



## February 2026 Partner Awards

The State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) recognized four businesses for their partnership with the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program at its quarterly meeting on Feb. 5.

The council's Partner Awards go to businesses that partner with VR directly or through a contracted provider or workforce partner. The award recognizes businesses that have gone above and beyond in recruiting, hiring, retaining and promoting individuals with disabilities.

These businesses created an environment where people with disabilities can thrive, whether they are students beginning to explore their future careers, people entering the workforce for the first time, or people looking to change careers or advance to the next level. They recognize the value people with disabilities bring to their workplaces.

### Award winners

#### Aisling Truck Academy

Aisling Truck Academy in Eugene and Medford has partnered with VR for 30 years by helping clients earn their Commercial Driver's License and find jobs in the trucking industry.

"They go above and beyond to offer tailored training when needed to ensure the clients who go through their school get the support they need to get their Commercial Driver's License and be successful in the workplace," said VR counselor Brandy Teel.

Husband-wife team Don and Rosie Edwards manage the schools and believe whole-heartedly in supporting students with disabilities. For example, they may provide one-on-one support or study tools in alternate formats. They also work closely with all students to help them secure employment that is a good fit for their skills and abilities.

“We are really committed to partnering with VR to help people with all kinds of disabilities succeed in our program and go on to find high paying jobs in the trucking industry,” Don Edwards said.



## One Fair World

[One Fair World](#) is a non-profit business that has been providing opportunities to students with disabilities in the Salem area for more than 20 years. Owners Kim Baldwin and Desta Sirrine host a work experience for students with disabilities to learn retail business skills like customer service, working the cash register and stocking shelves. They also learn basic work skills like showing up on time, how to dress professionally and appropriate cell phone use.

“Kim and Desta kindly and patiently provide vocational training and mentoring. This allows the students to gain employable skills and prepare them for the workplace,” said Christina Espinoza, Special Programs Employment Specialist with the Salem-Keizer School District.

## Safeway

Safeway stores in northeast Portland have shown exceptional flexibility and commitment to supporting employees with disabilities.

“Safeway has become an unexpected source of positive, long-term employment outcomes for our clients, helping them build their confidence in their ability to sustain employment and helping them strive toward larger, long-term goals, VR counselor Matthew Whitaker.

For example, one store manager adjusted the dress code to allow a VR participant with sensitivity to textures to wear shorts – a simple change that made a big difference in the employee’s comfort. For another VR participant, the store manager modified the employee’s tasks and offered cross-training opportunities in different departments.

“I’m truly grateful for this recognition,” said Denise Truett, Talent Acquisition Rep for Safeway. “It means a great deal to be part of a workplace that values belonging—where courtesy, dignity, and respect create the foundation for an inclusive and diverse community. This recognition reflects not just my efforts, but the culture we build together every day.”



*The SRC recognized the Safeway on NE Sandy Boulevard.*

## The Bridge Law Firm

This small Portland law firm has hired three VR clients since 2018, filling a legal assistant/paralegal and office support positions.

“The firm has given clients long-term employment opportunities, including advancement and prep for positions with greater responsibility,” said VR Branch Manager Adam Hewitt. “The Bridge Law Firm has made a commitment to providing opportunities to VR clients and has consistently backed that commitment up by hiring clients.”

Managing attorney Lewis Farmer said he has had a good experience working with VR to meet his hiring needs. “What some may consider a disability has turned into an asset,” he said.

To other businesses looking fill open positions, he suggests VR can be a resource. “Don’t discount people with disabilities. They can often do as good a job or better than anybody else,” he said.



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## About the State Rehabilitation Council

Oregon's [State Rehabilitation Council](#) (SRC) is an advisory partner to [Vocational Rehabilitation](#) (VR), which is a program under the Oregon Department of Human Services. The council is separate from VR. Its role is to listen to VR participants about their VR experience and advise the VR program on how to improve employment services for people who are looking for work. Members are volunteers who are appointed by the Governor.

The full council meets every three months. Committees meet monthly. All meetings are open to everyone. Find information on the SRC website at [orsrc.org](http://orsrc.org).

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