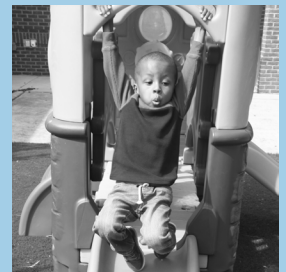




Alabama Department of
Rehabilitation Services

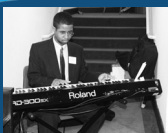
2024 annual report

Celebrating 30 Years as
One Department with One Mission



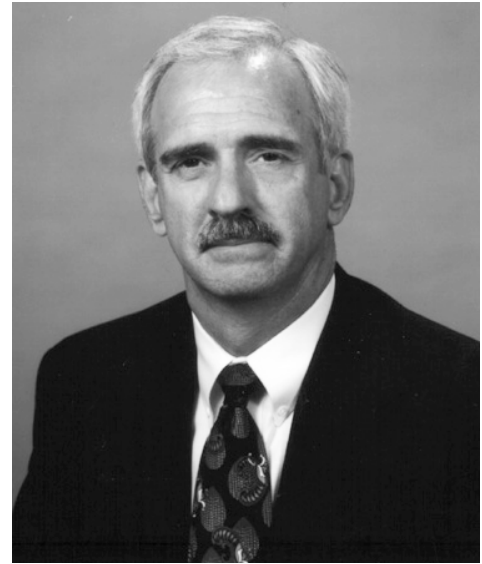


Empowering Alabamians with through a continuum of care



Cover Artist: Kelvin Pride is a Florence resident who is well-known for his artistic and musical abilities. Kelvin, who was diagnosed at five years old with autism, was first introduced to ADRS in middle school. He received mentoring through Children's Rehabilitation Service and participated in several programs to build on his skills. He transitioned to the Vocational Rehabilitation Service and was connected with job training opportunities. He interned at the North Alabama Medical Hospital and is employed at Books-A-Million. In 2018, Kelvin was named the Shoals Area Small Business Employee of the Year by the Governor's Committee on the Employment of People with Disabilities.

n disabilities
for decades



O.D. Van, 1995 Chair
ADRS Board of Directors

**“For the first time in history,
Alabama’s children and adults
with disabilities
have a department of state government
focused exclusively on them.**

**Our pledge is to create a state where
Alabamians with disabilities
can live, play and work
equally with their neighbors.**

**For those of whom we expect so much,
we can do no less.”**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dixie D.K." with a long horizontal flourish at the end.

**Letter from the Chair
1995 ADRS Annual Report**

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.

Developed by: Staff of the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services
Description: Mission/Values/Strategic Goals





Jane Elizabeth Burdeshaw
Commissioner

The ADRS 2024 Annual Report marks another incredible milestone for the Department: the 30th anniversary when Alabama consolidated services for individuals with disabilities into One Department with One Mission.

This point in our history is worth celebrating today as it was over a century ago when services for this population were first provided to Alabama citizens under the Smith-Fess Act of 1920.

In this report, we share snapshots of our history and the stories of Alabamians through the years who have benefited from the continuum of care model made possible by the Department's creation in 1994 by the Alabama Legislature. The foresight and actions of these leaders created a clearer path for individuals with disabilities to increase their independence, discover their talents and skills, reach their maximum potential, and improve their quality of life.

Since 1994, ADRS has provided - from a single point of entry - the specialized programs and services individuals with disabilities need to overcome barriers to success. Programs like diagnostic and therapeutic services, developmental instruction, family training, independent living training and supports, educational training and supports, vocational training and placement, work-based learning, adaptive driving, rehabilitation engineering, and assistive technology are all provided under one roof.

Today, ADRS continues to play a pivotal role with other state and community agencies as we collectively seek to advance the health, independence, skills, educational attainment, and workforce participation of Alabama's citizens. Proactively creating opportunities across the lifespan through individualized service delivery is how we accomplish this mission.

We hope you will celebrate with us as we highlight the history of ADRS and the growing number of Alabamians with disabilities who are creating their own unique success stories. We are dedicated to building on the legacy left by those who served before us, and we commit to carrying that legacy to new heights.

On behalf of the ADRS Family, we are grateful for the continued support of Governor Kay Ivey, the Alabama Legislature, and our many agency and community partners. We look forward to more significant milestones in our future together.



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.

About ADRS

Created by the Alabama Legislature in 1994, the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services (ADRS) is the state agency that serves Alabamians with disabilities from birth throughout their lives. Our “continuum of care” approach means that support, training, special services, and resources are available through one agency at every stage of a person’s life.

ADRS History page 9

Services are provided by our four main programs through 25 community offices, reaching residents in all 67 counties.

Alabama’s Early Intervention System (AEIS)

serves children from birth to age 3 by coordinating services statewide for infants and toddlers with developmental delays or a medical diagnosis that could result in developmental delays.

AEIS on page 10

Children’s Rehabilitation Service (CRS)

serves children and teens from birth to 21 with special healthcare needs and their families, and also individuals with hemophilia at any age.

CRS on page 14

Vocational Rehabilitation Service (VRS)

is our largest program. It serves teens and adults by providing specialized employment- and education-related services and training. Programs within this division include VRS Blind-Deaf Services, Business Enterprise Program, Business Relations Program, and Lakeshore Rehabilitation, Rehabilitation engineering and assistive technology, Traumatic Brain Injury Program, Pre-employment services for students, and OASIS program for seniors.

VRS on page 20

State of Alabama Independent Living - Homebound (SAIL)

assists individuals with the most significant disabilities, providing a wide range of education, assistive technology, training, and home-based services to increase independence.

SAIL on page 30

Board of Directors



Charles Wilkinson
District 6

Dear friends,

Serving as the Alabama Board of Rehabilitation Services Board Chair this year has been both a privilege and a deeply rewarding experience.

As ADRS marks its 30th anniversary in 2024, we have a unique opportunity to celebrate three decades of innovation and impact. From groundbreaking early intervention and rehabilitation initiatives to advancing vocational and business relations programs, and championing self-directed independent living, ADRS has built a remarkable legacy of service, transformation, and empowerment.

I am genuinely inspired by the unwavering dedication of our leaders and team of professionals whose tireless efforts break down barriers, ignite potential, and empower individuals across Alabama to achieve their dreams. The stories highlighted in this year's annual report stand as a powerful testament to the strength and resilience of the human spirit and the impact of the life-changing work made possible by ADRS.

On behalf of the Board, I extend my heartfelt appreciation to the ADRS team and our valued partners for another exceptional year. Your commitment and collaboration ensure that our mission thrives, building brighter futures and stronger communities as we honor this 30-year milestone.

United in purpose, we are together driving transformative change that uplifts individuals, empowers employers, and strengthens communities all across Alabama.

Best regards,

Charles Wilkinson, Chair



Michelle Glaze
District 1



Kimberlin Love
District 2



Judith Gilliam
District 3



Kevin Kidd
District 4
Vice Chair



Eddie Williams
District 5



Norma Lemley
District 7

The Alabama Board of Rehabilitation Services 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.



Lamona Hall Lucas
1934 - 2024

**“ADRS is unique in all the nation.
Our commitment to seeing that the
people we serve have choices and
are fully involved in a meaningful way
with our agency, and our collective
efforts create greater opportunities
for people with disabilities.
I know you share my pride and our joy
in the successes of the children and
adults we serve.”**

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Lamona H. Lucas".

ADRS Commissioner Letter
1995 ADRS Annual Report

Tribute to Lamona Lucas

The legacy that Lamona Lucas left at ADRS and in the disability community is everlasting.

Lamona, who served as the department’s first commissioner until her retirement in 1999, led the push that helped pass legislation consolidating state services for Alabama’s infants, children, youth, and adults with disabilities into a single department. Alabama families are still reaping the benefits that resulted from her groundbreaking leadership.

Commissioner Jane Elizabeth Burdeshaw said Lucas’ dedication to helping people with disabilities reach their maximum potential was felt nationwide.

“Her countless contributions to the disability community here in Alabama and across the country cannot be overstated,” said Jane Elizabeth.

Lamona earned her master’s degree from the University of South Alabama and became the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor for Rotary Rehabilitation Hospital. She then served as director for the Rehabilitation Services Division under the Alabama Department of Education, and became the first commissioner of the newly formed ADRS in 1994.

Her visionary skills led her to lead Foundations in Mobile (Arthritis and Lung) as well as establishing new programs within the state like Miss Wheelchair, the Traumatic Brain Injury Task Force, and wheelchair basketball.

Lamona was called upon to assist in the writing of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, which secured federal protections for people with disabilities from discrimination in many areas of life. Her assistance with the passage of the ADA was one of her greatest sources of pride, and she was invited to stand by the president in the White House Rose Garden when it was signed into law.

Lamona was highly regarded and respected for her work and advocacy throughout her life. The ADRS family remembers her with gratitude for helping to improve the lives of Alabamians we serve every day.



ADRS History

ONE DEPARTMENT. ONE MISSION.

The ADRS story has been told for 30 years, and it's still as monumental as the day the legislation passed in 1994 giving birth to the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services.

Because of the vision and determination of our pioneering leaders, ADRS is an independent agency serving people with disabilities at every age and stage of life with a successful continuum-of-care system that is looked to as a model by other states.

But the history of rehabilitation services in Alabama goes back before 1994, starting with the passage of the 1920 Smith-Fess Act signed into federal law to secure disability services for veterans and citizens.

Rehabilitation Services became a division within Alabama's Department of Education that same year. The Vocational Rehabilitation Program was added after the Social Security Act of 1935, and later, services were expanded to children in the 1940s during the polio epidemic. The children's and vocational programs were merged in 1956, and 1965 amendments to the Rehabilitation Act added specialized services for deaf and blind individuals.

