

GEORGIA

STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL

ANNUAL REPORT

20
23



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

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Welcome From the State Rehabilitation Council Chair

As Georgia continues to experience record economic development success, Georgians with disabilities must have a seat at the planning table to ensure that these opportunities are made available to all Georgians. All partners, including employers, need to be aware of the value of hiring individuals with disabilities as well as the services and supports that GVRA can offer to both the individuals and the employers. The Georgia State Rehabilitation Council's role as the "Voice of the Vocational Consumer with Disabilities", will continue to message the employment needs and barriers for these consumers as well as help ensure that all are fully aware of the extensive services available through GVRA.

Thank you to GVRA Director Chris Wells, the GVRA staff, the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Services (GVRS) Board and the Georgia SRC for their hard work in supporting Georgians' with disabilities pursuit of employment and independence.

Juliet Hardeman
SRC Chair

Message from the GVRA Executive Director

At GVRA, we are committed to Collaboration, Compassion, Integrity, Innovation, and Service as our core values. These values ensure that as an agency, we hold ourselves to the highest standard in providing exceptional service to the citizens of Georgia.

The best and brightest days are ahead for Georgians with disabilities who strive for meaningful employment and equal opportunities. The GVRA is building a client-focused agency that partners with the community to expand opportunities for Georgians with disabilities. We greatly appreciate the partners who are a part of our clients' journeys and look forward to our continued collaboration. We want to especially thank the SRC for their support under the leadership of Chairwoman Juliet Hardeman.

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.

Peggy Venable

Christina Peggy Venable brings over 40 years of experience with vocational rehabilitation services, case management, job placement, and vocational evaluation to the SRC. Currently, she is the project director of The Muskogee Vocational Rehabilitation Program. Peggy has also served as a family, individual, and mental health counselor with various other agencies. Peggy is certified in work adjustment, vocational evaluation, job placement, and worker's compensation. Her professional affiliations include serving as a member of the Georgia and National Rehabilitation Association, Georgia State Rehab Council, and the Georgia Statewide Coalition on Blindness.

In addition, she serves as treasurer for the Executive Board of the Consortia of Administrators for Native American Rehabilitation (CANAR). Peggy is a member of The Lower Muskogee Creek Tribe and serves as the project director for the Muskogee Vocational Rehabilitation Program. She is a singer, songwriter, author, and serves as tribal historian of The Lower Muskogee Creek Tribe in Whigham, Georgia. Peggy holds a master's in psychology, a doctorate in theology, a Ph.D. in philosophy, and a Doctor of Divinity, Summa Cum Laude.

Cherise Mlott

A native Atlantan, Cherise Mlott is a staunch advocate for the Multiple Sclerosis Society. In the past 19 years, she has raised over \$310,000 to find a cure for MS. Mlott currently serves as director of Corporate Real Estate Portfolio Management and Transactions at AT&T, where she has worked for 23 years.

Mlott earned her bachelor's degree from the University of Georgia and an MBA from Georgia State University. She lives in Brookhaven with her husband, Brent, and their Irish Setter, Katie.

Jennifer Page

Jennifer M. Page is the director of the Georgia Client Assistance Program (CAP), where she has worked for the past 13 years. CAP advocates and performs community outreach to educate individuals who may not be aware of the services GVRA (and CAP) provide. Having been involved with the disability community for 18 years, Jennifer is a member of the Georgia Rehabilitation Association and the Georgia Rehabilitation Counselors and Educators Association.

To increase her professional knowledge, Jennifer regularly attends workshops. She also participates in training sessions so she can better assist her clients. Jennifer holds a bachelor's in psychology from South Carolina State University and a master's in counseling from Webster University. She resides in Atlanta.

Wina H. Low

Wina Low is the State Director of the Division for Special Education Services and Supports with the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE). Prior to serving as State Director, she worked in other roles at GaDOE. Before joining GaDOE, Wina was the director of student services for Carrollton City Schools and served as an educational diagnostician and as a classroom teacher.

Wina earned a bachelor's degree in Middle Grades Education from Brenau University. She holds a master's degree as well as an education specialist degree in Special Education and Special Education Administration from the University of West Georgia. Wina 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 15 years. Previously, she worked for six years as a Parent Educator for the Babies Can't Wait program for Georgia State University.

Karen has been supporting the disability community since the birth of her daughter over 35 years ago. She holds a bachelor's degree from Virginia Commonwealth University. Karen and her husband, Peter, live in Lilburn and are the parents of two daughters.

