

# Moving Ahead Together

## The Georgia State Rehabilitation Council 2019 Annual Report

GVRA



GEORGIA VOCATIONAL  
REHABILITATION AGENCY



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# Welcome From the SRC Chair

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It is with great pleasure that I welcome you to the 2019 State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) report.

A lot of hard work has gone into producing this report, and we believe it does well to showcase

where we've been—and more importantly—where we're going.

Throughout the past year, SRC members did much to continue their mission of helping individuals with disabilities across Georgia gain

independence through meaningful employment, and their activities in the community are highlighted herein. In addition, this report breaks down the client base for the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency over the past year, shedding light on the individuals across the state who have received vocational rehabilitation services.

While we've done much in the past year, there's still work left to be done, and I know we're excited about this opportunity. Please read and share this report with anyone you think might benefit from it.

Rossany Rios  
SRC Chairwoman

# Message from GVRA Executive Director

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As Executive Director of the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency (GVRA), I deeply value the State Rehabilitation Council's essential role as the voice of the consumer.

Having heard the thoughts, concerns and ideas of our clients and the staff who directly serve them, GVRA is in a time of transition that will lead to faster

service, standardized procedures and ultimately better outcomes. Through it all, we will strive to ensure the voice of the customer is the very cornerstone of the vocational rehabilitation process.

While change is never easy and progress is not immediate, I believe the best and brightest days are ahead for Georgians with disabilities seeking employment and independence. We appreciate the partners who have joined us on this journey.

Shawn Ryan  
GVRA Executive Director

# *SRC Members Bios*

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

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

## **Lisa Leiter, Vice Chair — Advocacy Organization Representative — Transition Resource Specialist**

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

## **Peggy Venable — American Indian VR Program Representative**

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.

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

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

## **Deborah Hibben — Parent of a Child with a Disability**

Deborah Hibben is a retired educator who previously worked for Henry and Clay county schools. Her highest degree is in Educational Leadership from Lincoln Memorial University. Hibben lives in McDonough, Georgia, and she has two children, Hillary Anne and Hannah Elizabeth.

### **Dawn Johnson — Individuals with Cognitive/Learning Disabilities Representative**

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

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

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

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

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

### **Brian Mosley — Individuals with Sensory Disabilities Representative**

Brian Mosley is a former Assistant Program Manager for Walton Options for Independent Living (WOIL) South Carolina office. Brian is a former Walton Options and Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency client. Brian continues to serve individuals of all ages with all types of disabilities. 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.

### **Jennifer Page — Client Assistance Program Representative**

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.

### **Mike Pryor — Senior Director of Real Estate and New Business — Goodwill of North Georgia**

Mike Pryor is the Senior Director of Real Estate and 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 reside in Clarkesville.

### **Deborah Lovell — Individuals with Sensory Disabilities Representative**

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.

### **Tina Aldridge — Certified Rehabilitation Counselor**

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.

### **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.

### **Kate Brady, Ph.D. ABD — Individuals with Physical Disabilities Representative**

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.

### **Cherise Mlott — Business, Industry and Labor Representative**

Cherise Mlott is Director of Corporate Real Estate Portfolio Management and Transactions at AT&T. Mlott has worked for AT&T – formerly BellSouth – for twenty-two years. Mlott earned a bachelor's degree from the University of Georgia and an MBA from Georgia State University. She is a native of Atlanta and lives in Brookhaven, Georgia with her husband, Brent and Katie, their Irish Setter.

### **Col. Dr. Samuel Verniero, Jr. — Individuals with a Disability Representative**

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.

# *In the Community*

## SRC Members Stayed Busy in 2019

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Throughout the year, SRC members engage with the disability community in a number of ways. Below we highlight some of the events members participated in.

**Lisa Leiter** collaborated with another Cobb County School District staff member and a VR Transition Counselor to present at the 2019 IDEAS Conference.

In addition, she worked with the Cobb County School District Transition Team to host the College & Career Fair for students with disabilities, in which VR participated as a vendor.

She presented a Georgia DOE Transition Webinar: *Collaborating with Other Agencies*, which promotes the collaboration of transition stakeholders, including VR, to facilitate best transition outcomes for students.

Also, she participated in the State Rehabilitation Council Day at the Capitol during the 2019 legislative session, which provided an opportunity to share the mission of the SRC and GVRA with legislators.

**Deborah Lovell** attended the Georgia Association For Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (AER) in March. AER is the professional organization for those who work with individuals who are blind and visually impaired. She also serves as state treasurer.

She attended the Georgia Blind Veterans Association (BVA) conference in Atlanta in early April. BVA is a consumer group of blind and visually impaired veterans.

Deborah was on hand at Georgia Council of The Blind (GCB) meeting in May. It is a consumer/advocacy group, promoting blindness issues and services throughout Georgia.

She attended National White Cane Day in October. The nationally-recognized event is used to promote the important symbol of the white cane, which is a mobility tool that allows individuals who are blind and visually impaired to travel safely and independently. Georgia Vision Alliance, a newly-formed group, works with all organizations and agencies serving the Blind in Georgia.

In October, **Col. Dr. Samuel Verniero** attended the Statewide Independent Living Council of Georgia Board Meeting in Macon.

**Dawn Johnson** joined the WISE Supported Employment Leadership Cohort and attended the first in a series of four training sessions on November 13.

**Cherise Mlott** participated in the 2019 Bike MS for her 19th year cycling to fund a cure for Multiple Sclerosis. She has raised over \$300,000 in 19 years since she was diagnosed with MS in 2000. She has cycled with five different teams including BellSouth, AT&T, Team Drummond, Shepherd Center and most recently Coca-Cola. She is pictured below.



