

# Georgia Employment Needs Assessment Report

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**Research & Evaluation Unit**

*Institute on Human Development and Disability*

**UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA**

## AUTHORS:

### **Hamida Jinnah, PhD**

Research and Evaluation Unit (REU) Director  
Associate Research Faculty, University of Georgia

## CONTRIBUTIONS FROM:

### **Cassidy Gaddie**

Research and Evaluation Unit (REU)  
Graduate Research Assistant

### **Alexandria Hamilton**

Research and Evaluation Unit (REU)  
Program Manager

### **Anuja Sarda**

Research and Evaluation Unit (REU)  
Graduate Research Assistant

### **Whitney Ostrander**

Graphic Designer



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## MORE INFORMATION:

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### SURVEYS

#### INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES (IWDS)

- Disability Type - Autism/ASD and neurodiversity (34%), Learning disability /ADHD/ Dyslexia (27%), and Physical or mobility disability/cerebral palsy (26%). Survey respondents also had disabilities such as psychiatric disability (25%) and intellectual disability (22%).
- Residence / Living Situation - Nearly half of all individuals with disabilities in the sample lived with parents or family, followed by living in one's own residence independently (24%) or with support (14%), in a group home (6%), or in a nursing home (1%).
- Employment Status - Nearly two-thirds (63%) of individuals with disabilities were currently employed. The remaining one-third (34%) were not currently employed. Of those who were currently employed, just over half were in part-time employment earning minimum wage or higher. Nearly one-third (32%) of individuals with disabilities indicated that they were a student, and almost one-quarter (23%) were employed full-time earning minimum wage or higher. One individual was in sheltered workshop, center-based work. Remaining employment statuses included: Volunteer (13%), supported employment (4%), and self-employed (2%).
- Employment Status - When asked the type of industry they were employed in, 18% mentioned the non-profit and retail industries each, followed by education (16%) and service/hospitality (14%). Examples of 'Other' industries included working in law and being a graphic artist.
- The average hourly rate for employed individuals with disabilities was \$12.66 (minimum = \$2, maximum = \$46.10).
- Only one-third respondents indicated that their current job is related to their area of study.
- Timing of Disability Disclosure to Employer - When asked about when they let their employer know about their disability, roughly half of all employed individuals with disabilities disclosed their disability to their employer when they applied for the job, and another one-fifth disclosed during the job interview.
- Source of Help Getting Current Job - Over one-fourth of individuals with disabilities had their family help them find their current job. Another one-fifth had 'Other' help, which included responses such as finding the job themselves, through verbal offers from a professor or employer or having no help.
- Key Factors in Helping them to Keep a Job - Top responses include: supervisor and/or co-workers are supportive; it is the right job for them, and increased confidence in one's self. Other factors include support from family or friends, availability of accommodations or other supports on the job, and services from employment service providers.

- Work-Related Experiences - Statements that PWD agreed with the most include being confident in their ability to do their job, making friends at work, and enjoying their job. Respondents also agreed with the fact that they keep learning new things at work, that their job is important to the definition of who they are, and that they feel included in most activities at work.
- Beliefs About Work and Employment - Top statements that were true for respondents included, they would make a good worker for the right employer, they want to work but cannot find a job, and they have had jobs in the past and miss working. Also, they need to work in order to have sufficient income, and being unable to work due to their disability. Just over one-tenth of respondents felt discouraged that they would never find a job.
- Barriers to Getting or Seeking a Job - Top barriers identified include access to dependable transportation, employers' concerns about providing accommodations for individuals with disabilities, and misconceptions and low expectations among professionals. Concerns that employers have about the risks of hiring individuals with disabilities, difficulty accessing jobs, and lack of education or work experience needed for job goals were also identified as barriers.
- Service Helpful in Obtaining Employment - Top responses include on the job support, job development and placement, post-secondary education and help with keeping a job or advancing in a job. Vocational guidance or counseling, supported employment and assistive technology were also identified as helpful services.
- Aspects That Have Positively Impacted Employment - Top responses include understanding employers about their specific needs, job skills training, and on the job supports. Other factors that positively impact employment include higher wages, social or soft skills training customized work requirements to meet needs and improved accessibility to the workplace.
- Experience with GVRA - Over two-thirds of individuals with disabilities had not worked with the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency (GVRA).
- Satisfaction with Ability to Get or Keep a Job - Close to two-fifths (39%) of individuals with disabilities were either somewhat or extremely dissatisfied with their ability to get and keep a job in Georgia.
- Understand How ADA Protects Employment Rights - Half of the respondents understood how the American With Disabilities Act protects their rights related to employment

## **SURVEY RESULTS FOR KEY INFORMANTS**

- Identities - Disability advocates made up one-quarter of the total number of respondents. Independent Living Center professionals (21%), educators (20%), disability service providers (18%), and other professionals working with individuals with a disability (18%) made up the rest of the majority.
- Current Positions - Coordinators made up the majority of the respondents with nearly 30% of respondents (30%). Other positions (19%) such as direct support professionals, case managers, employment specialist, job coach, information and referral specialist etc. made up the rest of the majority in the sample.
- Barriers related to Employment - Nearly three-quarters of the respondents indicated access to transportation as a major barrier to employment, while over half of respondents endorsed fear of losing SSI/SDI benefits as a major barrier. Other barriers indicated by key informants include employers' concerns about risks associated with hiring individuals with disabilities, lack of education or work experience needed for job goals, and difficulty accessing jobs.
- Top Barriers in Getting or Keeping a Job - Two-thirds of the respondents indicated access to transportation as the major barrier to getting or keeping a job. Other barriers indicated by key informants include fear of losing SSI/SDI benefits, employer's concerns about risks associated with hiring individuals with disabilities, and lack of education or work experience needed for job goals among others.
- Services Helpful for Obtaining Meaningful Employment - Two-thirds of respondents indicated services related to the transition from education to employment after high school have been or would be the most helpful service for individuals with disabilities. Other helpful services indicated by respondents include services related to job development/ placement, on-the-job support, and supported employment (extended follow-up).
- Factors Positively Impacting Individuals to Obtain and Maintain Employment - Job skill training, better knowledge of how an individual's employment may or may not impact their social security benefits, and more understanding employers about an individual's specific needs as a person with a disability. Other factors include social and soft skills training and job search/placement assistance and training.
- Recommendations to Improve Employment Services - Nearly three-fourths of the respondents indicated access to reliable transportation for commuting to work, while another significant portion of respondents indicated that they would like more employment options in rural areas and more employment services for people with disabilities. More job coaching/supported employment, more funding for employment services and employer training.
- Adequacy of Employment Services and Supports - Half of respondents shared that the services are somewhat or very inadequate.

## **SURVEY RESULTS FOR FAMILY & CAREGIVERS**

- Identities of Family Members - Parents were the most represented group in the sample, making up four-fifth (80%) of respondents
- Residences - Majority of respondents shared that their family members with disabilities lived in the same home as them (93%).
- Disability Types - Two-fifths of respondents shared that their family member lives with an intellectual disability (40%), while nearly a quarter of respondents' family members live with Autism, ASD, & neurodiversity (23%). This is followed by respondents who have indicated that their family member lives with a learning disability, ADHD, and/or dyslexia (23%).
- Barriers to Employment - Common barriers included employers having concerns about the risks associated with hiring individuals with disabilities, misconceptions and low expectations among professionals, a lack of access to dependable transportation, and employers' concerns about providing accommodations to individuals with disabilities. Lack of long-term services or ongoing job coaching and difficulty accessing jobs (identifying openings, application process, interviewing, etc.) were also identified as barriers.
- Services Helpful for Individuals in Obtaining Employment - Supported employment with extended follow-up would be helpful for their family members with disabilities, along with on-the-job support, also known as job coaching. Job development and placement services and transition services (from education to employment) were also identified. Help with keeping a job, Discovery/Customized Employment, and vocational guidance and counseling) were also mentioned.
- Individual's Ability to Obtain & Maintain Employment - Employers becoming more understanding of the specific needs of individuals, on-the-job supports and customized work requirements to meet specific needs. Additional factors identified include job skills training, better knowledge of how employment affects social security benefits and reliable, low/no cost transportation services.
- Current Work Status of Individual with a Disability - Almost 70% of respondents shared that their family members with disabilities are not currently working.
- Employment Industries - Employment in the retail industry was highly represented amongst individuals with disabilities, followed by service/hospitality and industries such as social services, and manufacturing.
- Wage Rates - The most common wage rate endorsed by respondents was \$7.25 an hour.
- Helping with Employment Tasks – All family members endorsed helping their loved one with employment-related tasks (such as picking them up and dropping them off from work).
- Helping Individuals Get & Keep Jobs - Three-fifths of respondents mentioned that support from family or friends helps, half of respondents shared that increased confidence in themselves helps, and half of respondents expressed that having supportive supervisors and coworkers was helpful. Availability of accommodations and

other supports on the job and feeling that the job is the right job for them were also identified as helpful factors.

- Worked with GVRA – About half of family members reported that their loved one had worked with GVRA.
- Individual's Satisfaction with GVRA Supports & Services - Three-fifth (60%) of respondents were not at all or not satisfied with GVRA services.



## TOP CHOICE CATEGORIES

The tables below present the top choices for employment topics selected by all three key stakeholders – individuals with disabilities, family/caregivers and key informants.

### Barriers to Getting or Seeking a Job

| Individuals with Disabilities   | Key Informants   | Family/Caregivers  |
|---|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Access to dependable transportation</li> <li>▪ Concerns about accommodations</li> <li>▪ Misconceptions and low expectations among professionals</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Access to dependable transportation</li> <li>▪ Fear of losing SSI or SSDI benefits</li> <li>▪ Employer concerns about risks of hiring IWDs</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Employer concerns about risks of hiring IWDs</li> <li>▪ Misconceptions and low expectations among professionals</li> <li>▪ Access to dependable transportation</li> </ul> |

### Services Helpful in Obtaining Meaningful Employment

| Individuals with Disabilities  | Key Informants  | Family/Caregivers  |
|--|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ On-the-job supports</li> <li>▪ Job development and placement</li> <li>▪ Post-secondary education</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Transition services</li> <li>▪ Job development and placement</li> <li>▪ On-the-job supports</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Supported employment with extended follow-up</li> <li>▪ On-the-job supports</li> <li>▪ Job development and placement</li> </ul> |

### Aspects That Have Positively Impacted Ability to Obtain and Maintain Employment

| Individuals with Disabilities   | Key Informants  | Family/Caregivers  |
|---|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ More understanding employers about their specific needs</li> <li>▪ Job skills training</li> <li>▪ On-the-job supports</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Job skill training</li> <li>▪ Better knowledge of how employment would impact benefits</li> <li>▪ More understanding employers about their specific needs</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ More understanding employers about their specific needs</li> <li>▪ On-the-job supports</li> <li>▪ Customized work requirements</li> </ul> |

## INTERVIEWS/FOCUS GROUPS

- *Stigma, Negative Attitudes, and Low Expectations Towards People with Disabilities* – People with disabilities experience discrimination during the job-seeking process; employers do not give explicit reasons for rejections during interviews, but rejections once their disabilities become apparent are common. Employers, coworkers, and family/caregivers view people with disabilities from a deficit lens and underestimate their gifts, skills, and abilities. Individuals endorsed encountering negative and demeaning attitudes from employers, coworkers, and customers. Employers and coworkers may feel uncomfortable hiring and working with people with disabilities due to a lack of knowledge on accommodating and interacting with people with disabilities. Employers fear that they would need to invest extra time and money to accommodate individuals in the workspace.
- *Lack of Appropriate Accommodations* – Necessary workplace accommodations may be physical, sensory, technological, or instructional. Many workplaces are not ADA-accessible for people with physical disabilities. A lack of coordination between disability support providers (such as residential support or job coaches) can be a barrier to employment. Lack of flexibility by employers is a barrier to gaining and sustaining employment for people with disabilities; respondents have endorsed not getting jobs and losing jobs due to employers' unwillingness or inability to provide accommodations. People with invisible disabilities often don't receive workplace accommodations because employers don't believe they are necessary. Students endorse barriers to receiving accommodations, such as formal diagnosis requirements for classroom accommodations, and an inability to get part-time jobs or internships to prepare for employment.
- *Affordances and Constraints with Disability Benefits* – There is an income cap to receiving benefits such as Medicaid, but Social Security Income (SSI) is not enough to support living costs. People with disabilities fear losing their benefits, especially healthcare, if they make too much money by working. There is a lack of clear information available on ways for people with disabilities to keep their benefits while working for a sustainable wage.
- *Quality of GVRA Services* – People with disabilities encounter long waitlists for services. There is a lack of stability in vocational rehabilitation (VR) counselors; VR counselors have large caseloads and high turnover rates, slowing down the employment process for clients with disabilities. The number of VR counselors has decreased over the years. GVRA only provides short-term supported employment services, though some clients would benefit from long-term support. Providers who continue long-term supports as a condition of their contracts with GVRA are not compensated for this support. Respondents endorsed GVRA not adequately addressing their needs in areas such as job coaching and skill-building.

- *Lack of Knowledge About Employment Supports and Services* – There is a lack of knowledge about what employment supports are available in local areas. Information about community-based employment services is hard to find without existing connections to knowledgeable sources. There is not much employment support for families at the high school level. Parents and caregivers often find it hard to find employment information (such as transition programs and benefits planning) for their children transitioning out of high school into employment. People living in rural areas do not have a way to access all of the information relating to employment.
- *Inadequate Support to Make Transition to Employment* – Transition and employment support services help youth gain work experience and learn necessary skills. Information about transition programs and other employment support services is sometimes inaccessible to families and caregivers with youth transitioning from school to employment. Youth risk losing services and support from school once they transition into adulthood, limiting access to job opportunities. There is a lack of integration between the school system and adult service system for employment. Transition planning in schools needs to start earlier to give students more time to gain skills and do career exploration.
- *Systemic Issues (Bureaucracy, Legislative Challenges)* – Respondents mentioned that lawmakers are not responsive to individuals or organizations reaching out regarding employment issues such as income caps for Social Security and Medicaid benefits. Employees with disabilities can be fired at will due to Georgia’s status as a “Right to Work” state; people who believe they were fired due to disability status carry the burden of proving that they were discriminated against, which proves to be a barrier.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1) Continue sharing information, resources and advocating for best practices in employment

#### a) Employment First Framework.

Employment First framework promotes employment as the first and preferred option and prioritizes placing individuals with disabilities into competitive, integrated employment. In Georgia, the Employment First Council created by House Bill 831, titled the Employment First Act, was signed into law in May 2018. In addition to the above, Georgia's Employment First Act creates a Council of 14 members. These members include representatives from state agencies, employment providers, businesses, individuals with disabilities, and family members. The Council overall goal is to monitor the implementation and assimilation of a policy that acknowledges competitive integrated employment as the foremost and ideal option of all state funded services. Georgia's taskforce needs to be revived and should focus on aligning state policies and practices to eliminate barriers to employment.

#### b) State As Model Employer (SAME)

Georgia needs to adopt an approach known as the State as Model Employer that requires state agencies to set goals for the recruitment, and retention of people with disabilities. This policy aims to make state agencies leaders for what employment of persons with disabilities can and should look like in other organizations throughout the state. The National Conference of State Legislatures and the National Governors Association have both highlighted the practice of State as a Model Employer (SAME) as a bipartisan issue that state legislatures should adopt for economic reasons. Georgia needs to lead by example and adopt SAME policy.

#### c) Phase out the use of subminimum wages in Georgia

Nearly a dozen states have banned or have eliminated subminimum wages. The practice is discriminatory, doesn't lead to competitive integrated employment in the community, and has documented cases of abuse and exploitation that far outweigh any perceived benefits. Since August 2019, the number of active 14c certificate holders in Georgia has steadily decreased from 33 certificate holders paying 1500 Georgians with disabilities subminimum wages to [13](#) active certificate holders employing 253 Georgians with disabilities. The Advancing Employment is a Technical Assistance Center for Best Practices in Employment Supports, managed by the Institute on Human Development and Disabilities (IHDD) at the University of Georgia, funded by GCDD. The center is working towards this initiative and recommends that Georgia must phase out its use by 2023 and focus funding and transformation efforts on real jobs that pay minimum wage or above. GCDD should continue their efforts to host Advocacy Day at State Capitol, specifically focusing on advancing competitive employment for people with disabilities and phasing out subminimum wages in Georgia.

We agree with the recommendation of the Advancing Employment TA Center related to creating state tax benefits for employers. To encourage real work for real pay, a state tax-incentive should be designed for businesses hiring Georgia workers with disabilities that have been paid subminimum wages. High-growth industries and Georgia-owned companies should be targeted for additional tax-incentives.

d) Increased advocacy, funding and Supports for Supported employment including Customized Employment

Family members in the survey and focus groups shared that they prefer supported employment for their loved ones, specifically if they have significant disabilities and who require considerable assistance with extended follow up to maintain a career. Supported employment provides better support and job coaching for individuals, supports them as they begin their employment, and continues to be there as they progress in their career. Family members shared that it gives them a better sense of security knowing that there will be someone to help their loved one in their employment if any issues arise.

Customized employment is a process for achieving competitive integrated employment or self-employment through a relationship between employee and employer that is personalized to meet the needs of both. In 2014, customized employment was included in Title IV of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) as a strategy under the definition of supported employment.

There is a strong need to for Georgia to provide funding, training and other supports for Customized employment. Individuals with disabilities are often pushed into employment spaces like Goodwill, Kohl's, and Publix. There is a need for better matching of employment opportunities to the needs and desires of individuals with disabilities seeking employment.

- 2) Build a coalition that is comprised of key stakeholders in Georgia working on employment issues for people with disabilities. The coalition would build stronger relationships with state agencies. It would increase training opportunities for employment support professionals. It would actively educate employers, host employer summits on hiring people with disabilities and helping them navigate ADA provisions. The coalition would support employment first chapters, help advocate for disability employment issues at state level.
- 3) Continue local and statewide advocacy efforts on employment services and supports for Georgians with disabilities.
  - Continue advocating with Georgia legislators during the state legislative session to focus on increasing funding and supports for employment services including customized employment, self-employment.
  - Form coalitions with other disenfranchised groups.
  - Engage self-advocates in employment advocacy, and share employment advocacy resources with professionals and self-advocates.

- Some counties in Georgia have The Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST), which is a 1-cent sales tax approved by voters that funds a variety of capital projects. This is usually a large pot of money and if employment advocacy is rightly strategized and timed, can easily fund small or large employment initiatives.
- Specific advocacy relating to the following is needed:
  - Phasing out sub-minimum wage employment in Georgia
  - Georgia to adopt State as a Model Employer approach
  - Adopting employment first framework
  - Increased advocacy, funding and Supports for Supported employment including Customized Employment
- Georgia is fortunate to possess a vibrant economy. Being a large agrarian economy, it has robust agricultural outputs and also numerous high-tech corridors that are in demand in the 21st Century workforce. Georgia has also become a huge entertainment hub in the nation. Jobs in the green fields and the arts have increased rapidly in Georgia. These field provide immense opportunities for jobs and prosperity, for everyone including individuals with disabilities. There is a need to fund mini or large grants for innovative employment ideas, initiatives, best practices and partnerships.
  - Training and technical assistance on Supported employment including Customized Employment
  - Networking with and educating employers in various fields about employing and supporting people with disabilities in the workplace.
  - Advocate and fund innovative local employment initiatives, models or partnerships
  - Phasing out sub-minimum wage employment in Georgia
  - Grantees that support self-employment options; grantees that support potential entrepreneurs with disabilities through information provision and research.
  - Grantees that propose innovative ways to help people get jobs, in a more creative ways and creative fields like the green fields, arts, high-tech fields.
  - Grantees that propose to gather, energize and provide training and technical assistance to advocates and professionals on employment advocacy.
  - Identify and share employment funding sources that can be better directed to fund employment supports and services for people with disabilities.
  - Fund the formation of coalitions with local and state partners on employment issues.
  - Grantees that focus on building coalitions of entities working on disability employment issues, proposals that focus on providing work experiences to young adults in high school or college (IPSE programs or matriculated students), those that educate and support employers in hiring people with disabilities.
  - Grantees that propose to gather, organize, and disseminate data primary or secondary data on employment topics, including employment funding for Georgians with I/DD, employment issues, services and providers across GA.

- Fund innovative partnerships between non-governmental agencies, faith-based initiatives and other local initiatives.
- Group models of community “outings”, enclaves, volunteering in mass, and residing in group homes with little or no choice regarding roommates hampers inclusion. Entities that propose initiatives that support individualized and customized supports for employment, residential and community inclusion should be supported.
- Collaborate with local universities, wherein faculty and students can study how customized supported employment is not only beneficial for individuals, but also for employers, tax-payers, and the community as a whole; study the economic benefit of having people with disabilities in jobs; study the return-on-investment and financial contribution of people with disabilities in jobs.

4) Shift the narrative for employment advocacy

An alternative way to approach employment advocacy would be to move away from the charity or rights models and make it an economic contribution and empowerment model. It is important to highlight the important role that people with disabilities play in terms of contributing to the local economy, through employment, through increased purchasing power and spending, including spending on consumer goods and recreational activities.

We therefore recommend adopting Advancing Employment’s approach to employment advocacy, wherein there is a shift in advocacy from a Services Advocacy approach to an Economic Advocacy approach. Some terminology changes are suggested below.

| Services Advocacy  | Economic Advocacy   |
|--|---|
| Focus is on waiver slots, preserving funding                             | Focus is on return-on-investment (ROI), purchasing power                    |
| Tasks include letter writing, email blasts, and calls to legislators     | Tasks include conveying diversity, equity, and inclusion through employment |
| Words used focus on pity, loss, “otherness”, and disempowerment          | Words used focus on citizenship, workers’ rights, economic empowerment      |
| Outcomes are oftentimes long-term segregation in facility-based programs | Outcomes are employment and financial contributions in local communities    |
| Ongoing services are mostly professionalized                             | Ongoing supports also include natural and coworker-based approaches         |
| Advocacy is largely episodic and urgency-based                           | Advocacy is consistent and rooted in economics that are community-specific  |

## 5) Braided funding for Employment

Lack of funds has been a recurrent barrier to providing employment services and support in Georgia. Bringing the different state agencies together to collaborate and combine or braid their funding to meet the employment needs of an individual with a disability is important. When different state agencies collaborate to streamline funding that goes towards employment, it can help put the funds to best use for meeting employment needs of all individuals with disabilities.

There is a need to ensure that the renewals of the NOW and COMP waivers prioritize and incentivize employment. There is a need for a waiver program, similar to Tennessee, that prioritizes employment supports as well as true community inclusion services. The waiver could offer billable services for benefits counseling, self-employment, support for families regarding going to work for the first time, as well as business plan development, natural supports, and discreet services like job coaching for self-employment, and stipends paid to co-workers who provide supports.

## 6) Overhaul the disability payment system

- There is a need to raise the minimum income eligibility to expand job options. With the current restriction on the payroll, individuals with disabilities fear losing their disability benefits. By raising the minimum income eligibility, individuals will be able to pursue different jobs and get paid without worrying about the restriction.
- There is a need to advocate for an increase in the disability income payments to individuals with disabilities. The current disability payments are not enough to sustain one's living.

## 7) Education and awareness

In order to address ableism in hiring practices, employers should have knowledge and gain competence and confidence in working with and accommodating the needs of individuals with disabilities, through education and training. There is a need for increased employer awareness and knowledge. An important recommendation for improving employment services and systems in Georgia pertains to education and awareness of people with disabilities, their family members about the available employment options, approaches, services and support. It is important to be strategic about training and educating people, so that this is not just up to the disability community to tackle and address. But it's also something that employers are taking initiative on.

- 8) Continue funding The Advancing Employment is a Technical Assistance Center for Best Practices in Employment Supports, managed by the Institute on Human Development and Disabilities (IHDD) at the University of Georgia, funded by GCDD.



## METHODOLOGY

A total of 276 individuals with disabilities, family/caregivers and key informants participated in this study to give their input. About 188 valid surveys were completed by the targeted groups. The responses from the valid surveys included 92 individuals with disabilities, 40 family and caregivers and 56 key informants. Additionally, 88 individuals provided input through interviews or focus groups. About 56 individuals with disabilities, 5 family, caregivers and 27 key informants participated in focus groups or interviews.

### SURVEYS

Surveys were developed by the lead authors to collect input from the following target groups: 1) Individuals with disabilities, 2) Family and caregivers of Individuals with disabilities, and 3) Key Informants. The electronic survey was developed using an internet-based survey application known as Qualtrics. The surveys did not require the respondents to identify themselves when completing the survey. Surveys were made accessible and readable at 10th grade level or less, reliable and had face validity. They contained contact information to request access to alternate formats of the survey. Survey responses were aggregated and summarized by the REU team prior to reporting the results which further facilitated the obscuring of the individual identities. Surveys were pilot tested to test their validity, relevance, length and ease of understanding. Modifications were made based on the feedback gathered on the survey and the revised versions of the survey were then used for data collection.

A graphic designer also developed a web page dedicated to the employment needs assessment. This web page contained information about the study and the website links to access the surveys. Information about the survey and the webpage were widely distributed across networks (individuals and organizations) that work with individuals with disabilities in Georgia. The links to the surveys were also shared using social networking websites like Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. Flyers containing information about the surveys were distributed widely through social media.

The REU team shared information about the needs assessment and links to the survey to close to a hundred disability service organizations, providers, agencies, advocacy agencies and other entities working with the disability community in the state of Georgia. Introductory emails were sent out to different entities, introducing the study along with information that could be copied and pasted when forwarding the information to others. These entities were requested to post information about the needs assessment on their social media platforms. The web links for the survey and the webpage were also publicized on social media platforms of key disability entities in the state of Georgia. The REU team visited several disability service providers to help conduct surveys in person. Recruitment efforts also included meetings with representatives of disability providers, agencies, and advocacy agencies via Zoom to organize information sharing, survey taking and focus group events.

One of the purposes of the needs assessment was to capture a diverse set of perspectives from a wide range of individuals, caregivers and key informants who work with

individuals with disabilities. We made special efforts to recruit individuals with intersectional identities, individuals from unserved and underserved regions of Georgia and individuals belonging to culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

## **INTERVIEWS**

Interviews were conducted with the following target groups: 1) individuals with disabilities, 2) family and caregivers of individuals with disabilities, and 3) key informants who are knowledgeable about the employment needs of individuals with disabilities. The purpose of the interviews was to help identify the employment needs of individuals with disabilities, their families and caregivers, the barriers they face in accessing employment services and supports, what needs to be improved relating to employment services and supports. Interviewees were asked to share the needs of individuals from underrepresented groups including culturally and ethnically underrepresented communities. The interviews were semi-structured in nature and lasted between 20- 60 minutes. A semi structured interview protocol allowed the REU to personalize the interviews based on the expertise and experiences of the interviewees. Each interview was conducted via Zoom and was audio recorded after getting verbal and written consent from each of the participants. Consent was taken through a Qualtrics survey. At the end of the interviews, the interviewer saved the audio recordings and the transcriptions for each interview. The verbatim transcriptions were used for data analysis for the study.

### *Efforts to ensure respondent confidentiality*

The Zoom interviews were audio recorded with consent. Participants were informed that their participation was voluntary, they could stop the interview at any time, and could choose to answer the questions they wanted to. At the end of all the interviews, the responses were pooled together and reported in an aggregated form.

## **FOCUS GROUPS**

Focus groups were conducted with the following target groups: 1) individuals with disabilities, 2) family and caregivers of individuals with disabilities, and 3) key informants who are knowledgeable about the employment needs of individuals with disabilities. The purpose of the focus group was to help identify the employment on needs of individuals with disabilities, their families and caregivers, the barriers they face in accessing employment services and supports, and what needs to be improved relating to employment services and supports. Each of the focus groups lasted about an hour and were audio recorded. Two or three researchers from the REU team facilitated the focus groups where one researcher played the role of a moderator and the other served as a technological support along with taking notes. The researchers followed a semi structured interview protocol to guide the discussion while also leaving space to personalize the interview based on the participants expertise and experiences. Verbal as well as written consent were taken before the start of the focus groups. Consent was taken through a short Qualtrics survey. Audio recordings and transcripts were saved at the end of the focus groups and used later for data analysis.

### *Efforts to ensure respondent confidentiality*

The Zoom based focus groups were audio recorded with consent. Participants were informed that their participation was voluntary, they could stop the session at any time, and could choose to answer the questions they wanted to. At the end of all the interviews, the responses were pooled together and reported in an aggregated form.

### **DATA ANALYSIS**

The data for this study was analyzed using both Quantitative and Qualitative approaches. Quantitative data analysis consists of computing frequencies and descriptive statistics for survey items with fixed response options. Data were analyzed using quantitative statistical software IBM SPSS Statistics v.28, Qualtrics, and Excel 2021. Quantitative data analysis approaches like frequencies, percentages, means and other inferential statistics were used to analyze the responses from the survey. Open ended questions in the survey which yielded narratives were analyzed using content analysis for themes and concepts that were expressed by the respondents.

Narratives from the interviews and focus groups were analyzed using content analysis for themes and concepts that were consistently shared by the respondents. The results from the content analysis were organized according to the prompts in the interviews and focus groups. Themes that surfaced consistently were identified and reported as consensual themes in the report.

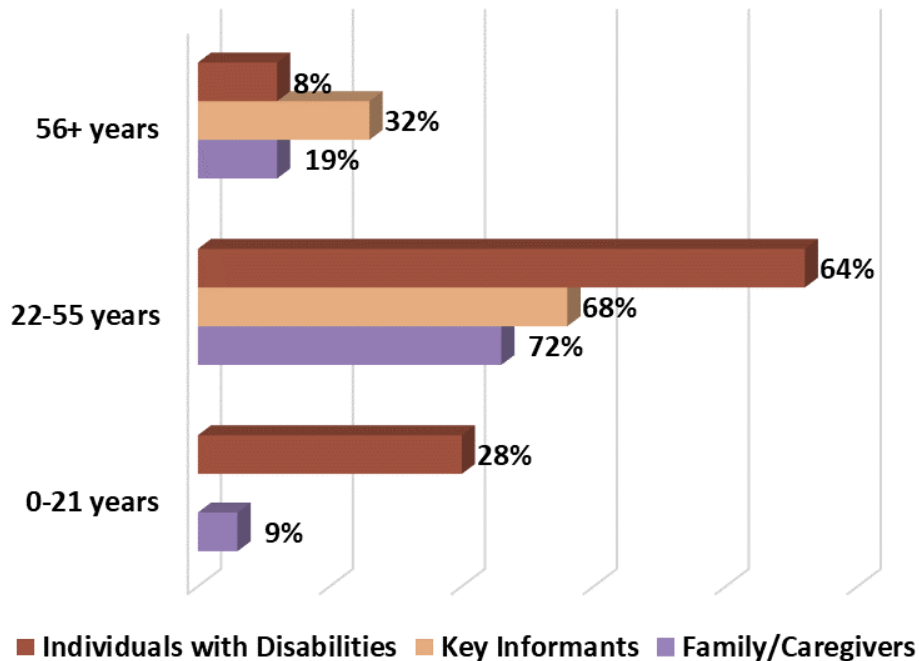
## SURVEY RESULTS

### COMBINED DEMOGRAPHICS FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES, FAMILY/CAREGIVERS AND KEY INFORMANTS

#### AGE GROUP

In regards to age of respondents, there were three primary age groups: 0 to 21 years old, 22 to 55 years old, and 56 years old and older. For individuals with disabilities, the majority of respondents were 22 to 55 years old (64%), followed by 0 to 21 years old (28%), and 56 years old and older (8%). For key informants, most were in the 22 to 55 years age group (68%) followed by 56 years and older (32%). For family and caregivers, the majority were in the 22-55 years age group (72%), followed by 56 years and older (19%), and 0 to 21 years old (9%).

#### Combined Age

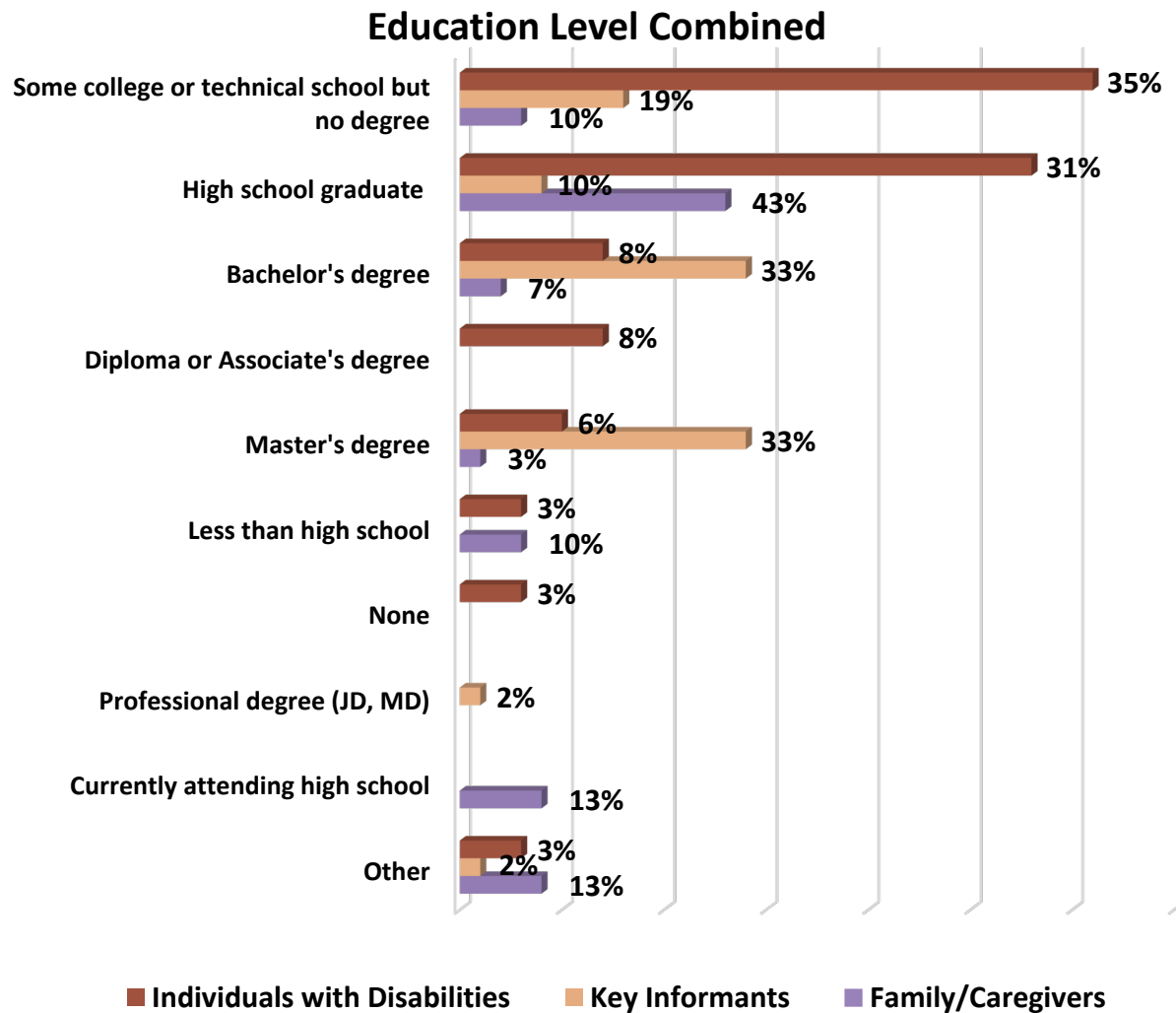


## EDUCATION LEVEL

In regard to education level, there was considerable variability across the three groups of respondents. For individuals with disabilities, the most common education level was some college or technical school but no degree (35%), followed by high school graduate (31%), bachelor's degree or Diploma or associate degree (8% each), Master's degree (6%), Less than high school or Other (3% each).

