

# Solutions

VOLUME 13, NO. 3

TEXAS WORKFORCE COMMISSION  
**WELCOMES NEW PROGRAMS**  
That Serve People with Disabilities



**SPECIAL EDITION 2016**

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# WELCOME

## TWC Vocational Rehabilitation Services Staff

We are excited to welcome the individuals served through programs previously administered by the Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services (DARS) and the more than 1,860 employees associated with those programs to the TWC and Texas Workforce Solutions family as of September 1.

For the past year, we have worked together and carefully planned to ensure that the transfer of vocational rehabilitation and other transitioning programs will be as seamless and efficient as possible.

With 20 years of experience providing integrated workforce development services for Texans, the addition of vocational rehabilitation services is a natural fit for us. There are already strong partnerships in many communities between Workforce Solutions offices and DARS service providers. We will build on those collaborations and form new ones.

Having the expertise of counselors who work directly with specific disability groups will enhance our ability to help guide employers to see the unique skills and abilities of people with disabilities. The expanded network of employers that work closely with each Workforce Solutions office around the state will open new doors of opportunity.

In this issue you will find stories about some of the vocational rehabilitation programs that have transferred to TWC. The successes that are achieved when employees like those who have now joined us, put their passions to work to serve others are what we are all about. We are pleased to share past success stories and we look forward to creating new successes together as one unified agency.



Transitioning staff, stakeholders and TWC staff representatives participate in a welcome event on Sept. 1, 2016.

We will celebrate this new partnership with a month of activities in October in connection with National Disability Employment Awareness Month. We are partnering with the Governor’s Committee on People with Disabilities to launch a Texas HireAbility campaign that will promote hiring opportunities for people with disabilities. Please be on the lookout for events near you that provide opportunities to connect employers with individuals with abilities who can meet their needs.

Please join us in welcoming the new staff, programs and services to our agency! ■



*Andres Alcantar*

**Andres Alcantar**  
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**Ruth R. Hughs**  
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*Julian Alvarez*

**Julian Alvarez**  
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# Programs transferred to TWC include SERVICES FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES FROM DARS

BY JUSTIN MINSKER



The Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) is eagerly welcoming several vocational rehabilitation programs formerly operated by the Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services (DARS) to the Texas Workforce Solutions family as of Sept. 1, 2016.

Through legislative action and authorization by Governor Greg Abbott during the 84th Texas Legislature, programs from DARS transferred to TWC and the Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC).

TWC is welcoming more than 1,860 DARS employees to its Workforce Solutions partner network. The integration of programs from DARS will expand the agency's partnerships and build more connections that will help Texans and Texas employers find success in our state.

"For over 20 years, TWC has been providing integrated workforce services that help Texans seeking employment and assist employers as they create jobs," said TWC Chairman Andres Alcantar. "With the addition of the skills and expertise of vocational rehabilitation staff in serving individuals with disabilities, TWC will elevate the services we make available to all Texans and more effectively connect all job seekers to employers across the state."

Programs transitioning to TWC ensure that people with disabilities have the opportunity to live independent and productive lives. Transitioning programs include: Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) programs (for people who are blind or who have other visual impairments), including the Criss Cole Rehabilitation Center; VR programs for people with other disabilities; the Business Enterprises of Texas (BET) program and the Independent Living Services for Older Individuals Who Are Blind grant program.

"We are grateful that our agency will be gaining the expertise and talents that each transitioning team member will provide," said TWC Commissioner Representing Employers Ruth R. Hughs. "We look forward to strengthening the impact of our combined services as we strive to empower Texans with the skills and resources they need to prosper in our state."

While vocational rehabilitation counselors and other program staff became TWC employees on Sept. 1, 2016, most are continuing to operate in their current locations until they can be fully integrated with Workforce Solutions offices over the next several years.

The general VR program and the VR program (for people who are blind) will be combined into a single program that will be known as Texas Workforce Solutions–Vocational Rehabilitation Services. This change will be completed on or before Oct. 1, 2017.

