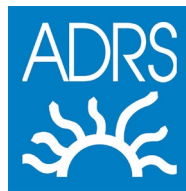




2023 ANNUAL REPORT



Alabama Department of
Rehabilitation Services

Empower
one
department
Equip
one mission
Encourage



ADRS Blueprint For the 21st Century

MISSION: TO ENABLE ALABAMA'S CHILDREN AND ADULTS WITH DISABILITIES
TO ACHIEVE THEIR MAXIMUM POTENTIAL

We VALUE the worth, dignity and rights of people with disabilities and we will:

- provide an easily accessible, integrated continuum of services;
- ensure quality services that are family-centered, culturally sensitive and community-based;
- promote and respect consumer choice regarding provision of services;
- advocate for the rights of persons with disabilities and promote self-advocacy;
- include people with disabilities, their families and advocates in agency planning and policy development.

We VALUE independence and meaningful work for people with disabilities and we will:

- educate families, children, employers, schools and the public that people with disabilities can and do work;
- advocate for quality health services and community supports that enable people with disabilities to work and/or function independently;
- develop, maintain and expand working relationships with employers;
- identify and create job opportunities that are compatible with consumer abilities;
- foster cross-divisional collaboration to achieve successful work outcomes.

We VALUE all staff and their contributions in achieving our mission and we will:

- communicate openly and honestly;
- recruit, develop, retain and promote a diverse, qualified staff;
- involve staff in agency planning, policy development and performance objectives;
- recognize and reward exemplary job performance;
- provide staff opportunities for personal and professional growth.

We VALUE leadership at all levels, and we will:

- maximize staff participation in all agency initiatives;
- create an environment which encourages and supports creativity and innovation;
- facilitate teamwork among all staff;
- provide support and leadership development opportunities.

We VALUE maximum acquisition and efficient and effective management of resources and we will:

- acquire maximum resources;
- increase legislative support;
- develop and use appropriate technological advancements;
- evaluate the effective and efficient use of our resources;
- collaborate with organizations in the public and private sectors.

We VALUE public support, and we will:

- educate the public about our mission, goals, services and expertise;
- secure support from business and industry, consumers of services, partners and policymakers;
- create partnerships that expand services to enhance opportunities for consumers;
- maximize staff involvement in the development of grassroots support.





Fellow Alabamians,

The ADRS Family is proud to present the 2023 ADRS Annual Report, One Department, One Mission: Empower, Equip, Encourage.

The information and stories contained in this report demonstrate the success of our continuum of care and our unique ability to support Alabamians along their individualized journeys toward self-sufficiency, independence, education, and employment.

We Empower those we serve by implementing the most innovative approaches in every ADRS program. ADRS developed or expanded specialized services, like in-demand diagnostic health services and screenings, rehabilitation engineering and assistive technology, transition (school

to employment), employment programs for out-of-school youth, and increased access to community college training.

We Equip those we serve by providing the support, tools, and training needed to reach their individual goals. ADRS is uniquely positioned to prepare Alabama's citizens with disabilities through a centralized and well-coordinated disability support service -- from birth, through school, into the workforce, and throughout a lifetime -- to reach their maximum potential, as well as become a vital part of the state's economy.

We Encourage those we serve to be bold, determined, and hopeful in their journey to independence. ADRS enables an increased number of individuals with the most significant disabilities to enter the workforce annually and ranks among the highest in the nation for job retention of those individuals in the 2nd and 4th quarters after exiting the vocational program, in a time when Alabama and the nation struggle to find solutions to an unprecedented labor shortage. ADRS is an integral partner in the effort to build a stronger workforce pipeline by helping develop this specific population of Alabamians to meet the needs of business and industry.

We hope you will be as inspired as we are by the individuals and businesses highlighted in this report and the dedicated staff that represent, One Department, One Mission. The ADRS Family is grateful for the continued support of Governor Kay Ivey, the Alabama Legislature, and our many partners, and we are eager to continue our work toward a brighter future for Alabama through the support of individuals and families impacted by disability.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jane Elizabeth Burdeshaw". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Jane Elizabeth Burdeshaw
Commissioner



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Continuum of Care

Whether the person is born with a disability or acquires a disability later in life, the goal is the same: self-sufficiency and independence. With individualized services provided in homes, schools, the workplace, and the community, ADRS assists every person in achieving their maximum potential.



Alabama's Early Intervention System (AEIS) coordinates services statewide for infants and toddlers with disabilities and developmental delays from birth to age 3, and helps prepare them and their families for the transition to preschool. Early Intervention (EI) also provides financial and technical support to community programs that provide direct service to families.



Children's Rehabilitation Service (CRS) provides individualized services to children and youth with special health care needs from birth to age 21 and their families at home, school, and in the community. In addition, CRS provides disability support, expertise, and adaptive technology for local school systems, teachers, and other school staff. The CRS Hemophilia Program serves Alabama's children and adults at any age to manage the challenges with this life-threatening blood disorder.



Vocational Rehabilitation Service (VRS) is an integral partner in Alabama's workforce development system providing rehabilitation, education, and employment services to teens and adults with disabilities, and providing disability support and talent acquisition services to Alabama businesses through its Business Relations Program. VRS also links businesses and individuals to our Rehabilitation Engineering and Assistive Technology service when customized services and accessibility supports are needed.



State of Alabama Independent Living (SAIL) / Homebound division provides services to Alabamians who have the most significant disabilities. SAIL/Homebound staff also provide education and support services to families with children and adults with significant disabilities to help them live independently in the home, community, or workplace.



Miracle Jemison, Tuscaloosa
CRS feature on page 17





Board of Directors



Charles Wilkinson
District 6

Dear friends,

It has indeed been an honor and pleasure to serve this year as the Alabama Board of Rehabilitation Services (ABRS) Board Chair.

I am proud of the Department's profound legacy, from pioneering early intervention and rehabilitation services to mainstreaming vocational rehabilitation and business relations programs, and revolutionizing self-directed independent living.

I am also inspired by our visionary leadership team and staff professionals who devote themselves every day to empowering our stakeholders to achieve their maximum potential and realize their own personal ambitions. The success stories presented in this year's annual report are both humbling and inspirational, and a testimony to the power of the human spirit.

On behalf of the board, I would like to offer my sincere thanks to the ABRS staff as well as our partners for another outstanding year.

Together we are transforming lives, transforming businesses, and transforming communities.

Best regards,

Charles Wilkinson, ABRS Chairman



Michelle Glaze
District 1



Kimberlin Love
District 2



Penny Foster
District 3



Kevin Kidd
District 4



Eddie Williams
District 5



Mitch Strickland
District 7

The Alabama Board of Rehabilitation Services (ABRS) consists of seven members, one from each U.S. Congressional District. Board members are appointed by the governor and confirmed by the Alabama Senate. Alabama law requires that three members be individuals with a disability selected from consumer disability organizations, one member be the parent of a child with a disability, and three members be from organizations of business and industry within the state.

The board's responsibilities include making rules and regulations for the provision of rehabilitation services, directing and supervising the expenditure of legislative appropriations, disseminating information concerning and promoting interest in disability and rehabilitation issues, taking appropriate action to guarantee the rights of and services to people with disabilities, and serving as the governing body of programs administered by the department.



Malia Turner-Horton, Madison County
AEIS feature on page 11





Alabama's Early Intervention System

Early childhood development is vital to the growth and success of all children, but those early years are especially crucial for a child with a disability or developmental delay. Studies indicate that 85 percent of a child's brain develops in the first three years of life.

Created to be a critical first step to ensuring that all children enter school equipped to learn, Alabama's Early Intervention System (AEIS) is instrumental in ensuring a lifetime of success for children with disabilities and developmental delays. Early Intervention (EI) works collaboratively with families, community organizations, and public and private service providers to enhance a child's development through its community-based, family-centered system of support and evidence-based practices.

Parents/caregivers are their child's best teachers. EI works alongside the family in the home and in other natural environments, or virtually if needed, coaching them while enhancing their child's development and learning.

Long-term studies have shown that investing in early childhood programs results in a stronger, more prosperous community. It

increases children's success in school and in the workforce while also reducing crime, poverty and homelessness, relieving the strain on public services.

Moreover, that investment reaps excellent returns, with [studies showing that each dollar spent on Early Intervention saves \\$7 in future costs](#). Because of Early Intervention, children with disabilities can participate inclusively in activities with their peers. With its 43 programs in local communities across Alabama, EI delivers evidence-based services and support to infants, toddlers, and their families in their homes and communities.

This year, EI launched a statewide public awareness campaign, "You know best. Know EARLY." to reach families in rural and underserved communities. The message to parents, caregivers, healthcare providers, and other referral sources is that "it's never too EARLY" to refer a child for Early Intervention. "You know best. Know EARLY." has proven successful, as evidenced by the increased number of referrals.

Sources of Revenue

State \$14,691,474

Other \$ 8,733,279

Federal \$8,808,130

Use of Revenue

Direct Services \$30,543,758 (95%)

Administration \$1,689,125 (5%)

AEIS 2023 Highlights

In FY23, Alabama's Early Intervention System:

- **Continued average growth of 366 new referrals each year** - Utilized grant funds from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) to continue recovery from the impact of COVID-19 as referrals quickly rose past pre-pandemic numbers.
- **Increased family supports** - Used IDEA Part C funds to increase the provision of technical equipment and virtual services to families, secure support for infrastructure changes to our database system to include third-party billing, and maintain ongoing initiatives.
- **Promoted autism best practices** - Collaborated with Alabama Interagency Autism Coordinating Council (AIACC) through the Early Childhood Autism Work Group in establishing best-practice strategies for intervention for young children with autism.
- **Engaged in nationwide networking** - Continued partnership with the National Infant & Toddler Coordinators Association (ITCA), which includes other states' Early Intervention Part C coordinators.
- **Led through training** - Provided training using evidence-based practices through the Department of Early Childhood Education (DECE) Grant for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder or children who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing.
- **Led capacity building** - Continued partnership with WestEd to lead the Office of Special Education's (OSEP) Part C Model Demonstration Project to Improve Services and Results for Infants, Toddlers, and Children with Disabilities. This project, also known as the Collective Impact Model-C (CIM-C), focuses on improving AEIS's capacity to utilize evidence-based approaches and strategies to equitably identify, refer, and evaluate infants and toddlers with disabilities.
- **Partnered for mental health supports** - Partnered with the AL Department of Mental Health (ADMH) and Infant Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (IECMH) on identifying EI families and their children needing mental health consultation, and accessed appropriate interventions/services.
- **Partnered for deaf and hard of hearing supports** - Collaborated with families of infants and toddlers who are deaf and hard of hearing and partners who deliver specialized services for this population to disseminate the Pathways for Families resource guide. Also collaborated with the Alabama Department of Public Health (ADPH) Early Hearing Detection & Intervention (EHDI) Learning Committee Work Group and the ADPH EDHI Advisory Board.



