



**GVRA**



**GEORGIA VOCATIONAL  
REHABILITATION AGENCY**

STATE FISCAL YEAR 2025

# ANNUAL REPORT





Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor and Client

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

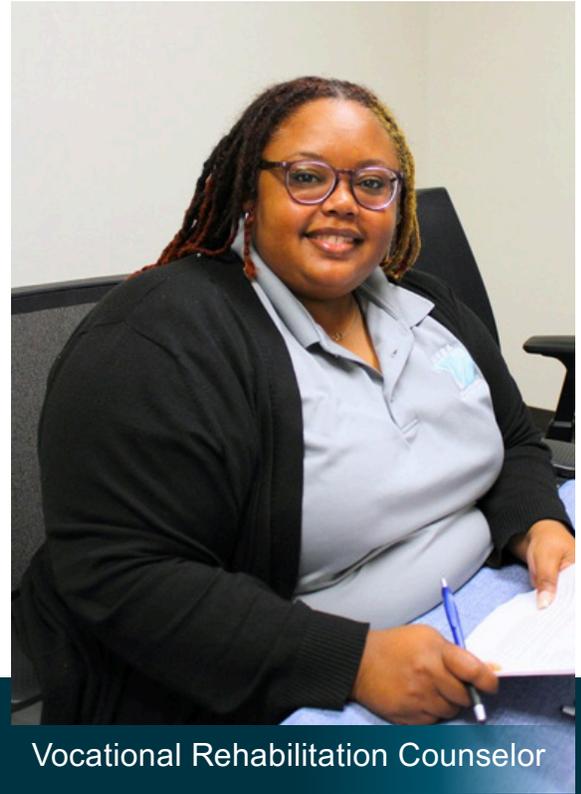
- 02. Mission and Programs
- 03. Letters from Our Leaders
- 04. GVRA by the Numbers
- 06. Vocational Rehabilitation
- 11. Business Enterprise Program
- 12. Georgia Industries for the Blind
- 13. Disability Adjudication Services
- 14. Infrastructure Updates
- 15. Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Services (GVRS)  
Board Members and State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) Members

# OUR MISSION

Serve Georgians with disabilities to empower them to live independently.

# OUR STRATEGIC GOALS

- ✓ Staffing
- ✓ Enhance Partnerships
- ✓ Infrastructure
- ✓ Improve Service Delivery
- ✓ Continual Process Improvement



Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor

# OUR PROGRAMS

★ **Vocational Rehabilitation (VR)** program offers an array of services to Georgians who have a disability and want to work or who need services to keep the job they have. Services range from providing a hearing aid to training in assistive technology to offering support with employment or post-secondary education.

★ **Roosevelt Warm Springs (RWS) and Cave Spring Center (CSC)** serve Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) clients, 18 years old and older, who are referred by their VR counselors. Clients participate in educational and training programs in a residential, holistic, college-like environment with individual attention and customized enrichment.

★ **Business Enterprise Program (BEP)** gives priority to blind vendors who want to operate food service facilities in federal and state government buildings. It helps visually impaired Georgians become independent business owners in the food service industry.

★ **Georgia Industries for the Blind (GIB)** manufactures file folders, safety vests, pillows, and individually wrapped 3-ply face masks. Employees also coordinate customized screen printing, sewing projects, and kitting for corporations at plants in Bainbridge, GA and Griffin, GA. In addition, GIB operates a service site at Robins Air Force Base in Warner Robins, GA.

★ **Disability Adjudication Services (DAS)** works with the Social Security Administration (SSA) to make disability determinations for Georgia citizens who apply for entitlement programs administered by the SSA, including Disability Insurance (SSDI) for workers who pay Federal Insurance Contributions Act taxes and Supplemental Security Income (SSI), a disability-needs program.

## MESSAGE FROM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CHRIS WELLS



In Fiscal Year 2025, the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency (GVRA) made significant progress in expanding opportunities and support for individuals with disabilities across Georgia. The continued growth in demand for our services reflects a rising awareness of the importance of an inclusive workforce in a state with a thriving economy. In Fiscal Year 2025, GVRA served more than 40,000 individuals, an increase driven by expanded outreach, stronger engagement efforts, and the dedication of our more than 700 employees.

