

A photograph of the Texas State Capitol building at dusk. The building is illuminated with warm lights, and its iconic dome is topped with the Statue of Liberty. A long, paved walkway leads from the foreground towards the building, flanked by rows of trees and street lamps. The sky is a deep blue, and the overall atmosphere is serene and majestic.

Rehabilitation Council of Texas 2019 Annual Report

In partnership with the Texas Workforce Commission

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RCT Quarterly Meeting, Rodrick Robinson, Matt Berend

Messages

Message from Council Chair Neva Fairchild



I am pleased to bring you the Rehabilitation Council of Texas (Council) Annual Report. The Council has worked in partnership with Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) staff throughout the past year to bring the best vocational rehabilitation (VR) services possible to Texans with disabilities, especially those with the most severe disabilities. This report was written in coordination with and through the hard work of Council members and overseen by our coordinator, Lisa Godwin. Everyone impacted by services provided through Texas Workforce Solutions–Vocational Rehabilitation Services deserves the best that the state of Texas has to 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 (TWC-VRD).

Governor Greg Abbott renewed and appointed new members to the Council in August 2019, and as I complete my second year as chair and my final term on the Council, I am confident that the Council will continue to work hard with TWC-VRD to provide Texans with disabilities with timely and effective VR services. The Council is your voice, and you are encouraged to reach out to any member at any time. You will find information about all of the Council members within these pages. Get to know them, let them hear from you, and together, we will make VR services in Texas the best they can be.

With Best Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Neva Fairchild". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Neva Fairchild, RCT Chair

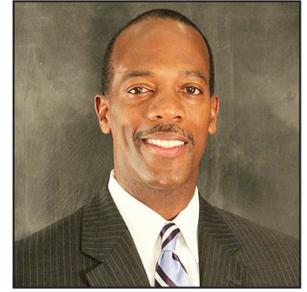
Message from the Commissioners



Bryan Daniel
Commissioner
Representing
the Public



Julian Alvarez III
Commissioner
Representing Labor



Aaron Demerson
Commissioner
Representing
Employers



Through our collaboration with the Rehabilitation Council of Texas (RCT), the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) ensures Texans with disabilities have access to effective vocational rehabilitation services designed to connect them to competitive integrated employment, gain or regain independence, or acquire workplace skills in preparation for a meaningful career.

In Fiscal Year 2019, TWC served more than 71,000 Texans with disabilities, and more than 13,500 of those individuals met their employment goals. TWC continues to implement strategies focused on improving opportunities for Texans with disabilities and connecting employers to this invaluable talent pipeline.

Highlighted in this report is the agency's customer satisfaction survey, statistics describing vocational rehabilitation services for persons with general disabilities (other than vision impairment) and a few of our favorite success stories.

As we mark a third year since the transfer of VR programs to TWC in 2016, we express sincere appreciation to the outgoing members of the Rehabilitation Council of Texas who have made vital contributions to our agency's ability to provide assistance to individuals with disabilities. We also welcome the RCT's eight newest members, with whom we look forward to working with in Fiscal Year 2020 to expand employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities.

About the Council



RCT Members 2019

Mission, Values, and Responsibilities

The Rehabilitation Council of Texas (Council) advises the state's designated Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program on policy, scope, and effectiveness of services. The Council is federally mandated by the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by WIOA.

The Council helps ensure that Texans with disabilities have access to effective VR services that result in competitive and integrated employment, greater independence, and community participation. Bylaws that are designed to support this goal govern the Council.

The Texas governor appoints Council members for three-year terms to represent a diverse range of individuals with 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 VR priorities, goals, and outcomes.

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

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 customer 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, customer satisfaction, responsibilities, functions, and eligibility, including the need for order of selection
- Submit vocational rehabilitation program progress reports to the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) commissioner
- Help prepare the Vocational Rehabilitation Services Program state plan and develop a description of the Council's input and recommendations as a part of the plan
- Review and analyze vocational rehabilitation program effectiveness, including an assessment of 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



Committees

The following committees are responsible for upholding the Council's mission, values, and responsibilities in partnership with representatives from the VR programs.

Executive Committee

Composed of chair, vice chair, and all committee chairs

Committee Chair: Neva Fairchild

The Executive Committee coordinates with VR programs' leadership; develops quarterly meeting agendas; develops public outreach materials; and reviews the Council's budget, bylaws, and amendments.

Planning and Review Committee

Committee Chair: Neva Fairchild

The Planning and Review Committee helps set and evaluate progress toward goals and priorities for the Combined State Plan for the state VR program, recommends ways to improve VR services, and reviews public comments.

Customer Satisfaction and Needs Assessment Committee

Committee Chair: Elizabeth "Lisa" Maciejewski-West

The Customer Satisfaction and Needs Assessment Committee reviews customer satisfaction survey results and other program data, addresses service concerns, and helps steer a statewide needs assessment every three years.

Membership and Education Committee

Committee Chair: Bobbie Hodges

The Membership and Education Committee 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 orientation activities.

Policy, Procedure, and Personnel Development Committee

Committee Chair: Karen Stanfill

The Policy, Procedure, and Personnel Development Committee comments on changes to VR policy; reviews appeals decisions; and monitors procedural changes, staffing, and impartial hearing officer selection.

Our Work in Fiscal Year 2019

Year in Review



TWC Former Chair and Commissioner Representing Employers Ruth R. Hughes presents Neva Fairchild with the Governor's Certificate.

The Council is pleased to share some of the events we held or participated in during Fiscal Year 2019 (FY'19), including conferences attended, participation in recommendations to TWC-VR, involvement in the TWC-VR state plan, and speakers that presented at our quarterly meetings.

Council members attended several events this year. In October 2018, committee member Karen Stanfill and Council vice chair, Paul Hunt, attended the National Coalition of State Rehabilitation Councils (NCSRC), Coalition of State Associations of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR), and National Coalition of State Associations for the Blind (NCSAB) fall conferences held in Long Beach, California. They returned with many ideas on how to improve our functions as a state rehabilitation council (SRC), as well as confirmation of the many things we, as a state and Council, are excelling at with respect to our VR programs.

Newly appointed Council members Amanda Bowdoin, Paul Hunt, Lisa Maciejewski-West, Rodrick Robinson, and Michael Ebbeler attended the Governor's Appointee Training Seminar on December 18, 2018, in Austin. This seminar was designed to acquaint Texas state agency board and commission members with the roles and responsibilities of their positions and with the resources available to them in carrying out these responsibilities. Governor Abbott shared his philosophy and priorities for the 86th Legislative Session. The governor plans to continue holding the Appointee Training Seminar in the upcoming years.

Council members Karen Stanfill and Rodrick Robinson represented the Council at the TWC Annual Conference in Houston in November 2018. This was a great opportunity for the Council to gain knowledge about what TWC-VR had planned for FY'19.

Council Chair Neva Fairchild attended the State Independent Living Council (SILC) Transportation Conference in March 2019 in McAllen. At the conference she learned that nearly 1.9 million Texans with disabilities reported not leaving their home due to inadequate transportation services, according to the Texas Council for Developmental Disabilities (TCDD). Robert Ferguson, Regional Disability Integration Advisor of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, stressed the importance of individuals with disabilities being a part of the emergency planning process in their home community. Todd Hanson, Assistant Research Scientist of the Texas A&M Transportation Institute, reported on several partnerships between paratransit and ride sharing services like Uber, which are improving transportation options for riders and reducing costs for all parties involved. "Increasing Travel for All" was an interactive discussion on accessibility in new transportation systems. Discussions were held about the Texas Bullet Train and The Project of Texas Central partners. Ms. Fairchild also participated in an advocacy panel discussion as a presenter. The panelists spoke about advocacy and customer's need in terms of transportation, as well as speaking up when transportation options are not adequate. Advocating for the needs of others as members develop advocacy skills and connections will change the landscape of transportation for individuals with disabilities in Texas.

In April 2019, Karen Stanfill and Council vice chair Paul Hunt attended the NCSRC, CSAVR, and NCSAB spring conferences, held in Bethesda, Maryland. The conferences were a great opportunity to discuss how SRCs from around the country operate and collaborate for better ways to represent and advocate for individuals with disabilities in the VR process. During the Spring quarterly Council meeting in May, members reviewed some of the topics and suggestions from other SRCs. The Council considered the following ideas:

- SRCs holding public comment for rulemaking at the SRC meeting
- VR agencies holding conference calls and webinars every other month about a specific topic and inviting providers and SRCs to give feedback
- SRC staff liaison attending other disability group meetings and bringing information back to the Council
- Inviting customers, advocacy groups, and service providers to participate in periodic focus groups facilitated by Council members (in addition to the town hall meetings held every three years) in different cities.

During these conferences, Council members also learned that the training resources manual for SRCs is under review and revision, including the IRI book, which was published before Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) was passed. RSA monitoring was discussed, as well as Vision 2020. There was also a topic discussed concerning women not being well represented in Randolph-Shepherd programs.

The Council welcomed a variety of speakers to the quarterly meetings in FY'19. These speakers included:

- Roger Levy, MA ATP, Director Texas Technology Access Program at the University of Texas at Austin, presented on assistive technology;
- Sandra Breitengross Bitter, Executive Director of the Texas SILC, provided an overview of the SILC structure and current grant-funded projects;
- Elyse Luke, VR Division Project Manager, gave a presentation on One DSU Implementation Project that outlined the operational alignment, efficiency, quality, customer service, and specialization and teamwork;
- Laura York, TWC VR Program Specialist for Special Projects, provided a presentation titled “Feedback Request: Model for Improving Services for Customers with Brain Injury”;
- Susanna Holt, Deputy General Counsel, and Melissa Collins, VR Hearings Coordinator, provided information on the impartial hearing officer (IHO) open enrollment process and TWC Chapter 850 Vocational Rehabilitation Services Administrative Rules and Procedures updates. They included an update on the current workload of IHOs, a brief overview of the open enrollment solicitation, and the newly adopted rules that address the VR appeals process; and
- Ruth R. Hughs, former Chair and Commissioner Representing Employers of TWC, provided an overview of the DiverseAbility forum and involvement in VR.



Elyse Luke, VR Division Project Manager, presentation.

At the Council's quarterly meetings, liaisons gave regular reports for the Texas Workforce Investment Council (TWIC), Partners Resource Network (PRN), SILC, Texas Education Agency (TEA), and the Client Assistance Program (CAP). These standard communications keep Council members aware of the involvement of other stakeholders. Members also received reports from TWC-VR Director Cheryl Fuller and performance measures updates from Adam Leonard, TWC Director of Operational Insight.

Council committees met each quarter to discuss and report on their activity. **The Planning and Review Committee** was heavily involved this year with reviewing and giving input in the TWC-VR portion of the WIOA Combined State Plan. The formal recommendations are in the Input and Recommendations section of this report. **The Customer Satisfaction and Needs Assessment Committee** has been involved in reviewing the CSNA reports and making recommendations to low-score areas, including rewriting the interview questions to clarify understanding and ensure accurate responses. This committee has also been busy preparing for 2020 town hall meetings. Keeping updated on House Bill 2110 has been important for this committee, as it could potentially affect the customer satisfaction survey in the future. **The Membership and Education Committee** has been working with the Office of the Texas Governor to receive new appointments for the Council. Governor Abbott appointed new members and made reappointments in August 2019, as follows:

- Reappointments: Matt Berend of Abilene, JoAnne Fluke of Abilene, Paul Hunt of Austin, Crystal Stark of College Station, and Cheryl A. Fuller of Austin
- New appointments: Lisa Cowart of Beaumont, Joe Powell of Grapevine, Colton Read of New Braunfels, and Lindsey Geeslin of Lorena.

An ongoing committee activity has been recruiting new members. Updating and preparing for New Member Orientation is another activity to ensure the Council members are informed of their duties and responsibilities. **The Policy, Procedure, and Personnel Development Committee** has been involved with reviewing IHOs and TWC-VR policy changes. Some of the focus areas for this committee include following trends in vacant positions in VR counselor positions, informed choice, and counselor training on vehicle modifications and self-employment.