**Tina Aldridge** is a member of GA AHEAD (Association for Higher Education and Disability). She presented during the 2019 AHEAD Conference for a lecture titled *Introduction to Blindness and the Barriers to Academic Success*. In October, she participated in a panel for the Dekalb County Disability Awareness Forum and Expo which was hosted by "In the Door." The audience was the disability community, including both job seekers and potential employers.

**Deborah Hibben** stayed busy this year as well. She participated in the Georgia Council on Development Disabilities quarterly meetings and attended the GCDD Advocacy Days at the State Capitol. Deborah is an active member of the Down Syndrome Association of Atlanta, and as part of that, she participated in World DS Day in

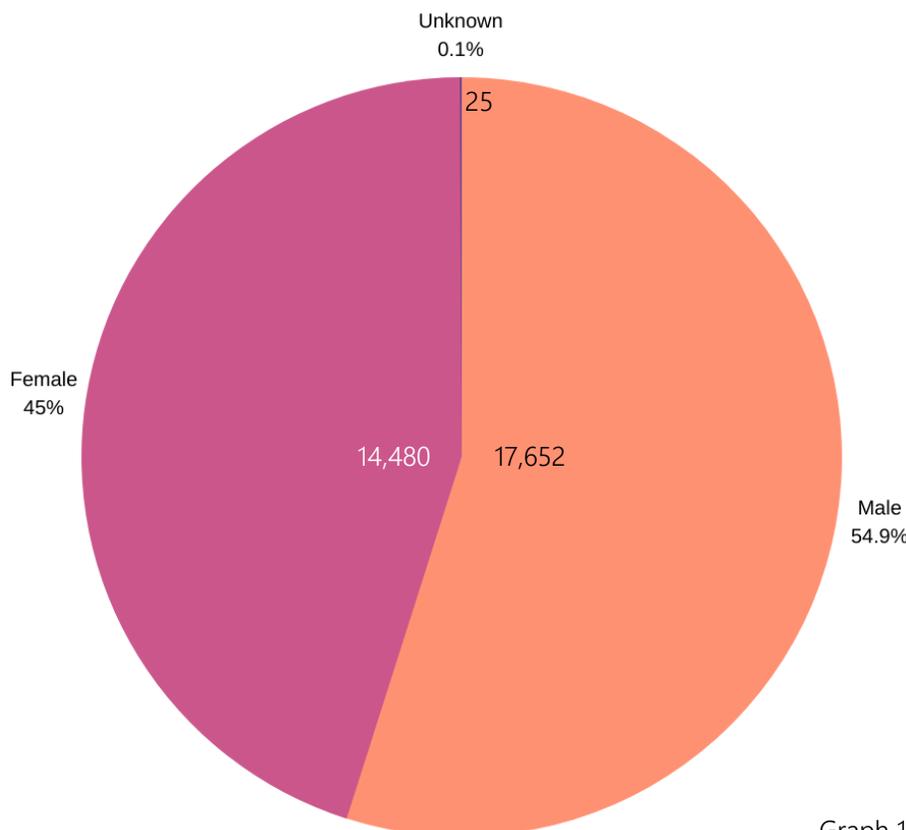
March and the Buddy Walk in October. In addition, she attended the National Down Syndrome Congress Conference in Pittsburgh.

She was a family participant in the University of Alabama's research study on disabilities and dementia. She also planned & hosted "Take Your Legislator to Work Day," and she attended the Welcoming Community Dialogue Summit at the Clarkston Community Center.

In October, she attended the Georgia Association of People Supporting Employment First (GAPSE) conference, a "Morning w/ Judy Heumann, International Disability Rights Activist" event in Decatur and the Disability History Symposium at the University of Georgia in Athens.

# Let's Do the Numbers

## Clients Served by Gender



**NOTE:** All numbers were taken from Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2019, which ran from Oct. 1, 2018 to Sept. 30, 2019.

The total number of clients served is 32,157, and 2,274 of those were marked as "closed rehabilitated" during the reporting period.

Of the total served, 25 individuals did not disclose their gender, and those individuals are reflected as "unknown" in the graph to the left.