In 1972, the Homebound Program was launched after Governor George C. Wallace was shot and came to realize there was a significant number of severely disabled individuals in Alabama who had little or no resources to help them rehabilitate and remain in their homes. In 1985, the State Department of Education established the Early Intervention program to serve children from birth to three years. A year later, the division's vocational program celebrated the 200,000th person rehabilitated into employment in Alabama.

“I am hopeful that every individual served by ADRS will be prepared and ready to move forward with the challenges that lie ahead in their lives. The system does work! I am proof of that in my own life.”

David Brock, 1995 ADRS Board of Directors

In the years that followed, Rehabilitation Director Lamona Lucas and her Executive Leadership Team advocated for an independent agency where Alabamians with disabilities would be better served through a continuum of care system. This integrated approach would prove to provide a seamless transition for the state's children and adults who need individualized services across a multitude of programs for as long as they require them. It would also increase accountability and efficiency through outcome-based budgeting, provide increased flexibility to respond to people's needs more quickly, improve overall access to services in every Alabama county, and expand services through community partnerships.

This advocacy campaign gained the legislative support needed to pass HB 125 on May 5, 1994. Upon Governor Jim Folsom's signature on May 9, 1994, the independent Department of Rehabilitation Services was established and began operations on January 3rd, 1995.

Today, we celebrate our extraordinary history and continue to follow our Blueprint for the 21st Century with the mission established by our founders: to enable Alabama's children and adults with disabilities to achieve their maximum potential.

AEIS 2024 Impact

- Served 9,260 children and their families, and had 11,511 new referrals.
- Conducted a comprehensive fiscal analysis and rate study to evaluate the existing funding structure and reimbursement rates for service provision, **leading to increased efficiency and improvements to service delivery** through the reduction of administrative burden.
- Collaborated with the Alabama Interagency Autism Coordinating Council (AIACC) through the Early Childhood Autism Work Group to **establish best-practice strategies for intervention with young children with autism.**
- Worked with the Department of Mental Health (DMH) and Infant Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (IECMH) to **identify children needing mental health consultation and help them access appropriate interventions and services.**

Early Intervention Program Locations

ANNISTON

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

BIRMINGHAM

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

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 310

DOTHAN

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

FLORENCE

SCOPE 310

GUNTERSVILLE

Marshall/Jackson MRA 310

HUNTSVILLE

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

JASPER

The 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)

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, Family 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

The Arc of Shelby County/Kids First

PRATTVILLE

The Arc of Autauga/Western Elmore County (EIEIO)

ROBERTSDALE

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

SCOTTSBORO

Marshall/Jackson MRA 310
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

The Arc of Chattahoochee Valley/
Valley Haven Early Intervention

WINFIELD

Tri-County Early Intervention



Alabama's Early Intervention System

Early childhood development is vital to the growth and success of all children, and 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. It's during this critical time that Early Intervention (EI) can make the greatest impact toward a lifetime of success for children served by the program.

Created to be a critical first step to ensuring that all children enter school equipped to learn, Alabama's Early Intervention System (AEIS) serves infants and toddlers under the age of three who have a developmental delay or a diagnosed medical condition that can cause delays and prevent the child from meeting developmental milestones.

Working alongside the family in their natural environment, the goal is to train, equip, and support parents and caregivers in being their child's first and best teachers.

AEIS has built a strong, statewide network connecting families, community organizations, and public and private service providers to ensure families and caregivers have everything they need to enhance their child's development through its community-based, family-centered system of support and evidence-based practices.

Alabama benefits from early intervention services, as well. Studies find that investing in early childhood programs increases the effectiveness of public schools, reduces crime rates, and meets the state's economic needs with more individuals participating in the workforce.

“Investing in early intervention not only impacts each child, but it also strengthens our workforce and prepares future generations to be competitive in the global economy tomorrow.”

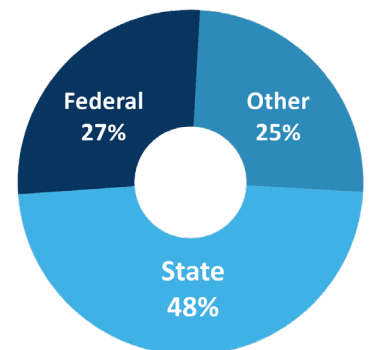
Professor James Jeckman, PhD
University of Chicago

Revenue

\$14,702,810 State Funds

\$8,310,109 Federal Funds

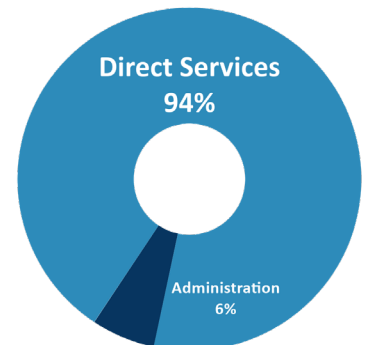
\$7,789,169 Other Funds



Expenditures

\$29,028,395 Direct Services

\$1,773,692 Administration



Where are they now: Sylvia Bowen

State Parent Consultant

Sylvia Bowen is focused on her mission to serve children and youth with special healthcare needs as CRS State Parent Consultant. She said serving has been a part of her healing process after losing her daughter at 14 months.

Zoe was born with Trisomy 18, a rare genetic disorder that occurs when a baby is born with three copies of chromosome 18 instead of two. It can cause physical deformities, internal organ defects, and severe developmental disabilities. The doctors had doubts that Zoe would make it home, but she did and her resilience lit a fire in her mother to support families facing similar circumstances.

“Every day that I come to work is a reminder that there is no other place I’d rather be,” she said. “To be able to do something that helps parents and caregivers navigate the medical care system, it’s so important.”

She currently serves families through CRS, but it was Alabama’s Early Intervention System that brought ADRS services to Sylvia’s attention. Dr. Julie Preskitt, a full-time professor in UAB’s School of Public Health, introduced her to EI Director Amy Blakeney. Amy described the services available to her through EI.

As the parent of a child with disabilities, Sylvia said she understands that the opinions and insights of other parents are crucial to developing new policies and better serving these families in clinics.

“That makes a huge difference to a parent of a child with special needs because sometimes it can be overwhelming,” she said. “They wonder if anyone is hearing them, and to know that there is a platform for parents to be able to speak up on behalf of other parents is absolutely amazing.”

Sylvia often reminds parents that the journey can be difficult, but it is also rewarding. She tells them, “It may not look like it right now, but I promise you down the



road, you will look back and will be so thankful that you were given this child because you are going to be blessed in more ways than you could ever imagine.”

She said they chose the name Zoe because it means “life” and Victoria because she would be victorious in her journey. She said faith helped her family appreciate that Zoe’s life had been victorious and would continue to have a positive impact. Indeed, her life continues to have a tremendous impact through her mother’s work at CRS.

“The pain, the joy, all of it - I wouldn’t trade it for anything. Zoe’s not here, but her life is still being used for such good. She gave us way more than we could have possibly ever given her, and she continues to give through the people who have been touched.”



Jalen Vann

Huntsville

Huntsville’s Marquitta Hillman said she first noticed possible developmental issues when her son Jalen was 16 months old. There were delays in his communication, and though he walked at 15 months, she felt it should have been sooner.

Marquitta enrolled Jalen in the ADRS Early Intervention (EI) program, where she learned activities that could be done in the home. That’s when Jalen began making progress.

He learned some sign language, improved his use of utensils for feeding, and learned to dress himself. His motor skills have always been strong, which helped him engage in the activities.

Marquitta, a physical therapist who recently began working in pediatrics, said she tried to do as much as she could on her own. Still, she valued the expertise of her EI family and loved how they all worked together as a team.

“They have gone out of their way to make sure they help me,” she said. “I just had to make the decision that it is okay to have help.”

Alabama’s Early Intervention System has a large network of programs across the state, building a bridge for families to get

**“They’ve gone out of their way to help me.
I just had to make the decision
that it is okay to have help.”**

Marquitta Hillman

connected to crucial services. This is especially important for children with an autism diagnosis.

Though autism is a lifelong condition, early diagnosis and evidence-based interventions can significantly improve the quality of life for children with the disorder as well as their caregivers and families.

Jalen, who turned four years old in November 2024, is just one of the many children in Alabama who have and will benefit from the extended services that follow an official autism diagnosis through Alabama’s Early Intervention System.

CRS 2024 Impact

- Served 15,901 children.
- Increased referrals and served 373 children with no health insurance.
- Served 503 individuals in the Hemophilia program.
- Accomplished 15,868 clinic visits and 3,988 information and referral contacts.
- Connected 1,799 individuals with community resources totaling \$2,194,495 for audiology, nutrition, speech-language therapies, food assistance, medical supplies, wheelchair ramps, prescription medication assistance, and other items.
- Advanced early autism screening by partnering with AEIS, the University of Alabama, and the University of Alabama-Birmingham (UAB) Civitan-Sparks Clinic through the pilot program, Pediatric Evaluation – Autism Diagnostic Clinics, located in Tuscaloosa, Homewood, and Mobile.
- With American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds, purchased a mobile unit to provide audiology, care coordination, and other direct services in local communities, reducing transportation barriers for families, especially in rural and under-served communities.
- Formed the 2025 Needs Assessment Advisory Committee, bringing together key stakeholders and partners such as the Alabama Department of Mental Health, Alabama Medicaid, Alabama Department of Public Health, Family Voices of Alabama, and other community partners. The five-year comprehensive needs assessment will be used to improve services and outcomes for children and youth with special healthcare needs (CSHCN) and their families.
- Added more Parent Consultants across the state to support families as peers and enhance engagement, allowing families to provide input in improving services.
- Launched a digital version of the Parent Connection newsletter to better connect the community of families served by CRS programs and expand educational resources and information to more families and community partners. By the newsletter's third monthly edition, there were 1,427 subscribed with a 66% average open rate - 23% above the national average for similar emailed newsletters.



