



Independence Center, Inc.

# FY 25 Annual Report



October 1, 2024 -  
September 30, 2025

[independence.org](http://independence.org)

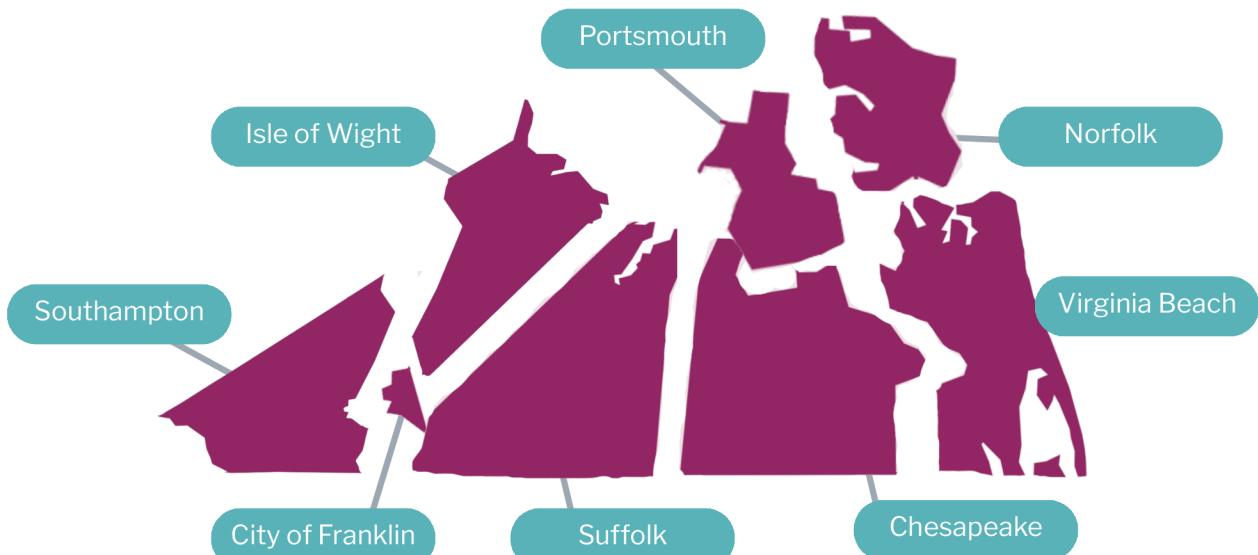
# About the Independence Center, Inc.

The Independence Center, Incorporated (ECI) is a consumer-controlled, community-based, cross-disability, non-residential, private, non-profit Center for Independent Living (CIL) operated by and for individuals with disabilities in South Hampton Roads, including the cities of Chesapeake, Franklin, Norfolk, Portsmouth, Suffolk, Virginia Beach, Southampton County, and Isle of Wight County.

**The purpose of ECI is two-fold; to prepare individuals, and to prepare the community for full integration of persons with disabilities into society.**

These goals are accomplished by the following strategies:

1. The provision of direct services to individuals with significant disabilities, that result in a greater level of independence and community integration/functioning.
2. The provision of services and advocacy in the community that result in a greater awareness of disability issues, physical and programmatic accessibility, and systems change.



# Message from Executive Director

As we reflect on the past year, I am proud to share the impact we have made together. This year brought both challenges and opportunities, and through dedication, collaboration, and a shared commitment to our mission, we continued to move forward with purpose and resilience.

Thanks to the support of our staff, board, partners, and community members, we strengthened our programs, maintained continuity, and responded thoughtfully to emerging needs. We remained attentive to how broader changes were felt at the local level, and we worked to ensure our services were personal, impactful, and accessible. The outcomes highlighted in this report reflect that ongoing commitment.

This year also gave us time to reflect and plan for the future. While the environment in which we operate continues to evolve, our organization is well positioned for the work ahead. Our experience, partnerships, and organizational capacity allow us to move forward with confidence and purpose. We approach the future with a focus on solutions, collaboration, and long-term impact.

I am deeply grateful to everyone who contributed their time, expertise, and resources this year. Your trust and partnership make our work possible. As we look ahead, we remain committed to advancing our mission, strengthening our impact, and continuing to serve our community with integrity and care.