Graph 1

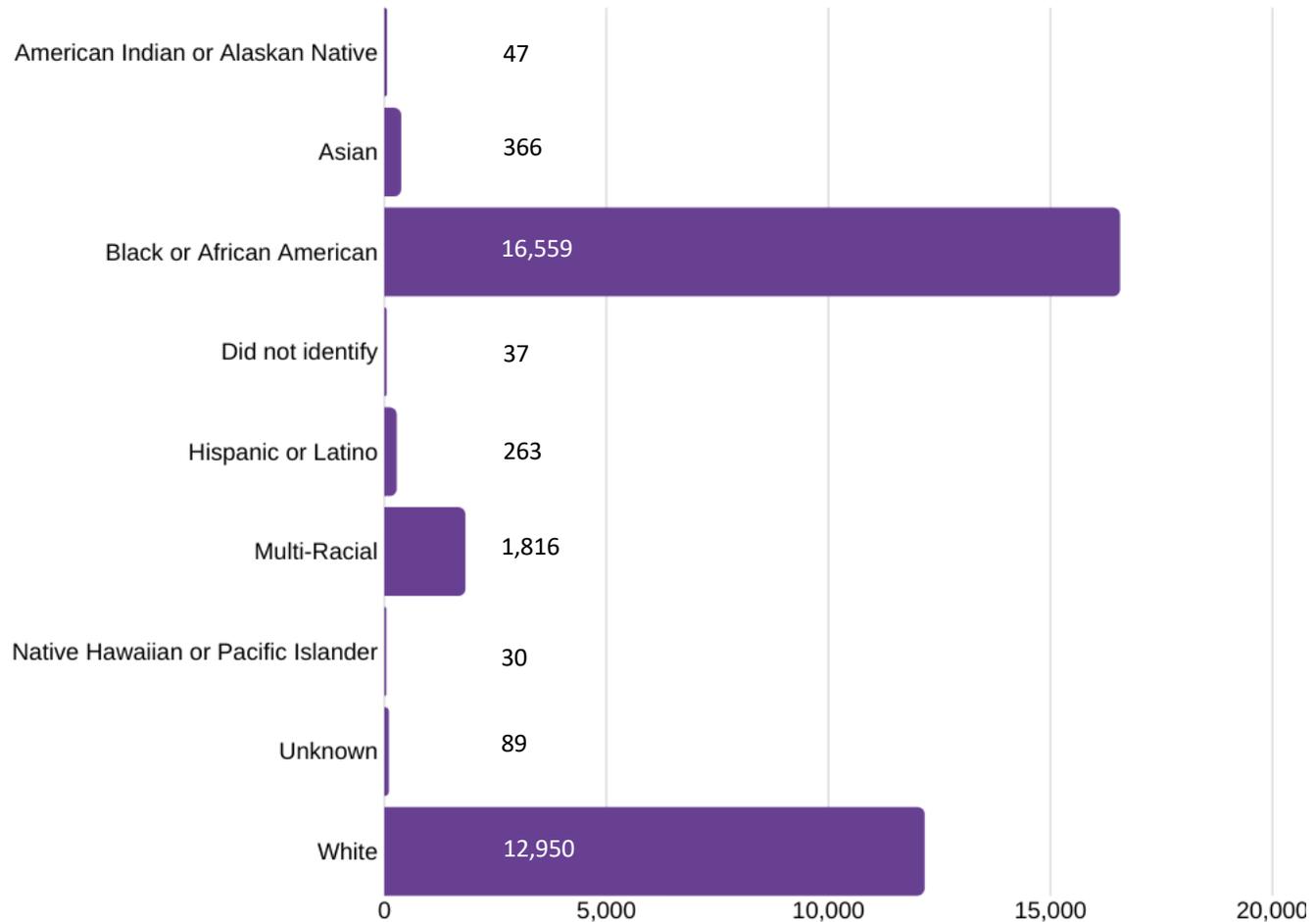
# Clients Served by Age and Gender

NOTE: 25 individuals chose not to identify their gender. They were included in the following: Age 18 and Under — 2; Age 18-24 — 11; Age 25-30 — 4; Age 31-39 — 1; Age 40-54 — 4; Age 55 and Over — 2

Chart 1

Under Age 18			Age 18-24			Age 25-30		
Under 18 Total	Under 18 Male	Under 18 Female	18 - 24 Total	18 - 24 Male	18 - 24 Female	25 - 30 Total	25 - 30 Male	25 - 30 Female
2,414	1,539	875	13,269	8,127	5,142	3,532	1,993	1,539
Age 31-39			Age 40-54			Age 55+>		
31 - 39 Total	31 - 39 Male	31 - 39 Female	40 - 54 Total	40 - 54 Male	40 - 54 Female	55 and Over Total	55 and Over Male	55 and Over Female
3,472	1,691	1,781	5,668	2,549	3,119	3,777	1,753	2,024

# Clients Served by Race and/or Ethnicity



Graph 2

# Clients Served by Education Level

Chart 2

Clients Served By Level of Education	Clients_Served
Bachelor's degree	476
Elementary education (grades 1-8)	153
High school graduate or equivalency certificate	2,746
Master's degree or higher	171
No Formal Schooling	20
Post-secondary education, no degree	1,733
Secondary education, no HS diploma	4,332
Special Ed (completion or attendance)	2,679
Vocational /Technical Certificate or License	549
Unknown	19,298
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>32,157</b>

# Clients Served by Disability

Chart 3

Disability	Clients Served
Blindness	883
Cognitive Impairments	12,266
Combination of Orthopedic/Neurological Impairments	579
Communicative Impairments (expressive/receptive)	516
Deaf-Blindness	43
Deafness, Primary Communication Auditory	198
Deafness, Primary Communication Visual	625
Dexterity Orthopedic/Neurological Impairments	72
General Physical Debilitation	1,069
Hearing Loss, Primary Communication Auditory	626
Hearing Loss, Primary Communication Visual	139
Manipulation Orthopedic/Neurological Impairments	424
Mobility Orthopedic/Neurological Impairments	1,627
No impairment	9
Not Available	31
Other Hearing Impairments	49
Other Mental Impairments	1,839
Other Orthopedic Impairments	549
Other Physical Impairments (not listed)	1,653
Other visual impairments	720
Psychosocial Impairments	7,036
Respiratory Impairments	155
Severe visual impairment	1
Unknown	1,048
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>32,157</b>

# Closed Cases by Disability with their Avg. Earnings

Disability	Average Weekly Earnings
Blindness	\$398.73
Cognitive Impairments	\$310.71
Combination of Orthopedic/Neurological Impairments	\$362.09
Communicative Impairments (expressive/receptive)	\$312.89
Deaf-Blindness	\$699.90
Deafness, Primary Communication Auditory	\$417.65
Deafness, Primary Communication Visual	\$362.31
Dexterity Orthopedic/Neurological Impairments	\$270.70
General Physical Debilitation	\$368.15
Hearing Loss, Primary Communication Auditory	\$487.65
Hearing Loss, Primary Communication Visual	\$519.93
Manipulation Orthopedic/Neurological Impairments	\$251.68
Mobility Orthopedic/Neurological Impairments	\$370.73
Other Hearing Impairments	\$426.48
Other Mental Impairments	\$295.97
Other Orthopedic Impairments	\$431.09
Other Physical Impairments (not listed)	\$375.97
Other visual impairments	\$438.04
Psychosocial Impairments	\$309.18
Respiratory Impairments	\$290.19



