
VGS

ANNUAL
REPORT

2024

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SPECIAL EVENTS & SPONSORS

FROM VGS BOARD CHAIR AND PRESIDENT & CEO

Dear Friends and Supporters,

At VGS, our mission—to create pathways for individuals with disabilities to engage in the community, achieve greater independence, and attain employment—guides everything we do. In 2024, we launched Customized Community Engagement & Employment (CCEE), a fresh approach to bring our mission to life in tangible ways, helping our participants to realize their goals, and deepen their connection to the community.

What does CCEE look like in practice? It begins with individuals deciding how they want to spend their time, what goals they have, and what brings them joy. The next step is identifying volunteer, work, social, and recreational opportunities that can best help that person succeed and then creating a personalized schedule for each individual. This service model allows people with disabilities to build genuine relationships, feel connected to their neighborhoods, and take pride in being part of a larger community. It also helps make our communities stronger and more inclusive. The most significant component of CCEE is that it recognizes each individual as a full person with preferences, abilities, and something unique to contribute.

Our continued success and growth are only possible because of people who believe that individuals with disabilities deserve to be fully included. We are grateful for the VGS staff, who are a constant source of inspiration and meet each day with compassion, professionalism, and a deep belief in what is possible for individuals with disabilities.

We are also grateful to the businesses that trust VGS to provide them with workforce solutions. Our employer partners do not collaborate with us out of a sense of obligation or charity, but because they value the dependable, capable, and committed team members we offer. We are proud to help individuals with disabilities join the workforce, support local employers, and build more inclusive workplaces.

To our donors, funders, and champions – thank you for believing in individuals with disabilities and believing in VGS. Your support is what makes our work possible. Together, we are creating a world where individuals with disabilities do not just exist but truly belong - building a more compassionate and stronger future for us all.



A stylized blue ink signature of Susie Barragate.

Susie Barragate
President & CEO of VGS



A stylized blue ink signature of Sebastien Glinzler.

Sebastien Glinzler
VGS Board Chair

SYWANZIA'S STORY



For Sywanzia and Tonya, being twin sisters is so much more than just sharing a birthday—it means carrying each other through every moment. Both sisters were born healthy, but Sywanzia's life changed drastically when she experienced a febrile seizure, brought on by a high fever, at just 14 months old. Her mother rushed her to the hospital where she was given the wrong medication. This critical mistake led to Sywanzia being in a coma for a total of 14 months – first for eight months and then, after a brief recovery, another six months. When she was discharged, she was in, according to doctors, a “vegetative state”, and her family was told Sywanzia would never see, walk, or speak again. Doctors recommended that she be placed in long-term institutional care.

Sywanzia's mother refused that plan of care and brought her daughter home to be taken care of by her family, which, over the years, included her twin sister, Tonya.

While it is true that Sywanzia cannot walk or talk - she is engaged, expressive, and deeply aware of the world around her.

Her mother, who was her primary caregiver, first brought her to VGS over 20 years ago. After their mother passed away from cancer, Tonya became Sywanzia's main caregiver and guardian. Tonya continued to bring Sywanzia to VGS, not just to receive Adult Day Services, but also for the sense of community and the care she gets from the VGS staff.

Tonya says the support system she has through VGS has truly been incredible. It gives her peace of mind that she couldn't find anywhere else. The additional level of care the VGS team provides has made a significant difference in Sywanzia's overall well-being.

Sywanzia prefers routine in her life, and her VGS team ensures that her days are structured. She starts her day off with a light snack, followed by her VGS Direct Support Professional (DSP) Vanita, who everyone knows as “Miss V”, putting on some old-school music that Sywanzia likes to vibe with while sitting in her favorite chair. All of her peers and staff are thrilled to see Sywanzia in the morning - and her perfectly put together outfits that Tonya picks out for her, all which include a pair of her more than 40 Converse sneakers.

Around 11:30 a.m., she has her lunch and by her own rules - she'll happily feed herself when Jill Rigelmayer, VGS Rehabilitation Manager, is helping her, but with other staff she prefers they take the lead. Weather permitting, Sywanzia enjoys spending time outdoors, an activity she shares with Tonya every weekend. Before her day at VGS ends, she enjoys watching TV, winding down in her own peaceful rhythm.