Thank you for being part of our journey. We look forward to the year ahead and the important work still to come.

With sincere appreciation,

C. Nichole Davis  
Executive Director  
Endependence Center, Inc.



# ECI History

As the first CIL established in the Commonwealth of Virginia, ECI has a long history of advocating at the local, state, and federal levels, working with communities to improve accessibility, and providing services to people with disabilities.

Handicaps Unlimited of Virginia (HUVA) received a federal grant to start a Center for Independent Living (CIL). In 1981, Tidewater Independent Living Center (ILC) was established.

**1980**

ECI was instrumental in establishing HB817, the “Virginians with Disabilities Act.” This act provided equal access to employment and accessibility for people with disabilities.

**1983**

Tidewater ILC became incorporated as a 501 (c) (3) non-profit organization under the name of Independence Center, Incorporated (ECI).

**1985**

Staff organized grassroots support for the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Staff attended the ADA signing ceremony in DC.

**1988**

Helped to establish legislation that was carried over to the following year with the General Assembly to require wheelchair lifts on buses.

**1990**

Coordinated a regional conference for the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), regarding emergency preparation.

**1993**

Worked closely with the City of Norfolk in the establishment of Harbor Park baseball stadium, with a fully accessible universal design that has been nationally recognized.

**1995**

Implemented a Department of Housing and Urban Development grant to train more than 1,000 people statewide on the Fair Housing Amendments Act.

**2001**

Began a long-term working relationship with the Social Security Administration for an annual contract to provide benefits counseling and outreach.

**2003**

Coordinated with the local Department of Medicaid Services to host two vaccine clinics at ECI, where people with disabilities could obtain vaccines in an environment they were familiar with. In April and May, 207 people were administered their first and second doses of the COVID-19 vaccine at the ECI vaccine clinic.

**2015**

Completed a two-year program from the Hampton Roads Community Foundation (HRCF) to expand and modify the Employment Network program.

**2021**

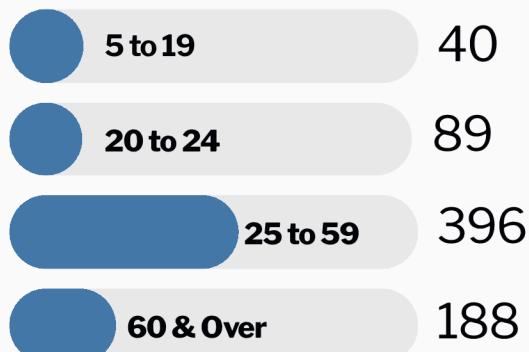
Received a grant from the City of Norfolk to provide Nursing Home Transition services to residents. This funding empowers individuals to transition back to the community, promoting independence and enhancing their quality of life.

**2023**

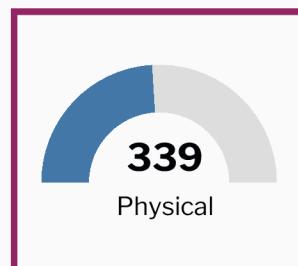
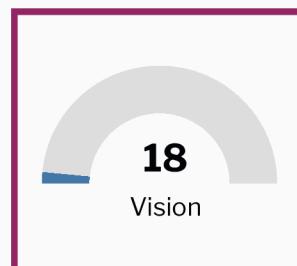
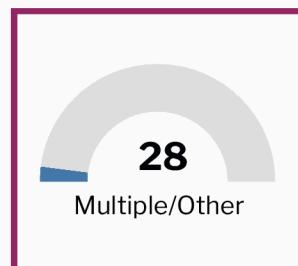
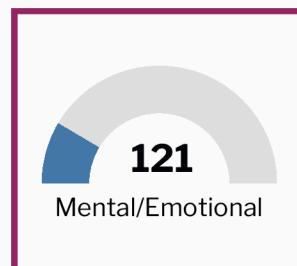
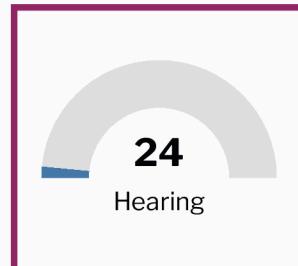
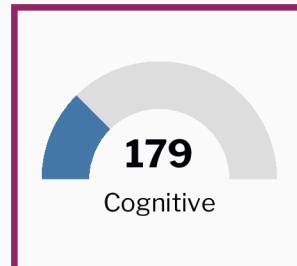
# Participant Demographics

