

Rising Above

Georgia State Rehabilitation Council 2018 Annual Report



GEORGIA
STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL



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Welcome From the SRC Chair

I want to take this opportunity to welcome you to the 2018 State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) report. Please read and enjoy the report and share with anyone you think might be interested in our mission.

Throughout 2018, individual members and the SRC as a whole did much to represent the consumer and in doing so, help individuals with disabilities across Georgia gain independence through meaningful employment. With the help of our partners across the disability community, the SRC was able to conduct public hearings, help realize the historic Employment First legislation and participate in disability-awareness events across the state.

As part of the SRC's efforts this past year, the Council has remained focused on developing a closer relationship with the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Services Board and the Statewide Independent Living council in addition to developing a greater understanding of GVRA's post-secondary inclusion program and how it helps Georgians with disabilities.

I'm excited about what we've accomplished in the last year, and I look forward to what 2019 has in store. Thank you again for reading and supporting the SRC.

Rossany Rios
SRC Chairwoman

A Letter From the GVRA Executive Director

Among those of us who have the honor of serving Georgians with disabilities, there is no greater strength than that which lies in partnerships. The State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) is among Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency's (GVRA) greatest partners because it provides a direct conduit to the consumer, serving as the voice of thousands of clients and potential clients around the state.

This report is the product of our collaboration with the SRC and a resource for anyone hoping to know more about disability employment in Georgia.

In the past couple of years, listening to those we serve has been our theme at GVRA. I personally have had the privilege of meeting the majority of my 1,400 coworkers in the offices where they work directly with individuals and families. We have developed improvement plans based on

their client experiences as well as internal and external feedback from surveys, town halls, public hearings, and personal conversations. Those plans have created a decentralized GVRA, a culture of empowerment within the programs and local offices, strategic process improvement to expedite hiring and services, and a renewed commitment to the sensory community.

GVRA and the SRC are all about giving people who want independence and careers the tools to accomplish their goals. I hope you will be as moved as I am by some of the success stories you'll read in this report.

Sean T. Casey
GVRA Executive Director

SRC Members

And the Categories They Represent

Rossany Rios, Chair — WIOA Representative — Technical College System of Georgia

Peggy Venable, Vice Chair — American Indian VR Program Representative

Sean Casey (Ex-Officio) — Commissioner — Executive Director of the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency

Kenneth Slade — Business, Industry and Labor Representative — Georgia State University

Lisa Leiter — Advocacy Organization Representative — Transition Resource Specialist

Brenda Bentley-Parrish — Business, Industry and Labor Representative — Internal Revenue Service

Dawn Johnson — Individuals with Cognitive/Learning Disabilities Representative

Carl S. McKinney — Individuals with Physical Disabilities Representative

Wina Low — State Department of Education Representative — Georgia Department of Education

Ruby Kaspers — Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Representative

Karen Addams — Parent Training Center Representative — Parent to Parent of Georgia

Christopher Moder — Business, Industry and Labor Representative — City of Norcross

Brian Mosley — Individuals with Sensory Disabilities Representative

Joy Norman — Individuals with Sensory Disabilities Representative

Steve Oldaker — Statewide Independent Living Council Representative

Jennifer Page — Client Assistance Program Representative

Mike Pryor — Community Rehabilitation Program Representative — Goodwill of North Georgia

Lewis Wheaton — Business, Industry and Labor Representative — Georgia Institute of Technology

Kayla Wilson — Former Vocational Rehabilitation Client Representative

Deborah Lovell — Individuals with Sensory Disabilities Representative

Michele Mason (Non Member) — GVRA Staff Liaison to the SRC

SRC Members Bios



Rossany Rios

Rossany Rios is the disability employment initiative state lead and a certified rehabilitation counselor for the State of Georgia. She previously served as a vocational rehabilitation manager and business relations director. Rossany earned a bachelor's degree in Social Work from the University of Puerto Rico and a master's degree in Vocational Rehabilitation Counseling from the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley. She and her husband, Balfre, have two children and live in Hampton.



Peggy Venable

Christina Peggy Venable has over 40 years of experience with vocational rehabilitation services, case management, job placement and vocational evaluation, among other areas of expertise. She is certified in work adjustment, vocational evaluation, job placement and worker's compensation.

Peggy is the project director of The Muskogee Vocational Rehabilitation Program and has served as a family, individual and mental health counselor with various other agencies. She is a member of the Georgia and National Rehabilitation Association, Georgia State Rehab Council and the Georgia Statewide Coalition on Blindness. She also serves as treasurer on the Executive Board of the Consortia of Administrators for Native American Rehabilitation (CANAR). She holds a Master's in Psychology, a Doctorate in Theology, a Ph.D. in Philosophy and received her Doctorate of Divinity, Summa Cum Laude. She is a member of The Lower Muskogee Creek Tribe and the Project Director for the Muskogee Vocational Rehabilitation Program. She is a singer, songwriter, author and serves as the tribal historian of The Lower Muskogee Creek Tribe in Whigham, Georgia.



Kenneth "Kip" Slade

Keneth "Kip" Slade currently serves a college facilities officer with Georgia State University. He previously served as the director for Georgia Project Access and as a Georgia Accessible Community Transportation Initiative Coordinator. He implemented the first Disability Navigator Project in Georgia. Kip earned a bachelor's degree from Georgia State University. He resides in Atlanta.



Lisa Leiter

Lisa Leiter is a Transition Resource Specialist for the Cobb County School District. She earned a Bachelor of Science Degree in Education with a concentration in Intellectual Disabilities from the University of Georgia. Lisa is currently pursuing a Master of Science in Education Degree with an emphasis in Secondary Special Education and Transition from the University of Kansas and will graduate in May of 2019. Lisa is a member of the Professional Association of Georgia Educators, the Metro Atlanta Transition Consortia, Georgia Interagency Transition Council, Georgia Rehabilitation Association, National Rehabilitation Association, the Council for Exceptional Children, and the Division on Career Development and Transition. Lisa and her husband, Jason, have four children and live in Marietta. She and her family served as the ambassador family for the March of Dimes Cobb Signature Chefs Auction in 2013, and she was named "Volunteer of the Year" in 2014 in Cobb Life Magazine. In November 2018, she was awarded the "Teacher of the Year" award from the Marriott Foundation's Bridges from School to Work Program.



