

NORTH CAROLINA
**State
Rehabilitation
Council**

2020 REPORT



MISSION OF THE COUNCIL

To enhance the employment, independent living and equality of individuals with disabilities in the state of North Carolina.

PURPOSE OF THE COUNCIL

- **To advise and work in partnership with the NC Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services.**
- **To assist the division in accomplishing its mission to promote employment and independence for people with disabilities through customer partnerships and community leadership.**
- **To provide guidance, input and recommendations relative to the development and expansion of vocational rehabilitation services and programs in an effort to maximize employment opportunities and independence for individuals with disabilities.**
- **To advocate for legislation that supports individuals with disabilities in making successful transitions into the workforce and the community.**
- **To provide customers and stakeholders of vocational rehabilitation services with a formal mechanism to influence policy and the direction of the division at the highest administrative level of the state.**

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2020 HIGHLIGHTS



DVRS Employment Services helped **3,847 individuals** with disabilities achieve **competitive, integrated employment**



DVRS Employment average hourly wage reached **\$10.94** and **28** average hours worked per week



34% of DVRS' successful employment outcomes were achieved by **transition-age youth**



The North Carolina Independent Living Rehabilitation Program (NCILRP) helped **1,089 North Carolinians** achieve their goals for independence



The North Carolina Assistive Technology Program (NCATP) made **769 short-term device loans** and made contact with **10,207 people** through outreach efforts



The North Carolina Client Assistance Program (NCCAP) assisted **1,099 clients** and provided mediation, negotiation and advocacy in **75 cases**

CHAIR'S MESSAGE



John Marens, Chair
North Carolina State
Rehabilitation Council

Well, what a year it has been! Who would have ever thought we would be facing the kind of disruption to our daily lives that we have faced for almost a year now? In our role as the State Rehabilitation Council to help the agency look at its goals and assess the effectiveness of its services in reaching those goals, we have seen unprecedented challenges to providing services to people with disabilities. When the pandemic hit, we were happy to see the agency move swiftly to assist staff to work from home, providing laptops and necessary equipment to telework to continue to provide services. It was and is a difficult challenge to assist consumers while protecting everyone's safety. Community Rehabilitation Programs (CRP's) and other providers have collaborated to find strategies to continue their good work. We know it's not perfect; challenges continue to present themselves.

We continue to passionately support the overall goal of the public rehabilitation programs, which is to assist individuals with disabling conditions to become employed and independent. We look at report data and consumer satisfaction surveys. We have seen one unexpected blessing in all this. As I hope you remember, the SRC sponsors two public forums per year, during which we provide consumers and families across the State the opportunity to share their experience, positive or negative, with our Council. This year, because we were forced to go virtual, we experienced the highest public participation we have ever seen, with over 100 participants, over four times what we usually experience. Because of this, the Council has decided that all future Public Forums should have a virtual component. Being Chair of the SRC continues to be an honor and a source of great satisfaction, and more so because we are an active council that asks thoughtful questions and offers relevant feedback. Change is constant, and more changes and challenges await us. I am confident that the SRC will continue to hold the VR agency accountable and support it in any way possible.



OBJECTIVES

Consulting with the state's Workforce Development Board to:

1

- review, analyze and advise the Designated State Agency (DSA) regarding the performance of the Designated State Unit (DSU), particularly with responsibilities related to eligibility (including order of selection);
 - extend effectiveness of the services and functions performed by state agencies that affect the ability of individuals with disabilities in achieving outcomes under this Title.
-

Partnering with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (DSU) to:

2

- develop, review and agree to state goals in accordance with Section 101(a) (15) (C);
 - evaluate the effectiveness of the vocational rehabilitation program; and
 - submit reports of progress to the Commissioner of the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) of the U.S. Department of Education in accordance with Section 101(a) (15) (E).
-

Advising the NC Department of Health and Human Services (DSA) and the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (DSU) regarding:

3

- authorized activities to be carried out under this Title and
 - preparation assistance of the State Plan, amendments to the Plan, applications, reports, needs, assessments and evaluations required by this Title.
-

Conducting reviews and analysis of the effectiveness of consumer satisfaction of:

4

- the functions of the NC Department of Health and Human Services provided by the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services and other public and private entities responsible for providing services to individuals with disabilities; and
- the employment outcomes achieved by eligible individuals receiving services, including the availability of health and other employment benefits in connection with such employment outcomes.



OBJECTIVES

5

Preparing and submitting an annual report to the Governor and the Commissioner of RSA on the status of the vocational rehabilitation programs operating within the state and to make this report available to the public.

6

Avoiding duplication of efforts and enhancing the number of individuals receiving services

Coordinating with the other councils within the state, participation in:

- the Statewide Independent Living Council;
 - the advisory panel established under Section 612(a) (21) of the Individuals with Disabilities Act Amendments of 1997;
 - the state Council on Developmental Disabilities;
 - the state Mental Health Planning Council;
 - the state Workforce Investment Board;
 - and other public and private organizations, groups and functions such as the Council of State Administrators for Vocational Rehabilitation, the National Rehabilitation Association, and the N.C. Rehabilitation Association.
-

8

Providing coordination to establish effective working relationships between the NC Department of Health and Human Services and the Statewide Independent Living Council and the Centers for Independent Living in the state.

9

Performing other functions consistent with the purposes of the council and comparable to other functions performed by the council.



