COMPREHENSIVE STATEWIDE NEEDS ASSESSMENT

2019

1. PROVIDE AN ASSESSMENT OF THE REHABILITATION NEEDS OF INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES RESIDING WITHIN THE STATE, PARTICULARLY THE VR SERVICES NEEDS OF THOSE:

A. WITH THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES, INCLUDING THEIR NEED FOR SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES;

Individuals with most significant disabilities (MSD) are defined as those whose physical or mental impairments require interventions or permanent accommodations that cannot be easily achieved to mitigate their limitations in three or more functional capacities regarding employment, such as communication, interpersonal skills, mobility, self-care, self-direction, work skills, and work tolerance. For the disabling condition to meet the definition of “most significant,” such individuals must either require multiple core VR services for a minimum of nine months to complete their vocational rehabilitation program or require personal assistance services, rehabilitation technology, or extended services for their employment.

In program year 2018-19, Individuals with MSD accounted for 610 (21.2%) of 2,871 eligible DSB VR consumers served.

Within this population, 257 (42.1%) were individuals whose primary disability was blindness, 325 (53.3%) were individuals with other visual impairments as their primary disability, 20 (3.3%) had deaf-blindness as their primary disability (another 10 individuals had deaf-blindness as a secondary disability), and 8 (1.4%) had another type of disability as their primary impediment to employment.

Individuals with MSD ranged in age from 13 to 79, with 38 as both the median and average age. Of the 610 eligible VR consumers with MSD, 165 (27%) were transition age youth, younger than 25; 306 (50.2%) were ages 25 to 54; and 139 (22.8%) were age 55 or older.

About half the individuals with MSD were female (n = 303) and half were individuals of minority backgrounds (n = 306), with Black or African American accounting for 42.6% and Hispanic or Latino accounting for 6.4%.

The services provided most for this population in PY 2018-19, as an indication of their rehabilitation service needs, were assessment and evaluation services, which were provided to 469 individuals (76.9%); counseling and guidance, which was provided to 320 individuals (52.5%); rehabilitation technology, which was provided to 178 individuals (29.2%), diagnosis and treatment of impairments, which was provided to 122 individuals (20%), and transportation, which was provided to 103 individuals (16.9%). Other services provided are listed in table J.1.

Table J.1. Services provided for Individuals with MSD, PY 2018-19

| Service Type | Number of clients that received the service | Percent of MSD population served |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Assessment and evaluation services | 469 | 76.9% |
| Counseling and guidance | 320 | 52.5% |
| Rehabilitation technology | 178 | 29.2% |
| Diagnosis and treatment of impairments | 122 | 20.0% |
| Transportation | 103 | 16.9% |
| Job search assistance | 87 | 14.3% |
| Job placement assistance | 77 | 12.6% |
| Disability related skills training | 72 | 11.8% |
| Information and referral services | 60 | 9.8% |
| Maintenance | 51 | 8.4% |
| Job readiness training | 36 | 5.9% |
| College or university training | 32 | 5.2% |
| Supported employment services | 31 | 5.1% |
| Community college training | 30 | 4.9% |
| Technical assistance | 21 | 3.4% |
| Literacy training | 20 | 3.3% |
| Miscellaneous training | 18 | 3.0% |
| Vocational training | 11 | 1.8% |
| Graduate school training | 10 | 1.6% |
| Interpreter services | 10 | 1.6% |
| Short term job supports | 9 | 1.5% |
| On the job training | 8 | 1.3% |
| Reader services | 3 | 0.5% |
| Benefits counseling | 2 | 0.3% |
| Customized employment services | 1 | 0.2% |
| Customized training | 1 | 0.2% |
| Personal assistant services | 1 | 0.2% |

In a survey of 671 rehabilitation professionals, responses as to the needs of individuals with most significant disabilities were provided by 296 survey participants. Of the valid responses, 77 (26.1%) reported a need for rehabilitation technology and adaptive devices; 57 (19.3%) reported transportation; 55 (18.6%) reported a need related to employer training assistance; 43 (14.6%) reported a need for job readiness related training; and 25 (8.5%) reported a need for additional staff training, such as at CRPs or the DVRS VR program. Other needs included advocacy services, interpreters, CRP assistance, and improvements to the overall service delivery system.

B. WHO ARE MINORITIES;

Individuals who are of a minority race or ethnicity accounted for 1,552 (54%) of 2,871 eligible DSB VR consumers served in PY 2018-19.

Within this population 273 (17.6%) were individuals with MSD; 973 (62.7%) were individuals with significant disabilities; and 273 (17.6%) did not have significant disabilities.

Regarding their disability, 487 (31.4%) had blindness as their primary impairment; 1,028 (66.2%) had a visual impairment other than blindness; 19 (1.2%) were deaf-blind; and 18 (1.2%) had disability other than vision as their primary impediment to employment.

