



ADVANCING
DISABILITY INCLUSION
& WORKFORCE
INNOVATION

Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation

Careers and Business Relations News Brief

September 24, 2023



CSAVR *Careers and Business Relations News Briefs* is a regular series covering The National Employment Team (NET) activities, business relations initiatives, media stories, business research initiatives, webinars, reports, conferences, and employment activities of interest to the membership.

Announcements:

Thank you to those of you who submitted proposals for the concurrent sessions at the CSAVR Fall conference! We are currently informing those who have been selected. There were so many great proposals to select from....thank you from the Officers and staff!

HIGHLIGHTS

1. [National Items of Interest](#)
2. [NET Updates](#)
3. [Articles and Events of Interest](#)

NATIONAL ITEMS OF INTEREST

Rehabilitation Act of 1973 – 50 Year Anniversary - The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 was [the first federal law to address access and equity for people with disabilities \[youtube.com\]](#). This Tuesday, September 26, the White House is facilitating a **Forum on Disability Rights** for the 50th Anniversary of The Act. We are thrilled that CSAVR has been invited to join the Forum, but more importantly that we have two individual customers and a state director who will be on a panel moderated by OSERS Assistant Secretary Glenna Gallo. The panelists are:

- Khalil Watson – Social Work Student, Virginia Commonwealth University
- Tim Rednour – English language Arts Teacher, Vallivue Academy
- Kathy Hayfield – Commissioner, Virginia Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services

Tonia Ferguson, CSAVR Director of Legislative Affairs, and Steve Wooderson, CSAVR CEO, will be joining the Forum in person.

Associated with the White House Forum, a special video celebration will be released where former Senator Tom Harkin and Assistant Secretary Gallo speak to the significance of this legislation. Several customers of the public VR program are highlighted in this musical tribute led by Mr. George Dennehy.

Special thanks to the Virginia DARS media team, Mr. Rick Sizemore and Ms. Betsy Civilette for their superb work on the video. And to leadership and staff of Idaho and Virginia for their overwhelming enthusiasm and support in arranging for their customers to participate in this exciting event.

Celebrating National Hispanic Heritage Month - In his 2023 [Presidential Proclamation \[lnks.gd\]](#) marking National Hispanic Heritage Month, President Biden stated:

“I have often said that America can be defined in one word: possibilities. The Hispanic community has always embodied that ideal. It lives in the dreams of those who have only just arrived here and in the legacy of families who have been here for centuries. Latinos have helped chart America’s course since our start — as doctors and engineers; artists and

entrepreneurs; and leaders in science, business, labor, government, and military and across grassroots movements.”

The President’s words are a reminder of how Hispanic Americans have contributed immensely to America’s success. Even with these gains, Hispanic workers continue to encounter prejudice and discrimination that impede their ability to fully participate in the workplace.

September is National Deaf Awareness Month - Deaf Awareness Month is held during the month of September. [It is a time to showcase and inform others about the unique culture, language, and experiences of the Deaf and hard-of-hearing \(HoH\) communities](#) ^[alldeaf.com]¹ [\[alldeaf.com\]](#). The International Week of the Deaf (IWDP) begins on September 18, 2023, and ends on September 24, 2023. [The International Day of Sign Language \(IDSL\) September 23, 2023](#) [\[alldeaf.com\]](#)

Oklahoma VR – Partners with Law Enforcement: Communication Cards Deaf/HH - Congratulations to our OKVR team who were featured on [network news \[newson6.com\]](#) regarding their work to develop communication cards to enhance communication between members of the Deaf/Hard of Hearing community and Law Enforcement.

David Hankinson is the Programs Manager for Statewide Services to the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Unit in Oklahoma Rehabilitation Services.

[988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline adopts ASL services for Deaf and hard of hearing](#) [\[abcnews.go.com\]](#)

The CDC reported that nearly 50,000 Americans died by suicide in 2022, a record-high number. Since the Lifeline launched under its new three-digit number in July 2022, over 5.5 million callers have accessed support.

The 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline now offers American Sign Language services for the deaf and hard of hearing, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration announced Friday.

