

Rehabilitation Council of Texas

2016 ANNUAL REPORT



In Partnership with the Texas Workforce Commission

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Legislative Notice:

Legislation authorized during the 84th Texas Legislature, Regular Session (2015) transferred vocational rehabilitation services from the former Texas Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services (DARS) to the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC).

This report covers activities that occurred between September 1, 2015, and August 31, 2016, during which time DARS was the designated state vocational rehabilitation agency. References to DARS have been retained in this report where it was not possible to more generally refer to the state vocational rehabilitation agency.

Prior to the transfer of the vocational rehabilitation programs on September 1, 2016, the Rehabilitation Council of Texas (RCT) began partnering with TWC to advocate for Texans with disabilities in the vocational rehabilitation process. Under TWC, vocational rehabilitation services are referred to as Texas Workforce Solutions-Vocational Rehabilitation Services (TWS-VRS).

Learn more at:

texasworkforce.org/news/departments-assistive-rehabilitative-services-program-transition.



Message from the Council Chair

On behalf of the Rehabilitation Council of Texas (Council), I am proud to share the 2016 RCT Annual Report. The report reviews the work of the Council, including the activities and accomplishments the Council, Texas Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services (DARS) and Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) have made possible by working in partnership. Our shared commitment to bringing collaboration, diverse perspectives, leadership and innovation to bear on the vocational rehabilitation process makes a positive difference in the lives of Texans with disabilities, including those with the most significant disabilities.

I am pleased to share some stories of Texans with disabilities who successfully prepared for, obtained or retained competitive integrated employment and achieved greater independence and social participation in their communities. The Council and leadership from Texas Workforce Solutions–Vocational Rehabilitation Services (TWS-VRS), formerly the DARS vocational rehabilitation programs, continue to make even more successes possible for the future by expanding services to meet the needs of Texans with disabilities, including youth and students with disabilities.

2016 has been an exciting year as we began to implement the new federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) regulations. We embraced the opportunity the regulations presented us to expand services to Texas students and youth. Council members and TWS-VRS staff worked tirelessly to adapt services to meet WIOA requirements. Thanks to these efforts, we have determined strategies for ensuring that Texas students and youth benefit from postsecondary opportunities and experience the success made possible by vocational rehabilitation services. We believe these efforts will improve the lives of Texans with disabilities in the years to come.

As directed by the 84th Texas Legislature, vocational rehabilitation services were successfully transitioned to TWC in September 2016. The collaboration among the Council, TWC and DARS led to the production and implementation of a transition plan that ensured minimal disruption to Texans receiving vocational rehabilitation services or wishing to apply for them. This transition plan will continue to guide the additional changes in 2017.

The Council will continue to be guided by its mission to advocate for Texans with disabilities to help them achieve employment. We look forward to another successful year of partnership in 2017 and working together to navigate the challenges and seize the opportunities ahead.

Martha Garber
Chair

Message from the Commissioners



Andres Alcantar
TWC Chairman and Commissioner
Representing the Public



Ruth R. Hughs
TWC Commissioner
Representing Employers



Julian Alvarez
TWC Commissioner
Representing Labor

The past year has been a time of change for the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) as we prepared to welcome vocational rehabilitation staff and services into the Texas Workforce Solutions network. With these services came the valuable insight and expertise of the dedicated members of the Rehabilitation Council of Texas (RCT), who will continue to provide TWC valuable advice on vocational rehabilitation services as a partner in advocating for Texans with disabilities receiving vocational rehabilitation services.

The transfer of services to TWC from the former Texas Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services (DARS) was legislatively directed to occur at the start of State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2017 (September 1, 2016), and staff from TWC, DARS and the Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) worked tirelessly to lay the groundwork for this transfer, with a focus on ensuring service continuity. The Council was an important partner in these efforts, providing feedback, making recommendations and asking questions that helped steer efforts toward a successful outcome.

The addition of vocational rehabilitation services expands our array of training, education and support services to Texas job seekers, while enhancing coordination with employers and other stakeholders. These services will be an asset to TWC and its 28 local workforce development partners who, along with our adult education providers across the state, comprise Texas Workforce Solutions. Providing services to people with disabilities that will assist them in preparing for employment falls right in line with TWC's mission to promote and support a workforce system that creates value and offers employers, individuals and communities the opportunity to achieve and sustain economic prosperity.

Another benefit of the transfer of vocational rehabilitation services is that all six federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) funded programs will be operated by TWC, resulting in more coordinated planning and service delivery. In fact, in 2016 Texas submitted its first Combined State Plan under WIOA, which included plans for vocational rehabilitation and other core workforce programs in Texas. The plan was approved by Texas Governor Greg Abbott and subsequently approved by the U.S. Departments of Labor and Education. The RCT was an invaluable partner in developing the vocational rehabilitation components of the plan.

During the coming year, TWC will continue to work toward implementing changes to improve vocational rehabilitation services in Texas. TWC will seek input from stakeholders in public meetings around the state to determine how best to make these changes while maintaining the same high level of service. As we look to 2017, we will begin colocating vocational rehabilitation services within Workforce Solutions offices to leverage resources, achieve efficiencies, improve employment outcomes and maintain the staff specialization and expertise needed to continue providing quality services.

We are pleased that the TWC family now includes vocational rehabilitation services—operated under the new name Texas Workforce Solutions—Vocational Rehabilitation Services—and look forward to building on our new partnership with RCT.

Handwritten signature of Andres Alcantar in black ink.

Handwritten signature of Ruth R. Hughs in black ink.

Handwritten signature of Julian Alvarez in black ink.



About the Council

Mission, Values and Responsibilities

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

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

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

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

Learn more by visiting

texasworkforce.org/agency/rehabilitation-council-texas



Mission

The Council's mission is to partner with the state vocational rehabilitation programs 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 that open doors to individual independence and participation in community life
- Person-centered goals, service plans and delivery systems leading to individual success
- Shared roles and responsibilities to improve consumer satisfaction with the rehabilitation process and outcomes
- Collaboration and partnership with federal, state and private agencies for system improvement

Responsibilities

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

Spotlight: About Vocational Rehabilitation Services

Vocational rehabilitation services help Texas adults and students with disabilities prepare for, find, keep or advance in employment or successfully transition from high school to education and employment opportunities.