**713**  
PARTICIPANTS

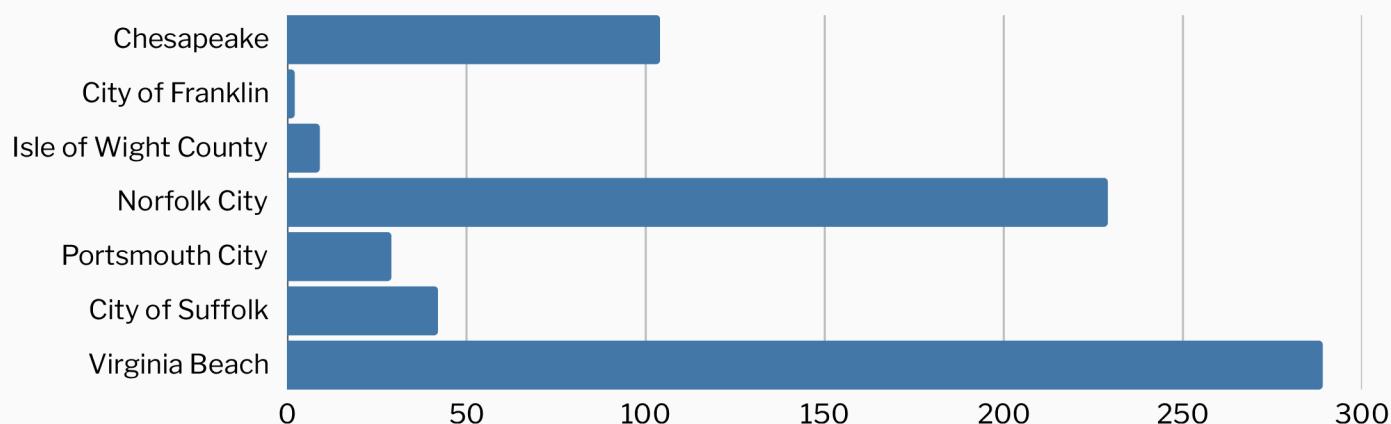
## AGE



## DISABILITIES



## CITY OF RESIDENCE



# Independent Living Services



## PEER MENTORING

Participants connect with other people with disabilities for support and opportunities to share valuable life experiences - this model is based on the belief that a Peer Mentor with shared disability-related experiences is the best guide to independence.



## INDEPENDENT LIVING SKILLS TRAINING

Participants identify training needs to gain skills for living independently. Monthly workshops with rotating topics are offered as well. Participants who set personal goals and choose to work with a Peer Mentor also gain independent living skills through the mentoring process.



## TRANSITION

ECI staff coordinates resources and services to help prevent individuals with disabilities from going into a nursing facility or institution and to enable individuals with disabilities to leave nursing facilities or institutions. For youth (14 to 24) with disabilities, ECI provides independent living services that empower youth to achieve self-determination and independence in the community.



## INFORMATION AND REFERRAL

ECI connects individuals with resources and services in the community, including transportation, healthcare, and legal assistance.



## ADVOCACY

Assistance is provided to individuals with disabilities to resolve discrimination complaints. Staff members participate in various activities that result in positive changes and greater accessibility and are involved in a number of systems advocacy efforts locally, regionally and across Virginia.