At the Roosevelt Warm Springs Comprehensive Rehabilitation Center, interest in skills-based training reached an all-time high. We saw a record number of applicants and a significant increase in the number of industry-recognized certifications earned by students.

We also strengthened partnerships with other state agencies to improve access to our services, reorganized internally to better align our staff for efficiency and impact, and optimized our resources to serve clients more effectively in every region of Georgia.

These accomplishments are a testament to the commitment of our employees and Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Services Board, the strength of our partnerships, and the determination of the individuals we serve. We are proud of what we achieved together in 2025 and remain dedicated to building on this momentum in the years ahead.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Chris Wells". The script is fluid and cursive.

**Chris Wells**  
Executive Director

## MESSAGE FROM GVRS BOARD CHAIRMAN THOMAS WILSON



This past year has been one of meaningful progress for the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency (GVRA). As the need for services continues to grow, GVRA remains deeply committed to ensuring people with disabilities throughout Georgia have access to the resources they need to succeed.

Under the leadership of Executive Director Chris Wells and through the dedication of GVRA's staff, the agency has strengthened partnerships, expanded outreach, and improved operational efficiency, all while remaining focused on its core mission. These efforts are making a real and measurable impact, from record enrollment at Roosevelt Warm Springs to enhanced service delivery statewide.

Of course, none of this progress would be possible without strong, collaborative leadership. I want to thank my fellow board members for their continued commitment and vision. Together with dedicated GVRA employees, we've laid a solid foundation for continued growth.

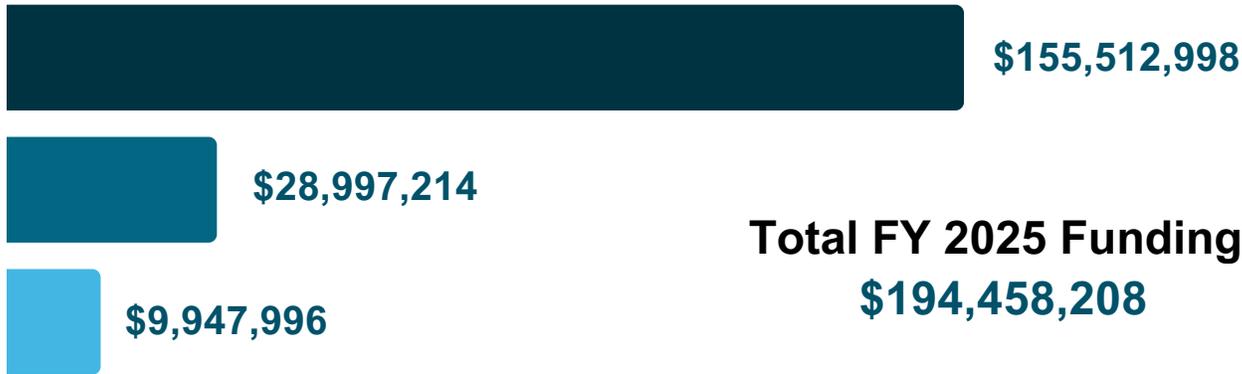
As we look ahead, our mission remains clear: to keep building a more inclusive, responsive, and empowered Georgia.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Thomas Wilson". The script is fluid and cursive.