The goal of services is competitive integrated employment, which is employment in jobs with work settings, wages, benefits and advancement opportunities equivalent to jobs held by people without disabilities.

To be eligible for services, Texans must have one or more disabilities that result in substantial barriers to employment and must be able to benefit from services. Visual disabilities served include significant visual impairments, blindness and deafblindness. Other disabilities served include behavioral and mental health conditions; hearing impairments; alcohol or drug addiction; intellectual, learning and developmental disabilities and physical disabilities.

Services are provided based on each person's needs. Services may include vocational counseling and guidance; education and training to get the skills needed for a chosen career; assistive devices such as hearing aids, screen readers, wheelchairs and prosthetics; vehicle and home modifications and training in key areas such as reading and writing Braille, using a white cane to navigate and using assistive technologies.

Services are also available to help employers successfully recruit, hire and retain qualified Texans with disabilities.

Learn more by visiting texasworkforce.org/jobseekers/vocational-rehabilitation-services

Committees

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

Executive Committee

Committee Chair: Martha Garber, M.Ed., LPC-S, LMFT *Composed of chair, vice chair, and all committee chairs*

Coordinates with state vocational rehabilitation programs leadership, develops quarterly meeting agendas, develops public outreach materials and reviews the Council's budget, bylaws and amendments.

Consumer Satisfaction and Needs Assessment Committee

Committee Chair: Joe Tims

Reviews consumer satisfaction survey results and other program data, addresses service concerns and helps steer a statewide needs assessment every three years.

Planning and Review Committee

Committee Chair: Rene Gonzalez, Ph.D.

Helps set and evaluate progress toward goals and priorities for the Combined State Plan for the Vocational Rehabilitation Programs, recommends ways to improve vocational rehabilitation services and receives public comment.

Membership and Education Committee

Committee Chair: Mark Schroeder

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

Policy, Procedure and Personnel Development Committee

Committee Chair: Karen Stanfill

Comments on changes to vocational rehabilitation policy, reviews appeals decisions and monitors procedural changes, staffing and impartial hearing officer selection.

Our Work 2016 Year in Review

Through strategic planning, the Council identified three primary vocational rehabilitation priorities for 2016. These priorities included Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) implementation, transition of vocational rehabilitation services from the Texas Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services (DARS) to the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) and developing innovative strategies to serve youth and students with disabilities.

The Council served on a WIOA implementation team for Texas along with leaders from the state vocational rehabilitation programs. As part of these efforts, Council Chair Martha Garber participated in the WIOA National Convening in Washington, D.C. along with Texas stakeholders and agency leadership. This opportunity allowed Texas vocational rehabilitation representatives to discuss ways to collaborate to serve program participants without duplicating services and provided additional information about WIOA requirements and best practices for innovative service delivery.

WIOA has driven the need to develop new policy and revise many existing policies. The Council's Policy, Procedure and Personnel Development (PPPD) Committee worked closely with vocational rehabilitation staff in 2016 to update policy to reflect WIOA requirements. Efforts included weekly conference calls to ensure understanding and consensus about proposed changes to policy.

A change in WIOA Title IV regarding vocational rehabilitation staff qualification requirements prompted the Council to conduct an extensive literature review to collect evidence-based information about best practices in this area. The literature review was completed in 2016 with the results to be delivered in early 2017.

The Council also worked closely with DARS and TWC leadership to transfer vocational rehabilitation services to TWC on September 1, 2016, as required by legislation authorized during the 84th Texas Legislative Session. At Council meetings, leadership from DARS and TWC shared updates on planning and transfer activities, received feedback from Council members and answered questions.

One issue raised by the Council regarding the transfer of vocational rehabilitation services to TWC was the importance of also transferring the impartial hearing officer (IHO) function to ensure continuity in the complaint resolution process. Council Chair Martha Garber and member Karen Stanfill participated in IHO training to learn more about this position and present the Council's recommendations.

The Council also invited vocational rehabilitation leadership and staff to participate on a panel about services for transition-aged youth and students at its April meeting. Key staff presented on current programs and planned improvements, as well as efforts to implement new federal regulations around Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS). This session provided an opportunity to review the state of vocational rehabilitation youth programs, identify areas of potential collaboration among partner programs and discuss program improvements.





Additionally, the Council continued its tradition of holding a joint meeting with the State Independent Living Council (SILC), an organization that helps to oversee the state's independent living services. The purpose of the joint meeting is to identify opportunities for collaboration to better serve Texans with disabilities. Although SILC and the Council will partner with different state agencies as of September 1, 2016, both organizations have agreed that continued close collaboration is in the best interests of Texans with disabilities, and joint meetings will continue to be held.

Other activities to highlight in 2016 include the publication of the Council's 2015 Annual Report and Council Chair Martha Garber's participation in the National Coalition of State Rehabilitation Councils (NCSRC) conference and Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) conference. These conferences are an opportunity to discuss Texas' successes and best practices with vocational rehabilitation leaders from across the nation.

The Council also worked with vocational rehabilitation staff to evaluate the results of the comprehensive statewide needs assessment (CSNA) and the quarterly consumer satisfaction surveys.

Spotlight: **Apprenticeship Program and Conference Prepare Students for Employment**

In 2016, the state vocational rehabilitation program partnered with the Greater Houston Business Leadership Network (GHBLN) to host the first ever Apprenticeship Conference for transition-aged students with disabilities. The conference was held in Houston and was attended by over 100 parents, students receiving vocational rehabilitation services, businesses, presenters and community partners.

Twelve of the conference participants were students with visual disabilities receiving vocational rehabilitation services and enrolled in the Apprenticeship program. This program helps students prepare for employment after high school through training in areas such as critical thinking, giving presentations, decision making, and interpersonal and soft skills.

