

Rethinking What's Possible

The Georgia State Rehabilitation Council 2020 Annual Report



GEORGIA VOCATIONAL
REHABILITATION AGENCY



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Welcome From the SRC Chair

It is with warm greetings that we bring you the 2020 State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) report.

A lot of hard work has gone into producing this report. Its' purpose is to tell the story of where we've been—and more importantly—where we're going.

Throughout the past year, SRC members continued to advance the mission of helping individuals with disabilities across Georgia gain independence through meaningful employment, and our activities are highlighted here. This report will also analyze the client base for the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency over the past year by presenting an overview of the people with disabilities who have received vocational rehabilitation services in Georgia.

While 2020 presented unprecedented challenges, and we've grieved and continue to grieve profound losses, being nimble in response to community needs has allowed us to move forward, recognizing much work remains. The SRC looks forward to your engagement, through public comment as well as partnership as we remain excited about the opportunities of the year to come. Please read and share this report with anyone you think might benefit from it.

Kate Brady, PhD ABD
SRC Chairperson

Message from GVRA Executive Director

Thank you for taking the time to read our annual report in partnership with the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC). As Executive Director of the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency (GVRA), I deeply value the SRC's essential role as the voice of the vocational rehabilitation consumer. Those of us involved in the disability community often use the phrase, "Nothing about us without us." Nowhere is this more critical than in ensuring the effective delivery of services related to employment and independence.

Having heard the thoughts, concerns and ideas of our clients and the staff who directly serve them, GVRA is making programmatic strides aimed at better outcomes for those who entrust us with their futures. Our commitment as we go forward is to ensure that the voice of the customer is our true north. The SRC helps us make that happen.

At GVRA, we are committed to transparency and ease of access to information. I hope you will find the service data and budget information, as well as some of the success stories in this report, to be helpful.

I believe the best and brightest days are ahead for Georgians with disabilities who strive for meaningful employment and a seat at the table. We appreciate the partners who are a part of our clients' journeys.

Chris Wells
GVRA Executive Director

SRC Members Bios

Kate Brady, Ph.D. ABD - Chair - Individuals with a Physical Impairment

Kate Brady has worked in the field of disability policy, services, and systems advocacy for nearly two decades. Kate is Deputy Director for the Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities with extensive experience in vocational rehabilitation, Medicaid, Social Security, systems change, and workforce development. She lives in Hapeville with her wife Michelle, two children, and three huskies.

Lisa Leiter - Vice Chair - Transition Resource Specialist

Lisa Leiter is a Transition Resource Specialist for the Cobb County School District. Lisa earned a Bachelor of Science Degree in Education, with a concentration in Intellectual Disabilities from the University of Georgia and a Master of Science in Education Degree with an emphasis in Secondary Special Education and Transition from the University of Kansas. Lisa is an active member of the Metro Atlanta Transition Council and the Statewide Interagency Council. Lisa and her husband, Jason, have four children and live in Marietta. She and her family served as the ambassador family for the 2013 March of Dimes Cobb Signature Chefs, she was named 2014 "Volunteer of the Year" by Cobb Life Magazine, and she was awarded the 2018 "Teacher of the Year" award from the Marriott Foundation's Bridges from School to Work Program.

Tina Aldridge - Individuals with a Visual Impairment

Since 2013, Tina Aldridge has served as a Vocational Rehabilitation Specialist with the Department of Veterans Affairs. Aldridge holds a master's degree in Rehabilitation Counseling from Georgia State University. She lives in Atlanta with her partner, Paul Green. She has two children, Italy Turner and Roddricus Aldridge, and four grandchildren.

Deborah Hibben - Parent of Individual with an Impairment

Deborah Hibben is a retired educator who previously worked for Henry and Clayton county schools, and her highest degree is that of Education Specialist from Lincoln Memorial University. Deborah serves on the Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities. Hibben lives in McDonough, Georgia, and she has two children, Hillary Anne and Hannah Elizabeth.

Peggy Venable - American Indian VR Program

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.

Deborah Lovell - Individuals with Visual Impairments

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.

Mike Pryor - Community Rehabilitation Program

Mike Pryor is the Sr. Director of Real Estate & New Business at 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 Myndi live in Clarkesville, and they are expecting their first child in April of 2020.

Austin McDonald - Former VR Client

Austin McDonald is a physical education teacher with Cornerstone Christian Academy in Peachtree Corners, Georgia. He has seven years of experience in both private and public schools, and he has used his time as a physical education teacher to help students overcome their unique barriers and provide encouragement. He lives in Dunwoody, Georgia with his wife, Christine, and their child, Ryelee.

