



**OKLAHOMA**  
Rehabilitation  
Services

# **ANNUAL REPORT 2023**

# DRS' STATE IMPACT

# 96,178

Total number of individuals served by DRS in State Fiscal Year 2023



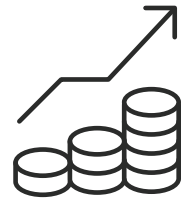
## 13,363

Vocational Rehabilitation and Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired cases served by staff in SFY 2023.



## \$28,414

Annual average earnings in SFY 2023 of clients who received VR and SBVI services.



## \$4,262

Annual average taxes paid in SFY 2023 by clients who received VR and SBVI services. (Based on 15% tax rate).



## 55,489

Benefits cases completed by Disability Determination Services in FFY 2023. (Estimated as of Sept. 5, 2023)



## 1 in 6

Oklahomans with disabilities.



## 4,962

Number of patrons for state's Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped in SFY 2023.



## 6,009

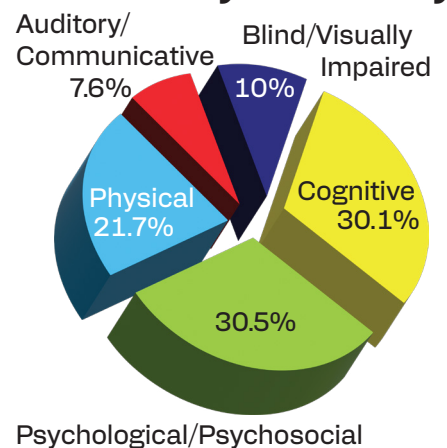
Total participants in Transition and Pre-Employment Transition Services.



## 452,934

Participants in Oklahoma School for the Deaf's online ASL classes in 2022-2023 school year. (428,551 from outside of state/country.)

### Clients by disability



# FEDERAL FUNDING IMPACT

## \$4 to \$1

Federal funds that match state funds used to serve VR and SBVI clients.



## \$13,180

This is the average cost of services per employed VR and SBVI client. The federal government pays 78.7% of that with the state paying the remaining 21.3%.



## \$7 to \$1

DRS services save taxpayers \$7 for every \$1 that would have been paid out in benefits over the lifetime of a worker who gets off SSA benefits.

## DRS reimbursed for helping clients leave social welfare programs behind

DRS is fully reimbursed by the federal government for all case costs for any client who was previously reliant on Supplemental Security Income or Social Security Disability Insurance. The reimbursement comes when Social Security determines the client has met its Substantial Gainful Activity earnings level.

In 2023, that means a person must make \$1,470 per month if they are receiving benefits for a disability other than blindness or visual impairment, and \$2,460 if their disability benefit is due to being blind or visually impaired.

SSA reimburses DRS' VR the entire cost of the case plus a monthly administrative stipend for the

months the case was open. SSA has determined that this is a good investment because they estimate that taxpayers save \$7 in return for every dollar they reimburse VR. This is determined based on what the individual would have received over a lifetime of disability benefits.

Oklahoma is among the top performing states when it comes to successfully helping people trade a life of disability benefits for a lifetime of quality employment.

During federal fiscal year 2023, DRS received nearly \$3.1 million in reimbursement when 283 Oklahomans traded staying at home for returning to work.

### Agency structure



- Vocational Rehabilitation
- Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired
- Executive Division
- Management Services
- Financial Services
- Oklahoma School for the Blind
- Oklahoma School for Deaf
- Disability Determination Services



# DRS LEADERSHIP



## Commission Chairman Jace Wolf

Jace Wolfe is the former director of audiology and research at the Hearts for Hearing Foundation in Oklahoma City.

He stepped down from the Commission for Rehabilitation Services in early 2023 after accepting the position of senior president of innovation at the Oberkötter Foundation in Philadelphia. The foundation helps families ensure their children who are deaf or hard of hearing

have opportunities to reach their full potential through listening and spoken language.

Wolfe had served on the Commission since July 2018.

Wolfe has authored and co-authored numerous textbooks, publications and articles in professional journals.

He has also presented at state, national and international conferences.



## Commissioner Wes Hilliard

Wes Hilliard is a banker and former Oklahoma state representative.

Oklahoma House of Representatives Speaker Charles McCall, R-Atoka, appointed Hilliard to the Commission for Rehabilitation Services, which oversees the Oklahoma Department of Rehabilitation Services.

Hilliard became president of Vision Bank in Sulphur in 2023. Prior to that,

he was Community Bank President at Simmons Bank in Davis.

He served in the Oklahoma House of Representatives from 2004 to 2012.

He has a bachelor's degree in political science from Oklahoma State University and a master's in education from East Central University in Ada.

Hilliard has three children, Weston, Jaxson and Blake.



## Commissioner Theresa Flannery

Theresa Flannery, of Mustang, was appointed by Gov. Kevin Stitt to serve as a member of the Commission for Rehabilitation Services.

Flannery is a senior director for social services at Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Oklahoma City. Prior to that, she worked closely with DRS for 20 years when she was community resources and compliance director at

Dale Rogers Training Center in Oklahoma City.

Flannery has received numerous awards for her work to help employ people with disabilities.

She earned a bachelor's degree in psychology from Southwestern Oklahoma State University in Weatherford. She and her husband Todd have two grown children, Samantha and Nickolas.



## Executive Director Melinda Fruendt

Melinda Fruendt was named executive director of the Oklahoma Department of Rehabilitation Services in 2018.

Her past positions with DRS included chief of staff, executive-level project coordinator and program manager of the Oklahoma Rehabilitation Council.

Fruendt grew up the youngest of six children on a family farm in Chouteau

in Eastern Oklahoma and continues to farm and ranch with her husband Paul in Guthrie where they have a cow-calf and stocker operation, as well as diversified crops production.

Fruendt holds both a bachelor's degree and a master's degree in agriculture education from Oklahoma State University in Stillwater.