Jerry Haywood

Jerry Haywood is a program coordinator and an associate professor of Psychology at Fort Valley State University. Before accepting his full-time faculty appointment, Jerry worked nearly 10 years as director of Academic Counseling & Disability Services. In that role, he served as an advocate and a liaison for students with disabilities. In addition to his experience in higher education, Jerry has over 15 years of experience and training in group and individual counseling.

His research and program development strategies on African American Males in Higher Education are well recognized by colleagues and scholars across the nation. Jerry attributes much of his success and his passion to his experiences growing up in a small town in rural Georgia. He earned a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology and a Master of Science in Rehabilitation Counseling, both from Fort Valley State University. In 2012, Jerry received his Ph.D. in Psychology from Capella University.

Katie Hearn-Member At Large

At the age of 28, Katie was diagnosed with pseudotumor cerebri, a rare disorder related to high pressure around the brain due to an excess of spinal fluid. That condition caused the loss of her eyesight.

Currently, she works for the Atlanta Braves as senior coordinator, Digital & Accessible Services, and serves as the Club's ADA Coordinator. In 2018, the Braves awarded Katie the Walker Banks Award for her extraordinary customer service. She is passionate about providing opportunities for people with

disabilities to live, work, and thrive in our state. Katie resides in Smyrna.

Joy Norman

For 18 years, Joy Norman served 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.

She also delivers self-advocacy presentations to high school students with disabilities through High School High Tech. Joy served six years as the chair of the Columbus Mayor's Commission for Persons with Disabilities. To honor her public service, Columbus Mayor Skip Henderson proclaimed September 1, 2021, as Joy Norman Day in Columbus. Joy and her husband, Mickey Norman, have a son, daughter, and six 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 501-c-3 that is committed to expanding business opportunities for people with disabilities. By providing mentorship, training, and ongoing support through its network of industry experts and volunteers, the organization helps individuals find their special spark and turn it into a business. As a parent of a child with Down Syndrome, Aarti has always been an advocate for her son; she resisted services that might isolate or disempower him.

Prior to founding Synergies Work, Aarti was a consultant to the Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities, where she built inclusive communities and developed workforce strategies for individuals with different abilities. She worked in the for-profit world for 14 years and spent three years with Parent to Parent of Georgia as a diversity coordinator. Furthering her commitment to advocate for individuals with different abilities, Aarti currently serves as a board secretary for the Georgia Association of People Supporting Employment First (APSE). She holds a degree in business administration.

Col. Dr. Samuel Verniero, Jr.

A resident of Holly Springs, Samuel is a Kentucky Colonel, an Arkansas Traveler and Ambassador, a United Nations World Humanity Commission Deputy High Commissioner-Ambassador, and a member of the Selective Service System Appellate Judicial Board. In 2020, Incyte Corp. and Cure Media Group named Samuel a 2020 MPN Hero for his advocacy on behalf of those living with Myeloproliferative Neoplasms (MPN). A tireless advocate, Samuel has also served on the DeKalb Community Service Board and the Department of Behavioral Health Advisory Council.

On Capitol Hill, Georgians honored Samuel's advocacy through two separate Georgia Senate resolutions in 2020 and in 2023. Similarly, he was honored by the Georgia House of Representatives through two separate resolutions in 2020 and in 2021. In 2019, Gov. Brian Kemp named Samuel an Honorary Lt. Colonel Aide De Camp, along with other commendations.

Michele Mason

Michele Mason is the disability services lead for the Technical College System of Georgia's (TCSG) Office of Workforce Development and serves as the state coordinator for the WorkSource Georgia Employment Network.

An advocate for the disabled, Michele has committed her career to serving the special populations community. In 1996, she began her employment services career with United Cerebral Palsy of New York City, where she served as a supported employment specialist for significantly disabled adults. Before relocating to the great state of Georgia, Michele worked in New York City for various public and private organizations that implemented initiatives for special populations.

In her career with the State of Georgia, she has served in various positions, including rehabilitation employment specialist, employment services manager, and board & council liaison for the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency (GVRA). Michele studied Human Services at Audrey Cohen College of Human Services, obtained a degree in Organizational Leadership from Point University, and is a Certified Public Manager, Certified Work Incentive Practitioner, and Certified Train-the-Trainer for Windmills and EOPII placement practices. A native New Yorker, Michele lives in Griffin with her two daughters, Monet and Tamia.

Myndi Kuhlmann

A native Mississippian, Myndi Kuhlmann Pryor moved to Athens in 2006 to work for the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency, first as a certified rehabilitation counselor, then as a rehabilitation unit manager. In 2011, Myndi accepted employment with Goodwill of North Georgia. She currently serves as senior director of career services at Goodwill; her previous positions with the organization include regional manager in Workforce Development and director of Workforce Development. During her tenure at Goodwill of North Georgia, Myndi has worked on a variety of state, federal, and private foundation grants/contracts which serve people with disabilities, veterans, returning citizens, low-income Georgians, and youth.

