

# VCU-RRTC on Employment of People with Physical Disabilities

Research Study #1: Identifying What People with Physical Disabilities Want and Need to Know About Employment: A Mixed Methods Research Study



## EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES FOR TRANSITION-AGE YOUTH WITH PHYSICAL DISABILITIES: VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION RSA 911 CLOSURE DATA FY 2011, 2012, & 2013

### Introduction

Transition-age youth with mobility/dexterity impairments face a number of barriers in achieving employment outcomes as they exit the school system. Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) services through the use of the federal and state VR program are a primary resource for these youth to obtain the needed supports that lead to successful competitive employment outcomes. This brief uses data from the RSA-911 Closure Report<sup>1</sup> for federal fiscal years 2011, 2012, and 2013 to identify general demographics, services received, receipt of SSI/SDI, and reasons for case closure for transition-age youth with mobility/dexterity impairments. The youth included in this data were age 24 or younger at the time of application for VR services.

### Demographic Information for FY 2011, 2012, and 2013

During 2011, 2012, and 2013, VR agencies closed 28,107 cases for individuals with mobility/dexterity impairment. The average age at application was 19.7 years old. In each year, slightly more than half of the cases closed were for males or approximately 56.5%. The majority of the individuals were white/Caucasian (80.3% in FY 2011, 79.7% in FY 2012, and 79.1% in FY 2013). The next largest racial/ethnic group was African Americans: 16.9% in FY 2011, 17.4% in FY 2012, and 18.2% in FY 2013. Very few cases were closed for individuals reported as Native American, Asian, or Pacific Islander during this time period. About 11% of the sample for each of the three years identified as Hispanic or Latino. (See Table 1 on the following page.)

<sup>1</sup>Detail on the RSA 911 Closure Report format for the Fiscal Years covered by this Research Brief can be viewed at <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/speced/guid/rsa/pd/2012/pd-12-05.pdf>



**Table 1: Demographics of Transition-age Youth with Mobility/Dexterity Impairments**

Demographic Data Categories	FY 2011	FY 2012	FY 2013
Number of Applicants Closed in FY	9,643	9,173	9,291
Male	56.7%	57.3%	55.5%
Female	43.3%	42.7%	44.5%
White/Caucasian	80.3%	79.7%	79.1%
African American	16.9%	17.4%	18.2%
Native American	2.2%	2.1%	2.0%
Asian	1.8%	1.9%	2.2%
Pacific Islander	0.5%	0.6%	0.7%
Hispanic or Latino	10.6%	10.8%	10.9%
Mean Age at Application	19.7	19.7	19.6
Standard Deviation: Age at Application	2.4	2.4	2.4

## Status of Participants at Point of Closure by VR

When reviewing this brief, the reader needs to know that each VR agency submits to the Federal Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) a RSA 911 Closure Report. Each 911 Report contains information on individuals who terminated VR services during an identified Fiscal Year. Termination of VR Services is reported as one of four Case Closure codes by a VR agency to include the following:

- **Status 08:** An individual found not eligible for services.
- **Status 30:** Unsuccessful, case closed after eligibility determination but before implementing an IPE.
- **Status 28:** Unsuccessful, case closed after implementing an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) without achieving an employment outcome.
- **Status 26:** Successful rehabilitation, employment outcome achieved.

**Table 2: Summary of Exit Categories of VR Case Closures**

Reasons for Case Closure	FY 2011	FY 2012	FY 2013
Number of Case Closures in FY (All Closure Categories)	9,643	9,173	9,291
Exited as an applicant	8.5%	8.3%	7.0%
Exited during or after a trial work experience	1.0%	1.0%	1.2%
Exited from an order of selection waiting list	0.6%	1.3%	1.5%
Exited without an employment outcome, after eligibility, but before an IPE was signed	24.2%	23.9%	23.1%
Exited without an employment outcome, after a signed IPE but before receiving services	2.54%	2.5%	2.5%
Exited without an employment outcome, after signing an IPE and receiving services (Status 28)	33.4%	31.4%	34.4%
Successfully exited with an employment outcome (Status 26)	29.0%	31.6%	30.4%

The majority of participants (approximately 63.7%) with mobility/dexterity impairments whose cases were closed in FYs 2011-2013 were closed after a signed IPE was implemented. This includes individuals who exited without an employment outcome (Status 28) and those who exited with an employment outcome (Status 26). In FY 2011, 29.0% of the VR case closures were for individuals whose cases were closed in Status 26. In FY 2012, 31.6% were closed in Status 26, and 30.4% were closed in Status 26 in FY 2013. These individuals were considered a successful rehabilitation by VR agencies. In other words, approximately 3 out of 10 transition-age youth with a primary disability of mobility/dexterity impairment exited the VR system with an employment outcome consistent with their IPE during this period. Other reasons for case closures and the corresponding percentages are in the table on the previous page.