Featured photo: Sywanzia, and twin sister Tonya

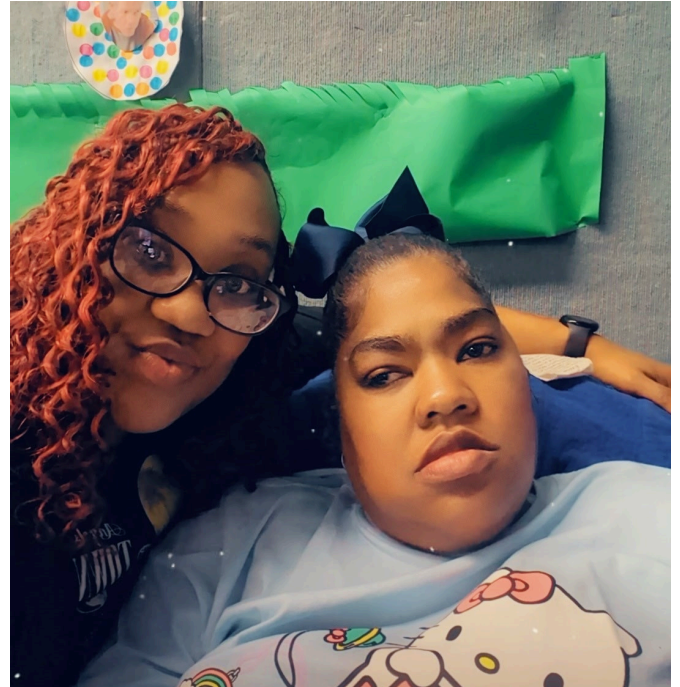
True to form, Sywanzia has a favorite object in Miss V's room, a toy with pop-up characters that she enjoys pressing down as they pop back up. Also unsurprisingly, given her morning music listening sessions, she loves to shake small musical instruments. Both of these activities help hone her concentration and motor skills. The VGS Team makes sure that activities not only serve a purpose, but that they are enjoyable. It is paramount that each individual is treated as a full person and have a say in what they do. Even with her penchant for the predictable, Sywanzia is game for an outing with her VGS friends. She is happy to go on any adventure, but is particularly fond of going to the movies and sightseeing around Cleveland.

Tonya receives updates on Sywanzia's progress and activities from the VGS team throughout the day. Tonya appreciates the communication from Sywanzia's team, like many caregivers, it gives her the security she needs to focus on her own needs and career. It also assures her that Sywanzia is living the full and dignified life she deserves.

Watching Tonya and Sywanzia interact is a beautiful thing - their love for one another is evident - and Tonya's dedication to her sister is simply inspiring. That Tonya trusts VGS with Sywanzia's care means so much to not only Miss V, Jill, and the staff at the VGS Cleveland West location - but to everyone at the organization.

Sywanzia's story is not about limitations, but about presence, persistence, and connection.

She may not speak, but she has a voice—and through the care of her sister and our devoted support team at VGS, her voice continues to be heard.



“My experience with Sywanzia has been nothing short of amazing! She brings so much joy to our room and lives. Her laugh is infectious! I love her and I am honored to care for her.” - Miss V



Featured photos: Top - Sywanzia and Vanita
Bottom: Sywanzia showing off her style

CONNECTED TO THE COMMUNITY

At the heart of the VGS mission is the belief that everyone deserves to feel seen, supported, and safe. In 2024, we expanded our community initiatives to deepen connections, develop trust, and create spaces where individuals feel empowered and valued.



CLEVELAND PUBLIC LIBRARY

At the library, our participants use public computers to explore topics they are interested in, access online resources to practice math, spelling, and other subjects. They also enjoy checking out new music, books, and magazines. They appreciate the opportunity to make their own choices from the library's many options!



BEACHWOOD MALL

While everyone does love to shop, our shopping trips are meant to be meaningful experiences for our participants. Money management, making wise spending decisions and navigating a large public space all help individuals become more independent.



LOWE'S

Individuals build their confidence and make progress towards working in the community by visiting local employers, completing job applications, and becoming more comfortable speaking with the employees. Applying for work with guidance is enjoyable, meaningful, and practical.

