# Rehabilitation Council of Texas

## 2018 ANNUAL REPORT

In Partnership with the Texas Workforce Commission

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# Message from Council Chair Neva Fairchild

It is my privilege to bring you the Annual Report of the Rehabilitation Council of Texas. The Council has worked in partnership with Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) staff throughout the past year to improve vocational rehabilitation (VR) services provided to people with disabilities in Texas, especially those with the most severe disabilities. You will read stories of success within these pages that will touch your heart, expand your thinking about the possibilities for people with disabilities and challenge you to find a way to be a part of the work provided through the state and federal partnership that is VR services. The men, women and youth impacted by these services deserve the best the state of Texas can offer, and the Council is proud to play a role in helping them to achieve competitive integrated employment outcomes by reviewing, analyzing and advising the Texas Workforce Commission Vocational Rehabilitation Division.

Governor Greg Abbott appointed new members to the Council near the end of this fiscal year, and I am excited about the possibilities for the Council in the coming year. In 2016, VR services moved from the Texas Health and Human Services Commission to TWC and in 2017 the general and blind service units were combined into one unit, retaining specialty caseloads for specific disabilities, including blindness. These sweeping changes were not easy, but great effort was made to accomplish the changes as seamlessly as possible. 2018 has seen a completely revised policy manual implemented and ongoing moves to relocate VR services into Texas Workforce Solutions offices across the state. As in our own lives, change is ever-present, but VR services seems to have withstood more than its fair share in the last three years. It is my hope that staff and customers alike are finding new and innovative ways to accomplish the goals of each individual seeking services. Notable increases in services to students and youth with disabilities are evident in summer programs across the state; especially commendable are those introducing students to careers in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM).

We are your voice, and I invite you to reach out to us at any time. You will find information about all the members of the Council within these pages. Get to know them, let them hear from you, and together, we will make VR services stronger in Texas.

With Best Regards,

Neva Fairchild

Neva Fairchild, RCT Chair

# Message from the Commissioners

Ruth R. Hughs
TWC Chair and Commissioner
Representing Employers

Julian Alvarez
TWC Commissioner
Representing Labor

Robert D. Thomas
TWC Commissioner
Representing the Public

The Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) is honored to partner with the Rehabilitation Council of Texas (RCT) to ensure that Texans with disabilities have opportunities to seek and maintain meaningful employment.

Since the transfer of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) programs to TWC in 2016, RCT has made vital contributions to our agency's ability to provide assistance to individuals with disabilities with no interruption of service. The thoughtful counsel and countless hours of analysis provided by the volunteer council helps improve our operation of VR programs, and we look forward to the council's support as we adapt to changes brought about by the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act.

With RCT's ongoing support, TWC served more than 74,000 Texans with disabilities in fiscal year (FY) 2018, leading to more than 13,000 individuals achieving successful employment outcomes. TWC also continued its integration of 245 VR staff into local Workforce Solutions offices around the state, providing customers with a one-stop option to receive VR services along with other valuable workforce support, while also better connecting local employers to VR jobseekers who have significant talents and unique strengths.

TWC continues to implement strategies focused on improving opportunities for Texans with disabilities and connecting employers to an additional talent pipeline. Whether through analysis of VR policy revisions or suggestions on updating the VR portion of our required Combined State Plan, RCT bolstered our efforts throughout the year to improve and expand our services in ways that make a difference for all Texans.

Now in its third year, our agency's Texas HireAbility campaign highlights the contributions of people with disabilities in the workforce and raises awareness about the benefits of hiring people with disabilities. The campaign is a partnership among TWC, the Texas Governor's Committee on People with Disabilities and Texas Workforce Solutions.

TWC also partnered with the Governor's Committee on People with Disabilities and the University of North Texas to host area employers, human resource professionals and employment stakeholders at a DiverseAbility Forum in Frisco. Among 235 participants, 81 employers discussed establishing best practices for hiring and retaining people with disabilities; creating a culture of inclusiveness through leadership, and stressing the importance of fair and consistent employee relations.

In addition, TWC partnered with Texas Workforce Solutions to conduct Summer Earn and Learn, one of two student programs that connects employers with youth and prepares students with disabilities for a successful transition to post secondary education and employment.

More than 2,350 students statewide gained work experience and training through Summer Earn and Learn this past summer, connecting with employers who included Baylor Scott & White Health in Temple, KLBK-TV in Lubbock and the Fort Worth Botanic Garden. The students learned about the employers' industries and developed specialized skills and work experience, and several students became employed full time.

*Explore STEM!* is another TWC initiative designed to help students explore careers in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields. TWC partnered with 10 universities, colleges and technical schools statewide to serve as hosts for *Explore STEM!* summer camps for 228 students with disabilities, aged 14-22. Each camp was five to seven days with hands-on, interactive instruction on topics that included computational engineering, cybersecurity, biotechnology, manufacturing, forensic science, archeology, astronomy, plant biology and robotics.

Explore STEM! is one of several initiatives developed from Governor Abbott's Tri-Agency Workforce Initiative, which calls for Texas leaders to help students prepare for and enter the workforce.

We also support the Student HireAbility Navigator program. It establishes a mechanism by which pre-employment transition services are provided to students with disabilities. Under the program, students have better information about career pathways to enable informed choices. The role of Student HireAbility Navigators is to improve access to employment and training services and increase employment opportunities for job seekers with disabilities. The program focuses exclusively on services for students with disabilities who are in the early phases of preparing for transition to postsecondary education and employment.

And in recognition of National Disability Employment Awareness Month in FY 2018, we were proud to support and attend White Cane Day in Austin. The event, observed in the United States since 1964, celebrates the achievements of people who are blind or visually impaired and educates the world about blindness and how the blind and visually impaired can live and work independently while giving back to their communities.

RCT shares our commitment to preparing students and Texans of all ages with disabilities for the future Texas workforce. We take this opportunity to express sincere appreciation for RCT's contributions over the past year, and we look forward to working with the council to expand employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities.

# *About the Council*

## Mission, Values, and Responsibilities

The Rehabilitation Council of Texas advises the state's designated vocational rehabilitation program on policy, scope, and effectiveness of services. The Council is federally mandated by the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended in 1992.

The Council helps ensure that Texans with disabilities have access to effective vocational rehabilitation services, which result in competitive integrated employment, greater independence, and community participation. The Council is governed by bylaws designed to support this goal.

Members are appointed by the Texas governor for three-year terms and are selected to represent a diverse range of disabilities and community perspectives. They are charged with being the "voice" of VR service recipients.

The Council participates in the National Coalition of State Rehabilitation Councils to promote a nationally consistent vision for vocational rehabilitation priorities, goals, and outcomes.

Learn more by visiting Texasworkforce.org/agency/rehabilitation-council-texas

Customer Satisfaction and Needs Assessment Committee members meeting.

## Mission

The Council's mission is to partner with the state vocational rehabilitation program to advocate for Texans with disabilities in the vocational rehabilitation process.

## Values

- The worth and dignity of each individual
- The right to choice, which is realized by access to full information
- Work opportunities, which open doors to individual independence and participation in community life
- Person-centered goals, service plans, and delivery systems leading to individual success
- Shared roles and responsibilities to improve consumer satisfaction with the rehabilitation process and outcomes
- Collaboration and partnership with federal, state, and private agencies for system improvement

## Responsibilities

- Review, analyze, and advise the state vocational rehabilitation programs on performance, effectiveness, consumer satisfaction, responsibilities, functions, and eligibility, including the need for order of selection.
- Submit reports of progress of the vocational rehabilitation program to the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) commissioner.
- Help prepare the State Plan for the Vocational Rehabilitation Services Program and develop a description of the Council's input and recommendations as a part of the plan.
- Review and analyze the vocational rehabilitation program effectiveness, including an assessment of the customer satisfaction and the vocational rehabilitation needs of Texans with disabilities.
- Submit an annual report that highlights vocational rehabilitation services' goals, achievements, and statistics to the Texas governor and RSA commissioner.
- Coordinate working relationships between the state vocational rehabilitation program, State Independent Living Council (SILC), and centers for independent living in Texas.
- Coordinate activities with other councils to avoid duplication of efforts and increase the number of individuals served.

## *Spotlight:* About Vocational Rehabilitation Services

Vocational rehabilitation services help Texas adults and students with disabilities prepare for, find, keep or advance in employment or successfully transition from high school to education and employment opportunities. The goal of services is competitive integrated employment, which is employment in jobs with work settings, wages, benefits and advancement opportunities equivalent to jobs held by people without disabilities. To be eligible for services, Texans must have one or more disabilities that result in substantial barriers to employment and must be able to benefit from services. Visual disabilities served include significant visual impairments, blindness and deafblindness. Other disabilities served include behavioral and mental health conditions; hearing impairments; alcohol or drug addiction; intellectual, learning and developmental disabilities; and physical disabilities. Services are provided based on each person's needs. Services may include vocational counseling and guidance; education and training to get the skills needed for a chosen career; assistive devices such as hearing aids, screen readers, wheelchairs and prosthetics; vehicle and home modifications; and training in key areas such as reading and writing Braille, using a white cane to navigate and using assistive technologies. Services are also available to help employers successfully recruit, hire and retain qualified Texans with disabilities. Learn more by visiting texasworkforce.org/jobseekers/vocational-rehabilitation-services

# Committees

The following committees are responsible for upholding the mission, values, and responsibilities of the Council in partnership with representatives from the state vocational rehabilitation programs.

### Executive Committee

Committee Chair: Neva Fairchild *Composed of chair, vice chair, and all committee chairs*
Coordinates with state vocational rehabilitation programs' leadership; develops quarterly meeting agendas; develops public outreach materials; and reviews the Council's budget, bylaws, and amendments.

### Customer Satisfaction and Needs Assessment Committee

Committee Chair: Troy Myree
Reviews customer satisfaction survey results and other program data, addresses service concerns, and helps steer a statewide needs assessment every three years.

### Planning and Review Committee

Committee Chair: Neva Fairchild
Helps set and evaluate progress toward goals and priorities for the Combined State Plan for the Vocational Rehabilitation Program, recommends ways to improve vocational rehabilitation services, and receives public comment.

### Membership and Education Committee

Committee Chair: Susie May
Educates Council members about federal and state legislation and how to best represent the interests of Texans with disabilities, recruits new members, and plans and oversees new member onboarding activities.

### Policy, Procedure, and Personnel Development Committee

Committee Chair: Karen Stanfill
Comments on changes to vocational rehabilitation policy; reviews appeals decisions; and monitors procedural changes, staffing, and impartial hearing officer selection.

# Our Work in Fiscal Year 2018—Year in Review

RCT Chair Neva Fairchild and TWC VR Director Cheryl Fuller pose with Mr. Troy Myree (pic 1) and Mr. Jim Brocato (pic 2) Mr. Myree and Mr. Brocato received certificates from the Texas Governor's office for participation in the RCT.

The Council was busy in Fiscal Year 2018 (FY'18). Several members' terms expired, creating many vacancies. We were pleased to receive seven new members in August 2018. Neva Fairchild, Chair, and Troy Myree, Vice Chair, were elected to serve the Council for FY'18. Council members attended state and national conferences, held quarterly meetings with guest speakers, and worked closely with the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) Vocational Rehabilitation Division (VR) on projects highlighted in this report.

Council members attended important state and national conferences in FY'18, where they increased their knowledge of VR services and expanded their network of others involved in VR services to better serve their constituencies.

In fall 2017, Neva Fairchild and Karen Stanfill attended conferences held by the National Coalition of State Rehabilitation Councils (NCSRC), the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR), and the National Council of State Agencies for the Blind (NCSAB) in Greenville, South Carolina. At the November Council meeting, they shared what they learned.

On January 25–26, 2018, Ms. Fairchild and Mr. Myree participated in the Transportation Summit in Waco, Texas. SILC held this summit in partnership with the Texas Council for Developmental Disabilities (TCDD) and the Heart of Central Texas Independent Living Center (HOCTIL).

The summit focused on efforts to expand inclusive transportation for all Texans. Ms. Fairchild and Mr. Myree brought back great input from the conference. For example, they shared details about a new phone app used to report violators of accessible parking at www.parkingmobility.com, which is being used in several counties with astonishing results.

On April 23–25, 2018, Ms. Fairchild and Mr. Myree also attended Climate Change—The IL Evolution Conference in Dallas. Some of the items discussed included the need to encourage individuals with disabilities to vote, accessing transportation and travel needs, increasing the availability of caretakers, and improving emergency evacuation processes.

