbility will improve outcomes for students and youth with emotional/behavioral disabilities served through the JOBS Supported Employment Program.
5. HireAbility will continue to expand efforts to effectively serve employers.
6. HireAbility will continue to seek opportunities to expand and/or improve services for underserved populations including individuals who need supported employment.
7. HireAbility will continue to track participant satisfaction with the program's services through the bi-annual consumer satisfaction survey.
8. HireAbility will evaluate how to deliver the most effective remote services to participants given the COVID-19 pandemic.
9. HireAbility will implement strategies to ensure cultural responsiveness and awareness for HireAbility staff, policies, and practices.

HireAbility has made substantial progress in meeting or exceeding the targets set in many of the areas identified in the Goals and Priorities. We are particularly pleased with the long-term trends and our performance under the Common Performance Measures. Below is a summary of our strategies and outcomes for PY 21 and PY 22.

#### **1. HireAbility will align services to support participants in achieving the WIOA Common Performance Outcome Measures.**

HireAbility is a strong supporter of the WIOA Common Performance Measures. We believe the new measures support participants in their career goals and promote higher wages and more sustainable employment. However, the WIOA measures are extremely lagging, meaning most of the desired outcomes occur well after services end. For example, the measure of median earnings occurs two full quarters after case closure. As a result, the measures are not very useful in guiding



the work of frontline staff on a day-to-day basis. Therefore, HireAbility has established leading measures expected to improve the longer-term WIOA outcome measures. HireAbility has already seen improvement in some of the most meaningful and lagging Common Performance Measures since implementing them. The following is a list of the leading measures and how they are expected to positively impact the lagging outcome measures:

- Leading Measure One: The use of career assessment tools supports exploration of and better matches between participants and higher wage and higher skill employment options.
- Leading Measure Two: The involvement of other team members (employment placement staff, Certified Work Incentives Counselors, and others) strengthens participant engagement in completing their employment goals.
- Leading Measure Three: Career focused education and training leads to higher wage and higher quality employment and retention.
- Leading Measure Four: Vocational counseling with an emphasis on career focused plans will lead to higher wage and higher quality employment.
- Leading Measure Five: Continued support and encouragement after job placement results in better job retention and career advancement.

HireAbility established the targets below for individual counselor caseloads:

- 50% of cases will include use of career assessment tools to support exploration of higher wage and higher skill options.
- 50% of cases will involve other team members (employment placement staff, Certified Work Incentives Counselors, and others) to strengthen participant engagement in completing their employment goal.
- 35% of participants in plan status will be enrolled in career focused education and training that leads to higher wage and higher quality employment.
- 35% of participants in plan status will have plans aimed at achieving careers in higher wage employment.
- 75% of HireAbility participants will continue to be engaged in HireAbility services after job placement.

Program Year 2022 Update Actual Dashboard Data

As noted, HireAbility uses the dashboard to track counselor performance in meeting these measures. The dashboard is updated at least weekly and is a point in time measure that looks back at the prior year's performance. The dashboard measures as of June 30, 2023 were as follows:

- 36% of cases included use of career assessment tools to support exploration of higher wage and higher skill options.
- 57% of cases involved other team members (employment placement staff, Certified Work Incentives Counselor, and others) to strengthen participant engagement in completing their employment goal.
- 25% of participants in plan status were enrolled in career focused education and training that leads to higher wages and higher quality employment.
- 65% of participants in plan status had plans aimed at achieving careers in higher wage employment.
- 79% of HireAbility participants continue to be engaged in HireAbility services after job placement.

Overall, the dashboard data is positive and moving in the right direction. However, the data suggests that we need to focus on increasing the number of participants enrolled in post-secondary credentialed programs and support staff with the use of career assessments. This is reflected in our Goals and Priorities for PY 24 and PY 25.

**2. HireAbility will increase the percentage of participants earning more than Vermont minimum wage at closure.**

HireAbility continued to focus on increasing wages at closure. We set the following targets for PY 22:

- 70% of HireAbility participants will earn at or above 110% of minimum wage at closure.
- 55% of HireAbility participants will earn at or above 125% of minimum wage at closure.
- 35% of HireAbility participants will earn at or above 150% of minimum wage at closure.

