

A New Focus On Transition

New Federal Regulations and New
Initiatives Focus on Younger Clients



What is Transition Services?

Renewing Our Focus on Youth with Disabilities



According to the Georgia Department of Education, students with disabilities are more than twice as likely drop out of school when compared to the student population as a whole. Add to that fact that while more and more students with disabilities want to pursue secondary education, stats show that they're not enrolling or completing secondary education at a percentage near their peers.

These are obvious problems.

But now GVRA, armed with newly-minted federal mandates through the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), is working towards solutions. While transition services have always been a part of GVRA's strategic efforts, WIOA has put a new focus on these efforts. Enter the Georgia's Career Pathways to Work: Explore, Engage and Employ (E3) initiative.

It's a culmination of partnerships with the Georgia Department of Education, the Poses Family Foundation, the Georgia State University Center for Leadership in Disability, the Burton Blatt Institute at Syracuse University, the Southeast ADA, Parent to Parent of Georgia and Georgia Workforce Development.

Funded through a \$4.7 million grant—stretched over five years—E3 is broken down into three components, and they follow the path of the student or young person as they prepare for a career.

The first “Explore” phase encourages students and youth to begin exploring the world of work and possible career goals, learning about soft skills and how benefits work.

The next phase, “Engage,” takes it a step further, allowing students to begin to participate in the world of work. In this phase, they'll learn self-advocacy and the kind of skills that are required for different jobs.

And the last phase, “Employ,” is broken down into two different phases in its own right. The first will focus on pre-employment services, preparing students to submit resumes and applications. The second looks at on-the-job accommodations, continuing education and the possibility of career advancement.

On the whole, said Transition Director Dale Arnold, the E3 program and the greater focus on youth with disabilities will allow GVRA to serve more clients than ever before.

READY TO
R I S E





On the Road

GVRA was a special guest at a recent movie screening

GVRA leadership and staff were recent guests at a special screening of **Being You**, a film produced by Understood.org and Roadtrip Nation. The film follows three young people with learning and attention issues as they travel the country to seek advice from TV host Howie Mandel, ice sculptor John Rodrigues and many more who have transformed their learning and attention issues from a struggle into an asset.

“We welcomed the invitation from Understood.org to screen their film,” said GVRA Senior Attorney Crystal Perry. “I’m glad that our staff had the opportunity to learn about the resources to share with students and youth with disabilities as we turn some of our focus to the service of a new population.”

A little bit about the young people who were featured in the film:

NOAH COATES

Age 18

From Gwynn Oak, MD

18-year-old Noah isn’t sure what’s out there in the world or how he fits into it. He wants to pursue a career in the entertainment or video game industry, but he’s not sure how to begin making his way—especially with his learning

and attention issues. He doesn’t want to let ADHD and Dyslexia stand in the way of his dream, and hopes to find mentors who prove it’s possible to pursue a goal no matter what’s thrown at you.

NICOLE KORBER

Age 23

From Gibsonia, PA

Diagnosed at an early age with learning and attention issues that made reading and writing difficult, Nicole has always had to work harder to do what many consider simple tasks—but she’s never let that deter her from reaching her goals. Although she was told she could never go to college, she recently graduated and has gone on to land a respected job. She’s proud of her accomplishments, but seeks to find deeper purpose with her work, and hopes meeting people with similar challenges who pursued their dreams will build her confidence so she can do the same.

STEPHANIE WHITHAM

Age 22

From La Canada, CA

Growing up, Stephanie thought she was the only one who learned differently. It wasn’t until college—an achievement she was told she’d never reach—that she realized she was part of a much larger cohort of people who

view the world differently, and have harnessed that unique perspective to make significant contributions to the world. She aims to show young people the many faces of learning differences, and help them see that they can accomplish what they put their minds to—not despite, but because of, their differences.

The film did a tremendous job demonstrating that so much of success relies on believing in oneself, said GVRA Marketing Manager Robin Folsom.

“I’m always proud to gather with others who work in organizations that support living independence and rewarding careers for everyone,” she said. “I think anyone who watches “Being You” can relate to a story about young people on a journey to self-discovery. Everyone can also relate to feeling different at some time or another in life. This video very well encapsulated one of our core values at GVRA: embracing our differences. The movie is well worth the watch.”

If you’d like to watch the film, it can be seen in its entirety at www.roadtripnation.com, and it’s also being shown regularly on public broadcasting stations across the country.

Understood.org, which is sponsored in part by the Poses Family Foundation (the same organization that’s funding the E3 grant), came together as the result of multiple partnerships.

It began with a dream to give parents everywhere access to the kind of resources usually only available to a few. Then 15 nonprofits came together to make that dream a reality.

