

# Painting A New Picture

## The Georgia State Rehabilitation Council 2021 Annual Report



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# *Message from GVRA Executive Director*

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Thank you for taking the time to read our annual report in partnership with the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC). As Executive Director of the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency (GVRA), I deeply value the SRC's essential role as the voice of the vocational rehabilitation consumer.

Having heard the thoughts, concerns and ideas of our clients and the staff who directly serve them, GVRA is making programmatic strides aimed at better outcomes for those who entrust us with their futures. It is our commitment to provide as many avenues as possible for people with disabilities to receive vocational rehabilitation services, and we thank the SRC for helping us make that happen.

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

I hope you will find the service data and other information to be helpful.

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

Chris Wells

GVRA Executive Director

# *SRC Members Bios*

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## **Kate Brady, Ph.D. ABD - Chair**

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.

## **Deborah Hibben**

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

## **Peggy Venable**

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.

## **Austin McDonald**

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

## **Cherise Mlott**

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

## **Jennifer Page**

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

University and a master's degree in Counseling from Webster University and resides in Atlanta.

### **Lisa Leiter (Vice Chair)**

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

### **Brenda Bentley-Parrish**

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

### **Dawn Johnson**

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

### **Wina H. Low**

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

### **Karen Addams**

Karen Addams is a Vice President at Parent to Parent of Georgia, where she has worked for over 13 years. She had previously worked for 6 years for Georgia State University as a Parent Educator for the Babies Can't Wait program. Karen has a bachelor's degree from Virginia Commonwealth University and has been supporting the disability community since the birth of her daughter over 30 years ago. She and her husband, Peter, live in Lilburn and are the parents of two daughters.

### **Col. Dr. Samuel Verniero, Jr.**

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.

### **Juliet Hardeman**

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 32 years and have raised 2 daughters on Wilmington Island, Georgia.

### **Jerry Haywood**

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

### **Katie Hearn**

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

### **Joy Norman**

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

### **Aarti Sahgal**

Aarti Sahgal is the founder of Synergies Work, a 501c3 that is committed to expanding business opportunities for people with disabilities. By providing mentorship, training, and ongoing support through their network of industry experts and volunteers, the organization helps individuals find that special spark and turn it into a business. As a parent of a child with Down Syndrome, Sahgal has always been an advocate for her son and resisted services for her son that might isolate or disempower him. Prior to founding Synergies Work, Sahgal worked as a consultant to the Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities, building inclusive communities and workforce strategies for individuals with different abilities and for three years with Parent to Parent of Georgia as a diversity coordinator. She currently serves as a secretary on the board of Georgia APSE. Sahgal holds a degree in business administration and has worked in the for-profit world for 14 years.



# Understanding the VR Process

## Going from Client to Closure

The vocational rehabilitation process begins when a client applies for VR services. An application is completed, and an intake interview is provided to explore the individual's medical, social, financial, educational and vocational experiences.

In the preliminary assessment, the applicant's skills, abilities, talents and interests are explored. The Certified Rehabilitation Counselor (CRC) uses the assessment to understand the vocational needs of the client. When necessary, other assessments are done to determine any barriers to employment an individual is facing.

