

**2022 Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment  
of the Rehabilitation Needs of Individuals  
with Disabilities in Maryland**

**Maryland State Department of Education  
Division of Rehabilitation Services  
and  
The Maryland State Rehabilitation Council**



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# Executive Summary

The Maryland State Department of Education Division of Rehabilitation Services (DORS) and the Maryland State Rehabilitation Council (MSRC) continually assess the rehabilitation needs of Maryland citizens with disabilities as part of their state and strategic planning process. DORS and the MSRC hold joint annual public meetings and the MSRC regularly provides input to DORS on agency planning, policy development, and recommendations. The results of consumer satisfaction surveys are also reviewed to provide insight into the rehabilitation needs of Maryland citizens with disabilities.

This year DORS, in collaboration with the MSRC, undertook the triennial comprehensive needs assessment in compliance with the [Code of Federal Regulations 34 CFR § 361.29](#). DORS executive staff decided that not only would the agency examine the required elements, but DORS would also examine additional topics which would benefit DORS in planning for the future of our consumers.

The 35-member team consisted of DORS staff with consultation from the MSRC and staff from the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition: The Collaborative at The George Washington University Center for Rehabilitation Counseling Research and Education. The Needs Assessment team:

- Collected and analyzed relevant existing data
- Conducted and analyzed findings of supplemental surveys
- Facilitated focus groups and key informant interviews to ascertain the needs of individuals with disabilities throughout Maryland.

As a result, the teams developed a list of needs/concerns and recommendations to address such. This report outlines 113 recommendations throughout the required elements and additional topics.

## Required Elements

The results of the Needs Assessment include the following required elements:

### **I. Comprehensive Assessment of the Vocational Rehabilitation Needs of Individuals with Disabilities in Maryland**

#### **A. Individuals with Most Significant Disabilities, Including Their Need for Supported Employment Services**

1. The Need of Individuals with Most Significant Disabilities for Supported Employment Services in Maryland
2. Individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disability, including Section 511 Considerations; and Individuals with Severe and Persistent Mental Illness
3. The Need of Individuals with Most Significant Disabilities
  - a. Individuals who are Blind/Visually Impaired
  - b. Individuals who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing

#### **B. Individuals with Disabilities who are Minorities and Individuals with Disabilities who have been Unserved or Underserved by the Vocational Rehabilitation Program**

1. Individuals with Disabilities who are Minorities – Hispanic and Asian Communities

2. Individuals with Disabilities who have been Unserved, or who are Underserved by the Vocational Rehabilitation Program
- C. Individuals with Disabilities Served through Other Components of the Statewide Workforce Investment System
  1. Maryland American Job Centers – Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Partners
  2. Maryland Community Colleges and Apprenticeship
- D. Youth with Disabilities and Students with Disabilities
  1. Assessment of the Needs of Students and Youth with Disabilities for Transition Services and Pre-Employment Transition Services, and the Extent to which Such Services are Coordinated with Local Education Agencies

## **II. Assessment of the Need to Establish, Develop, or Improve Community Rehabilitation Programs within the State – Including the Workforce & Technology Center**

### **Additional Topic**

In addition to the required elements noted above, for the 2022 Needs Assessment DORS executive staff chose to examine an additional area which would benefit DORS in planning for the future of our consumers:

## **III. Assessment of the Use of Existing Education or Vocational Training Programs Leading to a Recognized Post-Secondary Credential or Employment**

### **Impact of Federal Funding and State Government Personnel Actions on Staff Capacity**

As emphasized in previous Needs Assessments, the DORS waiting list and delays in service provision remain a prominent concern and constitute the most prominent barrier to vocational rehabilitation (VR) services for individuals with significant disabilities in Maryland.

As of the completion of the 2022 Needs Assessment, more than 2,700 eligible individuals with significant disabilities have been on a waiting list for vocational rehabilitation services since 2017. Clearly, individuals on the waiting list are the most seriously unserved of populations. Several factors currently prevent DORS from moving people from the waiting list:

#### **1. Federal Funding Levels**

DORS' funding for the three-year period FY2020 to FY2022 has increased from \$46,156,368 to \$48,623,984, which is a 5.3% increase over the last three years. However, inflation over that same period has increased by approximately 12%. The federal funding formula has disproportionately affected Maryland. DORS' funding would have been approximately \$54,458,000 compared to \$48,623,984, a difference of approximately \$5,834,000.

#### **2. Pre-Employment Transition Services: At Least 15% Reserve Fund Requirement**

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, requires VR agencies to reserve no less than 15% of their federal VR allotment to provide or arrange for the provision of Pre-Employment Transitioning Services (Pre-ETS) for students with disabilities transitioning from school to post-secondary education

programs and employment in competitive integrated settings. This requirement for DORS to reserve at least 15% of its grant also applies to re-allotted funds. This leaves only 85% of the annual budget remaining for services to adults.

As a result of COVID-19, over the last two years DORS saw a decrease in the number of student referrals for Pre-ETS; however, in calendar year 2022 DORS has seen a dramatic rebound in the number of student referrals for Pre-ETS. The current trend is tracking between 4,300 and 4,500 Pre-ETS referrals. In Program Year\* 2021, 7,051 of Pre-ETS students received a pre-employment transitioning service.

\* Note: Under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, the reporting year has moved from the traditional Federal Fiscal Year (October 1 to September 30) to a Program Year (July 1 to June 30) timeframe. The year designation is the beginning of the year versus the end of the year for the federal fiscal year.

### **3. State Government Personnel Actions**

Prior to COVID-19, Maryland was having difficulties in recruiting vocational rehabilitation counselors, especially in the Baltimore and District of Columbia metropolitan areas, due to low starting State wages compared to other jurisdictions. During 2020 and mid-way through 2021, due to the pandemic, there was a reduction in the number of staff leaving DORS. However, beginning in mid-2021, the number of staff leaving dramatically increased and the ability to replace those staff became even more challenging. DORS worked closely with the Maryland State Department of Education to perform a salary study of the vocational rehabilitation counselor positions in order to seek a higher starting salary. As a result, beginning July 1, 2022, the average starting salary for VR counselors was increased by 20%. This brought the salary more in line with other jurisdictions.

# **I. Comprehensive Assessment of the Vocational Rehabilitation Needs of Individuals with Disabilities in Maryland**

## **A. Individuals with Most Significant Disabilities, Including Their Need for Supported Employment Services**

### **1. The Need of Individuals with Most Significant Disabilities for Supported Employment Services in Maryland**

Supported Employment services have undergone a transition in the last few years with major changes to DORS' Supported Employment Policy, the total phaseout of 14(c) subminimum wages, and a focus on training and quality employment outcomes as evidenced by Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Benchmarks that include Measurable Skills Gains, Credential Attainment, and Post-Exit Outcomes across all partners. DORS anticipated an increase in Supported Employment consumers with the phase out of 14(c) subminimum wages and an increase in successful outcomes by incorporating training programs alongside job development services.

Since March 2020, the agency has seen a drastic reduction in staff and services available from Community Rehabilitation Programs because of COVID-19. Now that things are slowly getting back to normal, these services, which include job search and training, will be more available. Many now include a hybrid or fully remote version. This increases the availability of these services across the entire state, allowing participants who would normally need transportation to a program to access services from their home or a more accessible location.

#### **Methodology**

DORS Data Review: Data was collected and reviewed to assess the number of participants under an Individualized Plan for Employment who have been, or currently are, receiving Supported Employment services, what percentage of those have engaged in a training service, and their closure outcome.

#### **Supported Employment Plans and Outcomes Each Program Year**

- In Program Year 2019, 4,138 plans were issued, of which 1,246 were Supported Employment plans (30%). The successful outcome rate of those participants was 25%. Of those plans, 162 had a training service category on it and those participants had a successful outcome rate of 32%.
- In Program Year 2020, 2,544 plans were issued, of which 815 were Supported Employment plans (32%). The successful outcome rate of those participants was 22%. Of those plans, 121 had a training service category on it and those participants had a successful outcome rate of 41%.
- In Program Year 2021, 3,213 plans were issued, of which 903 were Supported Employment plans (28%). The successful outcome rate of those participants was 8%. Of those plans, 97 had a training service category on it and those participants had a successful outcome rate of 42%.

#### **Recidivism Rates**

- In Program Year 2019, 2,120 participants applied to DORS who had a previous case open at some point. Of those, 599 participants had a Supported Employment plan (28%).

- In Program Year 2020, 1,447 participants applied to DORS who had a previous case open at some point. Of those cases, 447 participants had a Supported Employment plan (31%).
- In Program Year 2021, 1,713 participants applied to DORS who had a previous case open at some point. Of those participants, 417 had a Supported Employment plan (24%).

### **Staff Survey Regarding Supported Employment Services and Training/Post-Secondary Education**

- There was an even distribution across the state: 123 respondents, 12% - 22% range for return of surveys per region.
- 80% of respondents have been in the field for more than two years.
- 80% of respondents work or have worked with Supported Employment participants.
- 92% of respondents reported they know that consumers can engage in training/post-secondary education and job search services at the same time.
- 65% of respondents reported they have provided training/post-secondary education and job search services at the same time, with 80% of those respondents reporting they feel training/post-secondary education contributed to the consumer obtaining competitive integrated employment.
- 76% of respondents reported they feel they have adequate knowledge of training/post-secondary educational programs in their area.
- 48% responded that they currently have consumers on their caseload that are engaged in both training/post-secondary education and job search services.

### **Needs/Concerns**

- As an agency, DORS needs to:
  1. Examine how participants who receive Supported Employment services have been accessing training.
  2. Identify barriers.
  3. Provide support at even the lowest levels so training/post-secondary is accessible.
- DORS needs to make sure staff understand the new Supported Employment policy changes and the overall focus of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act as it pertains to quality and long-term employment.
- Over the last 10 years the successful outcomes for Supported Employment participants are lower than the agency's total successful outcomes by 10%.
- The last three years DORS averaged 28% of previous Supported Employment participants returning each year. The more Supported Employment participants who obtain long-term employment, the more this rate should go down.

### **Recommendations**

- Have DORS develop and implement training to ensure new staff are being taught correctly how to provide concurrent job search and training/post-secondary education services.
- Continue to emphasize that counselors need to complete the Natural Supports Worksheet for Supported Employment Assessment with consumers to identify and

provide all services necessary to give consumers a higher chance to obtain long-term employment.

- Develop virtual training programs available through DORS' Workforce & Technology Center (WTC) which lead to industry-recognized certification to allow consumers receiving Supported Employment services to be able to participate from anywhere across the state.
- Students with low scores on placement tests have traditionally been required or encouraged to take developmental math or English classes before taking college-level gateway courses. Offer these courses through WTC's Academic Services, where consumers receiving Supported Employment services will be able to access appropriate disability supports more easily.

## 2. Individuals with Severe and Persistent Mental Illness and Individuals with Intellectual and Development Disabilities

For efficiency, the subtopic areas of individuals with severe and persistent mental illness and individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities under the main topic of "The Needs of Individuals with Most Significant Disabilities for Supported Employment" have been combined.

### Methodology:

DORS, Community Rehabilitation Programs, and Consumer Survey Data

The most common services provided to individuals with severe and persistent mental illness and individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities who were employed, and whose DORS cases were closed as "rehabilitated" (Closed-Rehab) were job search, placement, and short-term job coaching followed by assessment, benefits counseling after Individualized Plan for Employment, and Supported Employment services.

An examination of 432 Behavioral Health Administration (BHA)/Developmental Disabilities Administration (DDA) cases that were reopened revealed that 85.9% are BHA and 14% are DDA. Of the total number of DORS cases reopened, 22.3% are BHA and only 3.9% are DDA.

### Supported Employment plans that were open in 2019 through 2021 that included training:

DORS Region	Total Number of Supported Employment Cases	Training Plan Types	Percentage of Training Plan Types
1	865	25	2.9%
2	977	6	1%
3	722	43	6%
5	648	8	1.2%
6	702	13	1.9%
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,914</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>2.4%</b>

In addition to the above data from the DORS' case management system AWARE™, survey results were collected from Community Rehabilitation Programs. The following indicates service of long-term Supported Employment for people with persistent behavioral health and developmental disabilities.

- 53.1% of Community Rehabilitation Programs stated their primary funding source is DDA.



- 16.3% of Community Rehabilitation Programs stated their primary funding source is BHA.

Additionally:

- 55.3% of Community Rehabilitation Programs stated their primary service population is developmental disability.
- 23.4% of Community Rehabilitation Programs stated their primary service population is behavioral health.

Lastly, of the 38 Community Rehabilitation Programs responding, 73.7% stated they offer training for the individuals they serve. The following are examples of training programs reported:

- Internships (paid and/or unpaid)
- On-the-Job Training
- Skills development

Data revealed that the services which led to employment after Individualized Plan for Employment are:

1. Job Search
2. Job Placement
3. Short-term Job Coaching
4. Assessments
5. Benefits Counseling after Individualized Plan for Employment
6. Supported Employment Services
7. Goods/Services Required for Training
8. Transportation

Data revealed the top three disability groups receiving Supported Employment plans are:

1. Cognitive impairments
2. Other mental impairments
3. Psychosocial impairments

For these disability groups, the highest number of paid authorizations that lead to employment was job search authorizations followed by job support/job coaching authorizations. However, it is important to note that there were a significant number of participants with unused job support authorizations whose DORS cases were closed as “rehabilitated” (Closed-Rehab).

