



2017 COMPREHENSIVE NEEDS ASSESSMENT

*Vocational Rehabilitation Needs of
Rhode Islanders with Disabilities*

**State of Rhode Island
Department of Human Services
Office of Rehabilitation Services
In collaboration with the State Rehabilitation Council**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary.....	1
Environmental Scans.....	4
Assessment Activities Developed & Implemented by the State Rehabilitation Council and Office of Rehabilitation Services.....	9
Continuous Quality Improvement Activities.....	17
Conclusions.....	21
Acknowledgments.....	24

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, mandates the Office of Rehabilitation Services, in partnership with the State Rehabilitation Council to complete a Statewide Comprehensive Needs Assessment (CNA) at three-year increments. The Comprehensive Needs Assessment is intended to determine the rehabilitation needs of Rhode Islanders with disabilities, identify the needs of individuals with the most significant disabilities, including those in need of Supported Employment, minorities with significant disabilities, underserved individuals, youth with disabilities and individuals served by other components of the workforce development network. Also, the Comprehensive Needs Assessment is intended to identify the need to develop or improve Community Rehabilitation Programs.

The Office of Rehabilitation Services views the Comprehensive Needs Assessment as a dynamic and evolving process that incorporates information from several diverse sources rather than from any one event or data source. During Federal Fiscal Year 2016, the Office of Rehabilitation Services addressed the Statewide Comprehensive Needs Assessment by incorporating data from several resources including:

- ❖ Environmental Scans
- ❖ Comprehensive Needs Assessment activities developed & implemented by the State Rehabilitation Council and Office of Rehabilitation Services
- ❖ Ongoing Continuous Quality Improvement Activities

The findings of the Comprehensive Needs Assessment are presented to the personnel of the State Rehabilitation Council and Office of Rehabilitation Services. These findings contribute to the development of the vocational rehabilitation and supported employment state plan.

The main findings of the 2017 Comprehensive Needs Assessment can be summarized as follows:

TRANSITION:

- The Rhode Island Department of Education indicates that RI currently has 8,400 transition-aged students with Individualized Education Plans.
- Transition-aged youth and education personnel indicated that “at-risk” youth tend to be youth with learning challenges who do not wish to be identified as having a disability and therefore, are potentially not accessing services.

- Transition-aged youth indicated that overall they had a positive experience with the Office of Rehabilitation Services. These youth also indicated that the referral process was fairly seamless with support from their educators. However, their feedback indicated that they were unaware of the full breadth of services available to them and had difficulty understanding written materials provided by the Office of Rehabilitation Services. Student support staff shared that materials were also a challenge for parents to understand.

COMMUNITY REHABILITATION PROVIDERS:

- Providers shared that transportation barriers, maintaining staff, access to Benefits Counseling, and community-based job availability were challenges to delivering services and employment outcomes.
- Providers indicated that the most common personal barriers for individuals with disabilities were: fear of losing Social Security cash benefits, medical coverage, family expectations, expectations of the individuals themselves, issues surrounding the individual's home life, and lack of social skills.

EMPLOYERS:

- Employers who have employed individuals with a disability indicated the following:
 1. Challenges confronted in effectively providing accommodations and communication to employees with disabilities.
 2. The most major concerns in hiring an individual with a disability were accommodations, reliability, performing the necessary job duties and adaptability.
 3. On-the-job trainings and qualified applicants are the largest benefit provided by the Office of Rehabilitation Services to a potential employer.
 4. Marketing and awareness of Office of Rehabilitation Services as an employment resource were the common responses to what employers feel the Office of Rehabilitation Services should do in order to be viewed as a viable workforce resource.
- Employers who have not employed individuals with a disability indicated the following:
 1. Workplace safety, job productivity, potential cost of worker's compensation premiums, healthcare/insurance costs, fear of litigation, and additional time management are lesser concerns.
 2. Inability to find qualified workers with disabilities and unawareness to the potential costs of workplace accommodations were larger concerns.

3. Information in regards to: job accommodations, satisfactory job performance, work attendance & retention of individuals with disabilities; testimonial information from: line managers & senior executives attesting to the successful hiring of individuals with disabilities would be most helpful to employers for the recruitment of individuals with disabilities.

PERSONNEL OF THE OFFICE OF REHABILITATION SERVICES:

- The majority of caseloads are comprised of individuals with disabilities who have Behavioral Health/Emotional Impairments and Cognitive Impairments. Conversely, Deaf & Hard of Hearing Impairments and Visual Impairments comprise the smallest percentage of caseloads.
- There is a lack of transportation to available services.
- Staff feel there is a need for Spanish-speaking staff in all agencies.
- Community Rehabilitation Provider capacity to provide a continuum of services by qualified personnel with up-to-date skills are the two areas of greatest need in regards to the availability of employment and supported employment services.
- Individuals with Behavioral Health disabilities, Physical disabilities and Intellectual/Developmental disabilities are the most underserved.
- Overall lack of services and providers for minorities/emerging populations was a concern.
- Training/education/on-the-job training needs for consumers must evolve in accordance with labor market trends.
- Staff perceive their greatest training needs are the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, motivational interviewing, and effective time management.