For Key informants, the most common education level was bachelor's or master's degree (33% each), followed by some college or technical school but no degree (19%), High school graduate (10%), and Professional degree (JD, MD) or Other (2% each).

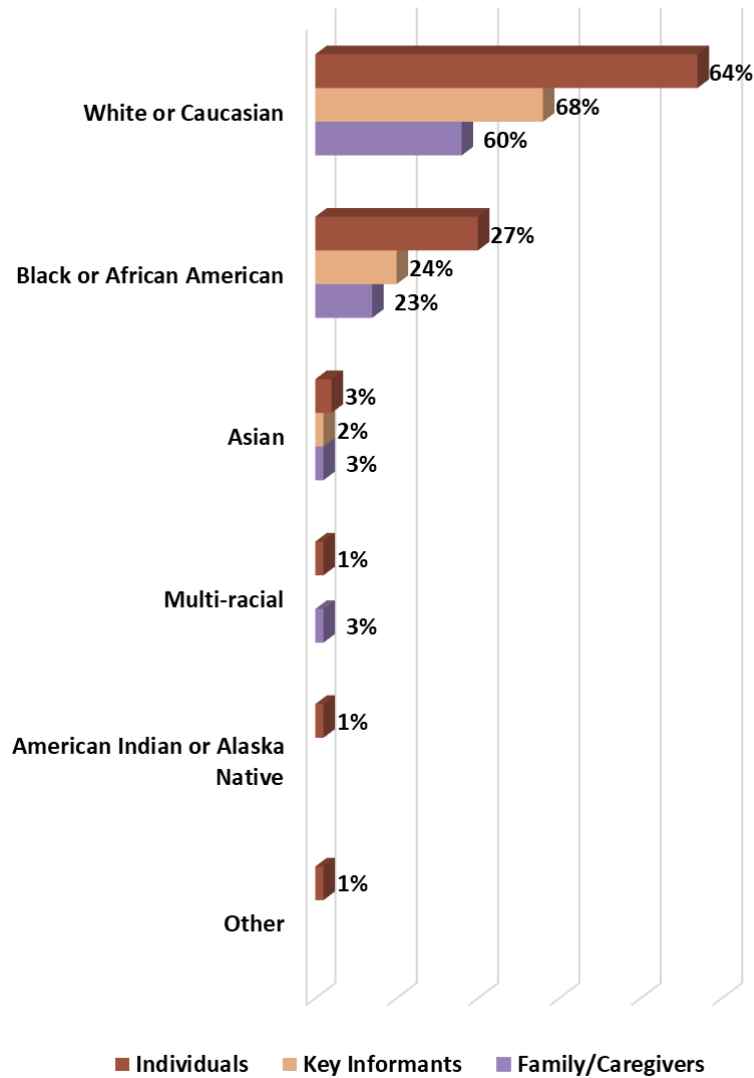
For Family/Caregivers, the most common education level was High school graduate (43%), followed by Other or Currently attending high school (13% each), Less than high school or some college/technical school but no degree (10% each), bachelor's degree (7%), and Master's degree (3%).



## RACE/ETHNICITY

For all respondent groups (individuals with disabilities [IWD], key informants, and family/caregivers), the majority of respondents were White (IWD: 64%; Key informants: 68%; Family/caregivers: 60%), followed by Black or African American (IWD: 27%; Key informants: 24%; Family/caregivers: 23%), and Asian (IWD: 3%; Key informants: 2%; Family/caregivers: 3%). There were no survey respondents who identified as Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander.

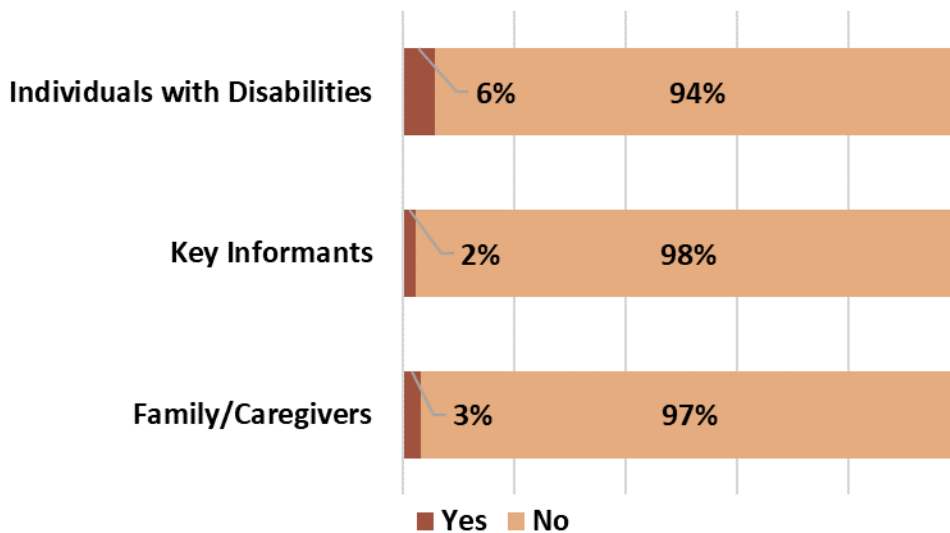
Combined Race/Ethnicity



## HISPANIC/LATINO

For all three respondent groups (individuals with disabilities, key informants, and family/caregivers), the vast majority of individuals did not identify as Hispanic/Latin(o/a/x). 6% of Individuals with disabilities identified as Hispanic/Latino, as did 2% of Key Informants, and 3% of Family/Caregivers.

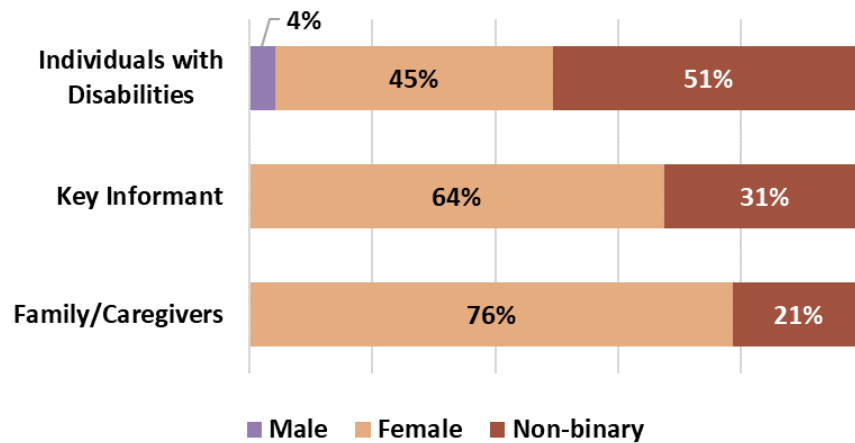
### Combined Hispanic/Latino



## GENDER

In terms of gender, the majority of Key informants (64%) and Family/caregivers (76%) identified as female. In contrast, the majority of individuals with disabilities identified as male (51%). Only three survey respondents across all three surveys identified as non-binary (individuals with disabilities, 4%).

### Combined Gender

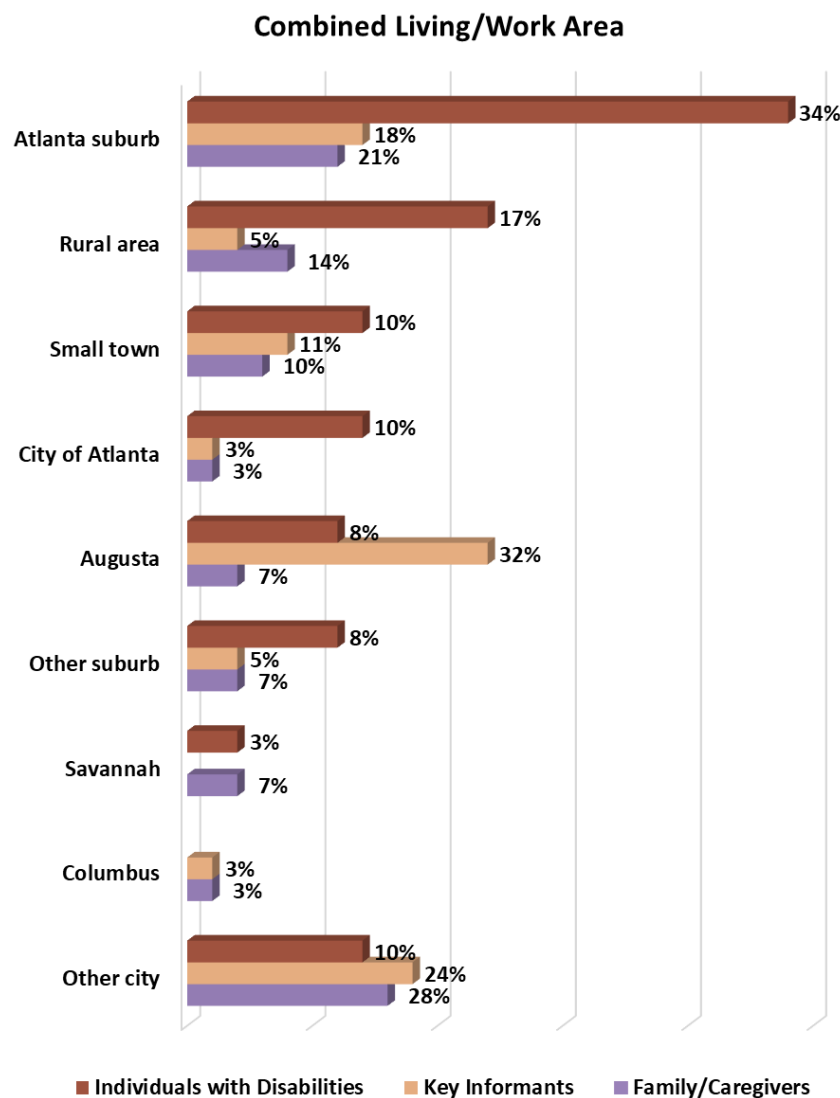


## LIVING/WORK AREA

There was considerable variability across the three survey in terms of where respondents worked and lived. For individuals with disabilities, the most common response was Atlanta suburb (34%), followed by: rural area (17%); Small town, city of Atlanta, or Other city (10% each); Augusta or other suburb (8% each); and Savannah (3%). An example of an “other city” is Athens, Georgia.

For Key informants, the most common response for where they worked was Augusta (32%), followed by: Other city (24%); Atlanta suburb (18%); small town (11%); rural area or other suburb (5% each); and city of Atlanta or Columbus (3% each).

For Family/Caregivers, the most common response for living area was Other city (28%), followed by: Atlanta suburb (21%); rural area (14%); small town (10%); Augusta, Other suburb, or Savannah (7% each); and city of Atlanta or Columbus (3% each).



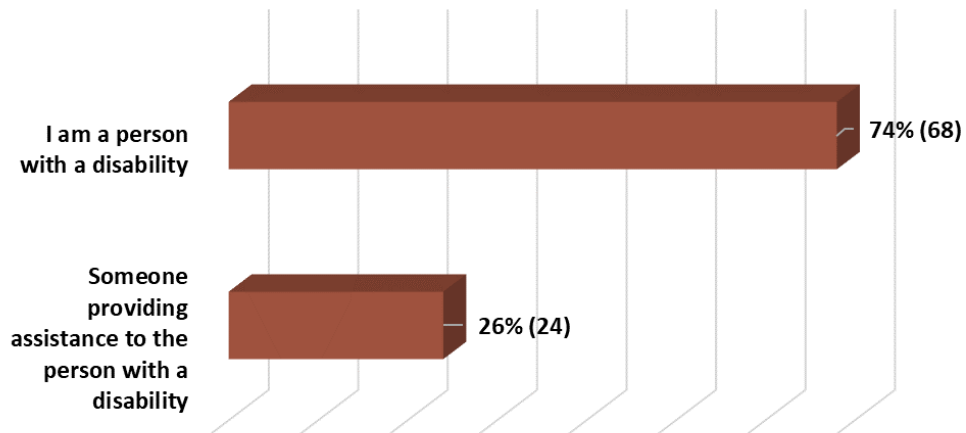


## SURVEY RESULTS FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES (IWDS)

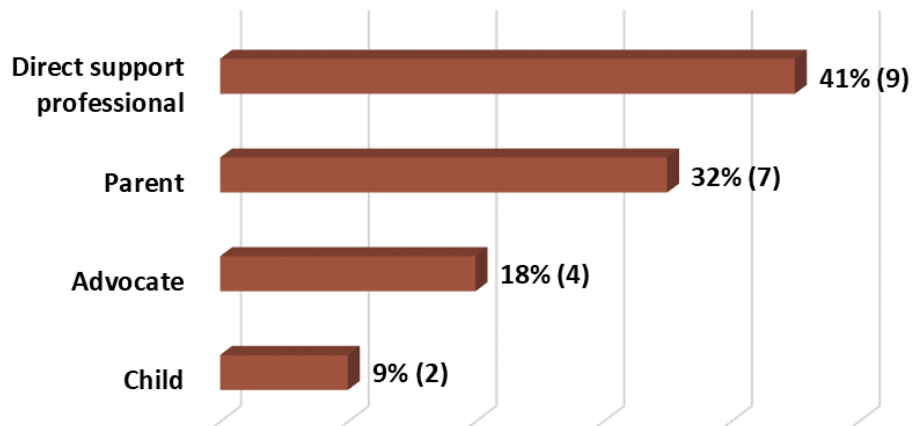
### RESPONDENT IDENTITY

Three-quarters of all survey respondents (74%) were persons with a disability. The remaining respondents were someone providing assistance to the person with a disability (26%). Of those responding on behalf of the individual with a disability (IWD), 41% were direct support professionals; the remaining persons were parents of IWD (32%), their children (9%) or advocates (18%).

**Identity of Respondent (n = 92)**



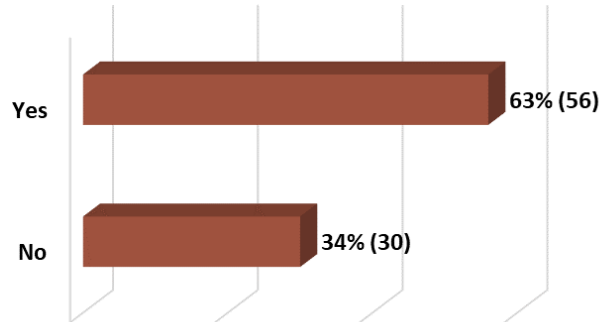
**Identity of Person Responding on Behalf of IWD (n = 22)**



## EMPLOYMENT STATUS AND INFORMATION

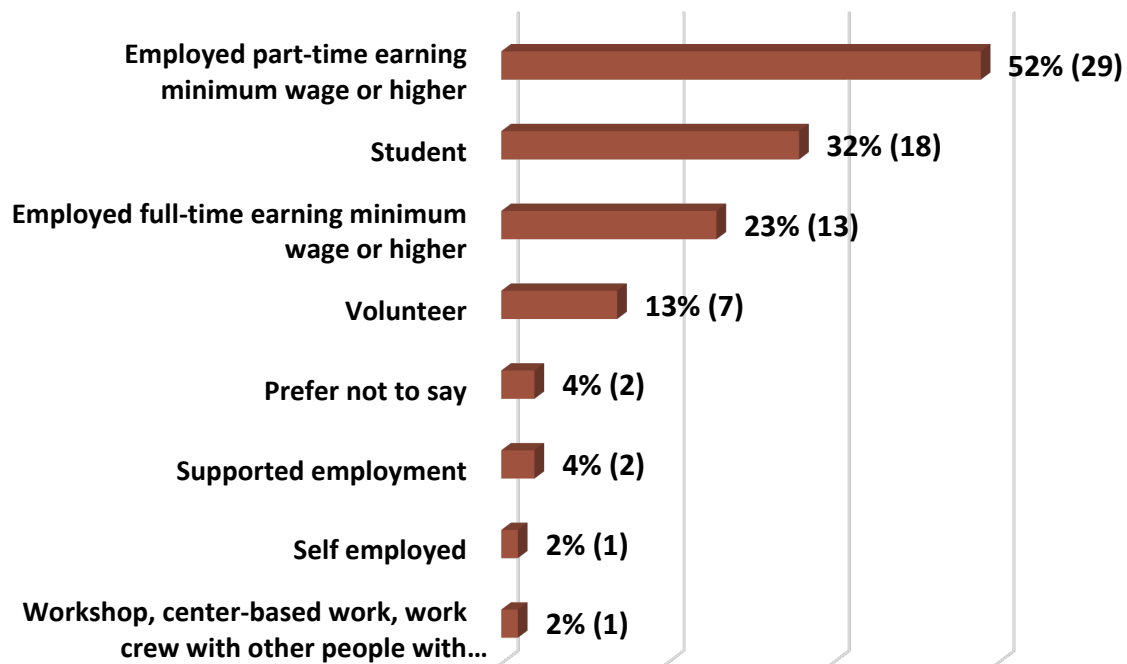
Nearly two-thirds (63%) of individuals with disabilities were currently employed. The remaining one-third (34%) were not currently employed.

### Currently Employed (n = 89)



Of those who were currently employed, just over half (52%) were in part-time employment earning minimum wage or higher. Nearly one-third (32%) of individuals with disabilities indicated that they were a student, and almost one-quarter (23%) were employed full-time earning minimum wage or higher. One individual was in sheltered workshop, center-based work. Remaining employment statuses included: Volunteer (13%), supported employment (4%), and self-employed (2%).

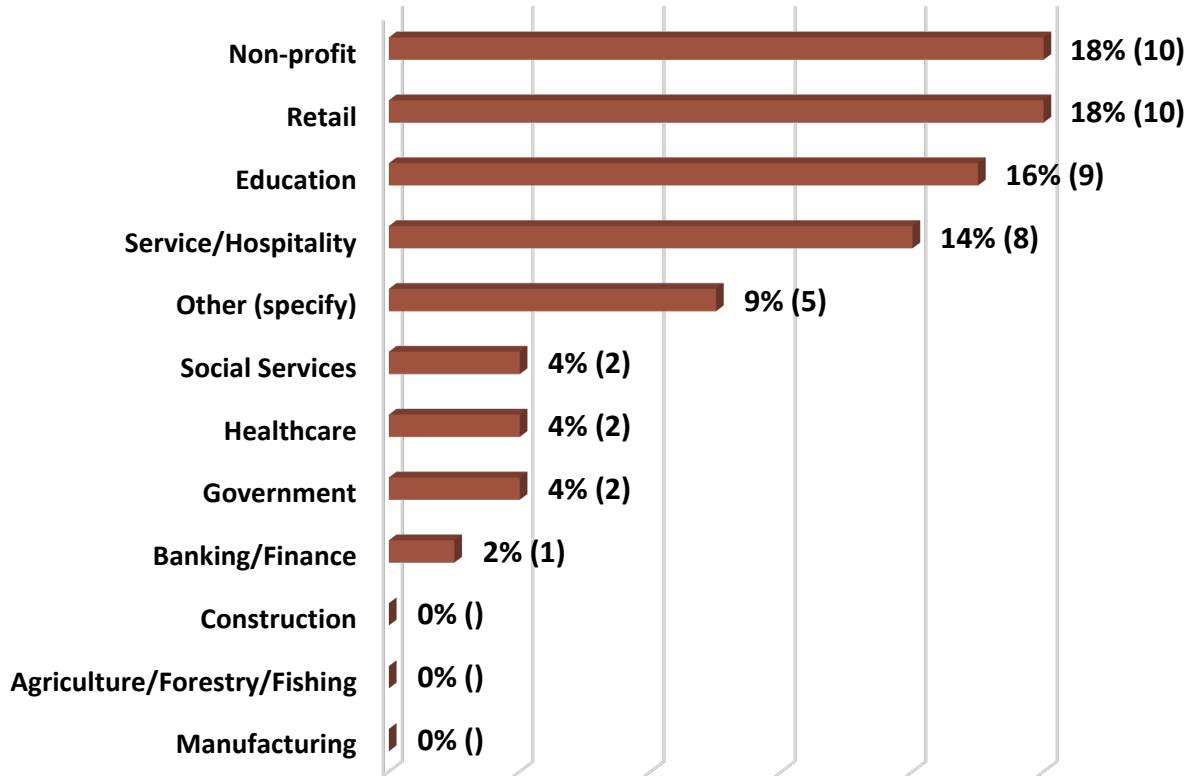
### Current Employment Status (n = 56)



When asked the type of industry they were employed in, 18% mentioned the non-profit and retail industries each, followed by education (16%) and service/hospitality (14%). Examples of

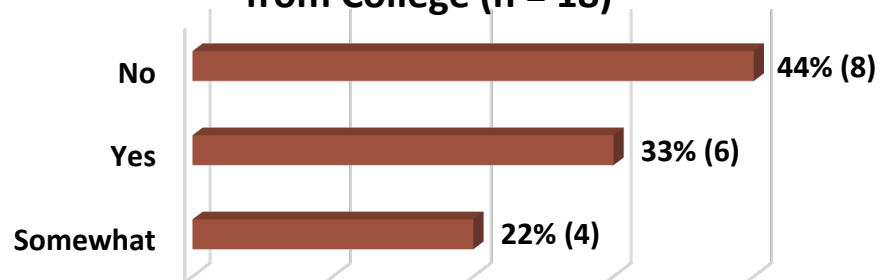
'Other' industries included working in law and being a graphic artist. The average hourly rate for employed individuals with disabilities was \$12.66 (minimum = \$2, maximum = \$46.10).

### Industry of Employment (n = 56)



Only one-third (33%) respondents indicated that their current job is related to their area of study. Over two-fifth (44%) said job is not related to their area of study in college, or only somewhat related (22%).

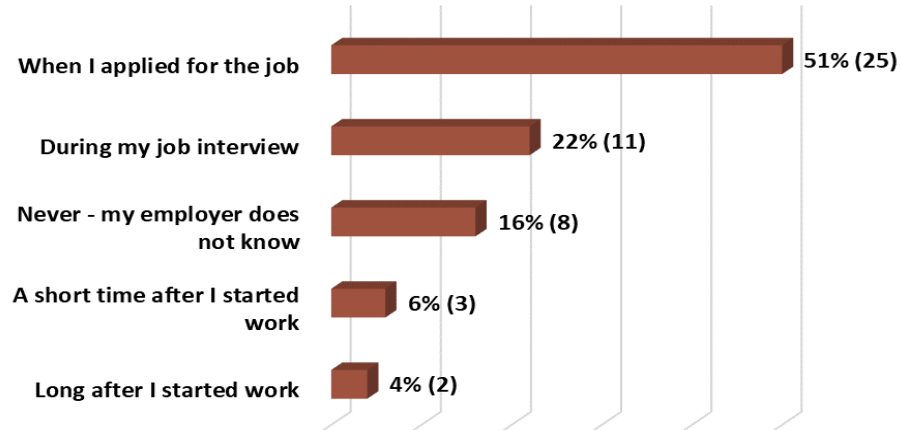
### Current Job is Related to Area of Study from College (n = 18)



### TIMING OF DISABILITY DISCLOSURE TO EMPLOYER

When asked about when they let their employer know about their disability, roughly half of all employed individuals with disabilities disclosed their disability to their employer when they applied for the job (51%), and another 22% disclosed during the job interview. 16% of respondents indicated that they have never disclosed their disability to their employer.

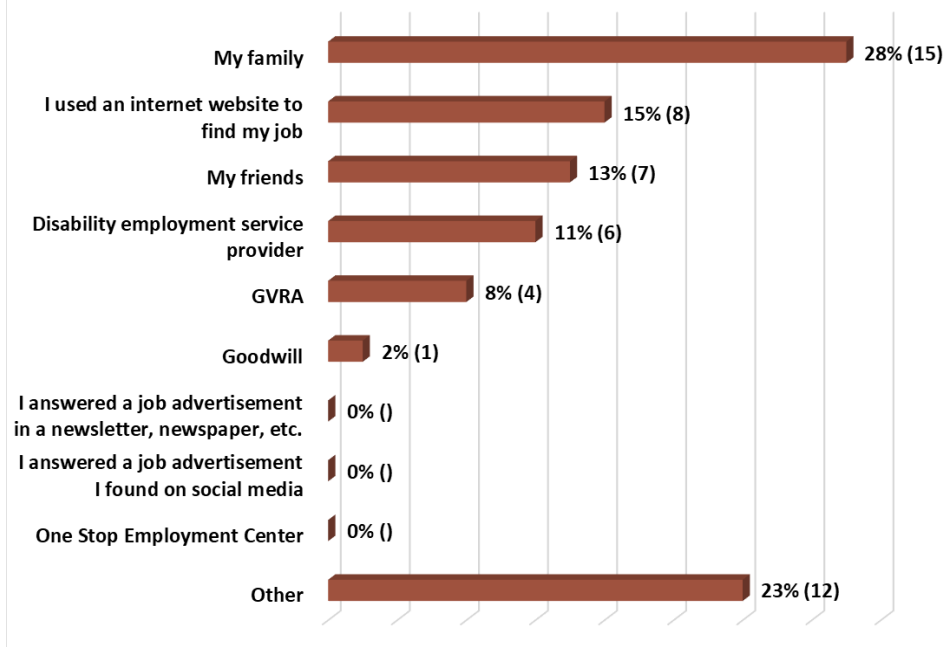
**Time of Disability Disclosure to Employer (n = 49)**



### SOURCE OF HELP GETTING CURRENT JOB

Over one-fourth (28%) of individuals with disabilities had their family help them find their current job. Another 23% had 'Other' help, which included responses such as finding the job themselves, through verbal offers from a professor or employer or having no help.

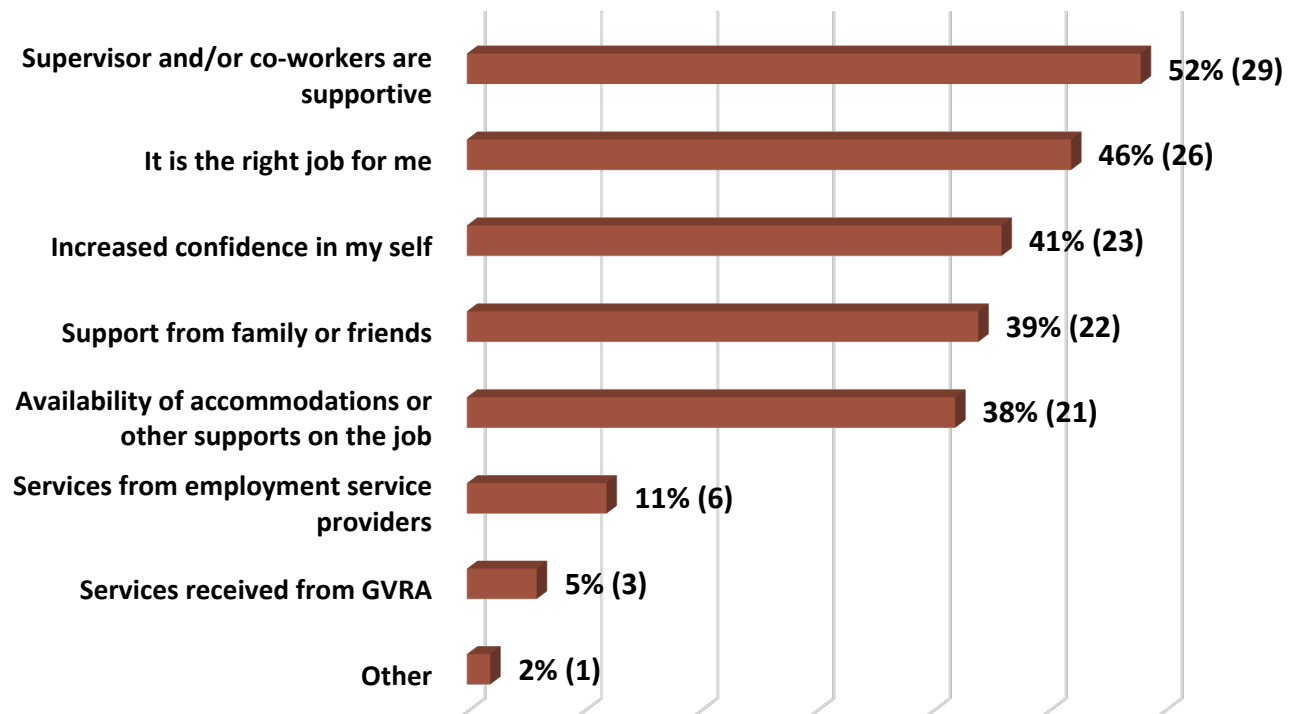
**Source of Help Getting Current Job (n = 53)**



## KEY FACTORS IN HELPING TO KEEP A JOB

The chart below highlights the key factors that have helped individuals with disabilities keep a job. The top responses include: supervisor and/or co-workers are supportive (52%); it is the right job for them (46%), and increased confidence in one's self (41%). Other named factors include support from family or friends (39%), availability of accommodations or other supports on the job (38%), and services from employment service providers (11%).

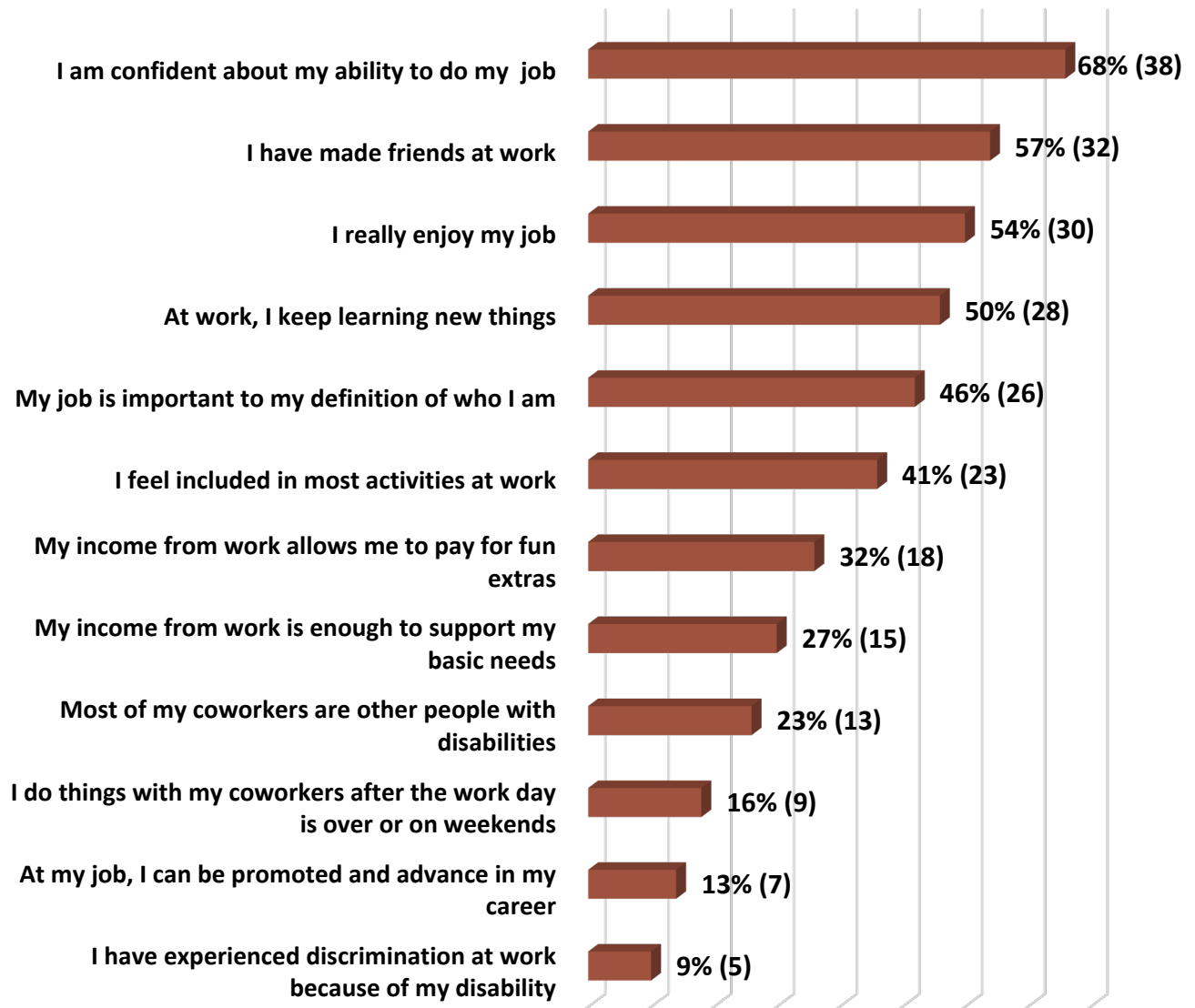
### Key Factors in Helping to Keep Job (n = 56)



## WORK-RELATED EXPERIENCES

The chart below presents respondents' agreement with some statements that focus on work-related experiences. Statements that PWD agreed with the most include being confident in their ability to do their job (68%), making friends at work (57%), and enjoying their job (54%). Respondents also agreed with the fact that they keep learning new things at work (50%), that their job is important to the definition of who they are (46%), and that they feel included in most activities at work (41%).