STRATEGIC PLAN 2020-2022

The Strategic Plan has three strategies with sub-strategies that provide guidance when creating the SRC quarterly meeting agenda and establishing committee goals. The SRC mission to the commitment of these goals was accomplished for the period ending in calendar year 2020.

1

Increase marketing and outreach to individuals with disabilities, employers, and potential partners, including colleges and universities

- a. Develop proposal for outreach, including leveraging social media and sharing success stories
- b. Identify strategies that can be achieved within the timeframe of the strategic plan
- c. Promote and/or implement the outreach strategies identified by the SRC

2

Honor people's life choices by assuring that the Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) goals and service provision are consumer-driven/consumer-focused

- a. Review how VR is measuring casework quality and recommend new measures as the SRC finds appropriate
- b. Identify measures of consumer satisfaction with their involvement in their IPE to establish baseline data
- c. Monitor and evaluate performance on consumer satisfaction with their involvement in their IPE

3

Facilitate the development of the VR program's capacity to improve service delivery capacity and staff and leadership training

- a. Evaluate continuously the VR program's service delivery capacity and staff and leadership training
- b. Review available documents, data, and dialogue with division staff
- c. Offer input and make recommendations for improvement



COMMUNITY OUTREACH

The Council's goal is to have greater impact on its mandates in the areas of community outreach, advocacy and SRC member development. To accomplish its goal, the Council designates SRC members as representatives to seven liaison groups, as well as other interest groups.

LIAISON GROUPS

Council on Education Services for Exceptional Children

NC Mental Health Planning and Advisory Council

NC Substance Use Disorder Federation

NC Council on Developmental Disabilities

NC Statewide Independent Living Council

NC WORKS Commission

Commission for Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities,
and Substance Abuse

ACTIONS

1

Identifying candidates who can effectively liaise with the seven liaison groups. Involvement is a critical opportunity to partner with key stakeholders and provides strategic paths for community outreach, advocacy, and member development.

2

Ongoing exchange of information among the different stakeholder groups has helped to educate members of the advocacy efforts within each sector.

3

Celebrations and conferences enabled remote participation from a broad audience for the ADA 30th Anniversary, first year of Employment First in NC and VR's 100th Year Celebration.



COMMITTEES



Executive Committee

Acts on behalf of the council and is consistent with its purpose as outlined in its bylaws, being responsible for compiling the council's response to the Unified State Plan and triennial Comprehensive Needs Assessment, preparing the annual report, establishing meeting agendas, and setting the general direction of the council and its committees.

ACTIONS

1. To expand SRC participation in the development and implementation of the Unified State Plan, the council's Executive Committee addresses state plan development, implementation, and progress toward plan goals and SRC goals within the "Goals, Priorities and Strategies" section of the plan during meetings with the division director. At each quarterly meeting, the Executive Committee, along with the division's Planning and Evaluation Section, reports on the Unified State Plan to the full council for their input and approval.
2. As a result of COVID-19, the committee met via videoconferencing platforms in the spring of 2020. Members received VR performance updates and were notified on the status of the Unified State Plan. This was the second cycle with the Workforce Development workgroups and division directors reviewing the contents and initial performance targets. The plan was submitted for RSA's review with minor adjustments.
3. RSA conducted a monitoring visit in July/August of 2018, which resulted in six findings. During the time between the visit and the receipt of the monitoring report, most of these items were resolved. The Corrective Action Plan (CAP) updates were related to eligibility timeliness; additional trainings, which were largely due to the challenges of vacancies and keeping up with multiple caseloads; webinars are now available and also working on modules; the IPE was not always completed within 90 days, with extensions to be agreed upon; and financial findings that are being effectively addressed and reported on a quarterly basis through the CAP.

4. As with many organizations, DVRS adjusted to new modes of operation during the onset of COVID-19. When first working from home, staff found themselves without adequate tools to carry out their work. Those in more rural and remote parts of our state often lacked reliable, hi-speed internet coverage. Staff who relied on desktop computers in the office needed access to equipment that suited a remote setting. In response, the division licensed a cloud-based software tool, Cisco Jabber, that facilitated secure telephonic communications with clients, as well as software to support virtual meetings. Manufacturing and supply issues led to an initial shortage of WiFi hotspots and laptops for staff and clients, but the division distributed equipment as quickly as possible to those in need.
5. DVRS expedited purchase of DocuSign to facilitate client signatures on vital documents and internal approvals of purchases.
6. Exterior work, such as ramp installations and other external accessibility improvements to homes, considered low-risk, was allowed to proceed, while interior work was postponed for clients at high risk unless, it was deemed with written consent of the client.
7. New policies and procedures were implemented in response to COVID-19, with critical items prioritized. For example, clients who needed to visit the office in person were scheduled to maintain strict safety and hygiene protocols.
8. DVRS will replace its current electronic case management system (CMS) with a cloud-based CMS, with a targeted go-live date of May 2022. Developing a new case management system required intensive collaboration between DVRS and the Division of Services for the Blind (DSB), ongoing gap analysis and joint application design to support business needs securely. Planning and implementation work has continued remotely in hopes of a seamless transition between the two systems.
9. Routine audits were conducted and issues of controls and allowable expenditures were reviewed. New counselors attended Casework Orientation and Skills Training (COAST) events to learn about division policies and procedures. DVRS staff are evaluated annually on their performance via the NC Value Individual Performance (VIP). The performance cycle was completed and the new one began as of July 1, 2020.
10. Committee members voted to postpone their standard practice of providing return on investment information to the NC General Assembly due to the pressing concerns with the pandemic. There was a drop in the number of applications and referrals were down due to the pandemic causing a ripple effect down the line for several months. Some offices were offsetting their goals in a month-to-month comparison. Governor Roy Cooper signed [Executive Order No. 158](#) to increase employment opportunities for people with criminal records by removing criminal history questions from the application for state employment and prohibiting inquiries into an applicant's criminal history during the initial stages of the hiring process.