Children’s Rehabilitation Service

Children’s Rehabilitation Service (CRS) is an essential resource and a proven lifeline for many parents of children and teens with special healthcare needs. CRS partners with families to develop a comprehensive plan of care with a team of doctors, nurses, social workers, therapists, audiologists, and nutritionists. 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, consultation, assessment, evaluation, therapy services, and assistive technologies -- all to help children with special healthcare needs participate more fully in school.

Fourteen community-based offices around the state offer a team approach to bring together healthcare specialists from many fields to provide services tailored to each family’s needs, including:

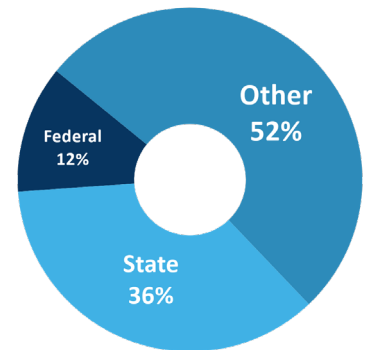
- Clinical medical services through specialty clinics throughout the state.
- Care coordination to assist the child and family in identifying, accessing, and using community resources to meet their individual needs.
- Clinical evaluation to identify the unique needs of a child with feeding problems, 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 provide information necessary to carry out treatment regimens successfully and to make informed choices about services.
- Parent Consultants that facilitate strong family and professional partnerships, and provide information, support, and opportunities for families to participate in program and policy development.

- The Youth Connection, which facilitates youth involvement with policy development and decision-making.

Services are available to any Alabama resident with special healthcare needs younger than 21, with the exception of individuals with hemophilia who 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.

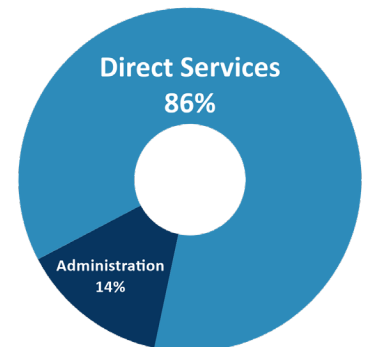
Revenue

\$13,909,942 State Funds
\$20,192,468 Other Funds
\$4,880,666 Federal Funds



Expenditures

\$33,441,329 Direct Services
\$5,541,747 Administration





Where are they now: Helen Hendrix Mobile

Helen Hendrix graduated fifth out of 604 seniors at Baker High School in Mobile, scored a 32 on her ACT, earned a 4.85 grade point average, completed 12 advanced placement classes, and gained early acceptance into medical school at the University of South Alabama (USA). She was also named the WKRG Scholar Athlete of the Year for her accomplishments with the track and cross-country team.

Social worker Taylor Jones-Martin, who has been working with Helen through Children’s Rehabilitation Service (CRS), said she is amazed by her maturity. Helen’s actions not only inspire other students; Taylor said she motivates the entire CRS staff.

“She inspires me,” she said. “Sometimes I ask, ‘How can I be more like Helen?’”

In 2024, Helen began classes in honors college. Although she had many scholarship offers, she said remaining in Mobile was great because she knows she can count on CRS if needed. Meeting with the disability services office at USA made her even more aware of this.

“It was nice knowing that I had all my resources with me instead of having to drive four hours,” she said. “We didn’t even consider that until then.”

“It was nice knowing that I had all my resources with me instead of having to drive hours (from school). They were always here to help.”

Helen Hendrix

Helen recently shared how beginning in the fourth grade, using hearing aids and a transponder connected to her teacher helped her excel academically.

“I definitely would not have accomplished these things without them,” she said. “They are always here to help, even if I have a problem when the programming changes and I can’t hear anything. They’ll come and fix the problems. Or if the wires break, they will send them off and I’ll get them back within a week or so.”

CRS Audiologist Rebecca Blankenhorn, who has worked with Helen alongside fellow audiologist Rebekah Welty, said they frequently share Helen’s success story with others, as well as the stories of many CRS consumers who have overcome obstacles and gone on to do great things.



Adryan Gaines

Oneonta

Every Friday night in the Fall, Adryan Gaines takes the field with the Oneonta High School marching band. Using an adaptive drum kit, which is placed on a platform, he plays bass, snare, suspended cymbal, bells, and maracas with his feet.

The freshman honor student, who was born with Arthrogryposis, which causes both arms to be contracted, always finds a way to participate in school activities and take care of himself independently. It's easy to see his determination.

Adryan began practicing with the band in 2023 and played in his first game during the 2024 season. He said it was the culmination of many hours of hard work and hopes it inspires others to do the same.

"Sometimes when I'm playing, I think, 'What if someone is seeing this and they want to do it?'" he said. "It makes me feel happy that somebody might be inspired by me playing the foot drum."

Adryan, who was first enrolled in the Early Intervention program, reconnected with ADRS through Children's Rehabilitation Service (CRS) when he started middle school and wanted to increase his independence.

His mother, Jessica McCurry, said her son was very involved in establishing his own plan of care with Social Work Administrator Holly Edwards.

"He just kind of took charge," she said. "He told us what he needed and what worked best for him - and what he thought might not work as well."

After a seating clinic and evaluation, CRS Occupational Therapist Dana Grady and Cliff McClinton from Physician's Home Health Superstore in Gadsden obtained for him several pieces of long-handled adaptive equipment to assist with dressing, and EazyHold tools to hold small items like toothbrushes, curved utensils for eating, a bath chair, non-slip mats around the shower, and suction brushes for him to bath himself in the shower. They also recommended motion-detected shampoo and body wash dispensers.

Adryan said he is excited to continue challenging himself by trying more activities as he progresses through high school.



**GOOD LUCK,
TEAM USA!**



Zion Redington

Birmingham

In 2008, when Heather Redington-Whitlock went to China to hold her son Zion for the first time, the Beijing Paralympic Games were in full swing. Sixteen years later, Zion was part of The U.S. Wheelchair Rugby team that brought home the silver medal from the 2024 Paris Games.

The moment, 16 years in the making, was the culmination of Zion overcoming obstacles and passing many tests. He was born with one finger on each hand and one toe on each foot. After suffering multiple bone breaks, Zion and his mother decided to have his feet amputated at age 6.

What would have been a setback to many became a springboard to athletic achievement for Zion. Within a year, Heather had allowed Zion to participate in many adaptive sports to help him find his niche: wheelchair rugby. The family moved to Birmingham to have access to the Lakeshore Foundation's extraordinary rehabilitation facilities and began a relationship with the ADRS Children's Rehabilitation Service (CRS).

Zion, who attends CRS's limb deficiency, prosthesis, and seating clinics, said he has been blown away by the support shown by Social Worker Patricia Patterson and everyone involved in his case.

"It has been amazing having them help me and guide me in all the different aspects that I need," he said. "It's been absolutely amazing for them to be there. They've been a great support in knowing what I am trying to do and supporting me."

For Heather, it has been a blessing to have so many resources in one place through CRS and Children's Hospital.

"It was nice to be able to come to a place where so many of his needs were met at one clinic compared to having to go to eight different appointments," she said. "It has been really special. It has allowed us to feel like Birmingham is home."

Where are they now: Joel Wilmoth

Homewood

As a young man attending amputee clinics, Joel Wilmoth never dreamed he would someday be representing his country in the Paralympics. Now, many years later, he has an even more rewarding role as a husband and father.

Joel, the father of 13- and 6-year-old daughters, works as the terminal manager of a port where barges and rail cars are unloaded on the Black Warrior River.

"It's a very demanding job and I enjoy every bit of it," he said. "I like to keep moving, so staying busy is great for me."

Joel was prepared for success in the workforce through a domino effect that began as a recipient of Children's Rehabilitation Service (CRS). At age 7, he began attending amputee clinics and was connected with his case worker, Cassie Sigler Allen.

"She helped me through every step of the process," he said. "She answered any questions I had and any time we had issues with prosthetics. She was always one phone call away, and I appreciate all the help she provided to make sure everything was taken care of."

A very active child, Joel was eventually introduced to wheelchair rugby. He loved the sport's contact and competitiveness, and he began competing through the Lakeshore Foundation.

His skills and competitive spirit earned him a tryout with Team USA in 2006. He said he did not fully understand the demands necessary to make the team and, sadly, was not selected. But he did not give up. This setback lit a fire in Joel, and by his 19th birthday, he'd earned a spot on the 2008 Paralympic Rugby team.

Hearing his name called after a grueling three-day tryout was surreal, Joel said.

"It's almost the same feeling making the team as when I won my gold medal," he said. "It was a great feeling."

The team, which traveled to Beijing, China for the games, returned victorious with gold medals. Joel said he continued competing on club teams but is now focused on his family.

VRS 2024 Impact

- Served 43,365 individuals.
- Took in 9,294 new applications.
- Developed 7,621 initial plans for employment.
- Closed 4,007 individual cases in competitive integrated employment.
- Received \$5,600,000 in Social Security Administration reimbursements for case service expenditures used to successfully employ former Social Security recipients.
- Served 13,921 individuals through the Community Rehabilitation Programs *(More on page 27)*.
- Provided Pre-Employment Transition Services to 9,918 students with disabilities in the 9th - 12th grades, with 1,954 becoming gainfully employed and many others transitioning to internships, hands-on job training programs, and post-secondary education.
- Increased the number of benefits counselors to educate participants about potential benefits' cliffs leading to more informed choice and successful outcomes and reduced dependency on subsidy programs.
- Changed college training policies to help more participants attain their associate degrees or professional job certifications at no cost.

