COMPREHENSIVE STATEWIDE NEEDS ASSESSMENT (CSNA)

Georgia

Research & Evaluation Unit
Institute on Human Development and Disability
UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

2023 COMPREHENSIVE STATEWIDE NEEDS ASSESSMENT
RESEARCH & EVALUATION UNIT | UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

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GEORGIA VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION AGENCY

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GVRA CSNA 2023

The Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency (GVRA) along with the Research and Evaluation Unit (REU) at the Institute on Human Development and Disability (IHDD) at the University of Georgia (UGA) and the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) jointly completed the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA) in 2023. To produce this report, UGA researchers implemented surveys, interviews, and focus groups with hundreds of clients, parents, staff, partners, and key stakeholders in Georgia. This process is required every three years by the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 as amended by Title IV of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and is intended to help inform and guide regular strategic planning.

METHODOLOGY

Input was obtained from a total of 1032 Georgians with disabilities, parents and family members, employment service providers, other community professionals and employers using both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. A total of 909 valid surveys were completed by a variety of entities including individuals with disabilities, parents and family members, employment service providers, other community professionals and employers. Qualitative methodologies like focus groups and interviews were used to collect additional information from 123 participants. This included twelve focus groups conducted with 85 participants, and 38 interviews conducted with key informants as well as individuals with disabilities, family members and caregivers, and professionals based in Georgia. A summary of key findings is included below.

KEY FINDINGS

SECTION I: NEEDS OF INDIVIDUALS WITH THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES, INCLUDING THEIR NEED FOR SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT

TOP THREE BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT FOR PEOPLE WITH MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES				
INDIVIDUAL WITH DISABILITY	**STAKEHOLDER PARENTS, FAMILY MEMBERS**	**STAKEHOLDER PROFESSIONALS**	**PROVIDERS PROFESSIONALS**	**EMPLOYERS**
• Access to dependable transportation • Misconceptions and low expectations among professionals • Employer's concerns about risks associated with hiring individuals with disabilities	• Access to dependable transportation • Lack of long-term services and ongoing job coaching • Misconceptions and low expectations among professionals	• Access to dependable transportation • Fear of losing benefits (SSI/SSDI) • Misconceptions and low expectations among professionals	• Access to dependable transportation • Fear of losing benefits (SSI/SSDI) • Employer's concerns about risks associated with hiring individuals with disabilities (e.g. worker's comp)	• Lack of dependable transportation • Poor job performance (speed, production, quality) • Lack of job preparation, skills, education needed for the job • Language and/or cultural barriers • Disability-related factors (medical, mental health, etc.)

Access to dependable transportation continues to remain the top need for individuals with disabilities related to employment that was identified by participants in all of the five surveys – individuals with disabilities, parents and caregivers, employment service providers, partnering professionals, and employers. This is a repeat of findings from the 2020 CSNA that reported transportation to be the main challenge for all stakeholders. Georgia is a large state that lacks a reliable public transportation system outside of the metro areas. For individuals with disabilities unable to drive due to their disability or do not own a vehicle, this can be a major impediment to employment. In the absence of reliable public transportation, people rely on others or other modes of transportation for commuting to work and other places. Other reasons include the distance to and location of available jobs, inability to access jobs in their areas without transportation, availability of transportation of services for specific populations (i.e. aging, wavier eligible recipients), lack of a vehicle and/or driver's license, the cost of transportation, long wait times, ride cancellations, advance scheduling requirements/issues, health conditions or the nature of disability, and the lack of reliability and the time required to travel via public transit/paratransit. These issues are particularly exacerbated for individuals with disabilities who live in rural and suburban areas. The Georgia Transportation Needs Assessment Report (2023), sponsored by the Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities, provides additional insights on the

transportation challenges and suggestions from the perspective of individuals with disabilities, their caregivers, and other key informants.

The second most frequently cited need of individuals with the most significant disabilities across all respondent groups includes misconceptions and low expectations among professionals regarding the capabilities of potential employees with disabilities. When professionals assume the individuals that they work with are not capable of many types of employment, individuals with disabilities are limited to jobs in only a few sectors. Many individuals with disabilities are limited to jobs in areas such as food service, maintenance work, and retail because these fields are assumed to be all that they are capable of, even though their interests and capabilities may be suited for jobs outside of these fields. There is a strong need for professionals working with individuals with disabilities to treat their clients as individuals and assess their unique employment capabilities without making assumptions based on past attitudes and experiences.

The third most frequently cited vocational rehabilitation need of individuals with the most significant disabilities cited by all groups includes the fear of losing benefits (SSI/SSDI) if they are employed. Respondents identified the need for education and help with benefits planning, counseling, and work incentives to be important. The income assurance protection that the program provides and the added reality of eligibility for Medicaid coverage for Social Security recipients is a major incentive for maintaining Social Security eligibility status by limiting or avoiding work altogether. There are many Social Security Work Incentives Programs, that make it possible for people to work without losing access to benefits, but they are complicated and not well understood by recipients, their families, or the professionals influencing decision-making. There is a strong need for providing benefits counseling to individuals with disabilities to help them understand how employment will affect their benefits including SSDI and Medicaid.

Employers' concerns about providing accommodation and the risks associated with hiring individuals with disabilities (e.g. worker's comp) were listed as an important barrier by individuals with disabilities and providers. Participants shared that employers' fears often stem from not knowing enough about how to appropriately support individuals with disabilities. Employers should be provided with the training and technical assistance support they need in providing accommodation for individuals with disabilities, including those with the most significant disabilities. The misconceptions held by professionals and employers about the abilities of individuals with disabilities are a significant barrier to employment and become more significant with the increase in the significance of disability. There is a need to educate professionals and employers, including clarifying some misconceptions or myths associated with hiring individuals with disabilities that they may have.

Individuals with significant disabilities are often not able to maintain employment long-term, without job coaches and other supported employment services from Vocational Rehabilitation. Stakeholders highlighted the need for on-the-job support like job coaching and long-term job support including supported employment to enable individuals with significant disabilities to maintain employment. Job skills training, job development, and job placement were other major services needed by individuals with disabilities to obtain and maintain

employment. Vocational guidance and counseling were also identified as being a high-priority service. Transportation assistance was identified by providers as an important service requested of them. Factors that most impact an individual's ability to work include work-from-home/remote employment opportunities, educational training (e.g. GED completion, trade school, college), job skills training, and more understanding employers about their specific needs as a person with a disability.

SECTION II: NEEDS OF INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES WHO HAVE BEEN UNSERVED OR UNDERSERVED BY THE VR PROGRAM, INCLUDING THOSE FROM DIFFERENT ETHNIC OR MINORITY GROUPS

POPULATIONS MOST LIKELY TO BE UNSERVED OR UNDERSERVED		
STAKEHOLDER PARENTS, FAMILY MEMBERS	**STAKEHOLDER PROFESSIONALS**	**PROVIDERS**
• Individuals with intellectual or developmental disabilities • Individuals with significant or complex disabilities • Individuals with mental illness • Transition-aged youth with disabilities (age 16 to 22 years)	• Individuals with significant or complex disabilities • Individuals with intellectual or developmental disabilities • Individuals with mental illness	• Individuals with significant or complex disabilities • Individuals with intellectual or developmental disabilities • Individuals with disabilities with criminal history • Individuals with disabilities who are homeless

Individuals with significant or complex disabilities and those with intellectual or developmental disabilities were identified as the most underserved or unserved populations by parents, family members, employment service providers, and professionals. Individuals with mental illness, transition-aged youth, those having criminal histories, and those living in rural areas were also identified among underserved and unserved populations.

BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT FOR RACIAL / ETHNIC MINORITY POPULATIONS		
STAKEHOLDER PARENTS, FAMILY MEMBERS	**STAKEHOLDER PROFESSIONALS**	**PROVIDERS**
• Access to dependable transportation • Lack of awareness about Vocational Rehabilitation Services • Fear of losing benefits (SSI/SSDI)	• Access to dependable transportation • Fear of losing benefits (SSI/SSDI) • Lack of awareness about Vocational Rehabilitation Services	• Access to dependable transportation • Fear of losing benefits (SSI/SSDI) • Lack of awareness about Vocational Rehabilitation Services

Key challenges for individuals from racial and ethnic minority populations include lack of access to dependable transportation, lack of awareness of vocational rehabilitation, and the fear of losing benefits (SSI/SSDI). These barriers were unanimously identified as top barriers by parents, professionals and providers.

SECTION III: YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES, AND STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES, INCLUDING THEIR NEED FOR PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES

BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT FOR YOUTH/STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES RELATED TO TRANSITION		
STAKEHOLDER PARENTS, FAMILY MEMBERS	**STAKEHOLDER PROFESSIONALS**	**PROVIDERS**
• Access to dependable transportation • Lack of awareness about Vocational Rehabilitation Services • Limited work experience	• Access to dependable transportation • Lack of awareness about Vocational Rehabilitation Services • Lack of family/community support	• Access to dependable transportation • Lack of awareness about Vocational Rehabilitation Services • Limited work experience

According to parents, professionals, and providers, lack of access to transportation was the top barrier for students and their ability to experience work. Limited work-based learning experiences and a lack of awareness of vocational rehabilitation were important barriers identified as important needs. Lack of support from family or community was also identified as a barrier by professionals to youth employment.

Job skills training and transportation assistance were identified as key services needed by youth and students in transition. Long-term job services and on-the-job support including job coaching and supported employment services were also identified as important needs related to employment of youth and students with disabilities in transition. Soft skills training, job development, job placement, vocational guidance and counseling, career exploration, and job shadowing were other services identified as important for transition-age youth.

According to the 2020 CSNA, all the five required pre-employment transition services represented significant rehabilitation needs of students with disabilities in Georgia. Of the pre-ETS services, the service that was identified as being provided or somewhat provided by most respondents was work readiness training, followed by work-based learning services. Self-advocacy service was the least provided service mentioned by respondents.

More than two thirds of parents or family members of youth with disabilities said they needed transition services to prepare their child to move from education to employment, but more than half indicated that they were extremely or somewhat dissatisfied with the school-based transition services offered by the GVRA. Many parents were not familiar with any transition services or pre-ETS services provided to their transition-aged youth in the school. A little over two-fifths of parents and family members responded that they had not received these services. For those who mentioned their youth did receive pre-ETS services in the school, an equal proportion mentioned being satisfied or dissatisfied with the services, suggesting there is wide variability across school districts.

Most parents or family members of students with disabilities mentioned that they were not at all familiar with the Pathways Explore platform and had not received Pathway Explore for Pre-ETS services. Most parents or family members of children who received Pathway Explore for Pre-ETS services responded that they were extremely or somewhat dissatisfied with the services.

Many respondents in this needs assessment identified the need to start transition and career planning early, as early as middle school. Educating and informing parents earlier about the available services for students with disabilities, both through GVRA or other provider agencies is important. Families need to be made aware and engaged in preparing the youth to enter the job market like teenagers without disabilities. GVRA should continue being involved and invested in the services being provided by schools. This includes hiring and having more staff allocated, ensuring schools are adequately servicing students, having GVRA counselors visit schools or communicate with teachers and families, and ensuring consistency both within and across school systems. Stakeholders suggested a need to clarify service provider expectations and have increased accountability for pre-ETS services from providers. There is also a need to standardize the pre-ETS curriculum and delivery of services. Transition personnel in school districts mentioned that they do not have a way of knowing what services have been provided to their students under pre-ETS and whether or how these services support the student's transition goal. There is a need for better planning and communication between districts, GVRA, and providers who provide pre-ETS.

SECTION IV: NEED TO ESTABLISH, DEVELOP, OR IMPROVE COMMUNITY REHABILITATION PROGRAMS IN GEORGIA

Providers agreed that there is a need to improve established Community Resource Providers (CRPs) in Georgia, and to expand current CRPs. Nearly three-quarters of respondents agreed that there is a need to establish new CRPs, to develop newly established CRPs and to improve established CRPs. There is also a need to develop CRPs' ability to provide services including training and support (which leads to improved job skills and job placement), customized employment, and transportation services. There is a need to develop CRPs with expertise in working with specific populations such as Deaf and Hard of Hearing, visual impairments, transition-age youth, racial and ethnic minority populations, and individuals with more significant disabilities.

Providers talked about the need to clarify expectations and provide increased guidance to them. They specifically emphasized the need to continue updating the provider manual to include more details about GVRA services, required paperwork, and expectations. Providers emphasized the need for GVRA to communicate more frequently and efficiently with them. Providers also expressed a need for GVRA to make payments promptly or explain immediately why a payment has been rejected. Respondents shared that there is a need for GVRA to increase the size of its provider network and engage providers more. Respondents shared that some transition and employment service providers are more effective than others. They employ creative practices to provide transition services and create successful employment outcomes. These (individual and agency) providers should be connected to form a task force that troubleshoots current issues and informs best practices to meet the needs of transition-age youth and adults in Georgia.

School transition personnel shared that there is a need to create more oversight and accountability for service providers so the schools can know or keep track of the services being provided by them. Individuals with disabilities and families talked about not having enough information about who provides employment services in their area and what services they provide. There is a need to maintain and share (in a user-friendly manner) vendor information and updated vendor records including details on the services they provide.

There is still a reliance on facility-based services and a limited provision of competitive integrated employment services. GVRA should continue its efforts to end sub-minimum wage employment in the state and transition to competitive integrated employment in the community. There are a limited number of providers who provide job development services outside Supported Employment. There is a need to focus on the use of best practices for creating successful employment outcomes and impact for individuals with disabilities.

SECTION V: THE NEEDS OF BUSINESSES

Employers were asked about factors that keep businesses from hiring, retaining, or promoting individuals with disabilities. They mentioned concerns about liability, worker's compensation, not knowing how to provide disability-related accommodations, and not understanding disability as being important factors. People not having the skills or credentials to do the job, budget restriction or hiring freezes, safety concerns were also identified as important factors. Interestingly, the cost of accommodation was listed as a small concern by most business owners. This suggests that not knowing enough about how to provide disability-related accommodations or the disability itself were greater impediments than the cost of providing those accommodations. Concerning employees with disabilities that employers have recruited now or had in the past, they were asked about the key challenges they have experienced with them regarding job retention. Key issues identified by employers include lack of dependable transportation, poor job performance (speed, production, quality), lack of job preparation, skills, education needed for the job, and disability-related factors (medical, mental health, etc.).

Services that were identified to be helpful or most helpful to businesses for hiring individuals with disabilities included providing workers with disabilities the tools, education needed to do the job, providing long-term on-the-job supports to workers with disabilities, training employers and staff to identify and implement workplace accommodation, and recruiting qualified job applicants that meet the business needs. The most common feedback received from participants across all groups regarding employers was the need to educate employers to help reduce their misconceptions and biases about the abilities of individuals with disabilities to perform job tasks. Education and training could help increase their knowledge and reduce fears about hiring people with disabilities.

SECTION VI: OVERALL SATISFACTION WITH GVRA AND SUGGESTIONS

SATISFACTION WITH GVRA		
INDIVIDUAL WITH DISABILITY	**STAKEHOLDER PARENTS, FAMILY MEMBERS**	**STAKEHOLDER PROFESSIONALS**
Most satisfied with: • Respect, sensitivity, and politeness shown by GVRA towards consumers • GVRA staff attitudes • GVRA staff's level of knowledge **Most dissatisfied with:** • Consumer being able to receive all services needed • Overall experience with GVRA • GVRA's responsiveness to calls and emails to consumers	**Most satisfied with:** • Respect, sensitivity, and politeness shown by GVRA towards consumers • GVRA staff attitudes • GVRA staff's level of knowledge **Most dissatisfied with:** • Consumer being able to receive all services needed • Overall experience with GVRA • GVRA's retention of qualified staff	**Most satisfied with:** • Respect, sensitivity, and politeness shown by GVRA towards consumers • GVRA staff attitudes • GVRA's explanation of services, purpose, and who would provide them **Most dissatisfied with:** • GVRA 's retention of qualified staff • Consumer being able to receive all services needed • Overall experience with GVRA

WHAT IS WORKING WELL

- Roosevelt Warm Springs/Cave Springs Residential programs of GVRA, which provide opportunities for young adults with disabilities to gain independent living skills and job skills are greatly appreciated by consumers. Many respondents identified the Roosevelt Warm Springs, Cave Springs programs (Get Ready for Opportunities in Work, GROW, and Pathways) as a big strength of GVRA. Many respondents highlighted a need for programs like these to be expanded across the state. An abundance of openings for new students, helpful services, and quickly responding to feedback are just a few of the compliments issued by professionals. Professionals were specifically impressed with the improved outreach to high-school students going on at these centers.
- Respondents were positive about the recent reorganization and restructuring that GVRA has been undergoing to make things efficient. Respondents were optimistic about things changing due to strong leadership and recent changes in policies, structures, and practices. Some respondents appreciated the fact that they feel heard.
- One of the biggest assets of GVRA is its counselors. Respondents characterized GVRA counselors and staff as being committed and caring individuals who strive to do their best for consumers. Many respondents indicated that their interactions and experiences with GVRA staff have been positive, with staff being dedicated and empathetic to the needs of their clients.
- Respondents in all groups were most satisfied with the respect, sensitivity, and politeness shown by GVRA staff towards consumers and GVRA staff attitudes. Respondents reported being satisfied with the GVRA

staff's level of knowledge. The committed and passionate staff are the greatest asset of the agency and should be nurtured and supported. Key informants shared that the recent increases in counselors' salaries are an important step in this direction and should be maintained.

- Many individuals with disabilities shared that communication and willingness of counselors to share information with clients was a GVRA strength. When they do receive information, it is of high quality and helps to fulfill their goals and needs.
- Although there is wide geographic disparity across the state in the quantity and quality of services provided by GVRA staff, there are many success stories of positive employment and self-employment outcomes for consumers across the state that need to be marketed and shared with the community.
- Respondents, in general, believed that the transition and pre-ETS services provided by GVRA, and schools is its biggest strength. Key informants shared that GVRA outreach and collaboration within schools and communities have improved leading to a more productive relationship between GVRA workers and parents, educators, and other personnel. A couple of strategies that professionals commended were the consistent presence of transition counselors in schools and providing informational sessions so parents can learn exactly what the GVRA does. Respondents appreciated that GVRA covered the tuition for Inclusive Post Secondary Education (IPSE) program participants.
- Professionals highlighted that soft skills training, High school high tech, and other pre-ETS services as both beneficial and fun for students and have had a positive effect on the careers of students after they leave high school.
- GVRA's partnerships with other agencies including other state agencies and school systems are a big asset and should be built upon. Examples include GVRA funding project SEARCH, a successful school-to-work transition program; partnership with the Shepard Center, increased communication with the DBHDD (Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities) and collaborating with schools to introduce technology to students.
- Consumers, professionals and providers appreciated the increased communication from GVRA. They specifically complimented the regular e-blasts they have been receiving from GVRA leadership. Participants shared that the communication improvements have led to quicker response time regarding applications and services, as well as an apparent increase in client satisfaction.

CONSUMER'S NEEDS AND CHALLENGES

Although there is a wide disparity across the state, many respondents in the surveys, interviews, and focus groups with stakeholders (including individuals with disabilities, families, providers, professionals and employers) indicated broad-based dissatisfaction with current GVRA services. It has been well acknowledged that GVRA needs to focus on enhancing service delivery and rebuilding trust with key stakeholders.

A shortage of staff (counselors) and a high turnover of staff at multiple levels has been identified as a challenge for the organization. Respondents were most dissatisfied with GVRA's retention of qualified counselors. Many respondents indicated that the high rates of counselor turnover and the challenges that GVRA faces in retaining competent counselors is a major hindrance to both the operation of the agency and

the subsequent quality of services received by clients. The limited number of counselors in field offices seems to have high caseloads. Being overworked leads to challenges and burnout for counselors and affects their ability and capacity to service clients promptly. Low pay and high workload were cited as an important reason for counselor turnover. Key informants believed that the slow approval of services, clients slipping through the cracks, and communication challenges are all just symptoms of a larger staffing concern. Many families mentioned that they started the process but gave up after not being able to contact someone after long periods of waiting.

There is wide geographic disparity across the state in the quantity and quality of services provided by GVRA counselors. Respondents recurrently talked about the need to improve some GVRA counselors' lack of responsiveness to calls and emails to consumers. Multiple respondents described their frustrations with the process required to obtain and receive GVRA services. Barriers within this process included bureaucratic roadblocks, lack of timely response from counselors, long delays, inconsistent services and confusing or unclear requirements.

Multiple respondents indicated the need for increased and/or improved training for GVRA counselors and staff. There is a need for GVRA counselors to listen more to the consumers and provide individual services as needed. There were major concerns about consumers being underemployed, or being employed in a setting that was not a good fit for their individual interests. Suggestions included taking a more individualized approach to consumer placement into employment and considering more competitive, integrated employment settings if they match the interests of the individual. Lack of adequate multilingual services for Spanish speaking consumers was identified as a need.

There is wide geographic disparity across the state in the quantity and quality of transition services provided. Respondents mentioned that there is a need for GVRA to increase its presence amongst transition-aged and youth populations. Suggestions for doing so included VR counselors being more present in the schools, including the school personnel (transition coordinators, counselors or teachers) in planning for the youth, expanding youth services and programs offered, and continued development of existing (and new) relationships with schools. Many parents reported not being aware of pre-ETS or Pathways Explore services. Educating parents about the need for transition planning and services available including GVRA services, would help parents prepare their youth with job preparation and work skills needed for employment. It is important to explore the potential causes of transition service deficits in the counties and school districts with low service provision to identify strategies that might provide greater service delivery rates and enhance quality in those areas. Some professionals were concerned about the eligibility requirements (high reading levels) for participation in Roosevelt Warm Springs.

Some providers shared that they were not informed of the content or the timing of the recent new policy changes, which has caused confusion and has negatively impacted their program sustainability. Providers also talked about delays in paying invoices and lack of specific communication about remediation when invoices

are denied. There was an elevated level of dissatisfaction among respondents about consumers not being able to receive all the services needed. This led to many respondents reporting their dissatisfaction with their overall experience with GVRA. Many individuals with disabilities, family members, and professionals talked about a lack of awareness of GVRA. There is a strong need for GVRA to increase its visibility across the state and do outreach to specific underserved populations including those with significant disabilities, intellectual disabilities, mental illness, and those living in rural areas of the state.

UP NEXT:

RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on findings from the environmental scan and quantitative and qualitative data collection, below are recommendations for GVRA to address expressed needs and gaps in services.

OVERALL

- Roosevelt Warm Springs/Cave Springs Residential programs of GVRA, which provide opportunities for young adults with disabilities to gain independent living skills and job skills are greatly appreciated by consumers. Many respondents identified the Roosevelt Warm Springs, and Cave Springs programs (Get Ready for Opportunities in Work, GROW, and Pathways) as a big strength of GVRA. There is a strong need for programs like these to be expanded across the state.
- GVRA should continue focusing on building or strengthening partnerships and collaborations with other agencies including the Georgia Department of Education, Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities (DBHDD), and service provider agencies. This is important particularly with the Office of Workforce Development to address skill attainment among youth and adults with disabilities to address Georgia's high-demand workforce needs.
- Respondents were positive about the recent reorganization and restructuring that GVRA has been undergoing to make things efficient. Respondents were optimistic about things changing due to strong leadership and recent changes in policies, structures, and practices. They acknowledged that it would take time to see the impact of those changes.
- There is wide geographic disparity across the state in the quantity and quality of services provided by GVRA staff. It is important to explore the potential causes of service deficits in certain counties/regions with low service provision and devise strategies that might enhance services in those areas. It is equally important to market widely the success stories of positive employment outcomes for consumers.
- One of the biggest assets of GVRA is its counselors. Although there is wide variability across the state, respondents characterized counselors as being committed and caring individuals who strive to do their best for consumers. One of the most important issues mentioned by consumers and professionals is the attrition of GVRA counselors and the turnover of staff.
- There is a strong need to improve organizational culture within GVRA to help improve counselor/staff retention and services to internal and external customers. GVRA should continue focusing on improving staff morale and performance, thus increasing staff stability. Powering recruitment and retention through a culture of belonging would be an important step.
- There is a need to hire additional GVRA counselors, increase counselor pay, and ensure the caseloads are manageable. Another suggestion was to have dedicated staff whose only role is to process and maintain appropriate paperwork so that skilled and trained VR counselors can focus their time and energies on engaging meaningfully with clients.
- A suggestion that school transition leadership/staff offered was to create a pipeline to recruit retired teachers to be GVRA counselors or liaisons with the school system. Respondents shared that the schools have experienced the most success with retired schoolteachers as counselors. School teachers know the system, including the students/parents, and are in the best position to place students/youth in jobs. They should be offered an incentive (like portable benefits) to work with GVRA, either full or part-time.
- To ensure consistency and adequacy in the standard of care given to all counselors and clients, there is a need to provide more training to counselors. GVRA should assess staff training needs and focus on

providing those trainings statewide. Negative attitudes and low expectations from staff about the ability of individuals with significant disabilities or intellectual disabilities to be employed were identified as barriers. Training focused on individualizing services and providing specialized services such as those to individuals who are deaf & hard of hearing and individuals with blindness and low vision would be important. Specific in-house training on GVRA processes and disability-related issues would be valuable. Having an effective onboarding training program would be helpful.

- There is a wide geographical disparity in service provision. Stakeholders shared that it would be good to have a way for consumers and other stakeholders to give feedback about counselors and staff. The feedback could be used to make staffing and other strategic decisions at local offices.
- Improve consumer engagement by emphasizing the client-counselor working alliance in counselor competencies and professional practice. By incorporating best practice approaches that emphasize the client-counselor relationship, such as working alliance constructs and motivational interviewing, consumers are more likely to feel understood, valued, and remain engaged. This client-centered service delivery supports more of a holistic approach versus one that is mostly case management-driven.
- There is a need for GVRA to focus on rebuilding trust with key stakeholders. Measures should be put in place to enhance communication between the consumer and local VR staff to ensure it's more timely, consistent, open, and informative. Identifying expectations early on and having ongoing communication with consumers is important. Increased communication, explanation, and guidance related to GVRA services, eligibility, specific processes, and expected timelines for services are important. The duration of time for consumers in each step of the GVRA process should be tracked and shortened, to create increased accountability.
- Improvements to existing processes include simplifying the application and referral processes, shortening timelines between applications, eligibility, to service provision, and more prompt communication with clients. There is a need to reduce waitlists and wait times for services. There is a need to reduce paperwork and streamline processing so that it is easier to complete. Additional strategies to explore include ways technology can be used for service provision, including using telehealth strategies.
- GVRA should focus on increasing efficiency in VR processes and services including CRP provider management and outcomes to enhance successful employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities in Georgia. There is a need to focus on meaningful employment outcomes for consumers leading to a career (not just a job) that ensures self-sufficiency beyond minimum wage. Taking a more individualized approach to consumer placement into employment and considering more competitive, integrated employment settings if they match the interests of the individual would be important. There is a need to channel funding and build provider capacity in evidence-based strategies like Individual Placement and Supports (IPS), and other best practices that lead to Competitive Integrated Employment.
- Both the 2020 and 2023 CSNA and the 2022 Georgia Transportation and Employment Needs Assessments report demonstrate that transportation remains the top barrier to employment for many GVRA consumers of all ages including youth with disabilities and project search participants. It is recommended that GVRA expand its services to provide funding for transportation (initially at least till they start a paycheck) assistance to consumers as part of employment support. There is also a need to reimburse providers for travel to provide services to consumers in rural areas.
- Another common suggestion was the need for GVRA to expand its domain of services. Examples of suggested service expansions included providing support for client transportation (at least initially during

employment which is tied to a milestone or time limit), increased on-the-job supports for a longer term (not for a limited time), and more individualized employment placements with a greater variety of providers. Relatedly, the need for more employment providers and placements beyond typically low-skilled and/or low-paying jobs and more competitive, integrated employment options is important.

- Local GVRA counselors and school transition coordinators could increase awareness of transportation options and prepare informational sheets on local transportation options within their counties/service areas. It is important to look at innovative approaches to using ride-share programs like Uber and Lyft. This includes developing wheelchair-accessible ride-share transportation options with them and employment options for individuals with disabilities looking for self-employment with flexible time requirements. Given that transportation is a systemic issue requiring collaboration on multiple levels, GVRA could serve well by developing partnerships with State and Federal Departments of Transportation and other state agencies (DBHDD). Additional information, data, and recommendations related to Georgian job seeker's needs related to transportation can be found in the Georgia Transportation Needs Assessment, sponsored by GCDD.
- GVRA should continue its outreach to specific underserved populations including those with significant disabilities, intellectual disabilities, Deaf & Hard of Hearing, Blind and Low Vision, those with mental illness, and those in rural areas. Outreach to schools and parents of transition-age youth about the services that GVRA provides is important.
- GVRA should continue increasing its visibility, coverage, and outreach across the state. Increasing awareness of GVRA and the services it provides is important, particularly in rural areas. GVRA should continue to participate in rural events like the Perry Fair to reach out to potential rural consumers.

TRANSITION

- Respondents, in general, believed that the transition and pre-ETS services provided by GVRA, and schools are its biggest strength. However, there is wide geographic disparity across the state in the quantity and quality of transition services provided. It is important to explore the potential causes of service deficits in the counties/school districts with low service provision to identify strategies that might provide greater service delivery rates and enhance quality in those areas.
- A large majority of respondents suggested that there is a need to start transition and career planning early, as early as middle school, so that families can become aware and engaged in preparing the youth to enter the job market like teenagers without disabilities. Multiple respondents suggested beginning pre-ETS services in middle school to ensure students have enough time to go through the full transition process and are ready for employment or a successful transition upon graduating.
- There is a need for GVRA to increase its presence amongst transition-aged and youth populations. This could be accomplished by GVRA counselors being more present in the schools, including the school personnel (counselors, parent mentors, or teachers) in planning for the youth, expanding youth services and programs offered, and continuing the development of existing (and new) relationships with schools. Many parents reported not being aware of pre-ETS or Pathways Explore services. Educating parents about the need for transition planning and services available including GVRA services, would help parents prepare their youth with job preparation and work skills needed for employment. Offering more community workshops, and parent informational sessions regarding what GVRA offers and the process for obtaining services, would be helpful. Providers should be connected to students and families while they

are in high school as that will increase familiarity and enable a smooth transition to adult services after graduation.

- School transition leadership personnel mentioned that they do not always have an easy way of knowing what services have been provided to their students under pre-ETS and whether or how these services support the student's transition goal. There is a need for better planning and communication between districts, GVRA, and providers who provide pre-ETS. There is a need for greater oversight and accountability for service providers within schools so that school personnel can stay informed on services being provided.
- Explore opportunities to increase the availability of work experiences for students with disabilities that more closely resemble the adult workplace through expanded business partnerships. It is known in the literature that providing services to students with disabilities with a business partnership focus, that more closely resembles the adult work environment, has a substantial correlation to achieving a successful employment outcome.
- GVRA should consider establishing a Community of Practice (CoP) for pre-ETS set up as a mutual learning community where school personnel could learn from each other. Successful school district/GVRA partnership teams that have successful outcomes for their students could share their best practices and success data (numbers) and lessons learned, that can be replicated in other parts of the state. Districts that are struggling could troubleshoot possible solutions. The focus groups we conducted sometimes became a platform for this mutual learning and exchange. Sharing best practices could also be done using webinars or factsheets.
- Many project search participants identified lack of transportation as the number one barrier that prevents students from accessing job experiences. GVRA should consider expanding its services to provide or reimburse transportation support to students and youth seeking work experiences and employment.
- There is a need to expand services to include more job shadowing experiences, more opportunities for providers to be in pre-ETS classrooms, more individualized approaches to career planning and exploration, and transportation supports for students and youth. Projects like Project SEARCH, which are widely appreciated, could be made available in more counties.

COMMUNITY REHABILITATION PROVIDERS

- There is a need to improve established Community Resource Providers (CRPs) in Georgia, and to expand current CRPs. There is a need to develop CRPs' ability to provide services including training and support (which leads to improved job skills and job placement), customized employment, and transportation services. There is a need to develop CRPs with expertise in working with specific populations such as Deaf and Hard of Hearing, visual impairments, transition-age youth, racial and ethnic minority populations, and individuals with more significant disabilities.
- It is recommended that GVRA continue to maintain and continually update a list of contracted vendors including their locations and details of the services they provide. This information should be made available to consumers and local GVRA staff in an easily accessible, user-friendly manner. The agency website could be utilized to disseminate provider information, such as standards, fees, and state-wide needs.
- It is recommended that GVRA leverage community rehabilitation provider partnerships through improved communication about what is expected of them regarding service delivery and outcomes, and more

guidance and information about GVRA changes that may impact them. Potential strategies include routinely scheduled meetings between local VR offices and local providers to strengthen communication and cross-training between local VR offices and providers. It is recommended that GVRA continue to update the provider manual regularly to include more details about GVRA services, required paperwork, and expectations. GVRA should take steps to ensure that payments to providers are made promptly and that providers receive communication about why a payment is rejected. Providers also expressed a need to be reimbursed for transportation to provide services in rural areas.

- Respondents identified a need for GVRA to increase the size of their provider network and to engage providers more.
- Greater oversight and accountability for service providers, including centralized electronic data collection and outcomes reporting system would be beneficial.
- There is a need to focus on using best practices for creating successful employment outcomes. Some transition and employment service providers are more effective than others. They employ creative practices to provide transition services and create successful employment outcomes. These providers could be connected through a Community of Practice focused on sharing best practices and troubleshooting possible solutions. This could also be accomplished through webinars or factsheets.
- There is still a reliance on facility-based services and a limited provision of competitive integrated employment services. GVRA should continue its efforts to end sub-minimum wage employment in Georgia and transition providers, so they provide competitive integrated employment in the community. There are a limited number of providers who provide job development services outside Supported Employment.

EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT

- Engaging potential employers and educating them by sharing success stories of employment of people with disabilities, consultation about accommodations, job task analyses and worksite accessibility would be an important step. Increased education will help reduce misconceptions, fears, and biases that employers hold about hiring people with disabilities. By providing these services, GVRA can better meet the needs of its dual customer, the employer, and increase opportunities for individuals with disabilities to obtain and maintain employment.
- Pursue business relationships within those industry sectors that are projected to experience the highest growth. Provide VR counselors with training and resources about industries with the largest potential for growth. As part of informed choice, it is recommended that GVRA counselors review these industry growth projections with participants and where appropriate, focus job goals and training toward these. In Georgia, new jobs are projected to be created in the following industries: Health Care, Assisted Living, Individual and Family Services, and retail sales. Georgia has also become a huge entertainment hub in the nation. Jobs in the green fields and the arts have increased rapidly in Georgia.
- During the COVID-19 pandemic, certain work-from-home opportunities which are more conducive for people with disabilities became more available, and many are still sustaining. GVRA counselors and service providers could continue directing consumers to those opportunities.

UP NEXT:

INTRODUCTION

ABOUT RESEARCH AND EVALUATION UNIT (REU)

The Research and Evaluation Unit (REU) at the Institute on Human Development and Disability (IHDD) at the University of Georgia (UGA) provides a full range of applied research and program evaluation services to help organizations answer important social questions and help support informed and accountable decision-making. Services that REU provides include designing and conducting formative and summative evaluations, needs assessments, developing logic models, and conducting qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-method research. REU uses a participatory, utilization-focused, strength-based, and culturally sensitive approach to research and evaluation, as appropriate. REU places a high premium on being ethical, unbiased, rigorous, and collaborative. The multidisciplinary team of researchers at REU has pooled experience of over 30 years related to program evaluations and the vocational rehabilitation system.

ABOUT COMPREHENSIVE STATEWIDE NEEDS ASSESSMENT (CSNA)

The Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency is the state administrator of the federal/state vocational rehabilitation program, which is authorized under Title I of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by Title IV of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). Under the provisions of WIOA, the Governor must submit a Unified State Plan to the U.S. Department of Labor that outlines a four-year strategy for the state's workforce development system, which is comprised of six core programs: The Youth, Adult, and Dislocated Worker Title I Workforce Development programs, the Wagner-Peyser Title III program, The Adult Education and Literacy Title II program, and the Vocational Rehabilitation Program.

The Research and Evaluation Unit (REU), housed at the Institute on Human Development and Disability (IHDD) at the University of Georgia (UGA), the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC), and the Georgia Department of Vocational Rehabilitation (GVRA) jointly conducted an assessment of the vocational rehabilitation needs of individuals with disabilities residing in the State of Georgia. A needs assessment is required every three years by the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 as amended by Title IV of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and is intended to help inform the Unified State Plan developed by the core partners in Georgia's Workforce Development System.

PURPOSE OF NEEDS ASSESSMENT

An important component of the vocational rehabilitation services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan is the results from a comprehensive statewide needs assessment (CSNA) describing the vocational rehabilitation needs of individuals with disabilities living in the state, particularly those with significant disabilities. The CSNA is to be conducted jointly between the state VR agency (GVRA) and the SRC every three years, describing the rehabilitation needs of individuals with disabilities residing within the State.

The purpose of CSNA, as described by the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA), is as follows:

1. Identify the rehabilitation needs of individuals in Georgia, particularly the vocational rehabilitation service needs of:
   a. Individuals with the most significant disabilities, including their need for supported employment services;
   b. Individuals with disabilities who are minorities and individuals with disabilities who have been unserved or underserved by the state vocational rehabilitation program;
   c. Individuals with disabilities served through other components of the statewide workforce development system as identified by those individuals and personnel assisting them through the components of that system; and
   d. Youth with disabilities, and students with disabilities, including their need for Pre-Employment Transition Services, an assessment of the needs for transition services, and the extent to which services provided are in coordination with the Department of Education, under IDEA.
2. Identify the need to establish, develop or improve Community Rehabilitation Programs within the state.

APPROACH

For this Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA), REU used a multi-method, participatory, utilization focused and culturally competent approach to gather and analyze information. We also used an Appreciative Inquiry (AI) approach, which is a positive 'Asset-based approach', focusing on the present potential of an organization, rather than the deficit-based approach of identifying problems and fixing them.

UTILIZATION OF NEEDS ASSESSMENT OUTCOMES

Data from the needs assessment effort is expected to provide GVRA and the SRC with direction for planning and allocating funds and guidance in planning for future structure and resource demands. Findings from the needs assessment project ideally also provide information for the state plan's strategic development. The data that appear in this report are relevant to the following activities:

1. Projecting needed services and redeployment of resources;
2. Identifying needs of specific groups and populations;
3. Identifying perceived gaps in vocational rehabilitation services; and
4. Providing data and a rationale for the development of the Georgia State Plan and amendments to the plan.

DISSEMINATION OF FINDINGS

Key findings from the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA) would be presented to the leadership and members of the State Rehabilitation Council and to GVRA leadership through a presentation and a formal report. The report or snapshots of findings would be shared with various audiences including GVRA staff and counselors, key stakeholders including individuals with disabilities, their families, advocates, professionals working with individuals with disabilities and provider agencies. The report would be made available for download on GVRA website.

LIMITATIONS

It is important to keep in mind certain limitations when interpreting the results. Although the best attempts were made to reach participants that were representative of the population, there could be a potential for bias in the selection of participants. The reported findings reflect only the responses of those willing to participate. Individuals who were disenfranchised, dissatisfied, or who did not wish to be involved with VR may not have participated in the surveys, or interviews.

It is also important to note that this needs assessment's findings cannot be generalized to the population. The information gathered from respondents may not accurately represent the broader concerns of all potential constituents and stakeholders. Although efforts were made to gather information from a variety of stakeholders in the vocational rehabilitation process, it cannot be assumed that those who contributed to the focus groups, the key informant interviews, and the survey research efforts constitute a fully representative sample of all the potential stakeholders in the vocational rehabilitation process throughout the state. Data gathered from service providers, for example, may reflect only the needs of individuals who are already recipients of services, to the exclusion of those who are not presently served.

KEY ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS FOR CSNA

1. What do the GVRA target and current population look like?
    a. What is the prevalence and regional distribution of prospective and current GVRA clients?
    b. What is the prevalence of selected GVRA target and current populations, including persons with the most significant disabilities, students transitioning from high school, individuals with disabilities from racial/ethnic minority groups, and persons who are currently underserved or unserved?

2. What are the primary barriers to employment for GVRA clients, and/or what are their service needs?
    a. How do barriers to employment vary for selected subgroups, including the selected target populations (listed above)?
    b. How are the service needs different for selected subgroups, including the selected target populations (listed above)?

3. What vocational rehabilitation services do GVRA clients need to support the achievement of employment goals?
    a. How can GVRA services best support client efforts to achieve positive employment outcomes?

4. Are services adequately available to GVRA clients through community service providers? How is the quality of services provided?

5. What are the strengths of GVRA services?

6. What strategic changes to GVRA provision, if any, are likely to improve employment outcomes for clients?

UP NEXT:

METHODOLOGY

SURVEYS

Surveys were developed to collect input from the following target groups: 1) Individuals with Disabilities; 2) Key Stakeholders – Parents, family members, advocates; 3) Key stakeholders – Professionals; 4) Employers; 5) Employment Service Providers. For data collection purposes, there was one survey that focused on all key stakeholders. For analysis purposes, the key stakeholder survey was split into two categories – one that included responses from parents, family members, and advocates; and the other that included responses from professionals who serve individuals with disabilities.

A total of four surveys were developed using Qualtrics online survey. The surveys were hosted on a dedicated webpage for CSNA on IHDD's website which was developed by the IHDD Graphic Designer. This web page contained information about the study and the website links to access the surveys. All four surveys were finalized within the Qualtrics platform and hosted on the webpage. Surveys were developed by the project team at REU with input from the SRC leadership. Surveys were piloted to assess their validity, ease of understanding, relevance, length, etc. The surveys were pilot tested with a group of respondents and feedback was obtained. Modifications were made to the surveys based on feedback obtained during the pilot-testing and from SRC leadership. A revised version of the survey was then ready for wider implementation.

The REU team shared information about the needs assessment and links to the survey to close to a hundred disability service organizations, providers, agencies, advocacy agencies, and other entities working with the disability community in the state of Georgia. The links to the webpage and surveys were shared using social networking websites like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. Flyers containing information about the surveys were distributed widely through social media.

Introductory emails were sent out to different entities, introducing the study along with information that could be copied and pasted when forwarding the information to others. These entities were requested to post information about the needs assessment on their social media platforms. The web links for the survey and the webpage were also publicized on social media platforms of key disability entities in the state of Georgia. The REU team visited several disability service providers to help conduct surveys in person. Recruitment efforts also included meetings with representatives of disability providers, agencies, and advocacy agencies via Zoom to organize information sharing, survey taking, and focus group events. Special attempts were made to advertise and encourage individuals with diverse backgrounds to complete the surveys. Our goal was to capture the perspectives of a wide range of individuals including individuals with significant disabilities; minority individuals with disabilities; unserved and underserved individuals with disabilities.

ACCESSIBILITY

All formats were accessible, readable at the 10.0 grade level or less, reliable, and had face validity. The electronic survey was designed using an accessible, internet-based survey application (Qualtrics). Surveys were found to be accessible for individuals with vision impairments or who used screen readers. Respondents were provided with the contact information for REU in order to place requests for alternate survey formats.

EFFORTS TO ENSURE RESPONDENT CONFIDENTIALITY

Respondents to the survey were not asked to identify themselves when completing the survey. In addition, responses to the electronic surveys were aggregated by the project team at REU prior to reporting results, which served to further obscure the identities of individual survey respondents.

NUMBER OF SURVEYS COMPLETED

A total of 909 valid surveys were completed by a variety of entities including individuals with disabilities, parents and family members, employment service providers, other community professionals, and employers. Valid surveys refer to surveys where the individual completed the survey, even if they did not answer all of the questions. Surveys that are not considered valid were those in which the respondent opened but did not start or complete questions beyond the initial question. The surveys were available online from September 11, 2023, through January 22, 2024.

GROUP	SURVEYS STARTED	VALID SURVEYS COMPLETED
Individuals with Disabilities	369	350
Stakeholders	402	Total - 426 {Parents, family members, caregivers –216 Professionals – 210}
Employment Service Providers	119	112
Employers	22	21
Total	**912**	**909**

DETAILS ABOUT INDIVIDUAL SURVEY INSTRUMENTS

INDIVIDUAL WITH DISABILITIES (IWD) SURVEY

» Survey Population

Individuals identified for participation in this survey effort can be described as individuals with disabilities who are potential, current, or former clients of GVRA.

» Survey Instrument

Individuals with disabilities were asked about demographic information including their gender, race/ethnicity, age range, education, and disabilities, among others. IWD were asked about top three barriers to employment faced by individuals with the most significant disabilities. IWD were also asked about their perspective on the need to expand and develop current community rehabilitation providers (CRPs) and the need to establish and support new CRPs. IWD were also asked about the strengths of GVRA and suggestions of what GVRA can do to improve their services and employment outcomes for IWD. Respondents were also asked about their current employment status, top challenges to accessing employment, and key factors contributing to job success.

KEY STAKEHOLDERS - PARENTS, FAMILY MEMBERS, ADVOCATES

» Survey Population

Individuals identified for participation in this survey effort can be described as parents, family members, advocates, or anyone in the community who provided care for or advocated for an individual with disabilities.

» Survey Instrument

Key stakeholders including parents, family members, and advocates were asked about demographic information including their gender, race/ethnicity, age range, and education. Parents were also asked to report on the demographic characteristics of individuals with disabilities that they care for including the type of disability, and their gender among other factors. Parents were asked about the top three barriers to employment faced by individuals with most significant disabilities, populations most likely to be unserved or underserved, the top three barriers to employment for minority populations including those from racial and ethnic minority populations, the top three barriers to employment for students and youth with disabilities in transition, the top three services needed for employment of individuals with most significant disabilities.

KEY STAKEHOLDERS – PROFESSIONALS

» Survey Population

Individuals identified for participation in this survey effort can be described as professionals who serve individuals with disabilities including those in the community and those working with agencies that partner with GVRA.

» Survey Instrument

Key stakeholders including professionals were asked about demographic information including their gender, race/ethnicity, age range, and education. Professionals were also asked to report on the demographic characteristics of individuals with disabilities that they serve including the type of disability and their gender among other factors. Professionals were asked about the top three barriers to employment faced by individuals with most significant disabilities, populations most likely to be unserved or underserved, the top three barriers to employment for minority populations including those from racial and ethnic minority populations, top three barriers to employment for students and youth with disabilities in transition, the top three services needed for employment of individuals with most significant disabilities. Professionals were also asked about their perspective on the need to expand and develop current community rehabilitation providers (CRPs) and the need to establish and support new CRPs.

EMPLOYMENT SERVICE PROVIDERS

» Survey Population

Individuals identified for participation in this survey effort can be described as individuals or agencies providing services to individuals with disabilities including leadership or staff of employment service provider agencies including employment specialists.

» Survey Instrument

Employment service providers were asked about demographic information including their gender, race/

ethnicity, age range, and education. Providers were also asked to report on the demographic characteristics of individuals with disabilities that they serve including the type of disability and their gender among other factors. Providers were asked about the top three barriers to employment faced by individuals with the most significant disabilities, the top three services needed for employment of individuals with most significant disabilities, the top three barriers to employment for minority populations including those from racial and ethnic minority populations, top three services needed for employment of individuals minority populations including those from racial and ethnic minority populations, top three barriers to employment for students and youth with disabilities in transition, top three services needed for employment for students and youth with disabilities in transition including their need for pre-employment transition services. Providers were also asked about their perspective on the need to expand and develop current community rehabilitation providers (CRPs) and the need to establish and support new CRPs.

EMPLOYERS

» Survey Population

Individuals identified for participation in this survey effort can be described as employers in the community who may or may not have employed individuals with disabilities in the past.

» Survey Instrument

Employers were asked about demographic information including their gender, race/ethnicity, age range, and education. Providers were also asked about the type of business, the size of their business, their current role, how long their business has been in operation, whether they have intentionally employed individuals with disabilities in the past, the type of accommodations they have provided to IWD related to their employment, their familiarity with GVRA services and satisfaction with services received from GVRA. Employers were asked about their views on the top challenges faced by IWD related to employment.

DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis consisted of computing frequencies and descriptive statistics for the survey items with fixed response options. Data was analyzed using quantitative statistical software IBM SPSS Statistics v.26, Qualtrics, and Excel 2016. Frequencies, percentages, means, and other inferential statistics were used for analyzing quantitative data from surveys. Open-ended survey questions, which yielded narrative responses were analyzed using content analysis for themes or concepts that were expressed consistently by respondents.

QUALITATIVE DATA GATHERING

Qualitative methodologies like focus groups and interviews were used to collect additional information from a total of 123 participants. Twelve focus groups were conducted with a total of 85 participants to gather a wide range of perspectives. Additionally, a total of 38 interviews were conducted with key informants as well as individuals with disabilities, family members and caregivers, and professionals based in Georgia.

FOCUS GROUPS

PROCEDURE

Focus groups were conducted to obtain additional perspectives on vocational rehabilitation needs from target groups and fill in gaps in data. Twelve focus groups were conducted with a total of 85 participants to gather a wide range of perspectives. They were paired with leading conferences or quarterly meetings of leading local consortia groups to increase the response rate. Each session lasted about an hour and a half and was audio-recorded. Two researchers facilitated each group; one served as moderator and the second as scribe, taking notes. A semi-structured interview protocol (included in the appendices) was used to guide the discussion. A few minutes were devoted to introductions, personal background, and rapport building in order to establish a productive focus group environment. The focus group moderator explained the purpose of the focus group and provided a brief description of the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment effort. The discussion ended with the moderator summarizing the themes and issues that emerged, verifying information with participants, and thanking them.

The semi-structured interview protocol was developed by REU researchers. Approvals were obtained from the Human Subjects office at the University of Georgia. REU researchers who conducted the focus groups completed the human subjects CITI training and were trained in facilitation techniques. The central question raised in each of the focus group meetings was the following: “What are the most important employment-related needs encountered by people with disabilities?” When appropriate the moderator introduced additional questions prompting respondents to discuss needs associated with preparing for employment, obtaining employment, retaining employment, and increasing the employment of persons with disabilities. Participants were asked to discuss the needs of individuals with the most significant disabilities; the needs of individuals from cultural, racial, or ethnic minority groups; and the needs of students with disabilities transitioning from high school.

EFFORTS TO ENSURE RESPONDENT CONFIDENTIALITY

Only first names were used and identifying characteristics were not recorded by the note-taker. Participants were told that the focus groups would be audio recorded and the audio recordings would be destroyed after study completion. Participants were also informed that their participation is completely voluntary, they can stop the interview at any time, and they only have to answer the questions they want to answer. They were also assured that their replies would be kept confidential. Their responses will not be linked to them individually. The responses will be pooled together, and results will be reported in aggregate form.

ACCESSIBILITY

The project team included funds in its budget sufficient to pay for communication accommodations necessary to conduct the focus groups; however, no accommodations were requested.

INTERVIEWS

A total of 38 interviews were conducted with key informants as well as individuals with disabilities, family members and caregivers, and professionals based in Georgia. Key informants included individuals who are experts and are particularly knowledgeable about the vocational rehabilitation needs of people with disabilities and the Georgia state rehabilitation service system. A total of 21 individuals participated in the key informant interviews. Interviews were also conducted with a total of 17 individuals with disabilities, family members and caregivers, and professionals based in Georgia.

PROCEDURE

For key informants, the snowball method was used to decide who the respondents were. For other groups including individuals with disabilities, family members and caregivers, and professionals, the self-selection method was used to gather interview volunteers. Interview volunteers signed up to be interviewed using an internet-based form developed in Qualtrics. Participants were initially sent an e-mail message by the researchers at REU informing them of the interview effort. They were then contacted by phone and asked to schedule a time for an interview. Those who did not respond to either the email message or telephone call were contacted once more by e-mail and offered an opportunity to participate. All interviews were conducted over Zoom. The general format of the interviews was consistent across the interviews.

The semi-structured interview protocol was developed by REU researchers. Approvals were obtained from the Human Subjects office at the University of Georgia. REU researchers who conducted the interviews completed the human subjects CITI training and were trained in interviewing techniques. Trained researchers conducted the Zoom interviews. A semi-structured interview protocol (included in the appendices) was used to guide the discussion. A few minutes were devoted to introductions, personal background, and rapport building in order to establish a productive focus group environment. The interviewer explained the purpose of the interview and provided a brief description of the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment effort. The central question raised in each interview was the following: “What are the most important employment-related needs encountered by people with disabilities?” When appropriate the interviewer asked additional questions prompting respondents to share more about the needs associated with preparing for employment, obtaining employment, retaining employment, and increasing the employment of persons with disabilities. Participants were asked to discuss the needs of individuals with the most significant disabilities; the needs of individuals from cultural, racial, or ethnic minority groups; and the needs of students with disabilities transitioning from high school. The interview ended with the interviewer summarizing the themes and issues that emerged, verifying information with participants, and thanking them. On average, each interview lasted for about 45 minutes and was audio recorded.

Key Informant Interviews

Key informants included members of the State Rehabilitation Council, VR counselors, directors or staff of GVRA partners and providers; transition personnel, and employers among others. During the interview, participants were first asked questions to ascertain their personal and professional expertise and their experience with VR. Participants were then asked open-ended questions about their perceptions of barriers to employment for persons with disabilities. Finally, participants were asked to share their perceptions of how VR could improve employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities.

Other Stakeholder Interviews

Stakeholder interviews were conducted with individuals with disabilities, family members and caregivers, and professionals based in Georgia. During the interview, participants were first asked questions to ascertain their personal and professional expertise and their experience with VR. Participants were then asked open-ended questions about their perceptions of barriers to employment for persons with disabilities. Finally, participants were asked to share their perceptions of how VR could improve employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities.

EFFORTS TO ENSURE RESPONDENT CONFIDENTIALITY

Participants were told that the interviews would be audio recorded and the audio recordings would be destroyed after study completion. Participants were also informed that their participation is completely voluntary, they can stop the interview at any time, and they only have to answer the questions they want to answer. They were also assured that their replies would be kept confidential. Their responses will not be linked to them individually. The responses will be pooled together and results will be reported in aggregate form.

ACCESSIBILITY

The project team included funds in its budget sufficient to pay for communication accommodations necessary to conduct the focus groups; however, no accommodation was requested.

DATA ANALYSIS

Notetakers took notes as the focus groups and interviews were conducted. The focus groups and interviews were transcribed and analyzed by the trained REU researchers. Narratives were analyzed using content analysis for themes or concepts that were expressed consistently by respondents. Results were organized according to the prompts used to stimulate discussion of the needs of individuals with disabilities (e.g., barriers related to employment for individuals with disabilities and so forth). Themes or concerns that surfaced with consistency across individuals were identified and reported as consensual themes.

UP NEXT:

ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN

ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN

All referenced sources are cited in-text with numbers linking to their full citation in the reference list (see Appendix G: References). The environmental scan makes frequent use of American Community Survey (ACS) census data. Please see NOTE ON THE USE OF ACS DATA at the end of the environmental scan for more details on the use of ACS data.

ESTIMATES OF TARGET POPULATION

OVERALL POPULATION

The U.S. Census Bureau estimated Georgia's 2022 population to be 10,912,876, making Georgia the 8th largest state based on population. According to Georgia's Department of Community Health State Office of Rural Health, out of Georgia's 159 counties, 120 are designated as rural.[1] Approximately 44% of the state's estimated population resides in the Metro Atlanta area (which includes the following counties: Cherokee, Clayton, Cobb, DeKalb, Douglas, Fayette, Fulton, Gwinnett, Henry, Rockdale).

The counties with the highest estimated populations include:

County	Estimated Population
Fulton	1,061,944
Gwinnett	957,977
Cobb	765,813
DeKalb	761,209
Clayton	296,312
Chatham	296,266
Cherokee	268,567
Forsyth	253,225
Henry	240,853
Richmond	206,153

The counties with the lowest estimated populations include:

County	Estimated Population
Taliaferro	1,635
Quitman	2,180
Webster	2,354
Clay	2,855
Baker	2,878
Glascock	2,903
Echols	3,707
Schley	4,565
Stewart	5,121
Warren	5,197

GENDER

It is estimated that 49% of Georgia's population is male and 51% is female, which is consistent with U.S. averages:

	GEORGIA (N=10,912,876)		UNITED STATES (N=333,287,562)	
	Estimated Population	Percentage	Estimated Population	Percentage
Male	5,323,951	49%	165,228,214	50%
Female	5,588,925	51%	168,059,348	50%

AGE

Roughly 47% of Georgia's population is working age (between age 20 and 64 years). According to American Community Survey (ACS) 2022 data,[4] the median age of Georgia's population is 37 years, which is slightly younger than the U.S. average (39 years). Following a similar trend, Georgia's population of individuals 65 and older constitutes 14% of the state's total population (U.S. average: 16%).

	US (331,097,593)	Georgia (10,722,325)
Under 5 years	6%	6%
5 to 9 years	6%	6%
10 to 14 years	7%	7%
15 to 19 years	7%	7%
20 to 24 years	7%	7%
25 to 29 years	7%	7%
30 to 34 years	7%	7%
35 to 39 years	7%	7%
40 to 44 years	6%	7%
45 to 49 years	6%	7%
50 to 54 years	6%	7%
55 to 59 years	7%	6%
60 to 64 years	6%	6%
65 to 69 years	5%	5%
70 to 74 years	4%	4%
75 to 79 years	3%	3%
80 to 84 years	2%	2%
85 years and over	2%	2%

ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN

The counties with the youngest median age in years:

County	Median Age (Years)
Chattahoochee County	24
Liberty County	29
Clarke County	28
Bulloch County	30
Lowndes County	31
Clayton County	33
Wheeler County	34
Camden County	34
Bryan County	34
Long County	34

Counties in Georgia with a median age greater than 50 years include:

County	Median Age (Years)
Greene County	51
McIntosh County	52
Fannin County	54
Union County	56
Towns County	56
Quitman County	59

Counties in Georgia with the highest percentage of individuals age 65 and older:

County	Median Age (Years)
Fulton County	36
Gwinnett County	36
DeKalb County	36
Cobb County	37
Chatham County	37
Cherokee County	40
Hall County	38
Forsyth County	39
Richmond County	35
Clayton County	33

RACE/ETHNICITY

According to 2022 population estimates, 31% of Georgia's overall population is Black/African American, compared to the national average of 12%. States or areas with similar or higher percentages include District of Columbia (42%), Mississippi (36%), Louisiana (31%), and Maryland (29%).[2]

Race/Ethnicity	United States (331,097,593)	Georgia (10,722,325)
White alone	65%	53%
Black or African American alone	12%	31%
American Indian and Alaska Native alone	0.82%	0.34%
Asian alone	6%	4%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone	0.18%	0.07%
Some other race alone	6%	3%
Two or more races	9%	6%
Hispanic or Latino (of any race)	18%	10%

GA POPULATION PROJECTIONS

Georgia's population is expected to increase by 1.49 million people (13.95%) between 2020 and 2035. Over half (51%) of that growth concentrated in the 10-county MetroAtlanta area. Other counties that are expected to have considerable growth include Forsyth, Jackson, Paulding, Dawson, Bryan, Effingham, Oconee, Newton, Coweta, and Hall.[3]

DISABILITY PREVALENCE

To identify the prevalence of disability among individuals living in Georgia and their potential need for services through GVRA, population estimates were obtained using 2022 American Community Survey (ACS) data, an annual survey completed by the U.S. Census Bureau, as well as from other state-specific resources. The ACS uses the following questions to identify the prevalence and type of disability.

Disability Type	ACS 2022 Question
Vision	Is this person blind or does he/she have serious difficulty seeing even when wearing glasses?
Hearing	Is this person deaf or does he/she have serious difficulty hearing?
Ambulatory	Does this person have serious difficulty walking or climbing stairs?
Cognitive	Because of a physical, mental, or emotional condition, does this person have serious difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions?
Self-Care	Does this person have difficulty dressing or bathing?
Independent Living (ages 15+ years only)	Because of a physical, mental, or emotional condition, does this person have difficulty doing errands alone such as visiting a doctor's office or shopping?

ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN

Based on 2022 ACS data, it is estimated that 13% of Georgia's estimated total population had a disability (all ages) which is consistent with the U.S. average of 13%.[4] However, in 25 counties, the estimated population of individuals with disabilities is 20% or higher. These counties include:

County	Percent with disability
Telfair	27%
Quitman	24%
Putnam	24%
Jenkins	23%
Twiggs	23%
Meriwether	23%
Treutlen	23%
Dodge	23%
Crisp	22%
Talbot	22%
Long	22%
Jeff Davis	22%
Mitchell	22%
Crawford	22%
Rabun	21%
Stewart	21%
McIntosh	21%
Hancock	21%
Taliaferro	21%
Seminole	21%
Heard	21%
Fannin	21%
Marion	21%
Bacon	21%
Emanuel	20%

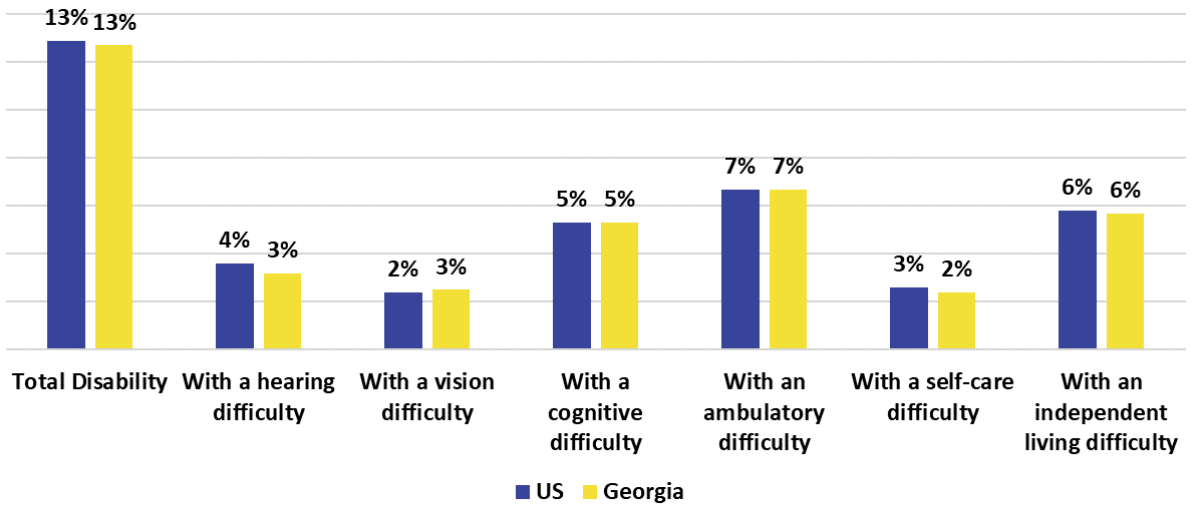
It should be noted that the estimated population of individuals aged 65 and older in Georgia is 14%; however, for the counties listed, above the estimated percentages range from 10% to 28%.[4]

PREVALENCE BY TYPE

Regarding disability type, Georgia's population is estimated to have the most difficulty with ambulation, followed by difficulties with independent living. These estimates are also consistent with U.S. averages.[4]

United States	Percent	Georgia	Percent
Total Disability	13%	Total Disability	13%
With a hearing difficulty	4%	With a hearing difficulty	3%
With a vision difficulty	2%	With a vision difficulty	3%
With a cognitive difficulty	5%	With a cognitive difficulty	5%
With an ambulatory difficulty	7%	With an ambulatory difficulty	7%
With a self-care difficulty	3%	With a self-care difficulty	2%
With an independent living difficulty	6%	With an independent living difficulty	6%

Disability Prevalence by Type: US and Georgia



However, as shown in the table below, younger individuals with disabilities in Georgia are more likely to report having a cognitive disability. Individuals aged 65 and older report difficulties with ambulation at a much higher rate than other age groups.

BY AGE AND TYPE

Age	Any Disability	Hearing	Visual	Cognitive	Ambulatory	Self-care	Independent living
Under 5	0.7%	0.5%	0.4%	5%*	0.6%*	1%*	
5 to 17	6%	0.6%	0.9%				
18-34	7%	0.9%	1%	5%	1%	0.9%	3%
35-64	12%	3%	2%	5%	7%	2%	4%
65-74	24%	9%	4%	5%	15%	4%	7%
75+	47%	21%	9%	13%	31%	12%	23%

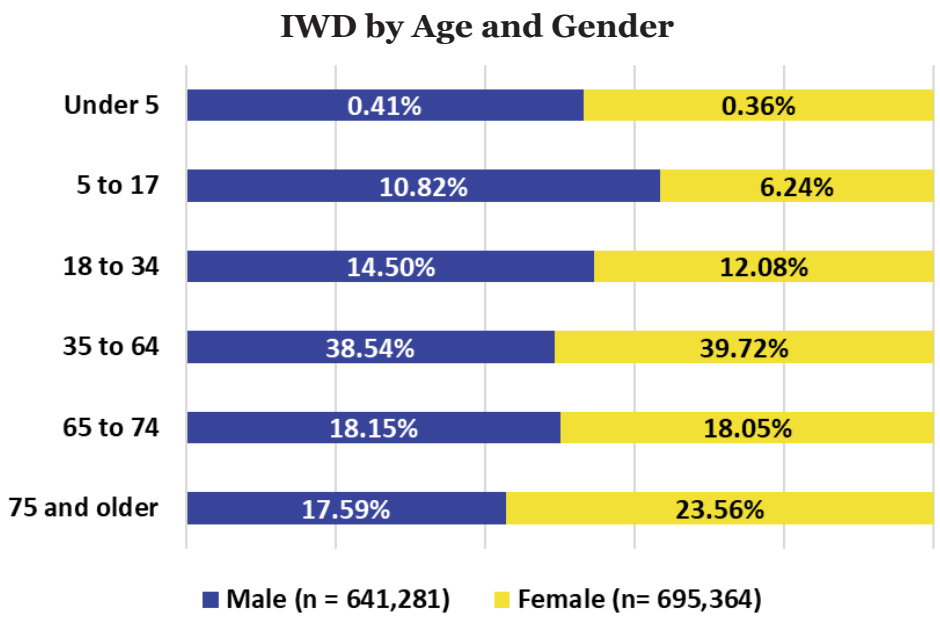
* Indicates data where age categories "Under 5" and "5 to 17" are merged into one data point.

ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN

BY AGE AND GENDER

Based on 2022 ACS data, it is estimated that among all age groups, 12% of all females and 12% of all males in Georgia reported having a disability. Male disability rates tend to see higher prevalence at earlier ages compared to females, with prevalence generally evening out as individuals get older.[4]

	Male (n = 641,281)	Female (n= 695,364)
Under 5	0.41%	0.36%
5 to 17	10.82%	6.24%
18 to 34	14.50%	12.08%
35 to 64	38.54%	39.72%
65 to 74	18.15%	18.05%
75 and older	17.59%	23.56%



BY RACE/ETHNICITY

According to 2022 ACS data, the American Indian and Alaska Native populations have the highest percentage of individuals reporting a disability in the U.S. Across all racial and ethnic groups, individuals in Georgia reported slightly lower disability prevalence rates (14%) compared to nationwide estimates (14%). The racial/ethnic groups with the lowest disability prevalence in Georgia are Asian individuals (6%), individuals of some other race (7%), and Hispanic/Latino individuals (7%).[4]

Race/Ethnicity	US		Georgia	
	Total	% with Disability	Total	% with Disability
White alone	215,099,040	14%	5,726,906	14%
Black or African American alone	40,107,546	14%	3,295,884	13%
American Indian and Alaska Native alone	2,719,857	16%	36,876	13%
Asian alone	19,011,280	8%	463,580	6%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone	610,355	12%	7,267	10%
Some other race alone	19,809,252	10%	373,269	7%
Two or more races	28,790,180	11%	628,118	10%
White alone, not Hispanic or Latino	192,154,287	14%	5,357,612	14%
Hispanic or Latino (any race)	61,024,815	10%	1,062,494	7%

PREVALENCE IN GEORGIA'S YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES

The 2022 ACS 1-year data estimated that 5% of all Georgians, ages 0-17, had a disability. Among those with disabilities, cognitive difficulty is the most prevalent.[4,5]

Under 18 Prevalence by Disability Type	Count (n=131,452)	% of Youth With Disabilities
Hearing	14,566	11%
Vision	19,650	15%
Cognitive	101,074	77%
Ambulatory	13,984	11%
Self-Care	21,934	17%

PREVALENCE OF SPECIFIC IMPAIRMENTS

MENTAL ILLNESS

The annual average of individuals aged 18 and older in Georgia with serious mental illness is estimated to be 475,000,[6] which is equivalent to 6% of the state's estimated population for this age group (n = 8,021,738). Additionally, according to SAMHSA and Georgia's State Mental Health Agency, state mental health agencies served 127,441 individuals in FY 2022.[7]

AUTISM

A 2021 report by The Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring (AADM) Network indicated that statistically, per 1,000 8-year-olds in Georgia, 25.2 (2.5%) are diagnosed with ASD.[8,9] Based on annual population estimates by the U.S. Census Bureau, Georgia's estimated 8-year-old population in 2022 was 137,873; of which 2.5% is approximately 3,447. Similarly, findings from the 2022 National Survey of Children's Health estimated 66,966 children out of Georgia's total population of children ages 3-17 (n = 2,082,488) had a diagnosis of an autism spectrum disorder.[10] This estimate is slightly lower than the U.S. average of 3%.

ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN

SPECIAL HEALTHCARE NEEDS

According to the 2022 National Survey of Children's Health, the percent of children with special health care needs in Georgia, ages 0 through 17, is 21% (n = 525,741) of the total population for that age group.[11]

	Children with special health care needs (CSHCN)	Non-CSHCN
0-5 years old	66,143	697,024
6-11 years old	201,398	626,887
12-17 years old	258,200	666,350

ADHD

The 2022 National Survey of Children's Health data indicates that among Georgia's total population of children ages 3-17, 12% have a current diagnosis of ADD/ADHD (n = 266,201), of which 30% were rated as mild, and 69% were rated as moderate or severe cases.[11] According to SAMHSA, an estimated 12,127 Georgians were diagnosed with ADD/ADHD in 2020. Of those, the majority of ADHD diagnoses were in children under the age of 11 (27%), and predominately male (66%).[12]

ARTHRITIS

Based on 2022 data from the CDC Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, 23.7% of adults in Georgia are estimated to have arthritis, which is nearly equivalent to the United States average of 23.9 percent. Of those, nearly half have experienced work limitations due to their arthritis (49%).[13]

DIABETES

The 2022 data from the CDC Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System found 11% of adults in Georgia aged 18 and older are diagnosed with diabetes.[14] Prevalence appears to increase as people age.