11. The Executive Committee advocates for strong leadership roles on the council, and carefully reviews the membership terms. New members are encouraged to serve on designated committees to provide a more balanced representation.
12. The Executive Committee produced print and a web-based annual report posted to the public website. The report summarizes the work of the council and highlights essential components of its mission, such as consumer satisfaction.



Consumer Input and Public Outreach Committee

Reviews, analyzes and makes recommendations to the council regarding the effectiveness of vocational rehabilitation services delivered by the division and other public and private agencies in the state.

ACTIONS

1. Reviewed the current methods and strategies for monitoring consumer input and public outreach. The contract with North Carolina State University permits 1,600+ telephone surveys of agency consumers to be conducted. The feedback has provided improved data results to track trends and themes.
2. In July, the committee began meeting on a weekly basis in addition to the regular quarterly meetings to focus on planning for a virtual forum for December 2020, which was the first time the council would be holding a forum using this venue.
3. The group discussed advertising strategies and how the council could attract more participants using the virtual platform. The plan included using a Facebook Boost and to post details of the forum on the department's social media sites; email outreach to community stakeholder groups with subsequent requests to post on their social media sites and mailing of 1,500 flyers to consumers in the general Raleigh service area.
4. NC State University's McKimmon Center provided technical support both in the registration process and in hosting the forum. The focus was to make it a free-flowing event, as if it were held in person and using a slide presentation to educate consumers about the SRC and its role in ensuring individuals receive the services they need to become successful and live independently.



Policy and Rules Review Committee

Reviews and makes recommendations relating to division policies and procedures that affect the public, and that are subject to public rule-making hearings under the state's Administrative Procedures Act and required for compliance with the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA).

ACTIONS

- Changes were performed to the following DVRS policy topics:

Work Adjustment Training Policy Draft and Transition Plan	Background Checks Policy
Prior Approval Requirements	Rehabilitation Counselor Proficiency Process
Memorandum of Agreement with Disability Rights NC	Cash Management Policies
Hurricane Dorian Shelter Work	Consent for In-Person or In-Home Services During Health Emergency
NC Disability Determination Services Records Sharing Procedures	Remote Services via Videoconferencing
Pre-Employment Transition Services	In-Home In-Person Service Delivery
Residential Modifications	Purchasing Reusable Face Coverings
National Voter Registration Act (NVRA) Forms and Guidance	Benefits Counseling Fee for Service
Extended Services	Section 1-2: Records Management
- DVRS policy staff proactively adapted and updated policies, procedures and guidance for delivery of ongoing services to clients during the pandemic.
- Application of security measures for remote services during videoconferences that would allow staff and service providers to continue services and employ technologies to maintain contact with clients.
- To minimize risks to consumers at the onset of the pandemic, home modifications were restricted to exterior services for ramps. Interior modifications were carefully considered on a case-by-case basis factoring risk analysis, approved client's consent and protective measures. Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) was provided to clients during interior modifications and office environment services.



CONSUMERS SURVEY

The consumer satisfaction survey is mandated by the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended (the Act), which states that the SRC shall conduct a review and analyze the effectiveness of client satisfaction with:

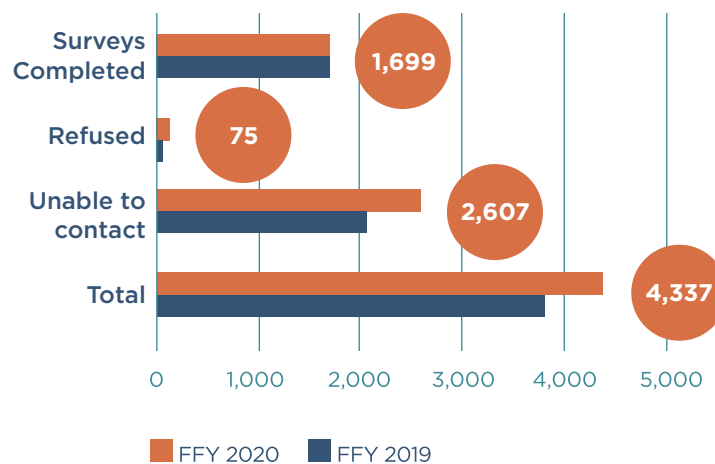
- The functions performed by the designated state agency
- Vocational rehabilitation services provided by state agencies, and other public and private entities responsible for providing vocational rehabilitation services to individuals with disabilities under the Act
- Employment outcomes achieved by eligible individuals receiving services under Title I of the Act including the availability of health and other employment benefits in connection with those employment outcomes

SURVEY PROCESS

The survey is conducted by the SRC in cooperation with division staff. Council and staff share responsibility for analyzing and reporting the results.

The 2020 Client Satisfaction Survey was conducted through a contract with the North Carolina State University, Center for Urban Affairs and Community Services. From a weighted sample of 1,655 clients with open or recently closed cases. After adjusting for clients who could not be contacted after six attempts, the completion rate was 98.4 percent.