"We are pleased that these employees have joined us at TWC," said TWC Commissioner Representing Labor Julian Alvarez. "We welcome them to a team of dedicated individuals who are committed to serving the people and the Texas labor force."

Program participants working with current VR staff are continuing to be served by those same individuals as their cases and services are transferred to TWC. Consumer services are continuing without interruption and previous DARS program participants will benefit from expanded employment connections through the Workforce Solutions network. ■



# Working together to help employers

## HIRE PEOPLE WITH ABILITIES

BY RONNIE BURCHETT

Employing knowledgeable and skilled employees who have strong abilities and dedicated work ethics is every employer's dream. On the flipside, most job seekers want to work for business owners, large and small, who focus on their strengths and commitment to their careers. Making both dreams come true can be possible when employers concentrate on a candidate's ability, not his or her disability, when hiring new employees.

Effective Sept. 1, 2016, the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) and employees from the former Texas Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services (DARS) began cementing an already strong partnership that strives for achievement of those dreams as the Business Services team of the vocational rehabilitation program joined the Texas Workforce Solutions service network and became part of TWC.

The transition to this new agency has been a smooth one as the two agencies and their partners have been working together for years to help connect employers with individuals who have the abilities they need.

The story of Rey Cantu is just one example of this collaborative effort.

Rey Cantu is a young man that has difficulty with his vision and is unable to see at night or in places that are not lit properly. He felt that it would not be possible to get a job because of his disability. Cantu is among the more than 1.6 million working-aged Texans with one or more disabilities.

To help Cantu gain employment, Texas Workforce Solutions Lower Rio Grande (Lower Rio) and former DARS employees encouraged him to

participate in the Work Experience Program with Lower Rio. Through this program, Cantu learned that he is not defined by his disability.

The Work Experience Program is a planned, structured learning experience that takes place with a business partner for a limited time period. After working with one employer for two-and-a-half months, Cantu was asked to stay on full time. He also received assistance with his communication skills and transportation needs, giving him the confidence needed to successfully gain employment.

"The Workforce Solutions Work Experience Program helps people get back into the workforce and support themselves," said Lower Rio CEO Frank Almaraz. "It may be something as simple as helping to coach someone to have a little more self-confidence, clean up their résumé and be able to present themselves well or prepare for an interview. Just like Cantu, this training can open the doors to a new career for job seekers looking to join the workforce."

Lower Rio has partnered with Project HIRE (Helping Individuals to Reach Employment) since 2012 to help hardworking individuals like Cantu develop skills for the workplace. Project HIRE is a grant awarded by the Texas Council for Developmental Disabilities which provides opportunities for people with disabilities to obtain workplace skills and training.

"Rey was able to gain knowledge, practice and understanding of how to complete job tasks through the work experience he received at Valley Association for Independent Living (VAIL)," said VAIL Program Director

Lidia A. Teran Gutierrez. "It allowed him to receive training that prepared him for the position he was offered. Because of this hands-on experience, Rey has been, and without a doubt, continues to be an asset at VAIL."

Partnerships such as Project HIRE provide an opportunity to encourage an individual's professional skills, while teaching them to overcome barriers to employment. Project HIRE offers people with disabilities the opportunity for a successful career and financial independence. Businesses benefit from these partnerships through technical assistance and training to learn more about accommodating employees with disabilities.

"Participating in the Workforce Solutions Work Experience program helped me show VAIL that I could do the job. I was able to show VAIL my strengths and I wouldn't have had the opportunity to get the job at VAIL in the first place without the help of Workforce Solutions," said Cantu. "Thanks to everyone for all the help."

Programs similar to Project HIRE and Workforce Experience help businesses become aware of how to train and retain employees who may have a disability.

On a national level, National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM) 2016 creates awareness of the importance that disability plays in workforce diversity. This year's NDEAM theme is #InclusionWorks and will be observed in October. NDEAM celebrates the contributions of workers with disabilities and educates employers about the value of a diverse workforce inclusive of their skills and talents. ■

# VOCATIONAL Preparation for



BY KATTIE BASNETT

Pamela Priest suffered a traumatic brain injury in a car accident and had difficulty doing everyday activities like driving and completing job duties. Pamela now has a new, rewarding career as an elementary school teacher.