OFFICE OF REHABILITATION SERVICES CONSUMERS:

- Ongoing consistent communication with their Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor is an area for improvement.
- Consumers indicated that Counselors are sensitive to their concerns and considers consumer's strengths, abilities, and capabilities when conducting vocational planning.
- Lack of public transportation is the largest barrier in accessing services.
- Networking with employers, providing labor market information, more training opportunities, and highly qualified job developers are areas in need of improvement.
- Job training is the single most important service received from the Office of Rehabilitation Services and is also the single service that should be offered by more agencies that work with the Office of Rehabilitation Services.

I. ENVIRONMENTAL SCANS

In order to gather accurate information about the needs of individuals with disabilities, it is important to incorporate information from sources outside of the Office of Rehabilitation Services. Other entities that address the needs of workforce development within RI, examine the broader needs of individuals with disabilities all contribute to a better understanding of the experience of trying to survive and thrive as an individual with a disability in RI. This section of the Comprehensive Needs Assessment considers information from the Comprehensive System Improvement Plan, a study conducted by the Governor's seekers and the resources available to both.

A. **Comprehensive System Improvement Plan**

Source: Governor's Workforce Board; In accordance with RI General Law 42-102-6

Submitted: 1/8/16 for statewide distribution

The purpose of the Comprehensive System Improvement Plan is to facilitate the seamless and coordinated delivery of services in RI, consistent with the goals and objectives of the Governor's Workforce Boards' statewide employment and training program. It also serves to identify specific barriers to creating a seamless and coordinated system.

The Governor's Workforce Board, appointed by the Governor, is invested in a better trained workforce, including a significant increase in grades K-12 spending, creating partnerships between high schools, colleges and employers that enable students to earn college degrees, and have access to job opportunities. The Governor's Workforce Board predicts that by 2020, 71% of jobs in RI will require a post-secondary degree or certification (currently, 40% of people in RI over age 25 have such a degree). Many students graduating high school are not college or career-ready.

The Governor's Workforce Board, responsible for RI's implementation of the Workforce Innovation & Opportunity Act, seeks to strengthen internal structures within the agencies to better support interagency collaboration and create capacity within the agencies to support interagency problem-solving as part of daily operations. The Workforce Innovation & Opportunity Act is looking to reimagine the role of One-Stops as a network connections facilitator, by re-tooling netWORKri. The Governor's Workforce Board states many of the complaints around the fragmentation seen among workforce development programs stem from the inability to jointly fund activities in a comprehensive way.

The Governor's Workforce Board findings suggest needs in the following areas:

- Stronger coordination across Government and non-Government entities in the workforce system including businesses.
- Better training programs.
- More opportunities for job seekers to gain experience through internships and apprenticeships.
- High schools, career & technical education, adult education, and the Community College of RI to proactively address workforce needs.

Stakeholders indicated the following needs:

- Increased engagement with workforce system partners from Higher Education, Rhode Island Department of Education, and Department of Human Services.
- Basic educational foundations and soft skills.
- Workforce programs that provide job trainings.
- User-friendly navigation through EmployRI (RI job database).

Additionally, businesses reported that they feel discouraged from utilizing the state workforce system and expressed the following concerns:

- Burdensome paperwork.
- The myriad and diversity of program offerings are confusing.
- The system is unresponsive to business needs.
- Resources should go to the "most valuable programs", i.e. on-the-job trainings and work experience.
- Variety of programs and lack of coordination is confusing.
- Frustration over state agencies being unable to speak the business language.
- Workforce system is unresponsive, i.e. on-the-job training programs have an arduous & time-consuming approval process and that payments are slow.
- Industrial arts programs have been defunded throughout high schools making it difficult to hire qualified workers.

YOUTH:

Youth are at a disadvantage in hiring due to lack of work experience and lack of soft skills. Community service providers argued that often the only way to keep disengaged, out-of-school youth in a program is by providing them with a paid opportunity, because they simply cannot afford to pursue activities that do not

provide financial compensation. Accessing job opportunities should come through internships, summer jobs, and specialized high school programs. For example, out-of-school youth tend to need wrap-around employment and support services in order to stay engaged.

B. Department of Labor and Training

Source: Rhode Island Department of Labor and Training

www.dlt.ri.gov/lmi/ces.htm;

www.dlt.ri.gov/lmi/uiadmin/characteristics.htm;

Submitted: January 2015 - October 2015

The Department of Labor and Training provides employment, workforce information, education, and training services to RI. The Department of Labor and Training's Workforce Development Services division oversees all programs that guide job-seekers to suitable employment and facilitates the connection between employers and qualified workers. In addition, the Workforce Development Services division has the ability to connect employers to recruitment, retention, training, and tax credit options.