The Table 3 presents information on the rehabilitation rate for transition-age youth with mobility/dexterity impairments for 2011, 2012, and 2013. The RSA calculates a “rehabilitation rate” to measure outcome performance for VR agencies. The rehabilitation rate is calculated by dividing the total number of Status 26 closures (individuals closed with an employment outcome) by the sum total of the Status 26 and Status 28 closures (individuals closed without an employment outcome after signing an IPE). The rehabilitation rate for transition-age youth with a primary disability of mobility/dexterity impairment was 47.2% in FY 2011; in FY 2012, 50.1%; and FY 2013, 46.9%.

**Table 3: Status at Case Closure for Participants who had an IPE Implemented**

Status at Case Closure for Transition-age Youth with Mobility/Dexterity Impairments	FY 2011	FY 2012	FY 2013
Exited without an employment outcome, after signing an IPE and receiving services (Status 28)	3,220	2,880	3,196
Successfully exited with an employment outcome (Status 26)	2,883	2,899	2,824
Rehabilitation rate (Status 26 divided by the sum of Status 26+28)	47.2%	50.1%	46.9%

## Demographic Information on Transition-age Youth with Mobility/Dexterity Impairments Closed in Employment (Status 26)

The percentages of males and females who achieved an employment outcome were consistent all three years. In addition, the majority of the individuals whose cases were closed in Status 26 during this time were white/Caucasian. Interestingly, the percentages of African American and Hispanic or Latino who achieved employment outcomes were lower each year in the study period than the percent for that race/ethnicity at application. (See Table 4)

**Table 4: Demographic Information for VR Transition-age Participants with Mobility/Dexterity Impairments Closed in Status 26**

Demographic Data Categories	FY 2011	FY 2012	FY 2013
Number of Case Closures in FY Successfully Exited with an Employment Outcome (Status 26)	2,883	2,899	2,824
Male	54.1%	57.6%	55.7%
Female	45.9%	42.4%	44.3%
White/Caucasian	85.8%	83.8%	84.2%
African American	12.0%	13.6%	13.6%
Native American	1.8%	1.5%	1.3%
Asian	1.7%	2.2%	2.0%
Pacific Islander	0.5%	0.3%	0.7%
Hispanic or Latino	8.7%	8.5%	9.0%

## Comparison of Services for Participants Closed in Status 26 or 2

Approximately two-thirds of transition-age youth with mobility/dexterity impairments whose cases were closed with an employment outcome received “Assessment” and/or “VR Counseling and Guidance” services. Slightly less than half, received “College or University Training,” with approximately 44% of those closed with an employment outcome having earned a post-secondary degree (14.5% Associate degree; 24.5% Bachelor degree; and 5% Master degree) prior to VR case closure. Close to 40% of clients whose cases were closed with an employment outcome received “Job Placement Assistance” and/or “Diagnosis and Treatment” services. “Transportation,” “Job Search Assistance,” “Information and Referral,” and “Maintenance” were the next most frequently received services. “On-the-Job Supports” were received by approximately 20%, while “Supported Employment” services were received by less than 10% across all three years. A primary difference between “On-the-Job Supports” and “Supported Employment” services is that supported employment would include the extended on-going support component that would continue after VR case closure.

The frequency of receipt of certain services did vary noticeably between those who achieved an employment outcome when compared to services received by participants closed in Status 28. For example, a range of 48% to 49.5% of individuals who achieved an employment outcome received “College or University Training,” compared to 35.7% to 36.7% of those who did not achieve an employment outcome. The same pattern occurred for “Assessment,” “Counseling and Guidance,” “Diagnosis and Treatment,” “Transportation,” and “Job Placement Assistance.” “Supported Employment” is one service where slightly higher percentages of those who did not achieve an employment outcome (a range of 11% to 11.7%) received