- Age 18-44: 3%
- Age 45-64: 17%
- Age 65+: 26%

TBI

Per the Georgia Department of Public Health (DPH): "Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) is a significant issue that can have a wide range of cognitive, physical, and psychological consequences. Additionally, the impacts of TBI go beyond the individual; there are also substantial community, societal, and economic burdens, increased emergency department (ED) visits, hospitalizations, and deaths."[15] In 2021, the Georgia Brain and Spinal Injury Registry recorded 24,827 TBI injuries including 16,505 emergency and 7,673 hospital admissions.[16] According to the Brain and Spinal Injury Trust Fund Commission, TBIs cost Georgians over $1.5 billion annually in lost wages and medical costs.[15]

SSDI & SSI RECIPIENTS IN GEORGIA

The Social Security Administration pays disability benefits to individuals who are unable to work due to a mental, physical, or medical condition that is expected to last more than a year or result in death. Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) is the benefit individuals with disabilities would receive if they have worked long enough and paid Social Security taxes. Supplemental Security Income (SSI) pays benefits based on financial need and is generally for those with limited work history. Some recipients receive both benefits.

According to the Social Security Administration, in 2022, 266,611 individuals aged 18-64 received SSDI based on having a disability, with an average monthly benefit of $851.50 (Median = $796.00).[17] 249,088 received SSI during 2022.[18] Also, that year, 42,153 individuals under 18 received SSI child benefits based on their disability.[18] The average monthly cash benefit for SSDI in 2022 was $1485.38[17] and $597.73 for SSI recipients.[18]

Youth with Disabilities Age 0-17, 2022		Adults of Working Age with Disabilities Age 18-64, 2022		
Est. Youth with Disabilities	Percentage receiving SSI 42,153	Est. Population w/ Disability (s)	Percentage receiving SSI 266,611	Percentage receiving SSDI 249,088
131,452	32%	739,291	36%	34%

Based on the estimated population of individuals in Georgia with a disability age 18-64 (n=371,691), in total, 50% received one or both entitlement benefits in 2022, as a result of their disability. Of those, an estimated 34% received SSDI and 36% received SSI. Additionally, during 2021, only 2% (n=16,254) of the SSI recipients aged 18-64 in Georgia were employed while receiving benefits.

Employment and Work Incentive Program Participation for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) Beneficiaries							
	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Total number of SSI recipients with disabilities	235,349	235,368	236,270	236,080	235,661	234,885	229,670
Number of SSI recipients with disabilities who are working	6,488	6,859	7,350	7,854	8,184	7,366	8,033
Percentage of SSI recipients with disabilities who are working	2.8%	2.9%	3.1%	3.3%	3.5%	3.1%	3.5%
SSI recipients with disabilities who received Plans for Achieving Self-Support (PASS) benefits	7	9	8	7	8	7	4
SSI recipients with disabilities who received Impairment Related Work Expenses (IRWE) benefits	114	116	133	149	163	124	116
SSI recipients with disabilities who received Blind Work Expenses (BWE) benefits	23	18	15	11	13	16	16

ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN

According to GVRA data for FY22, 2,586 VR clients (15% of all VR clients) aged 18-64 indicated that they relied on public benefits (SSI, SSDI, or TANF) at application. As shown in the table below, there is a considerable gap between the number of VR clients identified as receiving public benefits, compared to the number of recipients reported by the Social Security Administration.

Comparison of Percentage of IWD Receiving SSI/SSDI, 2022, and FY22 VR Clients	
IWD Age 18-64 w/ SSDI	34%
IWD Age 18-64 w/ SSI	36%
IWD Age 18-64 w/ VR clients	15%

TICKET TO WORK PROGRAM AND BENEFIT COUNSELING

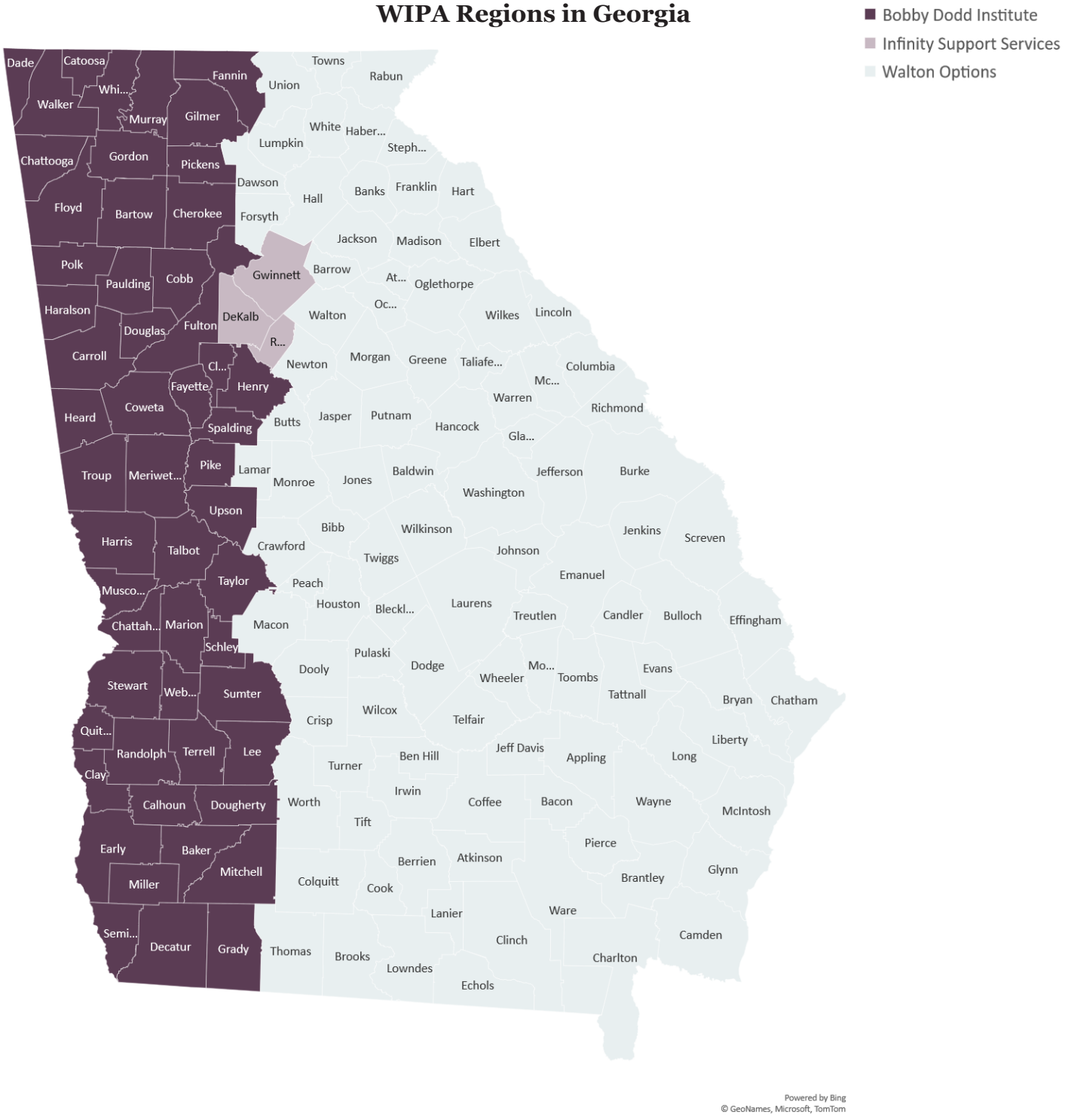
Social Security Administration's Ticket to Work program, is a free program for individuals aged 18-64 who receive SSDI and/or SSI and want to work. These services include benefit counseling, career planning/ counseling, job search and placement, ongoing employment supports, training programs, legal support and advocacy, and others.

Individuals who choose to participate in this program assign their "ticket" to one of several types of service providers, depending on their needs. Provider types include Employment Network service providers (EN), Workforce Employment Network service provider (WF), which is the state's public workforce system, the state's vocational rehabilitation program, the Work Incentive and Planning Assistance (WIPA) program or the state's Protection and Advocacy for Beneficiaries of Social Security (PABSS) program.

Currently, there are 93 ENs who provide services in Georgia, some of whom are national organizations and others are local community providers.[19] Social Security Administration's WIPA program is one that provides community-based Work Incentive expertise and benefit counseling to recipients of SSDI or SSI benefits based on their disability. The goal of the Work Incentives Planning and Assistance (WIPA) program is to provide beneficiaries with the information needed so that they can make an informed choice regarding employment.

There are currently three agencies providing benefit counseling through SSA-funded WIPA programs in Georgia. The Bobby Dodd Institute serves 54 counties in Georgia, most of which are in West Georgia. Walton Options, one of Georgia's Centers for Independent Living (CILs), serves 102 counties in the state. Infinity Support Services, based in North Carolina, serves 3 counties in Georgia: DeKalb, Gwinnett, and Rockdale.

WIPA Regions in Georgia



The Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities (DBHDD) also has a benefits counseling program called SOAR (SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access, and Recovery), which is specifically geared for individuals who are homeless or at risk of homelessness and have a mental health impairment and/or substance abuse disorder. According to DBHDD's website, SOAR-trained staff are available in each of DBHDD's six regions throughout the state.[20]

INCOME & POVERTY

According to ACS 2022 data, there were an estimated 4,092,467 households in Georgia. Of those, approximately 13% lived at or below the poverty level (n=528,872). Overall, the number of households living in poverty in Georgia has declined in recent years (2020: 14%; 2021: 14%).[4]

ESTIMATED HOUSEHOLD INCOME AMONG GEORGIANS WITH DISABILITIES

Using 2022 ACS 1-year estimates, the following table reflects 12-month earnings among individuals 16 years and over with and without disabilities in the United States and Georgia. This comparison clearly highlights how individuals with disabilities are more likely to earn considerably less than those without disabilities.[4,21]

Similarly, the estimated 2022 median earnings for a Georgia worker without a disability was $41,746 compared to $31,714 for workers with disabilities. This is consistent with trends on the national level.[4]

Income	US		Georgia	
	With Disability (n=13,503,752)	No Disability (n=162,657,771)	With Disability (n=437,332)	No Disability (n=5,267,334)
$1 to $4,999 or loss	13%	7%	13%	8%
$5,000 to $14,999	16%	11%	16%	11%
$15,000 to $24,999	13%	10%	12%	10%
$25,000 to $34,999	13%	12%	13%	13%
$35,000 to $49,999	14%	15%	15%	16%
$50,000 to $74,999	15%	18%	16%	18%
$75,000 or more	16%	26%	16%	25%
Median Earnings	$30,885	$43,883	$31,714	$41,746

POVERTY LEVEL

The table below highlights selected financial and employment outcomes over the past few years. Comparing those with and without a disability, PWDs are more likely to live below the poverty line than those without a disability. However, ACS data indicates that PWD who are employed are less likely to live below the poverty line. Although recent data for those specifically with a cognitive disability could not be located, the past years indicate that those with a cognitive disability are more likely to live below the poverty line, earn less, and work less than those with any or no disability.[22]

Employment Outcomes for Working-Aged People (Ages 16–64)	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Mean annual earnings from work for people with no disability (in thousands of dollars)	$44	$45	$47	$49	$51	$52	$54
Mean annual earnings from work for people with any disability (in thousands of dollars)	$32	$34	$36	$36	$39	$41	$39
Mean annual earnings from work for people with a cognitive disability (in thousands of dollars)	$22	$25	$26	$29	$31	$33	$32
Mean weekly hours worked for people with no disability	39	39	39	39	39	39	39
Mean weekly hours worked for people with any disability	37	37	37	37	38	37	38
Mean weekly hours worked for people with a cognitive disability	34	33	34	35	35	36	36
Percentage of people with no disability living below the poverty line	14%	13%	13%	12%	11%	12%	12%
Percentage of people with any disability living below the poverty line	28%	25%	27%	24%	23%	25%	23%
Percentage of people with a cognitive disability living below the poverty line	33%	27%	32%	28%	26%	28%	25%

According to data reports from the Carl Vinson Institute of Government using 2021 data, the counties with the top 15 highest percentages of individuals living in poverty in Georgia were: Calhoun, Wheeler, Stewart, Hancock, Macon, Telfair, Randolph, Tattnall, Sumter, Wilcox, Jenkins, Johnson, Terrell, Turner, and Early.[23]

GEORGIA'S LABOR MARKET PARTICIPATION

According to the ACS 2022 data release, the overall labor force participation rate in Georgia is 64%, compared to 48% for those with any disability. In contrast, 48% of individuals with disabilities are in the labor force, of which 43% are employed. These are comparable with the national average (64% and 49%). Additionally, full-time workers earned a median annual wage of $41,046 in Georgia. This is below the national average ($42,452).[4] As of 2022, the ten counties with the highest employment-population ratio were: Barrow, Bartow, Cherokee, Clayton, Cobb, Douglas, Effingham, Forsyth, Fulton, and Gwinnett.

LABOR FORCE CHARACTERISTICS AMONG PWD[24]

Nationally, for 2022, individuals without disabilities aged 16 and older are over two times more likely to be employed than those with disabilities (28% versus 68%). Regardless of disability status, women are less likely to be employed than men. However, there is a larger gap in employment rates between men with disabilities and men without as compared to the gap between women with disabilities and women without.

The following table reflects national trends of employment among individuals with disabilities aged 16 years and older of different racial and ethnic backgrounds. As reported in the 2023 U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) Report on Persons with a Disability Labor Force Characteristics: Black/African Americans with disabilities are the most likely to be unemployed, compared to the other racial and ethnic groups, and Hispanic/Latino people with disabilities are the most likely to be employed. However, it should be noted that employment rates are increasing for PWD across all races/ethnicities, and unemployment rates are decreasing.[25]

Race	U.S. Population with a Disability, aged 16 and older	Percentage Employed	Percentage Unemployed
White	26,296,000	23%	7%
Black/African American	4,634,000	21%	10%
Asian	1,120,000	17%	7%
Hispanic or Latino	4,138,000	24%	9%

The table on the next page provides additional insights into how employment outcomes for people with disabilities have changed over time. While employment of PWDs dropped in 2020, there was an increase in employment in 2021 and 2022, and this trend appears to continue into 2023. The 2023 unemployment rate for individuals with disabilities was 7.2%, a 0.4%-point drop from 2022 (7.6%) and a 2.9% point drop from 2021 (10.1%). One potential reason for this drop is the prevalence of remote work and self-employment amongst people with disabilities. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, remote work opportunities became widespread, making employment more accessible.[26]

Employment Participation for Working-Aged People (Ages 16-64)							
	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Number of people with no disability	5,877,143	5,848,170	5,970,367	6,029,955	5,999,773	6,004,446	6,080,050
Number of people with any disability	669,720	718,679	674,278	677,107	703,163	744,594	741,841
Number of people with a cognitive disability	280,665	303,842	285,770	291,785	317,903	349,660	334,780
Number of people with no disability who are employed	4,194,425	4,260,696	4,376,983	4,462,031	4,481,341	4,324,659	4,474,672
Number of people with any disability who are employed	206,822	241,707	226,258	240,680	247,069	275,169	282,826
Number of people with a cognitive disability who are employed	54,726	73,990	69,206	74,821	82,876	100,430	107,007
Percentage of people with no disability who are employed	71.4%	72.9%	73.3%	74.0%	75.0%	72%	73.6%
Percentage of people with any disability who are employed	30.9%	33.6%	33.6%	36.0%	35.0%	37%	38.1%
Percentage of people with a cognitive disability who are employed	19.5%	24.4%	24.2%	26.0%	26.0%	28.7%	32%

EDUCATION ATTAINMENT AMONG WORKERS WITH DISABILITIES[4]

Nationally, according to the US BLS Community Population Survey data for the years 2020-2021, the factor related to the lowest employment rate among individuals with disabilities is the lack of a high school diploma or equivalent. In fact, individuals with disabilities aged 25 years and above with less than a high school diploma are 6 times less likely to be employed than those without disabilities (8% versus 51%).

Individuals aged 25 years and older without disabilities who have a bachelor's degree or higher are 264% more likely to be employed than those with disabilities with the same education level. Individuals with disabilities who have a bachelor's degree or higher are three times more likely to be employed compared to their counterparts with less than a high school diploma (8% versus 28%).

State- level data related to education level among workers with disabilities is limited to data collected by the American Community Survey (ACS). As shown below, both nationally and in Georgia, individuals with disabilities aged 25 years and over are more likely to have not completed high school and are less likely to have above a high school diploma compared to individuals without a disability.

Educational Attainment	United States		Georgia	
	With Disability	No Disability	With Disability	No Disability
Population Age 25 and Over	36,753,828	187,329,670	1,175,985	5,898,366
Less than high school graduate	18%	9%	19%	9%
High school graduate (includes equivalency)	33%	25%	32%	25%
Some college or associates degree	29%	28%	29%	28%
Bachelor's degree or higher	20%	38%	20%	38%

GEORGIA'S EMPLOYMENT-POPULATION RATIO FOR PWD

According to 2022 ACS population estimates for Georgia, approximately 15% of Georgia's population aged 16 years and older had a disability, which is consistent with United States overall statistics for the same age group.[4] Additionally, as shown in the following table, it is estimated that 44% of Georgians with disabilities are employed; however, an overwhelming 52% are not in the labor force, compared to 78% and 19% (respectively) among individuals without disabilities.[4]

2022	
With Disability	No Disability
Employed: 44%	Employed: 78%
Not In Labor Force: 52%	Not In Labor Force: 19%

The employment-to-population ratio measures "the number of workers currently employed against the total working-age population of a region."[27] As shown in the following table, the 2022 employment-to-population ratios for people with disabilities in both Georgia and the United States are significantly lower than the employment-to-population ratios for people without disabilities.

The employment-to-population ratio for people with disabilities in Georgia is 38.9% as compared to a ratio of 76% for people without disabilities in Georgia. Georgia's ratios are similar to the employment-to-population ratios for the United States: 40.8% for people with disabilities as compared to a ratio of 76.6% for people without disabilities.

Additionally, the 2022 unemployment rates for people with disabilities are much higher than the unemployment rates for people without disabilities in both Georgia and the United States. The unemployment rate for people with disabilities in Georgia is 11.3% as compared to a rate of 5.1% for people without disabilities in Georgia. The unemployment rate for people with disabilities in Georgia is slightly lower compared to the rate for the United States (11.3% vs. 13.2%), while the unemployment rate for people without disabilities in Georgia is closer to the rate for the United States (5.1% vs 5.8%).[4]

Project	Employment-to-population ratios for people with disabilities[a]	Employment-to-population ratios for people without disabilities[b]	Unemployment rate for people with disabilities[c]	Unemployment rate for people without disabilities[d]
Georgia	38.9%	76.0%	11.3%	5.1%
United States	40.8%	76.6%	13.2%	5.8%

Notes for previous table:

- [a] The calculation for the employment-to-population ratios for people with disabilities = Employed with a disability / (Employed with a disability + Unemployed with a disability + Not in labor force with a disability).
- [b] The calculation for the employment-to-population ratios for people without disabilities = Employed without a disability / (Employed without a disability + Unemployed without a disability + Not in labor force without a disability).
- [c] The calculation for the unemployment rate for people with disabilities = Unemployed with a disability / (Employed with a disability + Unemployed with a disability).
- [d] The calculation for the unemployment rate for people without disabilities = Unemployed without a disability / (Employed without a disability + Unemployed without a disability).

GEORGIA'S CURRENT EMPLOYMENT TRENDS BY OCCUPATION

Georgia Department of Labor data indicates the total employment for 2022 was 5,108,604. Employment trends within the state according to the percentage of jobs per Standard Occupational Category (SOC) major grouping reflect Office and Administrative Support Occupations had the highest number of employed workers in the state during 2020.[28] Examples of specific types of jobs within this category include customer service representatives, secretaries and administrative assistants, and office clerks. Among state employment, jobs related to Sales were the second most prevalent, which includes jobs such as cashiers, retail salespersons, and sales representatives. The table below reflects the top 15 detailed occupations with the highest employment in Georgia during 2022, along with both average and hourly wages.[29]

SOC Detailed Occupation	Total Employment	Avg. Hourly	Avg. Annual
Retail salespersons	132,430	13.55	28,184
Laborers and freight, stock, and material movers, hand	122,880	15.51	32,261
Fast food and counter workers	112,670	11.18	23,254
Customer service representatives	105,530	17.34	36,067
Cashiers	101,360	10.8	22,464
General and operations managers	91,120	49.13	102,190
Registered nurses	78,290	36.24	75,379
Secretaries and administrative assistants, except legal, medical, and executive	66,310	17.31	36,005
Office clerks, general	64,560	17.17	35,714
Waiters and waitresses	64,110	10.96	22,797
Heavy and tractor-trailer truck drivers	62,750	23.87	49,650
Business operations specialists, all other	61,660	34.79	72,363
Janitors and cleaners, except maids and housekeeping cleaners	49,680	13.14	27,331
Miscellaneous Assemblers and Fabricators	47,690	16.27	33,842
Sales representatives, wholesale and manufacturing, except technical and scientific products	46,510	33.15	68,952

GEORGIA'S LABOR MARKET PROJECTIONS

GEORGIA'S HOT CAREERS 2018-2028[30]

Georgia's Department of Labor defined "Hot Careers" as those that have faster than state annual job growth, have average wages above the annual state average wage, and have at least 400 annual openings. Listed below are the top 10 jobs in Georgia projected to have the most annual openings, eight of which require a bachelor's degree.

Career	2018-2028 Annual Openings	Level of Education Needed
General & Operations Managers	8,960	Bachelor's degree
Registered Nurses	6,340	Bachelor's degree
Sales Reps, Wholesale & Manufacturing (Excluding Tech & Scientific Products)	5,750	High school diploma or equivalent
Sales Reps, Services, All Other	5,260	High school diploma or equivalent
Elementary School Teachers, (Excluding Special Education)	5,060	Bachelor's degree
Accountants & Auditors	4,890	Bachelor's degree
Business Operations Specialists, All Other	4,340	Bachelor's degree
Management Analysts	2,980	Bachelor's degree
Software Developers, Applications	2,980	Bachelor's degree
Market Research Analysts & Marketing Specialists	2,890	Bachelor's degree

GEORGIA'S INDUSTRY PROJECTIONS

Established in 2022, the High Demand Career Initiative (HDCI) identifies occupations within in-demand industries in Georgia that are shown to have above-average entry-level wages and are considered strong Georgia career paths.[31] These industries include Aerospace, Agribusiness, Business Services, Construction, Education, Energy and Environment, Entertainment, Hospitality and Tourism, Life Sciences, Logistics, and Manufacturing.

The top five industries that are expected to have the most growth, in terms of employment between 2020 and 2030, are Entertainment related (Motion Picture and Video Industries, 79% increase), Healthcare related (Offices of Other Health Practitioners, 54% increase; Outpatient Care Centers, 52% increase), Retirement and Assisted Living facilities (50% increase), and Individual and Family Services (48% increase).

Many of the high-demand occupations require technical skills, particularly in jobs related to advanced manufacturing. According to the National Skills Coalition, 54% of Georgia's current labor market requires skills beyond high school but not necessarily a four-year degree; however, it is estimated that due to a lack of access, only 42% of Georgia's workforce have had the skills training and education needed to fill-in demand jobs.[32]

However, the industries that are projected to have the most job losses include State Government (Excluding Education and Hospitals), Religious Organizations, Nursing Care Facilities, Furniture and Related Product Manufacturing, and Printing and Related Support Activities.[33]

OCCUPATIONAL TRENDS AMONG GEORGIANS WITH DISABILITIES

Regarding occupational trends among workers in Georgia who have disabilities, data is limited to ACS estimates, as there is not a public-use database available in Georgia where state agencies or programs providing employment services to individuals with disabilities (IWD) report outcomes, including details of employment obtained by their consumers.

According to 2022 ACS data,[4] on average, the occupational groups with the highest percentage of workers with disabilities in Georgia include Management, Business, Science and Arts (34%) and Sales and Office (21%), which is consistent with US percentages. For both individuals with disabilities and those without, the industries with the highest employment among workers aged 16 and older are Education/Healthcare/Social Assistance, Retail trade, and Professional/Scientific/Management/Administrative/Waste Management Services.

SELF-EMPLOYMENT

In recent years, rates of self-employment have increased, especially through the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic.[34] Individuals with disabilities have historically and consistently held higher rates of self-employment than those with no disabilities, usually as a solution to facing barriers to traditional employment. Regarding alternative work situations, 2021-2022 estimates indicate individuals with disabilities are more likely to engage in self-employment than individuals without disabilities.[4]

Self-Employment Rates							
2021				2022			
US		GA		US		GA	
IWD	No Disability	IWD	No Disability	IWD	No Disability	IWD	No Disability
11.20%	10.90%	11.5%	10%	11.1%	9.9%	11.5%	10%

REMOTE WORK AND TELEWORK

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a steep increase in the amount of remote work and telework being done. Before COVID-19, rates of remote work[35] consisted of only 6% of the workforce. After the COVID-19 onset, roughly one-third of the entire workforce was remote, with three-quarters of all office-based and professional occupations going remote. While decreases in the number of remote workers have been seen as organizations return to a preference for in-person, they have yet to reach pre-pandemic levels.

It is speculated that the rise in employment rates for people with disabilities has been facilitated in part by the availability of remote work.[36] In the wake of many organizations wanting to return to in-person settings, many disabled employees and individuals are concerned with the accessibility barriers posed by a mandated return to a physical office space.

SUPPORTED AND CUSTOMIZED EMPLOYMENT

Two widely regarded best practices when it comes to disability employment are customized employment and supported employment. While sometimes regarded as interchangeable,[37] some general distinctions are outlined below.

CUSTOMIZED EMPLOYMENT

Customized employment[38] (CE) refers to formal arrangements between a disabled employee and their employer that cater to the nature of the job and its demands to the employee's strengths. The primary focus[39] of customized employment is individualizing the employment experience. Some examples include work-from-home arrangements, adjusted schedules, or self-employment. Customized employment also became a part of federal law with the passage of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)[40] in 2014. Prior to WIOA, the Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) began a customized employment initiative in select states through the American Job Centers in 2001.

In Georgia, GVRA has defined and identified six steps for customized employment:[41]

1. Plan Meeting Service Identification
2. Discovery Assessment and Profile
3. Job Placement/Development
4. Training and Initiation of Ongoing Supports
5. Stabilization
6. VR Services Completion and Transition to Extended Services

DISCOVERY

A unique feature of customized employment is the discovery process. It represents a qualitative process[40] that a job seeker goes through to identify strengths, needs, and interests. The Office of Disability Employment Policy[40] and Griffin-Hammis and Associates[42] provide free, publicly available resources on customized employment, including steps for navigating the discovery process successfully. Outcomes of the discovery process[43] often include the identification of vocational themes and a detailed report of findings from the discovery process. While each organization and agency may take a slightly varied approach to customized employment, they all encompass the aspects identified in WIOA.

SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT

In contrast, supported employment (SE)[38] refers to ongoing services utilized by disabled employees to maintain employment and may not necessarily be related to the nature of the work and performing the job. Some examples include coworkers providing transportation for disabled employees or physical offices having a safe space employees can go to as needed. WIOA and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, define supported employment as a means for individuals with significant disabilities to obtain competitive, integrated employment, that is individualized and customized consistent with the strengths, abilities, interests, and informed choice of the individuals involved.

According to GVRA's VR Program Policy Manual, Supported Employment Policy (416.2.01): *"Supported Employment is competitive work performed on a full-time or part-time basis; in an integrated work setting that is paid at or above minimum wage, but not less than the customary or usual wage paid by the employer for the same or similar work performed by individuals who are not disabled. Placement in an enclave or group setting is not considered employment in an integrated setting."* In Georgia, GVRA has defined and identified five steps essential to the process of traditional supported employment:[41]

1. Services Identification
2. Job Development/Placement
3. Training and Initiation of Ongoing Supports
4. Stabilization
5. VR Services Completion and Transition to Extended Services

According to DBHDD,[44] there are 23 Supported Employment service providers in Georgia. Past work has indicated the many benefits of supported and customized employment, including those that extend to the general public. A 2010 study found that the average net benefit supported employees to taxpayers is $3,016.08 per employee, and the benefit-cost ratio is $1.46 for every dollar spent, totaling out to over $1.5 billion economic gain from supported employment programs.

Further, preliminary data[39] indicates that supported employees have more favorable life outcomes. A review of empirical research[45] found that individuals in supported employment via individual placement supports (IPS) had better vocational outcomes and an anticipated improvement in quality of life. Additionally, a recent systematic review of the comparative economic value of supported employment programs indicated they are more cost-effective and provide greater vocational training opportunities than sheltered workshops.[46]

SE THROUGH GVRA

GVRA utilizes three models of supported employment (SE) for which to provide SE services:

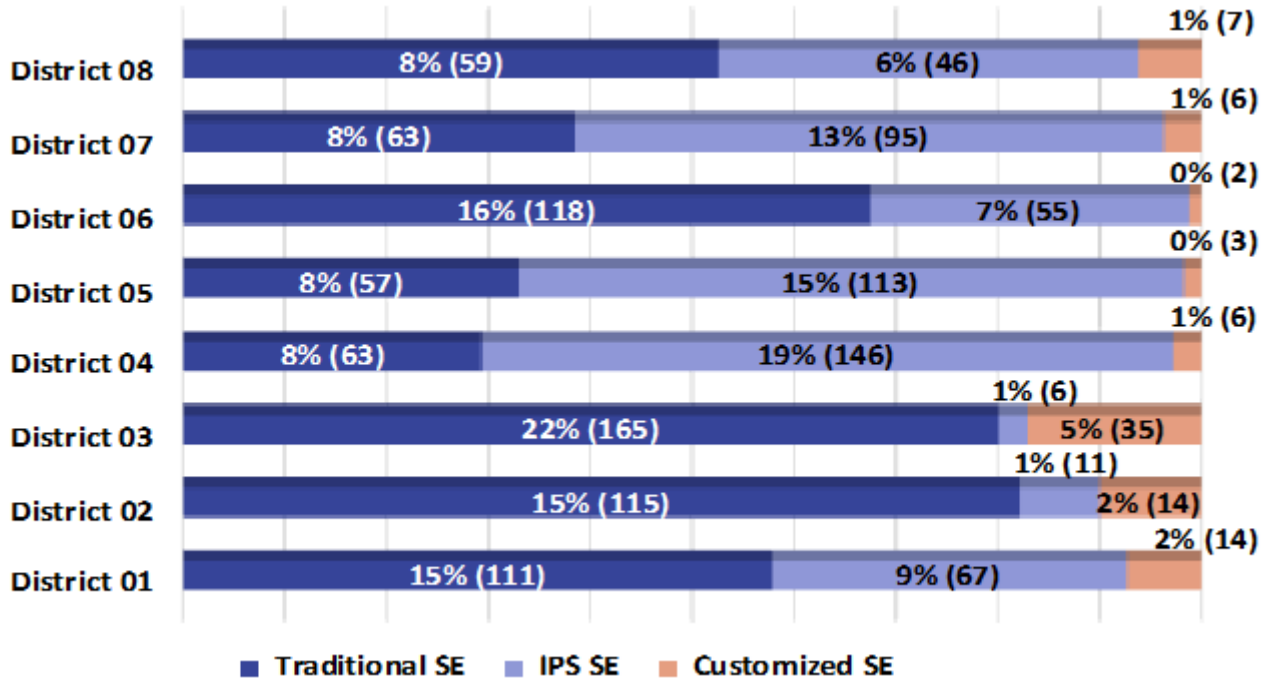
- **Traditional Supported Employment** is used for individuals who qualify for supported employment services and need intensive job coaching, ongoing support, and extended support but do not need job carving/job negotiation.
- **Customized Supported Employment** is for those who have the most significant disabilities, who would not likely benefit from or have been unsuccessful in the past with traditional supported employment and will require individually negotiated employment. CSE emphasizes a person-centered discovery process that leads to competitive integrated employment that was negotiated/carved to best meet the job seeker and employer's needs.
- **Individual Placement and Supports (IPS)** is a specific evidence-based model that was developed for individuals with severe and persistent mental illness. This model places an individual into employment as soon as possible, as it is believed that employment is an essential component of recovery. Supported Employment services are integrated and coordinated with mental health treatment and vocational rehabilitation services.

ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN

According to reports provided by GVRA, a total of $4,558,725 was spent on SE services during FY 22, which were provided by 72 vendors throughout the state. **Note:** Funds utilized may have been from other budget years. Additionally, the following trends were noted within these reports:

- Through GVRA's VR program, 1,398 individuals with significant disabilities received SE services.
- The traditional supported employment model was utilized for 54% of the total VR clients receiving SE services in SFY 22 (n=751), 39% received evidenced-based SE services (Individual Placement and Supports (IPS); n=539), and 6% received customized supported employment services (n=87).
- Of VR clients receiving SE services in FY 22, 522 cases were closed successfully in employment, which accounts for 42.9% of all successful closures in SFY 22. Jobs obtained were most commonly in the following occupations: Janitors and Cleaners (n=58), Customer Services Representatives (n=43), and varying types of Stock Clerks (Stockroom/Warehouse/Storage Yard, Sales Floor, Order Fillers; n=102).
- As shown in the following graph, VR clients receiving supported employment services in GVRA Districts 3 and 4 account for 31% of all SE clients statewide (15% and 16%, respectively).
  - » Counties within District 3 include: Forsyth, (North) Fulton, Gwinnett, DeKalb, Clayton, Rockdale, and Henry.
  - » Counties within District 4 include: Union, Towns, Rabun, Lumpkin, White, Habersham, Stephens, Hall, Banks, Franklin, Hart, Barrow, Jackson, Madison, Elbert, Clarke, Walton, Oconee, Oglethorpe, Newton, Morgan, and Greene.

Number of VR Clients per SE Model by GVRA District



SE THROUGH DBHDD

As the state administrator of CMS waiver services, the Developmental Disabilities (DD) Division of the Department of Behavioral Health & Developmental Disabilities (DBHDD) funds supported employment services for adults with behavioral and/or developmental disabilities, as well as for adolescents and young adults in some areas. For those not eligible for CMS waiver funding, state-funded Family Support Services may also be an option.

In State Fiscal Year 22 (FY 22), DBHDD served 1,822 individuals through their employment services, and 13,560 through their day services. The table below summarizes the number of individuals served through DBHDD's supported employment services over the past three fiscal years, and the percentage they make up of all service recipients.

Individuals with Disabilities Served through DBHDD					
FY 20 (n=12,986)		FY 21 (n=12,118)		FY 22 (n=15,382)	
# Served	% Total	# Served	% Total	# Served	% Total
2,171	16.72%	1,829	15.09%	2,551	16,58%

According to data from the Georgia 2020-2021 NCI data,[47] 13% (n=52.65) of the 405 respondents receiving DD-funded services indicated they had a job in the community, 47% of which was an individual job with supports and 12% was a "group" job, with or without supports. Whereas 70% of the respondents indicated they attended a day program or workshop.

Additionally, the Behavioral Health (BH) Division of DBHDD provides funding for evidenced-based supported employment services, also known as Individual Placement and Supports (IPS), for individuals meeting the definition of "severe and persistent mental illness." These services are primarily conducted by employment specialists employed by a regional community service board (CSB) organization or contracted provider.

In 2010, Georgia entered a settlement with the US Department of Justice to serve DD and BH consumers in the most integrated community setting possible. Within the settlement decree, the state BH division was required to implement IPS-supported employment services statewide and meet specified annual utilization goals for the number of individuals receiving supported employment services. During FY 22, 117,153 adults received community mental health services. Of those, 2% (n=2,551) received IPS-supported employment services. For FY 22, approximately 58% of those enrolled in supported employment are competitively employed (n=1,487).

EXTENDED FOLLOW-UP

A long-standing challenge for GVRA's supported employment providers is the expectation that they will provide extended services to the individuals for the life of the job, following VR case closure. Extended services are not only one of the hallmark components of supported employment, they are also federally mandated. However, upon VR case closure, SE providers are no longer able to receive payment for their services, unless the individual is eligible for long-term supports through the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disability.

As a result, GVRA providers who are not also providers of DBHDD are reluctant to expand their offerings of supported employment, which impacts the availability of the best practice service for those who don't have Intellectual or Developmental Disabilities but are still in need of services, such as those who acquired a traumatic brain injury or spinal cord injury as an adult.

ACCESSING WAIVER SERVICES IN GEORGIA

The Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities (DBHDD) maintains a short-term and long-term "waiting" list for waiver services, which the state uses to prioritize services based on need. Individuals are placed on these lists once they have been found eligible for services but are awaiting funding. As of March 2023, 7,031 individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities were awaiting needed waiver services. In 2020 and 2021, the number of people on the waiting list for employment and day services through DBHDD was 6,309 and 7,328 respectively.

ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

Individuals with the most significant disabilities often need assistive technology and rehabilitation engineering services to perform tasks, access their environment, and live independently. GVRA is one of the few state VR programs that prioritize Assistive Work Technology (AWT) services by having a dedicated internal unit of rehabilitation engineers, assistive work technologists, and occupational therapists who provide direct services to VR clients throughout the state. Recommendations made by this unit address issues related to accommodation and/or assistive technology needed to drive independently, participate in training, perform essential job tasks, or to improve accessibility within their home.

For a VR client to receive AWT services, the VR Professional overseeing the case must identify the need and initiate a referral to the AWT unit and authorize the purchase of the equipment, services, or other items recommended. During SFY 22, approximately $480,476 was spent by VR on services related to assistive technology and/or rehabilitation engineering. Note that this number may be higher as there are many services and purchases made on behalf of clients that may have been for AT purposes.

Up until 2020, Georgia Tools for Life (GATFL) housed at the Georgia Institute of Technology was Georgia's Assistive Technology (AT) Act Program. As required by federal legislation, Tools for Life provides AT demonstration, AT assessments, funding education, AT & durable medical equipment reuse, and training for individuals and groups. Additionally, in partnership with four organizations serving as AT Resource Centers, the Tools for Life Assistive Technology Network provides statewide AT lending services so that individuals can "try out" various equipment before purchasing. During 2019 GATFL assisted 66 individuals obtain financial loans to purchase AT devices, 36.4% (n=24) of which were related to daily living activities, and 33.3% (n=22) were for vehicle modification. Services through GATFL were suspended from 2020 through 2024 due to staff turnover and policy changes in the institution they were housed within.

However, it is anticipated that the Alternative Financing Program (CreditAble) previously run by GATFL will be revitalized by Friends of Disabled Adults and Children (FODAC) in Tucker, Georgia. FODAC works with

a network of partners and volunteers to provide refurbished equipment to Georgians with disabilities. Their primary focus is four-fold: home medical equipment, vehicle modifications, computer refurbishing, and working with assistive technology statewide partners.[48]

University of Georgia's Institute on Human Development and Disability (IHDD), is the administrator of Georgia's AgrAbility Project,[49] which is a national Assistive Technology (AT) program funded by USDA. The goal of the grant is to help farmers with disabilities continue in or return to their production agriculture operation by providing assistive technology recommendations to improve farm accessibility, safety, and independence in completing farm tasks. The Georgia AgrAbility Project works directly with field VR staff to facilitate the farmers in receiving the recommended assistive technology. The table below shows the amount spent by VR to help purchase assistive technology for AgrAbility clients.

VR AT Purchases for AgrAbility Clients by Fiscal Year			
2020	**2021**	**2022**	**2023**
$138,005	$133,034	$32,749	$90,721

GEORGIANS WITH DISABILITIES WHO ARE UNSERVED AND UNDERSERVED

VETERANS

According to ACS 2022 data,[4,50] the estimated number of veterans in Georgia was 607,506, which is approximately 7% of the state's total population and places Georgia ranking 9th among total state veteran populations. As shown in the table below, the percentage of veterans who are 65 and older is 42% compared to the U.S. average of 49%, signifying that more of Georgia's veteran population is estimated to be aged 18-64, and of working age. Additionally, women accounted for 10.3% of Georgia's total veteran population in 2022, which ranked Georgia among the top 5 states with the highest female veteran population.

	US	Georgia
Number of Veterans	16,200,322	607,506
% Adult Population (age 18+) that are veterans	6.20%	7.30%
% Veterans age 65+	49%	42%
Number of women veterans	1,671,237	81,954
% Women veterans of total veteran population	10.30%	13.43%

Using 2022 county population estimates[51] for individuals 18 and older, along with Veteran Affairs[52] estimates for the same year, the counties with the highest veterans to adult population ratio are, in ranking order:

- Chattahoochee: 2,231 (25% of adult population)
- Liberty: 14,443 (22% of adult population)
- Long: 2,339 (14% of adult population)
- Houston: 21,196 (13% of adult population)

ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN

The 2020 VA data[53] showed among the veterans in Georgia (n=690,000 estimated), 31% received compensation for a service-connected disability (n=214,398). Of these, 20% (n=42,612) had a 100% disability rating. Counties that had 40% or more of their veteran population receiving disability compensation: Liberty (53%), Long (51%), Muscogee (46%), Chattahoochee (45%), Columbia (43%), Quitman (42%), Bryan (42%), and Houston (42%).The majority of those counties have a lower-than-average percentage of their population that is age 65 and older (average=12%) with the exception of Muscogee (13%), Quitman (25%), and Richmond counties (13%).

According to a report put out by the US Department of Veteran Affairs,[54] $493,664,059.00 was spent on Education & Vocational Rehab services for Georgia veterans in FY 2021, making up only 7% of all programmatic spending. This is consistent with the national average (5%). The greatest areas of expenditure were on Compensation & Pension, and Medical Care. The same report indicated that 26% of all Georgia veterans received disability compensation as a benefit. As of December 2023,[55] 5.7 million veterans were receiving VA disability compensation in the US (31% of estimated total veteran population).

Of the 16,727 VR clients in SFY 22, 539 were identified as being veterans, accounting for 3.2% of total VR clients for that year. Additionally, 70% (n=375) of the veterans receiving VR services in SFY 22 identified as being male, and 45% (n=243) had a psychosocial or cognitive impairment listed as their primary disability. The average age of veteran clients was 49 years of age, and the majority were Black/African American (53%, n=288), followed by multi-racial (25%, n=137), and White (20%, n=109). The three most common service categories amongst veterans were: Diagnosis and treatment of impairments (n=187), Assessment (n=156), and Transportation (Public; n=100). Twenty veterans received Supported Employment services through GVRA. Of the veterans whose VR case was successfully closed in employment (n=28), four (4) had received Supported Employment using the Individual Placement and Supports model, which is the evidence-based model for those with severe and persistent mental illness.

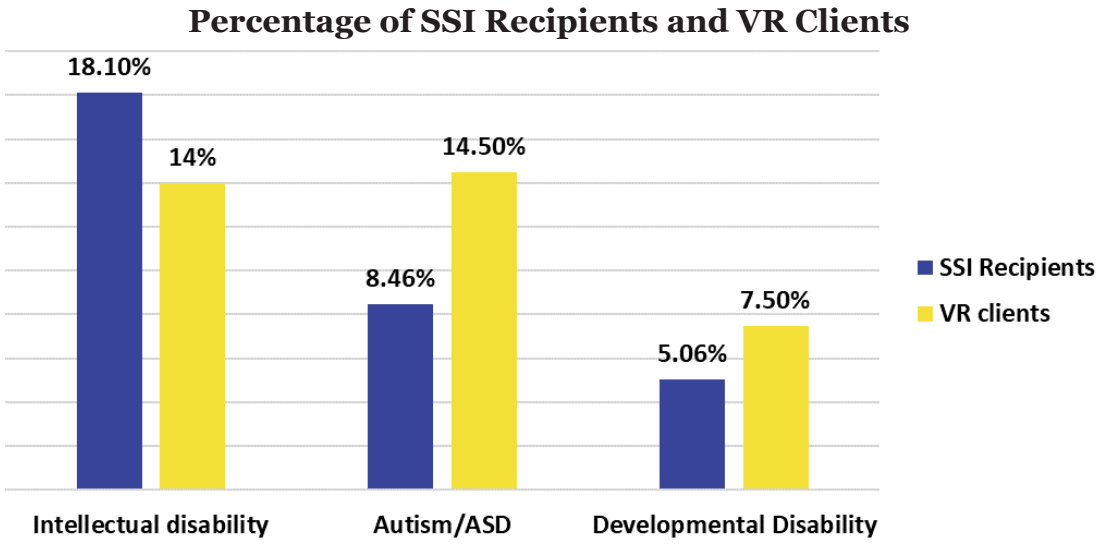
In regards to Veterans with disabilities receiving employment services through other entities, it is noted in the National Mental Health Services Survey Profile[56] for Georgia that, among the mental health treatment facilities reporting (n=225), 12% (n=27) reported offering vocational rehabilitation services, 29.8% (n=67) reported offering supported employment services. Of the 53,143 total clients in mental health treatment statewide between May 1, 2019, and April 30, 2020, approximately 7% identified themselves as military veterans.

INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES / COGNITIVE DISABILITIES

According to the 2022 SSI Annual Statistical Report,[57] 102,305 SSI recipients in Georgia received benefits due to a mental disorder diagnosis (54% of all recipients). Of those, 33% (n=33,760) received benefits due to an intellectual disability (ID). Additionally, 15.4% (n=15,754) of the recipients received benefits due to an autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and 9.2% (n=9,412) due to a developmental disability (DD).

VR data for SFY 22 listed Cognitive Impairments as the primary impairment for VR clients (38%, n=6,423). Intellectual disability was the second most common cause of primary impairment (14%, n=2,342), with the first

being autism (14.5%, n=2,425), and an additional 7.5% listed developmental disability-related conditions as the primary cause (Cerebral Palsy and Congenital/Birth Conditions). As shown in the graph below, the number of individuals served by VR with an Intellectual Disability as the primary cause of an impairment is significantly less than the number of individuals receiving SSI benefits based on that impairment.



Additionally, 19,090 individuals with an Intellectual and/or Developmental Disability received services from the Developmental Disabilities division of DBHDD during FY 22. Data from Georgia's 2021-2022 National Core Indicators (NCI) Adult In-Person Survey[58] revealed that an average of 11% of respondents (representing people with intellectual/developmental disabilities) were competitively employed in the community, which is slightly below the national average of 16%. Of those with a paid community job, the majority had publicly funded supports, worked 27.3 hours biweekly, and earned $10.81 per hour. Of those without a paid community job, 46% indicated that they want one (n=182), and 9% had community employment as a goal in their service plan.

Findings from FY 23 quality reviews of DBHDD providers conducted by the Georgia Collaborative Administrative Services Organization showed that the majority of supported employment providers met the Service Guidelines outlined in the Quality Management Annual Review process of DBHDD providers. For both group and individual SE service providers, 94% and 95% of providers complied with documentation guidelines as of FY 23.[59]

GEORGIANS WITH THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES

WIOA and The Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, defines an **Individual with a Significant Disability** as one who has a physical or mental impairment that seriously limits one or more functional capacities (such as mobility, communication, self-care, self-direction, interpersonal skills, work tolerance, or work skills) in terms of an employment outcome; and whose expected to require multiple vocational rehabilitation services over an extended period .

ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN

An **Individual with a Most Significant Disability** is an individual who meets additional criteria set by the state vocational rehabilitation agency. Georgia's Vocational Rehabilitation Program defines an individual with a most significant disability as one who has: limitations in 3 or more functional capacity areas and requires multiple services over 3 or more months; or is receiving supported employment services.

The number of VR clients identified as an 'Individual with a Most Significant Disability' in SFY 22 was 9,612, which is 57.5% of total GVRA clients for that year (n=16,727). According to 2022 ACS data, 2.4% of Georgia's total population is estimated to have a disability related to self-care, and 5.7% have a disability related to independent living. Some individuals with these impairments require support and services that allow them to work and live independently. Examples of populations with significant and/or complex disabilities:

MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS

- According to the National MS Society,[60] nearly 1 million people in the U.S. are diagnosed with MS, with 277,000 of those estimated to be living in the Southern Region. A 2023 research article estimates indicate that over three-quarters of those with MS are female.[61]
- Among the individuals eligible for VR services in FY 22, 81 had MS listed as the primary cause of impairment, which is 0.5 percent of the total clients.

SCI / TBI

- According to Georgia's Brain & Spinal Injury Trust Fund Commission,[16] there were 24,824 traumatic brain injuries, spinal cord injuries, or both in 2021. Of those, 50.75% (n=12,599) of injuries were in individuals who were of working age (ages 20-64).
- Percentage of individuals on VR caseload during FY 22: 1.9 percent of total VR clients (n=326).

SCHIZOPHRENIA AND OTHER PSYCHOTIC DISORDERS

- According to SAMHSA, in 2022,[62] 14.9 million individuals in the U.S. were identified as meeting the "Serious Mental Illness" criteria; of those, 1.5 million (<1%) were diagnosed with schizophrenia or a related psychotic disorder. In 2021-2022, it was estimated that 22.52% of all adults in Georgia experienced any kind of mental illness.
- Percentage of individuals on VR caseload during FY 22: 5.2 percent of total VR clients (n=858).

Authorized by the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, the Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC) of Georgia provides guidance to nine Centers of Independent Living that are located throughout the state. Based on the feedback obtained from community town halls in 2018, barriers to impacting the independence of Georgians include:

- **Transportation:** lack of awareness of what is available and how to access it, eligibility is limited to Medicaid recipients, costly services, and inaccessibility of bus stops and other physical barriers.
- **Employment:** Lack of awareness regarding the rights of people with disabilities, financial thresholds for state/federal supports do not allow for individuals to earn "livable" wages, and need for disability awareness training among employers
- **Housing:** Limited availability of accessible units, limited affordability, and lack of accountability regarding program accessibility and physical accessibility.

INDIVIDUALS AGE 65 AND OLDER WITH DISABILITIES

In a report for Georgia's Division of Aging,[63] the Georgia Health Policy Center noted that Georgia has the 11th fastest-growing 60+ population and the 10th fastest-growing 85+ population in the US. Additionally, according to the Social Security Administration, full retirement benefits start for most people at the age of 66; however, if individuals delay their retirement until the age of 70, they could receive as much as $1,000 per month in cash benefits. As a result of this incentive and other economic factors, people are working well past age 65., the Georgia Health Policy Center noted that Georgia has the 11th fastest growing 60+ population and has the 10th fastest growing 85+ population in the US. Additionally, according to the Social Security Administration, full retirement benefits start for most people at the age of 66; however, if individuals delay their retirement until the age of 70, they could receive as much as $1,000 per month in cash benefits. As a result of this incentive and other economic factors, people are working well past age 65.

Individuals aged 65 and older are estimated to be 14.7% of Georgia's total estimated population (n=10,799,566). However, among Georgia's population of individuals with disabilities, it is estimated that 39.1% are age 65 and older. As shown below (table), only 3.5 percent of VR clients in FY 22 were over the age of 65.

Age	# GA IWDs (n=1,428,789)	# VR Clients (n=16,727)
Age 65-74	260,098 (18.2%)	546 (3.3%)
Age 75+	297,948 (20.8%)	51 (0.2%)

The Georgia Department of Human Services Division of Aging allocates federal and state funding to Area Agencies on Aging (AAA) to provide direct services to individuals age 60 and older meeting eligibility criteria, of which ten percent (10%) is set aside for adults aged 65 and older who have disabilities (defined by having a mobility or self-care limitation). In their 2024-2027 State Plan and Stakeholder Input Report (conducted by the Carl Vinson Institute), respondents indicated a desire for more preference to be placed on services for older adults with disability, given the increasing rates of disability among these age groups. Among the services provided through contracted providers throughout the state, Home and Community-Based Services (non-Medicaid) are the most used, with most recipients aged 70 and older. Information regarding service utilization specific to those with disabilities is not available

Georgia's Division of Aging Services also allocates funding for the Senior Community Service Employment Program, which provides job training and employment for low-income persons who are 55 and older and have poor employment prospects. Eligible individuals are placed in paid part-time community service positions with the goal of transitioning to unsubsidized employment, which are located through community outreach efforts and coordination with Georgia's Department of Labor and state workforce development regions. There is no information available about the disability status of individuals in this program.

SENSORY IMPAIRMENTS

According to 2022 ACS estimates,[4] 2.5% of Georgians had a visual disability, and 3.2% had a hearing disability. Additionally, per Social Security Administration information, as of December 2022, 2,210 Georgians were eligible for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) due to Blindness.

Among the total SFY 22 VR clients, 1,111 had a primary impairment that was vision related. Of those, 369 cases had been closed, with only 61 of them successfully in employment (16.5%). The remaining 308 were closed for other reasons, Alternately, of the 923 VR clients with hearing-related impairments, 432 cases were closed with 22% being closed successfully (n=97). According to the 2020 National Mental Health Services Survey Report for Georgia,[64] of the 225 responding mental health treatment facilities, 65.8% (n=148) indicated they provided services using sign language.

GAPS IN SERVICES FOR MINORITIES

As noted in the table below, among the total VR clients in FY 22, 95% identified as either White (45%) or Black/African American (51%). Individuals with disabilities who identify with other races or ethnic backgrounds make up the remaining 4%, which is well below the state population estimates for both the general population and the population of individuals with disabilities.

Race/Ethnicity	% Georgia Population (n=10,321,846)	% Georgia IWD Population (n=1,349,161)	% VR Clients (n=16,727)
American Indian or Alaskan Native	0.90%	-	<1%
Black or African American	32%	31%	51%
Hispanic/Latinx	10%	5%	5%
Multi-Racial	3%	<1%	2%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	0.10%	-	<1%
White	57%	58%	45%
Asian	4.13%	2%	2%

Furthermore, findings from the 2017 Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Needs Assessment showed that 16% of the GVRA Counselors did not feel confident in providing culturally competent services, and 84% agreed cultural competency training would be helpful. Five out of the top 15 counties with the highest rate of poverty in Georgia are also the counties that have the highest estimated population of African American individuals. These counties include Calhoun, Hancock, Macon, Randolph, and Terrell.

DISABILITY BENEFIT RECIPIENTS

As of December 2022, 249,089 Georgians with disabilities received Supplemental Security Income (SSI), of which 88.36%% (n=220,084) identified as having a disability. Roughly 3.6% of all disabled SSI recipients (including blind recipients) were working (n=8,919). For Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) in 2022, there were 294,973 beneficiaries in Georgia, the majority of whom had a mental disorder of some form (28.3%). The most common mental health disorders diagnoses were depressive, bipolar, and mood disorders (8.7%), followed by intellectual disorders (8.3%).

SSI & MEDICAID WAIVER PROGRAMS

The Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program is a crucial component of the social safety net for low-income adults with severe disabilities. In addition to providing federal cash payments (with optional state supplements), SSI often serves as a gateway to health insurance under Medicaid, and for 40 states plus the

District of Columbia, SSI awardees are categorically eligible for Medicaid. In 34 of the jurisdictions, including Georgia, Medicaid enrollment is automatic. Most of Georgia's long-term waiver services are Medicaid-funded, including the supported employment services available through DBHDD. Therefore, individuals must be eligible for SSI in order to receive those services.

As of 2022,[65] an average of 53% of Georgia applications for Social Security Disability Income (SSDI) or Supplemental Security Income (SSI) were approved following a hearing before an Administrative Law Judge, consistent with the national average (54%).

YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES, TRANSITION, & PRE-ETS

The reauthorization of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, under the Work Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), which was signed into law in 2014, included significant changes to the state vocational rehabilitation program, one of which is the greater emphasis on the provision of transition services to youth and students with disabilities, as well as the provision of pre-employment services to transitioning youth, regardless of their VR Eligibility status.

WIOA's amendments created distinct definitions for the terms **"student with a disability"** and **"youth with a disability."** In general, a student with disabilities is an individual with a disability, age 16 to 21 (22 in Georgia), who is enrolled in an education program (secondary, postsecondary, or other recognized education program), and is eligible for and receiving special education services or in an individual with a disability under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. A "youth with a disability" is aged 14 to 24 but is not necessarily enrolled in an education program.

The Rehabilitation Act authorizes a continuum of services, such as **transition services**, job placement services, other VR services, and supported employment services for students and youth with disabilities, as appropriate, to secure meaningful careers. These services are available to groups of students or youth with disabilities or individually to eligible students or youth with disabilities under an approved individualized employment plan.

Pre-employment transition services (Pre-ETS), on the other hand, are only available to "students with disabilities", and can be provided regardless of whether they have applied and been determined eligible for VR services or not. These services are designed to help students with disabilities identify career interests that may be explored further through additional VR services, such as transition services, and develop and practice workplace skills before exiting HS.

In addition to the Rehab Act amendments stipulating that VR programs collaborate with local education agencies (LEAs) to provide or arrange for the provision of Pre-ETS, states are also required to reserve at least 15% of their Federal VR funds for the provision of pre-employment transition services to students with disabilities.

GA'S POPULATION OF YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES

Based on ACS data,[4] it is estimated that 23.4% of Georgia's population in 2020 were individuals aged 0 to 17 (n=2,503,322). Additionally, the estimated population of individuals, aged 0 to 17, with one or more disabilities is 7.5%. Furthermore, according to Social Security Administration data,[18] as of December 2022, 42,153 Georgians under the age of 18 received Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits due to a disability, which is 32% of the estimated population of individuals with disabilities of the same age.

Youth with Disabilities (Age 0-17, 2022)	
Est. Youth with Disabilities	**Percentage receiving SSI (n=42,153)**
131,452	32%

GA'S SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENTS SCHOOL YEAR 2022-2023

During the 2022-2023 school year, 229,405 Georgia K-12 students were enrolled in special education (SPED) services, which is approximately 13% of all students enrolled during that school year (n=1,751,168). Eligibility for special education services is based on the disability and its impact on the student's learning and education.

The following table reflects the special education enrollment for all public-school systems in Georgia, including state schools and charter schools. As shown, Specific Learning Disability is the most prevalent impairment for which special education eligibility is established, followed by other health impairments (16%), autism (13%), and speech/language impairment (12%).

Special Education Enrollment by SPED Category (2023)		
SPED Eligibility Category	**Number of Students**	**% (n=229,405)**
Mild Int. Disability	9,896	4.31%
Moderate Int. Disability	4,918	2.14%
Severe Int. Disability	1,247	0.54%
Profound Int. Disability	344	0.15%
Emotional/Behavioral Disorder	8,781	3.83%
Specific Learning Disability	79,318	34.58%
Orthopedic Impairment	693	0.30%
Hearing Impairment	1,397	0.61%
Deaf	328	0.14%
Other Health Impairment	36,231	15.79%
Visual Impairment	643	0.28%
Blind	76	0.03%
Deaf and Blind	42	0.02%
Speech/Language Impairment	28,564	12.45%
Autism	29,374	12.80%
Traumatic Brain Injury	385	0.17%
Significant Dev. Delay	27,168	11.84%

PRESCHOOL DISABILITIES SERVICES

The Preschool Disabilities Services program, administered by GDOE, provides funding to local school systems to support the inclusion of preschoolers, ages three and four, who have disabilities, in general education settings. In SFY 22,[66] this program served 9,318 preschoolers with disabilities. In the 2022-2023 school year, there were 10,121 Pre-K students enrolled in SPED.

STATE SCHOOLS SERVING YOUTH WITH SENSORY DISABILITIES

State schools serving students with sensory disabilities, grades 1-12, include the Atlanta Area School for the Deaf (AASD), the Georgia Academy for the Blind (GAB), the Georgia School for the Deaf (GSD), and the Georgia Parent Infant Network for Educational Services (GA PINES), an early intervention program for children under five with a suspected hearing or vision impairment.

State Schools Serving Youths with Sensory Disabilities				
	2020	2021	2022	2023
Atlanta Area School for the Deaf	174	165	154	137
Georgia Academy for the Blind	91	89	92	95
Georgia School for the Deaf	68	73	74	71

TRANSITION STUDENTS IN GEORGIA

During the 2022-2023 school year, there were 71,036 special education students in grades nine through 12, making up 31 percent of all SPED students. Information on disability by grade was not available due to privacy (FERPA) rules. The table below shows the number of SPED students by each grade for the previous three school years.

	2020		2021		2022		2023	
	#	% of Total (n=225,062)	#	% of Total (n=221,655)	#	% of Total (n=223,037)	#	% of Total (n=229,321)
Pre-K	11,299	5.02%	9,316	4.20%	9,288	4.16%	10,121	4.41%
Kindergarten	10,933	4.86%	9,831	4.44%	9,926	4.45%	10,626	4.63%
1st	13,210	5.87%	12,483	5.63%	12,386	5.55%	13,603	5.93%
2nd	14,856	6.60%	14,166	6.39%	14,290	6.41%	15,102	6.59%
3rd	16,392	7.28%	15,614	7.04%	15,750	7.06%	16,545	7.21%
4th	17,738	7.88%	17,020	7.68%	16,712	7.49%	17,495	7.63%
5th	19,384	8.61%	18,359	8.28%	18,076	8.10%	18,071	7.88%
6th	19,720	8.76%	19,290	8.70%	18,531	8.31%	18,432	8.04%
7th	19,510	8.67%	19,686	8.88%	19,473	8.73%	18,869	8.23%
8th	18,753	8.33%	19,373	8.74%	19,577	8.78%	19,421	8.47%
9th	20,350	9.04%	20,522	9.26%	22,225	9.96%	22,314	9.73%
10th	16,178	7.19%	17,670	7.97%	17,519	7.85%	18,777	8.19%
11th	13,048	5.80%	14,148	6.38%	14,552	6.52%	14,762	6.44%
12th	13,691	6.08%	14,177	6.40%	14,732	6.61%	15,183	6.62%

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES SERVED BY GVRA

Among the total list of 12,880 potentially eligible students connected with VR during SFY 22, 39.6% applied for VR services. Among those who were considered youth with disabilities (age 14-24), 1,844 youth with disabilities had applied for VR services or were eligible for VR services, of which 69.2% (n=1,273) were determined eligible for services. In total, there were 8,069 VR clients aged 14-24 during FY 22.

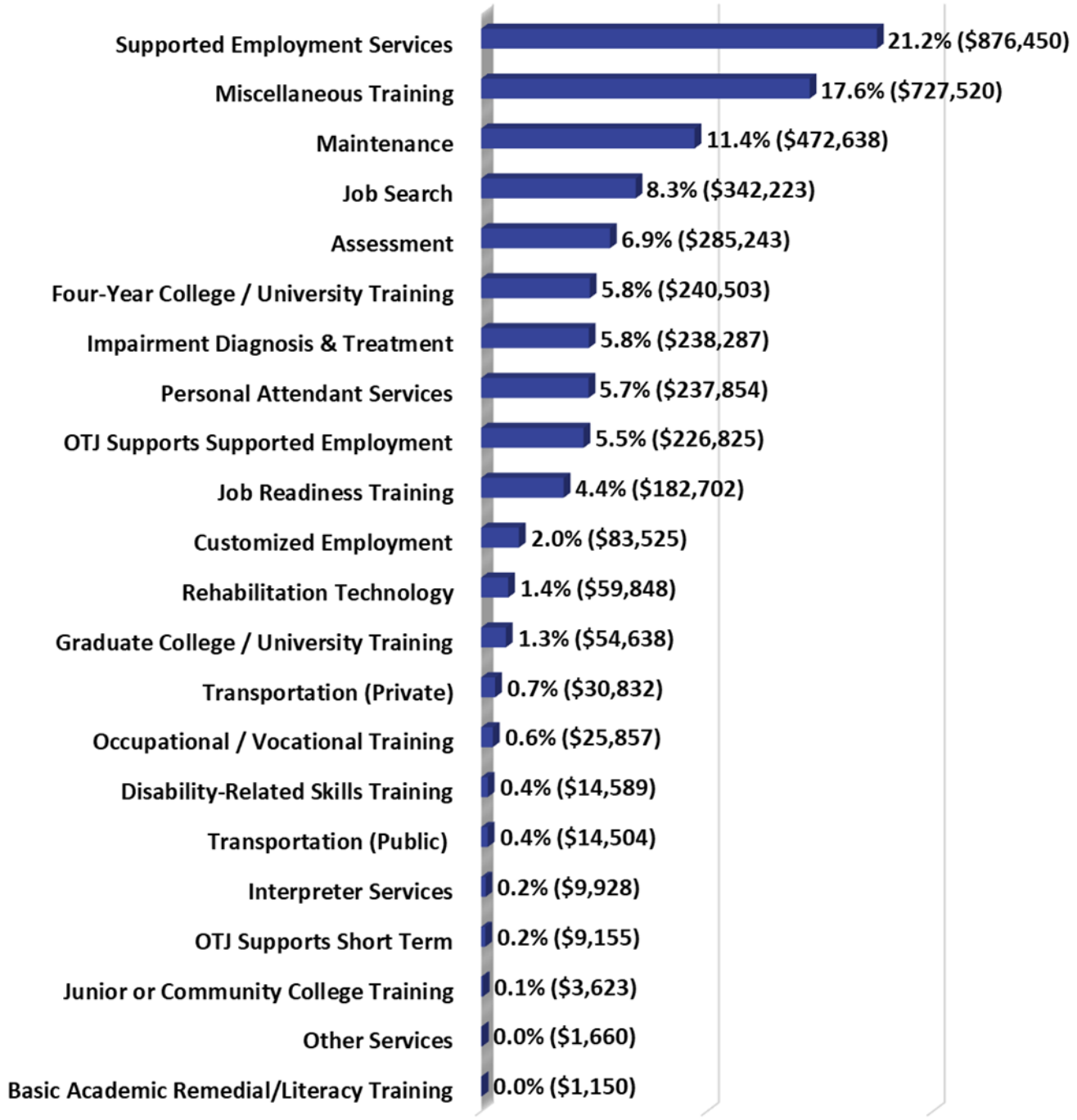
Regarding the impairments of those youth being served through the VR program, individuals are most likely to have Cognitive impairments, which include Intellectual Disability, Specific Learning Disability, and ADHD. The table below compares the prevalence of the most common disability types reported among Pre-ETS students and all transition-age VR clients.

	Pre-ETS		Youth With Disabilities	
Disability Type	**Count**	**Percent**	**Count**	**Percent**
Null	724	20.7%	222	2.8%
Blind/Low Vision Impairments	13	< 1%	219	2.7%
Cognitive Impairments	2,126	60.7%	4,703	58.3%
Communicative Impairments (expressive/receptive)	84	2.4%	320	4.0%
Deaf-Blindness	0	0%	7	< 1%
Deaf/Hard of Hearing Impairments	29	< 1%	276	3.4%
Mental Health/Psychosocial Impairments	403	11.5%	1,752	21.7%
No Disability	21	< 1%	1	< 1%
Orthopedic Impairments	44	1.3%	381	4.7%
Physical Impairments	61	1.7%	188	2.3%
TOTAL	**3,505**	-	**8,069**	-

SERVICES FROM GVRA

According to GVRA reports, 4,082 individuals received one or more services funded by VR during SFY 22, with a total spend of $11,047,803.57 on VR-eligible clients. Of this, $4,139,554 was spent on transition-aged clients (aged 14-24; excluding Pre-ETS services). Services utilized most (according to dollars spent) were Supported Employment, Miscellaneous Training, Job Search, and Maintenance.

Services Funded for Transition Aged VR Cases



PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES

As previously mentioned, and outlined by the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition,[67] VR programs are mandated to "set aside at least 15% of their federal funds to provide pre-employment transition services (Pre-ETS) to students with disabilities who are eligible or potentially eligible for VR services."

According to GVRA reports, there were 7,714 pre-ETS clients in FY 22. To determine the extent to which high school students with disabilities are accessing VR services, as intended by WIOA, the table below reflects the percentage of potentially eligible students (PES) connected with VR for each GVRA District relative to the total number of special education students in high school in those areas.

For example, among the individuals living in counties served by GVRA's District 3 (Metro Atlanta Regions), students in this District account for roughly 17% of all high school SPED students, and students served account for 13% of all PES served by VR. However, the 1,622 students receiving services in this district only account for 8% of the total number of special education high school students attending public schools in those same counties. Thus, there is a gap in the number of eligible students who need services and those who are getting them.