Ms. Fairchild and Mr. Myree both commented on how well the conference was arranged and presented. In April 2018, Crystal Stark attended the NCSRC and CSAVR conferences, while Ms. Fairchild attended the NCSAB conference. These three conferences were held in Bethesda, Maryland. Ms. Stark reported that although states share the same challenges, there are many differences in their delivery of VR services. Council members share knowledge gained from attending these conferences and look forward to what FY'19 has to offer.

RCT members look on as Debbie Carlson provides an update on the TWC WorkInTexas.com System.

Chase Bearden from the Coalition of Texans with Disabilities (CTD) provides RCT members with an update from CTD.

Quarterly meetings were held in November, February, May, and August. These meetings were attended by Council members and TWC staff, and the meetings were open to the public. This year there was a great response to the invitation for guest speakers. In November, the Council heard from Elizabeth Adkinson on training for the combined designated state unit (DSU) for TWC VR. She reported on the training that TWC VR counselors would receive to better understand the combined DSU. Training included classes such as Train the Trainer on the Fundamentals of VR Process, the Impact, and the Core Essentials. Weekly webinars were also held. These webinars were archived so that they can be viewed by staff members if they missed the original webinar or want a quick review. These classes and webinars are required training for TWC VR counselors.

Elyse L. Luke, PhD, ABD, and MSPH Project Manager, TWC VR, also presented in November on VR Benchmark.

In February, there was no guest speaker; however, Brad Napp from Commissioner Hughs' office attended the meeting and answered Council members' questions.In May, the Council invited Chase Bearden from the Coalition of Texans with Disabilities (CTD) to speak. Mr. Bearden presented an overview of CTD, a statewide disability advocacy organization that has been active for more than 40 years. Additionally, Alfredo Mycue, PMP, CSSBB, MA, and TWC Director of Business Transformation, spoke about TWC's Rapid Process Improvement (RPI). His presentation, titled "Rapid Process Improvement: What It Means for Vocational Rehabilitation and our Customers," proved interesting and informative. Some of TWC's RPI projects are Comparable Benefits and Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS). Possible upcoming projects include training at the regional level. The Council looks forward to Mr. Mycue speaking about progress on these projects in the future.

The Council's Policy, Procedure and Personnel Development Committee discussed TWC VR counselor vacancies and staff retention. Committee members learned that progress is being made in filling and retaining these positions.

During ongoing discussions, the Council revisited the issues with WorkInTexas.com. At the August meeting, guest speaker Debbie Carlson, TWC Deputy Division Director, Board Administered Programs, provided an update on the new WorkInTexas.com system and expressed hopes that it will be available in July 2019. Ms. Carlson acknowledged the issues with the current WorkInTexas.com has and opened the floor to comments from Council members to ensure that the new system is more user-friendly and that individuals with disabilities will be able to navigate it with ease. She also provided suggestions to help customers navigate the current system until the new one is in place. The

Alfredo Mycue, TWC Director of Business Transformation, explains RPI during the May RCT meeting.

committee also requested a copy of updated job descriptions for the manager, supervisor, counselor, specialty counselors/subject matter experts, and support positions in the field, now that VR general and blind services have combined. The Council is committed to ensuring that there is enough qualified staff available to provide services to all customers.

Our August guest speakers were from the Texas Department of Health and Human Services (HHSC): Keisha Rowe, Director of HHSC's Office for Independence Services and Health, Developmental and Independence Services department; and Laurie Pryor, manager for HHSC's Independent Living Services (ILS) programs. The Council received the ILS programs' organizational chart, and Ms. Pryor gave an overview of these programs.

Projects that the Council undertook during FY'18 include the following:

Reviewing and commenting on the two-year modification of the Combined State Plan for TWC VR. This process included intense reviews of the plan and many conference calls to ensure that the plan meets the needs of all Texans with disabilities. The modification was completed and submitted to RSA on June 29, 2018. RSA approved the plan on September 7, 2018.

Reviewing and providing input on the revised VR Policy Manual to ensure that it covers services for all general and blind customers. The combination of the two units into one also involved office relocations across Texas. TWC VR provided updates on the process of the VR office moves into Workforce Solutions Offices. To date, VR has 40 combined offices, with more planned for FY'19.

Larry Temple, TWC Executive Director, attended the November 2017 meeting and reported on the effects of Hurricane Harvey, which struck Texas on August 25, 2017. The storm caused the closing of 37 TWC VR offices. TWC VR staff reached out to more than 16,000 customers, making contact with 68 percent, to check on Hurricane Harvey's impact on their ability to work. Other issues included relocation and loss of homes, transportation, and/or equipment. Mr. Temple also provided an update on unemployment insurance services. Council members always appreciate Mr. Temple's visits, updates, and insights.

At each quarterly meeting, Adam Leonard, Director of TWC's Division of Operational Insight (DOI), gives a presentation on progress toward meeting state and federal VR measures. These in-depth presentations keep the Council current on TWC VR performance.

The Council and DOI also researched the use of TWC VR providers. DOI's James Farris and his team provided a list of contracted providers. TWC and the Council held several conference calls to ensure that the Council received the specific information requested.

The DOI team gave an overview of the data on contracted providers and answered the Council's questions regarding service provider locations and the specific services they provide.

Depending on the answers, other questions the Council asks may be where services are not being used that could be used. And where are services not available that are needed? The Council requested the status of any policy changes that would reinforce travel restrictions on VR contractors that travel to provide services and resources for remote areas of the state and open enrollment links for providers.

This project is ongoing, and the Council hopes that by gathering this information Council members will identify providers that are underused, making VR counselors aware of their availability, and address unmet needs that providers may be able to fulfill around the state.

Cheryl Fuller, TWC VR Division Director, gave updates on the Summer Earn and Learn and *Explore STEM!* camps.

TWC VR was designated as a voter registration agency. VR staff will offer customers the opportunity to register to vote when they apply for services and when they submit an address change. This service began on May 11, 2018.

Larry Temple, TWC Executive Director, and Cheryl Fuller, speak to the RCT during their November meeting.

## Input and Recommendations

The Rehabilitation Council of Texas (RCT) met quarterly with leaders from the Texas Workforce Commission Vocational Rehabilitation Division (TWC VR). During these meetings TWC VR leadership and staff provided updates, training, and discussion with the RCT on various initiatives and programs with the RCT. Conference calls were held as well to review changes in VR policy, changes in policy for the combination of the Division for Rehabilitation Services (DRS) and Division for Blind Services (DBS), policy manuals, and the combined state plan. RCT used information gathered from these meetings and reports such as Customer Satisfaction Reports, Designated State Unit's Performance Report and the Statewide Needs Assessment Report, to make informed recommendations.

The Council uses a committee structure to provide focused review and comment. These committees are: Executive Committee; Program Planning and Review Committee; Policy, Procedures and Personnel Development Committee; Consumer Satisfaction and Needs Assessment Committee; and Membership and Education Committee. The interaction with TWC VR included exchanges of information to achieve greater clarity and understanding. While the detail work is done in the committee structure, all comments and recommendations are made from the full RCT.

The following is a summary of the input and recommendations made to TWC VR for fiscal year 2018.

**Recommendation:** The Rehabilitation Council of Texas recommends that Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VR) continue to encourage VR counselors to have or obtain a master's degree.
**Response:** VR is committed to having highly qualified counselors serve customers with disabilities. As part of the Qualified Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor (QVRC) program, VR counselors are currently required to meet the Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD) standard within seven years of completing the initial training period, which means that a counselor will have completed a Master of Rehabilitation Counseling or a degree in a closely related field.

**Recommendation:** RCT recommends that VR include the turnover rate of its staff by job title in the Comprehensive System of Personnel Development and Data System section.
**Response:** VR believes that data regarding turnover rate are captured in data for attrition rate, which is found in Table 2, Vocational Rehabilitation Division Attrition Rate, within the Comprehensive System of Personnel Development and Data System section. Turnover, as defined and calculated on page 30 of this section, does not include vacancies created by employee promotions, reclassifications, demotions, or transfers within the agency. Attrition rates would appear to be like turnover rates, based on the categories listed under attrition (voluntary, involuntary, retirements, and other transfers), as they do not include promotions, reclassifications, demotions, or transfers within the agency.

For future state plans, VR will add data on the attrition rate for additional job title positions that include providing direct services to customers or supervising direct service delivery staff.

**Recommendation:** To ensure ethnic diversity among staff, RCT recommends that VR consider facilitating a comparison between the ethnic distribution of its employees to the ethnic diversity of customers served.
**Response:** TWC VR will incorporate comparison data into the next Combined State Plan (CSP).

**Recommendation:** If an Order of Selection is needed, RCT recommends that VR organize an implementation team to develop a plan to ensure a smooth transition.
**Response:** VR's annual estimates do not forecast an imminent need for an Order of Selection; however, VR is committed to planning for future contingencies. If data predict a possible need for an Order of Selection in future years, VR will engage a cross-agency team to ensure smooth implementation and will prepare the required section of the CSP in consultation with RCT.

**Recommendation:** RCT recommends that VR provide detailed training to VR counselors regarding the use of additional resources to assist customers, such as Medicaid waiver programs.
**Response:** As part of a five-day intensive training, VR state office program specialists for benefits and work incentives provide training on Medicaid waivers to staff members who function as subject matter resources on Social Security Administration (SSA) benefits. Additionally, a two-part webinar series on waivers is held each year for relevant staff. To date, 121 VR counselors have been trained as subject matter resources for benefits and work incentives, and an additional 58 staff members in management, as well as state office program specialists, have completed the training.

**Recommendation:** RCT acknowledges and commends VR for expanding the capacity of staff in assistive technology by training regional teams to become subject matter experts. Although it is possible that the Centers for Independent Living (CILs) around the state serve as resources to local VR staff, it is vital that VR staff have access to accurate and up-to-date information about assistive technology to overcome workplace barriers specific to disabilities. RCT recommends that VR clarify content in the Strategies and Use of Title I Funds for Innovation and Expansion Activities section to clarify which customers will be served by these teams.
**Response:** The regional teams are composed of VR staff members who have been trained in all levels of assistive technology and who provide recommendations on assistive technology to customers with various disabilities. The loaning or purchasing of assistive technology is not limited to customers with specific disabilities; it is available to all customers as needed.

**Recommendation:** RCT recommends that VR expand the content in the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA) overview about developing a provider base to include how this will be accomplished.
**Response:** CSNA results indicated that there is likely a need to expand the provider base, especially for blind services and independent living services that support vocational goals. The CSNA also identified service needs for further study and strategy development. Studying these service needs will include reviewing the sufficiency and performance of the provider base that meets those service needs, most importantly, employment services providers. VR has initiated that research process in collaboration with RCT, and it includes reviewing additional provider data by service type and region.

**Recommendation:** RCT recommends that VR clarify content in the CSP related to the time that rehabilitation assistants (RAs) with undergraduate degrees will be given to obtain a master's degree.
**Response:** While some RAs may have undergraduate degrees, there is not a requirement that RAs have a master's degree; therefore, there is no deadline for RAs to obtain a master's degree.

**Recommendation:** RCT recommends that VR ensure that the individual plan for employment (IPE) is completed as early as possible during the transition planning process and no later than the time the

student with a disability who is determined to be eligible for VR services leaves the school setting.
**Response:** Policy in VRSM C-1300 states that the VR counselor must complete the IPE before the eligible student leaves the school setting and no more than 90 days from the time of eligibility determination. VR is committed to ensuring that VR counselors comply with this policy, with an emphasis on monitoring through case reviews and readings.

**Recommendation:** RCT recommends that VR clarify what types of contractors are required to have a director with University of North Texas (UNT) credentials.
**Response:** All contracted service providers, except those providing post-acute brain injury services, are required to have a director with UNT credentials. Per the Standards for Providers manual Chapter 3, service contracts are used when a provider completes the following tasks or services:

- Assessing assistive technology designed for the blind and visually impaired
- Providing diabetes education
- Providing employment-related services
- Assessing a customer's work environment
- Providing Individual Living Services for Older Individuals Who Are Blind
- Providing Orientation and Mobility services
- Providing Post-Acute Brain Injury services
- Providing Pre-Employment Transition services
- Providing Project Search services
- Providing Supportive Residential Services for Persons in Recovery
- Developing wellness recovery action plans

**Recommendation:** RCT recommends that VR indicate where and how the use of Social Security benefits can be used to pay for extended services after VR involvement.
**Response:** Both VR and employment networks (ENs) participate in the Ticket to Work Partnership Plus Program for individuals between the ages of 18 and 64. When a VR case is closed successfully, the customer is informed that his or her Ticket to Work still has value and can be assigned to an EN to provide long-term job supports and services. Customers are informed of the ENs serving Texas. Additionally, subject matter resources on SSA disability benefits provide guidance to customers on using SSA work incentives, which can potentially assist with maintaining health insurance benefits and cash benefits after achieving employment. SSA benefits and the partnership between VR and ENs are fully explained on page 24, in the Social Security Administration section, and on page 58, in the Funding and Timing of Transition to Extended Services sections.