Cherise Mlott - Business/Individuals with an Impairment

Cherise Mlott is Director of Corporate Real Estate Portfolio Management and Transactions at AT&T. Mlott has worked for AT&T for twenty-three years. Mlott earned a bachelor's degree from the University of Georgia and an MBA from Georgia State University. Cherise is a strong advocate for the Multiple Sclerosis Society and has cycled for the last 19 years raising over \$310,000 to fund a cure for MS. She is a native of Atlanta and lives in Brookhaven, Georgia with her husband Brent and Katie, their Irish Setter.

Brian Mosley - Individuals with Visual Impairments

Brian Mosley is a former Assistant Program Manager for Walton Options for Independent Living (WOIL) South Carolina office. He is currently self employed. 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. Brian resides in Martinez, Georgia. He has a son and daughter and four grandchildren.

Jennifer Page - Client Assistance Program

Jennifer M. Page is the Director of the Georgia Client Assistance Program and has worked for this agency for the past 13 years. She has worked with the disability community for 18 years. Jennifer is a member of the Georgia Rehabilitation Association, the Georgia Rehabilitation Counselors and Educators Association and attends workshops and trainings to improve her knowledge and skills to better assist her clients. CAP is involved in community outreach to inform and educate those who are not aware of the services GVRA and CAP can provide. She has a bachelor's degree in Psychology from South Carolina State University and a master's degree in Counseling from Webster University and resides in Atlanta.

Brenda Bentley-Parrish - Business

Brenda Bentley-Parrish is a management and program analyst and the local accessibility coordinator for the Internal Revenue Service. She enjoys having oversight of the employees with disabilities in the Accounts Management business unit. Brenda earned a bachelor's degree in Biology from Knoxville College, in Knoxville, Tennessee. She has two children: a son Theodore and a daughter Brionne. Last year, she was blessed with granddaughter Dallas Kynnedi Simone Smith. She lives in Dekalb County, Georgia.

Dawn Johnson - Individuals with Cognitive Impairments

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. Dawn 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. Dawn and her husband, Joe, have two children and reside in Winder.

Wina H. Low - Georgia Department of Education

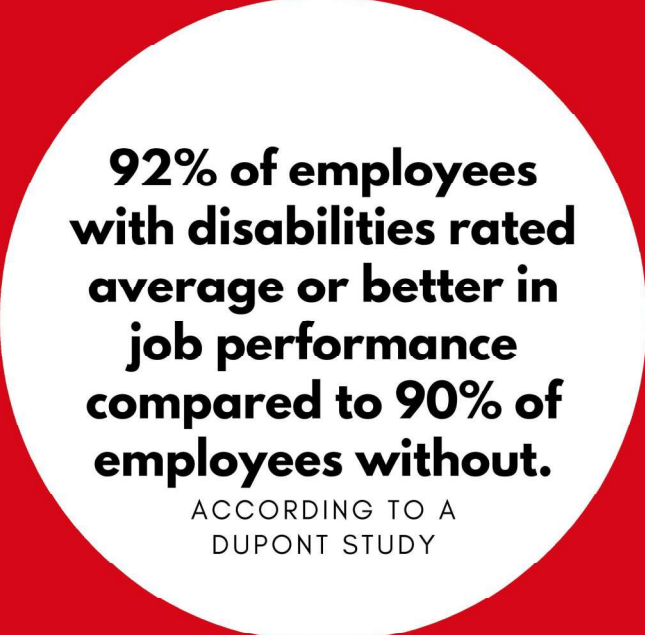
Wina Low is a program manager senior of the Division for Special Education Services and Supports with the Georgia Department of Education. She was previously the director of student services for Carrollton City Schools and worked as an educational diagnostician and a classroom teacher. Wina earned a 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 Big Canoe in the North Georgia Mountains.

Karen Addams - Parent to Parent

Karen Addams is a Vice President at Parent to Parent of Georgia, where she has worked for over 13 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 over 30 years ago. She and her husband, Peter, live in Lilburn and are the parents of two daughters.

Col. Dr. Samuel Verniero, Jr. - Individuals with an Impairment

A resident of Woodstock, Georgia, Samuel Verniero, Jr. has previously served as a Kentucky Colonel, Arkansas Traveler and Ambassador, United Nations World Humanity Commission Deputy High Commissioner-Ambassador, member of the DeKalb County Community Service Board, member of the Selective Service System Appellate Judicial Board, and member of the Department of Behavioral Health Advisory Council.



**92% of employees
with disabilities rated
average or better in
job performance
compared to 90% of
employees without.**

ACCORDING TO A
DUPONT STUDY

In the Community

SRC Members Reach Out

While this year proved challenging in many aspects—with events and conferences largely going virtual—SRC members made a point to connect with the disability community at large. Below are some examples of how Council members stayed busy this year.