Geoffrey Miller, Joe Powell and Adam Leonard

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, 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; Customer 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 2019.

Recommendation: Regarding Cooperative Agreements with Agencies Not Carrying Out Activities, clarify whether VRD coordinates with state AT programs other than the UT AT Project, and if so, include them in this section of the CSP, and if not, list them in this section and explain why VRD is not coordinating with them at this time.

Response: VRD is unaware of any other state assistive technology programs other than the University of Texas' Texas Technology Access Program (TTAP).

Recommendation: Regarding Coordination with Education Officials, consider a focus on STEM be added to this section.

Response: VRD agrees and included information in this section about the PCI initiative, Explore STEM!

Recommendation: Regarding Coordination with Education Officials, expand collaboration between VRD, education officials and ISD's beyond Pre-ETS in the CSP, to include a full array of VR services to students with disabilities, such as, but not limited to apprenticeships.

Response: VRD agrees with the recommendation and has added that apprenticeships are included as an appropriate service that may be available to customers. Based on the Explore Apprenticeships initiative that occurred in two areas of the state during summer 2019, it is anticipated that interest in apprenticeships will grow and enhanced collaboration with ISDs will be expanded to apprenticeships.

Recommendation: Regarding Coordination with Education Officials, make the Texas Transition and Employment Guide a hyperlink.

Response: VRD agrees, and a hyperlink to the Texas Transition and Employment Guide was added.

Recommendation: Regarding State's Strategies, add... "Implements employment premiums to reward providers who maintain training and skills necessary to work with blind or visually impaired customers" to the CSP.

Response: VRD agrees that it is important to maintain a sufficient provider base to serve customers who are blind or visually impaired. VRD has implemented several policies and standards to support this goal and will conduct further review of this recommendation in anticipation of further consideration by TWC's three-member Commission.

Recommendation: Regarding State's Strategies, additional disabilities where VRD should build staff capacity and subject matter experts should include: epilepsy, mental health, and spinal cord injury. Also suggest that the agency build staff capacity and expertise on the following service areas; self-employment, vehicle modification, home/job modifications and workers compensation in the CSP.

Response: VRD is committed to continuing to build staff capacity and expertise in serving customers with a variety of disabilities. VRD currently has counselors who are considered subject matter experts (SMEs) in some of the areas recommended; however, there are some geographic gaps in SMEs across the state. VRD agrees that there is opportunity to build staff capacity in the areas of self-employment, vehicle modifications, home/job modifications, and workers' compensation. State office program specialists for self-employment and workers' compensation have provided training to field staff in these areas and will continue to do so. The state office program specialists for Assistive and Rehabilitation Technology also host webinars with the Unit Assistive Technology specialists to provide valuable information on assistive technology, vehicle modifications, and home and job modifications, which is shared with counselors.

Recommendation: Regarding State's Strategies, TWS should include a mechanism within the ReHabWorks program to remind counselors to consider assistive technology to support the individual throughout the VR process.

Response: VRD is committed to ensuring that staff members realize the importance of assistive technology to support customers with disabilities. The recommendation to add a ReHabWorks (RHW) change to assist counselors with considering assistive technology throughout the VR process will be discussed with management and the RHW team. Additionally, VRD revised policy to include a requirement that the Diagnostic Interview case note must include a statement regarding discussion of assistive technology with the customer. Also, assistive technology consideration will be included in new counselor training conducted by the Training and Development department. VRD is emphasizing the importance of assistive technology, and recently added an additional program specialist to the state office program specialists for the Assistive and Rehabilitation Technology team. Each unit also has an assistive technology specialist to provide guidance and technical assistance to staff working with customers who may benefit from assistive technology.

Recommendation: Regarding State's Strategies, add, work with and reach out to individuals with disabilities who are Asian to this section.

Response: VRD serves eligible individuals of all ethnicities and races and is committed to outreaching all populations that may need VR services.

Recommendation: Regarding State's Strategies, In Goal Area 2, feedback from communication with the providers of the Pathways to Career Initiatives should be included in this section.

Response: VRD agrees that input from providers and participants of the eight Pathways to Careers initiatives is important. While surveys and evaluations are used with some of the initiatives, additional thought will be given as to the best modalities for gathering feedback about each initiative.

Recommendation: Regarding Arrangements and Cooperative Agreements for the Provision of Supported Employment Services, add the number of ISD's, as compared to the total number of ISD's in the state, that have cooperative agreements to provide transition services as well as those who offer supported employment services. If these numbers are not readily available, add gathering these numbers to the plan. If the numbers are low, add increasing cooperative agreements with ISD's to the CSP.

Response: VRD does not have agreements with ISDs to provide supported employment services. There may be agreements that require ISDs to provide supported employment services through Medicaid waiver programs; however, those are not through VRD. The only agreements that VRD has with ISDs are with the Texas School for the Deaf and the Texas School for the Blind and the Visually Impaired, and these agreements are for summer programs for students with disabilities, not for supported employment. VRD coordinates with ISDs across the state to provide a variety of services to students with disabilities, including supported employment and customized employment, when appropriate.

Recommendation: Regarding Arrangements and Cooperative Agreements for the Provision of Supported Employment Services, add the reason VRD partners with TX APSE, including how the relationship benefits customers.

Response: VRD has determined that there is not a current Texas Association of People Supporting Employment First (APSE) chapter; however, one is under development. The content regarding Texas APSE has been deleted.

Recommendation: Regarding Arrangements and Cooperative Agreements for the Provision of Supported Employment Services, reword this section to clarify and substantiate whether every ESP will work with every disability to provide supported employment services or not.

Response: While employment service providers may accept referrals of customers with any disability, some employment service providers have developed skills and capacity to serve customers with certain primary disabilities and may accept referrals on that basis. Because employment services providers are private entities, they can choose to accept or deny specific referrals but must comply with contract requirements and the Standards for Providers.

Recommendation: Regarding Arrangements and Cooperative Agreements for the Provision of Supported Employment Services, clarify whether TWS-VRS has identified an adequate number of ESPs to provide supported employment services, or if this is an area where more providers are needed, include this need in the CSP.

Response: VRD has not determined a specific number of supported employment providers that would be considered adequate to serve customers across the state. VRD is currently revising policy pertaining to supported employment and will continue to have open enrollment periods for vendors interested in providing supported employment services. If VRD determines that additional supported employment providers are not needed, then recruitment of these providers through open enrollment will be decreased.

Recommendation: Regarding Coordination with Employers, add a list of state and federal entities to support the claim that VRD is working with federal and state entities and local boards.

Response: VRD includes the names of some of the state and federal agencies that VRD is working with in the later part of this section. The US Veterans Administration has been added.

Recommendation: Regarding Coordination with Employers, add the numbers to the report of past symposia and job fairs as well as percentage of increase for planned growth. Consider using actual employment numbers as a measure of success and growth for these activities.

Response: VRD has added the number of events in 2018 and 2019 and has not set a percentage increase for 2019 but will consider whether that is an appropriate indicator of coordination with employers for future tracking. Additionally, VR will not have a specific number per symposia and job fairs because these events are open to the public and not all individuals with disabilities attending these events are VR customers.

Recommendation: Regarding Coordination with Employers, add how many students from targeted populations, such as: blind or significantly visually impaired (not including SWEAT), hard of hearing or deaf, neurodevelopmental disorders, mental health disorders and individuals from minority backgrounds, participated in SEAL, SEARCH or other summer work experience activities to the numbers reported in this section. Add plans to increase participation by these targeted populations.

Response: Students who are blind or visually impaired, deaf or hard of hearing, have neurodevelopmental disorders including autism and mental health disorders, and have minority backgrounds have participated in Summer Earn and Learn, Project Search, Explore STEM! and other student activities. VRD is committed to ensuring that students from these targeted populations continue to participate in initiatives such as Summer Earn and Learn, Project Search, Explore STEM! and other summer work experience. VRD will work with the Division of Operational Insight (DOI) to analyze participation by targeted population and report this information in future years.

Recommendation: Regarding Coordination with Employers, TWS-VRS should consider adding their role in working with the National Employment Team, NET, through CSAVR, that markets the VR program to corporations and businesses nationwide and connects these businesses with VR in each state to the CSP. TWS has a point of contact with the NET program to communicate with these employers to help clients find jobs.

Response: VRD agrees with the recommendation and has added additional information about the NET to this section.

Recommendation: Regarding State's Goals and Priorities, add, "such as", and provide examples of the advocacy organizations and providers, under the last bullet: "Input from customers, advocacy organizations, and providers" to this section.

Response: VRD agrees with the recommendation and has added Disability Rights Texas as an example.

Recommendation: Regarding Goals and Plans for Distribution of Title VI Supported Employment Funds, add clarification on what state general revenue fund employment services are used by VRD to this section.

Response: The Texas legislature has appropriated general revenue dollars to support the requirement that states must provide a 10 percent match for 50 percent of their federal supported employment allotment. As with the federal funds, these general revenue funds are used to provide supported employment services to youth with disabilities.

Recommendation: Regarding Goals and Plans for Distribution of Title VI Supported Employment Funds, consider adding cognitive disabilities to the list of targeted disabilities in Goal Area 1 to improve customer employment outcomes.

Response: Cognitive disabilities are now captured under the heading of Neurodevelopmental Disabilities. This change in terminology is reflected in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-V). Neurodevelopmental Disabilities is currently part of Goal Area 1. Following the 2020 CSNA, additional disability groups may be targeted in future goals.

Recommendation: Regarding Statewide Assessment, confirm the definition of "most significant disability" provided here is accurate based on what was developed in cooperation with the RCT. (Federal regulations allow each state and RCT to define "most significant disability".)

Response: VRD agrees with the recommendation and has added content to clarify the definition of most significant disability.

Recommendation: Regarding Statewide Assessment, remove the word "possibly" under the section titled Underserved Populations, as it sounds like we are not sure that these are underserved populations. If we are certain these populations are underserved, state "underserved populations identified:".

Response: VRD agrees with the recommendation and revised the language to read, "Based on data in the 2017 CSNA, likely underserved populations and unmet needs include..."

Recommendation: Regarding Statewide Assessment, it is unclear how the agency identifies these underserved populations. RCT suspects additional categories of disability, including: traumatic head injury, and spinal cord injury should be on this list as well. Consider adding them.

Response: Unserved populations are defined as groups of people who are not being served by VRD or who are being served in lower numbers than expected. Underserved populations are defined as groups of people who are not being served as effectively as expected and may have lower employment outcomes. During the 2020 CSNA, data and other information collected will assist RCT and VRD to determine if additional disability populations need to be added to “unserved” or “underserved”. Specific indicators include groups of people who are receiving fewer relevant services than other populations, experience longer wait times to receive services, and have poorer perceived quality of services.

Recommendation: Regarding Statewide Assessment, add a plan for TWS-VRS to provide training for staff to gain more knowledge on how to work with persons with significant disabilities. Those disability groups should include mental health, TBI, Spinal cord injury, multiple sclerosis, epilepsy and/or other underserved populations the agency identifies in this category.

Response: VRD agrees that continued training of staff in serving individuals with significant disabilities is important. During the 2020 CSNA, VRD will determine likely underserved populations, and will engage the TWC Training and Development department as well as VR staff members who are considered SMEs to determine the best training approaches.

Recommendation: Regarding Statewide Assessment, people on social security also may be receiving benefits from different waiver programs. Add a sentence that indicates VR staff will also be informed/learn about waiver programs and how the waiver programs may benefit recipients to go to work or be affected by going to work under Priority 2.

Response: VRD agrees with the recommendation and has added a statement about the training provided by state office program specialists to SMEs for Social Security benefits on waiver programs.

Recommendation: Regarding Statewide Assessment, both CAP and the RCT have been working with TWS for some time on informed choice. The RCT recently requested that TWS insert the regulations that address the topic into the policy manual in the chapter for informed choice. We are considering additional guidance, information and additional policy on this subject as well. There is a question in the customer satisfaction survey that addresses informed choice specifically that should be included under Priority 3 in this section of the state plan as a means to quantify how the agency is doing.