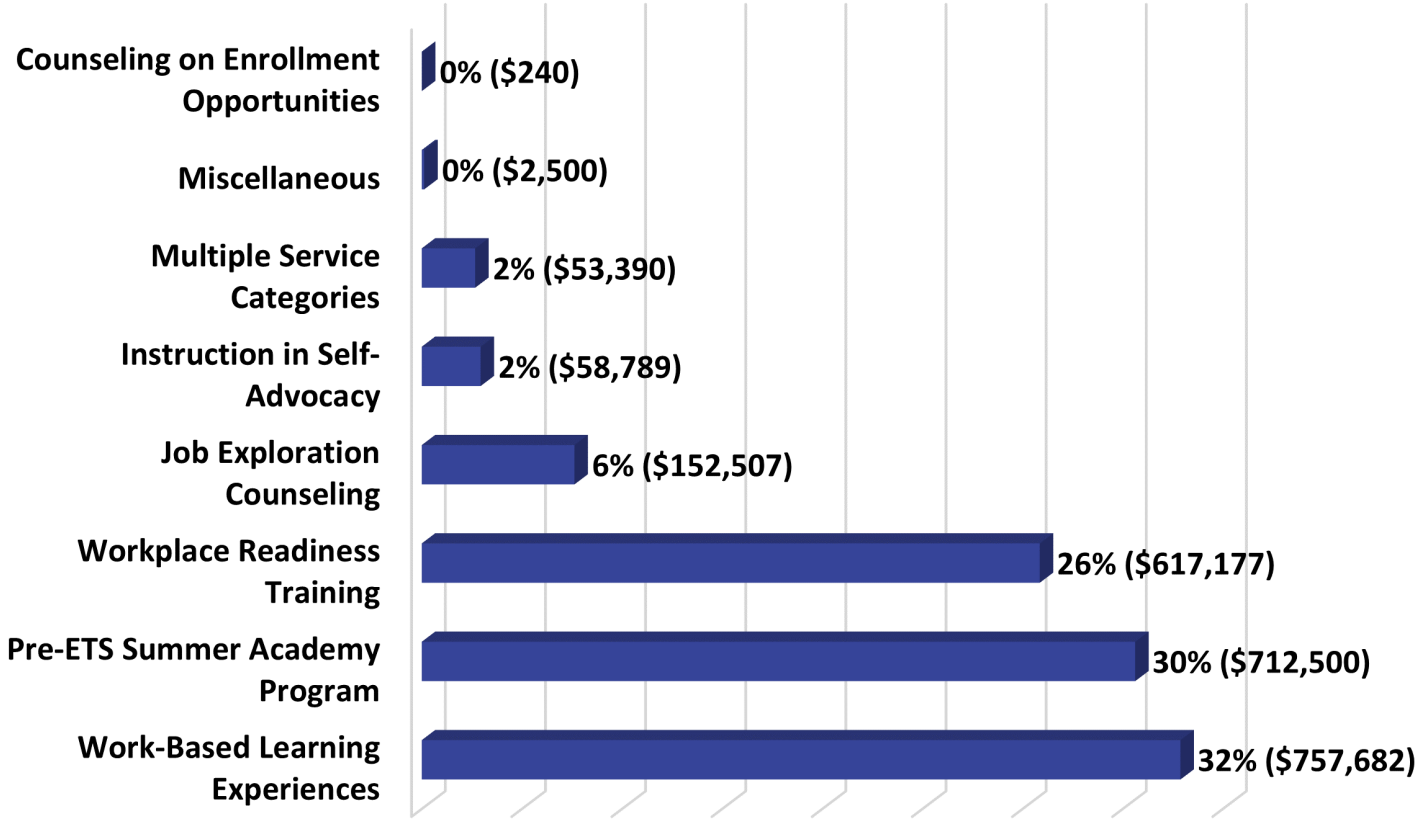
District	HS SPED Students (Grades 9-12)		PES Served by VR		Percent of PES Served of Districts' Total SPED Students
	Enrollment	Percent	Total Served	Percent	
1	7,733	12%	1,937	15%	25%
2	10,545	17%	1,818	14%	17%
3	19,457	31%	1,622	13%	8%
4	6,582	10%	1,642	13%	25%
5	5,292	8%	1,678	13%	32%
6	5,507	9%	1,830	14%	33%
7	3,363	5%	1,116	9%	33%
8	4,944	8%	1,237	10%	25%

In terms of Pre-ETS services, 3,867 students received at least one paid service, and 2,342 received at least one in-house service. In SFY 22, there were a total of 7,714 Pre-ETS clients. The most utilized Pre-ETS services included: Workplace readiness Training, Job exploration counseling, and Work-based learning experiences. The total amount allocated to pre-ETS services provided by GVRA was $2,354,785. According to WIOA legislation, "Pre-Employment Transition Services" consist of five (5) required activities:[68]

- **Job exploration:** Activities that help students identify viable career options or solidify careers that a student may want to explore further. Of those who received Pre-ETS services during FY 22, 40 percent participated in job exploration counseling (n=1,544).
- **Work-based Learning:** Using the workplace or real work to provide students with the knowledge and skills that will help them connect school experiences to real-life work activities and future career opportunities. Of those who received Pre-ETS services during FY 22, 27% participated in work-based learning experiences, which was one of the most frequently utilized services for Pre-ETS students (n=1058).

- **Counseling on Post-Secondary Education Options:** Increasing understanding of options that are available for higher education, including comprehensive transition programs, along with the requirements for attending, skills needed for success, available accommodations, and financial aid. Only 4 students with disabilities received these services.
- **Work Readiness Training:** Training to develop social/interpersonal skills, soft skills, independent living skills, and employability/job readiness skills, all of which are commonly expected in the world of work. Of those who received Pre-ETS services during FY 22, 68% received job readiness training, which was the most utilized service provided (n=2,639).
- **Instruction on Self-Advocacy:** Instruction for developing student's ability to effectively communicate needs, interests, and desires so that they can, direct their own lives, pursue the things that are important to them and experience the same life opportunities as other people in their communities. Of those who received Pre-ETS services during FY 22, 11% received self-advocacy-related personal social adjustment training services (n=414). GVRA discontinued personal social adjustment training at the end of FY 21.

Amount of Funding Allocated to GVRA Pre-ETS Services



TRANSITION OUTCOMES AMONG DIVERSE POPULATIONS

As of 2022, 16.3% of Georgia's youth lived in poverty, which is higher than the national average (16%). Further, nearly half a million K-12 students attending Georgia public schools are in or from rural areas, with 33% of all Georgia public schools being rural. According to a report from the Rural School and Community Trust, Georgian students in rural areas are more likely to also be racially diverse and economically disadvantaged, contributing to deeper inequities in terms of long-term educational and life outcomes.[69] As of 2023,[70] the 4-year graduation rate amongst students with a disability in Georgia was 73.2%, significantly below the graduation rate for all students in Georgia (84.4%).

DIPLOMAS AWARDED BY TYPE

The table below shows the total number of diplomas awarded to Special Education Students by diploma type across the previous three school years. The overwhelming number of diplomas awarded were General High School diplomas, followed by Special Education diplomas and Certificates of Attendance. There has also been a rising trend in the number of diplomas awarded each year, with almost a 30 percent increase in the total number of diplomas awarded.

Total Number of Diplomas by Type			
Diploma Type	**2020**	**2021**	**2022**
Certificate of Attendance	23	30	28
General High School Diploma	8,967	10,880	11,894
Special Education High School Diploma	338	250	188
Total	**9,328**	**11,160**	**12,110**

DIPLOMAS AWARDED BY RACE/ETHNICITY

The table below lists the total diplomas awarded by race to SPED students across the previous three school years. The group with the highest representation is Black students, followed by White and Hispanic students.

Total Diplomas by Race/Ethnicity						
Race/Ethnicity	**2020**	**2021**	**2022**	**% of Total (2020)**	**% of Total (2021)**	**% of Total (2022)**
Hispanic	1,044	1,515	1,794	11.19%	13.58%	14.81%
American Indian	20	19	30	0.21%	0.17%	0.25%
Asian	88	159	217	0.94%	1.42%	1.79%
Black	4,099	4,897	5,081	43.94%	43.88%	41.96%
Pacific Islander	8	10	7	0.09%	0.09%	0.06%
White	3,780	4,207	4,603	40.52%	37.70%	38.01%
Two or More Races	289	353	378	3.10%	3.16%	3.12%
Total	**9,328**	**11,160**	**12,110**	-	-	-

SPED WITHDRAWALS

During the 2021-22 school year, there were a total of 9,305 withdrawals by students in the special education program across all Georgia schools. While the overwhelming majority of reasons for withdrawal are unknown (77%), the next most common reason is removal for lack of attendance (17%).

# Overall Withdrawals		
2020	**2021**	**2022**
7,178	9,733	9,278

Withdrawal Reason						
	2020		**2021**		**2022**	
	#	**%**	**#**	**%**	**#**	**%**
Marriage	0	0.00%	1	0.01%	0	0.00%
Expelled	28	0.39%	35	0.36%	54	0.58%
Financial Hardship/Job	19	0.26%	31	0.32%	22	0.24%
Incarcerated	63	0.88%	74	0.76%	84	0.90%
Low Grades/School Failure	7	0.10%	18	0.18%	11	0.12%
Military	0	0.00%	2	0.02%	0	0.00%
Adult Ed/Post-Secondary	310	4.31%	404	4.14%	400	4.30%
Pregnant/Parent	18	0.25%	16	0.16%	18	0.19%
Removed for Lack of Attendance	811	11.27%	1,731	17.75%	1,558	16.74%
Serious Illness/Accident	30	0.42%	31	0.32%	35	0.38%
Unknown	5,910	82.13%	7,410	75.98%	7,123	76.55%
Total	**7,196**	-	**9,753**	-	**9,305**	-

INCLUSIVE POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION (IPSE) IN GEORGIA

Since 2010, the US Department of Education has funded the National Coordinating Center for Transition Postsecondary Programs for Students with Intellectual Disabilities (Think College) along with 318 postsecondary education programs[71] throughout the US, to create or expand inclusive postsecondary programs for students with intellectual disabilities. As of March 2023, these programs have served nearly 5,000 students in 34 states. Amongst 2020 grantees, 494 students had already been served by TPSID programs by 2022.[72] Between 2010 and 2023, 7 of Georgia's 9 IPSE programs have been TPSID grantees.

According to Think College, approximately 28% of the students nationally received state31 vocational rehabilitation services while participating in their IPSE program during the 2020-2021 academic year.[73] Services most frequently consisted of benefits counseling, self-advocacy instruction, job coaching, and work-based learning. Additionally, 82% (n=18) of the TPSID grantees reported having a partnership with their state VR agency to provide Pre-ETS services as defined in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act.

ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN

Georgia currently has nine IPSE programs.[71] In Fall 2021, there were 136 students enrolled in an inclusive college program. Nearly half of all 2021 IPSE graduates were employed.

DEPARTMENT OF JUVENILE JUSTICE SCHOOL SYSTEM

Through Georgia's Department of Juvenile Justice school system, youths who are serving short- and long-term detentions attend classes at one of 29 Georgia Preparatory Campus' across the state, which are located in Regional Detention Centers, Youth Developmental Campuses, and Education Transition Centers. According to GDOE enrollment data, 290 youth offenders received special education services during the 22-23 school year.

# SPED Students Department of Juvenile Justice			
2020	**2021**	**2022**	**2023**
336	230	293	290

EMPLOYMENT OUTLOOK

As of December 2022,[74] the unemployment rate for individuals with disabilities aged 16-64 was 5.4%, a drastic drop from 10.8% in 2021. According to data collected by US DOL's Bureau of Labor Statistics,[75] the factor related to the lowest employment ratio among individuals with disabilities is the lack of a high school diploma (or equivalent).

EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES AMONG VR'S TRANSITION AGE YOUTH

VR clients under the age of 25 account for 37% (n=455) of all VR cases closed successfully in employment during FY 22. GVRA reports indicated that at the time their VR case was successfully closed, they worked an average of 28 hours per week and earned an average of $12 per hour. The top 3 occupational job groups were: Office and Administrative Support Occupations (n=123), Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations (n=84), and Transportation and Material Moving Occupations (n=42).

GEORGIA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM

The Technical College System of Georgia's (TCSG) Office Workforce Development (OWD) is the administrator of WorkSource Georgia, the state's WIOA Title I Adult, Youth, and Dislocated Worker programs, which are regulated by the U.S. Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration unit.

The focus of WIOA's Title I programs includes 1) providing job training and career services to unemployed or underemployed low-income individuals, 2) meeting the workforce needs of businesses in high-demand industries, and 3) facilitating access to the American Job Centers in each state.

WIOA Title I youth services focus on assisting out-of-school youth and in-school youth with one or more barriers to employment with preparing for post-secondary education or employment, attaining the educational and/or skills training credentials needed for specific industries, and securing employment. To be eligible for WIOA Youth Services, out-of-school youth must be between the ages of 16 and 24, not attending school, and have one or more barriers to employment. In-school youth must be between the ages of 14 and 21, attend school, have a low income, and have one or more barriers to employment, which include having a disability.

The majority of the Title I funds are allocated by the OWD to 19 local workforce development areas (LWDA) for the provision of services that are tailored to the specific workforce and labor needs of that area. Additionally, WIOA requires local areas to spend at least 75 percent of WIOA Youth program funds on the out-of-school population, and at least 20% must be spent on providing work experience opportunities.

Under WIOA legislation, WorkSource Georgia has served 49,235 individuals.[76] The following tables indicate how many individuals with disabilities were served under Worksource Georgia's WIOA Title I Programs. The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) program year (PY) is defined as July to June, with the identifying year being that of the first six months (that is, the opposite of Georgia's state fiscal year which is identified by the year of the last six months). **Therefore, PY19 is July 2019 to June 2020, PY20 is July 2020 to June 2021, and PY21 is July 2021 to June 2022.**

TOTAL PARTICIPANTS SERVED BY YEAR

The table below details the total number of individuals served by program year through all Worksource Georgia WIOA Title I Programs. In terms of participants served, there has been a decreasing trend across the past three years. However, for reportable individuals, there was a 28.8% increase from PY20 to PY21.

	PY19	PY20	PY21
Participants Served	19,112	14,692	11,823
Reportable Individuals	787	1,267	1,632
Total	**19,899**	**15,959**	**13,455**

TOTAL PARTICIPANTS SERVED BY GENDER

The table below shows the total number of participants served by Title I programs by gender over the past three years. The majority of those served were female.

	PY19	PY20	PY21	Total
Female	11,600	8,919	7,257	**27,776**
Male	7,461	5,734	4,539	**17,734**
Total	**19,061**	**14,653**	**11,796**	-

TOTAL PARTICIPANTS SERVED BY RACE/ETHNICITY

The table below indicates the total number of participants served by race and ethnicity. Across the three most recent fiscal years, over half of all participants served were Black or African American (56%), followed by White (32%) and Hispanic/Latino (6.22%).

	PY19	PY20	PY21	Total (n=48,693)
Hispanic / Latino	1,236	1,004	791	**3,031**
American Indian or Alaskan Native	226	174	135	**535**
Asian	318	257	215	**790**
Black or African American	11,348	8,777	7,266	**27,391**
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	68	53	46	**167**
White	6,684	5,034	3,885	**15,603**
More Than One Race	481	374	321	**1176**
Total	**20,361**	**15,673**	**12,659**	-

PARTICIPANTS SERVED BY PROGRAM

The table below shows the total number of participants served by the Title I program over the past three years. The majority of those served were in the Adult program, followed by Youth and Dislocated Worker programs.

	PY19	PY20	PY21	Total
Adult	10,281	7,383	5,917	**23,581**
Dislocated Worker	2,232	1,947	1,548	**5,727**
Youth	6,599	5,362	4,358	**16,319**
Total	**19,112**	**14,692**	**11,823**	-

REPORTABLE INDIVIDUALS

The table below shows the total number of participants who were reportable individuals served by the Title I program over the past three years. The majority of those served were in the Adult program, followed by Dislocated Worker and Youth programs.

	PY19	PY20	PY21	Total
Adult	506	732	1,229	**2,467**
Dislocated Worker	197	489	317	**1,003**
Youth	84	46	86	**216**
Total	**787**	**1,267**	**1,632**	-

ADULT PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS SERVED BY TYPE OF SERVICE

Training programs funded by Workforce Development are those that consist of "courses or classes, or structured regimen that leads to a recognized Post-Secondary credential, secondary school diploma or its equivalent, employment, or measurable skill gains toward such a credential or employment."[77] Furthermore, training is available from eligible providers and for training programs that are prioritized by each of the 19 Local Workforce Area Boards.

Training can include occupational skill development, OJT, apprenticeships, adult education, or entrepreneurial training to name a few. Career Services can include such things as assessments of skills and service needs of eligible program participants, career planning assistance, work preparation activities, resume development, and internships or work experiences.

The table below shows the total number of adult program participants by type of service across the most recent fiscal years. The majority of participants were served through training services, followed by being enrolled in multiple core programs, and career services.

	PY19	PY20	PY21	Total
Training Service	9,072	6,642	5,241	**20,955**
Career Services	1,209	741	676	**2,626**
Enrolled in More than One Core Program	2,870	1,752	2,272	**6,894**
Total	**13,151**	**9,135**	**8,189**	-

YOUTH PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS SERVED BY TYPE OF SERVICE

Examples of Youth services under the WIOA Title I WFD program can include paid and unpaid work experiences, basic education skills training, tutoring, mentoring opportunities, GED services, and career exploration services. Occupational skills training is limited to youth ages 18-24. The table below shows the total number of youth program participants by type of service across the most recent fiscal years. The majority of participants were served through enrollment in multiple core programs.

	PY19	PY20	PY21	Total
Training Service	1,098	937	816	**2,851**
Enrolled in More than One Core Program	1,822	716	1142	**3,680**
Total	**2,920**	**1,653**	**1,958**	-

TOTAL PARTICIPANTS SERVED WHO SELF-IDENTIFY AS HAVING A DISABILITY

The table below shows the number of Worksource Georgia participants who self-identified as having a disability. Recent numbers in self-identification indicate a decrease in the number of individuals being served.

	PY19	PY20	PY21
Self-Identifying as Disabled	840	636	566

ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN

Although both the Title I Workforce Development program and the state Vocational Rehabilitation program provide training and career services to individuals, there are differences between the two core WIOA programs. Although the specific services may vary among the local workforce area, there is limited flexibility regarding the type of services, as well as the parameters for providing them. VR services, on the other hand, are individualized according to the unique needs of the consumer. Training opportunities available through the Local Workforce Regions are based on the labor market and employer needs within those specific areas. In contrast, training and other services provided by VR are based on the individual's stated employment goal. Lastly, a successful employment outcome for Workforce is counted on day one of a person's employment. VR clients must work a minimum of 90 days prior to the case closing successfully.

COLLABORATION WITH VR

Although the Office of Workforce Development is responsible for the overall program delivery of Title I WIOA services within Georgia, the local workforce areas do all the planning and coordination of services for their specific regions, which includes contracts with community providers for service delivery and/or MOUs with partnering agencies and organizations.

A focus of WIOA is the alignment of core employment programs in each state. As a result, Georgia's Local Workforce Areas and GVRA's VR Program Service Areas are more aligned with respect to counties served. However, due to LWDA having more local control over service delivery, the level of collaboration with VR varies significantly across the state.

COMMUNITY REHABILITATION PROGRAMS

The Rehabilitation Act, as amended, defines a Community Rehabilitation program as one that "provides directly or facilitates the provision of one or more vocational rehabilitation services to individuals with disabilities to enable those individuals to maximize their opportunities for employment, including career advancement."

COMMUNITY SERVICE PROVIDERS IN GEORGIA

GVRA utilizes community service providers for the direct provision of specific vocational rehabilitation services to individuals with disabilities. These providers can be community rehabilitation programs, self-employed vendors, or other organizations; all of whom must meet the minimal provider standards and qualifications set forth by GVRA; as well as have a service agreement or contract in place for the specific services they are intending to provide. The provider management process is completed at the VR Program state office level utilizing field staff assigned to the relevant geographic area when needed.

Accessing VR services is reliant on the assigned Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor or other Rehabilitation Professional to first identify the need for the service, determine the availability of service providers, complete the referral process, and then authorize payment for the service(s). Similarly, services funded by the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities are obtained through approved providers that have met specific accreditation and qualification standards set forth by DBHDD, which are often based on Center for Medicaid Services (CMS) criteria. The provision of these services is administered through field offices located in each of DBHDD's six (6) regions, which are the first point of contact for consumers.

Additionally, core services funded by either the state DD program or Behavioral Health program, are primarily provided by Community Service Boards (CSBs) organizations located in each of DBHDD's regions, or by a contracted provider. Community service providers for GVRA, DBHDD including their CSBs, as well as providers contracted with the Area Aging Agencies and the Local Workforce Development Area, often have contracts or service agreements with multiple applicable agencies; however, there is minimal public information available for consumers to access regarding which entities the providers are contracted with, the specific program requirements related to employment, provider performance, service area, the expertise of provider staff, or the steps a consumer has to take in order to receive quality services.

As of FY 22, there were 229 VR service providers with either an agreement to provide one or more employment-related services, a supported employment agreement, or one of the 37 contracted community rehab programs. The contracted "CRPs" vary in size and geographic location and have the option of delivering a full range of employment services that are listed in their contract.

EMPLOYMENT SERVICES PROVIDED BY CRPS

Contracted CRPs are currently the only providers who can provide job placement services, excluding supported employment. As a result, providers with service agreements tend to focus on "work readiness" types of services.

According to the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF), there are 135 individual community programs[78] accredited in Georgia that provide community employment support services, the majority of whom have an affiliated or parent company in which then are housed.

Over the past 11 years, DBHDD and GVRA have made concerted efforts to encourage supported employment providers to be duly approved by both agencies so individuals could get long-term support following their successful transition from VR services. As a result of these efforts, 20% of VR clients who received SE services did so through a DBHDD CSB organization (n=274).

During FY 22, there were a total of 205 employment service providers who were funded to assist VR clients throughout the state, many of whom were among the 48 with service agreements to provide Pre-Employment Transition Services to students with disabilities.

CSB	Supported Employment Model		
	Customized	IPS	Traditional
Advantage Behavioral Health Systems		95	2
Avita Community Partners		8	
Behavioral Health Services of South Georgia		8	1
Cobb CSB		6	1
Community Service Board of East Central GA (Serenity)		10	1
Dekalb CSB		2	1
Douglas County CSB		4	3
Gateway Behavioral Health Services		34	
Highland Rivers CSB		33	
Lookout Mountain CSB	5	1	6
McIntosh Trail CSB		2	1
New Horizons CSB		4	
Pathways Center for Behavioral and Developmental Growth		1	
River Edge CSB		36	4
Viewpoint Health		4	1
Total	**5**	**248**	**21**

FACILITY-BASED SERVICES

The Department of Justice issued an integration mandate in June 2011 regarding the enforcement of Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act and Olmstead v. L.C. and the expectation that states would develop a plan to address moving individuals who "spend their days in sheltered workshops or segregated day programs" to "integrated settings," which they defined as those located in "mainstream society" where they could "interact with non-disabled persons to the fullest extent possible."

In 2014, The Center for Medicaid Services (CMS) issued new regulations for Home and Community-Based Waiver Services (HCBS), known as the "Settings Rule," which requires states to provide services in "integrated settings and in the most community-inclusive manner." All HCBS providers must be "certified" as complying by 2022.

- According to data from DBHDD and the Georgia Collaborative ASO,[79] the total number of individuals receiving community-based mental health services statewide during SFY 22 was 117,153. Of those, 12.9% participated in Psychosocial Rehabilitation Services, which is provided in a group setting (n=15,109).
- The last time Community Work Adjustment Training (CWAT) was authorized as an in-house service by GVRA was SFY 21, with the internal codes being deactivated in April 2022. Among youth with disabilities, CWAT accounted for 2.24% of all funded services.

SUBMINIMUM WAGE CERTIFICATE HOLDERS

According to April 2024 data released by the Department of Labor,[80] nationally, 39,369 workers were being paid sub-minimum wages through a 14(c) certificate holder, which is an 11% decrease from July 2023 and a 64% decrease from 2018. Of those earning subminimum wages nationally, 37,732 individuals did so through a certified community rehabilitation program (CRP). As of April 2024, there were 810 active 14(c) certificate holders in the United States.

Since August 2019, the number of active 14c certificate holders in Georgia has steadily decreased from 33 certificate holders paying 1500 Georgians with disabilities subminimum wages to 8 active certificate holders employing 245 Georgians with disabilities in April 2024.

CRP SERVICES FOR SENSORY POPULATION

Based on the information provided by GVRA, the table below depicts VR providers utilized by impairment. In total, 82 providers were utilized by those with visual and hearing-related disabilities, of which 14 were private community rehabilitation programs.

Disability Impairment	Other Private Service Provider	Other Public Service Provider	Private Community Rehabilitation Program	Grand Total
Grand Total	**59**	**9**	**14**	**82**
Blindness	34	8	11	**53**
Deaf-Blindness	2	1	1	**4**
Deafness, Primary Communication Auditory	7	1	1	**9**
Deafness, Primary Communication Visual	17		4	**21**
Hearing Loss, Primary Communication Auditory	7	1	2	**10**
Hearing Loss, Primary Communication Visual	2	1	1	**4**
Other Hearing Disabilities	2		1	**3**
Other Visual Disabilities	13	1	7	**21**
Other visual impairments	18	3	7	**28**

BACKGROUND OF GVRA

The Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency (GVRA) operates five interdependent and integrated statutory programs that have the shared purpose of assisting individuals with disabilities to achieve independence and meaningful employment. This includes:

- **Business Enterprise Program (BEP)**, which supports individuals who are Blind or have a significant visual impairment and are interested in owning and operating vending businesses (authorized by the Randolph-Shepperd Act).
- **Georgia Industries for the Blind (GIB)**, a program that supports the employment of individuals who are Blind in jobs manufacturing facilities in Bainbridge, and Griffin. They also have a service site at Robins Air Force Base in Warner Robins.
- **Disability Adjudication Services (DAS)**, a state agency responsible for developing medical evidence and making the initial determination on disability claims filed with the Social Security Administration.
- **Roosevelt Warm Springs (RWS) and Cave Springs Center (CSC)** Residential programs, which provide opportunities for young adults with disabilities to gain independent living skills and job skills.
- **Vocational Rehabilitation Program (VR)**, which is the largest of the programs under the GVRA umbrella, provides services authorized by the Rehab Act of 1973, as amended by Title IV of WIOA.

Additionally, located under GVRA is the state's 14-person Employment First Council, which was created when Georgia's Employment First Act was signed into law in May 2018.

VR PROGRAM

The state VR program is 83.4% federally funded ($81,986,655; often referred to as 110 dollars), and 16.6% state funded ($16,358,383). States must receive and spend the full state match before being able to "draw down" or access the full federal amount. For many years, Georgia has had to "turn back" millions of federal dollars because of not receiving enough state dollars. Authorized funds awarded to Georgia for the most recently completed fiscal year are outlined in the table below.

Program	FY 2022
VR State Grant	$80,000,000
Older Blind Independent Living Grant	$881,018
Supported Employment Grant	$1,105,637

VR COUNSELORS

GVRA relies on counselors as the primary staff for serving VR-eligible clients and getting them set up with services. Given the major economic and employment shifts brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, available data was collected on the state of VR counselors' employment across recent fiscal years.

TURNOVER

Given the demanding nature of a counselor role, GVRA historically has faced high turnover rates.[81] The table below depicts the turnover rate over the past 6 complete fiscal years. As a result of increasing salaries each year from FY 2020, minor improvements in counselor retention are noticeable (3-point turnover rate drop from FY 2021 to FY 2022).

VR Counselor Turnover Rate					
FY 2017	**FY 2018**	**FY 2019**	**FY 2020**	**FY 2021**	**FY 2022**
19%	11%	5%	16%	16%	13%

SALARY

The table below depicts the average salary of GVRA VR Counselors across the most recent fiscal years.[81] As mentioned in the previous section on turnover, salary increases for current and entering counselors have been a concerted effort amongst GVRA in recent years. There has been a significant increase in the salary paid to counselors, with nearly a $15,000 pay difference for established counselors between FY 2020 and FY 2022. GVRA hopes to improve retention and recruitment of counselors as a result.

Counselor Salaries		
FY 2020	**FY 2021**	**FY 2022**
$35,682	$40,728	$49,510*

*Includes Cost of Living Adjustment

GVRA'S PRIORITY CATEGORIES FOR ORDER OF SELECTION

Additionally, GVRA, along with many other states, operates under an Order of Selection system, which is the second step in qualifying individuals for VR services. Once determined eligible, consumers are then assigned to priority categories that prioritize those with the most significant disabilities and service needs.

Priority Category 1	Priority Category 2	Priority Category 3
Individuals with the most significant disabilities	Individuals with significant disabilities	Individuals with disabilities
Limitations in 3 or more functional capacity areas and requires multiple VR services over an extended period of time.	Limitations in 1 or more functional capacity areas and requires multiple VR services over an extended period of time.	All remaining eligible individuals

VR PROGRAM DISTRICTS

Georgia's 159 counties are divided by GVRA into service districts, which are numbered 1 through 8. The table below details which counties are in each district.[82]

GVRA District	Counties Served
District 1	Dade, Catoosa, Whitfield, Murray, Gilmer, Fannin, Walker, Chattooga, Gordon, Pickens, Dawson, Floyd, Bartow, Cherokee, Polk, Paulding, Haralson
District 2	Cobb, Douglas, Carroll, (South) Fulton, Heard, Coweta, Fayette, Spalding, Butts, Pike, Lamar, Upson
District 3	Forsyth, (North) Fulton, Gwinnett, DeKalb, Clayton, Rockdale, and Henry
District 4	Union, Towns, Rabun, Lumpkin, White, Habersham, Stephens, Hall, Banks, Franklin, Hart, Barrow, Jackson, Madison, Elbert, Clarke, Walton, Oconee, Oglethorpe, Newton, Morgan, and Greene
District 5	Troup, Meriwether, Monroe, Harris, Talbot, Taylor, Crawford, Bibb, Twiggs, Peach, Houston, Macon, Schley, Marion, Chattahoochee, Muscogee, Stewart, Webster, Sumter, Dooly, Crisp, Pulaski, Wilcox, Quitman, Randolph, Clay
District 6	Jasper, Putnam, Taliaferro, Wilkes, Lincoln, Hancock, Warren, McDuffie, Columbia, Glascock, Baldwin, Jones, Wilkinson, Washington, Jefferson, Richmond, Burke, Bleckley, Dodge, Laurens, Johnson, Emanuel, Treutlen, Jenkins, Screven, Candler, Bulloch, Effingham
District 7	Early, Miller, Seminole, Decatur, Terrell, Calhoun, Baker, Mitchell, Grady, Dougherty, Lee, Worth, Colquitt, Thomas, Brooks, Cook, Tift, Turner, Ben Hill, Irwin, Berrien, Lanier, Lowndes, Echols, Coffee
District 8	Telfair, Wheeler, Montgomery, Toombs, Tattnall, Evans, Liberty, Bryan, Chatham, Long, Wayne, Appling, Jeff Davis, Bacon, Pierce, McIntosh, Brantley, Glynn, Ware, Atkinson, Clinch, Charlton, Camden

Please note: Fulton County is split across two service districts. South Fulton is served by District 2, and North Fulton is served by District 3 (includes Metro Atlanta).

GVRA PERFORMANCE

The following is a snapshot of GVRA's performance in providing vocational rehabilitation services and Pre-ETS services throughout the state, utilizing reports received from GVRA for State Fiscal Year 22 (SFY; July 1, 2021, through June 30, 2022). The data contained in the reports provided were based on information collected from VR's Case-Management System; therefore, care should be taken when interpreting the information due to possible data entry errors.

VR SERVICES (EXCLUDING PRE-ETS)

During SFY 22, statewide:

- 3,550 new VR applications were taken for individuals
- 2,934 individuals were determined eligible for VR services
- 1,218 VR cases were closed successfully "in employment"
- 5,869 VR cases were closed citing "other" reasons

As of June 30, 2022, statewide:

- 7,332 individuals were in the "In Service" status, meaning they were actively receiving planned services or somewhere along the continuum of service provision.
- 1,514 individuals had obtained employment and were being followed for at least 90 days before the case could be successfully closed.

The following table reflects the number of VR clients per GVRA District in comparison to the estimated population for each of the counties assigned to the district. District 3, which serves the Metro Atlanta area, had the highest number of clients compared to the other districts. However, it should be noted that Fulton County alone accounts for 10% of both all VR clients and the total state population (split between Districts 2 and 3). VR client prevalence by district is consistent with the state's population for those counties.

GVRA District	# of VR Clients (n=16,645)	% VR Clients	# of Population (n=10,722,325)	% Population
District 1	2,237	13%	1,215,501	11%
District 2	2,072	12%	1,467,201	14%
District 3	3,093	19%	2,603,217	24%
District 4	2,050	12%	1,090,135	10%
District 5	1,487	9%	886,658	8%
District 6	1,856	11%	917,032	9%
District 7	1,328	8%	653,716	6%
District 8	905	5%	826,921	8%

Please note: The table excludes VR clients who had a location listed outside of Georgia, as well as those VR clients belonging to Fulton County (which is split across two service Districts).

GENDER AND AGE OF VR CLIENTS

The average age (in years) of individuals served by VR in SFY 22 was 34.9 years old and the median age was 28, which are both notably lower than the state's overall estimated median age of 37.2. Among individuals eligible for VR services in SFY 22, 57.98% were male and 41.86% were female, which is slightly different than the Georgia population estimates where female representation is higher. Despite the increased prevalence of disability among older individuals, VR clients aged 65 and older account for only 4.9% of the total number of VR clients in SFY 22.

Age Group	Count	Percent
Up to 21	1,582	9.46%
22-64	14,325	85.64%
65-74	740	4.42%
75+	80	0.48%

Gender	Count	Percent
Female	12,038	41.86%
Male	16,674	57.98%

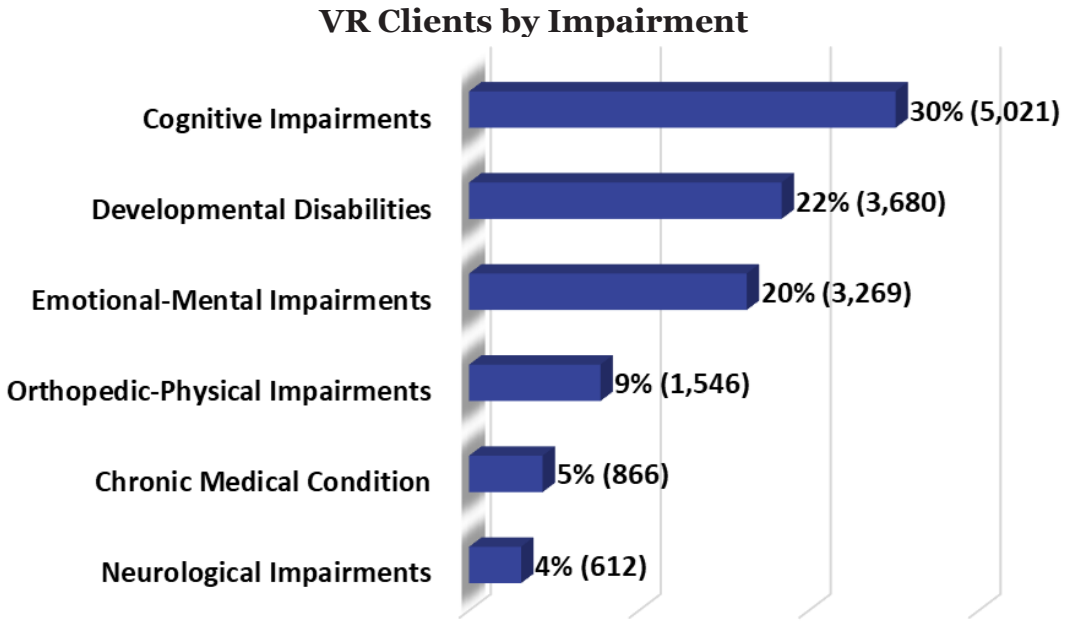
RACE AND ETHNICITY OF VR CLIENTS

As shown below, a higher percentage of VR clients identify themselves as African American or Black, which is not unexpected given the larger number of individuals being served in the Metro Atlanta area. However, the overall racial demographics of the individuals served by VR are not representative of the state's estimated population of other identity groups.

	VR Clients	% Total VR Clients	IWD GA	% Total GA IWD	GA Pop.	% GA Pop.
Black or African American	8,471	50.6%	438,353	33.4%	5,726,794	53.4%
White	7,483	44.7%	773,132	59.0%	3,296,043	30.7%
Multi-Racial	405	2.4%	65,324	5.0%	628,328	5.9%
Asian	258	1.5%	28,278	2.2%	463,204	4.3%
American Indian or Alaskan Native	43	0.3%	4,683	0.4%	36,456	0.3%
Native Hawaiian / Other Pacific Islander	27	0.2%	705	0.1%	7,506	0.1%
Prefer not to self-identify	20	0.1%	-	-	-	-
Does not wish to self-identify	18	0.1%	-	-	-	-

IMPAIRMENTS SERVED

Out of 16,727 VR cases listed, 1,733 were excluded due to lack of impairment information or had been found to not have an impairment. The graph below reflects the primary impairment that was identified for each of the remaining VR cases for which information was available. Nearly one-third of individuals served by VR had a cognitive impairment (30%); following that, the most common impairments were developmental disabilities (22%) and emotional-mental impairments (20%). Neurological impairments made up the lowest caseload.



SELECTED DISABILITY POPULATIONS

Estimates for the specific disabilities identified earlier in this report (see Prevalence of Specific Impairments) are compared below with the percentage of VR clients with the same disability listed as their primary impairment. VR clients with ID/DD, Vision impairments, and hearing impairments are served at a higher rate than the state's estimated prevalence, according to GVRA reports. Those with arthritis are served at a significantly lower rate than the state prevalence.

Disability	State Population Estimates (n=1,407,761)	% of VR Clients (n=16,727)
ID/DD	12.12%	21.5%
Vision Impairment	2.5%	6.64%
Hearing Impairment	3.2%	5.57%
Arthritis	23.7%	.80%
Diabetes	11%	1.4%
Traumatic Brain Injury	1.7%	1.14%
Serious Mental Illness*	5.9%	5.2%

*Mental illness numbers for VR clients included all mental health impairments.

SSI/SSDI RECIPIENTS

As mentioned in the section "SSI/SSDI Recipients in GA," 2,586 VR clients (15% of all VR clients) aged 18-64 indicated that they relied on public benefits (SSI, SSDI, or TANF) at application. This is significantly less than the percentage of individuals with disabilities in Georgia who receive either SSI (36%) or SSDI (34%).

Adults of Working Age with Disabilities			% VR Clients w/ Benefits
Est. Population w/ Disability	% Receiving SSI	% Receiving SSDI	
739,291	36.1%	33.7%	15%

VETERANS

As mentioned in the Veterans subsection of the report section titled, "Georgians with Disabilities who are Unserved or Underserved," approximately 3.2% of all VR clients in SFY 22 identified as veterans (n=539).

GA's Estimated Veteran Population	% Veterans w/ Disability	% VR Clients Identifying as Veterans
607,506	31%	3.2%

Additionally, veterans account for 2.3% (n=28) of all VR cases closed successfully in employment during FY 22. Trends noted among those closed successfully:

- Average weekly hours worked at closure: 33.64
- Average wage: $16.88

Top Occupational Groups:

- Accountants and Auditors
- Combined Food Preparation and Serving Workers
- Janitors and Cleaners
- Stock Clerks – Stockroom, Warehouse, or Storage Yard

ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN

As mentioned in the Veterans subsection on Georgians with Disabilities who are Unserved or Underserved (see Veterans), 70% (n=375) of the veterans receiving VR services in SFY 22 identified as being male, and 45% (n=243) had a psychosocial or cognitive impairment listed as their primary disability. The average age of veteran clients was 49 years of age, and the majority were Black/African American (53%, n=288), followed by multi-racial (25%, n=137), and White (20%, n=109).

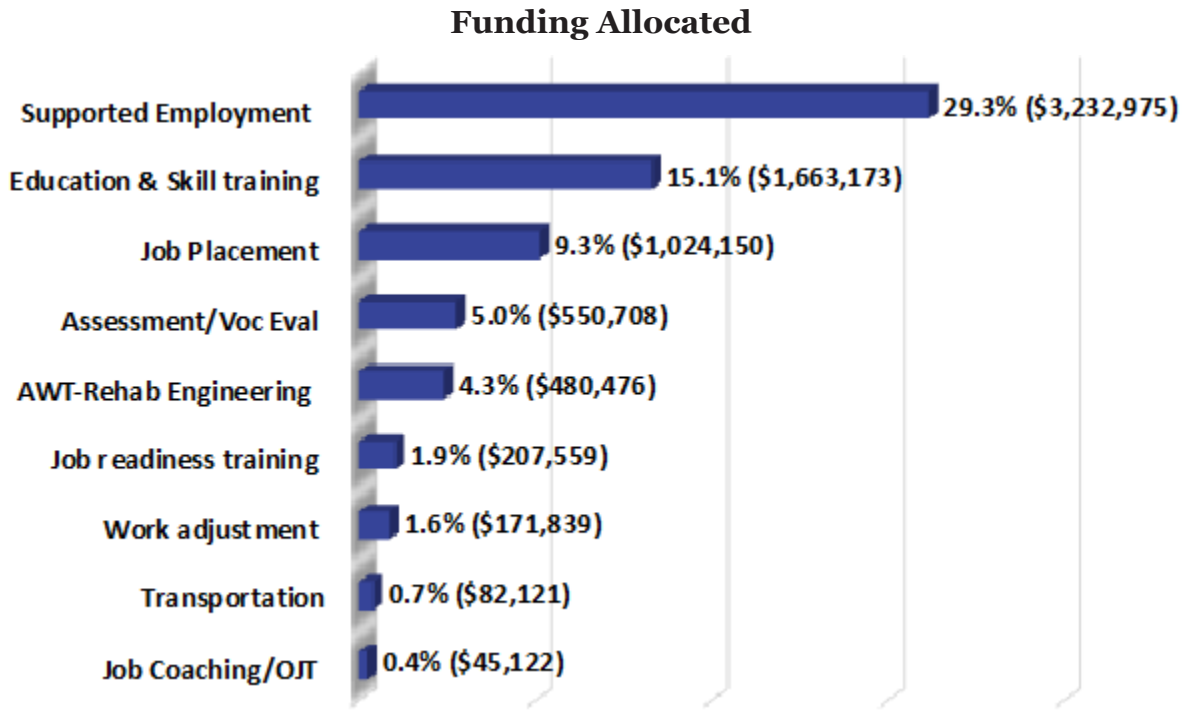
The three most common service categories amongst veterans were: Diagnosis and treatment of impairments (n=187), Assessment (n=156), and Transportation (Public; n=100). Twenty veterans received Supported Employment services through GVRA. Of the veterans whose VR case was successfully closed in employment (n=28), four (4) had received Supported Employment using the Individual Placement and Supports model, which is the evidence-based model for those with severe and persistent mental illness. Only one veteran received placement services from a local community rehabilitation program.

SERVICES RECEIVED

In FY 22, 12% of VR cases had an individualized plan for employment (n=2,008). Of all GVRA clients in FY 22, 4,082 received one or more services funded by VR. About 48% of all VR clients were "Youth with Disabilities" aged 14-24. During FY 22, $11,047,803.57 in funds were spent on services for VR-eligible clients. An additional $2,353,556 was spent on pre-employment transition services (Pre-ETS) for potentially eligible students with disabilities.

Among the total amount of services funded for VR clients, 67% was spent on services identified in the graph below. Supported employment, Education & skills training, and Job placement received the most funding. Job coaching/On-the-job training was funded the least.

Note: Funds expended may have been from multiple yearly budgets.



The table below lists the percentage of services that were funded for VR clients aged 14-24, specifically focusing on services related to facilitating transition into competitive integrated employment settings and excluding pre-ETS specific programs.

Service Category	Funding	Percent
Supported Employment Services	$876,450	21.2%
Miscellaneous Training	$727,520	17.6%
Maintenance	$472,638	11.4%
Job Search	$342,223	8.3%
Assessment	$285,243	6.9%
Four-Year College / University Training	$240,503	5.8%
Impairment Diagnosis & Treatment	$238,287	5.8%
Personal Attendant Services	$237,854	5.7%
OTJ Supports Supported Employment	$226,825	5.5%
Job Readiness Training	$182,702	4.4%
Customized Employment	$83,525	2.0%
Rehabilitation Technology	$59,848	1.4%
Graduate College / University Training	$54,638	1.3%
Transportation (Private)	$30,832	0.7%
Occupational / Vocational Training	$25,857	0.6%
Disability-Related Skills Training	$14,589	0.4%
Transportation (Public)	$14,504	0.4%
Interpreter Services	$9,928	0.2%
OTJ Supports Short Term	$9,155	0.2%
Junior or Community College Training	$3,623	0.1%
Other Services	$1,660	0.0%
Basic Academic Remedial/Literacy Training	$1,150	0.0%

VR CASE CLOSURE

Among the total VR cases closed in FY 22 (n=7,087), 17.19% were closed with a status of "rehabilitated," and the remaining cases were closed with a status of "other than rehabilitated." When compared to the estimated number of individuals with disabilities in Georgia who are working, the percentage of employed individuals following VR services is considerably less (see table below). However, the percentage of closed cases with a "rehabilitated" status has increased by nearly 3 points since the last CSNA in 2020 (14.5%).

2022 GA Population		FY 22 VR Case Closures
With Disability (n=1,407,761)	**No Disability (n=10,912,876)**	**VR Closures (n=7,087)**
Employed:	Employed:	"Rehabilitated"
44%	78%	17.19%
Not In Labor Force:	Not in Labor Force:	"Other than Rehabilitated"
52%	19%	82.83%

ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN

To gain insight into the successful closure rate among different impairment categories during FY 22, the following table shows the percentage of VR cases that were closed during FY 22 for each impairment category, as well as the percentage of the type of closure.

Impairment Category	VR Clients SFY 22 (n=16,727)	% of VR Cases	Total Closed	% Closed "Rehabilitated"	% Closed "Other"
Chronic Medical Conditions	441	3%	199	24%	76%
Cognitive Impairments	6,423	38%	2,632	18%	82%
Emotional-Mental Impairments	4,747	28%	2,075	20%	80%
Neurological Impairments	1,335	8%	535	13%	87%
Orthopedic-Physical Impairments	1,374	8%	629	15%	85%
Sensory-Communication	1,999	12%	742	16%	84%

The table below covers the average cost of case closures for potentially eligible students and VR clients for the past three fiscal years.

Year of Closure Date	Potentially Eligible Student	VR
FY 2020	$1,866	$20,291
FY 2021	$1,088	$17,150
FY 2022	$1,261	$20,894

SNAPSHOT OF VR SUCCESSFUL CASE CLOSURES (N=1,218)

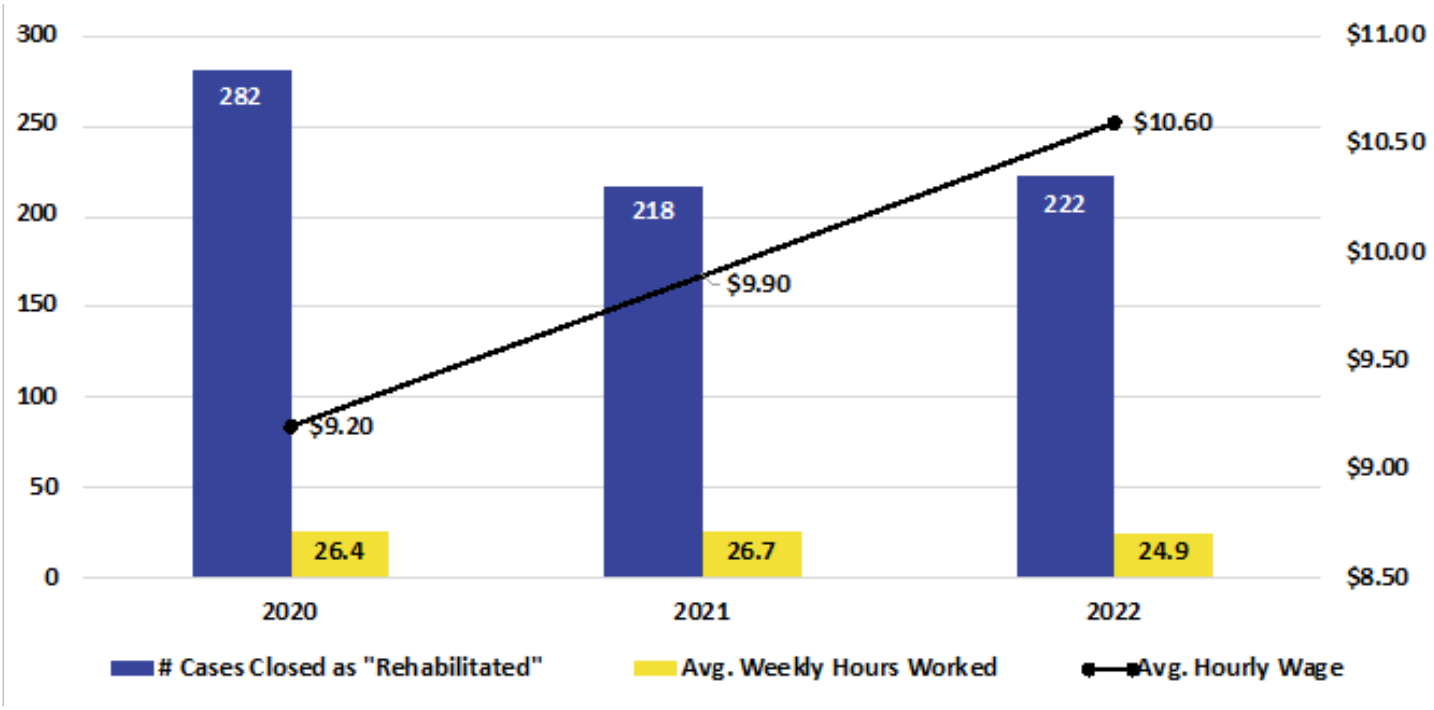
Below we detail some general trends in recent years across VR's successful case closures. For some data points, FY 22 was not reported, so insights were drawn from FY 20 and FY 21:

- **Total Cases Closed as "Rehabilitated":** Overall, we generally see that the number of case closures successfully resulting in employment has declined across the past three fiscal years (22% in FY 20 to 17% in FY 22).
- **Weekly Hours Worked:** The average number of weekly hours worked seems to be slowly remaining relatively stable across fiscal years, increasing from 29.5 in the 2020 CSNA to 30.18 in FY 21; however, there was a decrease to 29.83 in FY 22.
- **Average Hourly Wage:** Across the past three fiscal years, the average hourly wage has remained mostly consistent at around $13, with a slight increase in FY 21 to $13.59.

Metric	FY 20	FY 21	FY 22
% Cases Closed as "Rehabilitated"	22%	18%	17%
Avg. Weekly Hours Worked	30	30.18	29.83
Avg. Hourly Wage	$13	$13.59	$13

The graph below depicts the number of cases closed, average weekly hours, and average hourly wage for VR clients with an intellectual/developmental disability.

Snapshot of Closures for VR Clients with ID/DD

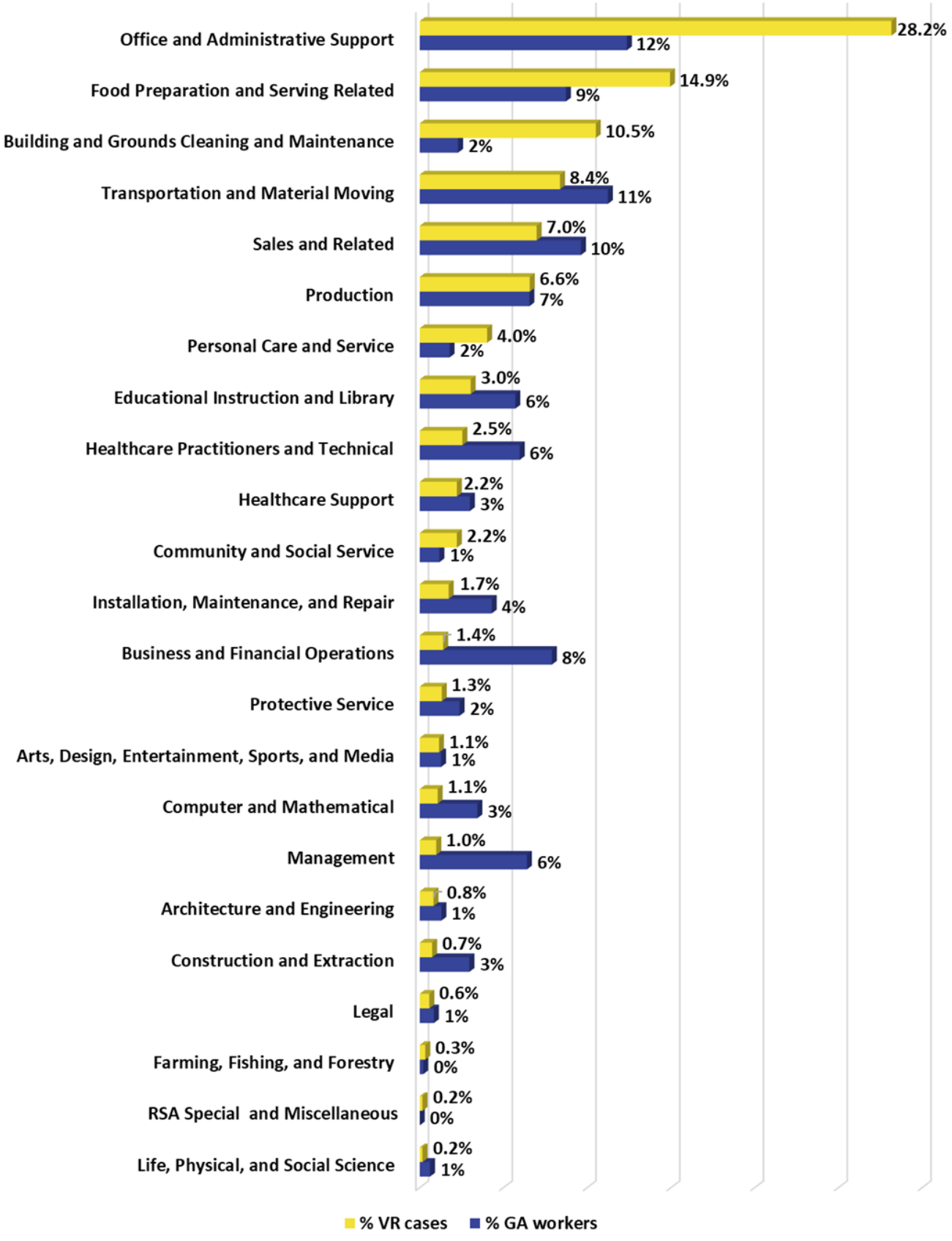


OCCUPATIONS AT VR CASE CLOSURE COMPARED TO GA EMPLOYMENT NUMBERS

The US Department of Labor[83] estimated that the number of employed persons in Georgia as of March 2023 was 4,757,900. Of those, the top major occupational group was "Office and Administrative Support Occupations," followed by jobs in Transportation and Material Moving.

Similarly, across successfully closed GVRA cases, the most common occupation for placement was Office and Administrative Support occupations; however, the next most common was Food Preparation and Serving Related occupations (4th top occupational group for all working Georgians). The chart on the next page compares the distribution of all Georgian workers by occupation with VR case closures by occupation.

Closures by Occupation



PRE-ETS

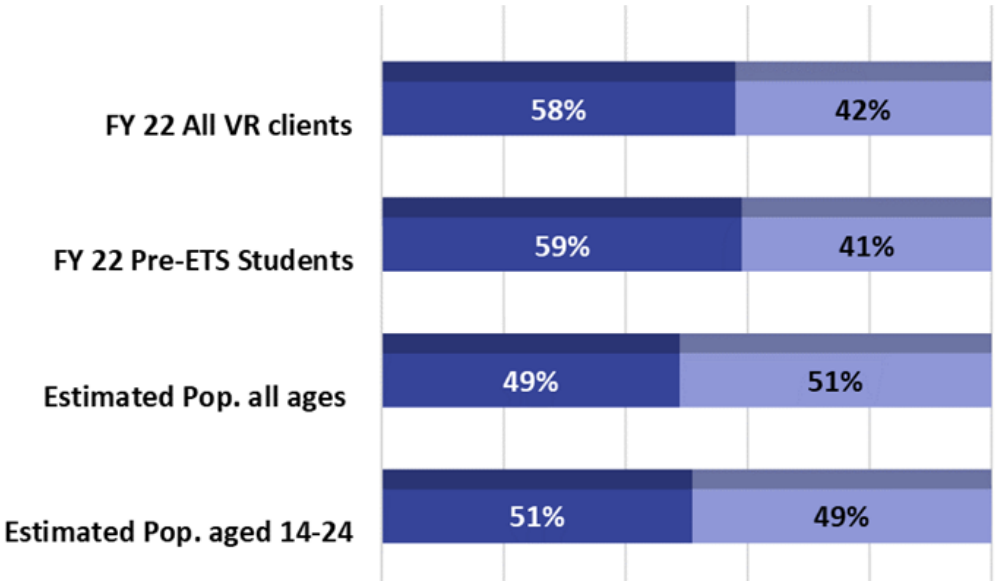
According to GVRA reports received for FY 2022, 3,867 students with disabilities received paid pre-ETS services; 2,342 received in-house pre-ETS. In total, there were 7,714 Pre-ETS clients during SFY 22.

The table below reflects the number of potentially eligible students per GVRA-VR Program District, and the percentage of Pre-ETS cases closed. Districts 4, 2, and 1 were the areas with the highest number of closed cases, with District 2 including much of Metro Atlanta. District 4 had the highest closure rate at 43%.

District	Total Served (Open & Closed)	Total Closed	Closure Rates
Grand Total	**12,880**	**3,519**	**27%**
District 01	1,937	545	28%
District 02	1,818	594	33%
District 03	1,622	224	14%
District 04	1,642	702	43%
District 05	1,678	414	25%
District 06	1,830	459	25%
District 07	1,116	256	23%
District 08	1,237	325	26%

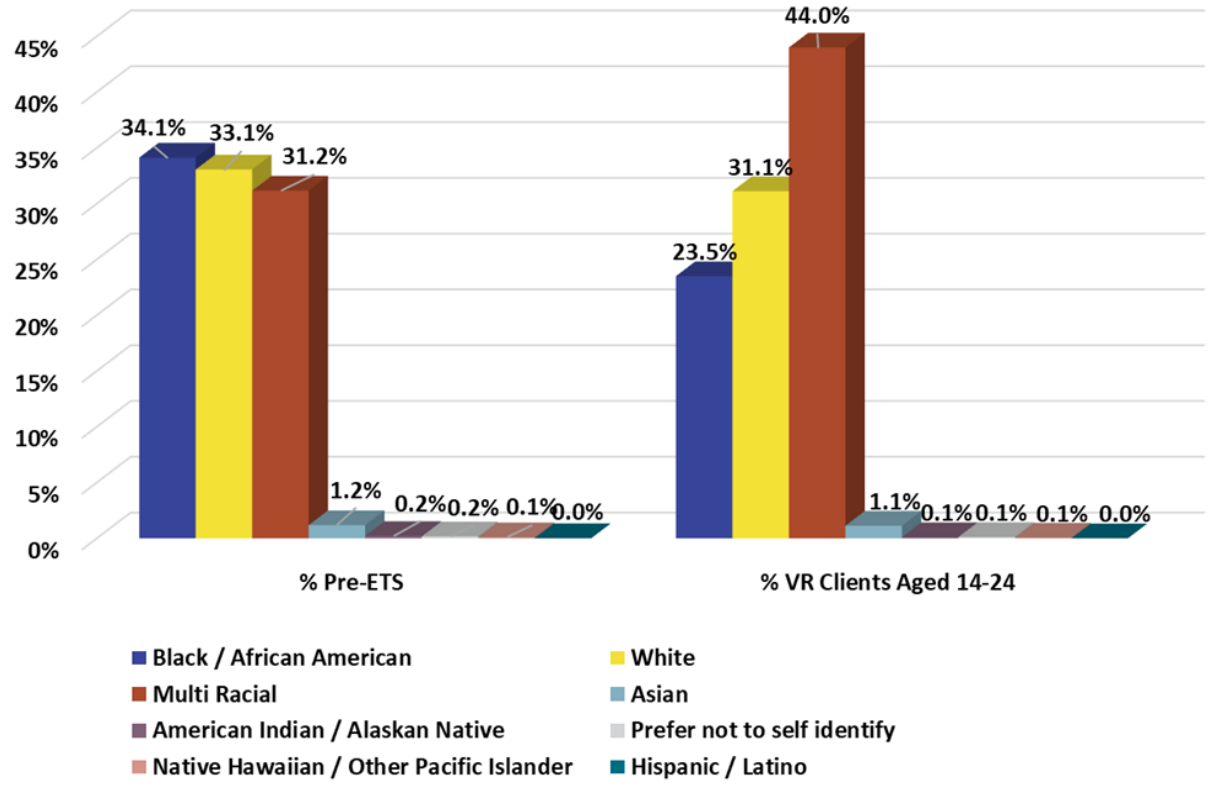
As shown below, similar to the gender ratio among VR clients, a higher percentage of pre-ETS students are male, whereas it is estimated that 49% of youth aged 14-24 are female.

Gender of VR Clients, Pre-ETS Students, and Population



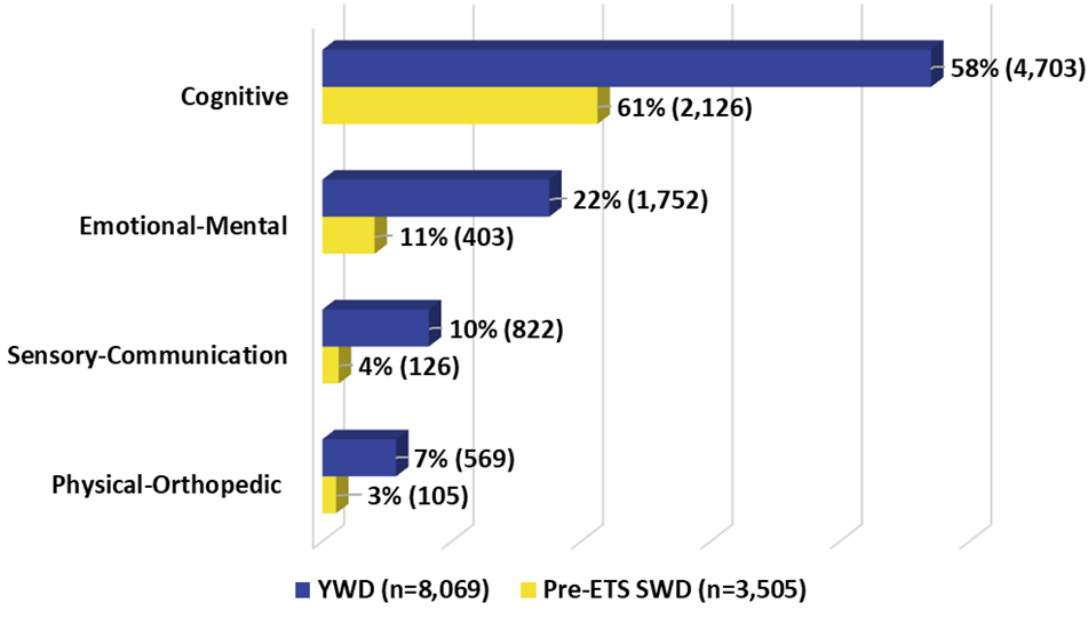
The graph on the next page compares the racial and ethnic background of pre-employment transition students with youth with disabilities (YWD) aged 14-24 who are VR clients.

Race/Ethnicity of Pre-ETS Students and Youth With Disabilities on VR Caseload



Lastly, for those with impairment information available, cognitive impairments were the predominant disability identified for both Pre-ETS students with disabilities (SWD) and transition-aged VR clients (aged 4-24). Specific impairments under this category include Intellectual Disability, ADHD, and Specific Learning Disability.

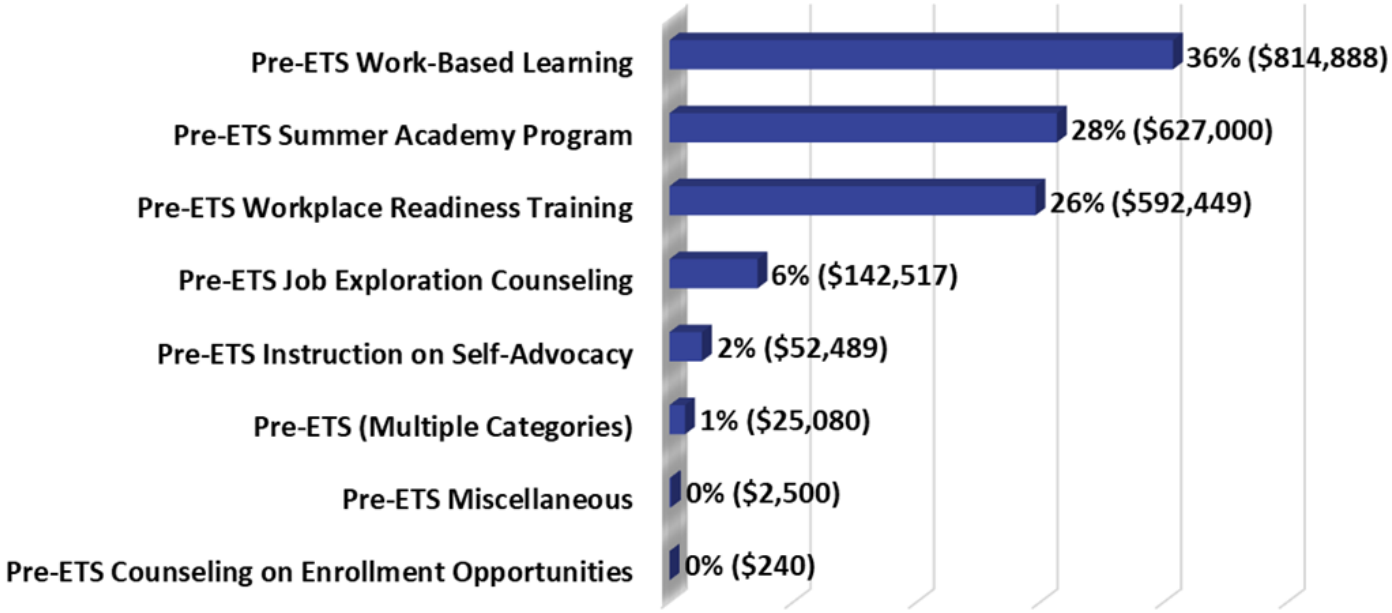
Impairments Served: YWD and Pre-ETS



SERVICES

In SFY 2022, $2,353,556 was spent on Pre-ETS services for eligible individuals with disabilities. The graph below depicts the various Pre-ETS opportunities available and the associated VR funding amount. Most of the funding went to Work-Based Learning, followed by the Summer Academy Program, and Workplace Readiness Training.

Funding Allocation: Pre-ETS



NOTE ON THE USE OF ACS DATA

While the 10-year Census data are a population count, American Community Survey data are population estimates based on sampling. Because of limited sample sizes, 1-year ACS data is only available for geographic areas with populations greater than 65,000. The 5-year ACS estimates are averages over the period, so 1-year estimates will provide the most current snapshot; however, the 1-year estimates are less reliable than 5-year estimates).[84] Data used for this report utilized both estimates for 2022 when appropriate, but care was given to utilize consistent data that would give the most accurate picture of Georgia's population and prevalence of disability.[85]

UP NEXT:

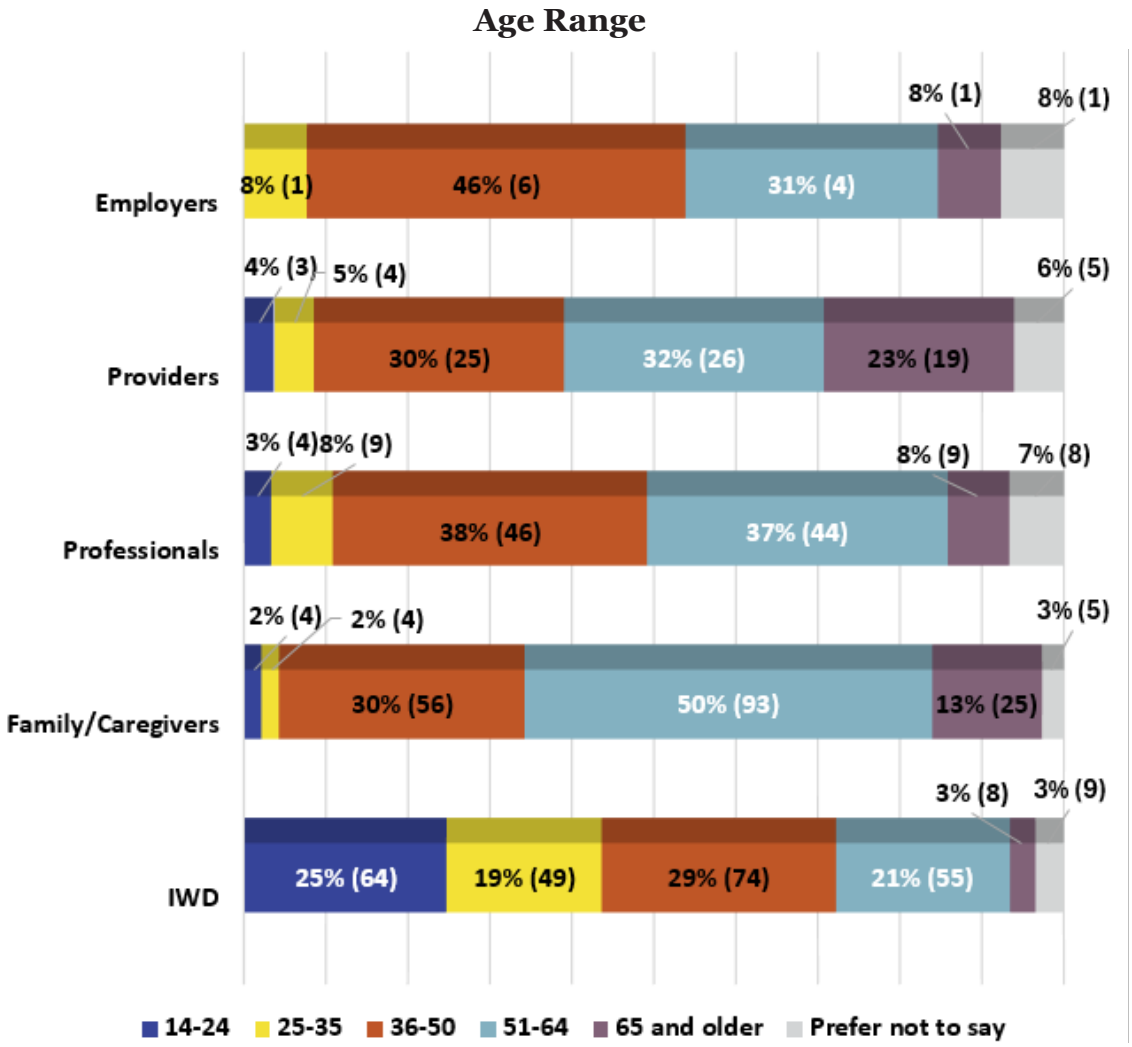
RESULTS FROM DATA COLLECTION

RESULTS FROM DATA COLLECTION

DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

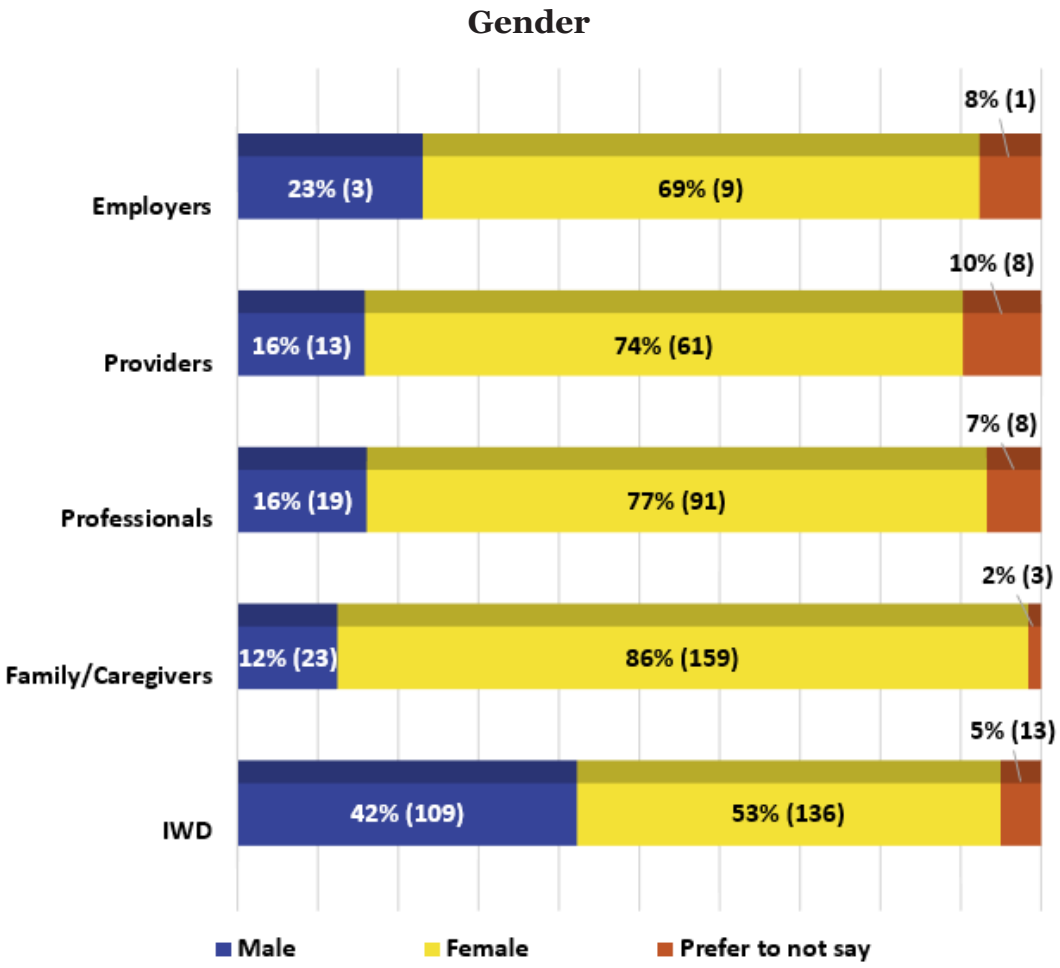
AGE OF RESPONDENTS

With regard to the age of respondents, there were five primary age groups: 14 to 24 years old, 25 to 35 years old, 36 to 50 years old, 51 to 64 years old, and 65 years old and older. For individuals with disabilities, most respondents were 36 to 50 years old (29%), followed by 14 to 24 years old (25%), and 51 to 64 years old (21%). For family and caregivers, the majority were in the 51 to 64 years age group (50%), followed by 36 to 50 years (30%), and 65 and older (13%). For professionals, most were in the 36 to 50 years age group (38%) followed by 51 to 64 years old (37%). For providers, the majority were 51 to 64 years old (32%) followed by ages 36 to 50 (30%) and 65 years and older (23%). Most employers were ages 36 to 50 (46%), 51 to 64 (31%), 25 to 35 (8%), and 65 and older (8%).