Employment bulletins, generated by the RI Department of Labor and Training, from January 2015 – October 2015 reported that RI gained 300 jobs per month through the first nine months of 2015, compared with an average monthly gain of 600 jobs during the same period in 2014.

This report indicated a fluctuation of RI job positions in 2015:

- Professional & Business increased by 2,900.
- Accommodation & Food Service increased by 1,600.
- Entertainment & Recreation increased by 200.
- Information jobs were unchanged.
- Manufacturing, Retail, Transportation and Educational Service showed a slight decrease.
- Government Employment decreased by 500.
- Health Care & Social Assistance decreased by 1,000.
- Construction decreased by 1,800.

During the latter half of 2015, there were 21,000 advertised job vacancies in RI. Further data from the RI Department of Labor and Training suggests that unemployment rates had decreased more in RI than in other New England states. However, the unemployment rate was higher in RI compared to the national average.

C. Office of Disability Employment Policy

Source: Respectability; US Census, Office of Disability Employment Policy

Submitted: 9/4/15

The Office of Disability Employment Policy is a branch of the United States Department of Labor. Their function is to promote policies, coordinate with employers and all levels of government to increase workplace success for people with disabilities.

Rhode Island Employment Statistics in 2013:

- Ranked 29th in the Nation for employing people with disabilities.
- 34.3% of individuals with a disability were employed.
- 76.3% of individuals without a disability were employed (42% gap)
- Ranked 36th in the Nation in regards to employment gap.

D. Bureau of Labor Statistics

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics; www.bls.gov/cps;

Submitted: 6/16/15

The Bureau of Labor Statistics is a branch of the United States Department of Labor. They are the principal Federal agency responsible for measuring labor market activity, working conditions, and price changes in the economy. Its mission is to collect, analyze, and disseminate essential economic information to support public and private decision-making. As an independent statistical agency, the Bureau of Labor Statistics serves its diverse user communities by providing products and services that are objective, timely, accurate and relevant.

National Employment Statistics in 2014:

- 17.1% of individuals with disabilities were employed.
- 64.6% of individuals without a disability were employed (47.5% gap).
- Unemployment rate for individuals with a disability was 12.5%.
- Unemployment rate for individuals without a disability was 5.9%

E. United States Census Bureau

Source: United States Census Bureau (Melanie Deal; Melissa Chiu)

www.census.gov/en.html

<http://blogs.census.gov/2013/03/14/the-occupations-of-workers-with-disabilities>.

Submitted: 3/14/13

The United States Census Bureau is a principal agency of the United States Federal Statistical System, with the mission to serve as the leading source of quality data in regards to the nation's people and economy.

Disability in the National Workforce:

In 2010, the last census, stated that individuals with a disability accounted for 9.4 (6%) of the 156 million civilian labor force.

During that same year, over half of all workers with a disability were concentrated in the following occupations:

- 18.2% worked in the Service fields (excluding protective service).
- 15.1% worked in Administrative support.
- 10.4% worked in Sales.
- 8.9% worked in Management, Business and Finance.

Among specific occupations in 2010, janitors and building cleaners had the highest number of employees with a disability at 315,000, or 11.8% of all workers in that field. 52% of individuals with disabilities earned less than \$25,000 per year, compared to 38% of people without disabilities. The earnings gap translated to individuals with disabilities earning about 75% of workers without disabilities. Furthermore, individuals with disabilities were 50% more likely to earn less than \$15,000 annually, compared to individuals without disabilities.

F. Rhode Island Department of Education

Source: Rhode Island Council on Elementary & Secondary Education

www.ride.ri.gov

Submitted: 8/24/2015

The mission of the Rhode Island Department of Education is to prepare every student in RI for success in college, careers and life.

Transition-Age Youth:

According to the Rhode Island Department of Education's five-year Strategic Plan (2015 – 2020) for PK-12 & Adult Education, there is focus and planning in the following:

- Increase the retention on both students and quality educators.
- Promote “one student to computer” training philosophy.
- Expand student access to early college and early career education training programs that yield portable credits and credentials.
- Expand and deepen college and career counseling services, including the use of Individualized Learning Plans to inform youth and adults for decision making.
- Reach out to businesses and industries to partner with schools in the development and management of career & technical education programs.
- Collaborate with districts, education providers, and business partners to offer recognized, career-ready credentials and skills transcripts.
- Reach out to employers and internship providers to partner with school districts to complete employability skills assessments and transcripts.