Malia Turner-Horton *Madison County*

Huntsville's Malia Turner-Horton is an example of how an early autism diagnosis can pave the way for a child to make huge strides in their development.

Early Intervention (EI) Service Coordinator Wendy Pittard said having an 'official' autism diagnosis as early as possible opens many more doors for the family.

"We're getting Malia a great start early," she said.

"We're connecting her family with more resources and getting her support as early as possible."

Recognizing the growing need for autism diagnostic services, Alabama's EI System and The Arc of Madison County are partnering with six other programs statewide to expand services and meet the needs of more children like Malia.

Michelle Creekmore, The Arc of Madison County's EI program director who wrote Malia's Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) said for too long, families in similar situations were slipping through the cracks without a proper diagnosis, causing their children to fall further and further behind.

"Hopefully, the clinics are going to expand and enhance everything that Early Intervention is doing in the area of early autism diagnosis and

treatments," she said.

Malia's mother, Ashley Turner, said 2-year-old Malia initially received a referral to EI to assess her speech, behavior, play, feeding, and other developmental progress. She was then referred to The Arc of Madison County's Autism Clinic for testing where she was diagnosed.

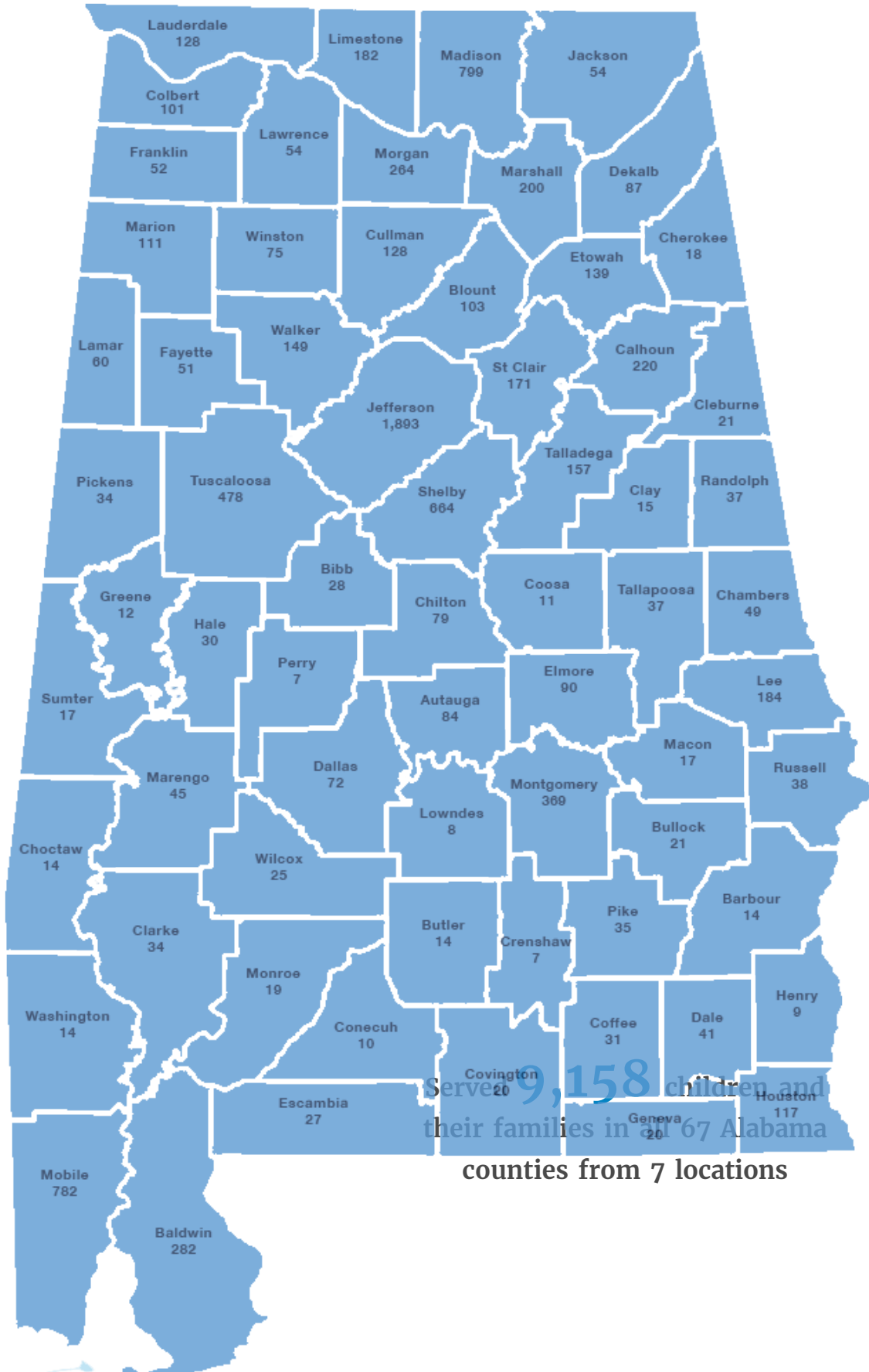
The Arc's Autism Clinic model serves children ages 2 through 5 and partners with pediatricians for thorough assessments.

Chris Foster, a developmental specialist and autism diagnostic clinician, regularly visited the family to put the IFSP into action.

As her mother and first teacher, Ashley is directly involved in helping Malia progress toward her milestones. Ashley said Chris has demonstrated activities they can practice on their own, and she has seen noticeable changes in Malia.

"She (Chris) showed me how to feed her with a spoon, and now she knows how to eat with a fork and spoon," she said. "She didn't use cups before she started Early Intervention. Now she can hold her own water bottle. She could not do all of that before they came along and helped."

AEIS Statewide Impact





You know best. Know EARLY.

Parents love watching their babies grow. Every moment they do something new is like a miracle; baby’s first smile, lifting their head, rolling over, and kicking those little legs are all exciting moments.

Parents also worry when their child isn’t doing something that other children the same age are doing. When parents have concerns, it’s critical that they find out if there is a developmental delay as EARLY as possible. It’s never too early for Early Intervention.

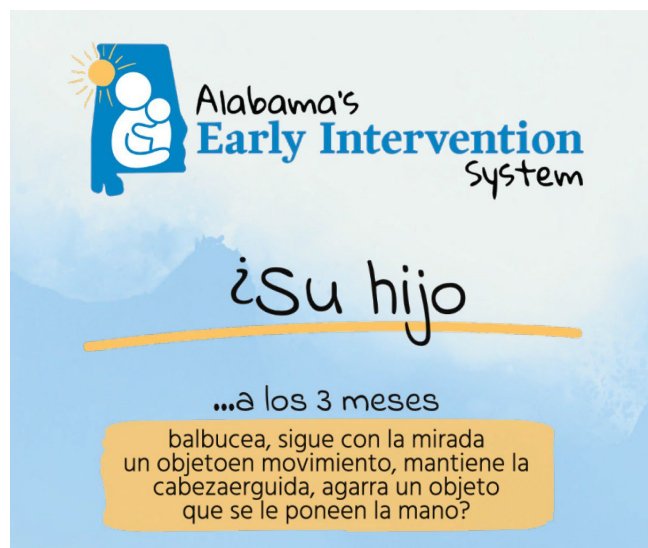
In FY23, ADRS launched the “You know best. Know EARLY.” public awareness campaign through Alabama’s Early Intervention System (AEIS).

AEIS Director Amy Blakeney said the public awareness campaign provided vital information to more Alabama families, especially those in rural and typically underserved communities, about the importance of early detection of delays and the supports available near them at no cost.

El campaign and milestone videos on [YouTube.com/ADRSTV](https://www.youtube.com/ADRSTV)

“Throughout the state, AEIS helps families of eligible children develop a plan and learn ways to help their child overcome these delays,” said Blakeney. “Parents and those caring for a child every day are their most important teachers. We want to empower and equip families to work with their children in ways that can improve their healthy development and help them reach important milestones in their growth.”

More information on the program is available at [NeverTooEarlyAL.org](https://www.NeverTooEarlyAL.org).





Physical therapists at Mobile CRS providing services to improve the motor skills of their clinic visitors.





Children's Rehabilitation Service is a vital resource and a proven lifeline for many parents of children and teens with special health care needs. CRS brings together a team of doctors, nurses, social workers, therapists, audiologists, and nutritionists, that partners with families following a coordinated plan of care. The team provides essential care and shares information and support for each child to succeed in school, at home, and in the community. CRS collaborates with school systems statewide to provide expertise and consultation for assessment, evaluation, therapy services, and assistive technologies; all to help children with special health care needs to participate more fully in school. Fourteen community-based offices around the state offer a team approach to bring together healthcare specialists from many fields providing services tailored to each family's needs.

Some services include:

- Clinical medical services, operating specialty clinics throughout the state.
- Care coordination to assist the child and family in effectively identifying, accessing, and using community resources to meet their individual needs.
- Clinical evaluation to identify the unique needs of a child with feeding problems, limited mobility, communication challenges, or other special diagnostic needs.
- Information and referral to link families to community resources and services.
- Patient and family education that provides information necessary to carry out treatment regimens and to make informed choices about services.
- The Parent Connection newsletter, which facilitates strong family and professional partnerships, and provides information, support, and opportunities for families to participate in program and policy development.
- The Youth Connection newsletter, which facilitates youth involvement with policy development and decision-making.

Services are available to any Alabama resident with special health care needs younger than 21; individuals with hemophilia are eligible for services into adulthood. Treatment options vary and can include clinical interventions and medication, specialized equipment, assistive technology, and referral to community resources for therapy services, as needed. Families can receive services regardless of their income.