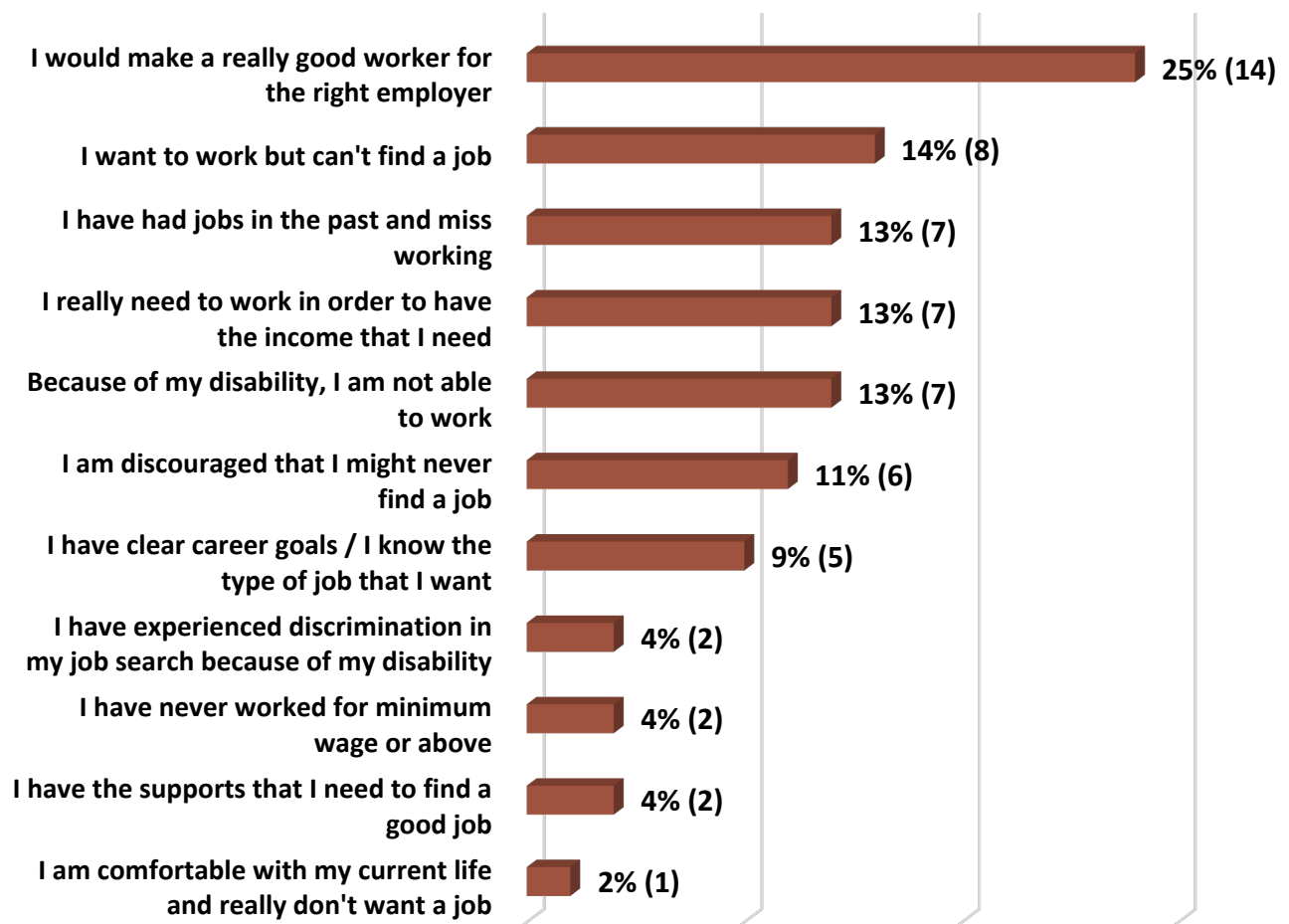
### Work-Related Experiences (n = 56)



## BELIEFS ABOUT WORK AND EMPLOYMENT

The chart below highlights individuals with disabilities' beliefs about work and employment. Respondents were asked as to which of the following statements have been true for them. The top statements that were true included - they would make a good worker for the right employer (25%), they want to work but cannot find a job (14%), and they have had jobs in the past and miss working (13%). Also, 13% each of respondents said it was true that they need to work in order to have sufficient income, and endorsed being unable to work due to their disability. Just over one-tenth (11%) of respondents felt discouraged that they would never find a job.

### Beliefs About Work and Employment (n = 56)



### **CURRENTLY SEEKING EMPLOYMENT**

Over half (55%) of individuals with disabilities were not currently seeking employment. A little less than two-fifths (38%) were currently seeking employment. For those seeking employment, the average length of time they had been looking was 5.34 years (minimum = two months, maximum = 22 years).

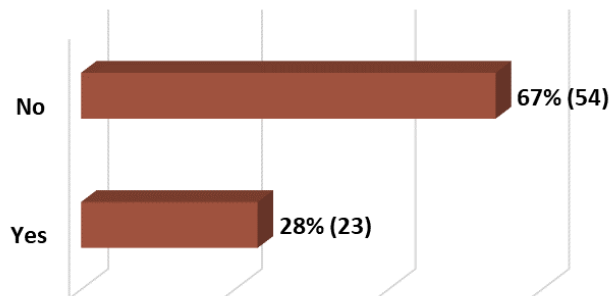
### **RECEIVED ASSISTANCE IN JOB SEARCH**

Of the ones that were seeking employment, 64% of individuals with disabilities had not received any help from individuals or organization(s) to find a job.

### **EXPERIENCE WITH GVRA**

Over two-thirds (67%) of individuals with disabilities had not worked with the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency (GVRA), while 28% had. Of those who had received services, 65% were either very satisfied or satisfied with the support or services.

**Have Worked With GVRA (n = 81)**

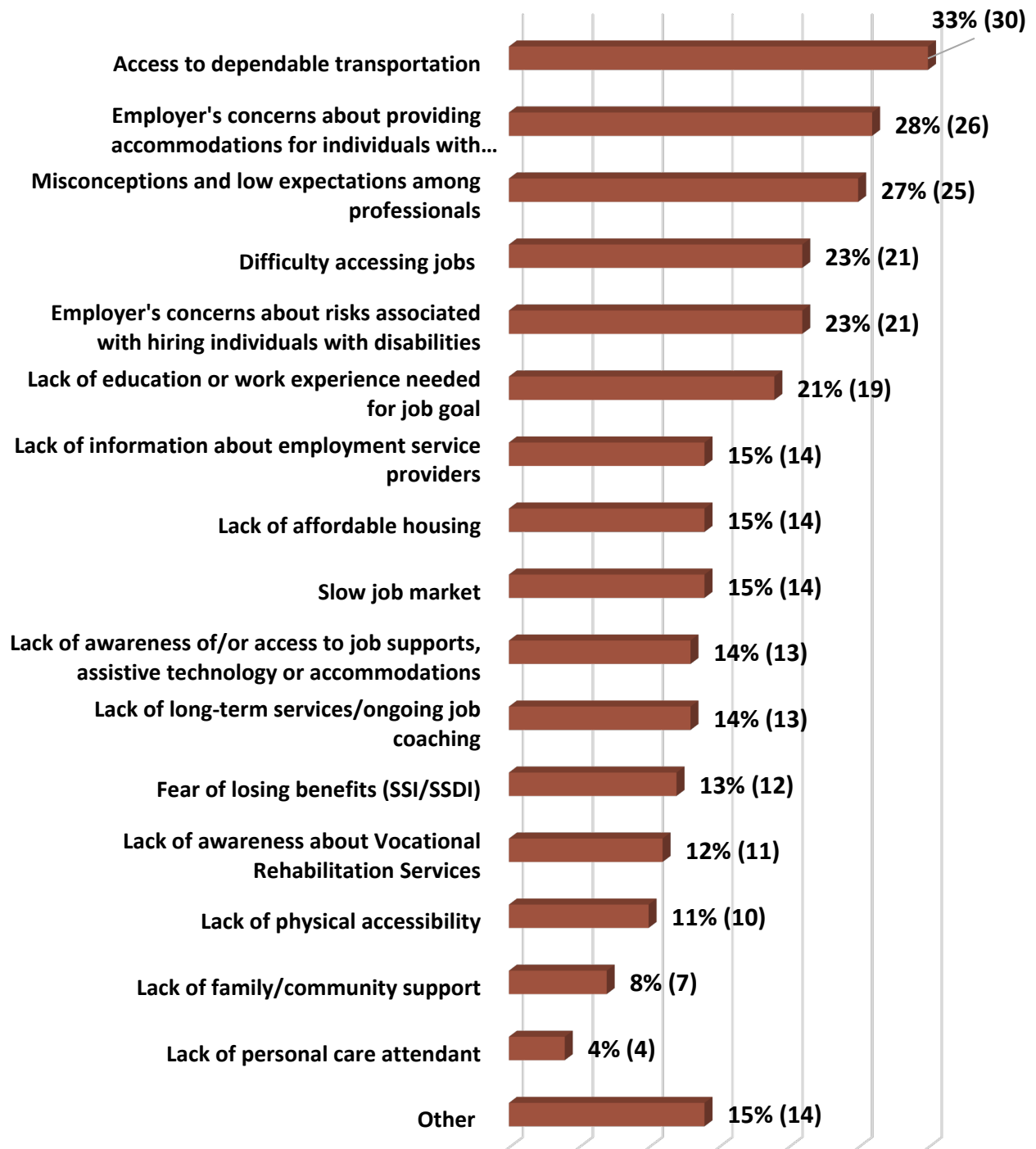


### **BARRIERS TO GETTING OR SEEKING A JOB**

The chart below highlights common barriers individuals with disabilities face in seeking or getting a job in Georgia. Top barriers identified include access to dependable transportation (33%), employers' concerns about providing accommodations for individuals with disabilities (28%), and misconceptions and low expectations among professionals (27%). Concerns that employers have about the risks of hiring individuals with disabilities (23%), difficulty accessing jobs (23%), and lack of education or work experience needed for job goals (21%) were also identified as barriers.



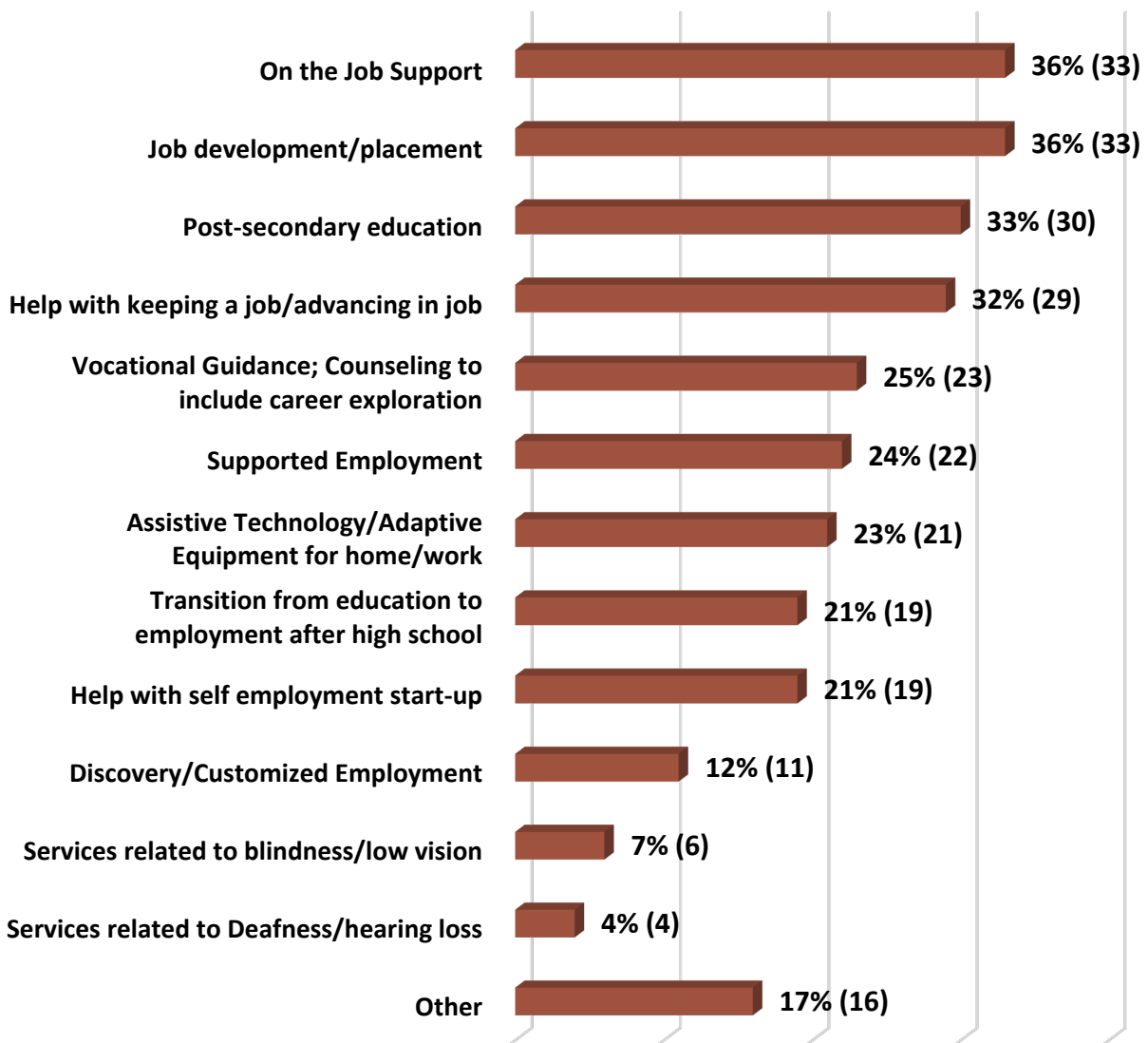
## Barriers to Seeking or Getting a Job (n = 92)



## SERVICE HELPFUL IN OBTAINING EMPLOYMENT

Services that would have been or would be helpful for individuals with disabilities to obtain meaningful employment in Georgia have been identified below. The top responses were: on the job support (36%), job development and placement (36%), post-secondary education (33%) and help with keeping a job or advancing in a job (32%). Vocational guidance or counseling (25%), supported employment (24%) and assistive technology (23%) were also identified as helpful services.

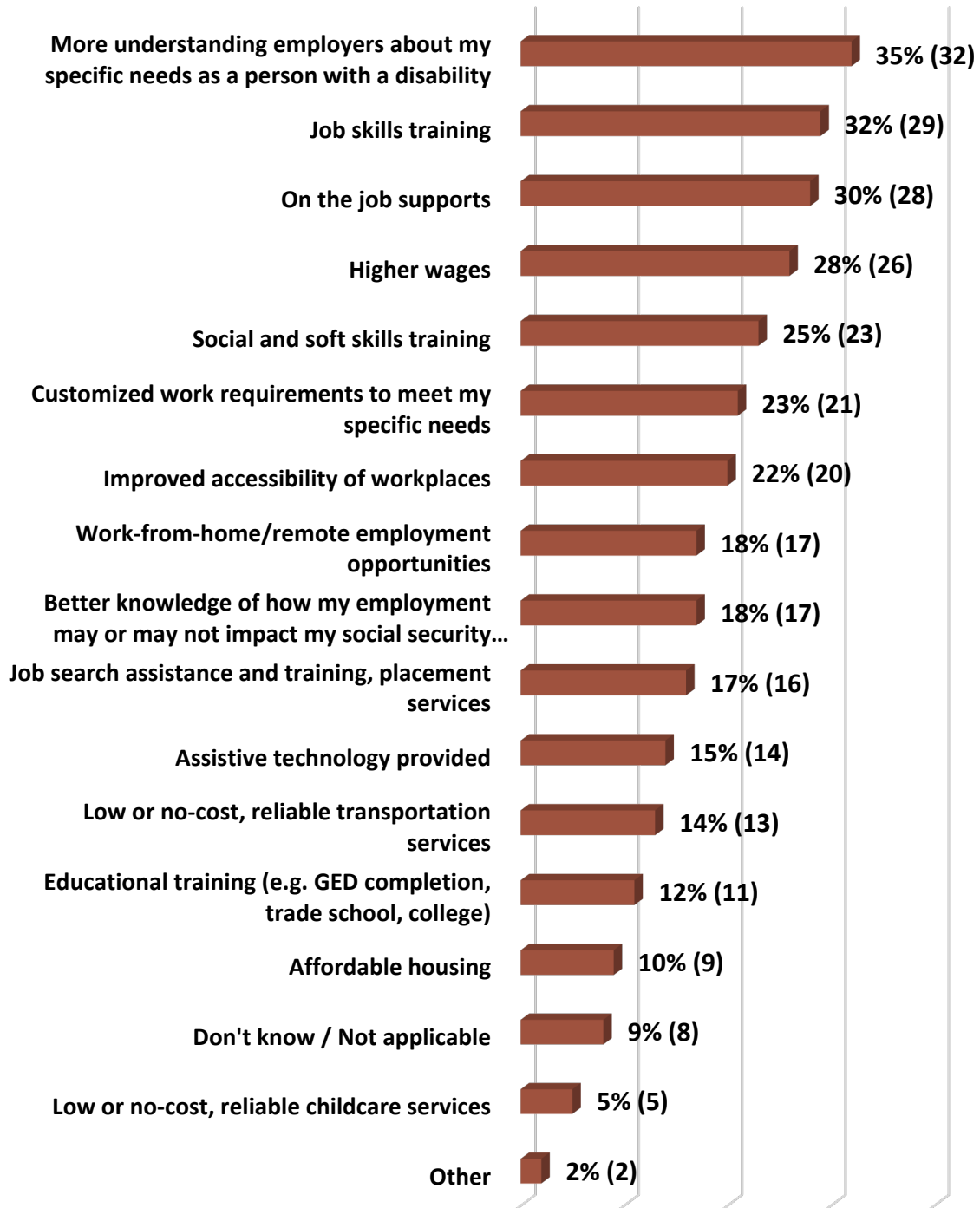
### Services That Would Have Been Helpful to Obtaining Employment (n = 92)



## **ASPECTS THAT HAVE POSITIVELY IMPACTED EMPLOYMENT**

The chart below highlights some of the most important things that have positively impacted individuals with disabilities' ability to obtain and maintain employment. The top responses selected were more understanding employers about their specific needs (35%), job skills training (32%), and on the job supports (30%). Other factors that positively impact employment include higher wages (28%), social or soft skills training (25%) customized work requirements to meet needs (23%) and improved accessibility to the workplace (22%).

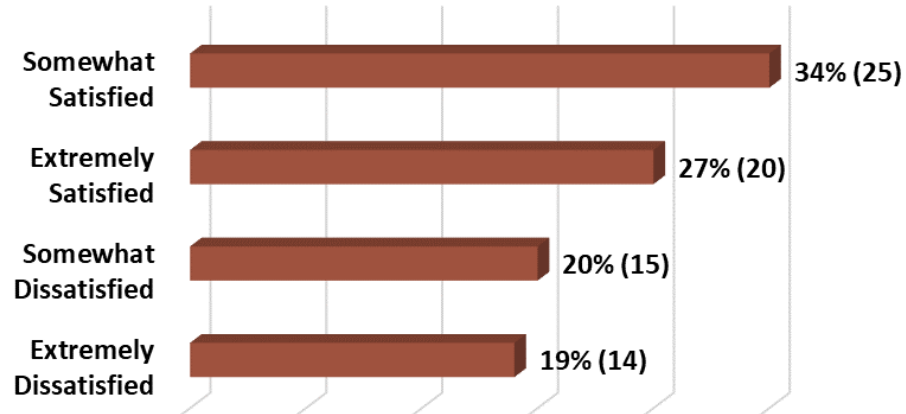
## Aspects That Have Positively Impacted Employment Journey (n = 92)



### SATISFACTION WITH ABILITY TO GET OR KEEP A JOB

Close to two-fifths (39%) of individuals with disabilities were either somewhat or extremely dissatisfied with their ability to get and keep a job in Georgia. The remaining (61%) reported being satisfied or extremely satisfied.

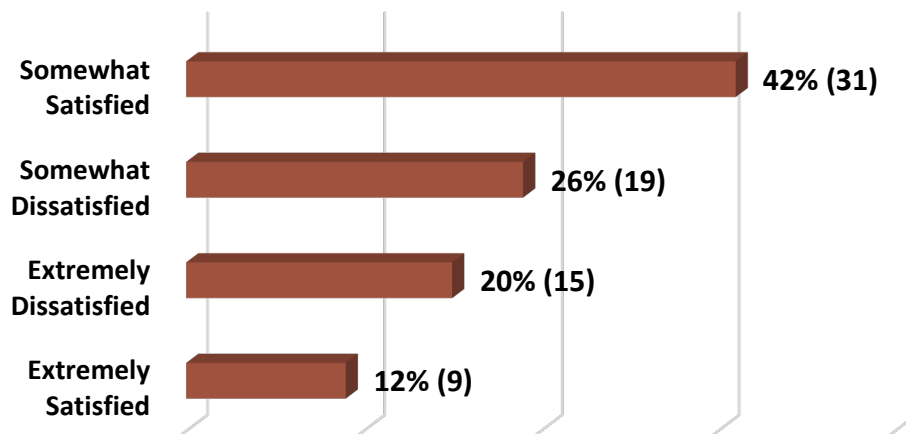
**Satisfaction With Ability to Get and Keep a Job (n = 74)**



### SATISFACTION WITH EMPLOYMENT-RELATED SERVICES AND SUPPORTS

A little less than one-third (32%) individuals with disabilities reported being somewhat or extremely dissatisfied with the employment-related services and support available in Georgia. The remaining sixty-eight percent of respondents reported being somewhat or extremely satisfied.

**Satisfaction With Employment-Related Services and Supports (n = 74)**

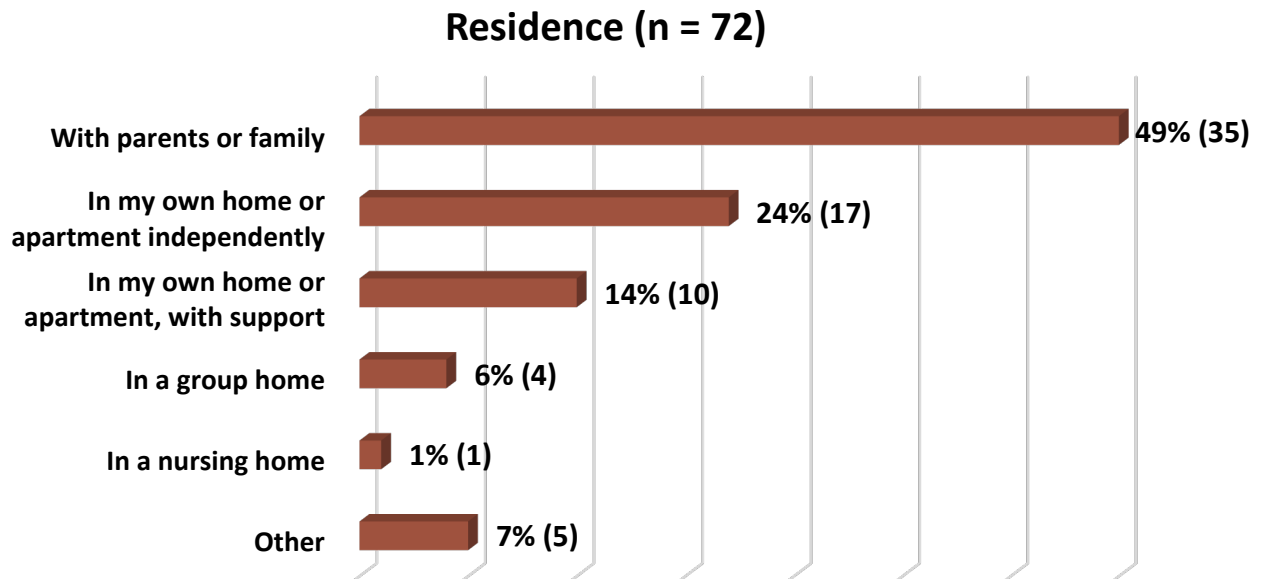


## UNDERSTAND HOW ADA PROTECTS EMPLOYMENT RIGHTS

Over half of individuals with disabilities understood how the American With Disabilities Act protects their rights related to employment. The remaining respondents either somewhat understood (26%) or did not understand how their rights were protected (18%).

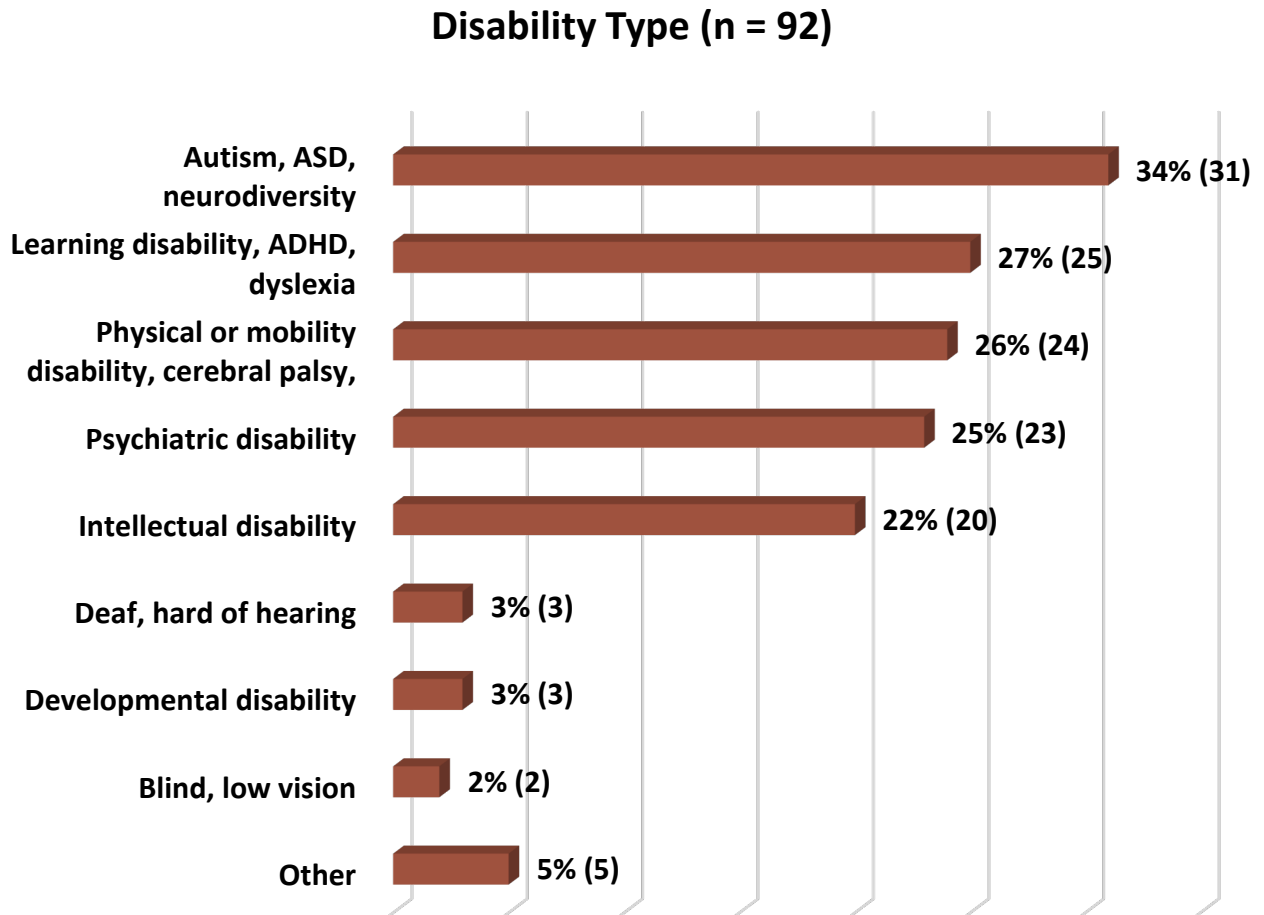
## RESIDENCE / LIVING SITUATION

Nearly half of all individuals with disabilities in the sample lived with parents or family (49%), followed by living in one's own residence independently (24%, n = 17) or with support (14%), in a group home (6%), or in a nursing home (1%). Other living situations (7%) included examples such as living in college or university housing.



## DISABILITY TYPE

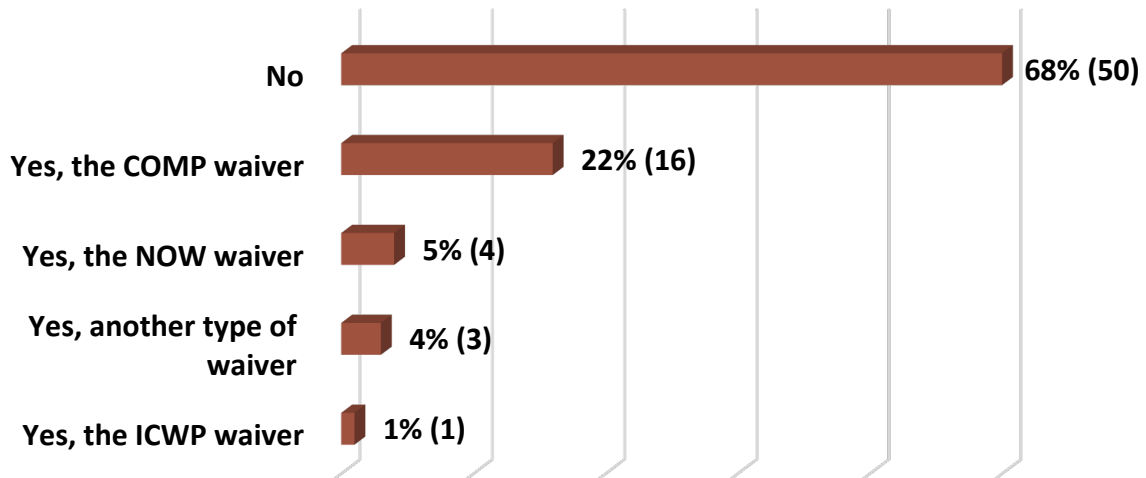
The chart below indicates which type(s) of disability survey respondents had. The top responses were: Autism/ASD and neurodiversity (34%), Learning disability/ADHD/Dyslexia (27%), and Physical or mobility disability/cerebral palsy (26%). Survey respondents also had disabilities such as psychiatric disability (25%) and intellectual disability (22%).



## MEDICAID WAIVER

Majority of individuals with disabilities in the survey sample did not have a Medicaid waiver (68%). Of those that did, 22% had the COMP waiver, 5% had the NOW waiver, and 1% had the ICWP waiver. Those who held another type of waiver (4%) included examples such as CCCP.

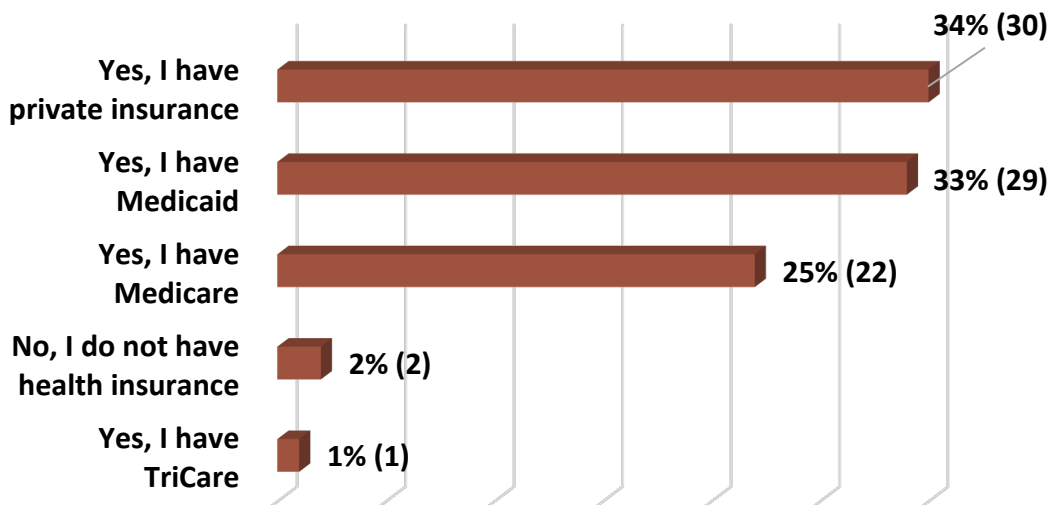
### Have Medicaid Waiver (n = 74)



## HEALTH INSURANCE

Over one-third (34%) of individuals with disabilities had private health insurance, followed by Medicaid (33%), Medicare (25%), and Tricare (1%). Two percent of respondents did not have health insurance (2%).

### Health Insurance (n = 88)





## RESPONSES TO OPEN ENDED QUESTIONS

### WHAT IS WORKING WELL RELATED TO EMPLOYMENT SERVICES AND SUPPORT

Several themes emerged when asking individuals with disabilities what is working well with regards to employment services and supports. One of the top responses was satisfaction with on the job supports and job placement services.

*"The many specialized programs for helping individuals with disabilities seek work are often beneficial... to those who qualify for them and are aware of them."*

*"Job placement assistance and on the job, support has been extremely beneficial."*

Another key theme that came up was the personal sense of fulfillment or the intrinsic benefits individuals with disabilities experience from having employment.

*"I find that working well at a job as an employee of the (XYZ) center has been very helpful and rewarding."*

### IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED RELATED TO EMPLOYMENT SERVICES AND SUPPORT

When asked what needed improvement in the state of Georgia for individuals with disabilities in employment or seeking employment, an overarching theme was the need for more education, which fell into two categories. First, there was an emphasis on education and training of individuals with disabilities to be fully aware of their rights at work and for them to be set up for success once employed. The second education area was a focus on employers and organizations to receive education and training to reduce discrimination and stigmatization of individuals with disabilities in the workplace.

*"Many more programs could be put into place - even if just to gather and distribute information about the accommodation services that the ADA entitles us to."*

*"More training and skills are required for employers. They should know more about ADA and work hard to protect their employees and make them feel safe in their position."*

*"Better education for employers to understand how to accommodate people with disabilities. Give employers more resources to help this with those accommodations if needed."*

*"Hiring and recruiting processes must change to be more inclusive. It is incredibly easy for employers to legally engage in discrimination by excluding applicants with certain characteristics (e.g. manner of speech in a phone call) ...People with disabilities need stronger employment protections."*

Another key improvement that was needed was on-the-job supports for individuals with disabilities, including supported employment, job training, transportation access, assistive technology, and other accommodations.