II. Assessment Activities Developed & Implemented by the State Rehabilitation Council and Office of Rehabilitation Services

The Office of Rehabilitation Services, in collaboration with the State Rehabilitation Council, formulated five sub-committee groups to target specific populations for the Comprehensive Needs Assessment focus areas, as defined by the Rehabilitation Services Administration. The sub-committees consisted of a Transition, Community Rehabilitation Provider, Employer, ORS Staff, and ORS Consumer sub-committee.

A. TRANSITION FOCUS GROUPS

The Transition AD-HOC Committee determined that the best way to capture information about the needs of youth was to host Focus Groups with educators, administrators, and students who use the Office of Rehabilitation Services. The committee was particularly

interested in the obstacles and potential challenges for “at-risk” or “underserved” youth. Many of these individuals may also receive Special Education services or services under a 504 plan. According to Rhode Island Department of Education, RI currently has 8,400 students, between the ages of 14 and 21, with Individualized Education Plans. Office of Rehabilitation Services is currently providing services to roughly 900 of these students. School personnel are aware of the supports and services that the Office of Rehabilitation Services can provide to transition-aged youth, as a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor functions as a liaison to every public high school throughout the state.

Focus Group: Educators

The first focus group was held on May 12, 2016 with thirty Special Education Teachers, Administrators, and Transition Personnel. The group was asked to consider the rehabilitation needs of transition-aged youth with disabilities who may be “underserved” by the Office of Rehabilitation Services and are potentially “at-risk”, as well as to help identify barriers, gaps and potential areas of improvement.

Participants explained how quite often “at-risk” youth tend to be youth with learning challenges who do not want to be identified as having a disability, and therefore, are not accessing services (this was also verified in the youth focus group). Although the group acknowledged the “at-risk” population may be challenging to engage, these are individuals who could benefit greatly from accessing services. This group suggested it may be helpful to identify the Community Rehabilitation Providers approved by the Office of Rehabilitation Services with expertise in working with youth.

Focus Group: Students

The second focus group was held on October 3, 2016 with ten youth who are currently receiving services from the Office of Rehabilitation Services.

Most students reported being involved with the Office of Rehabilitation Services through their school department, particularly their special education teachers and/or transition specialists. Students discussed their experiences with the referral process, and most articulated this as fairly seamless with support from their teachers in collaboration with their identified Office of Rehabilitation Services Counselor.

Students expressed that they did not have a clear understanding of the breadth of services that the Office of Rehabilitation Services could provide. In addition, they had difficulty understanding the materials provided to them about the Office of Rehabilitation Services. Often times it is also a challenge for parents to understand the services. Students also mentioned how they were unclear as to what the Office of Rehabilitation Services may or may not fund (i.e. work clothes, driving lessons, worksite accommodations, etc.).

Students shared they feel supported by services from the Office of Rehabilitation Services; however, other supports (teachers, job coaches, and program staff) have been

a critical piece to continue the students engagement with Office of Rehabilitation Services in assisting them to call their counselor, invite them to meetings, etc. Students report meeting with their Office of Rehabilitation Services Counselor minimally three times per year. Students overwhelmingly reported having a positive experience with the Office of Rehabilitation Services. It was noted that there is a potential barrier in connecting youth with behavioral health concerns to the Office of Rehabilitation Services.

B. Community Rehabilitation Provider Survey

The Office of Rehabilitation Services and State Rehabilitation Council committee distributed a survey via email and letter to sixty Community Rehabilitation Providers who are approved vendors of the Office of Rehabilitation Services. Twenty-six Community Rehabilitation Providers responded to the survey for a response rate of 43.3%.

Demographics of the Providers indicated that the majority of respondents provide generic services, while other providers conduct supported employment services; other services such as independent living, food service, etc.; and transition services, respectively.

The majority of respondents indicated providing services statewide, or in the Providence area, followed respectively by respondents from the East Bay, Northern RI, West Bay, and South County.

The majority of respondents indicated providing services to individuals who are Caucasian, Hispanic, Latino and/or African American, followed closely by individuals who are Portuguese and/or Cape Verdean, Asian, American Indian and/or Alaskan Native, respectively.

Respondents indicated providing services to the following emerging populations: Developmental Disabilities and Out-of-School Transition-Aged Youth (ages 16-24), followed by In-School Transition-Aged Youth, Veterans, Behavioral Health, Physical Disabilities, Homeless, Incarcerated, and RIWORKS, respectively.

The majority of respondents indicated providing Job Preparation services, including Job Development, Job Retention, and Job-Seeking Counseling (resume development, interviewing skills, etc.). Providers indicated they conduct other employment-related services such as Training/Education support, Work Trials/Internships/Situational Assessments, Vocational Evaluations/Employment Planning, Vocational Skills Training (welding, clerical, pet grooming, etc.), and Case Management for individual's personal life and care, respectively.

Respondents indicated the following as the most common personal challenges throughout individuals they serve in *obtaining* employment: Individual's social skills, fear

of losing Social Security Benefits (both cash and medical), expectations from family and the individuals themselves, and transportation, respectively.