**Additional Recommendations to the CSP Modification:**

**Recommended:** If Supported Self Employment is not covered in another section, the RCT recommends that the word "Supported" not be removed from number 5, second bullet, on the State's Strategies and Use of Title I Funds for Innovation and Expansion Activities section of the Combined State Plan (CSP).
**Response:** VR's self-employment services has three levels, Simple, Comprehensive, and Supported, therefore when referring to self-employment it would encompass all of the types of self-employment, including Supported Self-Employment.

**Recommended:** It is recommended that the entire section of the CSP "State's Strategies and Use of Title I Funds for Innovation and Expansion Activities" be checked for variances on meeting time for the PRE ETS. The CSP references two different schedules weekly and biweekly.
**Response:** The VR Pre-ETS Core Group initially conducted weekly teleconferences, and then changed to bi-weekly teleconferences.

**Recommended:** RCT recommends adding the word Eligible to the titles "VR Customers Served" on the tables on Annual Estimates in the CSP.
**Response:** VR agrees with the recommendation and the appropriate edit was made in the Annual Estimates section.

**Recommended:** RCT recommends that VR reword #4 on the Annual Estimates section of the CSP as these numbers include more than just closed cases with an employment outcome.
**Response:** VR agrees with the recommendation and appropriate edits were made in the Annual Estimates section.

**Recommendation:** The RCT recommends that the data in Table 1 be reviewed for accuracy. If the data is correct, the RCT recommends better headings on the columns or an explanation as to what data is collected for each heading. (May just put in an explanation or review data in Table 1 Legacy Blind + Legacy Rehab don't equal the Combined numbers) for the Comprehensive System of Personnel Development; Data System on Personnel and Personnel Development section of the CSP.
**Response:** Table 1 of the CSPD section of the CSP is reporting Projected Personnel Needs. The combined numbers are a result of slotting staff and repurposing positions when the two DSUs were combined into one; therefore, the combined number column does not total exactly from the separate figures for legacy Blind & General VR.

**Recommendation:** Explain what Average Strength stands for in the table on the Comprehensive System of Personnel Development; Data System on Personnel and Personnel Development section of the CSP.
**Response:** VR agrees with the recommendation and explained the definition of average strength in the CSPD table.

**Recommendation:** The use of the acronym "SE" is used for both supported employment and self-employment within the same section in the CSP. This can cause confusion to the reader. It is recommended that the acronym "SE" not be used for both supported employment and self-employment.
**Response:** VR agrees that "SE" used as an acronym for both "supported employment" and "self-employment" may be confusing to the reader and will clarify its use in subsequent state plans and other VR documents as needed.

**Recommendation:** Input on CSNA section "Evaluation and Reports of Progress: VR and Supported Employment Goals" of the CSP:

- Add fiscal years to all tables.
- Rewrite "Methodology, CSNA TX #1" on page 2.

- Expand the section about Developing Provider-Basis to include how this is to be accomplished. If this information will be in the full CSNA report, a synopsis sentence could be added to the overview.
- Full names with acronyms in parentheses should be spelled out on the first use. A glossary of acronyms at the beginning or the end would be helpful so that a reader doesn't have to search the document for the first use of the acronym.
- Use a more descriptive word for "no benefits received" such as "No public assistance" or "No Financial assistance".

**Response:** VR agrees with the recommendations and revisions were made.

**Input and Recommendations from RCT Quarterly Meetings and Policy Meetings/ Conference Calls:**

**Recommended:** RCT recommends that TWC and HHSC develop an MOU or a process by which job openings at TWC for counselor and other VR related jobs be posted/shared with HHSC.
**Response:** VR considered this recommendation; however, has decided not to implement a specific process for sharing postings of vacant positions with HHSC. Vacancies will continue to be posted in the same manner other TWC vacancies are posted.

**Recommended:** RCT recommends that TWC VR & RCT, on behalf of the RCT, draft a letter to the Rehabilitation Services Administration to ask for clarification on the role of RCT in reviewing VR Standards for Providers, particularly that which may be considered policy.
**Response:** VR has provided draft Standards to RCT for review and feedback using the same process that is in place for seeking RCT review and feedback of the VRSM, since December 1, 2017. VR does request that Policy Committee members who are also providers abstain from providing feedback on draft Standards to avoid a real or perceived conflict of interest.

**Input:** During a discussion about addressing the assistive technology kits and their ability to address the needs of all customers, it was suggested that TWC VR reach out to the Centers for Independent Living for help with assistive technology.
**Response:** VR agrees with the recommendation and will explore a possible collaboration around assistive technology with the Centers for Independent Living.

**Recommendation:** RCT recommends to have the "Can We Talk" brochure produced in an accessible, embossable file, and a Braille Ready File and have this available to all offices that have embossers.
**Response:** VR agrees with this recommendation. As of May 2018, Duxbury Braille embossable files of "Can We Talk" in English and Spanish were posted on the Vocational Rehabilitation Division Publications page.

**SFP 20.6 Travel Mileage Premium:**
**Recommend:** RCT recommends that exceptions be considered for customers requesting certain types of services.
Examples: The provider in the client's 50-mile radius is busy and booked up for weeks. You have a customer who needs someone in a hurry on the job with an issue. There are some customers that are uncomfortable with persons of a certain sex coming to their home and may prefer a provider of a certain sex. Others may have worked with a provider in the past and are not comfortable working with them in the future and would want another provider.
**Response:** VR customers are involved in the selection of providers. The 50-mile radius relates only to the availability of the mileage premium, which is additional funding that a provider may be eligible for if they meet the conditions specified in the SFP. Not all providers will be eligible for a mileage premium, but all providers are paid the standard rate for the service provided, as defined in the SFP.

**Input:** This policy states that staff and managers review and approve travel plans for premium travel. RCT suggests that the staff and management who will be doing the approval receive training on the blind services needs so they understand the reasons for request and approvals.
**Response:** VR is committed to ensuring staff receive training on the needs of customers who are blind and visually impaired. Several managers have participated in Emersion training at CCRC, and staff continue to be cross-trained on the needs of customers who are blind and visually impaired.

**Recommendation:** Provider location indicates the location would be the location of the business or office/satellite office. But in the example of calculating miles it references where the provider lives. To keep it clean-recommend that the location remain what is stated on the contract or the office not a person's residence (unless that is the office).
**Response:** Many of our providers do not work out of an office and/or have staff that telework from home providing services within the community. The example addresses the situation where a staff person teleworks from home.

**SFP 20.10 Travel Premium for Meals:**
**Recommendation:** SFP 20.10 Travel Premium for Meals states that the provider must provide receipts for meals and there is reference to using a Domestic Maximum Per Diem rate, but the policy does not clearly state that TWS-VR will only reimburse up to the amount listed for the county in the Domestic Maximum Per Diem rate. Was that the intention? It is recommended that expectation is clearly stated. (Some places go by receipts; other places go by per diem rates.)
Response: VR reimburses according to the amount on the receipt up to the Domestic Maximum Per Diem Rates published by the GSA, which identifies the maximum amount allowed.

**VRSM B-204-2 Customer ID**
**Recommended:** It is recommended that when the counselor is notified 120 days out of the documents expiring, the counselor has a conversation with the client and it is noted in the case file.
**Response:** VR policy in VRSM B-204-2: Customer Identification and Authorization for Employment requires VR staff to inform the customer that unexpired documents are required by an employer. A case note is not presently required. TWS-VR will consider adding a case note requirement to document that the customer has been informed that the document(s) are nearing expiration and that unexpired documents are required by an employer.

**Post-Employment Policy Change**
**Input:** The RCT does not agree with the proposed policy to remove the option of providing post-employment services to customers of the TWS-VR program. It is the understanding of the RCT that post-employment services is a phase of the vocational rehabilitation process as written in WIOA and the regulations for WIOA for VR. Additionally, post-employment services have existed in the Rehab Act of 1973 as amended and the regulations since at least 2001. It is the understanding of the RCT that TWS-VR is defining post-employment services as a phase of the rehab process once a job is obtained until 90 days of employment when the case is closed successfully. The RCT has the understanding that post employment services, can be provided after a person obtains employment, and after the customers' case is closed and determines they need to return to TWS-VR for services. The regulations, specifically post-employment services, are to be provided under an amended individualized plan for employment; thus, a re-determination of eligibility is not required. This would have to mean a case is closed if it is referencing a re-determination of eligibility is not required.
**Response:** VR agrees and will defer any changes to post-employment/post-closure services until written guidance is received from the Rehabilitation Services Administration.

# *Measures of Success*

## Customer Satisfaction Survey

The following survey results describe satisfaction with vocational rehabilitation services provided by the Texas Workforce Commission in State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2018. Surveys were completed by customers with an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) whose cases were closed as either successful (employed) or unsuccessful (not employed) the month prior to the survey.

Percentages indicate customers who were either satisfied or very satisfied and do not include data for survey responders who chose not to answer the question.

## Customer Satisfaction Survey Result: General Disabilities

*General disabilities include behavioral and mental health conditions; hearing impairments, including deafness; alcohol or drug addiction; intellectual, learning and developmental disabilities; and physical disabilities, including traumatic brain and spinal cord injury, back injury, paralysis and impaired movement.*

I was treated in a friendly, caring and respectful manner when I dealt with VR staff ..... 94.6%
I was seen within 15 minutes of my scheduled appointment time..... 91.2%
My counselor maintained communications with me regarding the process of my case ..... 82.3%
TWC VR staff demonstrated a can-do attitude with working with me..... 90.5%
When contacting my local VR office, someone responded to me no later than the next business day ..... 78.2%
TWC VR staff explained when and why appointments are scheduled with them..... 89.3%
My counselor and I maintained contact as often as agreed to in my IPE8..... 82.3%
I am satisfied with the explanation of services to help me reach my goa..... 87.2%
I had input in setting my employment goals ..... 90.2%
I agree with the employment goal my counselor and I have chosen..... 92.5%
I had input in planning the services I received ..... 88.0%
My counselor and I discussed when services began and ended ..... 83.1%
I had input (took part) in choosing who provided my services..... 74.8%
VR staff provided me the guidance I needed..... 86.4%
My services were not interrupted because my counselor changed or my counselor was absent..... 82.4%
I am satisfied with the services I received from service providers that my counselor sent me to..... 89.1%
I am satisfied with my counselor..... 89.5%
I am satisfied with my overall experience..... 88.1%

## Customer Satisfaction Survey Results: Visual Disabilities

*Visual disabilities include blindness, significant visual impairments and deafblindness.*

I was treated in a friendly, caring and respectful manner when I dealt with VR staff ..... 93.5%
I was seen within 15 minutes of my scheduled appointment time..... 89.79%
My counselor maintained communications with me regarding the process of my case ..... 78.54%
TWC VR staff demonstrated a can-do attitude with working with me..... 88.1%
When contacting my local VR office, someone responded to me no later than the next business day ..... 73.03%
TWC VR staff explained when and why appointments are scheduled with them..... 88.42%
My counselor and I maintained contact as often as agreed to in my IPE..... 81.96%
I am satisfied with the explanation of services to help me reach my goal..... 84.89%
I had input in setting my employment goals ..... 90.3%
I agree with the employment goal my counselor and I have chosen..... 93.35%
I had input in planning the services I received ..... 88.71%

My counselor and I discussed when services began and ended ..... 81.97%
I had input (took part) in choosing who provided my services ..... 71.32%
VR staff provided me the guidance I needed ..... 84.25%
My services were not interrupted because my counselor changed or my counselor was absent ..... 79.38%
I am satisfied with the services I received from service providers that my counselor sent me to ..... 90.67%
I am satisfied with my counselor ..... 86.9%
I am satisfied with my overall experience ..... 87.20%

## Statistics: General Disabilities

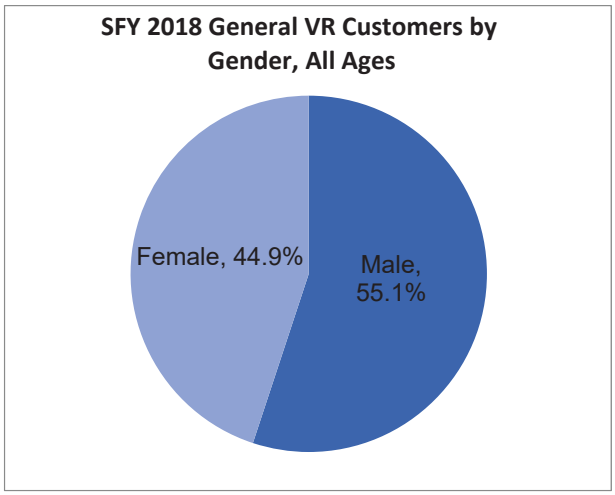
The following statistics describe vocational rehabilitation services for persons with general disabilities (other than vision impairment) provided in SFY 2018 by the Texas Workforce Commission. For age-related data, age reported at the start of the fiscal year was used. General disabilities include behavioral and mental health conditions; hearing impairments, including deafness; alcohol or drug addiction; intellectual, learning and developmental disabilities; and physical disabilities, including traumatic brain and spinal cord injury, back injury, paralysis and impaired movement.