GENDER OF RESPONDENTS

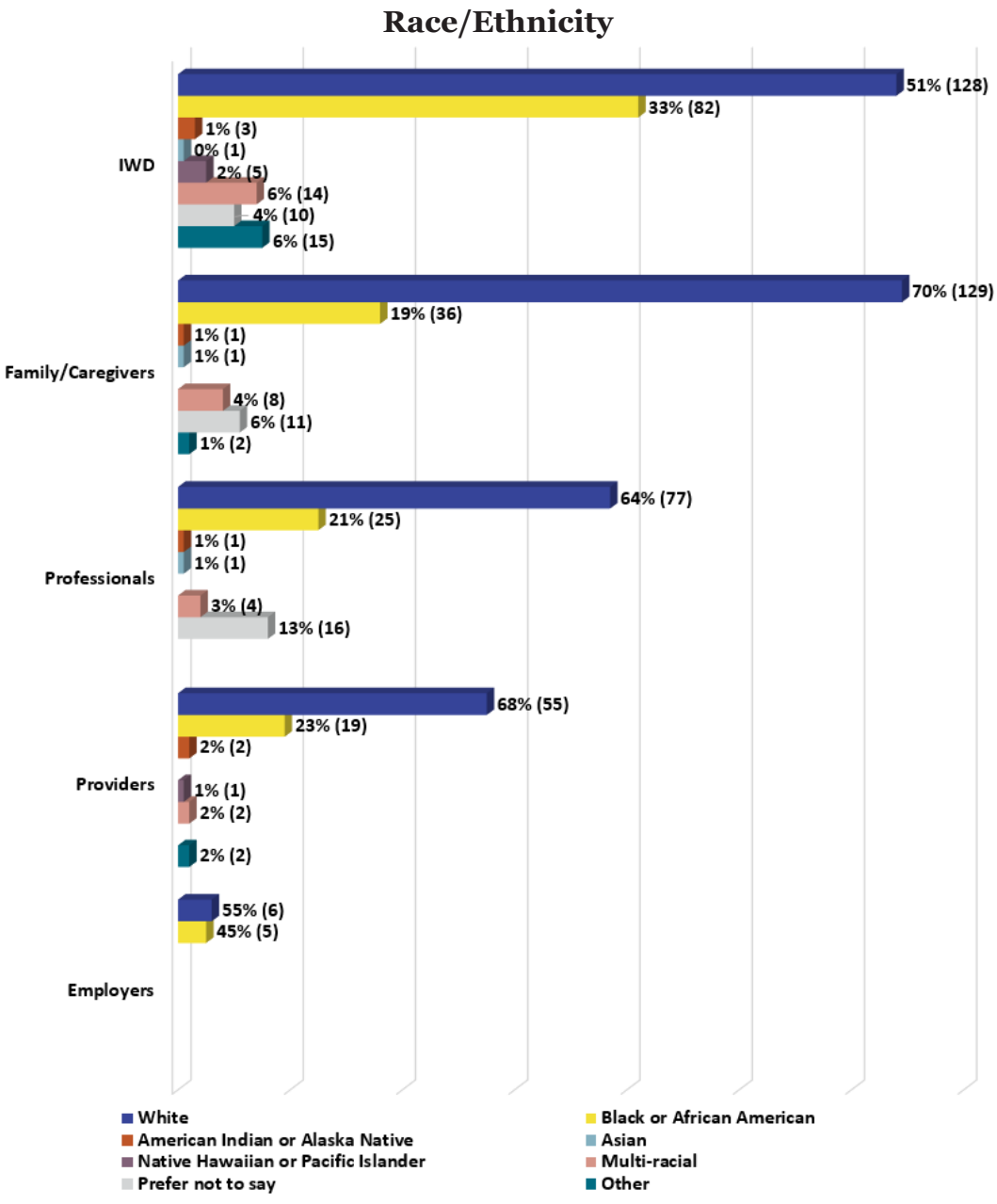
In terms of gender, the majority of respondents identified as female for all stakeholders including individuals with disabilities (53%), family and caregivers (86%), professionals (77%), providers (74%), and employers (69%).



RACE, ETHNICITY OF RESPONDENTS

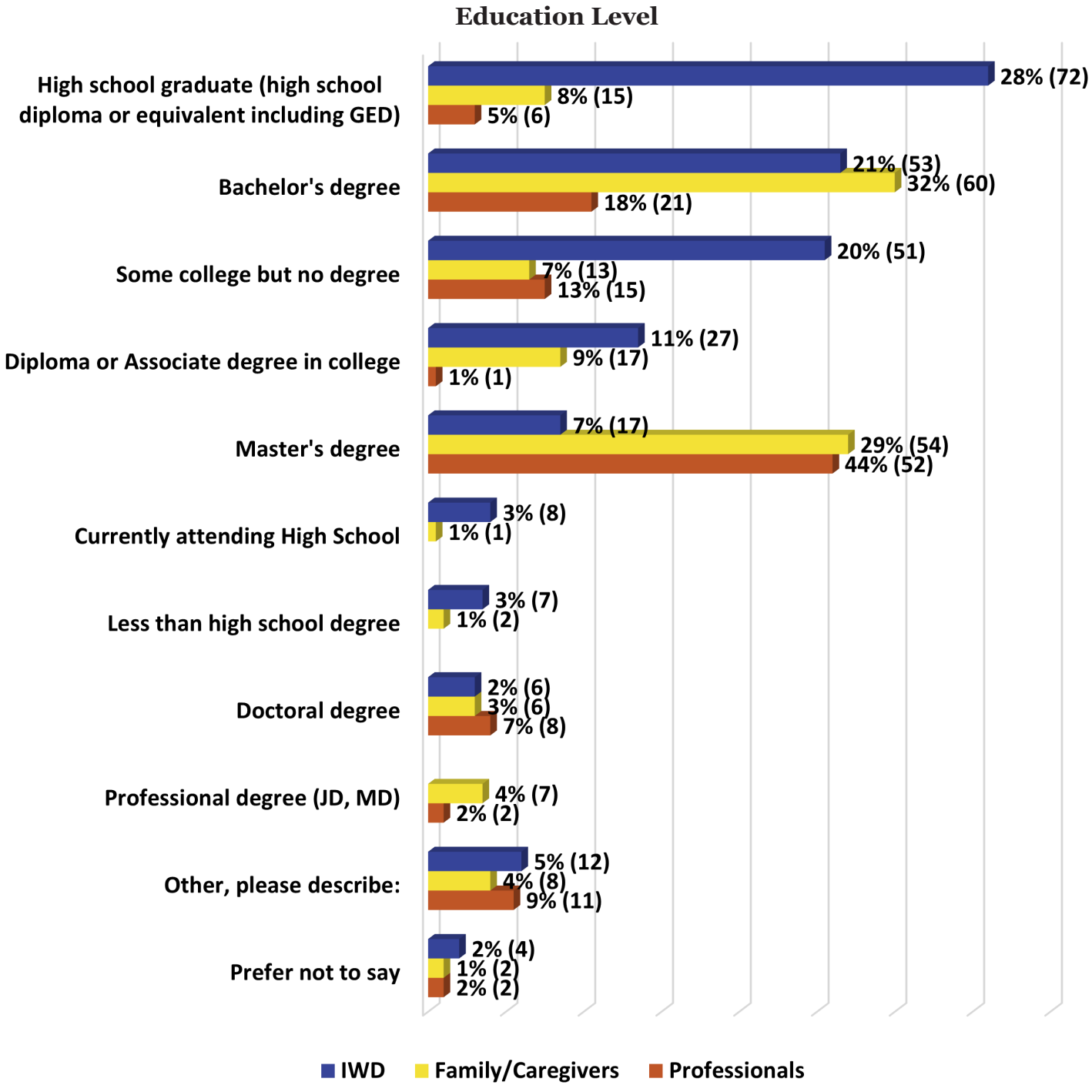
For all respondent groups, the majority of respondents were White (IWD: 51%; family and caregivers: 70%; professionals: 64%; providers: 68%; employers: 55%), followed by Black or African American (IWD: 33%; family and caregivers: 19%; professionals: 21%; providers: 23%; employers: 45%), and Multi-racial (IWD: 6%; family and caregivers: 4%; professionals: 3%; providers: 2%). Across all respondent groups, roughly 6 respondents were American Indian or Alaska Native, 3 Asian, and 6 Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander.

For all respondent groups (individuals with disabilities [IWD], family and caregivers, professionals, providers, and employers), the majority of respondents did not identify as Hispanic or Latino. Only 8% of IWD, 4% of family and caregivers, 4% of professionals, 2% of providers, and 15% of employers identify as Hispanic or Latino.



EDUCATIONAL LEVEL OF RESPONDENTS

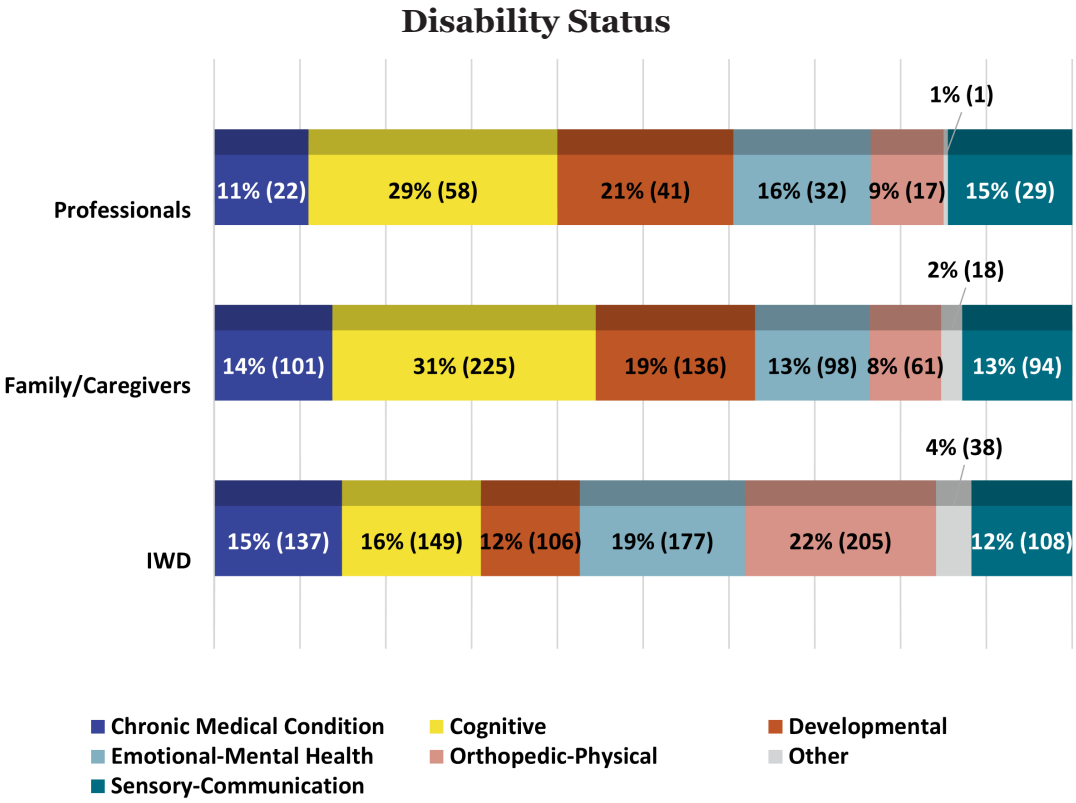
Regarding the education level, there was considerable variability across the three groups of respondents. For individuals with disabilities, the most common education level was a high school graduate (28%), bachelor's degree (21%), some college but no degree (20%), followed by a diploma or associate degree (11%). For families and caregivers, the most common education level was a bachelor's degree (32%), master's degree (29%), and diploma or associate degree (9%). For professionals, the most common education level was a master's degree (44%), followed by a bachelor's degree (18%) and some college but no degree (13%).



RESULTS FROM DATA COLLECTION

DISABILITY STATUS OF RESPONDENTS

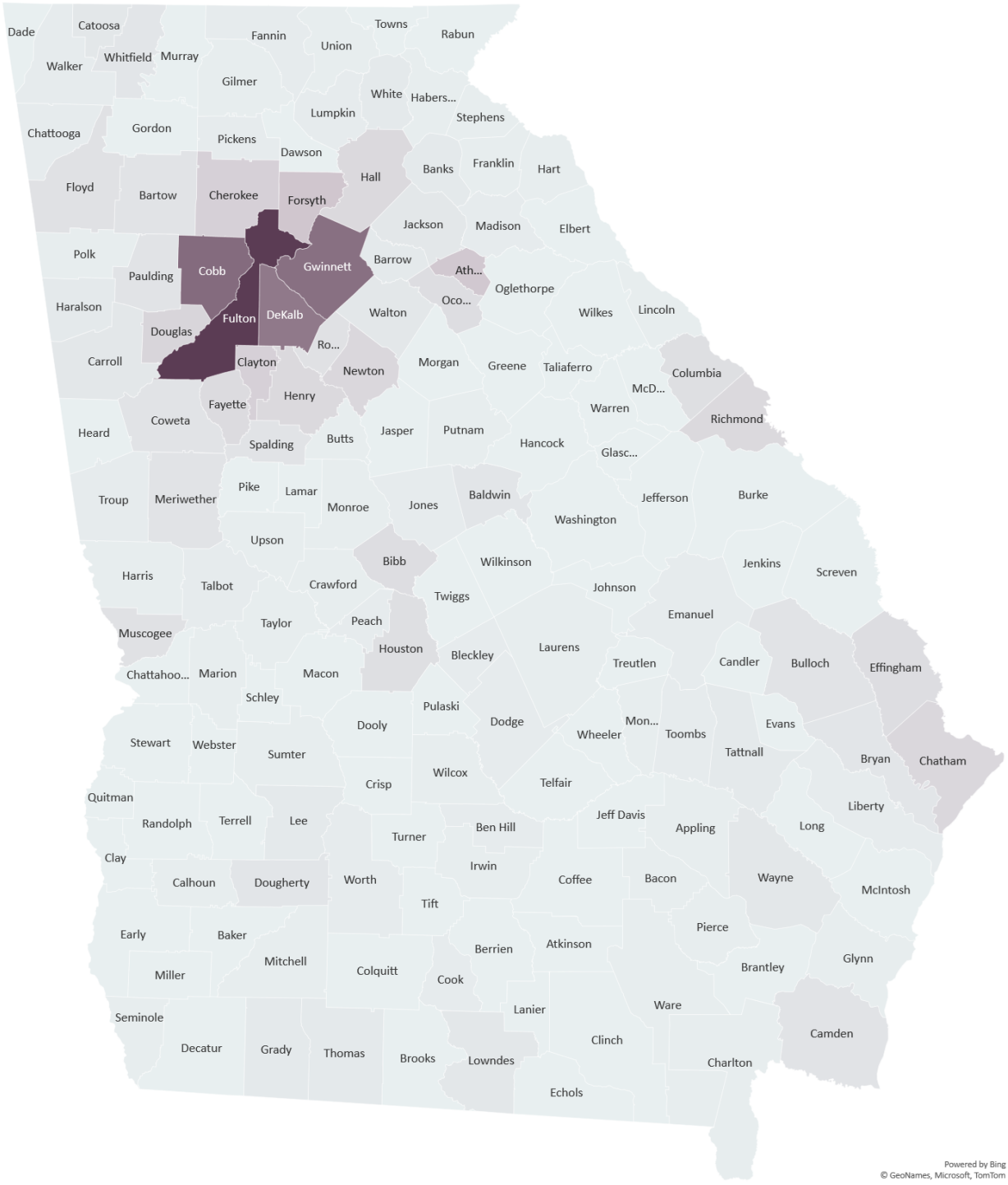
The survey respondents, divided into three distinct groups—individuals with disabilities (IWD), family and caregivers, and professionals—displayed significant variability in their reported disability statuses. Among individuals with disabilities, the most prevalent disabilities were Orthopedic, physical (22%) followed by Emotional, mental health (19%) and Cognitive (16%) disabilities. Family members and caregivers reported Cognitive (31%) followed by developmental disabilities (19%). Professionals predominantly identified cognitive, intellectual disabilities (29%) followed by developmental disabilities (21%).



RESIDENCE OF RESPONDENTS

Survey participants were asked to share their counties of residence. A total of 567 respondents completed information related to their county of residence. A total of 96 counties across Georgia had at least one or more community members respond to this survey. We did special outreach to reach individuals in rural areas of Georgia. In spite of our best efforts, rural participants comprised 19% of survey responses, while urban participants comprised 81% of survey responses. Only survey participants were asked to share their counties of residence; interview & focus group participants did not provide that information. We interviewed many community members, providers and professionals from rural areas that are not represented in these counts. Counties with the highest percentage of representation were Fulton County (9.3%), Cobb County (7.6%), Gwinnett County (7.4%), and DeKalb County (7.1%). The map below shows the concentration of survey respondent locations by county.

Survey Participant Locations by County



VETERAN STATUS OF RESPONDENTS

One respondent currently serves in the US Armed Services (active duty, reserves, or guard), five respondents stated they were veterans, and the remaining respondents (98%) answered they were not nor have been a part of the US Armed Services.

INDIVIDUALS WITH THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES, INCLUDING THEIR NEED FOR SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES - CUMULATIVE RESULTS

Participants in the surveys were asked the question, 'In your experience, generally, what are the top three barriers to employment encountered by people with disabilities, including those with significant disabilities'. Participants were asked to select any three options from a long list of different options. Lack of access to dependable transportation was the top barrier identified by the majority of stakeholders including individuals with disabilities; parents, family members; professionals as well as service providers. Georgia is a large state that lacks a reliable public transportation system outside of the metro areas. In the absence of reliable public transportation, people with disabilities must rely on other modes of transportation for commuting to work and other places. For those who are unable to drive due to their disability, this can be a major impediment to employment. Similarly, for youth with disabilities who have not yet learned to drive or lack the confidence or the resources to own a vehicle, transportation can present a barrier to accessing internships and other paid or unpaid work experiences. This issue can be particularly exacerbated for individuals with disabilities who live in rural and suburban areas.

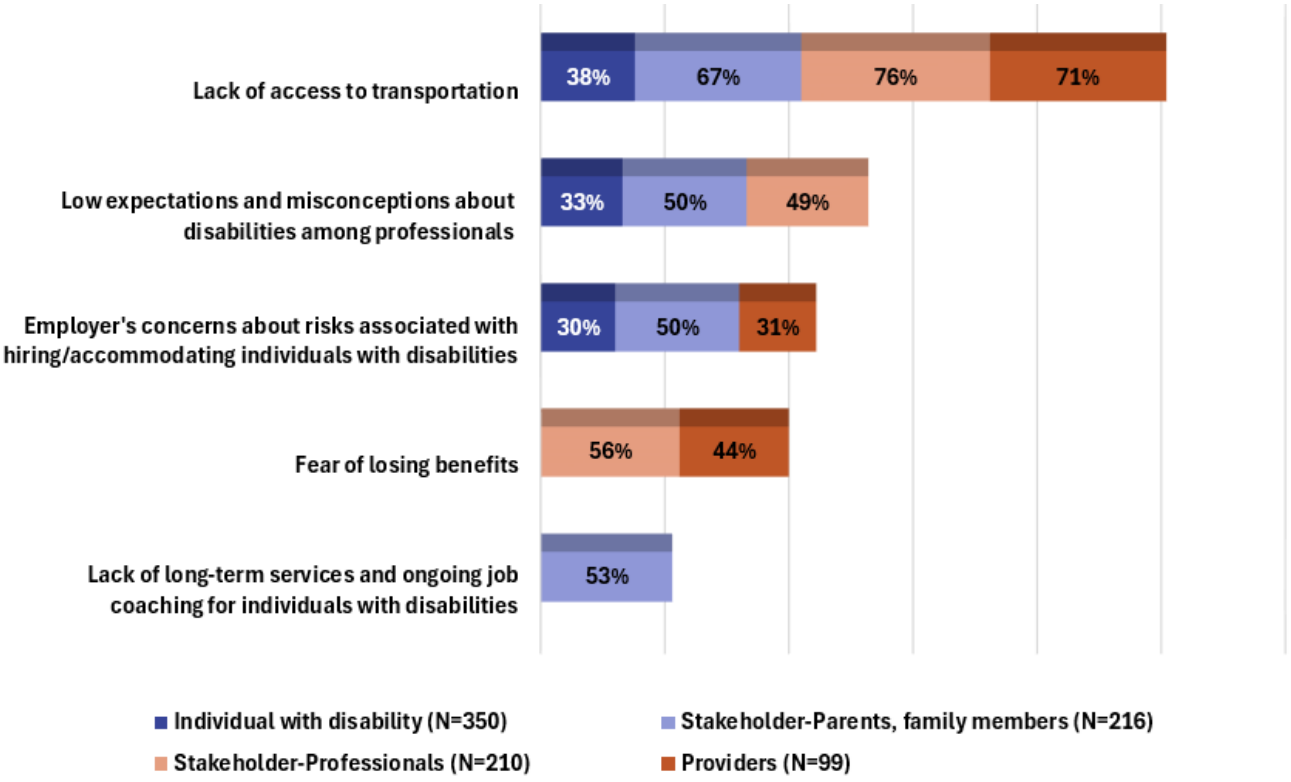
The infographic on the next page shows how the top barriers selected by each of the target groups stack against each other. For example, 38% of individuals with disabilities selected lack of access to dependable transportation as one of the top three barriers to obtaining employment. The percentages in the graph do not relate to each other. They are merely stacked side-by-side to show how cumulatively, lack of dependable transportation was the category chosen by most respondents across most surveys. Low expectations and misconceptions about disabilities among professionals were the second most identified barrier, followed by employer's concerns about risks associated with hiring or accommodating individuals with disabilities.

Professionals and service providers identified the fear of losing benefits for individuals with disabilities as an important barrier to potential employment. Not only is income assurance that the program provides important, but the added reality of eligibility for Medicaid coverage for Social Security recipients is a major incentive for maintaining Social Security eligibility status by limiting or avoiding work altogether. There are many Social Security Work Incentives Programs, that make it possible for people to work without losing access to benefits, but they are complicated and not well understood by recipients, their families, or the professionals influencing decision-making. There is a strong need for providing benefits counseling to individuals with disabilities to help them understand how employment will affect their benefits including SSDI and Medicaid. Parents and caregivers identified the lack of long-term supports and ongoing job coaching as an important barrier to the employment of people with disabilities. Even when individuals with disabilities obtain suitable employment, they are not able to sustain it without ongoing job coaching and long-term supports.

RESULTS FROM DATA COLLECTION

The next few graphs below show the top categories selected by each of the targeted groups.

Barriers to Getting, Seeking, or Keeping Job



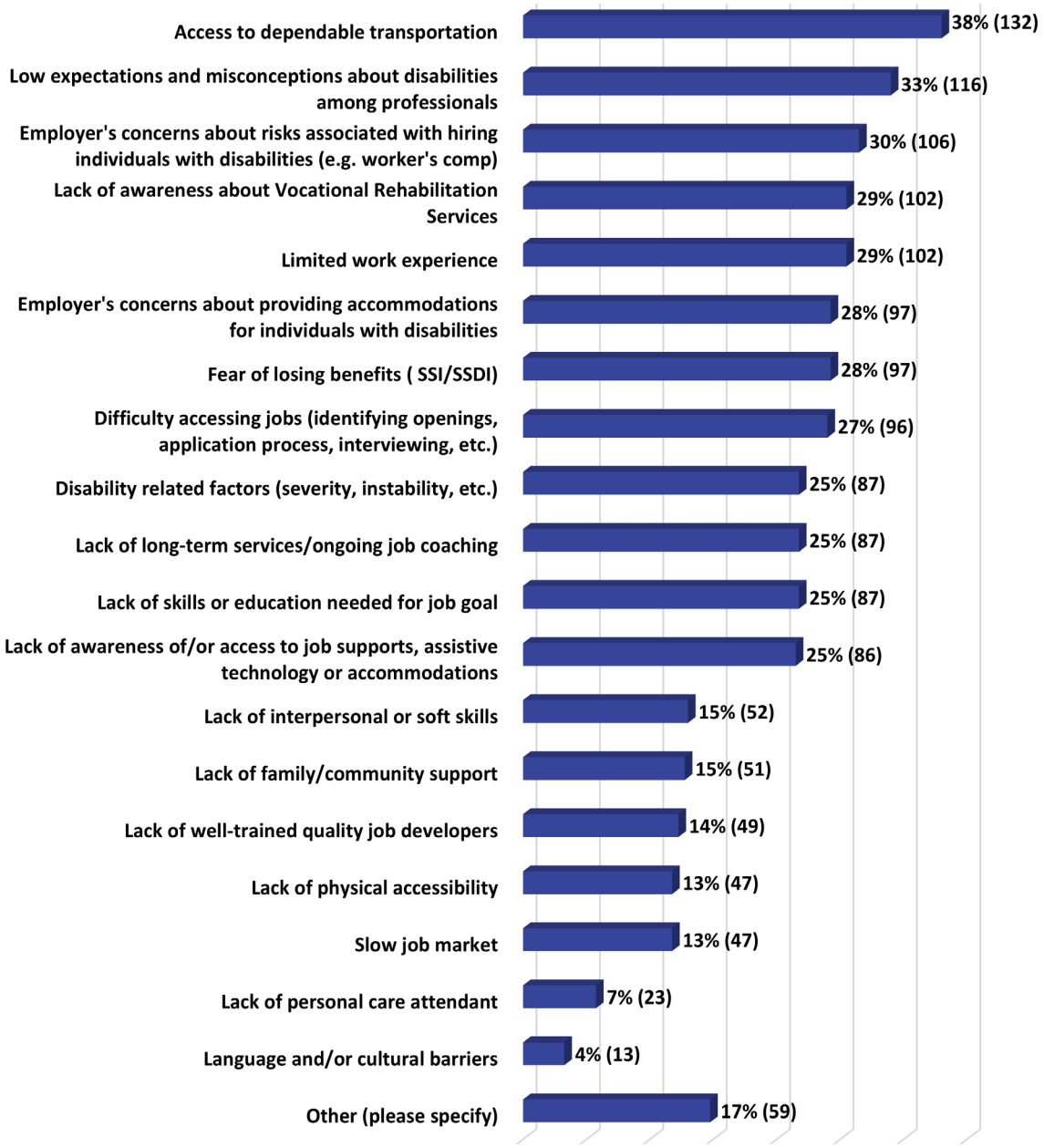
RESULTS FROM DATA COLLECTION

PERSPECTIVE OF INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES

Barriers to Getting, Seeking, or Keeping a Job

When asked about the barriers to employment encountered by people with disabilities, including those with significant disabilities, most individuals with disabilities selected lack of accessible transportation as the top barrier (38%). The second barrier identified by individuals with disabilities was the low expectations and misconceptions about disabilities among professionals (33%). Following that were the employer's concerns about risks associated with hiring individuals with disabilities (30%). Lack of awareness about Vocational Rehabilitation Services (29%) and limited work experience were the next most cited concerns (29%).

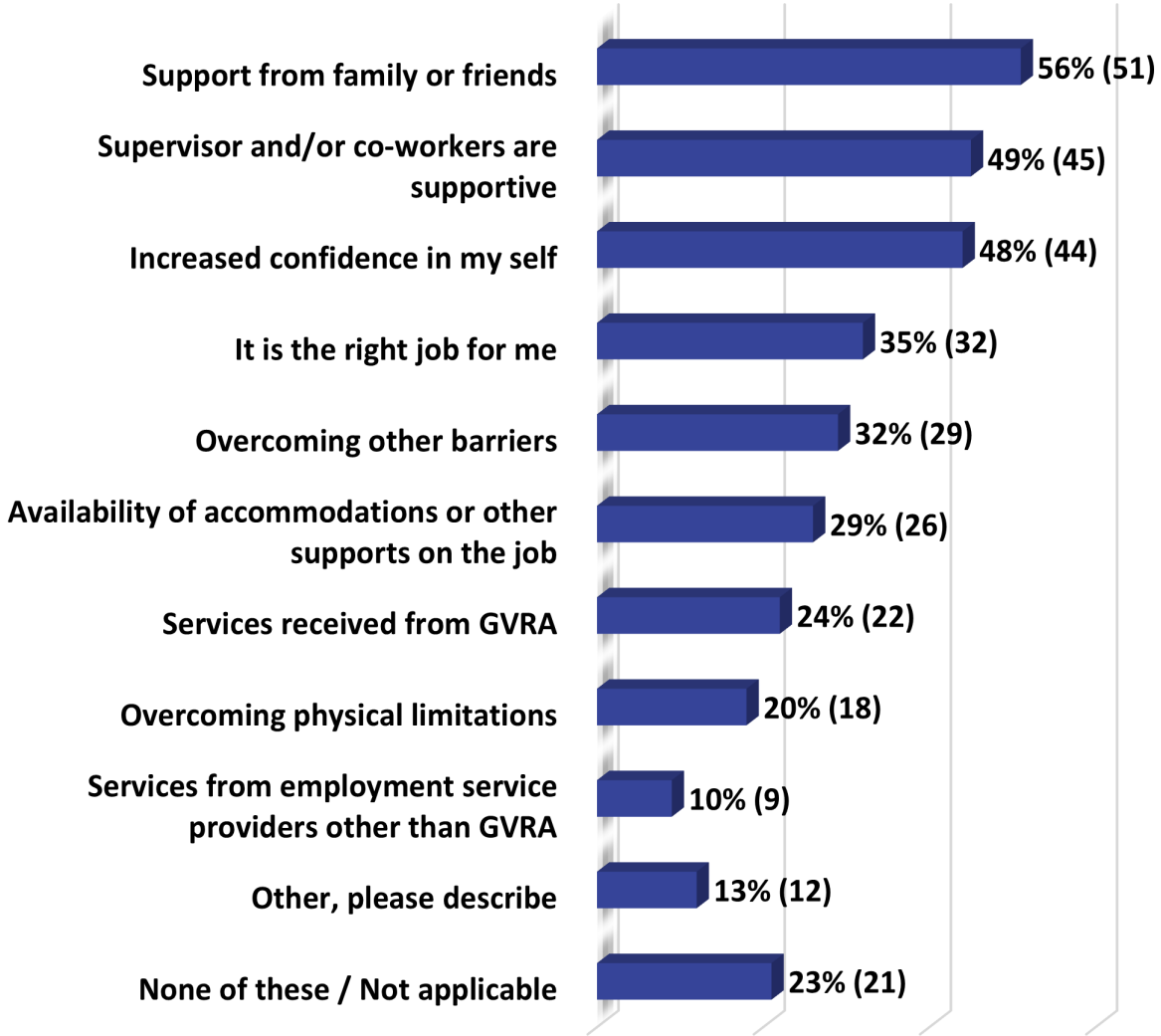
Barriers to Getting, Seeking, or Keeping Job (n=350)



Key Factors Contributing to Job Success

When asked about the key factors that have contributed to job success among people with disabilities, including those with significant disabilities, over half of individuals with disabilities selected support from family or friends (56%). The second key factor identified by individuals with disabilities was a supportive supervisor and/or coworkers (49%). Following that was the increased confidence in themselves (48%), it being the right job for them (35%) and overcoming other barriers were the next most cited key factors (32%).

Key Factors Contributing to Job Success (n=91)



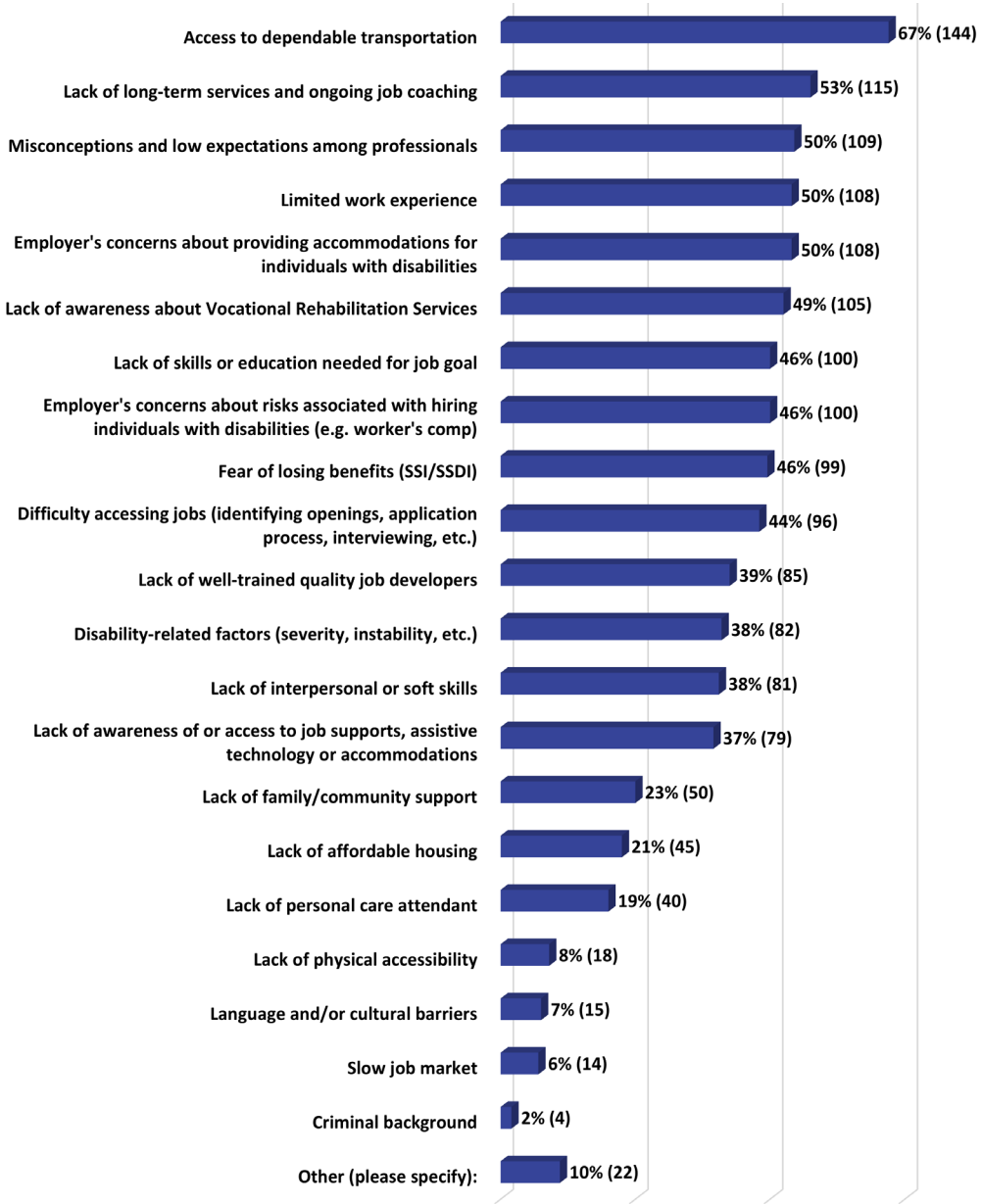
RESULTS FROM DATA COLLECTION

PERSPECTIVE OF KEY STAKEHOLDERS INCLUDING PARENTS, FAMILY MEMBERS, ADVOCATES

Barriers to Getting, Seeking, or Keeping a Job

When asked about the barriers to employment encountered by people with disabilities, including those with significant disabilities, most parents or caregivers of individuals with disabilities selected access to dependable transportation as the top barrier (67%). The second barrier identified by parents or caregivers of individuals with disabilities was the lack of long-term services and ongoing job coaching for individuals with disabilities (53%). Following that, the most cited concerns were misconceptions and low expectations among professionals, limited work experience, and employer's concerns about providing accommodations for individuals with disabilities (50% each).

Key Barriers to Employment (n=216)

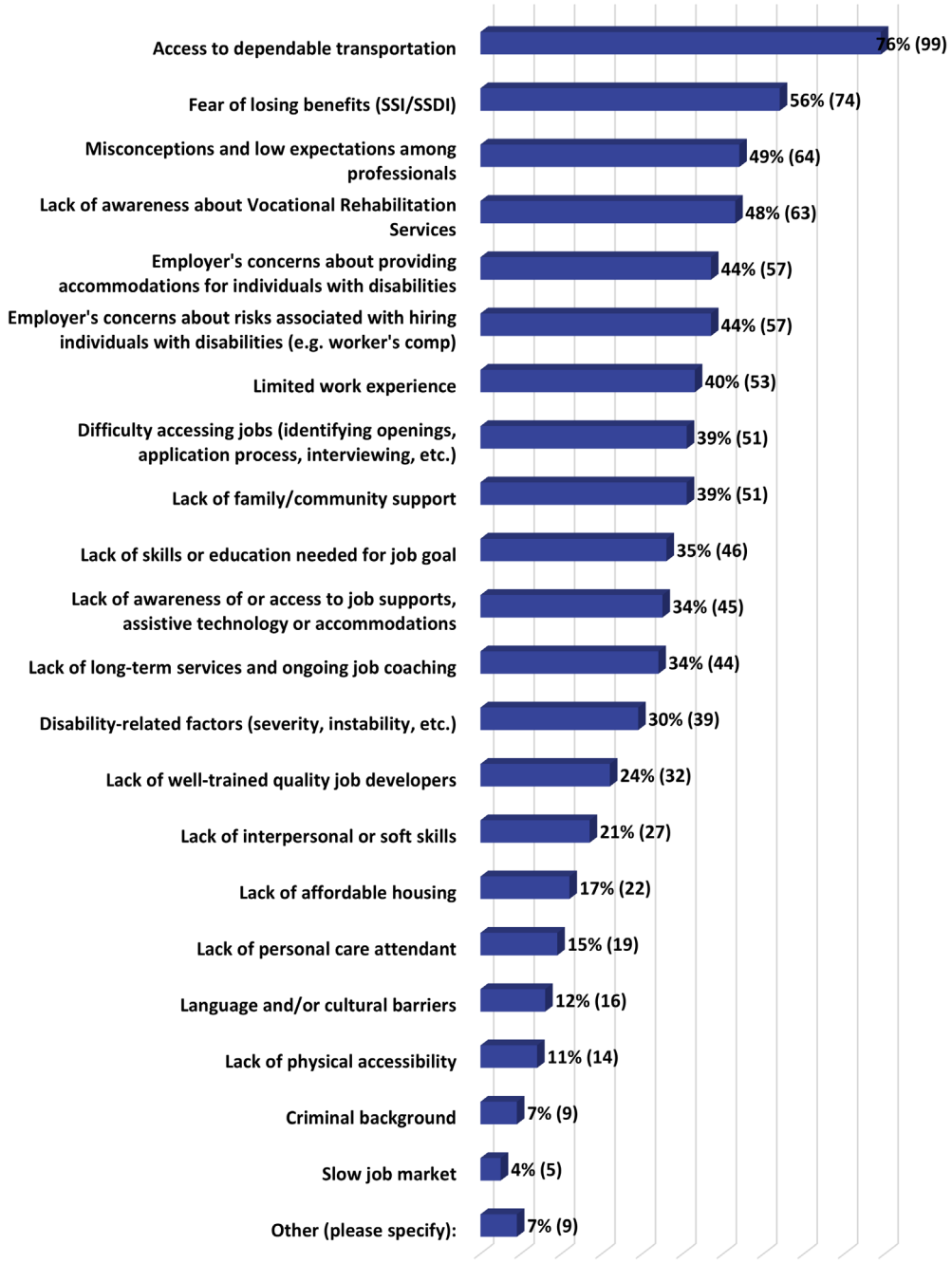


PERSPECTIVE OF KEY STAKEHOLDERS INCLUDING PROFESSIONALS

Barriers to Getting, Seeking, or Keeping a Job

When asked about the barriers to employment encountered by people with disabilities, including those with significant disabilities, most professionals selected access to dependable transportation as the top barrier (76%). The second barrier identified by professionals was the fear of losing benefits (56%). Misconceptions and low expectations among professionals (49%) and lack of awareness about Vocational Rehabilitation Services (48%) were the third and fourth most cited concerns among professionals.

Key Barriers to Employment (n=131)



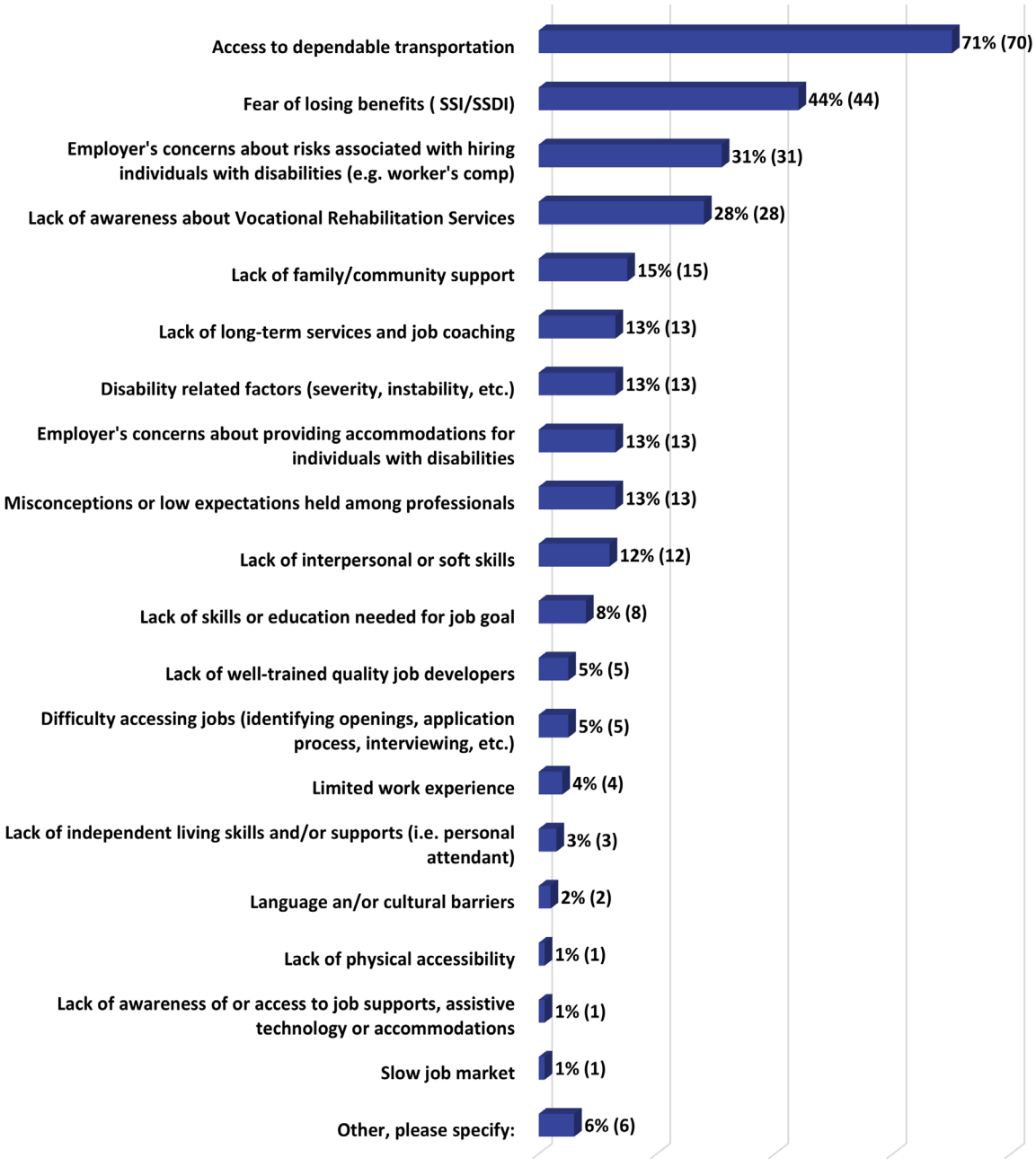
RESULTS FROM DATA COLLECTION

PERSPECTIVE OF EMPLOYMENT SERVICE PROVIDERS

Barriers to Getting, Seeking, or Keeping a Job

When asked about the top three barriers to employment encountered by individuals with disabilities, including those with significant disabilities, most of the employment service providers identified a lack of dependable transportation as the top barrier (71%). Fear of losing benefits (SSI/SSDI) was identified as the second most important barrier (44%). Employers' concern about risks associated with hiring individuals with disabilities was identified as the third most important barrier (31%). Following that was the lack of awareness about Vocational Rehabilitation Services (28%).

Key Barriers to Employment (n=99)

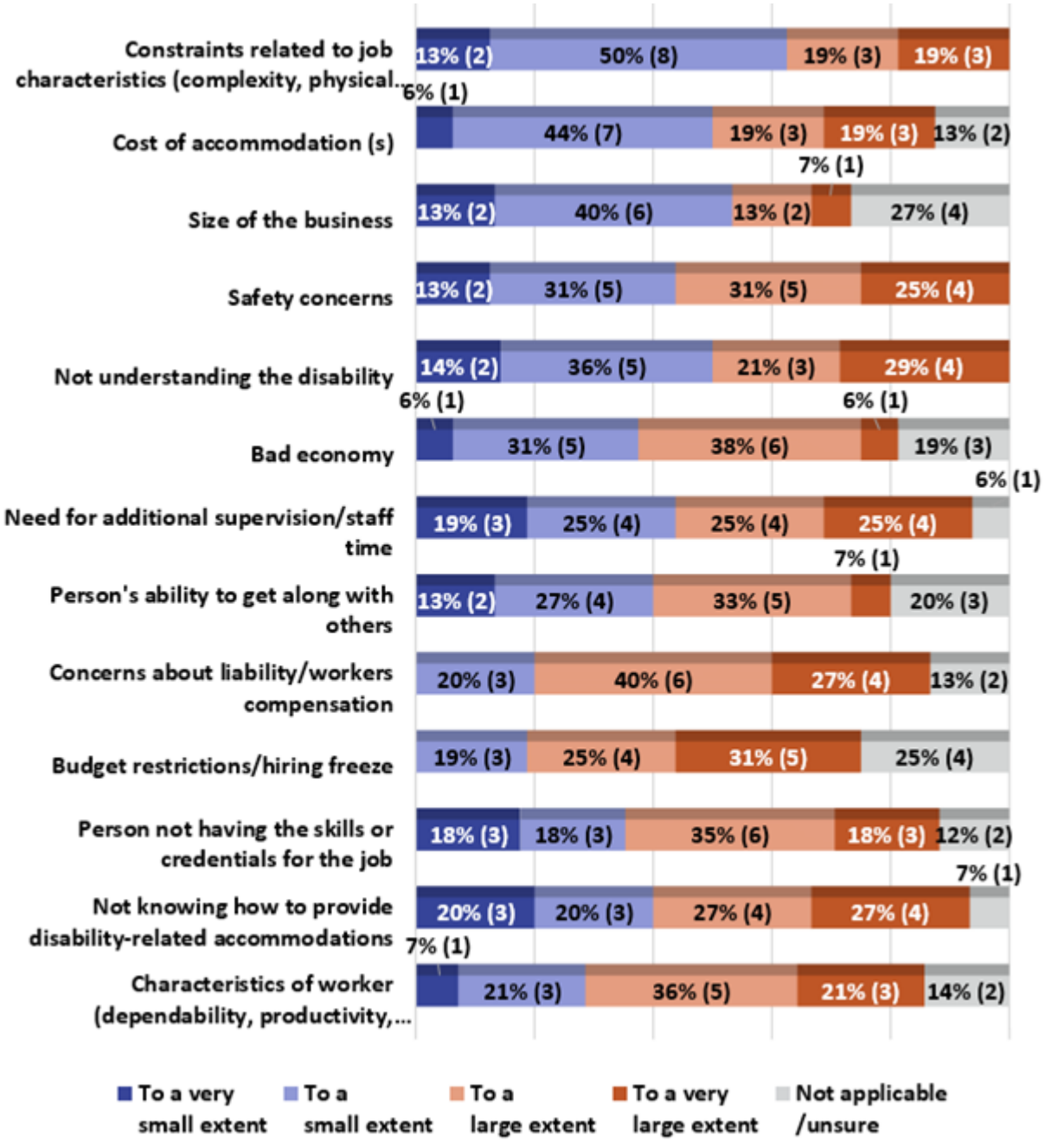


PERSPECTIVE OF EMPLOYERS

Factors Keep Businesses From Hiring, Retaining, or Promoting Individuals With Disabilities

Employers were asked to what extent the following factors keep businesses from hiring, retaining, or promoting individuals with disabilities. Employers reported that they agreed to a large or very large extent with concerns about liability, workers compensation (67%), not knowing how to provide disability accommodations (57%), budget restrictions or hiring freezes (56%), safety concerns (56%) and the person not having the skills or credentials to do the job (53%). Each of these statements was a separate question, so the sample size differs. The chart depicts the average sample size across all statements.

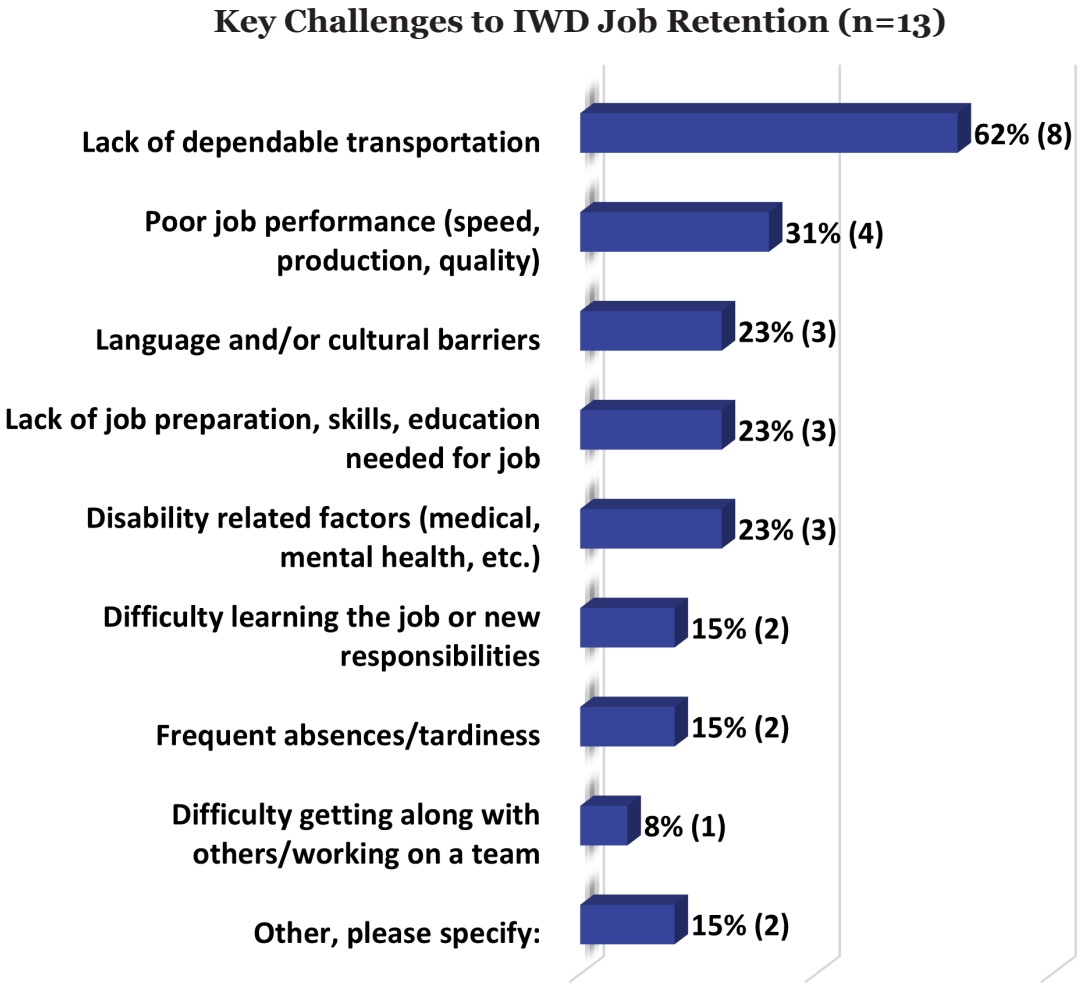
Extent of Barriers to Hiring, Retaining, and Promoting IWD (n=16)



RESULTS FROM DATA COLLECTION

Key Challenges to Retaining Employees With Disabilities

Employers were queried about the key challenges they faced in retaining employees with disabilities, with the majority citing a lack of dependable transportation as the primary challenge (62%). Following closely behind, poor job performance (speed, production, quality) was identified by thirty-one percent of respondents. Additionally, language and/or cultural barriers (23%), lack of job preparation, skills, and education needed for the job (23%), and disability-related factors (medical, mental health, etc.) (23%) were also highlighted as significant challenges.

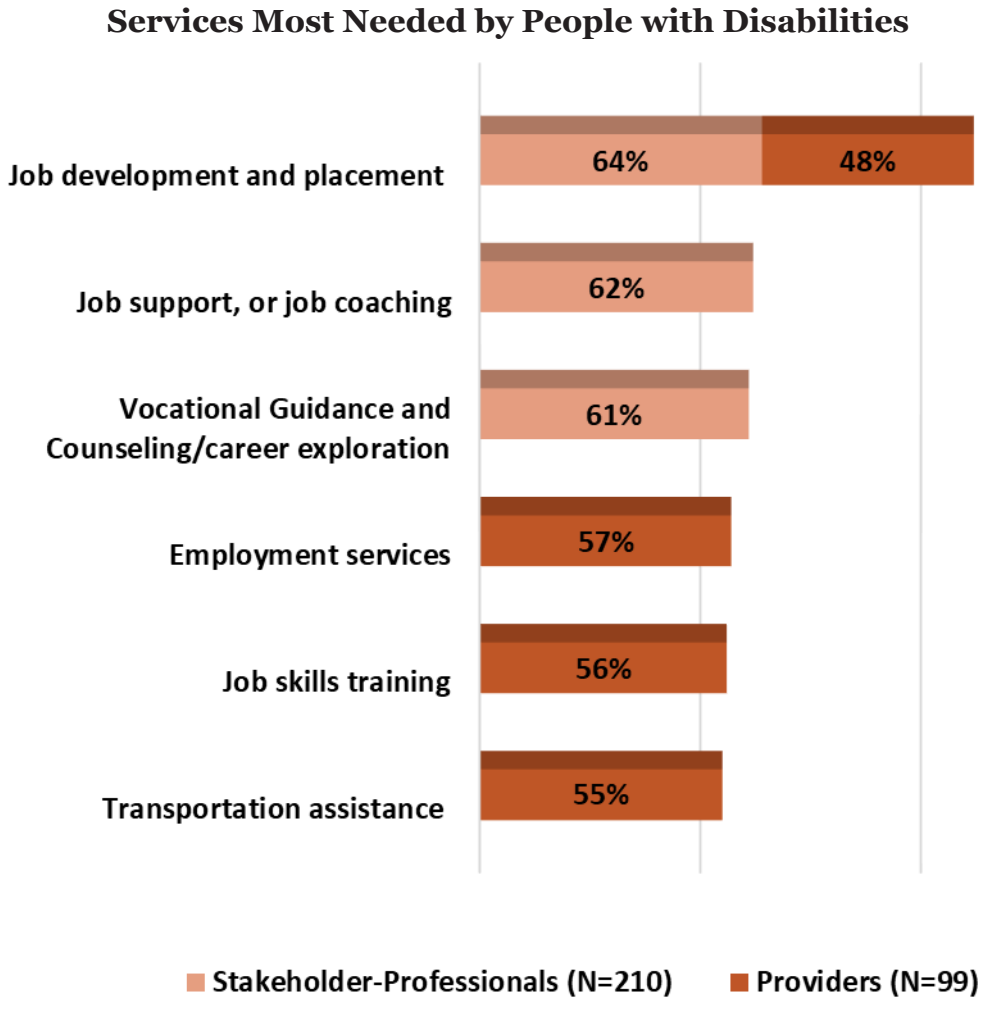


SERVICES MOST NEEDED BY PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES - CUMULATIVE RESULTS

Participants were asked the question, 'In your opinion, please identify the top three (3) services that are most needed by individuals with disabilities for obtaining meaningful employment.' Participants were asked to select any three options from a long list of different options.

Job development and job placement services were identified as the top need by professionals and providers. On-the-job support and job coaching was identified as the next most important service needed for maintaining the employment of individuals with significant disabilities. Vocational guidance and counseling services were also identified as high-priority services. Supported employment services and job skills training were also identified as important services needed by individuals with disabilities. Assistance with transportation was identified by providers as an important service needed for the employment of individuals with disabilities.

The infographic below shows how the top services identified by each of the target groups stack against each other. The percentages in the graph do not relate to each other. They merely show us that cumulatively, job development and placement was the category chosen by most survey respondents. The following graphs below show the categories selected by each of the targeted groups.



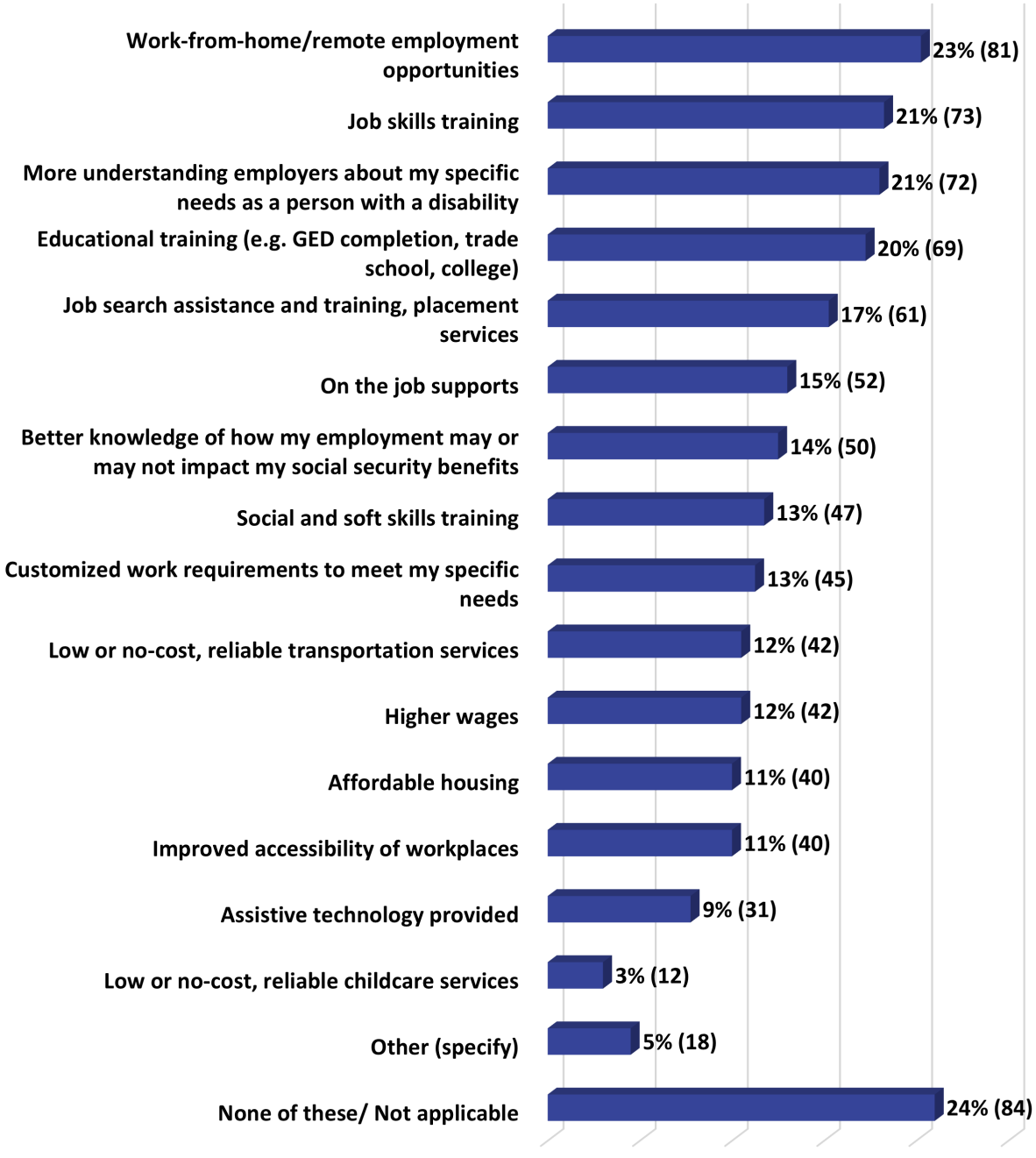
RESULTS FROM DATA COLLECTION

PERSPECTIVE OF INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES

Factors Positively Impacting Ability to Obtain and Maintain Employment

When asked about the most important things that have positively impacted the ability to obtain and maintain employment among people with disabilities, including those with significant disabilities, the majority selected work-from-home and remote employment opportunities (23%). Following that was job skills training (21%) and employers understanding more about the specific needs of each person with a disability (21%). Job search assistance and training and placement services were the next most cited factors having a positive impact (17%).

Factors Positively Impacting Ability to Obtain and Maintain Employment (n=350)

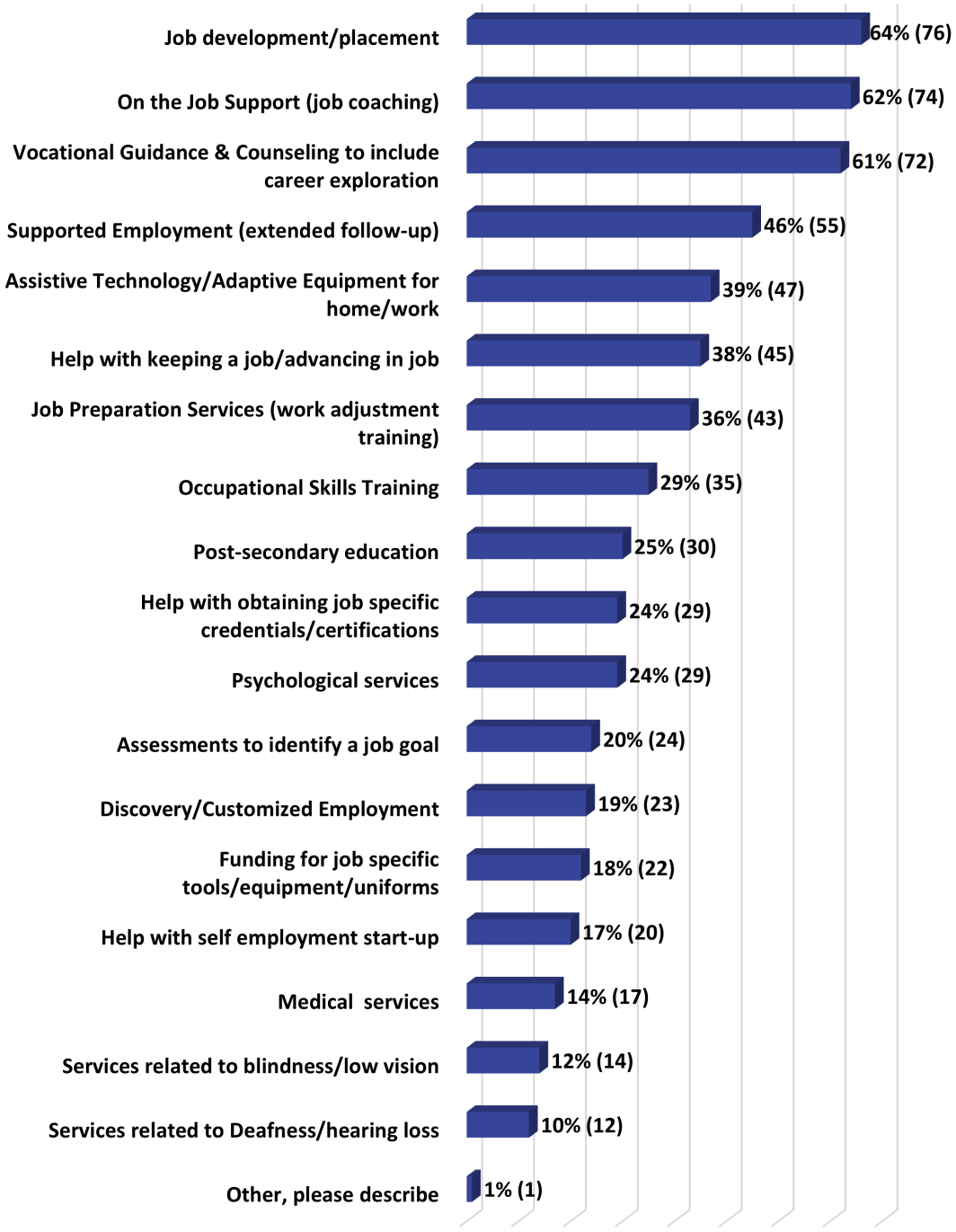


PERSPECTIVE OF KEY STAKEHOLDERS PROFESSIONALS

Services Most Needed by Individuals With Disabilities

When asked what key services are most needed by individuals with disabilities related to competitive integrated employment, job development and placement was the most chosen response (64%). Following that, the second most common response by professionals was on-the-job support, or job coaching (62%). Vocational Guidance and Counseling to include career exploration was the third most common needed service identified by professionals (61%).

Key Services Needed for Competitive Integrated Employment (n=119)



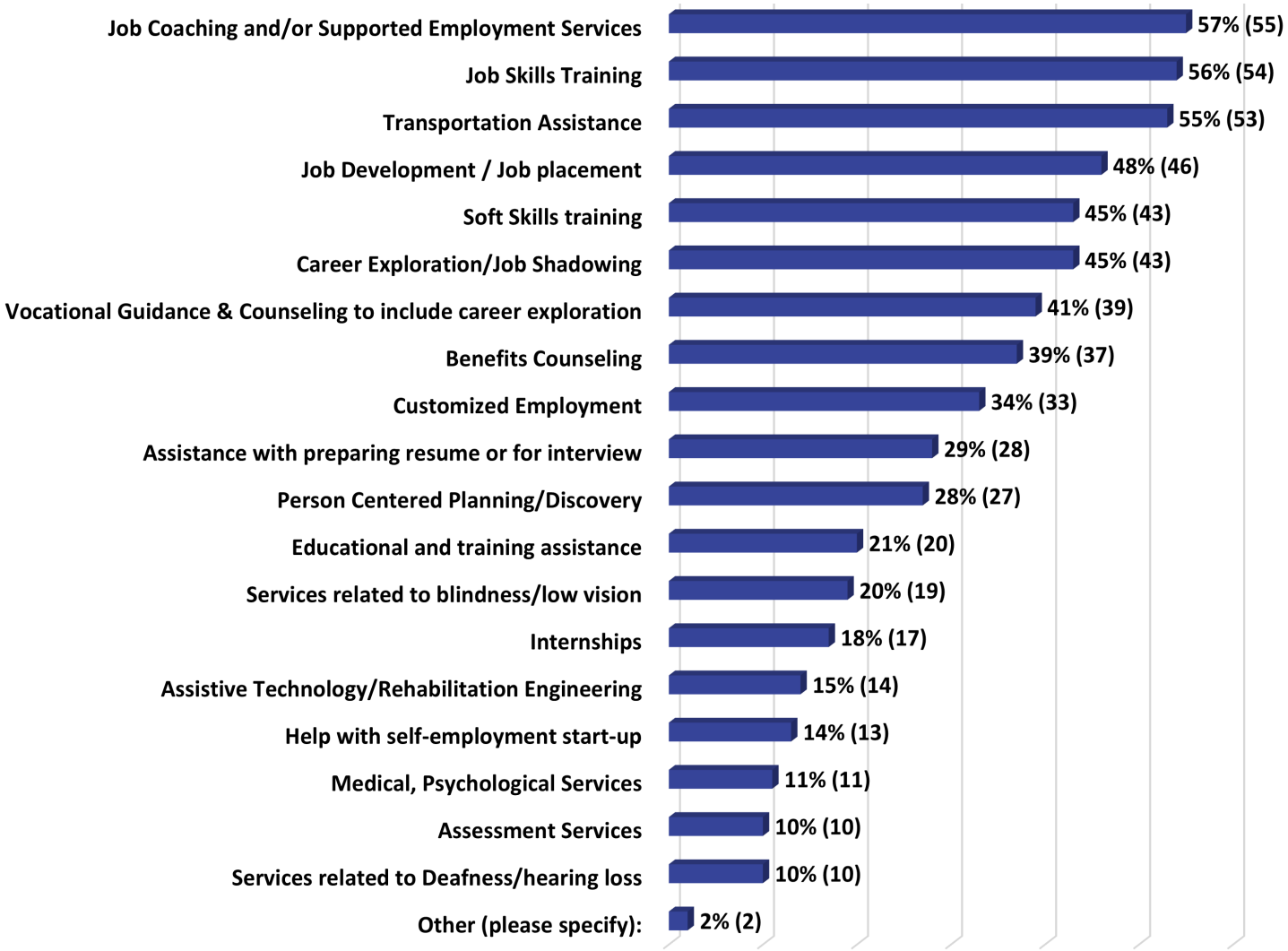
RESULTS FROM DATA COLLECTION

PERSPECTIVE OF EMPLOYMENT SERVICE PROVIDERS

Services Most Needed by Individuals With Disabilities

When asked about the key services needed by individuals with disabilities including those with significant disabilities related to competitive integrated employment. The top four are as follows: job coaching or supported employment services (57%), job skills training (56%), transportation assistance (55%), and job development and job placement (48%).