Hunter Baxter, Prattville



Graduating with honors from Auburn University at Montgomery spring of 2024 was a huge milestone, but it was also one of many chapters in Hunter Baxter's success story. Hunter, a Prattville resident, was paralyzed in a car accident in 2015. The spinal cord injury left him paralyzed from the neck down. The turning point, Hunter said, was getting back to work.

"Once I got back into the workforce and could keep my mind occupied, it helped me not to think about it that much," he said. "It slowly became my new normal. Once you accept that, things start to get better."

Home renovations provided through VRS and its partners made living independently more possible, along with a power wheelchair made possible through CRS and a modified van. Hunter lives on his own today, and is employed at the Alabama Department of Transportation.

Vocational Rehabilitation Service

Vocational Rehabilitation Service (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, VRS’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 participants 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.

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and Governor Kay Ivey’s Success Plus initiative to add 500,000 skilled Alabamians to the workforce by 2025 puts greater focus on skills gains, credentials, and access to in-demand careers. As a part of the state’s workforce initiatives, VRS changed its college training policy to remove cost barriers for participants to access technical education, certificate programs, and associate degree programs.

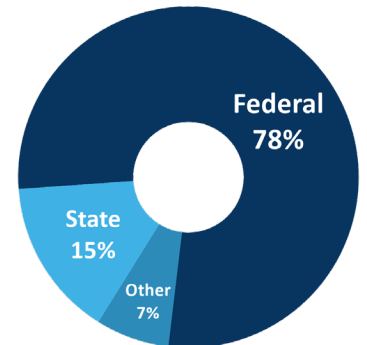
“When I was lost and couldn’t find the path back, VRS helped me prove to myself that I am very much capable of doing anything I put my mind to.”

Alex, VRS consumer in Lee County

VRS is measured annually by national performance indicators required under the WIOA. Alabama has consistently ranked among the highest in the nation for job retention of individuals in the 2nd and 4th quarters after exiting the vocational program.

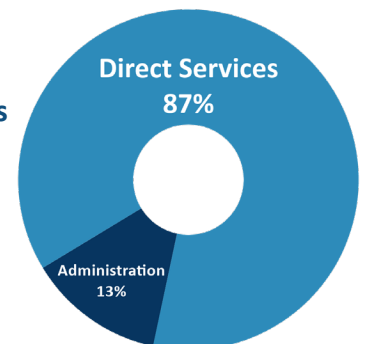
Revenue

\$15,976,946 State Funds
\$80,136,299 Federal Funds
\$7,354,467 Other Funds



Expenditures

\$90,434,137 Direct Services
\$13,033,576 Administration





Where are they now: Jerry Peters Troy

Jerry Peters said that of all the resources available through the Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) program, the most important to him was the human element.

Jerry, who is from Troy, served as a U.S. Marshal and did three tours as non-military personnel in Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. He also served in U.S. Territories and South America. He said the first significant step in his treatment was entering a program with people who showed genuine concern for his well-being.

“Just knowing that there is somebody out there who cares about you makes a huge difference,” he said. “If you’re dealing with traumatic brain injury, you’ve got to have a source that you can go to where you can talk through things and work through things.”

Throughout his career in the service, Jerry encountered dangerous and difficult situations that left him with neck injuries, nerve damage throughout his body, multiple head injuries, and memory issues, among other setbacks.

When he experienced emotional issues after moving to Troy three years ago, Jerry said he knew he needed to find solutions. He first emailed the TBI program and

**“Just knowing that there is somebody
who cares, a source you can go to and talk
and work through things with;
I’m glad I can share it
and maybe help somebody.”**

Jerry Peters

was given the hot line number. When he called, he was connected with Program Director April Turner.

The conversation led to a two-week evaluation at the Shepherd Center, which helped Jerry formulate a treatment plan.

Jerry still deals with the impact of his injuries daily, but he said the help he received from the TBI program allows him to share his experience and steer others toward treatment. He frequently speaks to support groups and founded the nonprofit Operation Life Support to help others in similar situations.

“I’m glad I can share it and maybe help somebody,” he said. “I’m also glad for all of the providers that are doing the kinds of things April does.”



Cameron Crenshaw

Hoover

Birmingham's Cameron Crenshaw was hired in 2023 at Renaissance Ross Bridge Golf Resort & Spa after a successful internship through Project SEARCH, a program offered through ADRS Vocational Rehabilitation Service.

The 19-year-old Spain Park High School graduate excelled so much during this internship that, after just one year of learning many different jobs at the resort, he was named Associate of the Month for October and was promoted to storeroom clerk in February 2024.

As storeroom clerk, Cameron works independently to ensure the kitchen and storeroom are clean, food is stored properly (dry goods and cold storage), the soda machines have ice and soda packs, and several other duties.

The promotion, Cameron said, gave him a sense of accomplishment and made his mother proud.

"She shed a tear," he said. "She called me on the phone. I told her what was going on, and she cried. When she came to pick me up, she got out of the car and gave me a hug."

Cameron was part of the first Project SEARCH Ross Bridge Class of 2022-2023 in which 50 percent of the class was retained for permanent employment, Human Resources Director Melina Porche said. They had previously participated in a summer

work program before making the transition to Project SEARCH. She said seeing Cameron grow through the internship and employment has been wonderful.

Cameron said he'd worked several summer jobs before getting connected to Project SEARCH through VRS. His mother encouraged him to seek additional job training to advance his skills and increase his employment opportunities.

Cameron was interviewed and selected for the Ross Bridge internship, and he began learning about the resort's inner workings through job rotations. He began in the banquets department, where he moved chairs, set up the ballrooms for events, and served guests during meetings and parties.

He then trained with front desk services as a bellman, where he greeted guests and helped with luggage. His third rotation in the kitchen led to permanent employment. According to his supervisor, Darryl Staples, he was such a hard worker that Staples offered him a job before the internship ended.

"He made me a dishwasher because he saw potential in me," he said. "He felt like I would be good at it."

Cameron's success has given him the confidence to set more goals toward greater independence, like getting his driver's license.



Molly Rhodes

Birmingham

Molly Rhodes is seeing America one adventure at a time. The former Vestavia resident has embraced the “van life” to travel the country while working full-time as a senior intelligence analyst for CrowdStrike, a cybersecurity company.

Molly, who has had several retinal detachments and eye surgeries, has traveled to South Dakota, California, Colorado, and even Baja, Mexico. She said learning to advocate for herself along the way has been a huge asset while on the road. The diagnosis is familial exudative vitreoretinopathy, a condition that caused blindness in her right eye and retinal detachments.

As a successful self-advocate, Molly was inspired to establish an Employee Resource Group with CrowdStrike to address disabilities. The group has grown to 250 people and serves as a place where people with disabilities are viewed more positively.

“That is the goal,” she said. “We want to use that word (disabilities) and try to destigmatize it. It’s not bad; it’s just different.”

She said she never considered herself a part of the disability community until her senior year of high school when some activities became more difficult.

After meeting with an occupational therapist who showed her how accommodations could help her as she transitioned to college, Molly was connected with

**“This is the goal:
to use the word ‘disabilities’ and try to
destigmatize it.
It’s not bad; it’s just different.”**

Molly Rhodes

Homewood Vocational Rehabilitation Service Counselor Joey Richey. It was then that Molly said she got a clearer picture of how services could help with her college and career goals.

“That was really helpful. First, there were the conversations that we had around my eyes as far as framing it as a disability,” she said. “They put into context how it was affecting my daily life and all of the ways that I was adapting naturally because that’s what I have always done.”

Molly earned her bachelor’s degree at Auburn University with a major in political science and minors in French and cyber analytics. She credits her ability to succeed to taking advantage of the accommodations available for taking tests and completing projects. She said receiving scholarships with Joey’s help took a lot of stress out of her undergraduate studies and her pursuit of a master’s in digital forensics at the University of Alabama at Birmingham.

VRS Blind and Deaf Services

VRS-BD 2024 Impact

- **Assisted 806 individuals among total served by VRS** who are blind or have low vision and who are deaf or hard of hearing **into successful employment outcomes.**
- Achieved **record-high average earnings of \$22.23/hour** upon exit from the program.
- Served **760 individuals through the OASIS program** (Older Alabamians System of Information and Services); 71% were new cases. Participants received **2,680 hours of individualized instruction and over \$139,000 in assistive devices and equipment at no cost to them.**
- **Assisted 60 licensed blind vendors in managing their own business** through the Business Enterprise Program (BEP), **and they employed 300 other Alabamians. BEP vendors generate over \$25 million in gross sales annually.** *(More on page 27)*

The VRS Blind and Deaf Services program aspires to empower blind and deaf individuals to lead independent and productive lives by providing the services, training, and support needed for them to be successful in today's workforce.

Services are delivered by a team of professionals who are trained in the unique communication, technology, and culture of this population. ADRS also partners with other state and private organizations to ensure participants receive the best and most appropriate care possible to achieve their maximum potential. Increased access to assistive technology, along with training programs in both technical and traditional colleges, has and will continue to lead to more in-demand job opportunities.



**"During my time at
E.H. Gentry Technical Facility in Talladega,
(VRS-BD partnership with the Alabama Institute for the Deaf and Blind)
I got to job-shadow some social workers on campus.
They inspired me to become a Social Worker.
I started my first semester of classes in 2024 at
Central Alabama Community College in Talladega."**

Kaitlynn Devero



Zaxby's Restaurants Mobile

Offering opportunity and growth makes Mobile Zaxby's restaurant locations a valuable partner to ADRS.

When District Manager Harold Wilton joined the company about five years ago, he brought with him a 20-year partnership with United Cerebral Palsy and ADRS.

Harold is a longtime advocate for employing people with disabilities and was eager to do the same with Zaxby's.