Individual surveys were sent to DORS consumers. Twenty responses were received. Two individuals stated that their counselors spoke to them about vocational training. These individuals indicated that the training discussed with them was formal career training and internships. Six noted that they received vocational training.

## **Methodology**

Subject Matter Expert Interviews: Interviews were conducted with various DORS staff to obtain information regarding the use of training and higher education on Supported Employment plans.

DORS staff reported that they typically do not discuss training or higher education with consumers due to the complexity and time involved with the process. In addition, DORS staff

stated that the use of training and higher education on Supported Employment plans is challenging as these consumers with these types of disabilities typically do not have the required academic levels and/or resources (e.g., transportation) to be successful in the completion of training programs or higher education. DORS staff shared that when they pursue training or higher education for this population, the results do not yield successful outcomes. DORS staff have also indicated that knowledge and staff training is insufficient in the areas of vocational training, apprenticeship, and internships.

### **Needs/Concerns**

- Community Rehabilitation Programs report they are referring consumers more than once because the referral has not been received by the DORS' counselor. Community Rehabilitation Programs are questioning what is happening to the referral.
- The vocational training and higher education process is cumbersome and confusing.
- Community Rehabilitation Program and DORS staff need to understand and support internships and other forms of vocational training.

### **Recommendations**

- The Eligibility Determination Unit needs to determine if BHA referrals can be processed through this unit to ensure consistency for these populations.
- Increase training opportunities for DORS staff and Community Rehabilitation Programs regarding services for BHA/DDA populations regarding how to support both training and employment simultaneously.
- Streamline process to support vocational training and higher education.
- Provide training opportunities for DORS staff and Community Rehabilitation Programs for specific disability populations, especially autism.
- Review Closed-Rehab cases to determine how and why they are being closed successfully without job search support.

## **3. The Needs of Individuals with Most Significant Disabilities**

### **Individuals who are Blind/Visually Impaired**

DORS' Office for Blindness and Vision Services (OBVS) is committed to providing quality and specialized services to Maryland citizens who are blind and visually impaired. OBVS operates the following programs and services for eligible participants:

- VR counselors are located throughout the state in DORS field offices and at WTC. The staff is providing employment and independent living services for individuals who have a goal of employment.
- Rehabilitation Teachers for the Blind are also located throughout the state in DORS field offices and WTC. The staff is providing independent living assessments and services to individuals who have a goal of employment. Additionally, these rehabilitation teachers are providing in-home teaching for the Maryland Independent Living Older Blind grant. They assess areas such as mobility, household management skills, and communication skills.
- OBVS staff at WTC offer services and programs for individuals who are blind and visually impaired. These services and programs address areas of independent living,

mobility, technology, and communication training in a residential setting. The program works with WTC's Rehabilitation Technology Services to provide assistive technology services, including assessments and training, for blind and visually impaired consumers.

To meet the vocational and occupational skills training needs of this population, there are currently only two Community Rehabilitation Programs that provide training specifically to this population. However, all DORS-approved Community Rehabilitation Programs which offer vocational and occupational skills training programs, as well as WTC, are available for OBVS consumers with assistive technology and accommodations as appropriate.

During the past three years, OBVS served 1,286 individuals in the VR program for whom visual impairment or blindness was reported to be their primary impairment. Of the individuals who applied for services from July 2019 to June 2022, 98 had previous cases and had returned for additional services.

Of 1,286 served during the past three years, 274 had vocational and occupational skills training listed on their Individual Plan for Employment. Of those 274, 14 were closed successfully with employment related to their training within the last three years. Of the remainder, 172 individuals continue to receive services and 88 were closed unsuccessfully.

## **Methodology**

- A survey was sent to OBVS field counselors to elicit their opinion regarding the main role of the counselor. In addition, the survey solicited the counselors' knowledge of training programs in the community and at WTC, and determined how they are disseminating this information. Surveys were sent to 15 OBVS field counselors and nine responses were received.
- A second survey was sent to a random selection of 40 OBVS consumers to obtain information regarding their knowledge and awareness of programs and services offered by community rehabilitation programs and WTC. Of the 40 surveys sent, 10 responses were received.
- Two focus groups were held with a total of five consumers who had multiple cases and received services during the last three years. The purpose of the focus groups was to obtain information on why consumers returned for services.
- In addition, information was collected from VR agencies in other states, including Utah, Rhode Island, Mississippi, and Wisconsin, regarding the recidivism rate.

## **Needs/Concerns**

- Lack of introductory immersion training programs for adults who are newly blind or have experienced a change in vision.
- Lack of community-based career training programs that are accessible to consumers with blindness or vision impairments.
- Lack of resources for jobs and/or a network of blind-friendly employers.
- Consumers lack knowledge and awareness of training programs available in the community.
- Counselors do not feel that they are adequately trained to handle some vision-related aspects of their jobs such as adjustment to vision loss and career counseling for the blind.
- Lack of efficiency in the service delivery and follow-up by OBVS' staff.

- Lack of adequate communication between counselors and consumers.
- Lack of access to training programs at WTC; programs at WTC are not inclusive.
- WTC staff lack knowledge of blindness and vision impairments as well as appropriate accommodations for consumers to participate in programs at WTC.
- Consumers lack knowledge of training programs at WTC.
- Consumers return to OBVS primarily due to major life changes (e.g., loss of job, decline in vision).
- Consumers return to OBVS because they require extended training for services such as orientation and mobility and assistive technology training.

## **Recommendations**

- Enhance and emphasize counselor role in:
  - Advising consumers about the full scope of services, the rehabilitation team and process, and community resources.
  - Focusing on capabilities and individualized needs and learning styles.
  - Facilitating access to assistive technology services and ongoing training.
  - Minimizing gaps in provision of services.
  - Increasing timeliness of the services provided.
- Provide updated case management training to OBVS' counselors.
- Create an updated blindness and visually impaired resource book with statewide community resources for use by OBVS' counselors and consumers, to include but not limited to mental health and housing resources, blindness resources, Social Service resources, blind-related apps for independent living and employment, and technology resources.
- Continue to foster relationships with Community Rehabilitation Programs for services to OBVS consumers.
- Continue to offer blind awareness to Community Rehabilitation Programs including understanding the value of assistive technology, assistive technology options available, and necessary accommodations.
- Require that all DORS-approved Community Rehabilitation Programs that offer vocational and occupational skills training programs, as well as WTC, provide equal access to these services through available technology and accommodations.
- Continue to offer enhanced rates to Community Rehabilitation Programs.
- Provide advanced training to OBVS consumers on software, devices, and technology used in competitive integrated employment.
- Utilize the WTC Staff Specialist for Blind & Vision Services for the provision of increased and enhanced blind awareness training for WTC staff, especially for career training programs, CCBC staff, and employment services staff.
- Collaborate with the WTC Staff Specialist for Blind & Vision Services when developing career training programs at WTC to ensure accessibility for all consumers.

## **Individuals who are Deaf/Hard of Hearing**

The [Maryland Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Annual Report for 2020-2021](#) reports that there are approximately 1.2 million Marylanders who are deaf or hard of hearing. For Program Years 2019, 2020, and 2021, data indicates that DORS has served 1,680 individuals who reported being deaf or hard of hearing as their primary disability.

The 2019 Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA) report provided recommendations to increase and enhance service delivery for individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing. The need to update eligibility forms and provide training to rehabilitation counselors for the deaf regarding appropriate use of the forms when determining eligibility for deaf/hard-of-hearing consumers was identified. As a result, all eligibility documents and policies were reviewed in preparation for the creation of the Eligibility Determination Unit to ensure appropriate use of forms when determining eligibility for deaf and hard of hearing individuals. One of the goals of the Eligibility Determination Unit is to ensure consistency in eligibility determination agency-wide. There are counselors in the Eligibility Determination Unit who specialize in working with individuals who are deaf and hard of hearing. Some of the recommendations from the 2019 report will be carried over to the 2022 CSNA.

## **Methodology**

AWARE™ Data:

Data from the case management system AWARE™ was reviewed from program years 2019, 2020, and 2021 to assess the number of deaf and hard of hearing individuals served by DORS who are in Service status and have vocational and occupational skills training or post-secondary education on their Individualized Plan for Employment. The data revealed the following:

- Deaf/hard-of-hearing consumers from all regions are in post-secondary education much more than vocational and occupational skills training.
- Most deaf/hard-of-hearing consumers attended Gallaudet University or Rochester Institute of Technology.
- Some deaf/hard-of-hearing consumers attended community colleges.

## **Methodology**

Community Rehabilitation Program Survey

An online survey was distributed to Community Rehabilitation Programs across the state of Maryland to ask questions about people they serve with disabilities. Out of the 52 Community Rehabilitation Programs that responded, only 11 answered the survey questions about deaf/hard of hearing consumers and the services offered.

- Only one of 11 Community Rehabilitation Programs has staff who are fluent in American Sign Language.
- Two of the 11 Community Rehabilitation Programs are not familiar with the accommodations and accessibility requirements for deaf/hard-of-hearing consumers.
- Five of 11 Community Rehabilitation Programs are not aware that there are paid incentives available from DORS if the Community Rehabilitation Program qualifies and provides services to deaf/hard of hearing individuals.
- Some Community Rehabilitation Programs need assistance from DORS with American Sign Language interpreting services and Deaf Culture training.

## **Methodology**

### Focus Group of DORS Rehabilitation Counselors for the Deaf

During a focus group with DORS Rehabilitation Counselors for the Deaf (RCDs), they were asked several questions regarding deaf/hard-of-hearing consumers returning to DORS for employment support services or vocational training programs.

- The RCDs explained that deaf/hard-of-hearing consumers return to DORS for several reasons, including:
  - Employment support to find a new job.
  - Bad experience in the workplace.
  - Issues with boss.
  - Lost job or laid off.
  - Need hearing aids.
  - Disability worsens.
  - Need additional training to get promoted.
- The RCDs explained that deaf/hard-of-hearing consumers are no longer employed due to termination, being laid off, transportation issues, and long distances from home.
- The RCDs claimed that they know some employment support services and vocational training programs, such as Work-Based Learning Experiences, WTC, community colleges, ABC contractors, VSP services, and apprenticeships.
- The RCDs refer their deaf/hard-of-hearing consumers to several Community Rehabilitation Programs, including:
  - Bell Davis
  - Deaf Independent Living Association
  - Vocational Services Program
  - Family Service Foundation
  - Humanim
  - Jewish Social Service Agency
  - Deaf Reach
- The RCDs mentioned the WTC services for deaf/hard-of-hearing consumers; however, some consumers do not want to or could not go to WTC due to the long distance from home and the insufficient number of deaf/hard-of-hearing consumers participating in services at this facility.
- An estimated 50% of deaf/hard-of-hearing consumers are interested in looking for employment. The other 50% seek higher education.
- Some RCDs are interested in in-person or virtual meetings or training to learn more about vocational training programs or employment services.

## **Methodology**

### Focus Group of Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing Consumers

Five deaf/hard-of-hearing consumers participated and were asked three questions regarding their return to services with DORS, in particular employment and the WTC.

#### **Reasons why the consumers return to DORS after their case is closed:**

- “I am no longer employed and seeking assistance to find new employment.”

- “I am currently employed but seek assistance to find new employment and new hearing aids.”
- Not applicable to three consumers since they are still involved with their initial DORS case.

**Reason for no longer being employed:**

- “I quit because I didn’t want to lose my benefits after the new manager increased my work hours and would not reduce it.”
- “I want to find new employment because of communication issues with new management. Have not received a pay increase for some time too.”
- “I resigned because of the COVID-19 pandemic. I did not work enough hours to risk exposing my elderly mother.”
- Not applicable to two consumers.

**Familiarity with WTC:**

- “Yes, my vocational rehabilitation counselor told me about WTC and the training programs in the beginning.”
- “Yes, when I was referred to a summer program while in high school.”
- “Yes, I was informed about the programs there when I met my vocational rehabilitation counselor and joined the Starbucks training program.”
- “I was with DORS for a long time but learned about WTC later around 2011 for computer class.”
- “I have known about WTC probably from the Deaf community in Baltimore. I had a hearing aid evaluation there too.”

**Needs/Concerns**

- Most Community Rehabilitation Programs staff do not know American Sign Language, do not have signing staff, nor understand what Deaf individuals need including accessibility and accommodations.
- Community Rehabilitation Programs need training regarding Deaf culture, accessibility, accommodations, American Sign Language, and interpreting services.
- RCDs may not know enough about vocational training programs or Community Rehabilitation Programs because most programs do not serve deaf/hard-of-hearing consumers.
- The number of deaf/hard-of-hearing consumers in training programs at WTC is insufficient.

**Recommendations**

The following recommendations are carried over from the 2019 CSNA report:

- Communication devices should be checked every six months to ensure that they are in working order.
- Purchase or replace communication devices, as needed, to ensure effective communication between hearing and deaf and hard of hearing staff or consumers.