Key Employment Services Needed (n=96)



INTERVIEW AND FOCUS GROUP RESULTS

INDIVIDUALS, PROFESSIONALS

Need for Ongoing Support

When asked about people with significant disabilities, two professionals agreed that there needs to be continued support and services for this population even after they are out of school. One respondent said that important services, like occupational and speech therapy, are stopped once the individual leaves school. Ongoing support for individuals with significant disabilities is needed for long-term success.

- *"I think they need ongoing occupational therapy or physical therapy and speech therapy To be successful in an employment environment. A lot of that stops when they leave school"*
- *"I think for our individuals with maybe more severe or involved disabilities. They need kind of ongoing coaching and supports..."*

Lack of Options for Support in Community After Aging Out of School

Another barrier was the lack of support for those individuals who have aged out. One professional stated that they do their best to get them waiver opportunities before they age out, but there are not many options. Another professional noted the need for a group home or place like it for individuals to go after they have aged out.

- *"We work really hard to try to get them to have the waiver services before they leave. But there's not a lot of activities for them"*
- *"Well, we don't even have a group home here or any respite care here…"*

Need for More Education

Professionals agreed that there is a need for more education and outreach about what VR services are available to those with significant disabilities. Teachers and districts need to be properly informed about services so that they can pass the information on to students and individuals who may be able to use them. Another professional urged the need for better job-prep for students, so that they may be better equipped with the knowledge necessary for long-term employment.

- *"...one of the things I think is just an education outreach where teachers / districts are given information on how they can be preparing students"*
- *"...You have the students, here's how we think you should best prep that student so that by the time they do graduate or do decide to leave school, they'll be able to be better prepared to work that job."*

Need for Feedback

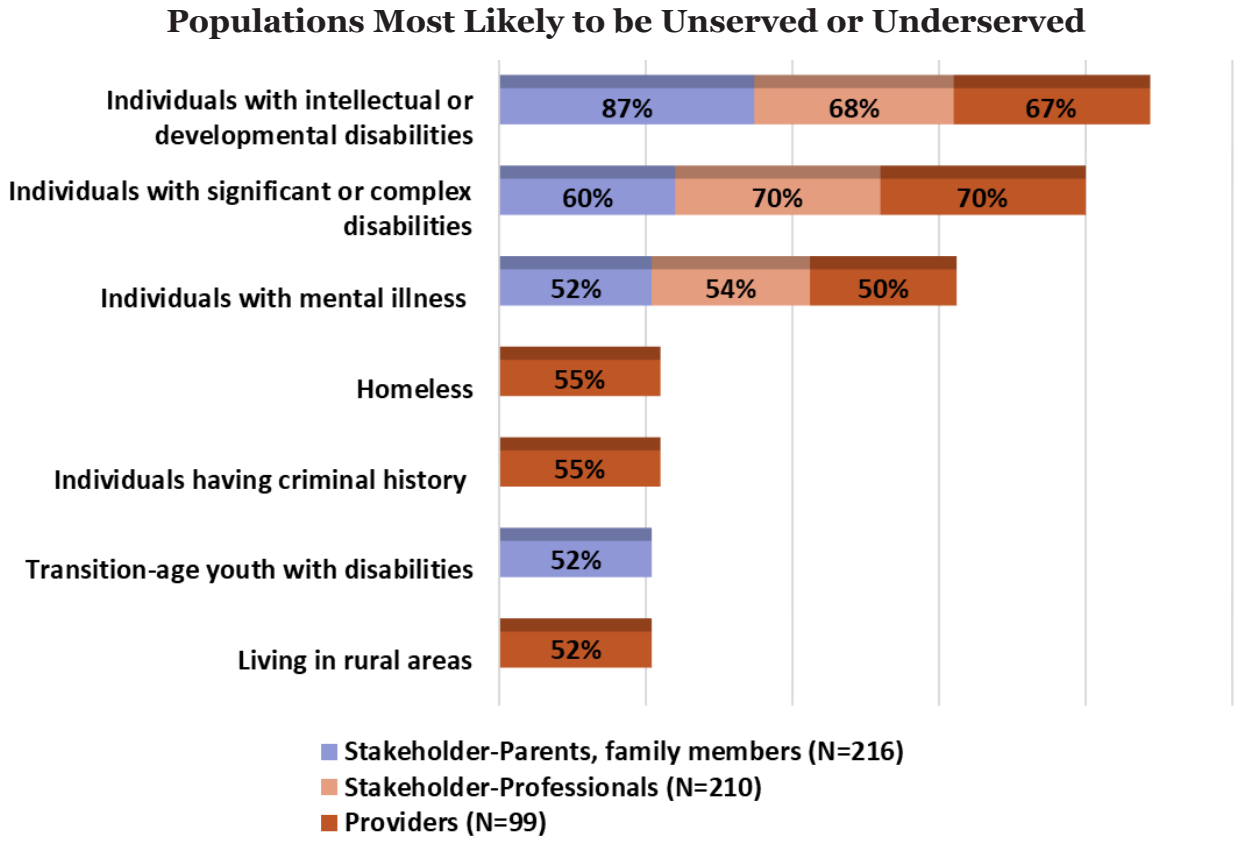
One professional expressed the need for feedback from families, individuals, and anyone else who may be involved in the life and health of those with significant disabilities. They stated that this feedback is what the GVRA should use to build the services around and that it will keep focus on what the barriers are for their clients. Capable but underserved - One respondent described those with significant disabilities as capable, yet still underserved. They stated, "They're just not receiving that outreach and support they need to move forward."

INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES WHO ARE UNSERVED OR UNDERSERVED BY GEORGIA VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM, INCLUDING MINORITIES

POPULATIONS MOST LIKELY TO BE UNSERVED OR UNDERSERVED - CUMULATIVE RESULTS

Survey respondents were asked about who they think is most likely to be underserved or unserved, and encounter barriers to accessing employment services. They were asked to select all options that applied to them. The infographic below shows how the top underserved or unserved group selected by each of the survey groups stack against each other. Individuals with intellectual or developmental disabilities were identified as the most underserved or unserved population by parents/family members; professionals and employment service providers selected this group as the second most underserved or unserved population. Individuals with significant or complex disabilities were identified as the most underserved or unserved population by professionals and employment service providers; parents/family members identified this group as the second most unserved or underserved population. Individuals with mental illness were identified as the third most underserved or unserved population. Homeless individuals, those having a criminal history, those living in rural areas, and transition-age youth were some other groups identified.

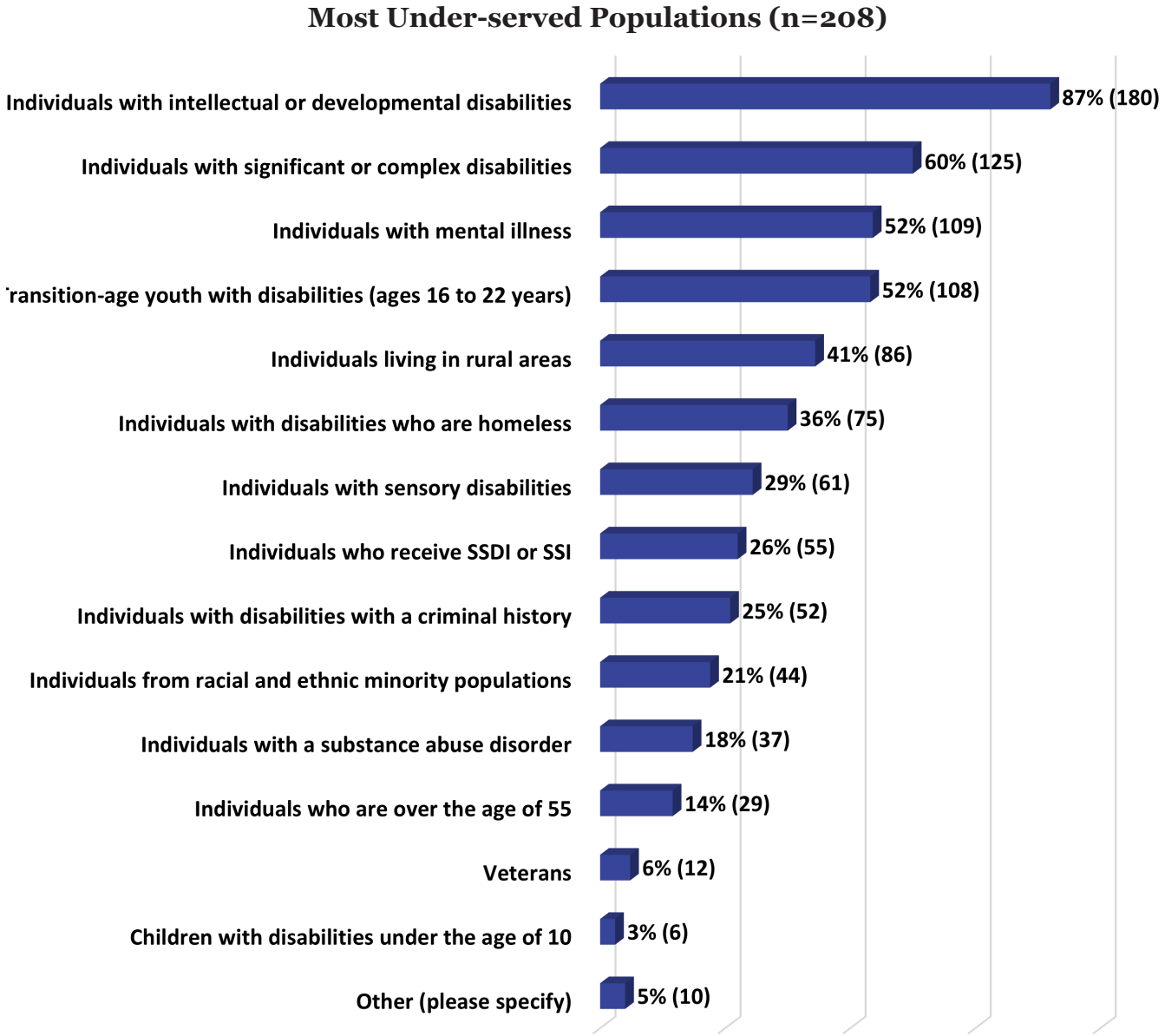
The percentages in the graph do not relate to each other. They merely demonstrate how the top categories identified by various stakeholders stack against each other. The next few graphs below show the categories selected by each of the targeted groups.



PERSPECTIVE OF PARENTS AND FAMILY MEMBERS

Populations Most Likely to be Unserved or Underserved

When asked which populations are most likely to be under-served and encounter barriers to accessing employment services, most parents or caregivers of individuals with disabilities selected individuals with significant or complex disabilities as the most under-served group (60%). The second most selected group were individuals with mental illness and transition-age youth with disabilities (52% each). Following that were individuals living in rural areas (41%).

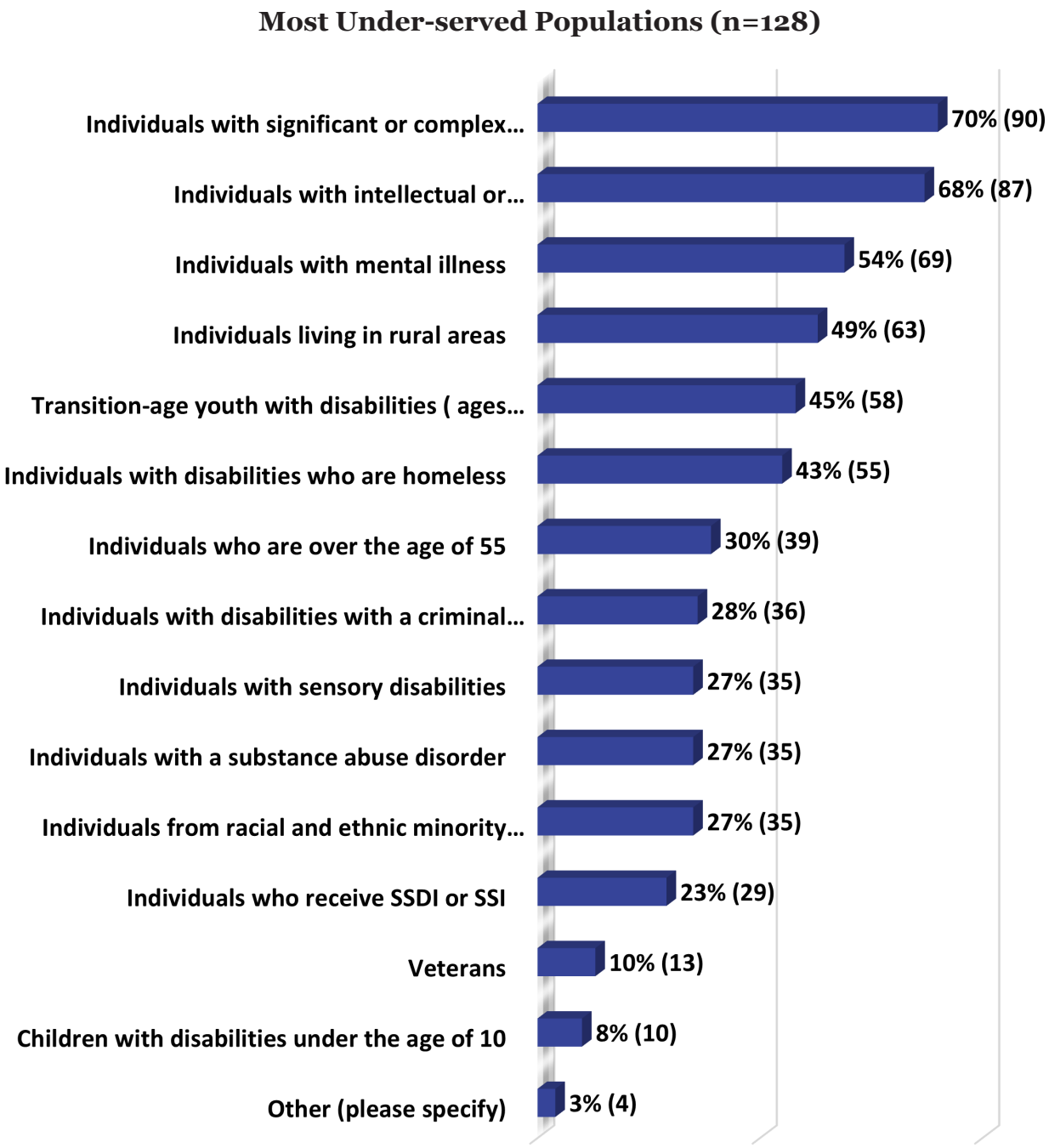


RESULTS FROM DATA COLLECTION

PERSPECTIVE OF PROFESSIONALS

Populations Most Likely to be Unserved or Underserved

When asked which populations are most likely to be under-served and encounter barriers to accessing employment services, most professionals selected individuals with significant or complex disabilities as the most under-served group (70%). The second most under-served group selected by professionals were individuals with intellectual or developmental disabilities (68%). Following that, the group selected by professionals as most likely to be under-served and encounter barriers to accessing employment services were individuals with mental illness (54%).

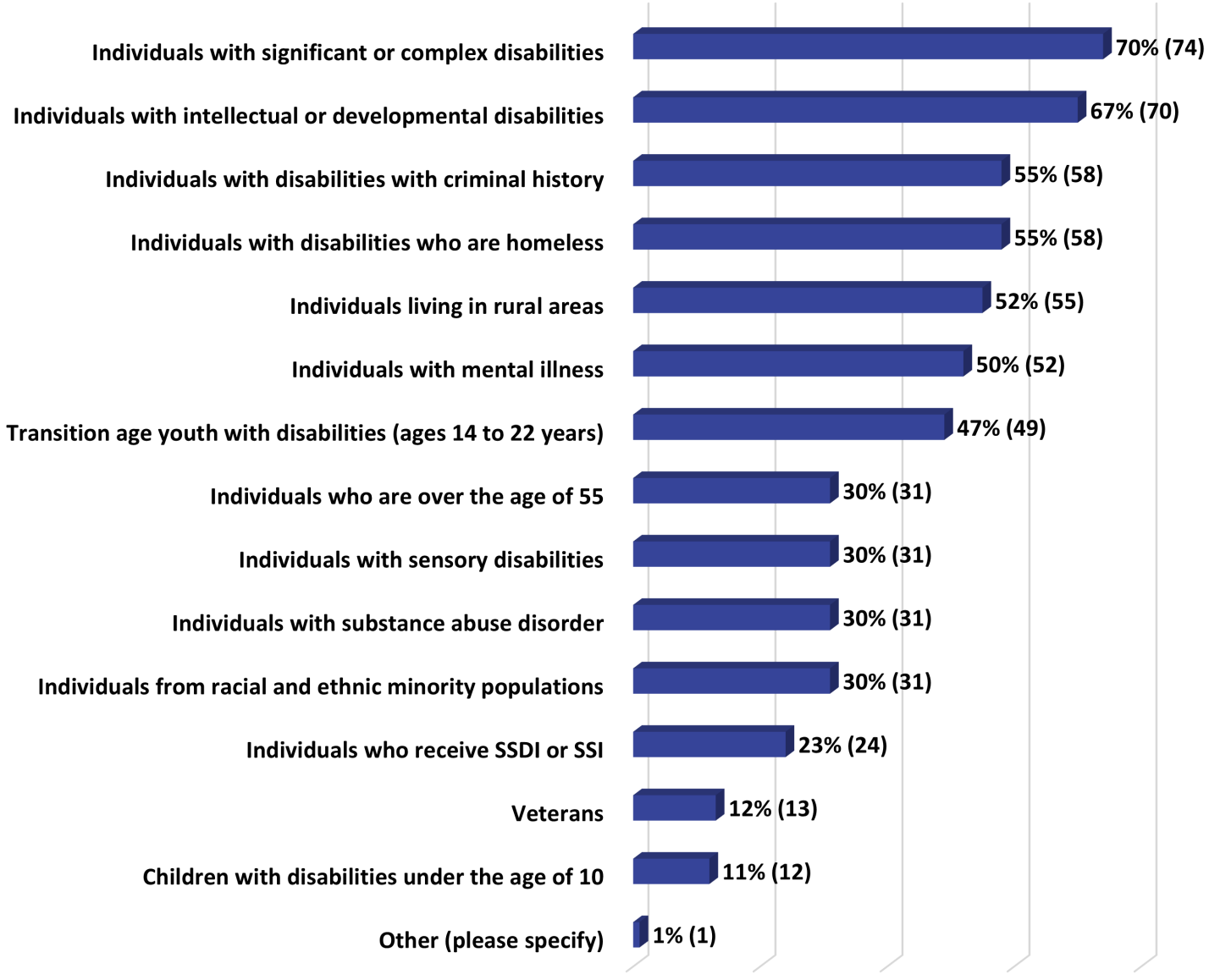


PERSPECTIVE OF EMPLOYMENT SERVICE PROVIDERS

Populations Most Likely to be Unserved or Underserved

When asked about who they think is most likely to be under-served or unserved and encounter barriers accessing employment services, most employment service providers identified individuals with significant or complex disabilities (70%). The second most important group identified were individuals with intellectual or developmental disabilities (67%). This was followed by four categories of individuals — those having a criminal history (55%), those who are homeless (55%), those living in rural areas (52%), and those having mental illness (50%).

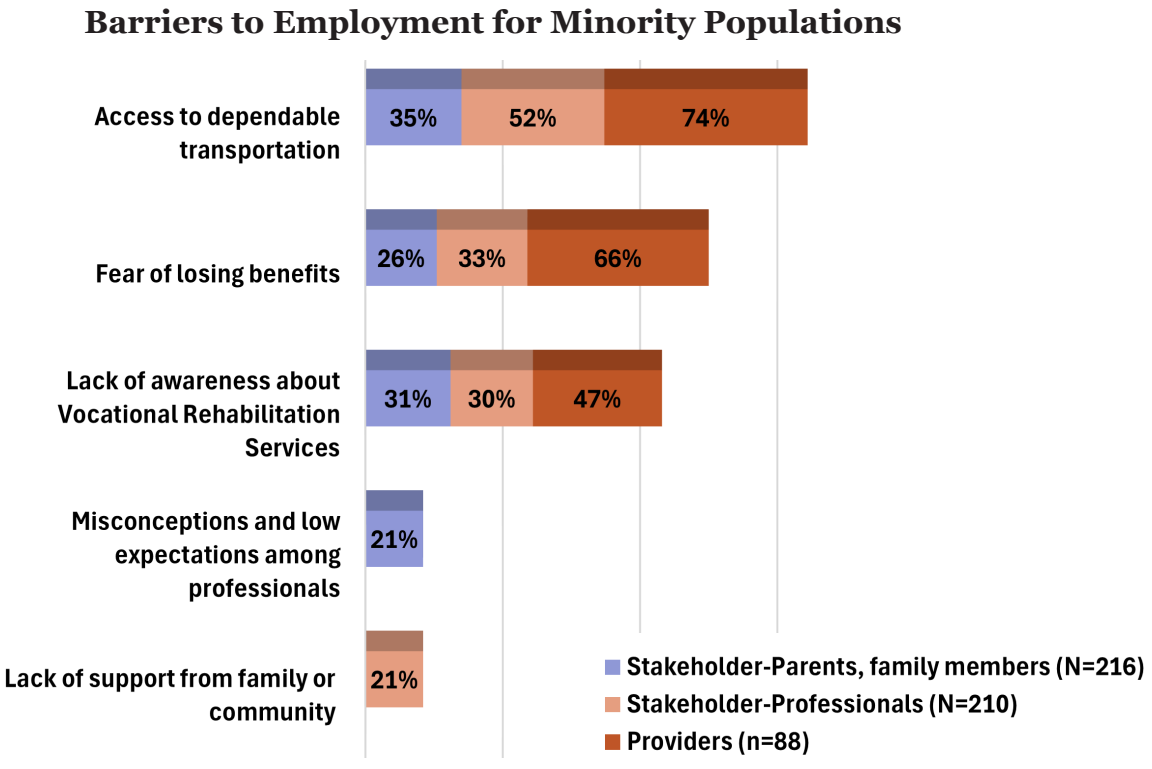
Most Under-served Populations (n=105)



BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT FOR MINORITY POPULATIONS- CUMULATIVE RESULTS

Participants in the surveys were asked the question, 'In your experience, generally, what are the top three barriers to employment encountered by people with disabilities from racial/ethnic minority populations?'. Participants were asked to select any three options from a long list of different options. The infographic below shows how the top barriers selected by each of the target groups stack against each other. For example, 52% of professionals selected lack of access to transportation as one of the top three barriers for obtaining employment. The percentages in the graph do not relate to each other. They merely show us that cumulatively, lack of dependable transportation was the top category chosen by most respondents across all surveys.

Lack of access to dependable transportation was identified as the top barrier by parents, professionals, and providers. Fear of losing benefits was the next barrier identified by participants. As discussed earlier, not only is income assurance that the program provides important, but the added reality of eligibility for Medicaid coverage for Social Security recipients is a major incentive for maintaining Social Security eligibility status by limiting or avoiding work altogether. There are many Social Security Work Incentives Programs, which make it possible for people to work without losing access to benefits, but they are complicated and not well understood by recipients, their families, or the professionals influencing decision-making. There is a strong need for providing benefits counseling to individuals with disabilities to help them understand how employment will affect their benefits, including SSDI and Medicaid. Lack of awareness about vocational rehabilitation services was the third barrier identified by participants. Lack of family or community support for employment, and misconceptions and low expectations among professionals were other barriers identified. The following graphs show the categories selected by each of the targeted groups.

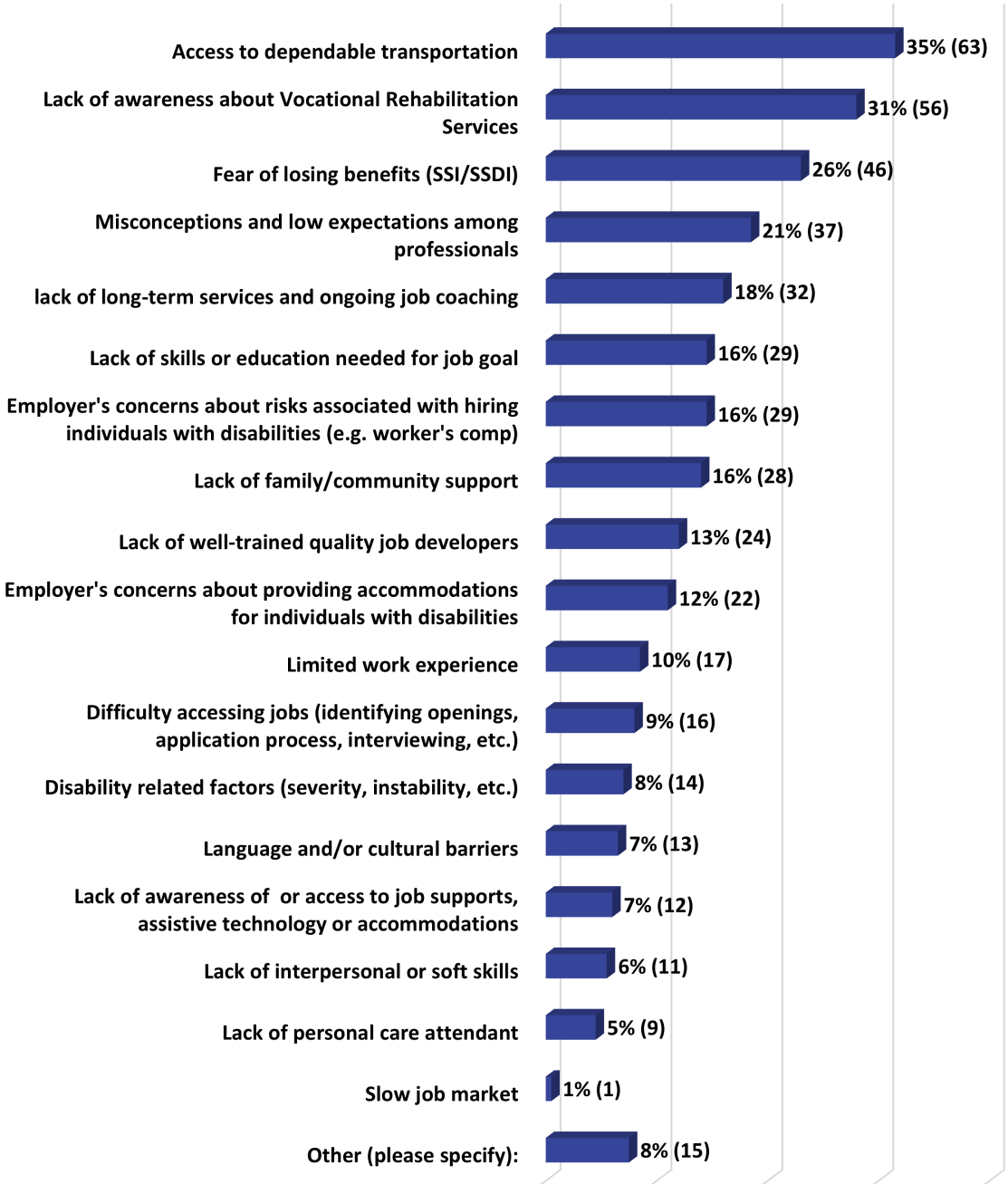


PERSPECTIVE OF PARENTS, FAMILY MEMBERS, ADVOCATES

Key Barriers to Employment for Racial/Ethnic Minority Populations

When asked about the key barriers to employment encountered by people with disabilities from racial/ethnic minority populations, most parents or caregivers of individuals with disabilities selected access to dependable transportation as the top barrier (35%). The second barrier identified by parents or caregivers of individuals with disabilities in minority populations was the lack of awareness about Vocational Rehabilitation Services (31%). Following that, the third most cited concern for this population was fear of losing benefits (26%). Misconceptions and low expectations among professionals (21%) were also mentioned as a barrier.

Key Barriers to Employment for IWD from Racial/Ethnic Minorities (n=178)



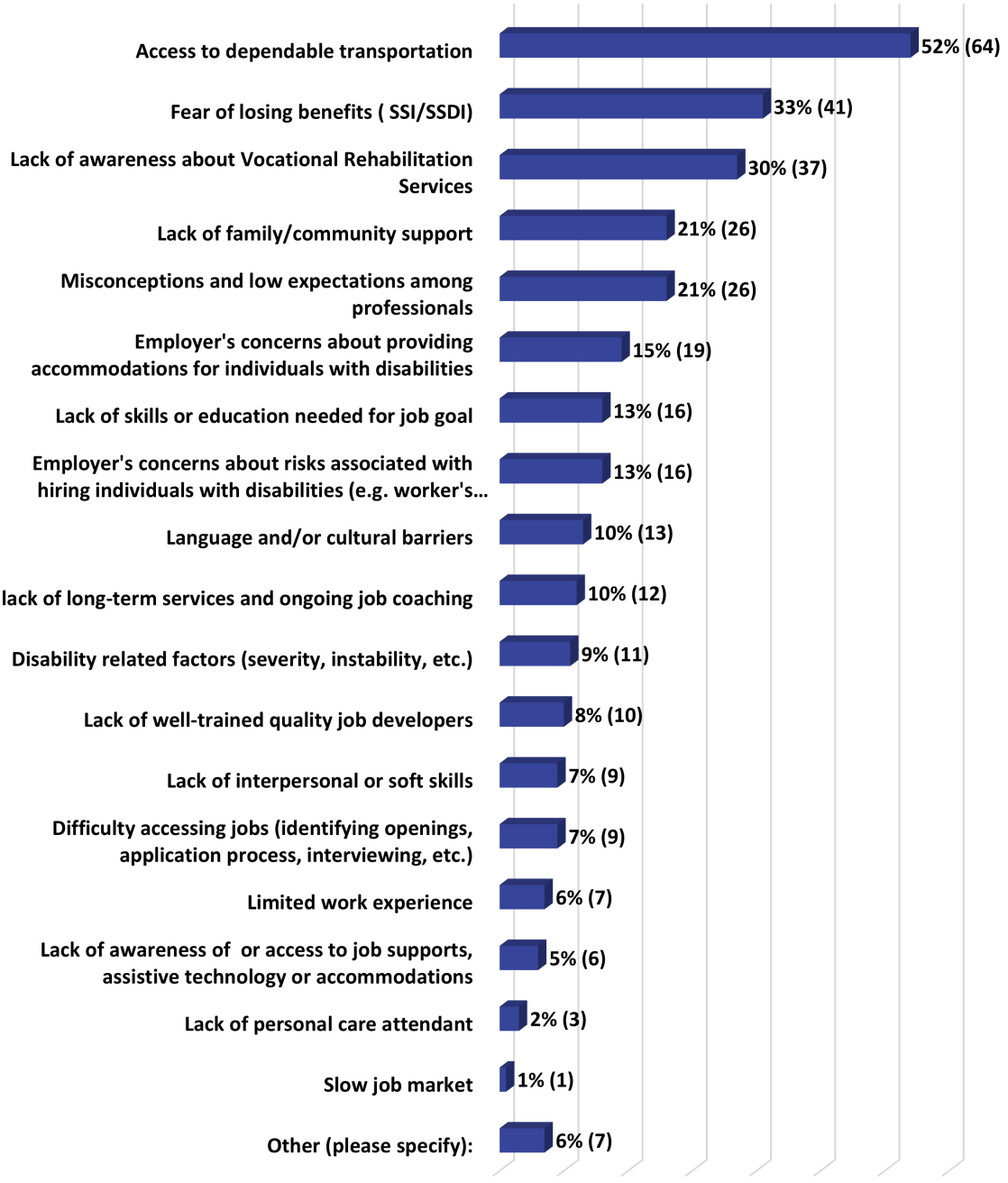
RESULTS FROM DATA COLLECTION

PERSPECTIVE OF PROFESSIONALS

Key Barriers to Employment for Racial/Ethnic Minority Populations

When asked about the key barriers to employment encountered by people with disabilities from racial/ethnic minority populations, professionals selected access to dependable transportation as the top barrier (52%). The second barrier for minority populations identified by professionals was fear of losing benefits (33%). Following that, the most cited concern for this population was lack of awareness of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (30%). Lack of support from family or community (21%) was another barrier identified by professionals related to the employment of people with disabilities.

Key Barriers to Employment for IWD from Racial/Ethnic Minorities (n=124)

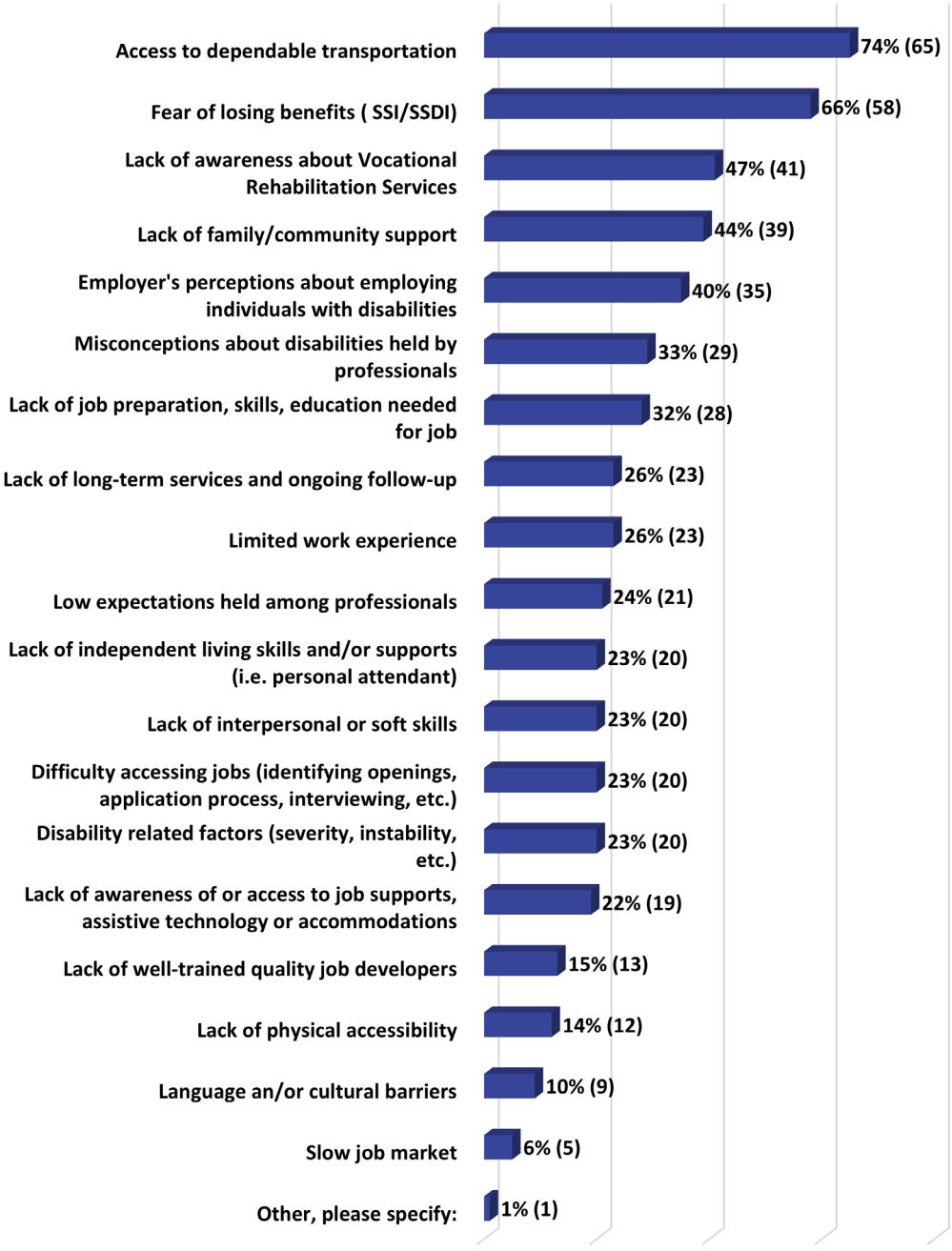


PERSPECTIVE OF EMPLOYMENT SERVICE PROVIDERS

Key Barriers to Employment for Racial/Ethnic Minority Populations

When asked about the top three barriers to employment encountered by individuals with disabilities from racial/ethnic minority populations, most of the employment service providers identified a lack of dependable transportation as the top barrier (74%). Fear of losing benefits (SSI/SSDI) was identified as the second most important barrier by employment service providers (66%). The lack of awareness about Vocational Rehabilitation Services was identified as the third most important barrier (47%). Following that was the lack of family and community support (44%).

Key Barriers to Employment for IWD from Racial/Ethnic Minorities (n=88)

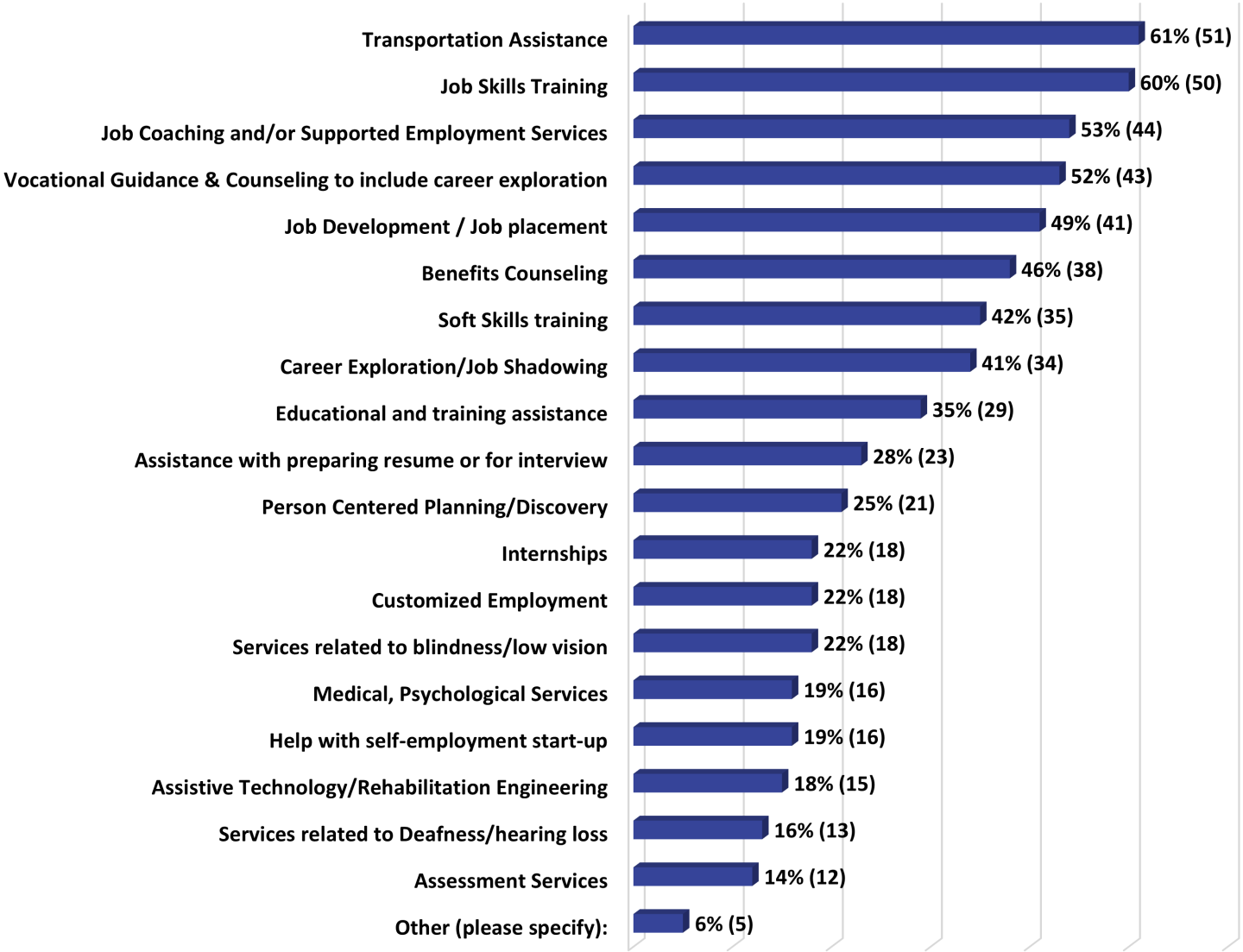


RESULTS FROM DATA COLLECTION

Services Most Needed by Individuals With Disabilities From Racial/Ethnic Minority Backgrounds

When asked about the key services needed by individuals with disabilities from racial/ethnic minority populations related to competitive integrated employment, transportation assistance was identified as the most important need (61%) followed by the need for job skills training (60%). A little over half of providers identified on-the-job assistance such as job coaching and supported employment (53%) and vocational guidance and counseling to include career exploration as key services (52%). Job development, job placement, and benefits counseling were some other services identified as being important for individuals from racial/ethnic minority populations.

Key Employment Services Needed for IWD from Racial/Ethnic Minorities (n=83)



INTERVIEW AND FOCUS GROUP RESULTS

INDIVIDUALS, FAMILY/CAREGIVERS, PROVIDERS, KEY INFORMANTS

Rural Areas

A key population identified by respondents as being underserved is those who live in rural areas. The most significant limitation to this population seems to be transportation, as one individual with a disability noted "… there is no transportation. So, if you don't have a vehicle, you don't go anywhere."

Family and caregivers of people with disabilities agreed that those living in rural areas are underserved by GVRA. Respondents identified lack of job training as an important barrier to this population. This absence of training and resources makes it very difficult for students to explore what they are interested in.

- *"I can say that certainly would be a barrier for a lot of students is that you know, what they might be interested in and what they might be very talented in, there just may not be those resources in the area…"*
- *"In rural areas, there may be a lack of places in the community for job training."*

Several professionals identified those who live in rural areas as an underserved population when it comes to GVRA services. These professionals identified the lack of job readiness training, fewer resources, and rural job deficit as examples of this underservice. One respondent noted that this job deficit in rural areas results in manual labor being the only option, which excludes many with disabilities that do not allow for physical labor. According to professionals, people with disabilities in rural areas are often overlooked when it comes to services in the state of Georgia, and this is a resource issue.

- *"We often don't think about rural communities"*
- *"And again, we're so rural, that we don't have anyone even for the area so the person that actually has extended themselves to help us is way out of our area but have given us as much information and helped us as much as they could with their you know with the arms that they have."*

Providers recognized that families and individuals in rural areas are underserved due to several barriers. They talked about the lack of providers in rural areas, stating that the financial limitations of being a non-profit do not allow for sending staff into rural areas often. Others noted that lack of reliable transportation and internet access are significant barriers to accessing GVRA services and obtaining employment in Georgia.

- *"GVRA doesn't reimburse for mileage like other states do. This makes it difficult for non-profits who reimburse for mileage to justify sending our staff into the very remote areas."*
- *"Being in a rural area, I think broadband internet and transportation are the largest barriers to quality employment for people with disabilities."*

Key informants discussed the challenges faced by underserved populations in rural areas, where access to service providers is limited. One interviewee highlights the lack of options for individuals seeking employment support, often resulting in them ending up in sheltered workshops or generic job placements instead of customized opportunities. Another respondent concurred, emphasizing the need for creative thinking to fix this disparity in service quality between rural and urban areas.

- *"I think that for underserved I really worry about our rural areas of the state...We have a lot of places who have no services. So, we really have to get creative to think, 'How do we take good practices that are working in some areas of the state, and help develop a model in these other areas?"*
- *"Rural areas, the more rural the area, the less likely there is to have...providers and they're... a lot of them are lucky to have any provider. Let alone have provider choice. And so I see a lot of employment providers who maybe don't provide good services. You know, they may provide sheltered work or they're placing people in jobs, but they're not customized jobs".*
- *"There's not a specialized counseling or service provider like through VR or through Medicaid who can then help you access individual services if you don't live somewhere ...where there's a program."*

Individuals With Most Significant Disabilities

Individuals with significant disabilities were another underserved population identified by respondents. Family and caregivers agreed that there is a general lack of support for those with complex disabilities, specifically in helping them find employment. One parent said there should be more effort to identify areas of interest for students with significant disabilities. By doing this, GVRA is helping these students build the skills and interests necessary for them to find sustainable employment.

- *"Supports and services to help adults with complex disabilities find employment."*
- *"And so just being able to identify areas of interest for students who might be more significantly impaired… helping them build those skill sets while they're in high school so that they can go on to employment."*

Respondents agreed that more attention and resources need to be focused on those with the most profound disabilities. One respondent specifically noted the lack of pre-ETS vendor options as a barrier for those with significant intellectual disabilities including autism.

- *"We found there's not really a lot out there for severe and profound or severe autistic students...A lot of it seemed more geared towards mild students or our moderate students"*
- *"They've got to turn their attention to those people with severe and profound disabilities because right now the attention is not on them."*

Respondents pointed out that families of color are a historically underserved group when it comes to disability services. One parent stated, "I think, you know, just historically and anything that we talk about, these families of color."

Professionals noted that families of color and those with language barriers are likely going to have a harder time finding employment that can accommodate them. One respondent noted that there is a lack of non-physical jobs that are supportive of those who do not speak English as a first language. Another respondent noted that minority families tend to have a more difficult experience advocating for themselves and accessing GVRA services.

- *"The other barrier that the clients I've worked with have faced in the workforce is that a lot of jobs that are available to the lower English level are more physically demanding."*
- *"Black and brown Families tend to have, in my experience, a little bit more difficulty advocating for services."*

Respondents highlighted the challenges faced by those who don't speak English fluently, and who often rely on family members to navigate the system. They point out the cultural tendency, especially within the Hispanic community, to prioritize family care. It emphasizes the need for disability workers to "meet them where they are", both culturally and linguistically, to ensure culturally responsive services. The quote underscores the need for intentional efforts to address the needs of these untapped populations effectively. Respondents highlighted that minority populations that are low income are most likely to be underserved. As one respondent stated, "I'll tell you who's not okay… areas that are highly populated with minority populations and below income."

Individuals With Mental Health Disabilities

Individuals with disabilities, as well as professionals, identified individuals with mental health disabilities as a possible underserved population, specifically when it comes to the transition to adulthood. As one respondent stated, "If it's not coordinated carefully with mental health services, and that they aren't working together correctly, then that can make things really difficult on the parents and on the graduate." Another individual stated, "I think they're difficult to employ because they're difficult behaviorally" and went on to say that this causes them to move in and out of jobs quickly.

Neurodivergence (ADHD, Autism)

Another underserved group identified by respondents was neurodiverse students. One respondent noted that disabilities, like ADHD, are most likely underserved because they are not apparent on the surface. Another parent said that their child in higher education has not been receiving tutoring or services for executive functioning issues because the focus has been on providing tutoring for academic subjects.

- *"It's very hard to get them to address that because they want to provide tutoring for academic subjects but not executive functioning type things."*
- *"I would say would be those borderline disabilities where It's not readily apparent on the surface. But there are challenges that could easily be overcome like ADHD and autism."*

Individuals and Students With Milder Support Needs

Another underserved population identified by respondents were students and individuals with mild to moderate support needs, specifically those on the general education/diploma track. One respondent noted that this could be remedied by better collaboration between entities involved in providing services to students. According to the survey, connecting students with these services is the best thing professionals and educators can do for them, as many of them are unaware of the GVRA services.

- *"What I've done is make sure to connect them to student services, and even had them attend meetings, talk, college, attend the meetings, and talk about that process."*
- *"That would be students with low-incident disabilities. Your mild and moderately intellectually disabled. Serving general education track students is more difficult."*

Families With Financial Limitations

Professionals shared that families who are financially challenged have a much harder time accessing GVRA services due to a range of barriers including lack of reliable internet (information), transportation, and money. Families privileged with greater financial resources are more able to access services for their family members.

- » *"...typically, when we think about low income in Georgia, we think about probably inner-city. And, yes, they do have difficulty accessing services."*
- » *"...the students that I have seen be successful have had parents that had the ability to spend hours on the phone answering emails, driving to inconvenient locations for the assessment, and things like that..."*

Families with limited resources may not have internet access and may be unaware of services. As one respondent stated, "families who don't have access financially, so regardless of race, you know, just not being aware that the services are available."

Lack of Support for Non-traditional Employment or Self-employment

Another underserved group identified by respondents was those who wished to find non-traditional employment. One provider noted that there is not a lot of support or services for those who wish to start their own business as an alternative to traditional employment. Another respondent stated that this lack of support may be due to long waitlists and providers who are stretched too thin.

- » *"There's a couple of people we support now that want to access some of the nontraditional services, maybe trying to start up their own business or that sort of thing... figure out how to navigate that system has been very difficult."*
- » *"The providers are few and far between...they had a wait list that was like 18 years long"*

People Who Use Assistive Technology Supports

Key informants highlighted the underrepresentation of individuals who use wheelchairs and rely on adaptive communication supports, such as communication systems. There is a significant gap in understanding and accommodating their communication needs within the service system. The suggestion for GVRA was to implement a 'mandatory module for onboarding' focusing on communication and active listening. This would better equip staff to comprehend and support non-traditional communication methods and utilize assistive technology effectively, thus addressing the underserved needs of this population.

Individuals With Traumatic Brain Injuries (TBI), Stroke, and Other Acquired Brain Injuries

Key informants noted that it is difficult to be hired after suffering a TBI or stroke, stating "...once you have a traumatic brain injury, nobody wants to hire...". Key informants identified that need that people with brain injuries need more than 90 days of on-the-job support, stating, "It's just, it's not enough."

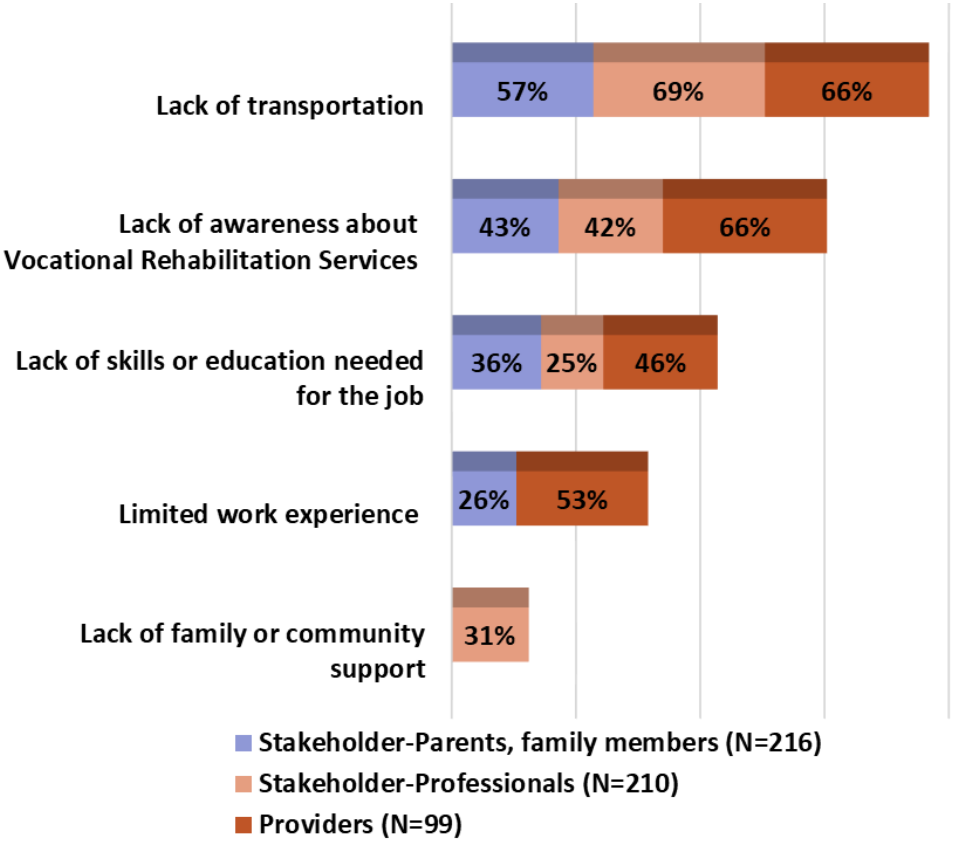
YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES, AND STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES, INCLUDING THEIR NEED FOR PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES

TOP BARRIERS FOR YOUTH AND STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN TRANSITION - CUMULATIVE RESULTS

Participants in the surveys were asked about what they thought were the three most important barriers to employment encountered by youth with disabilities who are in transition. Participants were asked to select any three options from a long list of different options. Lack of transportation was the top barrier identified by parents/family members, professionals, and employment service providers. Lack of awareness of vocational rehabilitation services was the second most important barrier identified by parents/family members, professionals, and employment service providers. Lack of skills or education needed for a job was the next barrier identified by parents, professionals, and providers. Limited work experience and lack of family and community support were other barriers identified by participants.

The infographic on the next page shows how the top barriers selected by each of the target groups stack against each other. For example, 66% of providers identified a lack of vocational rehabilitation services as one of the top three barriers to obtaining employment. The percentages in the graph do not relate to each other. They merely show us that cumulatively, lack of awareness of vocational rehabilitation services was the category chosen by most respondents across the surveys. The next few graphs below show the categories selected by each of the targeted groups.

Barriers for Youth and Students with Disabilities in Transition



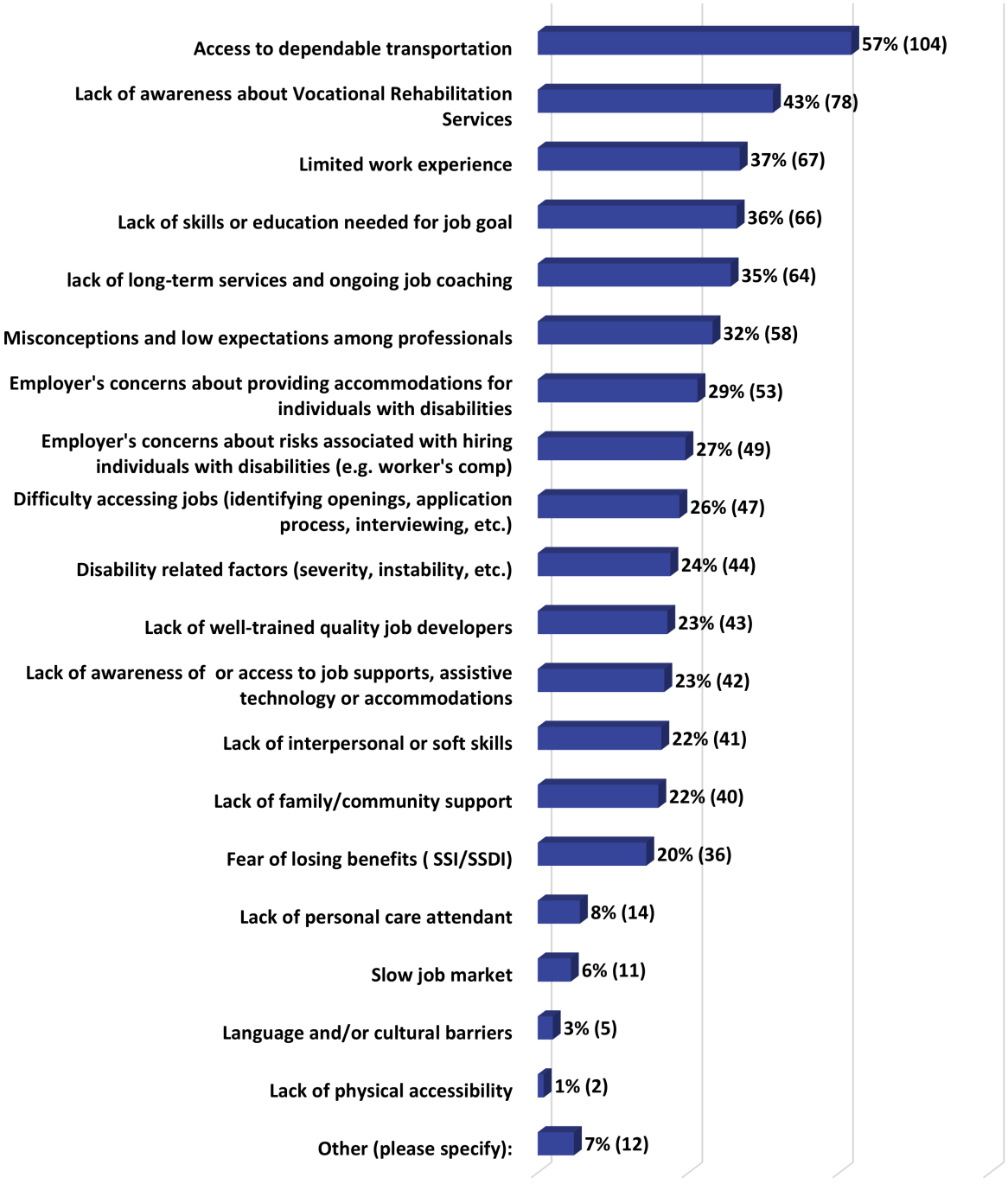
RESULTS FROM DATA COLLECTION

PERSPECTIVE OF PARENTS, FAMILY MEMBERS, ADVOCATES

Key Barriers to Employment for Youth With Disabilities in Transition

When asked about the key barriers to employment encountered by youth with disabilities who are in transition, most parents, family members, and advocates of individuals with disabilities selected access to dependable transportation as the top barrier (57%). The second most significant barrier for youth in transition was the lack of awareness about Vocational Rehabilitation Services (43%). Following that, the next most cited barriers were limited work experience (37%) and lack of skills and education needed for the job goal (36%).

Key Barriers to Employment for Youth with Disabilities in Transition (n=183)

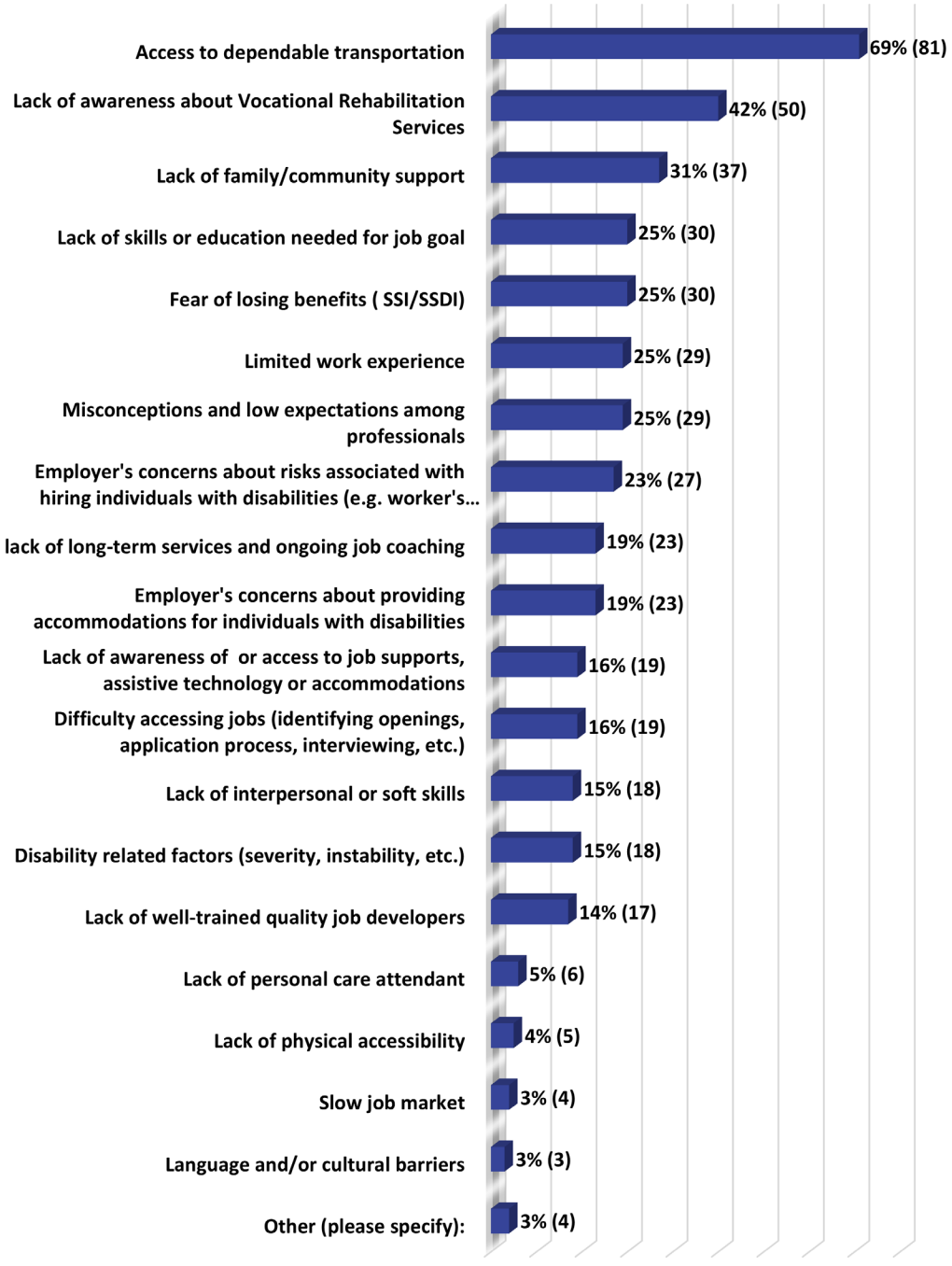


PERSPECTIVE OF PROFESSIONALS

Key Barriers to Employment for Youth With Disabilities in Transition

When asked about the key barriers to employment encountered by youth with disabilities who are in transition, most professionals selected access to dependable transportation as the top barrier (69%). The second most significant barrier for youth in transition identified by professionals was the lack of awareness about Vocational Rehabilitation Services (42%). Following that, the third most cited lack of family or community support (31%).

Key Barriers to Employment for Youth with Disabilities in Transition (n=118)



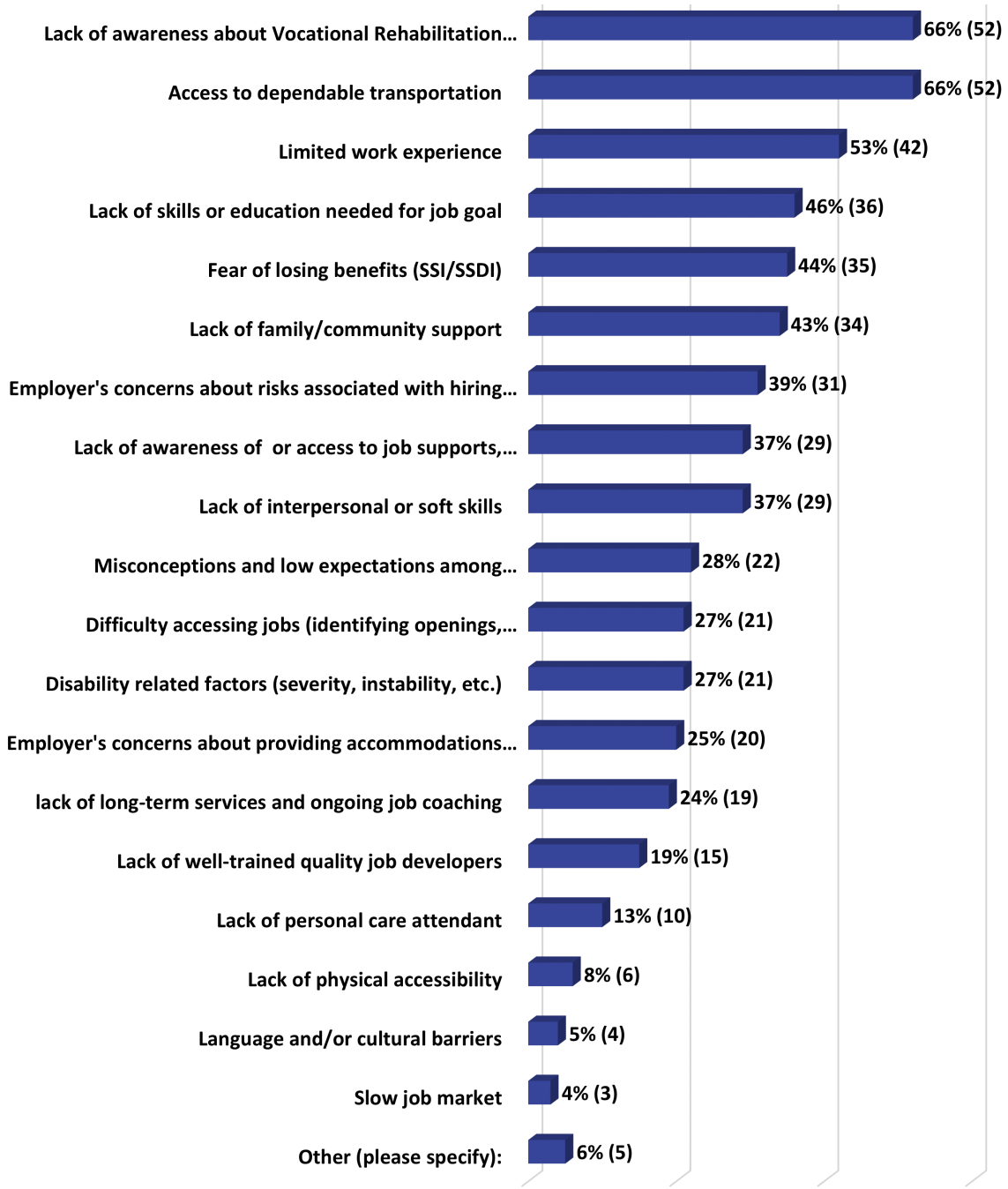
RESULTS FROM DATA COLLECTION

PERSPECTIVE OF EMPLOYMENT SERVICE PROVIDERS

Key Employment Barriers for Youth With Disabilities in Transition

When asked about the key barriers to employment encountered by youth and students with disabilities in transition, the majority of the professionals identified a lack of dependable transportation (66%) and lack of awareness about Vocational Rehabilitation Services as the top barrier (66%). Followed by limited work experience (53%) and lack of skills or education needed for the job goal (46%).

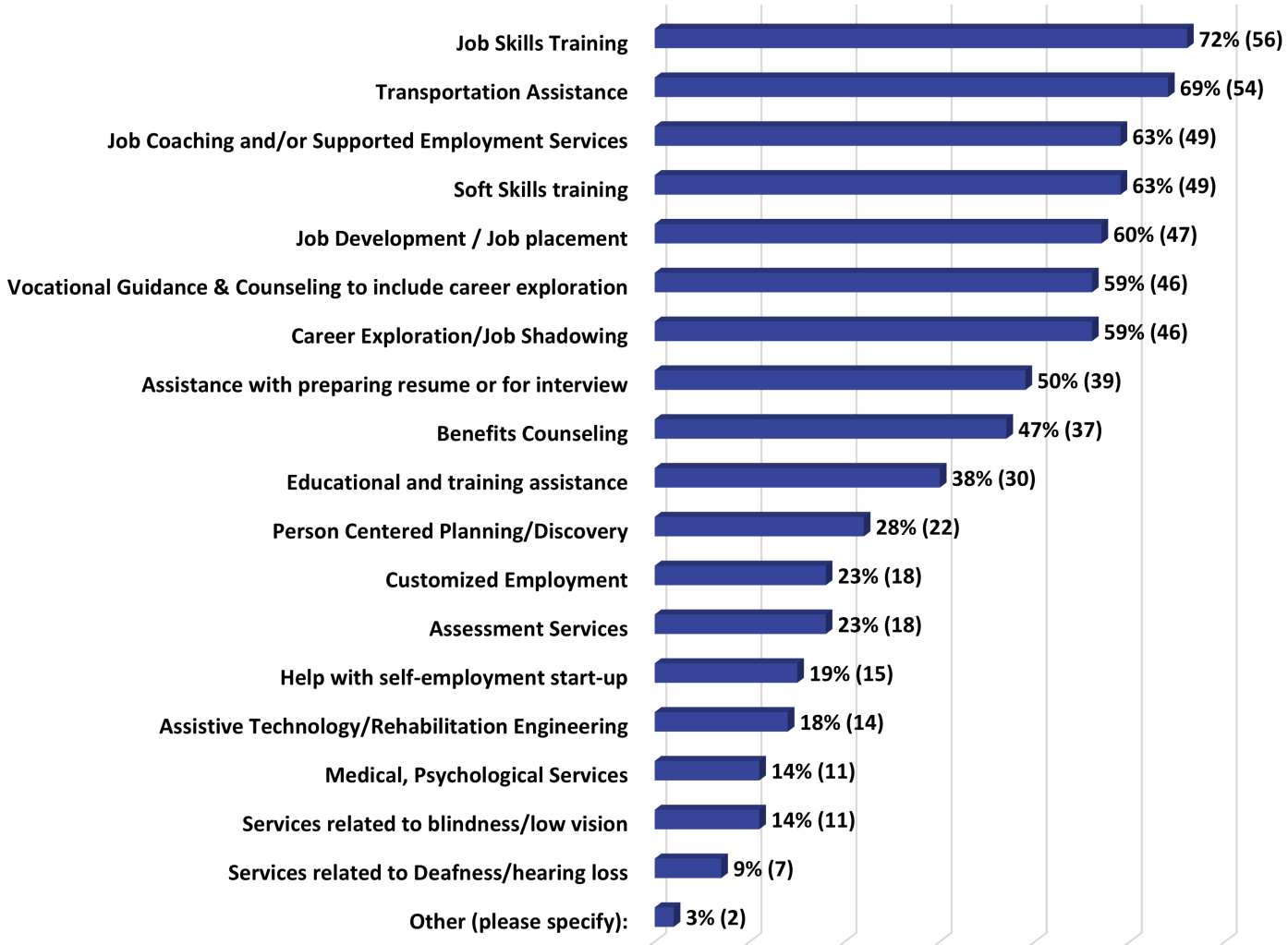
Key Employment Barriers for Youth with Disabilities in Transition (n=79)



SERVICES MOST NEEDED BY YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES IN TRANSITION

When asked about the key services needed by youth and students with disabilities in transition, job skills training was identified as the most important need (72%) followed by transportation assistance (69%). The need for on-the-job support including job coaching and supported employment services (63%) and soft skills training (63%) were identified as the next most needed services by youth and students with disabilities in transition. Job development, job placement, vocational guidance and counseling, career exploration, and job shadowing were some other services that were identified as being important for transition-age youth.

