

2024

GEORGIA

STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL

ANNUAL REPORT



Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency (GVRA)

gvs.georgia.gov

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Welcome From the State Rehabilitation Council Chair

Continued record growth in Georgia's labor market fuels more employment opportunities for all, including Georgians with disabilities. For this under-represented population to have its fair share of employment opportunities, all partners will need to continue to work together to blend, braid, and sequence their resources to meet the unique training and support needs of Individuals with Disabilities (IWDs). Messaging about the supports and services provided through the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency (GVRA) to these IWDs, their families and caregivers, state partners, and the businesses who are desperately seeking workforce talent will continue to be a priority for the SRC. Also, relaying stakeholders' feedback about processes that are working, those that are not working, and what could be done differently will help strengthen services and improve consumer satisfaction and CIE outcomes for IWDs.

On behalf of the Georgia State Rehabilitation Council, I would like to express our sincere gratitude to GVRA Executive Director Chris Wells, the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Services (GVRS) Board, and the dedicated agency staff for their tireless efforts in supporting Georgians with disabilities in their pursuit of employment and independence.

Juliet Hardeman
SRC Chair

Message from the GVRA Executive Director

At the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency, we are dedicated to our core values – Collaboration, Compassion, Integrity, Innovation, and Service. These guiding principles drive our work and underscore our commitment to delivering quality, comprehensive services that empower individuals with disabilities across our state.

Our approach combines personalized support, strong partnerships, and innovative strategies that are designed to remove barriers to employment for those we serve. Critical to our success is our collaboration with our stakeholders and partners, like the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC), which provides unwavering support to our agency.

On behalf of GVRA, I want to express my heartfelt gratitude to the members of the SRC, led by Chairwoman Juliet Hardeman, as well as to all the supporters who have been instrumental in our progress and success. We look forward to continuing our efforts to serve the state and advance our mission of empowering Georgians with disabilities to lead independent lives.

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.

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 of 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.

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 that 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.

Moses Little

Moses is a graduate of Georgia State University with a B.A. in psychology and minor in educational psychology. He has a master's in rehabilitation counseling from Mercer University in Atlanta, GA. Moses has been employed with Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency for the past two years, primarily serving the blind/low vision community as the district's Blind/Low Vision counselor. He has also worked facilitating substance abuse groups. Moses is currently in school at Mississippi State University to receive a Vision Specialist graduate certificate.