*"That they should have people help them on the job and that they should have a chance"*

*"Stronger mentorship programs need to be provided for people with disabilities so they can achieve full potential in the workplace. Better access to Assistive technology should be available at the workplace for people with disabilities. Better transportation needs to be available for people with disabilities so they can reach their job sites on time."*

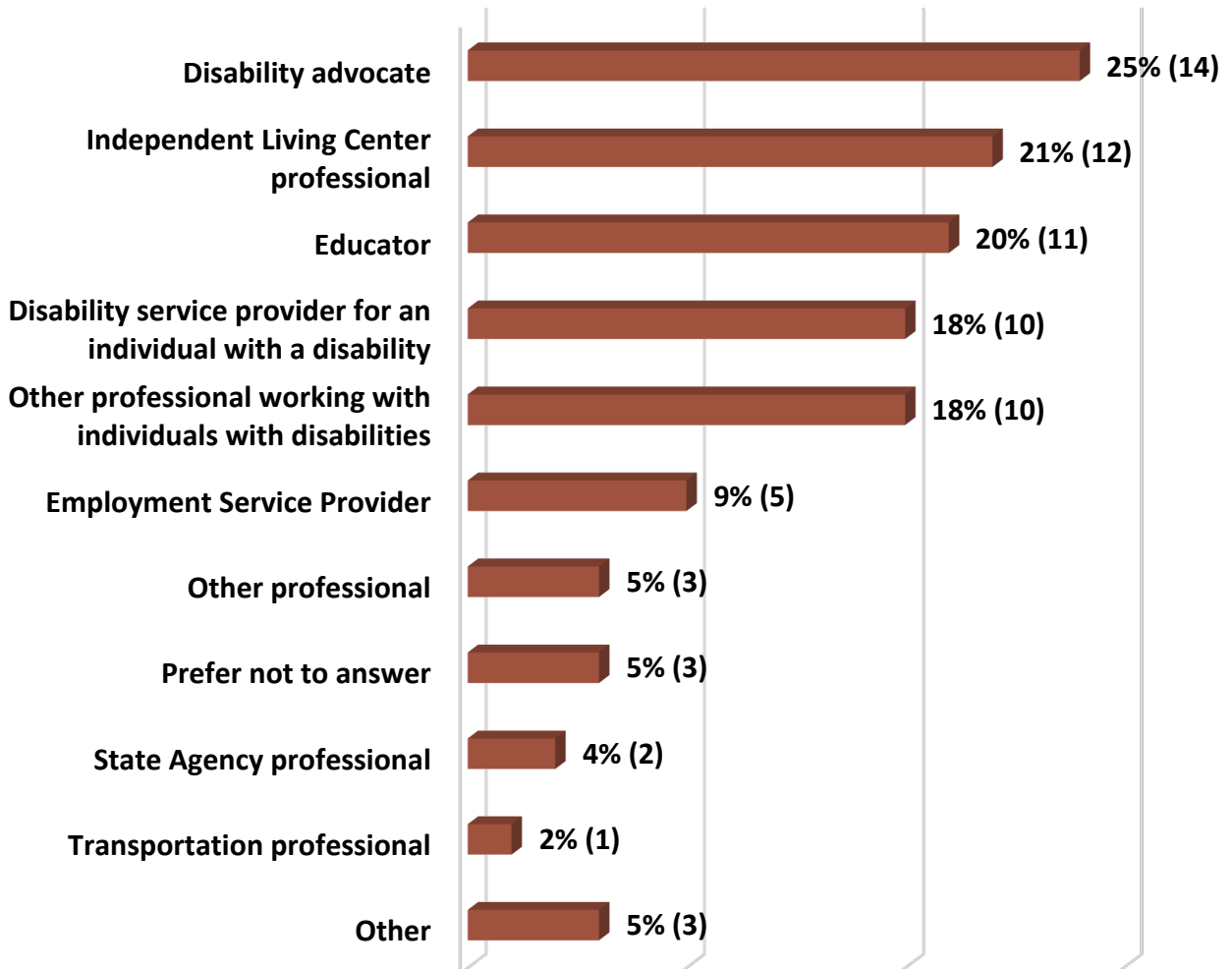
*"More accessible workplaces and supportive employers. More career services."*

## SURVEY RESULTS FOR KEY INFORMANTS

### IDENTITIES OF KEY INFORMANTS TAKING EMPLOYMENT SURVEY

The identities of key informants taking the Employment survey are shown below. Disability advocates made up one-quarter of the total number of respondents (25%). Independent Living Center professionals (21%), educators (20%), disability service providers (18%), and other professionals working with individuals with a disability (18%) made up the rest of the majority.

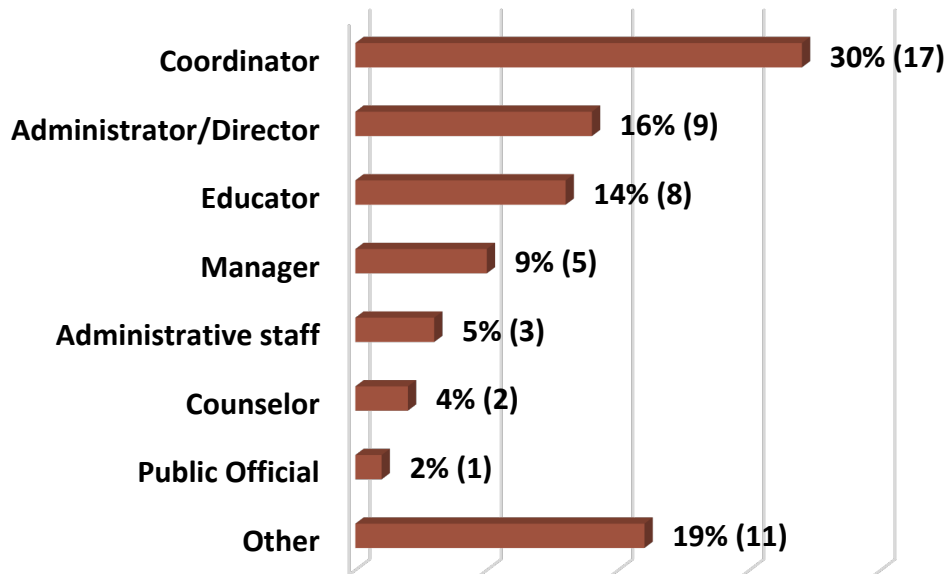
### Identities of Key Informants (n=56)



## CURRENT POSITIONS OF KEY INFORMANTS TAKING THE EMPLOYMENT SURVEY

The current employment positions of key informants taking the Employment survey are shown below. Coordinators made up the majority of the respondents with nearly 30% of respondents (30%). Other positions (19%) such as direct support professionals, case managers, employment specialist, job coach, information and referral specialist etc. made up the rest of the majority in the sample.

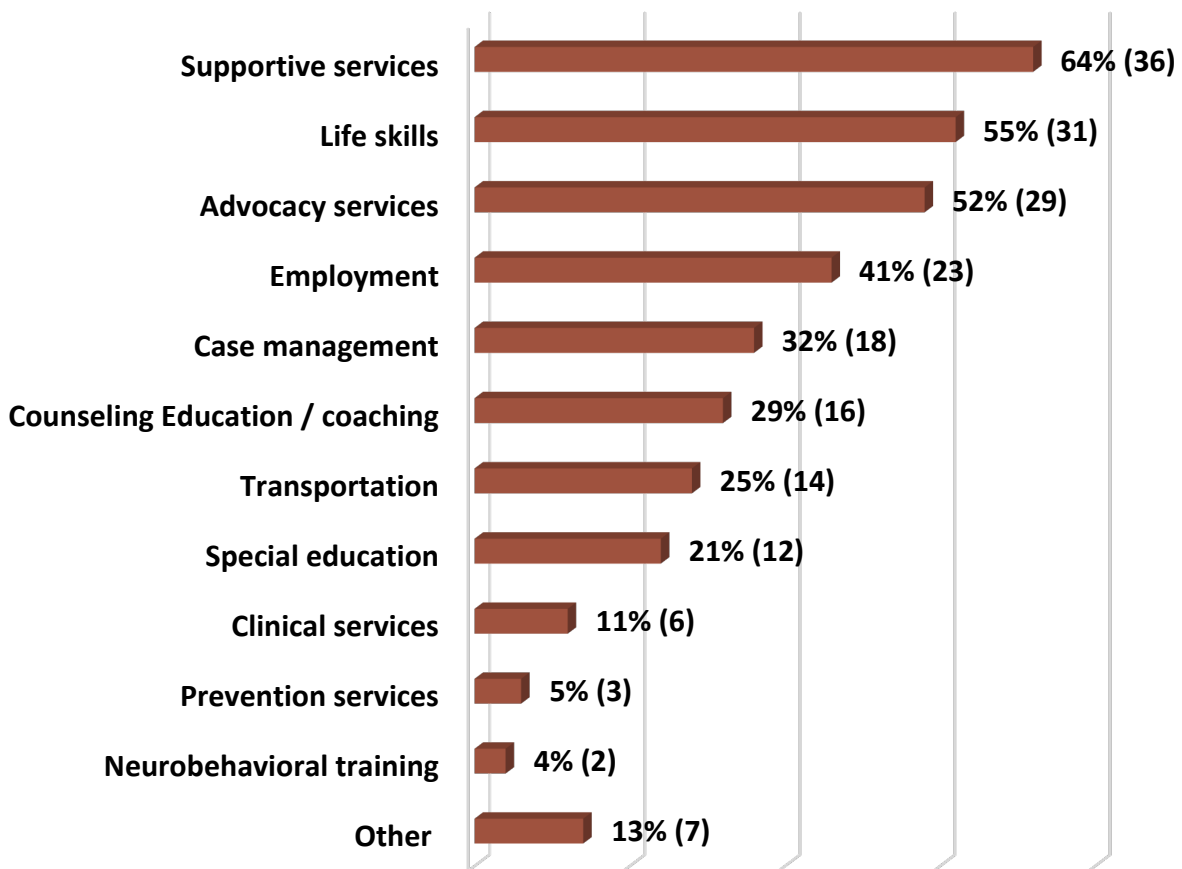
### Current Positions of Key Informants (n = 56)



## TYPE OF SERVICES OFFERED BY KEY INFORMANT AND/OR AGENCIES

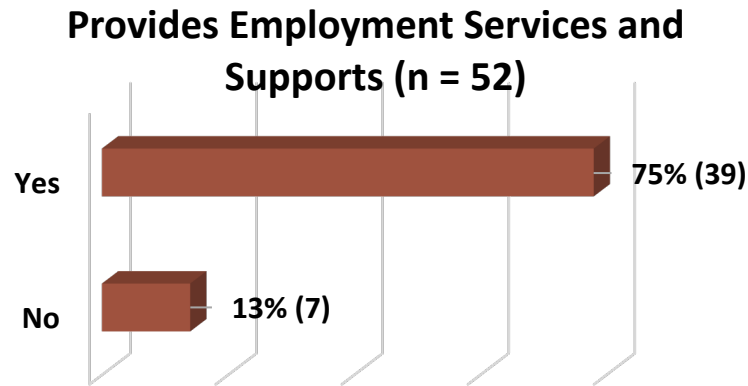
The types of services offered by key informant and/or their agencies to individuals with disabilities are shown below. Most of the respondents indicated that they provide supportive services to individuals with disabilities (64%), while another significant portion of the respondents shared that they offered life skills services to individuals with disabilities (55%). Other major services offered by the respondents includes advocacy services (52%), employment services (41%), and case management (32%).

### Types of Services Offered by Key Informants and/or Their Agencies (n = 56)



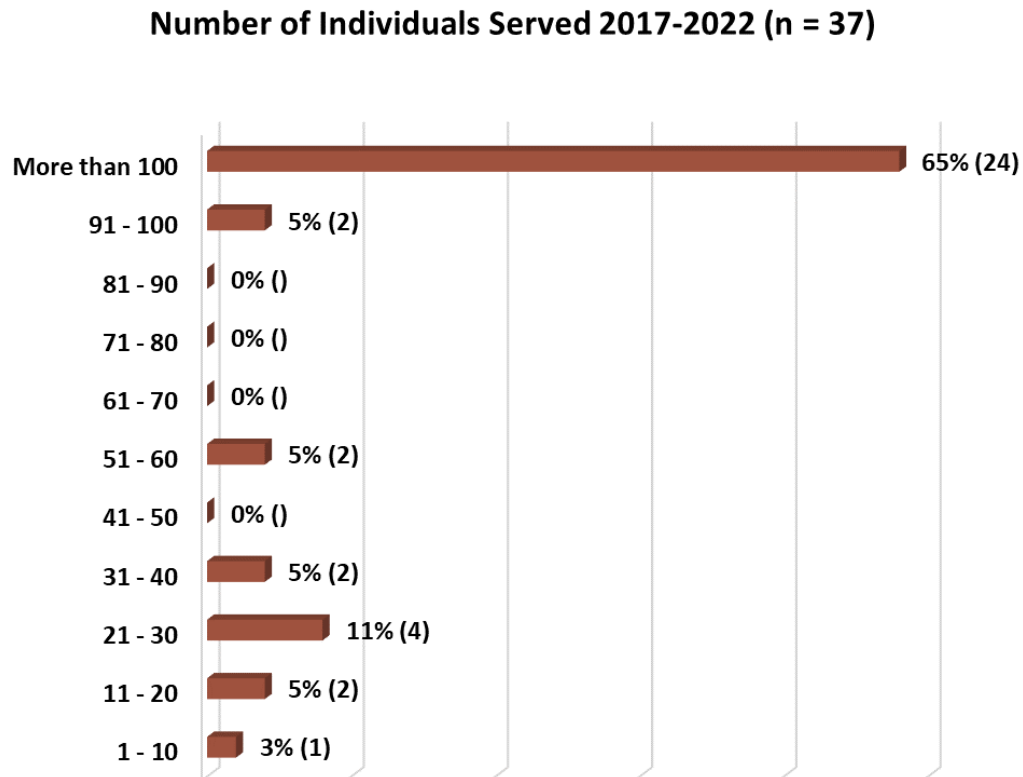
### AGENCY PROVIDING EMPLOYMENT SERVICES AND SUPPORTS

The percentage of agencies providing employment services to individuals with disabilities is shown below. The majority of the key informant respondents noted that they provide employment services to individuals with disabilities (75%).



### NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS SERVED IN THE LAST FIVE YEARS (2017-2022)

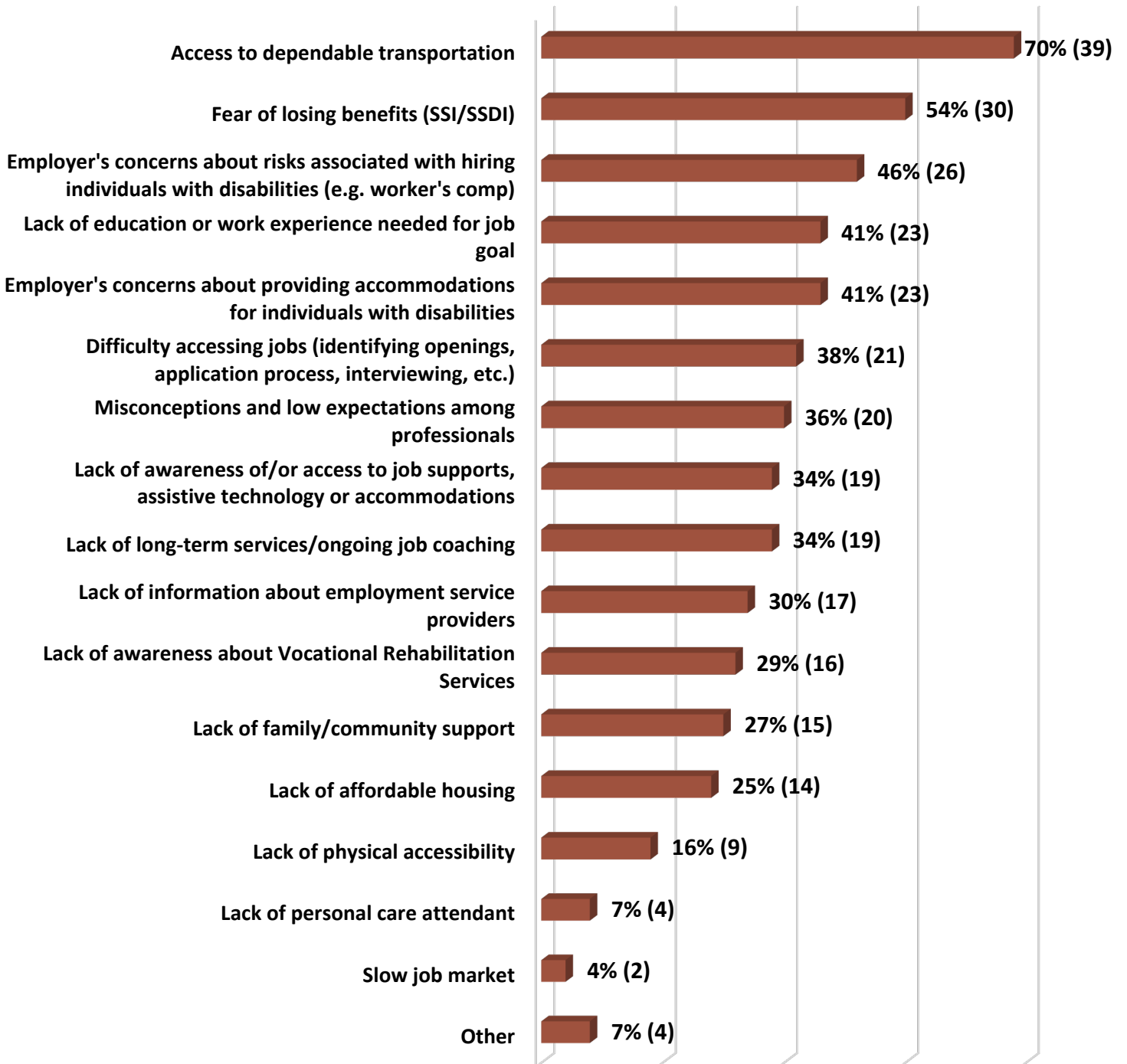
The number of individuals served by the key informants or their agencies in the last five years (2017-2022) are shown below. Nearly 65% of the respondents indicated serving more than 100 individuals in the last five years (65%). Other respondents noted serving around 21-30 individuals (11%) in the past five years.



## **BARRIERS RELATED TO EMPLOYMENT ENCOUNTERED BY PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES**

Key informants were asked about some of the barriers related to employment encountered by people with disabilities. The results are shown below. Nearly three-quarters of the respondents indicated access to transportation as a major barrier to employment (70%), while over half of respondents endorsed fear of losing SSI/SDI benefits as a major barrier (54%). Other barriers indicated by key informants include employers' concerns about risks associated with hiring individuals with disabilities (46%), lack of education or work experience needed for job goals (41%), and difficulty accessing jobs (38%).

## Key Informants' Perspective on Key Barriers to Employment for People with Disabilities (n = 56)

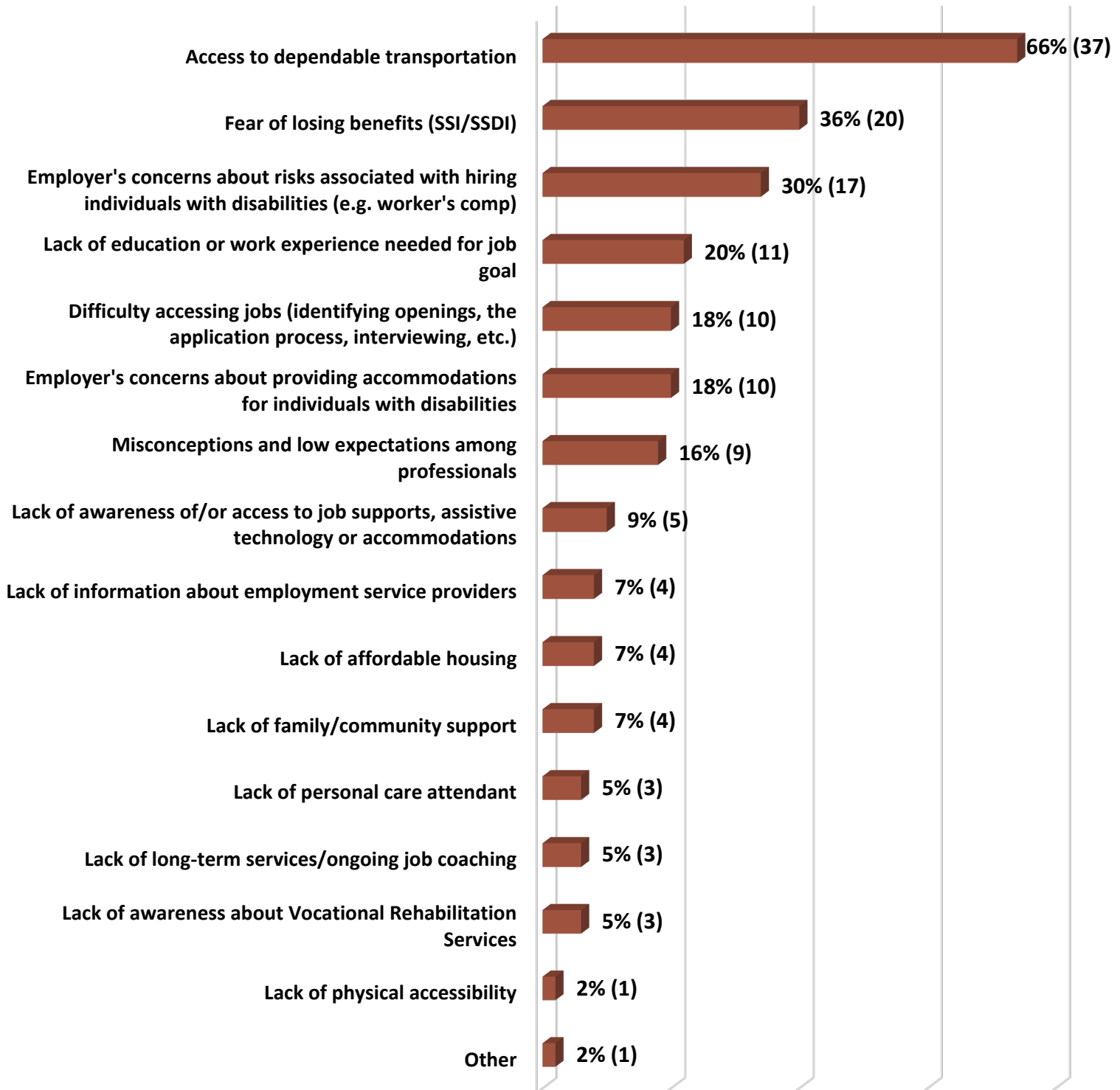


### **TOP THREE BARRIERS FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES IN GETTING OR KEEPING A JOB**

Key informants were asked about the top three barriers for individuals with disabilities in getting or keeping a job. The results are shown below. Two-thirds of the respondents indicated access to transportation as the major barrier to getting or keeping a job (66%). Other barriers indicated by key informants include fear of losing SSI/SDI benefits (36%), employer's concerns about risks associated with hiring individuals with disabilities (30%), and lack of education or work experience needed for job goals (20%) among others.



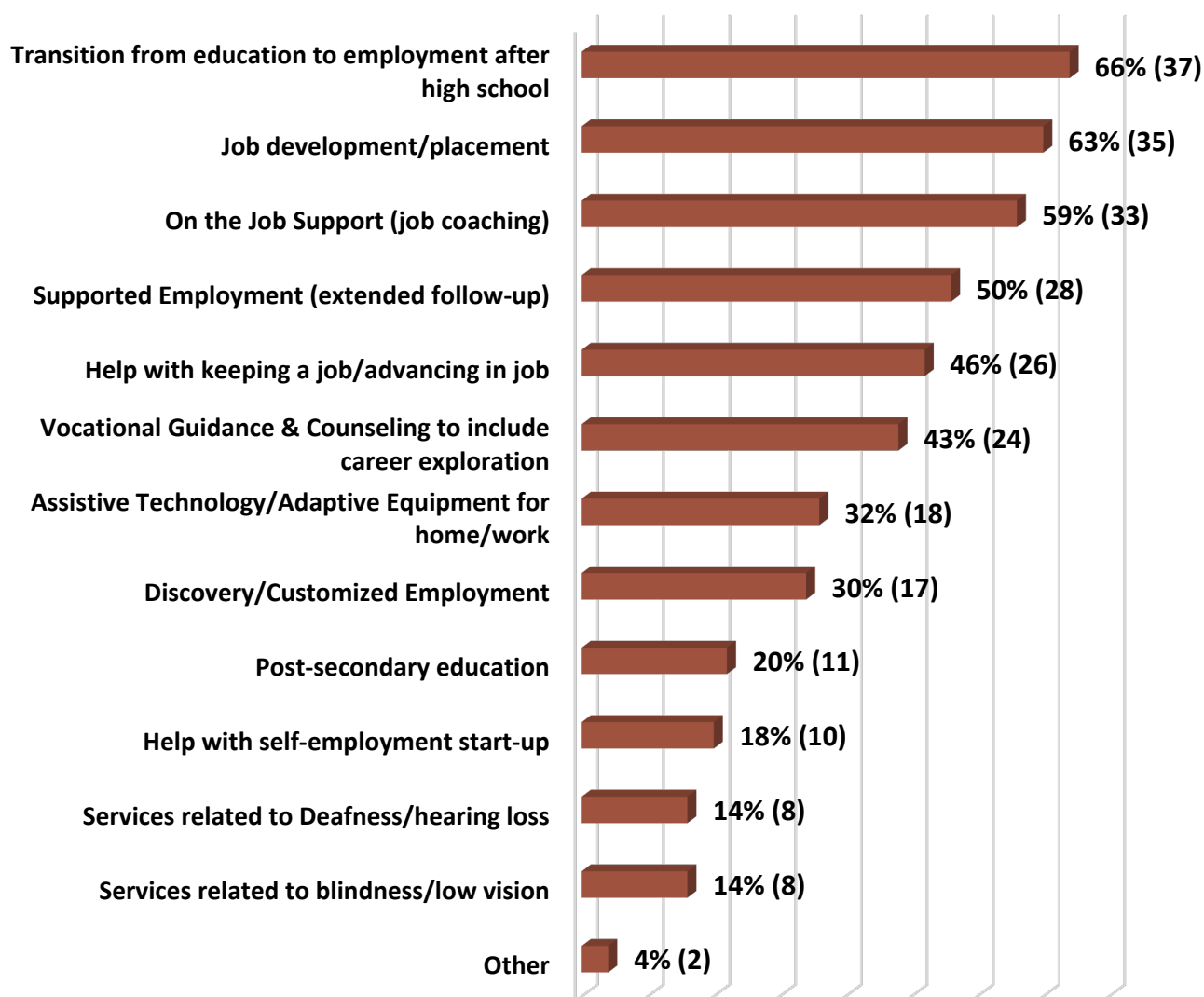
## Key Informants' Perspectives on Top Three Barriers for IWD in Getting or Keeping a Job (n = 56)



## SERVICES HELPFUL TO INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES FOR OBTAINING MEANINGFUL EMPLOYMENT

Key Informants were asked about the kind of services that have been/would be helpful to individuals with disabilities in obtaining meaningful employment in Georgia. The results are shown below. Two-thirds of respondents indicated services related to the transition from education to employment after high school have been or would be the most helpful service for individuals with disabilities (66%). Other helpful services indicated by respondents include services related to job development/ placement (63%), on-the-job support (59%), and supported employment (extended follow-up) (50%).

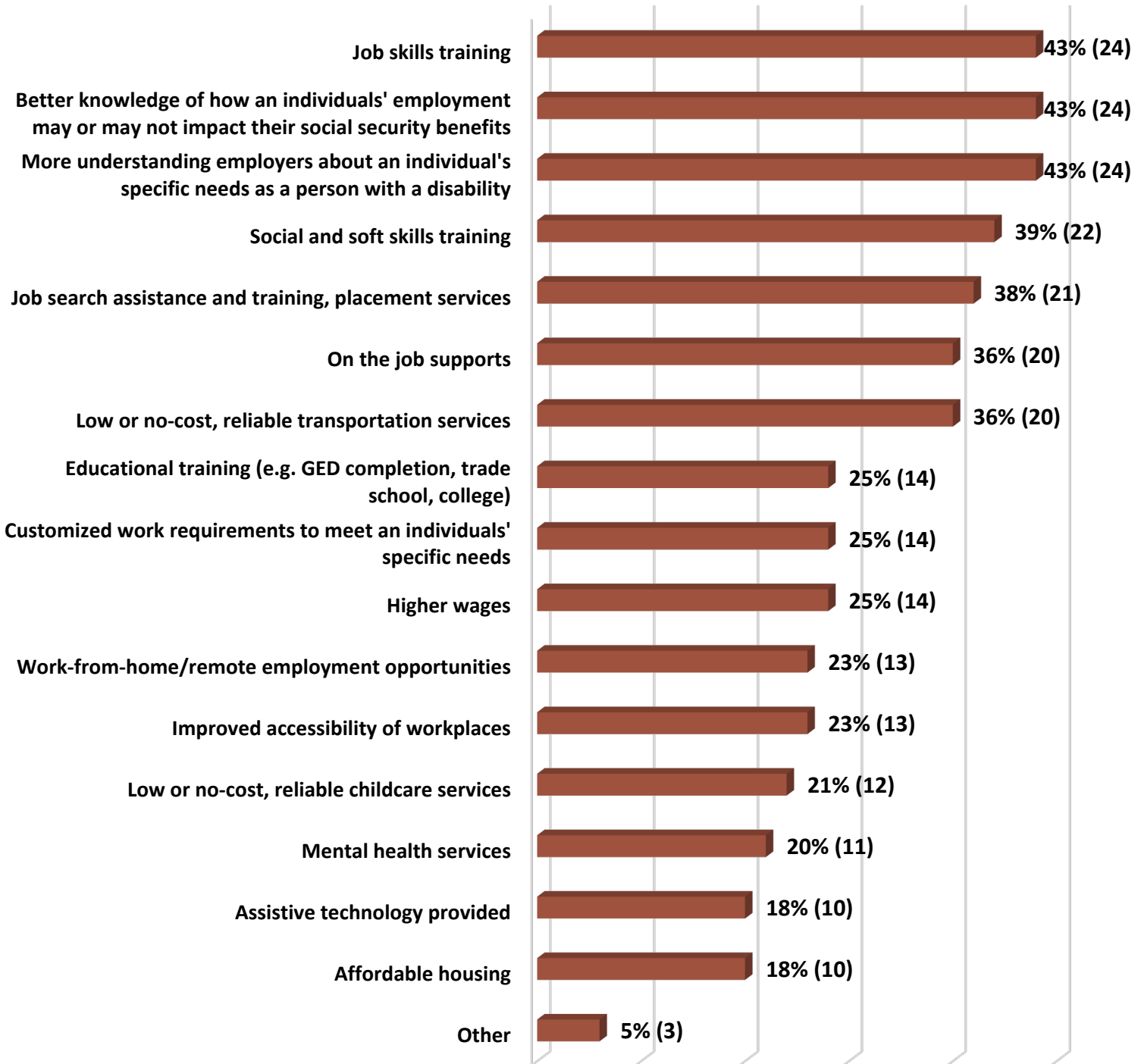
### Key Informants' Perspectives on Services Helpful to IWD for Obtaining Meaning Employment (n = 56)



## **FACTORS POSITIVELY IMPACTING INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES TO OBTAIN AND MAINTAIN EMPLOYMENT**

Key informants were asked to choose factors positively impacting individuals with disabilities to obtain and maintain employment from a given list of options. The results are shown below. There was an equal representation of three factors: namely job skill training, better knowledge of how an individual's employment may or may not impact their social security benefits, and more understanding employers about an individual's specific needs as a person with a disability with a share of 43% each. Other major factors that stood out in the responses relate to social and soft skills training (39%) and job search/placement assistance and training (38%).

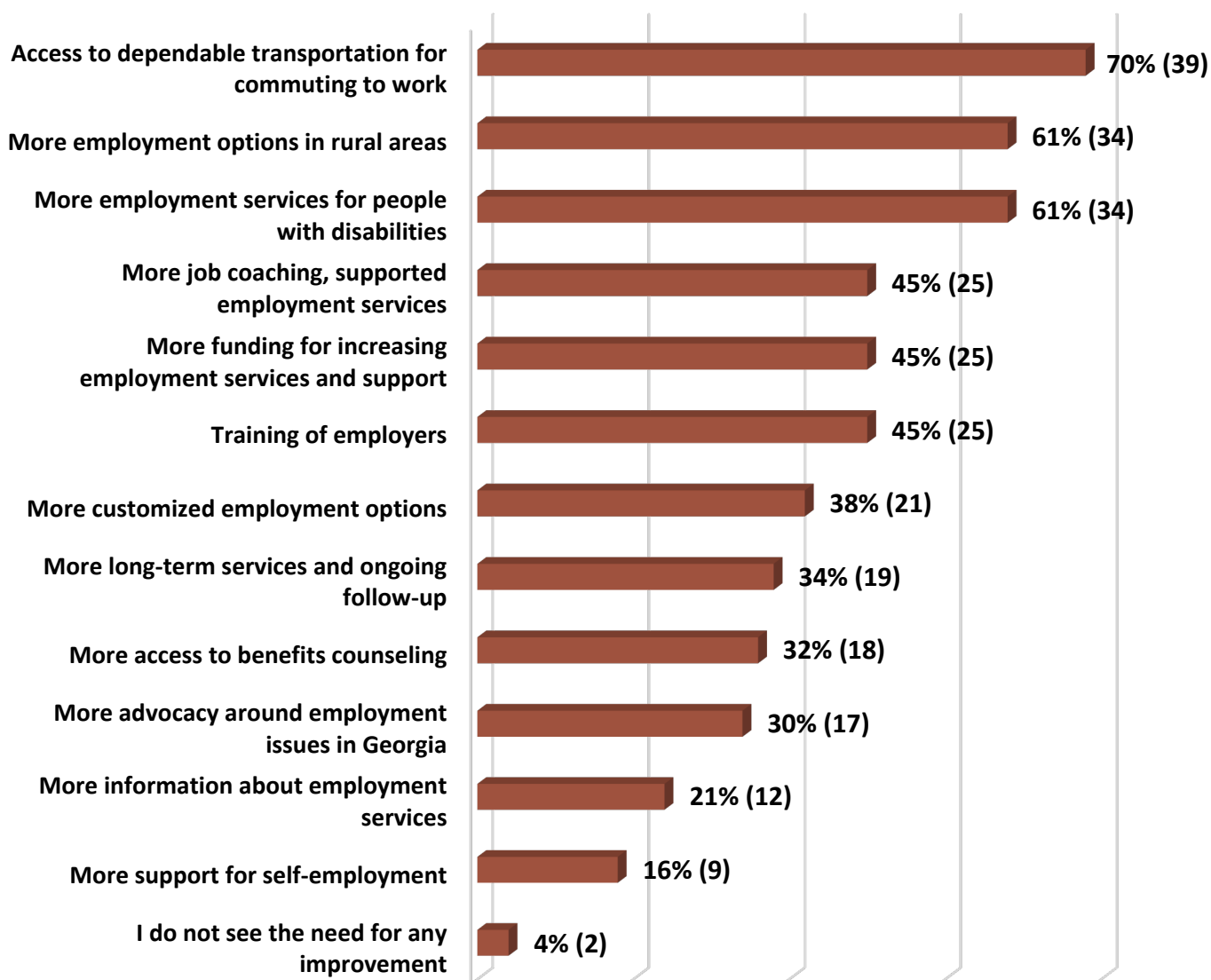
## Key Informants' Perspectives on Factors Positively Impacting IWD to Obtain and Maintain Employment (n = 56)



## RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

Key informants were asked to select some of the things they would like to see improved about employment service system in Georgia. The results are shown below. Nearly three-fourths of the respondents indicated access to reliable transportation for commuting to work (70%), while another significant portion of respondents indicated that they would like more employment options in rural areas (61%) and more employment services for people with disabilities (61%). More job coaching/supported employment, more funding for employment services and employer training made up 45% for each of the data labels mentioned.