Key Employment Services Needed by Youth with Disabilities in Transition (n=78)



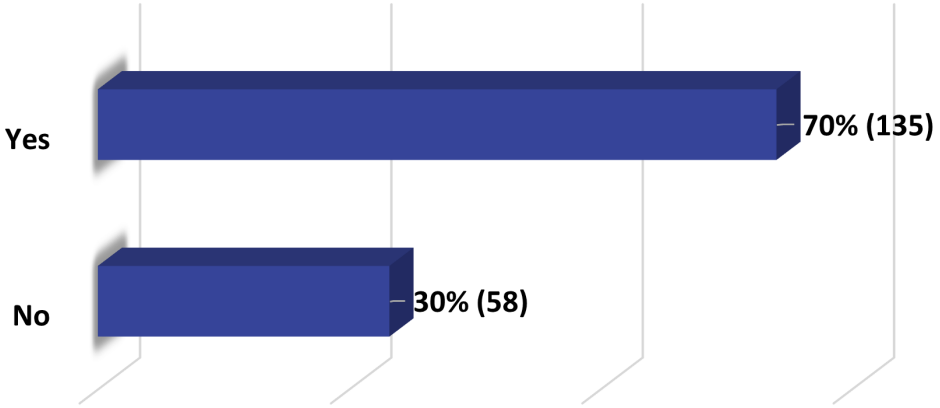
RESULTS FROM DATA COLLECTION

PERSPECTIVE OF PARENTS OR FAMILY MEMBERS

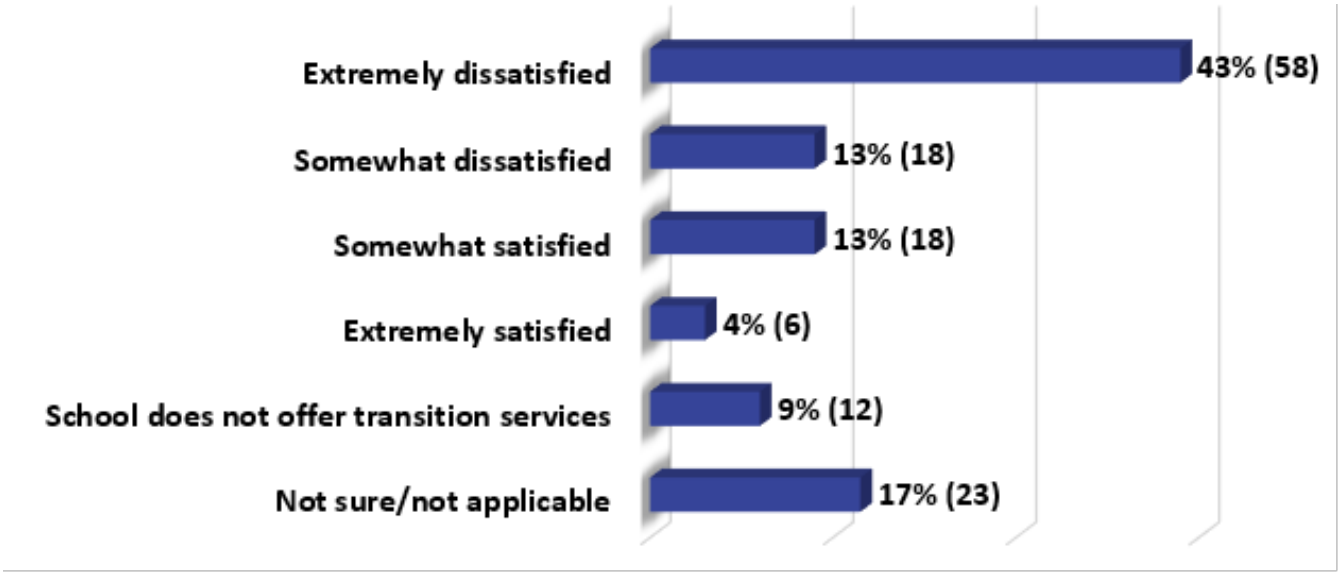
Family Member's Perception of the Need for Transition Services and Satisfaction

When parents or family members of youth with disabilities were asked if they needed transition services to prepare their child to move from education to employment, a majority selected 'Yes' (70%). Of those who said yes, more than half indicated that they were extremely or somewhat dissatisfied with the school-based transition services offered by the GVRA (56%). Some parents and family members were somewhat dissatisfied or satisfied (13% each), but very few were extremely satisfied with the transition services offered at their school (4%). Only 17% said that they were satisfied with transition services provided by GVRA.

Family Member of Youth with Disability who Needs or Needed Transition Services (n=193)

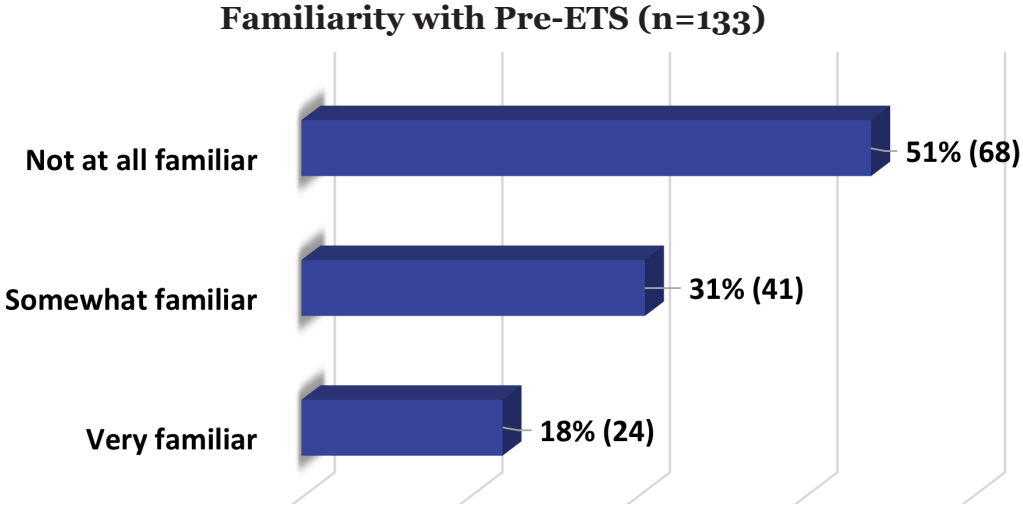


Satisfaction with Transition-related Services Provided by GVRA at School (n=135)



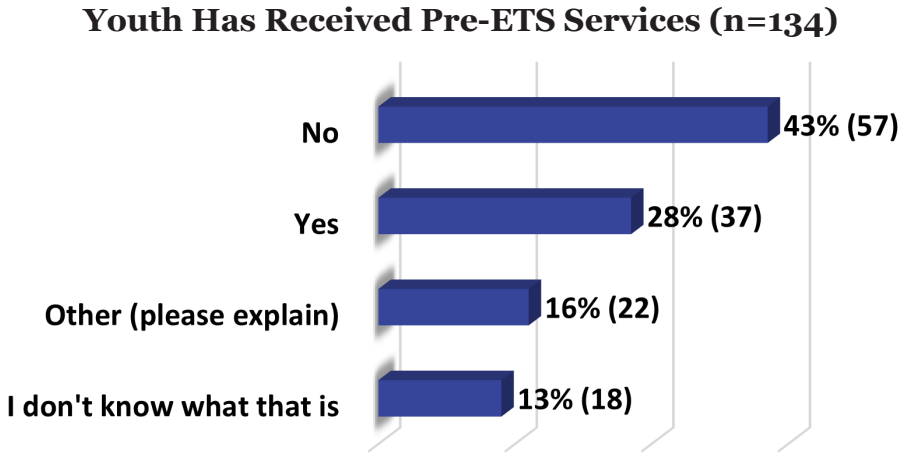
Familiarity With Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS)

When parents or family members of youth with disabilities were asked how familiar they were with pre-employment transition services offered to their child in the school, most respondents selected that they were either not familiar at all (51%) or somewhat familiar (31%) with the services. Only 18% of parents or family members indicated that they were very familiar with these employment transition services.



Youth Has Received Pre-ETS Services

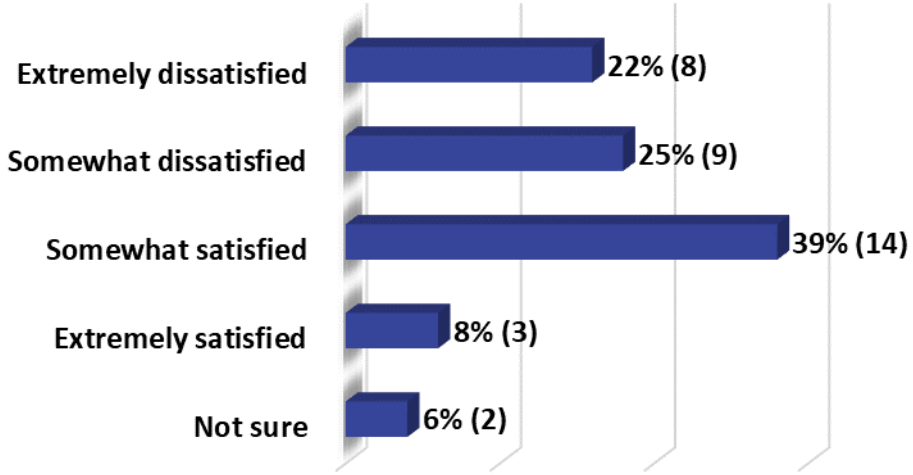
When asked if their student/youth received pre-ETS services offered by their school, a little over two-fifths of parents and family members responded that they had not received these services (43%). Some respondents mentioned that their students had received pre-ETS services in school (28%), however, several did not know what these services are (13%).



Satisfaction With Pre-ETS Services

When parents of students who have received pre-ETS services offered in schools were asked how satisfied they were with these services, less than half (47%) were somewhat or extremely dissatisfied, and an equal percentage (47%), were somewhat or extremely satisfied.

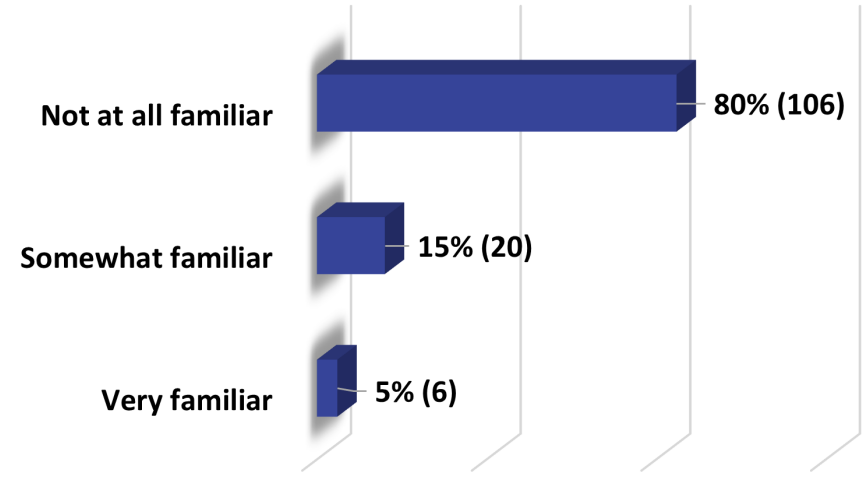
Satisfaction with Pre-ETS Services (n=36)



Familiarity With Pathway Explore for Pre-ETS

When asked about their familiarity with Pathway Explore for Pre-ETS offered in school, most parents or family members of students with disabilities selected that they were not at all familiar with the platform (80%). Only a small group of parents said they were somewhat familiar with Pathway Explore (15%), and the rest responded that they were very familiar (5%).

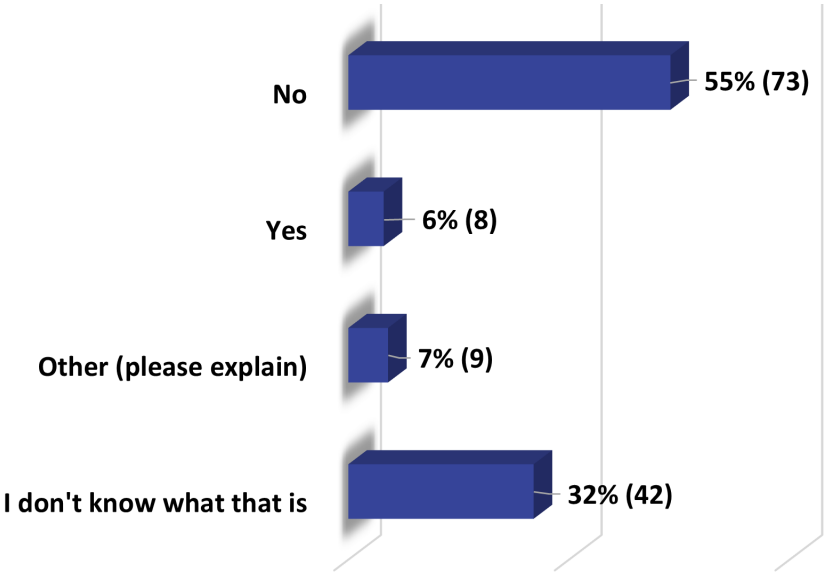
Familiarity with Pathway Explore for Pre-ETS (n=132)



Has Youth Received Pathway Explore for Pre-ETS

Of the parents or family members surveyed, over half responded that their child had not received Pathway Explore for Pre-ETS services (55%). Close to a third responded that they did not know what Pathway Explore is (32%), and the rest either responded that their child had received these services (6%) or selected 'Other' and explained their reasoning (7%), such as the service not being in place when the IWD was in the school system, or being irrelevant due to schooling circumstances (such as homeschooling).

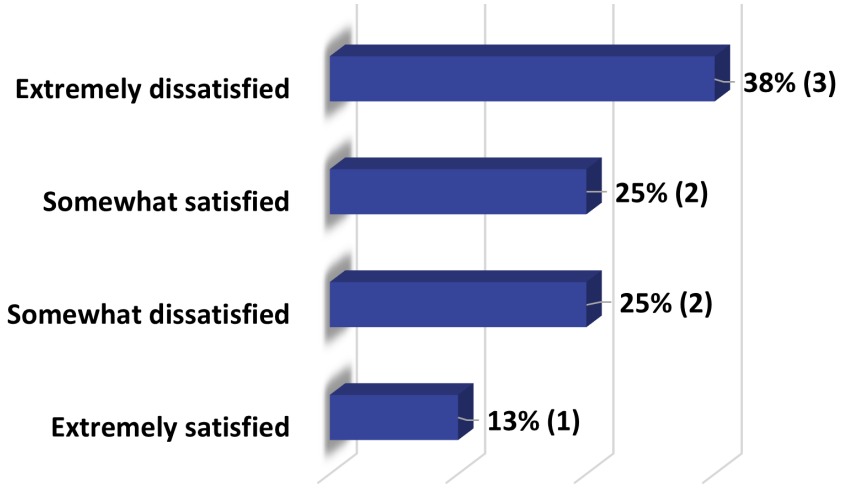
Has Youth Received Pathway Explore for Pre-ETS (n=132)



Satisfaction With Pathway Explore for Pre-ETS Services

Most parents or family members of children who received Pathway Explore for Pre-ETS services responded that they were extremely dissatisfied with the services (38%). A quarter of the respondents selected that they were somewhat satisfied with the services (25%), and another quarter selected that they were somewhat dissatisfied (25%). Only one respondent said that they were extremely satisfied with these services (13%).

Satisfaction with Pathway Explore for Pre-ETS Services (n=8)



INTERVIEW AND FOCUS GROUP RESULTS

FAMILY/CAREGIVERS, PROFESSIONALS, KEY INFORMANTS

Insufficient Transition Planning – Several interviewees endorsed a lack of emphasis on effective transition planning with students. They shared that current transition plans often focus only on getting the child matriculated out of high school but do not adequately focus on preparing the youth for life after school. Transition plans are frequently very general, based on standardized language, and are not individually tailored to each child. Interviewees shared that youth with disabilities lack access to opportunities that would lead them to successful employment outcomes in the future. Many employment-preparation opportunities that exist for students without disabilities are often inaccessible for students with disabilities.

- *"…even though there's a transition plan to adulthood written in the school and written in the IEP, when the time comes that the child leaves the school, they don't have a very clear idea of where they are going."*
- *"The transition plan is not really a plan past post-secondary. It's just to get them to matriculate out, that 12th grade, 22 years old […] There is a transition, but that transition does not go past 12th grade.*
- *"My daughter has a transition plan that's part of our IEP. It's been very general. They've asked for input, but they pretty much write it up the way that they, you know, that sort of standard way that they include it in the IEP."*
- *"There is no bridge between job skills learned in school and ongoing post-graduation training and employment opportunities."*
- *"...Lack of access to the same kind of education, technical assistance programs is the number one reason. The lack of thinking and choices that are provided to them are limited."*
- *"... are people with disabilities getting that same kind of track? Are they getting pushed into those jobs that probably a robot's gonna do?"*

Lack of Information and Resources for Families – Respondents talked about an ongoing struggle with finding information and assistance regarding employment services and benefits counseling. Information may be available, but families aren't aware of how to access it. Families often don't know what a benefits counselor is or how to get one.

- *"I think having the information when they transition […] I think there might be pockets of good transition where information is readily available, and families know what to do, but I think probably the majority, it's the opposite."*
- *"I think we would find that most families don't know what to do, or even if they do know where to go, the process is so complicated."*
- *"I feel like there is a barrier to getting a benefits counselor. And part of the barrier is that parents (or representatives if they're not the parent), they don't know how-- they might not have ever even heard of a benefits counselor, right?"*
- *"The problem is that not all parents have the capacity, or the time, or the knowledge in order to access services to help their child take those next steps because, as you know, parents are as unique as the students are and come from all different backgrounds and busyness levels and everything."*

Fears of Losing Benefits - Interviewees shared that many families fear the prospect of their young adults losing benefits. The fear of losing benefits leads families to not take advantage of available opportunities for existing services and transition programs.

- *"Even if the school gets them into the vocational rehab, they're pulling them out over a period of time, because they're too concerned that's gonna mess up their check."*
- *"[...] the process of them maintaining a job when it comes to if they have SSD and how it affects their checks that way, that's a large thing that I noticed here. We're actually trying to maneuver some of that for our parents now, too, because they don't understand the process."*
- *"We...have Project Search...has its own challenges because... if parents don't understand the program itself, they are very fearful of 'What am I gonna lose? What do I have to give up for my child or my young adult to be a part of this? Is it gonna affect their benefits?'"*
- *"There are other opportunities available, but then it's whether or not the parents take advantage of they have like--WorkSource. […] that disconnect is a beast because that is their biggest fear because the guardian looks at the fact that, "Well, if they already have a check coming, I don't have to worry about how they're going to live, what they're going to live off of because they have a check coming."*

Quality of Pre-ETS - Interviewees talked about some challenges regarding the quality of pre-ETS services in Georgia. Interviewees expressed that the quality of transition services in Georgia depends on location and the specific GVRA counselor. Respondents talked about a need for mor transparency related to selecting vendors, quality control measures for services. Additionally, COVID-19 has had a negative impact on the quality of pre-ETS services.

- *"[Quality of pre-ETS] depends on the GVRA counselor and the relationship between the district and counselor."*
- *"Each school is different. Each district is different. It depends on what type of district support and school support you have."*
- *"...my son's first week in high school, they put him to work mopping floors and cleaning tables and said that that was what they had decided that he was going to do for his career preparedness. And they had not looked at his transition paperwork. They just basically said, 'This is what we've always done. This is what we're going to continue to do. This is what we're able to offer the students at our school.'"*
- *"[I] probably know 2 or 3 families who have said 'this [pre-ETS] was really helpful and beneficial,' and have been able to use it."*
- *"My son received pre-ETS virtually during the pandemic. It was not effective at all."*
- *"Is there any plan for quality control or you know, manage, like observation or like, keeping track?"*

RESULTS FROM DATA COLLECTION

Challenges Implementing and Scheduling Pre-ETS Services - Interviewees shared that there have been challenges in implementing and scheduling pre-ETS services in school. Scheduling pre-ETS services to minimize disruption to academic class periods was identified as a challenge. Interviewees have also shared that it can be difficult to restart pre-ETS services after a gap in services or a change in service providers.

- *"Our teachers and staff value that time that students are having to miss any academic period time, so it's kind of difficult to figure out when they can actually be able to receive some of that."*
- *"We're very thankful for the service because it does supplement what we're trying to do...But it is--you have to schedule it very strategically."*
- *"... it's been hard to get our foot grounded to get started with some of those with the pre-ETS... here, lately, it's been kind of difficult to get back started back up again with the changeover."*

COVID Impact - According to interviewees, the arrival of COVID-19 has impacted student transition services. One professional shared that COVID-19 directly impacted their area's Project SEARCH program; the hospital they partnered with decided not to participate in the program.

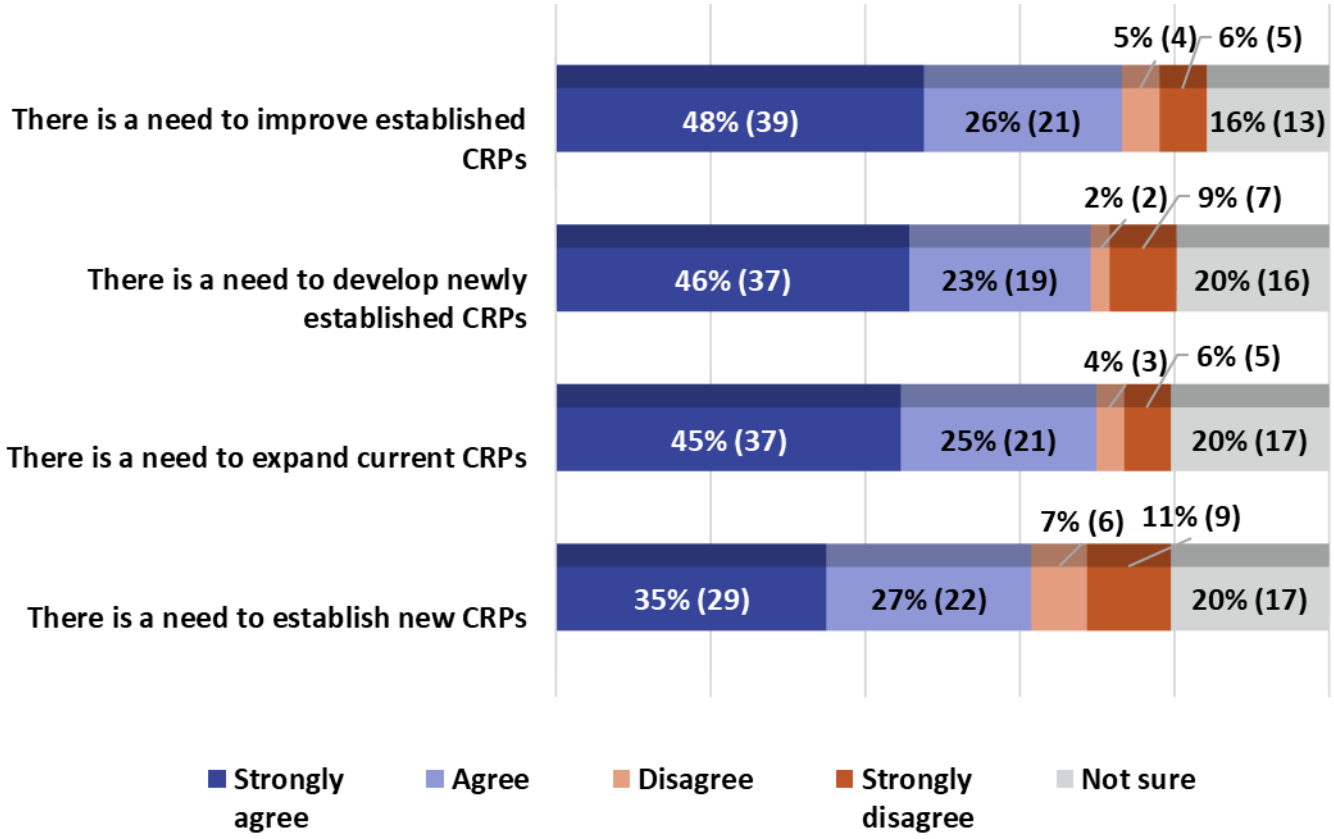
- *"With our area, before COVID, the hospital had said that they want to partner with us, and then when COVID hit, they dropped out and then we can't reengage them."*
- *"We are challenged; we're having to do a lot of training and certainly allocating a lot more funds to those very young children because there are more of them than we've ever seen, which I have to attribute to COVID."*

IDENTIFY THE NEED TO ESTABLISH, DEVELOP, OR IMPROVE COMMUNITY REHABILITATION PROGRAMS WITHIN THE STATE

KEY SURVEY RESULTS

Employment service providers were asked the following question, 'Considering existing community rehabilitation programs' (CRPs) capacity to provide employment services to Georgians with disabilities, please check the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.' The results are presented in the graph below. Almost all (74%) of providers mention that there is a need to improve established Community Resource Providers (CRPs) in Georgia, followed by 70% who agree or strongly agree that there is a need to expand current CRPs. About two-thirds of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that there is a need to establish new CRPs (62%) and that there is a need to develop newly established CRPs (69%).

Community Rehabilitation Programs' Needs (n=81)



INTERVIEW AND FOCUS GROUP RESULTS

INDIVIDUALS, FAMILY/CAREGIVERS, PROFESSIONALS, PROVIDERS, KEY INFORMANTS

Lack of Available Services - Interviewees endorsed a lack of available services assisting with employment and benefits navigation. Interviewees also discussed the lack of long-term support services available for individuals with disabilities after they find jobs. They need ongoing job support but are left 'on their own' to navigate their job after the first few weeks of employment. Additionally, interviewees expressed that individuals and families often lack services because they do not know where to find the providers that do exist in Georgia.

- *"We work really hard to try to get them to have the waiver services before they leave. But there's not a lot of activities for them"*
- *"Once they are hired, not having the support that they need on the job. I know that there's some support that help them for maybe the first few weeks. Some can have that, but overall, they're basically left on their own."*
- *"Besides the one I went through ABC, I don't know of another [long-term support service] that exists."*
- *"I have been fortunate to have some good providers in our life. But that generally does not happen because people don't know where to look for a provider."*

Perceptions & Attitudes Held by Service Providers - Interviewees expressed that some service providers hold deficit-based attitudes toward the employment capacities of their clients, leading them to focus on ways in which individuals with disabilities are unsuitable or unprepared for employment. Focus needs to be on what are the gifts of this person and what supports they need, rather than whether this person is ready to go to work. Strengths-based service provision would lead to more possibilities for individuals with disabilities to find and maintain employment.

- *"So specific to GVRA and some of the subcontractors or affiliates, there's struggles there. A lot of times, we have been told that 'so and so is non-employable.'"*
- *"A lot of times we have had assessments that are done and instead of them being strength-based --They were clearly not done by a social worker; they are deficit-based."*
- *"We're still approaching services with a mindset of readiness, a mindset of, you know, 'this person isn't ready to go to work because...' and we put too much emphasis on screening people out as opposed to figuring out, 'What are the supports that are needed?'"*

Customized Employment Contract Criteria - Interviewees discussed the challenges that providers face in providing customized employment to individuals with disabilities, namely that contracts require service for the entire duration of an individual's job search and employment while only paying them once. This limits the amount of payment that providers are able to receive for providing extended services and thus limits the capacity of providers to serve.

- *"Part of the criteria is that when you close out, and you're no longer working with the person on a regular basis, the provider was bound by a contract to say they would provide drop-in to see how the person's doing for the life of the job."*
- *"We may serve someone a long time. If it takes a year to develop a customized job for someone, then*

we served them for that year. But we only get paid one time. So, if it takes us 3 months or a year, our reimbursement rates will be the same."

» *"That's something that has kind of made some people hesitant to provide their services because it's expensive to provide customized employment. [...] And the way the regulation is written, now you serve that person for the life of their job. So, in theory, you could support somebody and coach them for 20 years and never be paid for it."*

Lack of Available Long-Term Support - Some individuals with disabilities require long-term support from providers to find employment and maintain employment success. Providers described a lack of funding for long-term support services throughout the state. This is especially detrimental to individuals with significant disabilities, as they are more likely to require long-term support.

» *"I think the largest barrier that the individuals I work with run into is not enough resources to provide the long-term supports they need."*

» *"A huge barrier is that people who typically need customized employment need ongoing support, and GVRA only does the front end, and the funding source for the other end is DBHDD. And so, the capacity on that side of the house Is limited as well."*

» *"[GVRA] wants to provide 90 days of work readiness training or 90 days of job coaching within a support employment setting; that's kind of their model. For persons with significant disabilities like acquired brain injury, 90 days is nothing. […] And so, it's just not enough, frankly."*

» *"There is a concept of rehab that once a person gets some services, they have kind of learned those things […] but you don't rehabilitate a developmental disability. You can give people skills and training […], but they are always going to have a cognitive disability that requires some support.*

Existence of Sheltered Workshops - Interviewees expressed their frustration with the continued existence of sheltered workshops.

» *"Sheltered workshops are antiquated. They're unethical. There's no semblance of equality."*

Lack of Resources for Providers - According to interviewees, providers are doing their best with the resources they have, but they need more resources.

» *"I think local providers are doing the very, very best that they can do […] you probably hear this from everybody. We need more funding. We need more resources. Given the level of resources that they have, I think that they're doing the very best that they can do. With that said, I think it's very limited and very remedial."*

Supported Employment Can Be Inflexible - Interviewees shared that providing services to clients through Supported Employment often comes with limitations, hindering the amount of assistance they are able to provide. Other forms of assistance, such as Community Access, can be more flexible and thus more helpful for clients to obtain employment.

» *"A lot of the people that we get jobs for ...we don't even use supported employment. We do it under Community Access; that is a whole lot more flexible in how you can spend the funding."*

» *"...supported employment does not really capture how many people are actually employed because we don't even use supported employment. We do it under other services because there's a whole lot more flexibility and we can get people jobs easier."*

ARE GVRA SERVICES MEETING THE EMPLOYMENT NEEDS OF GEORGIANS WITH DISABILITIES?

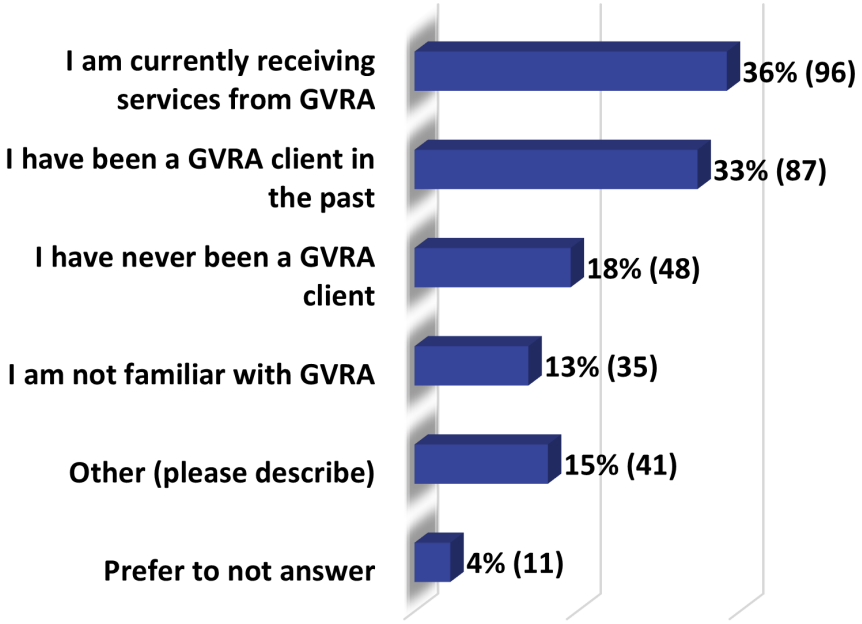
EXPERIENCE WITH GVRA – CUMULATIVE RESULTS

PERSPECTIVE OF INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES

Familiarity With GVRA

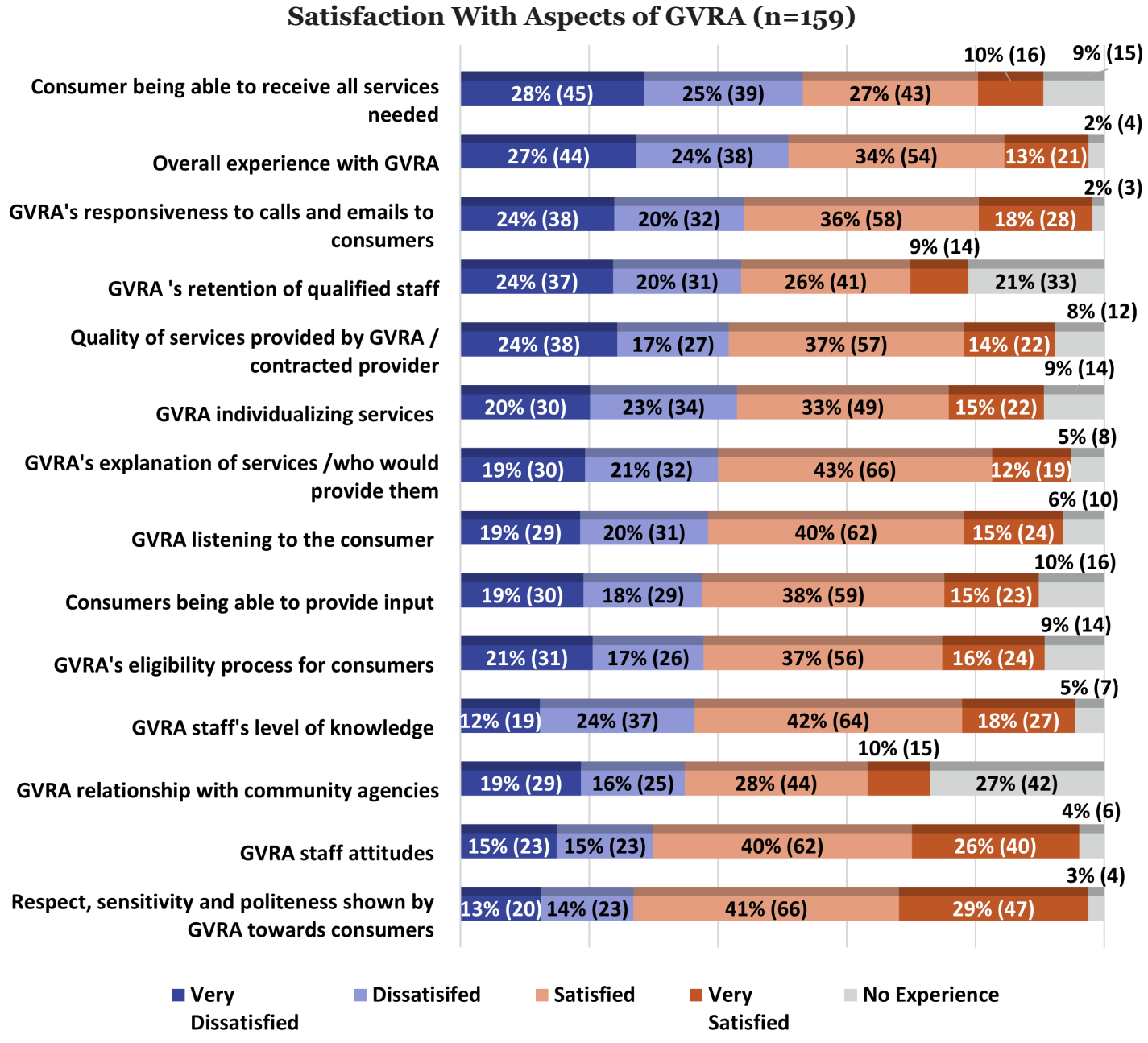
When asked about their familiarity or engagement with the GVRA, one-third of participants cited they were currently receiving services from GVRA (36%) and another one-third (33%) mentioned they had been a GVRA client in the past. A little over one-sixth (18%) said they had never been a GVRA client (18%), and another one-sixth (15%) provided other insights, including having applied for services but not yet received any or not received a response from the agency.

Familiarity with GVRA (n=267)



Satisfaction With GVRA

A little over half of individuals with disabilities (53%) were very dissatisfied or dissatisfied about being able to receive all the services needed. Respondents also mentioned being very dissatisfied or dissatisfied with their overall GVRA experience (51%); and staff retention at GVRA (44%). Consumers were also very dissatisfied with the GVRA counselor's responsiveness to calls and emails (44%). When asked to rate their experiences with GVRA, participants' satisfaction levels varied. About 70% of respondents were either satisfied or very satisfied with the respect, sensitivity, and politeness GVRA showed to customers. Other responses with high satisfaction ratings included - staff attitudes (66%); staff knowledge level (60%); and responsiveness to calls and emails (54%). Each of these statements was a separate question, so the sample size differs. The chart depicts the average sample size across all statements.



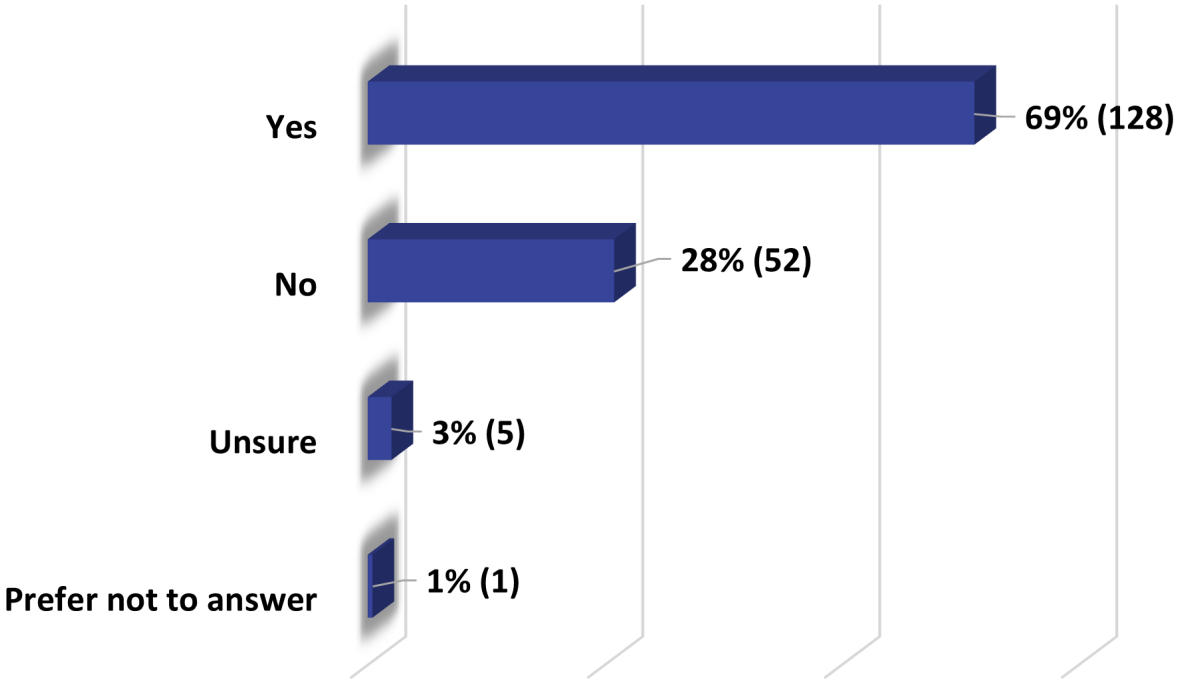
RESULTS FROM DATA COLLECTION

PERSPECTIVE OF PARENTS OR FAMILY MEMBERS

Have Interacted or Worked With GVRA to Receive Assistance

When asked whether or not they have interacted or worked with the GVRA to receive assistance for themselves or someone else, a large majority of the respondents replied that they had (69%). A little more than a quarter of the respondents selected that they had not worked or interacted with the GVRA to receive assistance (28%), and only a few were unsure (3%).

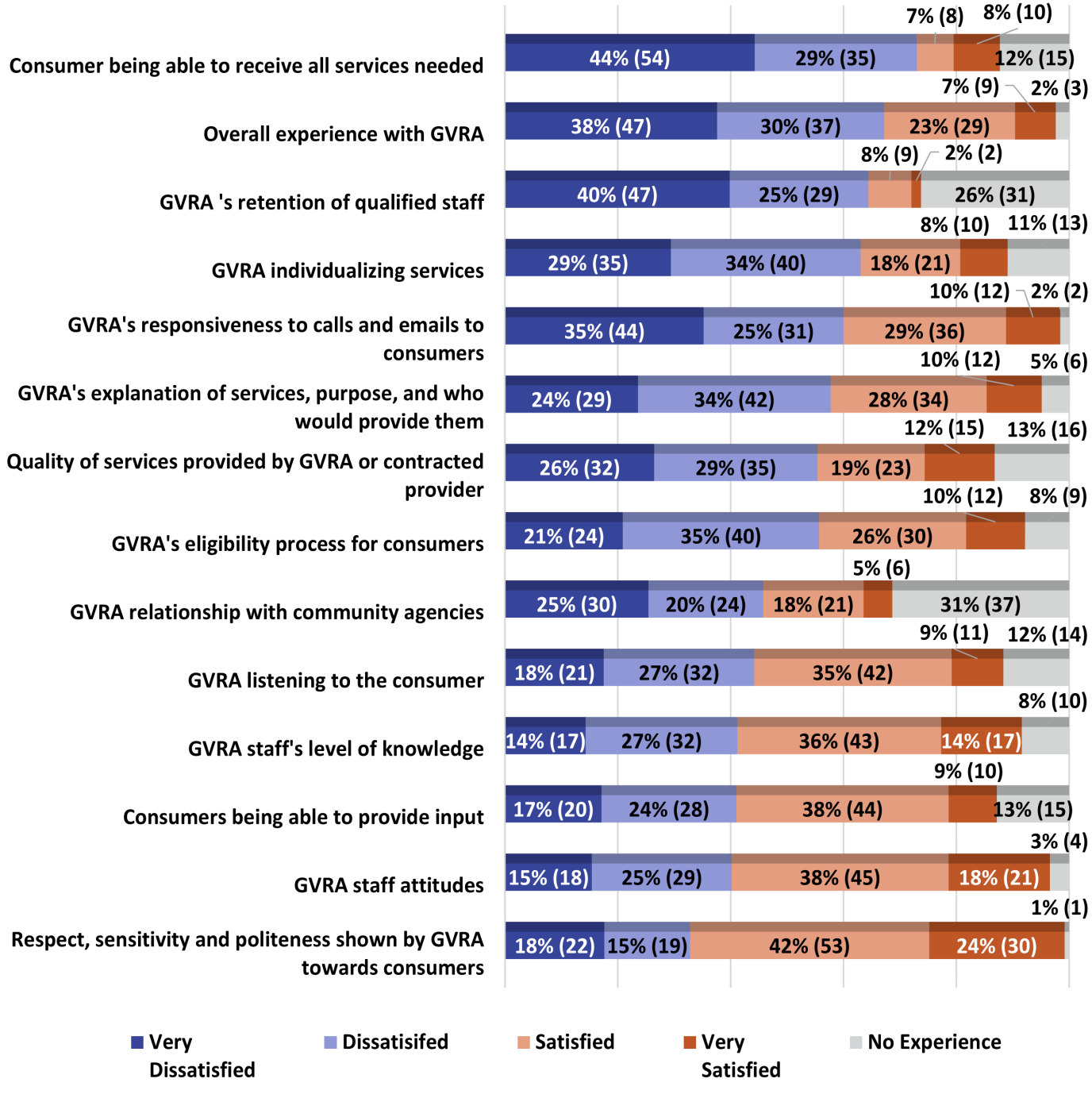
Have Interacted or Worked with GVRA to Receive Assistance (n=186)



Satisfaction With GVRA

A little less than three-quarters of parents or family members of individuals with disabilities reported being very dissatisfied or dissatisfied about being able to receive all the services they needed (73%). They were also very dissatisfied with their overall experience with GVRA (68%) and with GVRA's retention of qualified staff (65%). A little over five-eighths of parents were dissatisfied with the individualization of services by GVRA (63%). On the other hand, two-thirds of parents said they were satisfied with the respect, sensitivity, and politeness shown by GVRA towards consumers (66%) and staff attitudes (56%).

Satisfaction with GVRA (n=112)

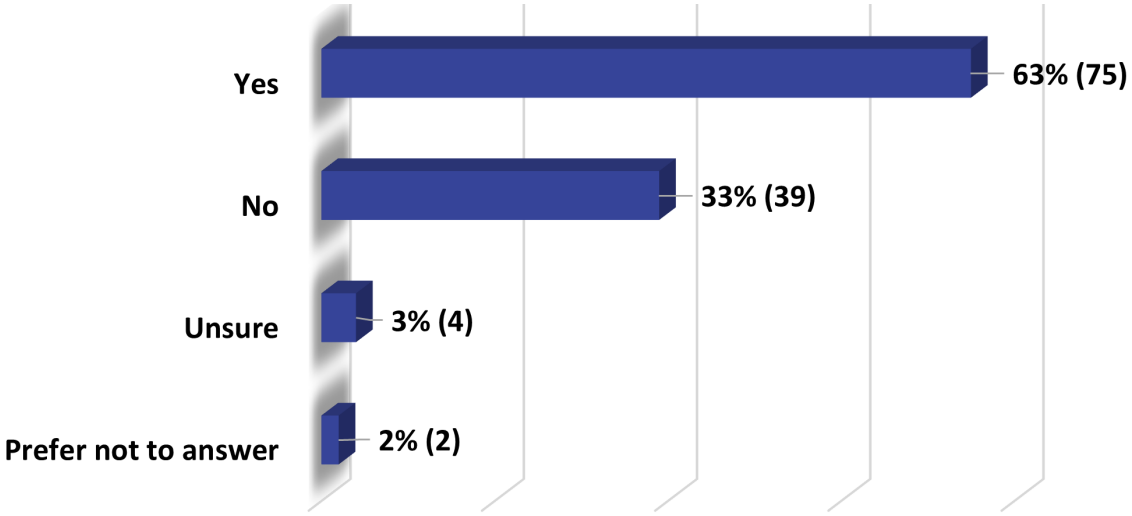


PERSPECTIVE OF PROFESSIONALS

Have Interacted or Worked With GVRA to Receive Assistance

When asked whether they have interacted or worked with the GVRA to receive assistance for themselves or someone else, a little over three-fifths of the professional respondents replied that they had (63%). A third of the respondents selected that they had not worked or interacted with the GVRA to receive assistance (33%), and only a few professionals were unsure (3%).

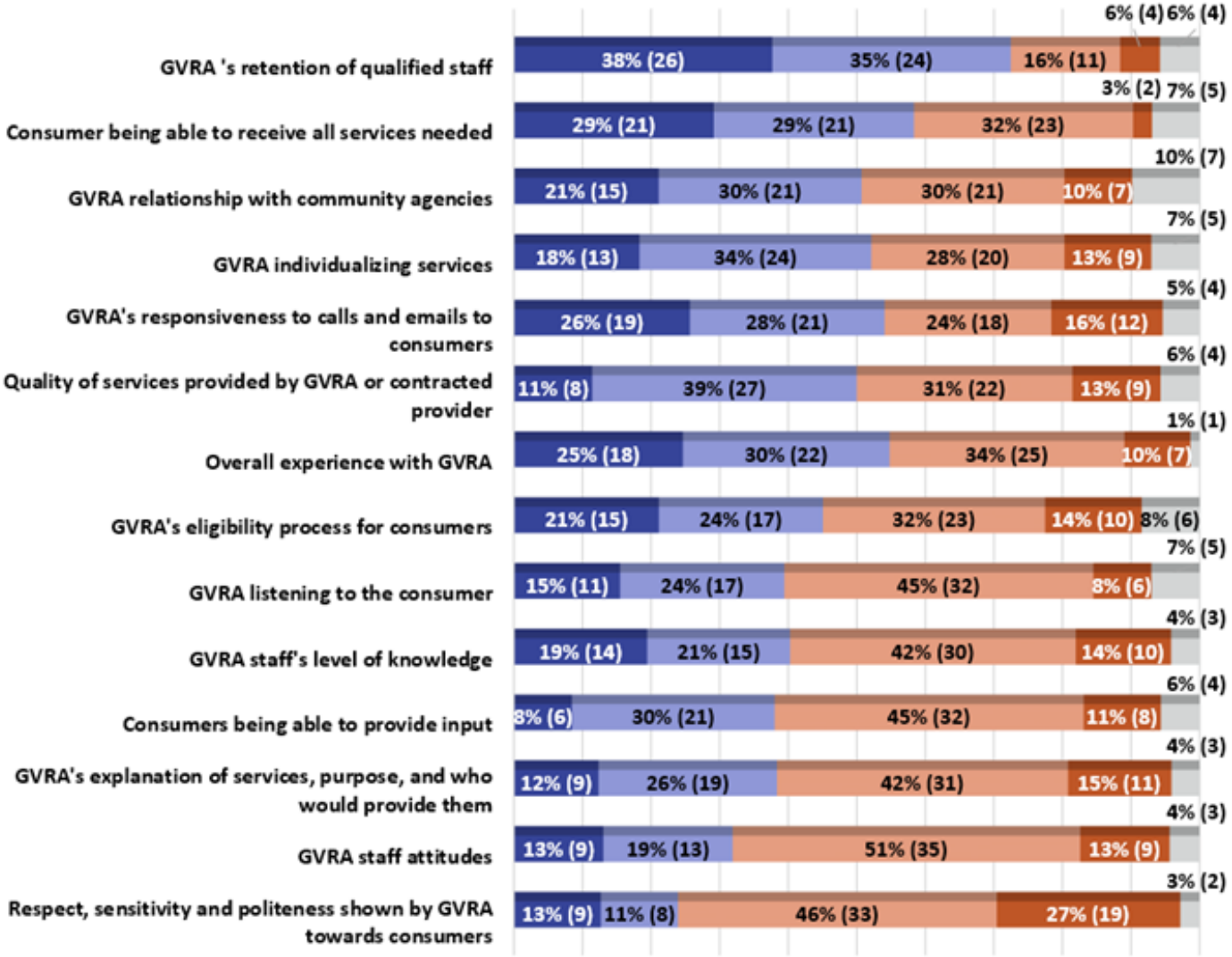
Have Interacted or Worked with GVRA to Receive Assistance (n=120)



Satisfaction With GVRA

A little less than three-quarters of professionals reported being very dissatisfied or dissatisfied with GVRA's retention of qualified staff (73%) followed by dissatisfaction with consumers being able to receive all services needed (58%). Professionals were also very dissatisfied with their overall experience with GVRA (55%) and with GVRA's responsiveness to calls and emails from consumers (54%). On the other hand, a little less than three-quarters of professionals said they were satisfied with the respect, sensitivity, and politeness shown by GVRA towards consumers (73%) and staff attitudes (64%). They were also satisfied with GVRA's explanation of services, purpose, and who would provide them (57%). Each of these statements was a separate question, so the sample size differs. The chart depicts the average sample size across all statements.

Satisfaction with GVRA (n=72)

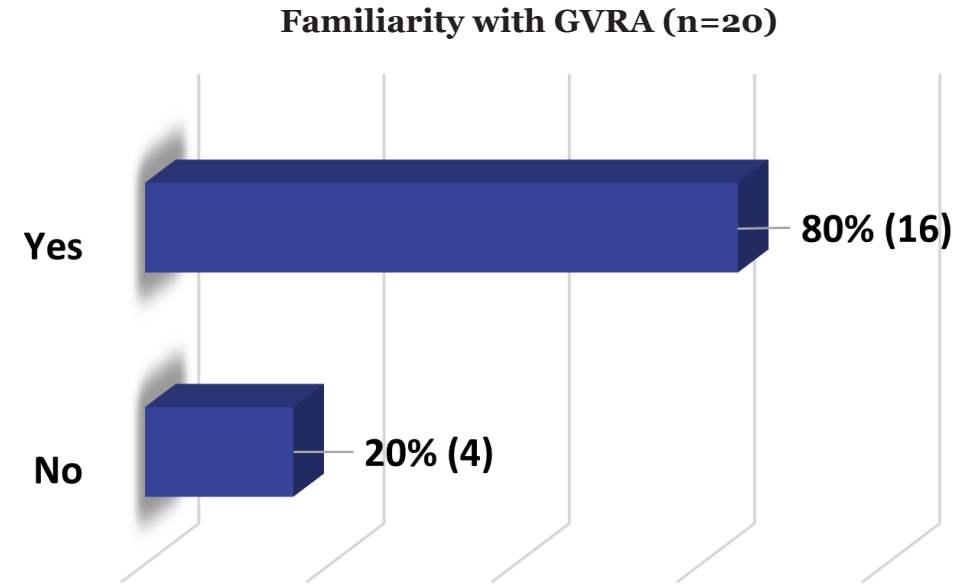


RESULTS FROM DATA COLLECTION

PERSPECTIVE OF EMPLOYERS

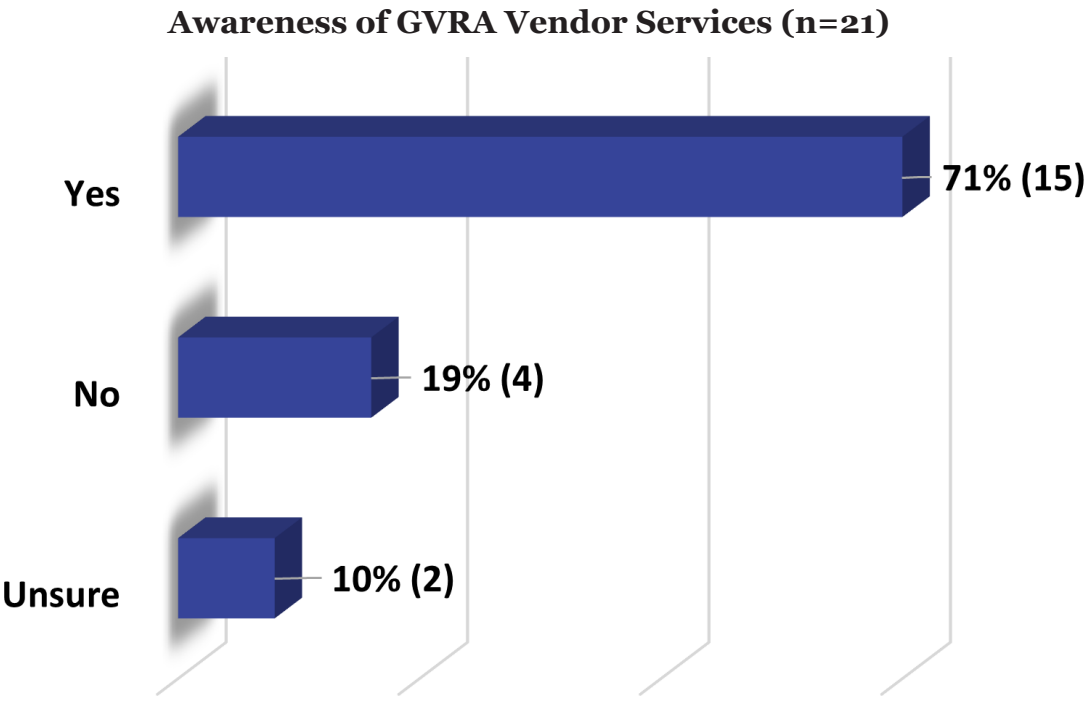
Familiarity With GVRA

Four-fifths of respondents stated they were familiar with the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency (GVRA), while the remaining respondents stated they were not familiar with the GVRA (20%).



Awareness of GVRA Vendor Services

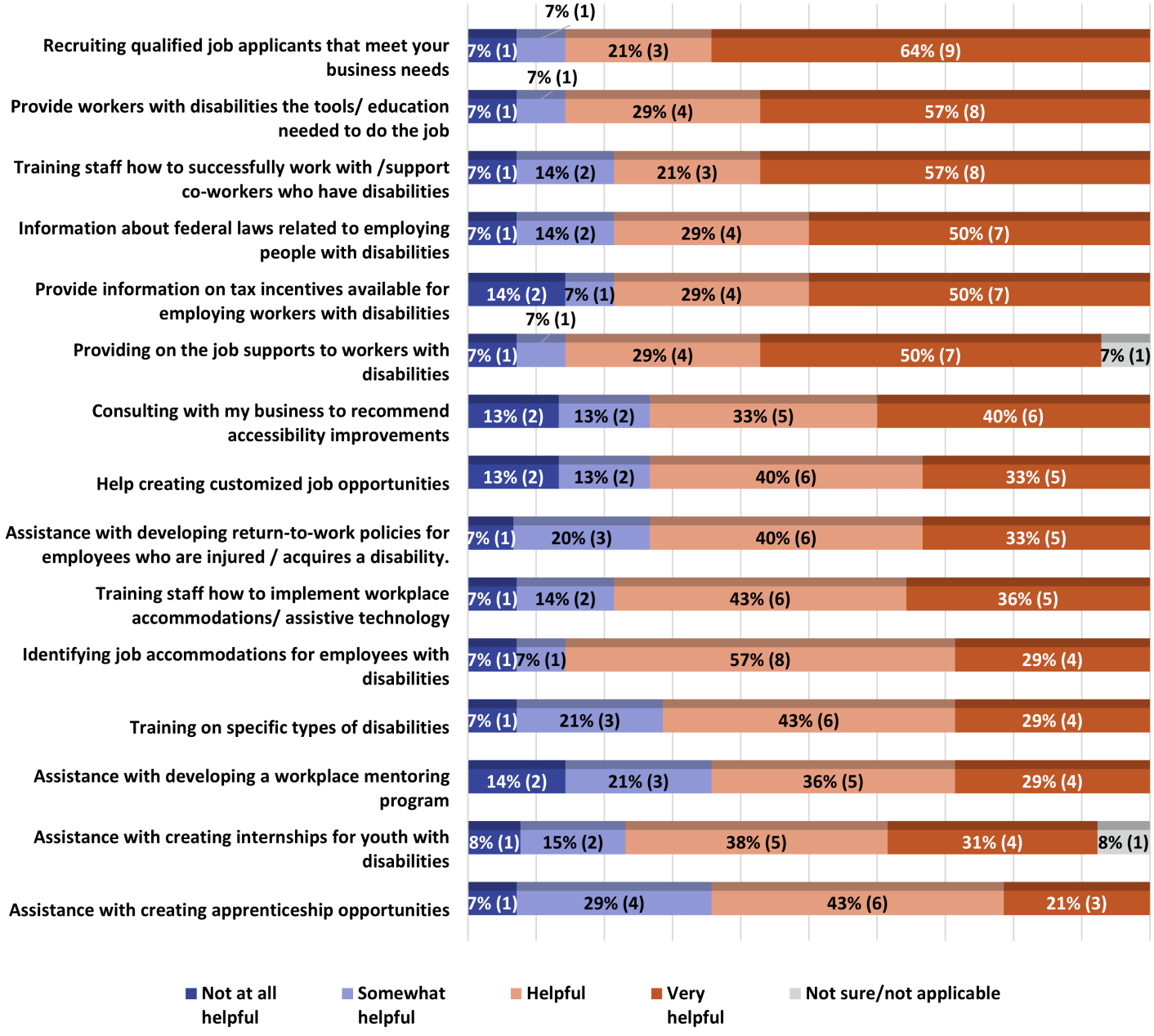
Over two-thirds of respondents were aware of the services offered to businesses by GVRA or through their vendors (71%) while the remaining were not aware (19%) or unsure (10%).



Helpfulness of Various GVRA Services for Employing IWD

The service that was identified to be helpful or most helpful was to provide workers with disabilities the tools and education needed to do the job (86%). Other helpful services include recruiting job applicants that meet business needs (85%), providing information on federal laws related to employing people with disabilities (79%), and providing information on tax incentives available for employing workers with disabilities (79%). Assistance with recruiting job applicants that meet business needs (83%) was also identified as a helpful service. Each of these statements was a separate question, so the sample size differs. The chart depicts the average sample size across all statements.

Helpfulness of Various GVRA Services for Employing IWD (n=11)

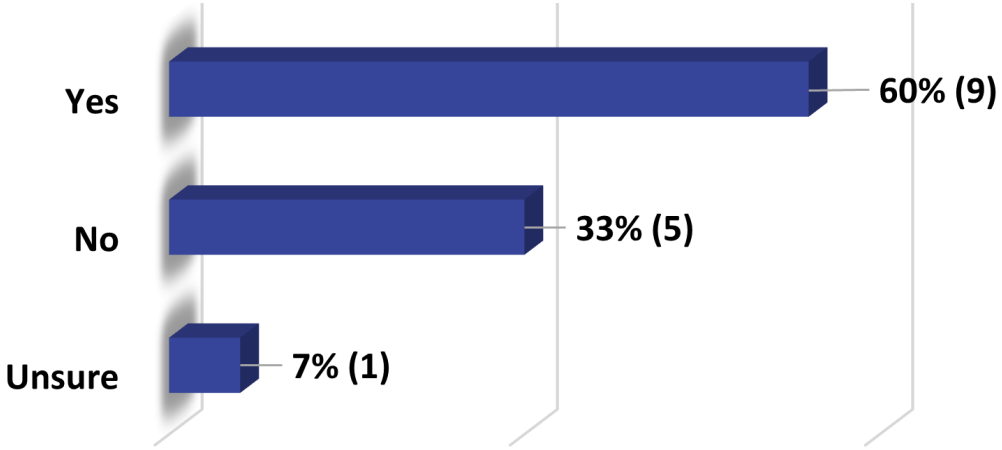


RESULTS FROM DATA COLLECTION

Have Received GVRA Services Previously

Most respondents received the services offered to businesses by GVRA or through their vendors (60%) while the remaining did not (33%) or were unsure (7%).

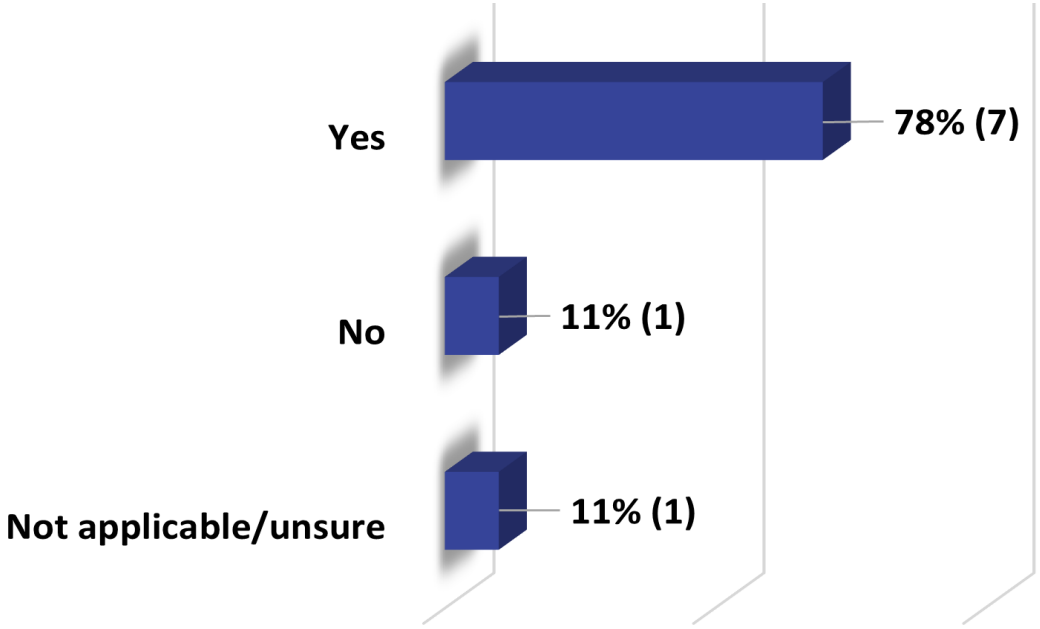
Have Received GVRA Services Previously (n=15)



GVRA Services' Helpfulness in Recruiting and Retaining Individuals With Disabilities

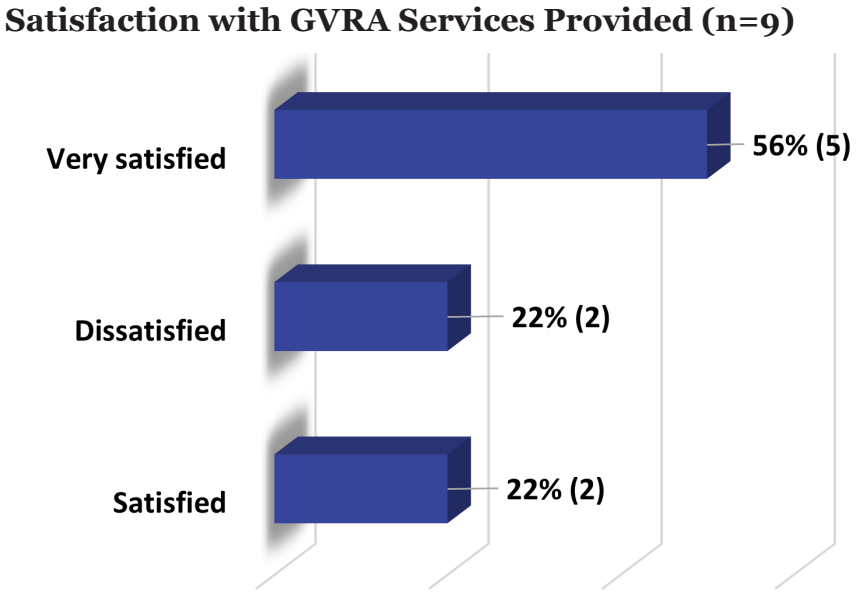
Among employers who received services from the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency (GVRA), the vast majority, comprising seventy-eight percent, reported receiving assistance with recruiting and retaining employees with disabilities. The remaining respondents either did not receive such assistance (11%) or indicated that did not apply to their situation (11%).

GVRA Service(s) Helpfulness in Recruiting and Retaining IWD (n=9)



Satisfaction With GVRA Services Provided

Among employers who received services from the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency (GVRA), a majority (78%) reported being very satisfied or satisfied with the services provided with the services provided. Two employers indicated dissatisfaction with the services received.



SURVEY FREE-RESPONSE, INTERVIEW, AND FOCUS GROUP RESULTS

CONSUMER'S NEEDS AND CHALLENGES

Although there is a wide disparity across the state, many respondents in the surveys, interviews, and focus groups with stakeholders, including individuals with disabilities, families, providers, and professionals, indicated broad-based dissatisfaction with current GVRA services. It has been well acknowledged that GVRA needs to focus on enhancing service delivery and rebuilding trust with key stakeholders.

High Staff Turnover

A shortage of staff (counselors) and a high turnover of staff at multiple levels have been identified as a challenge for the organization. Respondents were most dissatisfied with GVRA's retention of qualified counselors. Many respondents indicated that the high rates of counselor turnover and the challenges that GVRA faces in retaining competent counselors are major hindrances to both the operation of the agency and the subsequent quality of services received by clients. The limited number of counselors in field offices seems to have high caseloads. Low pay and being overworked lead to challenges and burnout for counselors and affect their ability and capacity to service clients promptly. Key informants believed that the slow approval of services, clients slipping through the cracks, and communication challenges were all just symptoms of a larger staffing concern. Many families mentioned that they started the process but gave up after not being able to contact someone after long periods of waiting.

» *"We've had good counselors, but they don't stay around. So, you kind of build that relationship, and then the next year they're gone"*

- *"And I think it's just lack a of personnel. So, I'm not sure what, why. But there does seem to be a lot of turnovers, and not enough people in some of the offices."*
- *"I know that they're trying to fill jobs all the time and a lot of people have large caseloads".*
- *"I mean, I definitely think pay is the reason why people leave, especially the younger counselors."*
- *"By GVRA being short staffed, we may have individuals that's coming-- the actual counselor may be in North Georgia, where we're in South Georgia, and trying to communicate that has been difficult."*
- *"Well, we're going to build this relationship, and then are you going to dump us at the end of the year?" Usually, we're not mad at that person, but we don't understand why they leave"*
- *"Most counselors really want to do that well, but they're spread so thin and have so many cases"*

Timeliness of Services and Responsiveness of Counselors

There is wide geographic disparity across the state in the quantity and quality of services provided by GVRA counselors. Respondents recurrently talked about the need to improve some GVRA counselors' lack of responsiveness to calls and emails to consumers. Multiple respondents described their frustrations with the process required to obtain and receive GVRA services. Barriers within this process included bureaucratic roadblocks, lack of timely response from counselors, long delays, inconsistent services, and confusing or unclear requirements. There was an elevated level of dissatisfaction among respondents about consumers not being able to receive all the services needed. This led to many respondents reporting their dissatisfaction with their overall experience with GVRA.