**Thomas Wilson**  
GVRS Board Chairman

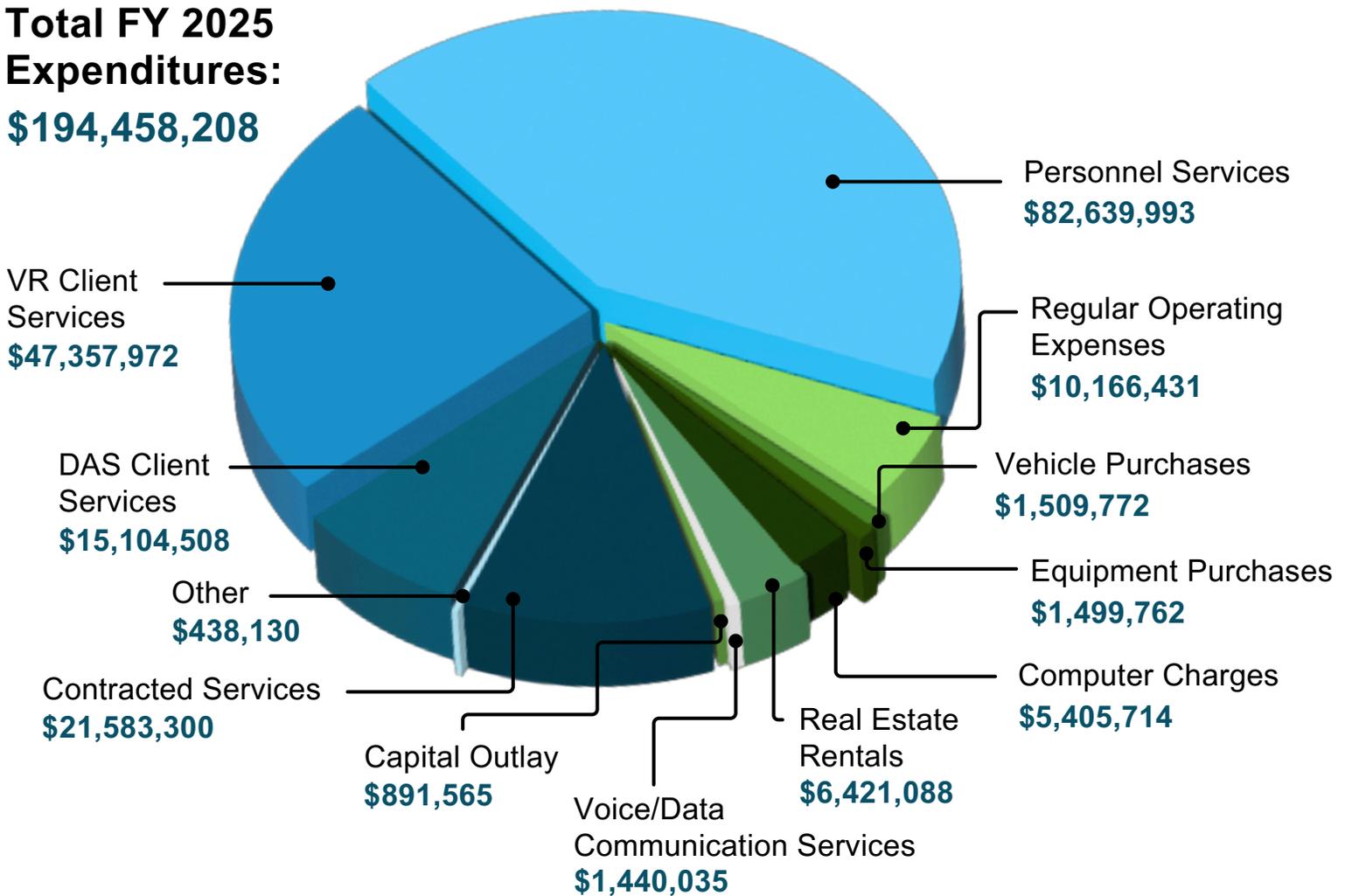
# FY 2025 FUNDING

● Federal Funds   ● State Funds   ● Other Funds



# FY 2025 EXPENDITURES BY OBJECT CLASS

**Total FY 2025 Expenditures:**  
**\$194,458,208**



# MEDIAN COUNSELOR SALARIES

● FY 2019 ● FY 2023 ● FY 2024 ● FY 2025



## GVRA EXPANDS OUTREACH THROUGH HIRING EVENTS

GVRA participated in seven on-campus hiring events at colleges and universities across Georgia, engaging with students and recent graduates preparing to enter the workforce. In addition, the agency took part in a virtual job fair and a networking event for veterans, helping connect those who have served our nation with career opportunities at GVRA. These events were part of GVRA's ongoing efforts to build on the momentum of previous recruitment and retention successes.