- All staff in each office should be trained at least once a year on the communication devices in their office to ensure effective communication with consumers.
- Data documents regarding employment information should be disseminated to appropriate staff on a regular basis.
- Employment specialists and RCDs serving deaf/hard-of-hearing individuals should have an employment toolbox which contains information on how to approach businesses.

The following recommendations for the 2022 CSNA are enhancements to the 2019 CSNA recommendations:

- Communication devices that malfunction should be repaired when the issue occurs vs waiting for the six-month check. All offices should have a device to ensure effective communication between hearing and deaf/hard-of-hearing staff or consumers.
- DORS needs to expand the number of Pre-ETS programs provided for deaf/hard-of-hearing consumers.
- A management team needs to be developed to ensure data is shared with employment specialists on a quarterly basis. DORS should have representation at a national level by attending the annual Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) and NET Summit (National Employment Team) meetings.

The following are new recommendations based on current information gathered:

- Provide additional training for Community Rehabilitation Program staff who serve deaf/hard-of-hearing consumers to learn more about deaf accessibility and accommodations, including Deaf culture and American Sign Language.
- Encourage Community Rehabilitation Programs to consider hiring staff who are fluent in American Sign Language.
- Educate Community Rehabilitation Programs about paid incentives available from DORS for serving deaf/hard-of-hearing consumers.
- Provide assistance and guidance to Community Rehabilitation Programs regarding interpreting services.
- Provide in-person or virtual training for RCDs to assist them with learning about vocational training programs.
- Examine solutions which will promote attendance of deaf/hard-of-hearing consumers at WTC. For example, hiring instructors who are fluent in American Sign Language or establish training designed for deaf/hard-of-hearing consumers.
- Educate and promote deaf/hard-of-hearing consumers regarding the benefits of participating in vocational training.
- Provide outreach and education to businesses on the benefits of employing deaf/hard-of-hearing employees.



## **B. Individuals with Disabilities Who Are Minorities and Individuals with Disabilities who have been Unserved or Underserved by the Vocational Rehabilitation Program**

### **1. Individuals with Disabilities Who Are Minorities**

The 2019 CSNA identified a need for DORS to consider targeted outreach efforts, in collaboration with workforce and education partners, to increase services to minority individuals with disabilities, with an emphasis on Hispanic and Asian individuals.

The 2019 CSNA report provided recommendations to increase accessible services for minority individuals with disabilities. The need to re-establish the Multicultural Access Committee was identified. As a result, in November 2020 that committee was re-established and renamed D.A.R.E. (Diversity, Awareness, Respect, Equity). Several cultural competency trainings were offered to staff by the DORS Staff Development Office, including Diversity in the Workplace. Other training for all staff in Diversity, Equity & Inclusion is in development.

The implementation of recommendations for both areas was delayed due to COVID-19, the closure of DORS offices due to the pandemic, and mandatory telework. Some of the recommendations from the 2019 report will be carried over to the 2022 CSNA report.

DORS continues to be committed to increasing and improving services for minority populations. According to the [2020 US Census Estimates](#), 15.2% of the population in Maryland are foreign-born. 10.6% of the population identified as Hispanic and 6.7% of the population identified as Asian. These estimates also show that 19% of households speak a language other than English.

### **Methodology**

AWARE™ data was reviewed to assess the number of consumers served by DORS in program year 2020 (July 1, 2019 to June 30, 2020) who are of Hispanic or Asian ethnicity (AWARE™ Report: Participants Served by Ethnicity) and to determine the number of individuals who were successfully rehabilitated by DORS who are of Hispanic or Asian ethnicity (AWARE™ Report: Rehabilitated Participants by Ethnicity).

Individuals from Hispanic and Asian backgrounds continue to be underrepresented among individuals receiving services.

#### **Program Year 2020**

- Hispanic Background:
  - 598 served (4% of total consumers served)
  - 40 rehabilitated (7% of Hispanic consumers served)
- Asian Background (Asian, Pacific Islander, Native Hawaiian, or Other Pacific Islander):
  - 529 served (3.7% of total consumers served)
  - 42 rehabilitated (8% of Asian consumers served)

### **Methodology**

Community Rehabilitation Program Survey: A comprehensive survey was distributed to Community Rehabilitation Programs throughout the state, of which 32 completed responses were recorded. Included in the survey were questions related to service provision for non-English speaking individuals.

## Needs/Concerns

- Of the Community Rehabilitation Programs, 77.5% responded that they do not provide DORS-funded services to individuals for whom English is a second language. Of the 22.5% that responded that they do provide services, the primary language of individuals served is Spanish (87.5%) and then Korean (25%).
- Community Rehabilitation Program staff fluency in languages other than English was low:
  - 70% reported that no staff are fluent in another language.
  - 25% reported having staff who are fluent in Spanish.
  - 2.5% reported having staff who are fluent in Chinese (Mandarin, Cantonese, other).
  - 2.5% reported having staff who are fluent in Korean.
- Communication methods used by Community Rehabilitation Program staff were reported as follows:
  - 40.7% use a professional translator.
  - 59.3% use a family member or friend.
  - 33.3% use a staff person fluent in a specific language.
  - 29.6% use Google Translate™.
  - 11.1% use translated printed material.
- When polled about barriers agencies have experienced in serving specifically Hispanic and Asian populations, results were:
  - 38.9% legal or work status in the US.
  - 27.8% lack of access to information.
  - 11.1% competing demands (inconvenience, cost, lack of time and financial resources).
- 80% of Community Rehabilitation Programs reported they have not declined referrals based on language needs.
- Of the 20% that have declined referrals based on language needs, they reported the following:
  - 87.5% lack of non-English speaking staff.
  - 75% lack of staff training on the provision of language services to limited English speakers.
  - 75% limited knowledge of language assistance services.
  - 62.5% lack of reimbursement for providing interpretation and translation services.
- 82.5% of Community Rehabilitation Programs surveyed were not aware of potentially paid incentives available from DORS if they qualify and provide services to individuals who need services in a different language other than English. Only 17.5% reported they were aware of this DORS incentive.

## Methodology:

DORS Staff Survey: A comprehensive survey was distributed to DORS staff covering topics related to all areas of the needs assessment, including questions regarding serving non-English-speaking individuals. In total, 198 responses were received; however, not all were fully completed.

## Needs/Concerns

- Not all printed materials/documents are available in various languages.
- Although 79.1% of staff reported no issues with using the foreign language interpretation service, those that did reported issues with dropped or disconnected calls, being on hold for long periods, and lateness of the interpreter arriving for the meetings due to distance traveled.
- Lack of bilingual or multilingual staff.
- 90% of staff reported no knowledge of any outreach efforts from DORS staff to assist individuals whose primary language is not English.
- Only 21.5% of staff reported providing information to non-citizens on how to become legally allowed to work in the United States.

## Recommendations

The following recommendations are carried over from the 2019 CSNA report:

- Before developing outreach efforts to increase the number of minorities served, DORS needs to ensure that the resources needed by field service staff have been developed and disseminated. This will contribute to a better employment outcome for minorities served by our agency.
- Task D.A.R.E. with developing a resource list for each region of available community agencies that provide assistance in completing the Application for Employment Authorization, Form I-765, which is the first step for non-citizens to become legally allowed to work in the U.S.
- Task D.A.R.E. with identifying a resource list for each region of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) providers.
- Task D.A.R.E. with publishing all information developed as a result of these recommendations on InDORS (DORS employee intranet).
- Develop a workgroup led by the WTC Academic Services department to explore the option of WTC offering English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes at WTC, in the regions, or virtually.
- Develop a workgroup led by the DORS Community Rehabilitation Programs Specialists to identify Community Rehabilitation Programs that provide services to non-English speaking consumers in their native language. Ensure that services include an understanding of the complicated vocational rehabilitation and job search process. Services should include identifying appropriate training, completing employment applications, and finding a suitable employer.
- Task the DORS Staff Development Office to continue to provide cultural competency training to ensure staff have been trained and are better sensitized to some of the needs of persons of color and people from different racial/ethnic backgrounds.

The following are new recommendations for the 2022 CSNA based on current information gathered:

- Consider DORS covering the cost for use of the Language Line interpretation service for Community Rehabilitation Programs as an incentive to expand service provision to this population.

- Offer placement incentives to Community Rehabilitation Programs who serve individuals with disabilities who speak a language other than English.
- Update the referral portion of the DORS website so that it is accessible in other languages.
- Examine additional options for foreign language interpreting services.
- Examine DORS protocols for when there are issues accessing foreign language interpreting services (e.g., dropped/disconnected calls, long holds).

## **2. Individuals with Disabilities who have been Unserved, or who are Underserved by the Vocational Rehabilitation Program**

Individuals unserved or underserved by the VR program is a constantly evolving area of assessment, reflecting demographic changes as well as agency initiatives. Previous needs assessments have used multiple strategies to identify areas of need and to propose recommendations. The most recent CSNA in 2019 identified the following needs:

- Lack of sufficient resources
- Continued use of “Delayed List.”
- Staff inexperience.
- Barriers to employment.

Having identified those needs, the following recommendations were made in the 2019 CSNA:

- Increase VR staff and manage caseload distribution across both the VR program and Pre-ETS.
- Provide benefits planning and address the lack of benefits planning service use among some populations.
- Improve information and referral to consumers on the DORS Delayed List, including assessment of the Order of Selection for Supplemental Security Income/Social Security Disability Insurance (SSI/SSDI) consumers on the list.
- Improve intra-agency data sharing and referral.
- Further assess barriers for accessing VR services (including lack of knowledge of the service).

Since 2019, progress has been made in addressing needs regarding those unserved/underserved, as follows:

- While additions to total VR staff have not been made, a reorganization of the agency resulting in the formation of an Eligibility Determination Unit is currently underway. The explicit goal of the Eligibility Determination Unit is to provide VR staff more time to allocate to VR services, as well as the Eligibility Determination Unit addressing efforts to remove underserved/unserved populations from the Delayed List (if the consumer is eligible for VR services) and to provide information and referral services to Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act partners.
- Caseload reallocation is undertaken to address these populations, as evidenced by interviews conducted with agency subject matter experts, summarized under “Methodology” below.

- DORS is preparing to shift the management of certain facets of Pre-ETS case management to a partner agency, as evidenced by discussion with agency subject matter experts, summarized under “Methodology” below.
- DORS has created a position, as well as associated data and reports, to facilitate Ticket to Work handoff to Employment Network partners, as well as assist counselors in identifying SSA beneficiaries for whom benefits planning phases have either not been initiated or fully completed.

As with previous CSNA reports, this current needs assessment has identified underserved and unserved populations for which DORS has been unable to fully meet the statutory requirements outlined in the Rehabilitation Act. This assessment has identified the following contributing factors:

- Lack of sufficient staffing and caseload reallocation challenges when addressing this need.
- Caseload size as related to statewide disability populations and agency capacity.
- Community Rehabilitation Program referral and coordination challenges.
- Creation and monitoring of new initiatives ( Pre-ETS, Eligibility Determination Unit) and their impact to these populations.
- Continued use of the Delayed List.
- Challenges with the provision of services tailored to addressing unserved/underserved populations.

To effectively address this content area, it is necessary to first define underserved and unserved populations. For the purposes of this report, “underserved” DORS consumers largely fall within four categories:

- Individuals on the DORS Delayed List.
- Individuals on a caseload that does not have a full-time counselor assigned (“vacant”), or their caseload is being covered by a supervisor or other staff person, or their case has been transferred between multiple VR counselors within a short period of time, or their counselor has less than three years’ experience.
- Individuals whose case has had little or no activity (case notes, case expenditures, referrals for service, etc.) for an extended period (defined as six months for the purposes of this assessment).
- Individuals who have been served by DORS but still require long-term supports and/or follow-along services, which should be identified in their DORS Individualized Plan for Employment and appropriate referral/handoff made at case closure.

(This includes information and referral to Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act partners, long-term support providers such as Behavioral Health Administration and Developmental Disabilities Administration, and in the case of SSA beneficiaries, potential handoff to an Employment Network.)

It is also important to identify individuals who are “unserved” by DORS. To address this, one must first identify individuals with a disability in Maryland who are not served by vocational rehabilitation. There are numerous data elements, outlined below, which present either a snapshot in time or trends over time. These elements can be compared to the comparable

periods of service for DORS consumers, thus identifying the total population available “to be served,” those being served by DORS, and the remainder being “unserved.”

Within each population noted above, there are also:

- Individuals on Social Security Disability benefits.
- Individuals who have a disability but are not receiving Social Security Disability benefits.

And within the Supplemental Security Income/Social Security Disability Insurance (SSI/SSDI) population, there are further subsets of individuals including:

- Individuals receiving and managing their own funds.
- Individuals who have a representative payee and often a guardian (whose wishes and decisions may impact the decisions made by and for the DORS consumer).

While there are similarities in the needs of these populations, there are also unique differences both in what services can be provided and how best to serve an individual of a specific type depending upon their vocational rehabilitation case status and those other parties involved in the decision making. Such differences will be highlighted in Needs/Concerns and/or Recommendations, when and as appropriate.