Survey Completion Results





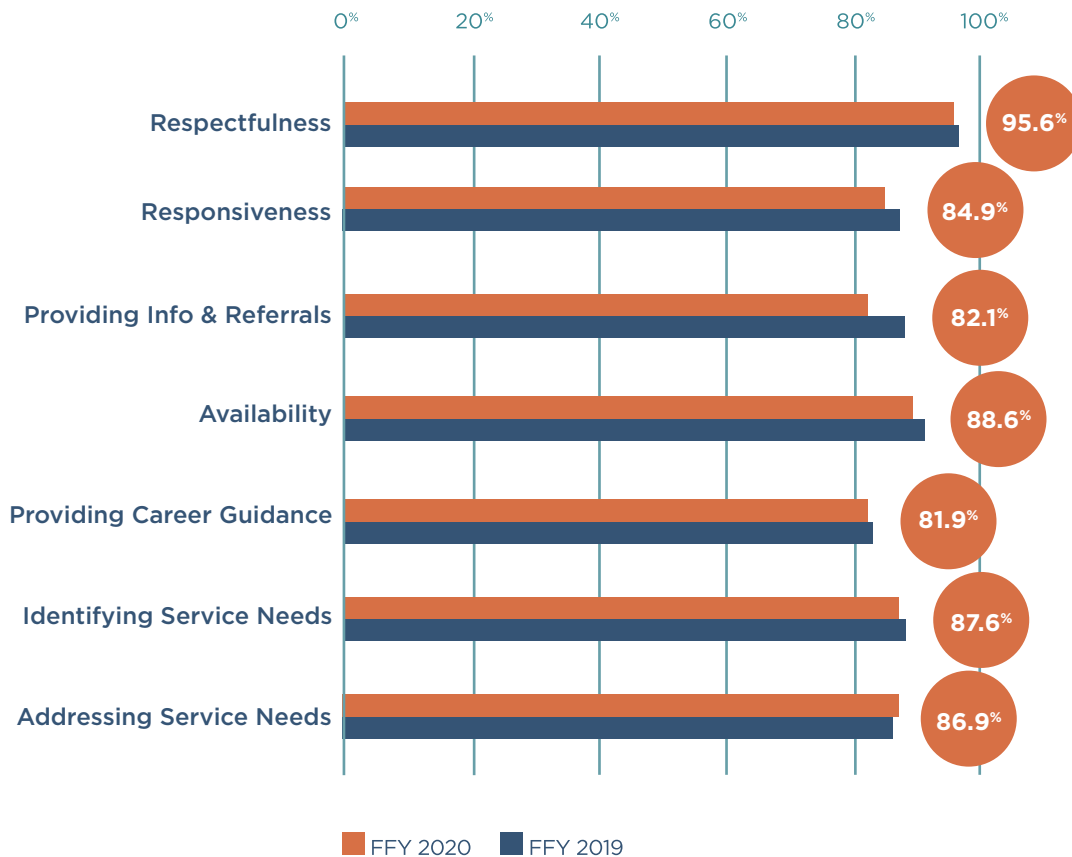
CONSUMERS SURVEY



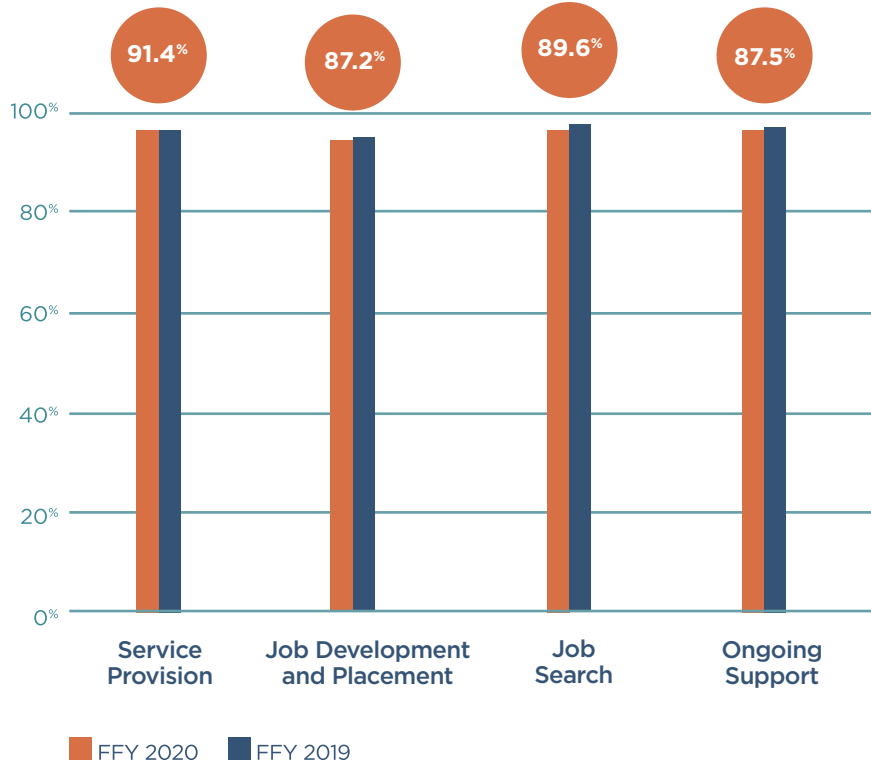
SECTION I

This section contained fourteen items regarding the client’s experience with NCDVR, including their interactions during eligibility, IPE development and after achieving employment. Clients indicating dissatisfaction were given the option to explain.

