

NC DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
**Division of Employment and Independence
for People with Disabilities**



Your goals. Our support.



2024 Annual Report

Director's Message

Welcome to the first ever annual report from the Division of Employment and Independence for People with Disabilities. In April 2024, our division officially changed its name from Vocational Rehabilitation Services to EIPD. This new name directly addresses our mission – to provide vital services to people with disabilities as they work to achieve their goals for employment and independence.

And we have a lot to celebrate in this year’s annual report! Over the last year EIPD has served more than 30,000 North Carolina residents. More than 27,000 clients received VR services from EIPD and more than 2,000 people successfully exited the program with competitive integrated employment. We provided Pre-Employment Transition Services to 8,506 students, and 704 transition-aged youth successfully exited the VR program in employment. We also served 3,630 clients who received services as part of their Independent Living Plan, and 717 clients achieved their independent living goals.

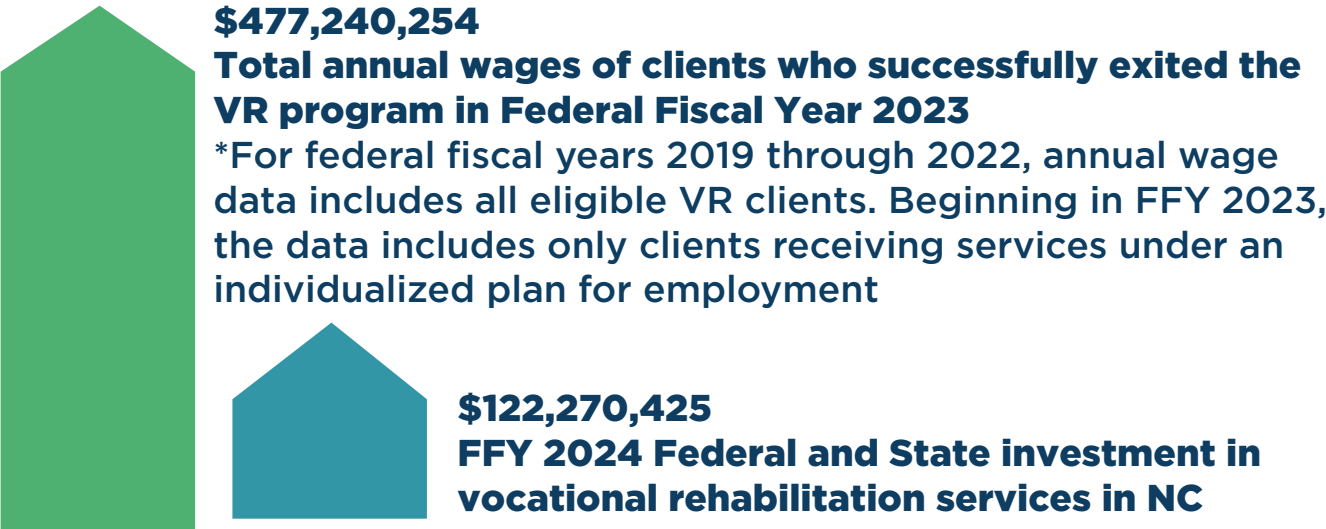
But the real stories of EIPD’s work go well beyond these impressive numbers and statistics. It’s about the people we serve and the positive changes that happen in their lives when they achieve their goals for employment and independence – positive changes that ripple through their families, their communities and ultimately throughout the state of North Carolina. Just a few examples of those personal success stories are presented here in the pages of this report to give you a glimpse into the victories we at EIPD are privileged to witness every day.

Our mission is vital, our goals are extensive, and thanks to the combined efforts of our staff, our partners, and our consumers – our successes are extraordinary. We have so much to celebrate, and I’m proud to be able to present those successes to you in this report!



Kathy Smith
Director, EIPD

2024 Snapshot: Return on Investment in Services



2024 Snapshot: VR Program Outcomes and Cost



2,073 individuals successfully exited the program in competitive integrated employment (CIE)



