

GEORGIA

STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL

ANNUAL REPORT

2022



Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency (GVRA)
gvs.georgia.gov

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Welcome From the State Rehabilitation Council Chair

The Georgia State Rehabilitation Council strives to be the “Voice of the Vocational Consumer with Disabilities” and helps ensure that these consumers are fully aware of all services through Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency (GVRA). These Georgians must be able to access services in order to support their goals of becoming productive members of their communities by securing paid employment. Lessons learned from the challenges of the pandemic include the highlighted importance of effective practices of messaging, social media, and collaborating with our state and local partners who support these Georgians in their pursuit of employment and independence.

I offer my thanks to the Executive Director and staff of GVRA, the Georgia Vocational Services Board, and my fellow members of the State Rehabilitation Council for their hard work and support during the challenging Fiscal Year 2022.

The following report outlines the SRC’s outreach, work, and efforts to positively impact the lives of Georgians with Disabilities.

Juliet Hardeman
SRC Chair

Message from the GVRA Executive Director

Thank you for taking the time to read our annual report in partnership with the State Rehabilitation Council. As Executive Director of the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency (GVRA), I deeply value the SRC’s important role as the voice of the vocational rehabilitation consumer. Having heard the ideas and feedback from our clients and staff who directly serve them, GVRA is making programmatic strides aimed at better outcomes for those who entrust us with their futures. It is our commitment to provide as many opportunities as possible for people with disabilities to receive vocational rehabilitation services, and we thank the SRC for helping us make that happen.

At GVRA, we are committed to Transparency, Empowerment, Accountability, Compassion, and Honesty (TEACH). Our core values ensure that as an agency we hold ourselves to the highest standard in providing exceptional service to the citizens of Georgia.

I believe the best and brightest days are ahead for Georgians with disabilities who strive for meaningful employment and equal opportunities. We appreciate the partners who are a part of our clients’ journeys and look forward to our continued collaboration.

Chris Wells
GVRA Executive Director

State Rehabilitation Council Members Bios

Juliet Hardeman-Chair

Juliet Hardeman is a mentor in the Georgia Parent Mentor Partnership, where she supports families of students with disabilities in Savannah-Chatham County Public Schools. Hardeman has also taught high school students with disabilities and holds a Master of Education from Georgia Southern University.

Additionally, Hardeman has served in the Army Medical Service Corps for over 21 years, and she has been deployed globally in support of combat and humanitarian missions. She and her husband, Frank have been married for over 33 years and have raised 2 daughters on Wilmington Island, Georgia.

Deborah Hibben

Deborah Hibben is a retired educator who previously worked for Henry and Clayton County public 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 has two children, Hillary Anne, and Hannah Elizabeth.

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 Rehabilitation 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 Doctor 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, and author and serves as the tribal historian of The Lower Muskogee Creek Tribe in Whigham, Georgia.

Austin McDonald

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

Cherise Mlott is Director of Corporate Real Estate Portfolio Management and Transactions at AT&T. Mlott has worked for AT&T for 23 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.

Jennifer Page

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. She resides in Atlanta.

Wina H. Low

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-Vice Chair

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.

Jerry Haywood

Jerry Haywood is the Program Coordinator and an Associate Professor of Psychology at Fort Valley State University. Before accepting a full-time faculty appointment, he worked as Director of Academic Counseling & Disability Services for nearly 10 years where he served as an advocate and liaison for students with disabilities within the University community. Haywood's research and program development strategies on African American Males in Higher Education have been well recognized by colleagues and scholars across the nation. He attributes much of his success and his passion to his experiences growing up in a small town in rural Georgia. Haywood received a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology and a Master of Science in Rehabilitation Counseling, both from Fort Valley State University. In 2012, he received a Ph.D. in Psychology from Capella University. In addition to his experience in higher education, he has over 15 years of experience and training in both group and individual counseling.

Katie Hearn-Member At Large

Katie Hearn works for the Atlanta Braves as Senior Coordinator, Digital & Accessible Services, and is their Club ADA Coordinator. At the age of 28, Hearn was diagnosed with pseudotumor cerebri, a rare disorder related to high pressure around the brain due to an excess of spinal fluid, resulting in the loss of her eyesight. In 2018, the Braves awarded Hearn with the Walker Banks Award for her extraordinary customer service. Hearn is passionate about providing opportunities to Georgians with disabilities to live, work, and thrive in our state. She resides in Smyrna.