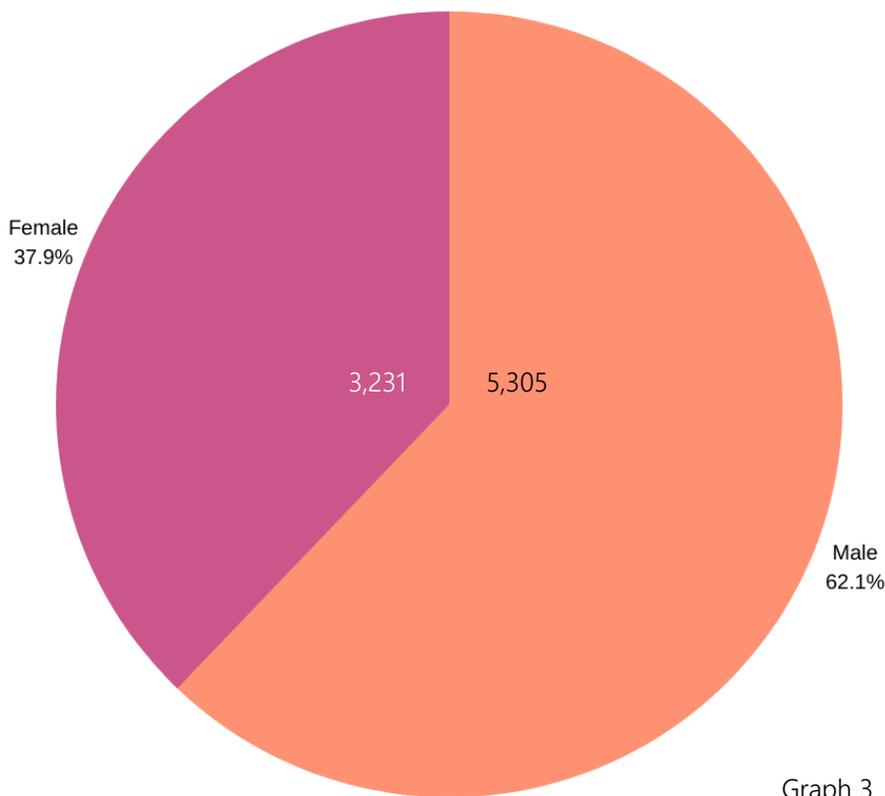
Studies have shown that consumers prefer to do business with companies who employ workers with disabilities.

# Potentially Eligible Students and Youth by Gender and Age

**NOTE:** All numbers were taken from Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2019, which ran from Oct. 1, 2018 to Sept. 30, 2019.

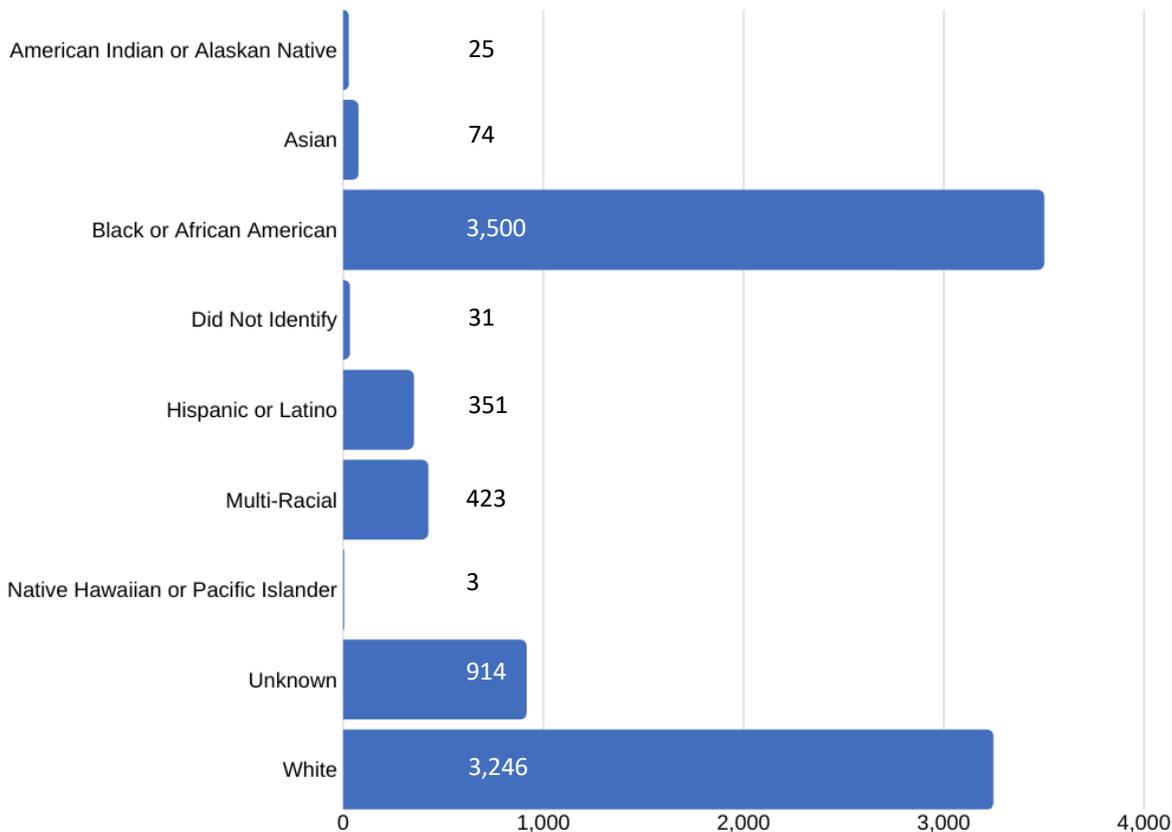
Because these individuals are transition-aged, none were over the age of 24. Of the total 8,567 served, 6,241 were under age 18, and 2,326 were between the ages of 18 and 24.

