

**SUMMARY OF INPUT AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE STATE  
REHABILITATION COUNCIL: RESPONSE OF THE DESIGNATED STATE UNIT:  
AND EXPLANATIONS FOR REJECTION OF INPUT OR RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Georgia Department of Labor (GDOL)/Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Program and the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) enjoy an extremely positive and productive working relationship. The SRC continues to assist GDOL/VR obtain vital input and feedback from the varying communities and constituencies it represents.

During the past year, the Council has provided GDOL/VR with a number of beneficial recommendations. GDOL/VR has accepted all of these recommendations, which have either been implemented or are in the process of implementation.

**Develop Interagency Partnerships**

- **SRC Recommendation:** Partner with other agencies to enhance the provision of vocational rehabilitation services, and to identify critical state and national legislative issues that affect individuals with disabilities.
- **VR Response:** Collaboration, cooperation, and partnerships are critical to the success of the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Program. GDOL/VR staff participate in a variety of collaborative efforts with community partners during the year. A few partnerships are highlighted below.

To strengthen the provision of transition services in Georgia, GDOL/VR is an active partner of the Statewide Transition Steering Committee. The overall purpose of the group is to bring together all interested parties, statewide, to have input into and participate in all possible avenues of effecting the successful transition of youth with disabilities from school to adult activities. The Committee operates under the organizational guidance of the Governor's Council for Developmental Disabilities (GCDD).

In an effort to maintain and strengthen the partnership and to further the common goal of providing the best possible services to Georgians with disabilities, GDOL/VR and the Georgia Independent Living Network entered into a cooperative agreement. The IL Network includes The Statewide Independent Living Council of GA, disABILITY Link, Living Independence for Everyone, Walton Options for Independent Living, Disability Connections, Access Center for Independent Living, Bainbridge Advocacy Individual Network, and Multiple Choices.

To make certain that cooperation and collaboration exist between the Department of Education (DOE) and GDOL/VR in implementing and maintaining a delivery system of vocational rehabilitation services to eligible students with disabilities, a cooperative agreement was established.

## **Consumer and Employer Satisfaction**

- **SRC Recommendation:** Support quality service delivery through consumer and employer satisfaction.
- **VR Response:** GDOL/VR continues to assess the effectiveness of vocational rehabilitation services through ongoing consumer and employer satisfaction surveys. The consumer survey evaluates the client's satisfaction with the services they received, professionalism of GDOL/VR personnel, and satisfaction with the development of their employment goals and outcomes.

To solicit employers input about the effectiveness of vocational rehabilitation services, GDOL/VR mailed satisfaction surveys to 5,000 employers throughout Georgia. These included employers who have used VR services to employ people with disabilities, and employers who have never used VR services. Employers were asked to identify the types of services they received from GDOL/VR, rate their experience working with GDOL/VR, the number of people with disabilities they hired based on GDOL/VR referrals, identify the strengths and weakness of those people regarding their readiness for work, and what GDOL/VR could do to encourage them to hire more people with disabilities.

The agency also initiated a statewide assessment process that was coordinated by Pepitone Worldwide. Surveys were sent to 20,000 consumers and employers.

## **Continue support of the Georgia Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities, Inc.**

- **SRC Recommendation:** Continue to support initiatives of the Georgia Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities, Inc.
- **VR Response:** GDOL/VR continues to support initiatives of the Georgia Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities, Inc. In collaboration with the Georgia Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities, Inc., the SRC and GDOL/VR has hosted a series of successful events to enhance employment opportunities for Georgians with disabilities

GDOL/VR continues to support Georgia High School/High Tech (HS/HT), an educational enrichment program for high school students with disabilities, empowering them to pursue careers in science, technology, and engineering.

## **Collaboration with the Native American Vocational Rehabilitation Program**

- **SRC Recommendation:** Continue to strengthen the cooperative relationship with the Lower Muskogee Creek Indian Tribe (Muskogee Vocational Rehabilitation Program).
- **VR Response:** The GDOL/VR Program maintains a cooperative relationship with the Lower Muskogee Creek Indian Tribe and provides disability assessment, evaluation, and referral services to clients of the tribe.

In collaboration with the MVR Program, the GDOL/VR Program was honored to co-host the mid-year conference of the Consortia of Administrators for Native American Rehabilitation (CANAR). Over 400 participants from the sixty-nine Native American rehabilitation projects across the country made the event a great success. The conference theme was "Honoring the

Past . . . Looking to the Future.” GDOL/VR looks forward to partnering in future CANAR conferences and programs that promote the employment of Native Americans with disabilities.