Users can connect with the service on the 988 Lifeline website using the [“ASL now” button](#) [\[988lifeline.org\]](#) or dial into the previous ten-digit number (1-800-273-8255) using a video phone to reach a Lifeline counselor trained in ASL. Callers will be able to connect to the service after dialing 988 in the coming weeks, according to SAMHSA.

“We're demonstrating our commitment to supporting individuals that are deaf or hard of hearing and need mental health or substance use support services, and we are making sure that we are continuing to be equitable in terms of access,” Monica Johnson, director of SAMHSA’s 988 and Behavioral Health Crisis Coordinating Office, told ABC News.

Health and Human Services Secretary Xavier Becerra said in a press release that the introduction of ASL services is “a testament to our ongoing commitment to ensure that no one is left behind when it comes to mental health support.”

Suicide is one of the leading causes of death in the United States. Last month, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention released its [provisional estimates for suicide deaths \[cdc.gov\]](#) in the country last year and found that suicide deaths increased for a second year in a row to an estimated 49,449 deaths.

If you are struggling with thoughts of suicide or worried about a friend or loved one, call or text the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline at 988 for free, confidential emotional support 24 hours a day, seven days a week. You can connect with ASL services on the 988 Lifeline website using the “ASL now” button or dial into the previous ten-digit number (1-800-273-8255) using a video phone to reach a Lifeline counselor trained in ASL.

NET UPDATES

NET Summit - The 2023 NET Summit took place last week. 175 NET points of contact, VR Business Relations staff, VR Training Center staff and partners were joined by 15 different businesses/federal partners to discuss hiring trends, workforce needs and supports offered to business via the NET, Business Relations staff and training Center teams. The team was joined by Michael MacKillop and Toni Wolf, the co-chairs of the Careers and Business Relations Committee along with CSAVR staff – Steve, Kathy, Tonia, Inger and Theresa. We also were joined by Jessica Hawes the WIOA Team leader from RSA as well as partners from DOL, the AbilityOne Commission and universities.

The first day the NET members, VR business relations staff, training center staff and partners participated in round table discussions on the six key topics recommended by the Regional NET Representatives:

- Cross Staff Training and Development: Connecting VRCs to Business Staff
- Business Based Training
- Measuring Outcomes of Business Relations Services
- Work Based Learning Strategies
- Transition – Career Connection
- Working with Partners, including Second Chance Employment

The Final Session included Working Models/Strategies at the State Level:

- Iowa - Video Marketing Candidates
- Idaho VR – Long-term Partnership with Corrections

Thank you to the roundtable facilitators! They took notes that will be compiled and shared by out with the team. It was a great opportunity to have cross-state discussions and learn from each other!

Reception: Celebrating 50 Years of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973

- NET Lifetime Achievement Award: CVS Health
- NET Partnership Award: Hands on Education at the Hyatt
- NET AAA (Achievement for Advancement in Accessibility) Award: General Motors, Accessibility Center of Excellence
- Legislative Champion Awards: Rita Martin and Paul Seifert

Call to Action for the Future: **Katy Neas**, Deputy Assistant Secretary, Office of Special Ed. And Rehab. Services, U.S. Department of Education

The second day was the opportunity to learn from NET business customers:

- Red River and MA VR (video message)
- VR Tools: TAP and ACT Virtual Training Academy
- U.S. ACCESS Board: Overview and Partnership
- CVS Health: Workforce Initiatives DEI&A Strategy and Intersectionality
- Hospitality/Service: Hyatt, Hands on Education and Sodexo
- Healthcare and Biopharmaceutical: Pfizer and UnitedHealth Group
 - Finance: Wells Fargo
 - Technology: Microsoft
 - Retail/Distribution: Walmart and McLane Company

Federal Partners

- Dept of Transportation, Federal Aviation Administration
- Department of State
- Department of Treasury – IRS
- United States Agency for International Development (USAID) –
- National Park Service

It was exciting to hear NET business partners share their appreciation and support of the VR NET! They want to continue to grow the partnerships at the national, state and local level to enable them to recruit, promote and retain employees with disabilities.