Event Date	Event Name
July 11, 2024	Celebration of Excellence 2024 at Renaissance Concourse Atlanta Airport Hotel
October 10, 2024	Employer Engagement Event/Networking Virtual
November 15, 2024	Veteran Job Fair at the Georgia Tech Research Institute
November 19, 2024	College Career Fair at Atlanta Metropolitan State College
February 11, 2025	Spring 2025 Career & Internship Fair at Georgia State University
February 19, 2025	Spring 2025 Job & Internship Career Expo at Mercer University (Macon Campus)
March 20, 2025	Job & Graduate School Fair 2025 at Clayton State University
March 26, 2025	Spring 2025 Job & Internship Fair at Kennesaw State University

**17%**

**GVRA STAFF  
TURNOVER RATE**

# BUILDING PATHWAYS: GVRA CONNECTS STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES TO EDUCATION AND CAREERS ACROSS GEORGIA



Students at FVSU event

In notable moments of Fiscal Year 2025, the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency demonstrated the impact of strategic outreach and collaboration through the successful hosting of two major events – GVRA Day at Fort Valley State University (FVSU) and GVRA Day at the Georgia National Fair. At FVSU, GVRA welcomed over 150 high school juniors and seniors with disabilities. This event, part of GVRA’s Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) program, featured interactive workshops, career exploration, and a campus tour designed to prepare students for higher education and workforce

success. The partnership highlighted FVSU’s commitment to accessibility and inclusive education.

Additionally, in collaboration with the Georgia Farm Bureau, GVRA hosted GVRA Day at the Fair on October 9th at the Georgia National Fair in Perry, GA, in celebration of National Disability Employment Awareness Month.

More than 1,300 students engaged in an immersive day of career exploration and work-based learning, focusing on opportunities within Georgia’s agriculture industry, a sector that contributes \$83.6 billion annually to the state’s economy. Students participated in educational stops, live demonstrations, and hands-on activities, gaining exposure to diverse career paths.

GVRA staff also were on hand, engaging with families and fair attendees through an educational outreach campaign about services supporting meaningful employment for individuals with disabilities. The event included a public GVRA Board Meeting at the Roquemore Conference Center.

In January 2025, GVRA and Centers for Independent Living hosted SenseAbility Week, connecting over 200 individuals with sensory disabilities to free services and resources across seven locations.

These combined efforts underscore GVRA’s commitment to building a stronger, more inclusive workforce by equipping Georgians with disabilities with the skills, knowledge, and resources needed for successful transitions to careers and independence.



325

EVENTS STATEWIDE

During FY 2025, GVRA participated in approximately 325 events statewide.

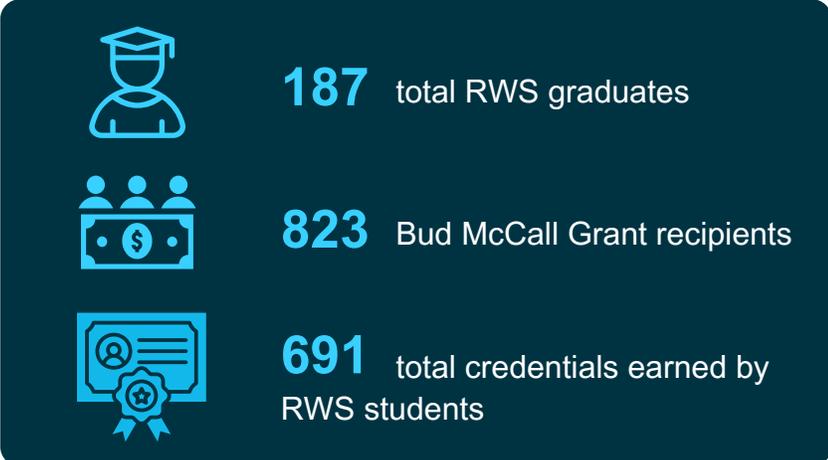


Students at GVRA Day at the GA Fair event

# ROOSEVELT WARM SPRINGS TRAINING LEADS TO EMPLOYMENT SUCCESS

The Roosevelt Warm Springs Comprehensive Rehabilitation Center continues to prove the transformative impact of vocational education combined with personalized support. In Fiscal Year 2025, 187 students graduated—100 in December and 87 at the spring ceremony in May. Together, they earned 691 industry-recognized certifications/credentials across eight high-demand career pathways.

- ★ Auto Detailing
- ★ Certified Nursing Assistant
- ★ CVS/Retail
- ★ Heavy Equipment Operation
- ★ Hospitality
- ★ Landscape Maintenance and Design
- ★ Light Electrical and Carpentry
- ★ Logistics – Forklift/Warehouse



- 187** total RWS graduates
- 823** Bud McCall Grant recipients
- 691** total credentials earned by RWS students

These credentials prepare students for greater independence and competitive employment. RWS staff and leadership provide individualized support to ensure students gain practical experience and workplace readiness. Several graduates secured jobs immediately, including placements through a partnership with C.W. Matthews, a leading Atlanta road construction firm, and in sectors like retail, healthcare, hospitality, and equipment operation. These outcomes reflect Roosevelt Warm Springs’ mission: empowering individuals through hands-on, career-focused training that leads to meaningful employment.