\$14.25 average hourly wage



26 average months from application to case closure

2024 VR Program Cost

23.7% State/Other Funds

76.3% Federal Funds



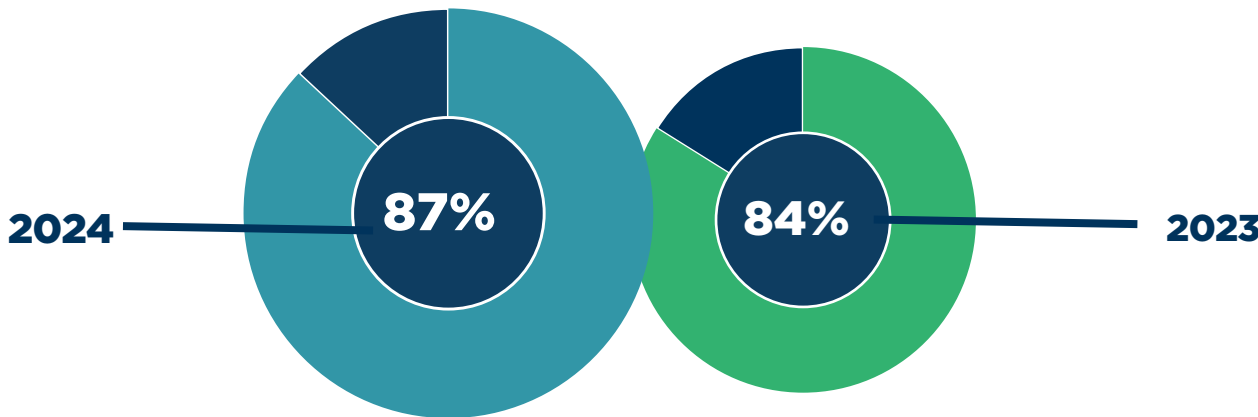
27 average weekly hours

New Name, Same Mission

On April 23, 2024, the Division Vocational Rehabilitation Services transitioned to a new name, the Division of Employment and Independence for People with Disabilities. This name change reflects the division’s century-long history of critical work with North Carolinians with disabilities. Former NC Health and Human Services Secretary Kody Kinsley, EIPD Director Kathie Smith, and EIPD clients celebrated the change at a kickoff event at the Haywood Building on Dorothea Dix Campus in Raleigh.

This announcement follows years of collaboration with clients, staff and partners across the state to develop the new name and ensure it accurately captures and clearly explains the division’s mission and spirit. In the weeks following the official launch, EIPD’s career training centers in Morganton and Goldsboro also hosted public events to introduce the new name to their communities and local media.

2024 Snapshot: Client Satisfaction with VR Program



Great Expectations

Competitive integrated employment means working at a job in the community, alongside co-workers without disabilities, getting the same pay and benefits as other people doing the same job. EIPD is committed to providing the ongoing supports so that individuals with disabilities can overcome barriers and get jobs that are a good match for their talents and skills.

Brittany Ellis always new she would work, and first came to the Division for help finding a job when she was 20. She started at a daycare center and, while she enjoyed being around kids, it wasn't the best fit. Ellis worked with her counselor to explore other opportunities, including a six-year stint in customer service at Walgreens.

Today Ellis works full-time at a Smithfield thrift store and is a leading voice of the inclusion movement. Brittany leads her Peer Mentoring group, where she shares what she's learned and encourages her group to develop their skills and to act as their own advocates. "Everyone has their own talents and gifts and it's important for everyone to contribute their abilities," she said. "I was able to go to work because I had the right supports. They helped me find the right fit and they supported me in finding jobs."

Through working with her vocational rehabilitation counselor and other staff, Brittany was able to identify her strengths and target jobs where she would be a good fit. "Society has a view of people with disabilities, but everybody has things they're good at or not so good at," she said. "We can all contribute and add something special."



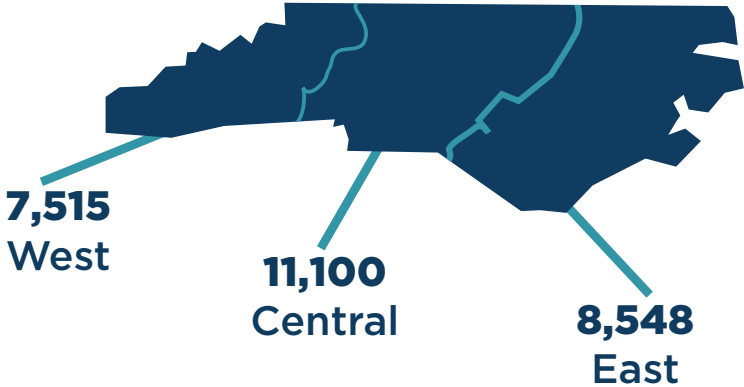
Brittany Ellis
Peer Mentor and
former EIPD client

