

**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) work in partnership to ensure that individuals with disabilities receive the services and support they need to become productive citizens through gainful employment and self-sufficiency. As a council to VR, the SRC reviews and monitors the effectiveness of VR and makes the following recommendations that have been accepted.

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. Several 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 (GILN) entered into a cooperative agreement. The GILN includes The Statewide Independent Living Council of GA, disABILITY LINK, disABILITY LINK, NW, Living Independence for Everyone, Walton Options for Independent Living, Disability Connections, Access Center for Independent Living, Bainbridge Advocacy Individual Network, and Multiple Choices.

Georgia Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities, Inc.

- **SRC Recommendation:** 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.

GDOL/VR supports 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. In 2002, the Georgia Department of Labor was awarded a two-year \$250,000 infrastructure grant by the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Disability

Employment Policy (ODEP) to develop a model for expanding HS/HT programs throughout Georgia. The grant funding cycle was completed in 2004, in which the HS/HT program was fully integrated into the GDOL/VR Program.

In addition to other year round programs and initiatives, VR supported the HS/HT first two-day Summit and Conference. The Summit introduced HS/HT to state and local Workforce Boards and their key partners, while the Conference brought together HS/HT students and coordinators for program-related training, network, and sharing of best practices.

Native American Vocational Rehabilitation Program

- **SRC Recommendation:** Continue to strengthen the cooperative relationship with the Lower Muskogee Creek Indian Tribe for the Muskogee Vocational Rehabilitation (MVR) 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. During FY2004, MVR maintained 100% successful closure. Sixteen American Indian consumers were provided individualized plans for employment; seven were assisted with obtaining success through employment; four had a vocational outcome of self-employment, and three were employed into the integrated labor market.

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 Consortia of Administrators for Native American Rehabilitation (CANAR), and represent VR at annual Native American summits, conferences, and on the MVR Advisory Council.

In collaboration with the MVR Program, the GDOL/VR Program and State Rehabilitation Council members attended the mid-year conference of the CANAR. The SRC representatives presented "Leadership in Rehabilitation" during the general session. The HS/HT Statewide Coordinator presented a concurrent session on establishing Native American HS/HT programs.

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 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (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. In FY2004, VR provided transition services to 1,799 students with disabilities and 256 achieved a successful rehabilitation/employment 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, and 80 took advantage of this opportunity in FY 2004.

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 of its employees to participate in the Master's Degree in Rehabilitation Counseling program offered by the University of Kentucky.

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 to be completed in sixteen months with the exit exam for the degree being the option to take and pass the CRC exam or take a comprehensive exit exam.

Through the efforts of the SRC, forty GDOL/VR staff from all job classes are currently involved in the UK program. Nineteen staff will complete the program and receive their master's degree in May 2005.

Interpreter Services for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Consumers

- **SRC Recommendation:** Increase and ensure access of interpreter services for deaf and hard-of-hearing consumers.
- **VR Response:** GDOL/VR is committed to ensuring that persons who are Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing benefit equally from services offered to the general public and will make reasonable accommodations for the provision of interpreter services through a variety of mediums.

VR uses independent interpreter referral agencies to meet the needs of staff and clients. These agencies oftentimes experience difficulties in filling interpreter requests because of the shortage of interpreters in Georgia. To address this issue, VR will pilot a project to provide sign language interpreter services through Video Remote Interpreting (VRI) for deaf and hard-of-hearing consumers.

With VRI, video-conferencing equipment is set up in the room where the deaf and hearing persons are located. An interpreter at the call center uses a headset to hear what the hearing person says. The interpreter signs to a camera everything the hearing person speaks and the deaf person watches the interpreter on a monitor. When the deaf person replies, the interpreter sees and voices the interpretation.