Sources of Revenue

State \$13,862,732

Other \$16,062,175

Federal \$4,114,884

Use of Revenue

Direct Services\$29,284,450 (86%)

Administration \$4,755,342 (14%)

CRS 2023 Highlights

In FY23, Children's Rehabilitation Service:

- **Increased referrals** - Served 15,234 children and youth with special health care needs, including 356 with no insurance, through the clinic program. The Hemophilia Program served 473 people with bleeding disorders through 42 on-site comprehensive, interdisciplinary care clinics, and nine telemedicine hemophilia clinics.
- **Accomplished clinical services** - 15,514 clinic visits and 3,951 information and referral contacts.
- **Saved families money** - Expedited a total of \$126,350 in Medicaid travel reimbursements to help families with travel expenses.
- **Connected families with resources** - Connected 1,726 individuals with community resources totaling \$296,613 for audiology, nutrition, speech-language, food assistance, medical supplies, wheelchair ramps, prescription medication assistance, and other items.
- **Advanced autism services** - Continued to meet the need for early Autism screening by partnering with EI, the University of Alabama, and the UAB Civitan-Sparks Clinic, through the pilot Pediatric Evaluation – Autism Diagnostic Clinic in the Tuscaloosa office, and expanded to the Homewood office, for children currently enrolled in EI.
- **Increased family engagement** - For the third consecutive year, CRS utilized the National Family Voices Family Engagement in Systems Assessment Tool (FESAT) to assess and guide efforts to improve meaningful family engagement. CRS saw a 9.2 percent increase over the FY21 baseline year. The FESAT focuses on four domains: commitment, transparency, representation, and impact. Each CRS district utilizes the results of the FESAT to develop a Family Engagement Quality Improvement Initiative to strengthen family engagement in their district.
- **Assisted successful transitions** - CRS formed the Transition Task Force, which consists of CRS state office leadership, district, and local staff including family representatives. The task force is working to ensure that the CRS Transition Program is addressing the needs of all transition age clients. CRS has also been utilizing the results of the Care Coordination and Transition Surveys to improve service delivery. Improvements include ensuring each family has a Plan of Care that includes goals that are jointly developed with the family and their interdisciplinary team.



Miracle Jemison *Tuscaloosa County*

Tuscaloosa's Miracle Jemison lives up to her name every day. The 8-year-old was paralyzed from the neck down in a car accident in 2022 that also injured her mother and brother. They were all fortunate to have survived.

Miracle's mother, Kara Martin, suffered a shattered ankle and used a wheelchair for weeks. Miracle's twin brother Malcolm was temporarily paralyzed from the waist down and lost strength in his right side. An ADRS and Children's Rehabilitation Service team assisted the family as all three began their recovery.

Kara said they were first introduced to CRS when Malcolm returned home from Children's Hospital in Birmingham. The young man received a wheelchair and ankle foot orthotics from CRS, and with rigorous therapy was walking again in less than a year.

Miracle's injuries were more severe and long-term. While experiencing such a drastic change would take months or years for many to process, Kara said that is not her daughter's style.

"There isn't a day when Miracle doesn't have a smile on her face," she said. "Even if she's had a bad moment, she's never had a bad day."

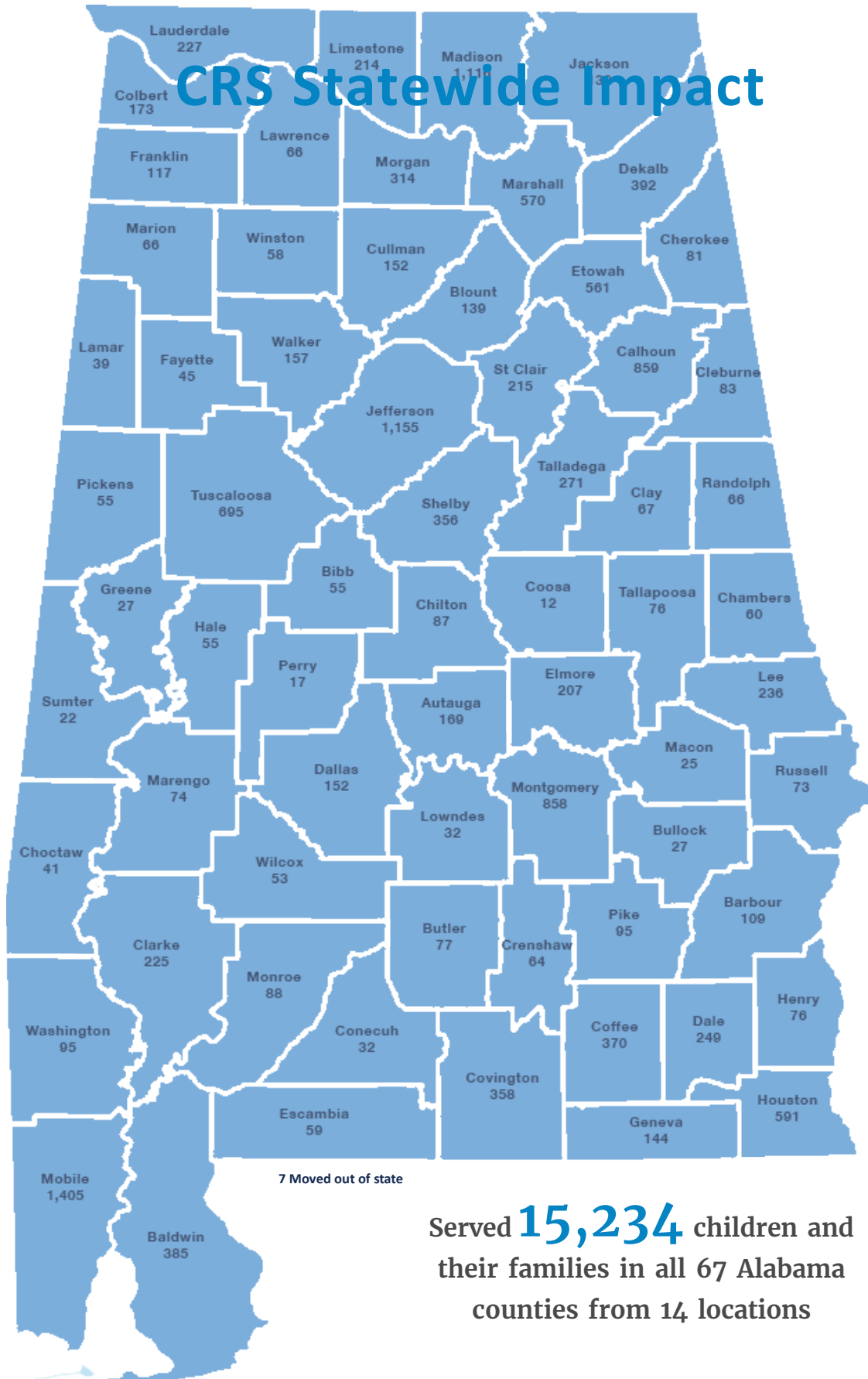
Care Coordinator Monica Grammer, Rehab Engineer Sylvia Perez, Speech Language Pathologist Karen Baggett, Speech Language Pathologist Lauren Clark, and Physical Therapist Mandy Newell all pooled their efforts to provide support and supplies for Miracle and her brother.

Mandy said she was stunned at how easily Miracle picked up on the navigation process when her new wheelchair arrived in April.

The combination of the chair and Tobii device that Sylvia taught her to use helped Miracle stay on track academically, and when school began in August, she returned to the classroom to start third grade.

"They (ADRS staff) have been part of the family ever since," Kara said. "We love CRS; we really do. We love everybody with ADRS."

CRS Statewide Impact



Served **15,234** children and their families in all 67 Alabama counties from 14 locations



Brent Weaver *Baldwin County*

Robertsdale's Brent Weaver sustained a traumatic brain injury in June 2020 in a motor vehicle accident. Initially, he could not care for himself or perform tasks without significant help from a caregiver and could not follow simple, one-step commands consistently. But he improved during his recovery by pure determination.

CRS partnered with several other agencies and organizations to ensure that Weaver received adaptive equipment and the needed therapies.

Through rigorous programs and support from his family, Weaver has regained much of his independence and continues to work hard while attending clinical outpatient physical, occupational, and speech therapy sessions. He can walk, dress, and feed himself independently.

In 2023, he graduated from Robertsdale High School and transitioned into Vocational Rehabilitation Service programs with his sights set on entering the workforce.

Because of his extraordinary progress, Brent was presented with the Alabama Rehabilitation Association's Children's Rehabilitation Service (CRS) Consumer Award during the Southeast Region National Rehabilitation Association Training Conference in March of 2023.

Weaver was nominated by Mobile CRS staff members Shelley Russell, Brittney Welch, and Cameron Riley, for his "hard work, persistence, and determination" and "potential to independently support himself by becoming a contributing member of society."



DEVIN HOWELL *Limestone County*

Devin Howell completed a six-week summer job with the U.S. Space and Rocket Center in Huntsville as a high school senior which helped him gain valuable work experience in the security and customer service fields.

Devin, who has cerebral palsy, was the first person that visitors saw at the Space and Rocket Center. He greeted visitors and often helped to reunite guests separated from their groups.

Providing transitional services, job training and placement, and assistance with accommodations are just a part of what ADRS programs do to support individuals as they enter the workforce. Additionally, ADRS programs support businesses that hire people with different abilities to ensure both the business and the employee are successful.

The U.S. Space and Rocket Center was honored as the 2023 Large Business Employer of the Year by the Alabama chapter of the Association for Persons Supporting Employment First (AL-APSE) for its commitment to hiring qualified people with disabilities, like Devin, and for understanding the value they bring to their business.

Devin credits ADRS programs through Children's Rehabilitation Service and Vocational Rehabilitation Service for becoming more prepared for his job.

For example, his ADRS team encouraged him to enroll in VRS transition programs, and they helped him get a needed upgrade for his communications device to perform his job.



ORIN WEBB Talladega County

Orin Webb's family lives by the mantra, "He who has the most options wins." From small-town Munford, his mother Rachel and father Tucker are dedicated to providing their son as many options as possible.