2024 Snapshot: Clients Receiving VR Services

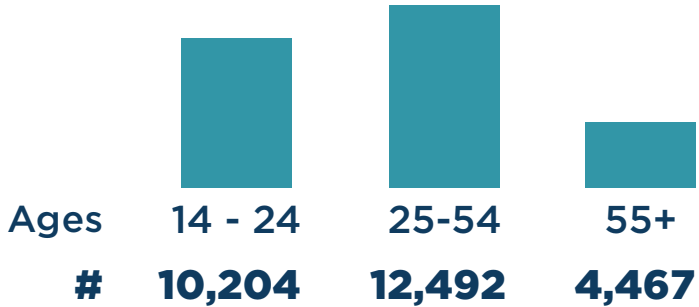


27,163
Total # of clients
receiving VR services
from EIPD

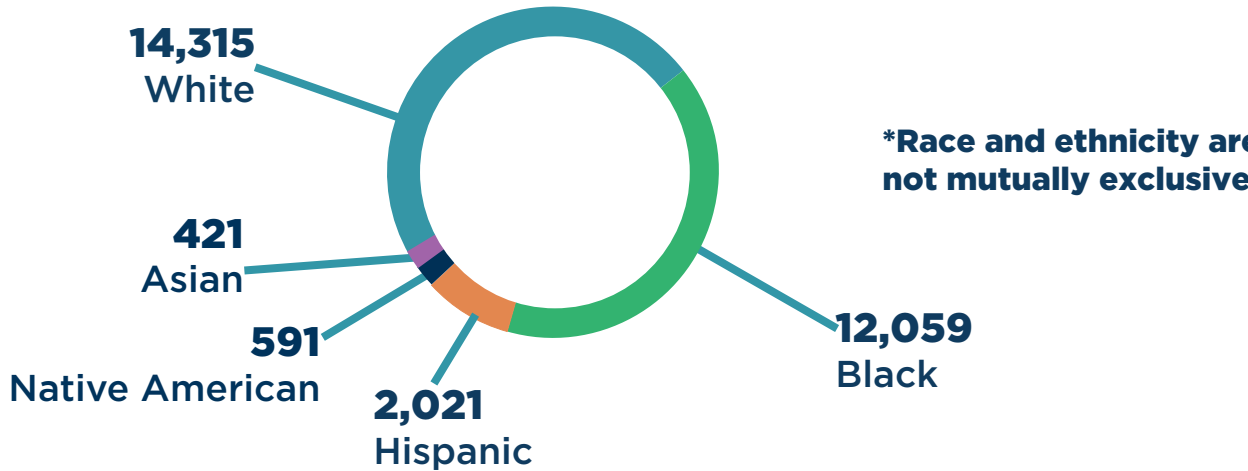
VR Cases by Region



VR Cases by Age



2024 Snapshot: VR Clients by Race and Ethnicity



Finding Success at WorkSource West

When Kelly Gilliam walked through the doors at WorkSource West in Morganton, he knew he wanted help to land a good job. He wasn't entirely sure which skills he'd need, or which career would be right for him, but his sister had recommended that he sign up for their job skills training program.

"She told me I should check it out because it helps people find a job - and it's hard to find one," he said. "I wanted to support myself. I wanted to be on my own and be independent." Gilliam took his sister's advice and began WorkSource West's Vocational Skills Training program, where he flourished.

The Housekeeping Program curriculum includes chemical safety, workplace safety and cleaning techniques. The students learn about dress codes and the kind of professional expectations that will be required on the job. It's a curriculum that lends itself to a variety of job opportunities. It also includes field trips to job locations so the students can become familiar with their work options.

Upon completion of the program, Gilliam decided to find a job in food services. He was hired by Grace Heights Health and Rehabilitation in Morganton. "I saw the dietary aide job," he said. "My dad was in the nursing home when he passed away, and I wanted to help."

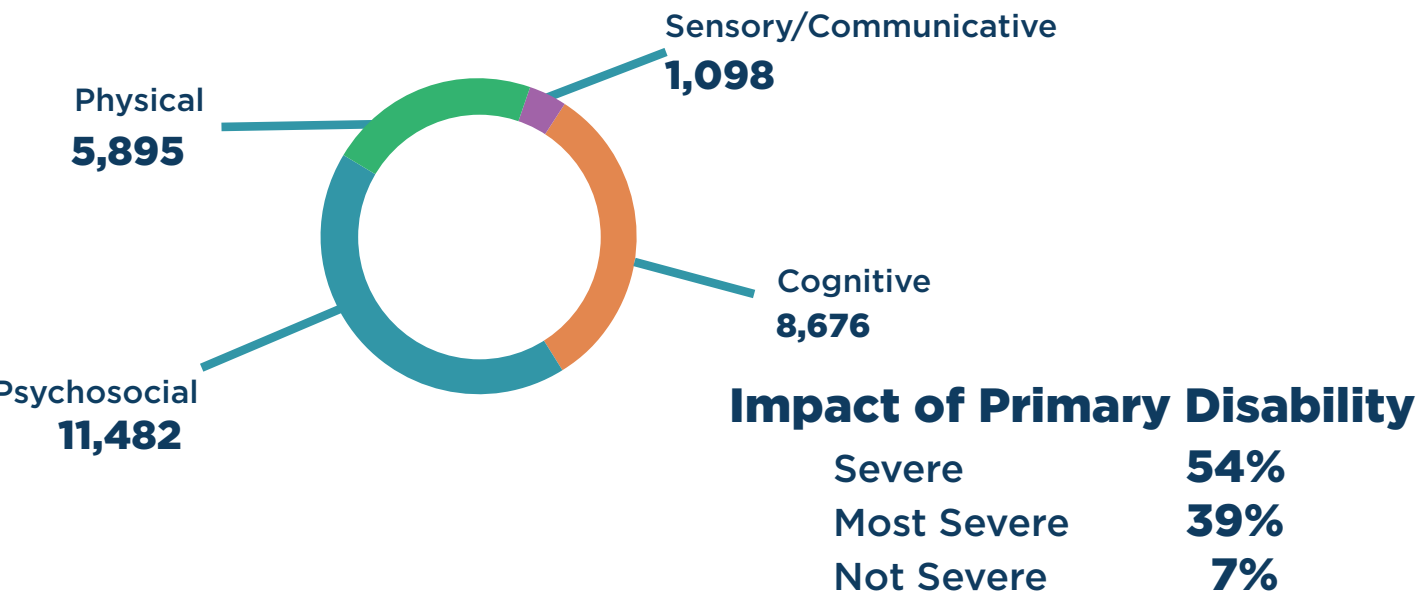
He also keeps an eye on the residents' meal tickets to make sure that the meals they're served are in alignment with their particular dietary requirements. "He loves his job here," said Dietary Manager Dianne Anthony, his supervisor. "He wants to move up so I'm going to start training him to become a cook."