Second, expanding upon the methodology of the 2019 CSNA, this review will focus upon literature from several sectors. This assessment will also call upon subject matter experts, summary and analysis of data sets both internal and external to DORS, and a brief survey of Community Rehabilitation Program partner agencies. Note: Current available national census data largely predates the prior CSNA and was discussed in that assessment. As such, data for this assessment will utilize case management and human resource sources.

Third, based upon an analysis of these combined resources, needs are identified, and recommendations proposed to address the documented areas of concern.

## **Methodology**

Literature Review: To assist in evaluating these populations, a literature review of the following has been conducted. Highlights related to un/underserved populations from each report are noted below.

### **United States Government Accountability Office (GAO) Reports**

- [GAO-22-104031: Social Security Disability](#), [GAO-21-105419: Supplemental Security Income](#)

Obstacles to Ticket Participation (defined as those who assign their Ticket to work with a Vocational Rehabilitation or Employment Network) and which may contribute to un/unserved populations include:

- Severity of disability.
- Fear of loss of cash and medical benefits.
- Fear of overpayment debt which in turn deters participants.
  - Ticket participants are more than twice as likely to receive an overpayment than nonparticipants (within five years of assignment).
  - Overpayments occur when beneficiaries do not report earnings (results from confusion as to who, how, and where to report) or when SSA does not take timely action on reported earnings.

- Lack of understanding the complex work incentive rules
  - Less than 1.5% of SSI youth benefit from incentives such as student earned income exclusions

### **Office of the Inspector General Social Security Administration Audit Reports**

- [A-02-18-50544 Office of the Inspector General, SSA. Audit Report: Beneficiaries Who Received Vocational Rehabilitation Services](#)

Nationwide, more beneficiaries have unsuccessful outcomes (62%) than successful outcomes (38%) after receiving VR services.

- Maryland mirrors these national statistics. Since 2019, SSI and SSDI beneficiaries at DORS application (AWARE™ Table Data):
  - 32.5% Closed-Rehab
  - 67.5% Closed-Unsuccessful
- Majority of successful beneficiaries report part-time work after VR (76%).
  - DORS mirrors this data (79% of beneficiaries part time at DORS closure).

### **SSA Employment Summit**

- [Summary Final Report, Achieving Successful Employment Outcomes for SSDI and SSI Beneficiaries: Transforming Ideas into Action Plans, 2019](#)

Recommendations proposed to SSA to address unserved/underserved populations:

- Improve communication to beneficiaries and language tone in SSA letters.
- Start programs earlier in the disability application/award process.
- Inform Ticket holders to expect contacts from providers offering services.
- Train local field office staff on return-to-work programs.
- Broaden the focus of Ticket to be more inclusive of part-time work.
- Address cash-cliff for SSDI beneficiaries (i.e., reduction of SSDI check to \$0 once over the substantial gainful activity (SGA) amount, and after Trial Work has been completed).
- Establish relationships with families and support group members. Get buy-in from payees/families to improve employment outcomes.

### **Maryland State Board of Education**

- [Spotlight on Students with Disabilities](#) (October 26, 2021)

Secondary students with disabilities are:

- Less likely to attend and complete college/university.
- More likely to work fewer hours and receive lower salaries.
- More likely to have fewer employment benefits than their peers.

Total count of students with disabilities and by percent of total students show concentrations in the counties surrounding urban areas of District of Columbia and Baltimore.

### **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)/National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities**

- [Disability Impacts Maryland](#)

1,040,158 adults in Maryland have a disability (22% or 1 in 5).

- Most often reported:
  - 10% mobility
  - 10% cognition
  - 6% independent living
  - 4% hearing
  - 4% vision
  - 3% self-care
- 28,813 high school students with disabilities (2020-2021 school year)

## **Methodology**

Subject Matter Expert Interviews: Subject matter experts were consulted for the following topics.

### **Caseload reallocation**

- Caseload reallocation has been conducted by DORS with the explicit goals of:
  - Tackling unserved/underserved populations on large and/or vacant caseloads.
  - Improving customer service, diversifying counselor expertise across new regions and with new resources, programs, providers, etc.
  - Engendering a uniform DORS-approach rather than district-specific tendencies.
- Caseload reallocation is conducted by the Office of Field Services (OFS) on a district-by-district level and principally began during the COVID-19 pandemic as counselors were required to serve consumers remotely. In so doing,
  - Reallocation facilitated reduction in long-term case vacancy issues to alleviate unserved populations.
  - Reallocation was used to standardize caseload size to create parity in workload and improve service to underserved populations on large caseloads.
- Caseload reallocation is conducted by OBVS differently. Rather than a wholesale transfer of cases, OBVS uses temporary assistance via existing staff across all roles during staff vacancy. There is not an attempt to identify a target caseload size. Instead, caseload division is conducted by geographical area to ensure customer service locally.
- Caseload reallocation supports supervisors currently covering multiple vacant caseloads.

### **Pre-Employment Transitioning Services Service Model Changes**

- Goal: reducing DORS staff time spent on Pre-ETS management to allow for improved services to vocational rehabilitation consumers, including those considered unserved/underserved.
  - Accomplished by reduction in caseload with the shift of Pre-ETS cases via models discussed below.
    - Smaller caseload size should improve service to underserved populations on open caseloads, and unserved populations exiting the Delayed List to be served.
    - This will ensure that all Pre-ETS consumers are also equitably served, as there are currently unserved/underserved populations within this group, due to caseload vacancy, caseload size, and other factors.
- Pre-ETS consumers are all eligible to be served and DORS cannot predict the flow of referrals, resulting in greater investment by DORS in these services; thus limiting VR



services and thereby increasing the populations of unserved/underserved VR consumers.

- Since the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, DORS is handling approximately 5,500 Pre-ETS referrals annually and this is expected to rise.
- A 2019 meeting of VR agency state directors from around the country led to various models to serve these populations. Model options to shift management of Pre-ETS include:
  - State coordination with universities to handle Pre-ETS from intake through closure. VR becomes involved if the Pre-ETS consumer chooses to be referred to VR.
  - States uses requests for proposals (RFPs) to establish cohorts of providers/ Community Rehabilitation Programs to manage Pre-ETS.
- DORS has received funding from the Maryland State Department of Education to create a two-year pilot project that explores an alternative model to handle Pre-ETS referrals.
  - DORS will be teaming with the University of Maryland Center for Transitioning & Career Innovation (CTCI) to explore various outreach and communication modes.
  - Over the two years CTCI will evaluate which approach or combination of approaches are best practice for obtaining the necessary student documentation. Based on CTCI's evaluation they will then develop a fee-for-service model that DORS can use to sustain this effort once the two-year pilot project is completed.
- DORS will explore what options are available to assist in the overall case management of Pre-ETS. Under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, there are specific non-delegable requirements of a vocational agency. The goal is to identify what case management aspects of Pre-ETS can be delegated to outside organizations, such as a universities or service providers, to ease the workload on DORS counselors.

## **Methodology**

### **Community Rehabilitation Provider Surveys**

To assess Community Rehabilitation Program needs, the following questions and responses were received via electronic survey:

- Are you currently accepting referrals from DORS?
  - 7.7% (3 respondents) said "No.. Of those, the reasons given were no referrals received, a focus on Developmental Disabilities Administration consumers, and lack of staff.
- Have you seen a change in the number of referrals coming into your agency from DORS? From other Sources?
  - 43.6% (17 respondents) saw a decrease in referrals from DORS, while only 17.9% saw a decrease from other sources.
- Have you noticed changes in the type of individuals being referred by DORS or who you are referring to DORS?
  - 15.4% (6 respondents) said "Yes." Reasons include individuals who are:
    - Increasingly disabled and/or less independent
    - Have a criminal background or other/multiple significant barriers to employment
    - Experiencing mental health challenges
    - Minority (Hispanic)

- Needing more individualized supports.

## Methodology

Data Review: Analysis of data from the following sources will also supplement this assessment.

### Maryland Students in High School with an Individual Education Plan (IEP)

- 28,813 (for the 2020-2021 school year). This is an increase of approximately 1,600 students from prior CSNA.

### Social Security Beneficiaries: via [SSA's Ticket Tracker January monthly data sets, 2014 through 2022](#)

- Ticket Holders served by DORS (as a percentage of all Ticket holders in Maryland):
  - 2014 through 2019: average of 4.24% of Assignable Tickets assigned to DORS.
  - 2020 through 2022: 4.33% of Assignable Tickets assigned to DORS.
- Nationally, Maryland:
  - Is above the 1.54% national average of Assignable Tickets assigned to VR agencies and above the overall average of 2.44% Tickets collectively assigned to VR and Employment Networks.
  - Ranks 3rd in percentage of Tickets assigned of total available, behind only District of Columbia and Utah, which have substantially smaller populations and assignable Tickets.
  - Ranks 7th in total Tickets assigned to VR agencies and 11th for collective number of Tickets assigned to VR or Employment Networks.

**Review of DORS-Based Data:** VR counselor statistics, AWARE™ case management system caseload statistics, Barriers to Employment, demographics, Benefits Planning/Ticket handoff statistics.

#### • DORS Counselors

- 133 full-time counselors in Office of Field Services (OFS) and Office for Blindness & Vision Services (OBVS), with 20 vacancies as of December 31, 2019.
- 133 full-time counselors in OFS and OBVS, with 42 vacancies as of May 19, 2022.
- As of April 2022, there were:
  - 33 Staff in OFS Region 1 (Western Maryland) serving 3,098 consumers.
  - 47 Staff in OFS Region 2 (Southern Maryland & Lower Eastern Shore) serving 4,074 consumers.
  - 39 Staff in OFS Region 3 (Baltimore City) serving 2,919 consumers.
  - 42 Staff in OFS Region 5 (Central Maryland & Upper Shore) serving 4,775 consumers.
  - 41 Staff in OFS Region 6 (DC Metro) serving 4,757 consumers.
  - 39 Staff in OBVS statewide, serving 951 consumers.

#### • Staff Retention

- Between January 2020 and 2022, 85 Vocational Rehabilitation Specialist I, II, and Technical Specialists (aka VR counselors) vacated their employment with DORS.

- Of those, seven were hired and then vacated their employment with DORS during this timeframe. The remaining 78 had been hired prior to 2020.
- 30 staff were hired during this period and remain with DORS.
- **2022 Counselor Caseload Overview**
  - The average OFS caseload size for a single DORS counselor is 172 people, made up of combined Pre-ETS and VR cases. (On average, 104 VR consumers and 68 Pre-ETS students.)
  - All OFS supervisors also carry a caseload in addition to their supervisory duties. Average supervisor caseload is 68 people (combined VR consumers and Pre-ETS students), though this varies tremendously based on number of vacancies within an office.
  - OBVS counselors average around 70 cases – 63 blind/visually impaired VR consumers and seven blind/visually impaired Pre-ETS students.
- **DORS Agency-Wide Case Distribution**
  - 14,833 total active cases in the following statuses:
    - 2,770 (on the) **Delayed** (list)
    - 10,879 (currently receiving) **Service**
    - 658 (recently determined) **Eligible**
    - 526 **Employed** (awaiting case closure after 90 days employment)
  - 8,406 total SSA Beneficiaries served, “beneficiary” defined as receiving Supplemental Security Income or Social Security Disability Insurance (SSI/SSDI) at time of DORS application.
    - 494 of these are age 65+ (i.e., receiving SSA retirement benefits)
  - Per the 2021 DORS Annual Report, DORS provided services to 6,693 youth (including 1,326 Pre-ETS students). This is down both from 2020 when 7,282 youth were served (including 3,264 Pre-ETS students) and 2019 when 7,479 youth were served (including 5,737 Pre-ETS students).
  - A breakdown of 17,295 DORS VR consumers since January 1, 2019, show the following disability impairments reported at application:
    - Psychosocial/Other Behavioral Impairment: 7,489 (43.3%)
    - Cognitive Impairment: 5,795 (33.5%)
    - Other Physical Impairment: 1,782 (10.3%)
    - Blind/Low Vision: 1,231 (7.1%)
    - Hearing Loss: 749 (4.3%)
    - Mobility Impairment: 594 (3.4%)
    - Communication Impairment: 269 (1.5%)
- **Delayed List**
  - October 2015, the Delayed List was 2,697 individuals, with an average wait of 17 months.
  - April 2019, the Delayed List was 2,505 individuals, with an average wait time of 32 months.
  - March 2022, the Delayed List was 2,770 individuals, with an average wait time of 26 months.

- Longest delayed period 1,884 Days (date of application was 01/30/2017).
- Barriers to Employment data (current-2022): Delayed List
  - Homeless - 67
  - Long-Term Unemployed - 871
  - Will exhaust Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) in two years - 30
  - Limited English - 150
- **DORS Benefits Planning Usage Statistics**
  - 2,677 authorizations were issued for Benefits Planning Phase 1, which ideally occurs as soon as a consumer signs their plan and encompasses the full Benefits Summary and Analysis Report. A review of those authorizations shows:
    - 1,035 Canceled
    - 439 Open
    - 1,606 Closed (Paid)
  - Provision of benefits planning services to eligible beneficiaries declined to 38% in FY22 (same as 2019 CSNA) after briefly rising to nearly 50% in 2020 prior to COVID-19.