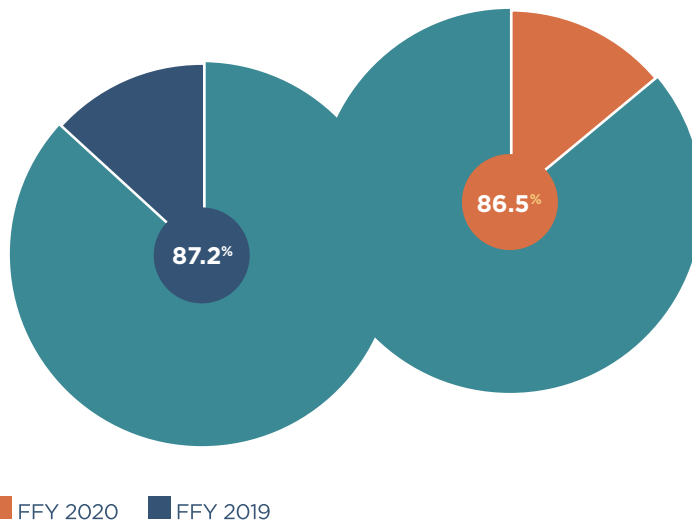
Satisfaction with Counselor and Staff



Satisfaction with Timeliness of Services



Satisfaction with Overall Experience

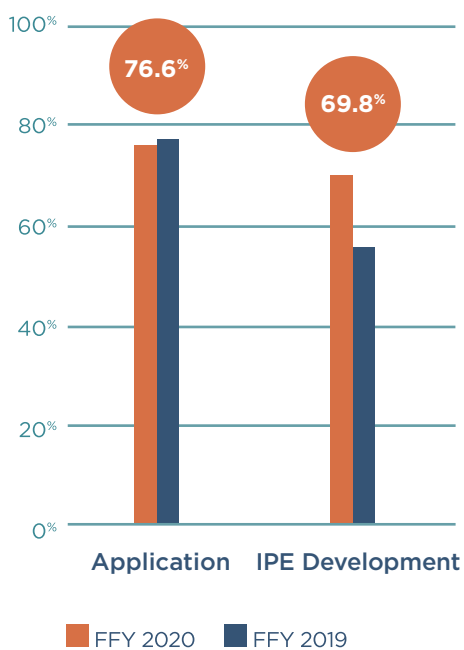




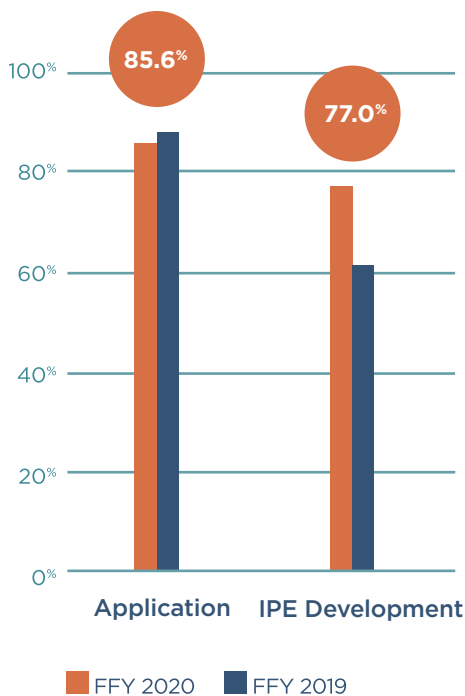
SECTION II

This section asks clients whether they were informed about the Client Assistance Program and their right to appeal agency decisions with which they disagree. Sub-items were added to determine if clients received information about NCCAP’s services when they applied for services and when completing an individualized plan for employment (IPE).