Respondents indicated the following as the most common personal challenges throughout individuals they serve in *maintaining* employment: Individual's social skills, personal/home life barriers, transportation, expectations from family, fear of losing Social Security Benefits (both cash and medical), and expectations from the individual, respectively.

Respondents indicated the following as the most frequent provider challenges in *obtaining* employment for individuals they serve: Job availability, matching individual's skills to the right job, provider time & resources, availability of job retention & supports, insufficient job search preparation, and availability of job development, respectively.

Respondents indicated the following as the most frequent provider challenges in *maintaining* employment for individuals they serve: matching individual's skills to the right job, provider time & resources, insufficient job search preparation, and availability of job retention & supports, respectively.

58% of respondents indicated their staff holds the credentials to provide supported employment services, while 86% of respondents indicated their staff possesses the skills and knowledge to provide supported employment services.

Respondents overwhelmingly indicated that Benefits Counseling is the employment-related service their agency is unable to sufficiently meet, followed by long-term supports and case management for personal/home life, job coaching, work trial/internship/situational assessments, and on-site job retention support, respectively.

C. Employer Survey

The Comprehensive Needs Assessment sub-committee distributed surveys to various employers throughout the local business community. The surveys were completed by twelve employers who currently employ individuals with disabilities and fourteen employers who do not employ individuals with disabilities.

Survey Answers from Employers who currently employ individuals with disabilities were as follows:

One-third of respondents indicated their company employs 10-50 employees, one-third of respondents indicated their company employs 50-100 employees, while another one-third of respondents indicated their company employs more than 100 employees. Nine of the twelve respondents were aware of the Office of Rehabilitation Services through Goodwill Industries.

Respondents commonly indicated that giving people a fair chance and helping out the community was their primary motivation in employing individuals with disabilities.

Respondents were asked the largest challenge they faced as a result of hiring a person with a disability. Most respondents indicated that there were no barriers or challenges. Some respondents indicated being able to effectively provide accommodations and communications were the largest challenges.

When asked the most major concern when deciding whether or not to hire an individual with a disability, respondents indicated that accommodations, reliability, performing the necessary job duties, and adaptability were their largest concerns.

When asked the largest reward in hiring individuals with disabilities, respondents overwhelmingly indicated that “joy”, “helping”, watching their employees “grow”, and gaining a valuable employee were the largest rewards. Furthermore, respondents indicated that on-the-job trainings and qualified applicants are the largest benefits that the Office of Rehabilitation Services can provide to employers.

Respondents were also asked what the Office of Rehabilitation Services needs to do in order to be seen as a viable workforce resource similar to monster.com or jobsinri.com. Creating awareness of the Office of Rehabilitation Services was the primary response. Other indications were to have a website that includes job postings and ways to match individuals with disabilities to a well-suited job.

Survey Answers from Employers who currently do not employ individuals with disabilities were as follows:

One respondent indicated that their company employs less than 10 employees. Four respondents indicated their company employs 10-50 employees. Two respondents indicated their company employs 50-100 employees. Seven respondents indicated their company employs more than 100 employees. Nine of the fourteen respondents indicated that they are aware of the Office of Rehabilitation Services, and that they are aware of the tax credits that are available for hiring individuals with disabilities. Twelve of the fourteen respondents indicated that they would consider hiring individuals with disabilities or other barriers to employment.

Respondents were asked which information would be most helpful in persuading them to recruit individuals with disabilities. Twelve of the fourteen chose to respond to this survey question. Eleven respondents indicated information about job accommodations. Six respondents indicated information on satisfactory job performance, attendance, and retention of individuals with disabilities. Six respondents indicated testimonial information from line managers attesting to the successful hiring and retention of individuals with disabilities, while five

respondents indicated testimonial information from senior executives attesting to the successful hiring and retention of individuals with disabilities. Four respondents indicated information supported by statistics or research. Three respondents indicated testimonial information from human resource managers attesting to the successful hiring and retention of individuals with disabilities. Three respondents stated information about tax incentives.

Respondents were asked about frequently cited concerns that some employers have over hiring individuals with disabilities. For each concern, respondents were asked to rate them as either a major concern, somewhat of a concern, or no concern, in regards to their respective companies. All fourteen responded.

The following were lesser concerns in hiring individuals with disabilities:

- Workplace safety.
- Job productivity.
- Healthcare costs/Insurance costs/Workers compensation premiums.
- Additional management time.
- Fear of litigation.

The following were greater concerns in hiring individuals with disabilities:

- Belief that individuals with disabilities lack the skills and experience to perform the job duties.
- Being unaware of the costs of potential accommodations.
- The actual costs of accommodating individuals with disabilities.