Individuals of minority backgrounds ranged in age from 13 to 78, with 43 as the average age. Of the 1,552 eligible VR consumers of minority backgrounds, 257 (16.6%) were transition age youth, younger than 25; 812 (52.3%) were ages 25 to 54; and 483 (31.1%) were age 55 or older.

About 53% the individuals of minority backgrounds were female (n = 821).

The minority backgrounds of this population included 1,323 (85.2%) who were Black or African American; 171 (11%) who were Hispanic or Latino; 47 (3%) who were American Indian or Alaskan Native; 37 (2.4%) who were Asian; and 12 (< 1%) who were Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander.

The services provided most for this population in PY 2018-19, as an indication of their rehabilitation service needs, were assessment and evaluation services, which were provided to 1,174 individuals (75.6%); counseling and guidance, which was provided to 627 individuals (40.4%); diagnosis and treatment of impairments, which was provided to 398 individuals (25.6%); rehabilitation technology, which was provided to 331individuals (21.3%), and transportation, which was provided to 193 individuals (12.4%). Other services provided are listed in table J.2.

Table J.2. Services provided for Individuals of Minority Backgrounds, PY 2018-19

| Service Type | Number of clients that received the service | Percent of minority population served |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Assessment and evaluation services | 1,174 | 75.6% |
| Counseling and guidance | 627 | 40.4% |
| Diagnosis and treatment of impairments | 398 | 25.6% |
| Rehabilitation technology | 331 | 21.3% |
| Transportation | 193 | 12.4% |
| Job search assistance | 165 | 10.6% |
| Job placement assistance | 164 | 10.6% |
| Maintenance | 121 | 7.8% |
| Disability related skills training | 96 | 6.2% |
| College or university training | 78 | 5.0% |
| Information and referral services | 69 | 4.4% |
| Job readiness training | 54 | 3.5% |
| Community college training | 46 | 3.0% |
| Technical assistance | 38 | 2.4% |
| Literacy training | 32 | 2.1% |
| Miscellaneous training | 25 | 1.6% |
| Supported employment services | 24 | 1.5% |
| Vocational training | 16 | 1.0% |
| Short term job supports | 15 | 1.0% |
| Graduate school training | 14 | 0.9% |
| Interpreter services | 14 | 0.9% |
| On the job training | 12 | 0.8% |
| Reader services | 5 | 0.3% |
| Benefits counseling | 2 | 0.1% |
| Customized employment services | 2 | 0.1% |
| Customized training | 2 | 0.1% |

C. WHO HAVE BEEN UNSERVED OR UNDERSERVED BY THE VR

PROGRAM;

There is no regulatory definition for individuals who have been unserved or underserved by the VR program. The federal guidance for establishing this category is that it can be defined from a comparison of the demographics of individuals served by the VR program with those of the population of individuals with disabilities residing in the state or from the results of a survey or key informant interviews.

The demographics of the population of the 2,871 eligible individuals served by the DSB VR program in PY 2018-19 are as follows:

Minority race and ethnicity: 1,552 (54.1%) were of a minority race or ethnicity, the distribution of which is described in the previous section.

Gender: 1,460 (50.9%) were female.

Age at the start of the program year: The age range was from 13 to 86. The average age was 43 and the median age was 45. 562 (19.6%) were transition-age youth younger than 25; 1,406 were adults ages 25 to 54; and 903 (31.5%) were adults ages 55 and older.

Significance of disability: 610 (21.2%) were individuals with MSD; 1,727 (60.2%) were individuals with a significant disability; and 534 (18.6%) were individuals whose disability was not significant.

Primary impairment: 873 (30.4%) with blindness; 1,930 (67.2%) with another visual impairment; 42 (1.5%) with deaf-blindness or hearing impaired; 26 (1%) had another disability as the primary impairment and blindness or a visual impairment was secondary.

Comorbidity: 1,498 (52.2%) had a secondary disability, of which 1,008 (67.3%) had a physical impairment other than orthopedic that in most all cases was not specifically listed; 168 (11.2%) had a psychosocial or other mental impairment; 95 (6.3%) had an orthopedic impairment; 87 (5.8%) had a cognitive impairment such as an intellectual or learning disability; 67 (4.5%) had deafness or hearing-loss; the remaining 4.9% had blindness or a visual impairment as the secondary disability.