# FINANCIAL BREAKDOWN

## Funding leveraged to provide clients a wide spectrum of services

Working to ensure Oklahomans with disabilities reach employment goals and pursue lives of independence, staff of Oklahoma Department of Rehabilitation Services leverages state and federal resources to make those goals attainable.

The majority of funding for the Vocational Rehabilitation and Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired is eligible for a federal/state match of 78.7 percent/21.3 percent.

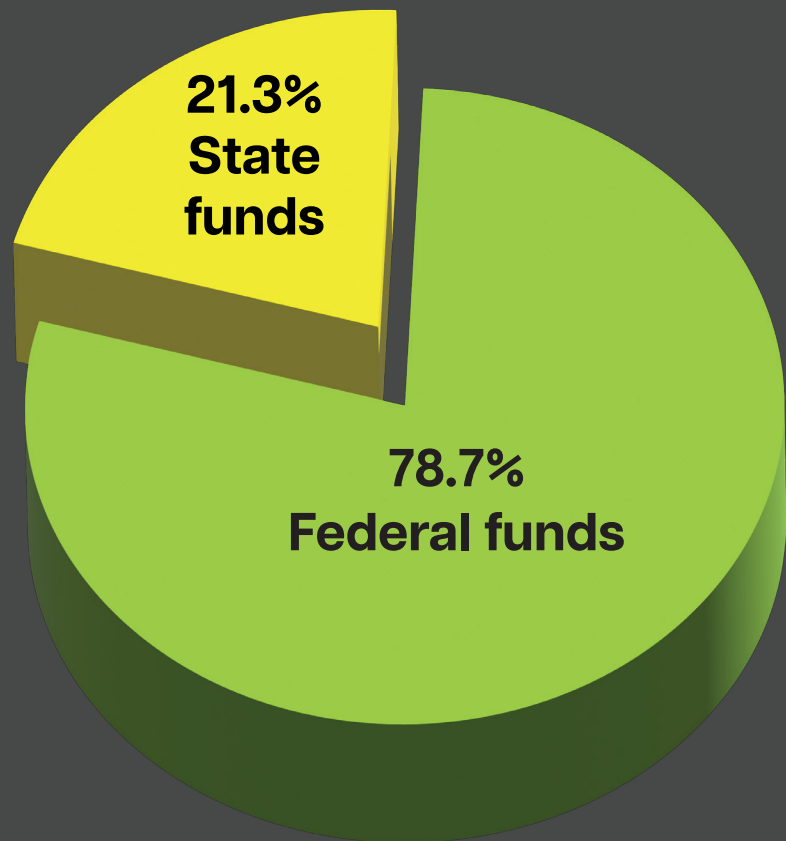
The Oklahoma Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped is state-funded.

The majority of funding for Oklahoma School for the Blind and the Oklahoma School for the Deaf is state appropriations.

Other key OSD funding comes from the Equipment Distribution Program, which provides telecommunications and other equipment to deaf, hard-of-hearing, deaf-blind and severely speech-impaired individuals.

In support services, DRS utilizes an indirect

## Basic support



cost rate as the standardized method for individual programs to pay a fair share of support service (general administration) costs. Statistical information is based on State Fiscal Year 2023.

## State Fiscal Year 2023 Expenditures

	VR/SBVI	Oklahoma School for the Blind	Oklahoma School for the Deaf	Disability Determination	Support Services	Total
State	\$14,179,000	\$7,590,000	\$13,417,000	\$634,000	\$2,880,000	\$38,700,000
Federal	\$38,099,000	\$22,000	\$0	\$43,453,000	\$6,488,000	\$88,062,000
Inter-agency	\$294,000	\$772,000	\$782,000	\$0	\$0	\$1,848,000
Other	\$286,000	\$60,000	\$322,000	\$0	\$5,000	\$673,000
Total	\$52,858,000	\$8,444,000	\$14,521,000	\$44,087,000	\$9,373,000	\$129,283,000

# VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION

## VR BY THE NUMBERS

**12,195**

Vocational Rehabilitation cases served in State Fiscal Year 2023.

**3,909**

Program applications made for VR services in SFY 2023.

**1,884**

Client employment plans completed.

**946**

DRS client employment outcomes achieved.

**\$28,325**

Average yearly earning of clients after receiving VR services.

**\$4,249**

Average yearly taxes paid by clients (based on 15-percent tax rate).



## Building the work force

### VR staff helps Oklahomans become independent, employed

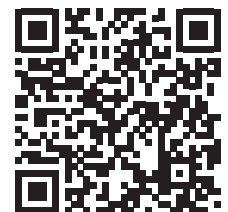
DRS' Vocational Rehabilitation staff makes it possible for Oklahomans with disabilities to live independently and pursue economic freedom through work. The VR staff offers employment services for people with any disability, except blindness or visual impairments.

Vocational rehabilitation staff use a range of tools that empower the clients including in-person counseling, testing and online tools when necessary to see that each client is on a path to start or return to work. DRS staff remove any barriers to employment for each client. Oklahomans with disabilities can become Oklahoma taxpayers, strengthening the state workforce.

DRS' staff guides and counsels clients on employment goals and networks with employers on behalf of people with disabilities. Staff can also assist employers in training the

employees and advise on workplace accommodations, if needed.

Clients achieving their dreams of living independently and pursuing a career is possible because of DRS services that include career counseling, vocational education and training, and medical services if it is determined it will help a client find employment. They may also receive assistive technology, job placement and coaching.



Learn more about  
VR services by  
scanning  
QR code.



# Ambition led Woodward man knew education was key

Doctors told Korbin Bowers' parents their 16-month-old son would never walk again after being diagnosed with Transverse Myelitis.

The spinal cord disease, which affected him from the neck down, would leave Bowers dependent on a wheelchair. However, the diagnosis would not dampen Bowers' dreams of a life of independence, and he and his family would seek help from the Oklahoma Department of Rehabilitation Services to make those hopes a reality.

"I had a fellow student in high school whose mom was a counselor at the local vo-tech – Amber Riley," Bowers said. "Riley told my parents about DRS. We contacted DRS and got an appointment. We did an in-person appointment."

