

**MINUTES OF MEETING**  
Georgia State Rehabilitation Council (SRC)  
April 23, 2025, 1pm – 4pm  
In Person and Virtual Meeting

**COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT:**

Juliet Hardeman (Chair)  
Jennifer Page  
Matthew Barnes  
Jerry Haywood  
Myndi Pryor  
Lisa Leiter  
Moses Little  
Joy Norman  
Samuel Verniero  
Charity Roberts  
Cherise Mlott  
Michele Mason

**Guests**

Jennifer Howell (GVRA)  
Jeff Allen (GVRA)  
Chris Wells (GVRA)  
Suranjita Timilsina (GVRA)  
Lauren Knox (GVRA)  
Raj Pagadala (GVRA)  
Desmond Williams (GVRA)  
Jaylen Pope (GVRA)  
Erica Shedd (GVRA)  
Arlene Fowler (GVRA)  
Stephanie Cutrufelli (CAP)  
Michael Johnson (GVRA)  
Julie Kegley (GAO)  
Kenneth Slade (CIL)  
Tracy Stepney (GVRA)  
Shelly Simmons (CIL)  
Ester DuRante (CIL)  
Rebecca Williamson (GVRA)  
Jay Houston (Albany Chamber)  
Doug Crandall (UGA)  
Brianna McDowell

**Approval of Agenda and Minutes**

The roll call was done. Welcome to the group by SRC Chair.

Minutes from January 2025 meeting were reviewed & approved unanimously.

Agenda for today was also approved.

**Chair Update – Juliet Hardeman**

- Legislation Passed by Georgia's Legislature
  - Dignity and Pay Act
  - GAME - Georgia as Model Employer
- CSNA 2026 Subcommittee will be established & approved; 5 categories of groups; monthly meetings; Joy, Matthew & Lisa are interested.
- SSA Work Incentives informational videos are being created by BDI.
- Chair attended NCSRC & CSAVR in Bethesda, MD. Success stories will be shared with Carla. The next one is being held in San Diego, CA in November; April 2026 will be held in Washington D.C.

**Thrive Program** - Matthew Barnes, The Arc of Southwest GA & Jay Houston, Albany Area Chamber of Commerce

Thrive Program - an Albany Area Chamber of Commerce talent development initiative for youth with disabilities. This program is targeted at high school students with disabilities who will seek employment after high school.

Agenda items included Employer Talk; What To/Not To Wear Fashion Show; Interview & Networking

Packets are being put together, which will include email template to send to businesses, email template to send to schools, email template to send to secondary education institutions, networking cards, survey cards, agenda templates & certificates of completion.

Possibly planning a year end summit in April for students that participated. Statewide employers, colleges outside of their area.

Middle school & high school versions; 2-3 times per year.

Leadership program is in development.

### **Community Partnership**

Shelly Simmons, Executive Director, Statewide Independent Living Council of Georgia

Ester Durante, Advocate and Outreach Coordinator

Kenneth Slade, Disability Employment Programs Analyst

The Statewide Independent Council of Georgia (SILCGA), an existing community partner/provider with GVRA, proposes to augment its partnership with Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency (GVRA) to implement Customized Employment (CE) in the Centers for Independent Living throughout Georgia. They plan to work with clients, who are also eligible for GVRA services, to increase employment outcomes.

Customized Employment (CE) as defined by the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy is a process for achieving competitive integrated employment (CIE) or self-employment through an employee and employer relationship that is personalized to meet the needs of both. It is a universal strategy that benefits many people, including people with disabilities who might not have found success through other employment strategies. In 2014, CE was included in Title IV of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) as a strategy under the definition of supported employment (<https://www.dol.gov/agencies/odep/program-areas/customized-employment>)

Some Examples of CE Strategies: Job Carving; Self Employment; Resource Ownership

By incorporating CE strategies they can (1) increase of the number of sustainable employment outcomes, (2) increase earnings potential, and (3) create employment outcomes that "person centered" hence more likely to be more sustainable and successful.

They will provide employment development professionals, other related staff members and community partners the necessary training to become ACRE Certified in Customized Employment, which is provided by Griffin Hammis Associates ([www.griffinhammis.com](http://www.griffinhammis.com)), a national and internationally recognized trainer on Customized Employment.