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

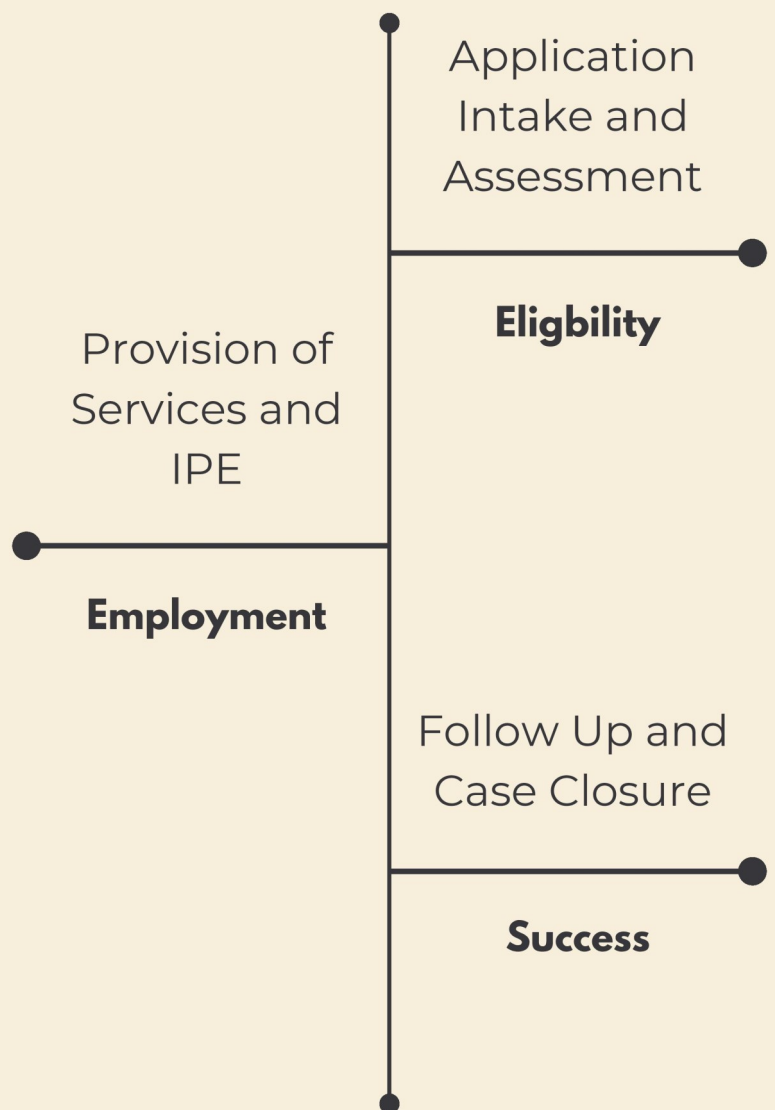
After eligibility, the client and his or her counselor develop an individualized plan for employment (IPE). This plan outlines the objectives and services needed to aid the client in reaching the vocational goal of their choice.

Each IPE is personalized to the needs of the client to assure the vocational goal is achievable and attainable. Working in partnership with the CRC, the client becomes knowledgeable about competitive integrated employment options.

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

Advocacy and support 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.