Myndi is passionate about understanding people with other abilities and supporting their success in work and in life. Currently, she serves as vice president of the Georgia Association of Training and Employment Supports; chairman of the board for the Georgia Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities, High School High Tech program; a provider council member, Metro Atlanta Exchange; a steering committee member, United Way Metro Atlanta Youth Collaborative; as a NextGen Youth committee member, Atlanta Regional Commission WorkSource; and a member of the Work-based Learning Advisory Panel, National Skills Coalition. In 2016, she served as president of the Georgia Rehabilitation Association. Myndi holds a bachelor's in psychology from Mississippi State University and a master's in counseling psychology from the University of Southern Mississippi.

Understanding the VR Process

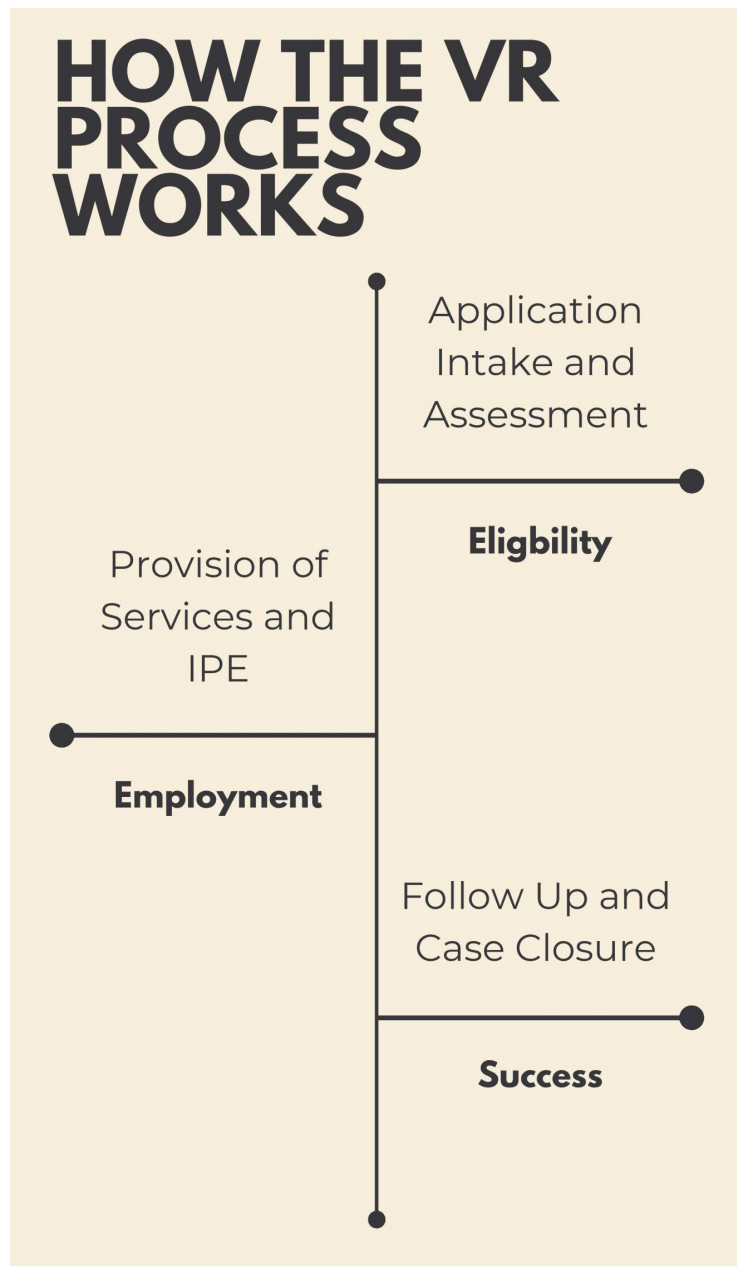
Going from Client to Closure

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.