Also, it's important to note that these potentially eligible students and youth are not necessarily VR clients, thus why there aren't referred to as such and why case closure statistics don't uniformly apply to this group.



Graph 3

# Potentially Eligible Students and Youth by Race and/or Ethnicity



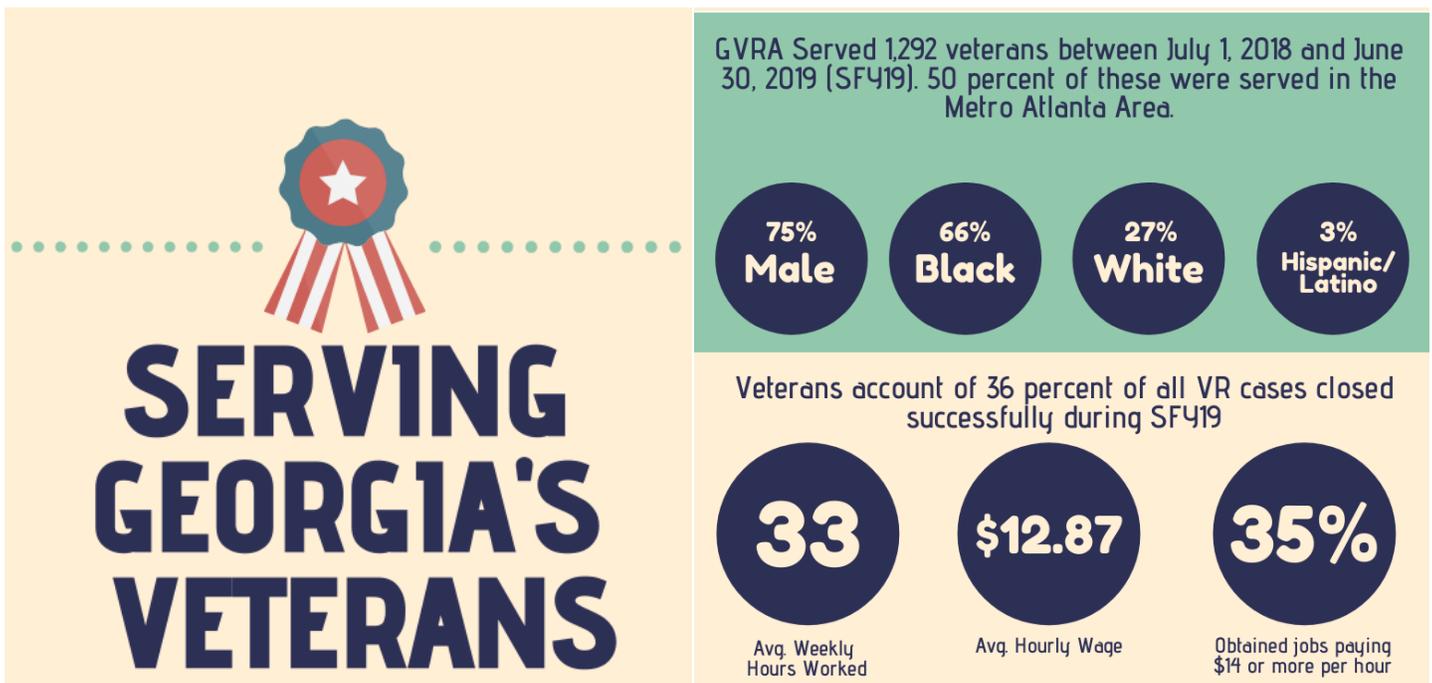
# Potentially Eligible Students and Youth Served by Disability

Chart 3

Disability	Clients Served
Blindness	9
Cognitive Impairments	2,811
Combination of Orthopedic/Neurological Impairments	14
Communicative Impairments (expressive/receptive)	91
Deafness, Primary Communication Auditory	10
Deafness, Primary Communication Visual	15
Dexterity Orthopedic/Neurological Impairments	5
General Physical Debilitation	1
Hearing Loss, Primary Communication Auditory	10
Hearing Loss, Primary Communication Visual	1
Manipulation Orthopedic/Neurological Impairments	11
Mobility Orthopedic/Neurological Impairments	18
No impairment	1
Not Available	63
Other Hearing Impairments	8
Other Mental Impairments	107
Other Orthopedic Impairments	5
Other Physical Impairments (not listed)	69
Other visual impairments	17
Psychosocial Impairments	258
Unknown	5,043
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>8,567</b>

## 2019 Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment

The following information was gathered by the University of Georgia as part of the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment.



## BEST PRACTICES IN SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT

# AND WHAT THEY MEAN



### Three Models

VR utilizes three models of Supported Employment to assist individuals in securing competitive integrated employment. Those are: Traditional Supported Employment, Customized Employment and Individual Placement and Supports (IPS).