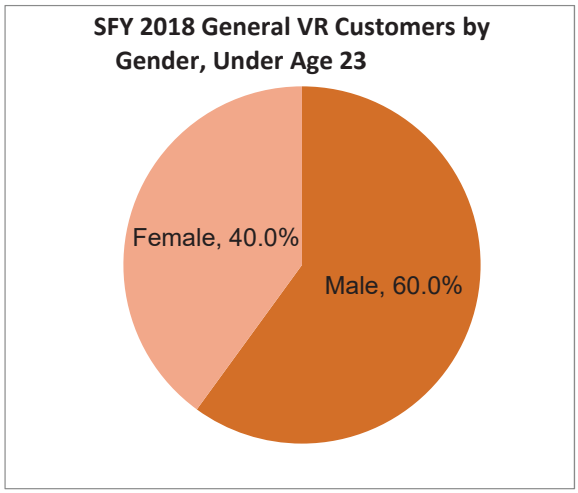
**Total number served:** 99,902

**Total number served under age 23:** 43,125

**PRE ETS Students Served:** 21,618
**Percent Served by Gender**
**All Ages** 44.9% Female 55.1% Male **Under Age** 23 40% Female 60% Male

*Gender is unknown or unavailable for 47 customers; missing for 22 customers under 23

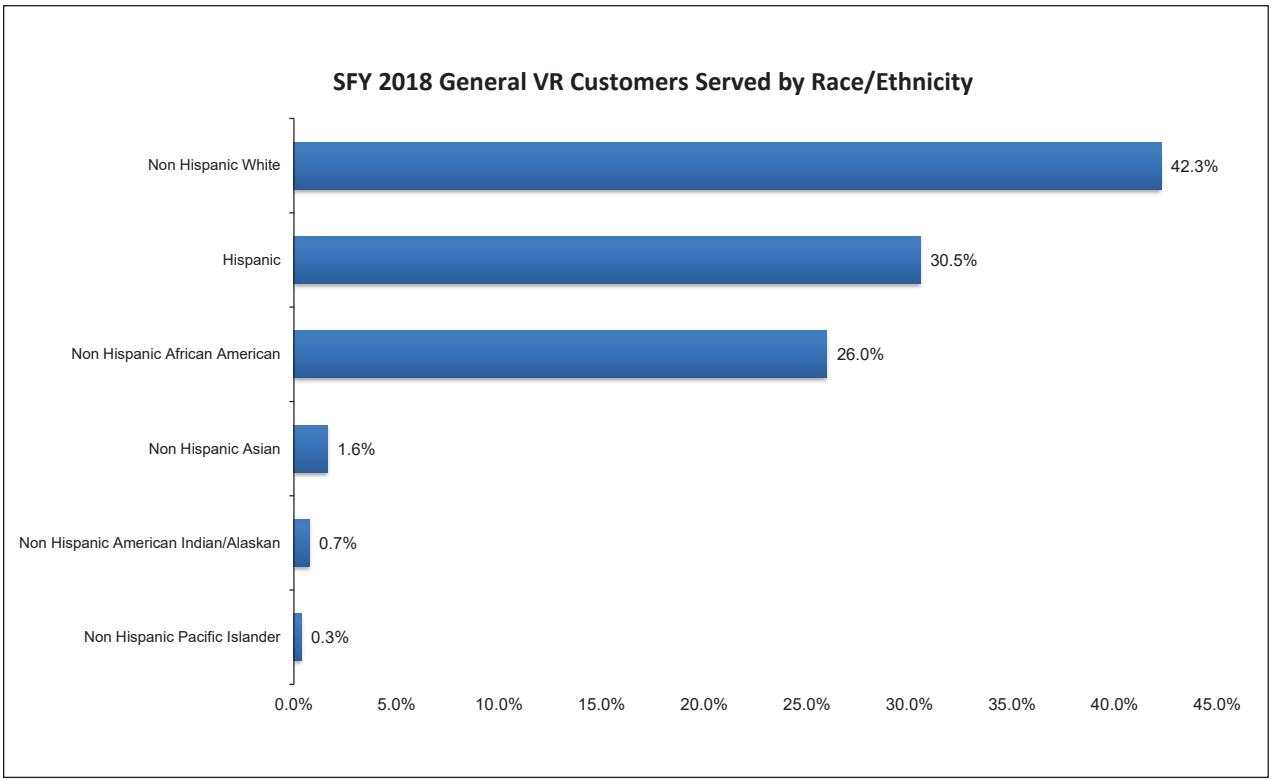


**Race/Ethnicity of General Disabilities Served**

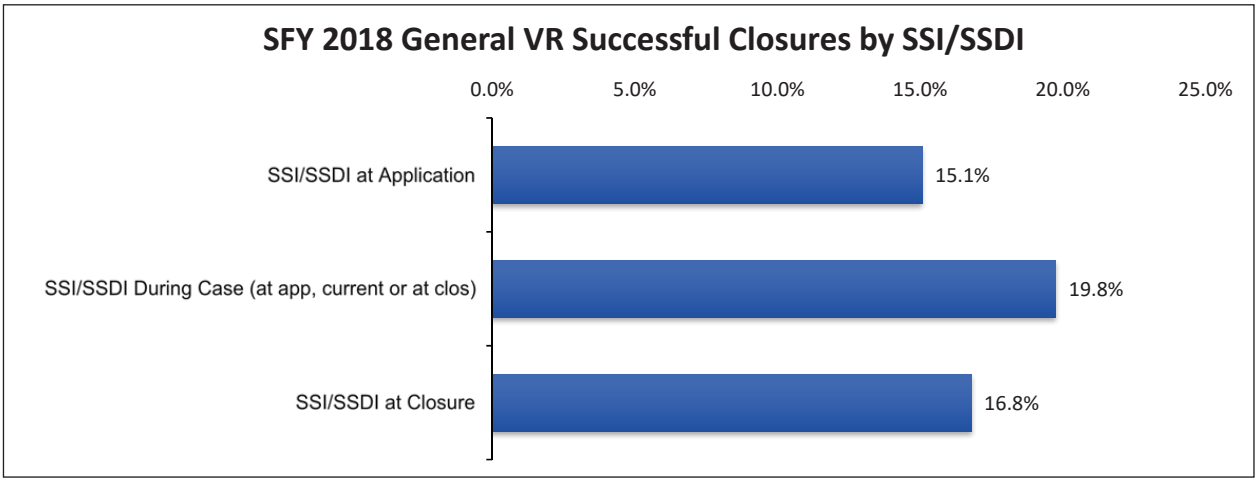
| Race/Ethnicity* | Percent General VR Customers Served |
|---|---|
| Non Hispanic White | 42.3% |
| Hispanic | 30.5% |
| Non Hispanic African American | 26.0% |
| Non Hispanic Asian | 1.6% |
| Non Hispanic American Indian/Alaskan | 0.7% |
| Non Hispanic Pacific Islander | 0.3% |
| **Total** | **101.46%** |

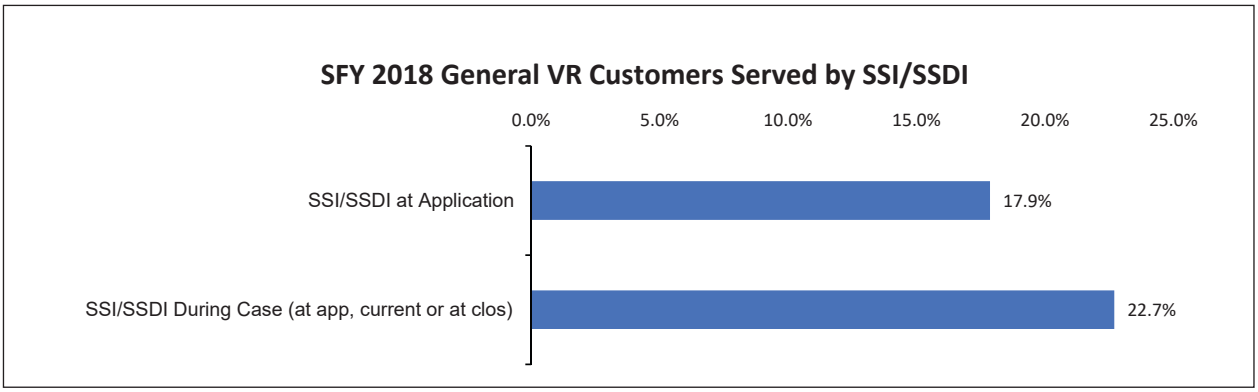
***Note: Consumers self-report and may claim multiple categories. Thus, total is greater than consumer counts. Percent sum may exceed 100%.**



## SSI/SSDI Information

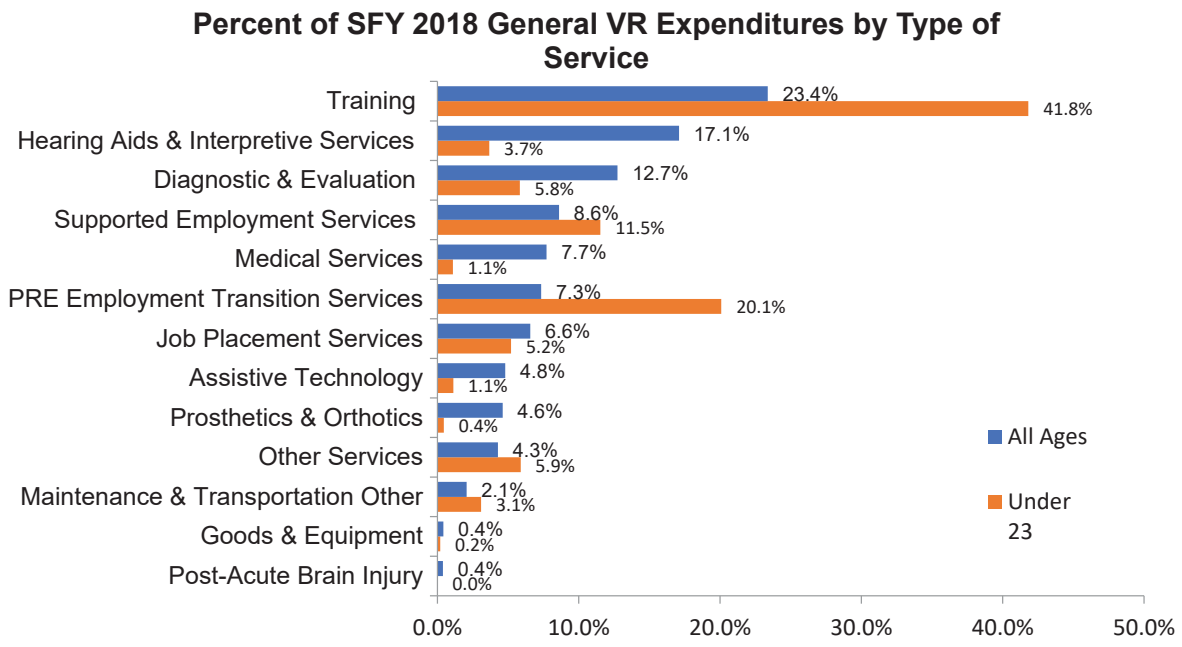
| SSI/SSDI Information | Total General VR Customers Served | Percent General VR Customers Served | Total General VR Successful Closures | Percent General VR Successful Closures |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| SSI/SSDI at Application | 17,841 | 17.9% | 1,847 | 15.1% |
| SSI/SSDI During Case (at app, current or at clos) | 22,672 | 22.7% | 2,421 | 19.8% |
| SSI/SSDI at Closure | Not Applicable | Not Applicable | 2,058 | 16.8% |