Brenda Bentley-Parrish

Brenda Bentley-Parrish is a management and program analyst and the local disability coordinator for the Internal Revenue Service. She is a member of the Rebirth Church of Atlanta. Bentley-Parrish earned a bachelor's degree in Biology from Knoxville College. She has two children and lives in Ellenwood.



Dawn Johnson

Dawn Johnson is the Director of Employment Services with the Hi-Hope Center and the former director of adult programs for the Frazer Center. She represents Georgia as a legislative liaison on the National Association of People Supporting Employment (APSE) First Public Policy Committee and sits on the board of directors for the Georgia chapter of APSE. Johnson also sits on the board of directors for the Service Providers Association for Developmental Disabilities and is a member of the UNLOCK! Coalition, which advocates for child and adult disability services in Georgia. She earned a bachelor's degree in Biology from the University of South Carolina Aiken and a master's degree in English from Queens University of Charlotte. Johnson and her husband, Joe, have two children and reside in Winder.



Carl S. McKinney

Carl McKinney retired as a special education teacher for the Griffin-Spalding County School System. He was previously a member of the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities (DBHDD) Human Rights Council and the DBHDD Executive Quality Council. McKinney earned a bachelor's degree in Special Education from the University of Georgia, a master's degree in Special Education from Illinois State University and an education specialist degree from the University of West Georgia. He and his wife, Patty, have one son and live in Griffin.



Wina H. Low

Wina Low is a program manager of the Division for Special Education Services and Supports with the Georgia Department of Education. She was previously the director of student services for Carrollton City Schools and worked as an educational diagnostician and a classroom teacher. Low earned a bachelor's degree in Middle Grades Education from Brenau University, as well as a master's degree and an education specialist degree in Special Education and Special Education Administration from the University of West Georgia. She and her husband, Michael, have two children and two granddaughters. They reside in Atlanta.



Ruby Kaspers

Ruby Kaspers is a certified rehabilitation counselor for the Vocational Rehabilitation Division of the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency. She sits on the board of the Georgia Rehabilitation Association. Kaspers earned bachelor's degrees in Psychology and Journalism and a master's degree in Rehabilitation Counseling from Georgia State University. She and her husband, Tyler, have one child and live in Macon.



Karen Addams

Karen Addams is a Vice President at Parent to Parent of Georgia where she has worked for 10 years. She had previously worked for 6 years for Georgia State University as a Parent Educator for the Babies Can't Wait program. Karen has a bachelor's degree from Virginia Commonwealth University and has been supporting the disability community since the birth of her daughter 30 years ago. She and her husband, Peter, live in Lilburn with their two daughters, Mary Anne and Caroline.



Christopher Moder

Chris Moder serves as the City of Norcross and Downtown Development Authority's Director of Economic Development. He was previously an Associate Director of Corporate Relations for the University of Georgia. Among his many professional business and education affiliations are the ARC Atlanta Regional Workforce Board, Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education Council, Georgia Economic Developers Association, Metro Atlanta Chamber, and the Technology Association of Georgia. Chris earned a bachelor's degree in Landscape Architecture from the University of Georgia and a master's degree in Urban and Regional Planning from Virginia Tech. He and his wife, Stephanie, have one child. They reside in Peachtree Corners.



Brian Mosley

Brian Mosley is a former Assistant Program Manager for Walton Options for Independent Living (WOIL) South Carolina office. He currently works in Employment Services as an IL/ Youth Program Coordinator and Skills Trainer out of the WOIL Augusta office. Brian is a former Walton Options and Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency client.

Brian continues to serve individuals of all ages with all types of disabilities through his work with the WOIL CIL. Previously, Brian spent nine years as a consumer and student, obtaining education concerning disability, advocacy and transitioning from being non-disabled to living with a disability. Afterwards, through his employment with Walton Options for Independent Living in Augusta, he successfully taught gaining preparedness skills and employment skills classes to job seekers with disabilities and pre-transition classes to students with disabilities. He has over 20 years of experience working in, for and with the disabled community in Georgia.

Brian is a 2003 graduate of Augusta State University, with a BA in Psychology. He is also a graduate of the 2008 "Partners in Policy-Makers" class, Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities. He has served as a State Advisory Panel member for the Georgia State Board of Education, including one year as chairman. In 2010, Brian was the first and only teacher to receive the Golden Apple Award for outstanding teaching. In 2011, he was awarded the Community Impact Award by Parent to Parent of Georgia. In 2012, Brian was awarded the Assistive-Technology Achievement Award by Tools for Life of Georgia for his successful ability to learn and teach JAWS to Blind/Visually-Impaired consumers.



Joy Norman

Joy Norman serves as the director of the Columbus State University's Office of Disability Services. Prior to this job, she worked as a workforce development counselor for Goodwill. She has served as vice-chair for the Columbus Mayor's Committee for Persons with Disabilities and currently serves on the board of directors for CONTACT Disability

Resource Center. Norman earned a bachelor's degree and a graduate degree from Columbus State University in Community Counseling. She and her husband, Mickey, have two children and two grandchildren. They reside in Columbus.



Steve Oldaker

Steve Oldaker retired as an IT Project Manager with the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center in Brunswick. He is Board President of the Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC) of Georgia; the SILC representative on the Georgia State Rehabilitation Council; Chair of the Brunswick Glynn County Mayor's Committee on Disabilities; Board Treasurer

for Living Independence for Everyone (LIFE), Inc. the coastal region's Center for Independent Living in Savannah and a member of the Georgia Brain and Spinal Injury Trust Fund Commission Public Policy Committee. Steve lives in Brunswick with his family.