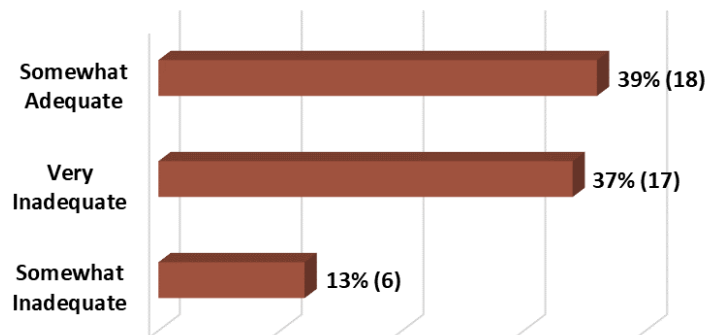
### Recommendations to Improve Employment Services (n = 56)



### ADEQUACY OF EMPLOYMENT SERVICES AND SUPPORTS

Key informants were asked by the adequacy of employment services and supports that currently exists in Georgia. The results are shown below. Nearly 40% of the respondents indicated that the current employment services and supports in Georgia are somewhat adequate (39%). Another significant portion of respondents shared that the services are very inadequate (37%). Only 13% of the respondents shared that the services and support are somewhat inadequate.

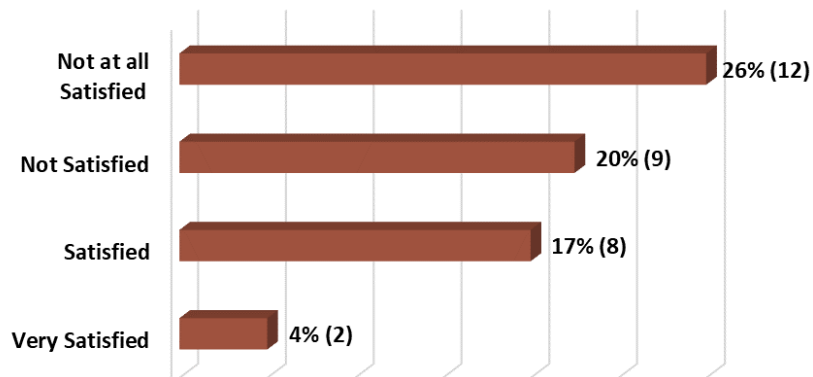
**Adequacy of Employment Services and Supports (n = 46)**



### SATISFACTION WITH SERVICES RECEIVED FROM GVRA

Key Informants taking the Employment survey were asked about their level of satisfaction with the services received by people with disabilities from Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency (GVRA). The results are shown below. Nearly 26% of respondents were not at all satisfied with the services from GVRA. Only 4% of respondents indicated that they were very satisfied with the services from GVRA.

**Satisfaction With Services Received From GVRA (n = 46)**



## RESPONSES TO OPEN ENDED QUESTIONS

### WHAT IS WORKING WELL WITH REGARDS TO EMPLOYMENT SERVICES AND SUPPORT

Many respondents value the services received from support systems such as independent living centers and rehabilitation places advocating for employment opportunities for people with disabilities and providing information about resources and educational opportunities. Some respondents shared positive experiences receiving services that have helped them thrive in their workplaces and grow in their roles. One respondent shared about their positive experience with IPSE programs preparing students for employment and connecting them with professionals in their area of interests. Another respondent shared about their positive experiences with GVRA, including their association with an employment service provider and successfully getting placed in their job roles through one-on-one job coaching and good relationships with employers. Some have also cited the increase in wages that is working well in the state of Georgia.

*“One-on-one job coaching and local providers are able to have relationships with the individuals being served and the employers, so that their job placement is robust and supports are longer-term”*

*“IPSE programs preparing students for employment and connecting them with professionals in their area of interest to assist with job search.”*

*“Supported Employment agencies are doing their job and clients are getting hired all over the state.”*

### IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED RELATED TO EMPLOYMENT SERVICES AND SUPPORT

Respondents shared a strong need to improve the services offered by GVRA. They voiced their concerns regarding the need for dedicated counselors for specialty caseloads, strong efforts towards the retention of VR staff, more knowledge about adults with disabilities, and more work in terms of meeting their organization’s mission goals. Other concerns of respondents relate to better transportation services in the state, educating employers about the abilities of people with disabilities, higher wages and training for jobs, awareness of agencies that are willing to employ people with disabilities, funding for support services/ housing/ transportation, and easier ways to apply for financial waivers.

*“VR and Supported Employment providers are definitely the weak link. Not sure why VR has declined over the years...They know nothing about adults with disabilities.”*

*“Employment support has to come from more than just GVRA as does Family Support funding and NOW/COMP. It needs to be broader for adequate access”*

*Transportation in rural and small towns needs to improve. In almost every situation an individual is burdened with the following: fear of losing SSI, unable to work certain hours because of public transit, and employers becoming hesitant to hire.*

*More job opportunities for persons with all types of disabilities as well as more employers being educated on hiring persons with a disability.*

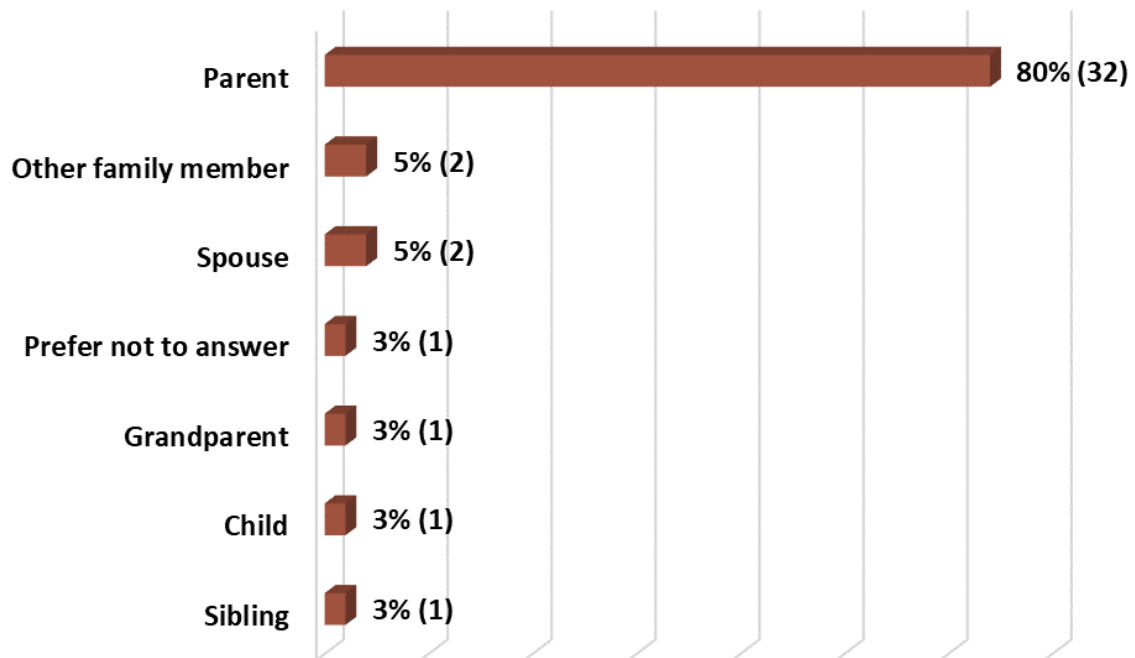
*Employers themselves need to be aware of ADA requirements and already have in place reasonable accommodations for a variety of disabilities.*

## SURVEY RESULTS FOR FAMILY & CAREGIVERS

### IDENTITIES OF FAMILY MEMBERS TAKING EMPLOYMENT SURVEY

The identities of family members and caregivers who completed the survey on employment shown below. Parents were the most represented group in the sample, making up four-fifth (80%) of respondents. Spouses (5%) and other family members (5%) made up the rest of the majority.

### Identities of Family Members Taking Employment Survey (n = 40)

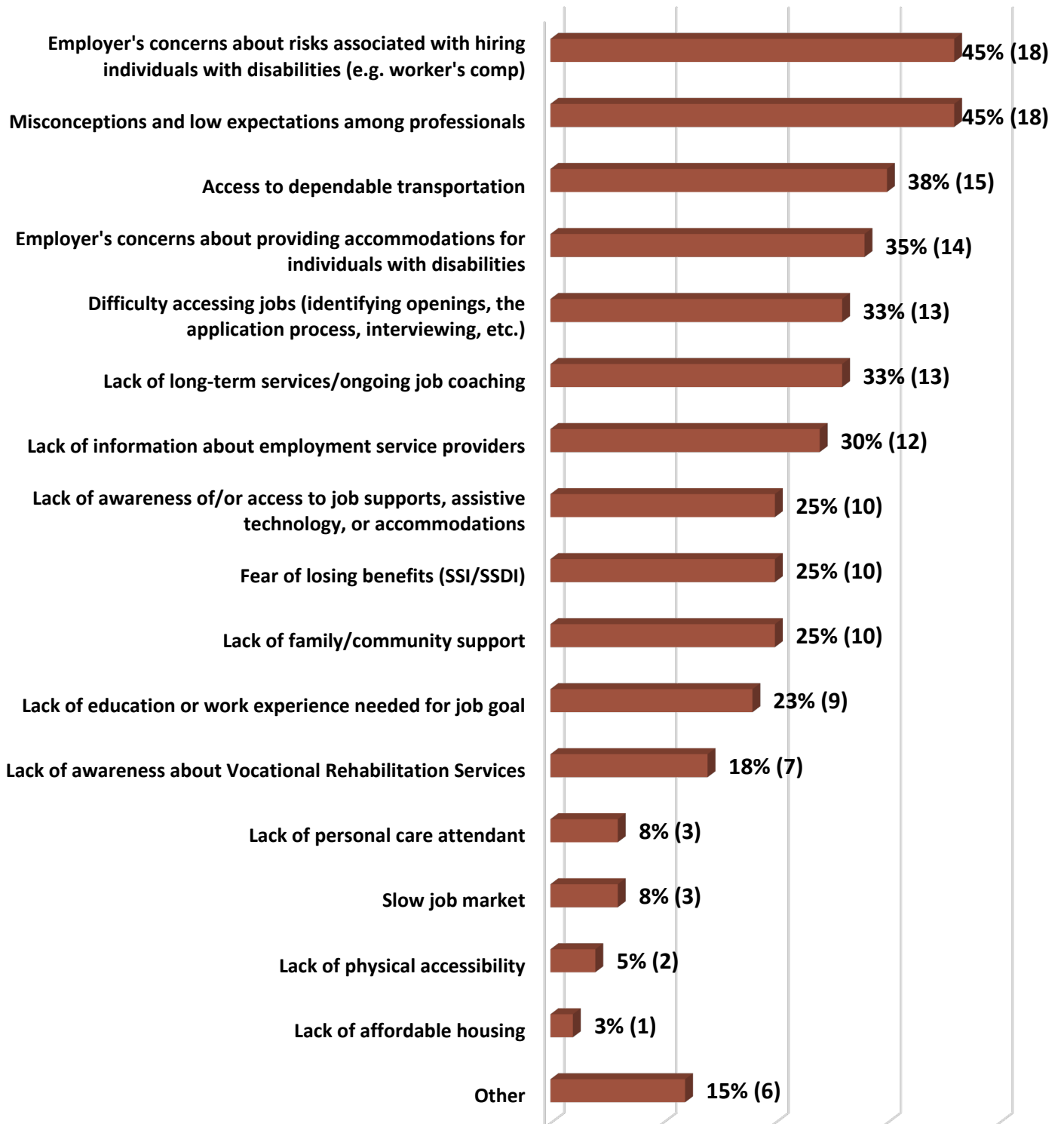




## **BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT FOR FAMILY MEMBERS WITH DISABILITIES**

Family members were asked to share the barriers that their loved ones with disabilities have experienced in getting or keeping a job in Georgia. Most common barriers expressed included employers having concerns about the risks associated with hiring individuals with disabilities (45%), misconceptions and low expectations among professionals (45%), a lack of access to dependable transportation (38%), and employers' concerns about providing accommodations to individuals with disabilities (35%). Lack of long-term services or ongoing job coaching and difficulty accessing jobs (identifying openings, application process, interviewing, etc.) were also identified as barriers, with 33% of respondents endorsing each.

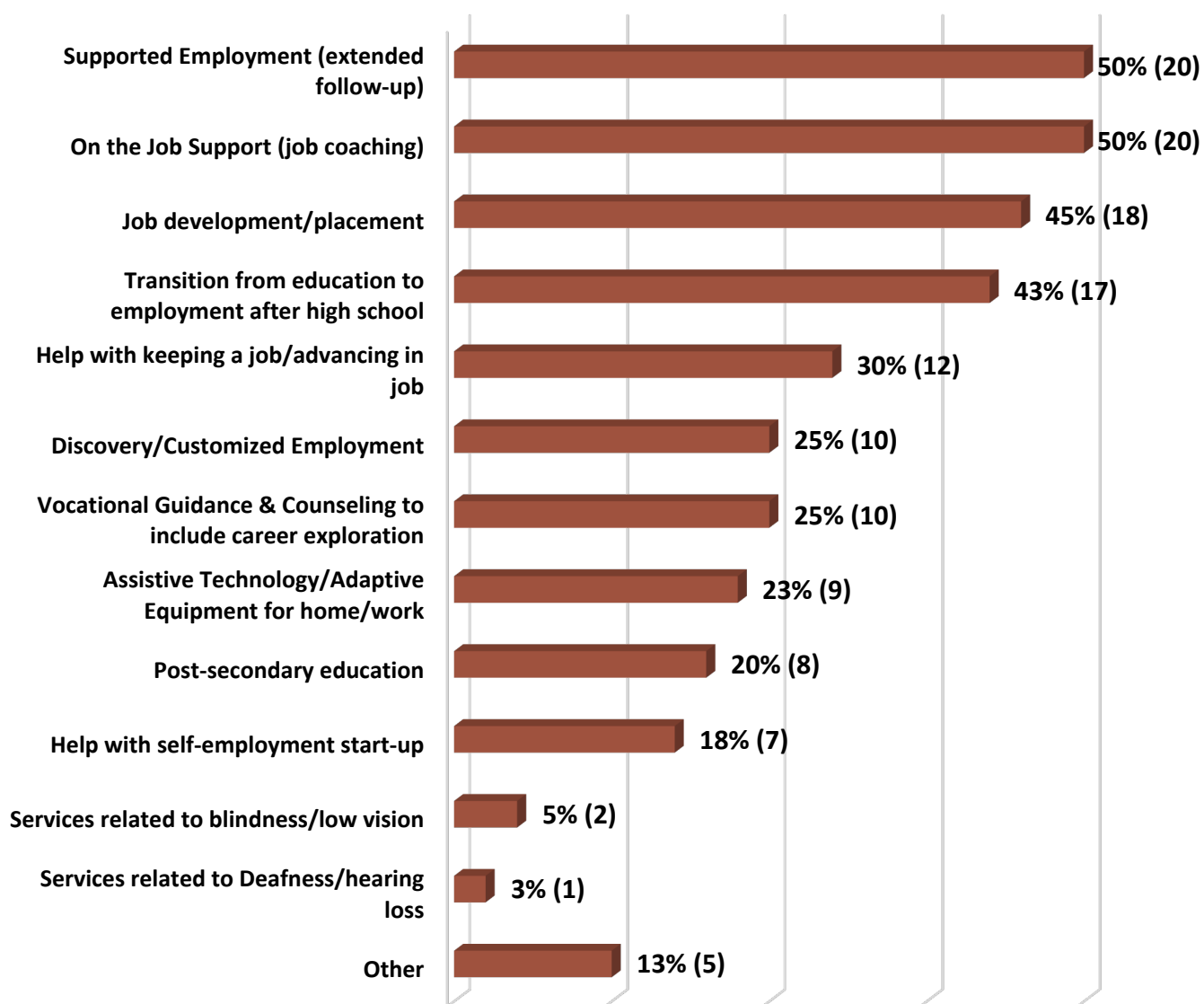
## Barriers to Employment for Family Members With Disabilities (n=40)



## FAMILY PERSPECTIVE ON SERVICES HELPFUL FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES IN OBTAINING EMPLOYMENT

Family members were asked to endorse services that have been or would be helpful for loved ones with disabilities in obtaining meaningful employment. Respondents mentioned that supported employment with extended follow-up would be helpful for their family members with disabilities (50%), along with on-the-job support, also known as job coaching (50%). Job development and placement services (45%) and transition services (from education to employment) (43%) were also identified. Help with keeping a job (30%), Discovery/Customized Employment (25%), and vocational guidance and counseling (25%) were also mentioned by respondents.

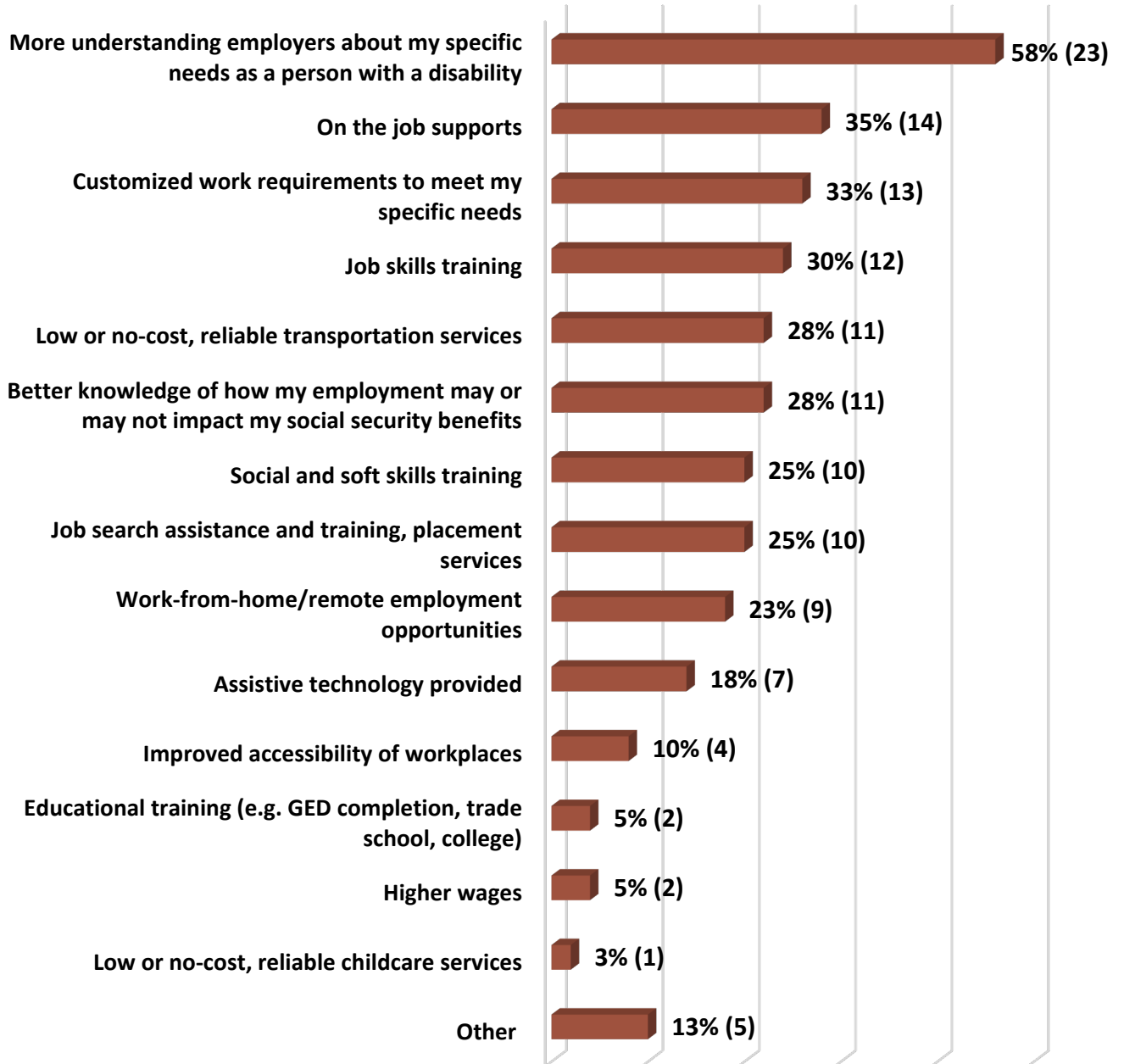
### Family Perspective on Services Helpful for Individuals with Disabilities in Obtaining Employment (n = 40)



## **FAMILY PERSPECTIVE ON INDIVIDUAL WITH DISABILITIES' ABILITY TO OBTAIN & MAINTAIN EMPLOYMENT**

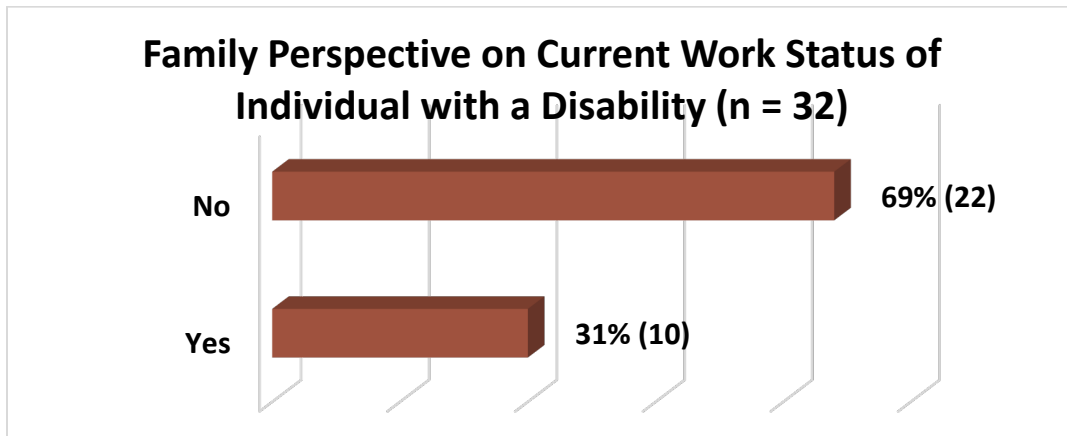
Family members were asked to identify factors that have had positive impacts on loved ones' ability to obtain and maintain employment. Respondents mentioned employers becoming more understanding of the specific needs of individuals (58%), on-the-job supports (35%) and customized work requirements to meet specific needs (33%). Additional factors identified include job skills training (30%), better knowledge of how employment affects social security benefits (28%) and reliable, low/no cost transportation services (28%).

## Family Perspective on Individual with Disabilities' Ability to Obtain & Maintain Employment (n = 40)



### **FAMILY PERSPECTIVE ON CURRENT WORK STATUS OF INDIVIDUAL WITH A DISABILITY**

Family members were asked whether their loved ones with disabilities are currently working, the results of which are shown below. Almost 70% of respondents shared that their family members with disabilities are not currently working (69%). Just over 30% of respondents shared that their family members with disabilities are currently working (31%).

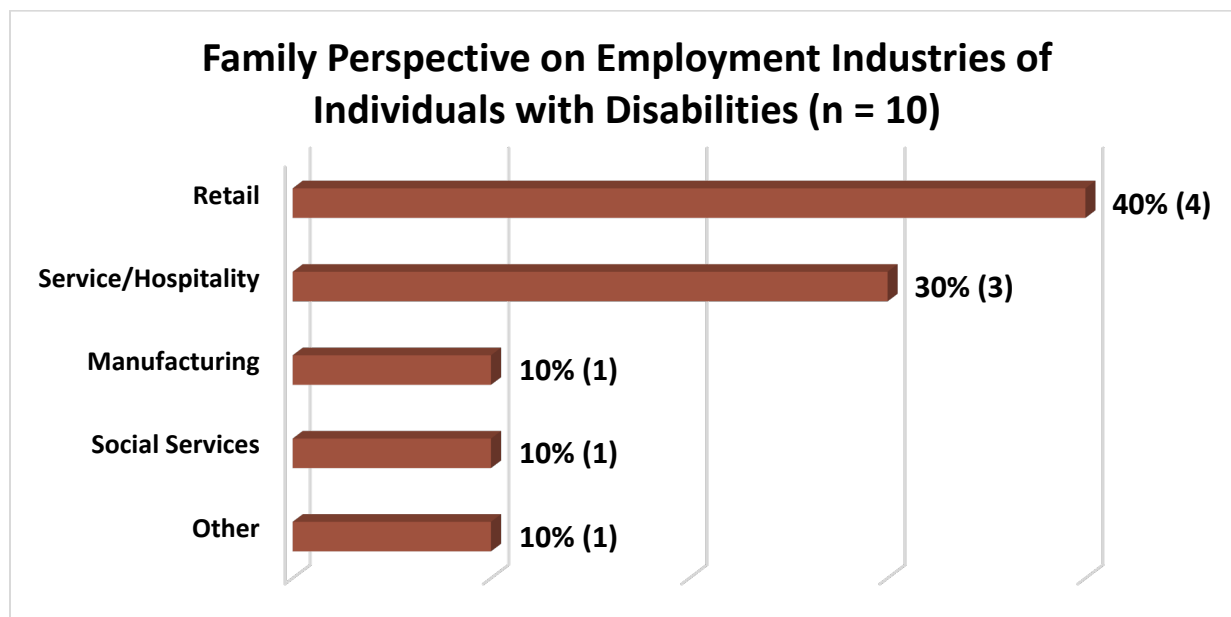


### **FAMILY PERSPECTIVE ON CURRENT EMPLOYMENT STATUS OF INDIVIDUAL WITH A DISABILITY**

Of the respondents that said their loved one was currently employed, nine-tenths (90%) shared that their family members with disabilities were employed part-time earning minimum wage or higher, while one-fifth of family members with disabilities were employed in supported employment (20%).

### **FAMILY PERSPECTIVE ON EMPLOYMENT INDUSTRIES OF INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES**

Family members whose loved ones with disabilities are currently employed were asked which industries their loved ones are employed in. Employment in the retail industry was highly represented amongst individuals with disabilities (40%), followed by service/hospitality (30%) and industries such as social services (10%), and manufacturing (10%).



### **FAMILY PERSPECTIVE ON INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES' JOB ROLES & TITLES**

Family members were asked to share the job roles and titles held by their loved ones with disabilities. Common examples included customer service, bus boy, courtesy clerk, bakery assistant.

### **FAMILY PERSPECTIVE ON INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES' WAGE RATES**

Family members were asked to share the wage rates earned by their loved ones with disabilities. The most common wage rate endorsed by respondents was \$7.25 an hour.

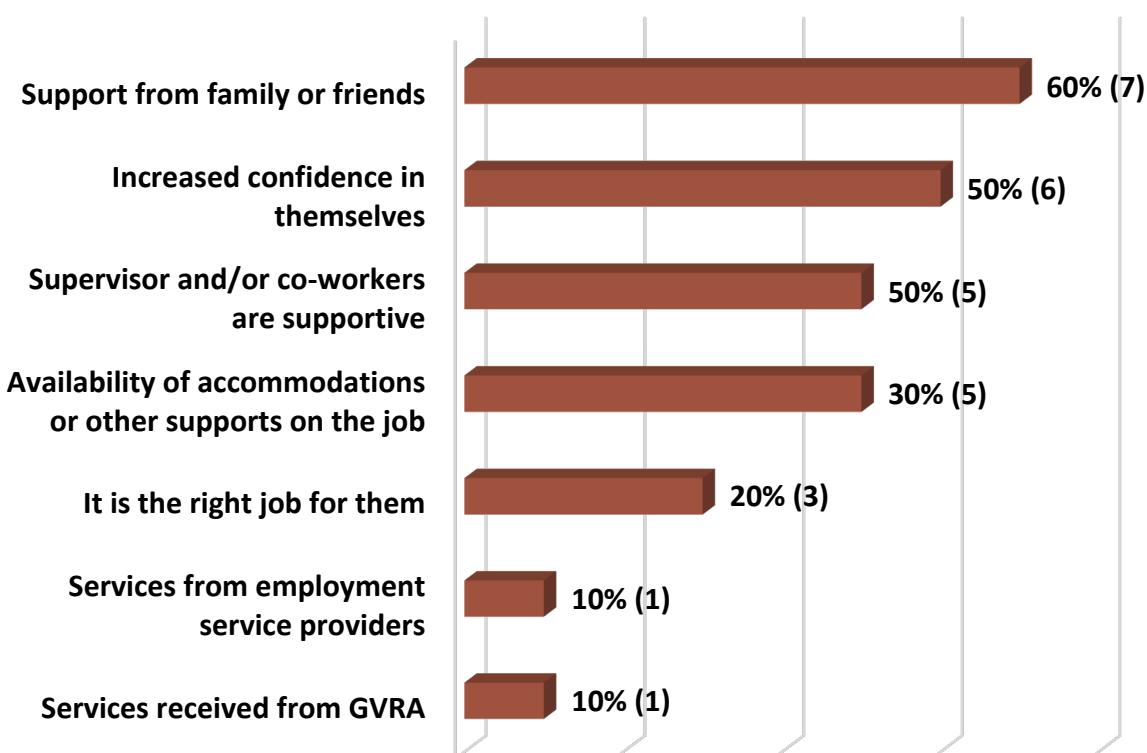
### **FAMILY MEMBERS HELPING LOVED ONES WITH DISABILITIES WITH EMPLOYMENT TASKS**

Family members were asked whether they helped loved ones with disabilities with employment-related tasks (such as picking them up and dropping them off from work). All respondents responded "yes" to helping their family members with disabilities complete employment-related tasks (100%).

## **FAMILY PERSPECTIVE ON KEY FACTORS HELPING INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES GET & KEEP JOBS**

Family members were asked to identify key factors that have helped their loved ones with disabilities to get and keep jobs. Three-fifths (60%) of respondents mentioned that support from family or friends helps, half of respondents shared that increased confidence in themselves helps (50%), and half of respondents expressed that having supportive supervisors and coworkers (50%) was helpful. Availability of accommodations and other supports on the job (30%) and feeling that the job is the right job for them (20%) were also identified as helpful factors.

### **Family Perspective on Key Factors Helping Individuals With Disabilities Get & Keep Jobs (n = 10)**



## **FAMILY PERSPECTIVE ON LOVED ONE WITH DISABILITIES CURRENTLY SEEKING EMPLOYMENT**

Family members were asked if their loved one with disabilities was currently seeking employment. Over a quarter (27%) of respondents shared that their family member was currently seeking employment.

## **HOW LONG HAS THE INDIVIDUAL WITH DISABILITY BEEN SEEKING EMPLOYMENT**

Family members were given asked to share how long their loved one with disabilities has been seeking employment. The average time frames mentioned by family members ranged from between eight months and four years.



## **FAMILY PERSPECTIVE ON INDIVIDUAL WITH A DISABILITY RECEIVING ASSISTANCE TO FIND A JOB**

Family members were asked if their loved ones with disabilities have ever received assistance to find a job. Only one-third (33%) of respondents mentioned that their family members have received assistance. The remaining respondents stated that their family members with disabilities have not received assistance in finding a job (67%).

## **ORGANIZATIONS HELPING FAMILY MEMBERS WITH EMPLOYMENT**

Family members whose loved ones received assistance in finding a job were asked to list the organizations that assisted them. The organizations that were named included Hi-Hope Service Center (Lawrenceville, GA) and Wiregrass Georgia Technical College (Valdosta, GA).

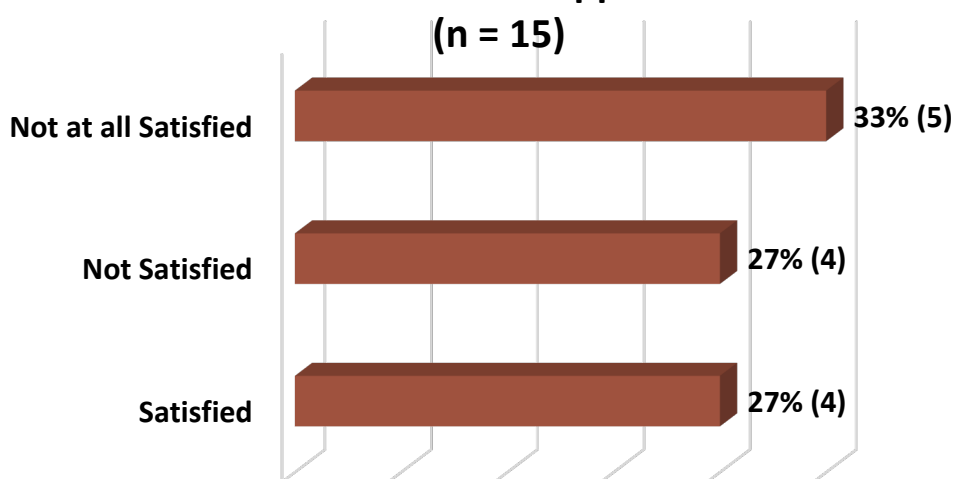
## **FAMILY PERSPECTIVE ON WHETHER INDIVIDUAL WITH A DISABILITY WORKED WITH GVRA**

Family members were asked if their loved ones with disabilities have ever worked with GVRA (Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency). Respondents' answers were nearly evenly split, with 48% of family members reporting that their loved ones have worked with GVRA and 45% of family members reporting that their loved ones have not worked with GVRA.

## **FAMILY PERSPECTIVE ON INDIVIDUAL'S SATISFACTION WITH GVRA SUPPORTS & SERVICES**

Family members were asked how satisfied they, or the individual with disability was, with the services the loved one received from GVRA (Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency). Three-fifths (60%) of respondents were not at all or not satisfied with GVRA services. Slightly over a quarter of family members or individuals with disabilities, were satisfied with the services their loved one received from GVRA (27%).

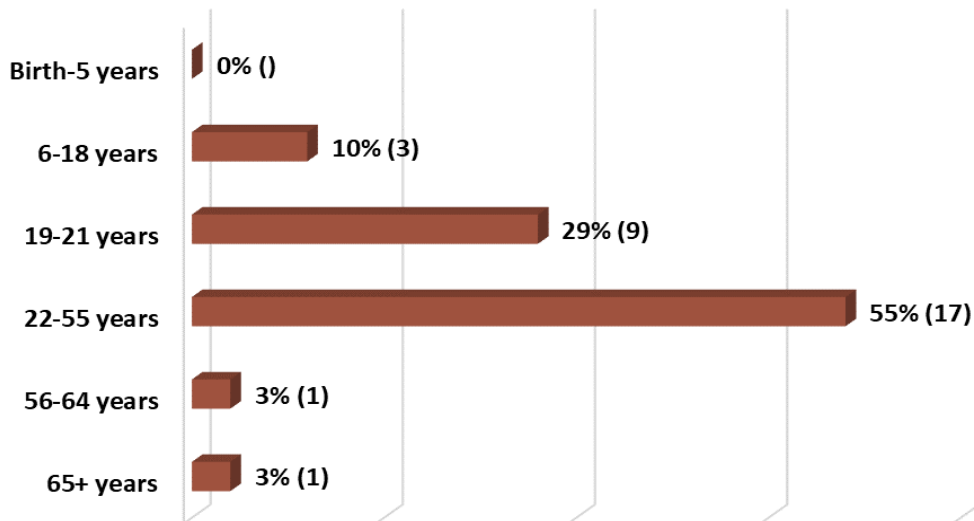
### **Family Perspective on Individual's Satisfaction with GVRA Supports & Services**



### AGE RANGES OF FAMILY MEMBERS WITH DISABILITIES

The age ranges of respondents' family members with disabilities are shown below. Over half (55%) of the sample was made up of family members and caregivers of individuals between the ages of 22-55, followed by ages 19-21 (29%) and 6-18 (10%).