Deborah Hibben started the year by participating in multiple advocacy days at the State Capitol, including specifically a day for persons with a disability and as part of a group associated with Medicaid waiver funding.

Like many others, Deborah transitioned in March to attending meetings virtually through online platforms. She participated in multiple meetings of the Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities, which she has served on since 2012. In addition, she provided guidance on biweekly calls of the Georgia COVID-19 Developmental Disability Group.

Deborah attended meetings of the ARC Georgia that dealt with how individuals with a disability would be impacted by the then-upcoming census and national election. She participated on local parks and recreation as well as Adult Disability Medical Healthcare calls about health and fitness for the disability community during the pandemic.

In addition, she took part in virtual fundraising walks for multiple nonprofit organizations and attended a virtual training with Stand Up for Down Syndrome where she learned the ins and outs of improvisation performance.

Deborah attended a Hope Story training regarding the distribution of new parent materials to local ob/gyn offices after a prenatal diagnosis of Down syndrome.

She concluded the year by participating

in multiple virtual conferences, including Camp Blue Skies, “Convention from Your Couch” with the National Down Syndrome Congress (NDSC) and the NDSC “Soirée of Stars” gala.

Brenda Bentley Parrish worked hard to make the 75th Anniversary of National Disability Employment Awareness Month a special occasion. As part of this, she prepared a Power Point presentation aimed at giving a virtual visual story of some important highlights of NDEAM (pictured in part below). The presentation highlighted an IRS coworker of Brenda’s who is deaf and attend Gallaudet University in Washington, DC.

She developed several interactive activities including an “Americans with Disabilities Act Spin the Wheel” game where participants had to answer disability-related questions.

She also worked with Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) within the IRS as the Schedule A Coordinator for hiring. She worked with CSAVR counselors from several states in an effort to recruit employees to work at the IRS. This initiative was a success, as the federal agency hired hundreds of individuals with disabilities across the country.



How Georgia Can Improve

The 2020 Statewide Comprehensive Needs Assessment

The Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency along with the Institute on Human Development and Disability at the University of Georgia (UGA) and the State Rehabilitation Council jointly completed the 2020 Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment in May 2020. To produce this report, UGA staff conducted hundreds of interviews with clients, parents, staff, partners and key stakeholders. 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.

A summary of key findings is included below.

Overall Satisfaction with GVRA and Suggestions

- GVRA counselors and staff are characterized as being committed and caring individuals that strive to do their best for consumers. Respondents in all groups were most satisfied with the respect, sensitivity and politeness shown by GVRA staff towards consumers as well as GVRA staff attitudes. The committed and passionate staff are the greatest asset of GVRA.
- The high turnover of staff has been a challenge for the organization in multiple areas and is related to the pay scale for staff. Respondents were most dissatisfied with the Agency's retention of qualified staff as well as the quality of services provided by GVRA or contracted providers. The limited number of counselors in field offices seem to have high caseloads. Numerous respondents recurrently talked about the need to improve GVRA's responsiveness to calls and emails to consumers.
- There is a need for GVRA counselors to listen more to the consumers and individualize services as needed. There is a need for enhanced communication and explanation of

GVRA services to consumers including who would provide them and the specific processes and timelines for services. Professionals, however, reported being satisfied with the fact that consumers are able to provide input.

The Needs of Businesses

- Employers were asked about factors that keep businesses from hiring, retaining or promoting individuals with disabilities. Employers mentioned not having the skills or credentials for the job, budget restrictions or hiring freezes, constraints of job characteristics (complexity, physical demand, skill level) as being important factors.
- The need for additional accommodation and staff time and staff not knowing how to provide disability related accommodation were also identified as important factors.
- Not understanding the disability, concerns about liability, worker's compensation or a bad economy were reported to prevent hiring of individuals with disabilities by businesses to a small or very small extent.
- 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 implement workplace accommodation, training staff to support co-workers with disabilities and assistive technology.
- The most frequent feedback received from participants across all groups regarding employers was the need to educate employers and reduce the biases held about the abilities of individuals with disabilities. Employers were frequently characterized as fearful about hiring

individuals with disabilities and about their capacity to perform the essential functions of many jobs.

Need to Establish, Develop or Improve Community Rehabilitation Programs (CRPs) in Georgia

- Almost all providers agreed or strongly agreed that there is a need to improve established Community Resource Providers in Georgia and a need to expand current CRPs. About two-thirds of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that there is a need to establish new CRPs and that there is a need to further develop newly-established 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, transition age youth, racial and ethnic minority populations and individuals with more significant disabilities.

Needs of Individuals with the Most Significant Disabilities

The chart on the right shows the most common responses when asked what challenges are faced by individuals with the most significant disabilities. Below are some recurring themes gathered from the interviews.