Joy Norman

Joy Norman served for 18 years as the Director of the Center for Accommodation and Access at Columbus State University. Recently retired, she continues to work as a part-time instructor at Columbus State University and gives self-advocacy presentations for Georgia high school students with disabilities for High School High Tech. Norman recently resigned from the Columbus Mayor's Commission for Persons with Disabilities after serving 6 years as chair. Columbus Mayor Skip Henderson proclaimed September 1, 2021, as Joy Norman Day in Columbus. Norman is married to Mickey Norman. They have a son and daughter and 6 granddaughters. She holds a bachelor's degree in health science and a master's in community counseling.

Aarti Sahgal

Aarti Sahgal is the founder of Synergies Work, a 501c3 that is committed to expanding business opportunities for people with disabilities. By providing mentorship, training, and ongoing support through their network of industry experts and volunteers, the organization helps individuals find that special spark and turn it into a business. As a parent of a child with Down Syndrome, Sahgal has always been an advocate for her son and resisted services for her son that might isolate or disempower him.

Prior to founding Synergies Work, Sahgal worked as a consultant to the Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities, building inclusive communities and workforce strategies for individuals with different abilities and for three years with Parent to Parent of Georgia as a diversity coordinator. She currently serves as a secretary on the board of Georgia APSE. Sahgal holds a degree in business administration and has worked in the for-profit world for 14 years.

Understanding the VR Process

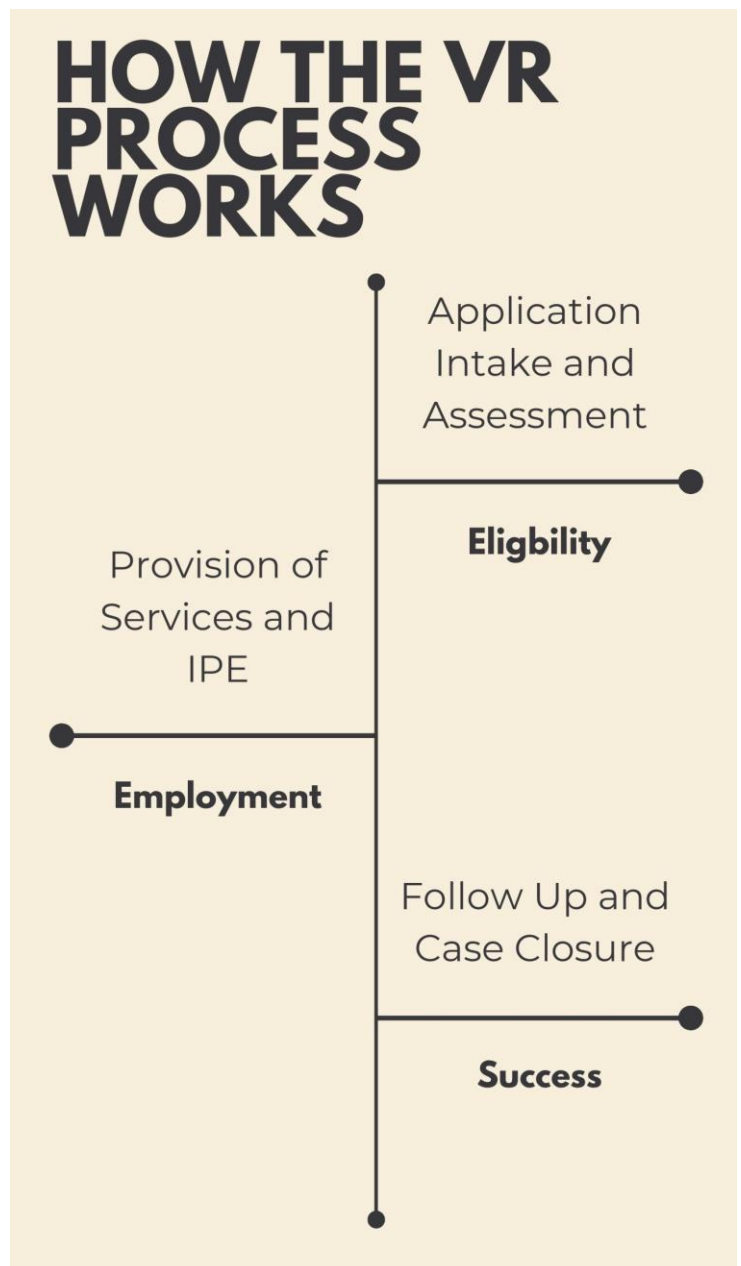
Going from Client to Closure

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.