D. Office of Rehabilitation Services Staff Survey:

The Office of Rehabilitation Services staff survey was distributed to sixty staff members working for the Agency either as a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor, Supervisor, Administrator, or Case Aide. Of the sixty staff members who received the survey, thirty-three participated in the survey for a response rate of 55%. Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors comprised the largest group of respondents at 73%. Supervisors comprised 15% of total respondents. Administrators comprised 9% of total respondents and Case Aides comprised 3% of total respondents.

Of the total respondents, 40% of respondents have been employed with the agency for more than 10 years, 33% have been employed with the agency between five to ten years, 24% have been employed with the agency between one to five years, and 3% have been employed with the agency for less than one year.

Respondents were asked to identify the disability category for the majority of their respective caseloads and to select all categories of disability that apply. Case Aides were asked to indicate caseloads they are currently assisting with and have assisted with in the past. Supervisors and Administration were asked to indicate caseloads in which they have covered in the past.

Respondents indicated the following disabilities as comprising the majority of their caseloads: Behavioral Health/Emotional Impairments, Cognitive Impairments, Physical Disabilities, Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities and Substance Abuse Disorders, respectively.

Respondents were asked to identify gaps in service availability for consumers. . Common responses were:

- Transportation to the services that are available.
- Access to services for individuals who are non-English-speaking.
- Services are not readily available for emerging populations/minorities.

Respondents indicated the following needs for Supported Employment services to individuals with the most significant disabilities.

Responses yielded the following:

- Concerns over service provider capacity.
- Need for a continuum of Supported Employment services for individuals with Behavioral Health and Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities.
- Need for providers to have qualified personnel to provide a continuum of services.

Respondents indicated the following concerns in regards to the provisions of agency services as they relate to the evolving labor market. The most common responses were:

- Matching of skills to rising employment opportunities and expectations.
- Ability to multi-task.
- On-the-job trainings must evolve in accordance with the labor market.
- Students are graduating with less of these above skills than in previous generations.

Respondents indicated the following when asked about individuals who have been served through other components of the statewide workforce development system, and what is needed to improve these services:

- Prepare consumers for emerging employment driven by employer needs.

- Office of Rehabilitation should be an active partner with the Department of Labor and Training and the employment community to promote access to employment for individuals with disabilities.
- Difficulty gaining access to these types of programs.
- Difficulty knowing which programs and services are the best fit for consumers.

Staff indicated there is a lack of services for Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities (Support services), along with a lack of Supported Employment services for Behavioral Health and Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities. Staff indicated that Community Rehabilitation Providers do not have the knowledge of services to serve individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder. Staff indicated that there is a need for access to training and services for individuals who are non-English speaking. Furthermore, individuals who are serviced by the Deaf & Hard of Hearing unit predominately only have one vendor for the provision of services.

Respondents indicated the following as training areas of greatest need for staff:

- Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act.
- Motivational Interviewing.
- Effective Time Management.

E. Office of Rehabilitation Services Consumer Survey

The Office of Rehabilitation Services Consumer Survey was mailed to 360 consumers who are receiving services through the Office of Rehabilitation Services. The pool of consumers was determined randomly and consisted solely of consumers who are either currently working through the help of the Office of Rehabilitation Services, or are receiving some type of training funded by Office of Rehabilitation Services. Fifty-seven consumers (15.8%) responded to the survey. Consumers had the option of completing the survey and mailing it back to Office of Rehabilitation Services, or completing the survey via Survey Monkey.

Respondents indicated the following as the largest barriers in accessing services:

- 50% of respondents indicated a lack of public transportation in traveling around the cities.
- 39% of respondents indicated communication between themselves and their Counselor.

- 28% of respondents indicated other challenges related to the location of Community Rehabilitation Providers.
- 24% of respondents indicated a lack of disability-related accommodations.
- 10% of respondents indicated difficulty completing the Office of Rehabilitation Services application.
- 4% indicated language barriers.

Respondents were asked the most important improvements the Office of Rehabilitation Services can make to improve service delivery. Common responses included:

- More networking with employers and knowledge of labor market.
- More training opportunities.
- Strengthening timely communication between themselves and their Counselor.
- Need for highly qualified job developers.
- More individualized attention and support from their Counselor.
- Physical location of Community Rehabilitation Providers.

Many Consumers indicated that job training is the single most important service they receive from Office of Rehabilitation Services, and that job training is also the type of service that should be offered more by agencies who work with Office of Rehabilitation Services. When asked about the single most important service that consumers do not receive from Office of Rehabilitation Services, responses centered on employment and job training. It is also worth noting that many consumers indicated “nothing” or “N/A” in response to this question.

When asked about how frequently consumers engage in contact with their Office of Rehabilitation Services Counselor, many consumers indicated that contact is either frequent or every few months.

III. Continuous Quality Improvement Activities

Continuous Quality Improvement is a process of creating an environment in which management and workers strive to create constant improvements in quality. It is a management system that looks at processes and outcomes, and promotes the need for objective data to analyze and improve agency processes.