DRS provided Bowers a variety of services including directing him to groups that could offer two highly-adapted vehicles, which would allow him to realize an independence that he lacked before.

"Being able to not rely on my parents or somebody else to get me from home to work has been a tremendous thing – especially the social freedom aspect because I can go see friends," he said

The vehicles along with financial assistance and a provided laptop would allow Bowers to attend college at Northwestern Oklahoma State University in Woodward where he earned a bachelor's degree in social work. DRS also made it possible for him to earn his master's degree in social work online from the University of Oklahoma.



"For me, college was always the answer because my physical disability did not allow me to go work a physical job," Bowers said. "I had more ambitions than just having a desk job."

Bowers, who is now 26, has worked at Northwest Domestic Crisis Services in Woodward for three years. After he was hired in his current job, DRS helped modify doors at his workplace to allow his wheelchair to pass through and modified a bathroom at the shelter to make it possible for him to use it.

"My job for the most part is to do domestic violence education classes with clients," he said. "They come in. We work through a safety plan. We talk

about red flags in a relationship.

We also work with victims on how to cope with everything they have been through."

He is also working toward becoming a counselor for his agency.

"Counseling is a little different from the regular advocate role because you meet with clients regularly and try to do therapeutic interventions," Bowers said. "It is a little bit more intensive. It is counseling specifically for domestic violence, and we won't have to refer clients out to other agencies for services making it an easier experience for the client."

Bowers said DRS made it possible to realize his dreams and become an Oklahoma taxpayer.

"DRS has been an incredible help, and I refer people to them all the time because of the potential services they could receive," he said.

Bowers lived at home with his parents before receiving DRS assistance and received \$500 a month from the government for his disability.

"Now, I am making \$15 an hour here, and I am able to afford my own car payment," he said. "Now I pay my own insurance and my own truck payment. I help with groceries and buy my own medical supplies. I can keep this job because of the skills I have now."

**“**  
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# Out of the darkness

## DRS support offered path to bright future

Susan Sanchez graduated a year early from Mangum High School but struggles with her mental health would lead her to drop out of college.

Years later, encouragement from a DRS counselor would open a door to helping her build a future.

"I have bipolar (disorder) with depressive symptoms," Sanchez said. "That is what I had for a long time. I was diagnosed in high school. I ended up with anxiety."

She said in her darkest moments after graduating in 1997, Sanchez was noncommunicative, hearing voices and often having hundreds of nightmares on the nights when she was able to sleep.

"There were many nights where I was awake all night," she said. "I went to the Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance meetings. My mother drove me, and my parents were big on my resources. I was privileged in the fact that they cared."

Her journey led her to seek medical care, which at one point had her taking four different medications daily including Lithium. Sanchez began to see some light in her future by receiving the care she needed as well as setting and achieving small obtainable goals for herself like building confidence in driving a car.

"I had not spoken many words in years," she said. "When I had that full conversation with my sister, she cried because I had not had a full conversation with her in many years."

She reduced her dependence on the medications, and now only takes one medication at a dosage that is a quarter of what is used to be.

In 2013, Vocational Rehabilitation Specialist Laura Prater reached out to Sanchez to see if she was ready to return to college. Sanchez had sought DRS' services while in school but had become disconnected from the agency as her mental health woes mounted.

"I was actually doing really well," she said. "I basically had remembered my faith - my church. I was



giving back. I had become very mentally healthy, and I was thinking it was time for me to move up and find a job that I would like to do and was meaningful to me."

Sanchez found needed encouragement and empowerment from Prater.

"All of this support made me feel safe," she said. "It was the right time for me to be doing it. My confidence was increased by the support of DRS. It affected my family, and everybody else because they were like, 'I am so thankful they (DRS) are helping you because we wouldn't be able to.'"

Sanchez began attending Mid-American Christian University where she

earned her bachelor's degree in behavioral sciences. She is now attending Southwestern Oklahoma State University in Weatherford, working toward a master's degree in licensed professional counseling. She is also working alongside Prater at DRS' Altus office as a vocational rehabilitation counselor. Sanchez said she wants to one day earn a doctorate degree and work as a part-time college professor.

"She (Prater) knew I wanted to go to college, so she didn't close my case," Sanchez said. "She said, 'Let's achieve your goals! She gave me a lot of encouragement."

Sanchez now helps other Oklahomans achieve their dreams of a career and an independent life.

"I tell them (DRS clients) I have mental health resources that I can offer them," she said. "If they are stable and ready, I hope they will be able to advocate for themselves."

DRS evaluations and testing make it possible for clients to learn what their strengths are, and where in the workforce they can be most productive.

"I love my job," Sanchez said. "I feel so free. I feel like I can make a difference here. The people I work with are gaining jobs that they love as much as I love mine. When they get a job, it feels meaningful."

# SERVICES FOR THE BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED

## SBVI BY THE NUMBERS

**1,168**

SBVI  
cases served in  
State Fiscal Year  
2023.

**351**

SBVI  
applications for  
services taken by  
staff.

**235**

Client  
employment  
plans completed.

**109**

DRS client  
employment  
outcomes  
achieved.

**\$29,186**

Average yearly  
earning of clients  
after receiving  
SBVI services.

**\$4,378**

Average yearly  
taxes paid by  
clients (based on  
15-percent tax rate).



## SBVI staff helps guide Oklahomans on path to independent life, career

Oklahomans who are blind or visually impaired can live independently and pursue fulfilling careers with assistance from DRS' Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired.

SBVI staff assist Oklahomans in achieving their dreams through a spectrum of services including career counseling; vocational education and training; medical services required to become employable; and assistive technology geared to their specific needs and job placement.

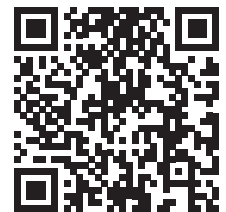
Oklahomans are eligible for the vocational rehabilitation services if their disability makes it difficult to work. They must be able to benefit from vocational rehabilitation services that prepare clients for employment.