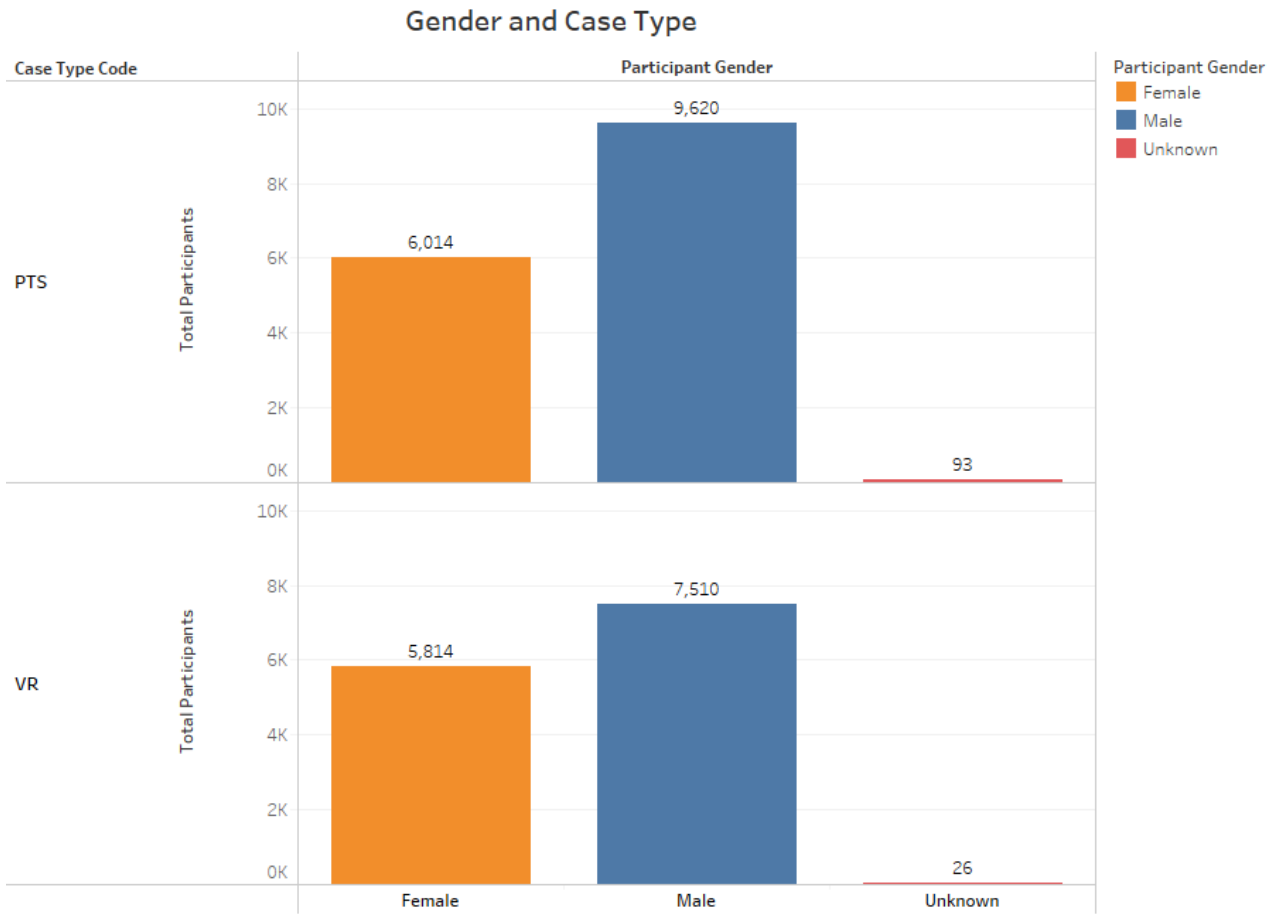
Ultimately, the client decides on the specific type of competitive employment in a career of their choice. Follow up services are provided by Vocational Rehabilitation to ensure that the employment choice of the client is stable, secure, and satisfactory to both the client and the employer.

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.