Jennifer Page

Jennifer Page has worked for the Georgia Client Assistance Program for the past seven years. She has worked with the disability community for 14 years. Jennifer is a member of the Georgia Rehabilitation Association and attends workshops and trainings to improve her knowledge and skills to better assist her clients. She has a bachelor's degree in Psychology and a master's degree in Counseling and resides in Atlanta.



Mike Pryor

Mike Pryor is the director of Program Development for Goodwill Industries of North Georgia. He has previously served as president of the Georgia Rehabilitation Association. Pryor earned a bachelor's degree from Western Carolina University and a master's degree in Human Services from Bellevue University. He and his wife, Renee, have four children. They reside in Clarkesville.



Lewis Wheaton

Lewis A. Wheaton, PhD is an Associate Professor at Georgia Tech in the School of Biological Sciences. He is also an Adjunct Associate Professor at Emory University School of Medicine in the Department of Rehabilitation Medicine. He has a doctorate in Neuroscience and Cognitive Science from the University of Maryland (College Park) and has a long track record of private and federally-funded research in neural injury and rehabilitation. Lewis is passionate in understanding the interaction of cognitive and motor systems in motor control. Among his interest are in enhancing the rehabilitation potential in persons with upper limb amputation and stroke. His research extends into the classroom where he teaches undergraduate and doctoral students in human neuroanatomy, motor learning and neuroimaging. Presently, he is a recipient of the College of Sciences Cullen-Peck Fellowship, which seeks to fund excellence in research. He has published over 40 peer reviewed research papers, authored several review articles and book chapters in rehabilitation, and presented at numerous national and international conferences on his research on cognitive motor control. He is a member of several organizations that focus on neural health and rehabilitation, such as the American Society for Neurorehabilitation, Society for Neuroscience and the Society for the Neural Control of Movement. In addition, he serves as co-Director for the Race and Racism in Contemporary Biomedicine Working Group, a collaborative between Georgia Tech, Spelman College and Emory University. In the community, Lewis has been active in student engagement in science at various schools. He is a Director for a Middle School Teacher Training Program in science and mathematics at the Fulton Leadership Academy (East Point, GA). He serves as a Den Leader for Cub Scout Pack 22 (Smyrna GA). He is also the Chair of the Campbell Middle School Council for 2017-2018 and as the co-Director for the Nickajack Elementary School Foundation Teacher Grant program. He and his wife Teri reside in Smyrna, GA with their two sons.



Kayla Wilson

Kayla Wilson is currently employed as an accounting coordinator at Sherman and Hemstreet Real Estate in Augusta. She participated in the Vocational Rehabilitation program through college, the High School High Tech Program while in high school, and has returned as a speaker, communicating with high school students across Georgia preparing to pursue higher education. Kayla graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree from Georgia Southern University. She resides in Evans.



Deborah Lovell

Deborah Lovell is the family outreach coordinator at the Augusta Blind Rehabilitation Center at the Charlie Norwood VA Medical Center. She was previously employed by the state of Georgia as a rehabilitation counselor and senior case manager. She is a member of the Georgia Rehabilitation Association, Georgia Association for the Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired and a member of the Georgia Council of the Blind. Lovell is a graduate of Shorter College and earned master’s degrees at Auburn University and Western Michigan University. She and her husband, Todd, live in Augusta.



Michele Mason

Michele Mason is the GVRA liaison to the State Rehabilitation Council. She started her career in employment services in 1996 as a Supported Employment Specialist with UCP of NYC, Inc. She has since committed to serving the disability community and special populations in the role of Job Developer, Recruitment Coordinator, Apprenticeship Program Recruiter, Workforce Development Manager, Contract Manager, and Vocational Counselor. Michele successfully coordinated outreach and collaborative strategy for several citywide economic development initiatives in New York City, such as the U.S. Open at Shea Stadium, Steiner Studios production assistant program, and the NYC Training Grant program. Michele joined GVRA as a Rehabilitation Employment Specialist, and in 2014, was promoted to Employment Services Manager for the Metro Quadrant.

SRC Functions

The Georgia State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) is a federally mandated council composed of Georgia citizens from across the state appointed by the Governor to represent a broad range of individuals with disabilities and stakeholders.

As part of this, the SRC:

- Collaborates with the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency
- Develops plans for services working through GVRA
- Makes recommendations to assist individuals with disabilities achieve employment and independence

SRC Mission

To collaborate with the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency in planning and providing comprehensive and effective services that assist individuals with disabilities to achieve their employment goals and contribute to Georgia’s economy.

SRC Vision

To be a strategic partners with the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency to make Georgia the best state for people with disabilities to live, work and thrive.

Around the State

How SRC Members Stayed Busy

Throughout the year, SRC members stay busy representing the consumers of GVRA services at disability-focused events across the state. Here are some of the events that members attended.

In March, **Jennifer Page** took part in multiple Southeast ADA webinars relating to financial independence. She attended the Autism Expo and Conference presented by Georgia State University in May and multiple Georgia Rehabilitation Counselors and Educators Association meetings throughout the summer. In August, she attended the Georgia Rehabilitation Association annual conference.

Lisa Leiter attended Georgia Rehabilitation Association and the National Coalition of State Rehabilitation Councils conferences, as well as meetings for the Georgia Interagency Transition Council and the North Metro Transition Consortium.

The Cobb County School District Transition Team collaborated to host a College and Career Fair for students with disabilities, including speakers and vendors. At the beginning of the 2018 school year, she initiated the High School High Tech (HSHT) at Osborne High School in Cobb County School District. HSHT is a comprehensive community-based program providing youth with disabilities a link to academic and career-development experiences, which will enable them to meet the workforce demands of the 21st century.

In November 2018, she was awarded the "Teacher of the Year" award from the Marriott Foundation's Bridges from School to Work Program. The Marriott Foundation for People with Disabilities, Bridges from School to Work program engages employers, schools, community resources, youth and their families to help businesses meet their workforce needs while offering young people with disabilities the

opportunity to learn, grow and succeed through employment.