The actual outcomes for participants in PY 22 were as follows:

- Participants at or above 110% of minimum wage at closure: 77%
- Participants at or above 125% of minimum wage at closure: 57%
- Participants at or above 150% of minimum wage at closure: 53%

In Program Year 2022 HireAbility exceeded its goals for supporting participants to exit the program in higher wage employment. We expect this trend to continue as we assist more participants to enter credentialed training programs.

**3. HireAbility will increase participant opportunities to engage in post-secondary education and training and gain industry recognized credentials.**

HireAbility has seen a consistent increase in the number of participants in credentialed training/education programs and participants achieving credentials, from PY 18 to PY 22. There was a slight dip in participation in PY 20 coinciding with the pandemic, but the upward trend is clear. In PY 22, HireAbility achieved a 53.2% credential attainment rate under the Common Performance Measures compared to the national average of 37.6%.

Program Year	Number of Participants Enrolled in Credentialed Programs	Credentials Attained
2018	244	48
2019	566	148
2020	506	111
2021	559	121
2022	626	156

**4. HireAbility will improve outcomes for students and youth with emotional/behavioral disabilities served through the JOBS Supported Employment Program.**

HireAbility planned to deploy a new performance-based contract in SFY 22 for all JOBS providers. However, after consultation with RSA and VR TAC we determined the contract structure and

outcomes needed to be revised. We worked with VR TAC to develop a new contract structure that better reflected the desired supported employment outcomes. The new contract will be deployed statewide in FFY 24. The new benchmarks in the contract are:

- Completion of career assessment.
- Participation in Paid Work Experiences (PWE).
- Placement in competitive employment.
- Supported employment post placement.
- Employment stabilization.
- Supported employment closure and earnings level at closure.
- Extended Employment post closure.

To support the programs with the new contract structure we have centralized case management under two Senior Vocational Counselors.

## **5. HireAbility will continue to expand efforts to effectively serve employers.**

HireAbility went through a major rebranding in 2020 and 2021. As part of that rebranding effort, we decided to retire Creative Workforce Solutions (CWS) and have all employer outreach activities under our new name, HireAbility.

The Business Account Managers (BAMS) are the primary employer engagement staff for HireAbility. They are deployed in all 12 district offices. HireAbility measures employer engagement through the following metrics:

- **New Employer Contacts:** These are defined as new contacts with employers who have never engaged with HireAbility.
- **Employer Activities:** These are defined as engagement activities with employers who have an ongoing relationship with HireAbility.
- **Employer Opportunities:** These are defined as specific participant opportunities such as a job opening, training opportunity, work-based learning opportunity, company tour or informational interview.
- **Caseload Driven Outreach:** Caseload Driven outreach is defined as labor market outreach directly related to participants on counselors' current caseloads. Business Account Managers are tasked with directing two-thirds of their activities to caseload needs.

The annual targets in the PY 22 and PY 23 State Plan were:

- **New Employer Contacts:** 775 new contacts
- **Employer Activities:** 2,500 distinct engagement activities
- **Employer Opportunities:** 2,750 discrete participant opportunities
- **Caseload Driven Outreach:** 1,650 distinct participant opportunities developed based on caseload need.

For PY 22 the actual counts were as follows:

- **New Employer Contacts:** 1,573
- **Employer Activities:** 3,587
- **Employer Opportunities:** 2,194

- Caseload Driven Outreach: 776

We believe the high number of new employer contacts and activities was driven by the very tight labor market. More than ever, employers are willing to consider recruiting from HireAbility. We were somewhat disappointed by the lower number of employer opportunities and caseload driven outreach. We believe this was driven by our own workforce challenges recruiting and retaining BAM staff. Considerable turnover of BAMs has likely depressed these numbers.

## **6. HireAbility will continue to seek opportunities to expand and/or improve services for underserved populations including individuals who need supported employment.**

HireAbility has had some considerable success in expanding services to underserved populations. Since the last State Plan Update. Most notably with the following populations:

### *Individuals with Opioid misuse disorder*

As it has nationally, the opioid crisis has greatly impacted Vermont communities. HireAbility was successful in getting state funding to implement two pilots to serve individuals in recovery from opioid misuse disorders. It is still early but the pilots have shown great promise.

### *Offenders with disabilities*

HireAbility is partnering with the Department of Corrections to serve offenders with disabilities. We have a dedicated counselor who works with individuals in the facilities prior to release. Eligible individuals are then referred to designated counselors in their home communities.