- Access to dependable transportation remains 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. Georgia is a large state that lacks a reliable public transportation system outside of the metro areas. In the absence of reliable public

TOP THREE BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT

For People with the Most Significant Disabilities



ACCORDING TO INDIVIDUALS WITH A DISABILITY

- 1) Access to dependable transportation
- 2) Misconceptions about a disability held by professionals
- 3) Employers' concerns about providing accommodations



ACCORDING TO PARENTS AND FAMILY MEMBERS

- 1) Access to dependable transportation
- 2) Misconceptions about a disability held by professionals
- 3) Employers' concerns about risks associated with hiring individuals with disabilities



ACCORDING TO STAKEHOLDER PROFESSIONALS

- 1) Access to dependable transportation
- 2) Fear of losing benefits
- 3) Lack of awareness of VR



ACCORDING TO PROVIDER PROFESSIONALS

- 1) Access to dependable transportation
- 2) Fear of losing benefits
- 3) Employers' concerns about risks associated with hiring individuals with disabilities



ACCORDING TO EMPLOYERS

- 1) Lack of dependable transportation
- 2) Lack of job preparation, skills, education
- 3) Difficulty learning the job or new responsibilities

transportation, people rely on others or other modes of transportation for commuting to work and other places. For individuals with disabilities who are unable to drive due to their disability, this can be a major impediment to employment. Other reasons include the distance to and location of available jobs, inability to access jobs in areas without transportation, availability of transportation of services for specific populations (i.e. aging, waiver eligible recipients), lack of a vehicle and/or driver's license, the cost of transportation, health conditions or the nature of disability and the reliability and the time required to travel via public transit/paratransit. This issue can be particularly exacerbated for individuals with disabilities who live in rural and suburban areas.

- The second most frequently cited vocational rehabilitation need of individuals with the most significant disabilities includes benefits counseling. There is a need to educate and counsel consumer on benefits planning and work incentives. 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 to provide benefits counseling to individuals with disabilities to help them understand how employment will affect their benefits including SSDI and Medicaid.

- Employer misconceptions about the abilities of individuals with disabilities is a significant barrier to employment and becomes more significant with the increase in the significance of the 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 hold.

- Employers need to be provided the assistance and support they need in providing accommodations for individuals with disabilities, including those with most significant disabilities. Long term, on the job supports including job coaching and supported employment for individuals with significant disabilities was identified by all target groups as the most important service needed for maintaining employment. The need for job development and job placement services was the second most important service needed by individuals with disabilities to obtain and maintain employment.

- Vocational guidance and counseling services were also identified as being a high priority service.

- Individuals with disabilities identified increased confidence in themselves as a top factor in contributing to job success along with supervisors and co-workers being supportive. Respondents also mentioned the job match as being an important factor contributing to job success.

Barriers to Employment for Minority Populations

The chart on the following page breaks down the barriers to employment for minorities with a disability. Below are some recurring themes gathered from the interviews.

- The need for skills or education needed for a job goal, transportation assistance and benefits counseling were the top needs related to employment of individuals with disabilities from unserved or underserved groups.

- The need for long-term job services and on the job support including job coaching and supported employment services were identified as one of the most important needs related to employment. Job development and job placement were also identified as important needs.

- There's a need for greater engagement of parents and families to increase their support

BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT FOR MINORITY POPULATIONS



ACCORDING TO PARENTS AND FAMILY MEMBERS

- 1) Lack of skills or education needed
- 2) Lack of long-term services/job coaching
- 3) Difficulty accessing jobs
- 4) Lack of awareness/access to job supports and assistive technology



ACCORDING TO STAKEHOLDER PROFESSIONALS

- 1) Access to dependable transportation
- 2) Fear of losing benefits
- 3) Lack of family/community support
- 4) Lack of awareness about Vocational Rehabilitation services



ACCORDING TO PROVIDER PROFESSIONALS

- 1) Access to dependable transportation
- 2) Fear of losing benefits
- 3) Lack of family/community support

for employment of youth with disabilities.

Additional Underserved Populations

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

Recommendations in Part

- Improve consumer engagement through emphasizing the client-counselor working alliance in counselor competencies and professional practice.
- It is recommended that GVRA maintain and continually update a list of contracted vendors including their locations and details of the services they provide. The agency website could be utilized to disseminate provider information, such as standards, fees, state-wide needs. This list needs to be made readily available to local GVRA staff as well as consumers.
- Explore opportunities to increase the availability of work experiences for students with disabilities that more closely resemble the adult workplace through expanded business partnerships.
- Expand the menu of services to employers, such as educating them by sharing success stories of employment of people with disabilities, consultation about accommodations, job task analyses and worksite accessibility. 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.