Response: VRD agrees that consistent and appropriate implementation of informed choice throughout the VR process is important. Consideration will be given to additional policy and guidance related to how counselors are providing informed choice to customers. While it provides some helpful information, a single survey question is not sufficient as a strategy for evaluation of VRD performance in this area. VRD will work with DOI to determine possible strategies to further evaluate informed choice.

Recommendation: Regarding Statewide Assessment, supported employment is a service, not a goal. It would be more appropriate to state: As Table 4 demonstrates, there is a gap in the employment rate between individuals who did not receive Supported Employment services compared to those who did receive the service. In the table, change SE Goal To “Received SE services”. Change the sentence under the table from SE goals to SE services. Do the same thing for table 2

Response: VRD concurs that supported employment is a service; however, it is also reflected in federal reporting requirements as a goal. The Reporting Manual for the Case Service Report (RSA-911) identifies a data element of “Supported Employment Goal on Current IPE,” which is described as the “individual has or does not have a supported employment goal on the current IPE.” The term “supported employment” is more fully defined in 34 CFR §361.5(c)(53). RSA uses the data submitted in the RSA-911 to evaluate program performance during on-site monitoring, which includes assessing the number of participants who achieved a goal of Competitive Integrated Employment in Supported Employment.

Recommendation: Regarding Statewide Assessment, the strategies outlined in this section do not list a strategy to increase stakeholder involvement. TWS should outline plans to contact disability organizations such as ARC, Diabetes Association, Muscular Dystrophy Association, Multiple Sclerosis association and other groups to work together to provide internships, volunteer positions and summer and year-round work experience programs in this section.

Response: VRD agrees and is developing a stakeholder plan to ensure outreach and engagement with a broader group. This is stated in the plan.

Recommendation: Regarding Statewide Assessment, TWS-VRS should focus on improving providers who can assist a person in obtaining a job in a professional capacity.

Response: VRD agrees that assisting customers who are qualified for professional jobs should be a focus. As an incentive, employment services providers are currently eligible to receive a premium if they place a customer in a job for which the minimum educational requirement is a bachelor’s degree.

Recommendation: Regarding Statewide Assessment, add the customer satisfaction survey as the source of the information “Customers value VR services and largely report that services are meeting their employment needs. Up to 78 percent of respondents indicated that they were satisfied or very satisfied with the quality of VR services from VR staff, their inclusion by VR staff in setting goals and making choices, the courteousness and respectfulness of VR staff, and the VR eligibility determination process. For the quality of services from VR service providers, views of respondents were slightly lower, at 68 percent.”, and clarify which program year these percentages refer to.

Response: The data stated above is taken from the VR Needs Survey administered by the Public Policy Research Institute at Texas A&M University in fall 2017, not the customer satisfaction survey.

Recommendation: Regarding Cooperative Agreements with Private Nonprofit Organizations, clarify whether Project Search is a program or a service. If it is a program, remove it from the bulleted list of service provider contracts.

Response: Project Search is a program; however, the vendors that provide Project Search services must adhere to the Standards for Providers manual and follow their service provider contracts; therefore, Project Search is contained on this list.

Recommendation: Regarding Cooperative Agreements with Private Nonprofit Organizations, clarify whether supported employment consultants are required to possess the CBTAC. If not, reword to make this clear. If so, explain why the credential is required.

Response: VRD confirmed in this section that only purchased services from supported self-employment and self-employment consultants are required to possess the CBTAC. Having the CBTAC credential ensures that service providers have knowledge of various components of self-employment and supported self-employment.

Recommendation: Regarding Cooperative Agreements with Private Nonprofit Organizations, add the fact that TWS-VRS pays premiums for those who work with persons with a criminal background as well as those who help people find a professional job to this section.

Response: VRD agrees and added content in this section that a premium payment is provided to employment services providers that place those customers with a criminal background as well as placing customers in a professional occupation.

Recommendation: The RCT commends TWC- VRD for maintaining and supporting the expectation that all Texas VR Counselors will have a master's degree and become CRC qualified.

Response: VRD appreciates the RCT's comment and is committed to ensuring that VR services are provided and facilitated by highly qualified VR counselors.

Recommendation: Regarding Annual Estimates and Projections, state the evidence TWC has that supports the prediction that total expenditures will continue to decrease in the immediate future. The cost of services will go up with inflation and other factors. Clarify how more customers are expected to be served in the next year and costs will go down.

Response: VRD anticipates that average and total expenditures on services will continue to decrease in the immediate future despite recovery from a downward trend in applications. Because new applicants take time to go through eligibility determination processes and start receiving services, financial trends lag a few years behind trends in customers served. Moreover, because participants typically receive services for two to four years, costs may not begin to increase again until 2020. DOI is currently constructing models to support and enhance VRD's financial projections. "Number served" for Table 3 is defined as "customers with a purchased service during the program year" to more accurately represent average and total costs. These figures are tentative, and total program costs may likely exceed predicted values.

Recommendation: Regarding Annual Estimates and Projections, state that numerous factors contributed, and it is unclear which most affected the numbers under PY17 numbers served. (list a variety of factors)

Response: It is difficult to effectively attribute cause, but the low unemployment rate and caseload vacancies are likely factors. Additionally, based on the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, potentially eligible students with disabilities are able to receive pre-ETS without the requirement of an application for services.



RCT Quarterly Meeting: Bobbie Hodges, Lisa Maciejewski-West, and Michael Ebbeler Jr.

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) 2019 (SFY'19). Surveys were completed by customers with Individualized Plans for Employment (IPEs) whose cases were closed as either successful (employed) or unsuccessful (not employed) the month prior to the survey. Percentages indicate customers who responded “yes” or those who answered “satisfied” or “very satisfied” and do not include data for survey responders who chose not to answer the question.

Customer Satisfaction Survey Results: All Disabilities (including both General and Visual 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. 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	93.9%
TWC VR staff demonstrated a can-do attitude when working with me	89.5%
When contacting my local VR office, someone responded to me no later than the next business day	79.7%
TWC VR staff explained when and why appointments were scheduled with them	89.4%
My counselor and I maintained contact as often as agreed to in my IPE	84.7%
I was satisfied with the explanation of services to help me reach my goal	87.1%
I had input in setting my employment goals	90.5%
I had input in planning the services I received	87.8%
My counselor and I discussed when services would begin and end	85.6%
I was involved in choosing who provided services (such as Job Placement, Supported Employment, Training, Orientation & Mobility, Diabetes Education, or other services) included on my IPE	67.8%
VR staff provided me the guidance I needed	84.0%
My services were not interrupted because my counselor changed or my counselor was absent	82.2%
I was satisfied with the services I received from service providers that my counselor sent me to	87.4%
I was satisfied with my counselor	87.5%
I was satisfied with my overall experience with VR	86.6%

I am working now	68.7%
I am satisfied with my wages	84.1%
I have employee benefits such as vacation, sick leave, and health insurance	58.3%
I am satisfied with not having employee benefits.....	46.2%
I am satisfied with the employee benefits I have	91.0%
I am satisfied with my chance for advancement	78.9%
I am satisfied with my job overall	90.6%

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	90.6%
TWC VR staff demonstrated a can-do attitude when working with me.....	86.2%
When contacting my local VR office, someone responded to me no later than the next business day	72.6%
TWC VR staff explained when and why appointments were scheduled with them	88.3%
My counselor and I maintained contact as often as agreed to in my IPE	78.9%
I was satisfied with the explanation of services to help me reach my goal	82.4%
I had input in setting my employment goals	90.7%
I had input in planning the services I received	87.4%
My counselor and I discussed when services would begin and end	84.7%
I was involved in choosing who provided services (such as Job Placement, Supported Employment, Training, Orientation & Mobility, Diabetes Education, or other services) included on my IPE	60.5%
VR staff provided me the guidance I needed.....	81.0%
My services were not interrupted because my counselor changed or my counselor was absent	79.6%
I was satisfied with the services I received from service providers that my counselor sent me to	88.4%
I was satisfied with my counselor	85.2%
I was satisfied with my overall experience with VR	85.5%
I am working now	58.8%
I am satisfied with my wages	81.8%
I have employee benefits such as vacation, sick leave, and health insurance.....	49.7%
I am satisfied with not having employee benefits.....	41.2%
I am satisfied with the employee benefits I have	91.7%
I am satisfied with my chance for advancement	75.2%
I am satisfied with my job overall	90.3%

Statistics: General Disabilities

The following statistics describe vocational rehabilitation services for individuals with general disabilities (other than vision impairment) provided in SFY 2019 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, all ages*: 94,476

Total number served under age 22:** 38,684

Pre-ETS Students Served*:** 26,972

*"Customers Served" = from Initial Contact with Case Assignment forward

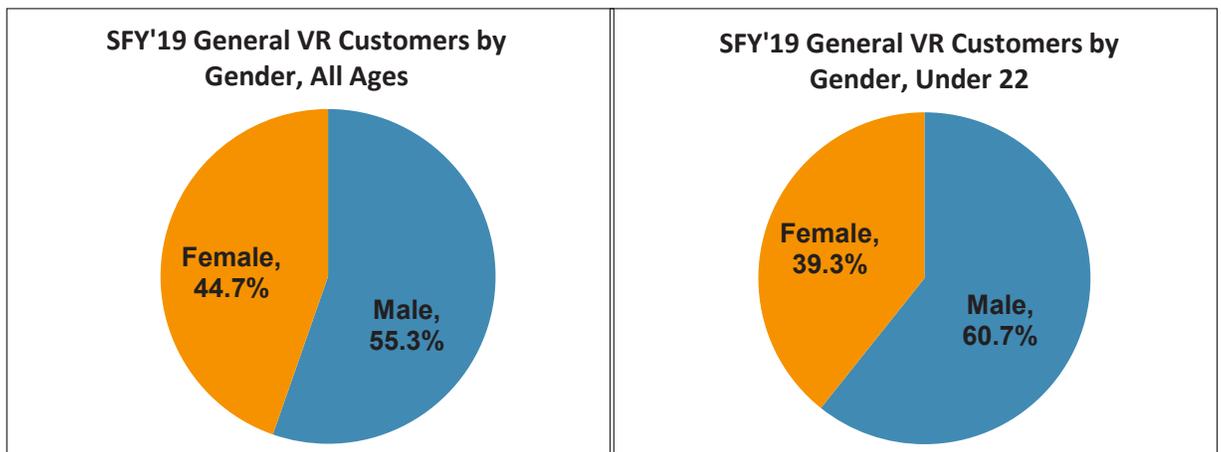
**Under the age of 22 as of 9/1/2018

***196 Pre-ETS customers were unassigned to a caseload, for a total of 29,262 combined General and Blind.

Percent Served by Gender

All Ages: 44.7% Female, 55.3% Male

Under Age 22: 39.3% Female, 60.7% Male

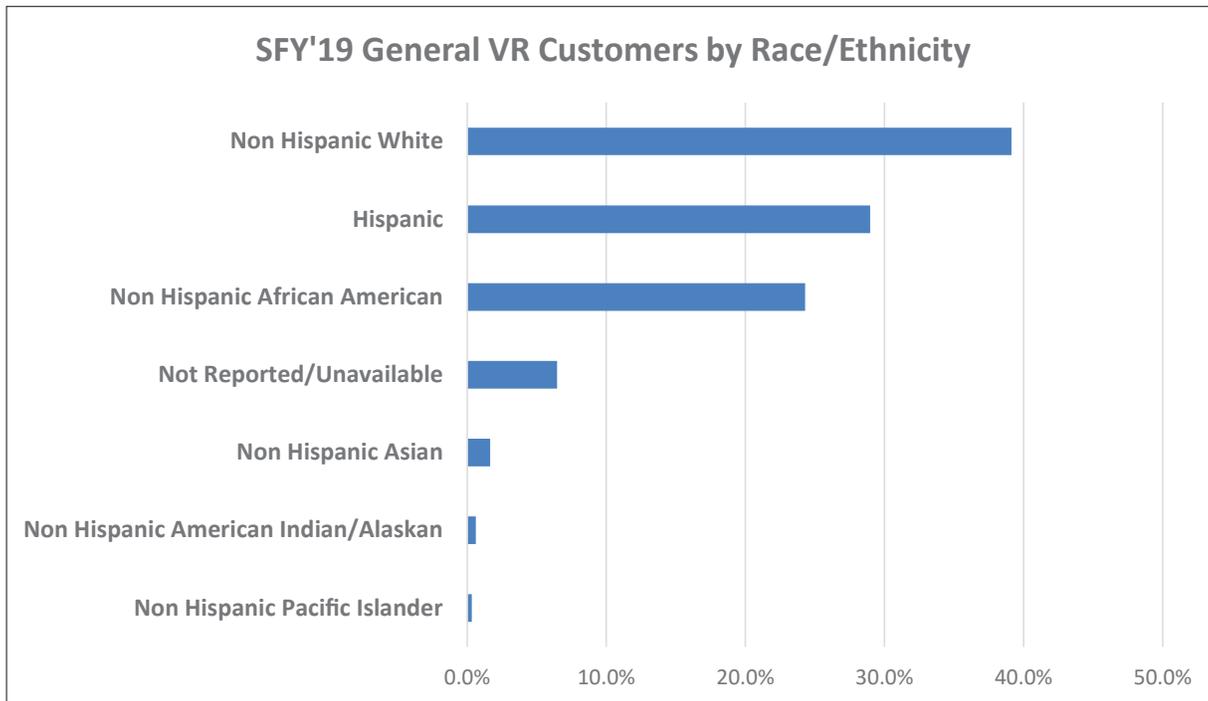


*Does not match total customer counts as gender is unknown or unavailable for most customers at pre-application phases