Joy Norman attended the High School High Tech awards luncheon in Columbus in September as well as a transition fair made possible the Columbus Mayor's Commission for Persons with Disabilities (Joy, who is chair of this Commission, is pictured below). This event, in March of this year, allowed more than 300 transition-aged students and their parents to learn more about opportunities after the students' time in high school.



Writing Her Own Story

One Client's Journey to Published Novel

It started with a dream. The literal kind that comes at night. Ann Harrison-Barnes was climbing a ladder, toward what she didn't know, but in this dream state, there was a compelling force telling her to climb, and so she did.

It was this dream that became the opening of Harrison-Barnes' latest novel, *A Journey of Faith: A Stepping Stones Mystery*. This latest book—four of which are available on Amazon—is also the continuance of the metaphorical kind of dream. The kind that comes in quiet moments. The kind that gets them up in the morning.

Like many career paths, the one that put Harrison-Barnes where she is today wasn't straight, and it's quite different than the one she believed she was on when she graduated from The Georgia Academy for the Blind (GAB) in Macon in 1995.

It was around that time that she first started working with Vocational Rehabilitation in Georgia. In the two decades since, she's had numerous counselors, learned a host of career and independent living skills and, most importantly, discovered what she *wanted* to do.

Her first jobs following her time at GAB and a stint at Kaplan University were in customer service and in call centers. And she hated it. Writing had long been a hobby, something she had tinkered in but never considered as a viable career option.

In 2004, she fell in love with a book called *New Stories of The South 2001*, and she began to write in earnest, both as a freelancer publishing nonfiction and hard news and as a novelist.

At first, like all things, it was challenging. She had missteps, and she at times struggled to find her voice, but she was committed. She surrounded herself with other writers and joined writing groups for individuals with disabilities,

and she kept going.

As she wrote, she began to realize that her disability could be a boon to her writing, heightening her other senses and allowing her to craft stories in ways and with voices that don't exist in the traditional world of mainstream publishing.

"Even though I am blind, my characters are not. My attention to detail has made it a lot easier to write," she said. "Because I'm totally blind, sound is one of the biggest thing to me. The vibrations of sound. Music is in my blood. Not just traditional music either. But there's music in the environment. If you close your eyes and listen to the rain, there's music in that. There's music out on the street. If you listen to a police siren, there's a rhythm."

While her path was unconventional, Harrison-Barnes said that others can also choose where they want to go, and with hard work, they can get there as well.

"Follow their heart. Don't give up on what you want. Follow your calling. If you're called to write, that's what you're supposed to do," she said. "Don't write from your head. It's got to come from your heart if it's going to matter."

To learn more or to purchase her books, visit Harrison-Barnes website at www.annwritesinspiration.com.



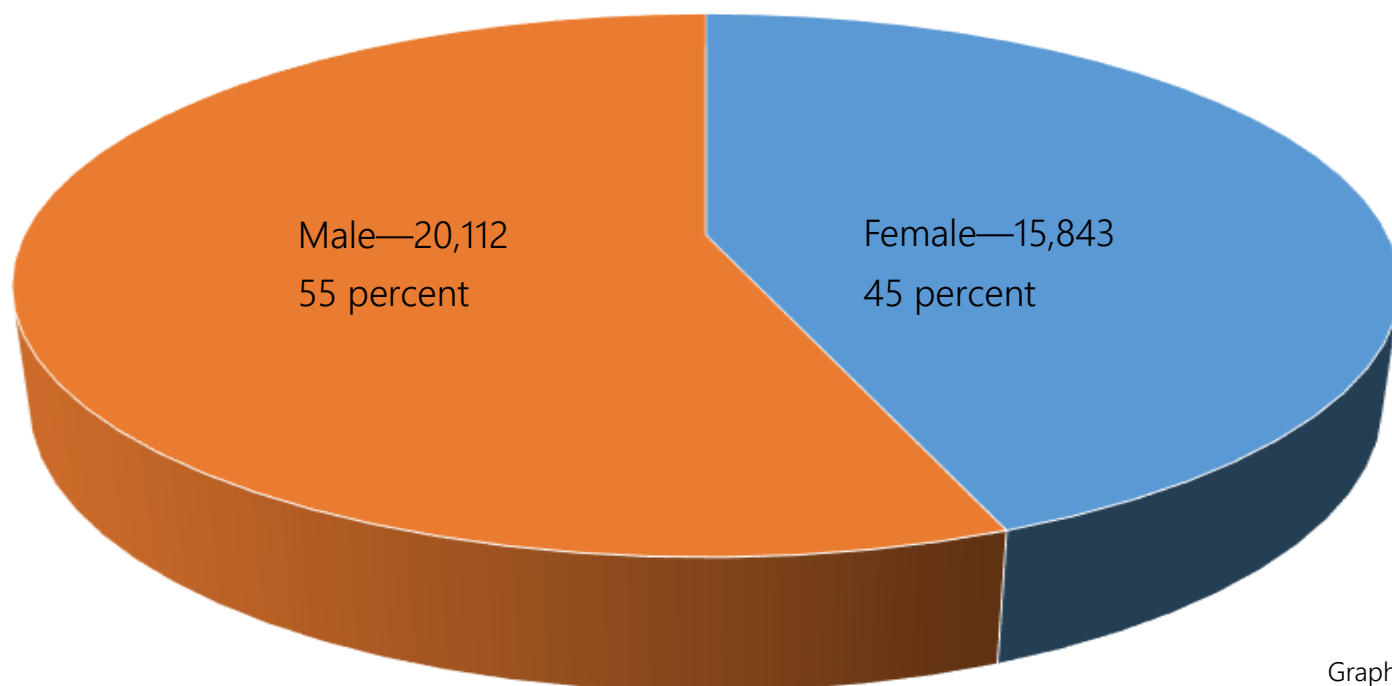
Ann Harrison-Barnes, a GVRA client who in 2018 published her fourth book to Amazon, sits with her GVRA Counselor Miracle Adkins.