In a survey of 671 rehabilitation professionals, specific populations of underserved individuals with blindness or other visual impairments were identified in 33 of the responses. These groups included people living in rural areas (17 responses); individuals with comorbidity, including deaf-blind and people with intellectual disabilities (5 responses); individuals on SSI or SSDI (3 responses); and there was one mention each of people who are completely blind; individuals with cataracts; individuals of low income, ex-offenders, immigrants; minorities; individuals who are homeless, youth, and seniors. The most commonly mentioned or barrier to employment was transportation, mainly for individuals living in rural areas. Benefits counseling was thought to be a need for individuals receiving SSI or SSDI. Individuals with multiple disabilities were thought to require more assistive technology, including communication devices for individuals who are deaf-blind or also have intellectual disabilities. For this population, there was also a need for various type of training for service providers, employers and clients. Capacity building and workforce partnerships was a theme across all groups, especially regarding the need for more services, outreach, and employment opportunities in rural areas and a more general need for employer education and community awareness.

D. WHO HAVE BEEN SERVED THROUGH OTHER COMPONENTS OF THE STATEWIDE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM; AND

Over half the individuals served by the DSB VR program are also served through other components of the workforce development system. Over a 10-year period, from PY 2008-09 to PY 2017-18, the DSB VR program served 10,191 unique individuals, as reported to the NC Common Follow-up System, of which, at some point during the 10-year period, 5,224 (51.3%) had also received services through NCWorks under the Title I Adult, Youth, or Dislocated Worker programs or Title III, Wagner-Peyser.

In a survey of Workforce Development Board Directors from the Kerr-Tar, Western Piedmont, Capital Area, and Charlotte Works Workforce Development Board regions, as key informants, the rehabilitation needs of individuals with blindness and visual disabilities were identified as follows: assistive technology, including Zoom and other adaptive software, braille signage, transportation assistance, and work-based learning opportunities.

E. WHO ARE YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES AND STUDENTS WITH

DISABILITIES, INCLUDING, AS APPROPRIATE, THEIR NEED FOR PREEMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES OR OTHER TRANSITION SERVICES.

Transition age youth, ages 14-24, comprise 19.4% (n = 589) of the 3,037 total individuals served by the DSB VR program in PY 2018-19, including potentially eligible students with disabilities and individuals who applied for VR services but had not been determined eligible by the end of the program year. Within this youth population, 350 (59.4%) of the 589 transition-age youth were ages 14-21 at the start of the program year and were identified as students with disabilities at either application to the VR program or the start date of their pre-employment transition services; however there were only two (2) potentially eligible students with disabilities that were provided pre-employment transition services and had not applied for VR services and 26 (4.4%) had not been determined eligible by the end of the program year. Of the 589 transition-age youth, 297 (50.4%) were female.

Of the 563 that had been determined eligible for VR services, 166 (28.2%) were individuals with MSD, 340 (57.7%) had significant disabilities, and 57 (9.7%) did not have significant disabilities. Within this group, 210 (35.7%) had blindness as their primary disability, 338 (57.4%) had another visual impairment, 13 (2.2%) were deaf-blind, and 2 (< 1%) had an intellectual disability as their primary impairment.

The services provided most for transition-age youth in PY 2018-19, as an indication of their rehabilitation service needs, were assessment and evaluation services, which were provided to 419 individuals (71.1%); counseling and guidance, which was provided to 244 individuals (41.4%); rehabilitation technology, which was provided to 160 individuals (27.1%); academic training at a four-year college or university, which was provided to 119 individuals (20.2%); transportation, which was provided to 94 individuals (16%); and maintenance supports, which were provided to 77 students (13.1%). Other services provided are listed in table J.3.

Table J.3. VR Services provided for Transition-age Youth, PY 2018-19

| Service Type | Number of clients that received the service | Percent of transition-age youth population served |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Assessment | 419 | 71.1% |
| Counseling and Guidance | 244 | 41.4% |
| Rehabilitation Technology | 160 | 27.2% |
| University Training | 119 | 20.2% |
| Transportation | 94 | 16.0% |
| Maintenance | 77 | 13.1% |
| Other Services | 61 | 10.4% |
| Disability Related Skills Training | 59 | 10.0% |
| Community College | 58 | 9.8% |
| Job Placement Assistance | 52 | 8.8% |
| Job Search Assistance | 45 | 7.6% |
| Job Readiness Training | 32 | 5.4% |
| Diagnosis and Treatment of Impairments | 31 | 5.3% |
| Information and Referral Services | 29 | 4.9% |
| Technical Assistance | 22 | 3.7% |
| Literacy Training | 16 | 2.7% |
| Miscellaneous Training | 15 | 2.5% |
| Supported Employment Services | 15 | 2.5% |
| Graduate School Training | 14 | 2.4% |
| Short Term Job Supports | 12 | 2.0% |
| Interpreter Services | 7 | 1.2% |
| On-the-Job Training | 7 | 1.2% |
| Customized Employment Services | 4 | 0.7% |
| Benefits Counseling | 2 | 0.3% |
| Customized Training | 2 | 0.3% |
| Vocational Training | 2 | 0.3% |

Within the population of 350 students with disabilities, ages 14-21, 227 (64.9%) were provided pre-employment transition services during the program year: 165 (47.1%) were provided work readiness training; 127 (36.3%) were provided job exploration counseling; 116 (33.1%) were provided a work-based learning experience; 88 (25.1%) were provided counseling on postsecondary enrollment opportunities; and 85 (24.3%) were provided self-advocacy training.