Students at RWS Graduation



RWS Graduation Ceremony

# A NEW ERA BEGINS AT ROOSEVELT WARM SPRINGS: \$20 MILLION INVESTMENT CELEBRATES LEGACY AND FUTURE



RWS Renovation Announcement

GVRA marked a historic milestone in 2025 with the launch of an ambitious \$20 million investment in the Roosevelt Warm Springs Comprehensive Center (RWS), signaling a bold new chapter for the historic campus.

The project’s ceremonial groundbreaking was held in April in the campus Quadrangle, an appropriate setting for a celebration that honors the past while building for the future.

The initial phase of the renovation, totaling more than \$8 million, is well underway and will revitalize several historic buildings on the RWS

campus. An additional \$12 million is budgeted for fiscal years 2025 and 2026. The focal point of the renovation project, with exterior waterproofing and painting for four quadrangle buildings, modernized water management systems, and upgraded signage. Kress Hall and Builders Hall will be fully renovated; Georgia Hall will see major bathroom upgrades, while Roosevelt Hall and several other campus facilities will also receive needed improvements.

Upon completion, the modernized campus will include updated hotel rooms and student housing, ensuring that accommodations meet the changing needs of students, staff, and guests. These revitalized spaces will support GVRA’s mission while enhancing the experience for all who live, learn, and work at Roosevelt Warm Springs.



RWS Renovation Announcement

## FY 2025: RWS RENOVATIONS AT A GLANCE

**Kress Hall:** \$3.1 Million

**Builders Hall:** \$2.2 Million

**Georgia Hall:** \$1.6 Million

**Roosevelt Hall:** \$1.1 Million

# RWS PROGRAMS SHINE DURING GEORGIA CHAMBER PRESIDENT’S TOUR



RWS Training Classrooms

As a key workforce development moment in FY 2025, the Roosevelt Warm Springs (RWS) campus welcomed Chris Clark, President and CEO of the Georgia Chamber of Commerce, for a campus tour highlighting career training programs for individuals with disabilities.

Clark was joined by Jeremy Whitaker of C.W. Matthews Contracting, one of Georgia’s leading highway contractors. Together, they visited training classrooms where students were actively engaged in hands-on instruction across multiple fields, including logistics, hospitality, healthcare, and heavy equipment operation. These programs

provide students with disabilities the practical skills and industry-recognized certifications needed to pursue competitive employment in Georgia’s demanding job market.

The visit underscored RWS’s expanding impact in preparing students for high-demand careers statewide. With record enrollment and growing demand for services through GVRA, the campus continues to lead in vocational training for students with disabilities.

“

The Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency’s Roosevelt Warm Springs campus creates an important talent pipeline for some of Georgia’s most in-demand jobs while providing career opportunities for deserving students. I was excited to see the good work from the GVRA Executive Director Chris Wells and Residential Director Dennis Medders during National Disability Employment Awareness Month as we continue ensuring employers in Georgia have the workforce they need.

**Chris Clark, President/CEO of the Georgia Chamber of Commerce**

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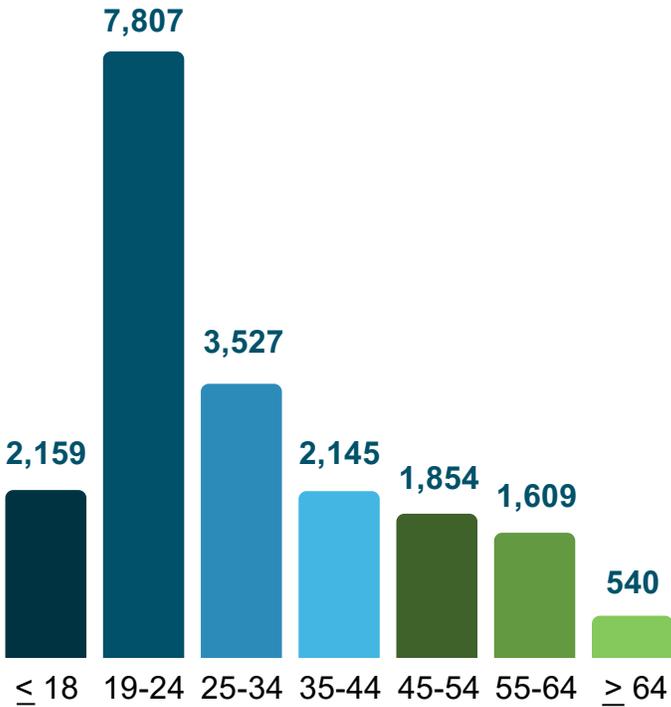