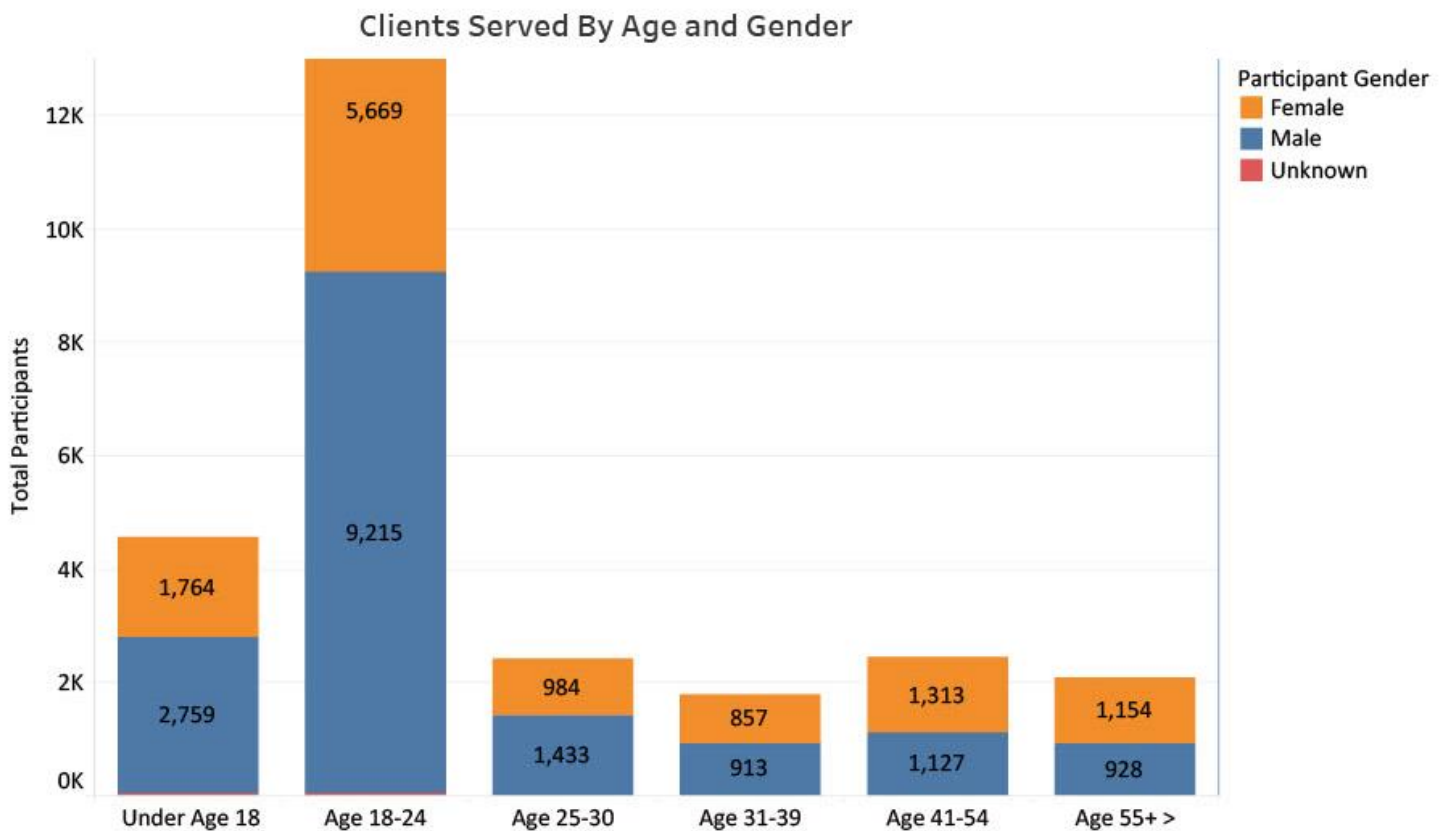
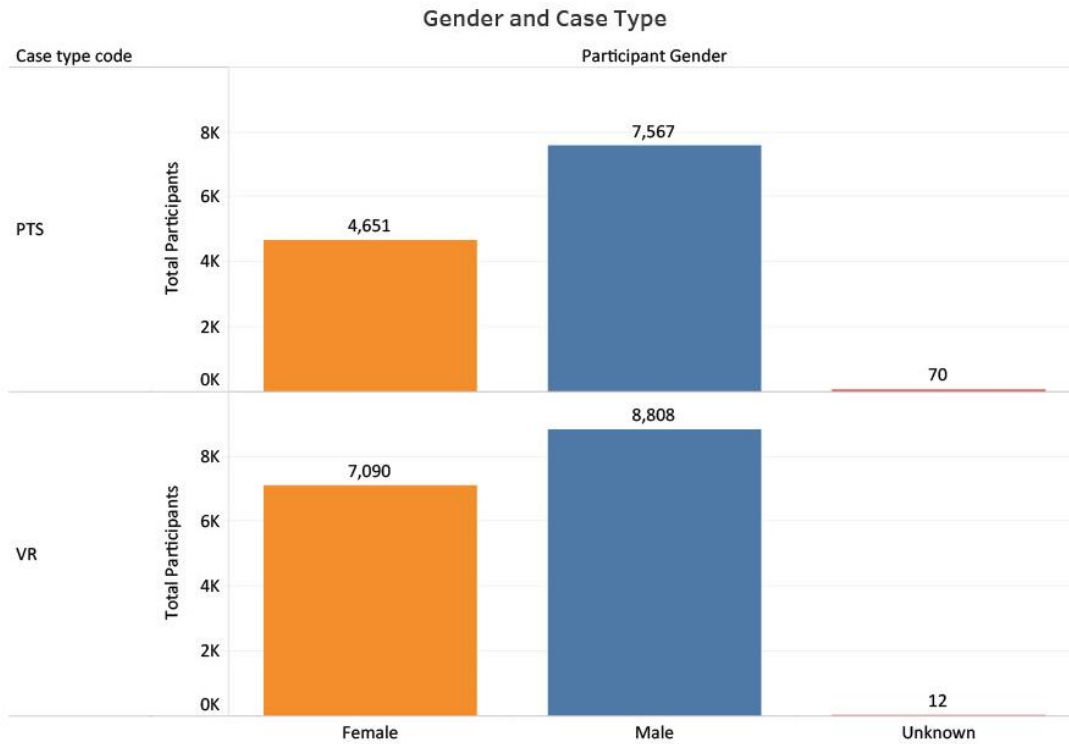
Ultimately, the client decides on the specific type of competitive employment in a career of their choice. Follow up services are provided by Vocational Rehabilitation to ensure that the employment choice of the client is stable, secure, and satisfactory to both the client and the employer.