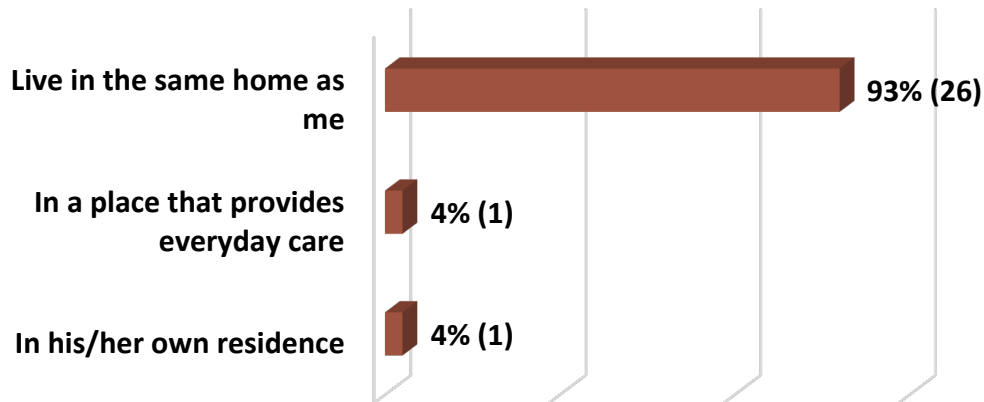
**Age Ranges of Family Members With Disabilities (n = 31)**



### **FAMILY PERSPECTIVE ON INDIVIDUAL WITH DISABILITIES' RESIDENCES**

The residences of respondents' family members with disabilities are shown below. Majority of respondents shared that their family members with disabilities lived in the same home as them (93%). Additionally, 4% of respondents' family members lived in a place that provides everyday care, and 4% of family members lived in their own residences.

#### **Family Perspective on Individual with Disabilities' Residences (n = 28)**



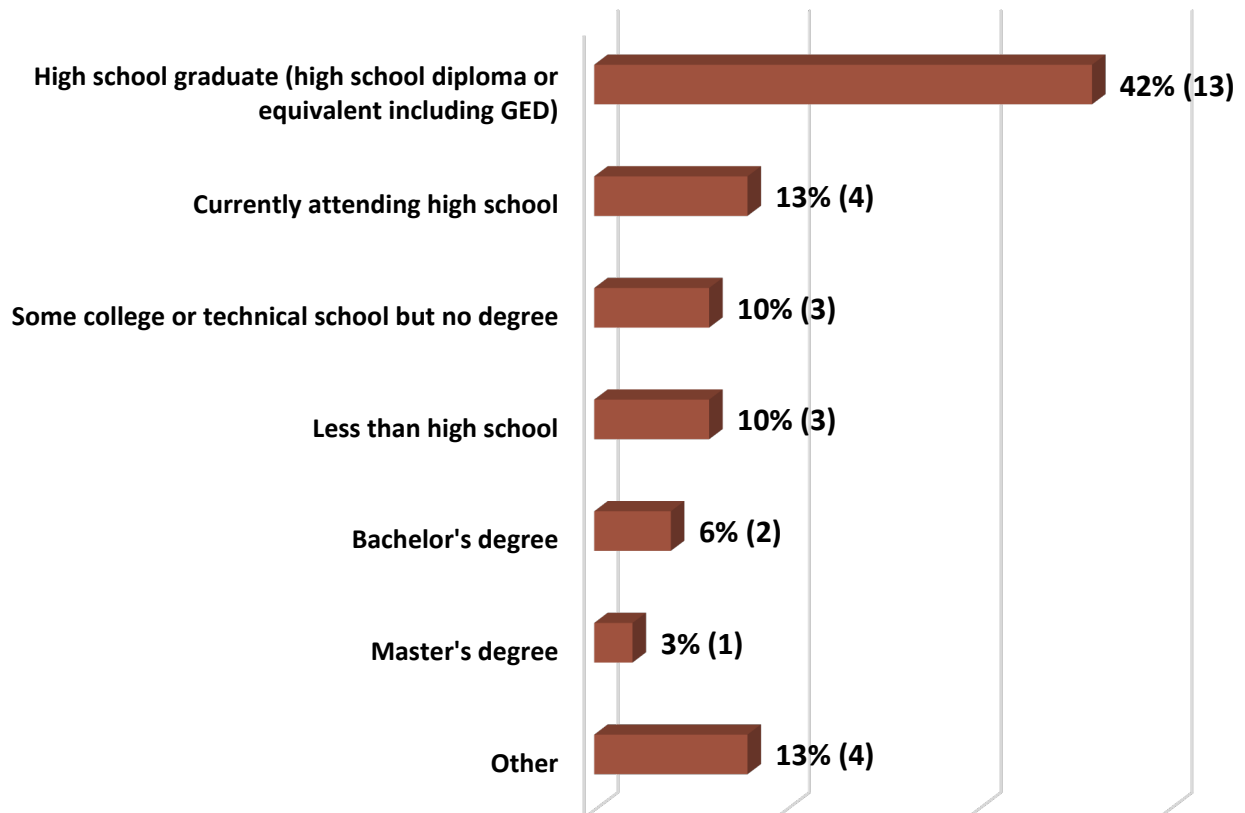
### **FAMILY REPORT ON INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES WHO HAVE BEEN IN US ARMED SERVICES**

Family members were asked if their loved ones with disabilities have ever served in the US Armed Services. Only 3% of respondents shared that their loved ones are currently serving in the US Armed Services (active duty, reserves, or guard).

## HIGHEST LEVEL OF SCHOOL COMPLETED BY FAMILY MEMBERS WITH DISABILITIES

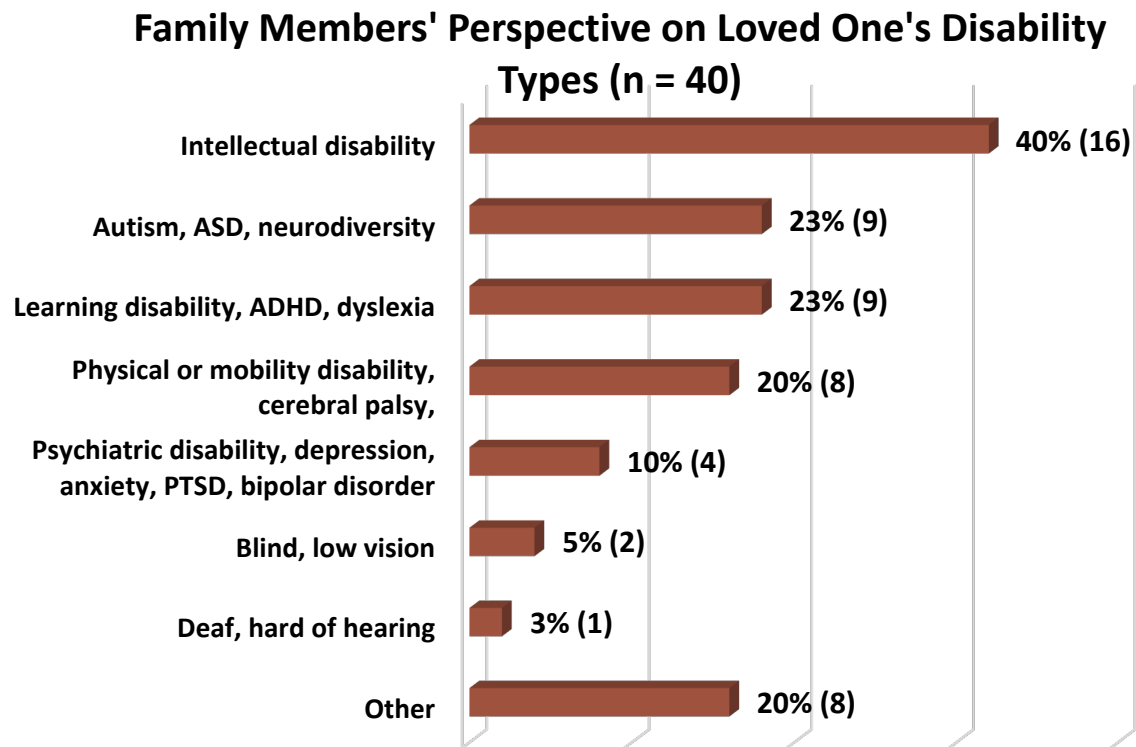
Family members were asked to share the highest level of school completed by their loved ones with disabilities. The results are shown below. Just over 40% of family members with disabilities were high school graduates with either a high school diploma or equivalent (42%). Nearly 15% of respondents shared that their family members were currently attending high school (13%). Nearly 15% of respondents expressed that their loved ones had completed “other” levels of schooling, including high school with a special education degree and partial completion of an IPSE program (13%).

### Highest Level of School Completed by Family Members With Disabilities (n = 31)



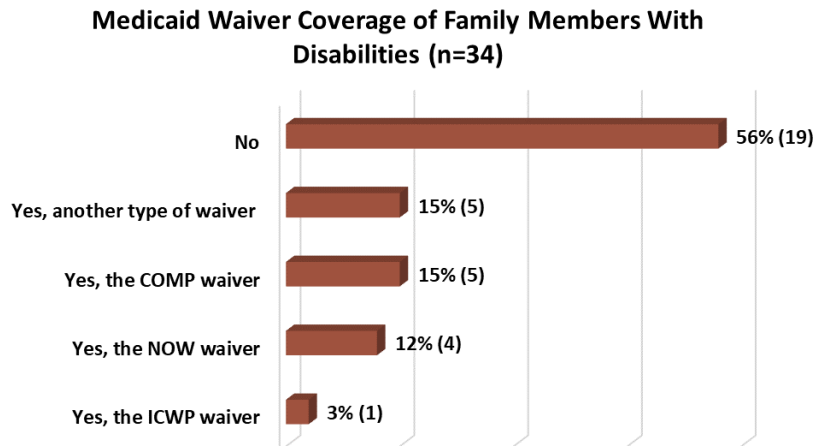
## FAMILY MEMBERS' DISABILITY TYPES

The disability types of individuals with disabilities as described by their family members or caregivers are shown below. Two-fifths of respondents shared that their family member lives with an intellectual disability (40%), while nearly a quarter of respondents' family members live with Autism, ASD, & neurodiversity (23%). This is followed by respondents who have indicated that their family member lives with a learning disability, ADHD, and/or dyslexia (23%).



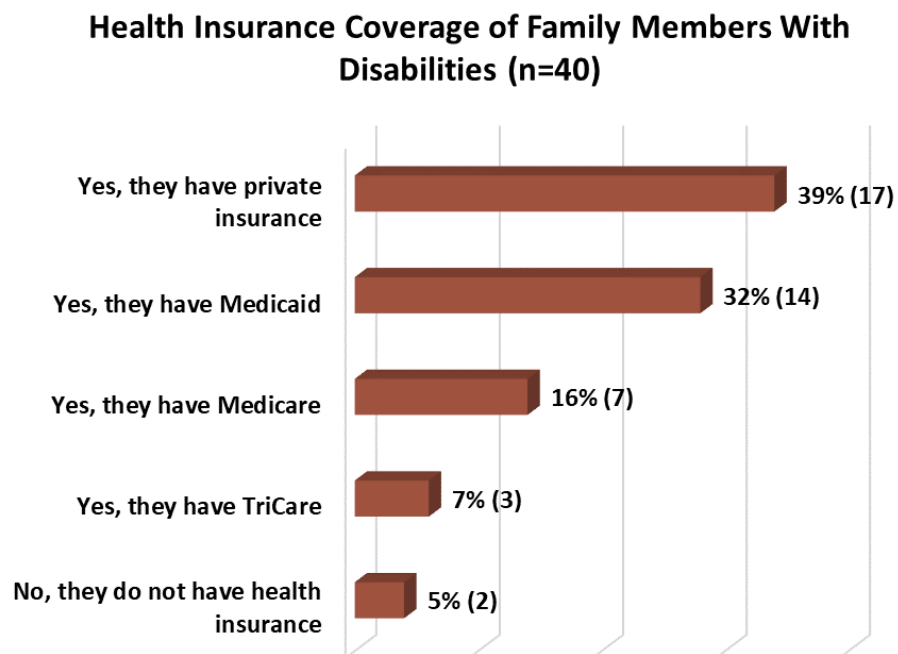
## MEDICAID WAIVER COVERAGE OF FAMILY MEMBERS WITH DISABILITIES

Over half of respondents' family members with disabilities do not have Medicaid waiver coverage (56%). While 15% of family members with disabilities have the COMP waiver, an additional 15% of respondents' family members have "other" waivers such as the Katie Beckett waiver, or are on the waitlist to receive a waiver.



## HEALTH INSURANCE COVERAGE OF FAMILY MEMBERS WITH DISABILITIES

Family members were asked whether their loved ones currently have health insurance. The results are shown below. Nearly 40% of respondents' family members with disabilities currently have private insurance (39%). Almost one-third of respondents' family members currently have Medicaid insurance (32%). Over 15% of respondents' family members have Medicare insurance (16%).



## **RESPONSES TO OPEN ENDED QUESTIONS**

### **FAMILY PERSPECTIVE ON CHALLENGES & BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT FACED BY INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES**

Common challenges and barriers include lack of accommodations and other supports by employers, lack of availability of assistance such as job coaching and transition planning, and the nature of the disability acting as an impairment to work.

*“Not enough one-on-one job assistance or coaching. My daughter works 3 hours a week at a bakery. I think she would like different opportunities, but that would require job coaching/mentoring as my daughter doesn't read/write, and has Autistic tendencies so she needs redirecting and guidance.”*

*“Employers don't have reasonable expectations for people with disabilities.”*

Family members shared about their dissatisfaction with GVRA services.

*“... Does not provide good employment opportunities, good coaching, ongoing support or training to ensure job is kept (let alone advancement). I've found the jobs myself for my daughter.”*

*“They did nothing for my son.”*

*“There are no services, VR does nothing. I coordinate everything on top of a full-time job. It is beyond stressful.”*

*“... VR is overloaded with consumers and the workers are also handling unrealistic caseloads. I believe the whole system needs to be revamped.”*

### **WHAT IS WORKING WELL WITH REGARDS TO EMPLOYMENT SERVICES AND SUPPORT**

Majority of respondents expressed that they do not know what has been working well. In cases where the families found employment for their youth, they were happy that the arrangement was working for them.

*“Not sure if anything is working right ...”*

*“We found a great family-owned business that understood my son, and has helped him with keeping the job and loving it.”*

### **WHAT NEEDS IMPROVEMENT RELATED TO EMPLOYMENT SERVICES AND SUPPORT**

Respondents expressed a desire to see more education for employers on how to hire & work with people with disabilities. Parents talked about lack of information and appropriate transition services for their youth before they age out of the public-school system. Families said they feel like they are left alone to fend for themselves and figure things out on their own. Parents talked about getting little help from GVRA. Additional themes included more job coaching & employment training for individuals with disabilities, and more education & resources provided to families by employment service agencies.

*“More information needs to be given when aging out of public-school system. All families have to fend for themselves and figure it out on their own.”*

*“Education of employers and their staff to best practices of having a fellow staff member that happens to have a disability. Many folks in Georgia just don't know how to*

*act around individuals with disabilities because they were never around growing up or talked about.”*

*“Training while in school and afterwards. People with disabilities are more able to do repetitive tasks, but no one takes the time to ensure that they enjoy their work and find ways to them being promoted to other tasks so they can rise up within the company.”*



## FOCUS GROUP AND INTERVIEW FINDINGS

### INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES

#### BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT

#### THEME: STIGMA, NEGATIVE ATTITUDES, AND LOW EXPECTATIONS TOWARDS PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

One of the most common barriers mentioned by people with disabilities related to their employment related to the stigma, negative attitudes, and low expectations of employers. Many individuals with disabilities endorsed experiencing discrimination during the job-seeking process. While many interviewees shared that they did not receive explicit reasons for their rejections during job interviews, experiences of being rejected once their disability became apparent in applications and interviews were common. Employers view people with disabilities from a deficit lens. They often underestimate the intelligence, skills, and abilities of people with disabilities and perceive them as

*“This lady just clearly told me that I wasn't qualified... while going over my resume and my other associated credentials, and the reason she told me that is clearly because she saw that she just couldn't fathom that a person with my circumstances would be able to operate in that capacity.”*

being unqualified to perform certain jobs. Because of this bias, people with disabilities said that they were often passed over for jobs that they were qualified for. As someone shared, *“Yes, absolutely. And because I think there is a stereotype of disabled equals mentally disabled, that if you have a disability of any sort, you're not as smart, and I do feel like that is very prevalent.”*

A potential challenge mentioned by jobseekers with disabilities was that employers sometimes lack the knowledge or desire to accommodate employees with disabilities. A second potential

*“I've literally had a guy...he goes, 'I'm sorry. I don't know what to do. I've never been in this situation. I don't know how it is, what we could do for somebody being blind.' He said, 'I'm just being honest,' but at least he was honest with me where everybody else, they just tried to either stroke an ego, pacify me to get me out of their office...”*

challenge is employers not knowing how to interact and work with employees with disabilities. Employers feel ill-prepared and therefore completely avoid hiring individuals with disabilities.

Employers' deficit-based perceptions of would-be employees with disabilities and the preconceived lack of ability to accommodate and interact with employees with disabilities in the workplace both prevent people with disabilities from being hired in jobs across industries.

*“I think there is also a stigma that comes with it when you reveal to someone that you are mentally disabled, or you have a disability. There is a shift in how they treat you. And I have personally experienced that at work where I have revealed that to my coordinator, who is directly above me, and he just laughed it off and didn't take it very seriously. It was just not a very pleasant*

Individuals with disabilities shared stories about encountering negative or demeaning attitudes towards them from employers, coworkers, and customers. Respondents shared that, employers and coworkers often underestimate the intelligence, skills, and abilities of employees with disabilities. Experiences of being treated differently at work, often due to the perception of being less intelligent, were commonly endorsed by individuals with disabilities. Interviewees with disabilities shared experiences of their disabilities not being taken seriously, often being questioned as to why their stated accommodations were necessary, and being treated poorly when their

work outputs were slower than typically expected. Individuals with disabilities endorsed being treated unfairly by coworkers, shared instances of being taken advantage of, and being made to do tasks deemed unpleasant by others, bullying, and exhibiting negative reactions to individuals' accommodations. Awareness and education of employers related to working with and fully including people with disabilities in work places are important to bring about attitudinal shifts in employers.

*“When I actually had a job, and people like took advantage that I was special, and they like made me do the stuff that they were supposed to like clean the tables when they were supposed to, and they said since you have special needs, you can do that...”*

## **THEME: LACK OF APPROPRIATE ACCOMMODATIONS TO SUPPORT EMPLOYMENT FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES**

Individuals with disabilities often face barriers to gaining and maintaining employment when they do not receive appropriate accommodations during the job interview process or later, in the workplace. Accommodations take many forms, including but not limited to, ADA-compliant physical accommodations, environmental accommodations for sensory impairments, technological accommodations for hearing and visual impairments, and instructional accommodations for specific learning disabilities and survivors of traumatic brain injuries (TBI).

## **PHYSICAL ACCOMMODATIONS**

Interviewees with physical disabilities spoke about lack of physical accessibility in workplaces. Barriers to physical movement in buildings often arise due to lack of ADA compliance, including nonexistent or nonfunctioning elevators, and a lack of infrastructure support for wheelchair, walker, and cane users. As one respondent expressed, *“anything built before '91 doesn't have to have a ramp, doesn't have to have an elevator, so you might find yourself in a situation where you physically can't get into the building...”* Individuals with invisible physical disabilities also navigate challenges with receiving appropriate accommodations, as they are often deemed unnecessary by employers. Accommodations such as chairs at workstations and cash registers are not seen as reasonable accommodations in some workplaces. Additionally, arbitrary weight-lifting ability requirements such as the ability to lift 50 pounds, occasionally, although rarely, prevent individuals with a variety of physical disabilities, from being hired in jobs.

*“...I wish cities especially would hire disabled people just to walk around their cities and buildings ...because code says you can't have a ramp that's more than 4 degrees-- 4 degrees doesn't sound very steep, but it is very steep, and if you're not in a wheelchair, if you're trying to walk with a walker or a cane, it's terrifying how steep 4 degrees can be...”*

## **SENSORY ACCOMMODATIONS**

With regard to sensory impairments, interviewees with disabilities spoke of the disruptive nature of the modern office environment. Because many offices are open-concept, people with sensory disabilities shared that the high frequency of activity in their workspaces sometimes overwhelms them. Efforts to reduce distraction, such as noise-cancelling headphones, are sometimes frowned upon.

## **TECHNOLOGICAL ACCOMMODATIONS**

*“...I was working for Williams-Sonoma [...] I was almost with them for a year. If I stayed for March, I'd be with them a year, but they didn't deem it necessary to have their programs changed to be accessible for the blind...”*

Lack of technological accommodations in the workplace appears to be a significant barrier to employment. Interviewees with visual and hearing impairments have spoken of not being hired for jobs due to employers' unwillingness or inability to obtain tools and software that would allow them to adequately perform job tasks. Respondents who have had the need for technological accommodations arise during the course of employment spoke of not receiving requested accommodations, and, at times, losing their jobs because they could not perform job tasks without the assistance of accommodations.

## **INSTRUCTIONAL ACCOMMODATIONS**

Instructional accommodations have been deemed as important by respondents with specific learning disabilities and traumatic brain injuries (TBI), in both educational and employment settings. A lack of appropriate accommodations for people with disabilities in these settings serves as a barrier both to gaining and retaining employment. Educational settings (such as colleges and universities) serve as preparation for the workforce. Barriers to academic success due to a lack of accommodations negatively impact chances of future success in employment. Interviewees in educational settings endorsed barriers to receiving instructional accommodations. They shared instances where colleges denied accommodations to individuals who received accommodations in K-12 education, due to not having an official diagnosis. One key informant shared about how they were forced to get a formal diagnosis, even though it is cost prohibitive, so that they could get the accommodations they need. Respondents shared about the colleges' lack of flexibility with regard to test requirements in class curriculums.

*"I was originally denied accommodations going to the collegiate level [...] (University) said, 'No, you're not approved for accommodations,' [...] that's why I got diagnosed my freshman year of college, because we had to pay \$500 to test to say, 'Yes, I do need accommodations...'"*

## **THEME: AFFORDANCES AND CONSTRAINTS WITH DISABILITY BENEFITS**

*"If I was to get hired right now, you would have to wait 90 to 120 days for any insurance to be offered to you. [...] I have maintenance medication that I have to take daily. I can't have that 90-day gap or grace period because it could cost me my life."*

Many people with disabilities depend on long-term supports from programs such as SSI (Supplemental Security Income) and the Medicaid waiver program. While individuals endorsed that SSI and Medicaid supported their cost of living, they shared that receiving these benefits comes with significant barriers to employment. Interviewees shared that the income cap to receiving benefits limits both the types of jobs and pay rates available to them. The fear of making too much money and losing their benefits often results in people with disabilities deciding not to work due to the risk. As one respondent shared, *"If I (take up a full-time job) and discover that my body and my brain just can't handle working full time, I've lost my disability, so it's not a chance I'm willing to take. I'd rather have guaranteed money than maybe money."*

The fear of losing benefits is especially relevant with regard to Medicaid, as healthcare costs are often unaffordable for people with disabilities without assistance from this waiver. Another respondent shared, *"I got so much to do out there for people, and I got so much love to give my community, and I'm trapped because I can't give up my insurance."*

Respondents also expressed that there is a lack of clear information available on ways for people with disabilities to keep their benefits while working for a sustainable wage. Individuals with long-term disability insurance payouts from previous jobs face similar issues, as interviewees shared that they were likely to lose their work-based disability payouts if they were deemed capable of returning to work.

*"I'm aware of different agencies...that have benefits counselors, things of that nature. But in my experience, those individuals are not able to do anything above and beyond what Social Security and Medicare has had in place, because you can't go outside the rules. They could take your benefits away."*

### **THEME: QUALITY OF SERVICES FROM GVRA**

The Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency (GVRA) aids Georgians with disabilities in preparing for, finding, and maintaining employment. A number of individuals with disabilities that were interviewed endorsed working with GVRA at some point during their employment journeys. While these experiences varied in quality, common themes arose as to the barriers to employment that people with disabilities faced during their time using GVRA services.

For individuals who sought to work with VR services, one of the first barriers that they encountered, was long waitlists for services. Job preparation efforts were paused for those who wished to start services for significant lengths of time. This can potentially lead to a lack of morale at the beginning of the job preparation process for people with disabilities who are seeking employment.

*"It's slow, that's the biggest thing is that it's just such a long process. And because they have a great deal of turnover, you may start with one case worker, and be passed off 3 or 4 times, and each time you almost have to start fresh with the new caseworker. So, it can take two full years before you even get through the system."*

Once someone is off the waitlist, one of the most endorsed barriers to GVRA services was the VR counselor instability. When an individual with disabilities begins vocational rehabilitation services, they are assigned a counselor to assist them in the job preparation process. However, a significant number of respondents shared that their VR counselors changed frequently. They expressed that VR counselors currently have high turnover rates, often leaving them feeling like the job preparation process is interrupted each time they are introduced to a new counselor. Each new counselor has to spend time familiarizing themselves with the case and sometimes, it is reinventing the wheel again. As one interviewee stated, *"My VR counselor has changed several times, with no stability on that end."*

*"I was with [vocational rehab] for 5 years, and I begged for a Victor reader which is a voice recorder [...] for the blind, because from the time you turn it on, it talks to you, and I even emailed my counselor. [...] You know what they gave me? A digital recorder. [...] I couldn't use it..."*

Respondents had several concerns about the quality of services provided by GVRA. They talked about not having their needs adequately addressed, and how that often acted as a barrier to successful employment. Assistance with finding jobs was insufficient. The jobs that were found did not fit their current capabilities. Respondents shared about the lack of job-matching and job customization. Interviewees who had professional jobs earlier, did not want to end up working at Kroger or Walmart, which is where they were referred to. One

respondent talked about how their repeated requests for assistive technology went unmet.

### **THEME: LACK OF TRANSPORTATION OPTIONS**

*"When I was living in my college town, I couldn't go pretty much anywhere, and so the only job opportunities that I ever really looked into were opportunities on campus because that was the only thing that I could take the bus, to be able to walk to, and not have any issue, and I had to get an on-campus job."*

People are typically required to have a reliable mode of transportation as a condition of employment, as most jobs require travel to the workplace. Many individuals with disabilities in our surveys and focus groups talked about lack of adequate and accessible transportation as being a big barrier to their employment. As expressed by one respondent, *"Transportation, employment and waiver services-- it's all intertwined whether we want it to be or not. You gotta have all three pieces for it to work because, without one, you don't have the other two."*

Not being able to drive was a common barrier for interviewees with disabilities. Many individuals we spoke with rely on public transportation to get from place to place. They endorsed several issues they face related to using public transit. One of the biggest barriers endorsed was that the public transportation options were unreliable. Getting to work on time is often a challenge due to delays in bus, train, and paratransit schedules. Another barrier faced by those who rely on public transportation to get to work is that work schedules and transit schedules don't always align, limiting them to jobs that can be reached within the scope of transit availability. Since some public or paratransit are not available during evening and weekend hours, and may not go outside the county boundaries. This restricts individuals on the type of jobs they could take. Due to the current nature of transit schedules, individuals have shared that their commute to and from work sometimes becomes too long, and is extended by hours.

Individuals in rural areas of Georgia shared that there are no public transit options available to service their transportation needs. As a result, many individuals rely on family and friends for transportation to and from work. This is feasible for people that have loved ones available to take them to places. Respondents shared their discomfort with having to always depend on others to give them rides. They shared that caregivers sometimes have work commitments or other health issues that makes it challenging for them to continually provide for transportation.

*“They still don't run at night [...] and it's just I think that's a barrier because you have to then go to this employee who's already taken a chance on hiring you and say, ‘Well, I can only work these hours because it's the only time I can get CATS or MATS to pick me up...’*”

Interviewees who worked in remote positions expressed the positive impact that remote work has had on their employment, as the barrier of transportation eliminated entirely. As one respondent shared regarding COVID-19's impact on remote work availability, *“I know with COVID, [remote work] pretty much had to be done...if there were more opportunities that could be done, work from home type things ... if we did have an outside job, we'd have to figure out transportation.”*

## **THEME: LOW WAGES**

Jobs with fair and sustainable wages are necessary for people to adequately support themselves and their families. During interviews, it emerged that low wages are a common barrier to employment satisfaction among individuals with disabilities in Georgia. Low-paying jobs were often the only jobs available to respondents; many interviewees endorsed working in jobs paying minimum wage or less, regardless of their advanced skill level or ability. In many places, this pay does not afford them the ability to live independently and afford a livable quality of life. As one respondent shared, *“The 3 or 4 survivors that are in my various support groups [...] are living at home, either with a parent, an elderly parent, or spouse [...] None of them are living independently because they can't. It's not enough money.”*

*“I had to advocate being paid according to the Union scale based on my skill set 'cause a lot of them didn't want to pay me according to Union scale, and I knew the reason that they didn't want to pay me, it was purely based on me having a disability.”*

Individuals also shared that they are often not paid fair value for their labor, with employers believing that they can get away with paying lower wages due to their employees' disabilities. One interviewee expressed that they pursued self-employment to be able to make an income: *“That's why I decided to really get busy with trying to build something on my own [...] it was looking like I wasn't going to be paid a fair wage if I kept going the way that I was going.”*

## **THEME: UNDEREMPLOYMENT AS A CHALLENGE TO FINDING A SUITABLE JOB**

Georgians with a variety of disabilities often seek assistance from employment support providers, when looking for jobs. However, interviewees shared that they find it difficult to collaborate with local employment service providers to find a job that is matching their skill and ability levels. Underemployment was mentioned by many respondents and seems to be an important barrier for individuals with disabilities. Interviewees endorsed feeling that their education levels and abilities were not taken into consideration when being connected with jobs. Job offers in fields such as food services, grocery services, warehousing, and custodial service were common, but individuals with skillsets in other areas expressed that they would benefit from employment options in fields more tailored to their abilities.

*“I’ve met with the (employment) Center before; we’ve had these conversations that they just don’t know what to do with college-educated engineers and nurses and teachers that have these disabilities. They can’t go back to that profession but don’t want to sweep floors.”*

## **THEME: LACK OF KNOWLEDGE ABOUT EMPLOYMENT SUPPORTS AND SERVICES**

*“It’s very hard to acquire those soft skills and technical skills that I need in order to acquire and keep a job. If you’re not very proactive about your professional journey, you can get left feeling very ill-equipped to enter the job force.”*

Community-based employment supports and services can serve as valuable professional resources for individuals with disabilities and their families who are seeking assistance in obtaining and maintaining employment. However, access to these services is often limited among people with disabilities, due to a lack of knowledge about what employment supports are available in their local area. According to one respondent, *“I’ve never really heard of any, and I think that’s a lot for a lot of people like me. They don’t have a way to connect to this resource.”*

Interviewees expressed that information about community-based employment services is hard to find without having existing connections to knowledgeable sources such as college campuses or the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency (GVRA). Interviewees shared that the information gap regarding available services has become more pronounced since the COVID-19 pandemic.



## **THEME: SYSTEMIC ISSUES (BUREAUCRACY, LEGISLATIVE CHALLENGES)**

Systemic barriers to employment are those that have damaging impacts on successful employment at the societal level, often held in place politically by laws and policies. Interviewees with disabilities endorsed a number of systemic barriers contributing to employment for people with disabilities in Georgia. One prominent barrier was that Georgia lawmakers are not communicative or responsive to individuals with disabilities or organizations that reach out to them regarding employment issues. Interviewees spoke about contacting their elected officials on issues such as income caps for Social Security and Medicaid benefits, expressing that they haven't received responses.

*"Yeah, lawmakers are aware. And yes, we do talk to our lawmakers, and even [The] Arc is an excellent resource, but they can only do so much. And again, this has been going on for decades, so it's going to be a challenge for many more years to come."*

## **SUGGESTION FOR IMPROVEMENT BY INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES**

Individuals with disabilities emphasized the need to increase employer awareness and knowledge related to employing and supporting people with disabilities. Respondents also shared the importance of customizing employment based on the person's abilities and interests. Participants discussed the need for appropriate and adequate accommodations at workplaces. Individuals with disabilities shared that the current disability payments are not enough to sustain one's living. They highlighted a need to raise the minimum income eligibility to expand job options. With the current restriction on the payroll, individuals with disabilities fear losing their disability benefits. By raising the minimum income eligibility, individuals will be able to pursue employment and get paid without worrying about the restriction.

## KEY INFORMANT PERSPECTIVE

### BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT

#### THEME: STIGMA, ATTITUDES AND EXPECTATIONS TOWARDS PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

A common theme that emerged pointed towards the stigmas, attitudes, and low expectations from employers and family members related to employment of people with disabilities. Employers and family members underestimate the skills and abilities of people with disabilities, who often end up doing odd jobs that do not align with their gifts, talents, or interests. Key informants shared that as a result, the gifts and talents of individuals with disabilities are not identified or valued, and they end up in day programs. As someone shared, *“I think it's unfortunate, but our systems are barriers. We have systems in Georgia that don't value people in that way, and there's still I think a mentality within our systems that there's some people who can't work.”*

*“They're being pushed through state funded day programs...It is absolutely disheartening to see people between the ages of 21 and 70 sitting around coloring Easter books...These are adults. Everybody has a gift or a talent that can be turned into some sort of employment opportunity... Be it through entrepreneurship or through already established businesses, with customized employment options”*

Ableist ideologies exist in educational, vocational rehabilitation, and employment spaces which undermine the abilities of people with disabilities. As one key informant pointed out, *“I think the biggest barrier is ableism that folks with disabilities...because they decide depending upon what category of disability that you believe in, you are capable of performing on a job, it all percolates right from the education system up to the vocational rehabilitation system, and then to the employers... it's the low expectations that people have from folks with disabilities.”*

Employers often perceive such individuals with disabilities from a deficit lens and often view them as a liability. Employers share worries about the demands that people with disabilities will place on them for accommodations and are often not educated on what those could be and how to make them. Employers fear that they would need to invest extra time and money to accommodate individuals, especially those with sensory disabilities in the workspace. Conversations with key informants made it clear that the current systems which are in place in employment spaces are dictated by stereotypes, misconceptions and deficit ideologies towards people with disabilities.