To ensure increased collaboration, GDOL/VR includes MVR staff in appropriate agency training programs and GDOL/VR staff is provided training on the Indian culture and its relationship to disability and work. GDOL/VR staff are active members of CANAR, and represent VR at annual Native American summits, conferences, and on the MVR Advisory Council.

### **Increase/Improve Transition Services for Students with Disabilities**

- **SRC Recommendation:** Further explore options with key education partners to develop a system of earlier identification of interventions for students with disabilities in support of the goals of the Rehabilitation Act and IDEA.
- **VR Response:** Education and employment are critical components to achieving independence and self-sufficiency. To that end, outreach to and providing services to students with disabilities is a top priority for the GDOL/VR program. Thirty-eight percent of GDOL/VR resources are directed to transitioning students from school to post-secondary opportunities with employment being the predominant outcome.

GDOL/VR has also established a collaborative agreement opportunity with DOE and local school systems (LSS). Each involved LSS receives intensive, dedicated rehabilitation services for the purpose of earlier identification of and intervention with students with disabilities. There are 181 public school systems in Georgia; in FY 2003, seventy-three (73) LSS’s took advantage of this opportunity.

### **Develop partnerships with collaborative WIA partners**

- **SRC Recommendation:** Continue working to ensure the inclusion of people with disabilities in vocational training and employment services provided under the Workforce Investment Act (WIA).
- **VR Response:** GDOL/VR has been an active participant in the planning and development of vocational training and employment services to be provided under the WIA system in Georgia. VR continues to provide leadership regarding services to persons with disabilities in the development of One-Stop Employment programs and maintains leadership on local workforce investment boards. GDOL/VR has developed Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) with 31 workforce development areas.

GDOL/VR is a committed partner in the implementation of the Workforce Investment System. GDOL/VR continues to work with local Career Centers to assure accessibility of services to all persons with disabilities. Efforts to establish a linkage between GDOL/VR staff and program services with those of the Career Centers have resulted in the co-location of several GDOL/VR hub offices.

### **Increase access of vocational rehabilitation services**

- **SRC Recommendation:** Increase access of vocational rehabilitation services so that consumers can easily obtain information about available services and service providers, and employment-related labor market information independently from their VR counselor.
- **VR Response:** The GDOL/VR Program supports client choice, self-sufficiency, and self-determination. Access to information is critical for successful employment outcomes of consumers and for the consumer-counselor relationship.

The GDOL/VR Program Client Services Policy and Procedures Manual is available on the internet. Consumers also have access to GDOL/VR Benefits Specialists for counsel on work incentives and benefits. Five percent of the calls received by the customer service unit are from VR consumers.

A customer service unit has been established to provide consumers a conduit for continuous customer feedback about the vocational services they need and receive. Customer Service Representatives provide information regarding such areas as transportation, accessible housing, and public and private agencies.

The GDOL/VR website offers a wealth of resources for job seekers, employers, and workforce professionals. There, consumers will find links to numerous websites offering resources, services, and technical assistance.

### **Expansion of Services to Juvenile Offenders with Disabilities**

- **SRC Recommendation:** Increase the provision of vocational rehabilitation services to youths with disabilities within the juvenile justice system.
- **VR Response:** GDOL/VR is working to identify and implement strategies that will increase and improve the provision of vocational rehabilitation services to Juvenile Offenders with Disabilities. A strategy being explored is the establishment of an interagency cooperative agreement with the Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ).

Joint VR and DJJ efforts will help to identify and overcome systemic barriers to serving youths with disabilities exiting the juvenile justice system. Most importantly, it will help address issues of coordination across systems that can lead to successful reintegration of Georgia youths with disabilities into the community.

### **Comprehensive System of Personnel Development**

- **SRC Recommendation:** Continue the development and implementation of the GDOL/VR plan for a Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD).
- **VR Response:** The GDOL/VR Program is dedicated to providing quality services to Georgia's citizens with disabilities. To this end, well-trained staff is essential. GDOL/VR is enthusiastic about the opportunity for all employees of the Georgia Department of Labor/Vocational Rehabilitation Program to participate in the Master's Degree in Rehabilitation Counseling program offered by the University of Kentucky.

Through the efforts of the SRC, nineteen GDOL/VR staff from all job classes were accepted into the program.

The web-based graduate program also expands the options available to GDOL/VR employees who must obtain a master's degree to meet CSPD requirements. The accelerated distance education program is designed to be completed in sixteen months with the exit exam for the course being successful completion of the CRC exam at the end of the program.