Attendees were energized, continued networking and the number one ask was ***when is the next NET Summit?!***

NET Partners Highlighted:

[CEOs of Microsoft and Lowes Connection to Disability \[bit.ly\]](#) - Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella has talked about how his late son's cerebral palsy shaped his commitment [\[blogs.microsoft.com\]](https://blogs.microsoft.com) to a workplace and products that are accessible to people with disabilities. Lowe's CEO Marvin Ellison has said the challenge of making his elderly father's home more accessible inspired the creation [\[foxbusiness.com\]](https://www.foxbusiness.com) of the retailer's Livable Home initiative, a one-stop shop for age-friendly products such as ramps and safety accessories that also support the disability community.

Northwest Arkansas' Welcoming Week – Walmart - SPRINGDALE -- Disabled Arkansans are an underused pool of talented workers, a Walmart executive said during the opening of Northwest Arkansas' Welcoming Week on Friday.

Arkansas is in the tightest labor market in its history with a record-low unemployment rate of 2.6% as of July, the latest state figures show. Yet the unemployment rate among Arkansans with a disability is 19%, said Victor Calise, director of global belonging, diversity, equity, and inclusion at Walmart.

Calise spoke during the kickoff for Welcoming Week, an event hosted by Northwest Arkansas businesses and community groups to celebrate the region's diversity and organized by Engage NWA at the Northwest Arkansas Council. At least 125 people attended the opening event at The Jones Center in Springdale.

"Yes, to employ them you would have to make accommodations, but the state will work with you to pay for those," Calise said, referring to items such as access ramps or equipment to help those with vision or hearing problems. **Employers need to contact Arkansas Rehabilitation Services or the Division of Services for the Blind**, both of which are divisions of the state Department of Workforce Services, to see what assistance is available, he said.

Calise worked as a plumber before an accident put him in a wheelchair, he told the audience. He then attained a college degree in sports management. He later took a job as accessibility coordinator for the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation, then with the city mayor's Office for People with Disabilities before his hiring by Walmart.

At the store headquarters he oversaw, for instance, the toning-down of sound in TV displays in stores' electronic departments to make shopping easier for parents with autistic children, and putting items needed by people with disabilities grouped in the same location in stores.

Businesses need to go beyond the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act to attract disabled customers, he said. The 1990 act assures access to facilities open to the general public. "It was written for people like me, in wheelchairs," he said. More needs doing for would-be customers with conditions affecting their vision, hearing or other disabilities, he said.

Jasmine Rara told the group she was surprised and delighted to see so many people like her when she arrived from southern California to take her job as director of community development and education for the Greater Bentonville Chamber of Commerce. Rara is of Filipino descent.

The community wasn't always like that, said Gary Head, chief executive of Signature Bank, in his remarks to the crowd. "Thirty-eight years ago this area was the opposite of diverse," he said. Now it's welcoming, diverse and stronger for it, he said. Efforts to convey how welcoming the Northwest Arkansas region is aren't helped by the current political climate, said Margarita Solorzano, executive director of the Hispanic Women's Organization of Arkansas, after Monday's event. Recent legislative efforts to censor what books libraries can make available to children and ban teaching of certain subjects in schools make the state look less tolerant than the communities are in Northwest Arkansas, she said.

Sen. Bart Hester, R-Cave Springs, is president of the Senate. He said Monday if the state wasn't known as a welcoming region, it wouldn't be growing, particularly at the rate it is in Northwest Arkansas.

ARTICLES AND EVENTS OF INTEREST

RSA Technical Assistance Circular: Maximizing Services and the Use of Funds to Support Quality Employment Outcomes for Individuals with Disabilities through the Vocational Rehabilitation and Supported Employment Programs

[RSA-TAC-23-03 - Maximizing Services and Employment Outcomes.pdf](#)

[Pre-apprenticeship Training in Construction - Seattle, WA.](#)

[\[woodtech.seattlecentral.edu\]](http://woodtech.seattlecentral.edu)

[John Fetterman – Statement on Disability Access \[www-rollingstone-com.cdn.ampproject.org\]](http://www-rollingstone-com.cdn.ampproject.org)

If you have any questions, please feel free to reach out to Kathy or Inger.