About Program



About Right to Appeal

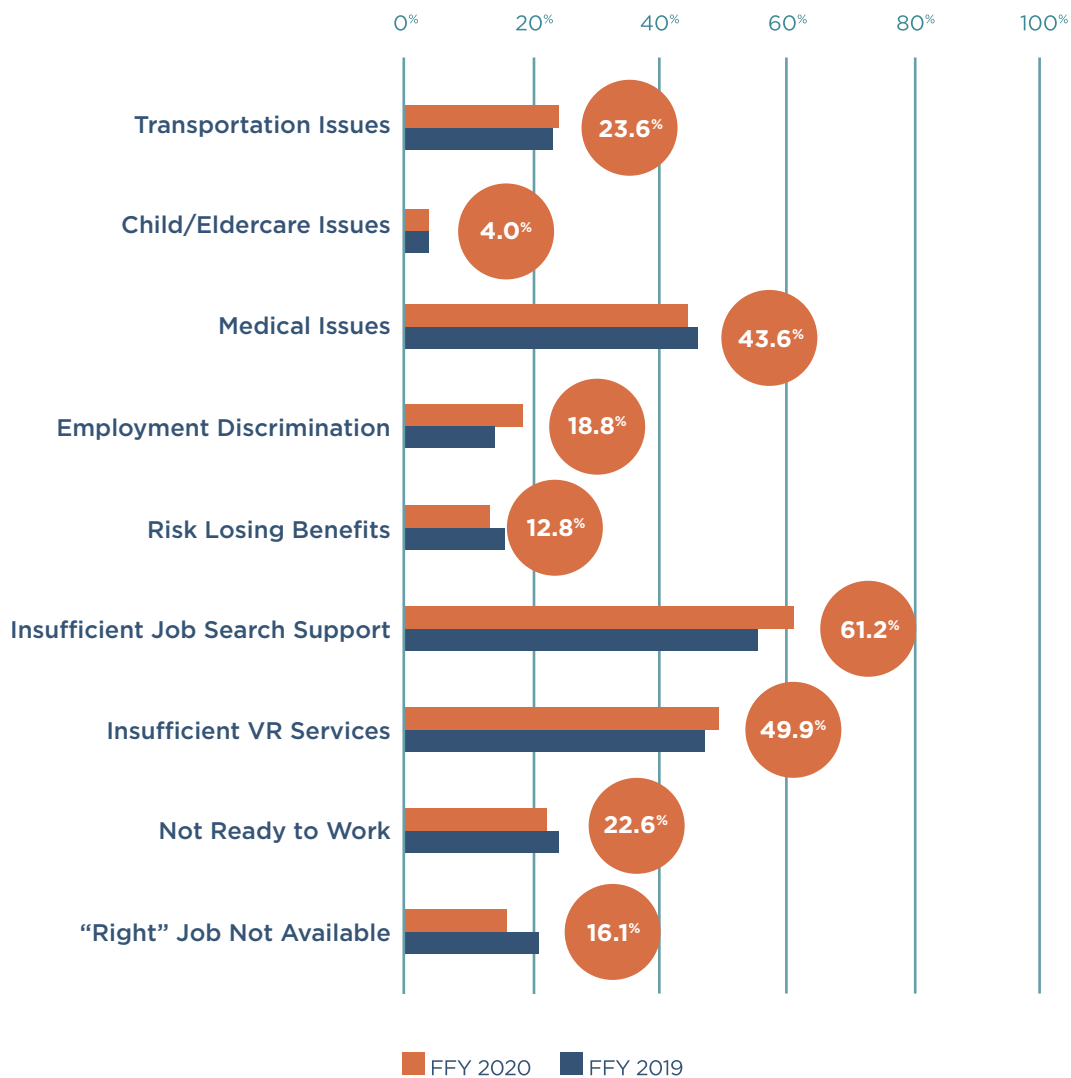




SECTION III

This section contained nine items that were promoted if the client was not working at the time the survey was conducted. Some items were revised from previous versions of the survey and an addition “N/A” response was added.

Barriers to Employment



SECTION IV

This section included open-ended questions for client, which asked about services improvement and two prompts about the vocational rehabilitation process exit without a successful employment outcome. The clients were asked (a) why they felt their case was closed before they achieved employment and (b) whether VR could have done more to help them start working.

PUBLIC FORUMS

At the full council meeting in June 2020, the council heard a number of different perspectives from attendees.



COMMENTS



A VR client's mother shared feedback about their experience with the VR program:







- Inconsistencies in services
- Numerous caseworkers
- High staff turnover volume
- Challenges receiving minimum wage payments
- Payment for summer classes, prior to documenting needs, was not offered



RESPONSES

1. DVRS Director, Kathie Trotter, appreciated the parent's comments and suggested exchange of information to determine the factors of her son's case. The basis of VR's policies is to ensure clients can reach their goals. The policy does allow for a student's individualized plan based on their need. The policy views a full course load as an expectation unless an individual's disability is an issue.
2. The counselor needs to work with the client, documentation is required and the concept of informed choice is applied where services are not exclusively based on the individual's preference but also what meets their disability-related needs.
3. John Marens, SRC Chair and Executive Director of Client Assistance Program, shared that high staff turnover is a real problem.
4. Kathie Trotter reiterated that DVRS is willing to work with consumers to sort through complex situations.

In Dec. 2020, the council hosted our first virtual public forum, with over 90 people in attendance, including advocates, clients, employers, providers and VR professionals. Participants were given the opportunity to provide comments in advance via email or during the live event featuring a panel of DVRS staff and SRC members.

 COMMENTS	
	<p>Two attendees shared their accolades:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The parent of a client commented that her daughter is involved in Project SEARCH and wanted to express her thanks for all the work that VR is doing on behalf of the program.• Another individual shared that she appreciated how dedicated VR is in making sure to connect clients to jobs that fit the individual's interests, skills and needs to be matched in long-term positions. All individuals are employable and can add value to society.
 RESPONSES	
The SRC and VR both agree with this statement.	
 COMMENTS	
	<p>A client with a physical disability stated that a judge dismissed her primary spinal injury and chose to focus on her mental health condition(s).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Client is uncertain about what avenues are available• Client is concerned that her back will prevent her from keeping a job and wants to return to work.
 RESPONSES	
SRC members who endured a physical injury encouraged her to continue to pursue her goals and that employers are required to make accommodations and to utilize assistive technologies.	



COMMENTS



The parent of a client commented about the high turnover rate in staff at the local office even prior to COVID-19 and felt that the counselor serving their case was overworked.

- Client has autism and trained as an assistant pastry chef.
- Client broke his foot and was not able to work and needed help returning to the workforce.



RESPONSES

Vacancies are an ongoing challenge and a fresh perspective needs to review the case. Finding employment is not easy and that is why VR has the services in place to assist individuals.



COMMENTS





Regarding staff changes without client notification, the Client Assistance Program recognizes this issue and has been proactively working with the department to address this situation.




RESPONSES


VR needs to figure out what to do with individuals who can work but who may not fit in the traditional world of work. One size doesn't fit everyone's needs.


