

**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 State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) emphasizes its role as a joint partner with the Georgia Department of Labor (GDOL), Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Program, with significant responsibilities for ensuring the effective delivery of vocational rehabilitation services. The SRC is dedicated to ensuring that persons with disabilities are offered the opportunity to follow an unfettered path to success in work, and become productive citizens within their communities.

The SRC and the VR Program jointly develop, agree to and review annually critical elements of the State Plan. In its assessment of the purpose and effectiveness of the VR delivery system, the Council is please to provide input to VR for the State Plan. The reports and other information sources used to develop recommendations are based on information gathered from previous regional town hall meetings, client and employer satisfaction surveys, feedback from customers, staff and strategic partners, the SRC strategic planning session, and the N.O.D./Harris Surveys of America.

### **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, Disability Resource Center, 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. VR regional initiatives coordinators and several counselors serve as HS/HT site coordinators and assist with initiating and managing local program activities. VR Benefits Specialists provide workshops for HS/HT students and their families about Social Security work incentives that are available for students with disabilities as they transition into post-secondary education and employment.

In 2005, VR supported the Carl Anthony Cunningham Youth Leadership Forum that was held at Georgia Southern College & State University. The participating students learned leadership skills, self-advocacy, and orientation to college life. VR will continue its support for the 2006 College Prep Experience/Youth Leadership Form at Valdosta State University.

In addition, VR donates refurbishable computers to the HS/HT program. The computers will be updated with the latest IT components, software, and assistive technology devices.

## **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 FY2005, MVR maintained ninety percent successful closure. Fifty-five American Indian consumers were provided individualized plans for employment, thirty-four were assisted with obtaining success through employment, seven had a vocational outcome of self-employment, and twenty-seven 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.

The VR Program hired a staff member to serve as Project Director of Special Statewide Initiatives/ Outreach Coordinator. It is this person's responsibility to assess how VR applies Section 21 in its service to the State of Georgia minority populations with disabilities. Assessment, troubleshooting, information dissemination, reporting, and translations of necessary

VR documents and materials are some of the areas covered. Field visitation and Outreach training are an integral part of implementation of our Section 21 commitment.

### **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 FY2005, VR provided transition services to 5,835 students with disabilities and 783 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 2005.

### **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, twenty-five GDOL/VR staff from all job classes are currently involved in the UK program.

### **Business Partnership**

- **SRC Recommendation:** Improve marketing and customer service to VR employer customers.
- **VR Response:** Based on results of the VR Employer Satisfaction Survey, the VR Program has developed an action plan to improve marketing and customer service to VR employer customers. Directors of the thirteen VR regional programs have developed unique strategic goals to attract

and serve employers within their region. Each goal has a specific activity, time expectation, desired outcome, assessment method, and potential impact. Addressing the workforce needs of businesses will help enhance employment outcomes of VR consumers.

### **Seminars for VR Consumers**

- **SRC Recommendations:** According to the N.O.D./Harris Surveys of Americans with Disabilities, the Education Gap is the difference in levels of educational achievement between people with and without disabilities. Therefore the SRC request that VR provide seminars for students with disabilities and their families to ensure adequate transitional planning for the students.
- **VR Response:** Georgia VR remains committed to providing transition planning services to eligible students with disabilities. As a part of continued outreach activities for these consumers, the VR regional programs will work with the State Rehabilitation Council to provide regional seminars for VR transition students and their families.

The seminars will be designed to promote the awareness of vocational rehabilitation services that are available to post-secondary students with disabilities. These services -- including early career exploration, vocational counseling and evaluation, work adjustment and work readiness training, on-the-job training, job placement, vocational and technical training, job coaching, and assistive work technology – support students transition into the world of work and independence.