## **Needs/Concerns**

Synthesizing the information gathered from literature review, data analysis, subject matter experts, and surveys, the following needs and concerns targeting un/underserved populations were identified.

- **Staffing**
  - Supervisors and VR counselors are assigned caseloads left “vacant” when other VR counselors vacate their positions, in addition to maintaining their own supervisory duties and/or their own caseloads (consumers underserved).
  - Caseload reallocation will likely remain an ongoing agency initiative, though its goals and methods may change depending upon agency needs and in response to unserved/underserved populations which fluctuate with staffing and referral changes statewide. Care should be taken to address the following concerns:
    - Due to staff retention and hiring barriers, what was supposed to be short-term coverage by supervisors instead results in a substantial caseload size for supervisors, contributing to unserved/underserved populations. Until staff hiring and retention are addressed, this will remain an area of need for future needs assessments.
    - Reallocation creates a learning curve for staff familiarity with local services, resources, providers, and job market (local counselors need a system between districts to provide training, resources, and experience in the local area for counselors serving consumers remotely).
    - Counselors must ensure consumer choice, including if an individual requests in-person/local services.
    - Delineation of responsibilities should be codified in policy.
    - Address scale of reallocation to ensure equitable distribution of workload.

- **Caseload Size**
  - Caseload size is above the recommended size (approximately 140, according to subject matter experts) to ensure effective provision of services.
- **Unserved Populations**
  - There are far more individuals with disabilities than DORS has the capacity to serve.
  - Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) data indicate that most high school students remain unserved.
  - Disabled individuals with barriers to employment (such as long-term unemployment, homelessness, exhausting Temporary Assistance for Needy Families/TANF) are waiting for services from DORS.
  - SSA Beneficiaries
    - For 2022, only 4.25% of all SSA Ticket Holders in Maryland are receiving VR services.
    - 1,157 individuals (42%) currently on the DORS Delayed List have a Social Security “Ticket to Work,” waiting to be assigned to a VR agency/Employment Network (consumers underserved). This is unchanged from the percentage of Ticket holders on the Delayed List from previous CSNAs.
      - In 2022, only 58 individuals from the Delayed List were assigned to Employment Networks.
    - Currently 33% of consumers receiving SSI and/or SSDI at application received benefits planning services or are currently authorized to receive these services.
- **Community Rehabilitation Program Needs Identified**
  - There is indication of a reduction in DORS referrals to some Community Rehabilitation Programs, which may:
    - Contribute to underserved populations (may be related to vacant caseloads, or staff covering multiple or large caseloads).
    - Pose a financial burden to Community Rehabilitation Programs (due to reduced revenue from DORS).
  - Community Rehabilitation Programs indicated a change in referred individuals towards those with a most significant disability coupled with multiple barriers to employment. These changes in referrals may be attributed to the Order of Selection, an increase in referrals of populations with multiple barriers, changes in the labor market (allowing those with less significant impairments to find jobs on their own), or other factors such as COVID-19, DORS staffing turnover, and limited community resources.

## **Recommendations**

The following are recommendations to address the needs and concerns outlined above.

- **Staffing**
  - Improve VR staff retention.
    - Offer incentives using SSA cost reimbursement funds.

- Evaluate availability of Community Rehabilitation Programs to provide WTC-type services in the local community.
- Continue to evaluate programs at the WTC to assure their effectiveness in meeting the needs of both the consumers and employers.
- Reach out to retirees to see if they would be interested in working part time as a roving counselor to help cover counselor vacancies.
- Improve the HR hiring process to expedite the filling of vacancies.
  - Collaborate with colleges to offer scholarships and increase our internship opportunities for students interested in VR programs
  - Institute an internship-to-hire program
- Develop a cold-case unit or other mechanism to address inactive cases to address underserved populations with no activity to either:
  - Re-engage that individual to move them from underserved to served, or
  - Close the case

Closing cold cases has a ripple effect allowing cases from the Delayed List (another underserved population) to be served.

- Caseload reallocation
  - Identify a consistent and equitable statewide consumer/staff workload ratio (data indicates this currently varies substantially by district and region).
  - Codify a formal reallocation process to include counselor cross-training, establish counselor supports including toolkits, provider lists, and local resources.
    - Consider specific factors in reallocation decisions such as number of cases, type of case (only active cases be reallocated), etc.
    - Establish a reallocation summary/checklist, including contacts/current supports, next steps.

- **Pre-Employment Transitioning Services**

- The University of Maryland management of Pre-ETS cases will require monitoring during the two-year pilot project.
  - Look for best practices that might also be used in the VR program.
- Develop a fee-based model that will enable Transitioning counselors to shift some of the case management responsibilities to a third party, such as a university or service provider.

- **Eligibility Determination Unit**

- The Eligibility Determination Unit will require monitoring and potential revision, as this approach is still being implemented.
  - Establish data and accountability procedures, whereby DORS can track and monitor provision of services by the Eligibility Determination Unit.
  - Monitor impact of this process on VR eligibility to include impact to unserved/underserved populations once transferred to VR for service delivery.

- Evaluate the effectiveness of the Eligibility Determination Unit at increasing the productivity of VR field counselors. This can be done via examination of data including successful rehabilitations, reduction in numbers of cases inactive (no case notes or authorizations for six months), etc.
  - Analyze the effectiveness of the Eligibility Determination Unit at appropriately processing SSA beneficiaries on DORS waiting list.
- **Delayed List**
    - When individuals are placed on the Delayed List, ensure that they are given referral information to the closest and most relevant Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act partner. In the case of Social Security beneficiaries, include referral information for the Partnership Plus Employment Networks.
- **Services**
    - Consider further assessment strategies to determine whether the barriers to access VR services or the lack of knowledge of VR services contribute to populations being unserved/underserved (identify and examine new groups such as LGBTQ+, refugee populations, and others not elsewhere currently examined within the CSNA).
    - Continue to include benefits planning service for consumers who receive Supplemental Security Income/Social Security Disability Insurance (SSI/SSDI) .
      - Track and analyze statistics regarding authorization cancellation. Identify strategies to improve referral process. Develop reports to increase referrals on cases for whom benefits planning should occur but has not.
      - Mitigate benefits planning delays by coordination with SSA to address Benefits Planning Query delays and propose solutions, including facilitation of mySSA accounts for VR consumers.
      - Ensure the inclusion of representative payees, legal guardians in benefits planning and other services to improve buy-in and support for VR planning and employment goals.
      - Revise the DORS Ticket to Work and Benefits Planning fact sheets to address consumer fears and demotivating factors identified in literature review.
    - Develop Financial Independence and Money Management training as a new service to increase and maintain independence during and after VR services.
    - Develop a workgroup to evaluate unsuccessful VR case closure after Individualized Plan for Employment creation. Identify strategies to increase the likelihood of successful employment outcomes.
- **Partners**
    - Address referral changes noted in the Community Rehabilitation Program survey.
      - Reduction in referral numbers:
        - Encourage collaboration between DORS and providers regarding services provided by Community Rehabilitation Programs for individuals referred by DORS.
        - Educate staff covering reallocated caseloads.

- Create a referral screening tool, such as a questionnaire, to determine which partner may best serve amongst Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act partners.
- Currently, Employment Networks do not wish to accept Ticket handoff candidates that are not already at or near substantial gainful activity (SGA) earnings. However, national and DORS data suggest that more than 75% of beneficiaries chose part-time work. Many of these eventually transition above SGA, as evidenced by cost reimbursement.
  - Efforts should be made to identify those cases likely to lead to SGA, for potential Ticket handoff. Collaboration with SSA’s Ticket Program Manager is needed.
- **CSNA Methodology**
  - Consideration should be given to refining this content area. As this content area is vast, and extends to multiple populations and areas of concern, separating underserved and unserved into separate content areas, and identifying specific areas of focus for review within the following CSNA is recommended.

## **C. Individuals with Disabilities Served through Other Components of the Statewide Workforce Investment System**

### **1. Maryland Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Partners**

In 2016, Governor Larry Hogan directed relevant state agencies to work together to develop a combined statewide workforce plan. Maryland Department of Labor, the Department of Human Services, and Maryland State Department of Education collaborated to develop the operational components of this combined plan. In 2018, the Department of Housing & Community Development’s Community Services Block Grant program, the Maryland Department of Labor Division of Unemployment Insurance, and the Senior Community Services Employment Program were added to Maryland’s Combined State Workforce Plan.

<b>Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act State Plan Program</b>	<b>Core Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Program as Determined by Law</b>	<b>Additional Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Program as Determined by Governor</b>	<b>Maryland State Agency Responsible for Oversight</b>
Adult Program	•		Labor
Dislocated Worker Program	•		Labor
Youth Program	•		Labor
Wagner-Peyser Act Program	•		Labor
Adult Education & Family Literacy Act	•		Labor
Vocational Rehabilitation Program	•		Education



Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act State Plan Program	Core Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Program as Determined by Law	Additional Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Program as Determined by Governor	Maryland State Agency Responsible for Oversight
Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Program		•	Human Services
Trade Adjustment Assistance for Workers Program		•	Labor
Jobs for Veterans State Grants (JVSG) Program		•	Labor
Unemployment Insurance (UI)		•	Labor
Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP)		•	Labor/Senior Service America, Inc.
Reentry Employment Opportunities (REO)		•	Local partners
Community Services Block Grant (CSBG)		•	Housing & Community Development

**Table:** Partners for Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act State Plan, as listed on the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act State Plan 2020-2024 Referrals from Workforce Partners including American Job Centers to DORS.

**Methodology:**

AWARE™ Data: AWARE™ referral data was requested to determine the number of referrals from Workforce partners including American Job Centers to DORS. AWARE™ referral data was requested from July 2019 through April 2022. Referral data was only available from December 2020 through April 2022 due to major changes in our online referral system that were implemented in December 2020.

Referral data in AWARE™ indicated that 215 referrals came from Maryland workforce partners from December 2020 through April 2022 (a 15-month period). There were 244 referrals from workforce partners recorded from 2016-2018 (a three-year period). It can be inferred from this data that the number of referrals from workforce partners has increased since the last CSNA was completed in 2019.

- 160 referrals were received from Department of Social Services.
- 38 referrals were received from American Job Center/One-Stop.
- 11 referrals were received from Adult Basic Education and Literacy Program.
- 6 referrals were received from Maryland Department of Labor.

**Needs/Concerns**

- As a result of the pandemic which began in March 2020, many of our workforce partners were operating remotely and American Job Centers were not open to the public, causing a dramatic decrease in the number of referrals received.

- Since implementing a new referral process at the end of 2020, DORS staff were no longer manually entering referral data into AWARE™. Referrals are now entered directly into the system by referral sources, and they select the appropriate “Vocational Rehabilitation Referral Source” themselves.
- The list of options under “Referral Source” on the DORS Online Referral can be confusing for some workforce partners that may fall under multiple categories.

### **Recommendations**

- The DORS online referral system has several selections for workforce partners to choose from when entering a referral. It is recommended that this section be updated and streamlined to allow for better data collection. An example of one choice that may not be necessary would be “American Job Center/One-Stop” since staff referring from the American Job Centers identify with agencies already listed as other options.
- Once the Eligibility Determination Unit begins to process all referrals statewide, referral processes that have been established with local workforce partners which include warm handoffs will need to be revisited.
- Continuing with periodic cross-training and education of all partners at the local level will contribute to an increase in referrals as evidenced by the data.

### **Methodology:**

AWARE™ Data, DORS staff Survey, and Subject Matter Expert Interviews

AWARE™ data was requested to determine the number of referrals DORS staff made to workforce partners between July 2019 and April 2022. AWARE™ data was only available through November 2021 as the agency made changes at that time related to how referrals to workforce partners were coded under Special Programs in AWARE™.

AWARE™ data indicated that DORS counselors made 1,269 referrals to workforce partners between July 2019 and November 2021.

- 699 referrals to “Other Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Funded Programs.”
- 325 referrals to “Other One-Stop Partner.”
- 153 referrals to “Department of Labor Employment and Training Services Programs.”
- 83 referrals to “Wagner-Peyser Employment Services Program.”
- 8 referrals were made to “Adult Education and Literacy Programs.”
- 1 referral to “Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act-Funded Indian and Native Americans Programs.”

A survey was sent out to all DORS staff with questions specific to referring consumers to American Job Centers, the services consumers are referred for, referral processes, and referral documentation.

Results revealed that 78.4% of DORS staff who responded indicated that they have knowledge of what services are available to consumers at an American Job Center and 74.5% have referred to an American Job Center for one or more services. DORS staff indicated that they referred to the following services at the American Job Centers:

- Job Search/Maryland Workforce Exchange
- Resume assistance
- Computer skills
- Career information sessions

- Certification training programs
- Hiring events
- Youth services

Most DORS staff who have not referred consumers for services provided through American Job Centers indicated that they had not done so because they were either new to DORS and unfamiliar about what services are available at the American Job Center or because they didn't feel that the American Job Center was equipped to serve individuals with more significant needs.

Subject Matter Expert Interviews were also conducted with various DORS staff statewide to determine how staff were referring and keeping track of referrals sent to workforce partners in local areas.

Both Subject Matter Experts and the DORS staff survey revealed that there is not a consistent method of referral to workforce partners or American Job Centers statewide. Referrals to partners occur via telephone, via paper referral if that mechanism exists in that local area, via email, or other computer-based systems if they are available in that local area.

