

COMPREHENSIVE STATEWIDE ASSESSMENT

The Comprehensive Statewide Assessment to identify the vocational rehabilitation needs of individuals with disabilities in Georgia is accomplished through a variety of assessment mechanisms. These mechanisms, including town hall meetings and public forums, allow VR consumers and/or their families, constituents, partners, advocates, and service providers to comment on the services received from the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Program.

VR also gathers valuable needs assessment information in other ways, including working with the Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC) on the preparation of the State Plan for Independent Living (SPIL). Ongoing comprehensive assessments are conducted through consumers and employers satisfaction surveys, and case file reviews. These assessments assist the VR Program with identifying the needs of individuals with disabilities who:

- have the most significant disabilities, including their need for supported employment services;
- are minorities and have been unserved or underserved; and
- are served through other components of the statewide Workforce Investment system.

Survey results from the National Organization on Disability, the 2000 U. S. Census Bureau, and the federal Social Security Supplemental Report for 2001 have been helpful in evaluating the vocational needs of people with disabilities in Georgia.

Survey Analysis and Reports

The National Organization on Disabilities, in cooperation with the Louis Harris Poll, provides timely survey research data on various disability related topics, including insight into the quality of life for persons with disabilities. The 2000 survey reports wide disparities between persons with disabilities and their nondisabled peers with regard to *employment, education, household income, and other factors*.

Although employment has improved somewhat over the past fourteen years for people who say they are able to work, employment is still the area with the widest gap between all people with disabilities and the rest of the population. Only three in ten working-age (18-64) adults with disabilities are employed full or part-time, compared to eight in ten working-age adult without disabilities (32% versus 81%). The presence of a disability seems to prevent a clear majority of unemployed persons with disabilities from participating in the workforce. Two out of three unemployed persons with disabilities would prefer to be working.

Given the lower rate of employment for people with disabilities, a significant income gap exists between people with and without disabilities. People with disabilities are much more likely than people without disabilities to live in poverty with very low household incomes of \$15,000 or less

(29% versus 10%). Conversely, people with disabilities are much less likely than people without disabilities to live in households that earn more than \$50,000 annually (16% versus 39%).

Georgia Disability Population

The 2000 U.S. Census Model-based Estimates of the Prevalence of Specific Disabilities Among Persons 16 and over provides background on several key characteristics of persons with disabilities in Georgia. First, Georgia has a higher percent of persons with disabilities (19.6%) compared to the national rate (18.4%). Second, Georgia has a higher percent of persons whose disability is severe (13.72%) compared to the national rate (12.54%). Third, Georgia has a higher percent of persons aged 16 and over with a work disability or mobility limitation (9.06%) compared to the national rate (8.38%) which means they number over 388,000. And, fourth, Georgia has a lower rate of employment for persons 16 and over with a work disability or a mobility limitation (33.06%) compared to the national rate (34.94%).

Consumers with Most Significant Disabilities

Review of the 2002 Third Interim Report: Longitudinal Study of Vocational Rehabilitation Service Programs and the Georgia Department of Labor, Rehabilitation Services uncovered four strong characteristics. Georgia VR consumers are much more likely to be severely or most severely disabled, much younger and less educated, much more likely to have mental retardation, much less likely to have orthopedic impairments, much more likely to not be working at application, and to earn less if they are the most severely disabled. VR has long worked to significantly strengthen services to Georgians with severe disabilities.

Improving Services to Minorities with Disabilities

The 2000 U. S. Census Bureau survey estimates Georgia's population to be 8,186,453. This estimation is composed of 65% Caucasian, 28.7% African American, 0.3% American Indian and Alaska Native, 2.1% Asian, and 0.1% Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander. Approximately 5.3% of Georgia's population is composed of Hispanic or Latino (including Mexican, Puerto Rican, and Cuban).

VR continues to explore innovative approaches to increase and expand program services to Georgia's minority populations, including African American, Hispanic, Asian, and Native American persons.

Improving Transition Services for Youths with Disabilities

A number of research findings have clearly demonstrated the need to improve transition outcomes for students with disabilities. Youth with disabilities, especially those with significant disabilities, often have difficult times completing high school, enrolling in and completing post-secondary education, and obtaining and maintaining employment. In addition, students with disabilities have higher drop out rates than non-disabled students. One out of five adults with disabilities has not graduated from high school, compared to less than one out of ten adults without disabilities. Drop out rates for students with disabilities vary with the nature and significance of the disability.

Nationally, youth with severe emotional disturbances (57.6%) and youth with learning disabilities (36%) have the highest drop out rates of all disability groups.

Students with disabilities have low rates of college enrollment. Only 14% of youth with disabilities attend post secondary school versus 53% in the general population. Nationally, 70% of youth with disabilities are unemployed two years after exiting high school.

The Georgia Department of Education/Division of Exceptional Student Services routinely coordinates needs assessment and analysis of special education students within Georgia's public school systems. The assessment analyzes what happens to special education students (age 14-21 years old) when they graduate from high school.

The FY2003 assessment analyzed post-school outcomes of 5,322 special education graduates. Of these graduates, 379 were working or attending post-secondary institutions; 437 were attending a college or university; 706 were attending technical/vocational school; 1,410 were working full-time (including military); 414 were working part-time; 250 were involved in sheltered employment or day rehabilitation programs; 121 were unemployed or on a waiting list; 338 were unemployed but seeking employment; 316 were unemployed not seeking employment; and 789 were unable to be contacted. The assessment does not include special education drop-outs, which was 25.75% during FY2003.

Based on the assessment results, DOE established ten performance goals for improving successful transition of students with disabilities. Local school systems are required to select three of the ten goals and to develop an improvement plan around those goals. These three goals are: (1) decreasing the percentage of students with disabilities who drop-out of school; (2) increasing the percentage of students with disabilities who earn a regular education diploma; and (3) increasing the percentage of students with disabilities who transition to their desired post-school outcome.

With transition being an important goal of the VR Program, continued joint VR/DOE collaborative efforts will result in improved transition services to Georgia's students with disabilities, including special education, at-risk youths, and juvenile delinquents.

Collaborating with Community Rehabilitation Programs (CRPs)

The capacity of CRPs to provide services to persons with significant and most significant disabilities in Georgia appears to be adequate in most regions of the state. However, VR understands the need for additional service providers to maximize service efforts for unserved and underserved populations in rural areas throughout Georgia. During FY2005, VR will continue efforts to implement a new process to identify and pilot a wider variety of innovative strategies to recruit more service providers in rural Georgia.

Improving Service Delivery to Georgia's Blind and Visually Impaired Consumers

In collaboration with peer support services and Centers for Independent Living (CILs), VR will continue to provide individualized rehabilitation services that result in optimal employment and independent living outcomes for citizens who are blind and visually impaired.

Other Assessment Activities

In an ongoing effort to assess the extent and nature of services and programs necessary to meet the vocational rehabilitation needs of Georgian's with disabilities, GDOL/VR has contracted with Pepitone Worldwide Services to conduct an extensive needs assessment of VR's employer customers, consumers, service vendors, and partner agencies.

The employer survey assesses employers experience and working relationship with VR. Employers are asked to identify the types of VR services they've received, and to rate their satisfaction of the work performance of the VR consumers they've hired. The consumer survey gathers input from current and former VR consumers to assess their satisfaction with their work plan and vocational outcome. The vendor survey allows VR to evaluate and appraise its relationship with prospective and existing service vendors. The partners survey allows VR to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of each partnership, and to gather information about improving joint support services that assist people with disabilities to work.

The assessment results will be included in the FY2006 State Plan.