## HOW THE VR PROCESS WORKS

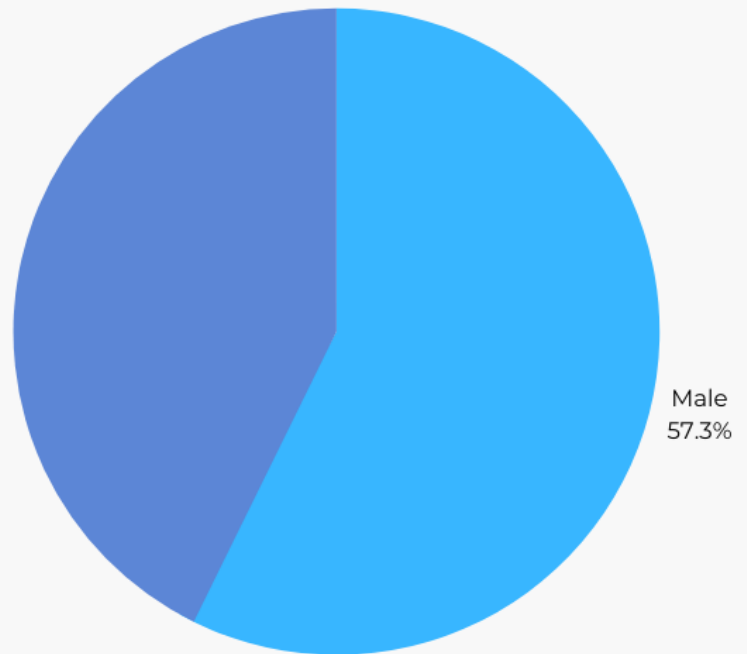


# *Let's Do the Numbers*

Data From Federal Fiscal Year 2021

## **VR CLIENTS SERVED BY GENDER**

Female  
42.7%

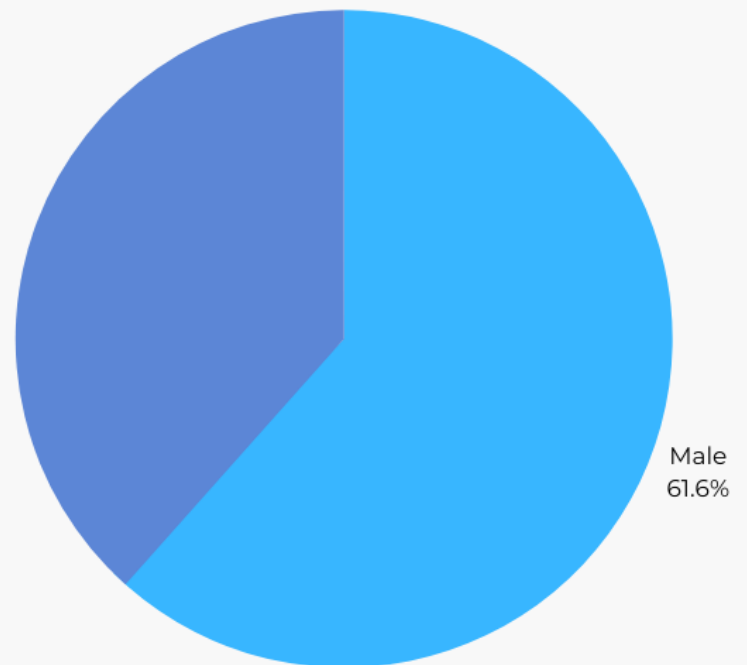


Male  
57.3%

Of the 29,167 clients served, 24 did not identify a gender. These individuals were not included in the graph above.

## **PTS CLIENTS SERVED BY GENDER**

Female  
38.4%

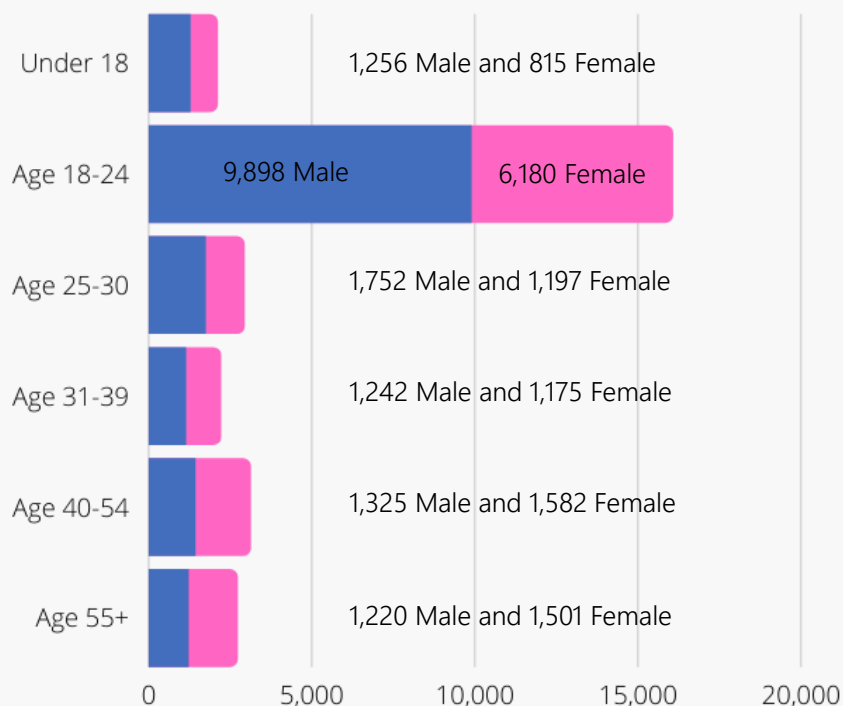


Male  
61.6%

Of the 9,368 clients qualifying for Pre-Employment Transition Services (PTS), 17 did not identify a gender and are not included above. All PTS were transition aged during FFY21, meaning they were age 24 or younger.