Gilliam is thriving in his new role and says Anthony's a great boss. "I have really nice coworkers," Gilliam said. "Diane's fun to work for she makes jokes and if anyone needs help, she gives them the training they need."



Kelly Gilliam
Dietary Aide and
former EIPD client

2024 Snapshot: VR Cases by Primary Disability



The Accessible Icon Project Comes to North Carolina

For more than 50 years the traditional image of a static person in a wheelchair on a field of blue has been adopted worldwide. The Accessible Icon Project updated this familiar graphic by creating one that displays an active, in-motion version of life with a disability.

The Accessible Icon Project is an ongoing work of design advocacy. It starts with a graphic icon, free for use in the public domain, and continues its work as a collaboration among people with disabilities and their allies toward a more accessible world.

The first state building to adopt the new icon was the EIPD office in New Bern, which held a ceremonial repainting of the parking spaces outside its front doors when state employees and volunteers came together to replace the old “handicapped” parking symbol with the new Accessible Icon symbol.

“The Accessible Icon Project is about social design that changes outlooks and emphasizes autonomy,” said Brendon Hildreth, EIPD’s Disability Peer Consultant, who also serves as the Accessible Icon Project’s Co-Director. “The old symbol looks static, and its design suggests that people with disabilities are part of the chair, lacking independence and autonomy. It’s not a good representation of what people with disabilities can do with the right accommodations.”

Hildreth is proud that EIPD has advocated for adopting the Accessible Icon and looks forward to seeing all EIPD offices across the state, and hopefully other state agencies, local businesses and non-profits adopt the icon and its message.



Brendon Hildreth and EIPD’s New Bern Unit Staff

Celebrating Success at WorkSource East Graduation

WorkSource East provides training opportunities for Wayne County high school students and jobseekers with disabilities from surrounding communities, as well as EIPD clients with disabilities from other parts of the state, who can apply to be a student at WSE.

“We are so proud of our students and seeing them grow as individuals and accomplish so much while they are here gives us all such joy and fulfillment every day,” said WorkSource East Facility Director Jackie Tetterton.

Many graduates are now going on interviews, checking in on applications and participating in internship opportunities through their local EIPD office. Five of December’s graduates are already working in the area they received training in at WSE, and two are participating in internships in their chosen fields.

This graduation was extra special as one of WSE’s speakers was Asiya Drivers who is also a WorkSource East graduate. Drivers’ inspiring speech encouraged the graduates and those in the audience to step outside of their comfort zones. She shared about how she grew as a young adult and utilized self-advocacy skills while in training. The event’s featured singer was Lydia Williams who is also a past WSE graduate.



Asiya Drivers
WSE graduate and former EIPD client

2024 Snapshot: Jobseeker Services

263 clients participated in a paid internship to prepare for their employment goal

88 clients received specialized services through the Brain Injury Support Services program

82 clients met with a Work Incentives Planning Assistance counselor to discuss the impact of earned income on benefits


1,482 individuals received Supported Employment services to help them succeed on the job

255 clients received supported employment services through the Individual Placement and Support program for people with severe and persistent mental illness


1,507 clients participated in Work Adjustment Training to acquire work skills and learn appropriate behaviors

138 individuals participated in a Project Search Transition to Work Program


2024 Snapshot: Supplemental Services for VR Clients




1,224 clients received maintenance and support services




332 clients received medical and/or dental services




1,061 clients received assistance with transportation




231 clients received Deaf interpreter and other communication access services



1,598 clients received a psychological evaluation



23 clients received rehabilitation engineering services to remove barriers from their home and/or workplace



197 clients received rehabilitation and assistive technologies and durable medical equipment

Together Everyone Achieves More

Many EIPD clients face additional barriers to employment. These barriers include having a secondary disability, justice system involvement, long-term unemployment, being a single parent or needing long term supports and services.