Orin was born almost seven weeks premature with a left leg, partial arms, and Moebius Syndrome, a condition that prevents facial muscles from creating expressions.

After being transferred to Children's Hospital of Birmingham, the family entered Early Intervention Services and learned about their next step.

"They (staff at Children's) were clear and adamant the whole time that we had to get involved with CRS," Rachel said. "They were really honest about CRS. They got us involved and once you get involved the therapists don't let you get away. They are wonderful. Absolutely incredible."

Meeting Speech Therapist Kym Smart and Physical Therapist Dana Grady proved to be a huge blessing from day one.

"Orin and Dana started making goo goo eyes at each other, and it was over after that," Rachel joked. "The first time she ever looked at Orin she said, 'We are going to get him an Obi robot.' That was the first thing she said."

Dana and the other members of the CRS staff made good on that promise. Orin, who had a G-tube at 22 months, met with Nutritionist Holli Griffin, and over time was eating by mouth and eventually on his own with the robotic feeder.

Other steps toward independence was obtaining a motorized wheelchair and a Tobii Dynavox speech device. Orin began attending clinics at 18 months old, and he received a chair through insurance by the time he was 2.5 years old after Dana had helped the family file for it.

Rachel said they refer to the chair as "Blue" and it has become a part of the family. She said they feel fortunate to have a chance to provide Orin with the devices to mentally and physically prepare him for other opportunities.



Lakeshore Vocational Rehabilitation Service College and Career Readiness Counselor Sabrina Wren helps a participant in Deaf College Prep to map out her career path.





VRS is the largest ADRS division. As a vital part of Alabama's workforce system, VRS provides specialized, individualized services and supports for businesses and for individuals with disabilities who want jobs. Studies show that for every \$1 invested in VR services, \$5 is returned to benefit Alabama's economy, and it bolsters the state's labor force with more skilled and motivated workers.

Each year, Vocational Rehabilitation Service's general and blind/deaf programs offer specialized employment- and education-related assistance to tens of thousands of teens and adults with disabilities.

Whether a young adult is going to school to prepare for their first job or an older adult is

trying to gain employment or remain employed, VRS can help.

Partnerships are the key to the program's success and the success of those it serves. To ensure consumers achieve in the classroom, VRS collaborates with CRS, high schools, vocational schools, junior colleges, and universities statewide to assist students with disabilities in receiving appropriate educational opportunities. Through 21 strategically located offices, VRS works closely with Alabama employers, community rehabilitation programs, workforce partners, and other state agencies to successfully match people with jobs.

Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)

ADRS ranks among the highest in the nation for job retention of those individuals in the 2nd and 4th quarters after exiting the vocational program.

62% 2nd quarter employment rate (compared to 56% nationally)

59.5% 4th quarter employment retention rate (compared to 53% nationally)

38.3% credential attainment rate (compared to 38% nationally)

53.8% measurable skill gains (compared to 49% nationally)

\$4,799 median earnings average
(ranked 28th among 52 states and territories, below the national average of \$5,130)

Sources of Revenue

State..... \$16,151,752

Other.....\$6,897,479

Federal.....\$71,711,868

Use of Revenue

Direct Services ... \$46,050,114 (49%)

Counseling & Placement..... \$36,931,831 (39%)

Administration: \$11,779,155 (12%)

VRS 2023 Highlights

In FY23, Vocational Rehabilitation Service:

- **Increased workforce participation** - Assisted 3,916 individuals with disabilities in achieving their goal of employment.
- **Advanced success** - Continued to offer Supported Employment Services in all 67 counties to people with the most significant disabilities to find specialized employment close to home.
- **Increased earnings** - Assisted 653 individuals with the most significant disabilities to work in supported, competitive, integrated jobs averaging 24.5 hours per week at \$11.34 an hour. 124 individuals in the program met the criteria for the Exceptional Wage Incentive.
- **Surpassed employment goal** - Exceeded the goal for successfully employing individuals from its Blind/Deaf division, with 741 blind/low-vision and deaf/hard-of-hearing individuals achieving their employment goals, at a record-high average earning of \$19.71 an hour.
- **Promoted in-demand jobs** - Blind and Deaf Services partnered with AIDB and AIDT to host five regional transition events titled “Transformers 2020” that focused on in-demand careers for high school students and their families, with over 250 participating.
- **Advanced college prep** - ADRS Deaf Services partnered with AIDB, Jacksonville State University, Troy University, and Auburn University to provide summer college prep and ACT prep camps, and facilitated an ACT Boot Camp for visually impaired students in partnership with the Alabama School for the Blind (ASB) and E.H. Gentry. Also held College Quest in partnership with AIDB and Auburn University, a simulated college experience for students with vision loss, focusing on assistive technology, independent living, orientation and mobility, and college course credits.
- **Advanced work experiences** - Held a successful 2023 Summer Paid Work Experience Program with blind/low vision and deaf/hard of hearing students, who earned wages for working up to 40 hours per week and learned essential work skills.



Rodney Henley and Kevin Young

Central Alabama Community College, Tallapoosa County

For the second time in five years, Central Alabama Community College (CACC) in Alexander City and ADRS teamed up to help deaf individuals obtain a Commercial Driver's License (CDL).

Gadsden's Rodney Henley and Tuscaloosa's Kevin Young earned their licenses in the spring of 2023 and were soon on the road.

Rodney said it was difficult to contain himself when he learned he had successfully completed all requirements.

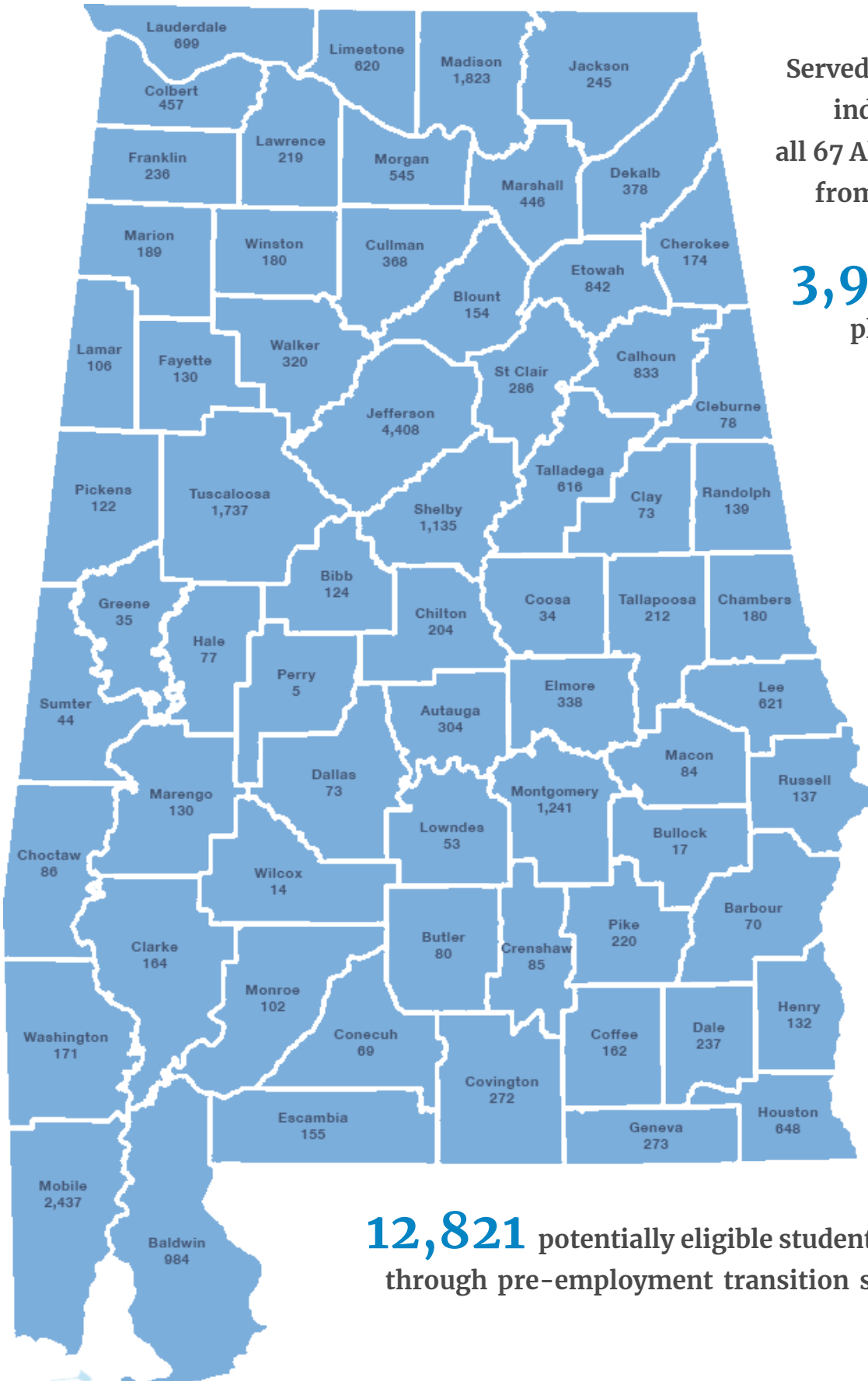
"I almost felt like I could cry," he said. "I couldn't believe that I really did it. I really passed; I really did it! To tell VR and tell them I passed, they were about to cry too."

ADRS Deaf Support Specialist Jennifer Cooper contacted CACC instructors to enroll them in the program and provide any supports needed, and American Sign Language (ASL) Interpreter Susan Gordon was on hand to assist with communications during training.

When Jennifer received a text from Henley that simply said "PASSED" in all caps, she was excited for him and others who could also benefit from the program.

"That's one of the proudest days I've had because this was huge for their lives and also for VR," she said, "because it shows it's a very viable employment opportunity for everyone, including those in the deaf community."

VRS Statewide Impact



Served **40,653** individuals in all 67 Alabama counties from 21 locations

3,916 individuals placed in jobs

12,821 potentially eligible students served through pre-employment transition services



Timothy Patrick *Mobile County*

Timothy Patrick, an Airbus engineer, said he wants his story to serve as an example to others, especially businesses that may be apprehensive about hiring someone with a disability.