Together, the group did extensive research with more than 2,200 parents. The parents said what they needed—from the kinds of tools that would help them navigate everyday challenges to the information they simply

couldn’t find anywhere else. They also shared their preferences, including the terms they feel comfortable using to describe their child’s issues. This research was invaluable, and it guided Understood’s decision-making every step of the way.

With the results of the research in mind, Understood’s team of experts worked with editors and designers to create thousands of articles, “deep dives,” decision guides, quizzes, slideshows, tips and more. They also developed first-of-their-kind tools like Through Your Child’s Eyes, Parenting Coach, Tech Finder and Decision Guide—with more to come.

Knowing that parents have busy lives, the founding partners designed Understood to work equally well on computer, tablet and smartphone, using the best techniques for people with learning and attention issues.

The end result is what you see today: an innovative digital resource where parents can come to understand and feel understood.

Resources offered at Understood run the gamut or parents and their children alike. Whether a child has attention issues or is having trouble in school or simply not doing a great job making friends, there’s helpful tips and activities for parents and their children to work through these issues.

Staff are encouraged to visit Understood.org and explore all the resources available to the community at large.

As the agency moves towards a greater focus on transition and serving youth with disabilities, it will be crucial to recognize the challenges this population faces and look at creative ways of overcoming those challenges and helping them succeed in higher education and beyond.

“If you focus on what you’re passionate about, you will most certainly achieve great things. I did, and in an odd twist of fate, it was my dyslexia that paved the way for my success.”

—Richard Branson





WIOA Explained (Sort of)

The Final Regulations of WIOA Are Out

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) is bipartisan, bicameral legislation that will improve our nation's workforce development system and help put Americans back to work. GVRA staff recently attended the Georgia WIOA Convening Conference, which officially launched WIOA implementation in Georgia. The law was signed into effect by President Obama in June of 2014, but it took almost two years for the regulations to be made publicly available. During that time, state agencies reviewed the law and began making preparations for the new partnerships that will be needed to ensure success. What follows is rough breakdown of what the law means from a couple of different sources.

From the U.S. House of Representatives:

WIOA creates: A streamlined workforce development system by:

- *Eliminating 15 existing programs.
- *Applying a single set of outcome metrics to every federal workforce program under the Act.
- *Creating smaller, nimbler, and more strategic state and local workforce development boards.
- *Integrating intake, case management and reporting systems while strengthening evaluations.
- *Eliminating the "sequence of services" and allowing local areas to better meet the unique needs of individuals.

Greater value by:

- *Maintaining the 15 percent funding reservation at the state level to allow states the flexibility to address specific needs.
- *Empowering local boards to tailor services to their region's employment and workforce needs.
- *Supporting access to real-world education and workforce development opportunities through: On-the-job, incumbent worker, and customized training; Pay-for-performance contracts; and Sector and pathway strategies.

Better coordination by:

- *Aligning workforce development programs with economic development and education initiatives.
- *Enabling businesses to identify in-demand skills and connect workers with the opportunities to build those skills.
- *Supporting strategic planning and streamlining current governance and administration by requiring core workforce programs to develop a single, comprehensive state plan to break down silos, reduce administrative costs, and streamline reporting requirements.
- *Ensuring individuals with disabilities have the skills necessary to be successful in businesses that provide competitive, integrated employment.

Improved outreach to disconnected youth by:

- *Focusing youth program services on out-of-school youth, high school dropout recovery

efforts, and attainment of recognized postsecondary credentials.

*Providing youth with disabilities the services and support they need to be successful in competitive, integrated employment. The Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce. ii Based on data from the Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), 2012. iii Based on data from the Current Population Survey, Bureau of Labor Statistics.

The U.S. Department of Education breaks WIOA down to five basic points.

WIOA means the first major reform to federal job training programs in more than 15 years. When WIOA passed with bipartisan majorities in Congress and was signed by President Obama in 2014, it had the potential to revitalize the public workforce system to reflect the realities of the 21st century economy and meet the needs of all job-seekers, workers, and employers. The final rules announced last month are the embodiment of that potential, setting the foundation for the workforce system to connect Americans of all walks of life more efficiently and effectively to high-quality careers. They also ensure that businesses of all sizes have access to the talent pipelines that will help grow their business and the U.S. economy.

WIOA means improved services for approximately 20 million people every year. Looking for work can be challenging on many levels. WIOA streamlines that process, breaking down barriers between government agencies and service locations. It provides seamless access to high-quality services to help people get a job and advance along a career pathway – as well as crucial supports like food and housing assistance – through a network of more than 2,400 American Job Centers and their partners across the country.