2024 IMPACT REPORT

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS

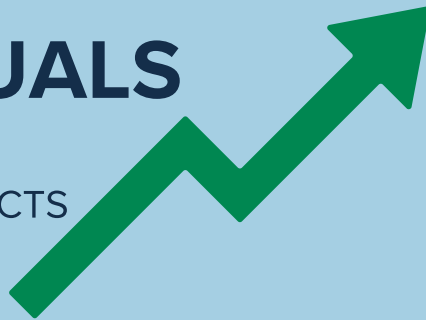


**SERVED 772
INDIVIDUALS**

ACROSS ALL PROGRAMS
AND SERVICES

**\$3.4M PAID TO
INDIVIDUALS**

THROUGH OUR
PARTNER CONTRACTS



60

PROGRAM
PARTICIPANTS WERE
HIRED INTO
COMPETITIVE
COMMUNITY
EMPLOYMENT

77

INDIVIDUALS EARNED A
PAYCHECK AT SUPPORTED
COMMUNITY WORKSITES

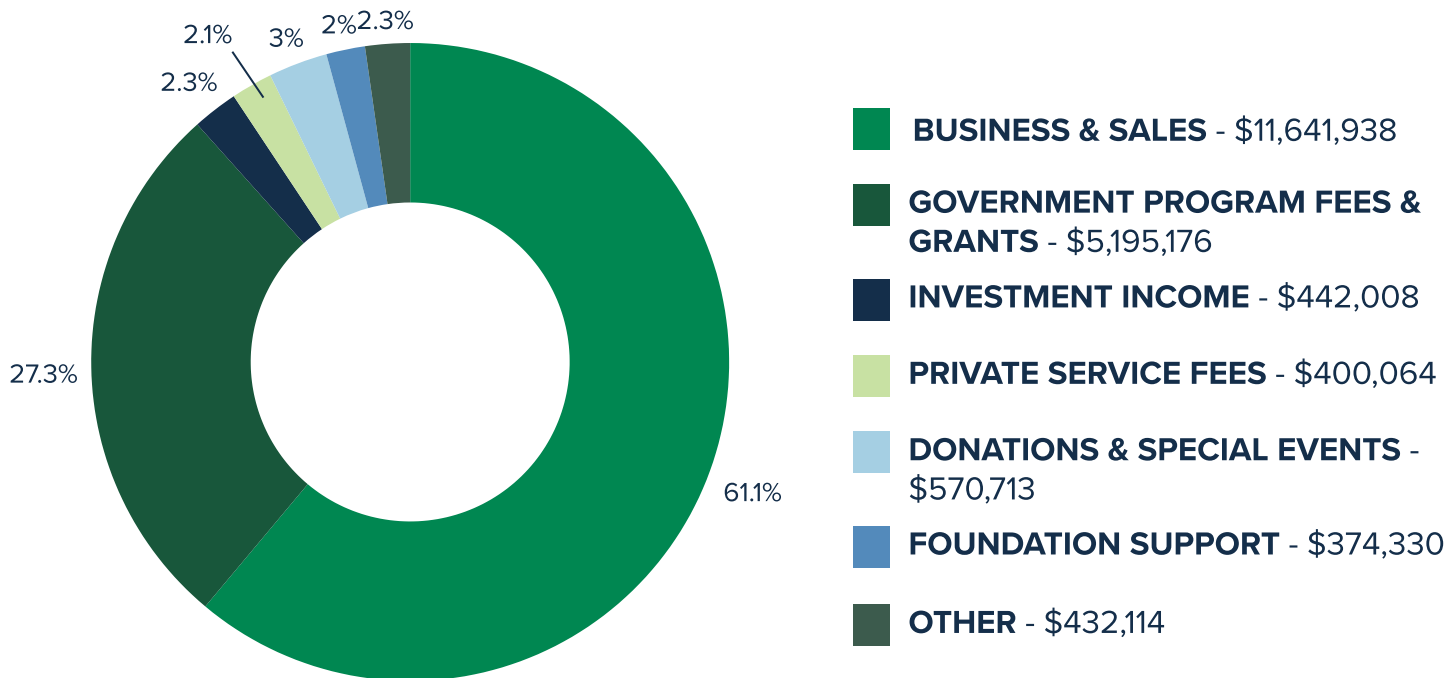
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WITH
DISABILITIES**