# VR CLIENTS SERVED BY AGE AND GENDER



Of the 29,167 clients served, 24 did not identify a gender. These individuals were not included in the graph above.

# VR CLIENTS SERVED BY EDUCATION LEVEL

Unknown	24,547
Secondary, No HS Diploma	1,556
Special Education	984
High School Graduate or Equivalent	925
Post-Secondary, No Degree	655
Bachelor's Degree	196
Vocational/Technical Certificate or License	176
Master's Degree or Higher	78
Elementary Education	45
No Formal Schooling	5

# VR CLIENTS SERVED BY RACE

Black or African American	9,923
White	7,785
Multi-Racial	1,384
Asian	275
Does Not Wish to Identify	43
American Indian/Native Alaskan	39
Pacific Islander	23
Unknown	5

# PTS CLIENTS SERVED BY RACE

White	4,098
Black or African American	4,014
Multi-Racial	1,000
Unknown	387
Asian	118
Does Not Wish to Identify	42
American Indian/Native Alaskan	27
Pacific Islander	4

PTS race data is not included in the general Vocational Rehabilitation numbers above. In all other instances, PTS data is included in the general VR numbers presented. When added together, the race data for VR clients and PTS clients comes to the total served on the year (29,167).

# VR CLIENTS SERVED BY DISABILITY

Cognitive Impairments	8,962
Unknown	4,643
Psychosocial Impairments	3,515
Cognitive Disabilities	2,692
Psychosocial Disabilities	1,246
Other Mental Impairments	1,052
Mobility Orthopedic/Neurological	927
Other Physical Impairments	773
Blindness	743
Communicative Impairments	631
General Physical Debilitation	618
Deafness, Visual Communication	467
Hearing Loss, Auditory	
Communication	452
Other visual impairments	447
Combo Orthopedic/Neurological	372
Other Mental Disabilities	365
Other Orthopedic Impairments	233
Manipulation Orthopedic/Neurological	214
Other Physical Disabilities	191
Deafness, Auditory Communication	158
Other Visual Disabilities	86
Hearing Loss, Visual Communication	76
Dexterity Orthopedic/Neurological	73
Respiratory Impairments	54
Both Mobility and Manip/Dexterity Or-	
tho/Neuro	34
Manipulation/Dexterity Orthopedic/	
Neurological	34
Deaf-Blindness	33
Other Orthopedic Disabilities	32
Other Hearing Impairments	24
No impairment	7
Respiratory Disabilities	6
Other Hearing Disabilities	4
No Disability	3

# PTS CLIENTS SERVED BY DISABILITY

Unknown	3,862
Cognitive Impairments	2,804
Cognitive Disabilities	1,458
Psychosocial Impairments	293
Communicative Impairments	206
Psychosocial Disabilities	165
Other Mental Impairments	122
Other Mental Disabilities	91
Other Physical Impairments	65
Other Physical Disabilities	49
Deafness, Visual Communication	47
Hearing Loss, Auditory Communication	28
Combo Orthopedic/Neurological	20
Blindness	20
General Physical Debilitation	20
Other Visual Impairments	17
Deafness, Auditory Communication	16
Mobility Orthopedic/Neurological	27
Other Visual Disabilities	11
Dexterity Orthopedic/Neurological	9
Other Orthopedic Disabilities	8
Other Orthopedic Impairments	7
Manipulation Orthopedic/Neurological	6
Other Hearing Impairments	5
No Disability	4
Hearing Loss, Primary Communication	
Visual	3
Deaf-Blindness	2
Other Hearing Disabilities	2
Respiratory Impairments	1

# VR CLIENTS SERVED BY DISABILITY AND WEEKLY EARNINGS

Other Orthopedic Impairments	\$486
Hearing Loss, Auditory Communication	\$464
Deafness, Visual Communication	\$454
Hearing Loss, Visual Communication	\$441
Deafness, Auditory Communication	\$438
Combo Orthopedic/Neurological	\$413
Other Hearing Impairments	\$386
Mobility Orthopedic/Neurological	\$380
Respiratory Impairments	\$367
Other Mental Disabilities	\$357
Deaf-Blindness	\$342
General Physical Debilitation	\$339
Manipulation Orthopedic/Neurological	\$337
Other Visual Impairments	\$328
Other Physical Impairments	\$318
Cognitive Impairments	\$300
Communicative Impairments	\$299
Other Mental Impairments	\$297
Psychosocial Impairments	\$295
Cognitive Disabilities	\$281
Psychosocial Disabilities	\$255
Blindness	\$206