Timothy said he feels fortunate to have the opportunity to be part of such a great company with a supportive team. For his many accomplishments and the value he brings to Airbus, Timothy was honored as the Alabama Governor's Committee on Employment for People with Disabilities 2023 Large Business Employee of the Year.

Accepting the award, Timothy said, "I really hope it brings awareness to future employers and those who are looking for jobs that people with disabilities can be successful in the workplace as long as they are provided with the right resources."

Timothy was born in southern China and adopted at age 10 by the Patrick family of Mobile. He faced the challenges that come with vision loss and starting a new life in a different

country, but he never let anything stand in the way of his goals.

As a college student, Timothy listened to lectures using assistive technology. He could read with the device at a rate of 500 to 600 words per minute, and he had no problem keeping up with sighted students.

ADRS Vocational Rehabilitation Service later provided him with Job Access With Speech (JAWS) technology, which is the world's most popular screen reader developed for computer users whose vision loss prevents them from seeing screen content or navigating with a mouse. JAWS provides speech and Braille output for the most popular computer applications, allowing users to navigate the Internet, write a document, read an email, and create presentations.

"I hope those who are looking for jobs can find hope and find that they can make a great living and have a normal life like everyone else," he said.



Christopher Gallimore *Calhoun County*

Nikasha Thomas noticed that her son, Christopher, was not reaching certain developmental milestones at an early age. After being diagnosed with autism, she was referred to Alabama's Early Intervention System (EI) where they began speech therapy, occupational therapy, and physical therapy.

"Early Intervention is the best," Nikasha said. "The sooner you get a diagnosis, the better. A lot of parents are in denial, but all that does is hold your child back. I think the earlier you find out, the earlier you can get help through Early Intervention, the better off your child will be."

When Christopher moved into Oxford High School, ADRS Vocational Rehabilitation Service Counselor Pam Curry came alongside him, and they developed a strong, trusting relationship. She assisted the once introverted and withdrawn teen to become more willing to step outside his comfort zone and try many new things.

Pam guided Christopher through the VRS Job Exploration Training Program (JETS), where he secured a job at Oxford's Civic Center. There he exceeded all expectations and was hired full-time after the JETS program ended.

The confidence Christopher developed also prepared him to learn to drive. Nikasha said working with ADRS Lakeshore's driving instructor Keith Adams was "incredible;" he helped Christopher earn his permit and license.

After watching her son grow through all of these interconnected ADRS programs, Nikasha said she no longer worries about how he will fare when he begins college classes because she knows that Pam and VRS are there if needed.



Mona Lewis *Jefferson County*

When Mona Rae Lewis was released in 2019 after 16 years of incarceration, she knew that finding a job and a business that would hire her could be difficult. She said fate intervened when she met Patricia Cook, her ADRS Vocational Rehabilitation Service counselor.

Patricia, who also once served as the counselor for Is-Able Ministries Executive Director Lorenzo Brown, got Mona connected with programs that would provide the best opportunities for her to rebuild her life.

Mona's cognitive and psychological impairments often caused her to experience physical fatigue, which presented her with challenges in preparing to reenter the workforce. Patricia and Lorenzo worked closely with Mona to identify her strengths and find the supports she needed to address her challenges to transition successfully.

Mona said she fondly remembers Patricia's kindness and her life-changing connection with Lorenzo.

"When I met him (Lorenzo), I was just overwhelmed because of how great he was in working with me step by step. Everything was a process, step by step."

The job-readiness training through Is-Able Ministries included workplace skills, conflict resolution, approaches to stress, and proper interviewing techniques. Mona also learned about the characteristics of an effective resume and the mindset for approaching job searches.

With her positive attitude, glowing personality, and heart-warming smile, she is writing her own success story through her job at Stacy Williams, a warehouse company that distributes vendor products, where she has been employed for two years. In 2023, Mona earned a promotion.

While still learning, adjusting, and working daily to keep progressing, Mona sings the praises of ADRS and Is-Able Ministries and often shares her experience to help others.

thank you

Not Exit



Business Relations Program

The ADRS Business Relations Program is the state's lead connection to Alabama businesses for disability issues in the workplace. The Business Relations program plays an integral role in ensuring that disability- and employment-related needs of businesses and industries are being met by the state workforce system.

In FY23, the program continued its efforts to address emerging issues for businesses and industries including:

- Helping business partners navigate accommodations and retain employees through the ADRS RAVE (Retaining a Valued Employee) Program.
- Addressing the workforce shortage in Alabama by connecting businesses with a qualified pool of job-ready applicants with disabilities.
- Rolling out new training programs to help businesses and industries become more inclusive with their hiring practices.
- Assisting employers in developing their DEIA (Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility) outreach plans to provide more employment opportunities for qualified people with disabilities.

In FY23, the statewide team of 15 Business Relations Consultants:

- Provided 5,237 no-cost services and 65 trainings to Alabama businesses and industries.
- Provided 5,481 services to 1,022 ADRS consumers seeking employment with job-readiness services and provided 65 specialized training sessions in local high schools.
- Created new opportunities for paid work experiences and employer hiring opportunities.
- Helped 394 individuals gain employment throughout Alabama.
- Partnered with Ability – Go to increase independence and competitive employment opportunities for over 50 consumers. Over 20 consumers accepted employment opportunities and are now competitively employed while working from home.



Business Enterprise Program

The Alabama Business Enterprise Program (BEP) provides qualified blind individuals with job training and employment opportunities that offer independence through self-employment.

Currently, 60 blind vendors are working within the Alabama BEP and they employ about 300 other Alabamians.

In addition to the operation of traditional vending facilities and military dining halls, our blind vendors are pursuing novel and innovative opportunities such as coffee services and micro-markets. This flexible business approach ensures that Alabama's BEP can satisfy consumer demand and remain viable in a challenging economic climate.

Thanks to the perseverance, hard work, and entrepreneurial spirit of our blind vendors, the Alabama BEP continues to thrive.

Community Rehabilitation Programs

Located throughout the state, the Community Rehabilitation Program (CRP) is a network of private organizations providing a full range of vocational rehabilitation (VRS) services to individuals with disabilities for more than 70 years. Partnerships have been established with 38 CRPs accredited by the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities.

These CRP facilities are located in every Alabama county and work closely with local VRS staff in pursuing the desire to see all Alabamians with disabilities achieve their maximum potential.

In FY23, our CRP partners provided over 13,000 VR consumers, including high school students in a pre-application status, with a wide array of VR services.

These VR services include pre-employment transition services, which includes job exploration counseling; work-based learning experiences; counseling on opportunities for enrollment in comprehensive transition or postsecondary educational programs at institutions of higher education; workplace readiness training; and instruction in self-advocacy. Other VR services include job readiness training; job development; job retention; job coaching; supported employment; vocational evaluations; driver's permit and driver's license training.

We greatly appreciate the CRP partnership and commend the CRP staff for the hard work and excellent service provision provided to VRS consumers.



Coworkers were excited to learn sign language to better communicate with coworker and friend Kendra Deramus at the Prattville Chick-fil-A restaurant on Cobbs Ford Road.





Chick-fil-A *Autauga County*

Chick-fil-A® Prattville South is leading the way in creating an inclusive culture, demonstrating how every employee can learn from, and value each other's different abilities.

In July, the Council of Organizations Serving Deaf Alabamians (COSDA) honored the staff at the Chick-fil-A Prattville South for learning American Sign Language (ASL) when new employee Kendra Deramus, who is deaf, joined their team.

"From the moment they met her, the entire Chick fil-A team - from the owner to her fellow coworkers - have made her feel like family," said ADRS Interpreter Jodie Jernigan. "They jumped in with both feet, ready hearts, and hands in the air to learn sign language in order to communicate with her."

The group voluntarily worked each day to add new signs to their vocabulary, on and off the clock. They also attended in-person lessons as a team,

which are available through ADRS interpreters who offer businesses the opportunity to expand their communication skills. Jodie provided classes on Sundays when the restaurant was closed, and each time more than 20 staff members participated.

The staff's dedication to opening the lines of communication surprised Kendra, who said it meant a lot to her to have coworkers who cared so much about making her feel respected and included.

"It made me feel so happy," she said. "It made me feel excited to get to know them, it made the environment more positive, and I've enjoyed getting to know my coworkers."

Not only does Kendra feel part of an inclusive team, but the team members have new valuable communication skills to carry with them throughout their lives.

Traumatic Brain Injury Program

ADRS is the state's lead agency in Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) services. It is a source of information, referral, resource facilitation, education, and care coordination for individuals with brain injuries, their families, professionals, and the community. It also provides community reintegration assistance, counseling, cognitive remediation, TBI education/training, Trauma Registry service linkage, and transition services to schools, communities, and/or employment.

In FY23:

- Led training on the national stage - Presented at the National Association of State Head Injury Administrators (NASHA) State of the States Conference, Pennsylvania's Brain Injury Association's Statewide TBI Conference, The SEED Summit with Congressional Brain Injury Task Force, and The National Academy of Science in Medicine TBI Forum in Washington DC.
- Led in innovation - Piloted The Online Brain Injury Screening, Services and Support Tool (OBISSS) in Alabama, which is now being used in 14 other states to improve TBI treatment and education. Also continued to partner with Alabama Department of Mental Health for implementation in its facilities and programs.
- Expanded capacity - Increased services statewide in the development of the New Statewide TBI Navigation System and Helpline for community providers, healthcare professionals, caregivers, and individuals with TBI.
- Promoted self-advocacy - New TBI Grant Navigators work directly with individuals with lived experience in developing and sharing their stories featured in our quarterly Alabama Head Injury Task Force Newsletter, The BrainLiner on www.alabamatbi.org.
- Expanded services to rural/underserved areas - Mental health counseling reached more individuals with TBI and their families through telehealth thanks to the ADRS Federal TBI Public Health Grant.
- Expanded the Get Schooled on Concussion - Teacher Acute Concussion Tool (TACT)
-Incorporated the TACT into The Children's of Alabama Concussion Clinic.