**Table 5: Services Received by Participants Closed Successfully in Status 26**

VR Services Received	FY 2011	FY 2012	FY 2013
Number of Case Closures in FY with an Employment Outcome (Status 26)	2,883	2,889	2,824
Average Length of Time from Application to Closure in Status 26	4.2 years	4.4 years	4.0 years
VR Counseling and Guidance	69.8%	69.3%	67.6%
Assessment	68.7%	65.7%	64.3%
College or University Training	48.3%	49.59%	48.0%
Job Placement Assistance	40.1%	38.8%	41.8%
Diagnosis and Treatment	38.3%	40.0%	36.5%
Other Services	33.3%	33.3%	33.6%
Transportation	31.2%	31.2%	31.5%
Job Search Assistance	28.1%	28.7%	30.0%
Information and Referral	21.5%	21.1%	24.2%
Maintenance	21.2%	21.7%	20.4%
Rehabilitation Technology	19.1%	29.7%	19.7%
On-the-Job Supports	18.5%	21.2%	21.4%
Job Readiness Training	13.8%	14.0%	13.3%
Misc. Training	13.2%	13.9%	13.5%
Occupational/Vocational Training	11.7%	12.7%	11.6%
Supported Employment	7.6%	9.0%	10.1%
On-the-Job Training	4.2%	5.1%	3.9%
Personal Attendant	2.8%	2.9%	4.1%
Technical Assistance	1.9%	1.3%	1.5%
Disability Related Augmentative Training	1.5%	1.6%	1.1%

the service compared to those who did achieve an employment outcome (7.6% to 10.1%). Conversely, “On-the-Job Supports” for those who did not receive an employment outcome (8.5% to 10.8%) was approximately 50% less than those who achieved an employment outcome (20%). A range of 19.1% to 29.7% of those with an employment outcome received “Rehabilitation Technology” services compared to a range of 16.9% to 18.0% for those closed without an employment outcome. “Rehabilitation Technology” services include rehabilitation engineering, assistance technology devices, and assistive technology services.

## Employment Outcomes for Individuals Closed in Status 26

The Table 6 presents information on number of hours worked per week, as well as weekly and hourly earnings for transition-age youth with mobility/dexterity impairments who terminated VR services with an employment outcome. The average number of hours worked per week was consistent across the three years: 30.6 hours during FY 2011, 30.7 hours in 2012, and 30.4 hours in 2013. Weekly earnings averaged \$375.96 across the three fiscal years and average hourly earnings were approximately \$12.30.

In comparing the percentage of participants closed with an employment outcome who worked full-time (35 or more hours per week) versus part-time employment (less than 35 hours per week), a slightly higher percentage of the individuals closed in Status 26 during this time worked full-time. Full-time employment outcomes were 52.8% in FY 2011, 51.2% in FY 2012, and 54.5% in FY 2013. The remaining employed individuals worked part-time.

**Table 6: Earnings and Hours of Employment for Individuals Closed Successfully in Status 26**

Employment Outcomes	FY 2011	FY 2012	FY 2013
Number of Case Closures in FY with an Employment Outcome (Status 26)	2,883	2,899	2,824
Average Hours Worked per Week	30.6	30.7	30.4
Average Weekly Earnings	\$380.08	\$368.02	\$379.78
Average Hourly Earnings	\$12.42	\$11.99	\$12.49

## State VR Agencies and Employment Outcome

Nationally, the percentage of transition-age youth with mobility/dexterity impairments closed with an employment outcome was 29% in FY 2011, 31.4% in FY 2012, and 30.4% in FY 2013. The table on the following page presents the five state VR agencies that had the highest percentage of individuals closed in employment for FYs 2011-2013, ranging from states with the highest success rate to the lowest. Iowa VR had the highest outcome rate in FY 2011 (51.0%) and the second highest rate in both FY 2012 (45.8%) and FY 2013 (46.8%). Vermont VR had the top overall rate for one year (55.6% in FY 2013).

**Table 7: Five Most Successful States: Percent of all Closures and Number of Transition-age Youth with Mobility/Dexterity Impairments Closed Successfully in Employment**

State	FY 2011	State	FY 2012	State	FY 2013
All States	n=2,883 29.9%	All States	n=2,880 31.6%	All States	n=2,824 30.4%
Iowa	n=145 51.0%	Nebraska	n=64 46.9%	Vermont	n=36 55.6%
Utah	n=164 48.8%	Iowa	n=131 45.85%	Iowa	n=124 46.8%
Alabama	n=208 48.1%	Arkansas	n=310 44.2%	Arkansas	n=353 46.2%
West Virginia	n=179 43.0%	Delaware	n=25 44.0%	Utah	n=133 45.1%
Nebraska	n=68 42.6%	West Virginia	n=217 42.4%	Minnesota	n=125 42.4%

## Discussion

Research indicates that youth with disabilities need assistance in advocating for themselves in the workplace and need help with learning how to ask for accommodations. Many youth come from experiences where supports are frequently provided by their school system and/or by parents and guardians. They may find it difficult to know what supports they will need in the workplace and how to ask for these supports. Youth transitioning from school also may worry about being treated differently than their co-workers, yet they cannot receive accommodations without disclosing (Lindsay et al., 2015). In seeking to improve the employment outcome rates for transition-age youth with mobility/dexterity impairments, VR programs and counselors need to address the inherent challenges youth with disabilities face in areas such as self-advocacy and disclosure.