**Percent Expenditure by Service Type**

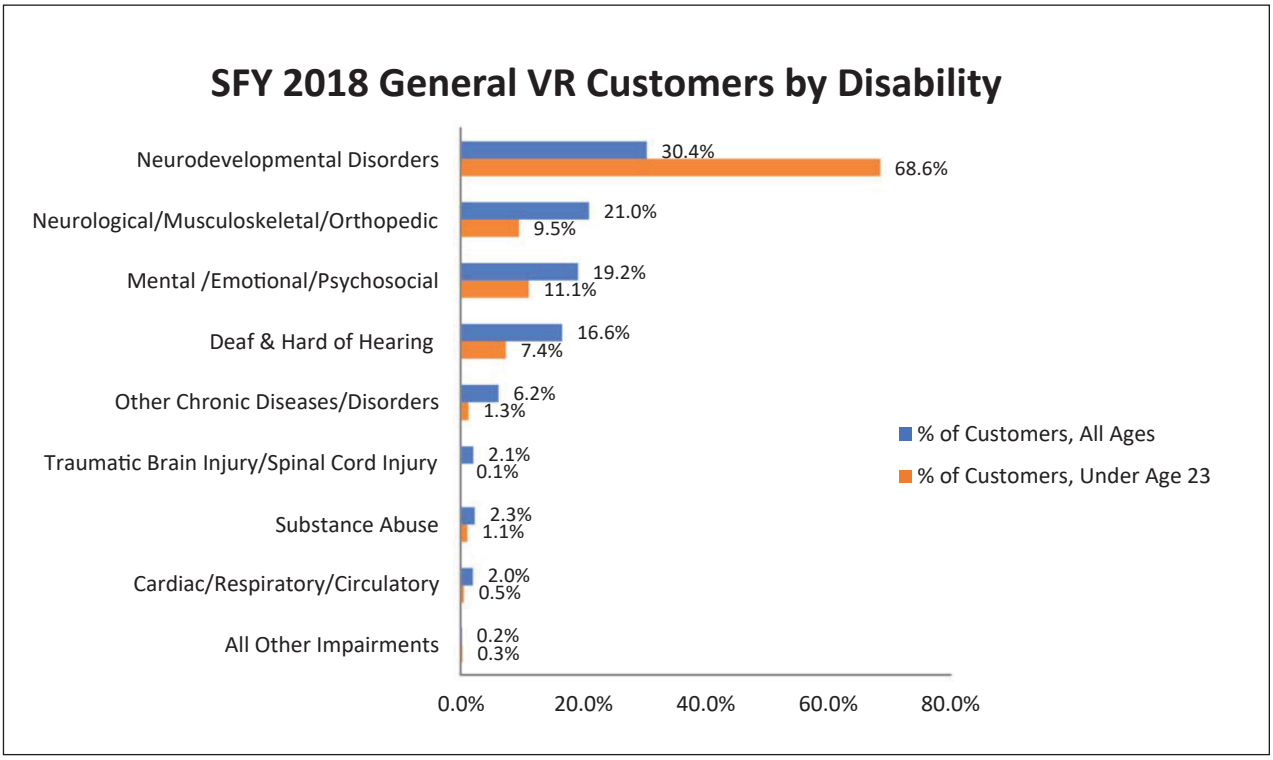
| Category | All Ages | Under 23 |
|---|---|---|
| Training | 23.4% | 41.8% |
| Hearing Aids & Interpretive Services | 17.1% | 3.7% |
| Diagnostic & Evaluation | 12.7% | 5.8% |
| Supported Employment Services | 8.6% | 11.5% |
| Medical Services | 7.7% | 1.1% |
| Pre-Employment Transition Services | 7.3% | 20.1% |
| Job Placement Services | 6.6% | 5.2% |
| Assistive Technology | 4.8% | 1.1% |
| Prosthetics & Orthotics | 4.6% | 0.4% |
| Other Services | 4.3% | 5.9% |
| Maintenance & Transportation | 2.1% | 3.1% |
| Other Goods & Equipment | 0.4% | 0.2% |
| Post-Acute Brain Injury | 0.4% | 0.0% |
| **Total** | **100%** | **100%** |




This information is based on expenditures recorded in RehabWorks; it does not include payment and adjustments made directly through WRAPS System. Other Services includes Other Services - Miscellaneous, Other Services for Family Members, Room and Board-Academic Training, Child Care, Other Services for Customers - Miscellaneous, State License Fees, Uniform Items for Employment, Employement Goods and Equipment - Non Consumable, Self Employment Goods and Equipment - Non Consumable, Other Rehab Tech Services, Other Personal Attendant Services, Translator for Limited English Proficiency, Room and Board- Vocational Training, Self Employment Services, and Halfway House Services - CRP only. Total Customer Services: $96,829,338

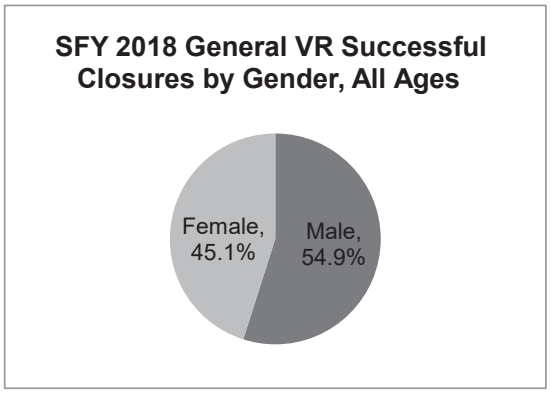
**Disabilities Served**

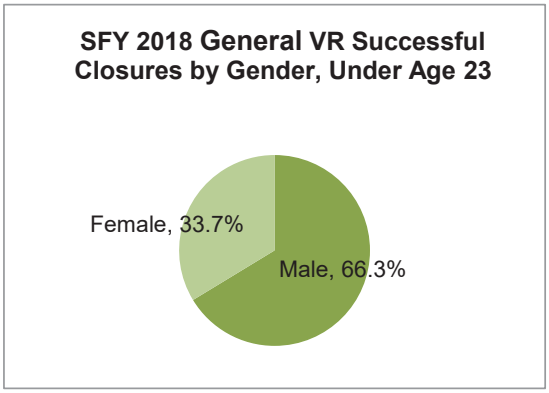
| Primary Disability | Percent All Ages | Percent Under Age 23 |
|---|---|---|
| Neurodevelopmental Disorders | 30.4% | 68.6% |
| Neurological /Musculoskeletal/Orthopedic | 21.0% | 9.5% |
| Mental/Emotional/Psychosocial | 19.2% | 11.1% |
| Deaf & Hard of Hearing | 16.6% | 7.4% |
| Other Chronic Diseases/Disorders | 6.2% | 1.3% |
| Substance Abuse | 2.3% | 1.1% |
| Traumatic Brain Injury/Spinal Cord Injury | 2.1% | 0.1% |
| Cardiac/Respiratory/Circulatory | 2% | 0.5% |
| All Other Impairments | 0.2% | 0.3% |
| **TOTAL** | **100%** | **100%** |




**Total successful closures:** 12,256
**Total successful closures under age 23**: 2,150

**Percent Served by Gender**



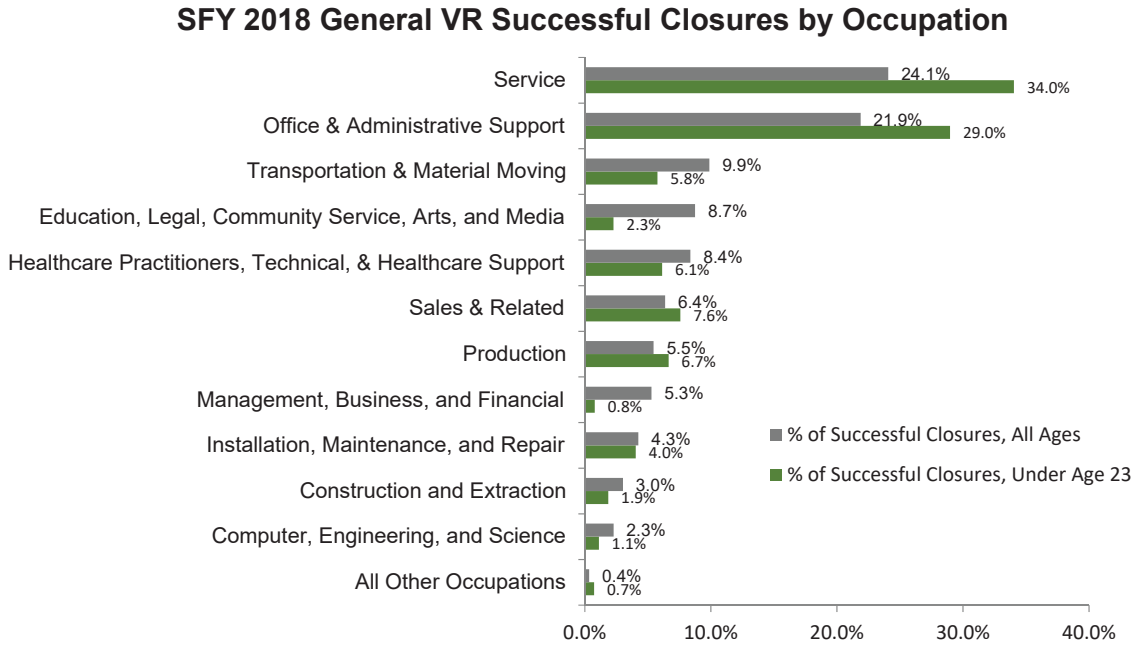




**All Ages** 45.1% Female 54.9% Male

**Under Age 23** 33.7% Female 66.3% Male

**Percent of Successful Closures by Occupation**

| Successful Closures by Occupation | Successful Closures All Ages | Successful Closures Under Age 23 |
|---|---|---|
| Service | 24.1% | 34.0% |
| Office & Administrative Support | 21.9% | 29.0% |
| Transportation & Material Moving | 9.9% | 5.8% |
| Education, Legal, Community Service, Arts & Media | 8.7% | 2.3% |
| Healthcare Practitioners, Technical & Healthcare Support | 8.4% | 6.1% |
| Sales & Related | 6.4% | 7.6% |
| Production | 5.5% | 6.7% |
| Management, Business & Financial | 5.3% | 0.8% |
| Installation, Maintenance & Repair | 4.3% | 4.0% |
| Construction and Extraction | 3.0% | 1.9% |
| Computer, Engineering & Science | 2.3% | 1.1% |
| All Other Occupations | 0.4% | 0.7% |
| **TOTAL** | **100%** | **100%** |

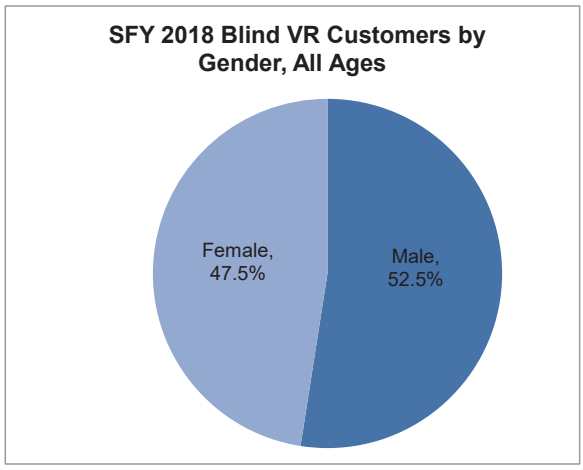


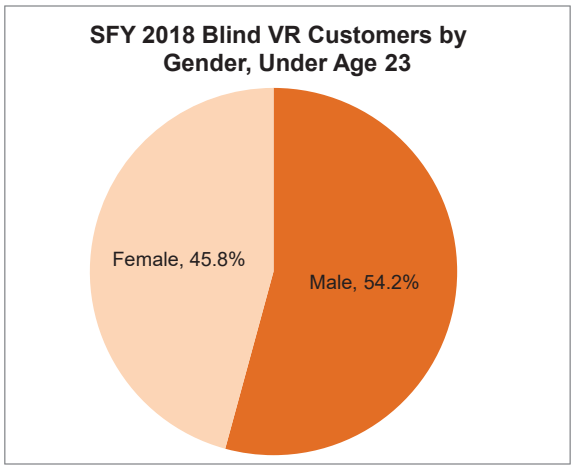

Customers that achieved an employment outcome as described in their Individualized Plan for Employment have maintained employment outcome for 90 days after substantial services are completed and employeed at closure. All Other Occupations includes Farming, Fishing, Forestry, Randolph-Sheppard Vending Facility Operators, Clerks, Military Specific Occupations, Homemakers, and Unpaid Family Workers.