Legal blindness occurs when visual acuity with best correction is 20/200 or less or when side vision results in a

field restriction of 20 degrees or less.

Individuals who are eligible for services through SBVI must be blind or visually impaired but might also have additional disabilities as well.

Many clients receive living skills training that allows them to navigate their environments, operate computers, manage money and much more. Empowered with these skills, people who are blind or visually impaired are ready to compete in the workplace and enjoy independence.



**Learn more about  
SBVI services by  
scanning QR code.**



# Career harmony

## Man built life after fellow singer took note

A fellow singer saw potential in Larry Duffy, calling him one day to say he wanted to pick him up and give him a few tests.

Reviewing the results, Jerry Gunkle, a former vocational rehabilitation staff member, told Duffy, "Larry we need to get you into school. You have too much to offer to be working on an hourly wage basis."

Duffy, now 79, had been born with congenital cataracts, limiting his vision.

"My dad was a smoker like many people were back then," Duffy said. "Mother would hand me a bottle, but I wouldn't reach for it. A baby will reach for things. My dad noticed that when he lit a match my eyes would follow the match."

His parents contacted their family doctor who diagnosed the cataracts. The family turned to an Oklahoma City surgeon who was willing to do the surgery that was experimental for an infant.

"Back then, they used needles to go in and attempt to lift the cataracts off the eye," Duffy said. "Doctors have told me it was like he left trash. I have been wearing glasses since I was 6-months-old. I never really broke my glasses or did without them because I was so grateful that I could see."

A few years later, Duffy was working at a funeral home in Altus, which had a company within it that built granite headstones for the Veteran's Administration. They produced 25,000 a year. Duffy said it was a good job, but it only paid an hourly wage. He had a wife and two small children.

"I was very fortunate that vocational rehab reached out to me at a time where I needed help and gave me the opportunity to get my education," he said.

DRS' support made it possible for Duffy to earn an associate's degree in arts from WOSC, and a bachelor's degree in music education and a master's degree in music from Southwestern Oklahoma State University.

"They (DRS) were supportive all the way through my master's program," he said.

His first job would be at Western Oklahoma State College in Altus where he was tasked to build a music department.

10 - DRS



"My first job here at the college was to build the music department here," he said. "I was teaching vocal music, choir and voice. But I also started a pep band for the basketball games."

Two decades later he would move into development for the college before retiring 10 years ago. The school would ask him to return to help lead the school's foundation.

"I thought it would be just a couple of years but that was 2013," he said. "I work three days a week. My wife says I am down to 40 hours a week."

Duffy was inducted into the Western Oklahoma State College Alumni Association Hall of Fame in April 2022 and Oklahoma Higher Education Hall of Fame in November 2022.

"I've had a wonderful, wonderful career," he said. "I've had the opportunity to help a lot of students and be a part of their lives. But really, I look back at it and it was that helping hand (from DRS) that provided funding for me to go back to school."

Duffy recommends DRS to others because of the potential Gunkle saw in him and the services the agency was able to provide.

SBVI Administrator Tracy Brigham said, "It is always incredible when one of our clients succeeds and thrives, but it's even more extraordinary when they can make their job a lifelong career. That's what SBVI aims for and wants for our clients."



# VR and SBVI services build independence for clients

## Business Services Program

DRS' Business Services Program works with businesses, meeting their employment needs by providing qualified candidates for employment.

BSP staff partners with businesses, offering candidates who are loyal and committed to long-term employment. DRS may share job training costs, and the businesses may qualify for tax credits.

The program's staff works with Workforce Centers, chambers of commerce, other state and federal agencies and non-profit organizations to provide

hiring events and disability consultations.

Benefits to employers through BSP can include:

- A variety of free training for businesses' staff.
- Support for job seekers with follow up and evaluation of any accommodation needs.
- Paid internships and paid work experiences.
- Increased profits by having a workforce that better reflects the customers served and lowers cost through their commitment to the employer.

## Orientation and mobility training

DRS' Orientation and Mobility Specialists provide instruction to blind individuals in using white canes

and other techniques for traveling independently in their communities.

## Deaf Blind Services

An individual may be referred for Deaf Blind Services if he or she has both of the following: legal blindness or progressive visual disabilities that will result in legal blindness, and severe to profound hearing loss or significant difficulties communicating in home or community settings.

There are no age requirements for services; however, this program primarily serves adults.

Deaf Blind services staff work closely with other DRS programs to ensure that Oklahomans with dual sensory loss have equal access to all services.

## Older Blind

DRS' Older Blind Independent Living Program offers free independent living services to people who are 55-years-old or older and legally blind.

Rehabilitation teachers located in SBVI offices throughout the state provide one-on-one assistance to individuals adjusting to blindness and regaining

or maintaining maximum independence.

SBVI staff will help clients learn to use their phones, sign their names, cook, identify money, tell time, match clothing and other skills to become or remain independent in their homes and/or communities.

## Business Enterprise Program



Oklahomans who are blind or visually impaired can move toward a new independent life with the assistance of a DRS program offering them the chance to own their own businesses.

Through the federally enacted Randolph-Sheppard Act of 1936 and Oklahoma State Statute Title 7, SBVI operates the Business Enterprise Program.

BEP's mission is to provide employment opportunities for people who at least are legally blind with best correction by establishing food service operations across the state.

These operations may consist

of vending machine routes, cafeterias or a variety of different types of snack bars. To accomplish this, the BEP aids entrepreneurs by providing extensive business training, licensing business owners, locating and equipping locations, securing initial inventory and offering on-going business consultation services.

BEP entrepreneurs are educated in food safety, hospitality, marketing and business management. A portion of each business' proceeds is paid to DRS for the licensed vendors' retirement and insurance costs.

# OKLAHOMA LIBRARY FOR THE BLIND AND PHYSICALLY HANDICAPPED

## OLBPH BY THE NUMBERS

**4,962**

Oklahomans with disabilities who are patrons of the OLBPH.

**1,412**

Books circulated by library daily to OLBPH patrons.