"I thought when I joined this company it would be great to introduce the idea to them, and they were great to adopt it and embrace it," he said. "It has been a really good program for us to be a part of."

The employees were first hired to keep the lobby clean but soon showed potential to contribute to other areas.

The success of the store's ownership and management in employing people with disabilities gained the attention of the Alabama Governor's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities, who named Zaxby's as its Large Business Employer of the Year for 2024.

"It's our responsibility as leaders of the community to provide opportunities for people to come aboard, learn new job skills, and have value for themselves."

Harold Wilton

Harold said their employees have become like family. He said it is an honor to be recognized, and added that he feels a duty to provide a chance for people with disabilities to prove themselves in the workforce.

"One of our biggest jobs here, not just as employers and businesses, is to help people be productive members of society," he said. "It's our responsibility as leaders of the community to do that. This has always been an opportunity for me to help people come aboard, learn new job skills, and have value for themselves. That's something that makes me feel good; to see them thrive."

Community Rehabilitation Program

The ADRS Community Rehabilitation Program (CRP) is a network of private organizations across the state that provide a full range of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) services to individuals with disabilities for more than 70 years. There are 36 CRPs accredited by the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities, and they partner with VRS to provide services such as pre-employment transition services, job readiness training, job development, job retention, job coaching, supported employment, vocational evaluations, and training for participants to obtain their driver's permit and driver's license. In FY24, the program served 13,921 individuals statewide. Throughout the years, CRPs have adapted to an increase in Pre-Employment Transition service provision for high school students along with an increase in job placement and work adjustment training in competitive integrated employment (CIE) opportunities.

Transition Services

The ADRS Transition Services program enables Alabama's students and youth with disabilities to be independent, productive, contributing members of their communities. In FY24, VRS counselors coordinated Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) for 9,918 students with disabilities in 9th through 12th grades to help them successfully transition from school into post-secondary education, career training, and employment. Among them, 1,954 attained gainful employment. The Transition program also connected 48 students with the Jobs for Alabama Graduates (JAG) program, 8 interns with the STRIVE program, and 10 students in the Out-of-School Project SEARCH program. Additionally, 24 students were selected to attend the Governor's Youth Leadership Forum for leadership and self-advocacy training.

Business Enterprise Program

The Alabama Business Enterprise Program (BEP) provides qualified blind individuals with job training, entrepreneurial, and employment opportunities that offer independence through self-employment. Established through the Randolph-Sheppard Act, the program enables legally blind individuals to manage vending facilities in federal, state, and private facilities. In FY24, 60 licensed blind vendors worked within the Alabama BEP to own and manage their own businesses, and they employ about 300 other Alabamians. The BEP generates more than \$25 million in gross sales and own/operate facilities on federal, state, and local government and private properties, like NASA, U.S. Postal Service, military bases, and 27 Interstate rest areas. Some businesses include Airbus Manufacturing, International Paper, Milo's Distribution Center, and the Wynfrey and Tutwiler Hotels. BEP Vendors earn their license by completing a 6-month training course at the E.H. Gentry Technical Facility in Talladega through a partnership between ADRS and the Alabama Institute for Deaf & Blind (AIDB).

OASIS Program

OASIS (Older Alabamians System of Information and Services) is designed to assist individuals ages 55 and older who are blind or visually impaired to live more independently in their homes and communities. Vision Rehabilitation Therapists help participants learn techniques for how to use assistive devices to do everyday activities, such as reading mail and safely using appliances. Orientation and Mobility Specialists help them learn to use travel techniques and strategies like using a white cane. OASIS staff work to connect participants to local community resources such as the Alabama Institute for the Deaf and Blind, and Area Agencies on Aging. In FY 24, OASIS served 760 individuals and 71% were new cases. 450 participants completed their rehabilitation plan, receiving 2,680 hours of individualized instruction and over \$139,000 in devices and equipment at no cost to them. Participants have said that OASIS helped them maintain their current living situation and avoid needing nursing home care.



Governor’s Committee on the Employment of People with Disabilities

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, community partners, and public officials who understand the value that people with disabilities bring to Alabama’s growing workforce.

During the 2024 ceremony, Gov. Ivey said she is proud to spotlight trailblazing individuals and businesses.

“These individuals are raising awareness of the tremendous potential of those with disabilities in our workforce. Nearly 39 percent of Alabamians with disabilities today are realizing their dreams of working and providing for themselves and their families.”

Commissioner Burdeshaw said that it is an honor to recognize the talented individuals who overcame obstacles to achieve competitive integrated employment and the employers who chose to provide opportunities for nontraditional workers. She said ADRS will continue to do its part to match people with disabilities in jobs that fit their skill sets, and meet the employer’s needs.

“I recommit to you that the department will do everything we can to ensure that people with disabilities have every opportunity to pursue the American dream,” she said.

2024 Award Winners

Employee of the Year for a Small Business

Andrew Heinzen - Auburn

Employee of the Year for a Large Business

Hunter Davis - Altoona

Small Business Employer of the Year

Ole Times Country Buffet - Auburn

Large Business Employer of the Year

Zaxby’s - Mobile

Public Service Award

Alabama Rep. Margie Wilcox

Student of the Year

Kaitlyn Rotton - Thomasville

Partner of the Year

The Arc of Shelby County

Andrew Heinzen and Ole Times Country Buffet Auburn

Matching the right employer with the right person for the job is a primary goal for Vocational Rehabilitation Business Relations Consultants (BRCs).

“The awareness they have to provide opportunities for individuals with disabilities gives you insight into where their heart is,” said BRC Steve Smith.

Ole Times Country Buffet in Auburn management has such a heart. Through its partnership with ADRS and the Achievement Center, it has made it a priority to hire people with disabilities and provide opportunities for them to contribute their skills and talents to the business’s success.

Steve said the business, recognized in 2024 as the Governor’s Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities Small Business of the Year, has shown great enthusiasm in establishing a partnership.

“They’ve had several of our participants come through the community-based training, and they have hired several,” he said.

“It’s such a diverse atmosphere. There are a lot of areas where our participants can gain experience in different areas of the food industry.”

Steve said the business’s leadership, which is based in Savannah, Georgia, has always been open to providing jobs for people with disabilities and was excited to bring that same enthusiasm to its Auburn market.

“The relationship we have had with them through the managers at the Auburn store has been very advantageous to the employment team and the job developers with the Achievement Center in creating opportunities,” he said.

Of the people recommended by the Achievement Center and hired by Ole Times Country Buffet, Andrew Heinzen also received a governor’s committee award in 2024, recognized as the Employee of the Year for a Small Business.

Business Relations Program

The ADRS Business Relations Program (BRP) is the state’s leading resource for Alabama businesses regarding disability issues in the workplace. The BRP plays an integral role in ensuring that disability- and employment-related needs of business and industry are being met by the state workforce system. Business Relations Consultants assist employers as they hire skilled employees with disabilities and help ensure their success by coordinating services to meet their accessibility needs in the workplace. They also partner with employers to educate the business community about how to overcome the misperceptions of hiring individuals with disabilities.

In FY24, the BRP served 940 VRS participants and provided 4,750 services. In addition, the BRC program continued to develop a relationship with Ability-Go-Director Interaction to cultivate work-from-home opportunities for participants.

Lakeshore Rehabilitation

ADRS Lakeshore was granted another 3-year accreditation extension by the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF), which is the longest that a facility can receive. Lakeshore provides training for Job Readiness, Career Exploration, Social Skills, College Preparation, Vocational Evaluations, Assistive Technology, and Adaptive Driving throughout the state of Alabama. Lakeshore collaborates with the State Vocational Evaluators Professional Network (SVEPN), which is a professional network with the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR). In FY24, Lakeshore’s Adaptive Driver Training (ADT) program established an agreement with the Alabama Law Enforcement Agency to administer the specialized accommodated test for obtaining the Alabama drivers permit.

State and National Efforts to Advance Employment of Alabamians with Disabilities

At the 2024 Alabama Association for Persons Supporting Employment First (AL-APSE) Conference, Commissioner Burdeshaw shared good news from the 2024 Alabama legislative session and highlighted the focus on increasing the labor force participation rate, including for people with disabilities. The passage of a seven-bill package, “Working for Alabama,” aims to transform Alabama’s workforce by getting more Alabamians trained for skilled jobs that lead to good pay and streamlining economic development efforts through investments in Alabama communities, particularly rural areas. Alabama’s workforce programs, including the ADRS Vocational Rehabilitation Service division, is working with the Governor’s office and the State Workforce Board to maximize the impact of this legislation.

To encourage the employment of people with disabilities, House Resolution 85 sponsored by Rep. Ben Robbins was passed unanimously. It states that Alabama is home to more than 800,000 working-age individuals with disabilities, and that “employment provides opportunities for individuals with disabilities to be financially independent, demonstrate their skills and abilities, and access the full benefits of our community.”

Commissioner Burdeshaw also shared innovative uses of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) appropriations that directly benefit the families served through ADRS, such as: augmentative communication devices for children and youth with special healthcare needs, home modifications and access ramps for individuals with significant physical disabilities like those served by SAIL, a mobile unit for rural access to audiology services, and transportation services for the deaf and blind community.

SAIL 2024 Impact

- Served 1,710 individuals in their homes, reducing state and federal costs for nursing home care.
- Leveraged more than \$239,897 in donated goods and services to support individuals in need of accessibility renovations to safely remain in their homes.
- Effectively used American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) grant funds to provide more direct-care services in the homes of individuals with significant disabilities.
- The Medicaid Waiver program worked with the Alabama Medicaid Agency to strengthen in-home supports, ensuring individuals have autonomy to make decisions regarding their service delivery.
- 15 SAIL participants, who would have been eligible for nursing home services, secured a job working from home through the SAIL/VRS hybrid program.
- Continued to weather the national direct-care workforce crisis by strengthening the self-directed service provision and providing additional supports to Medicaid Waiver participants in their homes.
- Conducted a comprehensive review of services and funding challenges for the Homebound program to seek solutions for addressing the direct-care workforce crisis being felt nationwide, which impacts service provision and the growing need for medical supplies and personal care services that allow Alabamians to continue to live and work in the community.