Understanding the VR Process

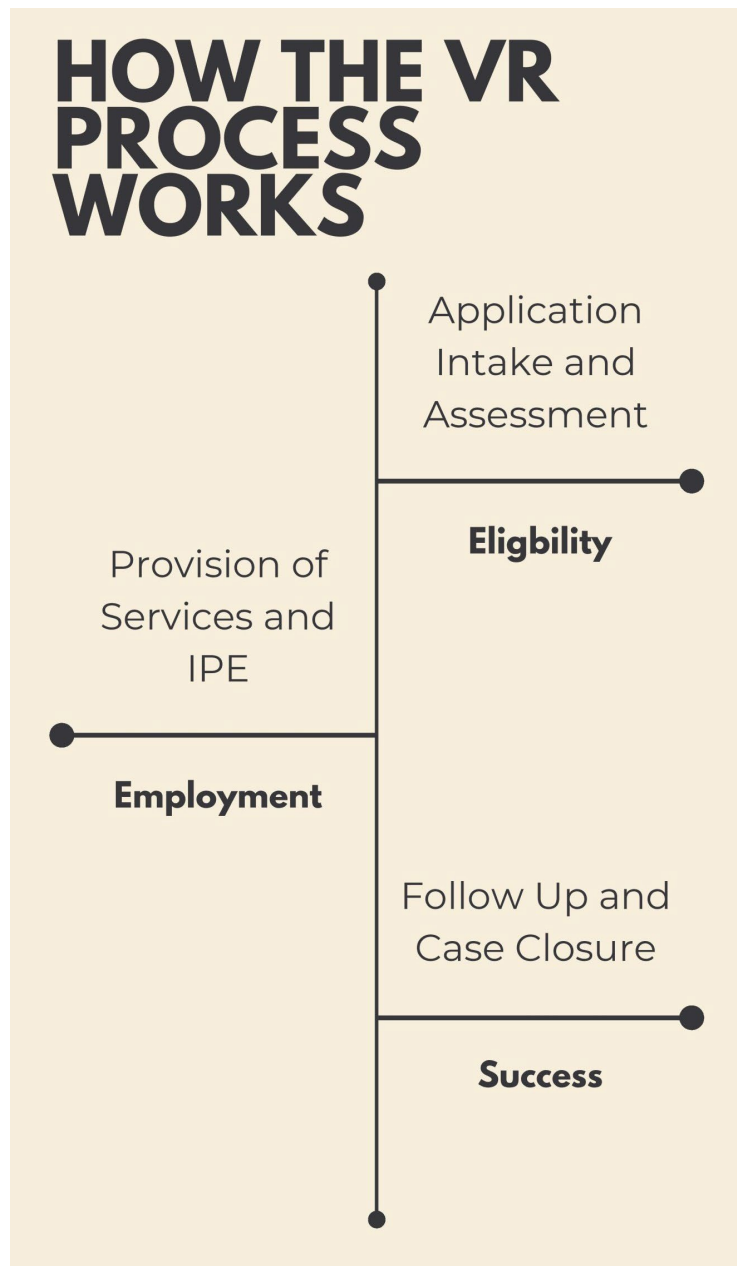
Going from Client to Closure

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.

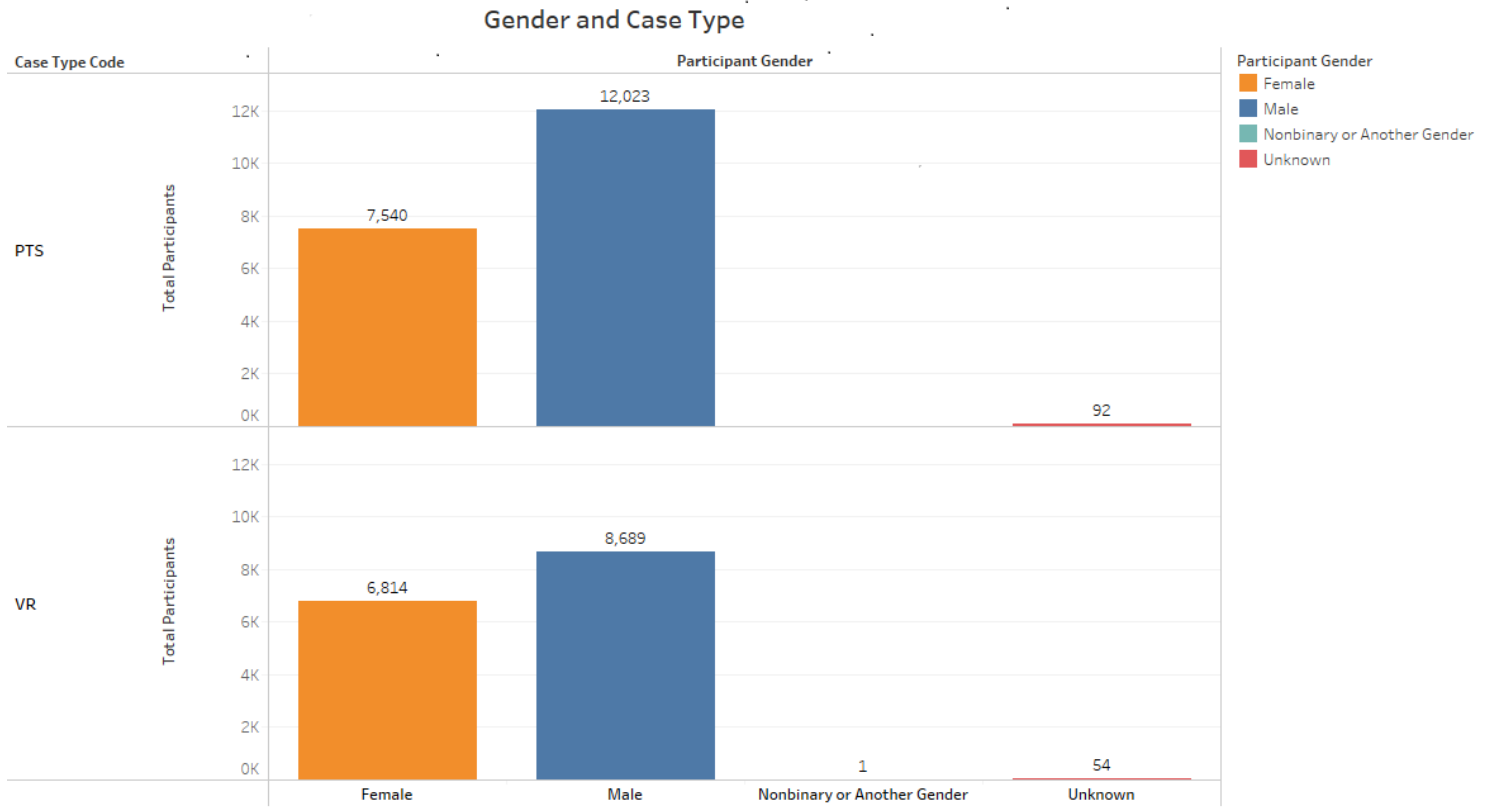
Ultimately, the client decides on the specific type of competitive employment in a career of their choice. Follow up services are provided by Vocational Rehabilitation to ensure that the employment choice of the client is stable, secure, and satisfactory to both the client and the employer.