**6,763**

Books received weekly by library patrons.

**1,078**

Children who are served through Accessible Instructional Materials Center.

**830**

Children with disabilities who are eligible for textbooks through AIM Center.

**\$405,479**

Federal textbook funding for Oklahoma children with disabilities



## Library important partner in getting students needed educational materials

The library makes it possible for Oklahomans to connect to thousands of books and periodicals available in audio recorded and Braille formats – all for free. The library provides services at no cost to eligible individuals with visual, physical or reading disabilities.

Patrons with internet access have the option of getting books and magazines in seconds by using our Braille and Audio Reading Download (BARD) service.

Other patrons get specially formatted audio cartridges and the player needed to read them through the mail. The cartridges typically contain multiple titles and are customized for each patron. Postage to and from the library is classified as “free matter,” so there is no charge at all for users.

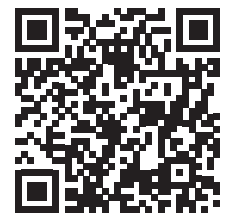
The library through its AIM Center provides Braille and large-print textbooks and assistive devices for students with visual impairments in kindergarten through 12th grade and

earlier developmental years as long as funds are available to meet the requests. Staff prioritizes support for students with disabilities to make sure their needs are being met.

For more information on all library services, go to the library’s website at [www.olbph.org](http://www.olbph.org). The library, which is operated by DRS’ Services

for the Blind and Visually Impaired, is part of the Library of Congress’ National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped.

Oklahomans for Special Library Services is the library’s friends group supporting the work of the library.



Learn more about OLBPH services by scanning QR code.



# TRANSITION AND PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES

## TRANSITION BY THE NUMBERS

**6,009**

Participants in  
Transition and  
Pre-Employment  
Transition Services.

**3,339**

Potentially eligible  
cases for Pre-ETS  
in SFY 2023.

**2,670**

Total number  
of Vocational  
Rehabilitation  
cases in Transition  
services.

**\$6.527 m**

Total expenditures  
for Transition and  
Pre-ETS program.



## Transition offers youth chance to gain skills, work experience

DRS' Transition and Pre-Employment Transition Service assist Oklahoma youth with disabilities to achieve their dreams of having a lifetime career and living independently.

The services for these youth can include education, training and work experience. Counselors for Vocational Rehabilitation and Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired make access to these services possible by working with the youth. DRS counselors work with high school students throughout the state.

VR and SBVI programs provide career focused preparation activities and services that are intended to help achieve community integration, independence, post-secondary education and/or competitive integrated employment.

These services assist youth and students with disabilities in a seamless transition from high school to a meaningful career path.

Transition students may participate in Pre-Employment Transition Services without having to apply to VR or be determined eligible for services.

Under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act every student with a disability can participate in Pre-employment Transition Services through VR, which can include job exploration counseling, work readiness training, work-based learning experiences, postsecondary educational counseling and self-advocacy training.



Learn more about  
Transition  
services by  
scanning QR code.





# Never giving up

## Owasso man inspiring others with story of perseverance

Will Lambley looked up at the scoreboard during a semifinal football game in December 2018, and instantly, he knew something was wrong - the score was blurry.

"Then, I was running down the field on a punt and the ball was in the air," Lambley said. "I looked up. I needed to try and find the ball so I can tackle someone. But I didn't know where the ball was."

Lambley, who was then 16, ran to the sideline after the play. He could see the players, but it was harder to tell who-was-who. Days later, he was no longer able to drive or make out the faces of people around him.

The eyesight changes led Lambley and his family on a six-month journey to try and find out what was going on. In May 2019, doctors at John Hopkins Community Physicians in Bethesda, Maryland, diagnosed him with Leber Hereditary Optic Neuropathy. It is a rare disease inherited from a person's mother and causes the person to lose their eyesight, starting with painless blurriness. Eventually, the person may become legally blind.

Lambley's love of football continued despite his blindness, and his coach Brent Marley, at Rejoice Christian School in Owasso, met with him most every day.

"He genuinely cared about me as a person," Lambley said. "One day I told him, 'coach I don't know how we are going to do this, but I still want to play



football! Just being around the guys helped me so much. He told me he was going to find a spot for me on the field."

Lambley would move to nose guard on the defensive line where he would line up across from the center.

"My job, every time I was out there, was to knock over the center, making a lane for the linebackers," he said. "It was so much fun. It made me forget about what was going on in a sense."

Lambley learned of DRS Transition Services in February 2019, which would allow him to learn to live an independent life, navigate his community and learn assistive technology that would allow him to continue his education.

"We knew what was going on with my sight, wasn't going to be solved with glasses," he said, adding

surgery was also not coming to his rescue.

DRS staff helped him learn to use JAWS software to use a computer. Job Access With Speech, or JAWS, is screen reader software, developed for computer users whose vision loss prevents them from seeing screen content or using a mouse. JAWS provides speech and Braille control for the most popular software applications and built-in features on a computer.

JAWS was a new skill that came slowly because, at first, he found it difficult to use, he said. But with time and committing to learning two new letters of the alphabet each week, he slowly grew his confidence.





DRS staff also taught him how to use a white cane to get around, cook at home, get a laptop, and when it was time, helped pay his university tuition.

“They helped me learn job skills such as never being afraid to communicate because communication has been one of the things that has really helped me,” Lambley said. “Just being able to type again, I can now do it better than I could when I still had sight.”

Lambley is now 21-years-old and a junior communications major at the University of Arkansas. He chose Arkansas because his parents had attended the school and because of one very important call. It was from Chad Morris, the former Arkansas head football coach.

“He gave me a call and was just so supportive,” Lambley said. “He told me he was there for me. He told me if I ever needed anything he, his family, his staff and the Razorback football team players would be there for me.”

That support led him to attend Razorback football practices, and several times he has been called upon to share his journey with players.

“They (coaches) often ask me to speak to incoming freshmen, sometimes the whole team. I love the relationships I have built with the guys,” he said.

It allows him a chance to be a perseverance role model.