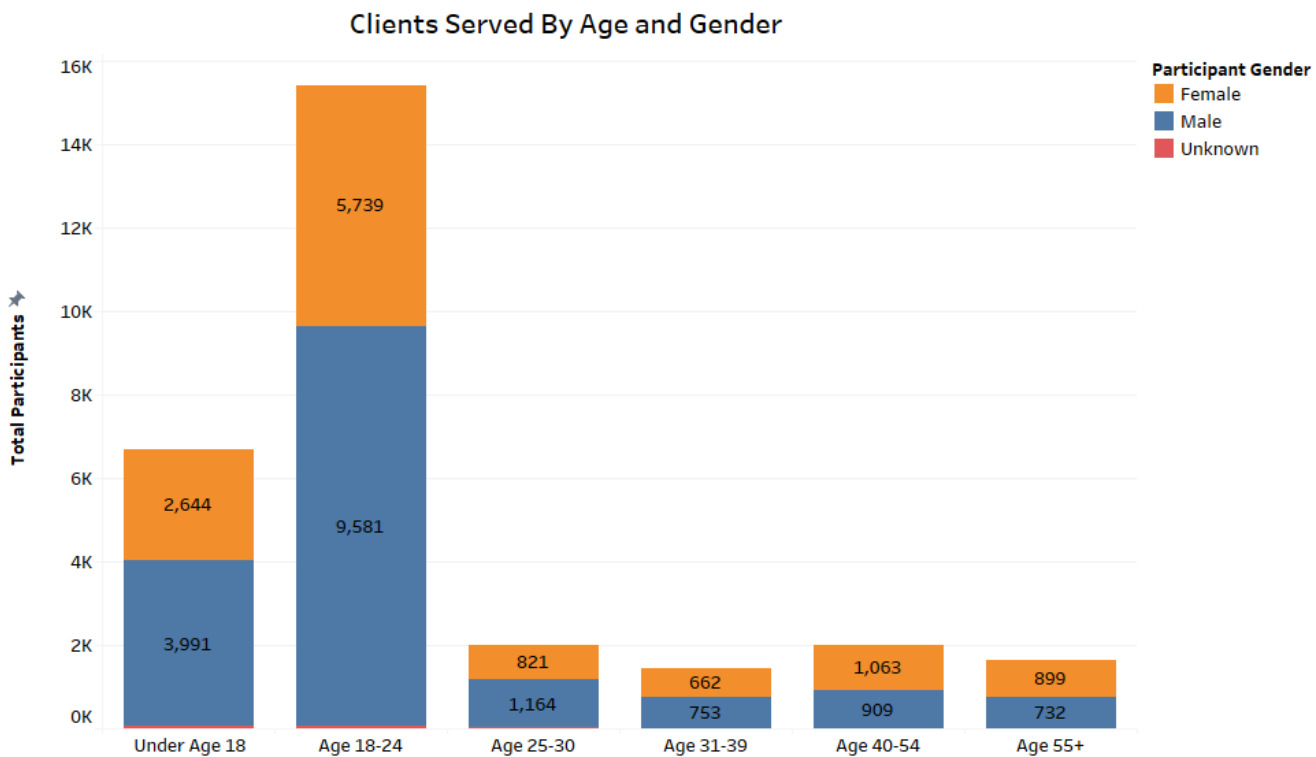


By the Numbers

Data From Federal Fiscal Year 2022

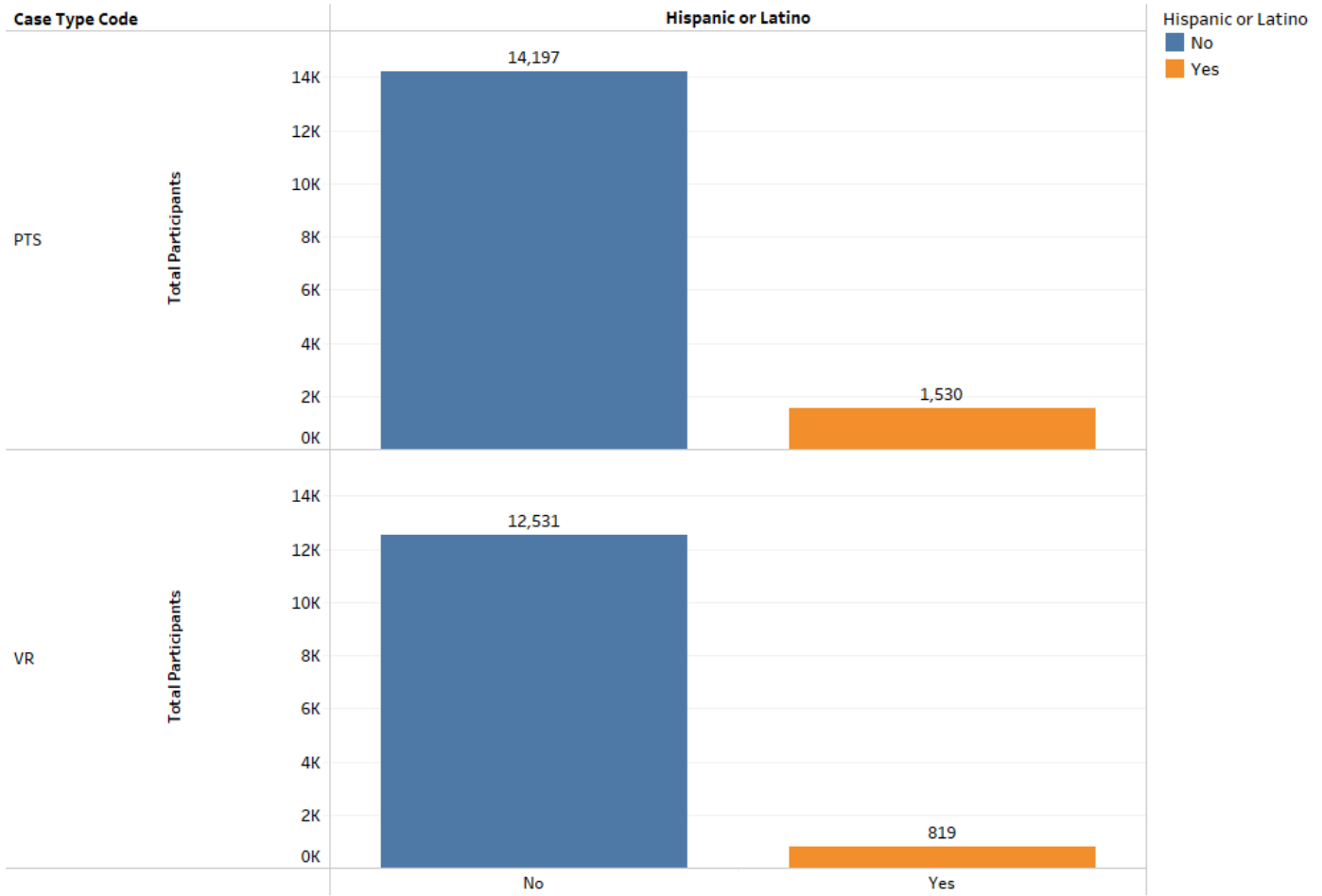


Distinct count of Case Master ID for each Participant Gender broken down by Case Type Code. Color shows details about Participant