WIOA helps people overcome hurdles to find a job. WIOA improves access to job training and education opportunities for people who have traditionally faced barriers to employment, including individuals with disabilities, out-of-school and at-risk youth, youth in foster care or young adults who have aged out of foster care, formerly incarcerated individuals, and others. WIOA emphasizes pursuing and obtaining post-secondary education, training and other credentials as a foundation for improving career prospects for the long-term. The final rules will also help the approximately 1 million veterans, who use these services every year, better translate the skills they learned in the military into quality civilian careers.

WIOA is better for business and communities. Under WIOA, businesses inform and guide the workforce system so that services are aligned with industry needs. WIOA places a premium on industry or sector partnerships and proven strategies like apprenticeship and work-based learning to deliver high-quality worker training. Since meeting workforce needs is critical to local, regional, and national economic growth, WIOA better aligns workforce development programs with economic development efforts. The final rules also put a greater emphasis on reemployment strategies and require rapid response activities at the state level in response to layoffs or other workforce reductions.

WIOA means more and better information about what works. The final rules require that education and training providers publicly report their results so that the millions of people who use these services can make more informed choices about programs to pursue. Improved transparency also means improved accountability through better program evaluations and strong common performance metrics to ensure future investments are evidence-based and data-driven.

A Former Client Opens Up Written by Tom Connelly

Tom currently lives in Albany and works in GVRA External Affairs



My association with GVRA has been a long and positive one. My introduction to the agency came early in life, as a result of my being thrown out of a car on a highway and sustaining a severe brain injury as a teenager. Because of the extent of the injury and the

host of cognitive and physical deficits it caused, I had to develop compensatory learning strategies to help me succeed. This required effort and time and did not always work. Because of that, I was a VR client over an extended period of time.

Tom Hall Ivey, of the Macon office, was my initial counselor. The summer after I graduated from high school, he secured for me a six-week evaluation at Warm Springs. As the result of my test scores there, my evaluator, Ken Barrett, encouraged me to go to college.

During my time in school, VR assisted my parents and me in paying for my college expenses. I studied diligently in part to show VR I appreciated their assistance.

Later, my new VR counselor, Richard Jacobson, played a role in my securing employment at Robins Air Force Base. Then, years later when I was completing my coursework for my Masters degree in rehabilitation counseling while working at Robins, the Macon VR office allowed me to work at their facility as an intern.

After completing my degree, I interviewed and secured a job with the agency as a Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) counselor in Albany. I found the staff to be accepting,

friendly and helpful. The district director, Yvonne Johnson (who later became the state VR director), and my unit supervisor, Mike Etheredge, made me feel welcome, as did my coworkers. Mr. Etheredge also provided me with sound advice. Carl McRae, statewide coordinator of the TBI network, put me at ease too. (Carl later became state VR Director and is now in Business Development.)

Working as a TBI counselor, and then as a TBI and SEI counselor, was gratifying. I was able to help people with disabilities I had personal experience with. (As a result of my TBI, I was initially 85% paralyzed on my left side, my dominant side. This gradually subsided and disappeared. With the help of Gloria Barrett (who now serves as RUM of the Americus office), I was able to meet my 26 closure goals every year. I was even allowed to study some at work for my CRC, which I obtained in 1990.

However, when the agency eliminated the TBI caseload and had this population handled by general counselors, my district director, Charles Hill, persuaded me to work in another position rather than a counselor. He felt I would be a good fit for it (my responsibilities would be to speak to groups of people about TBI and compensatory strategies).

VR has assisted me several times to help me deal with my disability and perform my job responsibilities better. For instance, after I experienced trouble manually inputting data on my computer as well as writing legibly, my supervisor, Mike Etheredge, secured an appointment for me at Georgia Tech to be evaluated at the Center of Rehabilitation

Technology. As a result of this assessment, I was provided with a slant board, computer desk and chair, all of which were adjustable. This enabled me to enter information into the computer more efficiently, as well as allowed me to write more clearly and in a more pain-free manner. More recently, due to my limited dexterity and fine motor skills in both hands, I have been provided with DragonDictate by the agency. This enables me to verbally input information into the computer rather than having to type everything on the keyboard. In addition, to help me remember better without having to write my thoughts down, I can use the tape recorder program on the new smart phone VR has provided me. For all of these evaluations and accommodations, I am extremely grateful.

While working for VR, I have been blessed to be affiliated with various disability related organizations. Initially, as a TBI counselor I became involved in the Brain Injury

Association of Georgia (BIAG) and the Brain Injury Association (BIA). In addition, I've had the good fortune to speak a number of times at state, regional, and even national conferences in this area.

I've even had the good fortune to speak annually to MCG physical therapy (since 1997) and occupational therapy classes, as well as at Roosevelt Warm Springs (to the executive leadership team, and to Dr. Jerry McIntosh's neuropsychological staff) and Emory (to medical students in a neurotrauma class).

I have been involved in other disability related agencies such as Partners in Policymaking and Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities, where I currently serve as the vice chair.