Let's Do the Numbers

Clients Served by Gender

NOTE: All numbers were taken from Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2018, which ran from Oct. 1, 2017 to Sept. 30, 2018.

The total number served is **36,002**. Roughly 40 individuals chose not to identify their gender, and roughly 10 individuals recorded their gender as unknown.



Graph 1

Clients Served by Age and Gender

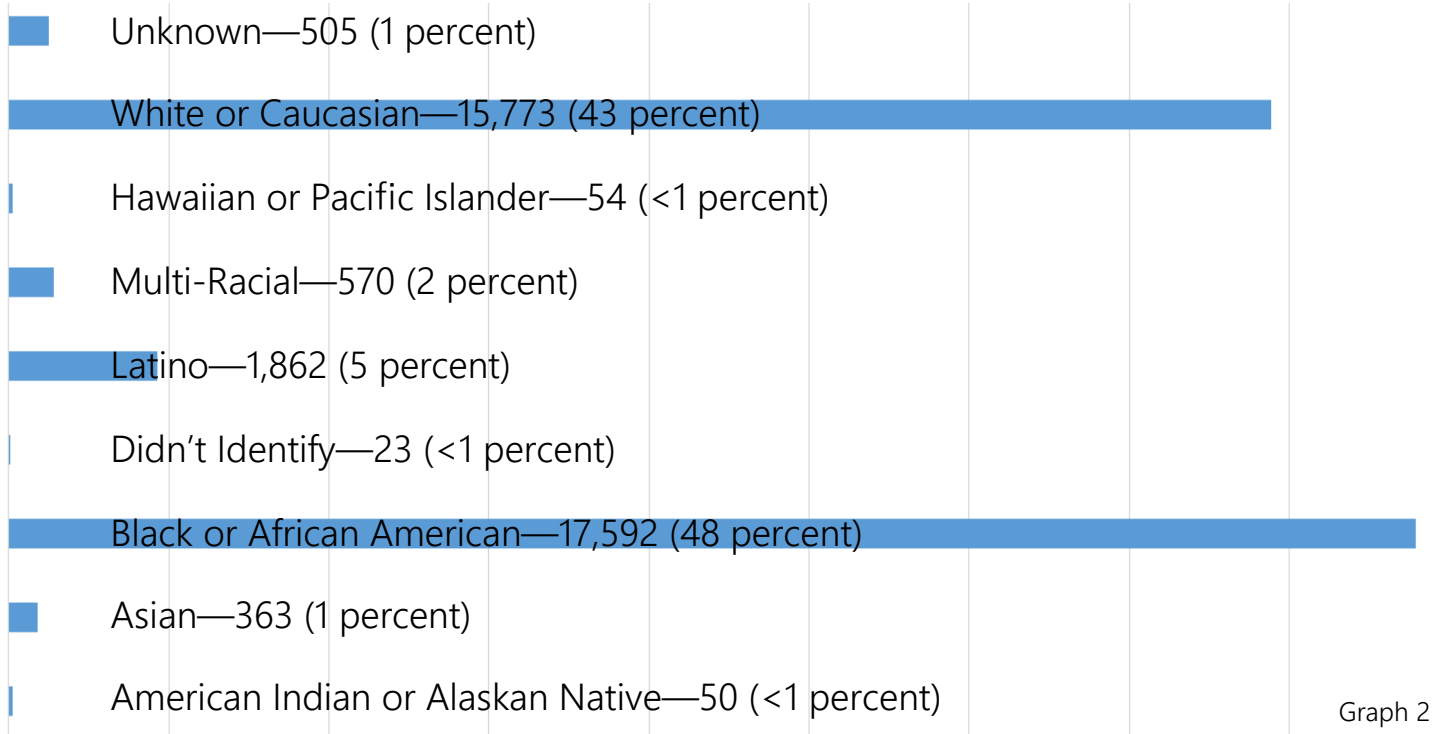
NOTE: Roughly 40 individuals chose not to identify their gender, and roughly 10 individuals recorded their gender as unknown.

Chart 1

Under Age 18			Age 18-24			Age 25-30			
Under 18	Under 18 Male	Under 18 Female	18 - 24	18 - 24 Male	18 - 24 Female	25 - 30	25 - 30 Male	25 - 30 Female	
	3,245	2,055	1,178	16,136	9,884	6,225	3,763	2,081	1,680
Age 31-39			Age 40-54			Age 55+ >			
31 - 39	31 - 39 Male	31 - 39 Female	40 - 54	40 - 54 Male	40 - 54 Female	55 and Over	55 and Over Male	55 and Over Female	
	3,495	1,723	1,771	5,559	2,582	2,975	3,804	1,787	2,014

Clients Served by Race and/or Ethnicity

NOTE: Individuals who identify as Latino and another race were not categorized as Multi-Racial, and thus, the numbers below will total more than the total number of clients served.



Graph 2

Clients Served by Education Level

Chart 2

Clients Served By Level of Education	Clients_Served
Bachelor's degree	751
Elementary education (grades 1-8)	248
High school graduate or equivalency certificate	4,499
Master's degree or higher	266
No Formal Schooling	30
Post-secondary education, no degree	2,651
Secondary education, no HS diploma	6,403
Special Ed (completion or attendance)	4,032
Vocational /Technical Certificate or License	903
Unknown	16,219
Grand Total	36,002

Clients Served by Disability

Chart 3

Disability	Clients Served
Blindness	847
Cognitive Impairments	13,185
Combination of Orthopedic/Neurological Impairments	611
Communicative Impairments (expressive/receptive)	415
Deaf-Blindness	45
Deafness, Primary Communication Auditory	185
Deafness, Primary Communication Visual	638
Dexterity Orthopedic/Neurological Impairments	26
General Physical Debilitation	1,026
Hearing Loss, Primary Communication Auditory	580
Hearing Loss, Primary Communication Visual	143
Manipulation Orthopedic/Neurological Impairments	432
Mobility Orthopedic/Neurological Impairments	1,625
No impairment	43
Not Available	20
Other Hearing Impairments	41
Other Mental Impairments	1,492
Other Orthopedic Impairments	549
Other Physical Impairments (not listed)	1,612
Other visual impairments	704
Psychosocial Impairments	7,068
Respiratory Impairments	179
Severe visual impairment	1
Unknown	4,535
Grand Total	36,002



Studies have shown that consumers prefer to do business with companies who employ workers with disabilities.