In the final phase of the program, students engage in a four-week-long group project that requires them to develop solutions to a real-world problem or challenge faced by a business partner. Students worked closely with participating business mentors from AT&T, Emerson Process Management, KMPG and WPG Consulting.

Projects were evaluated at the conference by a distinguished panel of judges representing businesses, agencies and other organizations. The conference also featured special guests and presenters and was followed by a four-week paid work experience for Apprenticeship program participants.

Input and Recommendations

The Council met with vocational rehabilitation leadership quarterly as a part of the Council meeting. During these meetings, quarterly program updates were shared and the Council provided input and recommendations. The vocational rehabilitation programs take into account the views of the Council in connection with matters of general policy arising in the administration of the State Plan.

The Council uses a committee structure to provide focused review and comment. These committees are: the executive committee; program planning and review committee; policy, procedures and personnel development committee; consumer satisfaction and needs assessment committee; and membership and education committee. Much of the interaction included exchanges of information in order to achieve greater clarity and understanding. While the detailed work is done in the committee structure, all comments and recommendations are made from the Council.

The Council provided input on a number of topics throughout the year. Among the topics were: representation of the vocational rehabilitation perspective within the Employment First Task Force, engagement in service projects with groups that benefit children and the integration of children with disabilities, guidance for counselors to help consumers exercise informed choice when selecting vendors, accessibility of technology for staff and consumers, training topics for impartial hearing officers, physical and program accessibility of local Texas Workforce Solutions offices, services for veterans, services for youth and students with disabilities and reimbursement payment for reader services.

Prior to making recommendations, the Council obtained information through a number of sources, including the following:

Designated state unit's performance reports

Policy review and dialogue

Quarterly consumer satisfaction reports

Input received from consumers, advocacy organizations and providers

Information obtained in the most recent statewide needs assessment

Quarterly updates provided by the director of the designated state agency

Program updates provided by designated state unit staff

In Fiscal Year (FY) 2016, the Council presented the following summary of recommendations. The Council assumes and supports informed consumer choice in all of its recommendations. A response from the vocational rehabilitation program follows each recommendation.

Recommendation: Have an external entity look at the capacity of Centers for Independent Living (CILs) to provide Independent Living (IL) services to eligible Texans with disabilities and make recommendations to ensure the needs of consumers are met statewide.

Response: The designated state vocational rehabilitation agency is committed to working in collaboration with CILs to ensure coordination of services for consumers receiving services from the Vocational Rehabilitation and Independent Living Services for Older Individuals who are Blind programs. In October 2015, an external entity was secured to assess the capacity of CILs in preparation for the outsourcing of IL programs operated by the former Texas Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services (DARS). This was directed by House Bill 2463, authorized during the 84th Texas Legislature. The final capacity assessment was issued in April 2016 and was used by DARS and the Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) to inform the outsourcing of the IL programs and the identification of training and technical assistance priorities.

Recommendation: The Council recommends that the Combined State Plan require in the comprehensive system of personnel development section that the qualified vocational rehabilitation counselor hold a master's degree and maintain qualifications consistent with the national certified rehabilitation counselor.

Response: This recommendation was included by DARS in the Combined State Plan submitted to the U.S. Departments of Education and Labor in April 2016.

Recommendation: Remove the term "suitable employment" in both the Rehabilitation Policy Manual (RPM) and Vocational Rehabilitation Manual (VRM).

Response: "Suitable employment" was replaced with the term "competitive integrated employment" in applicable policy. This change ensures that terminology in policy is consistent with WIOA.

Recommendation: Clarify in policy that the vocational goal included in the Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) must be developed to be consistent with the following requirements defined in WIOA 34 CFR 361.5(c)(15): selected by the individual, consistent with the individual's unique strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, interests and informed choice.

Response: Coordination with the Council's Policy, Procedure and Personnel Development Committee is underway to update the language in applicable policy to conform with 34 CFR 361.5(c)(15).

Recommendation: We understand that the law requires the designated vocational rehabilitation agency to presume eligible applicants who received Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI). The only exception to this requirement is the inability to verify benefits. Proposed policy uses an example "need for pre-eligibility trial work," which would be inappropriate. Recommend that this example be removed indicating there might be an additional exception.

Response: The example was removed from applicable policy.

Recommendation: The term "alcohol and drug abuse" in the RPM should be updated to reflect current language.

Response: The term "alcohol and drug abuse" was replaced with "substance use disorder" or "substance abuse" in applicable policy, depending on the context.

Recommendation: With regard to persons experiencing a substance use disorder, there is an appearance of two different criteria for eligibility for vocational rehabilitation services for individuals who receive Social Security and individuals who do not. We recommend that it be clarified so that all consumers have the same criteria for eligibility.

Response: The following statement will be added to applicable policy for clarification: "Recipients of Social Security benefits are automatically eligible for services. But before you develop an IPE, the consumer must have documented evidence of: currently maintaining sobriety; being sober for at least 30 consecutive days, excluding any incarceration time; and current involvement in a therapeutic program."

Recommendation: To emphasize the role of the consumer's choice and interests in trial work experiences, revise applicable policy to state that, "trial work experiences must be provided in competitive integrated employment settings to the maximum extent possible, consistent with the informed choice and rehab needs of the individual."

Response: Applicable policy was revised to include a definition of the term "Work Experience" consistent with the Council's recommendations, or to include a statement on trial work consistent with the recommendation. In FY 2017, additional conforming changes will be made to ensure policy alignment with WIOA requirements.





Recommendation: WIOA has removed the use of extended evaluation, and the pre-trial work eligibility appears to be very similar to the extended evaluation phase that was removed with WIOA. We understand that a pre-eligibility-trial work phase was initiated and extended evaluation removed. We have concerns that a federal audit of another state that initiated a similar policy was cited by the audit as an example of what would not be acceptable. We recommend that you review the proposed change against this information.