*"I think there are people that are afraid to just dip their foot in the waters of considering things because they don't want to, like, hurt somebody's feelings, or they don't want to say the wrong thing that makes them look like a ...."*

Sometimes due to lack of appropriate training and knowledge, employers are unaware of the capabilities of their employees who have some form of disability and fear that their language might offend someone from the community. Respondents shared that a big shift in perspective among employers through education and training is needed in order to tackle this barrier towards employment. Employers need to be trained so they can

see the affordances and benefits of hiring people with disabilities in a workspace and are more educated and open to hiring them.

Another perspective that emerged from interviews is the overprotection and concern from parents towards their children who have a disability. Parents' concerns for their children's well-being could become a barrier to employment when they fail to recognize the talents and skills of their children, and are unable to visualize them as being able to hold jobs and be productive members in the community. Educating parents and helping them develop a new vision would be an important step towards influencing children's' future employment.

*"There's a lack of vision for what that child's life could look like and I would argue it's because of the under employment of people with disabilities. [...] If everybody with a disability was working, and were in the banks and grocery stores and department stores or businesses...parents, then see that, and that does the help parents understand."*

## **THEME: DISCRIMINATORY PRACTICE OF SUBMINIMUM WAGES FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES**

Key informants shared that it has been legal for sheltered workshops and other human service programs to pay minimum wages to people with disabilities for decades. People with disabilities are still getting paid subminimum wages in Georgia. There has now been a push to phase this out in Georgia, where there are close to 80 providers who have a 14c waiver.

Key informants pointed out that getting paid subminimum wage is devaluing the contributions and worth of individuals with disabilities. Most of the disability income from waiver programs goes towards the rent for people with disabilities, and very little money for anything else including recreation or other expenses. These individuals find themselves stuck in 14c sheltered workshops that pay them minimum wages, leaving them in a financial crisis from not being able to manage

*"One of my hopes is that Georgia will become an Employment First state, and through that [...] We can then close down these 14c's because [...] I don't see the value that they're bringing to people's lives."*

their expenses and bills. Key informants felt strongly about the fact that paying subminimum wages to people with disabilities is a discriminatory practice that needs to be phased out so it is no longer a barrier to employment.

### **THEME: AFFORDANCES AND CONSTRAINTS WITH MEDICAID WAIVER**

Many individuals with disabilities and their families depend on the support received from Medicaid waiver. Key informants shared that there is lack of adequate information about social security benefits, and a person's ability to keep their Medicaid disability check. The result of this misinformation is the pressure from families to prioritize receiving benefits over finding employment. This is especially true for multi-generational family units that have a culture of dependence and contribution by every family member. In many cases, the income from Medicaid becomes extremely important for the functioning of the family as a unit. The constraints that come with Medicaid includes the cap on earning up to a certain amount of money. Anything over the cap disqualifies the individual from receiving Social Security and/or Medicaid benefits. Due to lack of complete information on how to maintain benefits while working, families are often reluctant to let their loved ones take up employment for fear of losing the guaranteed income and benefits.

*"Well, if an individual goes to work and earns a certain amount of money, they no longer qualify for this program. So, the very program that they need to get up and get to work can also be taken away."*

### **THEME: LACK OF SUPPORT FOR DIRECT SUPPORT PROFESSIONALS AND JOB COACHES**

*"He's [coworker] making \$14 an hour, his direct support staff makes \$8. Like someone needs to walk me through. Why, this support person who, I would argue, plays a critical role in this young man's life to make sure that he's up and ready for work that day? [...] But people with disabilities are so undervalued that everybody that is associated with them experiences that same devaluation as well."*

A critical part of supporting employment for people with disabilities is getting continuous support from direct support professionals (DSPs). Individuals with disabilities heavily rely on these professionals for their personal and professional well-being. Key informants highlighted the lack of recognition and value of direct support professionals. DSPs are often underpaid and undervalued, and are still expected to show up every day at work. There is a severe shortage of DSP workforce. The situation has worsened post-COVID, with fewer direct support professionals in the field.

The few who remain are sometimes not adequately trained to support individuals with disabilities, particularly those with intellectual disabilities or behavioral issues. Another issue identified by key informants was the lack of adequate job

coaches and lack of funding to pay them. As someone pointed out, *“Individuals with disabilities miss out on services due to lack of job coach availability. You know we've discharged people from our services, people who had high support needs, needed to come to our center because we could not hire staff to bring them back after COVID. We lost a lot of staff, and we have just not been able to hire anybody.”*

### **THEME: BARRIERS TO CUSTOMIZED EMPLOYMENT**

A key barrier to customized employment is when people with disabilities are unable to get support with customization of work opportunities. Key informants shared about how professionals sometimes have a fixed mindset that views only certain types of jobs as being suitable for people with disabilities. Providers are often focused on getting any kind of jobs for people with disabilities, irrespective of whether they have the interest in it or not. This results in people with disabilities not staying in the job for long or not being happy in the job. Key informants pointed out that Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency (GVRA) provides traditional and customized employment opportunities for students, but these are time limited services, which becomes a barrier.

*“If your (person with disability) interest, is working, let's say an office type job, but all they have are hotels and restaurants, guess what? You're going to work in a hotel or restaurant. And so, there's a lack of options for people that are capable of working outside those options provided with the opportunity to do so.”*

### **THEME: LACK OF TRANSPORTATION OPTIONS**

*“Transportation certainly goes into an employment barrier, unless you live in Metro Atlanta and have access to MARTA Mobility.”*

Having a reliable mode of transportation is one of the major requirements for employment, as most jobs require people to travel to their work places. During the interviews, many key informants identified lack of transportation as one of the most important barriers to employment for people with disabilities in Georgia.

An important barrier shared by key informants was that public transportation was unreliable. Buses, paratransit or trains often do not follow timely schedules, delaying individuals in their travel plans. Individuals spent a considerable amount (1-3 hours) of travel time to reach their work spaces. Most of the transit options in Georgia are located near metro Atlanta and have the option of door-to-door service through MARTA mobility. However, such options are almost non-existent in rural areas of Georgia. MARTA mobility, like transit options, has restrictions on pick up for a person who doesn't live three quarters of a mile from a MARTA bus stop. With limited funding that goes towards transportation services in Georgia, people are left with only few options of fixed and paratransit services that they can use. In rural areas, the options are even more limited and sparse.

*"They're [buses] just becoming later and later and later, most of the problems I personally have with my transportation, with public transportation, being late is usually in the evenings when I'm ready to come home from work."*

Most transportation options have limited time availability during weekdays, and weekends and for certain hours. This becomes a hindrance for individuals if their work times do not fall within the time constraints of public transportation. Travel options through Uber and Lyft are also

*"Recently [...] we had one of our individuals that was going to work from 3 o'clock to 8 o'clock. But we just couldn't work out transportation, because the bus doesn't run."*

limited to certain areas of Georgia, and are often expensive. In cases where individuals have access to transportation through family or friends, they have to rely on the schedules of their family/friends which further limits their mobility and creates a dependence. Physical accessibility is another barrier that relates to transportation for people with disabilities. Bus stops and train stations are sometimes not ADA compliant, making it difficult for people with disabilities to access transportation.

## **THEME: QUALITY OF SERVICES FROM GEORGIA VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION AGENCY (GVRA)**

GVRA works towards providing support and services to people with disabilities that relates to preparing for, finding, and maintaining employment. Key informants shared about the attrition and frequent changes in VR counselors. The number of counselors has decreased over the years, resulting in high caseloads for counselors currently at GVRA. Counselors play a crucial role in supporting individuals with additional training, getting access to clothes and equipment, job coaching services, and job development services. Having fewer counselors, who are over-burdened slows down the

*"I know that they [GVRA] have been mismanaged, for several years. I believe that they have to do some internal revamping, and hopefully they are on the right course. It took a while for it to be broken, so it's going to take a little for it to be fixed."*

GVRA services they can provide to job seekers with disabilities.

Key informants shared about another important barrier related to providing long term supported employment services. GVRA provides supported employment, but only for a limited time. This time-limited service becomes a barrier for students who are transitioning from school to employment and would benefit from a long-term support to establish their footing. Providers who support GVRA's long-term support services are paid on the basis of the milestones they have reached. However, since GVRA's services are time limited, the providers are forced to continue the long-term support despite the end of the time limited service (2 visits per month) without getting compensated for it.

### **THEME: LACK OF KNOWLEDGE ABOUT EMPLOYMENT SUPPORTS AND SERVICES**

*"And if you need programs, if you need attendant care, you're going to hit that glass ceiling, because if you make too much money, you're going to lose your services, and most of the people who have these attendant services, if they don't have them, they will end up in a nursing facility."*

There are vast amounts of information that relate to employment for individuals with disabilities. Knowing all of this information is crucial as it has a direct impact on retaining benefits and accessing different job opportunities. One of the things that key informants talked about was the glass ceiling that employees with disabilities need to be aware of. Employees who receive benefits are restricted to earning up to a certain amount or else they lose their benefits. This is an important piece of information that needs to reach the concerned parties, but sometimes falls in the cracks.

key informants shared that parents who are caregivers for individuals with disabilities, often find it hard to find information about employment for their children, such as transition programs and benefits planning information. They find it difficult to navigate through system requirements to find opportunities like inclusive post-secondary education (IPSE) programs. There is also not much support for families at the high school level. There is no single source "one-stop shop" for accessing information for parents and family members. Similarly, people living in rural areas of Georgia also do not have a way to access all of the information that relates to employment.

*"I'm thinking if you were to do a test and say to a family, "pretend you want supported employment services. How would you go about getting it? Here's a couple of websites, go for it." I bet you they couldn't come up with anything."*

**THEME: LACK OF APPROPRIATE ACCOMMODATIONS TO SUPPORT EMPLOYMENT FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES**

Individuals with disabilities face barriers to accepting and continuing employment if there aren't appropriate accommodations provided. Accommodations include accessibility to infrastructure through ADA compliance, such as ramps for anyone with physical disability or internet connectivity in rural areas. Key informants talked about the need for having access to interpreters, for Spanish speaking job seekers. Lack of interpreters or materials in other languages can create a barrier for this particular community to access employment in Georgia.

Typically, students work part-time during high school before they begin working as a full-time employee, so that they can get some work experience. However, due to several barriers, students with disabilities are often not able to get part time internships or jobs that would prepare them for full time jobs in the real world.

*“There are places in Georgia that still have steps and no other way to get in, no ramp, no other way to get in. So, can they (person with disability) physically go to that employer? Even though they're supposed to have their accommodations, is the employer really able to be accommodating? If there are some accommodations that need to be met, is there retaliation?”*

*“So just imagine a young person with disability. They don't get to have a part-time job in their high school. They don't get the opportunity for an internship, but we want them to go into a job cold turkey, and be good at it. Those opportunities just aren't there for them.”*

Another issue brought up by key informants related to coordination between different providers (residential support or job coach) that can cause a barrier to employment. For instance, if there is no one to provide residential support in the morning and the individuals' shift does not start before 1pm, a good collaboration between providers can help accommodate such situations. But if there is not much partnership between providers, this situation can become a barrier to employment.



## **THEME: INADEQUATE SUPPORT TO MAKE TRANSITION TO EMPLOYMENT**

Another major barrier to employment discussed by key informants was the lack of adequate support for youth to make the transition from high school to employment. Parents and other family caregivers sometimes do not have access to information about transition programs and other employment services and supports that can help youth transitioning from school to employment. These services are crucial for youth to understand the difference plan and gain work experience, to learn necessary soft skills, to build their resume as per the job requirements, and to learn any pre-employment skills that would be invaluable.

*“The access and the education that comes along with children/youth transitioning from school to adulthood. The education is not there, you know they don't know how to access employment services and what services are available.”*

Key informants also talked about beginning conversations about transition in schools earlier, so that there is ample time for individuals to learn and acquire the necessary skills. In some cases where high schools provide education about transition programs to youths, they risk losing these services and support from school once they transition into adulthood, thus making it a challenge for them to access job opportunities. This lack of integration between the school system and adult service system can be problematic for individuals making that transition.

## **THEME: LACK OF FUNDING AND OTHER BUREAUCRATIC CHALLENGES**

*“The funding for day services, to sit in a day service center, or you know the community-based models [...] far outweighs the funding for employment and I think that it's been underestimated in terms of the level of support that people need within employment.”*

Key informants pointed out that lack of adequate funding for competitive integrated employment and supported employment in Georgia is an important barrier to employment. They shared that providers get a lot more funds per person for say services or sheltered workshops, compared to placing individuals in competitive employment in the community. As a result, more funds are steered towards day programs instead of employment programs that have the ability to support an individual's agency and independence. There

are long waiting lists for individuals who are trying to get access services through waivers in Georgia.

GVRA is the primary agency for providing employment related supports and services to individuals with disabilities. Key informants shared that GVRA functioning has been affected due

to inadequate funding. There is a high staff turnover due to low salaries for their employees. With fewer counselors working at GVRA, the number of caseloads for each counselor has increased considerably, thus directly influencing the efficiency of the services at GVRA. Key informants shared GVRA funds were underutilized due to the high staff turnover. Key informants shared that GVRA previously used to fund tuition and maintenance benefits for IPSE programs, that were a crucial source of funding for the underrepresented individuals in the IPSE programs. However, due to lack of funding, that support could not continue. Another issue identified by key informants was that GVRA was able to pay providers for supported employment only till the time individuals are able to meet the milestones. Once they reach the milestones, GVRA does not pay the providers. Providers however need to continue supporting the clients by visiting them twice a month. So, this creates a barrier for providers in supporting individuals with their employment needs.

*“I mean, when VR functions, it functions well. But the problem is, it's not functioning. It's probably at half capacity...from office to office.”*

**THEME: SYSTEMIC ISSUES (BUREAUCRACY, LEGISLATIVE CHALLENGES)**

Key informants shared that advocacy groups have continually reached out to legislative bodies concerning disability rights in employment, but progress has been stalled due to the lack of responses from lawmakers. Another prominent barrier to employment for people with disabilities in Georgia is that Georgia is a “Right to Work” state. This means that employers have the right to fire employees at will at any time without much recourse. While the ADA prevents employers from firing employees with disabilities solely due to their disability status, they can be fired at will for nearly any other reason. If a person with a disability believes that they were fired because of their disability status, they carry the burden of proving that they were fired specifically due to their disability. As one interviewee expressed, *“Your supervisor can walk in and not like you that particular day, and say, ‘Toodahoo, you're out of here,’ and there's not really a lot of recourse that you have because of the way that the laws are written here in Georgia.”*

**SUGGESTIONS FROM KEY INFORMANTS**

Key informants expressed the need for increased employment advocacy at state as well as local levels. There is a need for more job developers. Job developers need to be proactive, go-getters, almost like sales people and help in marketing the excellent gifts and talents that people with disabilities can bring to the workplace. Agencies need to hire job developers who are good communicators and collaborators, who can build trusting and respectful relationships with people with disabilities and employers. Key informants shared about how successful models like Project SEARCH and IPSE have integrated education, employment and job placement seamlessly in their models.

Key informants talked about the need to begin conversations about jobs and employment earlier in the school years, as early as middle school, where they can start focusing on resume building, exploring interests and finding resources that can help later in securing employment. Key informants talked about the need to cultivate better relationships with employers and educate and engage them in employment conversations for young individuals with disabilities. It is important to educate employers about employing people with disabilities and disputing some of the myths that they may hold.

## FAMILY AND CAREGIVER PERSPECTIVE

### BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT

#### THEME: NEGATIVE PERCEPTIONS ABOUT DISABILITY

Family members of individuals with disabilities discussed the perception and bias against individuals with disabilities as a major barrier to employment. Employers often have misconceptions about people with disabilities as people with less skills and not cognitively high functioning. They do not recognize the gifts and strengths that people with disabilities will bring into the workspaces. Employers feel uncomfortable hiring someone with a disability. Biases around disabled individuals as people and beyond just their work abilities are also a major barrier. As someone mentioned, *“There's the overall prejudice of how they look, how they present, how they interact.”*

*“A disability is still considered lower than or less than, and people not understanding the gifts that come with a person period.”*

#### THEME: INADEQUATE SERVICES AND RESOURCES FOR EMPLOYMENT

Interviewees highlighted the lack of adequate support and services to pursue employment in the community. There are not enough services available for one-on-one support job support for people with disabilities. One of the family members shared how there is not much long-term housing support for people with disabilities. Caregivers shared their concerns about the safety of their loved ones with disabilities in work settings, especially for women. One parent stated, *“This is really why I haven't allowed her to be out there working somewhere, because I need her to be in a safe environment, and I don't know how safe a lot of these a lot of businesses [are].”* In rural areas, lack of transportation and poor internet connectivity impedes the ability of individuals with disabilities to apply for jobs online or use job searching apps like Juvii. Caregivers talked about not having proper support when applying for jobs, especially on how to tailor one's profile and make one stand out in resumes.

*“We hope she comes back to Georgia, but we don't have anything here, we don't have good supports for employment.”*

## **THEME: INADEQUATE SERVICES OFFERED BY GVRA**

Many family members voiced their grievances related to services and support offered by the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency. Specific concerns about the lack of stability in VR counselors or job coaches. One family member communicated specific needs of their child, such as having a pleasing personality that does not recognize the danger with strangers, and thus requires close supervision. However, GVRA services were not able to provide good job coaching services for their loved one, thus creating a barrier in their employment endeavors.

*“When we were first introduced to GVRA, we had a representative come to the school and talk to us about it, and we were really kind of promised the world, and it took about a year before we were ready to utilize services, [...] and all of a sudden they couldn't do any of what we needed.”*

## **THEME: TRANSITION PLANNING IN SCHOOLS**

Transition Planning in school is important for supporting the smooth transition and eventual employment of youth with disabilities. During interviews with parents and caregivers, issues related to inadequate transition planning was cited as a barrier for employment of their loved ones. One parent shared her bad experience with a transition program for her son. This particular program had only one type of route that involved working in a group home as part of sheltered employment. The parent seemed upset about the fact that they were making him pick up trash on the school grounds. There were no other meaningful options available for her son to participate in and work towards his dream job that involves travel.

*“...the trajectory that the school system had for him had him pinned into being less than what he wanted out of life.”*

## **THEME: SHORTAGE OF DIRECT SUPPORT PROFESSIONALS**

Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) play an important role when it comes to supporting the day-to-day needs of people with disabilities. Family members shared that their loved ones with disabilities are dependent on the support from DSPs; however, since many DSP are leaving their jobs, there has been a shortage in the field. In spite of the very critical roles that DSPs play in supporting people with disabilities, their work is undervalued and they are underpaid, leading to many DSPs quitting their jobs. Without the support that DSPs provide,

*“The direct support professional crisis is, there's not enough people to [provide] support.”*

related to personal care and other things, it is nearly impossible for individuals with disabilities to obtain or maintain their employment.

### **THEME: INADEQUATE JOB OPTIONS AND ACCOMMODATIONS**

Family members discussed the limited job options available for their loved ones with a disability, compared to an individual who doesn't have a disability. Misconceptions, negative biases and fears have limited the number of jobs available for individuals with disabilities. Jobs that are strict about their policies and expectations and are not open to being flexible and accommodating individuals with disabilities, create a barrier for their sustained employment.

*"I would love to have more choices for her, just like I do as an individual [...] and I know that I can get a job at maybe a half a dozen places where she can get a job, at one or two."*

One of the family members shared about her daughter being able to bag groceries at Publix but is unable to take the groceries to the customer's car as it would require her to be aware of the traffic. Her disability causes this limitation. Sometimes a person with a disability cannot work 8 hours compared to a person who doesn't have a disability, or can only work for a few hours because their job coach is available for a certain number of hours. In such situations, it is important for employers to be flexible and accommodative of people's disability-related needs.

### **THEME: LIMITATIONS ON INCOME**

Another barrier to employment for people with disabilities relates to the restriction on the amount of funds that is allowed in a bank account for a person with a disability. Family and caregivers shared how the Social Security Income (SSI) is not enough to sustain their loved ones. Caregivers shared that they are fortunate to currently support their loved ones financially, but worried about how they (loved ones with disabilities) will survive, especially when the caregivers are not there anymore to support them.

*"Up to this point we've been fortunate enough to be able to support her on our own; SSI does not provide enough living funds."*

## **THEME: NEED FOR JOB TRAINING AND JOB COACHING**

Many individuals having disabilities need support from a job coach to be able to find and maintain employment. Job coaches are able to identify and understand the needs of the person with a disability and are able to communicate the needs to employers, and help negotiate a customized job based on the skillset of the individual. For instance, they may be aware of how much time an individual can work before getting frustrated. Job coaches are often not available for the entire duration of employment or shift, which becomes a barrier for people with disabilities.

*“He needs a buddy in there with him to help him, you know, to be able to work, and to know signs that he's getting frustrated, [...] and like I said, the long hours they can't do.”*

## ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN

### DISABILITY PREVALENCE

Based on 2020 ACS data, it is estimated that 12.50% of Georgia’s estimated total population (n = 10,321,846) had a disability (all ages) which is consistent with the U.S. average of 12.70%<sup>1</sup>. However, in 19 counties, the estimated population of individuals with disabilities is 20% or higher. These include [Heard (26%), Fannin (25%), Quitman (23%), Charlton (23%), Clay (23%), Taylor (22%), Meriwether (22%), Crawford (21%), Rabun (21%), Seminole (21%), Stewart (21%), Elbert (21%), Hart (21%), McIntosh (21%), Gilmer (20%), Johnson (20%), Pulaski (20%), Grady (20%), Putnam (20%). It should be noted that the estimated population of individuals aged 65 and older in Georgia is 13.88%; however, for the counties listed above the estimated percentages range from 15% to 31%.<sup>1</sup>

### ECONOMIC OUTCOMES

#### INCOME: ESTIMATED HOUSEHOLD INCOME AMONG GEORGIANS WITH DISABILITIES

Using 2021 ACS 1-year estimates, the following table reflects 12-month earnings among individuals 16 and over with and without disabilities in the United States and Georgia. This comparison clearly highlights how individuals with disabilities are more likely to earn considerably less than those without disabilities.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, the estimated 2021 median earnings for a Georgia worker without a disability was \$38,550 compared to \$28,283 for workers with disabilities. This is consistent with trends on the national level.<sup>1</sup>

| Income                 | US                                |                                  | Georgia                        |                                |
|------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
|                        | With Disability<br>(n=12,230,293) | No Disability<br>(n=158,977,757) | With Disability<br>(n=391,975) | No Disability<br>(n=5,091,443) |
| \$1 to \$4,999 or less | 14.30%                            | 8.20%                            | 13.20%                         | 8.40%                          |
| \$5,000 to \$14,999    | 17.60%                            | 11.80%                           | 18.20%                         | 12.20%                         |
| \$15,000 to \$24,999   | 13.40%                            | 10.90%                           | 14.10%                         | 11.80%                         |
| \$25,000 to \$34,999   | 12.50%                            | 12.10%                           | 12.10%                         | 13.00%                         |
| \$35,000 to \$49,999   | 13.80%                            | 15.10%                           | 13.50%                         | 15.70%                         |
| \$50,000 to \$74,999   | 13.90%                            | 18.00%                           | 14.70%                         | 17.70%                         |
| \$75,000 or more       | 14.40%                            | 23.90%                           | 14.20%                         | 21.30%                         |
| Median Earnings        | \$28,438                          | \$40,948                         | \$28,283                       | \$38,550                       |

<sup>1</sup> United States Census Bureau (2022). *Explore Census Data*. <https://data.census.gov/>



## POVERTY LEVEL

The table below highlights selected financial and employment outcomes over the past decade. Comparing those with and without a disability, PWDs are more likely to live below the poverty line than those without a disability. However, ACS data indicates that PWD who are employed are less likely to live below the poverty line. Although recent data for those specifically with a cognitive disability could not be located, the past years indicate that those with a cognitive disability are more likely to live below the poverty line, earn less, and work less than those with any or no disability.

| <b>Employment Outcomes for Working-Age People (Ages 16–64)</b>                                  | <b>2012</b> | <b>2013</b> | <b>2014</b> | <b>2015</b> | <b>2016</b> | <b>2017</b> | <b>2018</b> | <b>2019</b> |
|---|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Mean annual earnings from work for people with no disability (in thousands of dollars)          | \$41        | \$41        | \$42        | \$44        | \$45        | \$47        | \$49        | \$51        |
| Mean annual earnings from work for people with any disability (in thousands of dollars)         | \$30        | \$31        | \$31        | \$32        | \$347       | \$36        | \$36        | \$39        |
| Mean annual earnings from work for people with a cognitive disability (in thousands of dollars) | \$22        | \$22        | \$23        | \$22        | \$25        | \$26        | \$29        | \$31        |
| Mean weekly hours worked for people with no disability  | 39          | 39          | 39          | 39          | 39          | 39          | 39          | 39          |
| Mean weekly hours worked for people with any disability   | 37          | 37          | 37          | 37          | 37          | 37          | 37          | 38          |
| Mean weekly hours worked for people with a cognitive disability                                 | 35          | 33          | 34          | 34          | 33          | 34          | 35          | 35          |
| Percentage of people with no disability living below the poverty line                           | 16%         | 16%         | 15%         | 14%         | 13%         | 13%         | 128%        | 11%         |
| Percentage of people with any disability living below the poverty line                          | 30%         | 29%         | 30%         | 28%         | 25%         | 27%         | 24%         | 23%         |
| Percentage of people with a cognitive disability living below the poverty line                  | 34%         | 31%         | 35%         | 33%         | 27%         | 32%         | 28%         | 26%         |

## LABOR MARKET AND EMPLOYMENT

### GEORGIA'S LABOR MARKET PARTICIPATION

According to ACS 2020 data, the labor force participation rate among Georgia's total population aged 16 and older is estimated to have been 63.3% in 2020, with the employment to population ratio at 59.2%.<sup>1</sup> These are comparable with the national average (63% and 58.6%, respectively). Additionally, full-time workers earned an average weekly wage of \$1,331 (\$69,252 annually). This is below the national averages (\$1,446 and \$75,203).<sup>1</sup>

As of December 2021, five out of the top ten counties in Georgia with the highest (non-farm) employment levels among individuals age 16 and older are those in the Metro area (Fulton, Cobb, Gwinnett, DeKalb, and Clayton), accounting for 44.8% of all statewide estimated employment.<sup>2</sup> The remaining five counties with the highest employment are Chatham, Richmond, Muscogee, Hall, and Bibb. The counties with the lowest employment were Taliaferro, Quitman, Glascock, Baker, and Webster.

### EMPLOYMENT

#### ***Labor Force Characteristics Among PWD<sup>3</sup>***

Nationally, for years 2020-2021, individuals without disabilities aged 16 and older, are over three times more likely to be employed than those with disabilities (19.1% versus 63.7%). Regardless of disability status, women are less likely to be employed than men. However, there is a larger gap in employment rates between men with disabilities and men without as compared to the gap between women with disabilities and women without.

The following table reflects national trends of employment among individuals with disabilities aged 16 and older of different racial and ethnic backgrounds. As reported in the 2021 U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) Report on Persons with a Disability Labor Force Characteristics: Black/African Americans with disabilities are the least likely to be employed, compared to the other racial and ethnic groups, and Hispanic/Latino people with disabilities are the most likely to be employed.

| Race                   | U.S. Population with a Disability, aged 16 and older | Percentage Employed | Percentage Unemployed |
|------------------------|--|---------------------|-----------------------|
| White                  | 24,644,000   | 19.60%              | 9.30%                 |
| Black/African American | 4,267,000  | 15.40%              | 15.10%                |
| Asian                  | 947,000  | 16.20%              | 8.50%                 |
| Hispanic or Latino     | 3,852,000  | 21.30%              | 13.30%                |

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2022, June 21). *County Employment and Wages in Georgia – Fourth Quarter 2021*. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. [https://www.bls.gov/regions/southeast/news-release/countyemploymentandwages\\_georgia.htm](https://www.bls.gov/regions/southeast/news-release/countyemploymentandwages_georgia.htm)

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2023, February 23). Persons with a disability: Labor force characteristics. News Release U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/disabl.pdf>

The following table provides additional insights on how employment outcomes for people with disabilities have changed over time. While employment of PWDs dropped in 2020, there was an increase in employment in 2021, and this trend appears to be continuing into 2022. The 2022 unemployment rate for individuals with disabilities was 7.6%, a 2.5%-point drop from 2021.3 One potential reason for this drop is the prevalence of remote work and self-employment amongst people with disabilities. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, remote work opportunities became widespread, making employment more accessible.<sup>4</sup>

| <b>Employment Participation for Working-Age People (Ages 16-64)</b> |             |             |             |             |             |             |             |             |             |             |
|---|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
|   | <b>2012</b> | <b>2013</b> | <b>2014</b> | <b>2015</b> | <b>2016</b> | <b>2017</b> | <b>2018</b> | <b>2019</b> | <b>2020</b> | <b>2021</b> |
| Number of people with no disability                                 | 5,720,327   | 5,744,666   | 5,774,619   | 5,877,143   | 5,848,170   | 5,970,367   | 6,029,955   | 5,999,773   | 6,909,601   | 6,996,935   |
| Number of people with any disability                                | 660,436     | 685,796     | 699,826     | 669,720     | 718,679     | 674,278     | 677,107     | 703,163     | 1,193,449   | 1,202,007   |
| Number of people with a cognitive disability                        | 272,686     | 273,888     | 287,856     | 280,665     | 303,842     | 285,770     | 291,785     | 317,903     | 288,633     | 320,902     |
| Number of people with no disability who are employed                | 3,899,763   | 3,966,658   | 4,058,303   | 4,194,425   | 4,260,696   | 4,376,983   | 4,462,031   | 4,481,341   | 4,621,575   | 4,700,128   |
| Number of people with any disability who are employed               | 196,053     | 213,634     | 200,469     | 206,822     | 241,707     | 226,258     | 240,680     | 247,069     | 287,455     | 332,031     |
| Number of people with a cognitive disability who are employed       | 56,182      | 53,127      | 54,129      | 54,726      | 73,990      | 69,206      | 74,821      | 82,876      | -           | 103,653     |
| Percentage of people with no disability who are employed            | 68.2%       | 69.0%       | 70.0%       | 71.4%       | 72.9%       | 73.3%       | 74.0%       | 75.0%       | 66.9%       | 67.2%       |
| Percentage of people with any disability who are employed           | 29.7%       | 31.2%       | 29.0%       | 30.9%       | 33.6%       | 33.6%       | 36.0%       | 35.0%       | 24.1%       | 27.6%       |
| Percentage of people with a cognitive disability who are employed   | 20.6%       | 19.4%       | 19.0%       | 19.5%       | 24.4%       | 24.2%       | 26.0%       | 26.0%       | -           | 32.3%       |

<sup>4</sup> Ceron, E. (2023, February 24). *Remote Work Helped Push Disability Employment Up to a Record High*. Bloomberg.Com. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2023-02-24/remote-work-helped-push-disability-employment-up-to-a-record-high>

## GEORGIA’S EMPLOYMENT-POPULATION RATIO FOR PWD

According to 2020 & 2021 ACS population estimates for Georgia, approximately 15% of Georgia’s population age 16 and older had a disability each of those years, which is consistent with United States overall statistics for the same age group.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, as shown in the following table, it is estimated that on average, only 25% of individuals with disabilities age 16 and older were employed (24% in 2020, 26% in 2021), compared to an average 66% employment rate among individuals without disabilities.<sup>1</sup>

| 2020                             |                                | 2021                             |                                |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| With Disability<br>(n=1,193,449) | No Disability<br>(n=6,909,601) | With Disability<br>(n=1,273,167) | No Disability<br>(n=7,104,528) |
| Employed:<br>24%                 | Employed:<br>67%               | Employed:<br>26%                 | Employed:<br>66%               |
| Not in Labor Force:<br>73%       | Not in Labor Force:<br>29%     | Not in Labor Force:<br>71%       | Not in Labor Force:<br>30%     |

### Exhibit G.1. Economic indicators (2022)

| Project       | Employment-to-population ratios for people with disabilities <sup>a</sup> | Employment-to-population ratios for people without disabilities <sup>b</sup> | Unemployment rate for people with disabilities <sup>c</sup> | Unemployment rate for people without disabilities <sup>d</sup> |
|---------------|---|--|---|--|
| Georgia       | 38.85%  | 76.01%   | 11.28%  | 5.13%  |
| United States | 40.79%  | 76.55%   | 13.18%  | 5.77%  |

Source: American Community Survey, U.S. Census Bureau 2022, Table B18120 Available at: [https://data.census.gov/cedsci/?intcmp=aff\\_cedsci\\_banner](https://data.census.gov/cedsci/?intcmp=aff_cedsci_banner)

<sup>a</sup> The calculation for the employment-to-population ratios for people with disabilities = Employed with a disability / (Employed with a disability + Unemployed with a disability + Not in labor force with a disability).

<sup>b</sup> The calculation for the employment-to-population ratios for people without disabilities = Employed without a disability / (Employed without a disability + Unemployed without a disability + Not in labor force without a disability).

<sup>c</sup> The calculation for the unemployment rate for people with disabilities = Unemployed with a disability / (Employed with a disability + Unemployed with a disability).

<sup>d</sup> The calculation for the unemployment rate for people without disabilities = Unemployed without a disability / (Employed without a disability + Unemployed without a disability).

## GEORGIA'S CURRENT EMPLOYMENT TRENDS BY OCCUPATION

Georgia Department of Labor data indicates the total employment for 2022 was 108,604<sup>5</sup>. Employment trends within the state according to the percentage of jobs per Standard Occupational Category (SOC) major grouping reflect Office and Administrative Support Occupations had the highest number of employed workers in the state during 2020.<sup>5</sup> Examples of specific types of jobs within this category include customer service representatives, secretaries and administrative assistants, and office clerks. Among state employment, jobs related to Sales were the second most prevalent, which includes jobs such as cashiers, retail salespersons, and sales representatives.