- Led through collaboration – Partnered with the Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs, sitting on the Governor's Challenge on Veterans Suicide, participating in statewide Veteran's Wellbeing Panels and SAMSHA Crisis Intercept Model Planning.
- Created TBI Core Competency Intensive Training Program - Shared knowledge on the Alabama Crisis System of Care, TBI and Vision, Alabama Probate Courts, Neuropsychiatric Rehabilitation Networks, ADRS Lakeshore Services, Lifespan Respite & Virtual Empathy Training, The Power of Emotional Intelligence and the New Online Brain Injury Services and Support System (OBISSS).
- Partnered with the National TBI Child Welfare Workgroup - Produced the National Child Welfare Brain Injury Guide.
- Added Neuropsychological Testing and transportation assistance.
- Expanded volunteer work opportunities - increased socialization/advocacy, community resource access, infrastructure, and screening for individuals with TBI through the Alabama Head Injury Task Force Priority Committees.

OASIS Program

Older Alabamians System of Information and Services (OASIS) is a federally funded program that assists individuals 55 and older who are blind or have low vision in living more independently in their homes and communities.

In FY23, 780 consumers were served through the OASIS program. Of these, 437 completed their individualized programs, received 2,656 hours of vision rehabilitation therapy instruction, 367 hours of orientation and mobility instruction, and \$135,670 in adaptive aides and devices.

OASIS also reissued 22 returned or donated assistive technology items to consumers, saving the program valuable dollars. Reaching out to local communities, staff recorded 534 awareness activities that reached an estimated 4,922 people.



Governor Kay Ivey pictured with Public Service Award recipients and representatives (L-R) Kim and Polly Spangler (accepting for Sen. Arthur Orr and Rep. Cynthia Almond), Reps. Leigh Hulsey and Debbie Wood, and ADRS Commissioner Jane Elizabeth Burdeshaw.

Alabama Governor’s Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities (AGCEPD)

The Alabama Governor’s Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities recognizes each year the contributions and successes of individuals with disabilities and the businesses that provide opportunities for success through competitive, integrated employment.

The awards are given to employers, employees, students, and public officials who understand the value that people with disabilities bring to Alabama’s growing workforce.

During a 2023 ceremony, Gov. Ivey pledged to do her part to provide opportunities for all Alabamians.

“My goal is to create a top-notch workforce where everyone’s unique skills and talents are recognized and utilized to their fullest extent.”

Ivey said the awards are a great way to show that businesses recognize everyone has a unique skill set.

“In Alabama, it’s not just about reducing unemployment. It’s about matching the right people with the right jobs. As we mark National Disability Awareness Month, this ceremony today honors those who have gone the extra mile to open doors for all who wish to enter the workforce.”

2023 Award Winners

Small Business Employee:
Dillon Smith - Opelika Jacob
Fiveash – Alabaster

Small Business Employer:
American Christian Academy – Tuscaloosa

Large Business Employee:
Timothy Patrick - Mobile Ty
Evans – Birmingham

Large Business Employer:
Schnellecke Logistics - Woodstock

Student of the Year:
Fisher Rizk – Auburn

Public Service:
Senator Arthur Orr - Decatur Rep.
Cynthia Almond - Tuscaloosa
Rep. Debbie Wood - Valley Rep.
Leigh Hulsey – Helena

ADRS Lakeshore

Lakeshore Vocational Rehabilitation Service assists people throughout the state with significant disabilities to achieve their maximum potential – whether it leads to vocational training, college, or employment. Services are individualized and may include vocational assessment to identify skills, abilities, and career goals. ADRS Lakeshore is comprised of four programs: Adaptive Driving Training, Assistive Technology, Employability Development, and Vocational Evaluation.

Centrally located in Birmingham, Lakeshore is accredited by the Council on the Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities.

In FY23:

- Served on two national committees that develop and facilitate adaptive driving training nationwide within the fields of mobility equipment professionals, driver rehabilitation professionals, and allied health professionals.
- Added the newest High-Tech vehicle developed out of Maine entering service.
- Provided Employment Development Services throughout the state virtually and in person.
- Provided College Prep at Jefferson State Community College-Shelby Campus, and Shelton State Community College in Tuscaloosa, and also virtually.
- The EDS program partnered with the Business Relations Counselors in the Huntsville area to create an Employment Boot Camp for their consumers who participated in the Reverse Job Fair.
- Collaborated with Employment Development and the Alabama School for the Deaf in their Transition Workshop Series.



- Participated in a nationwide group designed to explore the efficacy of vocational evaluation services.
- Many ADRS vocational evaluation team members met with evaluators across the country through a virtual group entitled, “State to State,” and were involved in the initial planning and implementation of this group, which has been recognized by CSAVR. Now known as the National Professional Network for State Vocational Evaluators (NPNSVE), the Lakeshore team will continue to be involved as it offers networking opportunities and training to vocational evaluators employed by state rehabilitation programs.

Supported Employment

With the assistance of 40 supported employment providers, there were 653 consumers with the most significant disabilities served under a supported employment plan working in competitive integrated employment. The workers averaged 24.5 hours per week, earning \$11.34 per hour on average. This average wage marks a significant increase from last year’s \$10.63 per-hour for individuals in supported employment.

Pre-ETS and Transition Services

Through the Transition Services Program, ADRS enables Alabama's students and youth with disabilities to be independent, and productive members of their communities.

Interns across the state participated in pre-employment transition services (Pre-ETS) and transition services in social skills, self-advocacy, financial management, job readiness, and work-based learning.

In FY23, VRS counselors coordinated and provided Pre-ETS and transition services to students with a disability in a greater capacity than in the previous fiscal year.

Accomplishments include:

- Successfully closed 1,914 students and youth in gainful employment.
- Authorized Pre-ETS activities for 9,838 students and approximately 1,900 transition-age students and youth were successfully employed.
- 83 students had the opportunity to receive additional Pre-ETS and transition services with the addition of new Jobs for Alabama Graduates (JAG) sites.
- Conducted Transition Unlimited in-person meetings, which is a statewide initiative that provides guidance to local education agencies (LEAs) and VRS counselors, as they develop action plans for the delivery of Pre-ETS for their students with disabilities, who are either potentially eligible or eligible for VRS services.
- Through a collaborative effort between VRS counselors, LEAs, 504 coordinators, and other school staff, action plans were developed for 361 public high schools in the state of Alabama.
- Alabama Governor's Youth Leadership Forum (YLF) provided leadership and self-advocacy training to 22 delegates.
- Project SEARCH staff attended the in-state Project SEARCH mini-conference and the National Project SEARCH Conference in July 2023.

The FY23 STRIVE Youth Program in Dekalb County has successfully worked with eight interns in work-based learning opportunities with five currently employed.

The program is expecting to serve four additional interns by the end of the program year with a total of 12. FY24 STRIVE is expected to grow across our state and assist in serving out-of-school youth with disabilities in transitioning to employment.

Gadsden's Out-of-School **Project SEARCH** in Etowah County, in partnership with Gadsden Regional Medical Center, Department of Labor, Commerce, Workforce, and Adult Education is in the sixth year of operation. During FY23, the program served 11 interns who are in work-based learning and receiving classroom instruction with an expected outcome of 75 percent employment rate.

The 11 in-school Project SEARCH programs across the state are in Montgomery, Mobile, Huntsville, Birmingham, Anniston, Shelby County, Pell City, Hoover, Guntersville, and Tuscaloosa. The local partner organizations are the local education agencies, Vocational Rehabilitation Services, business sites, mental health departments, community rehabilitation programs/supported employment providers, and developmental disability agencies.

Annual Program Data Outcomes in FY23:

- 103 students enrolled with various disabilities
- 23 interns were on the autism spectrum; 39 had an intellectual developmental disability, 16 had a learning disability, and 24 had other health impairments
- 92 were program completers
- 78 entered are successfully employed
- Average hourly wage: \$11.50
- Average hours worked: 17 to 33 hours



Ben Abercrombie, Shelby County
Story on page 41





State of Alabama Independent Living/Homebound Division

The State of Alabama Independent Living (SAIL)/Homebound program operates from seven community-based offices throughout Alabama serving residents in every county. SAIL assists individuals with the most significant disabilities in maintaining and regaining as much independence as possible while remaining in their homes and communities.

SAIL's team of registered nurses, rehabilitation

counselors, and community support specialists provides individuals and their families with personalized services and training on the unique issues and needs presented by their disabilities.

Through specialized in-home education, counseling, attendant care, training, and medical services, consumers are taught about activities of daily living, health, safety, nutrition, and assistive technology.

SAIL is comprised of four specialized programs:

- 1. The Homebound Services program** provides a wide range of education and in-home services to assist people with the most significant disabilities in leading more independent lives. To be eligible for this program, a person must:

 - be an Alabama resident
 - be at least 16 years old
 - have a medical diagnosis of traumatic brain injury or quadriplegia
 - be dependent on others for assistance with activities of daily living
 - demonstrate a financial need
- 2. The SAIL Medicaid Waiver program** can maximize its resources and access additional programs and services for the individuals served by providing services in the participant's home, leading to reductions in institutional placements. To be eligible for assistance through the waiver, a person must:

 - be at least 18 years old
 - be medically and financially qualified for a nursing home
- 3. The Community Supports program** enhances and promotes independence in the home, community, and workplace. To be eligible, a person must:

 - have experienced the onset of the disability before age 60
 - have a neurological disability as a result of reasons other than aging
- 4. The SAIL/VRS Hybrid program** allows individuals with the most significant disabilities to consider and pursue educational training and employment options. Participants in this program receive Waiver or Homebound services and Vocational Rehabilitation Services through one counselor.

Sources of Revenue

State\$6,263,689

Other.....\$15,316,310

Federal.....\$50,972

Use of Revenue

Direct Services ... \$20,382,742 (94%)

Administration \$1,248,230 (6%)

SAIL 2023 Highlights

In FY23, State of Alabama Independent Living-Homebound:

- **Expanded employment counseling services** - The SAIL/VRS Hybrid program allows individuals with the most significant disabilities to consider and pursue educational training and employment options. Participants in this program receive Waiver or Homebound services and Vocational Rehabilitation Services through one counselor. In FY23, Hybrid counselors began training in two new districts which will result in statewide coverage beginning FY24.
- **Collaborated to promote a continuum of care** - In 2023, Homebound continued to provide services to individuals with other significant disabilities. As consumers transitioned to other programs, homebound was able to offer critical services to additional Alabamians in need of supports to remain independent.
- **Advanced the ability for more individuals to live at home** - The SAIL Medicaid Waiver program can maximize its resources and access additional programs and services for the individuals served by providing services in the participant's home, leading to reductions in institutional placements.
- **Expanded services** - In 2023, the Waiver program expanded services in all districts and developed training and quality assurance measures to ensure consistency of services.
- **Leveraged and maximized resources to increase independence** - In 2023, The Community Supports program provided home modifications and other independent living aids to individuals with disabilities in Alabama and leveraged \$237,288.11 in donated goods and services to support these efforts.