Response: Pre-eligibility trial work is not an official or reportable status, but rather a subset of the application status. This is kept as a distinct identifier in the ReHabWorks case management system for case management purposes only. All references to extended evaluation were removed from applicable policy and a change request was submitted to remove references to extended evaluation within ReHabWorks.

Recommendation: Add WIOA language regarding “advance in competitive integrated employment” to training service-related areas of policy.

Response: The WIOA language was added throughout applicable policy.

Recommendation: With regard to training services, we recommend including the following to the areas listed: bachelor’s degree, master’s degrees and advanced degrees in the science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) areas, including medicine, law and business. As the intent of the policy change is to let counselors know that they can now help people to advance in employment, this change would indicate the level of help in advancement that is encouraged by the changes in WIOA.

Response: Statements consistent with the Council’s recommendations were added to applicable areas of policy, to emphasize advanced training for STEM occupations, and the medicine, law and business fields.

Recommendation: With regard to documenting the results of an IPE Joint Annual Review, we recommend providing more written guidance to counselors about when the review results indicate an IPE amendment is needed.

Response: Updates to applicable policy are in process to provide additional guidance to counselors regarding the Joint Annual Review, as recommended.

Recommendation: Develop and provide informational material to help consumers write their own IPE or seek assistance writing their own IPE, consistent with 34 CFR 361.45. It is recommended that information provided include: list of all required IPE components, explanation of agency guidelines and criteria for determining an eligible individual's financial commitments under an IPE, information on the availability of assistance in completing forms required as part of IPE development, any additional information that the consumer requests or is determined necessary, information on the right to appeal if a decision is made that the consumer does not agree with, and information regarding the Client Assistance Program.



Response: Vocational rehabilitation consumers are given brochures that address all of the components recommended, with the exception of specific language about consumers developing their own IPEs. Applicable policy was updated to include this information after discussion with all managers on an Area Manager teleconference.

Recommendation: We commented that the rates paid for the various types of transportation assistance be added to the policy manual for services for people with visual disabilities.

Response: Rates paid for transportation assistance were added to applicable policy, where the rates were not already included.

Recommendation: Include the WIOA-revised definition of Assistive Technology in applicable policy, replacing any outdated definitions

Response: In FY 2017, this recommendation and additional conforming changes will be made to ensure policy alignment with WIOA requirements.

Spotlight: **Statewide Job Fairs Connect Texans with Disabilities to Employers**

Vocational rehabilitation staff partnered with other state and federal agencies, businesses and organizations in their communities to hold job fairs and business symposia in communities across Texas in 2016.

These events help Texans with disabilities connect with hiring representatives from local businesses for competitive employment opportunities. Participating businesses and employers have included Lowe's, The Home Depot, Maximus, Old Navy, the City of Austin and more. Workshops on topics including dressing for your career, crafting an effective résumé and interviewing skills are also offered at many of these events.

In addition to being an opportunity to accept applications, interview and hire from a talented pool of job seekers, participating employers have opportunities to learn more about recruiting, hiring, retaining and accommodating employees with disabilities at many of these events.



Measures of Success

Consumer Satisfaction Survey

The following survey results describe satisfaction with vocational rehabilitation services provided by the former Texas Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services in SFY 2016. Surveys were completed by consumers with an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) whose cases were closed as either successful (employed) or unsuccessful (not employed) the month prior to the survey.

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

Consumer Satisfaction Survey Result: Other Disabilities

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

I was treated in a friendly, caring and respectful manner when I dealt with staff	94.6%
I had input in setting my employment goals.....	85.8%
I had input in planning the services I received.....	86.5%
I am satisfied with my counselor	92.6%
I am satisfied with my overall experience	91.3%

Consumer Satisfaction Survey Results: Visual Disabilities

Visual disabilities include blindness, significant visual impairments and deafblindness.

I have increased skills because of services I received	86.5%
My counselor listened to and considered my needs and concerns.....	90%
I was an active partner in making decisions.....	93.5%
I was actively involved in choosing my employment goals and services.....	91%
I received the services that my counselor and I planned	89.6%
I received my planned services within a reasonable amount of time	86.4%
The services I received helped me obtain or maintain my job	83.4%
My job is a good match for what I was looking for	84.9%

Statistics: Other Disabilities

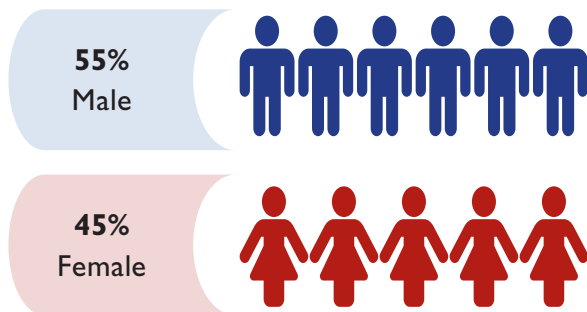
The following statistics describe vocational rehabilitation services for persons with general disabilities provided in SFY 2016 by the former Texas Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services. For age-related data, age reported at the start of the fiscal year was used.

Other 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.

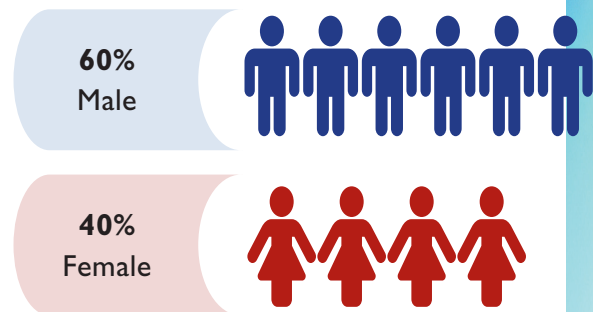
Total number served: 91,748

Total number served under age 23: 26,057

Percent Served by Gender—All Ages



Percent Served by Gender—Under Age 23



*Gender is unknown or unavailable for 35 consumers; missing for 20 consumers under 23