RWS Student Training

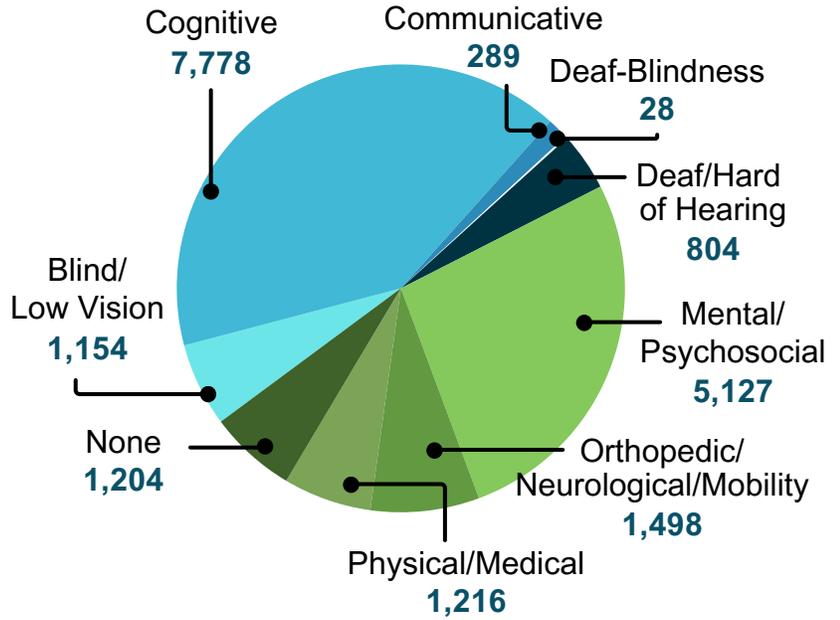


Chamber President Visit to RWS

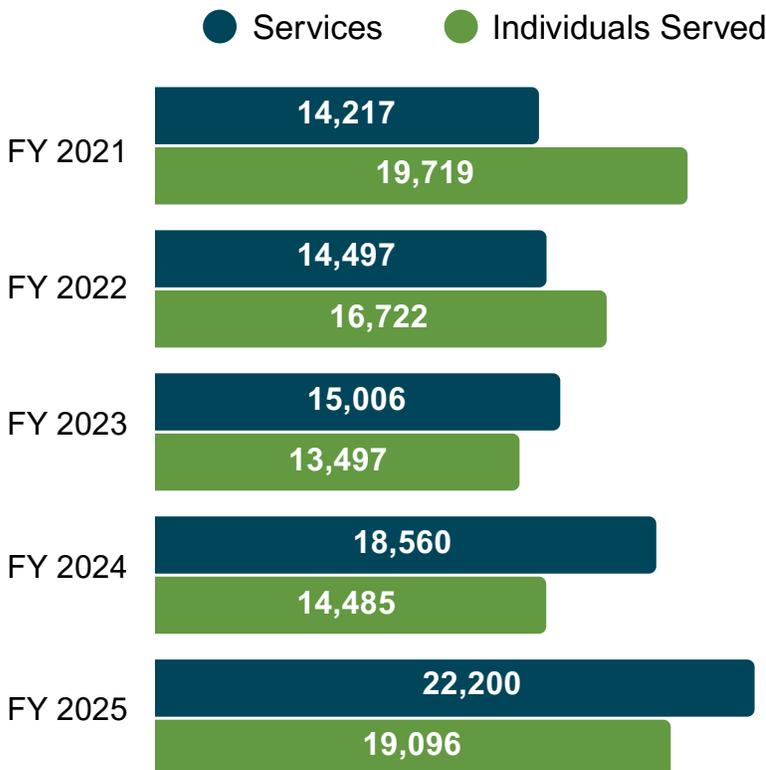
## VR CASES BY AGE



## VR CASES BY DISABILITY



## VR SERVICES PROVIDED AND INDIVIDUALS SERVED



## FY 2025 VR CLIENT OUTCOMES



**24,703** students with disabilities served



**58,524** Pre-ETS services provided to students with disabilities



**\$14.62** average hourly wage of employed clients



**558** average days from application to case closure



**49%** successful employment rate

## ENTREPRENEUR BEATS THE ODDS WITH HELP FROM GVRA



Business Enterprise Program Analyst William Graham and Vendor Stephen Thomas at Jr.'s Café in Atlanta.

After a 2019 car accident left Stephen Thomas gradually losing his eyesight, doctors told him he'd never work again. But Thomas refused to give up. "Somehow, some way, I was going to work again," he said.

Knowing he couldn't return to his warehouse job, Thomas searched for new opportunities and found the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency (GVRA). Working with a counselor, he explored career options and was introduced to the Business Enterprise Program (BEP), which trains blind and low vision individuals to manage food service operations in government buildings.

After completing six months of training, Thomas started as a relief operator and later secured his own micro-market location in Atlanta. He now operates multiple sites, including a vending route at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

Thomas credits BEP for helping him launch a successful business and encourages others to pursue the program. "Be assertive and follow up; that's been the key to my success," he said. "Thanks to BEP, I beat the odds."

## CAVE SPRING CENTER PILOTS INNOVATIVE TRAINING FOR BLIND AND LOW VISION FOOD SERVICE ENTREPRENEURS

During Fiscal 2025, the Business Enterprise Program (BEP) proudly introduced a pilot project at GVRA's Cave Spring Center near Rome, marking a significant step forward in advancing opportunities for the Blind and Low Vision community. The new residential training initiative empowers participants with the knowledge and skills needed to run their own food service businesses. Over the course of 16 weeks, five individuals immerse themselves in hands-on experiences with vending machines, food prep tools, and a point-of-sale system, gaining confidence with every skill learned.