State of Alabama Independent Living (SAIL) Homebound Program

The State of Alabama Independent Living (SAIL) - Homebound program assists individuals with the most significant disabilities in maintaining and regaining as much independence as possible while remaining in their homes and communities.

With seven community-based offices throughout Alabama serving residents in every county, SAIL's team of registered nurses, rehabilitation counselors, and community support specialists provides individuals and their families with personalized services and training for the unique needs presented by their disability. Through specialized in-home education, counseling, attendant care, training, and medical services, participants are taught about activities of daily living, health, safety, nutrition, and assistive technology.

SAIL is comprised of four specialized programs:

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

The SAIL Medicaid Waiver program reduces institutional placements by maximizing home and community service provision. 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
- have experienced the onset of the disability before age 60
- have a neurological disability as a result of reasons other than aging

The Community Supports program enhances and promotes independence in the home, community, and workplace. To be eligible, a person must:

- have a severe disability that limits their ability to live independently in their community
- provide evidence that by receiving CS service, their potential to participate fully in the community will improve

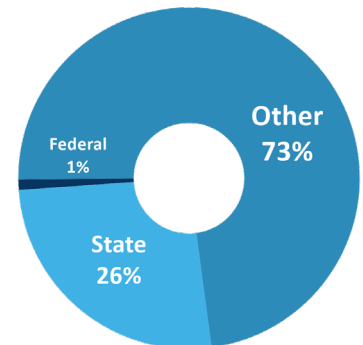
The SAIL/VRS Hybrid program allows individuals with the most significant disabilities to consider and pursue educational training and employment options. Participants in this program receive Waiver or Homebound services and Vocational Rehabilitation Services through one counselor.

Revenue

\$6,313,767 State Funds

\$258,349 Federal Funds

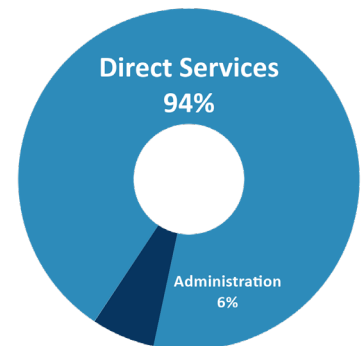
\$17,797,173 Other Funds



Expenditures

\$23,004,420 Direct Services

\$1,364,869 Administration





Volunteers Building Ramps

Limestone County

Volunteers in Limestone County, who are members of Bethel Church of Christ and the local Lion's Club in Athens, have made it their mission to serve individuals in their community through ramp-building projects coordinated through the State of Alabama Independent Living (SAIL) program.

ADRS Home Modification Specialist Bynum Duren helps establish partnerships throughout the state with many volunteer groups like this one. According to Bynum, the ramps can make a tremendous difference for individuals who are wheelchair users.

A ramp built this year by a volunteer group in the small town of Toney is just one example of how these partnerships benefit so many Alabamians with significant disabilities. The owner of a Boaz warehouse allowed the Limestone County crew to create sections of a ramp to be pieced together on-site, making the process more efficient.

The streamlined process allows SAIL to build between 150 to 200 ramps per year. SAIL provides materials and a plan designed by Bynum, and the volunteers provide the labor.

The ramp recipient's daughter, Breanna Smith, said she was very emotional when she saw the ramp created for her father.

"I started crying when I saw the picture of the ramp," she said. "There are no words to express how grateful I am that they've

"There are no words. I can't begin to tell you how much this is going to help my father and make life so much easier and safer for him."

Breanna Smith

done this for my father. I can't begin to tell you how much this is going to help him and make life so much easier and safer for him."

Bynum said he creates an outline based on the experience of the volunteers, which makes it possible for people of all skill levels to be a part of the process.

"That group has been very instrumental in developing this whole program because they are volunteers with a willingness to assist," Bynum said. "I can't say enough about them. They have been so supportive of what we're trying to do."

A Mobile facility similar to the Boaz warehouse has also increased capabilities in South Alabama, and Bynum said he is hopeful to recruit more volunteers in Dothan and the Wiregrass area.



Mildred Whittington

Mayor of Midway

A fall in September of 2023 left Midway Mayor Mildred Whittington with her neck broken in four places. She was uncertain of her future after receiving a diagnosis of quadriplegia.

Mildred, who has never backed down from a challenge, wasted no time dwelling on what she could not do and began looking for resources. Through this process, her daughter discovered the State of Alabama Independent Living Program (SAIL). She was enrolled in the program and began receiving assistance from some friendly faces.

“I’ve never known any group like them where everyone who comes in this door is so warm and caring about you and what your needs are,” she said.

To help the mayor regain more of her independence, SAIL staffers Sonya Beach, Alisha Redmon, and others collaborated to secure medical supplies, a home ramp, and an accessible van.

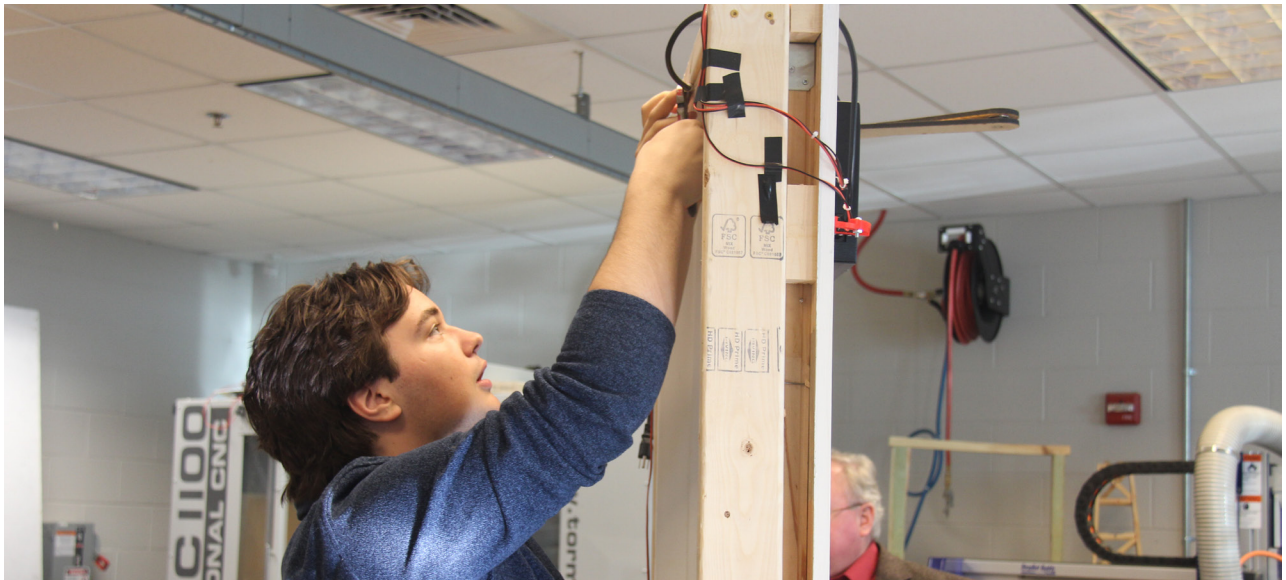
With her daughter appointed as a personal care worker, Mildred said it has been a huge boost to have nurses and professionals with the program come to her home to assist.

“That’s a really important part of the rehabilitation process because they are very knowledgeable,” she said. “When they come to see you, they can certainly tell you what you need and what is actually available to you.”

In one year, Mildred has made tremendous progress. She continued serving as mayor, became more independently mobile with her power chair, and can now stand. She continues her therapy with her next goal of one day being able to stand, pivot, and transfer herself from her bed to the chair.

Mildred said she sings the praises of SAIL every time she has an opportunity to raise awareness for the program.

“I’m really impressed with all of them,” she said. “The smiles on their faces, the warmth in their hearts. You don’t find that very often, and I appreciate that side of it. It’s a pretty amazing group.”



Students Solve for Tomorrow

Hoover High School

Hoover High School Engineering Academy gained national acclaim in 2024. It was one of the three winners of the annual Samsung “Solve For Tomorrow” contest for the team’s groundbreaking creation of an automatic door opener.

Michael Papp, ADRS Rehabilitation Engineering and Assistive Technology (RE&AT) program manager, challenged the students to create an alternative to expensive door openers for people with significant disabilities. Michael said there are door openers on the market, but they often involve installation processes and are expensive.

“You usually have to carve out large chunks of the frame, and you have to run a lot of electrical with big holes left in the door and the frame,” Michael said. “That’s okay if you own your property, but the vast majority of individuals – especially those who are younger or renting – do not have the option of tearing up their door frame or door to install an automatic door opener. That’s a major challenge.”

Michael said the door opener would be an ideal solution for people with cerebral palsy, spina bifida, a spinal cord injury, traumatic brain injury, multiple sclerosis, Parkinson’s disease, amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), or any number of disabilities that affect the neurological system and motor control. It is also helpful for amputees.

“That’s what makes it very exciting. We all need to think about sustainable solutions to all kinds of issues and identify what those are.”

Martin Ledvina

Michael said this assistive technology is a game changer for people with disabilities who would like to live independently. It could be placed on multiple doors in a home for the same cost as other door openers currently available.

Along with the recognition, the team from Hoover won \$100,000 worth of Samsung equipment and classroom supplies so they can continue to create new solutions that help improve the lives of more individuals.