 **COMMENTS**


 **Does VR offer any partnerships with micro-businesses for individuals with Intellectual Developmental Disabilities (IDD)?**

 **RESPONSES**

VR is held accountable under federal mandates to ensure clients achieve competitive integrated employment outcomes. The division does recognize the value of self-employment and the entrepreneurship opportunities for individuals with disabilities and applauds these efforts in the private sector. Rehabilitation counselors, in conjunction with our self-employment specialist, review and advise on these types of situations.

 **COMMENTS**

 **What is being done to help individuals with disabilities receive unemployment benefits from the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA)?**

 **RESPONSES**

While North Carolina does not typically allow unemployed workers to claim unemployment insurance (UI) if they receive a social security disability insurance (SSDI) payment in the same month, this provision was waived and SSDI recipients were deemed eligible for PUA. Eligible individuals with disabilities are encouraged to seek assistance with the PUA application from the [Division of Employment Security](#) at the NC Department of Commerce.



COMMENTS



How is VR working with the NC Department of Commerce to address this issue? Other states have recognized the importance of the individuals with disabilities receiving unemployment funds during these hard times.



RESPONSES

This issue has been heard and has been presented to appropriate authorities and subsequently is expected to be addressed with the NC General Assembly.



COMMENTS



What kinds of accommodations are you seeing for interviewing high functioning autistic job applicants for computer program jobs and what advice can you give about the best approach to accommodate these requests with HR?



RESPONSES

The Business Relations Representatives (BRR) utilize a dual customer approach. They contact businesses to match their needs for workers with the clients who can meet these goals. There is a Business Engagement Specialist within the state office who directs many of these efforts and approaches. The BRRs cover all 100 counties with some local representatives. These representatives all build relationships with businesses to understand their current talent acquisition needs that may be filled by the individuals served by NCDVRS.

The SRC's public forums continue to serve as a valuable way to obtain consumer input and increase awareness of the SRC's advocacy role in ensuring that the needs of the consumer and agency are met. Members strategized with regional and local staff to find viable solutions that can be implemented statewide.



RECOMMENDATIONS

The Executive Committee provided the following recommendations to the Division regarding goals, priorities or strategies.

1

In support of their strategic plan pertaining to legislative advocacy, the council recommended again this year for the division to prepare customized reports for each NC legislative district featuring the beneficial return on investment that the VR program has on consumers and on the economy of each district within NC.

DVRS Planning and Evaluation section will continue to support this request, revising the customized reports based on input and also added success stories to provide a human element to the data presented. The reports will continue to be prepared and distributed to members of the NC General Assembly during the upcoming session.

2

The council recommends improving the efficiency of the vocational rehabilitation process through the exploration of ways to expedite the provision of consumer services, including client purchases; conduct reviews of process for increased efficiencies, explore ways to involve staff in identifying and addressing inefficiencies, and, in general, increase capacity to serve consumers who use English as a second language

DVRS supports all components of this recommendation and is currently addressing them.

3

The council recommended for the quarterly full council meetings to contain a standing item for the Client Assistance Program to give an activity update. Further, the council recommended for a standardized set of questions and topic areas to be provided as a standard guideline to be used for regional director and/or regional unit manager reports during quarterly meetings to allow managers to provide updates for local activities, developments and to express any concerns to the Council.

DVRS has incorporated the recommended changes and will continue with these standing topics until the council recommends further adjustments.



RECOMMENDATIONS

4

The council recommended to continue to jointly conduct consumer input sessions to be held twice annually collecting input from various communities across the state and to strongly encourage staff attendance at such sessions whenever possible.

DVRS will continue to actively support jointly conducted input sessions twice annually canvassing various communities across the state focusing on how the VR program is addressing consumers' VR needs through its service provision.

5

Whereas the council is concerned about providing responsive services to consumers and realizes the division's abilities in this area are impeded when high vacancy rates occur within the division, the council recommends that DVRS provide regular updates regarding key vacancies, including direct service positions such as counseling positions, so that the council may advocate appropriately as included within the council's current strategic plan.

DVRS supports this recommendation and will continue to work with council members to regularly provide updates through statewide and regional vacancy reports.

6

Whereas the SRC Consumer Input and Public Outreach Committee acknowledged decreasing response rates on client satisfaction self-administered written questionnaires, the council recommends that DVRS continue the use of the telephonic client satisfaction survey.

Further, the council recommends extending the survey to clients in active status and employing a weighted sampling method to maintain costs and better ensure representation across disability types, minority status, age, and gender.

7

Whereas the council acknowledges the importance that reliable transportation solutions serve in assisting consumers in preparing for, obtaining, and maintaining employment, the council recommends the division to actively explore partnerships focusing on creative transportation solutions that will better meet the needs of all individuals with disabilities within the state.

The division also acknowledges the significance of this need and supports this recommendation. DHHS Senior Director for Employment and Community Inclusion Chris Egan serves on a planning council for NC Moves 2050, supported by the NC Department of Transportation, that is working to address these needs at the systems level; while means of systematically addressing individualized solutions through partnerships are also being explored.

MEMBERS TRAINING

Members were informed that DVRS continued as an essential human service program during the pandemic. The division notified 31,000 clients in writing via US mail in English, Spanish and large print format that DVRS was still open for business.

Staff began teleworking in March, which was a huge undertaking. Several departments, including Health and Human Services, Public Instruction and Information Technology took steps to ensure that proper protocols were being followed.

Field staff reported to the office on a staggered basis and followed the 3 W's of Wearing a face mask, Waiting six feet apart and Washing hands.