Closed Cases by Disability with their Avg. Earnings

Disability	Closed_Clients	Average Weekly Earnings
Blindness	35	\$417.72
Cognitive Impairments	824	\$300.49
Combination of Orthopedic/Neurological Impairments	40	\$275.66
Communicative Impairments (expressive/receptive)	18	\$331.24
Deaf-Blindness	1	\$640.00
Deafness, Primary Communication Auditory	9	\$440.39
Deafness, Primary Communication Visual	54	\$325.00
General Physical Debilitation	56	\$347.23
Hearing Loss, Primary Communication Auditory	91	\$466.18
Hearing Loss, Primary Communication Visual	14	\$522.17
Manipulation Orthopedic/Neurological Impairments	26	\$344.63
Mobility Orthopedic/Neurological Impairments	95	\$358.73
No impairment	2	\$560.44
Other Hearing Impairments	6	\$384.77
Other Mental Impairments	125	\$300.60
Other Orthopedic Impairments	33	\$424.62
Other Physical Impairments (not listed)	69	\$368.63
Other visual impairments	29	\$468.32
Psychosocial Impairments	631	\$314.59
Respiratory Impairments	11	\$395.56

Chart 4

Return on Investment

In addition to the thousands of dollars companies can receive in tax credits for every individual with a disability they hire, conservative estimates show that for every \$1 spent on helping such a person go to work contributes \$3 in return to the economy at large.

In Georgia, this translates to an ROI of more than \$200 million annually.

Source: GVRA SFY 2018 Vocational Rehabilitation Budget

How it Works

Inside the VR Process

The vocational rehabilitation process begins when a client applies for VR services. An application is completed and an intake interview is provided to explore the individual's medical, social, financial, educational and vocational experiences.

In the preliminary assessment, the applicant's skills, abilities, talents and interests are explored. The Certified Rehabilitation Counselor (CRC) uses the assessment to understand the vocational needs of the client. When necessary, other assessments are done to determine any barriers to employment an individual is facing.

The outcomes of these assessments provide useful information in establishing services for a client.

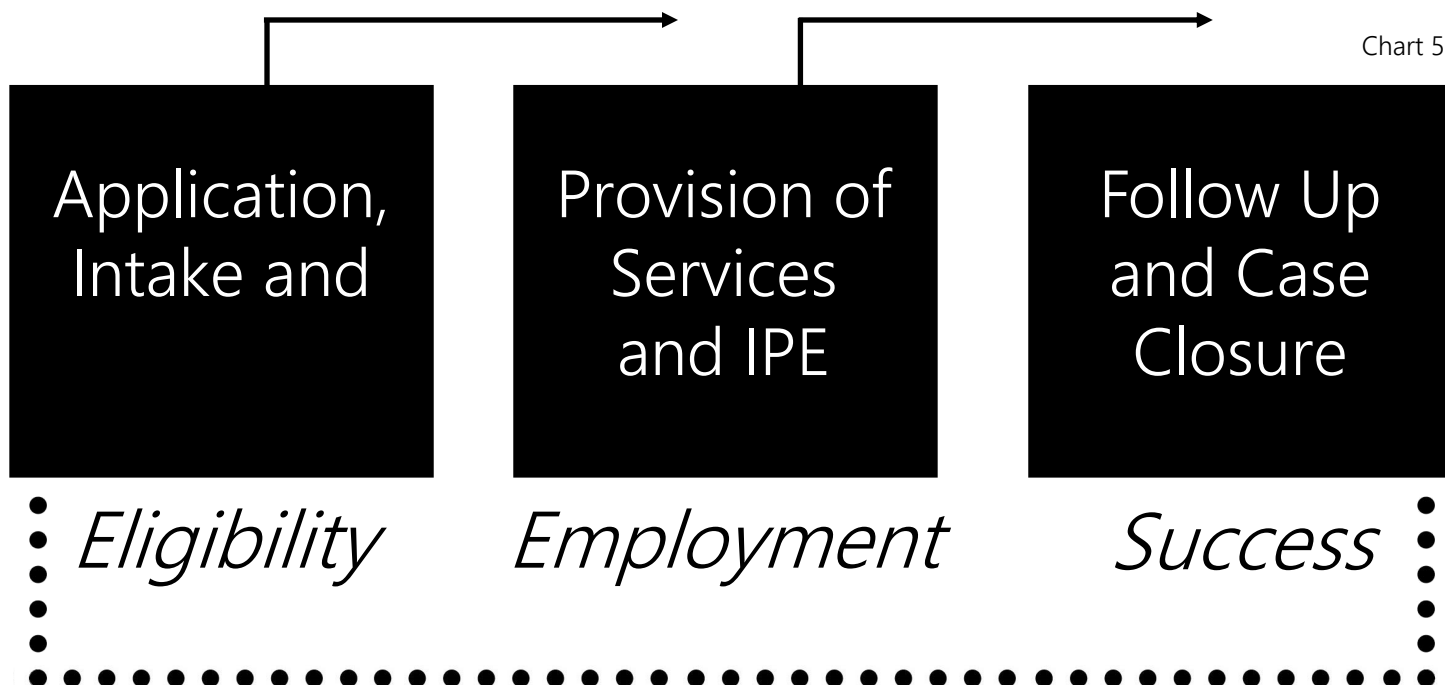
After eligibility, the client and his or her counselor develop an individualized plan for employment (IPE). This plan outlines the

objectives and services needed to aid the client in reaching the vocational goal of their choice.