Percent Expenditure by Service Type

Category	All Ages	Under 23
Other Goods & Equipment	1%	0%
Post Acute Brain Injury	1%	0%
Maintenance & Transportation	3%	4%
Prosthetics & Orthotics	4%	1%
Job Placement Services	6%	6%
Assistive Technology	6%	1%
Other Services	6%	11%
Pre-Employment Transition Services	4%	14%
Medical Services	10%	2%
Supported Employment Services	9%	15%
Hearing Aids & Interpretive Services	14%	5%
Training	18%	34%
Diagnostic & Evaluation	17%	7%
Total	100%	100%

Disabilities Served

Primary Disability	Number - All Ages	Percent - All Ages	Number - Under Age 23	Percent - Under Age 23
All Other Impairments	246	0%	95	0%
Cardiac/Respiratory/Circulatory	1,963	2%	167	1%
Traumatic Brain Injury/Spinal Cord Injury	2,083	2%	347	1%
Unavailable	8,290	9%	1,917	7%
Substance Abuse	2,228	2%	98	0%
Other Chronic Diseases/Disorders	5,885	6%	357	1%
Deaf & Hard of Hearing	13,466	15%	1,897	7%
Mental/Emotional/Psychosocial	16,360	18%	2,885	11%
Neurological/Musculoskeletal/Orthopedic	18,964	21%	2,478	10%
Intellectual/Cognitive	22,263	24%	15,816	61%
TOTAL	91,748	100%	26,057	100%

Total successful closures: 13,829

Total successful closures under age 23: 2,318

Percent Served by Gender—All Ages

55%

Male



45%

Female



Percent Served by Gender—Under Age 23

65%

Male



35%

Female



Percent of Successful Closures by Occupation

Successful Closures by Occupation	Successful Closures All Ages	Successful Closures Under Age 23
All Other Occupations	0%	0%
Computer, Engineering & Science	2%	1%
Construction and Extraction	3%	2%
Installation, Maintenance & Repair	4%	4%
Management, Business & Financial	6%	1%
Production	5%	6%
Sales & Related	7%	8%
Healthcare Practitioners, Technical & Healthcare Support	7%	5%
Education, Legal, Community Service, Arts & Media	8%	2%
Transportation & Material Moving	10%	8%
Office & Administrative Support	23%	30%
Service	25%	33%
TOTAL	100%	100%

Success Story

Matt Berend Helps Texans With Disabilities Achieve Employment

Matt Berend is a unit program specialist with the state vocational rehabilitation program's Abilene office and a recent appointee to the Rehabilitation Council of Texas. In 2007, while working two jobs and studying to become a veterinarian, Matt had a bull riding accident. The accident resulted in quadriplegia, which is paralysis of the limbs.

Since his accident, Matt has made it his life's commitment to help Texans with disabilities obtain careers they love through vocational rehabilitation.

Matt took an important step toward achieving this goal at age 21, when he began receiving vocational rehabilitation services to prepare for his career. Matt and his vocational rehabilitation counselor worked together to determine what job would be a good fit for him based on his interests, skills and abilities after Matt determined he could no longer perform the job tasks of a veterinarian.

After completing vocational assessments, receiving guidance from his counselor and doing research into several different careers, Matt decided his goal was to become a vocational rehabilitation counselor.

Matt and his counselor discussed the education, training and certification requirements and determined that Matt would receive financial assistance to help pay for tuition, fees and required books and materials. He also received a power wheelchair and vehicle modification services to allow him to travel independently and assistive technologies, like dictation software, to help him successfully complete coursework.

With these services and supports in place, Matt obtained a bachelor's degree in social work from Tarleton State University in 2012, and then took on his first job as a social worker at two nursing homes. While working, Matt was also enrolled in the Master of Rehabilitation Counseling program at the Texas Tech University Health Science Center.

In May 2013, Matt obtained a job as a vocational rehabilitation counselor and no longer required financial assistance from the vocational rehabilitation program to continue his studies. The job offered competitive wages and a benefits package, including educational support.

Matt completed his master's degree and continued to find ways to hone his job skills, increase his expertise and take on new responsibilities with the goal of positively impacting the lives of other Texans with disabilities.

In 2015, he was appointed to the Council by the Texas governor. Matt represents the state vocational rehabilitation program on the Council, providing his unique perspective to Council discussions and activities. "I relate to the individuals we're serving in order to empower them so they can also become independent and reach their career goals as I did," he explained.

In 2016, Matt was promoted to a unit program specialist position with the state vocational rehabilitation program. In this role, he assists with unit operations and quality and compliance issues. He also has mentorship responsibilities and continues working directly with a small caseload of Texans receiving vocational rehabilitation services.

"If it wasn't for vocational rehabilitation services, I would not be where I am at today nor have the success I have had with my career," Matt said. "As an individual living with a disability going through the process and now working on the other side of the desk, I know how impactful these services can be in a person's life."



"As an individual living with a disability going through the process and now working on the other side of the desk, I know how impactful these services can be in a person's life."

Statistics: Visual Disabilities

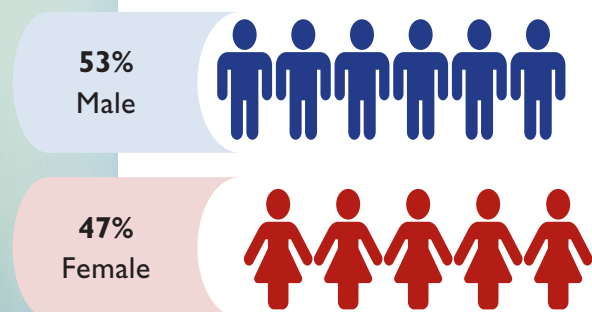
The following statistics describe vocational rehabilitation services for persons with visual disabilities provided in state fiscal year 2016 by the former Texas Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services. For age-related data, age reported at the start of the fiscal year was used.

Visual disabilities include blindness, significant visual impairments and deafblindness.