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.



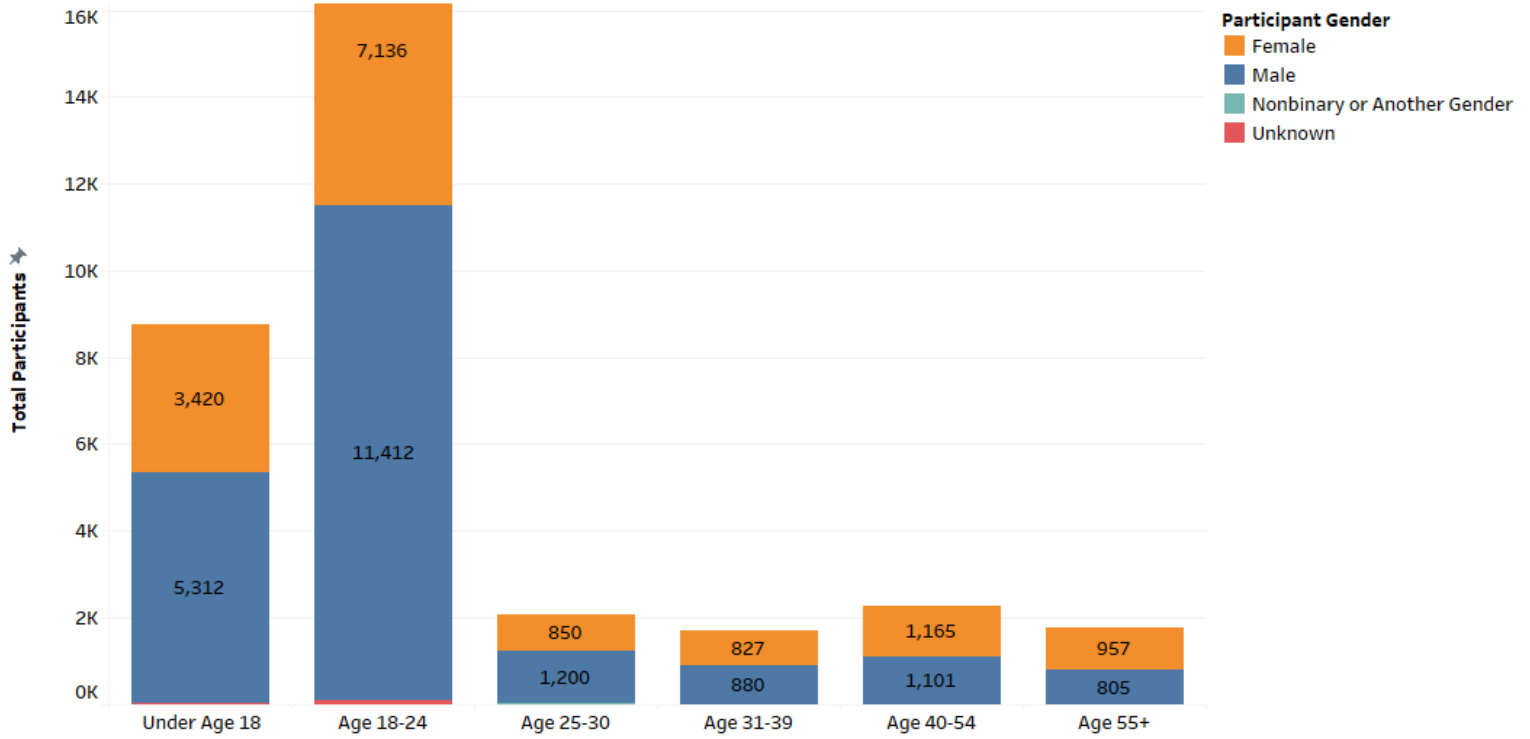
By the Numbers

Data From Federal Fiscal Year 2024