Advocacy and support are 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.



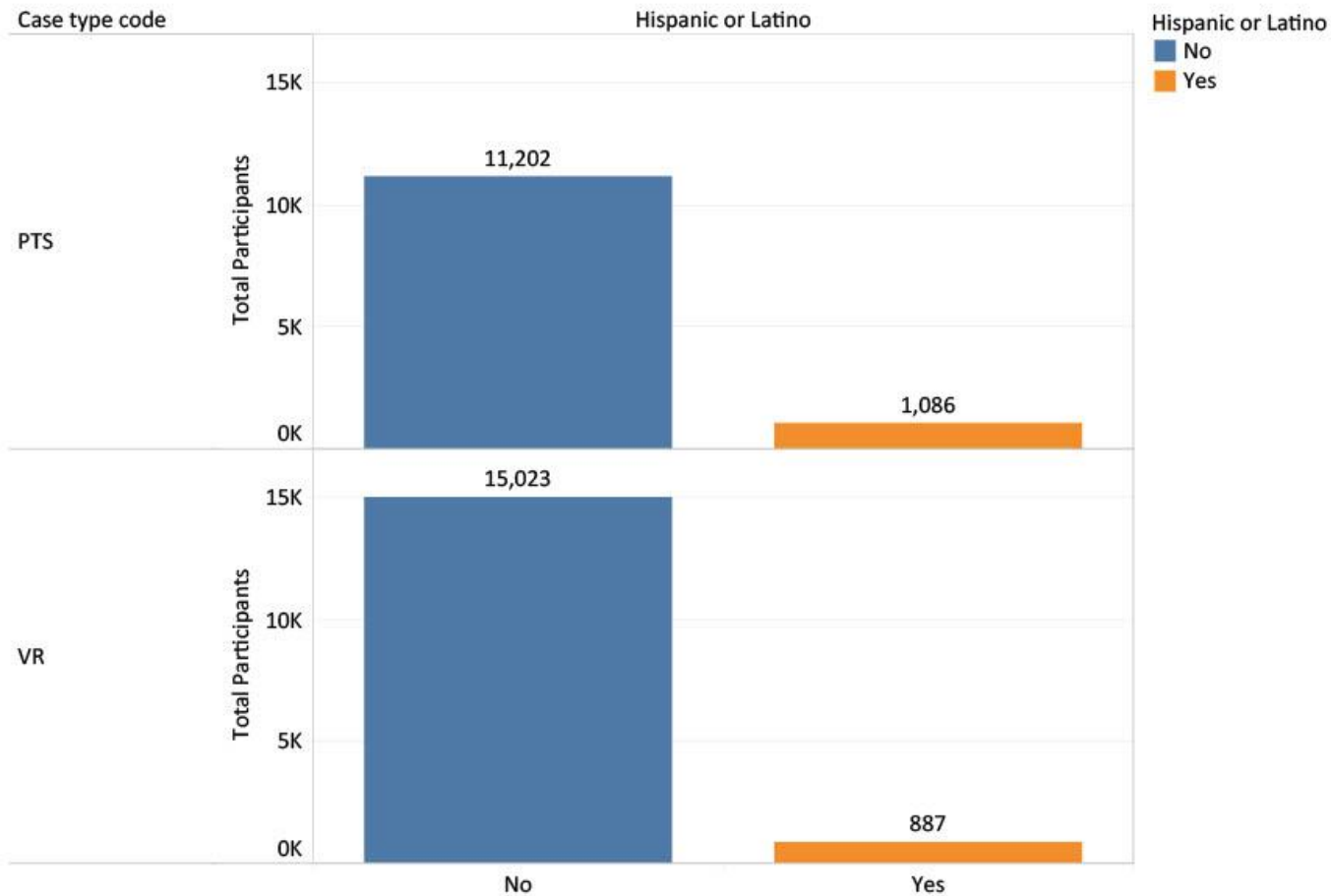
By the Numbers

Data From Federal Fiscal Year 2021

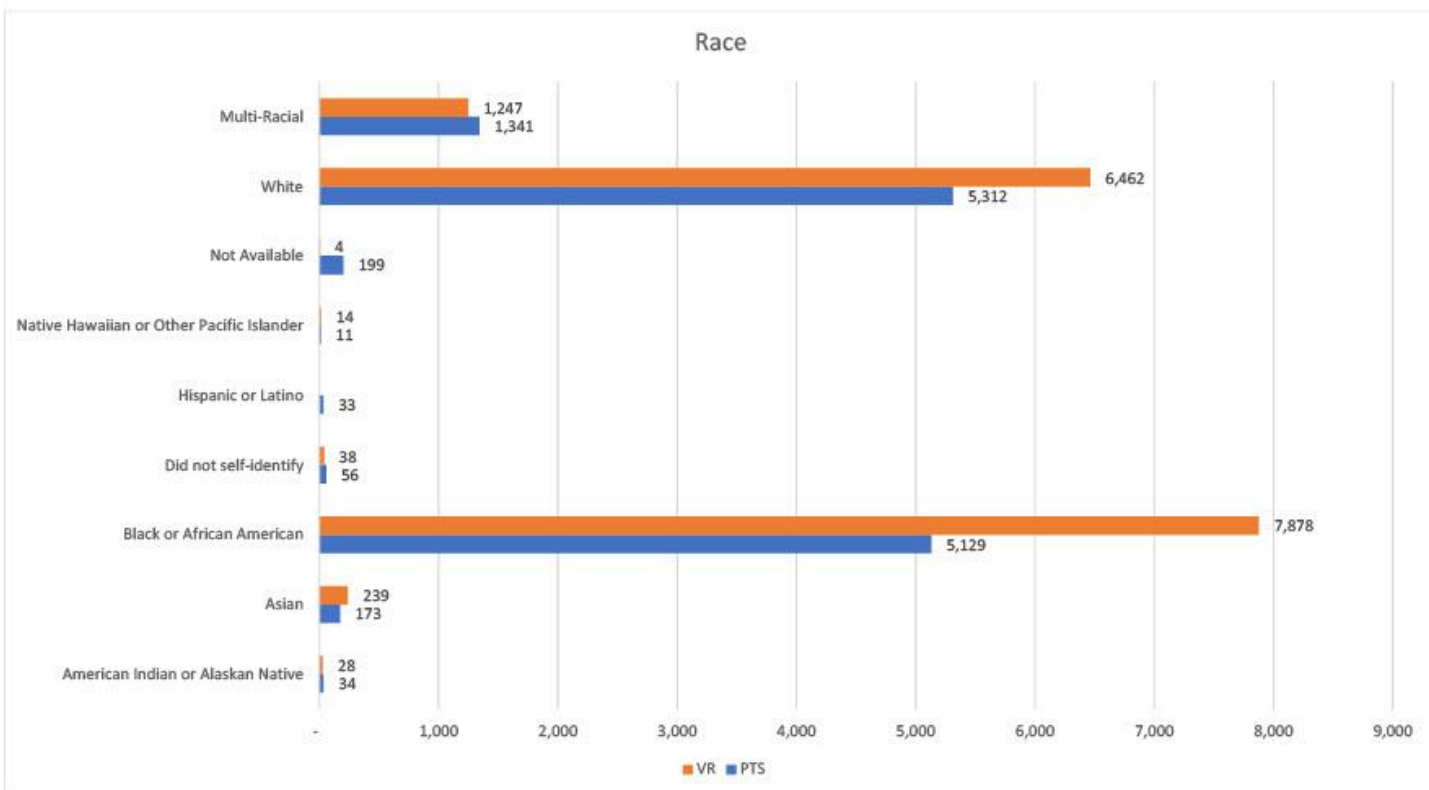


Distinct count of Participant ID for each Age Group. Color shows details about Participant Gender. *Note: 82 are Unknown.*

Ethnicity



Distinct count of Case Master ID for each Hispanic or Latino broken down by Case type code. Color shows details about Hispanic or Latino.



Clients Served by Disability

Primary Disability	PTS Clients Served	VR Clients Served	Grand Total
Blindness	29	638	667
Cognitive Impairments	1,944	3,760	5,704
Combination of Orthopedic/Neurological Impairments	22	254	276
Communicative Impairments (expressive/receptive)	273	359	632
Deaf-Blindness	5	30	35
Deafness, Primary Communication Auditory	26	136	162
Deafness, Primary Communication Visual	70	335	405
Dexterity Orthopedic/Neurological Impairments	9	56	65
General Physical Debilitation	21	466	487
Hearing Loss, Primary Communication Auditory	25	290	315
Hearing Loss, Primary Communication Visual	6	71	77
Manipulation Orthopedic/Neurological Impairments	3	123	126
Mobility Orthopedic/Neurological Impairments	7	482	489
No impairment		2	2
Not Available	70		70
Other Hearing Impairments	3	13	16
Other Mental Impairments	90	517	607
Other Orthopedic Impairments	5	125	130
Other Physical Impairments (not listed)	46	406	452
Other visual impairments	11	288	299
Psychosocial Impairments	195	1,802	1,997
Respiratory Impairments	1	32	33
Unknown	3,991	493	4,484
Mobility Orthopedic/Neurological Disabilities	17	222	239
Other Hearing Disabilities	2	6	8
Manipulation/Dexterity Orthopedic/Neurological		56	56
No Disability	2	3	5
Other Mental Disabilities	262	395	657