### **Needs/Concerns**

- Changes in the way referrals to workforce partners are coded in AWARE™ makes it challenging to obtain accurate data related to the number of referrals being made to our workforce partners. Warm handoffs to partners are the only referrals being coded in AWARE™.
- Although progress has been made since 2019 in cross-training workforce staff, including DORS staff, regarding services available through partners, not all areas have provided such training. DORS also has a number of new staff who have not yet had such training.
- Staff survey results revealed that there currently are multiple methods used to document referrals to workforce partners as well as uncertainty as to the correct way to document such referrals.
- Without having an established statewide workforce partner referral tracking system, it is difficult to collect and share data related to which agencies staff are referring to and for which services.

### **Recommendations**

- Referrals to workforce partners should be tracked in AWARE™ regardless of whether they count toward a counselor's performance evaluation. Currently referrals to workforce partners that are "warm handoffs" are the only referrals accounted for in our case management system but not all referrals to workforce partners require that level of collaboration. This practice should be revisited as it is not capturing all consumers being referred to partners.
- Cross-training of DORS and workforce partners should be conducted at least twice per year in each local area to ensure that new staff are made aware of the services offered and eligibility requirements for each partner.
- There is still confusion amongst staff distinguishing between referral to workforce partners, referral to American Job Centers, and collaborations with workforce partners. Current AWARE™ coding should be revisited and statewide training available to show staff how this should be documented.

## 2. Apprenticeship

### **Methodology:** Literature Review, Data Analysis, and DORS Staff Survey Results

The 2022 Needs Assessment committee members reviewed the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Disability and Employment Policy research and data regarding apprenticeship opportunities for individuals with disabilities. The following resources were used:

1. U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Disability & Employment Policy: [Apprenticeship](#)
2. U.S. Department of Labor: [Apprenticeship USA](#)
3. U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration: [Registered Apprenticeship National Results Fiscal Year 2021](#)

### **Results of Literature Review**

- The U.S. Department of Labor (U.S. Labor) is committed to growing and expanding apprenticeship and has recently awarded \$183 million as part of the [Scaling Apprenticeship Through Sector-Based Strategies](#) grants to expand apprenticeships and make them available to more workers and employers. U.S. Labor has also awarded a two-year, \$1.9 million contract to Social Policy Research Associates Inc. for the Inclusive Apprenticeship Initiative for Youth and Adults with Disabilities. The Apprenticeship Inclusion Models (AIM) demonstration project will develop pilot projects that research, test, and evaluate innovative strategies in existing apprenticeship programs to expand access, education, and occupational skills training in information technology, health care, and other in-demand sectors.
- The current U.S. Labor Strategic Plan documents evidence that supports expanding high-quality apprenticeship opportunities across sectors, including manufacturing, transportation, information technology, healthcare, and the skilled trades. The data indicates graduates of Registered Apprenticeship programs earn an average of \$72,000 per year, with a 92% rate of retention after exiting their apprenticeships.
- In FY 2021, more than 241,000 new apprentices entered the national apprenticeship system. Nationwide, there were over 593,000 apprentices obtaining the skills they need to succeed while earning the wages they need to build financial security. In FY 2021 96,000 apprentices graduated from the apprenticeship system. In Maryland, there were 8,040 active apprentices.
- In FY 2021, there were nearly 27,000 registered apprenticeship programs active across the nation and 2,879 new apprenticeship programs were established nationwide.
- In 2016, U.S. Labor's Apprenticeship Equal Employment Opportunity Regulations were updated to ensure equal employment opportunities in apprenticeship programs for under-represented groups, including people with disabilities. Previous regulations did not include nondiscrimination or affirmative action requirements based on disability. The final rule added disability as an element of sponsors' affirmative action programs and established a national goal that 7% of programs' apprentices be individuals with disabilities.
- In 2022, U.S. Labor's Registered Apprenticeship Technical Assistance Center of Excellence was formed and is building strategic partnerships across business, industry, workforce, education, and government. Organizations such as DORS are invited to join a national community of individuals and organizations working to expand and modernize apprenticeship. Organizations that join are:

- Recognized nationally for taking a role in scaling apprenticeship.
- Able to network and collaborate with other stakeholder partners.
- Invited to attend Center events with national and state leaders.
- Asked to provide input on state and federal policy.
- Invited to share, present, and apply for awards for organizational best practices.
- Able to access relevant, no-cost technical assistance on apprenticeships.
- Notified of apprenticeship-related events and news.

AWARE™ Data was requested to determine the number of apprenticeships coded as Educational Goals as well as authorizations in AWARE™. Only 53 cases were coded between 2019-2022.

DORS Staff were surveyed regarding their knowledge of apprenticeships and their ability to assist consumers in accessing apprenticeship programs.

- 21.3% of respondents indicated that they have had consumers involved in apprenticeship programs in the last three years.
- 58.3% of respondents indicated they had very little knowledge of registered apprenticeship programs.
- 52.7% of respondents said that they did not feel comfortable communicating the benefits of registered apprenticeship programs to a job seeker.
- 59.1% of respondents indicated that they had little knowledge of existing apprenticeship programs in their local area.

### **Needs/Concerns**

- Historically, apprenticeship opportunities for individuals with disabilities have been limited.
- There is limited collaboration, coordination, and cooperation among youth and adult service systems, state education agencies, state VR and workforce development agencies, schools, and youth with disabilities and their families to assist students with disabilities in achieving their post-secondary education and career goals.
- There is a service gap between youth and adult programs to encourage and expand opportunities for students and youth with disabilities up to age 24 (e.g., dual enrollment, internships, mentorships, apprenticeships, and post-secondary training options).
- During transition planning, there is limited encouragement provided to students with disabilities to consider apprenticeship programs.
- There are limited efforts to promote apprenticeship training through community college to help reduce costs for Registered Apprenticeship sponsors and youth and adults with disabilities.
- There is a tremendous need to increase outreach and recruitment efforts and tracking of apprenticeship participation and success.
- AWARE™ data indicate that staff may not be aware of how to code involvement in apprenticeships in our case management system.
- DORS staff indicated through survey results and the lack of data available in AWARE™ that overall, there is a significant knowledge gap related to registered apprenticeship programs.

## Recommendations

- Complete the hiring process for the WTC Staff Specialist for Apprenticeship Services and a WTC Academic Teacher to develop and coordinate an Apprenticeship Exploration Program at WTC and to work collaboratively to provide apprenticeship consultation and support services at WTC on behalf of consumers and staff statewide.
- Reestablish and expand the collaboration with the Maryland Apprenticeship Think Tank to increase the number of individuals with disabilities participating in Youth, Pre-apprenticeship and Registered Apprenticeship programs, and outreach to Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act partners.
- Utilize the members of the Maryland Apprenticeship Think Tank to identify community colleges and other approved labor vendors to provide training for a variety of apprenticeship programs for individuals with disabilities.
- Designate WTC staff to work in collaboration with the Maryland Department of Labor to promote and educate VR staff and partners such as consumers and their families, schools, Community Rehabilitation Programs, Pre-ETS providers, career assessment providers and other DORS' vendors about apprenticeship programs and services.
- Assign WTC staff to participate in activities such as Apprenticeship Maryland-Career and Technology Academy conferences and meetings, collaborate with Maryland Apprenticeship and Training Program partners, and represent WTC on the Youth Apprenticeship Advisory Committee, to better facilitate the transition of high school youth with disabilities into adult Maryland Department of Labor Apprenticeship services in collaboration with DORS.
- Establish a workgroup to fully develop policy and implement training for the tracking and documentation in AWARE™ of all measurable skills gains and credentials gained through consumer participation in apprenticeship programs and services.
- Utilize DORS' Business Services Representatives to increase the number of businesses offering apprenticeships in growth industries in Maryland in collaboration with Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act partners. Coordinate efforts with WTC staff to align with existing and new training programs offered.
- Review information on the U.S. Labor Registered Apprenticeship Technical Assistance Center of Excellence and join, if appropriate, to get support in the development of DORS programs and services for apprenticeship.

## Apprenticeships and Maryland Community Colleges

In 2019, the American Association of Community Colleges and U.S. Labor launched the Community College Apprenticeships Initiative, which will produce 16,000 new apprentices over the next three years. Colleges can join this partnership, which will use \$20 million in federal funding to help create apprenticeships.

In 2021, the Maryland Community College Apprenticeship Initiative - Maryland Apprenticeship and Training Program provided funding for expansion of registered apprenticeship opportunities into key economic hubs. The Maryland Department of Labor has allocated \$750,000 of the 2020-2023 State Apprenticeship Expansion Grant for the 2021 Maryland Community College Apprenticeship Initiative. Through a Competitive Grant Process, the Maryland Department of Labor will distribute three grants of \$250,000 each to increase the integration of community colleges and registered apprenticeships into the workforce system. All apprentices served by this grant must be newly registered apprentices and must meet the criteria for registered apprentices.

While strides have been made partnering with community colleges, there are additional objectives to be met, including advancing apprenticeship as a workforce strategy. Working with community colleges to expand the scope of services provided through registered apprenticeship programs could help state and local workforce systems transform how they meet the needs of businesses and workers fully achieving the vision of Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act.

## **Maryland Apprenticeship Think Tank**

The Maryland Apprenticeship Think Tank was developed in January of 2018 and is a network of professional organizations committed to expanding apprenticeship opportunities to individuals with disabilities. Through a diverse array of initiatives – research, education, public engagement, and on-the-ground innovation and practice – the Think Tank shares information on emerging trends and opportunities, best practices in apprenticeship and highlight how apprenticeship can break into new industry sectors and serve a more diverse population of vocational rehabilitation individuals. The Maryland Apprenticeship Think Tank members consist of a variety of leaders from DORS, including Workforce & Technology Center, along with the Maryland Department of Labor, Maryland Department of Disabilities, the Community College of Baltimore County, and community program providers such as the ARC who are collaborating to secure lasting change in Youth, Pre-Apprenticeship and Registered Apprenticeship at the state and local level.

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, engagement and progress for the Maryland Apprenticeship Think Tank was severely impacted in 2020 and 2021. At this point in 2022, with the approval to hire a Staff Specialist for Apprenticeship at WTC and to use a WTC Academic Teacher position for the purposes of creating and expanding apprenticeship exploration, consultation, and support services on behalf of DORS, the Think Tank will be reconvened starting fall 2022. The initial goals will be to re-engage existing members and invite new members to the table to help in the development of the new program and services, as well as to deepen the partnership and collaboration with DORS, Maryland State Department of Education/Youth Apprenticeship and Maryland community college programs, as well as other Pre-apprenticeship and Registered Apprenticeship programs and services statewide.

### **Methodology**

Subject Matter Expert Interviews: During May and June 2022, several Maryland high school and community college staff were contacted to discuss and review their pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship programs and services. Updates and information were received and compiled for use in WTC/DORS program development and staff were interviewed and asked for feedback and input as to the challenges faced by students with disabilities in the pursuit of apprenticeships as a career option after graduation or exit from high school.

Contacts included:

- Chaney Enterprises – CDL class B apprenticeship program
- Council for State Governments – compiled links to state apprenticeship laws and guidelines
- Anne Arundel County Public Schools
- Baltimore County Public Schools
- Caroline County Public Schools
- Calvert County Public Schools
- Carroll County Public Schools
- Howard County Public Schools

- Prince George's County Public Schools
- St. Mary's County Public Schools
- Talbot County Public Schools
- Washington County Public Schools
- Anne Arundel Community College staff
- Community College of Baltimore County – Earn While You Learn, reviewed related employers and their apprenticeship offerings
- Frederick County Community College – Programs in development, reviewed 4 current programs with office of internship
- Harford Community College – pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship programs reviewed
- Howard Community College – five programs reviewed
- Montgomery County Community College – building trades programs reviewed, Associate of Arts' programs offered in apprenticeship fields, certificate fields for apprenticeships

### **Needs/Concerns**

- Consumers transitioning from high school need direct assistance with exploration, remediation, and direct support in the process of preparing for and applying to apprenticeship programs and services.
- Consumers' needs for mental health support, accommodations, securing a driver's license/transportation or passing entrance exams can be significant challenges in succeeding in the apprenticeship career path.
- Need implementation of organizational/structural changes within DORS to assist students transitioning from high school to DORS programming seamlessly for those interested in apprenticeship services.
- Limited availability of statewide pre-apprenticeship programs in Construction/Electrical/Plumbing and Information Technology.
- Need for expansion of registered apprenticeship programs in collaboration with businesses and community colleges in some parts of the state.
- Lack of methods and strategies for the tracking and sharing of apprenticeship data between DORS, community colleges, and Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act partners.
- Need representation from Maryland State Department of Education, and Career Technical Education programs specifically, for participation on the Maryland Apprenticeship Think Tank.
- Systems are limited for the collaboration and communication between Maryland State Department of Education and DORS related to youth apprenticeship.
- Lack of consumer/family and staff knowledge regarding apprenticeship programs and services available statewide.