# Statistics: Visual Disabilities

The following statistics describe vocational rehabilitation services for persons with visual disabilities provided in state fiscal year 2018. For age-related data, age reported at the start of the fiscal year was used. Visual disabilities include blindness, significant visual impairments and deafblindness. **Total number served:** 9,765 **Total number served under age 23:** 2,421 **Total number PRE ETS Students Served:** 2,229

**Percent Served by Gender**



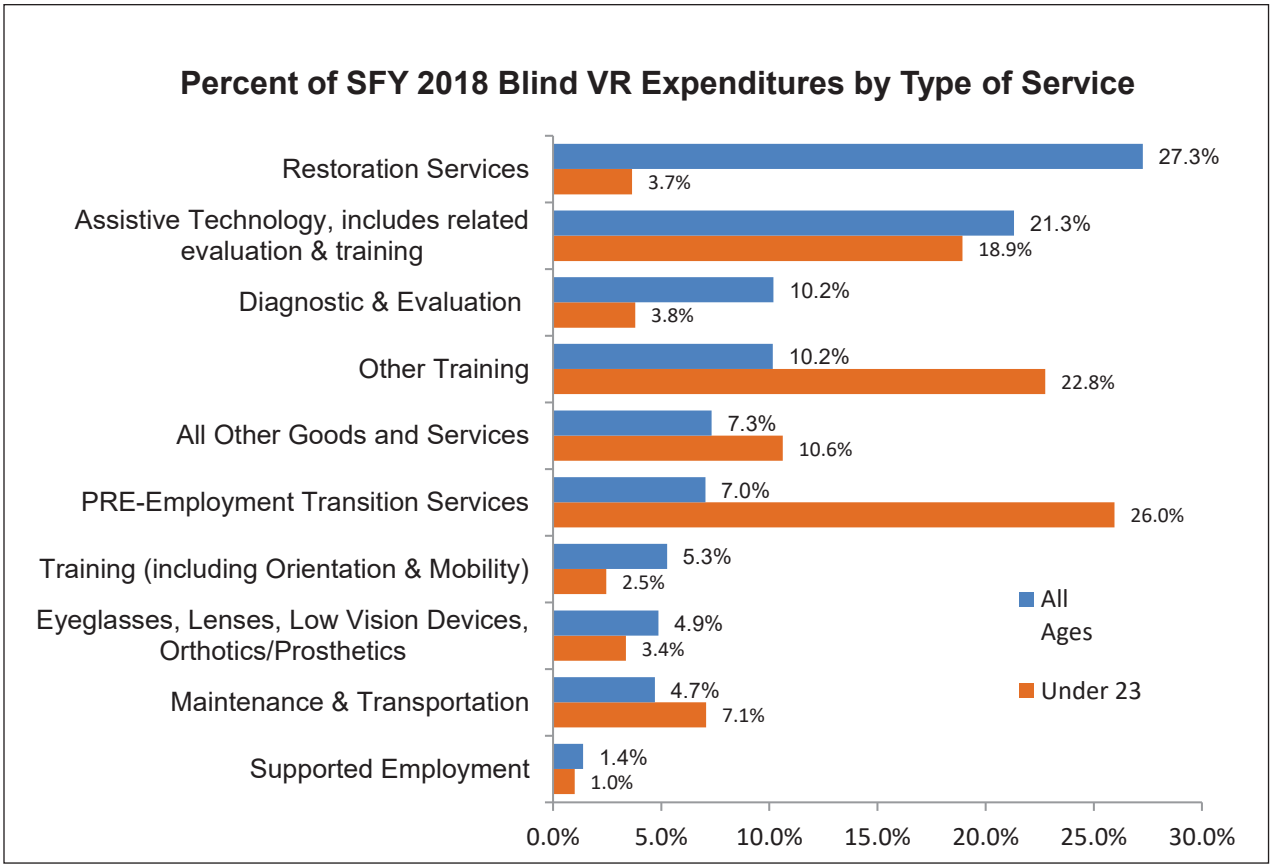

**All Ages 47.5%** Female **52.5%** Male

**Under Age 23 45.8%** Female **54.2%** Male

*Gender is unknown or unavailable for 1,341 customers (2 Under Age 23), the majority of whom have not completed an application.

**Percent Expenditure by Service Type**

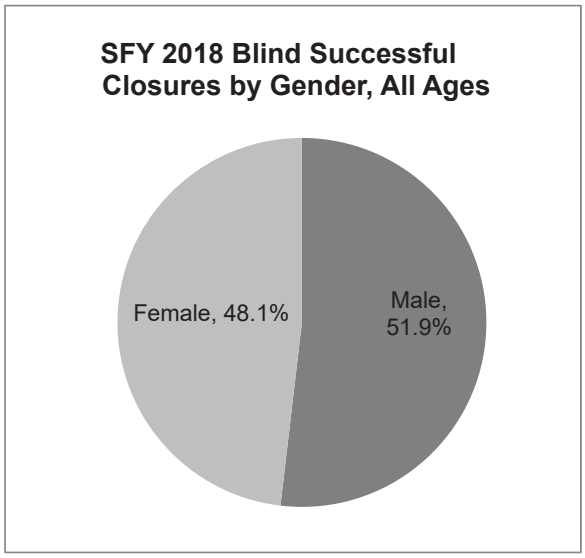
| Service Category | All Ages | Under 23 |
|---|---|---|
| Restoration Services | 27.3% | 3.7% |
| Assistive Technology, including related evaluation & training | 21.3% | 18.9% |
| Diagnostic & Evaluation | 10.2% | 3.8% |
| Other Training | 10.2% | 22.8% |
| All Other Goods & Services | 7.3% | 10.6% |
| Pre-Employment Transition Services | 7.0% | 26.0% |
| Training (including Orientation & Mobility) | 5.3% | 2.5% |
| Eyeglasses, Lenses, Low Vision Devices, Orthotics/Prosthetics | 4.9% | 3.4% |
| Maintenance & Transportation | 4.7% | 7.1% |
| Supported Employment | 1.4% | 1.0% |
| Job Placement | 0.5% | 0.4% |
| Total | 100% | 100% |

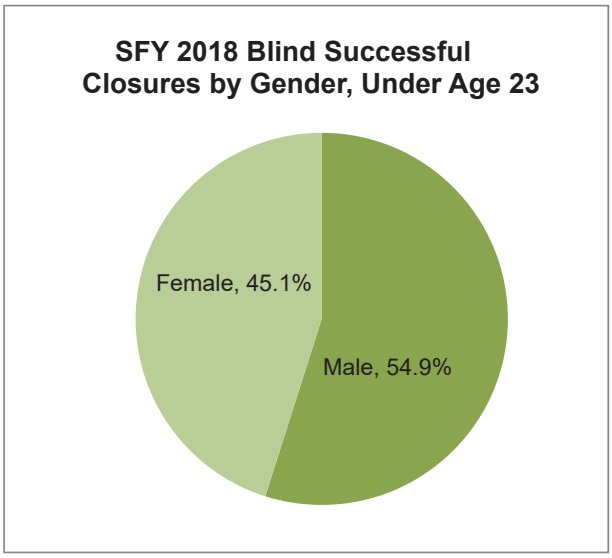



This information is based on expenditures recorded in RehabWorks; it does not include payment and adjustments made directly through WRAPS System. All Other Goods & Services includes Diabetes Education, Other Goods & Equipment, and Other Goods & Equipment-Youth. Total Customer Services: $10,442,506

Total successful closures: 837

**Percent Successful Closures by Gender—**



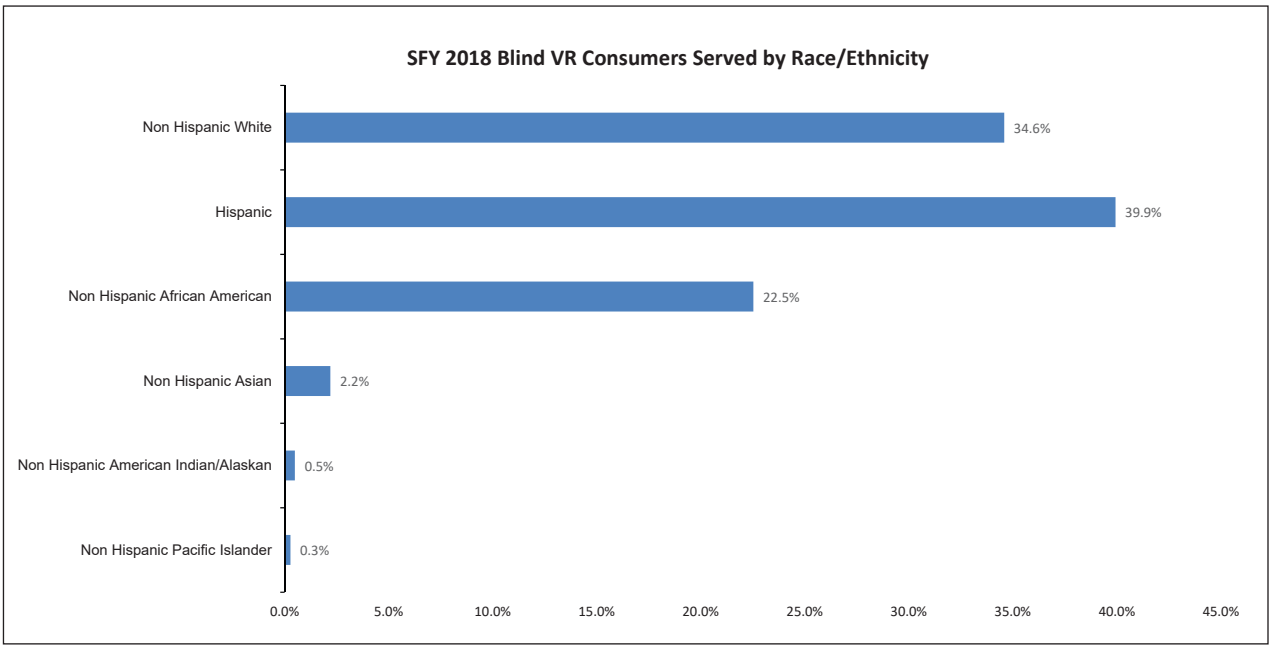




**All Ages 48.1%** Female **51.9%** Male

**Under Age 23 45.1%** Female **54.9%** Male

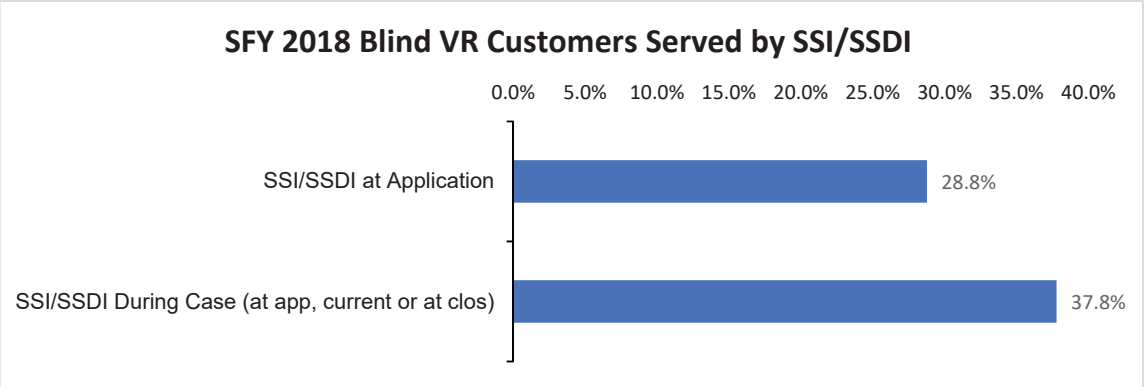
| Race/Ethnicity* | Percent Blind VR Customers Served |
|---|---|
| Non Hispanic White | 34.6% |
| Hispanic | 39.9% |
| Non Hispanic African American | 22.5% |
| Non Hispanic Asian | 2.2% |
| Non Hispanic American Indian/Alaskan | 0.5% |
| Non Hispanic Pacific Islander | 0.3% |
| **Total** | **100%** |

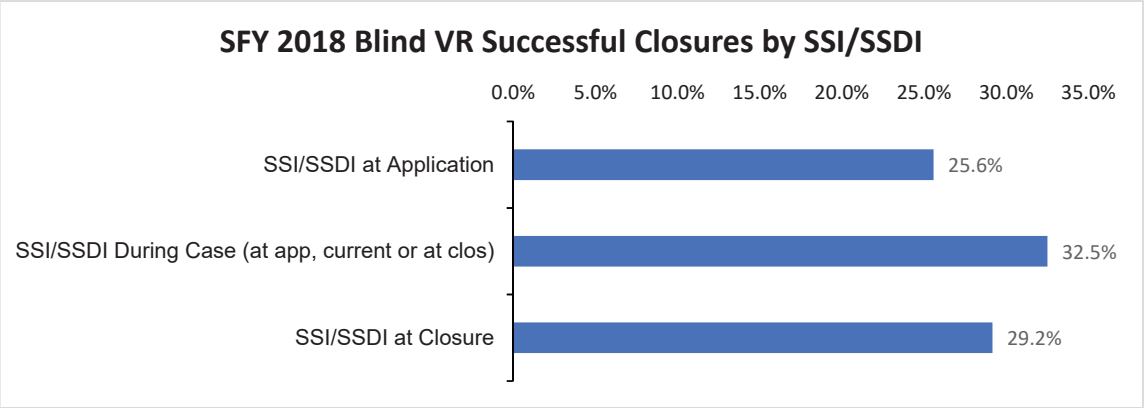
**Note: Consumers self-report and may claim multiple categories. Thus, total is greater than consumer counts. Percent sum may exceed 100%.*