Community Rehabilitation Program (CRP) services are funded based on outcomes and payment rates were increased for the first time in years. Requirements were adjusted to meet the conditions and remotely provided services were encouraged. Contracts were being modified to meet the challenges. One fundamental change was that multiple job developments were being offered with opportunities for temporary placements for shorter timeframes. CRPs were required to think more broadly about changing their infrastructure to meet the challenges of providing services during the pandemic. The relationship between VR and CRPs was crucial in continuing to provide important services to clients.

DVRS leadership and human resources staff met frequently over the rise in vacancies and are reviewing counselor salaries and working to develop pathways for counselor career advancement.

Members requested to hear from the different regions how staff were dealing with COVID-19 during the different phases of pandemic. During the spring quarterly meeting, Eastern Regional Director Billy Ross reported that staff were having difficulty finding a balance between stress and safety measures within their own families. Consumers and staff were practicing social distancing.

The rate of IPE development and applications was below normal; however, services were being handled by phone and email. Younger staff and consumers preferred using technologies to serve remotely. Staff shared both their positive and negative experiences of working remotely. Some reported no issues with productivity, better focus, more flexibility, shorter “commutes,” increased technical capabilities and satisfaction with ongoing ability to serve clients. Others reported long delays waiting for the technical tools they needed, more difficult working conditions, feeling isolated and anxious.

The SRC was scheduled to meet in New Bern. This meeting was postponed from 2018 and had to be postponed again. Members attended a virtual presentation from Stanley Kite, Director of Craven County Emergency Services on the impact of Hurricane Florence 2018. Emergency Services had sent out messages to 40,000 devices and over 1,800 calls were made to 911 dispatchers. The storm surge produced massive flooding and specialized vehicles were used to rescue people. The decision to evacuate the area was based on scientific data. Local and civic groups such as the Baptist Men helped with points of distribution for ready-to-eat meals. Inland shelters were in place in other areas of the state. New Bern continues to recover from the effects of this storm.

In December, fellow SRC Member Celeste Hunt, Director of 121 Projects for the Lumbee Tribal VR Services Program, presented a cultural overview to the full council. Members were informed how the Lumbee Tribe and other American Indian Tribal VR programs differ from traditional VR services.

The Lumbee Tribal Vocational Services Program was established in October 2007 to provide vocational rehabilitation services that help members of the Lumbee Tribe with disabilities achieve their goals for competitive employment and more independent living. There are over 12,500 consumers enrolled in the Lumbee Tribal VR program, which provides culturally competent services to members of the Lumbee Tribe with disabilities. To be eligible, the individual must be a member of the Lumbee Tribe; live within one of the four county tribal areas of Robeson, Cumberland, Bladen and Columbus counties; have a disabling condition or impediment to employment and must have a goal for seeking employment.

The Lumbee Tribal Vocational Rehabilitation Services Program provides 18 different services: assessment; guidance and counseling; referral and other services; job-related services; vocational training; diagnosis of physical and mental treatments; maintenance; transportation; on-the-job training; interpreter services; rehabilitation services for the blind; occupational license, tools, equipment and supplies; technical assistance; rehabilitation technology; transition services for students; supported employment and services to families to assist the consumer in achieving employment outcomes as well as post-employment services. Local and state services are provided in collaboration with the North Carolina Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services, the NC Department of Commerce and Division of Workforce Solutions in addition to private services and corporations. The University of North Carolina at Pembroke and Robeson County Community College provide access to educational services on their campuses.

Some of the traditional Native American Services are Sweat Lodge-Prayer through the purification of the individual through sweat and spending time with the creator for internal life reflections for the need of support or change. Members are referred to tribal spiritual advisors to guide them through the intricacies of these ceremonial practices. Smudging Ceremony uses four basic medicines of sage, sweet grass, tobacco, and cedar to cleanse an individual's negative thoughts or feelings. This service is provided on request during a counseling session and can include family or friends. Talking Circle-Gathering with other vocational rehabilitation consumers, between family and friends can be provided upon request. As part of the gathering, each individual within the talking circle may freely express their thoughts, issues or feelings in as much time that is required. This allows each person to have the opportunity to speak and reflect what others have shared within the talking circle to promote communal support and healing. Prayer can be incorporated into counseling sessions with vocational rehabilitation staff. Social events provide information about pow-wows, social gatherings and other cultural events within the native community. Traditional Lifestyle Information provides resources on cultural history, traditional healing techniques or medicines and on nutrition, diet and exercise.

2019-2020 SRC MEMBERS



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Representing
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Doreen Byrd
Davidson, NC
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Dec. 2020
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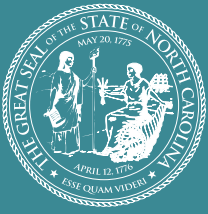
David Tedrow
Durham, NC
NC DVRS
Consumers



Kathie Trotter
Non-Voting Member
Division Director
Vocational Rehabilitation Services

VACANCIES

1. Labor
2. State Education Agency
(Pending)
3. NC Statewide Independent
Living Council (NCSILC)



NC DEPARTMENT OF
**HEALTH AND
HUMAN SERVICES**

Division of Vocational
Rehabilitation Services

NORTH CAROLINA STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL

www.ncdhhs.gov/dvrs

2020 MEETING SCHEDULE

March 26-27 (Videoconference)

June 18-19 (Videoconference)

September 17-18 (Videoconference)

December 9-10 (Videoconference)

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