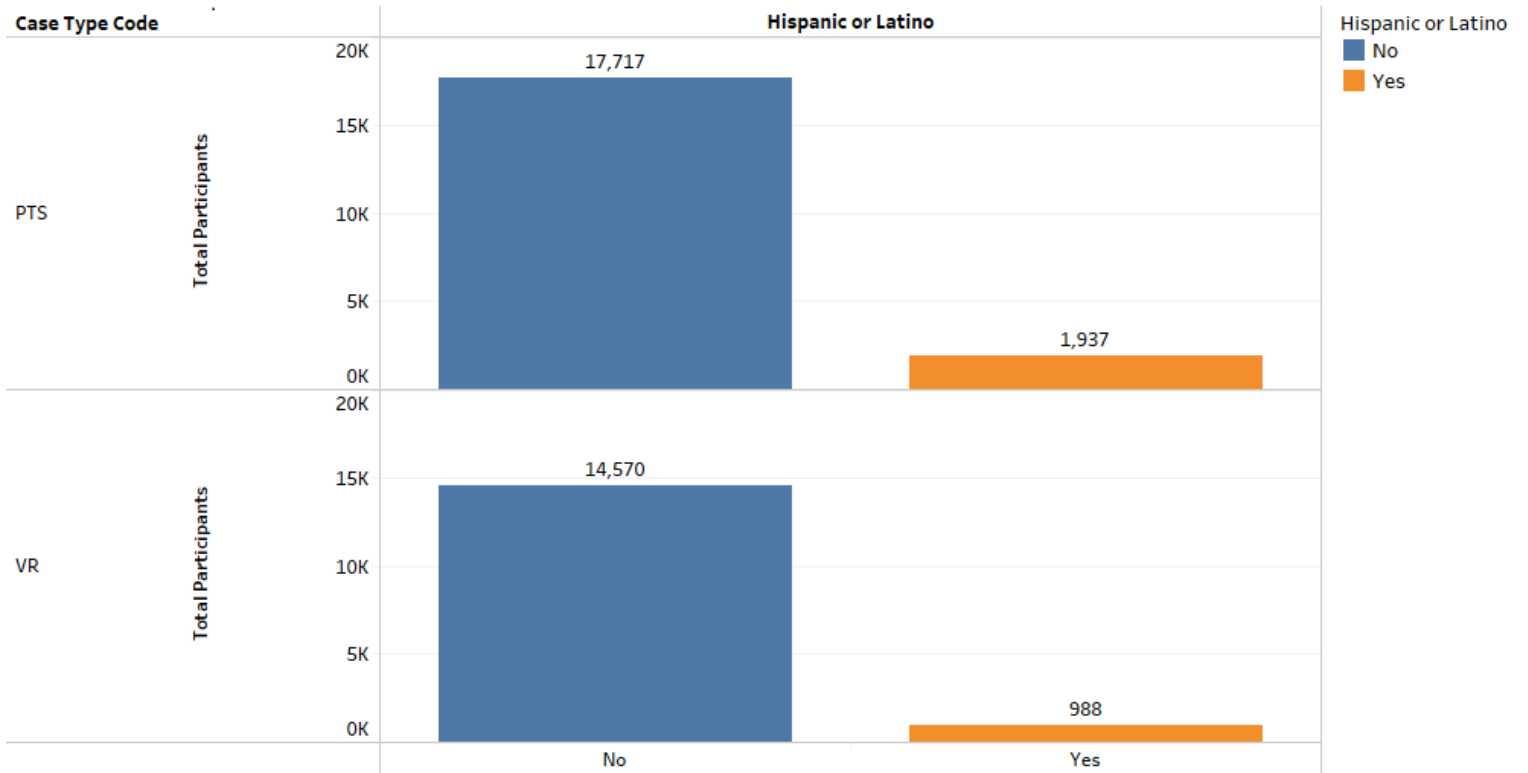
Distinct count of Case Master ID for each Participant Gender broken down by Case Type Code. Color shows details about Participant Gender.