### **Recommendations**

- Implement the plans for an Apprenticeship Exploration Program at WTC provided through the Academic Services department, in collaboration with the WTC Staff Specialist for Apprenticeship Services and other WTC/DORS staff, trade unions, businesses, community colleges, and community partners to create plans and pathways to effectively transition consumers into local, existing Pre-apprenticeship and Registered Apprenticeship programs and services statewide.



- Implement the expansion of Apprenticeship Navigation Services at WTC that will be responsible for the coordination, implementation, and documentation of apprenticeship services such as, collaboration with community colleges, Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act partners, statewide and local training, facilitation of consumer services related to apprenticeship consults and linkage to statewide Pre-apprenticeship and Registered Apprenticeship training and programs.
- Finalize plans with CVS Health and the Community College of Baltimore County to conduct the first Pharmacy Technician Training program at WTC and coordinate with the Maryland Department of Labor to enroll the graduates into the Registered Apprenticeship Program for Pharmacy Technician sponsored by CVS Health.
- DORS should continue its efforts to develop a system for data sharing agreements between the Maryland Department of Labor, community colleges, and DORS for apprenticeship, employment and credentialing information.
- Identify representation from the Maryland State Department of Education and the new apprenticeship coordinator from the Community College of Baltimore County for participation on the Maryland Apprenticeship Think Tank.
- Develop a system to enhance the collaboration and communication between the Maryland State Department of Education’s Career & Technology Education Instruction branch and DORS staff serving transitioning youth.
- Work with the DORS Office of Public Affairs to explore and develop new marketing strategies to enhance staff and consumer education and awareness about apprenticeships, including but not limited to, YouTube videos for staff and consumers, an Instagram account, podcasts, webinars, training sessions at various conferences and schools, information packets, etc.

## **D. Youth with Disabilities and Students with Disabilities**

### **1. Assessment of the Needs of Students and Youth with Disabilities for Transition Services and Pre-Employment Transition Services, and the Extent to which Such Services are Coordinated with Local Education Agencies**

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014 mandates that DORS set aside 15% of the federal allotment to provide pre-employment services to students with disabilities between the ages of 14 and 21 that are available to all students with disabilities regardless of the severity of their disability. To accomplish this, DORS must partner and work with local school systems to identify students and coordinate services.

Pre-ETS are very specific in nature and include the following:

- Job exploration counseling
- Work-based learning experiences
- Counseling on opportunities for enrollment in comprehensive transition or post-secondary educational programs
- Workplace readiness training to develop social and independent living skills
- Instruction in self-advocacy, including peer mentoring.

The need for Pre-ETS and other transition services in Maryland is most evident when reviewing the post-school outcomes of students receiving special education services, as reported on the [Maryland Report Card](#). In 2021:

- 10.19% of students in grades 9-12 receiving special education services and 4.76% of students in grades 9-12 receiving services under a 504 Plan dropped out of school, compared to 7.36% of students in regular education.
- 68.7% of students with disabilities graduated, compared to 87.20% of all students.
- 37.1% of students with disabilities who received special education services in high school were attending college 16 months post-high school, compared to 63.1% of students served in regular education.

DORS saw a decrease from Program Year 2018 in the number of students with disabilities who applied for Pre-ETS from grades 9-12: 1,662 new Pre-ETS applications in Program Year 2019; 1,333 in Program Year 2020. However, in Program Year 2021, applications from students began to rebound to 1,539. DORS has already seen a 33% increase in applications in the first two months of Program Year 2022 compared to Program Year 2021.

DORS would like to assess the current 2022 need for viable Pre-ETS programs statewide, as well as the availability of these services coordinated by local school systems. DORS would like to identify where these services are needed most to engage all students with disabilities, under an Individual Education Plan, 504 Plan, or other qualifying services.

The current statewide distribution of Pre-ETS programs is as follows:

- Region 1 (Western Maryland)
  - 35 Pre-ETS community partners
  - 45 secondary schools
  - 9 colleges
  - 4 workforce partners
- Region 2 (Southern Maryland & Lower Eastern Shore)
  - 41 Pre-ETS community partners
  - 56 secondary schools
  - 8 colleges
  - 1 workforce partners.
- Region 3 (Baltimore City)
  - 35 Pre-ETS community partners
  - 53 secondary schools
  - 15 colleges
  - 2 workforce partners.
- Region 5 (Central Maryland & Upper Shore)
  - 54 Pre-ETS community partners
  - 72 secondary schools
  - 10 colleges
  - 2 workforce partners.
- Region 6 (DC Metro)
  - 34 Pre-ETS community partners
  - 72 secondary schools
  - 8 colleges
  - 2 workforce partners

In addition, the current caseload distribution of cases in DORS for students being served under the age of 22 is as follows:

- Region 1: 1,393 students with disabilities under age 22

- Region 2: 2,008 students with disabilities under age 22
- Region 3: 1,033 students with disabilities under age 22
- Region 5: 2,042 students with disabilities under age 22
- Region 6: 2,300 students with disabilities under age 22

DORS seeks to use this CSNA to acquire a better understanding of the number of potentially eligible students with disabilities who will be able to participate in Pre-ETS, as well as which local school systems are providing these services. DORS seeks to understand and increase collaboration with local school systems, as well as identify how to administer Pre-ETS programs that are most appropriate to serve these students.

## **Methodology**

Survey of Local Education Agencies and DORS' statewide counselors who serve transition-age youth and students with disabilities

Surveys were sent to each of the Local Education Agencies to determine:

1. Which pre-employment transitioning services are being provided by the schools as part of secondary transition?
2. How are the services coordinated with the local DORS' counselor?
3. Which services are not available in their respective geographical areas?
4. Is the coordination of services between the local school systems and DORS sufficient to engage and meet the needs of students with disabilities?

## **Survey Responses:**

- In which county is your school is located?
  - 36% of the responses came from Montgomery County.
  - The next largest responses were from Baltimore County (8%), Howard County (7%) and Washington County (7%).
  - Responses were also received from: Allegany, Anne Arundel, Carroll, Cecil, Frederick, Harford, and Prince George's Counties.
- Do you have good working relationships with your DORS counselors?
  - 56% answered Yes and 19% indicated No.
- Are you able to obtain documentation/information from your assigned DORS staff in a timely manner?
  - 60% replied Yes, while 22% replied Sometimes.
- Does your assigned DORS' counselor reach out for questions or collaboration?
  - 56% indicated Yes, 25% answered Sometimes, and 19% answered No.
- Does DORS staff attend Transition Fairs and/or school events to promote services?
  - 55% indicated that DORS staff attends, 25% indicated this happens Sometimes and 20% answered No.
- How many referrals do you submit within a year?
  - 83% indicated less than 100, while 13% indicated less than 200. A small percentage (3%) indicated less than 300.
- Looking at DORS' counselor attendance at Individual Education Plan meetings, 93% indicated that counselors are attending 1-10 Individual Education Plan meetings a month and of those meetings, 68% were attended virtually.

## Methodology

Survey of DORS' Counselors: Surveys were also sent to DORS' counselors providing services to transition youth and students with disabilities to determine:

1. How coordination is being provided between DORS and local school systems and how often.
2. How many referrals for students with disabilities are received in a year.
3. How are counselors engaged in attending Individual Education Plan meetings.

## Survey Responses

This survey had a 77.1% completion rate, with most responses coming from Baltimore County (32%) and the next largest response from Anne Arundel County (14%). All other counties were represented with a 5% response rate.

- When asked how often DORS' counselors are in touch with the transition teacher in their area, 54% responded Monthly, while 29% indicated Weekly.
- 82% of counselors responded that they have a Good working relationship with their transition support teacher, 11% indicated Somewhat, and 7% indicated No.
- When asked if they receive documentation/information needed from the transition support teacher in a timely manner, 75% indicated Yes, while 22% indicated Sometimes.
- 86% of DORS staff indicated that their transition support teacher reaches out to them for questions and collaboration.
- When asked about attending transition fairs or school events to promote services, 68% indicated attendance, while 21% indicated that they attend Sometimes.
- When asked how many referrals are received from their schools within a year, 46% indicated less than 100, 32% indicated less than 200, and 14% indicated less than 300.
- 100% of counselors indicated that Individual Education Plan meetings are offered virtually for attendance.
- 82% of DORS staff indicated that they attend Individual Education Plan meetings monthly and of that number, 89% are attended virtually.

## Needs/Concerns

- Survey results indicated there needs to be a larger DORS presence at school events, including transition fairs to promote Pre-ETS and VR. Fewer than 70% who responded indicated that this was occurring.
- With the number of referrals received from the school on a yearly basis, a higher focus needs to be on reaching students in a variety of settings (e.g., schools, community).
- When asked about receiving needed documentation/information in a timely manner, 75% of DORS staff indicated that this happens, while only 60% of Transition Support Teachers responded with Yes.
- Although both surveys indicated a positive response regarding collaboration, it appears there is a disconnect between collaboration and getting the information to the students to provide services.

## Recommendations

- Each DORS Region needs to develop a plan for an increased level of consistent contact with the transitioning-age youth school staff.
- DORS needs to provide updated and accurate transition information and materials, sharing consistently with schools across the state.
- DORS needs to emphasize the importance of responding to school partner requests for student information.
- Formalize consistent partnerships with Local School Systems through agreements to ensure access to required Pre-ETS and transition-age youth VR services throughout the state.

## Methodology

Virtual interviews were held with surrounding VR programs in District of Columbia (RSA) and Delaware VR to determine how other VR programs are engaging with their local education agencies and provide Pre-ETS to students with disabilities.

Interview responses from: Tikeya Milburn Project Manager, Department of Disability Services, RSA Youth Transition Unit (District of Columbia/RSA):

- *How do counselors connect with LEAs?*  
“While virtual meetings allow for more participation, counselors do connect with students on-site. On average, a transition counselor goes to the school at least weekly, more if they are needed to connect with students. Counselors have monthly meetings with local school systems to review new referrals. Yearly retreats also help for networking and team building between the VR Program and Local School Systems. Counselors provide both case coordination and Pre-ETS provision while at the schools, including meetings with parents to conduct intakes and fill out paperwork. At this time, both VR Staff and vendors provide Pre-ETS.”
- *Do any of your LEAs provide Pre-ETS?*  
“Currently, Pre-ETS is provided as follows: three Workforce Development Coordinators coordinate services through an MOU and one job placement specialist facilitates the provision of Work-Based Learning Experiences. Note, these positions are hired by the DC Public School System and not funded by District of Columbia VR, but are provided through Memorandum of Agreements.”
- *How do counselors attend Individual Education Plan meetings?*  
“Counselors need to be invited to attend by the local school system.”

Interview responses from: David Frye, Delaware Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, Statewide Transition Coordinator:

- *How do counselors connect with LEAs?*  
“A grant-funded MOU is provided by VR for a Work-Based Learning Experiences specialist for the school. This employee has access to the VR AWARE™ case management system. Delaware also has the Center for Appropriate Dispute Resolution in Special Education (CADRE) meetings with Disability Services, school, VR, and Department of Education monthly to share information and data.”
- *Do any of your LEAs provide Pre-ETS?*  
“A school has been a service provider, but not often. VR has Pre-ETS program

specialists who meet with local school systems to coordinate services. Many Pre-ETS are provided to groups of potentially eligible students with disabilities.”

- *How do counselors attend Individual Education Plan meetings?*  
“They need to be invited and sign a release. They are working on developing a video for school systems to use at Individual Education Plan meetings to provide information about Pre-ETS.”

In addition, he shared information regarding how vocational rehabilitation counselors coordinate with local education systems. This includes a MOU to share data with the Department of Education, mostly for planning services, identifying the number of students with disabilities, and school systems having autonomy. So Pre-Employment Transitioning Services service provision varies depending on the local school system.

- Additional information provided regarding caseload size and VR counselor provision of services: Pre-ETS are completely separate from VR services, with different staff working with eligible students with disabilities and potentially eligible-only students.

### **Needs/Concerns**

- VR staff are unable to attend Individual Education Plan meetings without an invitation and permission received from a parent.
- Although virtual attendance at Individual Education Plan meetings is available, VR/Pre-ETS staff are required to meet in-person with identified students.
- There appears to be a lack of consistency throughout the state regarding attendance at Individual Education Plan meetings.

### **Recommendations**

- Consider a streamlined process for receiving invites to Individual Education Plan meetings that include parent consent as well as needed documentation for the robust discussion of Pre-ETS and VR transition services.
- Increase the provision of information about transition services. Consideration should be given to developing a video explaining services to students and parents prior to the Individual Education Plan meeting.
- DORS should consider partnering with transition coordinators to facilitate workshops for transitioning youth and students with disabilities to educate them regarding college or training options. Assistance with enrollment could also be provided.

### **Methodology**

Data Review: Students with 504 Plans in 2021, Source: [Maryland Report Card](#)

- Elementary Students: 9,421
- Middle Schools Students: 11,259
- High School: 16,639
- TOTAL: 37,319

Students with Disabilities with Individualized Education Plans in 2021, Source: Maryland State Department of Education

- Kindergarten through 21 years old: 109,443
- Students grades 9-12: 27,400
- Students under an Individual Education Plan in Non-Public Schools: 4,024

TOTAL number of students potentially requesting Pre-ETS and VR transition services (including students with 504 Plans): 48,063

### **Needs/Concerns**

- It is anticipated that based on data collected the number of students accessing DORS for Pre-ETS and other vocational services will increase each year.
- It is anticipated that there are 16,639 students being served under a 504 Plan that DORS will not be able to access due to limited collaboration between DORS and school staff monitoring 504 Plans.
- It is anticipated that the number of students with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities accessing DORS will increase each year due to Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act requirements related to Section 511.
- It is also anticipated that DORS transitioning caseloads will continue to grow each year to a size difficult to manage for needed collaboration and outreach.