In cases where clients have complex challenges to overcome and needs that require intensive wraparound services, the division partners with community rehabilitation program (CRP) providers to deliver the additional support they need.

CRPs offer a range of employment-related and support services for clients with specialized needs. EIPD directly administers two CRPs: WorkSource East in Goldsboro and WorkSource West in Morganton. CRP services include vocational evaluations and community-based assessments, job development and coaching, supported employment services, and work adjustment training services.

The partnership between EIPD and CRPs is vital to the success of the division. That’s why EIPD’s CRP Specialists Lenora Mathis and Maggie Leitch, along with their support team, planned and hosted the Community Rehabilitation Provider Training at the YMCA Blue Ridge Assembly in Black Mountain during the first week of May 2024.

CRPs tailor the training to the specific needs of each client, helping them address needs, such as how to properly interact with their supervisors and improve their time management skills. Support over time is a vital component that enables our clients to be successful on the job.



Sascha Prebor and Del Savage
EIPD staffers participate in training

From Probability to Productivity

On August 16, 2020, David Camfield’s heart stopped beating. After his catastrophic automobile accident, the paramedics were able to shock his heart back to its normal rhythm, and he is forever grateful for their quick action.

Camfield was active and fit before the accident - a long distance runner, no less. The accident left him hemiplegic, or paralyzed on the right side of his body, with no function in his right arm and partial paralysis of his right leg.

After the accident, it took more than a year of inpatient physical rehabilitation for Camfield to learn to walk again and function well enough to live independently. After rehab, he left his home in Michigan and moved to Asheville, which promised better weather and proximity to his family.

While he was in rehabilitation, he wasn’t sure what he would do to support himself. After service in the military and a career in the IT field, he didn’t know what he was even capable of doing for work. Thanks to his wonderful counselor in Omaha, where he recovered from his accident, he met Keri Walker from EIPD’s Asheville Office.

“The staff are wonderful,” Camfield explained. “They truly cared about me and worked diligently to help me and thousands of other people with disabilities succeed, giving us a chance to contribute to society.”

Camfield’s team also included Business Relations Representative Dag Bergrund, who helped align his skill set with labor market opportunities and explore adaptive technologies that would allow him to be productive as a writer. Begrund encouraged him to apply for an Employment First internship at the EIPD State Administrative Office.


“He took the time to drive me around for pre-employment fingerprinting and drug testing, and he didn’t have to do that,” Camfield explained. “I could have driven myself, but I didn’t know the area very well yet so it was very helpful. I’ve felt nothing but welcoming energy since I arrived in North Carolina.”

Camfield was selected for the internship and eventually accepted a part-time position with EIPD. He currently works as an editorial assistant for EIPD. “I’ve been able to contribute,” he said, “giving back to the community that has given so much to me.”




David Camfield
Editorial Assistant and former EIPD client

2024 Snapshot: Career and Training Services



534 clients received career services, like career assessments, counseling and workforce preparation activities; job search and placement assistance; and ongoing follow-up services



619 clients received training services to attain a secondary degree or postsecondary credential

2024 Snapshot: Youth and Student Services



10,204 clients with disabilities received VR services under an IPE to help explore and pursue career goals as they explore the world of work, enter into post-secondary education, training, and other workforce readiness activities, and prepare for competitive integrated employment



704 transition-aged youth achieved their employment goal and successfully exited the VR program in competitive integrated employment

8,506 students participated in **Pre-Employment Transition Services** to help them explore career options and prepare for the transition from high school to adult life, including workplace readiness training, job exploration counseling, work-based learning experiences, counseling on post-secondary options and instruction in self-advocacy

EIPD Hosts New Employee Orientation

More than 1,437,936 people who live in North Carolina have a disability, and EIPD serves more than 30,000 people across the state each year. The key to continuing to serve North Carolinians in need is to hire and retain the very best employees. In 2023, EIPD Director Kathie Smith instituted a comprehensive new employee orientation program and all of EIPD’s new permanent hires get to participate.

In April 2024, the division’s third cohort gathered at Raleigh’s North Hills Hilton where 38 new hires had the opportunity to learn about the division, network, and connect with leadership. Smith’s message to her new team was one of encouragement and teamwork. She talked about her personal 18-year journey within the division that took her from her earliest days as a VR counselor all the way to director – and she made it clear that EIPD is a place that fosters personal and professional growth.

When Smith asked her new employees why they’d chosen to work for the division, many responded that they had chosen to dedicate themselves to EIPD because they are driven to make a positive difference.



Whit Ayers and Del Savage
EIPD Professional Development and Training Staff

Antonio Griffin of Pinehurst is a new Rehabilitation Counselor who retired after 20 years in the military. His personal experience serves as his motivation.