# VR CLIENTS SERVED BY DISABILITY AND AVG. WEEKLY HOURS WORKED

Other Orthopedic Impairments	32
Hearing Loss, Auditory Communication	34
Deafness, Visual Communication	30
Hearing Loss, Visual Communication	33
Deafness, Auditory Communication	32
Combo Orthopedic/Neurological	30
Other Hearing Impairments	28
Mobility Orthopedic/Neurological	31
Respiratory Impairments	32
Other Mental Disabilities	31
Deaf-Blindness	31
General Physical Debilitation	32
Manipulation Orthopedic/Neurological	31
Other Visual Impairments	33
Other Physical Impairments	30
Cognitive Impairments	31
Communicative Impairments	31
Other Mental Impairments	31
Psychosocial Impairments	32
Cognitive Disabilities	27
Psychosocial Disabilities	25
Blindness	32

# Disability Myths Debunked

## Setting the Record Straight

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

*Myth 1: People with disabilities are brave and courageous.*

Fact: Adjusting to a disability requires adapting to a lifestyle, not bravery and courage.

*Myth 2: All persons who use wheelchairs are chronically ill or sickly.*

Fact: The association between wheelchair use and illness may have evolved through hospitals using wheelchairs to transport sick people. A person may use a wheelchair for a variety of reasons, none of which may have anything to do with lingering illness.

*Myth 3: Wheelchair use is confining; people who use wheelchairs are "wheelchair-bound."*

Fact: A wheelchair, like a bicycle or an automobile, is a personal assistive device that enables someone to get around.

*Myth 4: People who are blind acquire a "sixth sense."*

Fact: Although most people who are blind develop their remaining senses more fully, they do not have a "sixth sense."

*Myth 5: People with disabilities are more comfortable with "their own kind."*

Fact: In the past, grouping people with disabilities in separate schools and institutions reinforced this misconception. Today, many people with disabilities take advantage of new opportunities to join mainstream society.

*Myth 6: Non-disabled people are obligated to*

*"take care of" people with disabilities.*

Fact: Anyone may offer assistance, but most people with disabilities prefer to be responsible for themselves.

*Myth 7: Curious children should never ask people about their disabilities.*

Fact: Many children have a natural, uninhibited curiosity and may ask questions that some adults consider embarrassing. But scolding curious children may make them think having a disability is "wrong" or "bad." Most people with disabilities won't mind answering a child's question.

*Myth 8: The lives of people with disabilities are totally different than the lives of people without disabilities.*

Fact: People with disabilities go to school, get married, work, have families, do laundry, grocery shop, laugh, cry, pay taxes, get angry, have prejudices, vote, plan and dream like everyone else.

*Myth 9: It is all right for people without disabilities to park in accessible parking spaces, if only for a few minutes.*

Fact: Because accessible parking spaces are designed and situated to meet the needs of people who have disabilities, these spaces should only be used by people who need them.

*Myth 10: People with disabilities always need help.*

Fact: Many people with disabilities are independent and capable of giving help. If you would like to help someone with a disability, ask if he or she needs it before you act.



# Where GVRA Clients Work

A Few of Our Many Employer

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## In the Community

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While activities remained on pause or virtual this past year due to ongoing pandemic, SRC members still made a point of connecting with the community at large.

Deborah Hidden participated in the Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities Quarterly Council Meetings in January, April, July and October. She's been a member since 2012 and was recently selected to sit on the Executive Committee.

In addition, Deborah helped start two community organizations to assist those with disabilities. Circle 21 is a social group for young adults with Down syndrome in Henry County (and the surrounding area) to help those in program learn and grow social and communication skills.

Tennis People is a non -profit, local tennis program for adults with disabilities as an alternative to the Special Olympics.