The academy’s engineering instructor, Martin Ledvina, has partnered with Michael and ADRS before and finds great value in these hands-on projects designed to solve a real-world problem.

“I think that’s what makes it very exciting,” he said. “We all need, in society, to think about sustainable solutions to all kinds of issues and identify what those are. This really helps me to pull some of that into my curriculum here in the class.”

Rehabilitation Engineering and Assistive Technology

The Rehabilitation Engineering and Assistive Technology Program (RE&AT) provides state-of-the-art services to participants across the continuum of ADRS programs. The result is increased independence for individuals with disabilities in their community, at home, at school, and at work. **In FY24, RE&AT served 984 individuals with specialized assistive technology solutions tailored to their needs.** RE&AT partnered with the Alabama Department of Education and APTAT to develop and facilitate comprehensive training for teachers to evaluate and support students who use assistive technology in the classroom. Staff also provided training sessions covering essential topics such as iOS and Microsoft accessibility features, utilizing artificial intelligence as an assistive technology support, and integrating assistive technology into educational settings.

To encourage young aspiring engineers to consider careers in RE&AT, the program collaborated with six high school and

university engineering programs on design projects with real-world implications. **The students were guided through the process of developing new, innovative assistive technology for people with disabilities, engaging 12 project teams with a total of 57 student participants.** Impactful devices developed included a USB computer microphone amplifier to help people with soft voices use speech recognition software, a waterproof air-powered children's mobility cart for use in splash pad water parks, and a power wheelchair trainer for young children.

The most impressive project of the year was a low-cost automatic door opener and strike plate for rental apartments developed by students at Hoover High School's Engineering Academy (*see story on opposite page*), which won first place at the National Samsung Solve For Tomorrow Design Competition. This solution will save thousands of dollars for individuals in need of improved doorway accessibility, replacing the need for costly renovations.

Accessing Potential Through Assistive Technology (APTAT)

The Accessing Potential Through Assistive Technology (APTAT) program serves as a leading resource for individuals seeking information and support related to assistive technology (AT) in Alabama. Through its programs, APTAT provides opportunities to explore AT hands-on and learn more about the latest innovations. The experienced team is dedicated to increasing the capacity of AT services in Alabama through in-depth training, technical assistance, collaboration, outreach, and advocacy.

APTAT programs include:

Short-Term Loan Program: Individuals can borrow devices for up to 30 days to try before buying.

Device Demonstration Program: Individuals are guided through hands-on device trials to help them select the most suitable technology for their needs.

Device Reutilization Program: Recycled durable medical equipment (DME) is provided to citizens at no cost through partnerships with community rehabilitation organizations.

This year, five programs fulfilled 6,836 device requests, saving participants \$2.2 million on the purchase of DME.

Training and Education: Training programs are offered throughout the state in partnership with community organizations, state agencies, and educational institutions.

State Financing Activities: APTAT works to reduce the financial burden of acquiring AT by partnering with funding organizations and promoting AT "Maker" programs, which empower individuals to create and adapt their own, more affordable technology. **At just one event, participants took home a total of 153 devices they made, saving themselves over \$5,900 compared to retail prices.**

In FY24, \$500,000 in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds were used to increase APTAT's device inventory and purchase supplies for the Maker's initiatives. **APTAT added over 800 devices to its lending library inventory, bringing the total to 1,200 devices for individuals to borrow at no cost.**



Where are they now: Nakisha Adams Birmingham

Birmingham's Nakisha Adams, who has cerebral palsy, lives a life dedicated to setting an example for others. She was first introduced to rehabilitation services in 1976 through the Alabama Department of Education's rehabilitation division, and again when ADRS was founded as a separate department in 1994.

Nakisha is a program assistant with Accessing Potential Through Assistive Technology (APTAT), a program of ADRS, where she helps individuals learn about assistive technology. She utilizes a power wheelchair, iPad, and other assistive technology devices to communicate and live independently.

Using what she's learned about PowerPoint's accessibility features, she works with APTAT to develop content, organize presentations, and write scripts for trainings and conferences.

As a former CRS and VRS participant, she received services from ADRS rehabilitation engineers who customized her assistive technology, and she also received services through United Ability and its employment services. Her journey allows her to use her experience to help others by providing a first-hand account of ADRS's continuum of care, and demonstrate how assistive technology has helped her accomplish her goals.

"By far, working with APTAT is my favorite job I have had the opportunity to experience," she said. "I've been able to present at conferences and on webinars to educate people about assistive technology. I even got to speak at my first national conference."

APTAT Director Ashley McLeroy said having Nakisha around has been extremely helpful to the program.

"Nakisha has helped us find devices based on her experiences," she said. "As a person who navigates life with a disability, she provides user testing and feedback to help us figure out which devices to add to our inventory."

Nakisha has lived independently for 20 years and is known as "Speedy" by her neighbors because she is always on the move. Her motorized chair is fast, and it also allows her to move up and down to get items out of high places like the freezer and upper cabinets.

While Nakisha has a personal care attendant who assists with meals and other tasks twice a week, she said assistive technology has been a crucial tool to her independence and success, and she enjoys her job helping others learn more about how it can impact their lives.



Joshua and Rhema Godwin Dothan

Joshua Godwin of Dothan said his family's experiences with CRS offices over the past 12 years have been excellent. They have had the unique experience of being served by CRS offices in Birmingham, Mobile, and Dothan. While the locations differ, he said the staff's approach is the same.

Joshua's daughter Rhema was born with clubbed feet, hydrocephalus, and Myelomeningocele - the most severe form of spina bifida.

CRS helped his family secure hotel stays in Birmingham when Rhema was being seen at Children's Hospital. The staff also helped purchase durable medical equipment, bath chairs, standers, and crutches, and they facilitated the creation and modification of assistive technology like ankle-foot orthotics (AFO) and a specialized wheelchair. Joshua said physical therapists from Mobile CRS spent hours measuring Rhema and coordinating with a provider to secure a chair that provided the proper supports.

When Rhema's primary medical supplier was unable to fulfill their obligation, CRS quickly connected the family with other reliable suppliers who offer catheters, inserts, and other items that are needed monthly.

CRS Social Work Specialist Jessica Smith said that helping the Godwin family was a pleasure. She teamed up with Dothan CRS

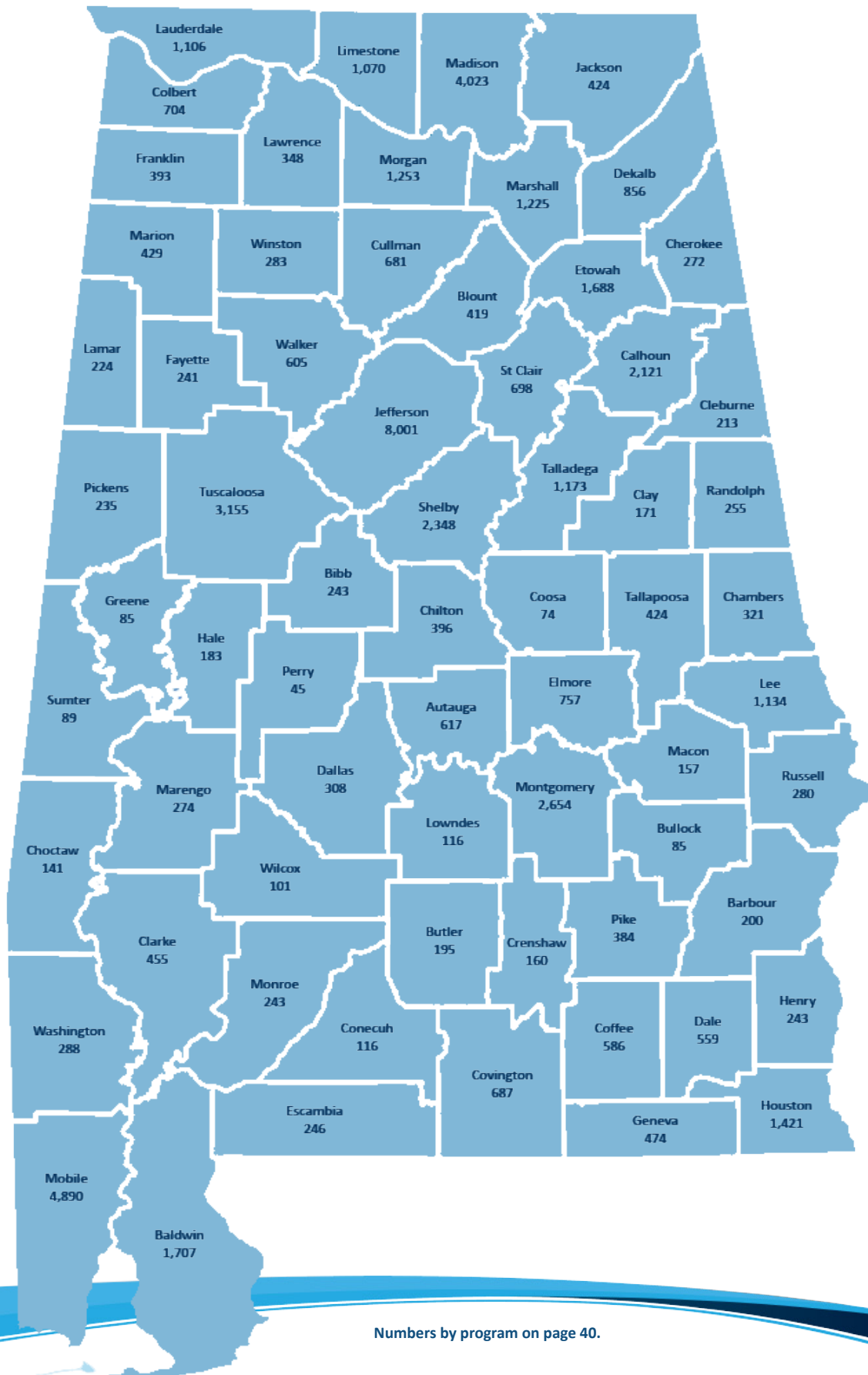
“Their love and dedication to Rhema has been evident in their perseverance with obtaining services and equipment to help her in every step of her medical journey.”