Truly, my time and association with GVRA has been positive.



“The starting point of all achievement is
desire.”

—Napoleon Hill

SRC Hits the Road

The State Rehabilitation Council is Holding Public Hearings

The State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) in collaboration with the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency (GVRA) will hold a series of public comment hearings statewide on the proposed GVRA policy revisions regarding Order of Selection and the implementation of Project Horizon.

The SRC and the GVRA value input from stakeholders regarding the proposed policy revisions.

The proposed policy revisions are available for review at www.gvra.ga.gov or you may request the written document by calling GVRA Customer Service at 1-844-for-GVRA (1-844-367-4872); TTY users call GA Relay 711.

The public hearings are in five locations around the state to solicit comments from a representative and diverse population. The date, time and location for each public hearing are:

Rome Public Hearing: August 11, 2016 from 11 am to 1:00 pm at Goodwill of North Georgia, 154 Hicks Drive, Rome, GA 30161

Savannah Public Hearing: August 16, 2016 from 4:00 pm to 6:00 pm at the Savannah Civic Center, 301 West Oglethorpe Avenue, Savannah, GA 31401

Augusta Public Hearing: August 18, 2016 from 4:00 pm to 6:00 pm in the Jack B. Patrick Information Technology Center, Building 1000, Augusta Technical College, 3200 Augusta Tech Drive, Augusta, GA 30906

Columbus Public Hearing: August 23, 2016 from 11:00 am to 1:00 pm in the Syn-

ovus Room at the Columbus Public Library, 3000 Macon Road, Columbus, GA 31906

Atlanta Public Hearing: August 25, 2016 from 11:00 am to 1:00 pm in the Empire Room, 20th Floor, 200 Piedmont Avenue, S.E., Sloppy Floyd Building, Atlanta, GA 30334

All interested persons are hereby given the opportunity to participate by submitting data, views or arguments orally or in writing. Oral comments may be limited to five (5) minutes per person.

Registration is not required to attend the hearings; a sign in sheet will be on site for participants.

There will be a Certified Interpreter at each public hearing. If you need auxiliary aids or other accommodations, please contact GVRA Disability Community Liaison, Robin Blount, at (404) 259-1720 or robin.blount@ablegeorgia.ga.gov.

Written comments must be submitted no later than the close of business at 5:00 p.m. or postmarked by Friday, September 2, 2016. Written statements should be no longer than two pages, double spaced. Comments may be faxed, emailed, or mailed to:

Georgia State Rehabilitation Council
Robin Blount
200 Piedmont Ave. 5th Floor
Atlanta, GA 30338
Phone: 470-259-1720
Fax: 404-331-3769
Robin.Blount@ablegeorgia.ga.gov

Attitude Above All Else

GVRA Client Dylan Kellar embraces positivity

Written by CRC Dana Skelton-Sanders

When Dylan Kellar first walked into the Goodwill Toccoa offices, he knew it was going to be a special place.

Dylan was referred to Goodwill for the first time in March of 2015 to participate in a work evaluation by Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Dana Skelton-Sanders.

At the time of the referral, Dylan was a senior at Stephens County High School, and was enrolled in a welding program at the school.

It became quickly apparent that Dylan was an exceptional young man. Dylan demonstrated all the attributes typically associated with those who are sure to succeed in their chosen careers and personal goals. Dylan was truly motivated, reliable and dependable.

The Goodwill staff immediately saw that Dylan had an exceptional “can do” attitude. Dylan soon demonstrated the ability to lead and to set a standard for others to follow. Dylan could be counted on to maintain a very high quality of production related tasks, and to effectively participate in team assignments.

The Goodwill staff became enamored with this young man and worked with his counselor to help him continue his training. Upon the completion of formal training provided through VR and Goodwill, the Goodwill staff offered Dylan contract work in the Goodwill facility to assist with many Production-related duties and to maintain promised completion dates.

A job opportunity became available at Applegate Insulation. While there, Dylan would work on a trial basis to see if he would

be a good fit.

It quickly became apparent to the company that Dylan demonstrated all of the qualities that they sought in their employee’s. Dylan was soon offered a permanent position where he remains employed today.

From Dylan:

“If it were not for the VR program, I would be sitting at home wondering how and where I was going to go to work.

I had put in over 58 applications all over Toccoa before the program came along.

When Ms. Dana began working with me, I wanted to just cry, she showed me that I was not alone.

There were people that I could depend on to help me through the hard things.

I don’t know how she did it, but she was able to call and bring all these people to help me.

Somehow the high school helped me to go to the dentist, and get my teeth fixed.

She met me and my mother at Goodwill to talk about how I was going to be able to working on goals for myself.

Goodwill and my job are a great fit for me!

Today I can say that, I would not be working full time without the assistance of VR. “