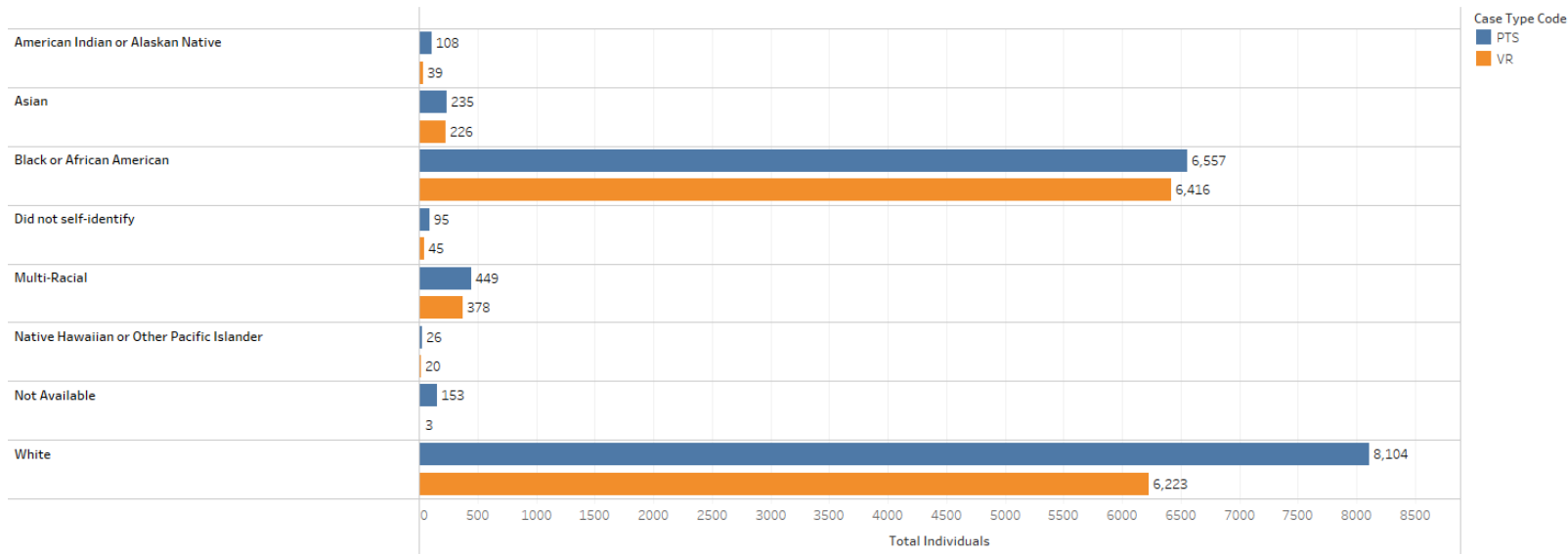
Distinct count of Case Master ID for each Age Range. Color shows details about Participant Gender. Note: 119 are Unknown.

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.