### *Students with developmental disabilities in transition who need supported employment*

The State of Vermont Developmental Services System has a robust supported employment program that guarantees students who exit with employment will receive supported employment services. However, many students with developmental disabilities exit high school without employment. As a result, they are placed in community-based services and generally do not have the opportunity to go to work. To address this issue, HireAbility is using reallocation funding to support four in school pilots serving students with developmental disabilities. The intent is to provide early work experiences and competitive supported employment opportunities for students while they are in school. The goal is to make sure students exit high school, employed. The provider agencies are the designated developmental services providers. This will facilitate a smooth transition to ongoing supported employment services after high school exit.

## **7. HireAbility will continue to track participant satisfaction with the program's services through the bi-annual consumer satisfaction survey.**

In the PY 22 and PY 23 State Plan Update, HireAbility set the following targets for participant satisfaction.

- At least 96% of HireAbility participants will report they would recommend HireAbility to family and friends.
- At least 92% will report they were satisfied or very satisfied with their experience working with HireAbility staff and counselors.

The following were the actual results for the survey conducted in 2022.

- 93% said they would recommend that their friends or family members seek help from HireAbility.
- 81% of participants reported they were satisfied or very satisfied with HireAbility.
- 90% of participants responded they are satisfied with their experience working with HireAbility staff and counselors. This is a two percent increase from our 2019 survey.
- 97% felt they were treated by staff with dignity and respect.

While we were slightly short of hitting our targets, the numbers are overwhelmingly positive, especially since this was the first survey since COVID.

### **8. HireAbility will evaluate how to deliver the most effective remote services to participants given the COVID-19 pandemic.**

HireAbility shifted to a remote service delivery model in March of 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Participant meetings and business outreach have been conducted by utilizing virtual meetings and telephone calls. Supporting HireAbility participants to obtain the necessary tools and technology to be able to actively engage in these virtual services has been a top priority. A set-aside fund was created to enable staff to support participants in purchasing the tools or services they need. As of November 1, 2021, HireAbility staff moved to a hybrid service delivery model working some days in the HireAbility offices and some days remotely.

In the 2022 participant satisfaction survey 77% of participants reported that it was very easy or somewhat easy to connect with their counselor, even during the times where services were being delivered entirely remotely. Overall satisfaction with our services remained very high through this crisis period despite all the challenges associated with serving participants during COVID.

### **9. HireAbility will implement strategies to ensure cultural responsiveness and awareness for HireAbility staff, policies, and practices.**

In 2021 Governor Scott announced the following proclamation: "Vermont seeks to achieve equality and equity and to create a culture in which racial, ethnic and other cultural disparities are openly acknowledged and addressed and where no one person is more likely to experience society's benefits or burdens than any other person." HireAbility has embraced this declaration and is working towards putting these words into practice. Working with a contractor and our partners we developed the following DEIA vision statement for the program: HireAbility will become an organization where; All staff and participants have a sense of belonging & feel welcomed here at HireAbility. Our diverse staff reflect the communities that we serve. Our strong connections with multicultural communities and community partners ensures engagement, successful outcomes, and career pathway opportunities for participants from diverse backgrounds.

To make this vision a reality, HireAbility worked with a consultant to conduct a needs assessment and identify opportunities for growth. Based on the results, we have identified four areas of focus, and have formed four charter groups made up of diverse cross-sections of staff to do this work in PY 24 and PY 25. The goals for each charter group are as follows:

- Develop a workforce that reflects the diverse populations we serve.
- Effectively reach all populations that are eligible for our services.
- Ensure staff have access to the tools and knowledge and feel able to serve all participants in a culturally responsive way.

- Strengthen our existing communication loops to ensure staff are informed and can contribute.

The Charter groups will be charged with developing strategies to move the agency forward in these areas. They will also identify metrics for success that are meaningful and measurable.

## 2. DESCRIBE THE FACTORS THAT IMPEDED THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE GOALS AND PRIORITIES

Since the pandemic Vermont has had a substantial labor shortage. HireAbility has been able to maintain a high level of staffing despite the challenging environment. However, the Vermont Association of Business Industry and Rehabilitation, our CRP, and supported employment provider agencies have had great difficulties with staffing. Rapid turnover and unfilled positions have impacted services. In response, HireAbility has increased its contract rates to allow providers to increase salaries in a highly competitive market.