## ADDITIONAL SERVICES

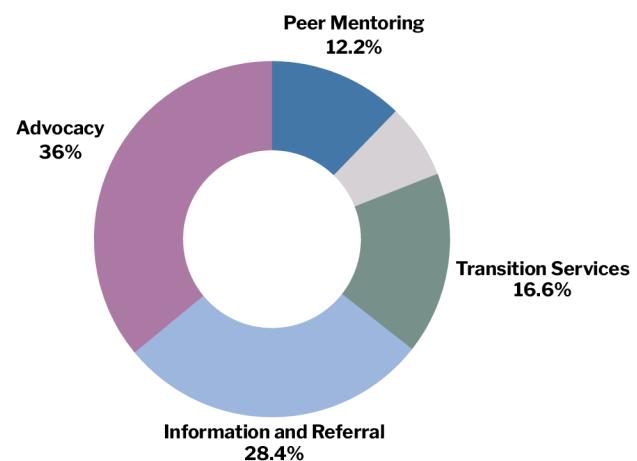
- Assistive technology for people who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing
- Career supports
- Community education
- Technical assistance
- Virginia Housing home modifications for renters, homeowners, and military veterans.
- Services Facilitation for people using Medicaid Consumer-Directed home and community-based services.
- Pre-Employment Transition Services for youth with disabilities.

# Direct & Core Services

As a Center for Independent Living, ECI provides five core services: Peer Mentoring, Independent Living Skills Training, Transition Services, Information & Referral, and Advocacy. Services are provided both directly to individuals and through community advocacy.

## Core Services: Hours of Service Provided

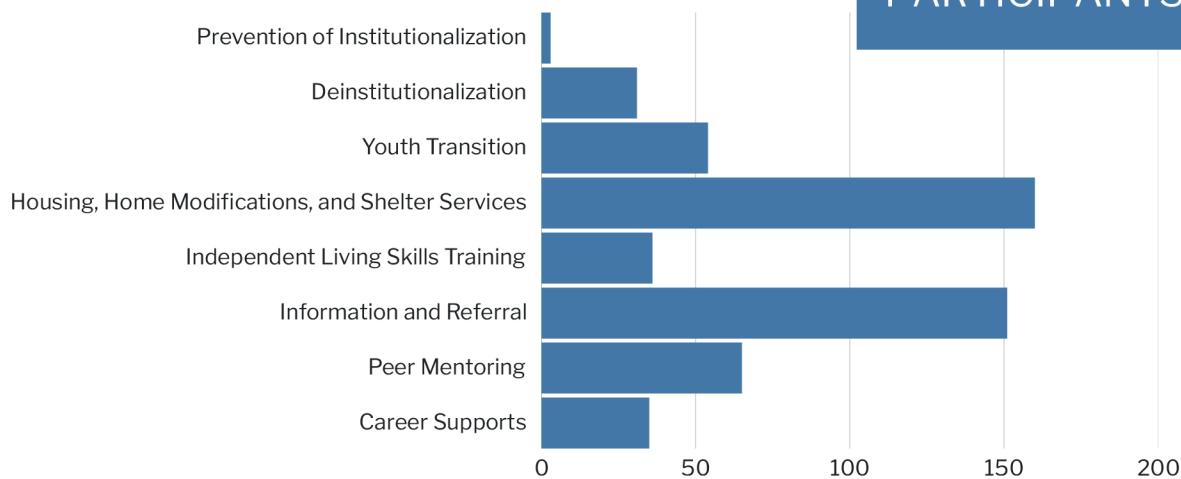
|                                      |              |
|--------------------------------------|--------------|
| ● Peer Mentoring                     | <b>163</b>   |
| ● Independent Living Skills Training | <b>212</b>   |
| ● Transition Services                | <b>2,085</b> |
| ● Information & Referral             | <b>2,485</b> |
| ● Advocacy                           | <b>2,224</b> |



ECI provided direct services to 713 participants in the reporting period, offering both core independent living services and additional services.