Ivett Bensinger

Occupational Therapist Ivett Bensinger and others to meet the family's needs and said Joshua and his wife were always willing to do their part.

“Joshua and Elizabeth have both been such great advocates for Rhema,” she said. “Their love and dedication to Rhema has been evident in their perseverance with obtaining services and equipment to help Rhema in every step of her medical journey. One thing is certain, you can always count on the Godwins to do whatever is necessary to meet her needs.”

Joshua feels it is important to share the support he has received from CRS with other families. He said he is eager to work alongside their CRS support system to reach as many families as possible.



Numbers by program on page 40.

70,236

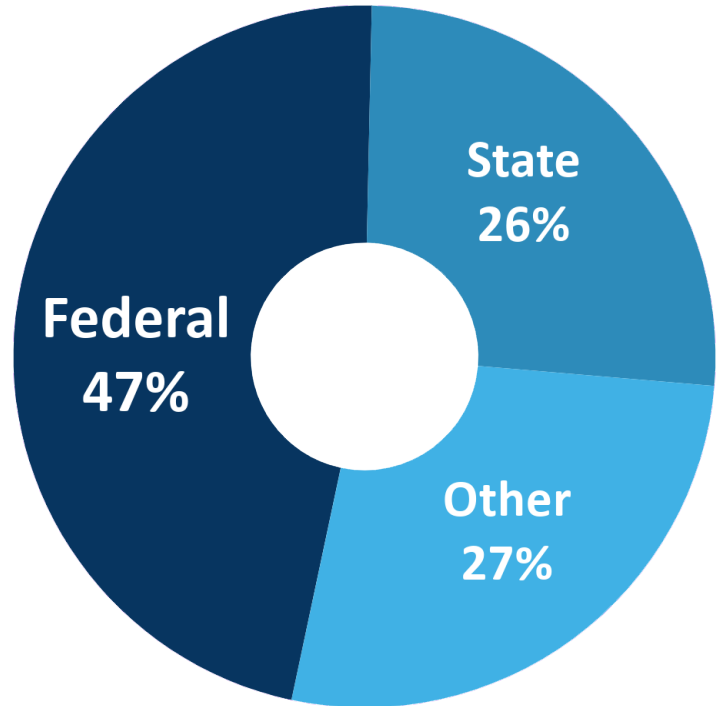
Total Alabamians Served by ADRS

Total revenue:

Federal: \$ 93,585,423

State: \$ 50,903,465

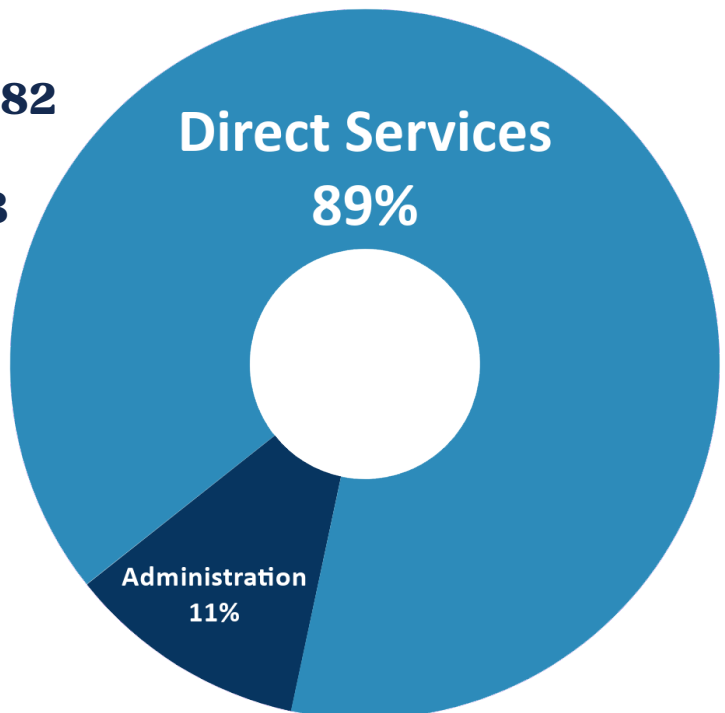
Other: \$ 53,133,276



Total expenditures:

Direct Services: \$ 175,908,282

Administration: \$ 21,713,883



Children and Adults Served by County

County	AEIS	CRS	VRS	SAIL	County	AEIS	CRS	VRS	SAIL	County	AEIS	CRS	VRS	SAIL
Autauga	105	184	301	27	DeKalb	88	373	383	12	Mobile	789	1453	2524	124
Baldwin	292	389	1002	24	Elmore	104	212	355	86	Monroe	21	99	117	6
Barbour	15	110	63	12	Escambia	35	56	149	6	Montgomery	351	853	1270	180
Bibb	38	60	138	7	Etowah	138	605	908	37	Morgan	270	338	623	22
Blount	88	152	155	24	Fayette	61	50	124	6	Perry	8	20	6	11
Bullock	13	34	24	14	Franklin	37	141	213	2	Pickens	35	55	129	16
Butler	21	86	79	9	Geneva	14	145	305	10	Pike	43	101	221	19
Calhoun	220	1002	841	58	Greene	13	27	37	8	Randolph	26	75	149	5
Chambers	49	53	203	16	Hale	32	56	78	17	Russell	41	68	154	17
Cherokee	18	76	166	12	Henry	12	77	143	11	Shelby	668	376	1270	34
Chilton	66	98	206	26	Houston	107	599	676	39	St. Clair	169	224	276	29
Choctaw	13	41	80	7	Jackson	57	125	238	4	Sumter	13	18	47	11
Clarke	45	220	177	13	Jefferson	1936	1221	4619	225	Talladega	144	279	696	54
Clay	17	68	80	6	Lamar	68	38	116	2	Tallapoosa	53	70	268	33
Cleburne	23	100	88	2	Lauderdale	150	246	694	16	Tuscaloosa	534	740	1801	80
Coffee	40	354	179	13	Lawrence	59	76	206	7	Walker	132	174	278	21
Colbert	78	188	430	8	Lee	184	232	668	50	Washington	16	100	166	6
Conecuh	8	35	68	5	Limestone	175	236	646	13	Wilcox	26	57	14	4
Coosa	10	14	39	11	Lowndes	12	35	57	12	Winston	88	58	128	9
Covington	21	376	271	19	Macon	19	16	107	15	Other*	1	11	14,272	0
Crenshaw	9	55	87	9	Madison	778	1216	1995	34	TOTAL	9,260	15,901	43,365	1,710
Cullman	117	157	388	19	Marengo	45	77	144	8					
Dale	39	246	260	14	Marion	116	82	210	21					
Dallas	55	163	72	18	Marshall	192	530	488	15					

**Moved out-of-state or pending eligibility*

ADRS Executive Leadership Team:

Jane Elizabeth Burdeshaw, Commissioner
 Karen Jenkins, Deputy Commissioner - Vocational Rehab Service (General)
 Ashley Townsend, Assistant Commissioner - Vocational Rehab Service (Blind/Deaf)
 Cathy Caldwell, Assistant Commissioner - Children's Rehab Service
 Amy Blakeney, Director - Alabama's Early Intervention System
 Lisa Alford, Director - State of Alabama Independent Living-Homebound Service
 Tracy Bird, Director - Human Resource Development Division
 Shay Cannon, Chief Financial Officer
 Beverly Floyd, Chief Information Officer
 Ashley Hamlett, General Counsel, Director - Legal Division
 Frank Snyder, Internal Audit Manager
 Jill W. West, Governmental Relations Manager - Director, OCI

ADRS Office of Communications and Information (OCI):

Jill W. West, Governmental Relations Manager - Director, OCI
 Rick Couch, Communications and Public Relations Specialist, Senior
 Amanda Gunn, Communications and Public Relations Specialist
 Paul Dunbar, Audio-Video Specialist III

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For electronic, text-only or printed copies of this report,
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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 report are funded in part with federal funds awarded by the U.S. Department of Education under the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR), Supported Employment Services, the Independent Living Services for Older Individuals Who are Blind (OIB) programs, the Infant and Toddler (Part C) program, and the APTAT program (formerly known as STAR). 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) 2023, the VR agency received \$75,095,921 in federal VR funds. Funds appropriated by the state paid 21.3 percent of the total costs (\$20,324,563) under the VR program. For purposes of the Supported Employment program, federal funds paid 95 percent of the total costs. In FFY 2023, the VR agency received \$833,158 in federal Supported Employment funds. Funds appropriated by the state paid 5 percent (\$46,287) of the total costs incurred under the program. For purposes of the OIB or OASIS program, federal funds paid 90 percent of the total costs incurred under the program. In FFY 2023, the agency received \$490,220 in federal grant funds for this program. Funds appropriated by the state paid 10 percent (\$54,469) of the total costs incurred under the OIB program. For purposes of the Early Intervention program, the federal Part C grant paid 24.0 percent of the total costs incurred by the program. In federal fiscal year 2023, the total amount of Part C funds was \$7,062,473. Funds appropriated by the state or another non-federal allowable source paid 76.0 percent of the total costs (\$22,307,784) under the EI program. For the purposes of the APTAT program (formerly known as STAR), the federal grant awarded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services under the Assistive Technology Act Section 4 – State Grants for Assistive Technology program paid 100 percent of the total costs incurred by the program. In federal fiscal year 2023, the APTAT program received \$529,162 in federal funds.



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