They also plan to engage the support of the Institute on Human Development and Disabilities at the University of Georgia (<https://www.fcs.uga.edu/ihdd>) to provide technical assistance on Customized Employment to our nine (9) Centers for Independent Living throughout Georgia.

They will work with community partners to sponsor seed funding (for expenses that many not be covered by GVRA or to blend the cost of expenses) for the expenses necessary to launch the CE strategy (i.e. microenterprise, resource ownership, etc.)

They will provide limited financial support to the Centers for Living for staffing needs & will host the statewide leadership (Project Director, Project Assistant, Project Advisor) at the SILCGA for this initiative.

They will host an annual conference to show case the microenterprises developed via the Centers for Independent Living throughout the state.

And finally, once the capacity to deliver CE (36 months or less) throughout the state is developed, it is their desire for Centers for Independent Living to become permanent partners/providers with GVRA to development CE outcomes throughout the state.

Jeff Allen reported there are currently 38 Acre certified training providers contracted with GVRA. Also, 12 are currently participating in CBTAC training through DBHDD collaborative.

## **SRC Committee Reports**

### ***Membership – Lisa Leiter***

Wina Low recently retired & Charity Roberts will be her replacement.

Patricia Lanasta will replace Karen Addams with Parent to Parent.

Joellen Hancock will replace Aarti Sahgal as a parent of a child with a disability.

All nomination packets have been submitted.

Cherise Mlott & Samuel Verniero's term will expire in 2026.

### ***Public Outreach - Katie Hearn***

No update.

### ***Policy - Michele Mason***

Upcoming policy & funding changes from the national level & DOGE were discussed. One major change coming concerns Administration for Community Living (ACL) funding for CILs.

Regents Center for Learning Disabilities (RCLD) training was held. Michele will share information with everyone.

WIPA & Employment Network are in place to advocate & assist youth receiving social security benefits. Michele suggested having someone to present at the next meeting.

## CSNA Subcommittee

Juliet proposed establishing a subcommittee for the next 18 months. Motion was made to create; Juliet will send out to everyone. A kickoff meeting will be planned for Oct/Nov to discuss what was previously reported in 2023, where we are with the gaps & next steps. RFP will be sent out for bidding.

### *CAP – Jennifer Page / Stephanie Cutrufelli*

There are currently eight state-operated comprehensive rehabilitation centers. However, it should be noted Arkansas ended its residential component in Dec 2019. (Arkansas, Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland, Michigan, Pennsylvania, Tennessee & Virginia)

Attendees: Ages 16+

Majority of SOCRC participants are typically aged 18-26. Virginia, Kentucky & Michigan noted in their annual reports, “there is no upper age limit, and more mature clients attend center programs as well.”

Michigan accepts referrals from entities outside of VR such as Veterans Affairs, the Bureau of Services for Blind Persons and other private rehabilitation agencies (on a space-available basis).

Each SOCRC, with the exception of Roosevelt Warm Springs, has documented policies pertaining to their facility either combined within their state’s VR Program Client Services Policy Manual and/or in a separate policy manual (available online).

Information on the state’s Client Assistance Program is provided by the other SOCRCs at the time of admittance and/or at the time a denial of admissions is issued to ensure clients are aware of their due process rights.

### Facility Comparison

- Admission & program length varies.
- Common admission restrictions include: those with communicable diseases; a hx and/or evidence of engaging in behavior that is considered dangerous to the health/safety of self or others; incarcerated in a correctional institution or required to be under the supervision of law enforcement officers; a minor who requires separate residential facilities for care or treatment; etc. (MD)
- Kentucky accepts new students weekly whereas other SOCRCs have 2-4 terms/year.
- Arkansas & Maryland offer online/hybrid vocational training models.
- Virtual courses at ACDC include: Retail Customer Service, Cleaning Tech, Security Guard (unarmed), Driver’s Permit Study, CDL Permit Study, ServSafe, OSHA, and Professional Guest Services.
- High school students who participate in ACDC’s Business & Logistics course and complete their class/internship may also earn up to 3 high school credits.

A lot of states collaborate with stakeholders in order to get feedback on how to best operate their facility & to identify any deficits or additional pathways. Examples of Virginia & Arkansas were provided.