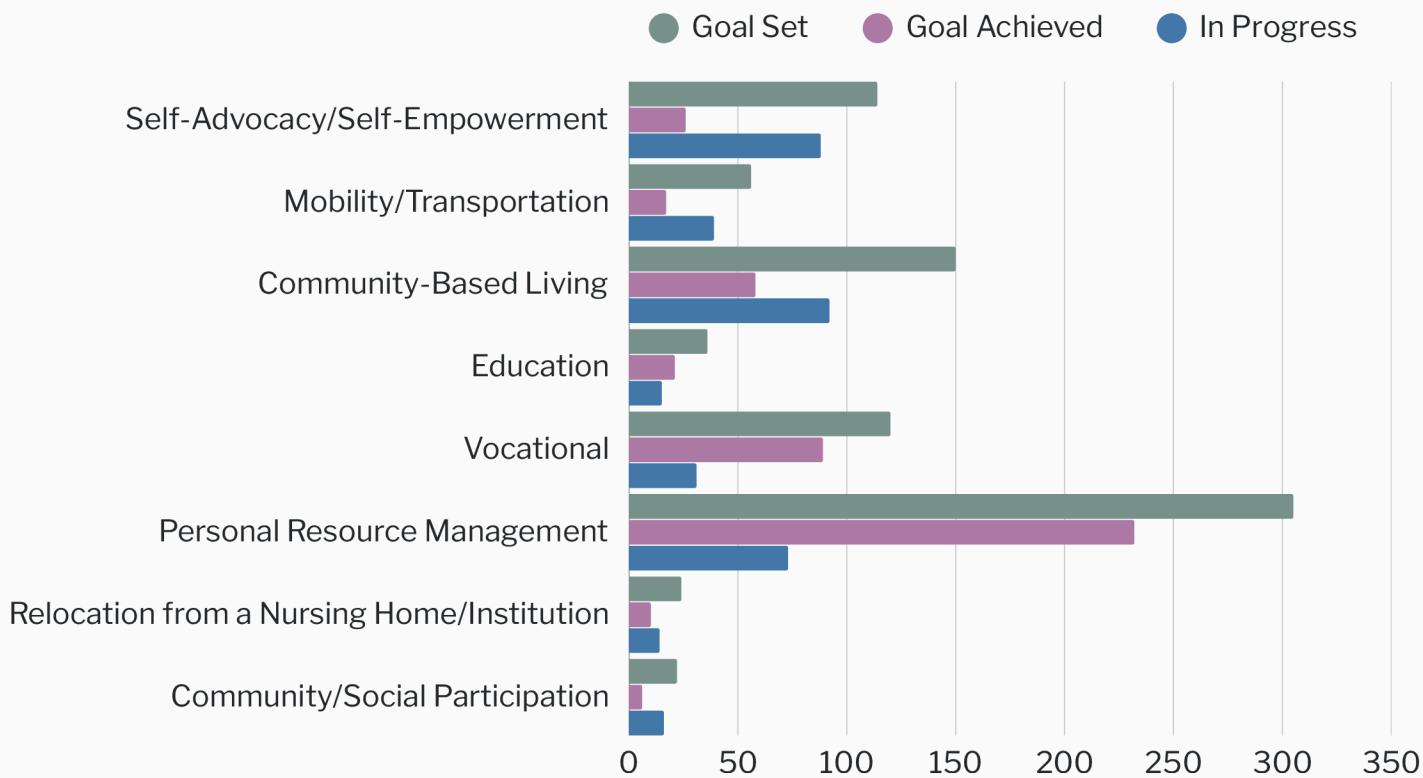
## Direct Service: Number of People Served

**713**  
PARTICIPANTS

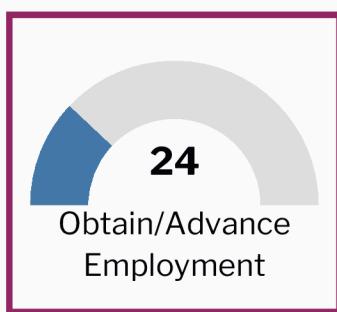
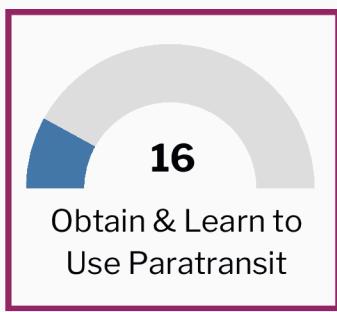
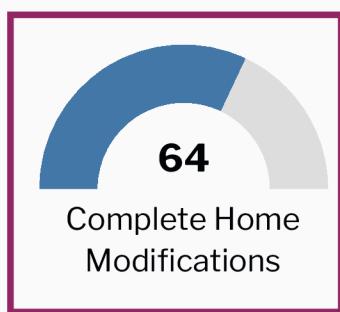




# Goal Achievements



## Goal Highlights:



# Core Services: Success Stories

## Independent Living Skills

ECI supported a 17-year-old student with a traumatic brain injury who participated in the Summer Youth Program to build daily living and self-advocacy skills. Through the program, he gained tools for goal setting, decision-making, and maintaining independence. After the program, he chose to remain active in ECI's Saturday Youth Group Independent Living Skills sessions, where he continued building confidence, connecting with peers, and practicing new skills. His continued participation demonstrates his growing commitment to self-sufficiency and personal growth.