Understanding the VR Process

Going from Client to Closure

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.

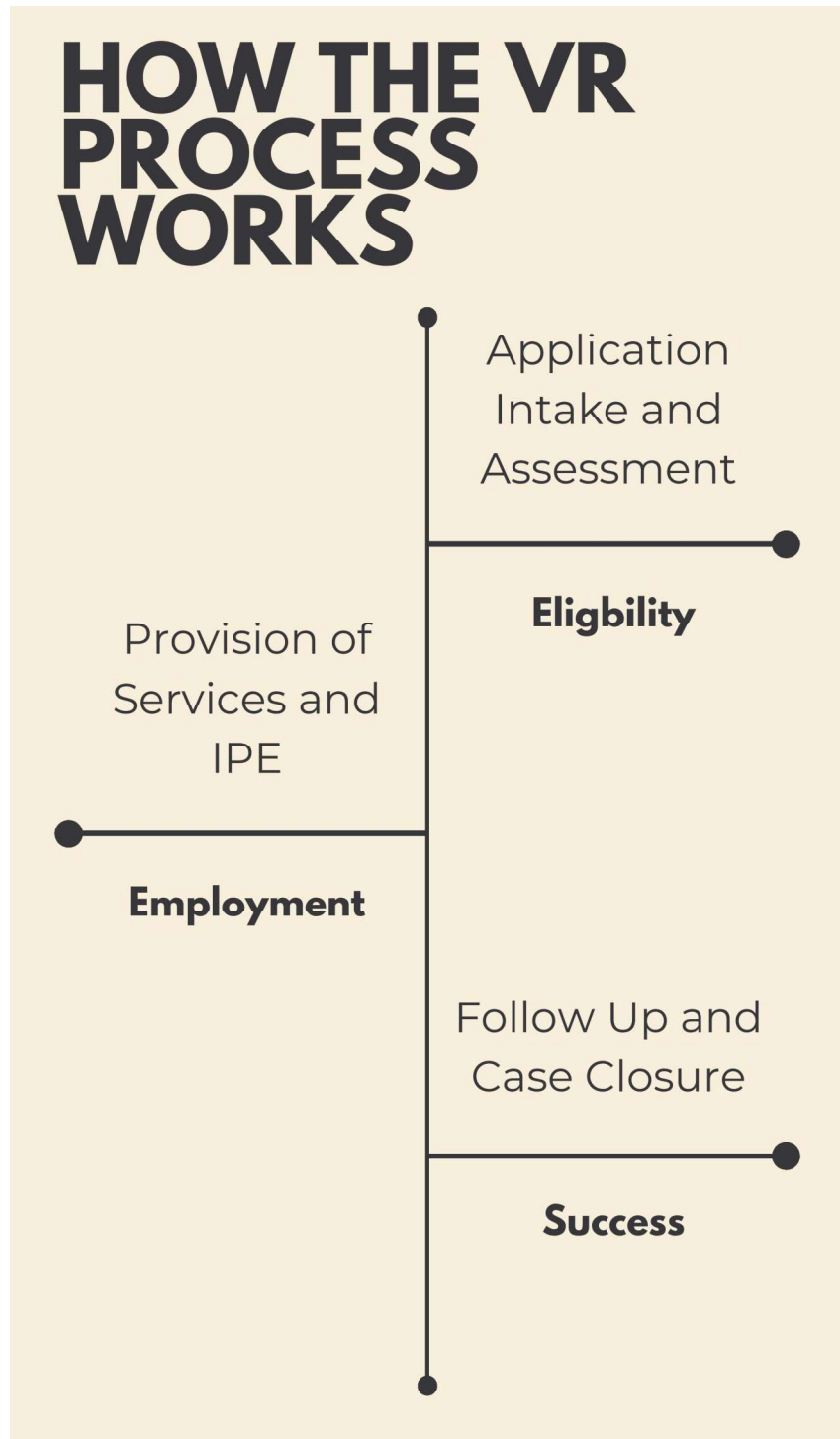
The outcomes of these assessments provide useful information in establishing services for a client.

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 CRC, the client becomes knowledgeable about competitive integrated employment options.

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 Customer Care should the need arise.



Paying it Forward

How a GVRA Client Overcame Challenges to Find Success

Having spent more than a decade working at Fort Gordon, Sylvia Hodge was not a stranger to disability. She saw it regularly in the men and women who had returned from overseas conflicts with lasting injuries, both those that were visible and those that were not. It was not uncommon for staff members working under Sylvia to see these young soldiers and become upset, but she had a message for her staff.

"I said 'They don't want you to cry for them. They want you to respect them and treat them like a human being. They don't want a pity party. They may not have arms or legs but you can give them a smile,'" Sylvia said. "I didn't pity them because pity wasn't what they needed from me. This was a lesson for me."