The number of students provided pre-employment transition services during the program year (n = 227) approximates the number of students in secondary education with a visual impairment, including blindness and deaf-blindness, identified by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction’s April 2017 Child Count by Grade and Disability (n = 240), however, the American Community Survey 5-year Public Use Microdata Sample for 2012-2016 estimated 8,700 students, ages 14-21, in secondary or postsecondary education that have “serious difficulty seeing even when wearing glasses.” Although this is a self-reported survey estimate subject to a margin of error, the difference suggests there many potentially eligible students in North Carolina, beyond those identified under IDEA, that may benefit from pre-employment transition services.

In a survey of rehabilitation professionals, 179 (26.7%) of 671 survey participants identified one or more needs for transition-age youth. The need most frequently identified was job training, which was mentioned in 47 (26.3%) of the responses; 40 (22.3%) responded that the needs of individuals with visual disabilities were largely the same as youth with disabilities, in general, and included pre-employment transition services, such as job readiness training and work-based learning experiences; 21 (11.7%) identified a need for assistive technology; and 16 (8.9%) identified a need for transportation. Other themes regarding client needs included employment opportunities; improved communication among service providers; training for service providers and employers on accommodations and communication; and family supports.

2. IDENTIFY THE NEED TO ESTABLISH, DEVELOP, OR IMPROVE

COMMUNITY REHABILITATION PROGRAMS WITHIN THE STATE;

The Community Rehabilitation Programs (CRPs) directly provide or facilitate the provision of VR services, such as community-based assessments, job development, training, and job coaching for short-term job supports and supported employment services. In PY 2018-19, of DSB eligible VR clients served, 27 (< 1%) were provided short-term job supports and 40 (1.4%) were provided supported employment services. This small population mostly includes individuals with significant or most significant disabilities and comorbidity of a cognitive or psychosocial impairment.

In a survey of rehabilitation professionals, 465 (69.2%) of 671 identified one or more needs with regard to establishing, developing, or improving CRPs in North Carolina. These needs, however, were not specific to services for individuals with visual impairments, but addressed the need for CRPs, in general. The most frequently identified need was staff training, which was mentioned in 220 (47.3%) of the responses; shortages in some areas, especially rural counties, which was mentioned in 128 (27.5%) of the responses; and communication among providers, including between CRPs and state agencies, which was mentioned in 123 (26.5%) of the responses. Other themes, more specific to individuals with visual impairments, included training for CRP staff on how to better serve the DSB population and the use of assistive technology, especially for individuals who are blind or deaf-blind.

3. INCLUDE AN ASSESSMENT OF THE NEEDS OF INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES FOR TRANSITION CAREER SERVICES AND PREEMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES, AND THE EXTENT TO WHICH SUCH SERVICES ARE COORDINATED WITH TRANSITION SERVICES PROVIDED UNDER THE INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES EDUCATION ACT.

Within the population of 350 students with disabilities, ages 14-21, 227 (64.9%) were provided pre-employment transition services during the program year: 165 (47.1%) were provided work readiness training; 127 (36.3%) were provided job exploration counseling; 116 (33.1%) were provided a work-based learning experience; 88 (25.1%) were provided counseling on postsecondary enrollment opportunities; and 85 (24.3%) were provided self-advocacy training.

The number of students provided pre-employment transition services during the program year (n = 227) approximates the number of students in secondary education with a visual impairment, including blindness and deaf-blindness, identified by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction’s April 2017 Child Count by Grade and Disability (n = 240), however, the American Community Survey 5-year Public Use Microdata Sample for 2012-2016 estimated 8,700 students, ages 14-21, in secondary or postsecondary education that have “serious difficulty seeing even when wearing glasses.” Although this is a self-reported survey estimate subject to a margin of error, the difference suggests there many potentially eligible students in North Carolina, beyond those identified under IDEA, that may benefit from pre-employment transition services.

In a survey of rehabilitation professionals, 179 (26.7%) of 671 survey participants identified one or more needs for transition-age youth. The need most frequently identified was job training, which was mentioned in 47 (26.3%) of the responses; 40 (22.3%) responded that the needs of individuals with visual disabilities were largely the same as youth with disabilities, in general, and included pre-employment transition services, such as job readiness training and work-based learning experiences; 21 (11.7%) identified a need for assistive technology; and 16 (8.9%) identified a need for transportation. Other themes regarding client needs included employment opportunities; improved communication among service providers; training for service providers and employers on accommodations and communication; and family supports.