## Nursing Home Transition

ECI staff supported a 69-year-old woman with a physical disability in her goal to transition from a nursing facility back into community living. ECI facilitated a collaborative meeting with the participant, facility staff, and her Medicaid managed care coordinator to develop a detailed transition plan. With ECI's guidance, she moved into an apartment, established utility services, obtained identification documents, and arranged transportation and medical appointments. She also accessed assistance for groceries and medication, secured personal care services, and received support to pay off past-due utility balances. Today, she is thriving in her own apartment, living independently with the supports she needs in place.

## Peer Mentoring & Advocacy

ECI began working with a 50-year-old Deaf woman who aimed to strengthen her financial management skills and move toward more sustainable housing. Working with a peer mentor who was fluent in ASL, communication barriers were removed, ensuring full participation. Throughout her time with ECI, she received benefits counseling, advocacy in requesting accommodations, and support in navigating complex systems. She also worked to improve her budgeting and financial literacy, eventually securing a job that allowed her to increase her work hours and transition off SSDI benefits. Her most significant accomplishment came when she successfully maintained ownership of her home, avoiding foreclosure despite significant financial hardship. Her journey is a testament to the power of advocacy, communication access, and consumer-driven independence.

## Information & Referral

ECI worked with a 20-year-old man with autism who wanted to explore his transportation options--especially learning to drive. ECI provided education on various transportation methods, helping him understand that while driving is a common goal, it's not the only way to achieve independence. Together, they reviewed the steps to get a driver's license and connected him with DARS for potential access to Wilson Workforce's driving services. While driving remains his long-term goal, he now confidently uses paratransit and other community transportation options in the meantime. With ECI's support, he feels empowered and well-informed about managing his transportation and making choices that support his independence goals.

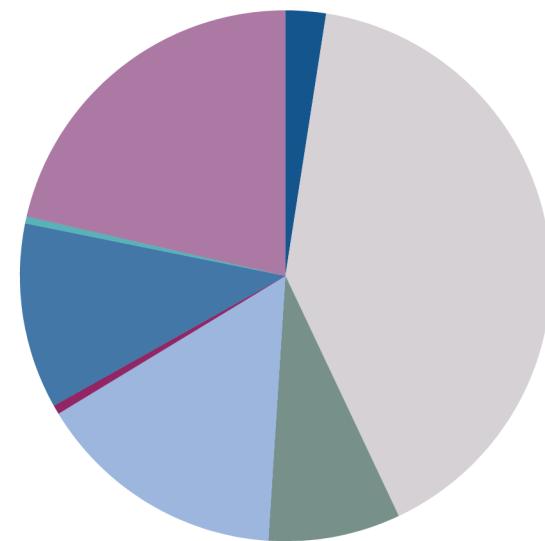


# Community Impact

Staff members participate in various activities that result in positive changes and greater accessibility at the local, state, and federal levels. Staff engage in systems advocacy in the same areas as individual advocacy, such as transportation, education, employment, housing, benefits, and accessibility.

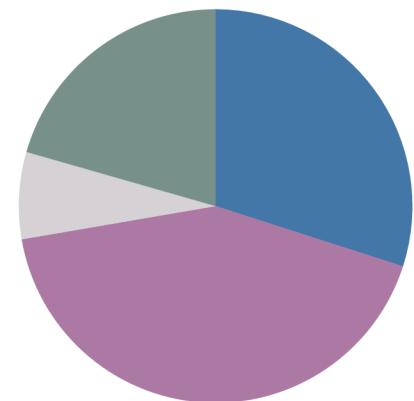
## Community Impact Hours by Issue Area

|   |              |
|---|--------------|
| ● ADA - Increased awareness of and compliance | <b>98</b>    |
| ● Community Advocacy                          | <b>1,617</b> |
| ● Prevention & Transition from Institutions   | <b>321</b>   |
| ● Education & Youth Transition                | <b>610</b>   |
| ● Employment                                  | <b>22</b>    |
| ● Housing                                     | <b>451</b>   |
| ● Transportation                              | <b>17</b>    |
| ● Community Outreach                          | <b>854</b>   |