Sylvia started her career in New Jersey, later relocating to New York to work at Fort Hamilton. When her mother became ill in 2009, she moved to Georgia, working her way to her current position as an operations assistant at Fort Gordon. In this position, she has a host of duties to ensure the facilities remain efficient and provided the services needed by the men and women stationed there.

"It's like a bingo what I do every day," she said. "Sometimes it's scheduling or making sure different paperwork is filled out correctly and goes to the right place. Altogether, it's just making sure everything runs right ... making sure the facility is running smoothly."

In August 2015, two days after her birthday, Sylvia went in for bypass surgery on a blood clot in her ankle. The bypass failed, and six weeks later, doctors amputated her leg.

Unable to continue working, Sylvia retired from the army. She would wait months for her first prosthetic to arrive, relying on a scooter to move from one room to the next. When it did arrive, the joint at the knee failed to lock, making some movements and prolonged

standing difficult. Due to issues with her insurance, she would wait five years before she could afford a replacement.

Near the end of this period, Sylvia was able to enroll in Medicare who in turn agreed to pay for 90 percent of her new prosthetic's cost. The device Sylvia wanted felt like something out of the future, she said. The operating system inside the prosthetic learns the wearer's gait and adjusts accordingly, and it has it to be charged nightly. When compared with her malfunctioning prosthetic, the new device would improve her life in many immeasurable ways. As a result, the remaining 10 percent not covered by Medicare amounted to \$9,000. This was money Sylvia didn't have.

Unsure of where to turn, Sylvia reached out to the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency at the behest of a friend. And this decision would make all the difference, Sylvia said.

"There were times I was so upset because I couldn't get the leg I needed. It felt really hopeless," she said. "But GVRA was there for me."

By helping fund her new prosthetic, GVRA didn't just help her become more mobile, she said. The agency helped give her a new sense of purpose and direction.

"It's so important that I pay it forward," Sylvia said. "I've been given so much, so I know it's up to me to help give to others."

Today, Sylvia is back at work. With the help of assistive technology, she was able to return to her old job at Fort Gordon, and in doing so, she has a chance to share her story and inspiration with others.

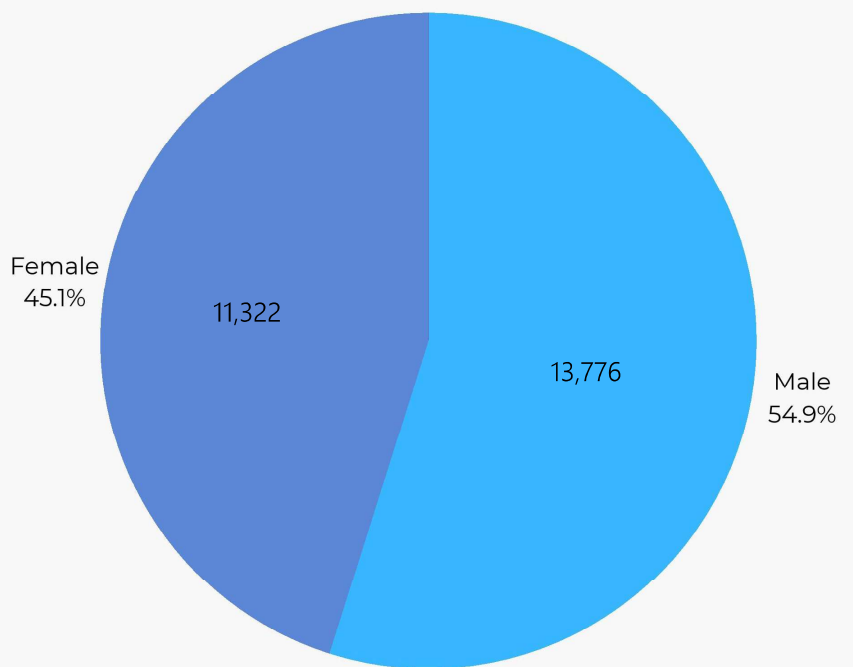
"I tell everyone how blessed I am," she said. "You have to count your blessing, and don't give up. Never give up."