Race/Ethnicity of General Disabilities Served

Race/Ethnicity	Percent General VR Customers Served
Non Hispanic Pacific Islander	0.3%
Non Hispanic American Indian/Alaskan	0.6%
Non Hispanic Asian	1.6%
Not Reported/Unavailable	6.5%
Non Hispanic African American	24.3%
Hispanic	29.0%
Non Hispanic White	39.1%
Total*	101.43%

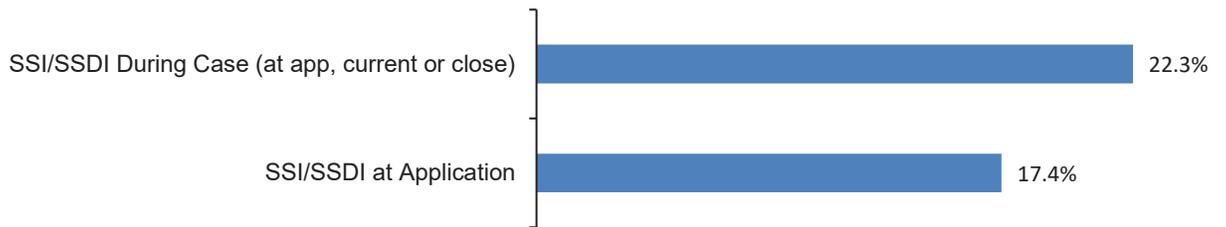
*Note: Consumers self-report and may claim multiple categories. Thus, total is greater than consumer counts. Percent sum may exceed 100%.



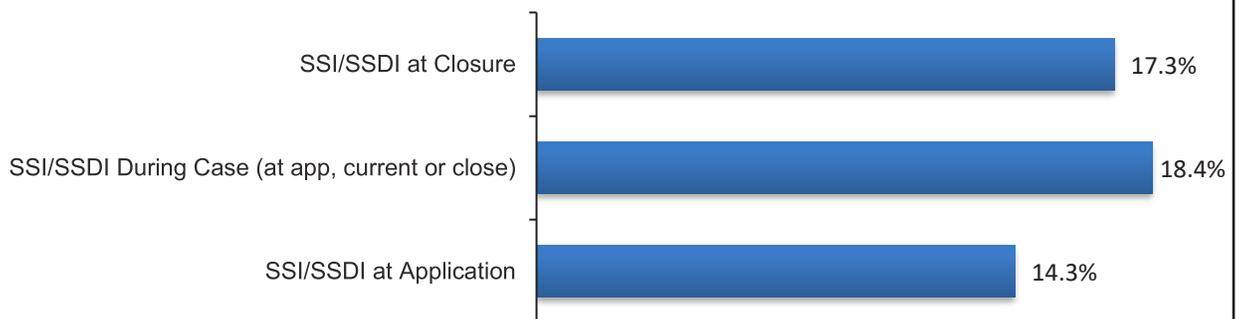
SSI/SSDI Information

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	16,446	17.4%	1,803	14.3%
SSI/SSDI During Case (at app, current or close)	21,090	22.3%	2,318	18.4%
SSI/SSDI at Closure	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	2,177	17.3%

SFY'19 General VR Customers Served by SSI/SSDI

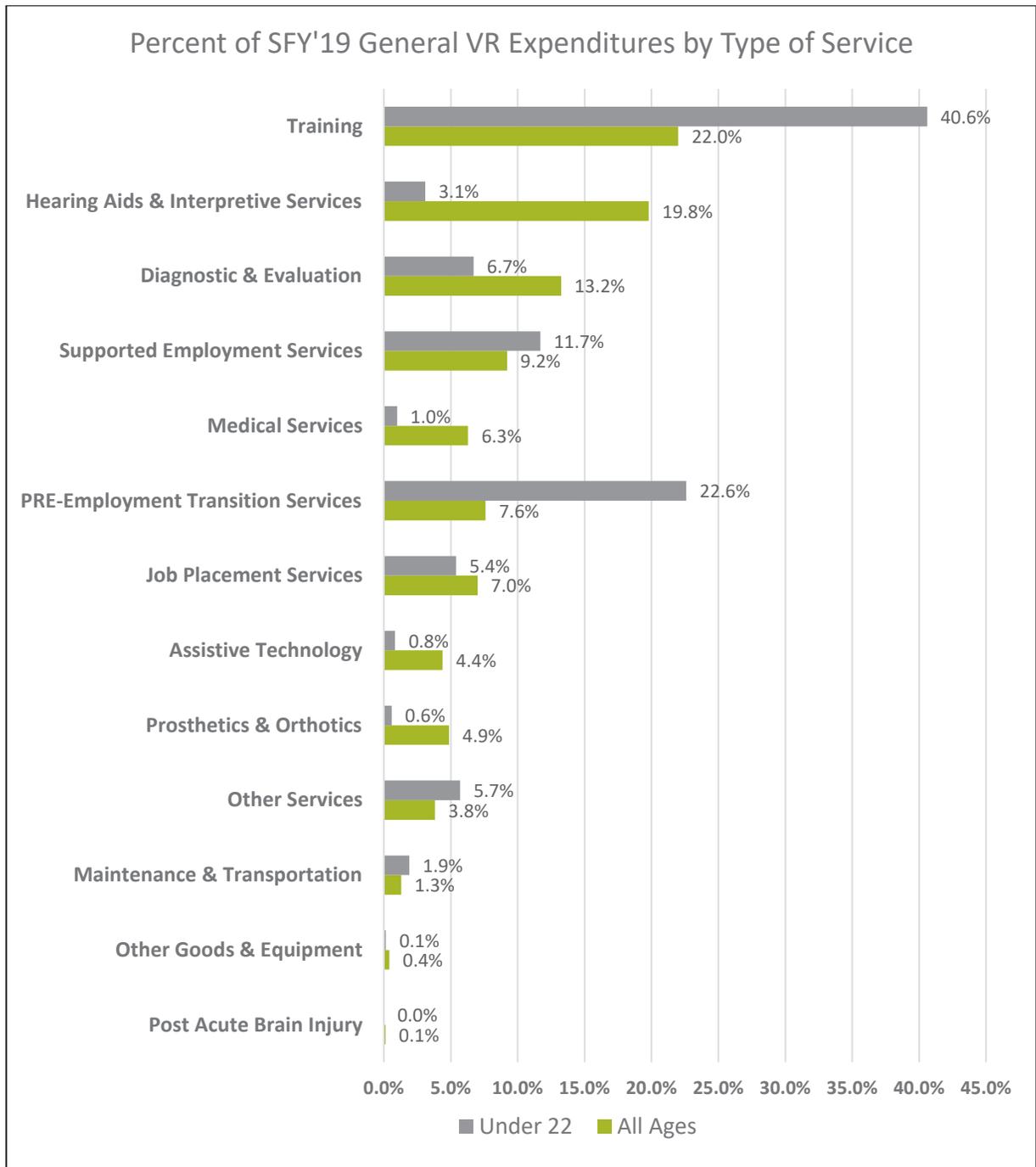


SFY'19 General VR Successful Closures by SSI/SSDI



Percent Expenditure by Service Type

Purchased Services for All General VR Customers by Category		
Category	All Ages	Under 22
Post-Acute Brain Injury	0.1%	0.0%
Other Goods & Equipment	0.4%	0.1%
Maintenance & Transportation	1.3%	1.9%
Other Services	3.8%	5.7%
Prosthetics & Orthotics	4.9%	0.6%
Assistive Technology	4.4%	0.8%
Job Placement Services	7.0%	5.4%
PRE-Employment Transition Services	7.6%	22.6%
Medical Services	6.3%	1.0%
Supported Employment Services	9.2%	11.4%
Diagnostic & Evaluation	13.2%	6.6%
Hearing Aids & Interpretive Services	19.8%	3.1%
Training	22.0%	40.6%
Total	100%	100%

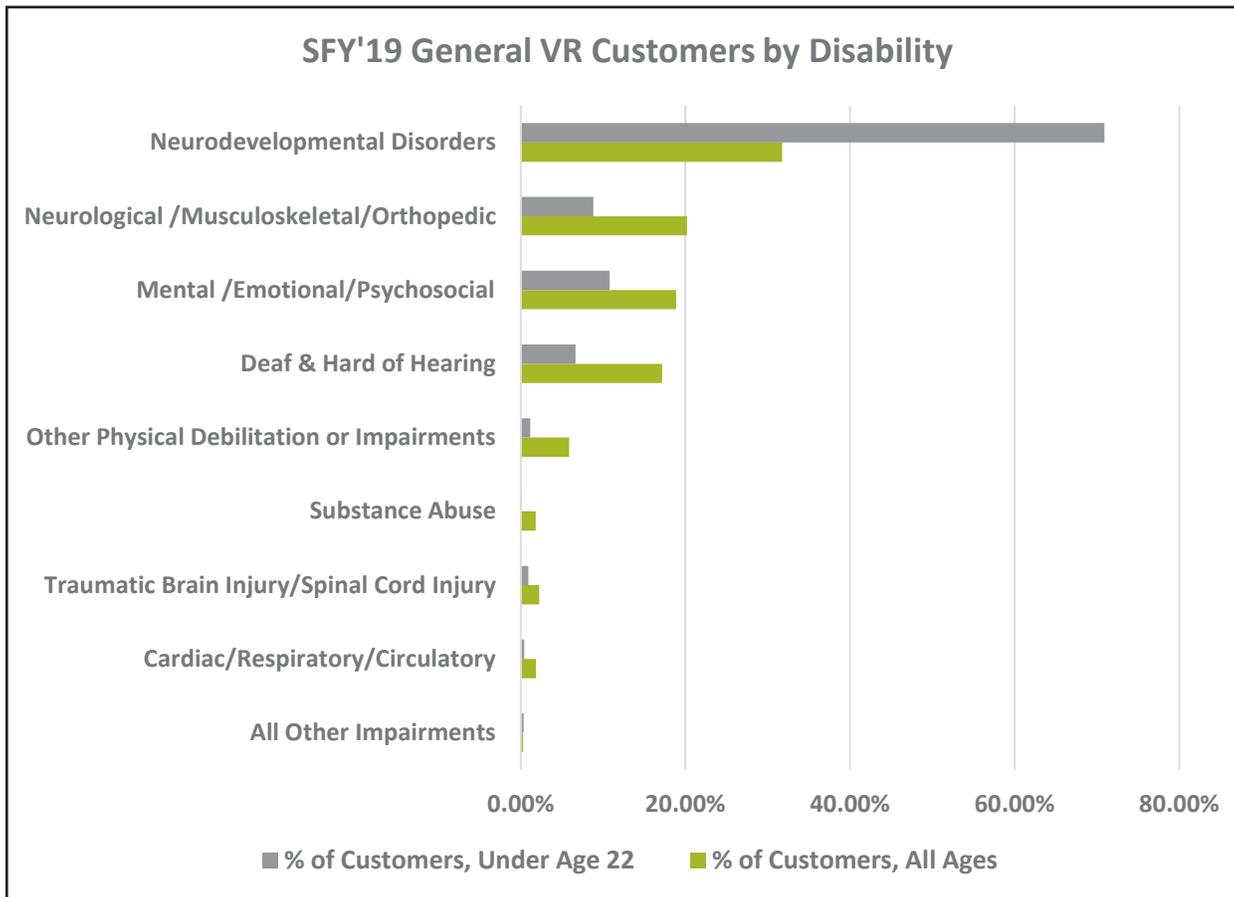


This information is based on expenditures recorded in ReHabWorks; it does not include payment and adjustments made directly through the WRAPS system.