“What people might look at as a disadvantage in my life, I am able to use as an advantage in my own life and help others by just being positive,” Lambley said.

He said people facing similar challenges should look to DRS for help.

“There were just so many resources I did not know were out there,” Lambley said. “DRS has helped me with technology and mobility. If it wasn’t for DRS, I would not have known that stuff was there.”

Lambley is set to graduate in May 2025 and has a podcast with friends. The podcast is called “Rise Above” and is available on podcast services.



OKLAHOMA

# SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND

## OSB BY THE NUMBERS

**100%**

Graduation rate for 2022-2023 school year.

**86**

Students enrolled (day and residential). 13 students with multiple disabilities.

**1 to 4**

OSB teacher to student ratio.

**1 to 4**

Direct Care specialist to student ratio.

**5,008**

Direct services from the school's outreach services.

**130/401**

Outreach services to families/schools.



## Staff committed to maximizing OSB students' full potential

Staff of the Oklahoma School for the Blind is committed to delivering superior educational opportunities to students who are blind or visually impaired. The school serves students preschool-age through 12th-grade, and tuition is free.

OSB students receive specialized educational programs in coordination with state-mandated educational requirements. Students develop independent living skills and receive specialized accessible technology equipment to assist each student in developing their maximum potential.

Students wishing to pursue music can join the OSB Jazz Band, which is recognized for setting a high bar for excellence.

Specialized instruction includes



Learn more about OSB by scanning QR code.

Braille, orientation and mobility, optimum use of low-vision adaptive equipment, technology and tactile graphic skills. These intensive specializations are not readily available at other public schools in the state.



# BUILDING LIVES, BUILDING WORKFORCE



WATCH JACKSON TELL  
HER STORY BY  
SCANNING QR CODE



*My old school would not give me the things I needed. Like I needed to be closer to the board. I needed things in large print. They wouldn't accommodate me.*



## Real world skills

### School brought 'normalcy' to Jackson's life

Emileigh Jackson found herself shy and uncomfortable while attending public schools in Tulsa.

Jackson, 17, felt separated from other students because she is legally blind and has Nystagmus, which causes her eyes to shake, often giving her headaches.

Emileigh's mother learned about the Oklahoma School for the Blind in Muskogee. Halfway through her daughter's 7th-grade year in 2019, the two traveled to the school to learn more. She began attending OSB soon afterwards.

"My old school would not give me the things I needed," Emileigh said. "Like, I needed to be closer to the board. I needed things in large print. They wouldn't accommodate me. My mom hears about this school, and we were like 'let's go see and find out if they will give me what I need.' They would, so I came here."

Emileigh has blossomed at OSB and serves as the school's cheerleading squad captain.

"When I was at my old school, I was really shy," she said. "I was uncomfortable. I didn't know how to do a lot of things. This school (OSB) has helped me know how to live normally with my disability and how to advocate for myself. It helped me a lot in the real world."

Emileigh stays at the school during the week but goes home on Thursday and returns to OSB on Sunday. She has a weekend part-time job at Chuy's Tex-Mex restaurant in Tulsa.

OSB staff provide Emileigh with direct interactions with teachers along with all accommodations she needs to be a successful student and young adult.

"Here I get a lot more one-on-one time with teachers than I ever got in my public school," she said. "At my public school, it was 20 students in a class. I didn't learn near as much because every other kid was also getting help. The (OSB) teachers are helpful in general, not just with what they are teaching but with anything else I need. They are willing to help no matter what."

At OSB, she has enjoyed the English classes she has taken, the Jazz Band she performs in as a keyboardist and as a senior leading the cheer team.

"At a public school, I wouldn't be able to do cheer because my vision — sometimes it lags," she said. "Here, everybody is able to do what they want. I think that one of my favorite parts about this school is that everyone is involved, no matter what."

Emileigh said she believes OSB can help Oklahoma youth with a vision disability grow into independent and well-rounded adults.

"I feel like this school, not even with just the school aspect but with the life aspect as well, teaches you how to live life independently," she said. "This school helps with all of that and teaches your child to be successful and not to be scared!"

OKLAHOMA

# SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF

## OSD BY THE NUMBERS

**100%**

Graduation rate for 2022-2023 school year.

**118**

Students enrolled (day and residential).  
10 students with multiple disabilities.

**1 to 4**

OSD teacher to student ratio.

**1 to 4**

Direct Care specialist to student ratio.

**621**

Total youth taking part in schools, programs, external services and camps.

**452,934**

Total number of people taking part in online ASL classes.



## Building communication skills empowers OSD students for life

Oklahoma School for the Deaf staff help students who are deaf and hard-of-hearing build a strong foundation for their lives by developing their communication skills and giving them confidence to advocate for themselves.

Staff and students communicate with each other using both American Sign Language and English. Maximized bilingual development is the goal for each student. Many students utilize cochlear implants or hearing aids. For these students, spoken English is also a developmental focus.

Students who attend OSD must meet all state graduation requirements. All classes are taught in consideration of each student's unique communication and educational needs. Students receive full educational and social experiences. They perform in school programs and dramas. They have



Learn more about OSD by scanning QR code.

prom and homecoming events for all sports. They compete with other schools on sports teams, leadership programs and academic teams.

OSD is a four-day-a-week program. Those who live close to campus commute back and forth to school. Students from greater distances live at the school free of charge and go home for three-day weekends, summers and holidays. OSD serves Oklahoma students from preschool to 12th grade.





**Shakayla Simmons  
plans to attend college.**

## ‘Inspired’

### OSD staff gives student affirmation and support

Shakayla Simmons was born deaf, but the Oklahoma School for the Deaf has given her the freedom to live her life out loud.

Simmons, who is 18 and from Lawton, is a senior at OSD and has attended the school since first being exposed to deaf education through satellite classes at the Jane Brooks School on the campus of the University of Science and Arts of Oklahoma in Chickasha.

“I wanted to experience what a deaf school was like,” Shakayla said. “Communication here (at OSD) was so much easier for me. I was able to communicate with everyone.”