Let's Do the Numbers

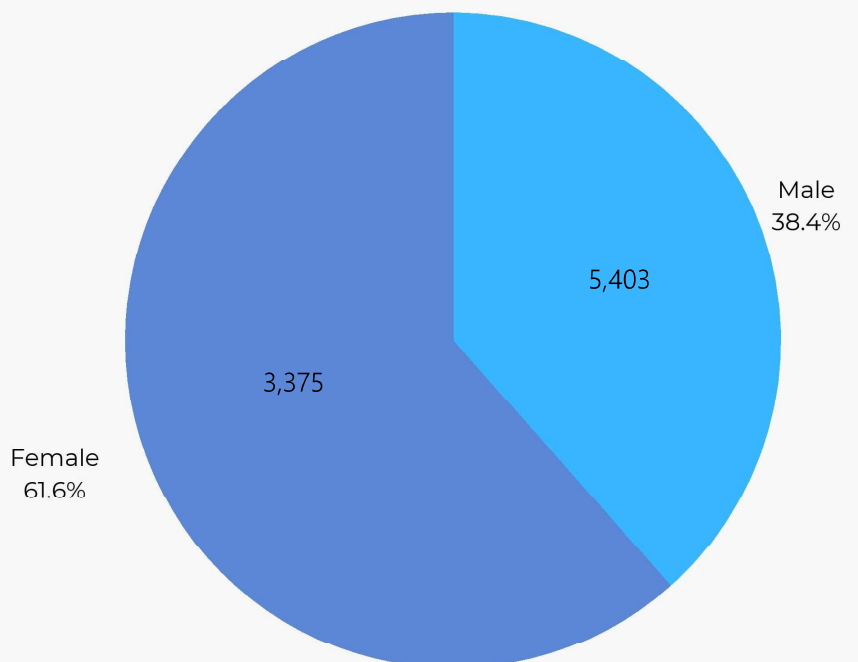
Data From Federal Fiscal Year 2020

VR CLIENTS SERVED BY GENDER



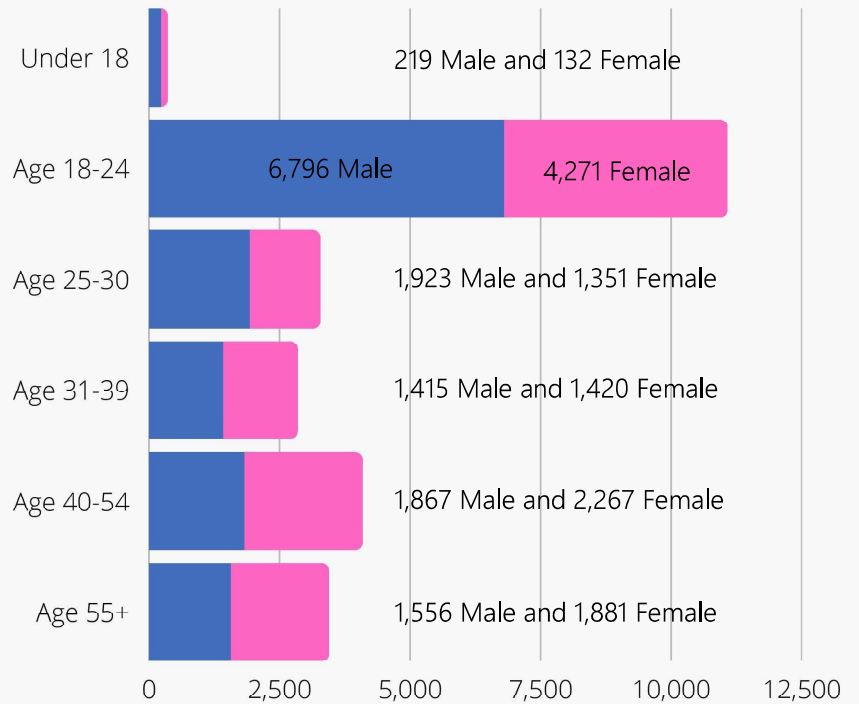
Of the 25,106 clients served, seven did not identify a gender and one was unknown. These individuals were not included in the graph above.

PTS CLIENTS SERVED BY GENDER



Of the 8,799 clients qualifying for Pre-Employment Transition Services (PTS), 18 did not identify a gender and three were unknown. These individuals were all transition aged during FFY20, meaning they had to be 24 or younger to qualify.

VR CLIENTS SERVED BY AGE AND GENDER



Of the 25,106 clients served, seven did not identify a gender and one was unknown. These individuals were not included in the graph above.

VR CLIENTS SERVED BY EDUCATION LEVEL

Not Applicable	17,753
Secondary, No HS Diploma	2,486
Special Education	1,581
High School Graduate or Equivalent	1,481
Post-Secondary, No Degree	1,009
Vocational/Technical Certificate or License	299
Bachelor's Degree	296
Master's Degree or Higher	115
Elementary Education	74
No Formal Schooling	12

TOTAL 25,106

VR CLIENTS SERVED BY RACE AND ETHNICITY

Black or African American	13,047
White	11,029
Hispanic or Latino	1,178
Multi-Racial	520
Asian	326
American Indian/Native Alaskan	57
Does Not Wish to Identify	46
Pacific Islander	43
Unknown	31

Of the 25,106 clients served, 46 choose not to identify their race and/or ethnicity, while 31 were unknown.