“I have a nerve disorder and I use that to identify with my clients who are disabled as well,” he said. “The impact of helping people gain employment and independence makes me happy – I’m gratified because I’ve been provided this opportunity to serve.”

Kimberly Grice, a new Rehabilitation Counselor working out of Dunn agreed. “I connected with VR services in high school, and VR helped me to go to college. I want to give back what was done for me,” Grice said with a smile.

Dutchess Honored with National Award

Julie Dutchess received the Joy Zabala Spirit Award in recognition of her dedication and passion for utilizing AT to support people with disabilities at work. The award was presented at the Assistive Technology Industry Association Conference in Orlando, Fla.

Dutchess has spent her career in dedicated service to people with disabilities. After earning her degree from Marshall University, she worked in the field of speech therapy in school settings. Inspired by continuing developments in the field of assistive technology, Dutchess shifted her focus to AT. She came to work for North Carolina’s Assistive Technology Program in 2008.

It was especially meaningful that ATIA selected her to receive the award because Dutchess has long been inspired by Zabala’s work. “I learned about the methods and strategies she had developed while I was in college, and I’ve kept going with her throughout my career,” Dutchess said. “Her work was influential in everything I’ve done, so this award means the world to me.”

Dutchess is an Assistive Technologist with Rehabilitation Engineering and Assistive Technology Society of North America (RESNA) certification and works out of the Sanford office, providing AT services in nine counties.



Julie Dutchess
Sanford AT Center Staff

2024 Snapshot: Assistive Technology Services



5,662 individuals were provided outreach, training and a variety of services from the Assistive Technology Program



739 clients received device demonstrations to help them explore options and choose the right product for their needs



39 individuals received new or refurbished AT devices and equipment at no cost



3,382 clients were provided information and assistance



546 individuals received training to help them use AT software and devices



943 clients received no-cost short-term device loans



\$126,393 financed to purchase AT through Self-Help Credit Union’s loan program



\$21,649 estimated value of AT exchanged through reuse program



\$38,788 saved on the purchase of AT for people with disabilities



\$17,139 estimated value of AT refurbished and repaired for reuse by people with disabilities

2024 Snapshot: Rehabilitation Engineering Services

Cost by Service Type for VR Clients



Cost by Service Type for IL Clients



For a Strong Workforce in North Carolina, Think Employment First

State agencies across North Carolina are seeing the benefits of hiring Employment First Interns. The program offers vital support for the agency host while providing opportunities for interns with disabilities to explore working in state government.

Employment First is a movement to deliver meaningful employment, fair wages, and career advancement for people with disabilities. NC Employment First (E1) started in March 2019 when Governor Roy Cooper issued Executive Order 92.

As of July 2023, 52 job seekers with disabilities have worked as interns across nine state government agencies. EIPD has hosted the most, but E1 interns have also had opportunities with Disability Determination Services, NC State Parks and Recreation, Department of Public Instruction, and the Secretary of State's Office, among others.

Several new state agency divisions are also planning to host interns in the coming months. Soon, E1 interns will have the opportunity to work for the Office of Rural Health, the Assistive Technology Program, and the Forest Service, gaining on-the-job skills and experiences with the state agencies benefitting from E1.

E1 seeks to level the playing field by building on the progress of other workforce initiatives, like NC Job Ready, Everybody Works NC, and Hometown Strong. These initiatives align with Cabinet agency efforts to create a workplace where everyone can thrive and contribute.

State government divisions have seen the benefits of hosting an E1 intern, which include: addressing staffing challenges by accessing a largely untapped pipeline for new hires, providing mentorship opportunities for existing employees, and gaining the fresh perspectives that new hires from unique backgrounds provide.

It's not just state agencies who are seeing upsides from the program - E1 interns, their families and their communities are benefitting as well.



Celebrating the Americans with Disability Act

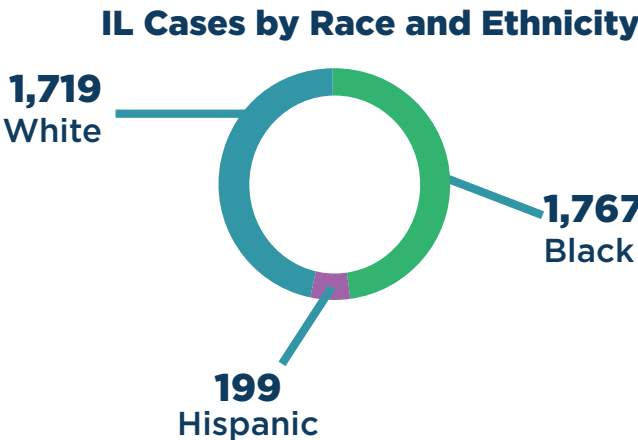
The state of North Carolina honored the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act, a landmark civil rights law passed on July 26, 1990, by highlighting how assistive technology can help individuals with disabilities gain access to these rights and opportunities.