Jermaine Williams struggled with coursework and social interactions in high school due to autism, which can impact a person's ability to learn and communicate their ideas or understand social situations. Today, Jermaine has a job he loves working with a tight-knit team of coworkers to feed a hospital's patients and visitors.

What do Jermaine and Pamela have in common? They credit their employment success to the vocational rehabilitation services they received in Texas.

As of Sept. 1, 2016, Texas' vocational rehabilitation services have transferred from the Texas Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services (DARS) to the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) under a new program name: Texas Workforce Solutions–Vocational Rehabilitation Services (TWS–VRS). The integration of these services into the Texas Workforce Solutions network will expand the state's ability to serve Texas employers and job seekers with disabilities.

Of the range of services offered by TWS–VRS, general services include education and training to get the skills needed for a chosen career, vehicle modification to allow independent travel, instruction in learning to read and write Braille, training in how to use a white cane to navigate without vision, and assistive technologies and devices such as hearing aids, screen readers and prosthetics to help improve job functioning.

Pamela desperately wanted to regain her career and sense of purpose after her car accident. She received vocational counseling and guidance to help her select an employment goal that capitalized on her strengths, interests and abilities. She also received educational assistance to earn a bachelor's degree in social work and a teaching certificate. Today, she is a successful elementary school

teacher. “[Services] helped me get a job and become ‘me’ again. I’m very happy,” said Pamela.

Students with disabilities also benefit from specialized services, called transition services, to help them prepare for life after school and achieve independence. Statewide Transition Specialist Erin Wilder described these services as “...educational support, counseling and guidance, work-based learning opportunities, job readiness activities, and other services to help students with disabilities prepare for careers in Texas.”

Jermaine received transition services to prepare for a career after school and participated in Project SEARCH, an internship program for students with disabilities. Jermaine completed his internship with business partner Seton Healthcare Family and was later hired for a full-time position where he helps prepare food trays for patients and visitors. “They did whatever they could to help me succeed and become the person I am today,” said Jermaine.

These services promote a diverse and qualified Texas workforce by helping adults and youth with disabilities, like Jermaine and Pamela, prepare for, find, keep or advance in employment. Texans with disabilities who receive vocational rehabilitation services are empowered to participate in and contribute to the expanding Texas economy, and they have the skills and expertise businesses across the state demand.

# REHABILITATION:

## employment and independence

TWS–VRS customers work in partnership with vocational rehabilitation counselors and support staff located in field offices throughout the state to prepare for competitive integrated employment—jobs which are performed in a work setting and with wages and benefits equivalent to jobs held by people without disabilities. The type of job selected is carefully aligned with each individual’s skills, interests, needs and abilities.

These efforts are supported by the Rehabilitation Council of Texas (RCT), whose members are appointed by the Governor, which is responsible for collaborating with TWS–VRS to help ensure the program’s effectiveness. RCT Chair Martha Garber said, “Efforts to provide a wide range of vocational rehabilitation services have made a significant positive impact on the lives of thousands of Texans with disabilities who now enjoy competitive employment, as well as greater levels of independence and participation in society.”

Customers also benefit from many specialized services which address employment barriers associated with specific disabilities or age groups. These services represent TWS–VRS’s commitment to helping customers of services reach their full potential as individuals with unique needs and goals.

Autism and Developmental Disorders Specialist Jennifer Kaut leads efforts to address the employment needs of customers with autism. “We recently developed a work environment assessment that helps match customers with autism to work environments that meet their needs and capitalize on their skills, and we offer specialized therapies and supports,” said Kaut.