Clients Served By Age and Gender



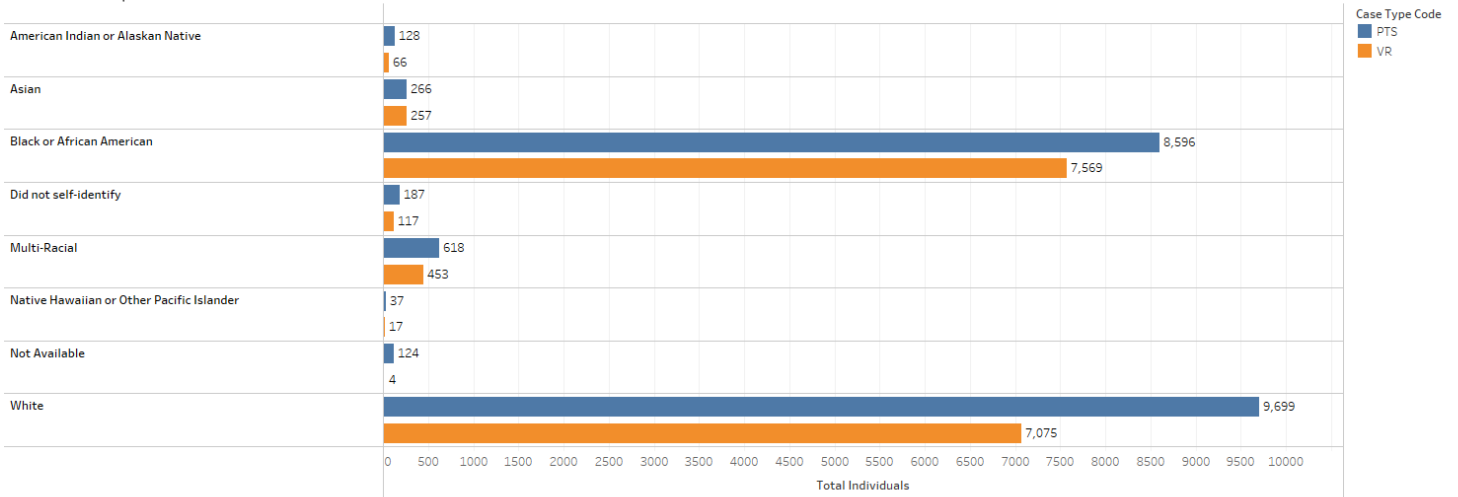
Distinct count of Case Master ID for each Age Range. Color shows details about Participant Gender. *Note: 119 are Unknown.*

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.