A. Continuous Quality Improvement Committee

The Office of Rehabilitation Services has an established Continuous Quality Improvement Committee which evaluates and analyzes internal and external processes and performances in order to further benefit service delivery to individuals with disabilities. The Committee meets on a monthly basis and is comprised of agency Supervisors (both regional and operational), Assistant Administrators, the Administrator of Vocational Rehabilitation and the Associate Director. The Committee also implements a systematic process of checking to see whether a service being delivered is meeting specified requirements, otherwise known as Quality Assurance.

The Office of Rehabilitation Services has recently developed a Continuous Quality Improvement Manual of Guidelines which serves as a Quality Assurance guide for Community Rehabilitation Providers servicing individuals with disabilities.

Office of Rehabilitation Services has surpassed the 90% threshold in advancing case movement with consumers. This includes moving consumer applicants to eligibility status within 60 days of applying for services, along with moving eligible consumers into an employment plan within 90 days of eligibility.

The Office of Rehabilitation Services will continue to assess information as it becomes available and will work towards quality assurance and improvement. One of the ways Office of Rehabilitation Services plans to work towards this is to engage in an Agency Strategic Planning day at Alton Jones in Fall 2017. During this event, agency staff will discuss goals, regional service planning, personnel growth, and development.

B. Consumer Satisfaction

Office of Rehabilitation Services, on a monthly basis, mails out four different satisfaction surveys to consumers. A survey is mailed to individuals who received supported employment services and had their case closed successfully, while another survey is mailed to consumers who received supported employment services and had their case closed unsuccessfully. Conversely, a survey is mailed to consumers who received non-supported employment services and had their case closed successfully, while another survey is mailed to consumers who received non-supported employment services and had their case closed unsuccessfully. Surveys are mailed to consumers at or around four weeks after their case is closed.

Monthly Satisfaction Surveys for Successful Closures for Federal Fiscal Year 2016: Surveys were mailed out to 652 individuals. 73 surveys were completed and returned for a response rate of 11.2%. Overall, those individuals commonly responded that: they feel they were assisted in obtaining employment that matched their stated goals, interests & abilities; were better prepared by Office of Rehabilitation Services to obtain & maintain employment; were provided the necessary information to make decisions regarding Social Security and work incentives; became more financially independent; were aware that they can re-connect with Office of Rehabilitation Services for help after their case is closed; and would refer a family member or friend with a disability to the Office of Rehabilitation Services.

Monthly Satisfaction Surveys for Unsuccessful Closures for Federal Fiscal Year 2016: Surveys were mailed out to 452 individuals. 32 surveys were completed and returned for a response rate of 7.1%. Overall, those individuals commonly responded that: they did not receive assessments to assist with determining their need for assistive technology (visual aids, writing aids, etc.); were not assisted in obtaining assistive technology based on an assessed need to enable them to move forward with employment; were provided the necessary information to make decisions regarding Social Security and work incentives; and were not concerned with losing benefits such as Social Security and medical coverage. Nearly half responded that they were not referred to services that matched their individual needs and were not assisted with identifying an employment goal that matched their interests, abilities & strengths.

Currently, the Office of Rehabilitation Services is looking forward to working with the State Rehabilitation Council in analyzing the effectiveness of this method and to determine whether or not improvements can be made. The Office of Rehabilitation Services also values feedback from consumers who have open cases with the agency and looks to explore avenues in capturing consumer feedback prior to case closure. Moving forward, Office of Rehabilitation Services is exploring the idea of reaching out to consumers who are actively engaging in services in order to capture their feedback prior to their cases being closed.

C. Wage & Employment Data

Title: Rhode Island Department of Human Services/Office of Rehabilitation Services and the State Rehabilitation Council **2015** Annual Report;

Survey or data from: **2015** Annual Report;

Source: ORS, SRC, DHS;

Throughout Federal Fiscal Year 2015, 643 individuals with disabilities were successfully closed (obtained and maintained employment) with the help of the Office of Rehabilitation Services.

Hourly wages of those 643 individuals were in the following range:

- 366 earning up to \$10/hour
- 190 earning between \$10 - \$15/hour
- 40 earning between \$15 - \$20/hour
- 17 earning between \$20 - \$25/hour
- 28 earning over \$25/hour
- 2 earning below \$8/hour

Primary Occupation of those 643 individuals was:

- Sales & Related Occupations - 256
- Healthcare Support - 223
- Production - 68
- Community & Social Service - 61
- Management - 33
- Homemaker - 2

Title: Rhode Island Department of Human Services/Office of Rehabilitation Services and the State Rehabilitation Council **2016** Annual Report;

Survey or data from: **2016** Annual Report;

Source: ORS, SRC, DHS;

Throughout Federal Fiscal Year 2016, 651 individuals with disabilities were successfully closed with the help of the Office of Rehabilitation Services.