RWS Data was reviewed. 150 Pathway graduates; 42 graduates with VR case closures; 55% successful employment rate; \$12 average hourly wage; 28 average hours per week. Top 3 occupations – retail salespersons; stock clerks; janitors/housekeepers.

## FY2023 RSA Monitoring Report

### Findings:

- “GVRA provided an update, as of March 2022, on its estimation of cost per participant at its RWS CRP facility as exceeding \$60,000 per participant.”

### Recommendations:

- The RSA team emphasized the importance of GVRA documenting RWS “protocols in the agency’s policies, procedures, and SOPs. GVRA expected to complete the revisions by August 2023.”
- GVRA should conduct further cost benefit analyses to determine how to better leverage the opportunities that RWS presents to the agency. “GVRA does not have a process to measure the degree to which VR participants/recipients want the service and the number willing to obtain such services at RWS. This information is critical to determining whether the costs associated with a new or expanded program are proportional to the benefit received by the VR program.”

RWS did note the agency has plans to expand pathways (medical, first responder, hvac, plumbing, audio visual, mechatronics & heavy machinery) by partnering with Technical College System of Georgia.

RWS operational budget is \$17,000,000 as of FY2016.

### System Advocacy

- Finalize policies for Roosevelt Warm Springs & submit for review to the State Rehabilitation Council and the Georgia Client Assistance Program.
- Seek stakeholder feedback via SRC Public Hearings before RWS policies are adopted.
- Provide the Georgia Client Assistance Program’s information & notice of VR due process rights at the time of RWS admission and/or denial of admission.
- Reconsider implementing age restrictions on RWS attendees.
- Explore CAP’s proposal of alternating semesters by age groups at RWS; utilizing Cave Spring as an alternate site for SOCRC attendees; and online/hybrid delivery models.
- Include RWS in Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment or complete an independent assessment of RWS.

They are now looking into outreach & delivery of pre-ETS transition services to students & youth with disabilities currently residing in residential psychiatric treatment facilities, DJJ & job corp as RSA data indicated those populations are currently unserved or underserved in Georgia.

RWS admission policies & procedures should be transparent & available for anyone to access. Public hearings are required to be held when changes are made. A separate discussion will be held.

Groundbreaking is being held soon on a cottage at RWS that should address the older population wanting to attend.

### **GVRA Executive Update – Chris Wells, Executive Director**

911 data and information was shared for PY24 Quarter 1 & Quarter 2. Total served; age, race, ethnicity & gender; WIOA Program Involvement; Employment at IPE; Barriers to Employment; Training services provided; Career services provided; Other services provided; Pre-ETS services provided; Primary disability type; Exit information.

Lisa Leiter shared examples of students completing the online referral, contact attempts being made during the school day & case being closed within two weeks. Asked if a ROI component could be included in online referral module.

ED Wells will ask IT if additional documents can be added to email sent to individual.

Myndi Pryor was concerned that the majority of Georgians with disabilities are over age 25 & that is the lowest number served. She would like to see a similar plan for adults, as students, so we can start seeing those numbers increase as well.

ED Wells will share additional data with overall numbers.

ED Wells stated he is confident in the state of VR; haven't been asked to cut funding. VR grant possibly moving to HHS or USDOL; preference seems to be USDOL due to WIOA & Wagner Peyser. ACL, Independent Living piece is also being discussed. He would love to partner with DOE & have MOUs in place like in the past with salary for dedicated counselors partially paid by school system/DOE. GVRA recently partnered with TCSG Rapid Response team.

### **Old Business**

None

### **New Business**

CSNA

RWS policy; action and strategy plan

### **Public Comments**

None

### **Adjournment**

Upcoming Conferences/Events:

The next GVRS Board Meeting is scheduled for May 14, 2025.

National ADA Symposium in Atlanta is scheduled for June 15-18, 2025.

NCSRC Fall 2025 Conference – Nov. 1-2, 2025

CSAVR Fall 2025 Conference - Oct. 31 - Nov. 7, 2025

NCSAB Fall 2025 Conference - Nov. 5-7, 2025

The next SRC meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, July 23, 2025 & will be held virtually. The October 22<sup>nd</sup> meeting could possibly include an overnight stay; location to be determined.

The meeting adjourned at 3:50 pm.