Other Services include Miscellaneous, Other Services for Family Members, Room and Board-Academic Training, Child Care, Other Services for Consumers—Miscellaneous, State License Fees, Uniform Items for Employment, Employment 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.

Disabilities Served

Primary Disability	Percent of Customers, All Ages	Percent of Customers, Under Age 22
All Other Impairments	0.24%	0.33%
Cardiac/Respiratory/Circulatory	1.83%	0.42%
Traumatic Brain Injury/Spinal Cord Injury	2.24%	0.91%
Substance Abuse	1.82%	0.07%
Other Physical Debilitation or Impairments	5.88%	1.14%
Deaf & Hard of Hearing	17.16%	6.65%
Mental /Emotional/Psychosocial	18.88%	10.78%
Neurological /Musculoskeletal/Orthopedic	20.19%	8.80%
Neurodevelopmental Disorders	31.76%	70.90%
TOTAL	100%	100%



Successful Closures

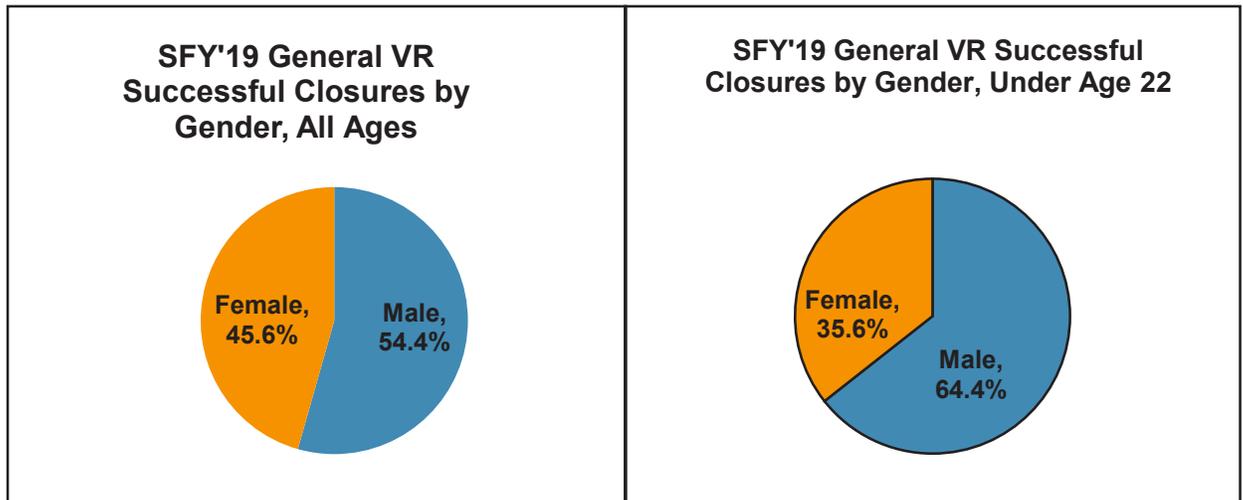
Total successful closures: 12,569

Total successful closures under age 22: 1,842

Percent of Successful Closures by Gender

All Ages 45.6% Female, 54.4% Male

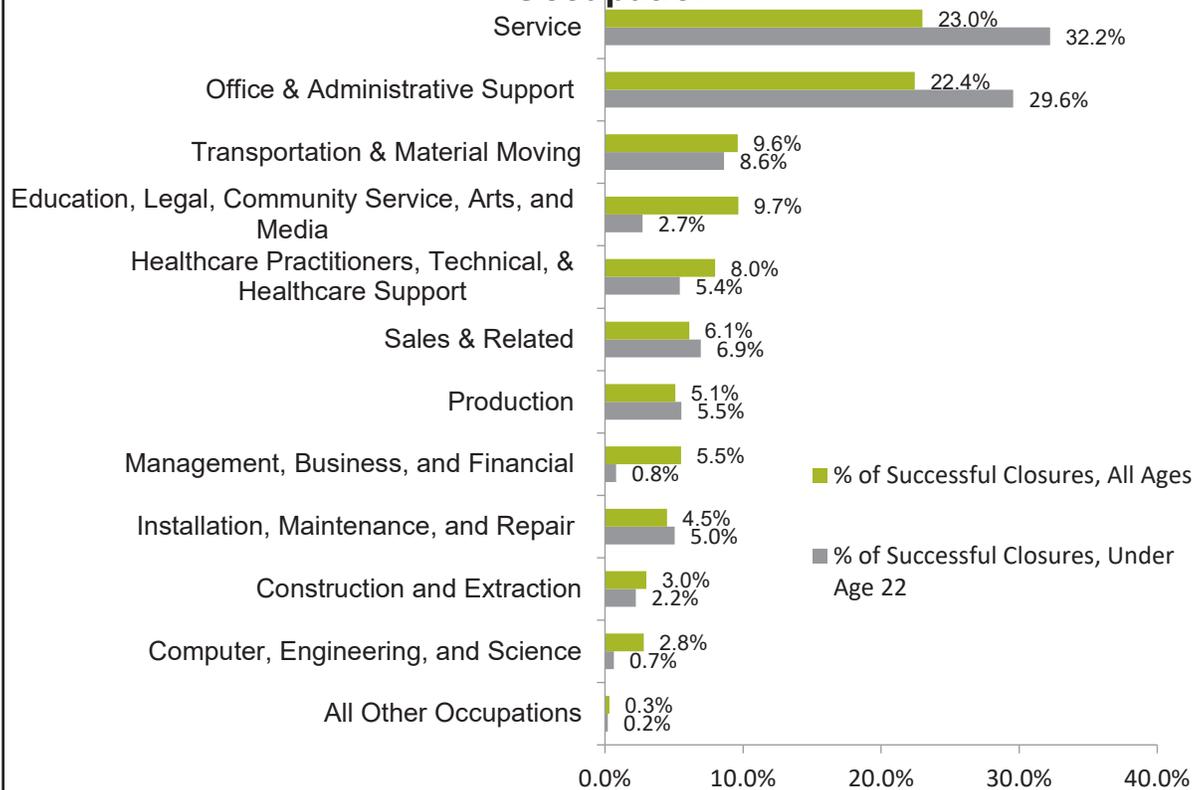
Under Age 22 35.6% Female, 64.4% Male



Percent of Successful Closures by Occupation

Successful Closures by Occupation	Successful Closures All Ages	Successful Closures Under Age 22
All Other Occupations	0.3%	0.2%
Computer, Engineering, and Science	2.8%	0.7%
Construction and Extraction	3.0%	2.2%
Installation, Maintenance, and Repair	4.5%	5.0%
Management, Business, and Financial	5.5%	0.8%
Production	5.1%	5.5%
Sales & Related	6.1%	6.9%
Healthcare Practitioners, Technical, & Healthcare Support	8.0%	5.4%
Education, Legal, Community Service, Arts, and Media	9.7%	2.7%
Transportation & Material Moving	9.6%	8.6%
Office & Administrative Support	22.4%	29.6%
Service	23.0%	32.2%
TOTAL	100%	100%

SFY'19 General VR Successful Closures by Occupation



Consumers that achieved an employment outcome as described in their Individualized Plans 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, Clerks, Military Specific Occupations, Homemakers, and Unpaid Family Workers.

Statistics: Visual Disabilities

The following statistics describe vocational rehabilitation services for individuals with visual disabilities provided in state fiscal year 2019. 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 Customers Served, All Ages*: 9,754