The program combines practical training with engaging coursework in food service management, customer service, and merchandising. A thoughtfully designed campus navigation handbook and structured course modules support participants every step of the way.

The journey concludes with a real-world internship, where participants put their new expertise into action in a live food service setting.



BEP Entrepreneur Training Program

# GIB SUCCESSFULLY COMPLETES ISO RECERTIFICATION PROCESS FOR MANUFACTURING AND DISTRIBUTION OPERATIONS

Georgia Industries for the Blind (GIB) proudly achieved recertification to the ISO 9001:2015 standard, with zero findings in Fiscal Year 2025, continuing their commitment to operational excellence and quality assurance.

The recertification process began in June 2025 and involved a comprehensive review of the program's Quality Management System (QMS). Once completed, the program received a certificate, which is valid through 2028.

ISO 9001:2015 is an internationally-recognized standard that outlines requirements for organizations to consistently deliver products and services that meet customer expectations and regulatory requirements. GIB's certification applies to the manufacturing, assembly, packaging, kitting, and distribution of office products, pillows, and safety products. Maintaining this certification is critical to internal standards of quality and is a requirement for doing business with the National Industries for the Blind (NIB).

Achieving recertification with zero findings is a major highlight for GIB. It ensures that the program remains a trusted supplier and a competitive program within the AbilityOne® network. It also underscores GIB's commitment to professionalism and attention to detail, while upholding the mission of creating meaningful employment opportunities for individuals who are blind and low vision.



## GEORGIA INDUSTRIES FOR THE BLIND FACTS



**47** total employees



**100%** GIB is fully funded through the sale of products



**2** visually impaired employees were nominated for the National Industries for the Blind (NIB) Employee of the Year award

## DAS ACHIEVES KEY MILESTONES IN FY 2025

In Fiscal Year 2025, the Disability Adjudication Services (DAS) team achieved significant milestones in service delivery and collaboration, cornerstones of GVRA's values of accountability and customer commitment. The team successfully processed **107,311 case clearances**, maintaining an average **accuracy rate of 95%**.