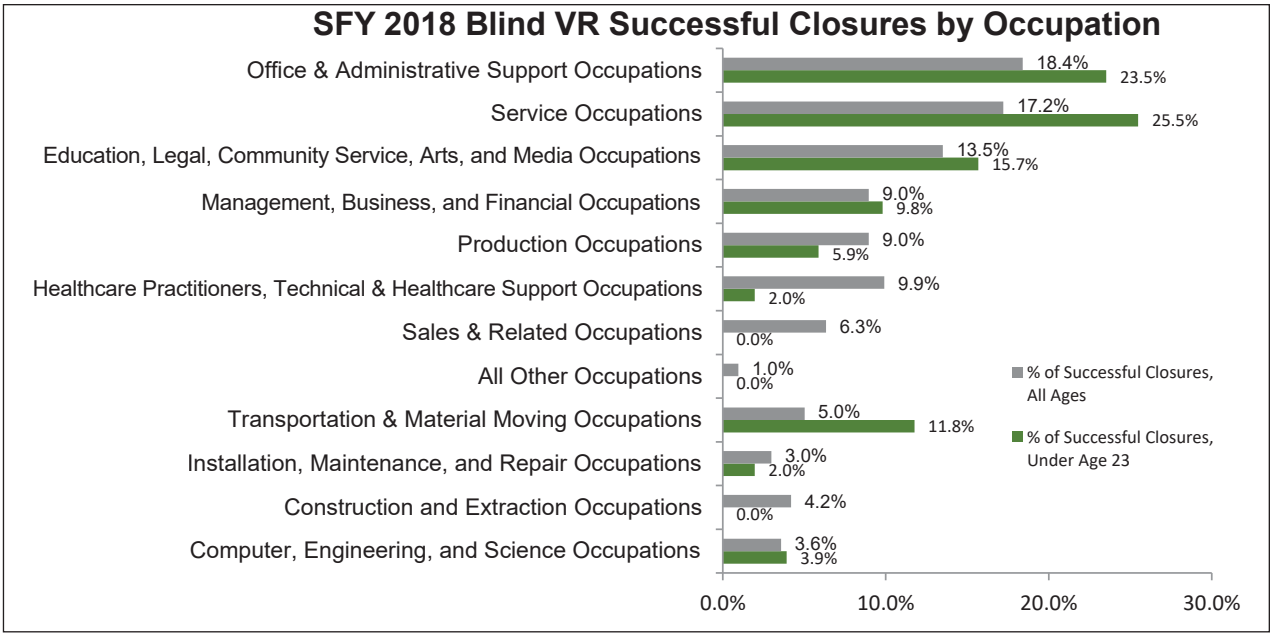

| SSI/SSDI Information | Total Blind VR Customers Served | Percent Blind VR Customers Served | Total Blind VR Successful Closures | Percent Blind VR Successful Closures |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| SSI/SSDI at Application | 2,808 | 28.8% | 214 | 25.6% |
| SSI/SSDI During Case (at app, current or at clos) | 3,688 | 37.8% | 272 | 32.5% |
| SSI/SSDI at Closure | Not Applicable | Not Applicable | 244 | 29.2% |

## Percent of Successful Closures by Occupation



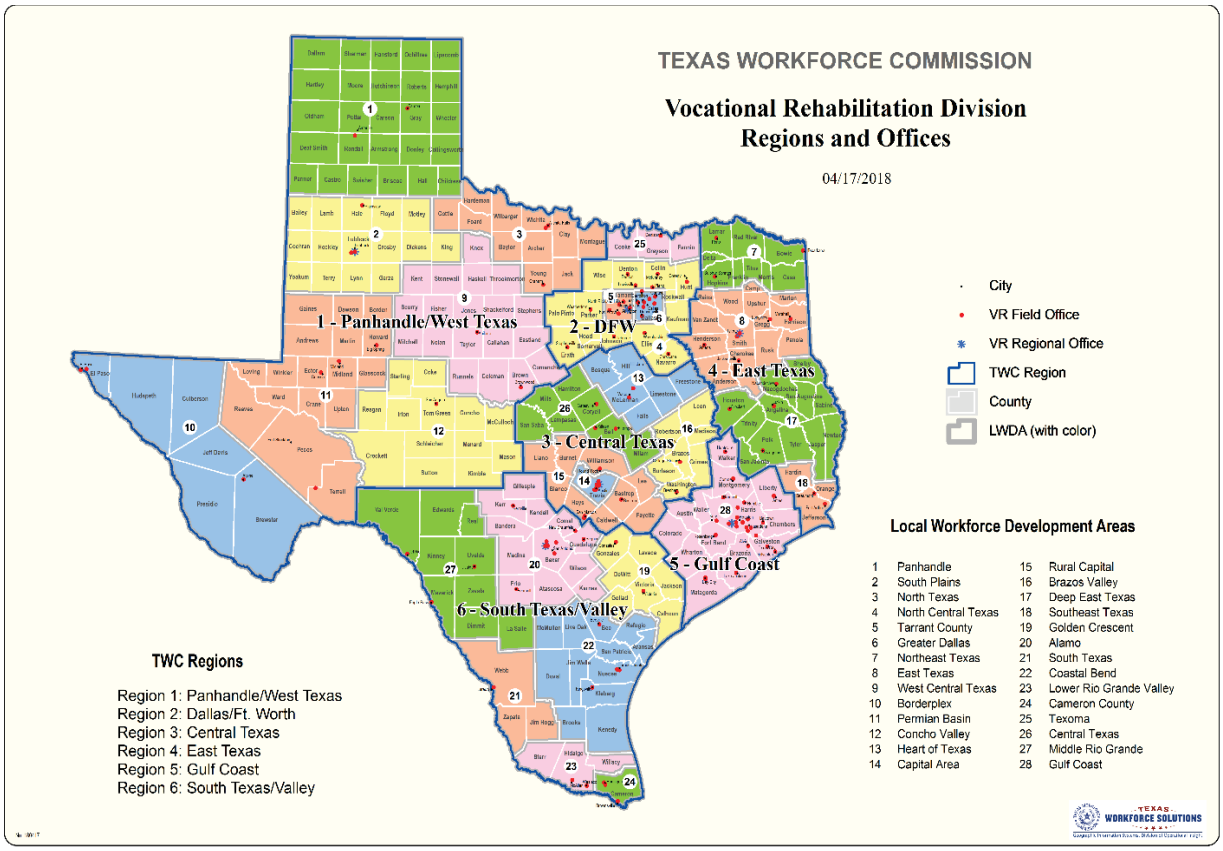




| Successful Closures by Occupation | Successful Closures, All Ages | Percent Successful Closures, All Ages | Successful Closures, Under Age 23 | Percent Successful Closures, Under Age 23 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Office & Administrative Support | 154 | 18.4% | 12 | 23.5% |
| Service | 144 | 17.2% | 13 | 25.5% |
| Education, Legal, Community Service, Arts & Media | 113 | 13.5% | 8 | 15.7% |
| Healthcare Practitioners, Technical & Healthcare Support | 83 | 9.9% | 1 | 2.0% |
| Management, Business & Financial | 75 | 9.0% | 5 | 9.8% |
| Production | 75 | 9.0% | 3 | 5.9% |
| Sales & Related | 53 | 6.3% | 0 | 0.0% |
| Transportation & Material Moving | 42 | 5.0% | 6 | 11.8% |
| Construction and Extraction | 35 | 4.2% | 0 | 0.0% |
| Computer, Engineering & Science | 30 | 3.6% | 2 | 3.9% |
| Installation, Maintenance & Repair | 25 | 3.0% | 1 | 2.0% |
| All Other Occupations | 8 | 1.0% | 0 | 0% |
| TOTAL | 837 | 100% | 51 | 100% |




Customers that achieved an employment outcome as described in their Individualized Plan for Employment, have maintained employment outcome for 90 days after substantial services are completed and employed at closure. All Other Occupations includes Farming, Fishing, Forestry, Randolph-Sheppard Vending Facility Operators, and Clerks.

## Texas Workforce Commission VR Division Regions and Offices Map

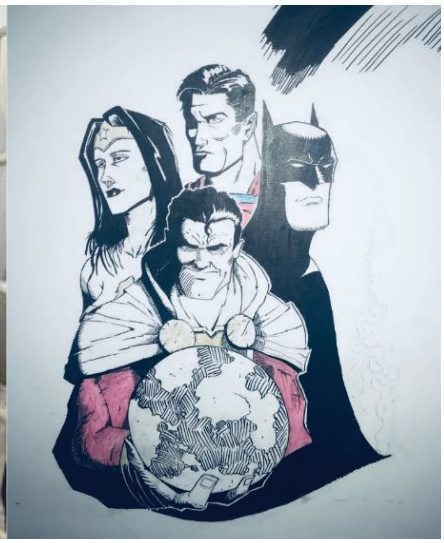


# *Success Stories*

## Summer Earn and Learn Success Story

Summer Earn and Learn intern Brendan Pham was placed in a five-week internship with Hops and Heroes, a comic book store in Austin. Brendan's internship included opportunities for experience in customer service, merchandising, sales, and the like. Brendan thoroughly enjoyed his internship and first-ever work experience. Over time, Brendan grew more confident in his work skills and became a mentor to his peers. During the internship, Brendan's supervisor took an interest in his artistic talent. Brendan was assigned the task of designing and painting a mural for the store (pictured below).

Since his internship, Brendan has enrolled at Austin Community College and is studying art. His goal is to become a concept artist and to one day publish his own comic book. Currently, he is focusing on studying and hopes to participate in Summer Earn and Learn again next year.



## STEM Success Story

Allow me to introduce you to Ethan. Ethan is 14 years old. He loves Legos and reports that he owns more than 11,000 Legos pieces. He often doesn't follow the instructions to build a design and doesn't build what the packaging indicates as the design. Ethan is a bright child who is energetic, enthusiastic, and full of excitement. He is very open and honest. When I first met Ethan, he shared with me that he would often cry (sometimes daily), because he had no friends and was not treated well at school by the other students. Ethan is autistic. He knows that some of his behaviors are not like those of the other kids, but that still does not take away the pain of being mistreated or explain why others don't accept him as he is.

I met with Ethan and his mother to discuss transition services and available programs for students ages 14–22. Ethan was especially interested in the STEM camps and wanted to attend Robot Masters, which focuses on robotics and physics. His mother wasn't sure about him attending because of the other campers' ages and also because she didn't want him to have similar unpleasant experiences that he has experienced in school. I assured her that I would be present as a familiar face and that staff with the Lamar Institute of Technology would ensure that he had a positive experience. She agreed that he could attend.

When I arrived on the first day, I discovered that the blind campers' attendant was not able to be there. Therefore, I volunteered to "be their eyes" and assist the campers with their project. Ethan sat right next to them, which made it easier for me, since I was handing out parts and pieces and reading instructions. As I helped the students, I noticed that Ethan was lightning fast. He had built several vehicles in the manual, while we were still identifying pieces. At one point he looked at me and said, "I know I'm outta control, but I am so excited!" He really wasn't out of control and I assured him that it was okay because summer camp is all about being excited.

Ethan would occasionally glance at us as another student was fitting pieces and listening to see if we were working together smoothly. Ethan obviously didn't understand the mechanics or physics to make the vehicles work. The two boys struck up a conversation and before long the blind camper was explaining things to Ethan, letting him feel the pressure in the tanks, and showing him how the exhaust and motor should work. Ethan made suggestions regarding which parts seem to fit better together. The boys were now like any other kids at summer camp, helping each other and laughing; they no longer needed me. I stepped back and watched how the boy who would cry every day was finally like every other kid at summer camp, laughing and having fun. This is the kind of success that you can't plan for, and it is priceless.

## VR Adult Success Story

Sylvia Torres, from the Lower Rio Grande Valley, came to us in the spring of 2012, right out of high school. Ms. Torres was diagnosed with borderline intellectual functioning and major depression and anxiety (due to her very low self-esteem) and had attended special education classes every school year. She performed at third-grade reading, comprehension, and math levels.