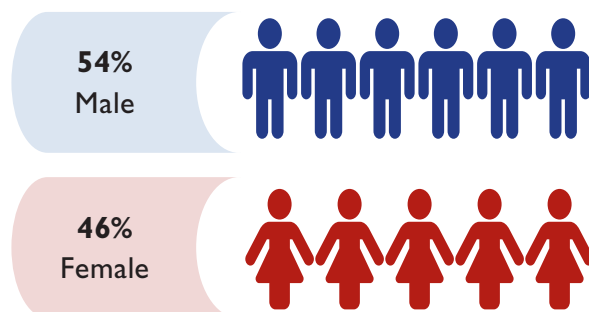
Total number served: 11,104

Total number served under age 23: 2,486

Percent Served by Gender—All Ages



Percent Served by Gender—Under Age 23



*Gender is unknown or unavailable for 1,346 consumers, two under age 23, the majority of whom have not completed an application

Percent Expenditure by Service Type

Service Category	All Ages	Under 23
Job Placement	1%	0%
Supported Employment	1%	1%
Eyeglasses, Lenses, Low Vision Devices, Orthotics/Prosthetics	4%	2%
Maintenance & Transportation	4%	3%
Diagnostic & Evaluation	2%	1%
All Other Goods & Services	8%	7%
Training (including Orientation & Mobility)	4%	2%
Assistive Technology, including related evaluation & training	19%	7%
Other Training	9%	13%
Pre-Employment Transition Services	19%	61%
Restoration Services	29%	3%
Total	100%	100%

Total successful closures: 1,441

**Percent Successful Closures by Gender—
All Ages**

52%
Male



48%
Female



**Percent Successful Closures by Gender—
Under Age 23**

60%
Male



40%
Female



Percent of Successful Closures by Occupation

Successful Closures by Occupation	Successful Closures, All Ages	Percent Successful Closures, All Ages	Successful Closures, Under Age 23	Percent Successful Closures, Under Age 23
All Other Occupations	23	2%	1	1%
Computer, Engineering & Science	32	2%	3	4%
Installation, Maintenance & Repair	40	3%	2	3%
Construction and Extraction	44	3%	2	3%
Transportation & Material Moving	63	4%	4	6%
Healthcare Practitioners, Technical & Healthcare Support	84	6%	1	1%
Sales & Related	103	7%	11	5%
Management, Business & Financial	113	8%	3	4%
Production	138	10%	5	7%
Education, Legal, Community Service, Arts & Media	167	12%	5	7%
Office & Administrative Support	193	13%	18	25%
Homemaker/Unpaid Family Worker	220	15%	5	7%
Service	221	15%	12	17%
TOTAL	1,441	100%	72	100%

Success Story

Rowdy Cogdell Opens Espresso and Tea Bar in Silverton



Rowdy Cogdell is 22 years old, blind and the proud owner of the Night Owl Espresso and Tea Bar. The Night Owl is a popular new place for residents of Silverton, Texas, to go to enjoy specialty coffees, teas, smoothies, frappes and desserts in a welcoming, rugged decor.

Rowdy started his journey toward opening the Night Owl at age 10. That is when he began receiving transition services from the designated state vocational rehabilitation agency to help him adjust to his disability and develop the skills needed to succeed as an adult.

Transition services include job exploration and counseling, work-based learning opportunities, counseling on education and training opportunities, workplace readiness training and more.

These services help Texas' large population of students with disabilities achieve highly-skilled, competitive jobs and contribute to Texas' growing business community. They are provided in partnership with the student's family, school and professionals from local businesses, education service centers and institutions of higher education.

With services, Rowdy learned how to independently navigate, complete chores and stay organized without vision. He also learned how to read Braille, a non-visual language system that uses raised dots, and was trained to use a screen reader and other assistive devices.

"When I began receiving transition services I had many, many other obstacles to overcome besides blindness," Rowdy explained. Rowdy found socializing difficult and struggled to make friends. "Social interactions with my teachers, classmates and people in general were very overwhelming."

Rowdy received training in how to orient himself to a speaker, appropriately initiate conversation and learned skills to develop and maintain social relationships. He got to practice these skills at Camp Villa, where he participated in recreational activities alongside other students with visual disabilities.

Through these experiences, Rowdy began feeling more comfortable engaging with others and began developing confidence in his abilities—both of which were important steps toward becoming a successful business owner.



“I feel like all of the help that I have received through my life from my family, my community and the transition services have helped me to accomplish my dreams.”

At age 15, Rowdy participated in his first work-based learning opportunity. He spent the summer at Texas Tech University living on campus and working at least 20 hours a week as part of Project SWEEP (Summer Work Experience and Empowerment Program).

“SWEEP gave me a taste of working in a real job where I made money, but also had a boss and expectations to perform my job,” said Rowdy. It was also one of Rowdy’s first experiences working with his counselor to figure out what assistive technologies, accommodations and supports would be required for him to perform job tasks.

Rowdy’s counselor helped him explore his career options, including owning his own business. Although he briefly considered a job in radio broadcasting, Rowdy ultimately decided he wanted to own a coffee shop.

Rowdy and his counselor worked together to ensure he had the skills and training to successfully operate his business. As part of this effort, Rowdy completed a proposal for self-employment and a feasibility worksheet to document his ability to meet business expenses.

Rowdy’s counselor then provided employment assistance services. She determined what assistive technology Rowdy would need to operate his business—a screen reader—and helped him purchase business equipment.

“I feel like all of the help that I have received through my life from my family, my community and the transition services have helped me to accomplish my dreams,” Rowdy said.

His accomplishments aren’t limited to the Night Owl either—Rowdy is also a new member of the Silverton volunteer fire department.

Membership and Meetings

Members



Martha Garber, M.Ed., LPC-S, LMFT

of Coppel is chair of the Council. Garber is director of applied research and development and adjunct faculty in the Department of Disability and Addictions Rehabilitation at the University of North Texas (UNT). At UNT, Garber directs Workplace Inclusion and Sustainable Employment. She is active in the professional and advocacy community serving as a board member of the North Texas Area Rehabilitation Association and a past president of the Texas Rehabilitation Association. She earned a bachelor's degree from Baylor University and a master's degree in counseling from the University of Louisiana at Monroe. She is also a licensed professional counselor supervisor and licensed marriage and family therapist.