### Stats from State Fiscal Year 2019

JULY 1, 2018 TO JUNE 30, 2019

321 individuals successfully obtained employment through Supported Employment services, which is 18 percent of all successful closures during this time. 38 percent of these SE closures were individuals under the age of 25.



### What Jobs Were They Getting?

CLOSURES WERE IN THE FOLLOWING CATEGORIES

Office and Administrative Support  
Food Preparation and Serving  
Building and Grounds Cleaning/Maintenance  
Transportation and Material Moving



### Over \$6 Million Spent on SE

DURING SFY 2019

45 percent of this was used for Evidence Based Supported Employment (IPS), and 30 percent of this was used for supporting jobs paying above \$10/hour.



### Why Supported Employment?

IT CAN CHANGE LIVES

Supported Employment is the service used to support individuals with the most significant disabilities as they secure competitive integrated employment. Supported Employment is a means by which people can be successful in employment that fits their talents, interests and abilities.

AND THIS IS WHY SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT WORKS

## SERVING TRANSITION-AGED YOUTH

# LOOKING AT THE NUMBERS



### Stats from State Fiscal Year 2019

JULY 1, 2018 TO JUNE 30, 2019

GVRA served 13,365 individuals with disabilities under the age of 25 in SFY19, which is 46 percent of all VR consumers served during this time.



### Demographics

LET'S BREAK IT DOWN FURTHER.

Male: 61.66 percent -- Female: 38.26 percent

White: 53.1 percent -- Black: 41.4 percent  
Hispanic/Latino: 7 percent -- Asian 1.4 percent  
American Indian/Alaskan: 0.3 percent



### What Jobs Were They Getting?

CLOSURES WERE IN THE FOLLOWING CATEGORIES

Office and Administrative Support  
Food Preparation and Serving  
Sales and Related Occupations



### Over \$17 million spent

DURING SFY 2019

More than \$17 million was spent in SFY19 to assist youth and young adults with disabilities in helping them obtain their career goals.



### Gaining Independence

TAKING THE NEXT STEP

Transition-aged youth who successfully found employment through VR during SF29 made on average \$9.50/hour and worked 29 hours a week.

HELPING YOUNG PEOPLE SUCCEED IN THE WORKPLACE

# *Root, Root, Root for the Braves*

## How One Client Keeps Braves Fans Happy

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Katie Hearn recently changed offices, just down the hall from her old office. As a rule, change for anyone can take a quick second to adjust. In Katie's case though, the change required a little more than simply hanging art on the walls and getting office supplies organized. Several years ago, Katie lost her eyesight, and so changes in her commute, even if it's a matter of a few hundred feet, require adaptation that many of us take for granted. So how long did it take her to adjust?

"Maybe a few days," she said. "It helps if I can get a mental map of it, and then it's just doing it enough that it becomes second nature."

Katie has done a lot of learning since she started work with the Atlanta Braves in 2016, and the vast majority of it has had little to do with navigating the office or the intricacies of the infield fly rule. Katie heads a team during every home game that monitors all the Braves' social media platforms. If someone fires off a Tweet complaining about the long lines at the ice cream station by the third base concourse, her team redirects more staff members to that area. If someone needs help navigating the twists and turns of Suntrust Park, her team helps them with directions.

"So much of what we do is listening to the community. Listening to people," she said. "Learning what we can do better and then doing it."

It was Katie's ability to engage with the fan community that helped propel her to where she is today. When she first started with the Braves, she was only part time, oftentimes stationed at one of the gates handing out programs as people shuffled into the park. This gave her a great opportunity to chat with fans from all over the southeast who made the pilgrimage to the home of the Braves. From there, she made the

leap to Digital Services Representative, a member of the team that she now heads up. By January of this year, her ability to both connect with fans and uphold the mission and values of the Atlanta Braves put her in line for a promotion, and she was moved to the role she currently occupies.

If it weren't for the spur-of-the-moment decision on a cold evening in February 2016 to apply to be a part of the game-day staff, her path would have looked quite a bit different. At the time, Katie, who had recently graduated from LaGrange College, was teaching at a local high school and coaching softball on the side. But it wasn't for her. So she decided to make a change, and it quickly paid off.

"I fell in love with it," she said. "It was exciting being a part of the Braves organization and getting to meet so many new people."

In February 2017, around the time of a certain Super Bowl that Atlanta sports fans won't soon forget, Katie's vision began to rapidly decline, and it became clear that things were going to change quickly, and she needed to adapt just as quickly if she was going to keep up. In April and May of that year, Katie went through five surgeries. With her condition stabilized, her ophthalmologist had a single question. What now? The answer, Katie said, was easy.

"Once my vision loss happened, there was nobody that was going to tell me I wasn't going to go back. I was going to work as hard as I could to make sure that I could go back," she said. "I was going to try, and everybody here supported me every step of the way."

In addition, to the support from the Braves organization, Katie knew that she would need help adjusting to her disability, and her ophthalmologist recommended services from

the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency. With VR support, Katie learned how to navigate the world with the aid of her trusty service dog Jack. In addition, she received assistive technology support. Her job very much relies on the use of the social media, and Katie learned how to engage with fans online using voice-to-text programs.

All of this, of course, wasn't easy. There was the anxiety of wondering if she could do the work. The fear that people would treat her differently. At the end of the day, though, Katie knew that she had one tool that could open any lock. Trust in herself.

"I think that being confident in yourself and knowing your importance to yourself is the biggest part. I remember when I first started training, I was a little bit meek. But if I go in there and don't believe I can do it, nobody else is going to believe I can do it either" Katie said. "So you got to go in there and believe in yourself. It starts with you."