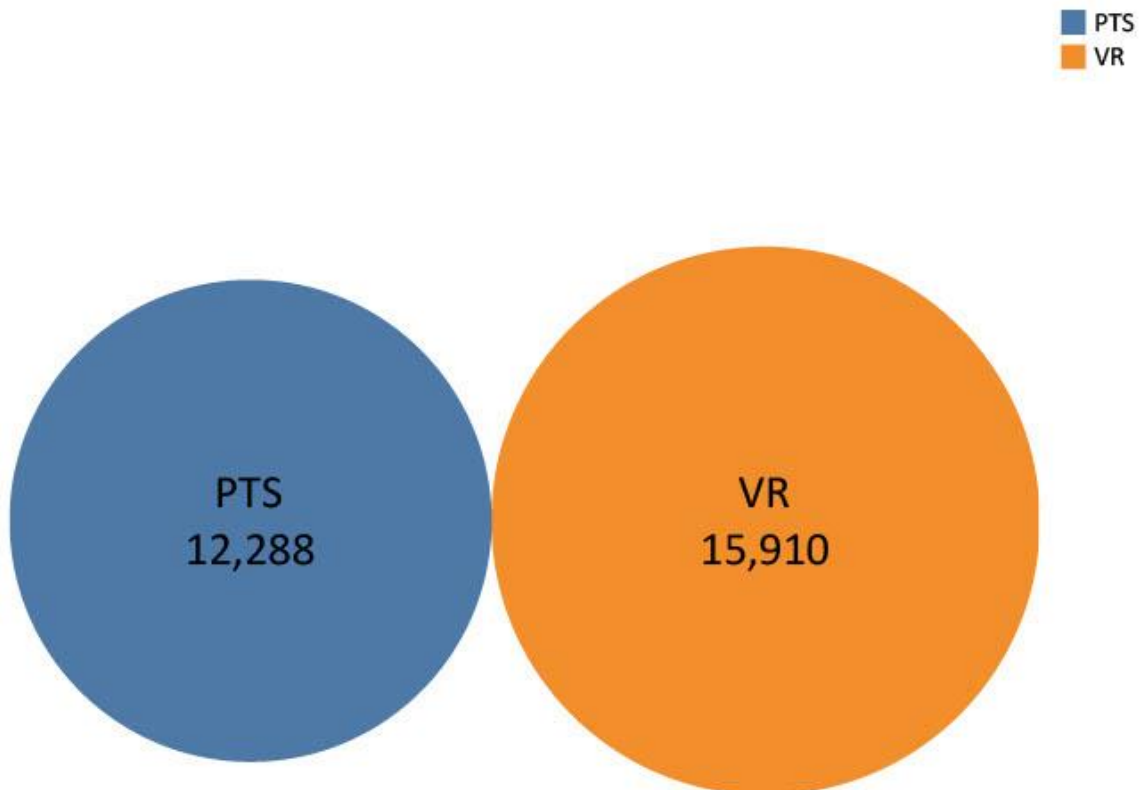
Distinct count of Participant ID broken down by Case Type and "Number Of Clients Served" vs. Primary Disability. The view is filtered on "Number Of Clients Served" and Primary Disability. The "Number Of Clients Served" filter keeps no members. The Primary Disability filter has multiple members selected.

Clients Served by Disability

Primary Disability	PTS Clients Served	VR Clients Served	Grand Total
Other Orthopedic Disabilities	18	37	55
Other Physical Disabilities	135	236	371
Other Visual Disabilities	31	134	165
Psychosocial Disabilities	437	1,794	2,231
Both Mobility and Manip/Dexterity Ortho/Neuro		62	62
Cognitive Disabilities	4,532	2,274	6,806
Respiratory Disabilities		13	13
Grand Total	12,288	15,910	28,198

Distinct count of Participant ID broken down by Case Type and "Number Of Clients Served" vs. Primary Disability. The view is filtered on "Number Of Clients Served" and Primary Disability. The "Number Of Clients Served" filter keeps no members. The Primary Disability filter has multiple members selected.

Clients Served = 28,198



Case Type and distinct count of Participant ID. Color shows details about Case Type. Size shows distinct count of Participant ID. The marks are labeled by Case Type and distinct count of Participant ID.

**Closed Successfully Rehabilitated by Primary Disability
and Average Weekly Earnings/Hours Worked**

Primary Disability	Average Weekly Earnings	Average Weekly Hours
Blindness	\$532.05	31
Cognitive Disabilities	\$264.83	24
Cognitive Impairments	\$323.62	27
Combination of Orthopedic/Neurological Impairments	\$184.69	23
Communicative Impairments (expressive/receptive)	\$241.45	28
Deafness, Primary Communication Auditory	\$508.38	34
Deafness, Primary Communication Visual	\$303.65	28
Dexterity Orthopedic/Neurological Impairments	\$825.00	40
General Physical Debilitation	\$296.50	31
Hearing Loss, Primary Communication Auditory	\$555.44	37
Hearing Loss, Primary Communication Visual	\$415.60	36
Manipulation Orthopedic/Neurological Impairments	\$379.00	30
Mobility Orthopedic/Neurological Impairments	\$319.00	33
Other Hearing Impairments	\$780.00	40
Other Mental Disabilities	\$239.29	28
Other Mental Impairments	\$298.52	30
Other Orthopedic Impairments	\$330.00	25
Other Physical Disabilities	\$315.00	35
Other Physical Impairments (not listed)	\$241.14	26
Other Visual Disabilities	\$300.00	25
Other visual impairments	\$357.83	26
Psychosocial Disabilities	\$364.64	31
Psychosocial Impairments	\$318.86	27
Respiratory Impairments	\$257.50	33

Disability Myths Debunked

Setting the Record Straight

At GVRA, we believe it's important to challenge harmful stereotypes related to disability. Our partners at Easter Seals 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 Employers



In the Community

As communities began to ease back to in-person/hybrid activities, the GA SRC actively began re-establishing contacts with partners and meeting with groups to share information about its role with GA Vocational Rehabilitation Agency (GVRA). Council members also obtained feedback in regards to vocational services and needs from current & potential clients as well as state partners, providers, parents and other agency staff. Several of our SRC members participate in and/or lead state partner boards or other community groups which also support the vision of employment and independence for Georgians with disabilities. These council members were able to bring back perception information from our state stakeholders to the Council.