In one of two ADA-themed Accessibility for All events, the NC Assistive Technology Program featured former clients who achieved their goals for employment and independent living with the help of assistive technology. The event featured former clients, including Sandy Carr from Elizabeth City. She expressed her gratitude to the ADA for helping her to stay connected with the most important people in her life during the pandemic and beyond.

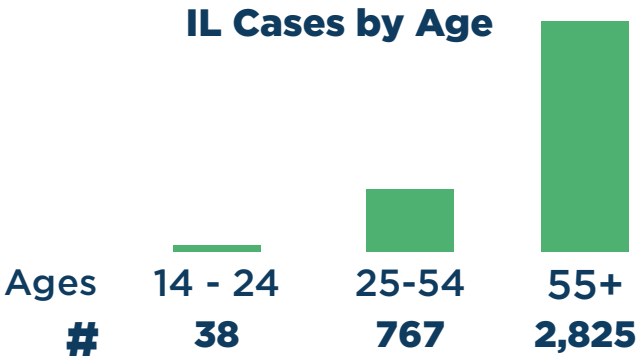
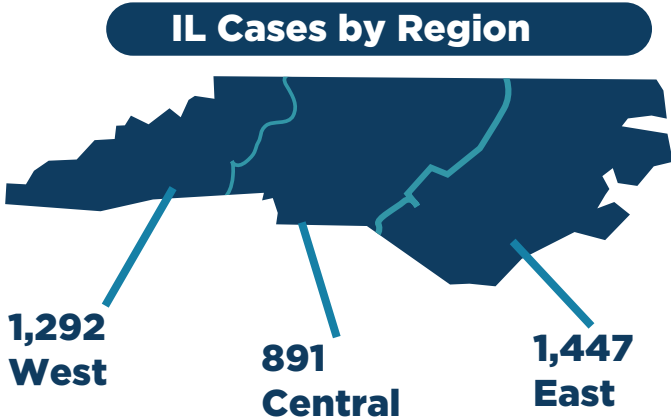
"While I might not be the most tech-savvy person, I proudly consider myself an assistive technology evangelist," Carr said. Carr went on to explain how one piece of assistive technology, the HeadMouse, was a life saver for someone like her, with limited use of their hands. "The HeadMouse sensor tracks a tiny target on my glasses. With small, natural head movements, I can control my computer hands-free to access the internet or send emails. This tool, along with the support from the team at EIPD, allowed me to stay connected to news, important events, and keep in touch with friends, family, and care providers," she said.




2024 Snapshot: Clients Receiving IL Services




*Race and ethnicity are not mutually exclusive




2024 Snapshot: Independent Living Services




3,630 clients received IL services under a plan for independent living (IPIL)




415 clients received barrier removal and home modification services



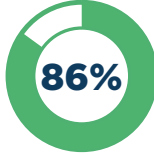
212 clients received AT devices and/or durable medical equipment



341 clients received personal assistance services to help them remain independent



717 clients successfully achieved their independent living goal



86% goal achievement rate for IL clients receiving services under an IPIL

Disability Inclusion at Work is a Win-Win

A Goldsboro company specializing in automotive manufacturing of exhaust and emissions products has found a way to close the gap between job seekers and their hiring needs. AP Emissions Technologies manufactures a complete line of automotive, light truck, and heavy-duty exhaust, and emissions products. Founded in 1927, the company now hosts a skilled workforce today of more than 500 employees in the Goldsboro facility.

Executive Vice President of Human Resources for AP Emissions Technologies Yusef Ewais has partnered with the vocational rehabilitation program to provide a path to employment for people with disabilities in the eastern region. Over the years, Ewais’ companies have hired more than 100 clients.



Yusef Ewais
EIPD Employer Partner

“Partnering with EIPD provides a great opportunity for everyone involved,” Ewais said. “We’re focused on hiring practices that result in a strong workforce that reflects our community. With this focus, we get great, loyal, trustworthy, hardworking employees who are happy to have an opportunity to provide for their families and our community.”

Ewais and his team drive the company’s performance in recruitment and employee relations, which emphasizes the importance of finding the right people for the right job. “Most companies approach hiring as a way to fill a spot, rather than truly taking the time to consider whether the candidate would be a good fit for the organization,” he said.

At AP Emissions they approach hiring with a different mindset. The HR team spends time getting to know prospective employees and gives them a chance to also get to know the company and its culture. Job seekers tour the factory floor to learn about the opportunities available. From there the job interview shifts to feeling more like a conversation where the applicants get the chance to talk about where they think their skills and talents would be the best fit at AP Emissions. It’s a method that’s working and providing results.