Her success and determination in overcoming adversity did not go unnoticed. Earlier this year, Katie made the trek to Midtown Manhattan where she told her story on The Today Show. Was she nervous? Of course, but her worries were less centered around the interview itself than they were when it came to where Jack would be able to use the bathroom. Talking to people comes easy to her. It's what she does and what she loves.

So, if you find yourself at SunTrust Park as the Major League Baseball postseason draws near and need some assistance, pull out your phone and send a message to any number of the Braves' social media accounts. Katie and her team will be on the other end of the conversation.

And they'll be more than happy to help.

*Katie Hearn is pictured with her guide dog at Suntrust Park. Katie worked with GVRA to ensure she could continue to flourish in her job with the Atlanta Braves.*





Katie Hearn is a former client who works for the Atlanta Braves. Through hard work and determination, Katie was able to find success in the workplace and inspire many others along the way.



# *Behind the Machines*

## One Client and an International Manufacturing Company

When Cole Allen was in high school, sometimes his friends would go places his power chair—and as a result, he himself—couldn't. The woods for a campfire. A house with stairs to the entrance.

At Roosevelt Warm Springs (RWS) though, this wasn't a problem. There wasn't a place on campus that he couldn't go, the entirety of the property and the buildings therein outfitted with accessible doors, sidewalks and ramps. This sense of empowerment wasn't just limited to his mobility around campus either. At RWS, Cole became involved in the student council and jumped on other leadership opportunities, and his peers noticed.

"I learned that I had leadership skills, and it felt good to know that," Cole said. "People wanted to talk to me about stuff, about problems they were having, and I helped their drive to be all that they could be. You've got to grow yourself in the way that you're afraid of because when you get there and you make friends and talk to people, you hear other people's stories and you realize that you're all in this together."

Cole knows the importance of community and a strong support system because that's exactly what he found when he arrived at RWS several years ago. Being drawn to the field of engineering at a young age, Cole had learned about computer-aided drafting (CAD)—and the blueprints such a system produces—when he was in high school. Billy Garrett, the Computer Numerical Control (CNC) instructor at RWS, helped him take what he had already learned to the next level. Put in layman's terms, when a machine breaks at a factory, the replacement part is designed in a CAD system, which then produces a 2-D blueprint that is fed into a CNC machine that then builds the replacement part. With the knowledge he gained at RWS and the CNC certification that came with it, Cole could

navigate every part of the process. There was no doubt, Billy said, that Cole would take this knowledge and use it to start his career.

"Cole is a great example of what all educators want to see in students ... an individual with a thirst for knowledge and initiative to get it. He was always the first to arrive and the last to leave," Billy said. "He wants to work, and he wants to make his own way."

After graduating in June of 2017, Cole set his sights on finding a job, and with his hometown of Carrollton being home to the largest copper wire manufacturer in the world in Southwire, it made sense that it would be a natural landing place for his skill set.

And Southwire agreed.

He was hired in late 2018, and after Southwire made several modifications to ensure Cole's workspace was accessible, he began work there in January of this year, the goal of applying what he learned to real world practice finally realized.

Cole is the first to tell you he's not done setting and achieving his goals. So what's next? He said he hopes to one day go to college and earn his engineering degree, and after that, he hopes to start his own business producing machine parts for those who need them.

"I never want to stop learning," he said. "We learn so much every day, but we may not know it. But it's true."



Cole Allen, a graduate of Roosevelt Warm Springs, has been working at international manufacturer Southwire since January 2019. Cole works to digitize old blue prints and create 3-D models.



# How it Works

## Inside the VR Process

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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.

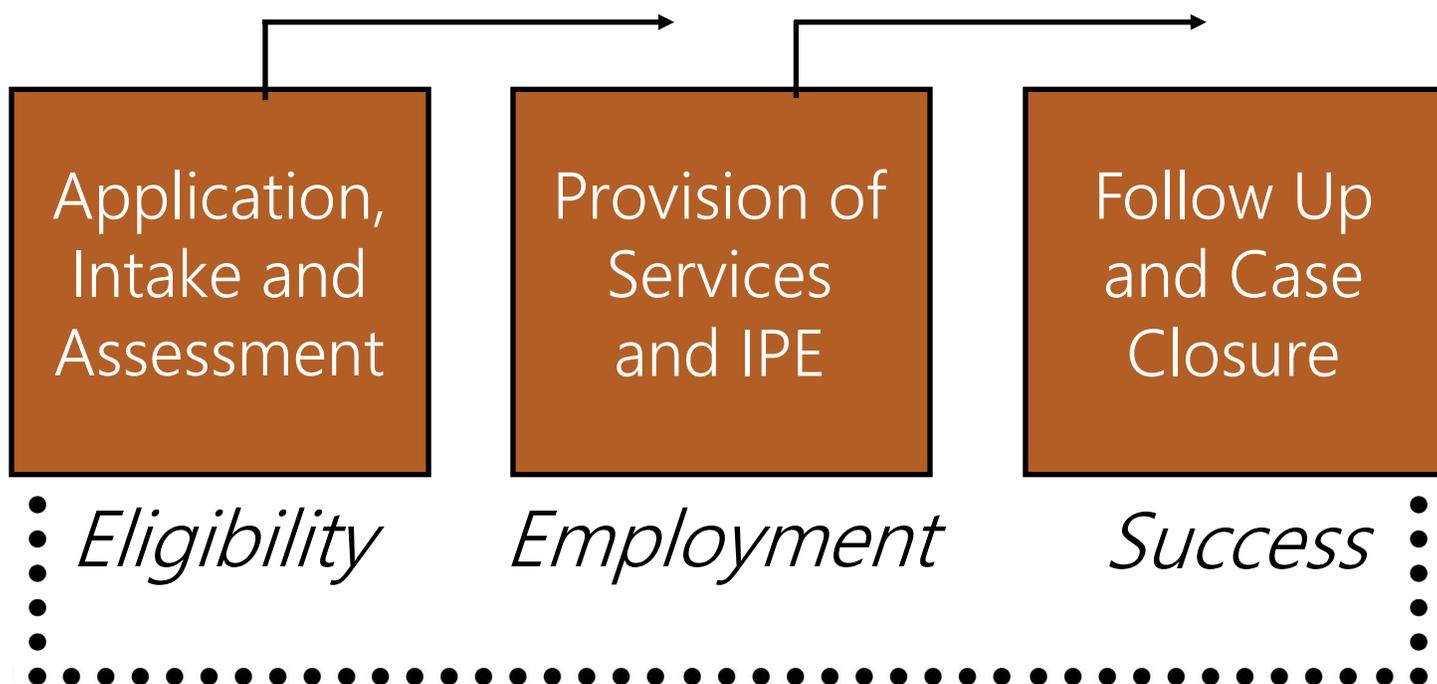
After eligibility, the client and his or her counselor develop an individualized plan for employment (IPE). This plan outlines the