Total Customers Served, Under Age 22:** 2,114

Total PRE-ETS Students Served: 2,094

*"Customers Served" = from Initial Contact with Case Assignment forward

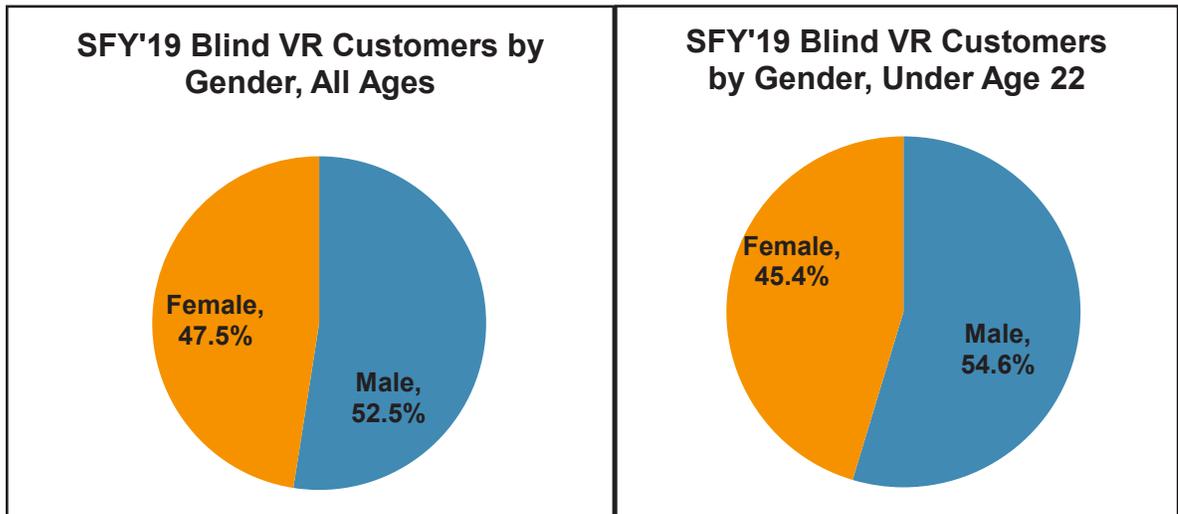
**Under the age of 22 as of 9/1/2018

***196 Pre-ETS customers were unassigned to a caseload, for a total of 29,262 combined General and Blind.

Percent Served by Gender

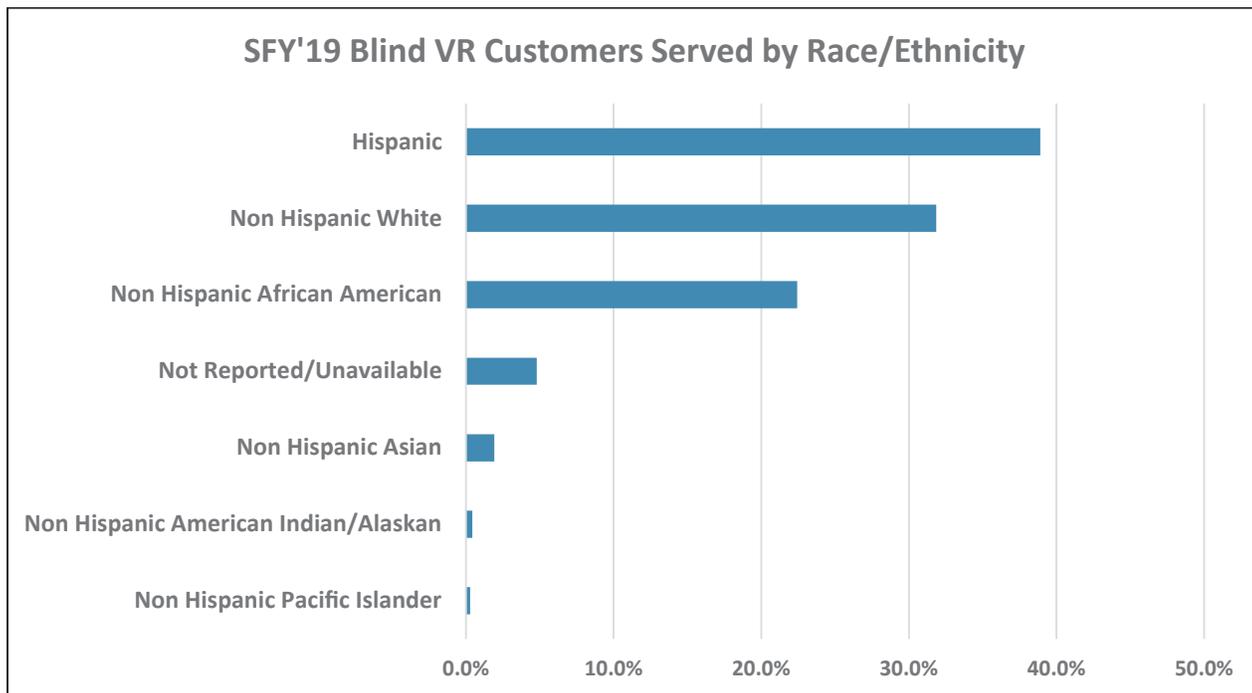
All Ages 47.5% Female, 52.5% Male

Under Age 22 45.4% Female, 54.6% Male



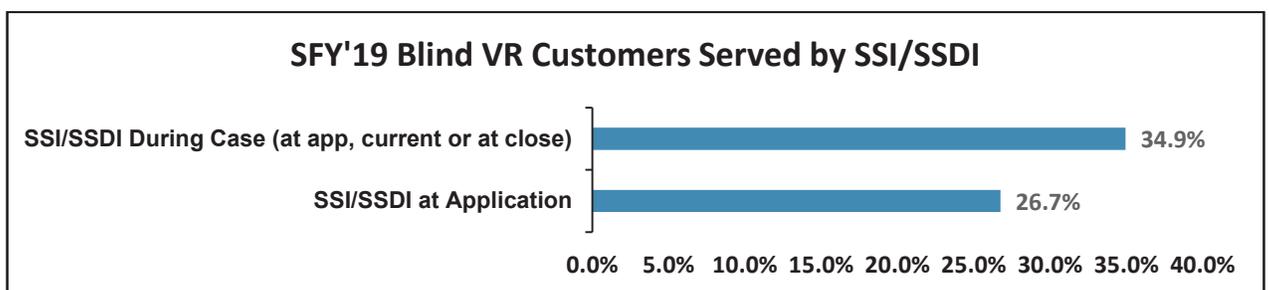
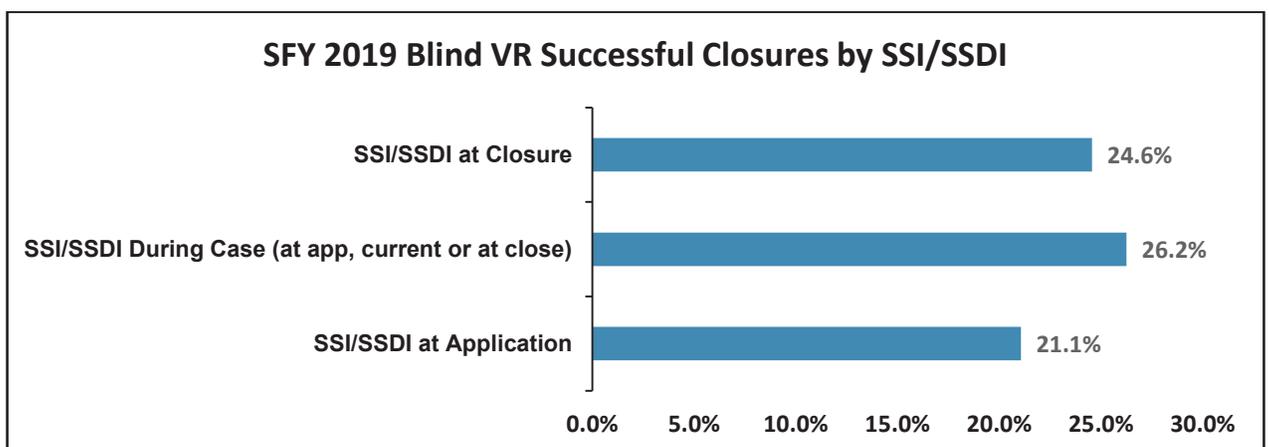
Race/Ethnicity of Blind VR Customers Served

Race/Ethnicity*	Total Responses	Percent Blind VR Customers Served
Non Hispanic Pacific Islander	28	0.3%
Non Hispanic American Indian/Alaskan	41	0.4%
Non Hispanic Asian	188	1.9%
Not Reported/Unavailable	472	4.8%
Non Hispanic African American	2,185	22.4%
Hispanic	3,790	38.9%
Non Hispanic White	3,111	31.9%
Total*	9,815	101%



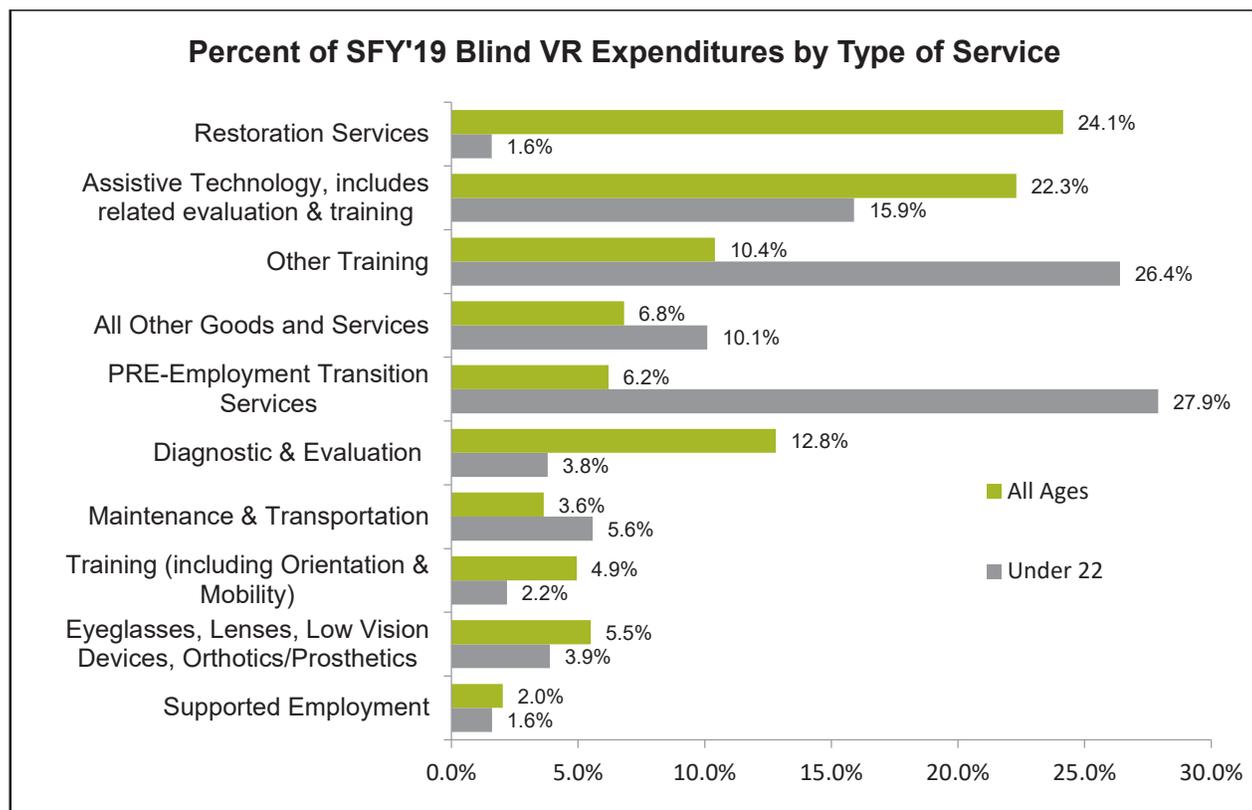
SSI/SSDI Information Blind

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	2,607	26.7%	211	21.1%
SSI/SSDI During Case (at app, current or at close)	3,406	34.9%	263	26.2%
SSI/SSDI at Closure	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	246	24.6%



Percent Expenditure by Service Type

Service Category	All Ages	Under 22
Job Placement	1.3%	1.0%
Supported Employment	2.0%	1.6%
Eyeglasses, Lenses, Low Vision Devices, Orthotics/Prosthetics	5.5%	3.9%
Training (including Orientation & Mobility)	4.9%	2.2%
Maintenance & Transportation	3.6%	5.6%
Diagnostic & Evaluation	12.8%	3.8%
PRE-Employment Transition Services	6.2%	27.9%
All Other Goods and Services	6.8%	10.1%
Other Training	10.4%	26.4%
Assistive Technology, includes related evaluation & training	22.3%	15.9%
Restoration Services	24.1%	1.6%
Total	100%	100%



This information is based on expenditures recorded in RehabWorks. It does not include payment and adjustments made directly through the WRAPS system. All Other Goods and Services includes Diabetes Education, Other Goods & Equipment, and Other Goods & Equipment-Youth.