Jermaine and Pamela are two examples of how the partnership between TWS–VRS and Texans with disabilities gets the job done—not only for these Texans, but also for the businesses and communities that benefit from the diversity and skills they provide. TWC is pleased to welcome TWS–VRS to the Workforce Solutions network, and to share vocational rehabilitation services with business partners and job seekers to promote economic prosperity in Texas. ■

**“ Efforts to provide a wide range of vocational rehabilitation services have made a significant positive impact on the lives of thousands of Texans with disabilities who now enjoy competitive employment, as well as greater levels of independence and participation in society. ”**

—RCT Chair Martha Garber



Left – Karla Martinez

Above – Karla Martinez gives TWC Chairman Andres Alcantar a tour of her Karla's Kuisine restaurant.

## Business program helps individuals WITH VISUAL DISABILITIES ACHIEVE SUCCESS

BY W.J. SCOTT

Karla Martinez of Austin wanted to find a career path to support herself and her children. She was born with congenital cataracts. After the birth of her two children, her vision began to deteriorate rapidly. Karla became depressed and struggled to make a living. She sought advice from her grandmother, who encouraged Karla to be patient and seek help from others.

One day, Karla met a man on a bus who told her about his job working in a cafeteria through the Business Enterprises of Texas (BET) program. BET is a federally sponsored program, which effective Sept. 1, 2016, is administered by the Texas Workforce Commission. BET collaborates with Texas Workforce Solutions–Vocational Rehabilitation Services to identify customer who are suitable for food service and vending management training and employment.

Individuals who are selected to become licensed BET managers earn their personal income from profits produced by their businesses, which are located on state and federal properties. Managers hire and pay their own labor and purchase products for resale.

Businesses managed by BET managers produce more than \$60 million in annual sales. Each manager aims to provide an appealing variety of quality food and beverage choices, including healthy options, in a pleasant environment.

### Karla's Road to Success with BET

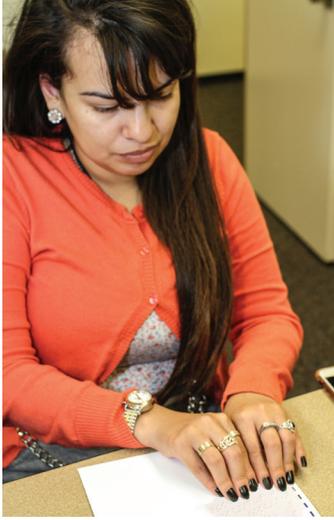
Karla was impressed with the success of the man she met on the bus and decided to look into BET. As a young girl, Karla had helped her grandparents in the restaurant they managed. With her bachelor's degree in publicity and marketing, and her love for food and people, Karla thought BET was a good fit for her.

Karla contacted and worked with a vocational rehabilitation counselor who referred her to a BET business consultant and a BET trainer. The BET training covered all aspects of running a business including bookkeeping, food and labor costs, portion control, and menu planning. Karla was up for the learning challenge.

"I knew the training would be tough," she said, "especially as a single mother of two young boys, but learning about bookkeeping and how to properly do my own paperwork gave me the control to have a successful business."

The BET program has given Karla the independence she wanted, and she considers herself an entrepreneur. She runs a restaurant, Karla's Kuisine, inside the Health and Human Services Commission's Brown-Heatly Building in Austin. Karla says she is self-sufficient and takes care of her two boys without any assistance. "The BET program has created stability in my life," she said. "It has given me the opportunity to show my boys, who are also visually impaired, that no matter what challenges you face in life, you can still be successful." ■

*Left* – CCRC student Ana reading Braille  
*Middle* – CCRC student Andrew applying a Braille label to a condiment  
*Right* – Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Rafelina Emuang



## New skills = new horizons AT CRISS COLE REHABILITATION CENTER BY LORI NAJVAR

*The Criss Cole Rehabilitation Center (CCRC), a state-of-the-art adult residential training center for individuals who are blind or visually impaired in Austin, is the largest vocational training facility in the U.S. To be eligible to attend, students must be legally blind and referred by a vocational rehabilitation counselor. As part of the vocational rehabilitation program for individuals with visual impairments, CCRC services were transferred to the Texas Workforce Commission from the former Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services.*

Whether due to accident, disease or genetics, the causes of blindness are diverse and so is the population served at CCRC which ranges in age from 18 to 70-something. Some students have been blind since birth and others lost their vision later in life. In all cases, the students at CCRC learn to make life adjustments and gain skills that will help them to achieve their life goals and live full and productive lives.