## 3. THE VR PROGRAM'S PERFORMANCE ON THE PERFORMANCE ACCOUNTABILITY INDICATORS UNDER SECTION 116 OF WIOA

HireAbility, has consistently performed above the national average across measures. We have also seen performance improvement each year. We believe this is because of the strategic alignment of our services as outlined in the Goals and Priorities of our post WIOA State Plans.

MEASURE	NATIONAL AVERAGE SFY 20	VERMONT RESULTS SFY 20	NATIONAL AVERAGE SFY 21	VERMONT RESULTS SFY 21	NATIONAL AVERAGE SFY 22	VERMONT RESULTS SFY 22	NATIONAL AVERAGE SFY 23	VERMONT RESULTS SFY 23
MEASURABLE SKILLS GAINS	31.4%	49.3%	43.3%	49.0%	43.0%	57.3%	48.7%	56.7%
EMPLOYMENT RATE 2 QUARTERS POST EXIT	51.3%	51.1%	48.6%	53.3%	52.5%	53.3%	56.2%	56.0%
EMPLOYMENT RATE 4 QUARTERS POST EXIT	43.6%	49.7%	44.0%	48.3%	48.0%	52.0%	52.8%	55.4%
MEDIAN EARNINGS 2 QUARTERS POST EXIT	\$4,005	\$3,901	\$4,280	\$4,630	\$4,776	\$5,213	\$5,130	\$6,153

CREDENTIAL ATTAINMENT	NA	NA	23.2%	42.5%	30.8%	42.5%	37.6%	53.2%
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#### 4. HOW THE FUNDS RESERVED FOR INNOVATION AND EXPANSION (I&E) ACTIVITIES WERE UTILIZED

I&E funds were used to support the "Our Time is Now" initiative. HireAbility, DBVI, the SRC, the Developmental Disabilities Council, the Vermont Center for Independent Living, and the Vermont Public Assets Institute partnered to support a public information campaign that promotes the employment of people with disabilities and dispels myths and stereotypes. The goal of the campaign is to inform state policy makers, employers, and the general public about the workforce potential of people with disabilities. The group produced a report in PY 2020 that was very well received. It demonstrated that Vermont has an acute workforce shortage and people with disabilities are a large and ready pool of potential workers. In the spring of 2022, I&E funds were used to launch a marketing effort to promote the employment of people with disabilities under the banner of "Our Time is Now. The marketing effort was very well received in the community.

In PY 22 HireAbility started planning a follow up to "Our Time is Now" with a focus on individuals with chronic health conditions. I&E funds are being used to contract David Stapleton, a highly respected disability researcher to develop the follow up report.

#### Q. QUALITY, SCOPE, AND EXTENT OF SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

##### 1. THE QUALITY, SCOPE, AND EXTENT OF SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES TO BE PROVIDED TO INDIVIDUALS WITH THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES, INCLUDING YOUTH WITH THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES

##### **Individuals with Developmental Disabilities**

HireAbility works closely with the Developmental Disabilities Services Division (DDSD) to provide supported employment services. This is a 35 year-plus partnership. Up until FFY 17, HireAbility specifically allocated funds to provide assessment, training, and placement services until case closure. Due to sudden and severe changes in funding, Development Services agreed to pick up HireAbility's contribution in order to continue these long-standing services. These funds are an integral part of the overall employment budget for individuals with developmental disabilities. The funding allows programs to create a seamless structure of upfront and ongoing support with dedicated positions. HireAbility continues to jointly monitor outcomes and provide technical assistance alongside DDSD. HireAbility also continues to open DS supported employment cases to provide individual case services which include work incentives counseling and assistive technology services. Post-Secondary options are available to people with developmental disabilities through College Steps, Succeed, Think College and Project Search.

HireAbility and DDSD only support individual integrated competitive supported employment. The State does not support any sheltered work or congregate work settings. The most recent employment rate data for individuals with developmental disabilities (SFY 22) showed a 42% employment rate for working age adults in the DDSD system, which was a drop in only 5% following a national pandemic.

HireAbility and DDSD have not had sheltered employment workshops for individuals with developmental disabilities since 2002. That same year, Vermont was ranked number 1 in the nation

in the number of people with developmental disabilities who received supported employment to work per 100,000 of the state population.<sup>1</sup> In the past three years, the numbers of individuals with developmental disabilities employed in competitive jobs have continued to increase.