Joyce Delores Taylor, PE, MA, MS of Houston is vice chair of the Council. Taylor is president and chief executive officer of J's Dynamic Transformation and is a member of the Texas Workforce Investment Council, Adult Education and Literacy Council, Texas Education Agency Academic Achievement Designation Council, American Psychological Association, Society of Women Engineers, National Management Association, Federation of Houston Professional Women, Society of Human Resource Management, Houston Association for Industrial and Organizational Psychologists, Texas Society of Professional Engineers and the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers. Taylor is also the past chair of the University of Houston-Clear Lake (UHCL) Alumni Association Executive Council. She earned master's degrees in criminology, industrial and organizational psychology, and women's studies from UHCL. She also earned bachelor's degrees in mathematics and electrical engineering from Wilberforce University and the University of Dayton and received an academic scholarship to study abroad.



Matt Berend of Abilene is a unit program specialist for Texas Workforce Solutions–Vocational Rehabilitation Services with the Texas Workforce Commission and a former vocational rehabilitation services recipient. Berend is a member of the Texas Rehabilitation Association and is an advocate for people with disabilities. He earned a bachelor's degree in social work from Tarleton State University and a master's degree in rehabilitation counseling from Texas Tech University Health Science Center. He is also a licensed social worker.



Neva Fairchild of Carrollton is a National Independent Living and Employment Specialist with the American Foundation for the Blind Center on Vision Loss in Dallas. Fairchild has served in several key roles with the Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (AER)—she is a past president and secretary of the Texas chapter and currently serves as an international board member, chair of the Division on Aging and has a dual appointment as secretary and treasurer of the Information Technology Division. Fairchild is also president of the Braille Revival League of Texas. She earned a bachelor's degree in rehabilitation science and a master's degree in rehabilitation counseling psychology from The University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center.



Jim Brocato of Beaumont is the Executive Director of RISE Center for Independent Living (CIL) and has over 25 years of experience advocating for people with disabilities through public policy, education, research and public service in partnership with healthcare, nonprofit and government organizations. Brocato serves as the CIL representative for the State Independent Living Council and is a member of Texas Centers for Independent Living, Texas Area Health Education Center East and the National Council on Independent Living. He earned a bachelor's degree in sociology and a master's degree in human services administration from St. Edward's University.



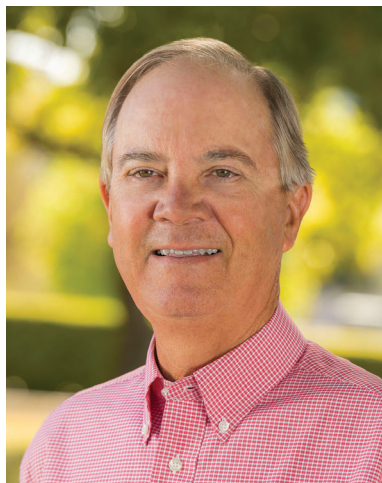
JoAnne Fluke of Lumberton is a volunteer with Partners Resource Network in Houston and an instructor for Zumba International Fitness. Fluke formerly served on the Ms. Wheelchair Kansas Board and is a past group leader for the Kansas Youth Leadership Forum. Fluke also worked at Camp MITIOG, a camp for children with Spina Bifida. She earned a bachelor's degree in religious studies from Baker University in Kansas.



Cheryl Fuller of Austin is an ex-officio member of the Council and serves as the director over Texas Workforce Solutions-Vocational Rehabilitation Services at the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC). Fuller has over 25 years of experience working in state and local government programs focused on helping Texans prepare for, gain and retain employment. Prior to transferring to TWC in September 2016, Fuller served three years as assistant commissioner of the Division for Rehabilitation Services at the Texas Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services (DARS). Fuller joined DARS in 2011 as director of the agency's Center for Learning Management after serving over 11 years as director of the Texas Workforce Investment Council in the Office of the Governor and holding previous positions with local employment and training programs. She earned a bachelor's degree in communications from Angelo State University.



Rene Gonzalez, Ph.D. of Alton is an associate professor for The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley's School of Rehabilitation Services and Counseling. Gonzalez has over 15 years of clinical experience in the field of rehabilitation counseling, including assisting veterans with mental health conditions and students with disabilities. Gonzalez is a member of the National Council on Rehabilitation Education and Learning Disabilities Association of America. He earned a doctoral degree in rehabilitation psychology from the University of Wisconsin-Madison.



Bruce H. Hooper of San Antonio is co-founder and co-director of American Blind Golf. Hooper is a World Blind Golf Champion and an eight-time United States National Blind Golf Champion. Hooper formerly served on the San Antonio Lighthouse for the Blind's Board of Directors and currently serves on the organization's Events and Program committees. Hooper has over 35 years of experience in golf industry sales and marketing and also served in the United States Air Force. Hooper was recently selected for the San Antonio Master Leadership Program and earned a bachelor's degree from Texas State University.



Casey D. Hertel of Abilene is a Community Integration Specialist/Relocations Follow-Up staff member for Disability In Action, where he formerly volunteered. Hertel is a past member of the Texas Association of Centers for Independent Living Consumer Advocacy Team and Statewide Independent Living Council Project Advisory Committee. He earned a medical assistant certification from the Southeastern Career Institute.



Paul Hunt of Austin is secretary of the Austin Council of the Blind, member of the Capital Metropolitan Transportation Authority Access Committee and provides contract training for the Integration Technology Group. Hunt, who is retired, worked 37 years for the Internal Revenue Service and is a former chair and member of the Capital Metropolitan Transportation Authority's Mobility Impaired Services Advisory Committee. He earned an associate's degree in liberal arts from Macomb County Community College in Michigan and is a certified adaptive technology trainer.