One of the silver linings of the pandemic is the increased use of virtual meetings. This technology has made attending meetings, presenting information to support groups and collaborating with state partners more available and accessible for SRC members. Some of the virtual/hybrid activities reported by the SRC include attending board meetings with our state partners, Department of Behavioral Health & Developmental Disability (DBHDD) and GVRA. The SRC was also able to have other state partners such as GA Client Assistance Program (GACAP) and GA Parent Mentor Partnership (GA PMP) share information about their programs and how they support IWD. Other virtual activities include attending the GA State CIL meeting, National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM) virtual presentation, GA CAN Statewide Parent Support Group and CTAERN CTI Presentation.

In-person activities included members attending Inter-Agency meetings, school district's transition fair, Night of Champions which recognizes employers who employ IWD, tours of Cave Springs & Roosevelt Warms Springs, and GA Workforce Conference. Members also shared information about the SRC and its role in collaborating with GVRA with the Columbus Mayor's Commission for Persons with Disabilities, Waves Autism Center in Athens and Goodwill SE GA. Members also had the opportunity to represent the SRC at the SILC-GA Disability Presentation, "Inclusion" in Atlanta as well as share information about the SRC to locally elected representatives in Savannah.

Our SRC also had a member who started two community organizations to assist individuals with disabilities. Circle 21 is a social group for young adults with Down syndrome in Henry County (and the surrounding area) which focuses on supporting the IWD in learning social and communication skills. The second organization is Tennis People, an alternative program to Special Olympics which is a non-profit, local tennis program for adults with disabilities.

Our GA SRC looks forward to more opportunities in sharing information about vocational supports and services to Individuals with disabilities, their parents and community agencies staffs who support them as well as collaborating with GVRA in supporting employment and independence for Georgians with disabilities.

<u>Date</u>	<u>SRC Member</u>	<u>Activity</u>	<u>In-Person/Virtual</u>
2/10/2022	Hardeman	DBHDD Board Meeting	Virtual
3/22/2022	Hardeman	ICAN Conference- Dublin GA	In-Person
4/10/2022	Hardeman	NDEAM - Atlanta	In-Person
4/14/2022	Hardeman	Night of Champions	In-Person
5/2/2022	Hardeman	GVRA Vendor Visit- Employability	In-Person
5/2/2022	Hardeman	SE County Interagency meeting at Goodwill /Wells	In-Person
7/1/2022	Hibben	SRC Membership Recruitment	Virtual
7/13/2022	Hardeman	GVRA Board Meeting	In-Person
8/15/2022	Hardeman	GA State Center for Independent Living Meeting	Virtual
8/18/2022	Hardeman	Lowcountry Down Syndrome Society	In-Person
8/31/2022	Hardeman	Cave Spring/School for the Deaf Tour with GVRA	In-Person
9/14/2022	Hardeman	GVRA Board Meeting	Virtual
9/15/2022	Hardeman	Lowcountry Down Syndrome Society	In-Person
9/27/2022	Hardeman	Meeting with Director Wells & staff	Virtual
10/1/2022	Norman	Columbus Mayor's Commission for Persons with Disabilities	In-Person
10/4/2022	Hardeman	NDEAM Virtual presentation	Virtual
10/7/2022	Hardeman	DBHDD/GVRA/SRC meeting for CIE for IWD	Virtual
10/18/2022	Hardeman	GA CAN Presentation with Jeff Allen	Virtual
10/25/2022	Hibben	Waves Autism Center in Warner Robins	In-Person
10/26/2022	SRC-select	Tour Roosevelt Warm Springs	In-Person
11/1/2022	Hardeman	GA Workforce Conference- Athens	In-Person
11/10/2022	Hardeman	GA PMP Leadership Meeting	Virtual
11/16/2022	Hardeman	GVRA Board Meeting	Virtual
11/28/2022	Hardeman	CTI	Virtual
12/9/2022	Hearn	SILC-GA Disability Presentation " Inclusion:	In-Person
12/9/2022	Hardeman	Present SRC info to elected officials	In-Person