Her disability could have sidelined her in public schools, but at OSD, she is fully engaged in her education and school activities.

“I am involved in a lot of things,” she said. “There are activities I can do here that I would not have been able to do in public schools. OSD has given me the opportunity to be in a lot of clubs. I have had a lot of experiences that I would not have been able to do in public schools.”

Shakayla plays volleyball, basketball and runs track. She serves as the reporter for Junior National Association of the Deaf Club, is the secretary for

student government and a member of the Performing Arts Club. Last fall, she was the captain of the cheer team.

Shakayla’s activities, including the sporting events, has meant she has traveled often, meeting new people.

She said she is inspired by OSD teachers and staff especially Angie Shelby, a coach and physical education teacher.

“She (Shelby) is always encouraging me to think positive and be positive,” Shakayla said.

The school staff has taught and encouraged her to be an advocate for herself.

“OSD will support you no matter what,” she said, adding that parents of children with a hearing disability should consider the school so their children can become fully immersed in their school experience and build a solid foundation for their future.

“The school has inspired me,” Shakayla said. “I have had a great education, and I can communicate with everyone. The best part is hanging out with my friends, and I learn something new every day.”

She plans to attend college after graduation to become a counselor.



# DISABILITY DETERMINATION

## DDS BY THE NUMBERS

**55,489**

Disability cases completed.

**51,759**

Budgeted case workload for FFY 2023.

**97.7%**

Accuracy rates on cases.

**122.8**

Average processing time (days after receipt of cases).

Numbers based on Federal Fiscal Year estimates as of Sept. 5, 2023.

## DDS staff works together to make critical determinations

Decisions on whether Oklahomans are medically eligible for Social Security disability benefits are crucial for people looking to build a secure foundation for their lives. Staff at DRS' Disability Determination Services understand those needs and place a priority on quickly processing cases as well as delivering accurate decisions.

DDS processes applications made to the Social Security Administration for Social Security Disability Insurance and Supplemental Security Income.

For each disability claim, a team of para-professionals, disability specialists and medical/psychological consultants review each applicant's medical and work history. The team determines whether applicants meet federal medical eligibility criteria for disability or blindness.

DDS' claim processing time averages 122 days.



During Federal Fiscal Year 2023, DDS was on track to meet their budgeted workload, processing 93.3-percent of their allotted cases as of Sept. 5.

DDS has also placed a priority on saving taxpayers money by investigating fraudulent claims.

The Cooperative Disability Investigations unit investigates individual disability claims and identifies third parties to prevent fraud in SSA's SSDI and SSI disability programs and related federal and state programs.

DDS' budget is federally funded.



Learn more about DDS by scanning QR code.



**OKLAHOMA**  
**Rehabilitation**  
**Services**

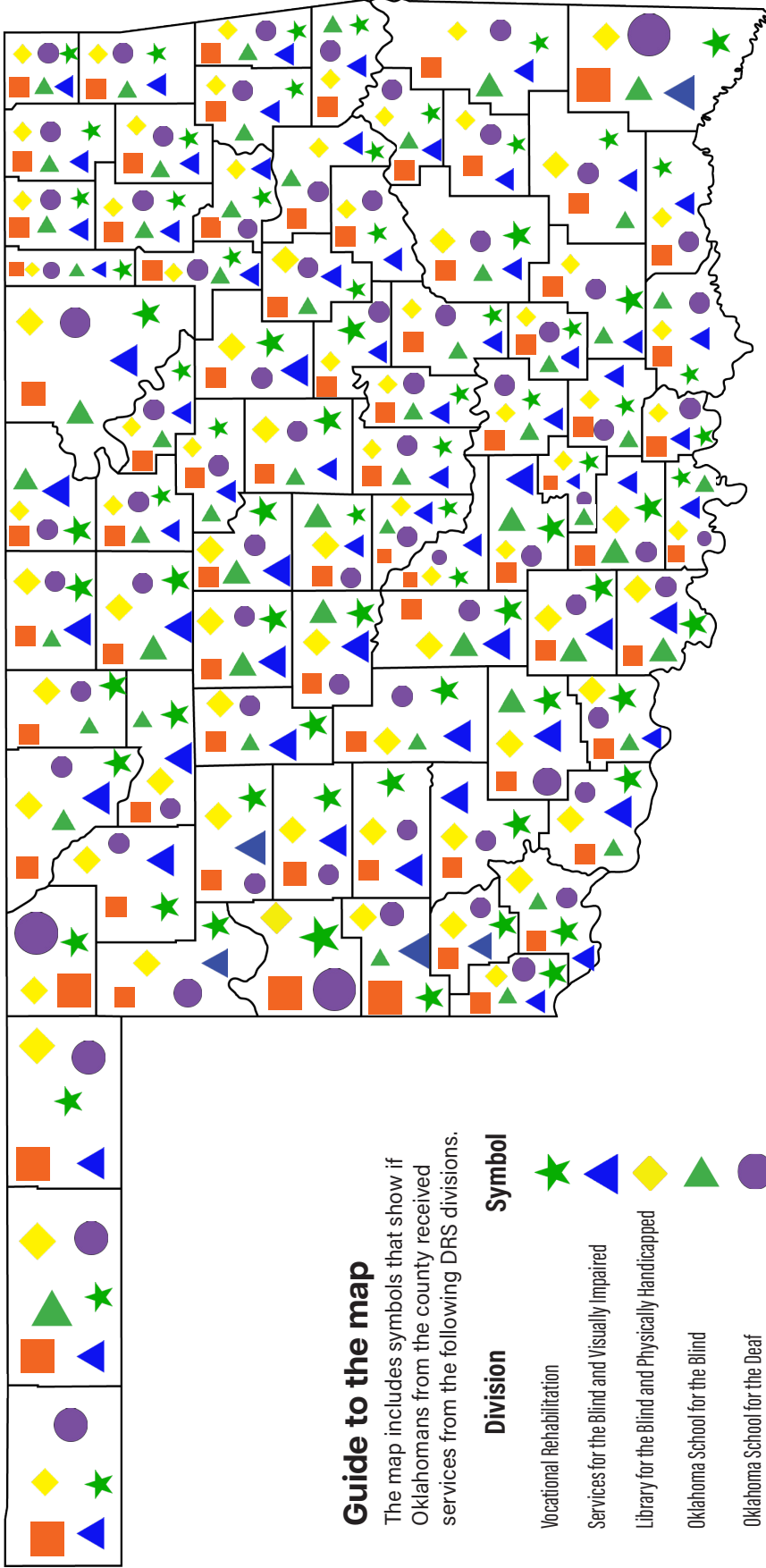
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*Empowering  
Oklahomans  
with disabilities*