A single mom and corporate regional manager, Rafelina Emuang, came to CCRC after her sight progressively deteriorated to the point where she could no longer do her job. She enrolled in a nine-month program where she learned to adapt to her loss of vision and was able to regain her confidence and independence.

“I went in the program as a sparrow with a broken wing, and by the time I finished, I felt like an eagle soaring high,” Emuang said.

Emuang went on to earn a Rehabilitation Counseling masters degree and Ph.D. at the University of Texas–Austin and today serves as a vocational rehabilitation counselor at CCRC where she inspires others to reach their full potential.

CCRC provides training to prepare its students for the challenges they face, while offering resources that help them gain independence as they learn practical life skills. This unique residential training center encourages personal exploration including: a career exploration; transferable skills; self-employment; college preparation and business enterprise coaching.

Seminars led by dedicated professional educators open the floor to questions such as: How do I talk about my blindness? What skills do I need to get a good job? What about a resume? The discussion leads to practical answers. Students learn to share

their experiences, accumulate skills that lead to jobs and not only how to write a résumé, but also how to speak about their blindness in a job interview.

Students receive support on basic questions like: How will I choose clothes? How will I keep up with paperwork?

The Daily Living trainings are designed to address these everyday tasks, providing multi-level tools and pragmatic answers for adapting to a sighted environment. Instructional class topics include orientation and mobility, cooking, learning Braille, planning and organization, and technology.

Today’s technological tools require special instruction, but also offer people with disabilities another level of independence with employment and education.

“It’s a wonderful time for a blind person to go back to school,” says CCRC Technology Program Coordinator Jesse Johnson. Johnson introduces sustainable technology that enables students to continue their education and communication in today’s society. In one-on-one or small-class settings students learn essential navigating, keyboarding, and more advanced career skills.

Core classes teach basic skills that build confidence. Students develop independence as they acquire domestic home maintenance and personal finance management skills. Practical home repairs like replacing doorknobs and fixing a leaky toilet form part of the curriculum. These new accomplishments instill the confidence and sense of independence that help students move beyond the limitations of the disability—ultimately leading to a significant change in lifestyle and employability.

Visitors to the center may see a student studying Braille, cooking with a microwave or sanding a box that they had built. Barriers are broken, limitations overcome, and obstacles become opportunities. Ultimately, CCRC students develop a healthy attitude towards blindness.

“Most sighted people don’t even know how to operate power tools. Just imagine a blind person’s sense of achievement and personal empowerment when he or she creates a functional object built with their own hands,” shared Vocational Training Services Manager Brenda Stone. “CCRC’s main purpose is to encourage independence and help develop confidence with our students.” We become an ‘attitude factory.’” ■



October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month, and the Texas Workforce Commission is launching Texas HireAbility, a new campaign that promotes employment opportunities for talented and dedicated Texans with disabilities. There will be many events throughout the state connecting employers to skilled workers who meet their hiring needs. To learn more visit [TXHireAbility.texasworkforce.org](http://TXHireAbility.texasworkforce.org). Here are a few of the many events occurring in October:

## 2016 Fort Worth Mayor's Committee on Persons with Disabilities Conference

The 2016 Mayor's Committee on Persons with Disabilities Conference will be held on Oct. 20, 2016, in Fort Worth. The Fort Worth Human Relations Commission will host the conference. Employers can participate in a resource forum and workshops that will discuss employment and adult education for individuals with disabilities.

## 2016 UTEP Annual Ability Awareness Week

The University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) Center for Accommodations and Support Services will host the 2016 UTEP Annual Ability Awareness Week from Oct. 3-7, 2016, in El Paso. Activities will focus on providing assistance to and raising disability awareness. Employers, students, and the general public are invited to participate in events.