Each IPE is personalized to the needs of the client to assure the vocational goal is achievable and attainable. Working in partnership with the VRC, the client becomes knowledgeable about competitive employment choices.

Ultimately, the client decides on the specific type of competitive employment in a career of their choice. Follow up services are provided by Vocational Rehabilitation to ensure that the employment choice of the client is stable, secure and satisfactory to both the client and the employer.

Advocacy and support is available through the Client Assistance Program (CAP) throughout the VR process. In addition, clients are encouraged to reach out to GVRA Constituent Services should the need arise.



Employment First is Law

The Historic Legislation Passed Earlier This Year

Governor Nathan Deal earlier this year signed into law Georgia's Employment First Act (HB 831), which promotes employment as the first and preferred option offered to people with disabilities receiving government funded services. This came as a direct result of hard work and sustained partnerships between GVRA, the SRC and others in the disability community.

The Act creates a 14-member council, to be administered by the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency (GVRA) and chaired by GVRA's Executive Director. The group will be comprised of people with various disabilities, a family member of an individual with a disability and representatives from state agencies involved in workforce development. Its purpose is to produce biannual reports that make policy and legislative recommendations promoting successful Employment First implementation.

"On the state level, we are committed to making Georgia the best place in which to work, learn and call home for all people," said Gov. Nathan Deal. "Time and again, our diverse and vibrant workforce makes significant contributions to Georgia's economy and strengthens our distinction as the No. 1 state for business. With this legislation, the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency will have greater support for Employment First implementation, thereby expanding opportunities for individuals with disabilities and benefitting communities across the state."

In states where Employment First has been implemented, employment rates of individuals with disabilities have increased significantly. GVRA's Executive Director, Sean T. Casey acknowledged the multiplier effect.

"When you have a person, previously dependent upon government benefits, and they go to work, they get more than a paycheck,"

Casey said. "They get a sense of pride because now they can contribute financially to their households. They develop social networks where previously, they may have been isolated. And the money they earn gives them spending power to help create stronger economies."

The council held their first meeting in early December, with more meetings to be scheduled in 2019. Comments or questions about the Council can be addressed to GVRA Legislative Liaison Charlie Miller.

The council members are as follows:

Dr. Conrado Marion-Landais
James Stinchcomb
David C. Ward
John B. Wells III
Todd Youngblood
Parker Glick
Brandt White

State Agency Representatives:

Sean T. Casey, Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency
Tim Evans, Georgia Department of Labor
Eric E. Jacobson, Georgia Counsel of Developmental Disabilities
Paula Poulicek, Georgia Department of Education
Amy R. Reidesel, Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities
Rossany Rios, Technical College System of Georgia
Felita Williams, Board of Regents



Governor Nathan Deal signs the historic Employment First legislation, while GVRA staff members and representatives from the disability community look on.

It's All in the Numbers

Education and Success For One Client

By Director of Communications/Marketing Robin Folsom

Maria Sotnikova's life has just changed, and it's taken her in directions her wildest hopes previously wouldn't have ventured.

Maria, who emigrated to the U.S. from Russia at five years old, has always been intelligent, determined and career-minded.

A data scientist with the Atlanta Regional Commission, she has impressive academic credentials, which include an undergraduate degree from Georgia Tech's School of Industrial Systems and Engineering, earned with Honors. She also holds dual Masters from her alma mater in Public Policy and City and Regional Planning.

She was missing a few tools though. Maria has a condition that affects her mobility, and she uses a power wheelchair to get to work, get around the office, and do other major daily tasks, both at home and in the community. While the wheelchair works well to help her navigate terrain, her disability also affects range of motion in her arms. For her, draping a sweater around her shoulders, pulling copies off an office printer, and pushing buttons on an elevator were all barriers to independence.

"Elevators were always a problem," she said. "I would literally have to wait for someone else to get on and push the buttons.

While she was already exceling at work, she circled back to her Assistive Workplace Technologist, Gigi Taylor, to discuss ways to further improve her mobility while on the job.

"I came in and said, 'Okay, let's do a walk through, and find some of the things that we can make easier,'" said Gigi. "Show me."

There were a few tasks Maria identified, and most of them were simple things, like turning on a light switch or operating a copier.

After exploring multiple work-arounds, Gigi tapped into technology, knowing she could find a solution that would expand Maria's independence.

Enter the Jaco arm, managed by an Assistive Technology company called Kinova. While the notion of a robotic arm may conjure up images of science fiction and intimidate some, Maria took to its operation with ease. "It was like re-exploring the world," she said.

Gigi was impressed with how quickly Maria used the device, a shiny black piece of equipment affixed to her power chair, with multiple pivots and a touch controller.

Gigi said, "I watched her face light up when she turned on the lights in a room. I was happy and relieved when I watched her successfully push elevator buttons and openly abandon the fear of being alone when riding in its cab."

Abe Clark, who works Jaco's manufacturer, told Gigi and Maria that the device works exactly as assistive technology should, assisting you in your ability instead of replacing it."

As Maria manipulated her Jaco to lift a pencil from a counter, she was asked about the biggest thing her device had changed for her.

"My life," Maria replied. "It changed my life. It's just changed everything."

Myths vs. Facts

What Everyone Should Know About Disability

Everybody's fighting some kind of stereotype, and people with disabilities are no exception. The difference is that barriers people with disabilities face begin with people's attitudes — attitudes often rooted in misinformation and misunderstandings about what it's like to live with a disability.

Myth 1: People with disabilities are brave and courageous.

Fact: Adjusting to a disability requires adapting to a lifestyle, not bravery and courage.

Myth 2: All persons who use wheelchairs are chronically ill or sickly.

Fact: The association between wheelchair use and illness may have evolved through hospitals using wheelchairs to transport sick people. A person may use a wheelchair for a variety of reasons, none of which may have anything to do with lingering illness.

Myth 3: Wheelchair use is confining; people who use wheelchairs are "wheelchair-bound."