Race

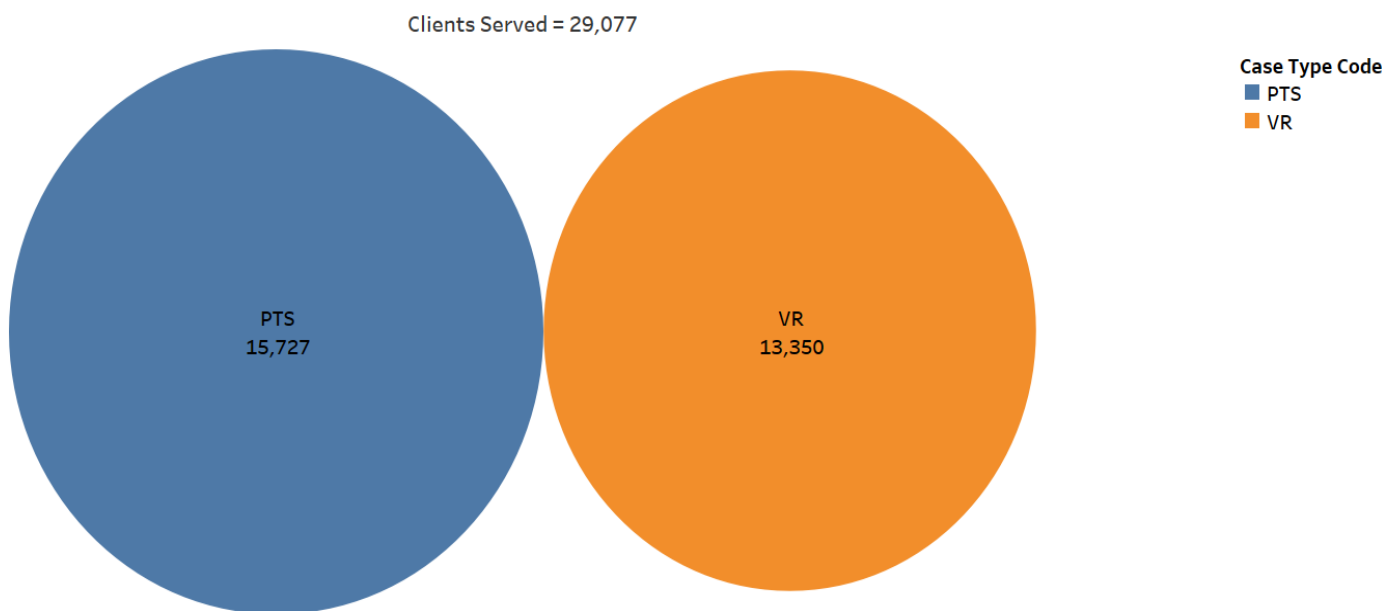


Distinct count of Case Master ID for each Case Type Code broken down by Race. Color shows details about Case Type Code.

Clients Served By Disability

Primary Disability	PTS	VR	Grand Total
Grand Total	15,727	13,350	29,077
Blindness	32	546	578
Both Mobility and Manipulation/Dexterity Orthopedic/Neurological Impairments	64	287	351
Cognitive Impairments	8,203	5,200	13,403
Communicative Impairments (expressive/receptive)	262	287	549
Deaf-Blindness	4	21	25
Deafness, Primary Communication Auditory	51	112	163
Deafness, Primary Communication Visual	74	198	272
General Physical Debilitation	24	346	370
Hearing Loss, Primary Communication Auditory	48	223	271
Hearing Loss, Primary Communication Visual	6	38	44
Manipulation/Dexterity Orthopedic/Neurological Impairments	30	185	215
Mobility Orthopedic/Neurological Impairments	34	590	624
No Impairment	21	3	24
Not Available	5,310	371	5,681
Other Hearing Impairments	4	7	11
Other Mental Impairments	413	729	1,142
Other Orthopedic Impairments	24	123	147
Other Physical Impairments (not listed)	187	486	673
Other Visual Impairments	39	382	421
Psychosocial Impairments	891	3,178	4,069
Respiratory Impairments	6	38	44

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 Primary Disability filter has multiple members selected.