Ben Abercrombie *Shelby County*

When former Hoover High School standout Ben Abercrombie arrived on Harvard's campus in 2017 as a member of the football team, he was excited to begin his playing career. That ended when a tackle led to a spinal cord injury that caused paralysis from the neck down.

Determined to continue his studies at Harvard, he enlisted the help of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VRS), and the State of Alabama Independent Living (SAIL) program. The hybrid team from ADRS became part of the new game plan.

Ben connected with VRS and Assistive Technology Specialist Pat O'Brien to help him secure the tools he would need to complete his education independently. Pat helped to train him on a computer using Tobii Eye Gaze Technology and Dragon software.

The eye-gaze tech tracks Ben's eye movements, which move the mouse on a computer screen. He can select items by holding an eye gaze for

a specific time, blinking, or clicking an external button. Dragon technology allows him to "type" by speaking into documents, web pages, his email and calendar, and almost every other application.

"The more I got comfortable with it, the more I realized that I could basically do just about everything I used to be able to do with it," he said. "It definitely helps out with school. I have become more efficient as time has gone on."

More than 1,000 miles separate Ben from his ADRS team including Pat, Amy Gibbs with SAIL, and VRS Counselor JeVida Yow. However, they stay in contact and continue to ensure his needs are met.

Ben is on track to earn his bachelor's degree in finance in 2024.



Jeremy Champion *Talladega County*

A Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) can be a dramatically life-altering experience, but not always how one might expect. While it can be devastating, there is hope for many that new doors can open to a different, equally fulfilling life.

In 2020, Talladega resident Jeremy Champion was not expected to leave the hospital after suffering a subdural hematoma and subarachnoid hemorrhage caused by a gunshot to the head. In less than two years of working with ADRS's TBI Care Coordinator Tammy Lovell, he began considering his options to return to the workforce.

Tammy began her role in Jeremy's recovery in 2021 after Spain Rehab Center referred him. When his cranioplasty was complete, they began cognitive activities focused on memory, processing speed, attention, concentration, and word finding.

Jeremy said he took these activities very seriously because he knew it was the first step

toward attaining employment.

"All the activities we do, I love them because it really gets my mind working," he said.

When Tammy discovered that the Marianna Greene Henry Special Equestrian Center had an opening for volunteer work, she discussed the opportunity with Jeremy. He decided to apply and was approved to begin volunteering in August of 2022.

Working at the center helped him improve his motor skills and establish a routine. He gained strength and improved dexterity by using his hands and other muscles for cleaning stalls, spraying things down, carrying feed, and other activities.

Jeremy continues to prepare for the workforce with his VRS counselor in Talladega. His job outlook is different from what he once thought it would be. But he has hope for new career opportunities as he continues his journey to recovery.



Rehabilitation Engineering & Assistive Technology Services

Facilitating Dignity and Independence with Technology
A Program of the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services

The Rehabilitation Engineering and Assistive Technology (RE&AT) Program provides innovative accommodation and assistive technology solutions to remove barriers to education, vocation, and independent living for people with disabilities enrolled in an ADRS program.

Using comprehensive knowledge of engineering principles, technology, human behavior, and disability, along with an array of technical skills and methodologies, rehab engineers develop recommendations to assist individuals in utilizing their abilities to achieve their unique goals. The RE&AT team is passionate about helping individuals with disabilities reach their maximum potential.

Services are available to anyone enrolled in an ADRS program (EI, CRS, VRS, or SAIL) and are not limited by age or disability. ADRS rehab engineers and assistive technology specialists can be seen providing mounting solutions for CRS Augmentative Communication Clinic; assisting schools with the implementation of Assistive Technology (AT) for students of all ages; working alongside employment specialists to train VRS participants how to use their AT at work; building a custom devices in the local RE&AT workshop to help individuals complete a task; or working with a family to design a more accessible living space.

ADRS engineers maintain a working knowledge of a variety of technical fields including fabrication, construction, design, computer-aided drafting, ergonomics, biomechanics, assistive technology, educational technology, informational technology, and more, to ensure that people across the continuum of care at ADRS - especially those with the most complex needs - are able to be more independent.

In FY23, the RE&AT program held training events across the state to bring awareness of rehabilitation engineering and assistive technology. The program was represented at the Alabama Education Technology Conference, the Alabama Department of Education's MEGA conference, the Assistive Technology Resource Expo and Learning Event, a Hands-On Makers Workshop, and the Worlds of Work Expo in different cities across the state. They also continued to develop their recruitment and training initiatives by working with local engineering student groups on assistive technology design projects and participated in the Conference For Developing Engineers at Alabama State University.

Finally, RE&AT started an initiative with the Birmingham Education Foundation to provide high school students interested in engineering with internships. These initiatives help increase awareness of AT concepts and disability needs to future innovators and often result in job shadowing or internship opportunities that help the program recruit future staff.



Hoover High School Engineering Academy *Shelby County*

Hoover High School Engineering Academy students and Engineering Teacher Martin Ledvina have been creating award-winning projects by partnering with the ADRS Rehabilitation Engineering & Assistive Technology (RE&AT) Program.

The projects are focused on designs that would benefit people with disabilities and encourage students to understand from the very outset the needs of the user and incorporate those needs into a design.

One project is a pen that vibrates to help people with Parkinson's tremors write more clearly.

This project earned the Engineering Academy recognition as a 2022 School of Distinction for the capstone projects, selected by the Council for Leaders in Alabama Schools.

The ADRS and Hoover Academy partnership began about five years ago when RE&AT

Program Manager Michael Papp was working with University of Alabama at Birmingham engineering students to develop their senior projects. A representative of Hoover High School reached out to Michael to see if they could take on similar projects.

"They saw that whiteboard (listing possible projects) and that's all they needed to see," he said. "Ever since then, we have been in constant communication. I have been providing projects to them and working with their students, usually electronically, and giving them feedback and different ideas as to what they can do."

Papp said the partnership allows engineering students to learn the engineering process and, more importantly, how to design products to meet the needs of people with disabilities. It also encourages future engineers to work in the field of assistive technology.



The DRS Accessing Potential Through Assistive Technology (APTAT) Team



Accessing Potential Through Assistive Technology

Accessing Potential Through Assistive Technology (APTAT) is a leading resource in the state of Alabama for assistive technology (AT). Receiving federal funding through the 21st Century Assistive Technology Act, APTAT provides services such as a short-term loan library, device demonstrations, and device reutilization to make AT more accessible to Alabamians with disabilities. In addition, their experienced team provides in-depth educational activities and technical assistance to organizations that want to learn more about adaptive technology and ways to improve their AT services.

The short-term loan program is available for individuals to borrow devices for up to 30 days for the purposes of “try before you buy,” temporary accommodations, or professional development.

The device demonstration program provides an individual and their support team an opportunity to meet with an AT expert who can guide them through hands on device trials and comparison to assist the individual with deciding which technology would best fit their needs.

This year, APTAT worked diligently to increase the capacity of their device inventory, closing out the year with over 450 devices available for loan or demonstration. They opened their first demonstration center in the ADRS Homewood Vocational Rehabilitation office; an accessible space dedicated to providing AT services to the community.

The device reutilization program, made possible through invaluable partnerships

with community rehabilitation partners, provides recycled durable medical equipment (DME) to citizens at no cost. Each center manages donations, refurbishes equipment as needed, and responds to requests from their community. This year they fulfilled requests for a total of 6,836 devices, saving consumers \$2.2 million on the purchase of DME.

In FY23, APTAT provided 55 educational activities to various organizations such as schools and colleges, disability advocacy groups, and professionals in the field of employment. They also served as a lead presenter and coordinator of the first annual AT Alabama Resource Expo and Learning Event. The free Resource Expo provided an opportunity for attendees to try state-of-the-art technology like adaptive video games, an eye gaze-driven wheelchair, and 3D printing. The one-day learning event provided 16 in-depth educational sessions on assistive technology. It was attended by over 300 family members, individuals with disabilities, and service providers who left with increased knowledge, excitement, and inspiration.

The reuse centers are located at Waste Not at Christmas Charities Year-Round in Huntsville, Remedy with Birmingham Baptist Association in Birmingham, CARE Project at Easterseals of Central Alabama in Montgomery, REAL Project at Wiregrass Rehabilitation Center in Dothan, and We Share at Goodwill Gulf Coast in Mobile.