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.



# *Myths and Facts on Disability*

## Sorting Truth From Fiction

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As 2019 comes to a close, what is “real” news and what is “fake” news has become a murkier and murkier distinction to parse. The same can be said about attitudes and beliefs as they relate to the disability community. Our goal is to help clear up some of these misconceptions.

**MYTH:** We should recognize people with disabilities as an inspiration.

**FACT:** People with disabilities want what people without disabilities want: to be viewed as unique individuals with interests, skills, talents, strengths, and yes, flaws. Someone with a disability may do mundane daily tasks differently (i.e. with assistive technology or the support of a personal care assistant), but many individuals find it uncomfortable when others express ‘amazement’ at their ability to hold a job, drive a car or have a romantic relationship.

**MYTH:** All people with disabilities need extra help.

**FACT:** Most people, disabled or not, will at some point need assistance throughout the course of a day, whether it is help carrying packages or directions to a location. However, many who have physical or cognitive disabilities are already excellent problem solvers. What looks like a “struggle” to others may just be a person’s every day solution to a task. As with all interactions with others, it is best not to make assumptions. If you feel like help may be needed, politely offer first and accept the answer if someone declines.

**MYTH:** People with disabilities would gladly trade places with people without disabilities.

**FACT:** Many people with disabilities feel entirely satisfied just as they are. Though, like everyone else, they have personal goals, and the desire to continue growing and to acquire new skills does not mean a person is resentful

of the disability or wishes he or she could walk, see, hear, etc.

**MYTH:** There is no point in inviting a friend or family member with a sensory disability to a movie, concert or other activity that usually involves sight or hearing.

**FACT:** People have all kinds of interests and hobbies and find ways to enjoy them whether or not they have disabilities. Many people who are Deaf have partial hearing, enjoy feeling the rhythm of music or play an instrument themselves. Some people who are Blind are film buffs and may take advantage of audio description at theaters (or enjoy the movie without assistive technology). Always choose to be inclusive and allow your friend or family member to decide for themselves if they are interested.

**MYTH:** It is deeply offensive to use words like see, hear or walk with people who are Blind, Deaf or use wheelchairs.

**FACT:** Many of us are familiar with modern terminology that places the emphasis on the individual rather than the disability (i.e. ‘woman who is Blind’ rather than ‘Blind woman’). However, there is no need to apologize if, for example, you casually ask a coworker who is Deaf if they have ‘heard’ about the company holiday party or a person who uses a wheelchair if they are ready to “walk’ over to a meeting. When your intent is respectful and inclusive, your communication will likely be well-received. If the person with whom you are speaking would like to offer a correction, then you have both benefited from an honest exchange.

# *Employment First in Georgia*

## The Council's Progress Through 2019

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In 2018, Governor Nathan Deal signed into law Georgia's Employment First Act (HB 831), which promotes employment as the first and preferred option offered to people with disabilities receiving government funded services.

The Act created a 14-member council that is comprised of people with various disabilities, a family member of an individual with a disability and representatives from state agencies involved in workforce development. It is tasked with creating biannual reports that make policy and legislative recommendations promoting successful Employment First implementation.

The Council has held 4 meetings to date: one on December 5, 2018, one on February 19, 2019, one on June 4, 2019 and one on August 27, 2019. All meetings took place in Atlanta and were facilitated by the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency.

While distinct from the responsibilities outlined by HB 831, the Council established the following goals to be completed in its first year during the meetings:

- \* Compile a database of all the funding attached to Employment First related matters.
- \* Determine all programs, agencies and other organizations that play a part in Employment First matters.
- \* Document the experience of people with disabilities who apply for services or assist agencies with the goal of ultimately creating a more effective system for the provider and consumer.
- \* Explore all agreements, memorandums of understanding and other engagements of the represented state agencies.

In addition, the Council has approved a logo to be used by partner organizations as well as language to be used for promotional and marketing purposes.

In 2020, the Council is slated to meet in February, May, August and November.

To learn more, visit the Employment First page at [www.gvs.ga.gov](http://www.gvs.ga.gov).



# Where GVRA Clients Work

A Few of Our Many Employer Partners

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