Troy Myree of Houston works for the Contemporary Services Corporation in the area of events. Myree formerly served in the United States Marine Corps and is a life member of the organization Paralyzed Veterans of America. Myree is also a member of the Family to Family Network and a board member of the Barbara Jordan Endeavors Corporation. He earned a bachelor's degree from the University of Houston-Downtown, a master's degree in social work from the University of Houston and a master's degree in healthcare administration from the University of Phoenix.



Susie May of Austin is a Texas Education Agency program specialist in the Division of Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Support. May has more than 30 years of experience in the field of special education and is a retired teacher from North East Independent School District in San Antonio. She earned a bachelor's degree in education from The University of Texas at San Antonio.



Mark Schroeder of Grand Prairie is an information technology security and solutions architect and associate professor at the University of Maryland University College. He earned a bachelor's degree in business administration from The University of Texas at Austin and a master's degree in business administration from Wayland Baptist University.



Karen Stanfill of Houston is an advocate supervisor for the Client Assistance Program (CAP) with Disability Rights Texas. Stanfill began her career in Goodwill Industries' Rehabilitation Department and worked for 15 years as a rehabilitation counselor. Stanfill is a member of the National Rehabilitation Association, the Texas Rehabilitation Association and the Houston Area Rehabilitation Association. She earned a bachelor's degree in rehabilitation counseling and business from Stephen F. Austin State University and is a certified rehabilitation counselor.



Crystal Stark of College Station is a vocational rehabilitation counselor with over a decade of experience. Stark served as chair of the Texas Rehab Action Network's Accessibility Committee, chair of the Mayor's Committee on People with Disabilities, committee chair for the Brazos Valley Center for Independent Living and was a member of the Masters of Rehabilitation Counseling Advisory Board at Texas Tech University Health Science Center. She earned a bachelor's degree in psychology from Angelo State University and a master's degree in rehabilitation counseling from Texas Tech University Health Science Center.



Joe Tims of Justin operates his own business. He is a past president and founding member of the Justin Lions Club, serves on the Justin Business Association Board of Directors and various other boards. He proudly served in the United States Air Force and Air Force Reserves.



Spotlight: **Become a Member**

If you are a person 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 Texas governor. 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 persons with disabilities, their families or authorized representatives. Business, industry and labor representatives, as well as those from the State Workforce Investment Board and Texas Education Agency, are also required.

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

2017 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.

2017 Quarterly Meeting Schedule

February 2-3, 2017

May 4-5, 2017

August 3-4, 2017

November 2-3, 2017

Additional meeting information and materials will be posted on the following web page as they become finalized at:

texasworkforce.org/agency/rehabilitation-council-texas#meetingScheduleAgendasMinutes.

Vocational Rehabilitation 2017 and Beyond

New Texas Workforce Commission Partnership

The Rehabilitation Council of Texas recently gained a new partner—the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC).

Legislation authorized during the 84th Texas Legislative Session transferred vocational rehabilitation services to TWC effective September 1, 2016. This legislation also abolished the Texas Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services (DARS), the former state vocational rehabilitation agency and Council partner.

The Council is confident that its new partnership with TWC will be a strong and productive one. This exciting opportunity to learn, work and evolve together with TWC will open doors to new possibilities for strengthening vocational rehabilitation services, as well as Texas' workforce and economy.

TWC's mission is to promote and support a workforce system that creates value and offers employers, individuals and communities the opportunity to achieve and sustain economic prosperity.

TWC is part of the Texas Workforce Solutions network, which is also comprised of 28 Local Workforce Development Boards and service-providing partners.

TWC and the Texas Workforce Solutions network have a long history of providing workforce training, education and support services to Texas job seekers. The network also coordinates with employers, economic development organizations and educators to develop a well-trained workforce that meets Texas' business needs.

With the transfer of vocational rehabilitation services to TWC under the new program name Texas Workforce Solutions-Vocational Rehabilitation Services and the integration of vocational rehabilitation staff into Workforce Solutions offices statewide, the network is poised to significantly increase employment opportunities for Texans with disabilities and better meet the needs of the state's diverse industries and employers.

To learn more, visit texasworkforce.org/news/departments-assistive-rehabilitative-services-program-transition

Spotlight: **Benefits of Vocational Rehabilitation Transfer**

The following benefits are expected with the transfer of vocational rehabilitation services to TWC:

- Texans with disabilities will go to one place to receive Workforce Solutions and vocational rehabilitation services when these staff colocate in shared offices by August 2018.
- Texans with disabilities will experience increased efficiency, resource sharing and purchasing power as vocational rehabilitation and Workforce Solutions staff begin to colocate and train as cross-functional teams.
- Texans with disabilities will gain access to an expanded network of employers across the state and a coordinated outreach campaign to additional employers.
- Texas employers will have access to more services, including vocational rehabilitation services to recruit, hire and retain employees with disabilities and customized services from local Boards such as workforce training programs, screening and referral, job fairs and labor market analytics.
- All six federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) funded programs will be operated by TWC, resulting in more coordinated planning and delivery of services to Texans, including youth and students with disabilities.



1.6 million job seekers received Workforce Solutions employment services in FY 2016.



89,135 employers received services from workforce boards in FY 2016.

Timeline



June 2015—

Governor Greg Abbott authorizes legislation to transfer the state's vocational rehabilitation services from the Texas Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services (DARS) to TWC and abolish DARS.



March 3, 2016—

Texas submits the WIOA State Plan to the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Labor. This is a four-year plan for achieving the state's workforce goals.



Sept. 1, 2016—

Vocational rehabilitation services transfer from DARS to TWC under a new program name: Texas Workforce Solutions-Vocational Rehabilitation Services.



By Oct. 1, 2017—

TWC integrates vocational rehabilitation for individuals with vision-related disabilities and individuals with general disabilities into a single program.



By Aug. 31, 2018—

TWC integrates its vocational rehabilitation staff into the state's local workforce development boards and Workforce Solutions offices to the extent possible



TEXAS WORKFORCE COMMISSION

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

Equal Opportunity Employer/Program

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