## Community Impact Hours by Activity

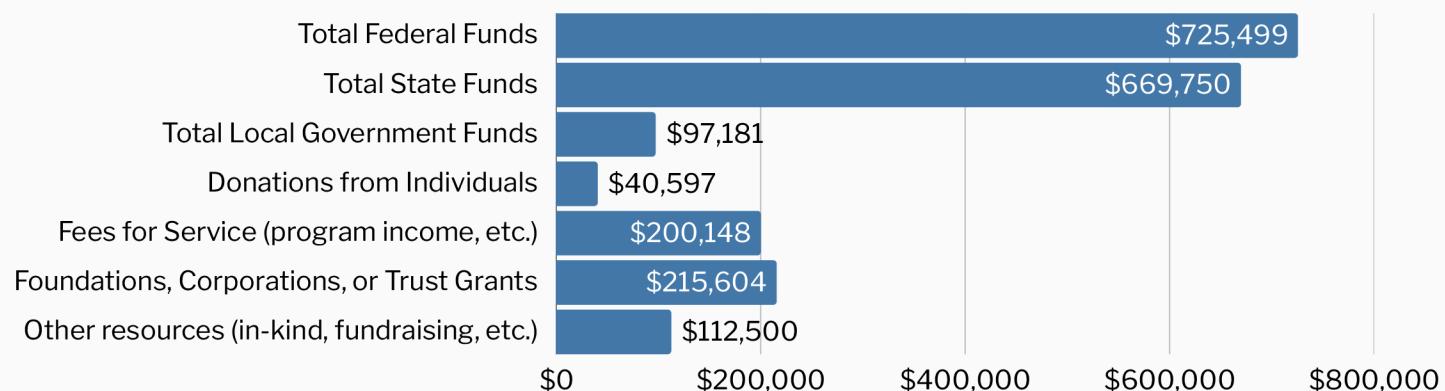
|  |            |
|--|------------|
| ● Community Education & Public Information | <b>692</b> |
| ● Community & Systems Advocacy             | <b>978</b> |
| ● Technical Assistance                     | <b>165</b> |
| ● Outreach Efforts                         | <b>475</b> |