“Currently, we’re approximately 98 percent staffed, while our competitors are still

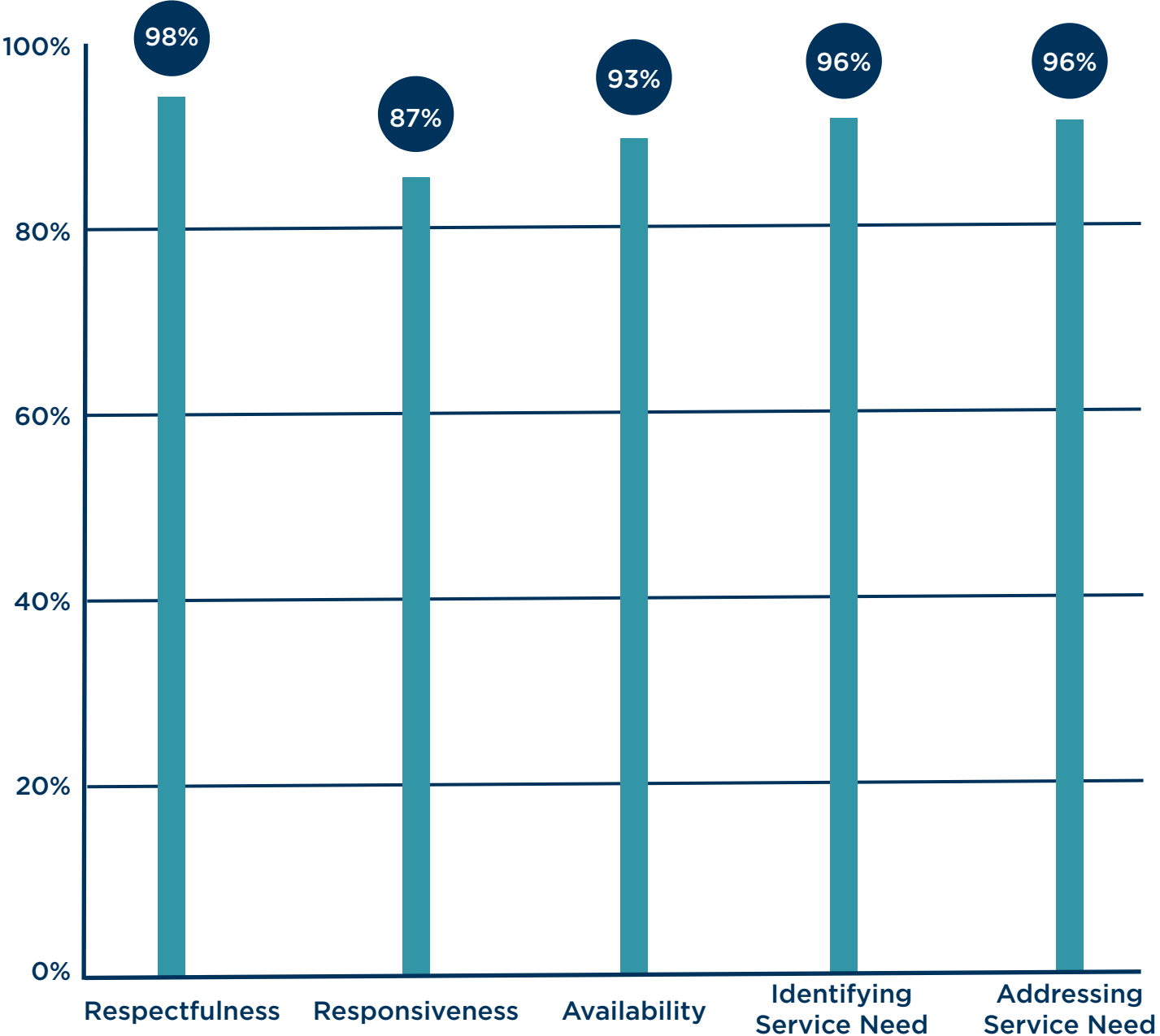
Disability Inclusion at Work is a Win-Win (Continued)

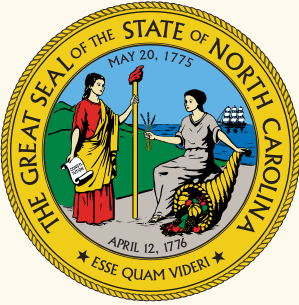
struggling with staffing,” Ewais said. “We’re in the business of retention. We want our team members to work where they feel comfortable and impactful – where it’s a great fit for both parties.”

Ewais began working with Statewide Employment Specialist Kristy Brinson in 2013, when she was a business relations representative in the eastern region. He conducted workshops to help with interviews and resume writing, and began hiring candidates.

“Employers that are open to a variety of candidates will easily overcome hiring hurdles because they are choosing from a larger pool of talented applicants from all walks of life,” Ewais said. “When an applicant meets most of the criteria but doesn’t check all the boxes, that individual can still be a great asset to our organization. For me, it’s simple: we look for candidates who want to work. If they have the right attitude, everything else we can teach or figure out.”

2024 Client Satisfaction Survey: Counselor Ratings





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NCDHHS is an equal opportunity employer and provider. 9/25

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