PARTICIPATED IN
VOCATIONAL
REHABILITATION
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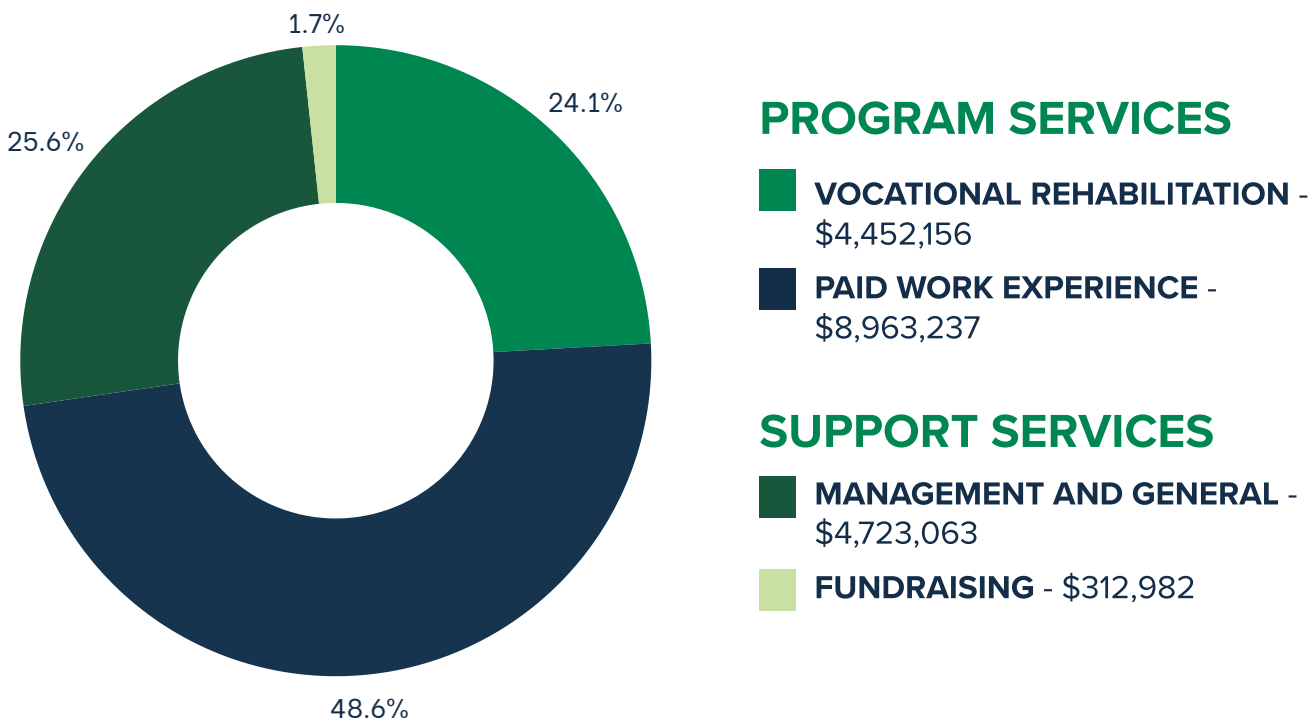


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TOTAL EXPENSES



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Polly Bruch White was an ardent supporter of VGS and the Sunbeam Board for 58 years. Her dedication helped countless individuals with disabilities. In November 2024, the Polly Bruch White Fund was established with the sole purpose of providing meaningful activities for our program participants and the Sunbeam Board.

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2024 ANNUAL EVENTS



Friday, April 12, 2024

Friday Night on 55th Co-Chairs

Elizabeth Horvitz & Sarah McWhorter

A festive tropical celebration will include cocktails, hors d'oeuvres, live music and more!



Wednesday, November 13 - Friday, November 14, 2024

Sunbeam Holiday Boutique Co-Chairs

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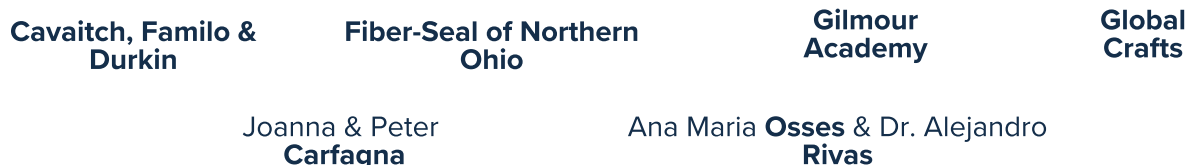
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PATRONS



FRIENDS OF VGS





Creating pathways for individuals with disabilities to engage in the community, achieve greater independence, and attain employment.

vgsjob.org

LOCATIONS

Cleveland

2235-2239 East 55th Street
Cleveland, Ohio 44103

Cleveland West

4720 Hinckley Industrial Parkway
Cleveland, Ohio 44109

Elyria

359 Lowell Street
Elyria, Ohio 44035

Columbus

3964 C Brown Park Drive
Hilliard, OH 43026

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This report summarizes the 2024 activities and accomplishments of Vocational Guidance Services and its affiliates, VGS, Inc., and Vocational Services Inc.