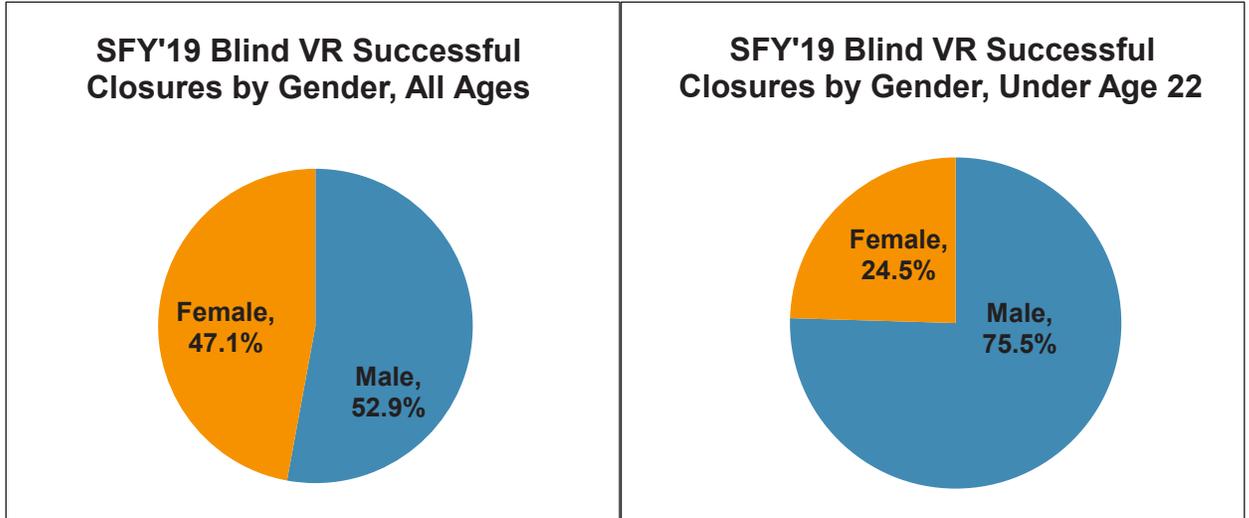
Successful Closures

Total Successful Closures: 1,002

Percent of Successful Closures by Gender

All Ages 47.1% Female, 52.9% Male

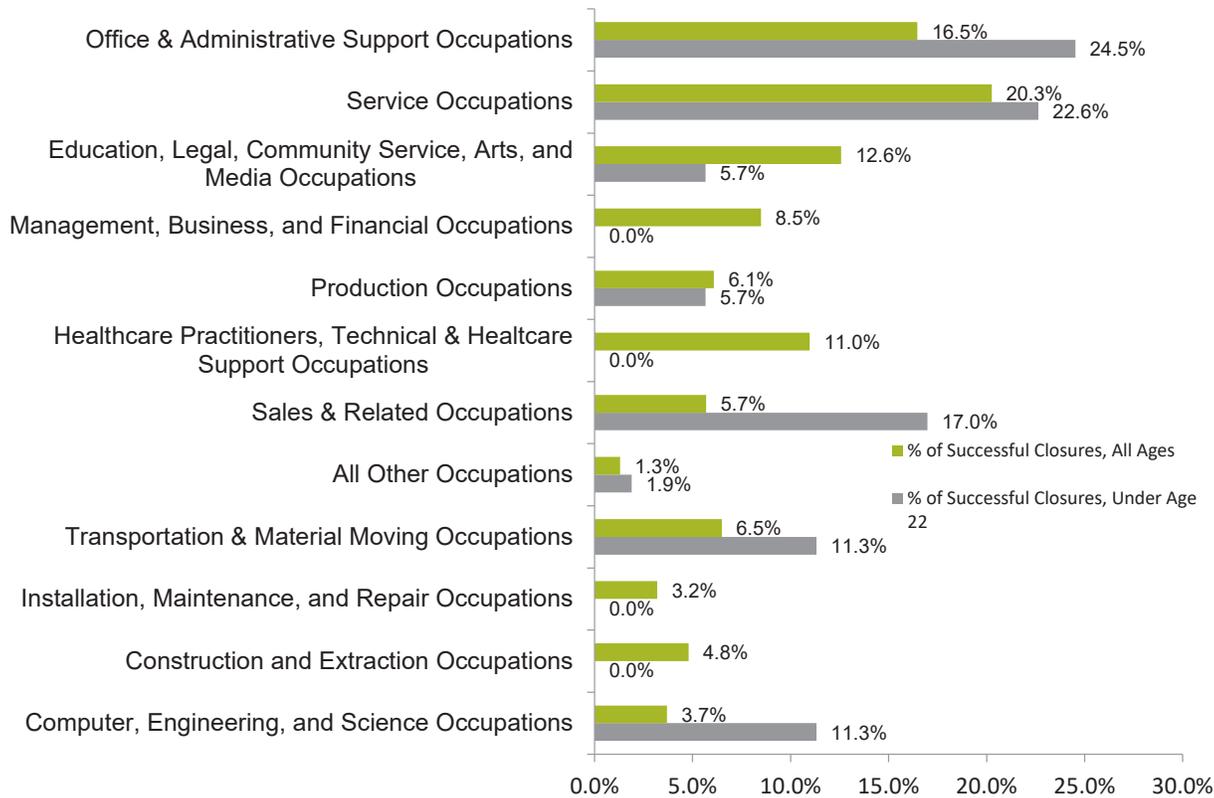
Under Age 22 24.5% Female, 75.5% Male



Percent of Successful Closures by Occupation

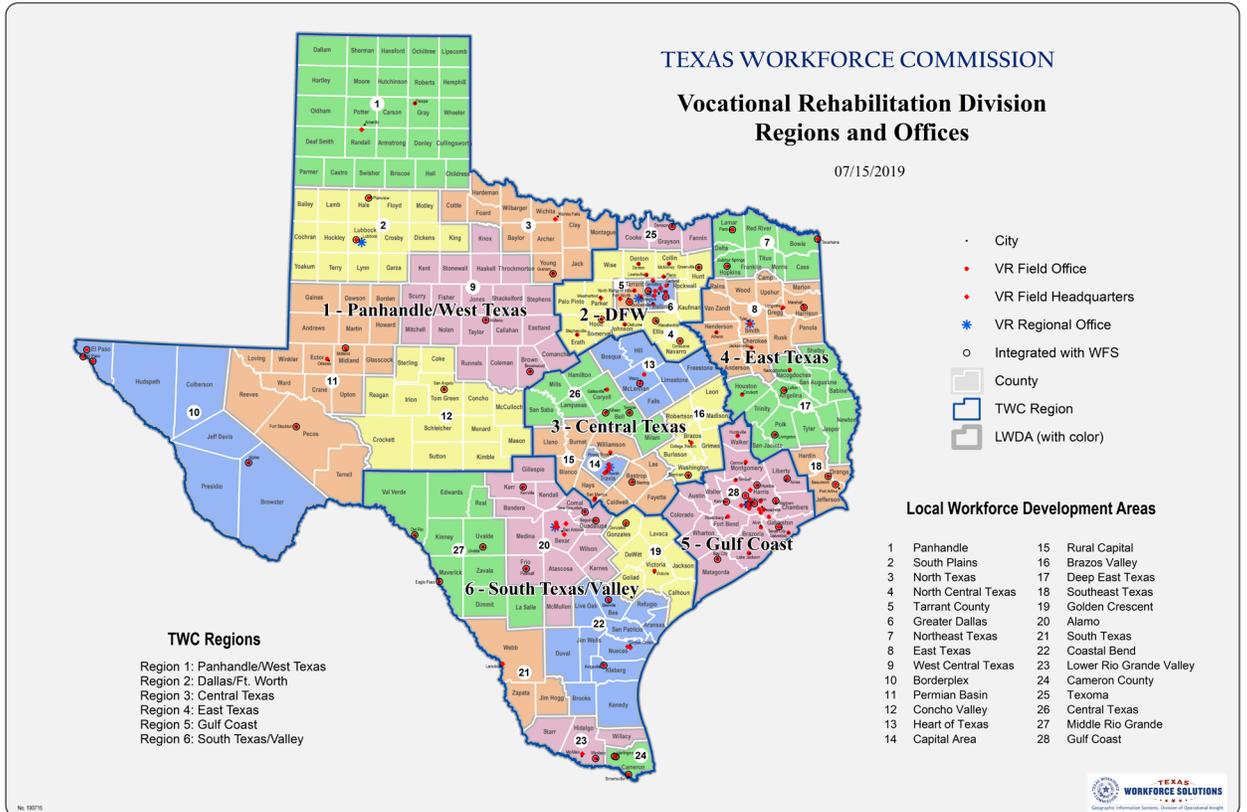
Successful Closures by Occupation	Percent Successful Closures All Ages	Percent Successful Closures, Under Age 22
Computer, Engineering, and Science Occupations	3.7%	11.3%
Construction and Extraction Occupations	4.8%	0.0%
Installation, Maintenance, and Repair Occupations	3.2%	0.0%
Transportation & Material Moving Occupations	6.5%	11.3%
All Other Occupations	1.3%	1.9%
Sales & Related Occupations	5.7%	17.0%
Healthcare Practitioners, Technical & Healthcare Support Occupations	11.0%	0.0%
Production Occupations	6.1%	5.7%
Management, Business, and Financial Occupations	8.5%	0.0%
Education, Legal, Community Service, Arts, and Media Occupations	12.6%	5.7%
Service Occupations	20.3%	22.6%
Office & Administrative Support Occupations	16.5%	24.5%
TOTAL	100%	100%

SFY'19 Blind VR Successful Closures by Occupation



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.

TWC-VR Division Regions and Offices Map



Success Stories



Zack, attending class during his stay at Texas A&M.

WACO Project Helps Students and Young Adults With Disabilities Explore Career Options in a Living, Learning Environment

Zack, a 19-year-old Texan, is at a stage in life like most of his fellow high school peers; they are contemplating their future and career options. So, when Zack and his dad learned of the Work and College Opportunity (WACO) project, they welcomed the opportunity for Zack to participate in the five-week residential summer work and college training program held at Texas A&M University for young adults with disabilities aged 18-22.

The project launched in 2014, has assisted more than 70 students in the span of five summers, and is funded by federal and state vocational rehabilitation funds.

During their stay, WACO project participants learn to live independently on the campus while socially integrating into the larger Bryan/College Station community. Along with Texas A&M, WACO project

partners include the Center on Disability and Development, Brazos Valley Center for Independent Living, and Texas Workforces Solutions-Vocational Rehabilitation Services (TWS-VRS). The WACO project serves customers from several Workforce Solutions areas including Brazos Valley, Capital Area, Central Texas, Deep East Texas, Heart of Texas, Gulf Coast, and Rural Capital.

“We first learned of the WACO project from [TWS-VRS Transition Counselor] Luis Castillo and later Zack’s visual instructor at our high school,” said Zack’s parents, Rick and Kris.

“WACO project is a work and college opportunity where customers can find a purpose, water it, nurture it and watch it grow into something meaningful,” said Castillo. “I knew it would be a great fit for Zack and his parents.”

The WACO project serves teens and young adults with disabilities to help them successfully transition into postsecondary education and employment. Participants attend classes specially designed to build confidence and audit other college classes based on their career interests.

“In my classes I learned how to act professionally, how to speak and what to wear,” said Zack. “I also had a class on self-determination, deciding on what I want to do next [for my career] and not giving up.”

WACO project participants attend classes during the morning. In the afternoon, they travel to their workplaces and receive work-based learning experiences as paid interns.

Zack’s work assignment was at Bryan/College Station Habitat for Humanity ReStore, a non-profit that resells building and home supplies, including furniture and appliances. It was Zack’s first job.

“Getting my first paycheck felt really good. It made me feel like I accomplished something, said Zack. “I helped my co-workers maintain the store and restore the merchandise, making it presentable. I really enjoyed working at ReStore. I had a goal going in, to buy a new TV. I met that goal and had additional money to buy things that I needed or wanted.”

Each evening after work, students brush up on their independent living and social skills. Activities include preparing evening meals; learning to use public and other transportation options; participating in various recreational and social activities; completing homework assignments; and preparing for the next days’ schedule.

At the end of their five-week stay, students share their overall experience and learned experiences with their family and WACO project staff, who advise students on their performance and long-term goals.

“During his exit interview, WACO project staff noted Zack’s growth, independence and willingness to help others,” said Zack’s dad, Rick. “I saw the same and for us, as parents, we [Zack’s mom Kris and I] realized the need to learn to let go and understand that Zack will survive. The experience was great for everyone involved.”

What Zack liked the most about his experience with the WACO project was the helpfulness of staff. “Everyone was so friendly. If I had a problem, I could go to one of the college staff members, [TWS-VRS Transition Counselor] Luis or another TWS-VRS counselor if I needed help right off the bat.”

After graduating high school, Zack plans to attend college. He’s still researching his choice of schools and major.

Powering Through a Bad Call



TWC, the Criss Cole Rehabilitation Center and Texas Workforce Solutions-Vocational Rehabilitation Services Collaborate to Assist a Student with a Visual Impairment

By Joe Shine

Colin Baxter was a proud member of the Texas Tech University Red Raiders Men's Basketball team. He worked hard at every practice. He challenged himself to be better rolling with the good calls and learning from the bad. Announcers loved to have him sit courtside with them. He was, and still is, an inspiration to all who meet him. Did we mention that Colin Baxter is not a basketball player?

Long before any of this, in the fall of 2016, Colin was six classes away from graduating. That's when life delivered a bad call: Colin had a brain tumor that would need to be removed. Prior to surgery, the doctors briefed Colin on the possible risks, but never once did they

mention a permanent loss of vision.

For many, the shock of having cancer, needing brain surgery to remove a tumor and losing their vision would be a bad call they might never recover from. Colin Baxter, true to his nature, took it in stride as well as anyone could.

Loss of vision or not, Colin was still determined to graduate. Resolute, and with a set path, Colin knew adjustments would have to be made before he could go back to school, before his life could even begin to return to normal. He knew he would need help, so he turned to the Texas Workforce Solutions-Vocational Rehabilitation Services (TWS-VRS).