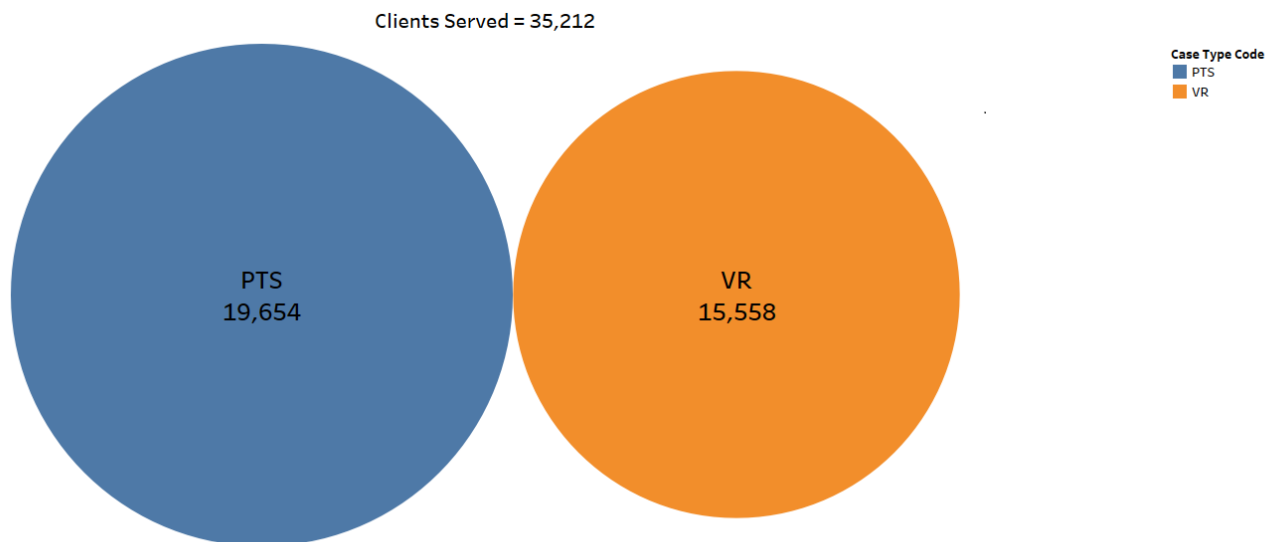
Black or African American	16,165
White	16,774
Multi-racial	1,071
Asian	523
Does Not Wish to Identify	304
American Indian/Native Alaskan	194
Pacific Islander	54
Unknown	128

Female	14,354
Male	20,712
Nonbinary or Another Gender	1
Unknown	146

Clients Served By Disability

Primary Disability	PTS	VR	Grand Total
Grand Total	19,654	15,558	35,212
Blindness	57	597	654
Both Mobility and Manipulation/Dexterity Orthopedic/Neurological Impairments	77	399	476
Cognitive Impairments	10,263	6,319	16,582
Communicative Impairments (expressive/receptive)	193	247	440
Deaf-Blindness	5	26	31
Deafness, Primary Communication Auditory	63	154	217
Deafness, Primary Communication Visual	61	211	272
General Physical Debilitation	26	344	370
Hearing Loss, Primary Communication Auditory	53	270	323
Hearing Loss, Primary Communication Visual	5	38	43
Manipulation/Dexterity Orthopedic/Neurological Impairments	48	197	245
Mobility Orthopedic/Neurological Impairments	60	607	667
No Impairment	24	3	27
Not Available	6,928	355	7,283
Other Hearing Impairments	6	8	14
Other Mental Impairments	514	875	1,389
Other Orthopedic Impairments	24	135	159
Other Physical Impairments (not listed)	197	629	826
Other Visual Impairments	33	439	472
Psychosocial Impairments	1,011	3,656	4,667
Respiratory Impairments	6	49	55

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 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.