- *"Counselor not following through, dropping the ball".*
- *"A big thing starting out was the time. The turnaround time was kind of slow. And then after that, I would say that the services provided, they're not doing too much for me."*
- *"But from that day, it could take six months before they can get approved for services. And even through that time, I'd probably be comfortable in saying that half get lost in the system"*
- *"There is no mechanism to complain about a counselor and the fear of retaliation is real".*
- *"…we'll start with a counselor. But then, by maybe Christmas, we found out someone else is going to be our person. And so just kind of a lack of consistency."*
- *"Initially, caseworker follow-through was a barrier. However, with persistence from myself and my son, he ended up getting good services through GVRA"*
- *"I just don't feel like I'm getting the services that I need from GVRA."*

Staff Attitudes and Training

Multiple respondents indicated the need for increased and/or improved training for GVRA counselors and staff. There is a need for GVRA counselors to listen more to the consumers and provide individual services as needed. Negative attitudes and low expectations from staff about the ability of individuals, particularly those with significant disabilities or intellectual disabilities, to be employed were identified as barriers. There were major concerns about consumers being underemployed, or being employed in a setting that was not a good fit for their individual interests. Suggestions included taking a more individualized approach to consumer placement into employment and considering more competitive, integrated employment settings if they match the interests of the individual. The lack of adequate multilingual services for Spanish-speaking consumers was identified as a need.

- *"The job I got was not related to my degree…they did not have the connections with more professional jobs."*
- *"GVRA just says, they call them unemployable. And so, they have just walked away."*
- *"I wish I could say the experience that my Hispanic families have had with VR was a great one. But it was horrible. It was appalling. Bad, bad, very bad"*
- *"And they're bounced around to different folks, and then eventually, their case gets closed because nobody is able to reach out to them in their language."*

Service Issues

There is wide geographic disparity across the state in the quantity and quality of services provided by GVRA counselors. Respondents recurrently talked about the need to improve some GVRA counselors' lack of responsiveness to calls and emails to consumers. Many respondents described their frustrations with the process required to obtain and receive GVRA services. Barriers within this process included bureaucratic roadblocks, lack of timely response from counselors, long delays, inconsistent services, and confusing or unclear requirements. Consumers talked about the need for individualizing job options based on the consumer's interests and gifts, rather than trying to fit all consumers into retail or other contracted options leading to underemployment. Consumers mentioned the need for long-term on-the-job support for individuals who need them.

- *"It's incredibly frustrating that it takes the amount of effort that it does to get a bare minimum level of service."*
- *"The GVRA application process is somewhat lengthy and often it will take 6-12 months, just to get a provider in place to begin looking for a job. And this is very frustrating for those who are wanting to work ASAP."*
- *"They need better job offerings. My daughter was only offered retail jobs. She asked to learn office job skills, but that was not made available to her."*
- *"Consider the gifts and talents of individuals and don't just "pigeon-hole" them into employment opportunities."*
- *"Consider existing interests and skills of an individual and help support them. Not just plug them into places they have contracts with. Think outside the box."*
- *"Include ongoing job support for a longer period of time."*

Lack of access to reliable transportation severely impacts an individual's ability to access employment and educational opportunities. These transportation barriers are particularly hard to overcome in areas outside of urban centers like Atlanta, posing a large issue for people with disabilities in rural settings.

- *"To me the first and largest barrier to accessing employment and especially equitable employment is transportation."*
- *"First and foremost, transportation. Anywhere outside of the Atlanta proper area. It's very hard to get around with public transportation."*

Communication Challenges

Respondents described issues related to a lack of communication or follow-up from counselors. Lack of response to emails or calls and not knowing what the next steps in their case would be makes it hard for consumers. Respondents expressed frustration due to not being told when GVRA counselors and other personnel left the agency.

- *"I just need someone to get back to me for I know what the next step is. And that's been my main problem. It's like I have, I'm just in limbo. Nothing's happened."*
- *"Be responsive to and communicate in a timely manner. Calls and emails frequently go unanswered, very frustrating."*
- *"Follow through. I have spoken to many people, but nothing was followed up on. No equipment was supplied; they discussed getting him a tool to do job tasks. A watch for reminders. Test him out at Good Will....None of this happened."*
- *"I don't know, people leave, just leave, no communication."*

Transition and Pre-ETS Services

There is wide geographic disparity across the state in the quantity and quality of transition services provided. Respondents mentioned that there is a need for GVRA to increase its presence amongst transition-aged and youth populations. Suggestions for doing so included VR counselors being more present in the schools, including the school personnel (transition coordinators, counselors, or teachers) in planning for the youth, expanding youth services and programs offered, and continued development of existing (and new) relationships with schools. Many parents reported not being aware of pre-ETS or Pathways Explore services. Educating parents about the need for transition planning and services available including GVRA services, would help parents prepare their youth with job preparation and work skills needed for employment. It is important to explore the potential causes of transition service deficits in the counties and school districts with low service provision to identify strategies that might provide greater service delivery rates and enhance quality in those areas. Some professionals were concerned about the eligibility requirements (high reading levels) for participation in Roosevelt Warm Springs.

- *"Sometimes I feel like GVRA is trying to push us towards a certain pre-ETS provider. And when we've met that provider, we don't feel like they can meet our needs"*
- *"It's like, "Oh, you can't use this vendor anymore. They're not gonna be on the list." And they really can't tell us why they're not on the list"*
- *"We feel like it's gonna be a little bit-- like the reading levels, or it's gonna be too high for some of our students"*

Provider Relationships

Some providers shared that they were not informed of the content or the timing of the recent new policy changes, which has caused confusion and has negatively impacted their program's sustainability. Providers also talked about delays in paying invoices and a lack of specific communication about remediation when invoices are denied.

- *"It seems like lately, there's been a lot of frequent and regular changes and alterations and additions to policies and procedures more than in the past, which can make it difficult to always stay on top of"*

- » *"I don't necessarily disagree with some of the policy and process changes that they have put in place, but it feels as though they implement them before they are ready to be implemented."*
- » *"If invoices are denied, we don't always find out, or if we do, we don't know why"*
- » *"There's so much red tape, there's so many policies and procedures and hoops to jump through, that impacts our ability to effectively provide services"*
- » *"I am aware of many providers, and the quality is very, very high. The barrier is them getting requests for services and being referred clients"*
- » *"We are having some difficulty with getting authorizations in a timely manner for pre-ETS"*

GVRA Awareness and Visibility

Many individuals with disabilities, family members, and professionals talked about a lack of awareness of GVRA. There is a strong need for GVRA to increase its visibility across the state and do outreach to specific underserved populations including those with significant disabilities, intellectual disabilities, mental illness, and those living in rural areas of the state.

- » *"I guess first would be the question is, what do they have to offer?"*
- » *"And what helped me also was the packet that GVRA sent me through the vocational rehabilitation services… So, I had to be a little bit proactive, and it is daunting, and it is draining."*
- » *"…the other thing that I have come across is with a lot of our participants, they aren't even aware that GVRA can help Assistive Technology, we're always having to tell them that."*
- » *"But I run into people with disabilities, who often have waited a year and sometimes longer to really get any help. And they have a lot of trouble kind of figuring out what the process is."*

WHAT IS WORKING WELL

- Roosevelt Warm Springs/Cave Springs Residential programs of GVRA, which provide opportunities for young adults with disabilities to gain independent living skills and job skills are greatly appreciated by consumers. Many respondents identified the Roosevelt Warm Springs, and Cave Springs programs (Get Ready for Opportunities in Work, GROW, and Pathways) as a big strength of GVRA. Many respondents highlighted a need for programs like these to be expanded across the state. An abundance of openings for new students, helpful services, and quick responses to feedback are just a few of the compliments issued by professionals. Professionals were specifically impressed with the improved outreach to high-school students going on at these centers.
  - » *"Roosevelt Warm Springs was a great opportunity for my son. He came away ready to work and has maintained his job for eight months now. I felt they prepared him well there."*
  - » *"I'm certainly impressed with what is happening at Warm Springs and want more of our students to participate in that…"*
  - » *"...Roosevelt Warm Springs is an exemplary provider agency".*
  - » *"…get the word out about that program because it can be a really great avenue to be ready for competitive employment."*
  - » *"...they've made remarkable progress with the revamp of Roosevelt Warm Springs. They have hired a lot of former educators to help staff that program. They've really expanded the opportunities down there."*

RESULTS FROM DATA COLLECTION

- Respondents were positive about the recent reorganization and restructuring that GVRA has been undergoing to make things efficient. Respondents were optimistic about things changing due to strong leadership and recent changes in policies, structures, and practices. Some respondents appreciated the fact that they felt heard.
- One of the biggest assets of GVRA is its counselors. Respondents characterized GVRA counselors and staff as being committed and caring individuals who strive to do their best for consumers. Many respondents indicated that their interactions and experiences with GVRA staff have been positive, with staff being dedicated and empathetic to the needs of their clients.
  - » *"So, she's great. We really appreciate her and her willingness to work with us"*
  - » *"I was very impressed with her training, her enthusiasm, just the preparation for the job"*
  - » *"I would say the responsiveness of the counselors has been good."*
  - » *"It's hard for them to do their jobs effectively because they feel it takes them away from their clients. But definitely agree that the heart to serve is there."*
- Respondents in all groups were most satisfied with the respect, sensitivity, and politeness shown by GVRA staff towards consumers and GVRA staff attitudes. Respondents reported being satisfied with the GVRA staff's level of knowledge. The committed and passionate staff are the greatest asset of the agency and should be nurtured and supported. Key informants shared that the recent increases in counselors' salaries are an important step in this direction and should be maintained.
  - » *"When you are able to get a case worker who is dedicated and knowledgeable, the experience is good."*
  - » *"All the caseworkers were cool… She came to the job to check on me."*
- Many individuals with disabilities shared that communication and the willingness of counselors to share information with clients was a GVRA strength. When they do receive information, it is of high quality and helps to fulfill their goals and needs.
  - » *"What is GVRA? Why is it here? How can it be beneficial to you?" Did the same thing with our staff. [...] made sure that I understand what was there."*
- Although there is wide geographic disparity across the state in the quantity and quality of services provided by GVRA staff, there are many success stories of positive employment and self-employment outcomes for consumers across the state that need to be marketed and shared with the community.
- Respondents, in general, believed that the transition and pre-ETS services provided by GVRA, and schools are its biggest strength. Key informants shared that GVRA outreach and collaboration within schools and communities have improved leading to a more productive relationship between GVRA workers and parents, educators, and other personnel. A couple of strategies that professionals commended were the consistent presence of transition counselors in schools and providing informational sessions so parents can learn exactly what the GVRA does. Respondents appreciated that GVRA covered the tuition for Inclusive Post-Secondary Education (IPSE) program participants.
  - » *"I've had success in the past six to eight months that I had not had in the past several years, as far as students who are transitioning to college"*
  - » *"Yeah, so one counselor, like actually came in and met with students in classes and let them know, "The Pre-ETS services. Those are great. Those are great for our kids. And having someone Come in and do those, we appreciate that, and our kids enjoy it"*

  - » *"I don't know where it stands now, but I think it was great the GVRA covered tuition for IPSE programs."*

- Professionals highlighted that soft skills training, High school high tech, and other pre-ETS services as both beneficial and fun for students and have had a positive effect on the careers of students after they leave high school.
  - » *"I am glad they are finally available to my county!"*
  - » *"They have a statewide presence and platform."*
  - » *"We really like High School High Tech where they take our kids into viewing different options: colleges, technical schools [...] those are really good experiences."*

- GVRA's partnerships with other agencies including other state agencies and school systems are a big asset and should be built upon. Examples include GVRA funding Project SEARCH, a successful school-to-work transition program; partnership with the Shepard Center, increased communication with the DBHDD (Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities) and collaborating with schools to introduce technology to students. Respondents shared that many service providers are doing great work in getting people jobs.
  - » *"I think the fact that DBHDD and GVRA at the at the state level are actually talking to each other on a regular basis and trying to figure out things that are policy issues that get in the way Is huge. I think that I think that is really important. I'm really glad it's happening."*
  - » *"I think the work that they're doing with high school, high tech is probably the best thing that they do at this point."*
  - » *[Referring to Project SEARCH] "I mean, they each had different jobs, but they were really much higher-skilled jobs, especially for students completely blind, but they had really overcome those barriers. So, I thought that that was just a great project that GVRA did with funding."*
  - » *"I think one of the positive things that they have started doing is they are now working together with DBHDD to see how best they can tackle this."*
  - » *"I think it's effective. I think that it could be better, but I think we just need more businesses to partner."*
  - » *"I would say the ABC program. Everybody that I've encountered that is successful went through that program."*

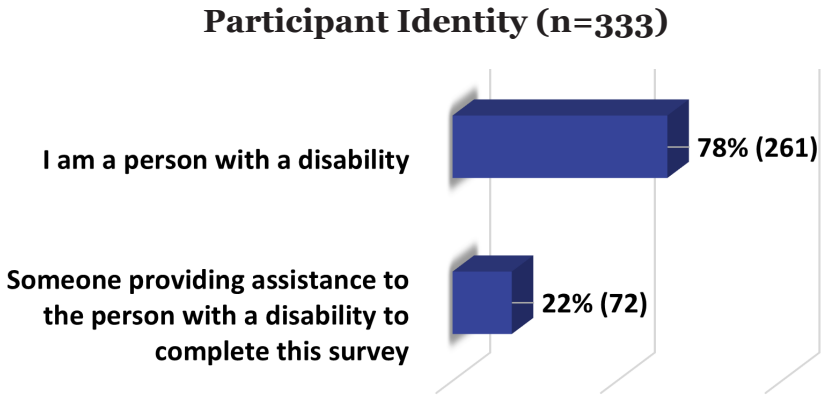
- Consumers, professionals, and providers appreciated the increased communication from GVRA. They specifically complimented the regular e-blasts they have been receiving from GVRA leadership. Participants shared that the communication improvements have led to quicker response time regarding applications and services, as well as an apparent increase in client satisfaction.
  - » *"… they are listening to suggestions from us"*

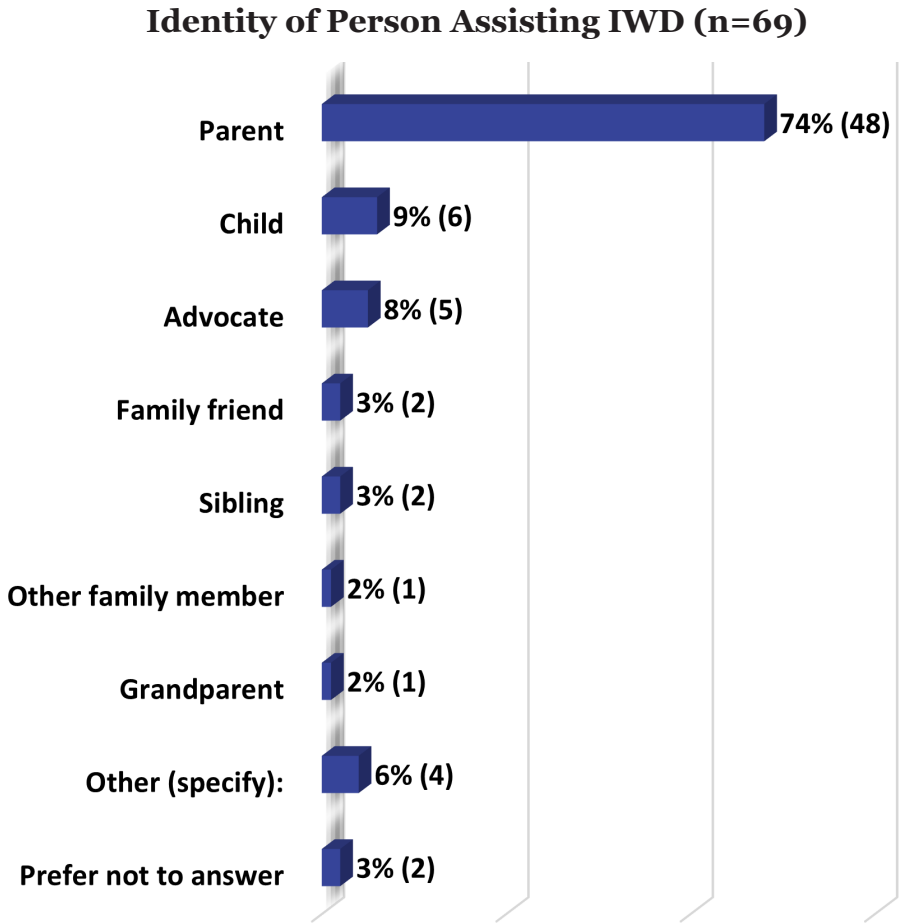
OTHER RESPONSES

INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES

Participant Identity and Identity of Person Assisting IWD

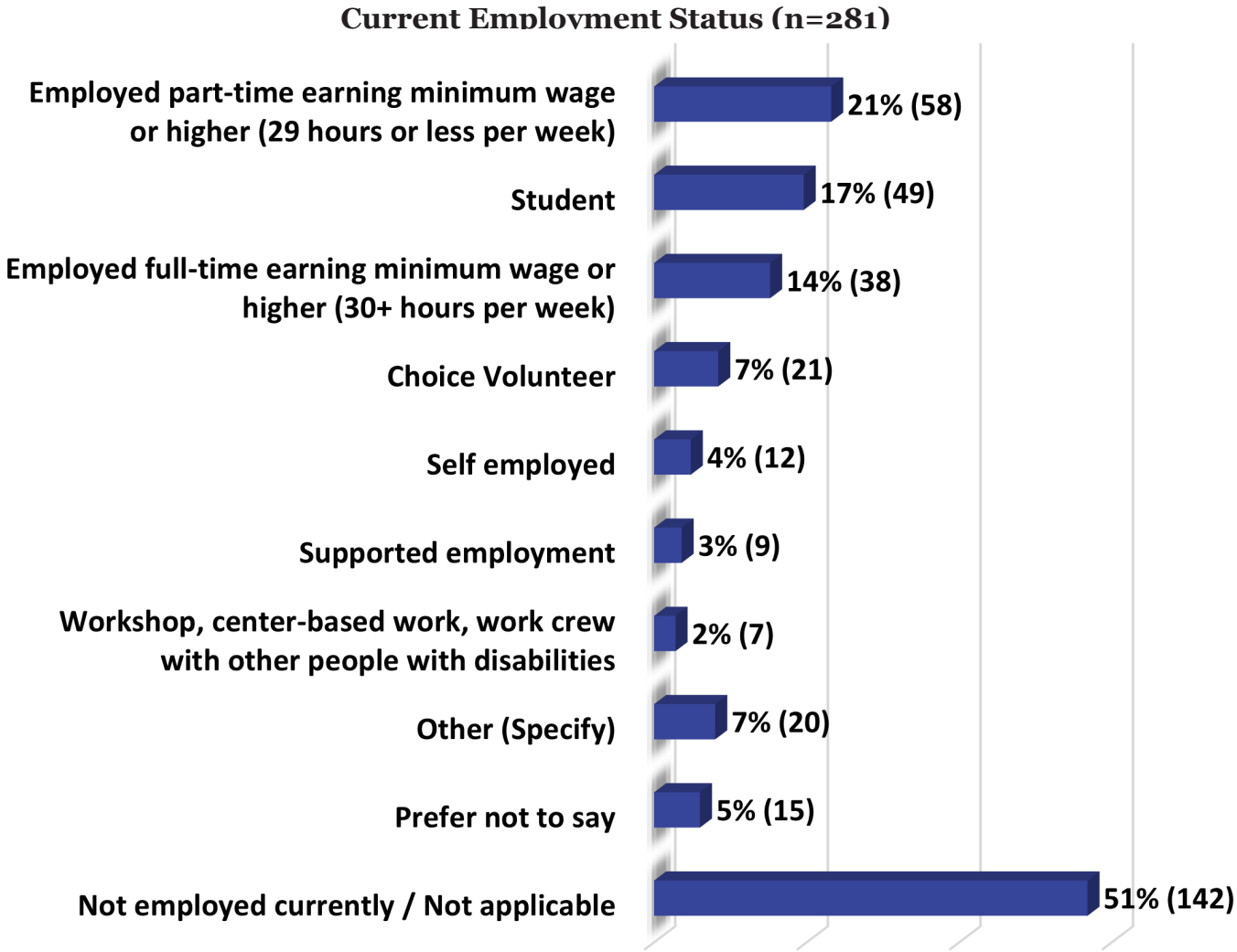
Of all respondents, the majority were individuals with disabilities completing the survey themselves (n=261). Of those receiving assistance while completing the survey (n=69), almost one-third (74%) of participants with disabilities were assisted by parents while taking the survey (n=48), followed by one's child (9%), and advocates (8%).





Current Employment Status

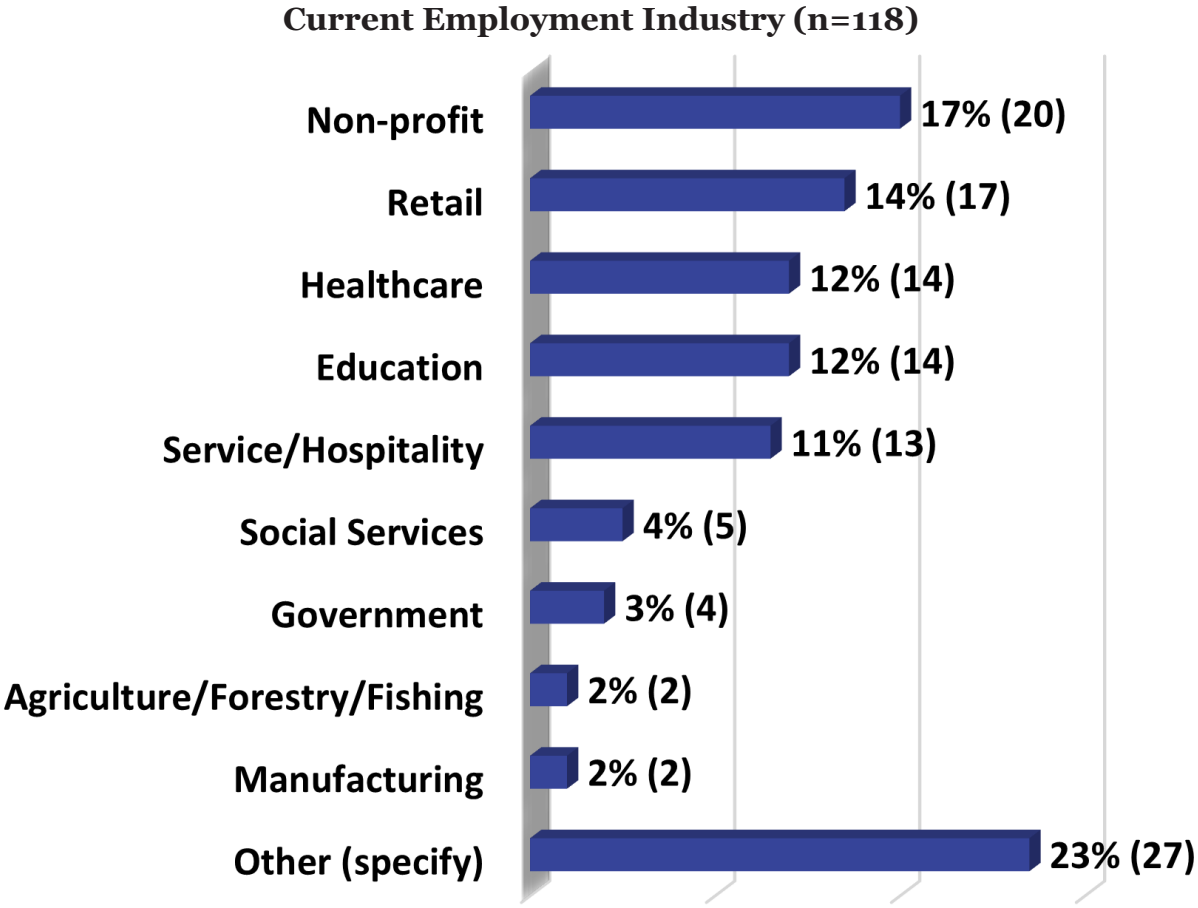
When people with disabilities were asked to describe their current employment status, over half (51%) stated they were not employed currently. The second employment status by individuals with disabilities was a part-time job earning minimum wage or higher, working 29 hours or less per week (21%). The next most common responses were: a student (17%) and a full-time employee earning minimum wage or higher and working 30+ hours per week (14%).



RESULTS FROM DATA COLLECTION

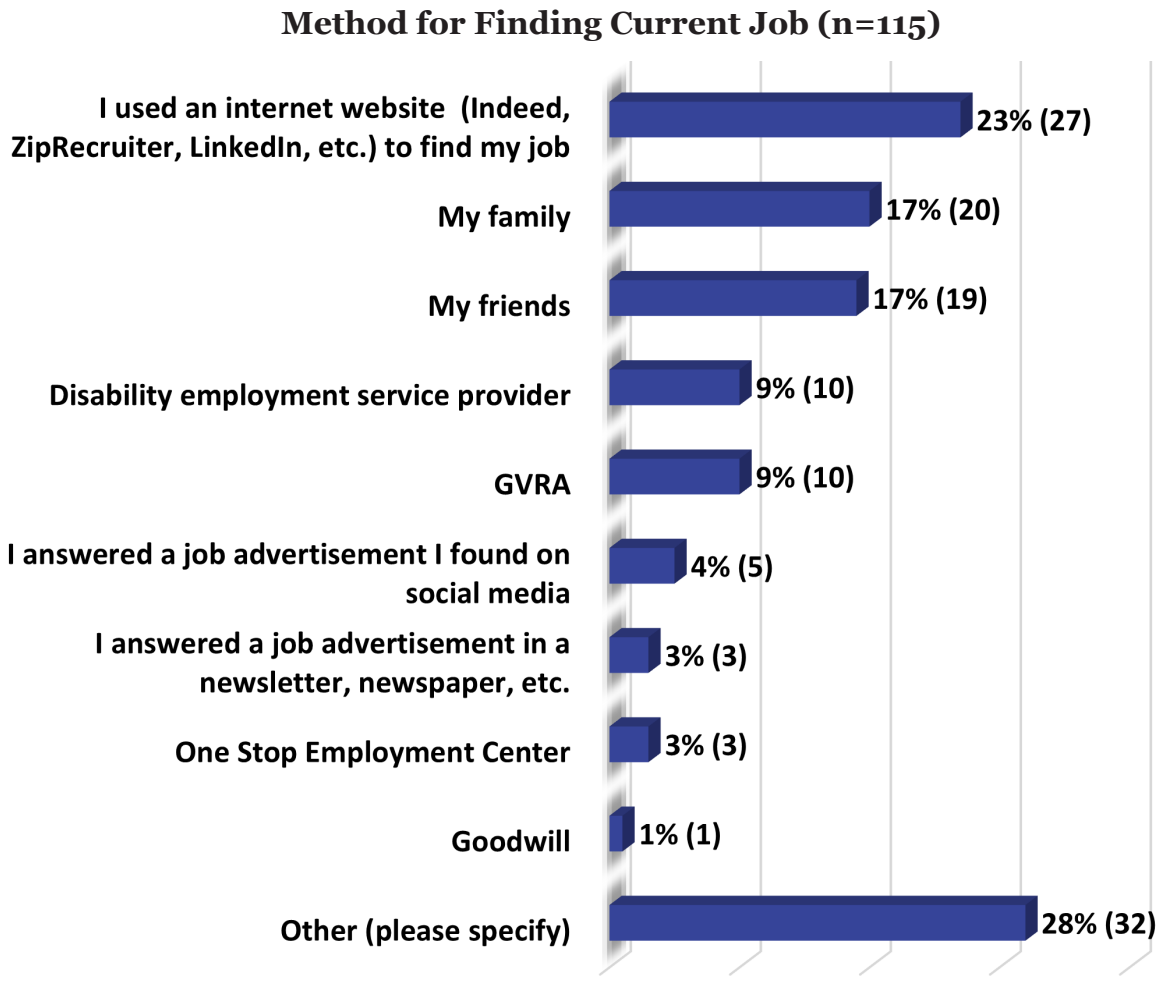
Current Employment Industry

Respondents to the individuals with disabilities survey were asked what industry they were currently employed in. A little less than one-fifth (19%) worked in retail and about one-sixth (17%) worked in non-profit. Following that, individuals reported working in service/hospitality (14%) and healthcare (14%). Education was the next most-rated category (12%).



Method for Finding Current Job

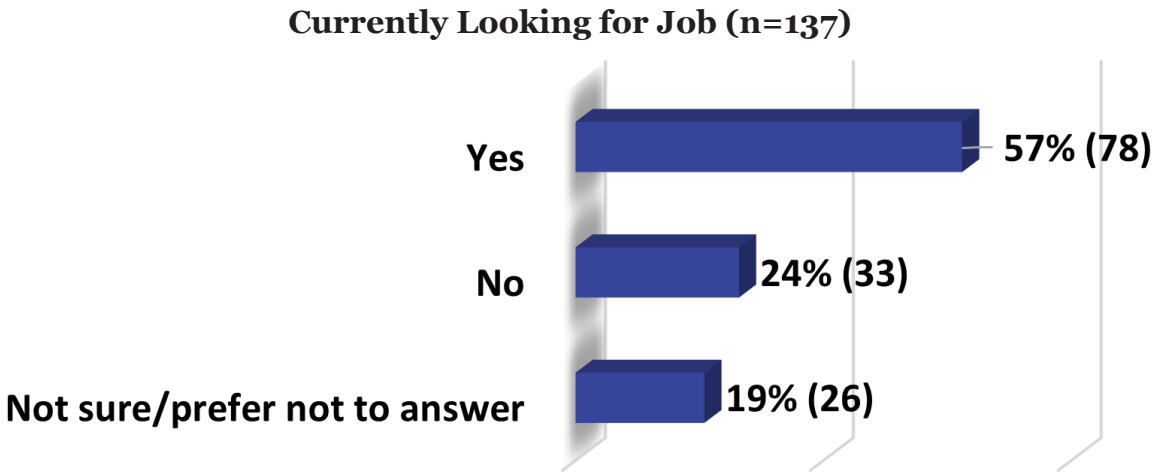
When asked about who helped with the search to find their current job, the majority of people with disabilities, including those with significant disabilities, specified other forms of help (28%). Some of the most common 'other' sources of help included: Finding a job by one's self; self-employment; or other community organizations or providers, such as nonprofit organizations. Almost one-fourth (23%) of people with disabilities used an internet website (Indeed, ZipRecruiter, LinkedIn, etc.) to find their job. Following that their family (17%) and their friends provided help (17%). The other comments included many individuals who found the job themselves in some way.



RESULTS FROM DATA COLLECTION

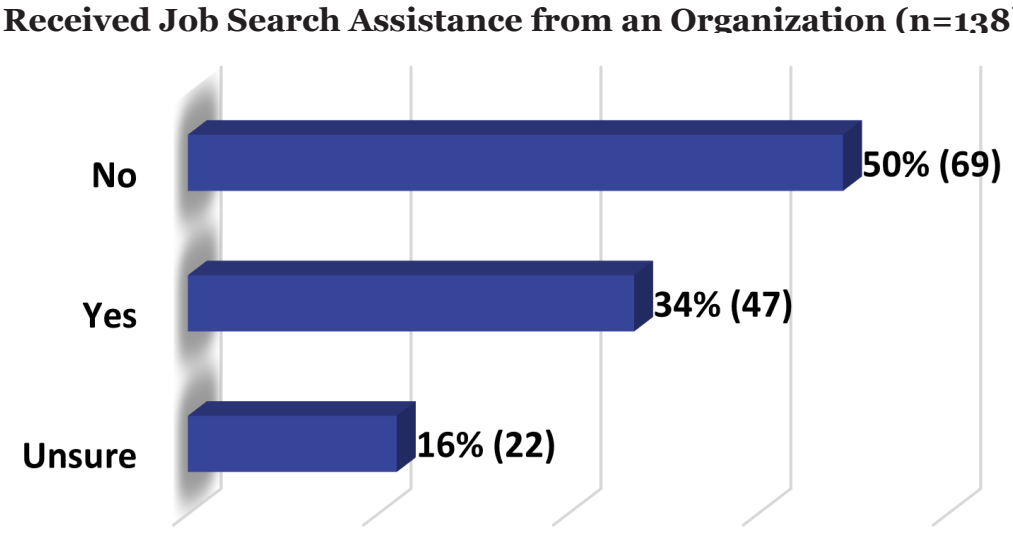
Currently Looking for Job

Of 137 respondents, over half (57%) of participants with disabilities stated they were looking for a job.



Received Job Search Assistance From an Organization

Of 138 respondents, half (50%) of the participants stated they did not receive assistance from an organization to find a job. Of the others, 34% said they did receive assistance or that they were unsure (16%).

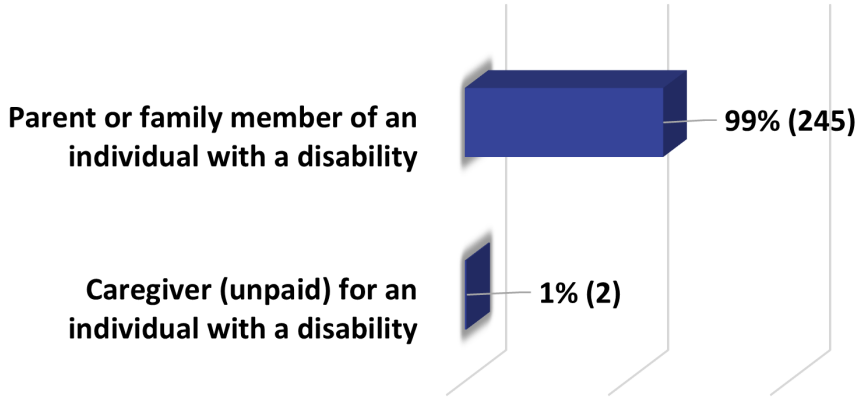


FAMILY / CAREGIVERS

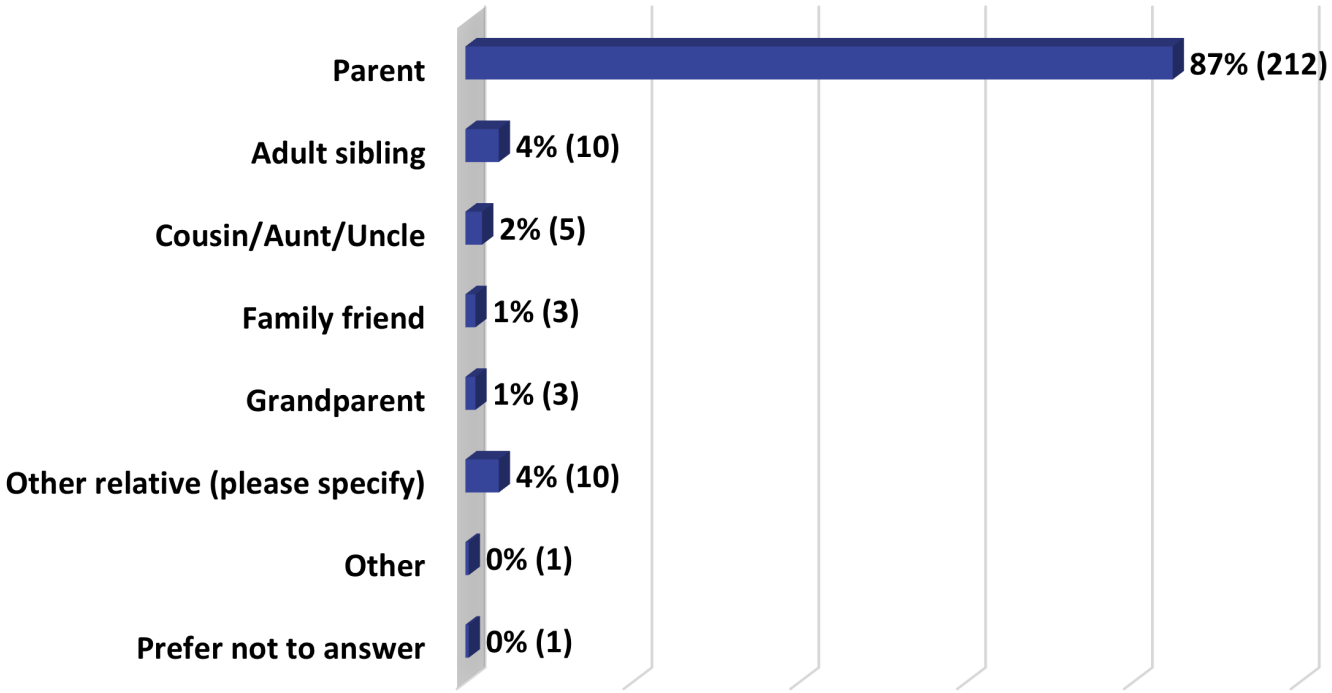
Respondent Identity and Family Respondent Identity

Of 247 respondents, the overwhelming majority were either a parent or family member of an individual with a disability (99%). Of those family members, most were parents of an individual with disabilities (87%), followed by adult siblings and other relatives (4% each).

Respondent Identity (n=247)



Family Respondent Identity (n=245)

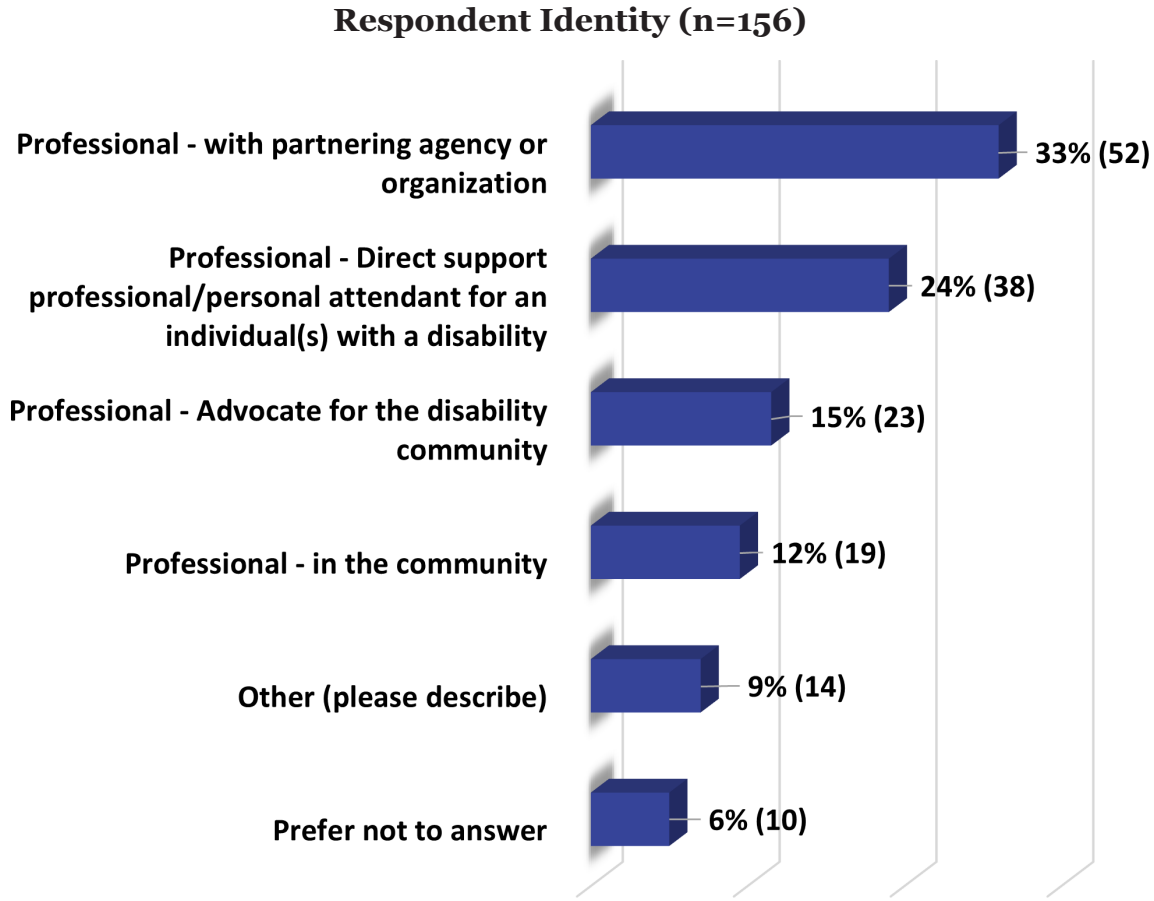


RESULTS FROM DATA COLLECTION

PROFESSIONALS

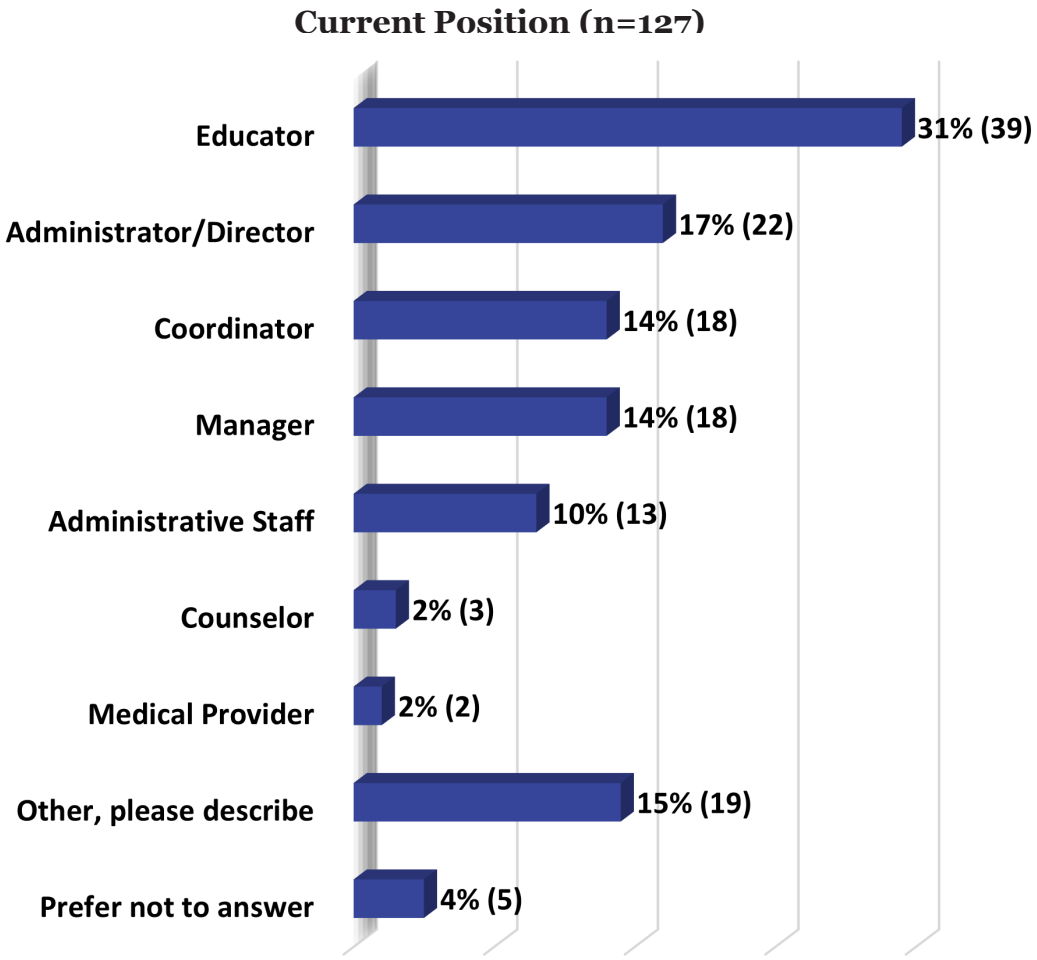
Respondent Identity

Of 156 respondents, one-third were professionals at a GVRA-partnering agency or organization (33%). The next most common professional respondent identities were: Direct support professionals (DSPs) or attendants (24%), and disability community advocates (15%).



Current Position

When asked about their current position, about 31% of professionals described themselves as an educator, followed by: Administrator/Director (17%); Others, such as DSP or Parent (15%); and coordinator or manager (14% each).

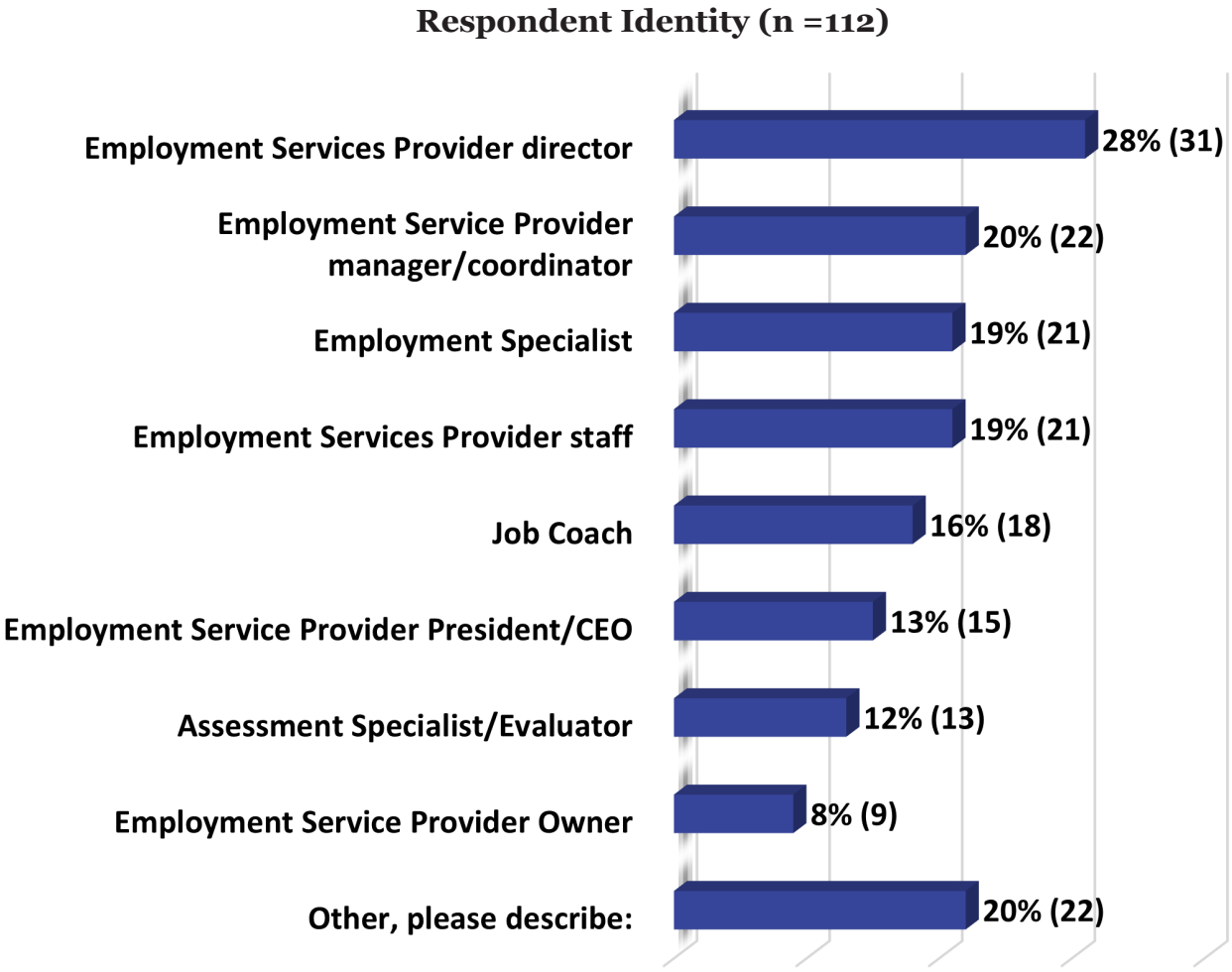


RESULTS FROM DATA COLLECTION

PROVIDERS

Respondent Identity

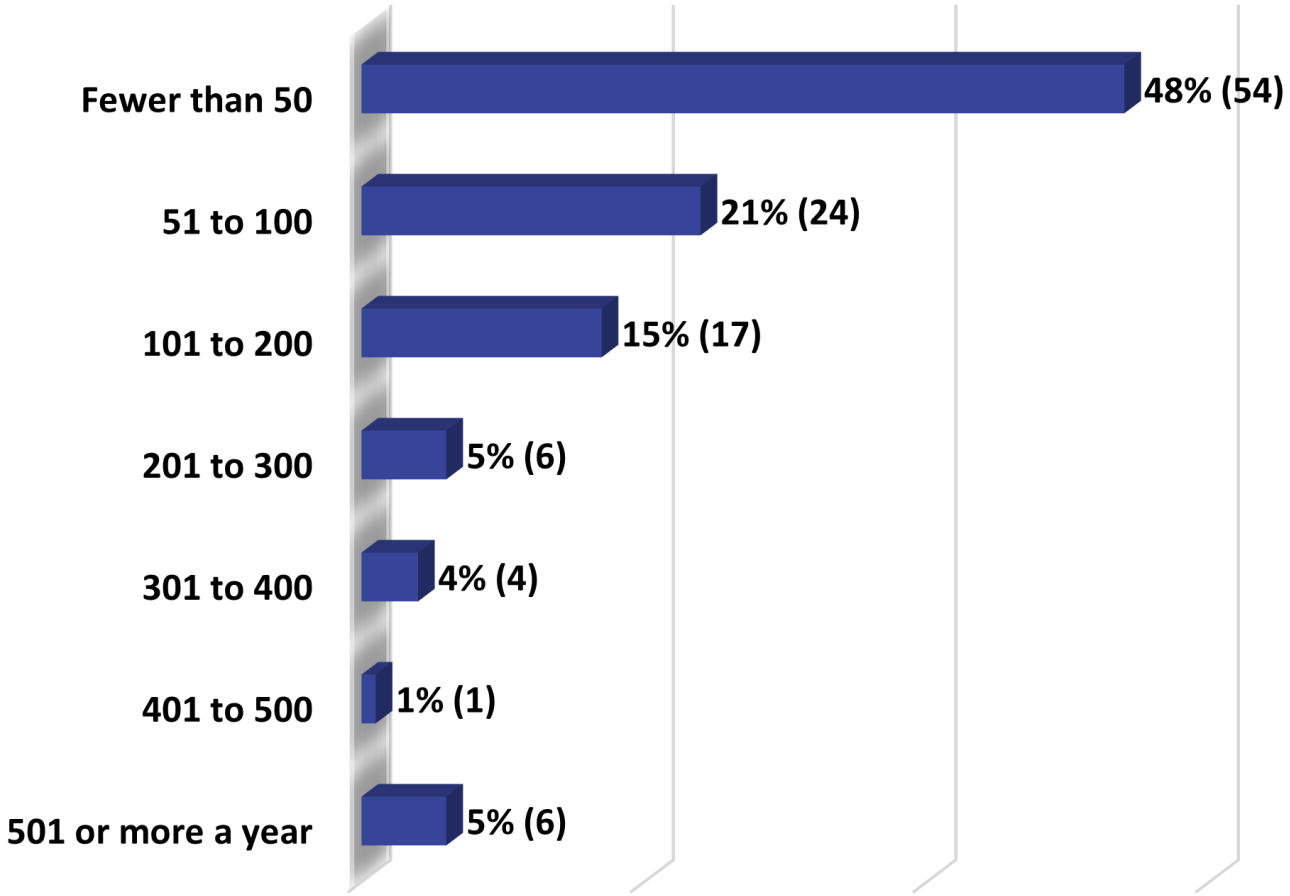
The job titles that people hold included employment services provider director (28%), employment services provider manager (20%), employment specialist (19%), employment service provider staff (19%), and one-fifth (20%) gave descriptions of other roles they hold. Other such roles included: Support coordinator, other types of Coordinators, and Resource Provider.



Number of Consumers Receiving Employment Services

A little less than half (48%) of agencies provided services to fewer than 50 individuals with disabilities. About one-fifth (21%) provided services to between 50 and 100 individuals with disabilities, and 16% provided services to more than 500 individuals with disabilities a year.

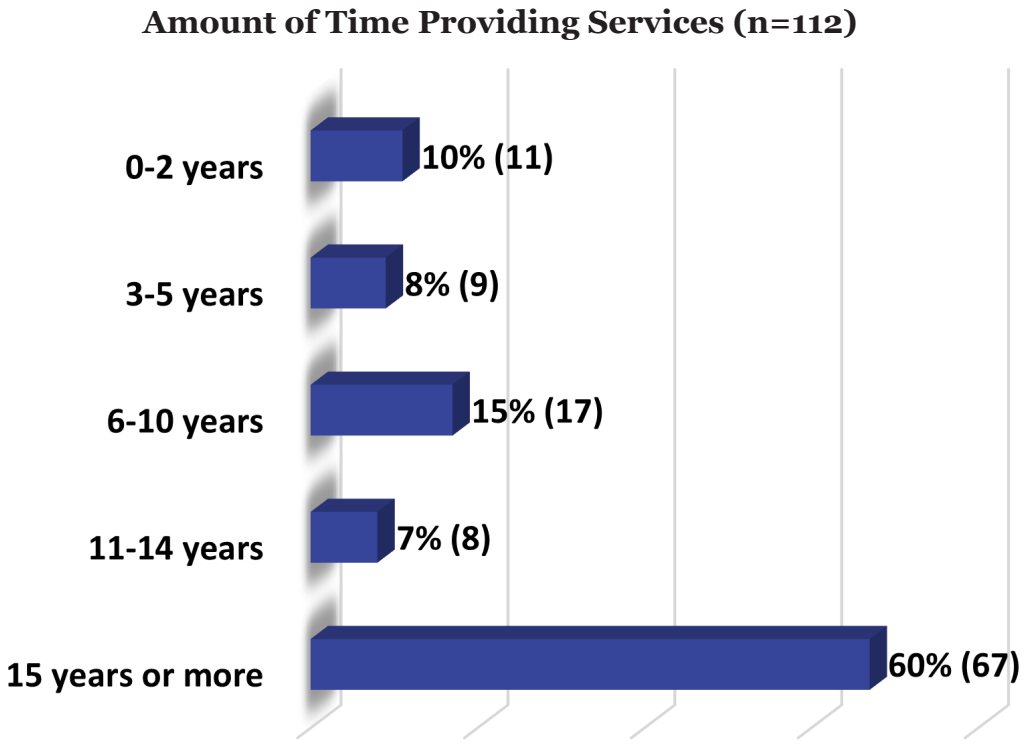
Amount of Consumers Receiving Employment Services (n=112)



RESULTS FROM DATA COLLECTION

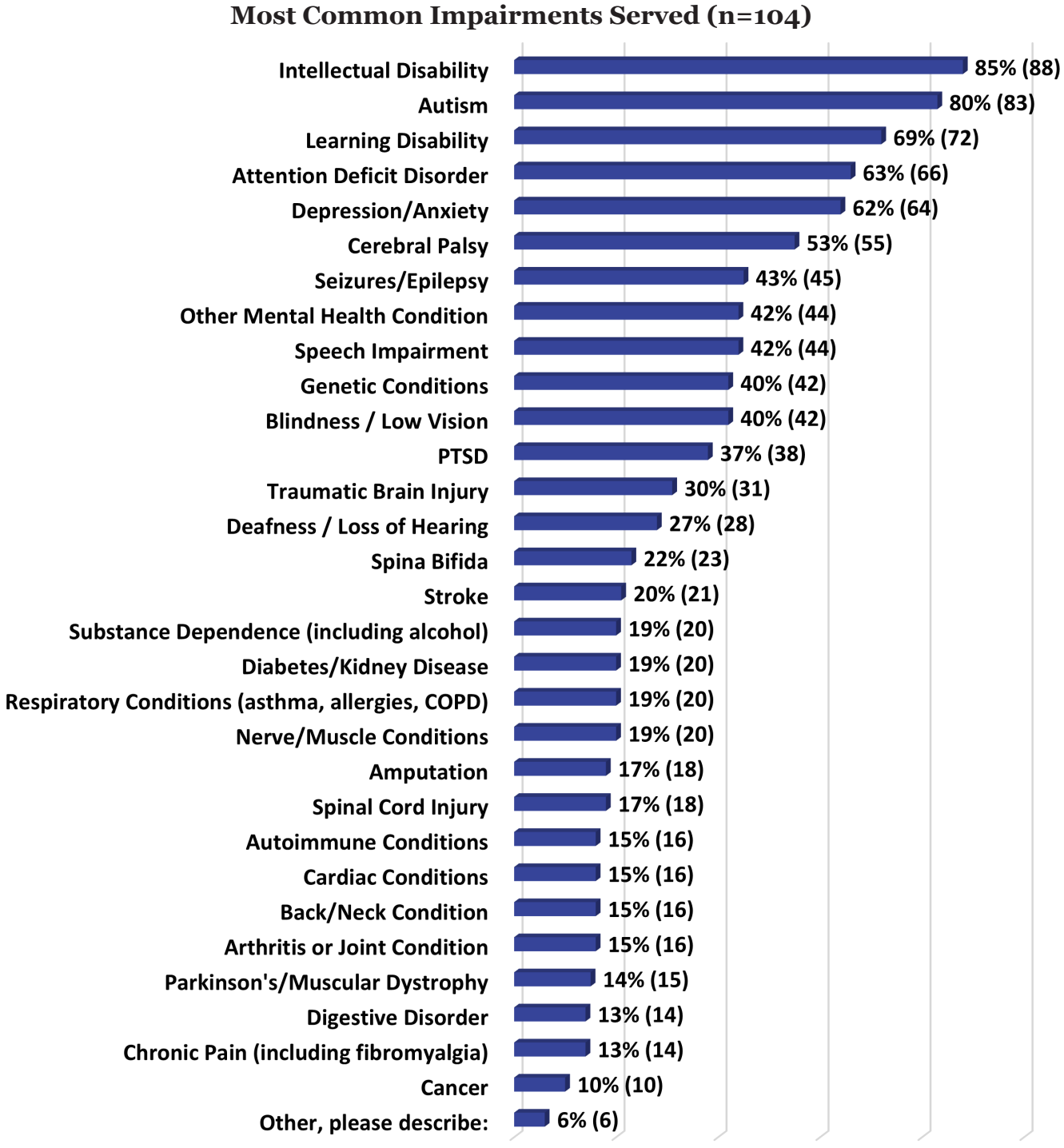
Amount of Time Providing Services

In terms of longevity of service provision, providers were asked how long they have been providing employment services to individuals with disabilities. Three-fifths of providers (60%) mentioned providing employment services to IWD for 15 or more years. Some other reported durations were between 6 to 10 years (15%), 0 to 2 years (10%), 3 to 5 years (8%) and 11 to 14 years (7%).



Most Common Impairments Serviced

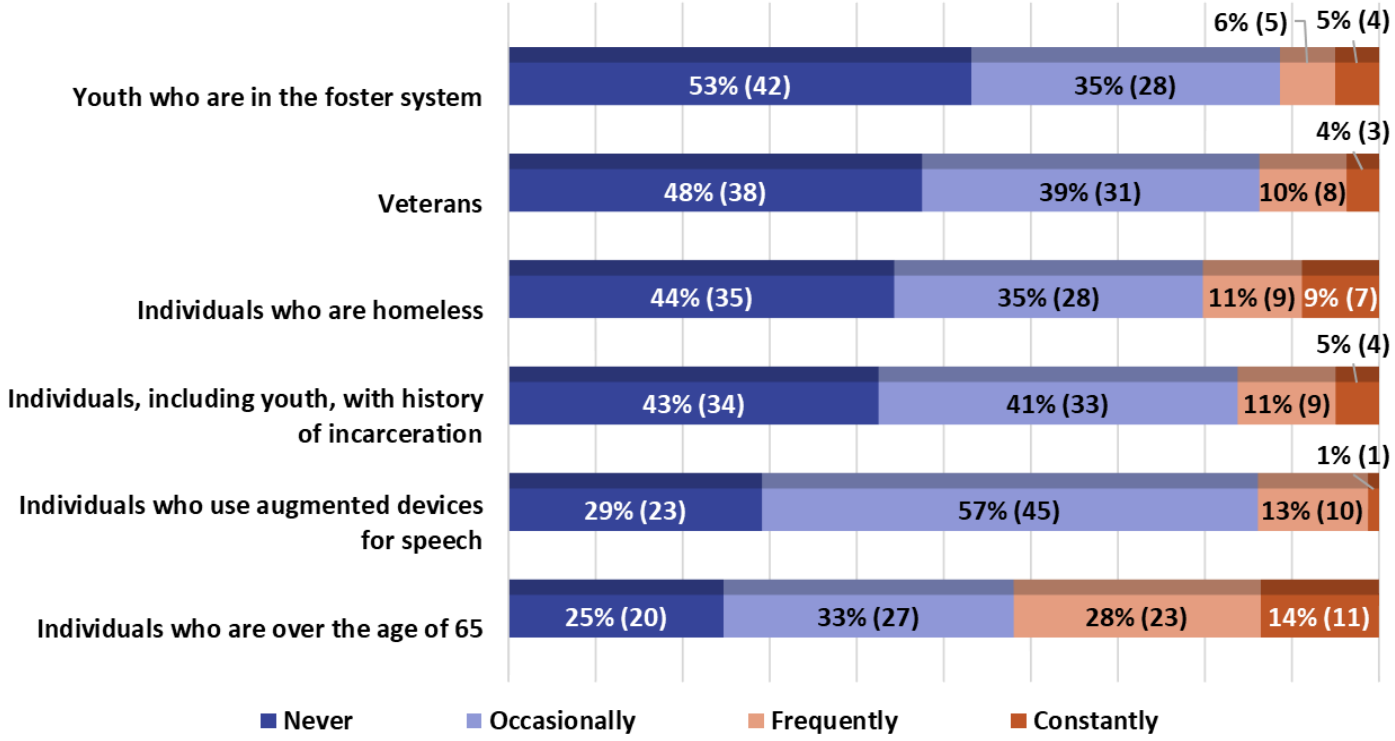
Providers reported on the impairments that their agency services most. The majority of providers reported that they service those with intellectual disabilities the most (85%). The second most served are individuals with autism (80%), followed by those with a learning disability (69%), attention deficit disorder (63%), and depression and anxiety (62%).



Frequency of Providing Services

Providers reported on the frequency with which they provide services to IWD with specific characteristics. Providers reported to be constantly working with individuals who are over 65 years of age (42%) as well as individuals who use augmented devices for speech (14%). Providers reported to never or only occasionally provide services to youth in the foster system (88%), veterans (87%), and incarcerated youth (82%).

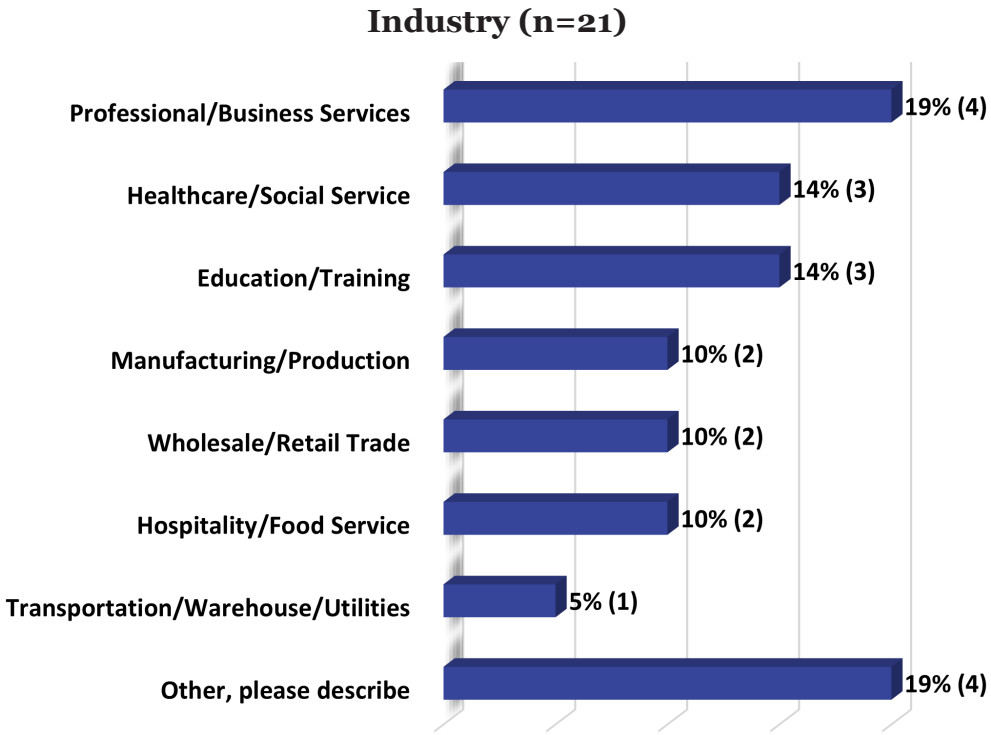
Frequency of Service Provision to Specific Populations (n=79-81)



EMPLOYERS

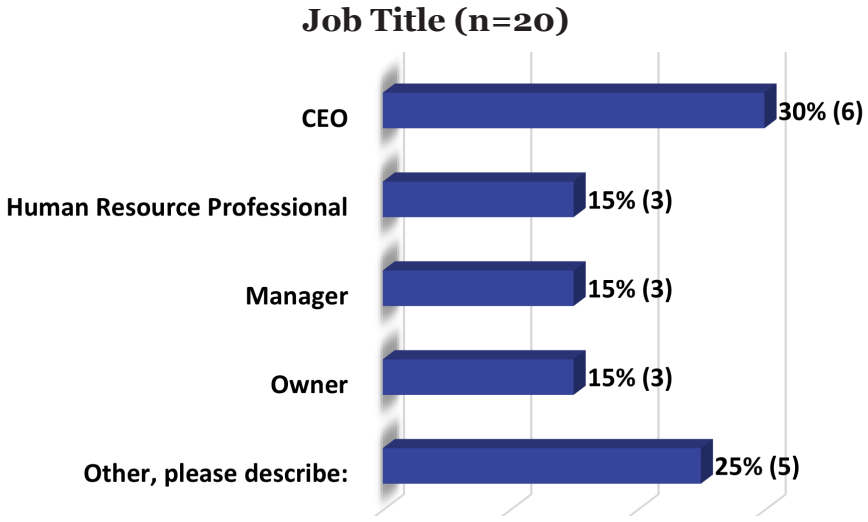
Industry

The respondents' businesses spanned various sectors, with the majority involved in Professional/Business Services (19%), followed by Healthcare/Social Service (14%), Education/Training (14%), Manufacturing/ Production (10%), Wholesale/Retail Trade (10%), Hospitality/Food Service (10%), and the remaining 19% representing diverse industries not categorized above.



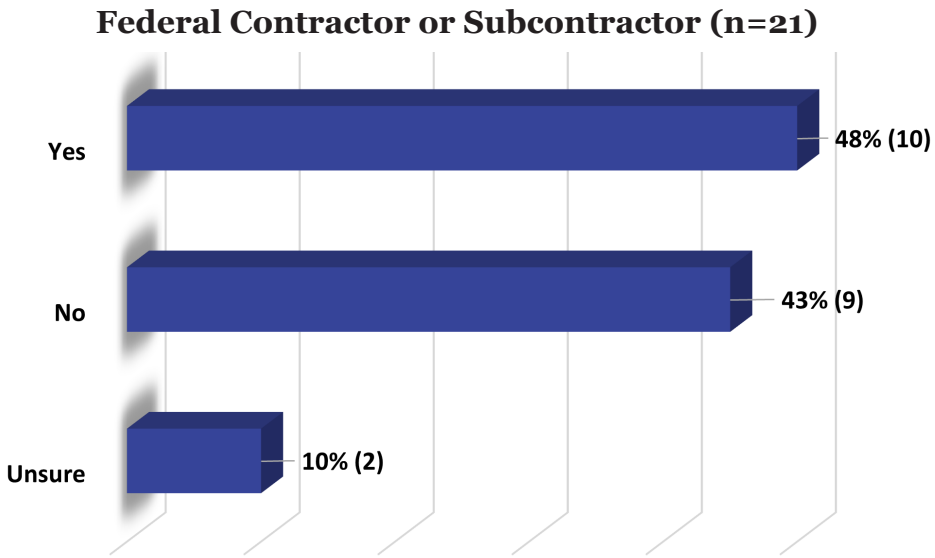
Job Title

The survey revealed that the majority of respondents were Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) (30%), with the next largest group consisting of respondents with various other job titles (25%). The remaining respondents comprised Human Resource Professionals (HR personnel) (15%), managers (15%), and owners (15%).



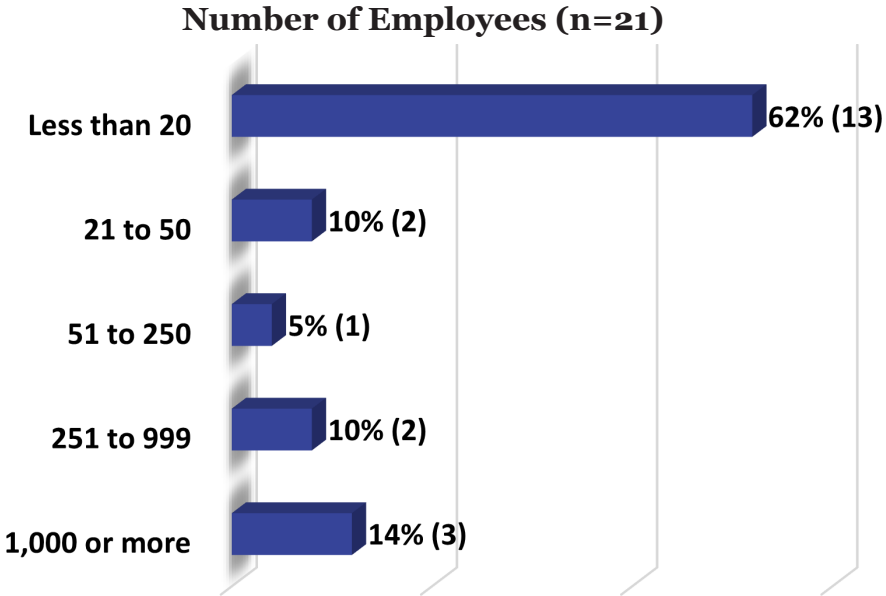
Federal Contractor or Subcontractor

A little less than half of respondents identified as a federal contractor or subcontractor (48%) and nearly the same number did not identify as a federal contractor or subcontractor (43%). The remaining respondents were unsure if they identify as either (10%).