### **Adults with Significant Mental Illness**

HireAbility has historically worked closely with DMH to support the integration of employment into the broad array of clinical mental health services available to individuals with significant mental health issues. Similar to its relationship with DDS, HireAbility funding was braided with the DMH Community Rehabilitation and Treatment (CRT) Medicaid case rate to provide a seamless structure of upfront and ongoing support.

Up until SFY 16, HireAbility funds have been specifically allocated to provide assessment, training, and placement services until closure, with the CRT Medicaid case rate funds providing the necessary long term follow up. Starting in SFY 16, HireAbility decided to reallocate the \$700,000 in Title 110 funds committed to adult mental health to the JOBS program. This decision was made to ensure HireAbility came into compliance with the Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) requirement. In order to meet the 15% Pre-ETS expenditure target, HireAbility had to reassign funds from adult services to services for students and youth. This was a very difficult decision for HireAbility and we are greatly saddened by the impact on supported employment services for adults with mental illness.

While HireAbility no longer has a formal contractual program with the CRT programs to deliver supported employment services, HireAbility continues to partner with CRT programs at the local level. Many CRT programs have sustained their supported employment services despite the loss of

HireAbility funding. Local HireAbility offices continue to provide services for CRT participants that supplement their Medicaid funded services such as work Incentives counseling, assistive technology, Employee Assistance Program services, and career counseling and guidance. HireAbility shares in Ticket to Work reimbursement with CRT programs for those mutually shared participants.

HireAbility and DMH continue to work together at the state level, to support evidence based supported employment. Vermont was the first state to pilot a Johnson and Johnson Dartmouth initiative, now in 13 states, which continues to demonstrate that adherence to the principles of evidence based supported employment is key to increasing employment rates. HireAbility and DMH bring together CRT staff and HireAbility staff on a quarterly basis for training and collaboration efforts statewide. Each HireAbility office has a designated HireAbility vocational counselor liaison assigned to carry the CRT caseload and collaborate with their respective Designated Agency.

### **Youth with Emotional and Behavioral Disturbances**

The JOBS program is an innovative supported employment and intensive case management service for youth with emotional and behavioral disturbances (EBD) that uses work as the primary means

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<sup>1</sup> The State of the States in Developmental Disabilities: 2002 Study Summary, Coleman Institute for Cognitive Disabilities & Department of Psychiatry, University of Colorado, January 2004.



to reach this challenging population. As a result of a unique partnership between the Department of Mental Health's Child, Adolescent and Family Unit (CAFU), the Department for Children and Families, the Department of Corrections, HireAbility, and contract agencies, the JOBS program is operational in thirteen sites across the state. The JOBS program is funded through a combination of Medicaid Global Commitment funds and HireAbility funds. The partnership for this program has been in place for nearly 30 years.

JOBS involves employers and the business community in meeting the needs of youth through intensive job development, placement, and on- and off-site training support. JOBS differs from other traditional employment models by providing intensive case management services to assist young people in meeting other areas of need in their lives (e.g., dealing with legal issues, homelessness, drug/alcohol use, transportation, and involvement with the criminal justice system). Within this model, HireAbility funds are accessed through a fee-for-benchmark funding structure which supports an employment focus. This includes employment assessment, pre-employment work experiences, and placement services. The case management and ongoing support is provided through state general funds contributed by the state departments noted above, which are matched to Medicaid through a fee for service arrangement with DMH.

### **Individuals with Traumatic Brain Injury**

HireAbility also works with the Developmental Disabilities Services Division (DDSD) to provide seamless employment support to individuals with Traumatic Brain Injury. Similar to the collaboration that serves individuals with developmental disabilities, HireAbility funds are used for the upfront assessment, training, and placement services, while individual Medicaid waiver funds are used to provide the ongoing support.

### **Use of HireAbility Funds**

For all the above program collaborations, if HireAbility funds are used, Title I funds are used for pre-placement activities and Title VI or Title I funds for post placement supported employment services and extended services for youth with the most significant disabilities, until age 25, and for a period not to exceed four years.

## **2. THE TIMING OF TRANSITION TO EXTENDED SERVICES**

Extended services are provided after the transition from the provision of supported employment for a period of up to 24 months or longer if necessary to meet the needs of an individual with a most significant disability and ensure stabilization has occurred.