John Fuller, director of workforce and board support at the Texas Workforce Commission, and Joyce Wilson, CEO of Workforce Solutions Borderplex, will speak at the welcoming reception on October 3. In addition, Workforce Solutions Employer Recognition Awards will be presented at the reception.

## Borderplex Ability Hiring Fair

Workforce Solutions Borderplex is hosting the Borderplex Ability Hiring Fair on Oct. 12, 2016, in El Paso. All jobseekers and employers are invited to participate. Participating employers include Goodwill Industries, ReadyOne Industries, Pride Industries, Walgreens, federal contractors and more. Employer workshops will discuss topics that include hiring and retaining individuals with disabilities and providing interview accommodations for job seekers with disabilities.

## 2016 Alliances Helping Employers Achieve Diversity Job and Resource Fair

The 2016 Alliances Helping Employers Achieve Diversity (AHEAD) Job and Resource Fair will be held on Oct. 7, 2016, in Austin to help Texas businesses recruit and hire job seekers with disabilities.

The Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) is proud to partner with the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Federal Contract Compliance Program (OFCCP), U.S. Department of Veteran's Affairs, Workforce Solutions Capital Area, Education Service Center and Independent Living Experience to support this event.

Businesses which register to participate will be able to accept resumes and applications from adult and student job seekers with disabilities in attendance. They will also have opportunities to schedule post-event interviews with promising applicants.

Job seekers with disabilities will not only be able to connect with businesses, but will also have opportunities to visit vendor booths to learn more about community and other resources available to help them achieve their career objectives.

## 2016 employAbility Career Expo

The 2016 employAbility Career Expo will be held on Oct. 11, 2016, in Dallas. The Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) is proud to partner with the Dallas Mayor's Committee for the Employment of People with Disabilities to support this event, which brings Texas businesses and job seekers with disabilities together to promote an inclusive and diverse workforce.

TWC anticipates that approximately 700 adult job seekers with disabilities and 200 students with disabilities will register and attend this year's event.

Representatives from at least 50 Dallas/Fort Worth-area businesses will be present to accept résumés, applications, and conduct on-site interviews. Some attending businesses include AT&T, Pepsi, Home Depot, Lockheed Martin, Bank of America and Lowes.

Registered job seekers with disabilities will have opportunities to participate in classes on resume development, interviewing and dressing professionally. They can also visit vendor booths to learn more about community and other resources available to help them achieve their career objectives.

**For event information or to register for these or other events throughout the state, visit:**

**[TXHireAbility.texasworkforce.org](http://TXHireAbility.texasworkforce.org)**



## TWC to provide independent living services to older individuals who are blind

Among the programs that transferred to TWC from the former Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services (DARS) was a program which provides Independent Living Services to individuals 55 and older who have vision-related disabilities that make everyday routines difficult. Services are available that can help these individuals accomplish everyday tasks, participate in activities, communicate with family and friends, understand their visual impairment and regain confidence in themselves.

To be eligible for these services, individuals must have a significant visual impairment that limits their ability to function independently in the home or in the community. These services are available to help these individuals live independently in their homes or community. They include: independent living skills training, orientation and mobility training, low vision and vision device evaluations, diabetes education, deafblind evaluations and equipment, adjustment to blindness counseling, and other services.

For more information visit the Independent Living Services for Older Individuals Who are Blind web page: [TexasWorkforce.org/il-oib](http://TexasWorkforce.org/il-oib).

Save the Date  
**NOV 10**  
**2016**



## Hiring **Red**, White & **You!**<sup>TM</sup> Statewide Hiring Fair

Join the Texas Workforce Commission, 28 local workforce development boards and the Texas Veterans Commission in partnership with the Texas Medical Center for the **5th Annual Hiring Red, White & You!** Statewide Hiring Fair to connect veterans, service members and their spouses to Texas employers. For your local hiring fair location: [Texasworkforce.org/hrwy](http://Texasworkforce.org/hrwy).

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