PTS CLIENTS SERVED BY RACE AND ETHNICITY

White	4,051
Black or African American	3,661
Hispanic or Latino	717
Unknown	610
Multi-Racial	161
Asian	89
Does Not Wish to Identify	43
American Indian/Native Alaskan	33
Pacific Islander	6

Of the 8,799 clients qualifying for Pre-Employment Transition Services, 43 choose not to identify their race and/or ethnicity, while 610 were unknown.

VR CLIENTS SERVED BY DISABILITY

Cognitive Impairments	9,303
Psychosocial Impairments	5,389
Other Mental Impairments	1,549
Other Physical Impairments	1,196
Mobility Orthopedic/Neurological Impairments	1,171
Not Available	1,077
General Physical	829
Blindness	806
Other Visual Impairments	589
Hearing Loss, Auditory Communication	556
Deafness, Visual Communication	516
Communicative Impairments	431
Mobility and Manipulation/Dexterity Orthopedic/Neurological Impairments	494
Manipulation/Dexterity Orthopedic/ Neurological Impairments	379
Other Orthopedic Impairments	379
Deafness, Auditory Communication	170
Hearing Loss, Visual Communication	104
Respiratory Impairments	101
Deaf-Blindness	36
Other Hearing Impairments	31

PTS CLIENTS SERVED BY DISABILITY

Not Available	4,488
Cognitive Impairments	3,442
Psychosocial Impairments	339
Communicative Impairments	162
Other Mental Impairments	137
Other Physical Impairments	73
Other Visual Impairments	25
Mobility Orthopedic/Neurological Impairments	20
Deafness, Visual Communication	19
Mobility and Manipulation/Dexterity Orthopedic/Neurological Impairments	18
Hearing Loss, Auditory Communication	18
Manipulaton/Dexterity Orthopedic/ Neurological Impairments	16
Deafness, Auditory Communication	12
Blindness	8
Other Orthopedic Impairments	7
General Physical	6
Other Hearing Impairments	5
Deaf-Blindness	2
Hearing Loss, Visual Communication	1
Respiratory Impairments	1

VR CLIENTS SERVED BY DISABILITY AND WEEKLY EARNINGS

Hearing Loss, Auditory Communication	\$555
Blindness	\$528
Other Hearing Impairments	\$527
Other Mental Impairments	\$476
Other Visual Impairments	\$475
Deafness, Auditory Communication	\$461
Hearing Loss, Visual Communication	\$430
Other Orthopedic Impairments	\$421
Other Physical Impairments	\$414
Mobility Orthopedic/Neurological Disabilities	\$414
General Physical	\$405
Dexterity Orthopedic/Neurological	\$368
Respiratory Impairments	\$350
Deafness, Visual Communication	\$327
Cognitive Impairments	\$318
Communicative Impairments	\$315
Manipulation Orthopedic/Neurological	\$314
Psychosocial Impairments	\$312
Combination Orthopedic/Neurological	\$294
Other Mental Disabilities	\$290
Mobility Orthopedic/Neurological Impairments	\$279
Psychosocial Disabilities	\$227
Deaf-Blindness	\$225
Cognitive Disabilities	\$224
Mobility and Dexterity Ortho/Neuro	\$102

VR CLIENTS SERVED BY DISABILITY AND AVG. WEEKLY HOURS WORKED

Other Hearing Impairments	40
Other Mental Disabilities	40
Hearing Loss, Auditory Communication	35
Dexterity Orthopedic/Neurological	35
Hearing Loss, Visual Communication	32
Other Visual Impairments	32
Communicative Impairments	31
Other Orthopedic Impairments	31
Blindness	30
Deafness, Auditory Communication	30
General Physical	30
Other Physical Impairments	30
Cognitive Impairments	29
Mobility Orthopedic/Neurological Disabilities	29
Other Mental Impairments	29
Psychosocial Impairments	29
Respiratory Impairments	29
Deafness, Visual Communication	28
Manipulation Orthopedic/Neurological	28
Combination Orthopedic/Neurological	26
Cognitive Disabilities	26
Deaf-Blindness	25
Mobility Orthopedic/Neurological Impairments	25
Psychosocial Disabilities	23
Mobility and Dexterity Ortho/Neuro	12

Disability Myths Debunked

Setting the Record Straight

At GVRA, we believe it's important to challenge harmful stereotypes related to disability. Our partners at EasterSeals compiled this list of disability myths and facts to help with this.

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: 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 5: 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 6: 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 7: 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 8: 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 9: 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 10: 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.

Where GVRA Clients Work

A Few of Our Many Employer Partners



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