# DRS IMPACT ON STATE

## Oklahomans served during state fiscal year 2023



# DRS IMPACT BY COUNTY

County	VR	SBVI	OSB	OSD	DDS	OLBPH	Total by county
Adair	23	7	6	193	380	30	639
Alfalfa	18	0	3	87	64	22	194
Atoka	113	6	1	157	231	27	535
Beaver	4	4	0	51	71	5	135
Beckham	92	12	3	129	343	32	611
Blaine	28	2	2	73	159	12	276
Bryan	121	14	4	377	839	50	1,405
Caddo	60	8	1	226	518	35	848
Canadian	256	34	2	1,293	1,185	195	2,965
Carter	104	39	11	493	864	66	1,577
Cherokee	70	12	17	363	699	66	1,227
Choctaw	37	10	0	107	316	28	498
Cimarron	2	1	0	7	14	2	26
Cleveland	424	56	3	1,959	2,518	359	5,319
Coal	53	7	1	44	101	7	213
Comanche	338	52	22	862	2,150	139	3,563
Cotton	5	1	5	40	103	16	170
Craig	16	6	9	98	333	29	491
Creek	145	25	0	443	907	114	1,634
Custer	129	16	0	225	337	47	754
Delaware	53	10	8	208	619	56	954
Dewey	10	2	0	40	60	6	118
Ellis	4	3	0	18	44	4	73
Garfield	219	28	8	269	865	80	1,469
Garvin	87	21	2	264	358	37	769
Grady	101	16	3	433	668	55	1,276
Grant	10	1	2	22	53	8	96
Greer	28	1	0	39	98	2	168
Harmon	5	1	2	39	66	3	116
Harper	5	0	0	17	27	7	56
Haskell	74	4	1	90	211	14	394
Hughes	30	7	4	85	214	25	365
Jackson	92	6	6	159	358	26	647
Jefferson	9	4	1	63	115	7	199
Johnston	37	2	1	112	173	9	334
Kay	114	16	3	239	754	50	1,176
Kingfisher	23	7	1	128	141	24	324
Kiowa	82	2	0	48	187	14	333
Latimer	19	3	0	83	129	18	252
Leflore	105	16	12	330	1,086	44	1,593
Lincoln	51	7	1	243	513	58	873
Logan	67	9	1	263	429	61	830



County	VR	SBVI	OSB	OSD	DDS	OLBPH	Total by county
Love	26	6	1	80	143	8	264
Major	17	6	3	344	83	15	468
Marshall	50	7	0	151	276	15	499
Mayes	111	10	12	142	653	40	968
McClain	33	8	0	34	517	52	644
McCurtain	65	24	3	108	610	45	855
McIntosh	23	8	0	279	395	30	735
Murray	55	5	4	327	197	30	618
Muskogee	68	35	37	453	1,422	155	2,170
Noble	10	5	7	82	143	14	261
Nowata	25	1	3	69	169	14	281
Okfuskee	26	1	0	71	238	23	359
Oklahoma	1,765	192	18	4,560	11,371	1,035	18,941
Oklmulgee	114	8	2	241	808	52	1,225
Osage	94	8	5	222	388	60	777
Ottawa	50	10	6	186	761	42	1,055
Pawnee	37	3	2	89	264	34	429
Payne	123	19	8	512	893	124	1,679
Pittsburgh	156	22	1	325	696	66	1,266
Pontotoc	184	34	3	404	571	53	1,249
Pottawatomie	127	23	10	548	1,307	109	2,124
Pushmataha	47	12	1	100	189	16	365
Roger Mills	8	0	0	33	47	6	94
Rogers	170	31	9	568	847	106	1,731
Seminole	57	6	2	131	516	24	736
Sequoyah	53	17	7	208	904	64	1,253
Stephens	98	20	1	369	709	53	1,250
Texas	7	3	4	72	86	5	177
Tillman	9	3	1	48	110	7	178
Tulsa	1,117	240	63	3,381	7,668	812	13,281
Wagoner	88	14	6	482	515	62	1,167
Washington	149	14	2	353	706	90	1,394
Washita	42	6	0	89	184	24	345
Woods	58	2	2	42	76	15	195
Woodward	59	10	0	104	242	35	450
OK unknown**	1,092	0	0	4	0	0	1,096
Out of state	72	9	0	11	0	12	104
<b>Total by program</b>	<b>9,548</b>	<b>1,300</b>	<b>369</b>	<b>25,641</b>	<b>54,084</b>	<b>5,236</b>	<b>96,178</b>

NOTES:

- The school counts include students at the physical locations, student outreach, camps, and other training and equipment programs.
- The OK School for the Deaf continues to offer free ASL classes online and this has resulted in higher service numbers for OSD since the online ASL classes became available. During SFY23, 24,383 Oklahomans participated in the ASL classes along with 428,551 individuals outside of Oklahoma. The ASL participants outside of Oklahoma have been excluded from the served individuals count.
- The OK Library for the Blind count includes library patrons and students served through the AIM Center.
- SBVI counts include job-seeking clients and participants in the Older Blind Independent Living Program.
- Pre-ETS services are provided to potentially eligible students, as required under WIOA, throughout the state. The specific county of residence is not available for the participants, and they are counted under VR — OK Unknown



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**OKLAHOMA**  
Rehabilitation  
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