Fact: A wheelchair, like a bicycle or an automobile, is a personal assistive device that enables someone to get around.

Myth 4: All persons with hearing disabilities can read lips.

Fact: Lip-reading skills vary among people who use them and are never entirely reliable.

Myth 5: People who are blind acquire a "sixth sense."

Fact: Although most people who are blind develop their remaining senses more fully, they do not have a "sixth sense."

Myth 6: People with disabilities are more comfortable with "their own kind."

Fact: In the past, grouping people with disabilities in separate schools and institutions reinforced this misconception. Today, many

people with disabilities take advantage of new opportunities to join mainstream society.

Myth 7: Non-disabled people are obligated to "take care of" people with disabilities.

Fact: Anyone may offer assistance, but most people with disabilities prefer to be responsible for themselves.

Myth 8: Curious children should never ask people about their disabilities.

Fact: Many children have a natural, uninhibited curiosity and may ask questions that some adults consider embarrassing. But scolding curious children may make them think having a disability is "wrong" or "bad." Most people with disabilities won't mind answering a child's question.

Myth 9: The lives of people with disabilities are totally different than the lives of people without disabilities.

Fact: People with disabilities go to school, get married, work, have families, do laundry, grocery shop, laugh, cry, pay taxes, get angry, have prejudices, vote, plan and dream like everyone else.

Myth 10: It is all right for people without disabilities to park in accessible parking spaces, if only for a few minutes.

Fact: Because accessible parking spaces are designed and situated to meet the needs of people who have disabilities, these spaces should only be used by people who need them.

Myth 11: Most people with disabilities cannot have sexual relationships.

Fact: Anyone can have a sexual relationship by adapting the sexual activity. People with disabilities can have children naturally or through adoption. People with disabilities, like other people, are sexual beings.

Myth 12: People with disabilities always need help.

Fact: Many people with disabilities are independent and capable of giving help. If you would like to help someone with a disability, ask if he or she needs it before you act.

Myth 13: There is nothing one person can do to help eliminate the barriers confronting people with disabilities.

Fact: Everyone can contribute to change. You can help remove barriers by:

1) Understanding the need for accessible parking and leaving it for those who need it

2) Encouraging participation of people with

disabilities in community activities by using accessible meeting and event sites

3) Understanding children's curiosity about disabilities and people who have them

4) Advocating a barrier-free environment

5) Speaking up when negative words or phrases are used about disability

6) Writing producers and editors a note of support when they portray someone with a disability as a "regular person" in the media

7) Accepting people with disabilities as individuals capable of the same needs and feelings as yourself, and hiring qualified disabled persons whenever possible

Educating Employers

How GVRA Is Working With Major Brands

Coca Cola, Georgia Power and UPS are just a few of the big-name corporate partners who have joined with GVRA on a statewide network of businesses to help foster careers for individuals with disabilities.

The concept for the group (called Disability IN: Greater Atlanta) initially came out of conversations among GVRA Employment Services staff in April of 2017. The goal at that time was to organize a local organization similar to the United States Disability IN organization, which aims to unite business around disability inclusion in the workplace, supply chains and the marketplace. The first organization that signed on to the Georgia group was Georgia Power, and from there, GVRA recruited other national and international—though Georgia-based—employers, with the total number of organizations in the network currently at just short of a dozen.

And it will continue to grow in the future as more and more businesses begin to recognize

the bottom-line benefits of hiring individuals with disabilities both as a means of securing a strong and productive workforce and as a means for expansion into an untapped market, said Business Relations Manager Lawrence Davis.

As part of the local group, GVRA had the opportunity to sit down with some of the decision makers at Coke, and from this conversation, the world's largest soft drink manufacturer decided to kickoff the "This-Ability" campaign, with the program aimed at hiring individuals with disabilities and also finding ways to include those with disabilities in their marketing and promotional practices.

"It's all about education," Davis said. "There are misconceptions about hiring someone who has a disability. In reality, these workers will help them grow their business and become even more competitive in the marketplace."

In Memoriam

Remembering Justin Pressley

SRC member Justin Pressley, 46 of Gainesville, passed away earlier this year at his home. He is remembered as someone who was dedicated to working with individuals with disabilities, and he will be missed by the SRC and the disability community as a whole.

"Justin's passion was evident since his earliest participation in the council," said SRC Chair Rossany Rios. "His knowledge and love for serving others will always be remembered."

A lifelong resident of Hall County, Justin had worked for 10 years in the banking industry starting at The Citizens Bank. After working there, he created two small businesses and was later an Olympic torch bearer in the 1996 Centennial Olympics.

His community service included serving as a founding Commissioner of the Georgia Brain and Spinal Cord Injury Trust Fund as well as serving as its first treasurer. He volunteered for 10 years as Vice President and Treasurer of Access Hall County, Inc., and co-founded the Access Center for Independent Living. Justin served on the advisory board of North Georgia Health Systems and was a founding board member of Our Neighbor, Inc. Justin had been involved in the disability rights movement since the early 90's with Adapt and the National Organization on Disability, and he was currently a Core Leader for Georgia for the National Participant Network.

Because of a supportive family, he had been able to live independently and was guided by an "independent living philosophy."

Justin's hobbies included hunting, fishing and power soccer. He co-founded the North Georgia Screamin' Eagles in 2006 and had served on the marketing and tournament selection committees of the U.S. Power Soccer

Association, in addition to being chair of the Georgia Games Power Soccer committee.

Survivors include his parents, Vicki and Danny Pressley; sister and brother-in-law, Heather and Lincoln Holcombe; brother and sister-in-law; Luke and Lori Pressley; nephews and nieces, Austin and Cooper Holcombe and Kaylee and Kamryn Pressley.

He is preceded in death by his maternal grandparents, Lucius and Claudine Nix, and paternal grandparents, Henry and Mattie Pressley.



Where GVRA Clients Work

A Few of Our Many Employer Partners



We want to hear from you.

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