Hourly wages of those 651 individuals were in the following range:

- 554 earning between \$9 - \$15/hour
- 55 earning between \$15 - \$20/hour
- 23 earning between \$20 - \$25/hour
- 18 earning over \$25/hour
- 1 earning less than \$9/hour

Primary Occupation of those 651 individuals was:

- Service Occupations – 250
- Office & Administrative Support – 159
- Sales & Related Occupations – 63
- Installation, Maintenance, Repair – 30
- Transportation – 30
- Education, Legal, Community Services, Arts & Media – 30
- Construction & Extraction – 20
- Computer, Engineering & Science – 19
- Management, Business & Financial – 18
- Production – 15
- Health – 15
- Blind Vending Facility – 1
- Homemaker – 1

IV. Conclusions

TRANSITION:

Based on the findings of the Transition Ad-Hoc Committee, the following possible strategies will be explored:

- Develop materials about Office of Rehabilitation Services that are easier to comprehend for both students and parents.
- Consider strategies on how to better connect to “at-risk” students outside of the schools, as students report feeling stigmatized.
- Opportunity for youth to access Office of Rehabilitation Services information outside of school (mental health centers, youth centers, higher education, etc.).
- Expand outreach to other programs, such as youth centers, family resource centers, and career & technical education programs.
- Strengthen connections to higher education, particularly disability support services coordinators, to increase access to underserved youth.
- Assist schools in increasing communication and coordination for “at-risk” youth.

COMMUNITY REHABILITATION PROVIDERS:

Most respondents occupy a position of supervisory and/or up. Respondents indicated they feel they and their organizations have the necessary skills to successfully work with individuals with disabilities. Challenging community barriers that were common across respondents were:

- Lack of adequate transportation around the state.
- Turnover rates among Community Rehabilitation Provider agencies.
- Meeting the needs of Benefits Counseling.
- Community-based Job Availability.
- Personal barriers throughout the individuals they serve.

EMPLOYERS:

Based on the responses from the Employer survey, the following points were indicated as to why employers are hiring individuals with disabilities:

- Greater diversity.
- Different skill sets.
- Willingness to work.
- Giving individuals a fair chance.

The following points were indicated as to why employers have apprehension over hiring individuals with disabilities:

- Beliefs & stigmas.
- Concerns over job productivity.
- Possible extended time off from work.
- Belief of not being able to meet potential accommodations.

PERSONNEL OF THE OFFICE OF REHABILITATION SERVICES:

Based on the responses of from personnel, the following common themes emerged:

- Need for transportation to available consumer services.
- Need for access to services for non-English speaking consumers.
- Need for ongoing business relationship building.

- Need for qualified providers with up-to-date skills and provider staff training are high priority for developing and improving provider performance throughout RI.
- Need for providers to have skills with the on-line job application process, workplace accommodations, job development, and long-term supports with a consumer-driven approach.
- Community Rehabilitation Providers, Consumers, and Vocational Rehabilitation Staff must work closely as a team in order to succeed.
- Transition services are strong and doing well for the youth in our community.
- Individuals with Behavioral Health/Mental Health, Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities, Physical Disabilities, and Autism are the most underserved populations in our community.
- Overall lack of services and providers in our community for emerging populations/minorities.

OFFICE OF REHABILITATION SERVICES CONSUMERS:

The Consumer survey responses yielded the following common themes and findings:

- 46% indicated they are youth between the ages of 16-24.
- 86% indicated they are Caucasian.
- Preferred method of Communication is Telephone, Email, Letter, and In-Person meeting, respectively.
- 77% indicated there is adequate accessibility to the Office of Rehabilitation Services locations.
- 88% indicated they feel their Office of Rehabilitation Services Counselor is sensitive to their disability concerns, cultural background, spoken language, family concerns, and financial situation.
- 88% indicated they feel their Office of Rehabilitation Services Counselor considers their strengths, abilities, and capabilities when conducting vocational planning.
- 50% indicated there is a lack of transportation throughout the communities of RI.
- There is a need for personnel at the Office of Rehabilitation Services to conduct more networking with employers and to have adequate knowledge of the labor market.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Comprehensive Needs Assessment report includes a summary of the survey and focus groups design & tools, along with other gathered information and findings. The Office of Rehabilitation Services and the State Rehabilitation Council would like to thank all community stakeholders who provided feedback and input to the 2017 Comprehensive Needs Assessment. Additionally, the Office of Rehabilitation Services thanks the Governor's Commission on Disabilities for their support and assistance with assessing the needs of our mutual consumer groups and staff at the Office of Rehabilitation Services who assisted with the Comprehensive Needs Assessment design, implementation and synthesizing of information.

Questions related to this Comprehensive Needs Assessment may be directed to:

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