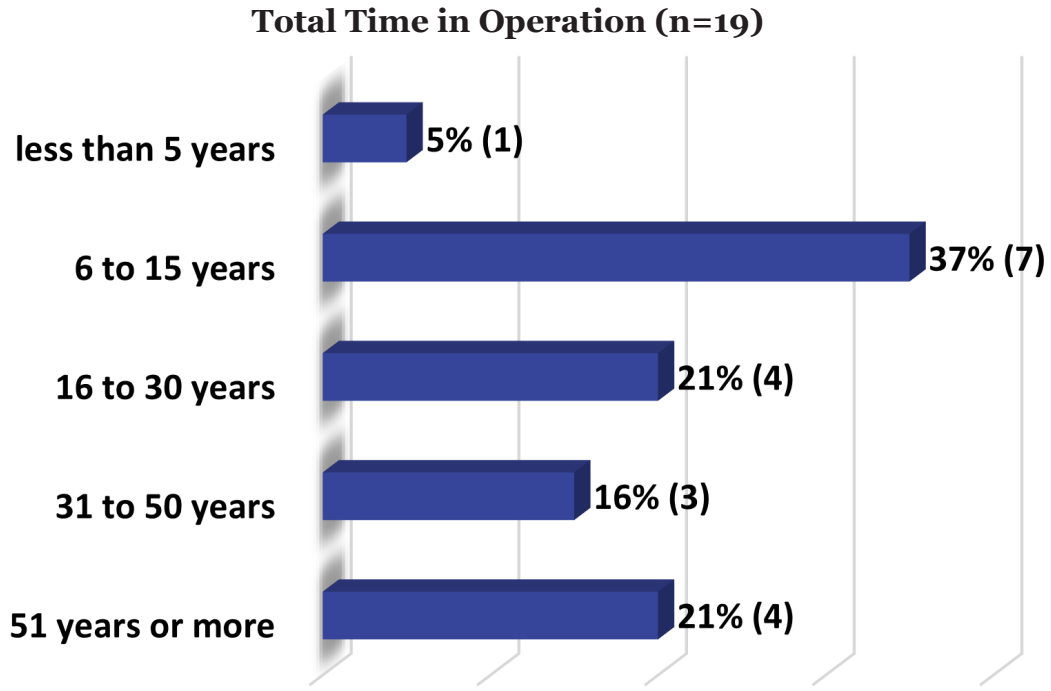
Number of Employees

Almost half (48%) were small businesses that employed less than 20 individuals and close to one-eighth (14%) were large businesses that employed more than 100 individuals. One-tenth (10%) employed between 21 and 50 employees and one-tenth employed between 251 to 999 individuals. The remaining businesses employed 51 to 250 individuals.



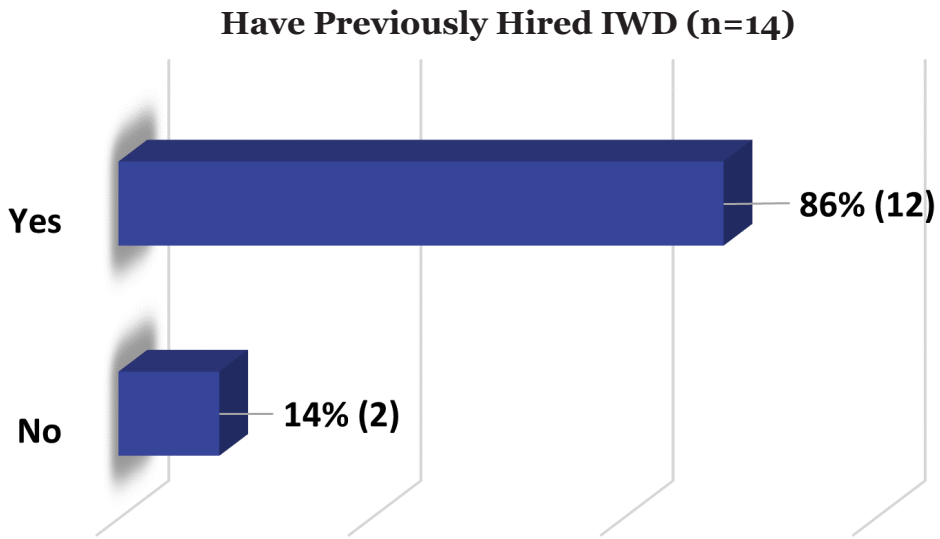
Total Time in Operation

Most businesses were in operation for 6 to 15 years (37%), followed by businesses in operation for 51 years or more (21%) and 16 to 30 years (21%).



Have Previously Hired IWD

The majority of employers stated they knowingly hired individuals with disabilities in the past (86%) and the remaining have not (14%).



APPENDIX A: SURVEY - GEORGIANS WITH DISABILITIES

SURVEY



INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES
who live in Georgia

Q1 Survey for Georgians with Disabilities

The Research and Evaluation Unit (REU) at the Institute on Human Development and Disability (IHDD), located at the University of Georgia (UGA), in partnership with the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) of Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency (GVRA), is conducting a needs assessment to learn more about the employment needs of individuals with disabilities in Georgia. The information you provide will inform GVRA's portion of Georgia's Unified State Plan, as well as influence decision making and delivery of vocational services to individuals with disabilities.

This survey should take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete, and your participation is completely voluntary. There are no right or wrong answers, and you are free to answer only the questions you are comfortable with. Your responses will be kept confidential, and you will not be asked to provide your name or the name of your organization. Feedback gathered through this survey will be combined into a summary report along with other data collected for this project.

Should you need accommodations or would like this survey in an alternate format, please send an email to researchevaluation.ihdd@gmail.com or call (706) 542-6089.

Note: For the purpose of this survey, an "individual with a disability" is a person who has a physical, mental, sensory or cognitive impairment that impacts their ability to prepare for, obtain or maintain gainful employment. In advance, thanks for your time and participation!

APPENDIX A

SURVEY - GEORGIANS WITH DISABILITIES

Q2 Would you require assistance from our project staff in filling out this survey (completing it over the phone)?

- ○ Yes (1)
- ○ No (2)

Display This Question:
If Would you require assistance from our project staff in filling out this survey (completing it ove... = Yes

Q3 Please leave your name, contact number and/or email address, where one of our trained interviewers can reach you.

_____

_____

_____

Skip To: End of Survey If Condition: Please leave your name, con... Is Displayed. Skip To: End of Survey.

Q4 Which best describes you (person completing the survey)?

- ○ I am a person with a disability (1)
- ○ Someone providing assistance to the person with a disability to complete this survey (responding on behalf of a person with a disability) (2)

Display This Question:
If Which best describes you (person completing the survey)? = Someone providing assistance to the person with a disability to complete this survey (responding on behalf of a person with a disability)

Q5 If you are someone assisting an individual with a disability (responding on behalf of a person with a disability), please check who you are.

- ○ Spouse (1)
- ○ Sibling (2)
- ○ Parent (3)
- ○ Child (4)
- ○ Significant other (5)
- ○ Grandparent (6)
- ○ Family friend (7)
- ○ Neighbor (8)
- ○ Church member (9)
- ○ Advocate (10)
- ○ Other family member (11)
- ○ Prefer not to answer (12)
- ○ Other (specify): (13) _____

APPENDIX A: SURVEY - GEORGIANS WITH DISABILITIES

Q6 Which of the following have been barriers for you (individual with a disability) in seeking, getting or keeping a job in Georgia (Please select all that apply)

- ○ Access to dependable transportation (1)
- ○ Lack of awareness about Vocational Rehabilitation Services (2)
- ○ Low expectations and misconceptions about disabilities among professionals (3)
- ○ Employer's concerns about risks associated with hiring individuals with disabilities (e.g. worker's comp) (4)
- ○ Employer's concerns about providing accommodations for individuals with disabilities (5)
- ○ Lack of family/community support (6)
- ○ Disability related factors (severity, instability, etc.) (7)
- ○ Fear of losing benefits (SSI/SSDI) (8)
- ○ Lack of skills or education needed for job goal (9)
- ○ Limited work experience (10)
- ○ Slow job market (11)
- ○ Lack of long-term services/ongoing job coaching (12)
- ○ Language and/or cultural barriers (13)
- ○ Difficulty accessing jobs (identifying openings, application process, interviewing, etc.) (14)
- ○ Lack of well-trained quality job developers (15)
- ○ Lack of interpersonal or soft skills (16)
- ○ Lack of awareness of/or access to job supports, assistive technology or accommodations (17)
- ○ Lack of physical accessibility (18)
- ○ Lack of personal care attendant (19)
- ○ Other (please specify) (20) _____

Q7 In your opinion, what are the top challenges a person with a disability experiences in accessing employment services in Georgia? (Please select all that apply)

- ○ Lack of information about who provides employment services (1)
- ○ Lack of information about funding employment services (2)
- ○ Not able to get an appointment when needed (3)
- ○ Lack of transportation to meet with employment service providers (4)
- ○ Lack of clear information about available services (5)
- ○ The eligibility process is too challenging (6)
- ○ The location of the service provider is not accessible (7)
- ○ Other, please describe: (8) _____

Q8 What are some of the most important things that have positively impacted your ability to obtain and maintain employment? (Please select all that apply)

- ○ None of these/ Not applicable (1)
- ○ Higher wages (2)
- ○ Low or no-cost, reliable transportation services (3)
- ○ Low or no-cost, reliable childcare services (4)
- ○ Work-from-home/remote employment opportunities (5)
- ○ Better knowledge of how my employment may or may not impact my social security benefits (6)
- ○ More understanding employers about my specific needs as a person with a disability (7)
- ○ Educational training (e.g. GED completion, trade school, college) (8)
- ○ Improved accessibility of workplaces (9)
- ○ Assistive technology provided (10)

- ○ Job skills training (11)
- ○ Job search assistance and training, placement services (12)
- ○ On the job supports (13)
- ○ Affordable housing (14)
- ○ Social and soft skills training (15)
- ○ Customized work requirements to meet my specific needs (16)
- ○ Other (specify) (17) _____

Q9 How will you (person with disabilities) describe your current employment status? (Please select all options that apply)

- ○ Not employed currently / Not applicable (1)
- ○ Employed full-time earning minimum wage or higher (30 hours or more per week) (2)
- ○ Employed part-time earning minimum wage or higher (29 hours or less per week) (3)
- ○ Supported employment (4)
- ○ Workshop, center-based work, work crew with other people with disabilities (5)
- ○ Self employed (6)
- ○ Volunteer (7)
- ○ Student (8)
- ○ Prefer not to say (9)
- ○ Other (Specify) (10) _____

Display This Question:

If How will you (person with disabilities) describe your current employment status? (Please select a... = Employed full-time earning minimum wage or higher (30 hours or more per week)

Or How will you (person with disabilities) describe your current employment status? (Please select a... = Employed part-time earning minimum wage or higher (29 hours or less per week)

Or How will you (person with disabilities) describe your current employment status? (Please select a... = Supported employment

Or How will you (person with disabilities) describe your current employment status? (Please select a... = Workshop, center-based work, work crew with other people with disabilities

Or How will you (person with disabilities) describe your current employment status? (Please select a... = Self employed

Or How will you (person with disabilities) describe your current employment status? (Please select a... = Volunteer

Q10 What industry are you (individual with a disability) employed in?

- ○ Service/Hospitality (1)
- ○ Retail (2)
- ○ Manufacturing (3)
- ○ Agriculture/Forestry/Fishing (4)
- ○ Construction (5)
- ○ Government (6)
- ○ Education (7)
- ○ Healthcare (8)
- ○ Banking/Finance (9)
- ○ Social Services (10)
- ○ Non-profit (11)
- ○ Other (specify) (12) _____

APPENDIX A: SURVEY - GEORGIANS WITH DISABILITIES

Display This Question:

If How will you (person with disabilities) describe your current employment status? (Please select a... = Employed full-time earning minimum wage or higher (30 hours or more per week)

Or How will you (person with disabilities) describe your current employment status? (Please select a... = Employed part-time earning minimum wage or higher (29 hours or less per week)

Or How will you (person with disabilities) describe your current employment status? (Please select a... = Supported employment

Or How will you (person with disabilities) describe your current employment status? (Please select a... = Workshop, center-based work, work crew with other people with disabilities

Or How will you (person with disabilities) describe your current employment status? (Please select a... = Self employed

Or How will you (person with disabilities) describe your current employment status? (Please select a... = Volunteer

Q11 What is your (individual with disabilities) job title or type of work?

_____

Q12 Who helped you find your current job?

- ○ My family (1)
- ○ My friends (2)
- ○ GVRA (3)
- ○ Goodwill (4)
- ○ One Stop Employment Center (5)
- ○ Disability employment service provider (6)
- ○ I used an internet website (Indeed, ZipRecruiter, LinkedIn, etc.) to find my job (7)
- ○ I answered a job advertisement I found on social media (8)
- ○ I answered a job advertisement in a newsletter, newspaper, etc. (9)
- ○ Other (please specify) (10) _____

Q13 Please identify the key factors that have contributed to your job success. (Choose all that apply).

- ○ None of these / Not applicable (1)
- ○ Services received from GVRA (2)
- ○ Services from employment service providers other than GVRA (3)
- ○ Increased confidence in my self (4)
- ○ Overcoming physical limitations (5)
- ○ Overcoming other barriers (6)
- ○ Availability of accommodations or other supports on the job (7)
- ○ Support from family or friends (8)
- ○ It is the right job for me (9)
- ○ Supervisor and/or co-workers are supportive (10)
- ○ Other, please describe (11) _____

APPENDIX A

SURVEY - GEORGIANS WITH DISABILITIES

Display This Question:

If How will you (person with disabilities) describe your current employment status? (Please select a... = Not employed currently / Not applicable

And How will you (person with disabilities) describe your current employment status? (Please select a... = Not employed currently / Not applicable

Q14 Are you currently looking for a job?

- ○ Yes (1)
- ○ No (2)
- ○ Not sure/ prefer not to answer (3)

Display This Question:

If How will you (person with disabilities) describe your current employment status? (Please select a... = Not employed currently / Not applicable

And Are you currently looking for a job? = Yes

Q15 How long have you (individual with a disability) been seeking employment? (e.g. Since 2021 or 6 months)

_____

_____

Display This Question:

If How will you (person with disabilities) describe your current employment status? (Please select a... = Not employed currently / Not applicable

Q16 Have you ever received assistance from an organization to find a job?

- ○ Yes (1)
- ○ No (2)
- ○ Unsure (3)

Display This Question:

If Have you ever received assistance from an organization to find a job? = Yes

And How will you (person with disabilities) describe your current employment status? (Please select a... = Not employed currently / Not applicable

Q17 If yes, please list the organization(s) that assisted you.

_____

_____

APPENDIX A: SURVEY - GEORGIANS WITH DISABILITIES

Q18 Which of the following best describes you? Please select all that apply.

- O I have never been a GVRA client (1)
- O I am currently receiving services from GVRA (2)
- O I have been a GVRA client in the past (3)
- O I am not familiar with GVRA (4)
- O Prefer to not answer (5)
- O Other (please describe) (6) _____

Display This Question:

If Which of the following best describes you? Please select all that apply. = I am currently receiving services from GVRA

Or Which of the following best describes you? Please select all that apply. = I have been a GVRA client in the past

Q19 Please rate your experience with GVRA, on a scale from 1 (very dissatisfied) to 4 (very satisfied) for each of the following areas.

	Very Dissatisfied (1)	Dissatisfied (2)	Satisfied (3)	Very Satisfied (4)	No Experience (5)
Respect, sensitivity and politeness shown by GVRA towards consumers (1)	O	O	O	O	O
GVRA's responsiveness to calls and emails to consumers (2)	O	O	O	O	O
GVRA's eligibility process for consumers (3)	O	O	O	O	O
GVRA's explanation of services /who would provide them (4)	O	O	O	O	O
GVRA individualizing services (5)	O	O	O	O	O
Consumers being able to provide input (6)	O	O	O	O	O
GVRA listening to the consumer (7)	O	O	O	O	O
GVRA staff attitudes (8)	O	O	O	O	O
GVRA staff's level of knowledge (9)	O	O	O	O	O
Quality of services provided by GVRA / contracted provider (10)	O	O	O	O	O
GVRA 's retention of qualified staff (11)	O	O	O	O	O
GVRA relationship with community agencies (12)	O	O	O	O	O
Consumer being able to receive all services needed (13)	O	O	O	O	O
Overall experience with GVRA (14)	O	O	O	O	O

Q20 What are some challenges or barriers that people face in accessing services from Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency (GVRA)?

_____

_____

Q21 What, according to you, are some strengths of the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency (GVRA)?

_____

_____

Q22 What suggestions do you have for GVRA so it can provide better services that lead to improved employment outcomes for its clients?

_____

_____

Q23 What is your (person with disabilities) current age range?

- ○ 14-24 (1)
- ○ 25-35 (2)
- ○ 36-50 (3)
- ○ 51-64 (4)
- ○ 65 and older (5)
- ○ Prefer not to say (6)

Q24 What is your (person with disabilities) gender?

- ○ Male (1)
- ○ Female (2)
- ○ Prefer not to say (3)

Q25 What is your (person with disabilities) race/ethnicity?

- ○ White (1)
- ○ Black or African American (2)
- ○ American Indian or Alaska Native (3)
- ○ Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (4)
- ○ Asian (5)
- ○ Multi-racial (6)
- ○ Prefer not to say (7)
- ○ Other (please specify) (8) _____

Q26 Are you Hispanic or Latino?

- ○ Yes (1)
- ○ No (2)

APPENDIX A: SURVEY - GEORGIANS WITH DISABILITIES

Q27 Which county do you (person with disabilities) live in? Please select from the list.

***Survey respondents were given a list of all 159 Georgia counties to choose from. Counties were listed in alphabetical order from A (Appling County, Georgia) to W (Worth County, Georgia).**

Appling County, Georgia

Q28 From the list below, please identify the impairment(s) that impact you the most:

- ○ Blindness / Low Vision (1)
- ○ Deafness / Loss of Hearing (2)
- ○ Speech Impairment (3)
- ○ Spinal Cord Injury (4)
- ○ Amputation (5)
- ○ Arthritis or Joint Condition (6)
- ○ Back/Neck Condition (7)
- ○ Chronic Pain (including fibromyalgia) (8)
- ○ Nerve/Muscle Conditions (9)
- ○ Digestive Disorder (10)
- ○ Cancer (11)
- ○ Respiratory Conditions (asthma, allergies, COPD) (12)
- ○ Diabetes/Kidney Disease (13)
- ○ Cardiac Conditions (14)
- ○ Autoimmune Conditions (15)
- ○ Traumatic Brain Injury (16)
- ○ Parkinson's/Muscular Dystrophy (17)
- ○ Stroke (18)
- ○ Seizures/Epilepsy (19)
- ○ Autism (20)
- ○ Cerebral Palsy (21)
- ○ Spina Bifida (22)
- ○ Genetic Conditions (23)
- ○ Intellectual Disability (24)
- ○ Learning Disability (25)
- ○ Attention Deficit Disorder (26)
- ○ Depression/Anxiety (27)
- ○ PTSD (28)
- ○ Other Mental Health Condition (29)
- ○ Substance Dependence (including alcohol) (30)
- ○ Other, please describe: (31) _____

SURVEY - GEORGIANS WITH DISABILITIES

Q29 What is the highest level of school you (individual with a disability) have completed or the highest degree you have received?

- ○ Currently attending high school (1)
- ○ Less than high school (2)
- ○ High school graduate (high school diploma or equivalent including GED) (3)
- ○ Some college or technical school but no degree (4)
- ○ Diploma or Associates degree (5)
- ○ Bachelor's degree (6)
- ○ Master's degree (7)
- ○ Doctoral degree (8)
- ○ Professional degree (JD, MD) (9)
- ○ Prefer not to say (10)
- ○ Other, please describe (11) _____

Q30 Are you or have you been in the US Armed Services?

- ○ Currently serving (active duty, reserves or guard) (1)
- ○ Yes, I am a veteran (2)
- ○ No (3)

Q31 Your input is very much appreciated. Is there any additional information you would like to share about GVRA, or the employment-related needs of individuals with disabilities in Georgia?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

APPENDIX B: SURVEY – STAKEHOLDERS

SURVEY



STAKEHOLDERS
family, friends, professionals, advocates of people with disabilities

Q1 Survey for Stakeholders in Georgia (Stakeholders include family, friends, professionals, advocates etc.)

The Research and Evaluation Unit (REU) at the Institute on Human Development and Disability (IHDD), located at the University of Georgia (UGA), in partnership with the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) of Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency (GVRA), is conducting a needs assessment to learn more about the employment needs of individuals with disabilities in Georgia. The information you provide will inform GVRA's portion of Georgia's Unified State Plan, as well as influence decision making and delivery of vocational services to individuals with disabilities.

This survey should take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete, and your participation is completely voluntary. There are no right or wrong answers, and you are free to answer only the questions you are comfortable with. Your responses will be kept confidential, and you will not be asked to provide your name or the name of your organization. Feedback gathered through this survey will be combined into a summary report along with other data collected for this project.

Should you need accommodations or would like this survey in an alternate format, please send an email to researchevaluation.ihdd@gmail.com or call (706) 542-6089.

Note: For the purpose of this survey, an "individual with a disability" is a person who has a physical, mental, sensory or cognitive impairment that impacts their ability to prepare for, obtain or maintain gainful employment. In advance, thank for your time and participation!

Q2 Which of the following best describes you?

- ○ Parent or family member of an individual with a disability (1)
- ○ Caregiver (unpaid) for an individual with a disability (2)
- ○ Professional - Direct support professional/personal attendant for an individual(s) with a disability (3)
- ○ Professional - Advocate for the disability community (4)
- ○ Professional - with partnering agency or organization (5)
- ○ Professional - in the community (6)
- ○ Prefer not to answer (7)
- ○ Other (please describe) (8) _____

APPENDIX B

SURVEY – STAKEHOLDERS

Display This Question:

If Which of the following best describes you? = Professional - Direct support professional/personal attendant for an individual(s) with a disability

Or Which of the following best describes you? = Professional - Advocate for the disability community

Or Which of the following best describes you? = Professional - with partnering agency or organization

Or Which of the following best describes you? = Professional - in the community

Q3 If you are a professional, which of the following best describes your current position?

- ○ Administrator/Director (1)
- ○ Manager (2)
- ○ Counselor (3)
- ○ Coordinator (4)
- ○ Educator (5)
- ○ Medical Provider (6)
- ○ Public Official (7)
- ○ Administrative Staff (8)
- ○ Prefer not to answer (9)
- ○ Other, please describe (10) _____

Display This Question:

If Which of the following best describes you? = Parent or family member of an individual with a disability

Or Which of the following best describes you? = Caregiver (unpaid) for an individual with a disability

Q4 If you are a parent or caregiver, what is your relationship to the person you are caring for, assisting?

- ○ Parent (1)
- ○ Adult sibling (2)
- ○ Cousin/Aunt/Uncle (3)
- ○ Grandparent (4)
- ○ Family friend (5)
- ○ Neighbor (6)
- ○ Church member (7)
- ○ Other relative (please specify relationship) (8) _____
- ○ Prefer not to answer (9)
- ○ Other (10) _____

Q5 In your experience, generally, what are the key barriers to employment encountered by people with disabilities, including those with significant disabilities? (Please select all that apply)

- ○ Access to dependable transportation (1)
- ○ Lack of awareness about Vocational Rehabilitation Services (2)
- ○ Misconceptions and low expectations among professionals (3)

APPENDIX B: SURVEY – STAKEHOLDERS

- ○ Employer's concerns about risks associated with hiring individuals with disabilities (e.g. worker's comp) (4)
- ○ Employer's concerns about providing accommodations for individuals with disabilities (5)
- ○ Lack of family/community support (6)
- ○ Disability-related factors (severity, instability, etc.) (7)
- ○ Fear of losing benefits (SSI/SSDI) (8)
- ○ Criminal background (9)
- ○ Lack of skills or education needed for job goal (10)
- ○ Limited work experience (11)
- ○ Slow job market (12)
- ○ Lack of long-term services and ongoing job coaching (13)
- ○ Language and/or cultural barriers (14)
- ○ Difficulty accessing jobs (identifying openings, application process, interviewing, etc.) (15)
- ○ Lack of well-trained quality job developers (16)
- ○ Lack of interpersonal or soft skills (17)
- ○ Lack of awareness of or access to job supports, assistive technology or accommodations (18)
- ○ Lack of affordable housing (19)
- ○ Lack of physical accessibility (20)
- ○ Lack of personal care attendant (21)
- ○ Other (please specify): (22) _____

Q6 In your opinion, which of the following populations are most likely to be under-served and encounter barriers to accessing employment services? (Please select all that apply)

- ○ Individuals with intellectual or developmental disabilities (1)
- ○ Transition-age youth with disabilities (ages 16 to 22 years) (2)
- ○ Individuals with significant or complex disabilities (3)
- ○ Individuals from racial and ethnic minority populations (4)
- ○ Individuals with disabilities who are homeless (5)
- ○ Individuals with mental illness (6)
- ○ Individuals with a substance abuse disorder (7)
- ○ Individuals with disabilities with a criminal history (8)
- ○ Individuals living in rural areas (9)
- ○ Individuals with sensory disabilities (10)
- ○ Individuals who receive SSDI or SSI (11)
- ○ Individuals who are over the age of 55 (12)
- ○ Children with disabilities under the age of 10 (13)
- ○ Veterans (14)
- ○ Other (please specify) (15) _____

Q7 In your experience, generally, what are the key barriers to employment encountered by people with disabilities from racial/ethnic minority populations? (Please select all that apply)

- ○ Access to dependable transportation (1)
- ○ Lack of awareness about Vocational Rehabilitation Services (2)
- ○ Misconceptions and low expectations among professionals (3)
- ○ Employer's concerns about risks associated with hiring individuals with disabilities (e.g. worker's comp) (4)
- ○ Employer's concerns about providing accommodations for individuals with disabilities (5)
- ○ Lack of family/community support (6)
- ○ Disability related factors (severity, instability, etc.) (7)

- ○ Fear of losing benefits (SSI/SSDI) (8)
- ○ Lack of skills or education needed for job goal (9)
- ○ Limited work experience (10)
- ○ Slow job market (11)
- ○ Lack of long-term services and ongoing job coaching (12)
- ○ Language and/or cultural barriers (13)
- ○ Difficulty accessing jobs (identifying openings, application process, interviewing, etc.) (14)
- ○ Lack of well-trained quality job developers (15)
- ○ Lack of interpersonal or soft skills (16)
- ○ Lack of awareness of or access to job supports, assistive technology or accommodations (17)
- ○ Lack of physical accessibility (18)
- ○ Lack of personal care attendant (19)
- ○ Other (please specify): (20) _____

Q8 In your experience, generally, what are the key barriers to employment encountered by youth with disabilities who are in transition? (Please select all that apply)

- ○ Access to dependable transportation (1)
- ○ Lack of awareness about Vocational Rehabilitation Services (2)
- ○ Misconceptions and low expectations among professionals (3)
- ○ Employer's concerns about risks associated with hiring individuals with disabilities (e.g. worker's comp) (4)
- ○ Employer's concerns about providing accommodations for individuals with disabilities (5)
- ○ Lack of family/community support (6)
- ○ Disability related factors (severity, instability, etc.) (7)
- ○ Fear of losing benefits (SSI/SSDI) (8)
- ○ Lack of skills or education needed for job goal (9)
- ○ Limited work experience (10)
- ○ Slow job market (11)
- ○ Lack of long-term services and ongoing job coaching (12)
- ○ Language and/or cultural barriers (13)
- ○ Difficulty accessing jobs (identifying openings, application process, interviewing, etc.) (14)
- ○ Lack of well-trained quality job developers (15)
- ○ Lack of interpersonal or soft skills (16)
- ○ Lack of awareness of or access to job supports, assistive technology or accommodations (17)
- ○ Lack of physical accessibility (18)
- ○ Lack of personal care attendant (19)
- ○ Other (please specify): (20) _____

Display This Question:

If Which of the following best describes you? = Parent or family member of an individual with a disability

Or Which of the following best describes you? = Caregiver (unpaid) for an individual with a disability

Q9 Are you a parent or a family member of a child/youth with a disability who needs/has needed transition services to prepare them to move from school/education to employment?

- ○ Yes (1)
- ○ No (2)

APPENDIX B: SURVEY – STAKEHOLDERS

Display This Question:
If Which of the following best describes you? = Parent or family member of an individual with a disability
And Are you a parent or a family member of a child/youth with a disability who needs/has needed trans... = Yes

Q10 If yes, overall, how satisfied were you with the transition-related services offered by GVRA at their school?

- ○ Extremely dissatisfied (1)
- ○ Somewhat dissatisfied (2)
- ○ Somewhat satisfied (3)
- ○ Extremely satisfied (4)
- ○ School does not offer transition services (5)
- ○ Not sure/not applicable (6)

Display This Question:
If Are you a parent or a family member of a child/youth with a disability who needs/has needed trans... = Yes

Q11 As a parent or family member, how familiar are you with pre-ETS (pre employment transition services) offered to students/youth ages of 14 to 21 years, in your child's school?

- ○ Not at all familiar (1)
- ○ Somewhat familiar (2)
- ○ Very familiar (3)

Display This Question:
If Are you a parent or a family member of a child/youth with a disability who needs/has needed trans... = Yes

Q12 Has your student/youth received pre-ETS services offered in their school?

- ○ No (1)
- ○ Yes (2)
- ○ I don't know what that is (3)
- ○ Other (please explain) (4) _____

Display This Question:
If Has your student/youth received pre-ETS services offered in their school? = Yes

Q13 If your youth/students have received pre-ETS services offered in schools, how satisfied were you with the services?

- ○ Extremely dissatisfied (1)
- ○ Somewhat dissatisfied (2)
- ○ Somewhat satisfied (3)
- ○ Extremely satisfied (4)
- ○ Not sure (5)

APPENDIX B

SURVEY – STAKEHOLDERS

Display This Question:
If Are you a parent or a family member of a child/youth with a disability who needs/has needed trans... = Yes

Q14 As a parent or family member of a youth/student with a disability, how familiar are you with Pathway Explore for Pre-ETS offered in schools?

- ○ Not at all familiar (1)
- ○ Somewhat familiar (2)
- ○ Very familiar (3)

Q15 If you are a parent or family member of a youth/student with a disability, has your child received Pathway Explore for Pre-ETS services offered in schools?

- ○ No (1)
- ○ Yes (2)
- ○ I don't know what that is (3)
- ○ Other (please explain) (4) _____

Display This Question:
If you are a parent or family member of a youth/student with a disability, has your child receive... = Yes

Q16 If your youth/student has received Pathway Explore for Pre-ETS services offered in schools, how satisfied were you with the services?

- ○ Extremely dissatisfied (1)
- ○ Somewhat dissatisfied (2)
- ○ Somewhat satisfied (3)
- ○ Extremely satisfied (4)
- ○ Not sure (5)

Display This Question:
If Are you a parent or a family member of a child/youth with a disability who needs/has needed trans... = Yes

Q17 If you are a parent or family member of an individual with disabilities, what resources have you used to learn about employment services in Georgia?

_____

_____

Q18 In your opinion, please identify the key services that are most needed by individuals with disabilities related to competitive integrated employment. (Please choose all that apply).

- ○ Medical services (1)
- ○ Post-secondary education (2)
- ○ Psychological services (3)
- ○ Assistive Technology/Adaptive Equipment for home/work (4)
- ○ Vocational Guidance & Counseling to include career exploration (5)

APPENDIX B: SURVEY – STAKEHOLDERS

- ○ Job development/placement (6)
- ○ Services related to blindness/low vision (7)
- ○ Occupational Skills Training (8)
- ○ On the Job Support (job coaching) (9)
- ○ Supported Employment (extended follow-up) (10)
- ○ Services related to Deafness/hearing loss (11)
- ○ Job Preparation Services (work adjustment training) (12)
- ○ Assessments to identify a job goal (13)
- ○ Discovery/Customized Employment (14)
- ○ Help with self-employment start-up (15)
- ○ Help with keeping a job/advancing in job (16)
- ○ Help with obtaining job specific credentials/certifications (17)
- ○ Funding for job specific tools/equipment/uniforms (18)
- ○ Other, please describe (19) _____

Q19 In your opinion, please identify the key services that are most needed by individuals with disabilities related to competitive integrated employment. (Please choose all that apply).

- ○ Medical services (1)
- ○ Post-secondary education (2)
- ○ Psychological services (3)
- ○ Assistive Technology/Adaptive Equipment for home/work (4)
- ○ Vocational Guidance & Counseling to include career exploration (5)
- ○ Job development/placement (6)
- ○ Services related to blindness/low vision (7)
- ○ Occupational Skills Training (8)
- ○ On the Job Support (job coaching) (9)
- ○ Supported Employment (extended follow-up) (10)
- ○ Services related to Deafness/hearing loss (11)
- ○ Job Preparation Services (work adjustment training) (12)
- ○ Assessments to identify a job goal (13)
- ○ Discovery/Customized Employment (14)
- ○ Help with self-employment start-up (15)
- ○ Help with keeping a job/advancing in job (16)
- ○ Help with obtaining job specific credentials/certifications (17)
- ○ Funding for job specific tools/equipment/uniforms (18)
- ○ Other, please describe (19) _____

Q20 Have you ever interacted or worked with the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency (GVRA) to receive assistance for yourself or someone else (family member, client)?

- ○ Yes (1)
- ○ No (2)
- ○ Prefer not to answer (3)
- ○ Unsure (4)

APPENDIX B

SURVEY – STAKEHOLDERS

Display This Question:

If Have you ever interacted or worked with the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency (GVRA) to re... = Yes

Q21 Please rate your experience with GVRA, on a scale from 1 (very dissatisfied) to 4 (very satisfied) for each of the following areas.

	Very Dissatisfied (1)	Dissatisfied (2)	Satisfied (3)	Very Satisfied (4)	No Experience (5)
Respect, sensitivity and politeness shown by GVRA towards consumers (1)	O	O	O	O	O
GVRA's responsiveness to calls and emails to consumers (2)	O	O	O	O	O
GVRA's eligibility process for consumers (3)	O	O	O	O	O
GVRA's explanation of services, purpose, and who would provide them (4)	O	O	O	O	O
GVRA individualizing services (5)	O	O	O	O	O
Consumers being able to provide input (6)	O	O	O	O	O
GVRA listening to the consumer (7)	O	O	O	O	O
GVRA staff attitudes (8)	O	O	O	O	O
GVRA staff's level of knowledge (9)	O	O	O	O	O
Quality of services provided by GVRA or contracted provider (10)	O	O	O	O	O
GVRA 's retention of qualified staff (11)	O	O	O	O	O
GVRA relationship with community agencies (12)	O	O	O	O	O
Consumer being able to receive all services needed (13)	O	O	O	O	O
Overall experience with GVRA (14)	O	O	O	O	O

APPENDIX B: SURVEY – STAKEHOLDERS

Display This Question:
If Have you ever interacted or worked with the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency (GVRA) to re... = Yes

Q22 What, according to you, are some of the strengths of the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency (GVRA)?

_____

_____

Q23 What suggestions do you have for GVRA so it can provide better services and improve employment outcomes for its clients?

_____

_____

Q24 What is your current age range?

- ○ 14-24 (1)
- ○ 25-35 (2)
- ○ 36-50 (3)
- ○ 51-64 (4)
- ○ 65 and older (5)
- ○ Prefer not to say (6)

Q25 What is your gender?

- ○ Male (1)
- ○ Female (2)
- ○ Prefer to not say (3)

Q26 What is your race/ethnicity? (Select all that apply)

- ○ White (1)
- ○ Black or African American (2)
- ○ American Indian or Alaska Native (3)
- ○ Asian (4)
- ○ Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (5)
- ○ Multi-racial (6)
- ○ Prefer not to say (8)
- ○ Other (7) _____

Q27 Are you Hispanic or Latino?

- ○ Yes (1)
- ○ No (2)

Q28 Which county do you (person with disabilities) live in? Please select from the list.
***Survey respondents were given a list of all 159 Georgia counties to choose from. Counties were listed in alphabetical order from A (Appling County, Georgia) to W (Worth County, Georgia).**

Appling County, Georgia

Q29 What is the highest level of school you have completed or the highest degree you have received?

- ○ Currently attending High School (1)
- ○ Less than high school degree (2)
- ○ High school graduate (high school diploma or equivalent including GED) (3)
- ○ Some college but no degree (4)
- ○ Diploma or Associate degree in college (5)
- ○ Bachelor's degree (6)
- ○ Master's degree (7)
- ○ Doctoral degree (8)
- ○ Professional degree (JD, MD) (9)
- ○ Prefer not to say (11)
- ○ Other, please describe: (10) _____

Display This Question:

If Which of the following best describes you? = Parent or family member of an individual with a disability

Or Which of the following best describes you? = Caregiver (unpaid) for an individual with a disability

Or Which of the following best describes you? = Professional - Direct support professional/personal attendant for an individual(s) with a disability

Q30 Please answer the next few questions keeping in mind the individual with a disability you are caring for. If you are currently caring for multiple individuals, please choose all the responses that apply.

APPENDIX B: SURVEY – STAKEHOLDERS

Display This Question:

If Which of the following best describes you? = Parent or family member of an individual with a disability

Or Which of the following best describes you? = Caregiver (unpaid) for an individual with a disability

Or Which of the following best describes you? = Professional - Direct support professional/personal attendant for an individual(s) with a disability

Q31 From the list below, please identify the impairment(s) that impact the person with disabilities that you support

- ○ Blindness / Low Vision (1)
- ○ Deafness / Loss of Hearing (2)
- ○ Speech Impairment (3)
- ○ Spinal Cord Injury (4)
- ○ Amputation (5)
- ○ Arthritis or Joint Condition (6)
- ○ Back/Neck Condition (7)
- ○ Chronic Pain (including fibromyalgia) (8)
- ○ Nerve/Muscle Conditions (9)
- ○ Digestive Disorder (10)
- ○ Cancer (11)
- ○ Respiratory Conditions (asthma, allergies, COPD) (12)
- ○ Diabetes/Kidney Disease (13)
- ○ Cardiac Conditions (14)
- ○ Autoimmune Conditions (15)
- ○ Traumatic Brain Injury (16)
- ○ Parkinson's/Muscular Dystrophy (17)
- ○ Stroke (18)
- ○ Seizures/Epilepsy (19)
- ○ Autism (20)
- ○ Cerebral Palsy (21)
- ○ Spina Bifida (22)
- ○ Genetic Conditions (23)
- ○ Intellectual Disability (24)
- ○ Learning Disability (25)
- ○ Attention Deficit Disorder (26)
- ○ Depression/Anxiety (27)
- ○ PTSD (28)
- ○ Other Mental Health Condition (29)
- ○ Substance Dependence (including alcohol) (30)
- ○ Other, please describe: (31) _____

APPENDIX B

SURVEY – STAKEHOLDERS

Display This Question:

If Which of the following best describes you? = Parent or family member of an individual with a disability

Or Which of the following best describes you? = Caregiver (unpaid) for an individual with a disability

Or Which of the following best describes you? = Professional - Direct support professional/personal attendant for an individual(s) with a disability

Q32 What is the current age range of the person with disabilities that you support?

- ○ 14-24 (1)
- ○ 25-35 (2)
- ○ 36-50 (3)
- ○ 51-64 (4)
- ○ 65 and older (5)
- ○ Prefer not to say (6)

Q33 What is the gender of the person with disabilities that you support?

- ○ Male (1)
- ○ Female (2)
- ○ Non-binary (3)
- ○ Prefer not to say (4)

Q34 What is the race of the person with disabilities that you support?

- ○ White (1)
- ○ Black or African American (2)
- ○ American Indian or Alaska Native (3)
- ○ Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (4)
- ○ Asian (5)
- ○ Multi-racial (6)
- ○ Prefer not to say (8)
- ○ Other (please specify) (7) _____

Q35 Your input is very much appreciated. Is there any additional information you would like to share about GVRA or the employment-related needs of individuals with disabilities in Georgia?

_____

_____

_____

APPENDIX C: SURVEY – PROVIDERS

SURVEY



SERVICE PROVIDERS
that help individuals with disabilities find jobs

Q1 Survey for Georgia Employment Service Providers

The Research and Evaluation Unit (REU) at the Institute on Human Development and Disability (IHDD), located at the University of Georgia (UGA), in partnership with the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) of Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency (GVRA), is conducting a needs assessment to learn more about the employment needs of individuals with disabilities in Georgia. The information you provide will inform GVRA's portion of Georgia's Unified State Plan, as well as influence decision making and delivery of vocational services to individuals with disabilities.

This survey should take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete, and your participation is completely voluntary. There are no right or wrong answers, and you are free to answer only the questions you are comfortable with. Your responses will be kept confidential, and you will not be asked to provide your name or the name of your organization. Feedback gathered through this survey will be combined into a summary report along with other data collected for this project.

Should you need accommodations or would like this survey in an alternate format, please send an email to researchevaluation.ihdd@gmail.com or call (706) 542-6089.

Note: For the purpose of this survey, an "individual with a disability" is a person who has a physical, mental, sensory or cognitive impairment that impacts their ability to prepare for, obtain or maintain gainful employment. In advance, thanks for your time and participation!

Q2 From the list below, please choose what best describes you. (Choose all that apply.)

- ○ Employment Services Provider director (1)
- ○ Employment Service Provider President/CEO (2)
- ○ Employment Services Provider staff (3)
- ○ Employment Service Provider Owner (4)
- ○ Employment Service Provider manager/coordinator (5)
- ○ Employment Specialist (6)
- ○ Job Coach (7)
- ○ Assessment Specialist/Evaluator (8)
- ○ Other, please describe: (9) _____

APPENDIX C

SURVEY – PROVIDERS

Q3 On average, approximately how many consumers with disabilities receive employment services from your organization in a given year (from any source)?

- ○ Fewer than 50 (1)
- ○ 51 to 100 (2)
- ○ 101 to 200 (3)
- ○ 201 to 300 (4)
- ○ 301 to 400 (5)
- ○ 401 to 500 (6)
- ○ 501 or more a year (7)

Q4 How long has your agency been providing employment services to individuals with disabilities?

- ○ 0-2 years (1)
- ○ 3-5 years (2)
- ○ 6-10 years (3)
- ○ 11-14 years (4)
- ○ 15 years or more (5)

Q5 From the list below, please identify the impairment(s) that your agency services the most (Please select all that apply)

- ○ Blindness / Low Vision (1)
- ○ Deafness / Loss of Hearing (2)
- ○ Speech Impairment (3)
- ○ Spinal Cord Injury (4)
- ○ Amputation (5)
- ○ Arthritis or Joint Condition (6)
- ○ Back/Neck Condition (7)
- ○ Chronic Pain (including fibromyalgia) (8)
- ○ Nerve/Muscle Conditions (9)
- ○ Digestive Disorder (10)
- ○ Cancer (11)
- ○ Respiratory Conditions (asthma, allergies, COPD) (12)
- ○ Diabetes/Kidney Disease (13)
- ○ Cardiac Conditions (14)
- ○ Autoimmune Conditions (15)
- ○ Traumatic Brain Injury (16)
- ○ Parkinson's/Muscular Dystrophy (17)
- ○ Stroke (18)
- ○ Seizures/Epilepsy (19)
- ○ Autism (20)
- ○ Cerebral Palsy (21)
- ○ Spina Bifida (22)
- ○ Genetic Conditions (23)
- ○ Intellectual Disability (24)
- ○ Learning Disability (25)
- ○ Attention Deficit Disorder (26)

APPENDIX C: SURVEY – PROVIDERS

- ○ Depression/Anxiety (27)
- ○ PTSD (28)
- ○ Other Mental Health Condition (29)
- ○ Substance Dependence (including alcohol) (30)
- ○ Other, please describe: (31) _____

Q6 In your opinion, which of the following populations are most likely to be under-served and encounter barriers to accessing employment services? (Please select all that apply)

- ○ Individuals with intellectual or developmental disabilities (1)
- ○ Transition age youth with disabilities (ages 14 to 22 years) (2)
- ○ Individuals with significant or complex disabilities (3)
- ○ Individuals from racial and ethnic minority populations (4)
- ○ Individuals with disabilities who are homeless (5)
- ○ Individuals with mental illness (6)
- ○ Individuals with substance abuse disorder (7)
- ○ Individuals with disabilities with criminal history (8)
- ○ Individuals living in rural areas (9)
- ○ Individuals with sensory disabilities (10)
- ○ Individuals who receive SSDI or SSI (11)
- ○ Individuals who are over the age of 55 (12)
- ○ Children with disabilities under the age of 10 (13)
- ○ Veterans (14)
- ○ Other (please specify) (15) _____

Q7 In your experience, generally, what are the key barriers to employment encountered by individuals with the disabilities, including those with the most significant disabilities? (Please select all that apply)

- ○ Access to dependable transportation (1)
- ○ Lack of awareness about Vocational Rehabilitation Services (2)
- ○ Misconceptions or low expectations held among professionals (3)
- ○ Employer's concerns about risks associated with hiring individuals with disabilities (e.g. worker's comp) (4)
- ○ Employer's concerns about providing accommodations for individuals with disabilities (5)
- ○ Lack of family/community support (6)
- ○ Disability related factors (severity, instability, etc.) (7)
- ○ Fear of losing benefits (SSI/SSDI) (8)
- ○ Lack of skills or education needed for job goal (9)
- ○ Limited work experience (10)
- ○ Slow job market (11)
- ○ Lack of long-term services and job coaching (12)
- ○ Language an/or cultural barriers (13)
- ○ Difficulty accessing jobs (identifying openings, application process, interviewing, etc.) (14)
- ○ Lack of well-trained quality job developers (15)
- ○ Lack of interpersonal or soft skills (16)
- ○ Lack of awareness of or access to job supports, assistive technology or accommodations (17)
- ○ Lack of physical accessibility (18)
- ○ Lack of independent living skills and/or supports (i.e. personal attendant) (19)
- ○ Other, please specify: (20) _____

APPENDIX C

SURVEY – PROVIDERS

Q8 In your opinion, please identify the key services from providers that are needed by individuals with the most significant disabilities, related to competitive integrated employment. (Please choose all that apply).

- ○ Career Exploration/Job Shadowing (1)
- ○ Benefits Counseling (2)
- ○ Vocational Guidance & Counseling to include career exploration (3)
- ○ Job Skills Training (4)
- ○ Soft Skills training (5)
- ○ Assistance with preparing resume or for interview (6)
- ○ Job Development / Job placement (7)
- ○ Job Coaching and/or Supported Employment Services (8)
- ○ Educational and training assistance (9)
- ○ Services related to blindness/low vision (10)
- ○ Services related to Deafness/hearing loss (11)
- ○ Help with self-employment start-up (12)
- ○ Transportation Assistance (13)
- ○ Assessment Services (14)
- ○ Assistive Technology/Rehabilitation Engineering (15)
- ○ Medical, Psychological Services (16)
- ○ Person Centered Planning/Discovery (17)
- ○ Customized Employment (18)
- ○ Internships (19)
- ○ Other (please specify): (20) _____

Q9 What more can the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency or their contracted employment service provider do to improve the provision of services to individuals with the most significant disabilities?

_____

_____

Q10 In your experience, generally, what are the key barriers to employment encountered by people with disabilities from racial/ethnic minority populations? (Please select all that apply)

- ○ Access to dependable transportation (1)
- ○ Lack of awareness about Vocational Rehabilitation Services (2)
- ○ Low expectations held among professionals (3)
- ○ Misconceptions about disabilities held by professionals (4)
- ○ Employer's perceptions about employing individuals with disabilities (5)
- ○ Lack of family/community support (6)
- ○ Disability related factors (severity, instability, etc.) (7)
- ○ Fear of losing benefits (SSI/SSDI) (8)
- ○ Lack of job preparation, skills, education needed for job (9)
- ○ Limited work experience (10)
- ○ Slow job market (11)
- ○ Lack of long-term services and ongoing follow-up (12)

APPENDIX C: SURVEY – PROVIDERS

- ○ Language and/or cultural barriers (13)
- ○ Difficulty accessing jobs (identifying openings, application process, interviewing, etc.) (14)
- ○ Lack of well-trained quality job developers (15)
- ○ Lack of awareness of or access to job supports, assistive technology or accommodations (16)
- ○ Lack of interpersonal or soft skills (17)
- ○ Lack of physical accessibility (18)
- ○ Lack of independent living skills and/or supports (i.e. personal attendant) (19)
- ○ Other, please specify: (20) _____

Q11 In your opinion, please identify the key services from providers, that are needed by individuals with the disabilities from racial / ethnic minority populations, related to competitive integrated employment. (Please choose all that apply).

- ○ Career Exploration/Job Shadowing (1)
- ○ Benefits Counseling (2)
- ○ Vocational Guidance & Counseling to include career exploration (3)
- ○ Job Skills Training (4)
- ○ Soft Skills training (5)
- ○ Assistance with preparing resume or for interview (6)
- ○ Job Development / Job placement (7)
- ○ Job Coaching and/or Supported Employment Services (8)
- ○ Educational and training assistance (9)
- ○ Services related to blindness/low vision (10)
- ○ Services related to Deafness/hearing loss (11)
- ○ Help with self-employment start-up (12)
- ○ Transportation Assistance (13)
- ○ Assessment Services (14)
- ○ Assistive Technology/Rehabilitation Engineering (15)
- ○ Medical, Psychological Services (16)
- ○ Person Centered Planning/Discovery (17)
- ○ Customized Employment (18)
- ○ Internships (19)
- ○ Other (please specify): (20) _____

Q12 What can the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency or their contracted employment service provider do to improve the provision of services to individuals with disabilities from racial / ethnic minority populations?

_____

_____

Q13 In your experience, generally, what are the key barriers to employment encountered by youth with disabilities who are in transition? (Please select all that apply)

- ○ Access to dependable transportation (1)
- ○ Lack of awareness about Vocational Rehabilitation Services (2)
- ○ Misconceptions and low expectations among professionals (3)

- ○ Employer's concerns about risks associated with hiring individuals with disabilities (e.g. worker's comp) (4)
- ○ Employer's concerns about providing accommodations for individuals with disabilities (5)
- ○ Lack of family/community support (6)
- ○ Disability related factors (severity, instability, etc.) (7)
- ○ Fear of losing benefits (SSI/SSDI) (8)
- ○ Lack of skills or education needed for job goal (9)
- ○ Limited work experience (10)
- ○ Slow job market (11)
- ○ Lack of long-term services and ongoing job coaching (12)
- ○ Language and/or cultural barriers (13)
- ○ Difficulty accessing jobs (identifying openings, application process, interviewing, etc.) (14)
- ○ Lack of well-trained quality job developers (15)
- ○ Lack of interpersonal or soft skills (16)
- ○ Lack of awareness of or access to job supports, assistive technology or accommodations (17)
- ○ Lack of physical accessibility (18)
- ○ Lack of personal care attendant (19)
- ○ Other (please specify): (20) _____

Q14 In your opinion, please identify the key services from providers, that are needed by youth with disabilities who are in transition, related to competitive integrated employment. (Please choose all that apply).

- ○ Career Exploration/Job Shadowing (1)
- ○ Benefits Counseling (2)
- ○ Vocational Guidance & Counseling to include career exploration (3)
- ○ Job Skills Training (4)
- ○ Soft Skills training (5)
- ○ Assistance with preparing resume or for interview (6)
- ○ Job Development / Job placement (7)
- ○ Job Coaching and/or Supported Employment Services (8)
- ○ Educational and training assistance (9)
- ○ Services related to blindness/low vision (10)
- ○ Services related to Deafness/hearing loss (11)
- ○ Help with self-employment start-up (12)
- ○ Transportation Assistance (13)
- ○ Assessment Services (14)
- ○ Assistive Technology/Rehabilitation Engineering (15)
- ○ Medical, Psychological Services (16)
- ○ Person Centered Planning/Discovery (17)
- ○ Customized Employment (18)
- ○ Internships (19)
- ○ Other (please specify): (20) _____

APPENDIX C: SURVEY – PROVIDERS

Q15 What can the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency or their contracted employment service provider do to improve the provision of services to youth with disabilities who are in transition?

_____

Q16 Considering existing community rehabilitation programs' (CRPs) capacity to provide employment services to Georgians with disabilities, please check the extent which you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Agree (3)	Strongly agree (4)	Not sure (5)
There is a need to establish new CRPs (1)	O	O	O	O	O
There is a need to expand current CRPs (2)	O	O	O	O	O
There is a need to improve established CRPs (3)	O	O	O	O	O
There is a need to develop newly established CRPs (4)	O	O	O	O	O

Q17 In your experience, what is the estimated frequency your organization provides services to the following populations within a given year?

	Never (1)	Occasionally (2)	Frequently (3)	Constantly (4)
Youth who are in the foster system (1)	O	O	O	O
Veterans (2)	O	O	O	O
Individuals who are homeless (3)	O	O	O	O
Individuals who use augmented devices for speech (4)	O	O	O	O
Individuals, including youth, with history of incarceration (5)	O	O	O	O
Individuals who are over the age of 65 (6)	O	O	O	O

Q18 What, according to you, are some of the strengths of the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency (GVRA)?

_____

_____

Q19 What suggestions do you have for GVRA so it can provide better services and improve employment outcomes for its clients?

_____

_____

APPENDIX C

SURVEY – PROVIDERS

Q20 What is your current age range?

- ○ 14-24 (1)
- ○ 25-35 (2)
- ○ 36-50 (3)
- ○ 51-64 (4)
- ○ 65 and older (5)
- ○ Prefer not to say (6)

Q21 What is your gender?

- ○ Male (1)
- ○ Female (2)
- ○ Prefer to not say (3)

Q22 What is your race/ethnic background?

- ○ White (1)
- ○ Black or African American (2)
- ○ American Indian or Alaska Native (3)
- ○ Asian (4)
- ○ Multi-racial (5)
- ○ Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (6)
- ○ Hispanic or Latino (7)
- ○ Other (please specify) (8) _____

Q23 Which county do you (person with disabilities) live in? Please select from the list.

***Survey respondents were given a list of all 159 Georgia counties to choose from. Counties were listed in alphabetical order from A (Appling County, Georgia) to W (Worth County, Georgia).**

Appling County, Georgia ⌄

Q24 Your input is very much appreciated. Is there any additional information you would like to share about GVRA or the employment-related needs of individuals with disabilities in Georgia?

_____

_____

APPENDIX D: SURVEY – EMPLOYERS

SURVEY



EMPLOYERS
Individuals or organizations hiring people with disabilities

Q1 Survey for Employers

The Research and Evaluation Unit (REU) at the Institute on Human Development and Disability (IHDD), located at the University of Georgia (UGA), in partnership with the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) of Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency (GVRA), is conducting a needs assessment to learn more about the employment needs of individuals with disabilities in Georgia. The information you provide will inform GVRA's portion of Georgia's Unified State Plan, as well as influence decision making and delivery of vocational services to individuals with disabilities.

This survey should take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete, and your participation is completely voluntary. There are no right or wrong answers, and you are free to answer only the questions you are comfortable with. Your responses will be kept confidential, and you will not be asked to provide your name or the name of your organization. Feedback gathered through this survey will be combined into a summary report along with other data collected for this project.

Should you need accommodations or would like this survey in an alternate format, please send an email to researchevaluation.ihdd@gmail.com or call (706) 542-6089.

Note: For the purpose of this survey, an "individual with a disability" is a person who has a physical, mental, sensory or cognitive impairment that impacts their ability to prepare for, obtain or maintain gainful employment. In advance, thanks for your time and participation!

Q2 Which of the following industries best describes your type of business? Please select only one.

- ○ Hospitality/Food Service (1)
- ○ Wholesale/Retail Trade (2)
- ○ Manufacturing/Production (3)
- ○ Agriculture/Forestry/Fishing (4)
- ○ Construction (5)
- ○ Transportation/Warehouse/Utilities (6)
- ○ Communication/Media/Publishing (7)
- ○ Government/Public Administration (including protective services) (8)
- ○ Education/Training (9)
- ○ Healthcare/Social Service (10)
- ○ Finance/Insurance/Real Estate (11)
- ○ Professional/Business Services (12)
- ○ Other, please describe (13) _____

APPENDIX D

SURVEY – EMPLOYERS

Q3 Which of the following best describes your current job title?

- ○ CEO (1)
- ○ Owner (2)
- ○ Manager (3)
- ○ Assistant Manager (4)
- ○ Human Resource Professional (5)
- ○ Other, please describe: (6) _____

Q4 Are you (and business) considered a federal contractor or subcontractor?

- ○ Yes (1)
- ○ No (2)
- ○ Unsure (3)

Q5 How many people are employed at your business? If multiple locations, choose total number.

- ○ Less than 20 (1)
- ○ 21 to 50 (2)
- ○ 51 to 250 (3)
- ○ 251 to 999 (4)
- ○ 1,000 or more (5)

Q6 How many years has your business been in operation?

- ○ Less than 5 years (1)
- ○ 6 to 15 years (2)
- ○ 16 to 30 years (3)
- ○ 31 to 50 years (4)
- ○ 51 years or more (5)

Q7 Are you familiar with the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency (GVRA)?

- ○ Yes (1)
- ○ No (2)
- ○ Unsure (3)

Q8 Are you aware of the services offered to businesses by GVRA or through one of their vendors?

- ○ Yes (1)
- ○ No (2)
- ○ Unsure (3)

APPENDIX D: SURVEY – EMPLOYERS

Q9 In your opinion, to what extent would the following factors keep a business from hiring, retaining or promoting a person with a disability?

	To a very small extent (1)	To a small extent (2)	To a large extent (3)	To a very large extent (4)	Not applicable /unsure (5)
Size of the business (1)	O	O	O	O	O
Bad economy (2)	O	O	O	O	O
Budget restrictions/hiring freeze (3)	O	O	O	O	O
Cost of accommodation(s) (4)	O	O	O	O	O
Need for additional supervision/staff time (5)	O	O	O	O	O
Concerns about liability/workers compensation (6)	O	O	O	O	O
Not knowing how to provide disability-related accommodations (7)	O	O	O	O	O
Safety concerns (8)	O	O	O	O	O
Characteristics of worker (dependability, productivity, performance, etc.) (9)	O	O	O	O	O
Constraints related to job characteristics (complexity, physical demand, skill level) (10)	O	O	O	O	O
Not understanding the disability (11)	O	O	O	O	O
Person's ability to get along with others (12)	O	O	O	O	O
Person not having the skills or credentials for the job (13)	O	O	O	O	O

APPENDIX D

SURVEY – EMPLOYERS

Q10 How helpful would each of the following Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency (GVRA) services be in helping your business employ workers with disabilities?

	Not at all helpful (1)	Somewhat helpful (2)	Helpful (3)	Very helpful (4)	Not applicable /unsure (5)
Recruiting qualified job applicants that meet your business needs (1)	O	O	O	O	O
Training staff how to successfully work with / support co-workers who have disabilities (2)	O	O	O	O	O
Consulting with my business to recommend accessibility improvements (3)	O	O	O	O	O
Identifying job accommodations for employees with disabilities (4)	O	O	O	O	O
Training staff how to implement workplace accommodations/ assistive technology (5)	O	O	O	O	O
Providing on the job supports to workers with disabilities (6)	O	O	O	O	O
Provide workers with disabilities the tools/ education needed to do the job (7)	O	O	O	O	O
Provide information on tax incentives available for employing workers with disabilities (8)	O	O	O	O	O
Assistance with creating internships for youth with disabilities (9)	O	O	O	O	O
Assistance with creating apprenticeship opportunities (10)	O	O	O	O	O
Assistance with developing a workplace mentoring program (11)	O	O	O	O	O
Training on specific types of disabilities (12)	O	O	O	O	O
Information about federal laws related to employing people with disabilities (13)	O	O	O	O	O
Assistance with developing return-to-work policies for employees who are injured / acquires a disability. (14)	O	O	O	O	O
Help creating customized job opportunities (15)	O	O	O	O	O

APPENDIX D: SURVEY – EMPLOYERS

Q11 Have you knowingly hired individuals with disabilities in the past?
- ○ Yes (1)
- ○ No (2)
- ○ Unsure (3)

Q12 With respect to employees with disabilities you have now or have had in the past, what are the key challenges you have experienced with them regarding job retention? (Please select all that apply).
- ○ Lack of dependable transportation (1)
- ○ Disability related factors (medical, mental health, etc.) (2)
- ○ Lack of job preparation, skills, education needed for job (3)
- ○ Language and/or cultural barriers (4)
- ○ Frequent absences/tardiness (5)
- ○ Poor job performance (speed, production, quality) (6)
- ○ Difficulty learning the job or new responsibilities (7)
- ○ Difficulty getting along with others/working on a team (8)
- ○ Other, please specify: (9) _____

Q13 Please describe below the types of accommodations your business has provided to employees with disabilities.

_____

Q14 Have you or your business received services from the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency or one of their contracted vendors in the past?
- ○ Yes (1)
- ○ No (2)
- ○ Unsure (3)

Display This Question:
If Have you or your business received services from the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency or... = Yes

Q15 If yes, did those services help you with recruiting / retaining employees with disabilities?
- ○ Yes (1)
- ○ No (2)
- ○ Not applicable/unsure (3)

Q16 How satisfied were you with the services that were provided?
- ○ Very satisfied (1)
- ○ Satisfied (2)
- ○ Dissatisfied (3)
- ○ Very dissatisfied (4)
- ○ Not applicable/unsure (5)

APPENDIX D

SURVEY – EMPLOYERS

Q17 What are some things GVRA is doing well to partner with businesses to increase employment of people with disabilities?

_____

_____

Q18 What more can GVRA do to best meet the needs of the business community?

_____

_____

Q19 What is your current age range?

- ○ 14-24 (1)
- ○ 25-35 (2)
- ○ 36-50 (3)
- ○ 51-64 (4)
- ○ 65 and older (5)
- ○ Prefer not to say (6)

Q20 What is your gender?

- ○ Male (1)
- ○ Female (2)
- ○ Prefer to not say (3)

Q21 Which county do you (person with disabilities) live in? Please select from the list.
***Survey respondents were given a list of all 159 Georgia counties to choose from. Counties were listed in alphabetical order from A (Appling County, Georgia) to W (Worth County, Georgia).**

Appling County, Georgia

Q22 What is your race/ethnic background?

- ○ White (1)
- ○ Black or African American (2)
- ○ American Indian or Alaska Native (3)
- ○ Asian (4)
- ○ Multi-racial (5)
- ○ Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (6)
- ○ Hispanic or Latino (7)
- ○ Other (please specify) (8) _____

Q23 If you would like to provide additional feedback regarding ways GVRA can partner with businesses to increase employment opportunities among individuals with disabilities, please do so below.

_____

_____

APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Please describe your affiliation with individuals with disabilities – person with disability, family member, friend, advocate, professional. Please share more about your current role and past background as it relates to individuals with disabilities in Georgia. (Please share more about the person with disabilities - gender, age, abilities, or limitations).

EMPLOYMENT GOALS

- What barriers do people with disabilities in Georgia face in getting or keeping a job?
- *(Probes: Education, not enough jobs, discrimination, attitudes, lack of communications, fear of loss of benefits, lack of knowledge of options)*
- What services are needed to help a person with a disability 'get' a job and 'keep' a job?

GVRA SERVICE ACCESS

- What are the barriers that you (or your loved one, client, friend, etc.) have faced (or people with disabilities face) when trying to 'initiate' or 'maintain' services with GVRA?

UNSERVED/UNDERSERVED POPULATIONS

- Who are unserved or underserved populations with disabilities in your area? That is, what groups or areas are not receiving GVRA services? *(Probes- individuals from racial and ethnic minority backgrounds, individuals with significant disabilities, individuals living in rural areas)*
- Why are these populations not receiving services from GVRA?
- What can GVRA do to outreach to these populations and improve the provision of services to these populations?

MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES

- Now we are going to move into a discussion of people with the "most significant disabilities."
  - » *The individual has a physical or mental impairment that seriously limits three or more functional capacities in the following areas: mobility, communication, self-care, self-direction, interpersonal skills, work tolerance, or work skills in terms of an employment outcome;*
  - » *And Vocational rehabilitation can be expected to require multiple core vocational rehabilitation services for an extended period of time.*
- What are the rehabilitation needs of individuals with the most significant disabilities?
- Does GVRA offer enough opportunities for individuals with the "most significant" disabilities to gain competitive employment in an integrated setting with co-workers who are not disabled?
- How could GVRA improve the services offered to individuals with the "most significant" disabilities?

SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT

- Moving on to our next topic, we would like to talk about the need for Supported Employment services. The individual has not worked, or has worked only intermittently, in competitive employment;

- » *The individual has been determined eligible for VR services based on a comprehensive assessment, including consideration of Supported Employment as an employment outcome*
- » *The individual needs extended services in order to maintain employment following successful VR closure. (Extended services means ongoing support services provided by another agency or provider that are needed to support the consumer in maintaining their job after the VR case is closed); and*
- » *The individual has the potential to maintain competitive employment with the necessary supports in place. For GVRA consumers who need Extended Supports, often referred to as Long-term Supports, to maintain competitive employment in an integrated setting:*

- Please describe how effective the SE program is in Georgia. What populations are receiving SE services? What SE needs are not being met?
- What can VR do to improve these services in your area?

TRANSITION (14 – 22 YEARS)

- What services for students with disabilities are most likely to lead to successful employment in the future?
- How well are these needs being met by GVRA? Schools? Service providers?
- What can GVRA do to improve Pre-ETS and transition services in Georgia?
- Are you familiar with Pre-ETS? How would you describe the quality of Pre-ETS (Pre Employment Transition Services) provided by GVRA and schools in Georgia?

CRPS (COMMUNITY REHABILITATION PROGRAMS) (NEED FOR ESTABLISHMENT, DEVELOPMENT OR IMPROVEMENT OF CRPS)

- » *Community rehabilitation providers (CRP) are local community organizations that provide services to adults with disabilities. Typically CRPs provide three main types of day services: (a) employment services leading to integrated employment in the general labor market (b) work opportunities in a sheltered workshop with other workers with disabilities or (c) non-work day activities in either a program facility or in the community.*[86]

- In your opinion, how effective is the system of service providers in Georgia in meeting the needs of individuals with disabilities?
- In your opinion, is there a need for an improvement in services provided by existing Community Rehabilitation Providers? If yes, what suggestions do you have for GVRA to facilitate needed improvement(s)?
- What community-based rehabilitation services are most helpful? What makes them so?

GVRA OVERALL SERVICES AND OUTCOMES

- What are some things that GVRA is currently doing that is working well in meeting the employment needs of individuals with disabilities in Georgia?
- What can GVRA do to improve its ability to provide vocational rehabilitation services and outcomes for individuals with disabilities in the State?

APPENDIX F: FOCUS GROUP GUIDE

EMPLOYMENT GOALS

- What are some key barriers that people with disabilities in Georgia face when it comes to getting or keeping a job? *(Probes: lack of job skills, soft skills, adequate work experience, not enough jobs, discrimination, attitudes of employers, fear of loss of benefits, lack of knowledge of options)*
- According to you, what services are needed to help a person with a disability get and keep a job? *(Probes: job skills training, educational or vocational training, assistance with job search/job placement, vocational assessment, job development, job placement, employer relationships, Job exploration counseling, work-based learning, counseling on post- secondary education options, work readiness, instruction in self-advocacy)*

UNSERVED/UNDERSERVED POPULATIONS

- Who are unserved or underserved populations of people with disabilities in your area? (what groups or areas are not receiving GVRA services? *(Probes- individuals from racial and ethnic minority backgrounds, individuals with significant disabilities, rural areas, transition age youth)*
- Why are these populations unserved/underserved? What are the barriers that these populations face when accessing and maintaining services with GVRA? *(Probes: transportation, language and culture, lack of knowledge of VR, lack of family support related to employment)*
- What can GVRA do to outreach to these populations and improve the provision of services to unserved and underserved populations of people with disabilities?

MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES

DEFINITION - most significant disability - The individual has a physical or mental impairment that seriously limits three or more functional capacities in the following areas: mobility, communication, self-care, self-direction, interpersonal skills, work tolerance, or work skills in terms of an employment outcome; and Vocational rehabilitation can be expected to require multiple core vocational rehabilitation services for an extended period of time.

- What are the rehabilitation needs of individuals with the most significant disabilities? *(Probes: employment, housing, transportation, direct support provision)*
- How successful has GVRA been in offering adequate opportunities for individuals with the “most significant” disabilities to gain competitive employment in an integrated setting with co-workers who are not disabled?
- How could GVRA do a better job of providing services to individuals with the “most significant” disabilities?

GVRA SERVICES

- What are some barriers that you (or your clients) have faced when trying to access and maintain services with GVRA?
- What can GVRA do to improve their ability to provide vocational rehabilitation services to individuals with disabilities in the State?

APPENDIX F

FOCUS GROUP GUIDE

CRPS

- In your opinion, how effective is the system of service providers in Georgia in meeting the needs of individuals with disabilities?
- What community-based rehabilitation services are most successful? How are they most successful or what makes them so?
- What suggestions do you have for GVRA to facilitate improvement(s) related to community-based rehabilitation services?

TRANSITION

- What are some barriers to achieving employment goals for youth in transition? *(Probes: no job skills, no education or training, poor social skills, work based experiences)*
- What are some services that are most likely to lead to improved employment outcomes for students with disabilities? *(Probes: job skills training, educational or vocational training, assistance with job search/ job placement, vocational assessment, job development, job placement, employer relationships, Job exploration counseling, work-based learning, counseling on post- secondary education options, work readiness, instruction in self-advocacy)*

PRE-ETS

- Are you familiar with Pre-ETS? *(15% funds Students with disabilities 16 to 21(22 in Georgia) who are enrolled in an education program, and are eligible for and receiving special education services or is an individual with disability under Section 504. 5 components - Job exploration counseling, work-based learning, counseling on post- secondary education options, work readiness, instruction in self-advocacy)*
- How would you describe the quality of Pre-ETS (Pre Employment Transition Services) provided by GVRA, GA schools and providers? What can GVRA do to improve Pre-ETS and transition services in Georgia?

SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT

- Please describe how effective the SE program is in Georgia. What populations are receiving SE services? What SE needs are not being met?
- What can VR do to improve these services in your area?

GVRA OVERALL SERVICES AND OUTCOMES

- What are some things that GVRA is currently has/is doing that is working well in meeting the employment needs of individuals with disabilities in Georgia?

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