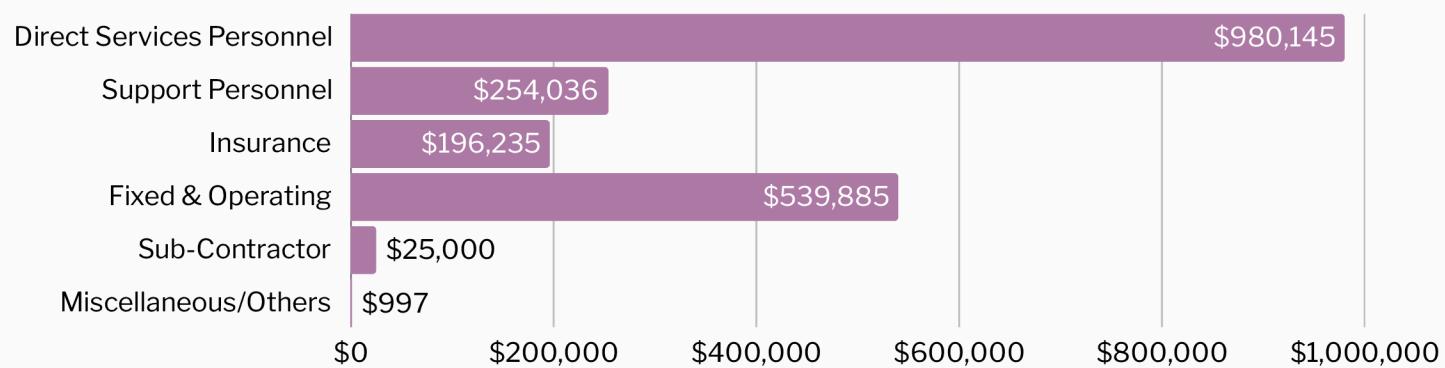
**2,546** Community Contacts

# Financial Performance

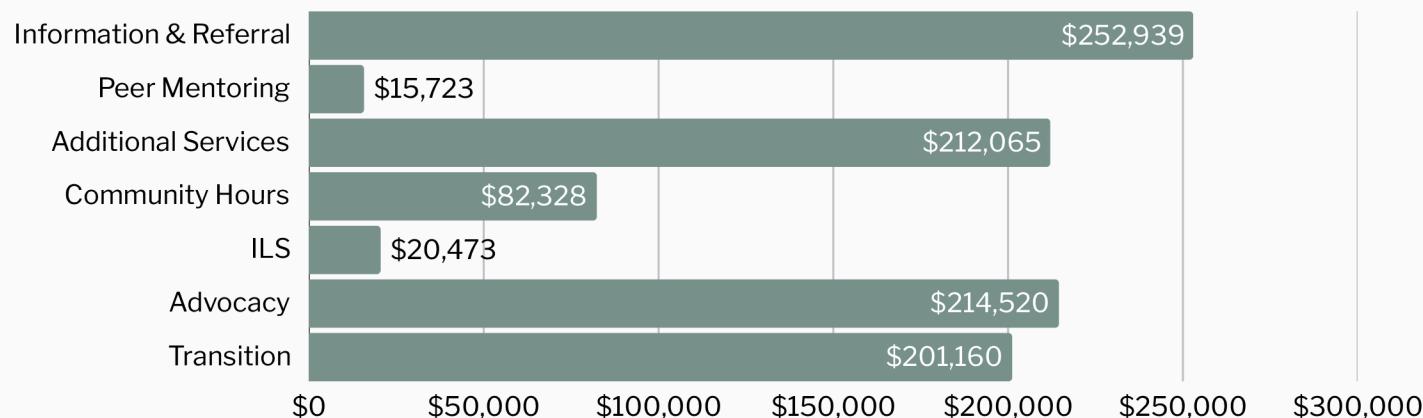
**Total Revenue \$2,061,279**



**Total Expense \$ 1,996,298**



## Salary Allocation by Service





-  [endependence.org](http://endependence.org)
-  757-461-8007
-  [ecinorf@endependence.org](mailto:ecinorf@endependence.org)
-  @ECInorfolk
-  6300 E. Virginia Beach Blvd., Norfolk, VA 23502



## **Board of Directors for Reporting Period**

*Lisbet Dula, President*

*Nancy Perry, Vice President*

*Deanna Smith, Vice President*

*Cee-Cee Simmons, Treasurer*

*Claudia Godoy*

*Deon Latham*

*Ericka Neville*

*Kaitlyn Hodges*

## **Staff List for Reporting Period**

*Nichole Davis, Executive Director*

*Matt Ballard, Administrative Assistant*

*Olivia Brichter, Youth Independent Living Coordinator*

*Maureen Chappell, Employment Coordinator*

*Felicia Brown, Facilitation Coordinator*

*Jackie Brown, Receptionist*

*Vantoria Clay, Housing Coordinator*

*Frances Durham, Community Work Incentives Coordinator*

*Jeanette Flanders, Community Work Incentives Coordinator*

*Catrina Flowers, Bookkeeper*

*Emily Hoapili, Operations Manager*

*Shernika Holley, Deaf & Hard of Hearing Outreach Coordinator*

*Maureen Hollowell, Director of Advocacy & Services*

*Justin Johnson, Youth Independent Living Coordinator*

*Linda Johnson, Director of Employment Programs*

*Katherine Keesler, Personal Care Attendant*

*Rena Lewis, Independent Living Coordinator*

*Tammy Manno, Administrative Assistant*

*Amy Ouellette, Youth Independent Living Coordinator*

*Amadeo San Antonio, Finance Director*

*Ben White, Employment Coordinator*

*Travis Webb, Independent Living Coordinator*

*Latoshia Wilson-Nixon, Independent Living Coordinator*