### **Recommendations**

- The State Agency Transition Collaborative of Maryland is working on consistent 504 Plan implementation across the state. DORS will participate in this larger effort to identify local 504 Coordinators in order to provide information about available Pre-ETS.
- Explore possibilities of outsourcing the coordination and/or delivery of Pre-ETS.
- Develop a tiered plan with varying levels for the provision of Pre-ETS programming by designing/structuring services to meet student needs.

## **II. Assessment of the Need to Establish, Develop, or Improve Community Rehabilitation Programs within the State – Including the Workforce & Technology Center**

### **A. Community Rehabilitation Partners**

As noted in the 2019 Needs Assessment, the success of DORS consumers is due in many instances to the partnerships DORS has established with Community Rehabilitation Programs. To maintain continued positive partnerships with Community Rehabilitation Programs and to ensure that services provided meet the needs of DORS consumers, the 2022 Needs Assessment will examine various components related to service delivery. The Needs Assessment will examine job coaching services for job development and how job coaching can be improved including services designed for specific disability populations. In addition, the 2022 Needs Assessment will evaluate which services are leading to an employment outcome and examine additional services that are needed by consumers.

#### **Methodology**

DORS Staff Survey/Data Comparison: A survey was sent to DORS staff regarding Community Rehabilitation Program services.

- 198 responses were received from DORS staff.
- 61% reported purchasing job development preparation services.
- 56% purchased short-term job coaching with job search assistance.
- 41% purchased short-term job coaching (fading schedule) for maintaining employment.
- 29% purchased job coaching (supported employment fading schedule) for maintaining employment.

DORS staff reported limited or no access to services from their Community Rehabilitation Providers for specific consumer disability types. Data revealed that most Community Rehabilitation Providers do not offer services to individuals whose primary language is not English. Secondly, data revealed that community providers have limited to no services for individuals who are deaf and hard of hearing or blind and visually impaired. Remaining data in descending order revealed limited-to-no access to services for individuals with traumatic or acquired brain injury, autism, behavioral health and other disabilities.

Of DORS staff responding:

- 67% indicated that they routinely offer vocational and career training to their consumers.
- 77% indicated that they offer formal career training from an outside vendor.
- 57% provide Community Rehabilitation Program skills training.
- 46% provide on-the-job training.
- 42% provide internships.
- 78% indicated that they do not provide internship opportunities. Staff report that a lack of information is the primary reason they do not use internships more often.
- 61% reported that they do not have a process in their office to refer individuals to their local workforce partners.

#### **Methodology**

DORS Community Rehabilitation Program Survey/Data Comparison



A survey was sent to approximately 157 Community Rehabilitation Programs. Of the Community Rehabilitation Programs who received the survey, 52 responded.

The primary funding source identified by the Community Rehabilitation Programs were:

- Developmental Disabilities Administration: 53%
- DORS: 29%
- Behavioral Health Administration: 16%
- Other Source: 2%.

The Community Rehabilitation Programs surveyed listed their primary service populations as:

- Intellectual disability: 55.3%
- Behavioral health: 23.4%
- Other populations: 12.8%
- Autism: 6.4%
- Deaf and hard of hearing: 2.1%

DORS data below reflects services for special populations by region:

	Region 1	Region 2 - Western Shore	Region 2 - Eastern Shore	Region 3	Region 5	Region 6
Deaf/Hard of Hearing	1	3	1	2	0	2
Blind, Deaf-Blind & Visual Impairment	10	4	7	10	11	9
DDA	22	9	16	10	34	21
BHA SEP	5	4	4	23	10	10
BHA ACT	0	1	1	5	4	2
BHA EBP	3	2	5	4	5	4
ABI	2	0	2	1	2	4
Autism	2	0	0	3	3	0

\*Numbers indicate # of providers, not locations

Additionally, although no blind-specific agencies responded to the survey, there are two agencies providing VR employment services to blind individuals.

While primary populations are listed above as reported by Community Rehabilitation Programs, it is also worth mentioning that surveyed Programs reported they also serve other populations including traumatic or acquired brain injury, blind and visually impaired, ex-offenders, veterans, physical limitations, homelessness, senior citizens, and transition-age youth.

A majority (54.3%) of the Community Rehabilitation Programs indicated that they are not interested in serving any other populations than the ones they currently serve. Others said they would consider serving behavior health, traumatic or acquired brain injury, deaf and hard of hearing, ex-offenders, veterans, and other populations.

To better serve consumers, the Community Rehabilitation Programs reported they would like more training for serving specific populations. These include:

- Blind/Visually Impaired: 71%

- Autism: 67.7%
- Deaf/Hard of Hearing: 54%

Community Rehabilitation Programs responded that they are aware of the potential enhanced rates for providing services to:

- Blind/Visually Impaired; 71%
- Deaf/Hard of Hearing: 62%
- Individuals who need services in a language other than English: 17%

When the Community Rehabilitation Programs were asked if they take advantage of DORS placement incentives, 74% reported Yes. DORS' internal reports indicate a discrepancy in the amount of placement incentives offered across regions.

Other than job development and job coaching, 74% of the reported Community Rehabilitation Programs stated they offer the following training services:

- Individualized training: 78.6%
- On-the-job training: 67.9%
- Internships - paid and unpaid: 32.1%
- Apprenticeships: 28.6%
- Contract Work: 14.3% (Ability 1 and Maryland Works)
- Work groups: 14.3%

### **Needs/Concerns**

- A need to train Community Rehabilitation Programs staff regarding various disability populations.
- A need for more Community Rehabilitation Programs to provide services for consumers who are blind or visually impaired, deaf/ hard of hearing, and those whose primary language is other than English.
- A need for Community Rehabilitation Programs to provide additional training services including internships (paid and unpaid).
- A need for consistent issuance of placement incentives.

### **Recommendations**

- Train DORS staff regarding placement incentives including eligibility and issuance to ensure consistent use across all Community Rehabilitation Programs.
- Ensure Community Rehabilitation Programs are aware of all potential enhanced rates offered for services for consumers who are blind or visually impaired, deaf/hard of hearing, and those whose primary language is other than English.
- Conduct a survey which will help to determine the training needs and desires of Community Rehabilitation Programs.
- Consider additional incentives for 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> quarter employment.
- Educate DORS and Community Rehabilitation Program staff regarding training services available including internships, paid and unpaid.

## **B. Workforce & Technology Center**

### **Methodology**

DORS Staff Survey/Data Comparison: A survey was sent to DORS staff including questions regarding WTC services. 198 responses were received from DORS staff.

Of the DORS staff responding, 81% reported that they refer individuals for services at WTC. The services they use the most at WTC are:

- Career training: 59%
- Functional capacity, occupational therapy and physical therapy evaluations: 34%
- Dormitory services: 28%

DORS staff who do not refer consumers to WTC cited the following reasons:

- Concerns about location,
- Distance
- Transportation.

When asked what services they would like to see added to WTC, staff indicated:

- More training programs,
- Addiction services
- Career assessment services provided in American Sign Language
- Services and training for individuals with low vision or blindness.

Staff also suggested the addition of various programs that WTC already offers, such as childcare and warehouse training.

DORS staff were asked to identify concerns that consumers have expressed about receiving services at WTC. Concerns identified were:

- Distance
- Sharing a room in the dorm
- Dislike of the cafeteria food
- Wait times for training programs

WTC is an effective partner in their consumers' rehabilitation according to 88% of respondents. Of the remaining 12%, concerns identified were a lack of services directed at individuals who have low vision or blindness, and the distance of WTC from the consumers' home.

### **Needs/Concerns**

- A need for addictions services at WTC.
- A need for additional services at WTC for consumers who are blind or visually impaired.
- A need for more training programs to meet market needs and consumer interests at WTC.
- A need for increased promotion of WTC training programs to improve staff awareness of the services available and the timelines for services and training.

- A need for transportation solutions to assist consumers in attending desired training and services at WTC.

## **Recommendations**

- WTC will expand its available addictions services through the hiring of staff and the development of the Behavioral Health Services department.
- WTC will continue to offer the new pilot program for individuals who are blind or visually impaired which focuses on mastering the application of technology for competitive integrated employment.
- WTC will explore the development of a Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) program in conjunction with existing business partners.
- WTC will use DORS monthly virtual coffee hour sessions to inform DORS staff of upcoming trainings and service openings.
- WTC will explore transportation assistance to include travel training when needed and other accommodations to make travel more affordable.

### **III. Assessment of the Utilization of Existing Education or Vocational Training Programs Leading to a Recognized Post-Secondary Credential or Employment**

DORS would like to evaluate staff knowledge and challenges with developing Individualized Plans for Employment that contain college, vocational training, and training available through the American Job Centers and Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act partners. DORS has been working to increase the number of training services provided to eligible participants since the enactment of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act and has experienced challenges adapting from historically placement-oriented services.

#### **Methodology**

DORS Staff Survey: A statewide survey was conducted of DORS VR counselors, VR technical specialists, and VR supervisors who develop Individualized Plans for Employment with eligible consumers which may include college and vocational training leading to a recognized post-secondary credential or employment. Sixty-one surveys were completed.

Survey results are as follows:

- Respondents represented various positions within DORS:
  - VR Counselors: 43%
  - VR Technical Specialists: 38%
  - VR Supervisors: 18%
- Respondents identified their length of service within the agency:
  - Less than one year: 13%
  - One to three years: 8.3%
  - Four to six years: 18.3%
  - Seven to 10 years: 26.7%
  - More than 10 years: 33.3%
- Respondents were asked to comment on the obstacles that they face or perceive in informing consumers about training plans. Responses identified several themes:
  - Complexity of requirements, including time necessary to obtain and process financial information and administrative approval.
  - Limited training resources/availability in all areas of the state.
  - Knowledge of available resources.
  - Lack of consumer participation and follow through with training requirements.
- When asked to select the phrase that best describes “informed choice,” 100% correctly indicated “Provide guidance and counseling to explore all options.”
- In response to the question “Are you comfortable writing training plans and preparing the case for Administrative Approval (when required)?”
  - 75% Yes
  - 20% Somewhat
  - 5% No
- Respondents were asked to explain any challenges they have when writing training plans and preparing the case for Administrative Approval (when required). Answers identified several themes:
  - Technical challenges, including obtaining financial information and other required documentation from the consumer.
  - Not having a clear understanding of all Plan requirements.

- Time necessary to complete all requirements.
- What training do they feel is needed to improve training plans for consumers?  
Staff provided 51 responses including training topic ideas and suggestions to improve training plans:
  - Planning, including career exploration and identification of career goals.
  - College plan development including use of financial information and calculation of case expenditures.
  - Reaching Independence through Self-Employment (RISE) Program training.
  - Training opportunities other than college and proprietary schools.
  - Plan templates and examples of measures of success.
- Have they ever referred a consumer to an American Job Center or a Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act partner to participate in one of their approved training programs?
  - 68.3% Yes
  - 31.7% No
- Those who answered NO were asked to explain why they do not refer to an American Job Center or a Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act partner to participate in one of their approved training programs.
  - Counselor's lack of knowledge of programs.
  - Counselor unsure of referral process.
  - Partners' limited ability to serve individuals with severe disabilities.
- Those who answered YES were asked to identify any American Job Center or Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act partner trainings which they have referred consumers:
  - 37 staff indicated that they had referred DORS consumers to training opportunities offered by Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act partners.
  - Training programs include virtual job shadowing, basic computer skills, warehouse, Commercial Driver's License, welding, manufacturing, Certified Nursing Assistant, clerical, and resume writing.
  - Staff responses indicated referrals to 15 American Job Center locations.
- Respondents were asked to identify how important employment retention is in the 2nd and 4th quarter after program exit:
  - 90% Very Important
  - 10% Somewhat important
- Respondents were asked to identify the most important part of DORS' mission:
  - 6.7% Independence and Economic Self-Sufficiency
  - 3.3% Employment
  - 90% Both are equally important

### **Needs/Concerns**

- Required complexity of Individualized Plan for Employment.
- Various levels of approval required for training plans.
- Lack of understanding regarding the consumer's required financial contribution.
- Time to research training programs and to write extensive plans.
- Lack of knowledge about available training programs.

## **Recommendations**

- Hire a Staff Specialist III for Consumer Education and Training. This person would attend Workforce Development Board meetings and liaison with community colleges and DORS Staff Development Office.
- Streamline the Administrative Approval process and forms.
- Create a college/training checklist for the Counselor Toolkit.
- Use Citrix Sharefile and digital signatures for administrative approvals.
- Lower caseload sizes to allow counselors more time with plan development.
- Create online regional resource manuals with industry profiles and information regarding related training opportunities.
- Improve connection between DORS and college Disability Support Services.
- Improve connection between DORS staff and community college staff.