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

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

Primary Disability	Average Weekly Earnings	Average Weekly Hours
Blindness	\$468	31
Both Mobility and Manipulation/Dexterity Orthopedic/Neurological Impairments	\$405	31
Cognitive Impairments	\$344	26
Combination of Orthopedic/Neurological Impairments	\$538	30
Communicative Impairments (expressive/receptive)	\$387	28
Deafness, Primary Communication Auditory	\$574	32
Deafness, Primary Communication Visual	\$483	32
General Physical Debilitation	\$385	31
Hearing Loss, Primary Communication Auditory	\$640	35
Manipulation/Dexterity Orthopedic/Neurological Impairments	\$245	22
Mobility Orthopedic/Neurological Impairments	\$542	30
Other Hearing Impairments	\$550	38
Other Mental Impairments	\$350	28
Other Orthopedic Impairments	\$508	33
Other Physical Impairments (not listed)	\$424	29
Other visual impairments	\$586	28
Psychosocial Impairments	\$385	29
Respiratory Impairments	\$242	24

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

The Georgia State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) kicked off 2023 with extensive engagement with Georgians with disabilities and community partners as well as supporting the implementation of the 2023 Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA). In early January 2023, the SRC held a meeting to review the 2020 CSNA Executive Summary with council members, GVRA staff, GVRS Board President and the research team conducting the CSNA. The CSNA committee held monthly meetings to review plans, outreach processes and next steps for the CSNA throughout the year. Multiple focus groups and individual interviews were also held by the research team. The GA SRC supported the work by sharing the survey opportunities through their personal networks in Georgia as well as participating in the survey, focus groups and/or individual interviews.

SRC outreach included meetings with Georgians with disabilities, their families, and caregivers; and partner agencies and advocacy groups which support individuals with disabilities (IWD). SRC members attended advocacy days at our state capitol to hear concerns from IWDs and had opportunities to share and inform Georgia's elected officials about the barriers to employment and share ideas to improve employment outcomes. Several GA SRC members are also members of key partner boards and councils which support the vision of employment and independence for Georgians with disabilities. These council members bring back perception information from our state stakeholders to the GA SRC.

In their home communities around the state, SRC members also were busy meeting with IWDs, community leaders and organizations. Council members attended activities during National Disability Employment Awareness

Month and participated in conversations about employment, Mayor's Councils to address transportation barriers and next steps to improve services and supports for IWD. One of our members had an opportunity to participate in a national conversation about employment with Workingnation.org. SRC members also supported two policy workshops and shared the public comment opportunities for changes to policy throughout their extensive personal networks in Georgia. Additionally, SRC members had numerous opportunities to engage with GVRA staff and leadership through events at the Roosevelt Warm Springs Comprehensive Rehabilitation Center (RWS), the Georgia National Fair in Perry, GA, GVRS Board meetings, through social media and Teams meetings.

SRC members also had opportunities to further their personal knowledge by attending the National Coalition of State Rehabilitation Council meeting in Savannah, GA as well as complete individual training modules. Our GA SRC now meets our By-Laws membership requirements. Having a full council will enable the GA SRC to increase outreach to underserved or unrepresented parts of our state to hear concerns as well as share opportunities about vocational support and services through GVRA.

The 2023 meetings have been a combination of virtual and in-person. The year has included tours of Project Search Chico's Distribution Site in Winder, a hybrid meeting with the GA Regents Center of Learning Disorders and a tour of the UGA Disability Resource Center in Athens. Some of the other partner meetings by GA SRC members include the Department of Behavioral Health & Developmental Disabilities (DBHDD), GA State CIL meeting, Georgia Project Search, National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM), Savannah Blind & Low Vision event, GA CAN Parent Group, and

numerous other local groups.

Our GA SRC looks forward to building on progress in communicating, collaborating and coordinating with GVRA to better share information about vocational supports and services to Individuals with disabilities (IWD), their families and community agencies who support these IWD.

<u>Date</u>	<u>SRC Member</u>	<u>Activity</u>	<u>In-Person/Virtual</u>
10/3/2023	Norman	Public Meeting-Metra Public Transportation	In-Person
3/3/2023	Norman	Roosevelt Warm Springs Meet & Greet New Director	In-Person
10/28/2023	Norman	National Coalition of State Rehabilitation Councils	In-Person
10/29/2023	Norman	National Coalition of State Rehabilitation Councils	In-Person
10/28/2023	Mason	National Coalition of State Rehabilitation Councils	In-Person
10/29/2023	Mason	National Coalition of State Rehabilitation Councils	In-Person
10/28/2023	Barnes	National Coalition of State Rehabilitation Councils	In-Person
10/29/2023	Barnes	National Coalition of State Rehabilitation Councils	In-Person
10/28/2023	Hardeman	National Coalition of State Rehabilitation Councils	In -Person
10/29/2023	Hardeman	National Coalition of State Rehabilitation Councils	In-Person
10/28/2023	Kuhlmann	National Coalition of State Rehabilitation Councils	In-Person
10/29/2023	Kuhlmann	National Coalition of State Rehabilitation Councils	In-Person
10/12/2023	Hardeman	GVRS Board Meeting at Perry Fair	In-Person