To increase the successful employment outcome rates for minority populations, VR counselors should recognize that cultural diversity may complicate access and response to services. For example, communication between the VR counselor and a VR participant from a minority ethnic population might be inhibited by variations in diction, speech patterns, vocabulary, and cultural experiences (Amezcuca, 2014). VR counselors should strive to provide culturally and linguistically responsive services to help overcome the disadvantages often faced by minority youth with disabilities.

Overall, more transition-age youth with a mobility/dexterity impairments were closed by VR without an employment after an IPE was implemented than those who were closed with an employment outcome. In comparison, the national rehabilitation rate for all individuals closed by VR agencies after an IPE was implemented was 55.4% in FY 2012 and 58.5% in FY 2013 (RSA, 2016). VR agencies and counselors need to focus attention on strategies that hold the most promise for improving employment outcome rates among transition-age youth with mobility/dexterity impairment.

It is apparent from the age and educational level indicators of the study sample at application that a minority of students and youth in this population applied for VR services while still participating in a secondary level program. The average age at application for VR services for the study sample was 19.7.

Approximately 60% of applicants had completed their secondary level education at time of application. It is clear that VR programs need to focus on diversifying and expanding transition oriented vocational rehabilitation services to a younger group of secondary level students and youth with a primary disability of mobility/dexterity impairment.

The priorities, funding and service guidelines established in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) are a timely resource for VR agencies in diversifying and expanding transition services. WIOA sets a clear goal that youth with disabilities will obtain integrated competitive employment or postsecondary education as a transition outcome. Research has demonstrated that vocational activities, including community work experiences while in secondary education, is a primary predictor of successful employment outcomes individuals with disabilities (Lindstrom et al., 2013; Shandra & Hogan, 2008; Wehman, Sima, et al., 2015). WIOA builds on this research by emphasizing “pre-employment transition services.” For example, 15% of state Title I VR Funds must be used for “pre-employment transition services” for in-school youth. These services include:

- job exploration counseling,
- work based learning experiences,
- counseling on post-secondary opportunities,
- workplace readiness training, and
- training on self-advocacy.

Additional specified activities for local VR area offices, based on availability of funds, include:

- attending Individual Education Plan (IEP) meetings for Special Education Students with IEPs;
- working with schools to ensure provisions of pre-employment transition services;
- when invited, attending person-centered planning meetings; and
- working with Workforce Boards, One Stop Career Centers, and employers to develop employment opportunities.

These youth oriented revisions to vocational rehabilitation move potential initiation of VR involvement to an earlier age. WIOA extends this involvement to as young as 14 years old, strengthening vocational rehabilitation and school partnership opportunities. WIOA has also expanded the definition of supported employment to include customized employment, thus expanding the employment focused tools available to VR counselors in working with individuals with significant and the most significant disabilities. The goals and service requirements of WIOA, particularly in the area of pre-vocational services, provide VR agencies the opportunity to initiate services to younger and more diverse population of transition-age youth with a primary mobility/dexterity impairment.

There are a number of state VR agencies identified in this study whose success rate at achieving employment outcomes in close to and at times above 50% of applicants for VR services who are transition-age youth with a mobility/dexterity impairment. In comparison, the national average success rate of is approximately 30%. Identifying the specific reasons for these higher success rates was beyond the scope of this study. However, these higher success rates point clearly to the ability of VR participants to achieve employment success and that the current 30% national employment outcome rate for VR participants substantially understates the employment potential of this population. State VR agencies in Iowa, Vermont, Arkansas, Nebraska, and West Virginia can provide valuable information on VR service profiles with

demonstrated effectiveness in providing VR services and supports leading to employment outcomes for transition-age youth with mobility/dexterity.

In summary, the information gained from this study can serve as a baseline for research and demonstration efforts focused on measuring progress in the coming years in VR efforts to support transition-age youth with a primary disability of mobility/dexterity impairment in achieving post-secondary and employment outcomes consistent with their goals and interests. In recent years, the primary population from this target group benefiting from VR services in terms of achieving an employment outcome was individuals who applied for VR services after completion of their secondary program. Consistent with the goals of the Workforce Innovations and Opportunities Act, VR agencies need to aggressively reach out to a younger secondary-age population while working closely with secondary and post-secondary level programs and employers to assist a more diverse population of transition-age youth enter and benefit from VR services.

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