In February of 2017, Colin reached out to TWS-VRS to start the process of assessment. His Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor (VRC) quickly determined he was eligible for assistance and began developing an Individual Plan of Employment (IPE). Colin's case was unique. Many

customers are born with visual impairment or have a steady decline in their vision, so the suddenness of Colin's blindness added an additional level of difficulty. For Colin, he had to relearn daily life skills such as reading, writing, and mobility.

In July 2017, Colin went to the Criss Cole Rehabilitation Center (CCRC), a full-time residential vocational rehabilitation training facility that serves adults who are legally blind. Here, attending classes five days per week from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Colin learned alternative techniques to prepare himself for finding and retaining employment, attending college, and living independently in the community. He graduated in October 2017, prepared and ready to reenroll as a student at Texas Tech University in the spring of 2018.

Before returning to Texas Tech, Colin continued his blindness skills training at home with a Vocational Rehabilitation Teacher (VRT), Karen Guay. The training at home reinforced the skills he had learned at CCRC in his home environment. "Colin never showed any fear whatsoever, only confidence," said Karen.

Prior to the spring 2018 school semester, with funding from TWS-VRS, Colin was able to obtain the necessary assistive technology needed to reenroll in school. Still only six classes short of graduating, Colin completed two online classes that spring semester. Two classes down and four to go, but those remaining courses were not offered online. Colin would have to return to campus.

As if Colin wasn't motivated enough, a chance meeting with the coach of the Red Raiders basketball team led to an invitation to come work for them once he was back on campus. Little by little, Colin's life was returning to normal. He was going to be back on campus soon and there was a job ready and waiting for him.

Thanks to the various supports provided by TWS-VRS, Colin's VRT, the skills Colin learned at the CCRC and the addition of a new seeing-eye dog, Chase, Colin returned to campus in the fall of 2018 believing and saying, "I'm still me. I'm just a better me."

Once he was back at campus, he began working for the basketball team and quickly became an integral part of the Red Raider family, an inspiration to all of them.

Many will argue that the Red Raiders basketball team never recovered from a bad call in the dying seconds of the 2019 National Championship game. The dream of a national title slipped away with a shrill whistle, and a cruel stroke of bad luck. The same cannot be said of Colin Baxter and his dreams.

Life dealt Colin a bad call, but he didn't let it derail his dreams. With determination, assistance from available programs and a great attitude, Colin overcame it. He is now a proud graduate with a degree in History and working full time at Texas Tech University as an Event Specialist.

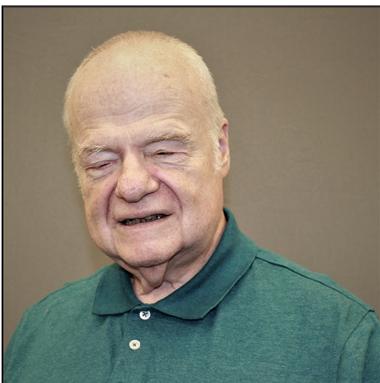
Membership and Meetings

Members



Neva Fairchild of Carrollton has served the Rehabilitation Council of Texas (Council) as Chair for two years. She is the National Aging & Vision Loss Specialist for the American Foundation for the Blind, where she has worked since 2008. She was employed for more than 15 years by the State of Texas as a VR counselor and an employment assistance specialist, and she began her career at the Dallas Lighthouse for the Blind as a vocational evaluator. Ms. Fairchild is the president-elect of the Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (AER), where she is also the immediate past chair of the Division on

Aging. She also served as president and secretary of the Texas Chapter of AER near the beginning of her career. Ms. Fairchild began her education at Texas A&M University in College Station immediately after graduating from Nimitz High School in Irving but left college three years later to marry and eventually become a stay-at-home mom. When her youngest child began school, she returned to college and completed her 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 at Dallas. Ms. Fairchild has been married for more than 42 years and has two children who are married, one granddaughter, and one foster grandson. Her current Seeing Eye dog, Vinny, has served with her throughout her four years on the Council.



Paul Hunt of Austin retired from the Internal Revenue Service after 37 years of service. He is a former president of the Austin Council of the Blind and vice chair of the Capital Metropolitan Transportation Authority Access Committee. Additionally, he is a former chair and member of 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 and for VR customers in Travis and Williamson Counties.



Matt Berend of Abilene is a VR supervisor for Texas Workforce Solutions Vocational Rehabilitation Services. Previously, Mr. Berend worked as a unit program specialist and VR counselor for the agency. He was also a recipient of VR services after a bull riding accident left him paralyzed. Since 2015, Mr. Berend has served on the Council as a VR counselor representative. He is a member of the Texas Rehabilitation Association and is an active advocate for individuals living 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 Science Center (TTUHSC) in Lubbock. In 2017, he received TTUHSC's Presidential Alumni Award for the Department of Clinic Counseling and Mental Health. Mr. Berend is also a licensed social worker and a certified rehabilitation counselor.



Erin "Amanda" Bowdoin of Forney is a certified teacher of the visually impaired and a brailist 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 (ECC) 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 specializing in visual impairment from Stephen F. Austin University.



Lisa Cowart of Beaumont is the PATH Project Director for Partners Resource Network. She has served on the Apprenticeship and Training Advisory Committee of the Texas Workforce Investment Council and has been a member of the Texas Association of Continuing Educators and the Texas Association of College Technical Educators. Ms. Cowart received a Bachelor of Business Administration in Marketing from Lamar University.



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 and a Travis County badge carrier and voluntary member of the Travis County Disabled Parking Enforcement Task Force. Mr. Ebbeler received a Bachelor of Arts in Government 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 former member of the Ms. Wheelchair Kansas Board, 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. In her free time, she is an instructor for Zumba International Fitness, and she loves ballroom dancing. Her passion is to give individuals with disabilities the opportunity to pursue their passions.



Cheryl Fuller of Austin is Director of TWC's Vocational Rehabilitation Division. She has 29 years of experience working in federally funded programs that focus on helping Texans prepare for, gain, and retain employment. She served as assistant commissioner of the Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services (DARS), Division for Rehabilitation Services (DRS), from August 2013 to 2016, before transferring to TWC on September 1, 2016, with the former DARS programs. Ms. Fuller joined DARS in 2011 as the agency's director of the Center for Learning Management after serving more than 11 years as director of the Texas Workforce Investment Council in the Office of the Texas 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 Workforce Investment Act. She was appointed as an ex-officio member of the Council in 2014.



Lindsey R. Geeslin of Lorena is the Executive Director of the Texas Masonry Council (TMC). Ms. Geeslin joined TMC in 2012. Prior to that, she was the Executive Marketing Manager from Brazos Masonry, Inc. With 15 years of involvement in the masonry construction industry, Ms. Geeslin has deep roots within the trade and a passion for continuing to excel the industry to the next level through her work with the Texas Workforce Investment Council (TWIC) and the Council. She holds a Bachelor of Science in Agriculture Business and Management from Texas State University.



Crystal H. George of Argyle is a vocational specialist for 29 Acres. She is an executive board member for the Texas Rehabilitation Association and a member of the National Rehabilitation Association. She is a 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 Science in Social Science and a Master of Science in Rehabilitation Counseling from the University of North Texas.



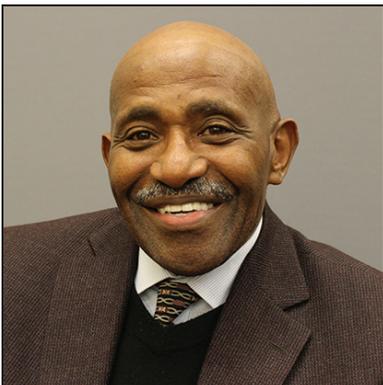
Bobbie Hodges of Fort Worth is Senior Director of Workforce Development for Goodwill Industries. She has 26 years of experience working with individuals with disabilities, disadvantages, and barriers to employment, providing training and assisting them to secure and retain employment. Ms. Hodges joined Goodwill 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 contracts. She is a former member of the Association of People Supporting Employment First and served on the Mayor's Advisory Council in Shreveport, Louisiana. She received the Mayor of Shreveport 2010 HERA Award, recognizing untiring and selfless volunteer efforts to be helpful, effective, and responsible advocates 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. She has been a member of the Council since August 2018.



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, Healthcare Compliance Association, and the American Academy of Professional Coders. She also volunteers as a mentor and leader with Young Lives and is a member 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 of Austin 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 various roles as teacher, behavior consultant, and campus and state leader. Additionally, Ms. May is currently a technical assistant specialist in the area of Transition for the Division of Special Education at the Texas Education Agency.



Joseph Powell of Irving is the president and CEO of the Association of Persons Affected by Addiction, Dallas. He is a board member of the Texas Certification Board. Additionally, he is an advisory member of the National Southwest Addiction Technology Transfer Center, a member of the Eastfield Community College Advisory Board, and a planning partner of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration Recovery Month Planning Partners. Mr. Powell attended Eastfield College and Amber University for social work and substance use and has been a licensed chemical dependency counselor for 25 years.



Colton J. Read of New Braunfels is the owner of Gruene Shredding. He is the chair of the State Independent Living Council. Additionally, he was honorably discharged from the United States Air Force and has served as a Wounded Warrior Mentor and as treasurer of the Veterans Alliance at Texas State University. Mr. Read received a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology from Texas State University.



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, McKinney Airport Advisory Committee, and McKinney Comprehensive Plan Committee. Additionally, Mr. Robinson is a board member of the Texas Rehabilitation Association. He is also an Ordained Deacon at First Baptist McKinney, a student mentor for McKinney ISD, 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.



Karen Stanfill of Houston is an advocate supervisor for the Client Assistance Program (CAP) at Disability Rights Texas. Her professional employment began at Goodwill Industries in the rehabilitation department, and she worked as a counselor with the state vocational rehabilitation agency, now Texas Workforce Solutions Vocational Rehabilitation Services (TWS-VRS), for 15 years. She is a member of the National Rehabilitation Association, the Texas Rehabilitation Association, and the Houston Area Rehabilitation Association. Additionally, Ms. Stanfill is a board member of the National Coalition for State Rehabilitation

Councils. Ms. Stanfill was reappointed to the Council in 2015 as the CAP representative and is chair of the Policy, Procedure, and Personnel Development Committee. She holds a bachelor's degree from Stephen F. Austin State University with a double major in rehabilitation counseling and business. She is also a certified rehabilitation counselor.



Crystal Stark of College Station is a VR counselor/unit support coordinator at the Texas Workforce Commission. She has worked in the VR field for more than a decade. She has served as Chair of the Accessibility Committee for the National Rehabilitation Association and Texas Rehab Action Network, Chair of the Mayor's Committee on People with Disabilities in the Brazos Valley, a board member of the Texas Tech University Health Science Center (TTUHSC) Masters of Rehabilitation Counseling Advisory Board, and Chair of the Vision and Eligibility Committee for the National Beep Baseball Association, a non-

profit organization that supports an adaptive form of baseball for individuals who are blind or visually impaired. Ms. Stark received a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology from Angelo State University and a Master of Science in Rehabilitation Counseling from TTUHSC in Lubbock.

Become a Member



RCT Meeting: David Norman, Amanda Bowdoin, and Michael Ebbeler Jr.

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, 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 twc.texas.gov/agency/rehabilitation-council-texas



RCT Meeting: Neva Fairchild, Rodrick Robinson, and Paul Hunt

2020 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 a.m.–4:30 p.m.

2nd day 9:00 a.m.–12:00 p.m.

Meeting Location:

Criss Cole Rehabilitation Center (CCRC)

4800 North Lamar Boulevard

Austin, Texas 78756

2020 Quarterly Meeting Schedule:

February 6–7, 2020

May 7–8, 2020

August 6–7, 2020

November 5–6, 2020 (location to be determined)

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



Quarterly Meeting: Karen Stanfill, Crystal George, Rodrick Robinson, Lindsey Geeslin, Susan May, and JoAnne Fluke.



TEXAS WORKFORCE COMMISSION

**101 East 15th Street
Austin, Texas 78778
512-463-2222**

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