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

Primary Disability	Average Weekly Earnings	Average Hours Worked Weekly
Blindness	\$596	34
Both Mobility and Manipulation/Dexterity Orthopedic/Neurological Impairments	\$474	29
Cognitive Impairments	\$350	26
Communicative Impairments (expressive/receptive)	\$383	28
Deaf-Blindness	\$298	24
Deafness, Primary Communication Auditory	\$548	34
Deafness, Primary Communication Visual	\$345	30
General Physical Debilitation	\$516	29
Hearing Loss, Primary Communication Auditory	\$616	34
Hearing Loss, Primary Communication Visual	\$507	33
Manipulation/Dexterity Orthopedic/Neurological Impairments	\$357	28
Mobility Orthopedic/Neurological Impairments	\$568	29
Other Hearing Impairments	\$310	20
Other Mental Impairments	\$378	27
Other Orthopedic Impairments	\$612	31
Other Physical Impairments (not listed)	\$568	34
Other Visual Impairments	\$576	34
Psychosocial Impairments	\$390	28
Respiratory Impairments	\$137	23

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.

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 year 2024 started off strong with the Georgia State Rehabilitation Council increasing its outreach to include expanding to the remote areas of our state. Three of our four scheduled 2024 SRC meetings have been in-person (with hybrid offered) and our summer meeting virtual. Council members have shared that while hybrid is convenient, the council would have better engagement through more in-person opportunities when possible. Council members have also attended, both in-person / virtually, many of our state partner meetings (GA DOE SAP, DBHDD Advisory Council & Board meetings, GA CIL meetings, GVS Board meetings) as well as joined our partners in several of the events which they hosted during year. These events have included multiple Expos & job fairs as well as Council participating as panelists in training & networking opportunities such as Albany's Chamber of Commerce THRIVE event, Good Company, Inc. and GA Learning Resources System (GLRS).

Several of our council members are also members of other disability boards and councils. This dual representation helps our SRC hear perceptions from other key stakeholders about how services are being delivered and supported in our communities. Open communication and closer partnerships between the SRC and the agency have identified some gaps in services around the state but have also contributed to development of strategies to better support individuals with barriers to employment.

Our council continues to strengthen its professional learning to be better able to support the work of the agency in meeting the needs of Georgians with disabilities who want to work and live independent lives. Council participates in training offered by the National Council of State Rehabilitation Council (NCSRC) as well as training and professional

learning offered by other national partners such as APSE and NENA. The agency staff makes itself available to engage in conversations about services, data and unmet needs of Georgians with disabilities as well as ways to collaborate to help move the work of the agency forward. Members of both the SRC and our Agency's Executive Director were able to attend the GA Workforce Pipeline Conference both as attendees and 2 as panelists. Also, needs such as making information about Pre-ETS, VR services and work incentives available to parents and caregivers earlier in the school years. The Executive Director and agency staff have joined with SRC in sharing information to individuals with disabilities, their families and other agency staff who support them in the process of transition to employment.

SRC members have continued meeting with IWDS, business leaders, advocates, and other interested members of their communities during the past year. Our council members have kept an active calendar of attending community events that are in support of individuals with disabilities. From NDEAM 2024 to the 34th Anniversary of ADA, council members have represented IWDS and help message the opportunities available through GVRA. State-wide, there is a continued need of messaging opportunities through VR to IWD, best practices to support IWD through the process and continued building of relationships with partners including the workforce/employers for the next decade.

Our GA SRC is looking forward to continuing collaborating with GVRA to support Georgians with disabilities who want to work in competitive integrated employment. We are also determined in elevating the stakeholder voice and making sure these individuals have a place at the table and can access services leading to productive lives.



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