Another key accomplishment in 2025 was the reduction of the backlog of unassigned cases by 22,700, representing a 28.4% decrease.

Additionally, the DAS Training Department continued to demonstrate leadership in professional development. Its training presentations were shared with all 52 Disability Determination Services (DDSs) across the nation and have been implemented as part of the Social Security Administration's national DDS training resources. These achievements reflect DAS's ongoing commitment to timely, accurate service to claimants across Georgia.



Social Security Administration Building

## GVRA HONORED FOR OUTSTANDING COMMUNICATIONS CAMPAIGN

The Public Affairs & Communications Department earned one of the Georgia Public Relations Society of America's (PRSA) top honors for its statewide campaign promoting the Bud McCall Vocational Rehabilitation Post-Secondary Grant.

GVRA received the **Award of Excellence for Most Effective Campaign on a Shoestring Budget (under \$5,000)** at the PRSA Phoenix Awards Ceremony in November at the Cobb Energy Performing Arts Center. The agency was recognized alongside major organizations including Delta Air Lines, Cox Communications, and Children's Healthcare of Atlanta.

The campaign raised awareness following a key policy change in 2023 that removed financial barriers for students with disabilities. With support from Vocational Rehabilitation staff, the campaign used digital and print materials, targeted outreach, and strategic messaging to reach educators, families, and students across Georgia.

In just six months, post-secondary client cases grew from 50 to 144, and graduate-level cases nearly doubled.

This recognition reflected GVRA's commitment to collaboration, innovation, and improving access to education for individuals with disabilities across the state.



PRSA Phoenix Award

## RISK ASSESSMENTS STRENGTHEN SAFETY ACROSS ALL VR SITES

In FY 2025, GVRA successfully completed comprehensive risk assessments at each Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) facility. These on-site evaluations play a critical role in ensuring the health and safety of our clients, staff, and visitors. By inspecting structural integrity, fire safety, physical hazards, security measures, compliance, and accessibility, GVRA has taken proactive steps to mitigate potential risks and create a safer, more supportive environment across all facilities.

## MARIETTA VR OFFICE RELOCATES TO ENHANCE ACCESSIBILITY

To better serve clients in Cobb County and surrounding areas, the Marietta VR office relocated to a new, more accessible location: **1091 Northchase Parkway, Suite 350, Marietta, GA 30067**.

The move enhances the client experience and creates new opportunities for GVRA to strengthen partnerships with other state agencies, improving collaboration and expanding support services for individuals with disabilities.



## GVRA FLEET EXPANDS BY 46% TO SUPPORT STATEWIDE SERVICES

In Fiscal Year 2025, GVRA expanded its vehicle fleet by **46%** with the addition of **51 new vehicles**, significantly enhancing the agency’s transportation capacity across the state. The investment directly addresses one of the key challenges identified in the 2023 Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA): lack of transportation as a barrier to accessing services, especially in rural and underserved areas.

The upgraded fleet enables GVRA staff to meet clients where they are. By allowing staff to travel more easily, GVRA can conduct more in-person outreach and intake in remote areas, deliver services to rural areas of the state where public transportation is limited or unavailable, and reduce wait times for prospective clients seeking services. The additional vehicles also assist GVRA staff in building relationships in the communities we serve.

As the agency looks ahead, the enhanced fleet will remain a critical resource in helping more Georgians overcome transportation barriers, connect with the support GVRA provides, and pursue opportunities for employment and independence.



## GEORGIA VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SERVICES (GVRS) BOARD MEMBERS

Thomas W. Wilson, *Chair*  
Faye Perdue, *Vice Chair*  
Sandy Adams, *Secretary*  
Craig Camuso  
Suzanne Dooley  
Louise Hill  
Vincent Martin  
Jane McCall  
Johnathan Taylor  
Jimmy Defoor, *Chair Emeritus*

## STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL (SRC) MEMBERS

Juliet Hardeman, <i>Chair</i>	Michele Mason
Karen Addams	Cherise Mlott
Matthew Barnes	Joy Norman
Jerry Haywood	Jennifer Page
Katie Hearn	Charity Roberts
Deborah Hibben	Aarti Sahgal
Myndi Kuhlmann	Peggy Venable
Lisa Leiter	Col. Dr. Samuel Verniero, Jr.



**GVRA**



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