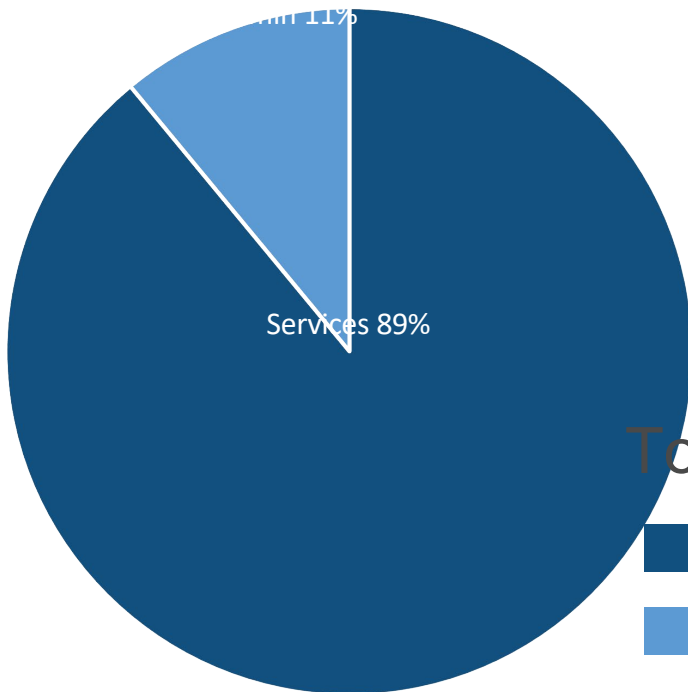
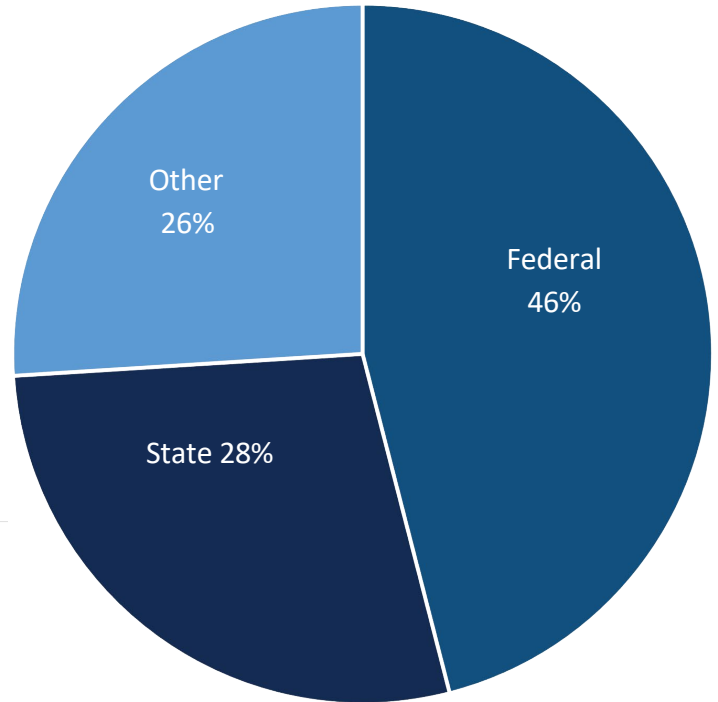


67,151

Total Alabamians served

Total revenue:

- Federal: \$84,685,855**
- State: \$50,969,647**
- Other: \$47,009,244**



Total expenditures:

- Direct Services: \$163,192,895**
- Administration: \$19,471,851**

Community Rehabilitation Program Locations

ANNISTON

Opportunity Center-Easter Seals

BIRMINGHAM

ADRS-Lakeshore
Easter Seals of the Birmingham Area
Glennwood
Goodwill Industries of Alabama
Independent Advantage
The Arc of Central Alabama The Is-
Able Center
Triumph Services United
Ability Workshops Inc.

DECATUR

Erica Allen Employment Services
(EASE)
Phoenix Rehabilitation
Foundation

DOTHAN

The Little Network
Wiregrass Rehabilitation Center

GADSDEN

Darden Rehabilitation Foundation

HUNTSVILLE

Phoenix Rehabilitation Foundation
The Arc of Madison County The
Transition Team

JACKSON

The Arc of Clarke County

KELLYTON

Central Alabama Reach Out Center
(CAROC)

MOBILE

Goodwill Gulf Coast
Howell Employment Services
Hybrid LLC
United Cerebral Palsy of Mobile
Volunteers of America

MONTGOMERY

Easter Seals Central Alabama
Goodwill Industries of Central
Alabama
Rainbow 66 Storehouse
Volunteers of America

MUSCLE SHOALS

Easter Seals of Northwest Alabama

ONEONTA

The Arc of Central Alabama - Blount
Division

OPELIKA

Achievement Center-Easter Seals
Jackie Johnson Employment
Services

PELHAM EQUIP

The Arc of Shelby County

SELMA

Easter Seals of West-Central
Alabama

SPANISH FORT

ICan Train

TALLADEGA

Alabama Institute for Deaf and
Blind - E.H. Gentry

TUSCALOOSA

Easter Seals West Alabama

Early Intervention Program Locations

ANNISTON

East Central Alabama United
Cerebral Palsy (UCP) Center Inc.

BIRMINGHAM

Alabama Institute for Deaf and
Blind, regional office
ARC of Central Alabama Children R
Us
Children's of Alabama Early
Intervention Program
United Ability of Greater
Birmingham – Hand in Hand
Village Early Intervention Watch
Me Grow
WISE - Wooley Institute for
Spoken-Language Education

CULLMAN

Cullman County Center for
Developmentally Disabled Inc.
(Todd's Club)

DECATUR

Alabama Institute for Deaf and
Blind, Decatur Regional Office
Center for the Developmentally
Disabled (CDD)
North Central Alabama MRA

DOTHAN

Alabama Institute for Deaf and
Blind, regional office
Dothan-Houston County MRB Inc.
(Vaughn Blumberg Center)

FLORENCE

SCOPE 310

GADSDEN

United Ability of Greater
Birmingham – Hand in Hand

GUNTERSVILLE

Marshall/Jackson MRA

HUNTSVILLE

Alabama Institute for Deaf and
Blind, regional office
ARC of Madison County
UCP of Huntsville and Tennessee
Valley

JASPER

ARC of Walker County

MOBILE

Alabama Institute for Deaf and
Blind, regional office
Goodwill Easter Seals of the Gulf
Coast
Gulf Coast Therapy Early
Intervention
UCP of Mobile (Project Special
Delivery, New Journey, Families
First)

MONTGOMERY

Alabama Institute for Deaf and
Blind, Montgomery and Auburn
offices
Children's Center of Montgomery
Inc. (PPEI)
Project Wiggles and Giggles
UCP of Mobile (Horizon, Familiy
Ties)

MUSCLE SHOALS

Alabama Institute for the Deaf and
Blind, regional office

OPELIKA - AUBURN

Alabama Institute for the Deaf and
Blind, regional office

OZARK

Vivian B. Adams Early Intervention

PELHAM

Shelby County ARC/Kids First

PRATTVILLE

ARC of Autauga/Western Elmore
County (EIEIO)

ROBERTSDALE

Cindy Haber Center, Inc.
UCP of Mobile (Project Sunrise)

SCOTTSBORO

Marshall/Jackson MRA
Twin Acres Early Intervention

SELMA

Cahaba Center Early Intervention

TALLADEGA

Alabama Institute for Deaf and
Blind, regional office

TUSCALOOSA

Alabama Institute for Deaf and
Blind, regional office
Community Service Programs of West
Alabama Inc.
Early Intervention at the
University of Alabama

TUSCUMBIA

Alabama Institute for Deaf and
Blind, regional office
UCP of Northwest Alabama

VALLEY

Chattahoochee Valley ARC/ Valley
Haven Early Intervention

WINFIELD

Tri-County Early Intervention

Numbers Served by County

County	AEIS	CRS	VRS	SAIL	County	AEIS	CRS	VRS	SAIL	County	AEIS	CRS	VRS	SAIL
Autauga	84	169	304	37	DeKalb	87	392	378	12	Mobile	782	1,405	2,437	137
Baldwin	282	385	984	27	Elmore	90	207	338	76	Monroe	19	88	102	5
Barbour	14	109	70	13	Escambia	27	59	155	7	Montgomery	369	858	1,241	201
Bibb	28	55	124	9	Etowah	139	561	842	29	Morgan	264	314	545	23
Blount	103	139	154	21	Fayette	51	45	130	7	Perry	7	17	5	9
Bullock	21	27	17	4	Franklin	52	117	236	2	Pickens	34	55	122	15
Butler	14	77	80	8	Geneva	20	144	273	10	Pike	35	95	220	18
Calhoun	220	859	833	49	Greene	12	27	35	9	Randolph	37	66	139	7
Chambers	49	60	180	15	Hale	30	55	77	18	Russell	38	73	137	13
Cherokee	18	81	174	9	Henry	9	76	132	8	Shelby	664	356	1,135	41
Chilton	79	87	204	24	Houston	117	591	648	34	St. Clair	171	215	286	31
Choctaw	14	41	86	11	Jackson	54	138	245	7	Sumter	17	22	44	11
Clarke	34	225	164	20	Jefferson	1,893	1,155	4,408	230	Talladega	157	271	616	62
Clay	15	67	73	6	Lamar	60	39	106	1	Tallapoosa	37	76	212	32
Cleburne	21	83	78	2	Lauderdale	128	227	699	14	Tuscaloosa	478	695	1,737	89
Coffee	31	370	162	8	Lawrence	54	66	219	13	Walker	149	157	320	19
Colbert	101	173	457	8	Lee	184	236	621	52	Washington	14	95	171	8
Conecuh	10	32	69	4	Limestone	182	214	620	16	Wilcox	25	53	14	6
Coosa	11	12	34	8	Lowndes	8	32	53	11	Winston	75	58	180	9
Covington	20	358	272	13	Macon	17	25	84	15	Other*	0	7	12,821	0
Crenshaw	7	64	85	6	Madison	799	1,116	1,823	43	TOTAL	9,158	15,234	40,653	1,752
Cullman	128	152	368	16	Marengo	45	74	130	14	<i>*Moved out-of-state or pending eligibility</i>				
Dale	41	249	237	12	Marion	111	66	189	21					
Dallas	72	152	73	21	Marshall	200	570	446	16					

The 2023 ADRS Annual Report was produced by the ADRS Office of Communications and Information (OCI):

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For electronic, text-only or printed copies of this report, contact the ADRS
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Some stories in this report are also available in video and can be viewed and shared on
youtube.com/adrsfamily and youtube.com/adrstv

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The services described in this brochure are funded in part with federal funds awarded by the U.S. Department of Education under the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR), Supported Employment Services, and the Independent Living Services for Older Individuals Who are Blind (OIB) programs. For purposes of the VR program, the federal VR grant paid 78.7 percent of the total costs of the program. In federal fiscal year (FFY) 2022, the VR agency received \$69,944,263 in federal VR funds. Funds appropriated by the state paid 21.3 percent of the total costs (\$18,930,277) under the VR program. For purposes of the Supported Employment program, federal funds paid 95 percent of the total costs. In FFY 2022, the VR agency received \$559,238 in federal Supported Employment funds. Funds appropriated by the state paid 5 percent (\$31,069) of the total costs incurred under the program. For purposes of the OIB program, federal funds paid 90 percent of the total costs incurred under the program. In FFY 2022, the agency received \$470,531 in federal grant funds for this program. Funds appropriated by the state paid 10 percent (\$52,281) of the total costs incurred under the OIB program.



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