Part of her eligibility case notes from six years ago reads as follows:
"Consumer is very shy, very quiet, and relies too much on her mom. She is very timid and 'appears' to be fearful of things and somewhat helpless in her demeanor. She believes that if she fails a class or does not do well that things will just completely fall apart; her mom supports her and tells her that this is not so and that she just needs to learn to be stronger and do more for herself. VRC encouraged her to get school requirements done on her own and she has stated that she will."

But through working with us, she obtained her associate's degree from Texas State Technical College in the Teachers Assistant program (fall 2017) and is now working for Neighbors In Need of Services, Inc. (NINOS, Inc.) Head Start (La Gallina) as a teacher! The qualification for teachers with NINOS, Inc., is an associate's degree, and the pay is $12.31 per hour. Ms. Torres works 40 hours per week, has medical insurance, and is happy in her job. She had been one of the shyest kids I worked with, but she has matured and now is a different, confident adult. Her mom says (in Spanish), "Remember how she was when she first came to see you?" Ms. Torres' mom also works for NINOS, Inc., Head Start as a cook, but now Ms. Torres is making more money than her mother (and her father). Additionally, she is now a role model for her four younger siblings. We sponsored her for a significant amount of tutoring, had remarkable success, and are proud of her.

# *Membership and Meetings*

## Members

**Neva Fairchild** of Carrollton is the national independent living and employment specialist for the American Foundation for the Blind, where she has worked since 2008. Previously, she was employed for more than 15 years by the State of Texas as a VR counselor and as an employment assistance specialist, and she began her career at the Dallas Lighthouse for the Blind as a vocational evaluator. She serves on the International Board of the Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (AER), where she is also immediate past chair of its Division on Aging. She has also served as president and secretary of the Texas AER chapter. Ms. Fairchild began her education at Texas A&M University but left college to marry and care for her young family. After nine years at home, she returned to school and obtained a Bachelor of Science in Rehabilitation Science in 1988 and a Master of Science in Rehabilitation Counseling Psychology in 1992 at The University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center in Dallas.

**Paul Hunt** of Austin is retired from the Internal Revenue Service after 37 years of service. He is past president of the Austin Council of the Blind and vice chair of the Capital Metropolitan Transportation Authority Access Committee. Additionally, he is former chair and member of the Capital Metropolitan Transportation Authority Mobility Impaired Services Advisory Committee. Mr. Hunt received an associate's degree in Liberal Arts from Macomb County Community College in Warren, Michigan. He is a certified adaptive technology trainer and provides contract training for the Integration Technology Group.

**Matt Berend** of Wichita Falls is a VR supervisor for the Texas Workforce Solutions VR Services. Previously, Mr. Berend worked as a unit program specialist and VR counselor for the Texas Workforce Commission. He received VR services after a bull-riding accident left him paralyzed. He has served on the Council since 2015 as a VR counselor representative. Additionally, he is a member of the Texas Rehabilitation Association and is an active advocate for individuals with disabilities. Mr. Berend received his Bachelor of Social Work from Tarleton State University in Stephenville and a Master of Rehabilitation Counseling from Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center (TTUHSC) in Lubbock. In 2017, he received TTUHSC's Presidential Alumni Award for the Department of Clinical Counseling and Mental Health. Additionally, Mr. Berend is a licensed social worker and a certified rehabilitation counselor.

**Erin "Amanda" Bowdoin** of Forney is a certified teacher of the visually impaired and a braillist for Mesquite Independent School District. She is a former volunteer for the American Foundation for the Blind and Visually Impaired and former member of the Expanded Core Curriculum Committee for Region 10 Education Service Center. Ms. Bowdoin received a Bachelor of Arts in Elementary Education from Texas A&M University–Commerce and a Master of Education in Special Education from Stephen F. Austin University, specializing in visual impairment.

**James M. "Jim" Brocato** of Beaumont is the Executive Director of the RISE Center for Independent Living. He is a member of the Texas Centers for Independent Living, the Texas Area Health Education Center East, and the National Council on Independent Living, and has served since 2013 as the Centers for Independent Living representative on the Texas State Independent Living Council. Mr. Brocato has extensive knowledge of disability issues in the areas of disability advocacy, public policy, education, research, and public service. He has more than 25 years of experience in the Southeast Texas area managing and marketing health care/physician groups and nonprofit organizations and has collaborated with numerous local and statewide nonprofit organizations and governmental agencies, advocating for individuals with disabilities. Mr. Brocato received a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology and a master's degree in Human Services Administration from St. Edward's University in Austin.

**Michael A. Ebbeler, Jr.** of Austin is a professional in energy exploration. He is a former member of the Lone Star Paralysis Foundation Steering Committee. Mr. Ebbeler received a Bachelor of Arts in Government and Economics from The University of Texas at Austin.

**JoAnne Fluke** of Abilene is the Independent Living Services program specialist at Disability in Action. Before she moved to Texas, she was a member of the Ms. Wheelchair Kansas Board, a group leader for Kansas Youth Leadership Forum, and a staff member of Camp MITIOG, a camp devoted to children living with spina bifida. Ms. Fluke received a Bachelor of Arts in Religion from Baker University in Baldwin City, Kansas. Additionally, she is an instructor for Zumba International Fitness. She loves ballroom dancing as well. Ms. Fluke's passion is to give individuals with disabilities the opportunity to pursue their own passions.

**Cheryl Fuller** of Austin is the director of the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) Vocational Rehabilitation Division. She has 28 years of experience working in federally funded programs that focus on helping Texans prepare for, obtain, and retain employment. Prior to transferring to TWC on September 1, 2016, with the former DARS programs, she served as the DARS assistant commissioner for its Division for Rehabilitation Services (DRS) from August 2013 through August 2016. Ms. Fuller joined DARS in 2011 as the director of its Center for Learning Management after serving more than 11 years as director of the Texas Workforce Investment Council in the Office of the Governor. Ms. Fuller began her career in Abilene, where she worked for almost nine years in employment and training programs funded by the Job Training Partnership Act and the Workforce Investment Act. She was appointed as an ex-officio member of the Council in 2014.

**Crystal H. George** of Argyle is a job accommodation specialist for Sedgwick. She is an executive board member of the Texas Rehabilitation Association and a member of both the National Rehabilitation Association and the Association of People Supporting Employment First. Ms. George is past president of the North Texas Area Rehabilitation Association and a volunteer with the Weatherford Citizen Police Alumni Association. Ms. George received a Bachelor of Arts in Social Science and a Master of Science in Rehabilitation Counseling from the University of North Texas.

**Bobbie Hodges** is the senior director of workforce development for Goodwill Industries of Fort Worth. She has 25 years of experience working with individuals with disabilities, disadvantages, and barriers to employment. Ms. Hodges provides these individuals with training and assists them with obtaining and retaining employment. She joined Goodwill Fort Worth in 2015 after serving more than 15 years at Goodwill Industries of North Louisiana, where she most recently served as contracts manager, overseeing federal and state set-aside contracts. She is a former member of the Association of People Supporting Employment First (APSE) and served on the Mayor's Advisory Council in Shreveport, Louisiana. Additionally, Ms. Hodges volunteered for various events including Coats for Kids and Tour De Goodwill in Louisiana. She received the Mayor of Shreveport 2010 HERA Award, recognizing untiring and selfless volunteer efforts to be a helpful, effective, and responsible advocate for Shreveport women and youth. Ms. Hodges received a Bachelor of Science and a Master of Science in Recreation Therapy from Southern University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

**Elizabeth "Lisa" Maciejewski-West** of San Angelo is the president and owner of Gold Star Medical Business Services and a faculty member of the Practice Management Institute. She is a member of the San Angelo Chamber of Commerce, Health Care Compliance Association, and the American Academy of Professional Coders. She also volunteers as a mentor and leader with Young Lives, in addition to being a member of and volunteer at PaulAnn Baptist Church in San Angelo. Ms. Maciejewski-West received a Bachelor of Arts in Music from the Manhattan School of Music in New York City.

**Susan "Susie" May** began her 37-year career in public education as a special education teacher. She has served students with disabilities in Texas public schools at all grade levels and in various roles as teacher, behavior consultant, and campus and state leader. Ms. May is a technical assistant specialist in the Texas Education Agency's Transition for the Division of Special Education program.

**Troyon "Troy" Myree** of Houston served in the US Marine Corps and is a life member of Paralyzed Veterans of America. Mr. Myree also is a member of the Family to Family Network and a board member of the Barbara Jordan S.A.F.E. Diversity (Student and Family Empowerment) Troy was appointed to the Council in 2014 as a VR services recipient representative and is a member of the Policy, Procedure and Personnel Development Committee. Mr. Myree earned a bachelor's degree from the University of Houston–Downtown, a master's in Social Work from the University of Houston, and a Master's in Health Administration from the University of Phoenix.

**Rodrick D. Robinson** of McKinney is founder and CEO of New Life Medical Equipment. He is a member of Baylor Scott & White McKinney Medical Center Board of Trustees, the McKinney Airport Advisory Committee, and the McKinney Comprehensive Plan Committee. Additionally, Mr. Robinson serves as a board member of the Texas Rehabilitation Association. Mr. Robinson also is an ordained deacon at First McKinney Baptist Church, a student mentor for McKinney Independent School District, a former volunteer for Voting for Hearing Impaired, and a former board member of Texas Rehab Action Network. Mr. Robinson received a Bachelor of Business Administration in Entrepreneurship and Strategic Management from the University of North Texas in Denton.

**Karen Stanfill** of Houston is an advocate supervisor for the Client Assistance Program at Disability Rights Texas. Her professional employment began in the rehabilitation department at Goodwill Industries, and she worked as a counselor with the state VR agency, now Texas Workforce Solutions–Vocational Rehabilitation Services, for 15 years. Ms. Stanfill is a member of the National Rehabilitation Association, the Texas Rehabilitation Association, and the Houston Area Rehabilitation Association. Additionally, she serves as a board member of the National Coalition for State Rehabilitation Councils. She was reappointed to the Council in 2015 as the Client Assistance Program representative and is chair of the Council's Policy, Procedure and Personnel Development Committee. Ms. Stanfill is a Certified Rehabilitation Counselor and holds a bachelor's degree from Stephen F. Austin State University with a double major in Rehabilitation Counseling and Business.

**Crystal Stark** of College Station is a VR counselor and unit support coordinator for the Texas Workforce Commission and has worked in the VR field for more than a decade. Ms. Stark served as chair of the Accessibility Committee for the National Rehabilitation Association, the Texas Rehab Action Network, the Mayor's Committee on People with Disabilities in the Brazos Valley, and the Vision and Eligibility Committee for the National Beep Baseball Association, a nonprofit that supports an adaptive form of baseball for individuals who are blind or visually impaired. Additionally, she serves as a board member of the Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center Master of Science Clinical Rehabilitation Counseling Advisory Board. Ms. Stark received a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology from Angelo State University and a Master of Rehabilitation Counseling from Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center in Lubbock.

# *Spotlight:* **Become a Member**

RCT Members Paul Hunt and JoAnne Fluke during the RCT Quarterly Meeting.

If you are an individual with a disability or someone interested in providing input on vocational rehabilitation services for Texans with disabilities, the Council may be for you. Interested individuals must submit an application to the governor of Texas. Council members are appointed by the governor for three-year terms and represent a diverse range of disabilities and community perspectives. The Council must include representatives of the State Rehabilitation Program, State Independent Living Council, and the Community Rehabilitation Programs and other disability organizations and programs, as well as individuals with disabilities, and their families or authorized representatives. Business, industry, and labor representatives, as well as those from the State Workforce Investment Board and Texas Education Agency, are also required.

Learn more by visiting texasworkforce.org/agency/rehabilitation-council-texas

# 2019 Rehabilitation Council of Texas Quarterly Meeting Schedule

Council members convene for quarterly meetings to participate in discussion panels, presentations, and committee meetings in support of the Council's mission, values, and responsibilities.

All Meeting Times
1st day 9:00 am – 4:30 pm
2nd day 9:00 am – 12:00 pm

Meeting Location:
Criss Cole Rehabilitation Center (CCRC)
4800 N. Lamar Boulevard
Austin, Texas 78756

| 2019 Quarterly Meeting Schedule |
| --- |
| February 7–8, 2019 |
| May 2–3, 2019 |
| August 1–2, 2019 |
| November 7-8, 2019 |

Additional meeting information and materials will be posted as they become finalized at texasworkforce.org/agency/rehabilitation-council-texas#meetingScheduleAgendasMinutes

TEXAS WORKFORCE COMMISSION
101 East 15th Street
Austin, Texas 78778-0001
512-463-2222

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