The table below reflects the top 15 detailed occupations with the highest employment in Georgia during 2021<sup>6</sup>, along with both average and hourly wages.

| SOC Detailed Occupation  | Total Employment | Avg. Hourly | Avg. Annual |
|--|------------------|-------------|-------------|
| Retail salespersons  | 124,150          | \$14.21     | \$29,557    |
| Laborers/Freight, Stock, and Material Movers, Hand   | 123,620          | \$15.75     | \$32,760    |
| Cashiers   | 111,930          | \$11.54     | \$24,003    |
| Customer Service Representatives   | 108,860          | \$17.60     | \$36,608    |
| General and Operations Managers  | 76,650           | \$56.91     | \$118,373   |
| Registered Nurses  | 73,230           | \$35.75     | \$74,360    |
| Office Clerks, General   | 70,870           | \$17.65     | \$36,712    |
| Waiters and Waitresses   | 66,710           | \$11.48     | \$23,878    |
| Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers  | 62,390           | \$24.48     | \$50,918    |
| Secretaries and Admin. Assistants, except legal, medical, and executive                      | 61,890           | \$17.52     | \$36,442    |
| Janitors and Cleaners, Except Maids and Housekeeping Cleaners                                | 51,030           | \$13.22     | \$27,498    |
| Sales Representatives, Wholesale and Manufacturing, Except Technical and Scientific Products | 46,130           | \$36.26     | \$75,421    |
| First-line Supervisors of Office and Administrative Support Workers                          | 43,960           | \$28.99     | \$60,299    |
| Elementary School Teachers, Except Special Education   | 43,610           | -           | \$63,730    |
| Maintenance and Repair Workers, General  | 40,240           | \$20.01     | \$41,621    |

<sup>5</sup> Georgia Department of Labor (n.d.). *Area unemployment rate and labor force estimates*. Georgia Department of Labor. <https://dol.georgia.gov/area-unemployment-rate-and-labor-force-estimates>

<sup>6</sup> Georgia Department of Labor. (2022). *Occupational wages*. Georgia Labor Market Explorer. <https://explorer.gdol.ga.gov/vosnet/gsipub/documentView.aspx?enc=bvgeDG3pzsifwxQaIBRNzw==>

## EDUCATION ATTAINMENT AMONG WORKERS WITH DISABILITIES<sup>1</sup>

Nationally, according to the US BLS Community Population Survey data for years 2020-2021, the factor related to the lowest employment rate among individuals with disabilities is the lack of a high school diploma or equivalent. In fact, individuals with disabilities age 25 and above with less than a high school diploma are 6 times less likely to be employed than those without disabilities (8% versus 51.4%).

Individuals age 25 and older without disabilities who have a bachelor's degree or higher are 264% more likely to be employed than those with disabilities who have the same education level. Individuals with disabilities who have a bachelor's degree or higher are three times more likely to be employed compared to their counterparts with less than a high school diploma (8% versus 27.7%). State level data related to education level among workers with disabilities is limited to data collected by the American Community Survey (ACS). As shown below, both nationally and in Georgia, individuals with disabilities age 25 and over are more likely to have not completed high school and are less likely to have above a high school diploma compared to individuals without a disability.

| Educational Attainment                      | United States   |               | Georgia         |               |
|---|-----------------|---------------|-----------------|---------------|
|   | With Disability | No Disability | With Disability | No Disability |
| Population Age 25 and Over                  | 36,753,828      | 187,329,670   | 1,175,985       | 5,898,366     |
| Less than high school graduate              | 17.50%          | 9.10%         | 18.90%          | 9.20%         |
| High school graduate (includes equivalency) | 33.20%          | 24.60%        | 32.30%          | 25.30%        |
| Some college or associate's degree          | 29.10%          | 27.90%        | 28.70%          | 27.50%        |
| Bachelor's degree or higher                 | 20.20%          | 38.40%        | 20.10%          | 38.10%        |

## GEORGIA'S LABOR MARKET PROJECTIONS

### Georgia's Hot Careers 2018-2028<sup>7</sup>

Georgia's Department of Labor defined "Hot Careers" as those that have faster than state annual job growth, have average wages above the annual state average wage, and have at least 400 annual openings. Listed below are the top 10 jobs in Georgia projected to have the most annual openings, eight of which require a bachelor's degree.

<sup>7</sup> Workforce Statistics and Economic Research (n.d). *Georgia's Hot Careers 2018-2028*. Georgia Department of Labor.

<https://explorer.gdol.ga.gov/vosnet/gsipub/documentView.aspx?enc=+Ts4H/enqfVSHeLXhKDaA==>

| Career   | 2018-2028 Annual Openings | Level of Education Needed         |
|--|---------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| General & Operations Managers  | 8,960                     | Bachelor's degree                 |
| Registered Nurses  | 6,340                     | Bachelor's degree                 |
| Sales Reps, Wholesale & Manufacturing (Excluding Tech & Scientific Products) | 5,750                     | High school diploma or equivalent |
| Sales Reps, Services, All Other  | 5,260                     | High school diploma or equivalent |
| Elementary School Teachers, (Excluding Special Education)                    | 5,060                     | Bachelor's degree                 |
| Accountants & Auditors   | 4,890                     | Bachelor's degree                 |
| Business Operations Specialists, All Other                                   | 4,340                     | Bachelor's degree                 |
| Management Analysts  | 2,980                     | Bachelor's degree                 |
| Software Developers, Applications  | 2,980                     | Bachelor's degree                 |
| Market Research Analysts & Marketing Specialists                             | 2,890                     | Bachelor's degree                 |

**Georgia’s Key Industry Projections**

Established in 2022, the High Demand Career Initiative (HDCI) identifies occupations within in-demand industries in Georgia that are shown to have above average entry-level wages and are considered strong Georgia career paths.<sup>8</sup> These industries include: Aerospace, Agribusiness, Business Services, Construction, Education, Energy and Environment, Entertainment, Hospitality and Tourism, Life Sciences, Logistics, and Manufacturing.

The top five industries that are expected to have the most growth, in terms of employment between 2020 and 2030, are Entertainment related (Motion Picture and Video Industries, 78.9% increase), Healthcare related (Offices of Other Health Practitioners, 53.7% increase; Outpatient Care Centers, 51.8% increase), Retirement and Assisted Living facilities (49.7% increase), and Individual and Family Services (48.1% increase). Many of the high demand occupations require technical skills, particularly in jobs related to advanced manufacturing. According to the National Skills Coalition<sup>9</sup>, 54% of Georgia’s current labor market require skills beyond high school but not necessarily a four-year degree; however, it is estimated that due to a lack of access, only 42% of Georgia’s workforce have had the skills training and education

<sup>8</sup> HDCI (n.d.). *HDCI Occupations List*. Technical College System of Georgia. <https://www.tcsge.edu/hdci/hdci-occupations-list/>

<sup>9</sup> National Skills Coalition. (2020). *The Georgia skills mismatch*. National Skills Coalition. <https://nationalskillscoalition.org/skills-mismatch/georgia-skills-mismatch/>

needed to fill-in demand jobs. However, among the industries that are projected to have the most job losses include State Government (Excluding Education and Hospitals), Religious Organizations, Nursing Care Facilities, Furniture and Related Product Manufacturing, and Printing and Related Support Activities.<sup>10</sup>

### **OCCUPATIONAL TRENDS AMONG GEORGIANS WITH DISABILITIES**

In regard to occupational trends among workers in Georgia who have disabilities, data is limited to ACS estimates, as there is not a public-use database available in Georgia where state agencies or programs providing employment services to individuals with disabilities (IWD) report outcomes, including details of employment obtained by their consumers.

According to 2020 and 2021 ACS data<sup>1</sup>, on average, the occupational groups with the highest percentage of workers with disabilities in Georgia include Management, Business, Science and Arts (33.15%) and Sales and Office (22.5%), which is consistent with US percentages. For both individuals with disabilities and those without, the industries with the highest employment among workers aged 16 and older are Education/Healthcare/Social Assistance and Professional/Scientific/Management/Administrative/Waste Management Services. However, it should be noted that the percentage rate for employment in the former industry is slightly higher for those with disabilities than without.

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<sup>10</sup> Georgia Department of Labor, Workforce Statistics Division. (2018). *Georgia Workforce Trends: An analysis of long-term employment projections to 2028*. Georgia Department of Labor. <https://explorer.gdol.ga.gov/vosnet/mis/current/gaworkforcecurrent.pdf>



## Self-Employment

In recent years, rates of self-employment have increased, especially through the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>11</sup> Individuals with disabilities have historically and consistently held higher rates of self-employment than those with no disabilities, usually as a solution to facing barriers to traditional employment. In regard to alternative work situations, 2020-2021 estimates indicate individuals with disabilities are more likely to engage in self-employment than individuals without disabilities<sup>1</sup>.

| Self-Employment Among Individuals with Disabilities |                                  |                    |                                |                       |                                  |                    |                                |
|---|----------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------------|
| 2020  |                                  |                    |                                | 2021                  |                                  |                    |                                |
| US  |                                  | GA                 |                                | US                    |                                  | GA                 |                                |
| IWD<br>(n=9,261,719)                                | No Disability<br>(n=146,599,527) | IWD<br>(n=287,455) | No Disability<br>(n=4,621,575) | IWD<br>(n=10,298,729) | No Disability<br>(n=146,062,077) | IWD<br>(n=332,031) | No Disability<br>(n=4,700,128) |
| 11.60%  | 9.50%                            | 12%                | 9.60%                          | 11.20%                | 10.90%                           | 11.50%             | 10%                            |

## Remote Work and Telework for People with Disabilities

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a steep increase in the amount of remote work and telework being done. Before COVID-19, rates of remote work<sup>12</sup> consisted of only 6% of the workforce. After the COVID-19 onset, roughly one-third of the entire workforce was remote, with three-quarters of all office-based and professional occupations going remote. While decreases in the number of remote workers have been seen as organizations return to a preference for in-person, they have yet to reach pre-pandemic levels.

It is speculated that the rise in employment rates for people with disabilities has been facilitated in part by the availability of remote work<sup>13</sup>. In the wake of many organizations wanting to return to in-person settings, many disabled employees and individuals are concerned with the accessibility barriers posed by a mandated return to a physical office space.

<sup>11</sup> Kochhar, R. (2021). *The self-employed are back at work in pre-COVID-19 numbers, but their businesses have smaller payrolls*. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2021/11/03/the-self-employed-are-back-at-work-in-pre-covid-19-numbers-but-their-businesses-have-smaller-payrolls/#:~:text=A%20delay%20in%20reporting%20downsizing,98.7%20million%20to%20107.5%20million.>

<sup>12</sup> Coate, P. (2021, January 25). *Remote work before, during, and after the pandemic*. NCCI. [https://www.ncci.com/SecureDocuments/QEB/QEB\\_Q4\\_2020\\_RemoteWork.html](https://www.ncci.com/SecureDocuments/QEB/QEB_Q4_2020_RemoteWork.html)

<sup>13</sup> Gonzales, M. (2022, October 24). *Remote work helps people with Disabilities Land Jobs*. SHRM. <https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/hr-topics/behavioral-competencies/global-and-cultural-effectiveness/pages/remote-work-helps-people-with-disabilities-land-jobs.aspx>

## SUPPORTED AND CUSTOMIZED EMPLOYMENT

Two widely regarded best practices when it comes to disability employment are customized employment and supported employment. While sometimes regarded as interchangeable<sup>14</sup>, some general distinctions are outlined below.

### Customized Employment

Customized employment<sup>15</sup> (CE) refers to formal arrangements between a disabled employee and their employer that caters the nature of the job and its demands to the employee's strengths. The primary focus<sup>16</sup> of customized employment is individualizing the employment experience. Some examples include work from home arrangements, adjusted schedules, or self-employment. Customized employment also became a part of federal law with the passage of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)<sup>17</sup> in 2014. Prior to WIOA, the Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) began a customized employment initiative in select states through the American Job Centers in 2001.

In Georgia, GVRA has defined and identified six steps for customized employment:<sup>18</sup>

1. Plan Meeting Service Identification
2. Discovery Assessment and Profile
3. Job Placement/Development
4. Training and initiation of Ongoing Supports
5. Stabilization
6. VR Services Completion and Transition to Extended Services

### Discovery

A unique feature of customized employment is the discovery process. It represents a qualitative process<sup>17</sup> that a job seeker goes through to identify strengths, needs, and interests. The Office of Disability Employment Policy<sup>17</sup> and Griffin-Hammis and Associates<sup>19</sup> provide free, publicly available resources on customized employment, including steps for navigating the discovery process successfully. Outcomes of the discovery process<sup>20</sup> often include identification of vocational themes and a detailed report of findings from the discovery process. While each organization and agency may take a slightly varied approach to customized employment, they all encompass the aspects identified in WIOA.

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<sup>14</sup> LEAD Center. (2015). *Information brief: Perspective of employers on customized employment*. LEAD Center. [https://leadcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/CE\\_Info\\_Brief\\_Employer\\_Perspective\\_o.pdf](https://leadcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/CE_Info_Brief_Employer_Perspective_o.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> Center on Community Living and Careers. (n.d.). *Supported and customized employment*. Indiana Institute on Disability and Community.

<sup>16</sup> Statewide Quality Improvement Council. (2014, September 22). *Guide to supported employment*. Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities.

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/odep/program-areas/customized-employment>

<sup>18</sup> DBHDD. (n.d.). *Guide to customized/supported employment*. Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities.

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.griffinhammis.com/what-we-do/customized-employment/>

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.griffinhammis.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Brining-Fidelity-to-CE-Processes-2023.pdf>

## Supported Employment

In contrast, supported employment<sup>15</sup> refers to ongoing services utilized by disabled employees to maintain employment and may not necessarily be related to the nature of the work and performing the job. Some examples include coworkers providing transportation for disabled employees or physical offices having a safe space that employees can go to as needed.

In Georgia, GVRA has defined and identified five steps essential to the process of traditional supported employment:<sup>18</sup>

1. Services Identification
2. Job Development/Placement
3. Training and Initiation of Ongoing Supports
4. Stabilization
5. VR Services Completion and Transition to Extended Services

According to DBHDD<sup>21</sup>, there are 23 Supported Employment service providers in Georgia. Past work has indicated the many benefits of supported and customized employment, including those that extend to the general public. A 2010 study found that the average net benefit supported employees to taxpayers is \$3,016.08 per employee, and the benefit cost ratio is \$1.46 for every dollar spent, totaling out to over \$1.5 billion economic gain from supported employment programs. Further, preliminary data<sup>16</sup> indicates that supported employees have more favorable life outcomes. A review of empirical research<sup>22</sup> found that individuals in supported employment via individual placement supports (IPS) had better vocational outcomes and an anticipated improvement in quality of life. NCI 2020-2021 data<sup>23</sup> indicated that the average number of Georgians with disabilities with a paid community job was 13% (national average: 15%); of those, there was a 100% satisfaction rating with their job. Further, the average length of employment is 87 months, well above the national average (66). Of those without a paid community job, over half indicated that they would like to.

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<sup>21</sup> <https://dbhdd.georgia.gov/supported-employment>

<sup>22</sup> Frederick, D. E., & VanderWeele, T. J. (2019). Supported employment: Meta-analysis and review of randomized controlled trials of individual placement and support. *PLoS ONE*, 14(2), e0212208. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0212208>

<sup>23</sup> <https://idd.nationalcoreindicators.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/GA-IPS-20-21-State-Report-508.pdf>

### **Supported Employment through DBHDD**

As the state administrator of CMS waiver services, the Developmental Disabilities (DD) Division of Department of Behavioral Health & Developmental Disabilities (DBHDD) funds supported employment services for adults with behavioral and/or developmental disabilities, as well as for adolescents and young adults in some areas. For those not eligible for CMS waiver funding, state-funded Family Support Services, may also be an option. The table below summarizes the number of individuals served through DBHDD’s supported employment services over the past three fiscal years.

| <b>Individuals with Disabilities Served through DBHDD</b> |                |                        |                |
|---|----------------|------------------------|----------------|
| <b>FY20 (n=12,986)</b>                                    |                | <b>FY21 (n=12,118)</b> |                |
| <b># Served</b>   | <b>% Total</b> | <b># Served</b>        | <b>% Total</b> |
| 2,171   | 16.72%         | 1,829                  | 15.09%         |

According to data from the Georgia 2020-2021 NCI data<sup>23</sup>, 13% (n=52.65) of the 405 respondents receiving DD funded services indicated they had a job in the community, 47% of which was an individual job with supports and 12% was a “group” job, with or without supports. Whereas, 70% of the respondents indicated they attended a day program or workshop.

Additionally, the Behavioral Health (BH) Division of DBHDD provides funding for evidenced-based supported employment services, also known as Individual Placement and Supports (IPS), for individuals meeting the definition of “severe and persistent mental illness.” These services are primarily conducted by employment specialists employed by a regional community service board (CSB) organization or contracted provider. In 2010, Georgia entered into a settlement with the US Department of Justice to serve DD and BH consumers in the most integrated community setting possible. Within the settlement decree the state BH division was required to implement IPS supported employment services statewide and meet specified annual utilization goals for the number of individuals receiving supported employment services.

#### ***Accessing Waiver Services***

The Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities (DBHDD) maintains a short term and long-term “waiting” list for waiver services, which the state uses to prioritize services based on need. Individuals are placed on these lists once they have been found eligible for services but are awaiting funding. As of March 2023, 7,031 individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities were awaiting needed waiver services. In 2020 and 2021, the number of people on the waiting list for employment and day services through DBHDD was 6,309 and 7,328 respectively.

## TRANSITION SERVICES

### Inclusive Post-Secondary Education (IPSE)

Since 2010, the US Department of Education has funded the National Coordinating Center for Transition Postsecondary Programs for Students with Intellectual Disabilities (Think College) along with 318 postsecondary education programs<sup>24</sup> throughout the US, to create or expand inclusive postsecondary programs for students with intellectual disabilities. As of March 2023, these programs have served nearly 5,000 students in 34 states. Amongst 2020 grantees, 494 students had already been served by TPSID programs by 2022<sup>25</sup>. Between 2010 and 2023, 7 of Georgia's 9 IPSE programs have been TPSID grantees.

According to Think College, approximately 28% of the students nationally received state vocational rehabilitation services while participating in their IPSE program during the 2020-2021 academic year. Services most frequently consisted of benefits counseling, self-advocacy instruction, job coaching, and work-based learning. Additionally, 82% (n = 18) of the TPSID grantees reported have a partnership with their state VR agency to provide Pre-ETS services as defined in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. Georgia currently has nine IPSE programs<sup>26</sup>.

### Employer Partnerships

A key component in successful employment and placement of individuals with disabilities into jobs is collaborative efforts between agencies, employers, and individuals. Without collaboration, efforts may be duplicated, lost in translation, or ineffective in fulfilling the employment goals and prospects for people with disabilities. Indeed, a common complaint and concern is the lack of conversation between the stakeholders involved in the disability employment process.

Some states have served as trailblazers in demonstrating what increased collaborations between employers and agencies could look like. For instance, the Administration for Community Living (ACL) has previously allocated grants at the state-level to invest in developing programs aimed at cross-agency and business collaboration. One such example is the Partners with Business<sup>27</sup> program in Wisconsin, instituted by the Wisconsin Board for People with Developmental Disabilities (BPDD). In bridging the gap between state agencies, providers, and employers, Partners with Business aims to re-emphasize and prioritize the components of supported and integrated employment as integral to a successful placement. Other states with partnerships in employment (PIE) programs include Alaska, California, Iowa, Mississippi, Missouri, New York, and Tennessee. In comparing states with and without PIE programs<sup>28</sup>,

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<sup>24</sup> <https://thinkcollege.net/college-search>

<sup>25</sup> [https://thinkcollege.net/sites/default/files/files/resources/TCReports\\_Cohort%203\\_Year2\\_R.pdf](https://thinkcollege.net/sites/default/files/files/resources/TCReports_Cohort%203_Year2_R.pdf)

<sup>26</sup> [https://thinkcollege.net/college-search?f\[o\]=tc\\_state\\_province%3AGeorgia](https://thinkcollege.net/college-search?f[o]=tc_state_province%3AGeorgia)

<sup>27</sup> <https://wi-bpdd.org/index.php/partners-with-business/>

<sup>28</sup> Butterworth, J., Christensen, J.J., & Flippo, K. (2017). Partnerships in Employment: Building strong coalitions to facilitate systems change for youth and young adults. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, 47, 265-276.

those with see twice or more increases in the number of closures into employment for people with disabilities, and specifically improved outcomes for those with intellectual disabilities.

### Economic Advocacy

Integral to advancing employment opportunities and outlook for people with disabilities is acknowledging and taking stock of the role they play in the economy. In doing so, it is important to acknowledge the value that employment of individuals with disabilities brings not only to themselves, but to the public at large. As mentioned previously, recent research has supported the economic benefits of investing into customized and supported employment. In furthering advocacy efforts, Advancing Employment<sup>29</sup> proposes a shift from a Services Advocacy approach to an Economic Advocacy Approach:

| Services Advocacy  | Economic Advocacy   |
|--|---|
| Focus is on waiver slots, preserving funding                             | Focus is on return-on-investment (ROI), purchasing power                    |
| Tasks include letter writing, email blasts, and calls to legislators     | Tasks include conveying diversity, equity, and inclusion through employment |
| Words used focus on pity, loss, “otherness”, and disempowerment          | Words used focus on citizenship, workers’ rights, economic empowerment      |
| Outcomes are oftentimes long-term segregation in facility-based programs | Outcomes are employment and financial contributions in local communities    |
| Ongoing services are mostly professionalized                             | Ongoing supports also include natural and coworker-based approaches         |
| Advocacy is largely episodic and urgency-based                           | Advocacy is consistent and rooted in economics that are community-specific  |

A major focus in organizations has been on making the “business case” for diversity, highlighting what benefits hiring individuals from diverse and underrepresented backgrounds does to promote organizational performance and the overall bottom line. The emphasis on economic advocacy reinforces the case for hiring employees with disabilities and the larger business case for diversity, which has been further expanded upon in the popular press<sup>30,31</sup>.

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.advancingemployment.com/disability-and-economics>

<sup>30</sup> Herson, K. (2021, December). *Seven reasons why hiring people with disabilities is good for business*. Forbes. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesbusinesscouncil/2021/12/03/seven-reasons-why-hiring-people-with-disabilities-is-good-for-business/?sh=6f3ac25c1832>

<sup>31</sup> Owen, J. (2012, May). *The benefits of disability in the workplace*. Forbes. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/judyowen/2012/05/12/a-cost-benefit-analysis-of-disability-in-the-workplace/?sh=10aca7183501>

## Model Programs

### ***Project SEARCH***

Project SEARCH<sup>32</sup> is an international network of programs that offers high school transition-to-work programs for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. It was established in 1996 at Cincinnati Children’s Hospital Medical Center. The end goal of Project SEARCH programs is to place individuals with IDD into competitive employment positions.

Work on the short- and long-term outcomes of Project SEARCH programs and its participants have shown to be promising. In a longitudinal study of three New York-based Project SEARCH programs, Christensen et al. (2015)<sup>33</sup> found an 83% success rate, much higher than the national average (at the time) of 68%. For 2020-2021, Project SEARCH employment was approximately 73% for all jobs, and 64% for those who met all criteria for competitive employment. In Georgia, there are 22 Project SEARCH sites<sup>34</sup>.

## LEGISLATION

### **WIOA**

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act<sup>35</sup> (WIOA) was signed into law on July 22, 2014. Its purpose is to “strengthen and improve our nation's public workforce system and help get Americans, including youth and those with significant barriers to employment, into high-quality jobs and careers and help employers hire and retain skilled workers.” This represented a landmark legislative move for workforce development systems, the first piece of reform since 1998. As part of WIOA, states are required to align their workforce development programs to fit the needs of both jobseekers and employers via four-year strategic plans. WIOA partners with the US DOL, US DOE, and US Health and Human Services (HHS), and encourages partnerships and collaboration amongst agencies at the state-level to reduce duplication of effort.

Below is a list of all WIOA programs, with many focusing on targeting vulnerable populations. WIOA programs and services are available at over 2,400 American Job Centers (AJCs) nationwide:

- Adult & Dislocated Worker Program<sup>36</sup>
- Indian and Native American Program<sup>37</sup>
- Job Corps<sup>38</sup>
- National Dislocated Worker Grants (NDWG)<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> <https://projectsearch.us/who-we-are/>

<sup>33</sup> Christensen, J., Hetherington, S., Daston, M., & Riehle, E. (2015). Longitudinal outcomes of Project SEARCH in upstate New York. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, 42(3), 247-255.

<sup>34</sup> <https://projectsearch.us/find-a-program/>

<sup>35</sup> <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/wioa/>

<sup>36</sup> <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/workforce-investment/adult>

<sup>37</sup> <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/dinap>

<sup>38</sup> <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/jobcorps>

<sup>39</sup> <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/dislocated-workers/>

- National Farmworker Jobs Program<sup>40</sup>
- Reentry Employment Opportunities Program (REO)<sup>41</sup>
- Wagner-Peyser Employment Service<sup>42</sup>
- WIOA Youth Program<sup>43</sup>
- YouthBuild<sup>44</sup>

Georgia’s Disability Employment Initiative received federal recognition<sup>45</sup> for implementing best practices in terms of supporting individuals with disabilities in their efforts to seek employment opportunities. This was done by establishing a Certified Rehabilitation Counselor at GVRVA whose sole caseload was working with those co-enrolled in WIOA Title I and Title IV programs.

## **EMPLOYMENT FIRST**

Understanding Employment First begins with a simple presumption: that all people, regardless of disability, can work. The United States Department of Labor<sup>46</sup> recognizes Employment First as a framework aimed at placing individuals with disabilities into competitive, integrated employment and prioritizing it as a first and preferred option. Nationally, the Office of Disability Employment Policy has provided employers, state agencies, and individuals with webinars and open-access information for how to take an Employment First approach.

In May 2018<sup>47</sup>, Georgia signed into law the Georgia’s Employment First Act. As stated in the bill, “The General Assembly finds and declares that competitive integrated employment, including self-employment, in the general workforce is the first and preferred option in the provision of publicly funded services for all working age citizens with disabilities, regardless of the level of disability” (Georgia House Bill 831, 2018, p. 1). The bill also created a 14-person Employment First Council to monitor the state’s progress.

Over 35 states<sup>48</sup> have some form of Employment First law or policy, with 21 of them explicitly mentioning competitive, integrated employment as a first preferred option for placement of individuals with disabilities. In states committing to an Employment First framework, positive increases in competitive, integrated job placement and community involvement have been noted for people with disabilities.

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<sup>40</sup> <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/agriculture>

<sup>41</sup> <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/reentry>

<sup>42</sup> <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/american-job-centers/wagner-peyser>

<sup>43</sup> <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/youth>

<sup>44</sup> <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/youth/youthbuild>

<sup>45</sup> <https://www.nationaldisabilityinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/dei-georgia-vr-partnership.pdf>

<sup>46</sup> <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/odep/initiatives/employment-first>

<sup>47</sup> <https://www.advancingemployment.com/employmentfirst>

<sup>48</sup> <https://autisticadvocacy.org/actioncenter/issues/employment/first/>



## **STATE AS MODEL EMPLOYER (SAME)**

State as Model Employer (SAME)<sup>49</sup> is a policy framework that would require states to adopt a strategic plan for the recruitment and retention of persons with disabilities into state agencies for employment. This policy aims to make state agencies leaders for what employment of persons with disabilities can and should look like in other organizations throughout the state.

As of March 2023, there are 21 states<sup>50</sup> that have SAME policies either through executive order, legislation, or both (Kansas, Massachusetts, New Mexico, Vermont, Louisiana, Missouri, Minnesota, Ohio, Arizona, Colorado, Connecticut, Illinois, Montana, Oklahoma, Utah, Alaska, California, Delaware, Maine, New York, and Washington). While Georgia has not yet adopted SAME, Advancing Employment<sup>49</sup> has provided resources to promote advocacy and education of Georgians on the topic of SAME. The Council of State Governments<sup>50</sup> also released a report outlining steps and processes states should take in adopting SAME.

## **PHASING OUT 14(C) CERTIFICATION AND SUBMINIMUM WAGES**

In 1938, the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA)<sup>51</sup> was passed as a framework for minimum wage and overtime rates. It also included an exemption known as 14(c) certificates for employers to pay people with disabilities subminimum wages, originally intended as an incentive to engage disabled veterans in the workforce. Today, the majority of employers holding 14(c) certificates use them to employ sheltered workshops, which are segregated facility-based programs where workers engage in tasks such as assembling, packaging, and manufacturing.

Recent efforts both nationally and at the state level have been aimed at phasing out 14(c) and subminimum wages. As of March 1, 2023, 13 states<sup>52</sup> have passed legislation to eliminate subminimum wages and 14(c) certifications (Alaska, Maine, Maryland, New Hampshire, Oregon, Washington, Hawaii, Colorado, California, Delaware, Tennessee, South Carolina, and Rhode Island). Further, both the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights<sup>53</sup> and the National Council on Disability have made recommendations for phasing out the legislation and placing restrictions and/or complete bans on holding 14(c) certification.

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<sup>49</sup> <https://www.advancingemployment.com/state-as-model-employer>

<sup>50</sup> <https://seed.csg.org/policy-curriculum/state-as-a-model-employer/>

<sup>51</sup> <https://www.advancingemployment.com/sub-minimum-wage>

<sup>52</sup> <https://apse.org/state->

[legislation/#:~:text=14\(c\)%2Fsubminimum%20wage%20legislation&text=Note%3A%20The%20following%20states%20have,%2C%20South%20Carolina%20%26%20Rhode%20Island](https://apse.org/state-)

<sup>53</sup> <https://www.usccr.gov/files/2020/2020-09-17-Subminimum-Wages-Report.pdf>

The table below reports recent numbers of Georgians with disabilities in various employment and day services settings. In line with trends in other states, there was a decrease in the number of individuals in facility-based work settings (15.75% decrease).

|                                     | FY 20  | FY 21 |
|-------------------------------------|--------|-------|
| <b># in integrated employment</b>   | 2,171  | 1,829 |
| <b># in facility-based work</b>     | 1,632  | 1,345 |
| <b># in facility-based nonwork</b>  | 10,018 | 9,366 |
| <b># in community-based nonwork</b> | 4,038  | 3,695 |

In Georgia, there has been no legislation introduced explicitly addressing 14(c) and subminimum wages. However, there is a lot of work and advocacy happening in the area. In Spring 2022, Advancing Employment released a series of webinars called “Ending Subminimum Wages in Georgia Series”<sup>54</sup> in partnership with the Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities<sup>55</sup> (GCDD), covering the discussion of subminimum wages in Georgia. Advancing Employment is managed by the Institute on Human Development and Disabilities (IHDD) at the University of Georgia and serves as a Technical Assistance Center for Best Practices in Employment Supports.

### **Barriers to Phasing Out 14(c) and Subminimum Wages**

***Fear of Losing Benefits:*** A commonly cited barrier to moving workers out of 14(c) facilities is the worker or family’s fears about an individual with disabilities losing their benefits and healthcare coverage.

***Beliefs and Misconceptions About Capabilities:*** As mentioned above, much of the work done by those in 14(c) facilities revolves around simpler tasks related to assembly and manufacturing, entrenched in a historical precedent that these experiences would allow job training to prepare individuals for other employment. The nature of this work stems from the beliefs and misconceptions the public holds about people with disabilities and their capabilities. Rather than serving as a stepping stone for future employment, 14(c) facilities have become a systemic form of segregating disabled workers from the larger employment system.

***Family and Caregiver Reluctance:*** A common argument in support of 14(c) is points raised by the family members and caregivers of people with disabilities. One reason is facilities often offer transportation services for their employees, which is a benefit to families and caregivers who work their own full-time positions. They make the case that if these facilities were not available, and individuals had to find other employment, that they would not be able to get them transportation to these new jobs and instead may have to use other non-

<sup>54</sup> <https://www.advancingemployment.com/webinar-archive>

<sup>55</sup> <https://gcdd.org/news-a-media/press-releases/3681-advancing-employment-webinar-series-focuses-on-ending-subminimum-wages-in-georgia.html>

employment alternatives, such as day programs. Another reason is concerns about safety in the community for people with disabilities.

**Lack of Support from GVRA:** In discussions with workers in 14(c) facilities, many discussed that while they may have a GVRA counselor or have consulted with GVRA, they are not receiving sufficient or adequate support from their staff or facility to seek other employment opportunities.

**Lack of Understanding of What is Possible:** Individuals with disabilities often get placed into 14(c) after graduating high school as a place to be during the day, rather than a day program, limiting their understanding of what range of employment possibilities there are for them.

### **Justifications for Phasing Out 14(c) and Subminimum Wages**

**PWDs Want Competitive, Integrated Employment:** In October 2021, APSE (Association of People Supporting Employment First) released a report on recent trends and findings related to 14(c) at the national level. In their report, they showed that the majority (about [55%](#))<sup>56</sup> of workers with disabilities wanted to hold a paid job within their communities, which is consistent with National Core Indicators data<sup>57</sup> for Georgians with disabilities. This demonstrates the desire for competitive, integrated employment amongst people with disabilities.

**Phasing Out 14(c) Improves Employment Outcomes:** While existing data is limited on how the elimination of 14(c) leads to improved outcomes for people with disabilities, preliminary work<sup>58</sup> in some states shows a positive impact on employment outcomes. For instance, New Hampshire, Maryland, and Vermont all reported that employment rates for individuals with all disabilities *and* those with cognitive disabilities have increased since the date of policy enactment (ranging from 2015 to 2016).

### **Past Advocacy Efforts and Current Challenges**

**Reducing Certificate Holders:** Since August 2019, the number of active 14c certificate holders in Georgia has steadily decreased from 33 certificate holders paying 1500 Georgians with disabilities subminimum wages to 14 active certificate holders employing 253 Georgians with disabilities<sup>67</sup>.

**People First of Georgia:** People First is a self-advocacy organization for people with disabilities who support efforts to make self-informed choices and advocacy viewpoints. People First chapters in Georgia have previously supported advocacy of efforts for placement into competitive, integrated employment for people with disabilities.

**GCDD Advocacy Days:** On March 7 and 8, 2023, the Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities (GCDD) hosted an advocacy day at the Georgia State Capitol, specifically focusing on advancing competitive employment for people with disabilities and phasing out subminimum wages in Georgia.

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<sup>56</sup> [https://apse.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/10\\_20\\_21-APSE-14c-Update-REV.pdf](https://apse.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/10_20_21-APSE-14c-Update-REV.pdf)

<sup>57</sup> <https://georgiarecorder.com/2023/03/09/hiring-more-people-with-developmental-disabilities-pitched-as-georgias-labor-shortage-fix/>

<sup>58</sup> [https://apse.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/10\\_20\\_21-APSE-14c-Update-REV.pdf](https://apse.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/10_20_21-APSE-14c-Update-REV.pdf)

## **ADVANCING EMPLOYMENT 2023 POLICY IMPERATIVES<sup>59</sup>**

1. Adopt an approach known as the State as Model Employer that requires Georgia state agencies to set goals for the recruitment, and retention of people with disabilities.
2. Phase out the use of subminimum wages in Georgia by 2024.
3. Create a state tax-incentive for businesses that hire workers with disabilities that have previously been paid subminimum wages.
4. Ensure that the renewals of the NOW and COMP waivers prioritize and incentivize employment.
5. Create a pilot project(s) to demonstrate the use of paid co-worker supports as an alternative to traditional job coaching. The focus should be on employer engagement, fidelity to evidence-based practices, technology supports, and gathering outcomes data
6. Create evidence-based expectations and practices in services funded by DBHDD such as Community Access Individual that will contribute to a more robust employment focus
7. Enact the self-employment policy recommendations provided to GVRA in 2018<sup>60</sup> so that microenterprise is an option for Georgians with disabilities
8. Create an initiative in tandem with the Employment First Council to promote an Economic Coalition for Employment and Disability to guide research and dissemination related to return-on-investment, purchasing power, and economic growth.

### **NATIONAL CORE INDICATORS DATA**

The National Core Indicators (NCI) are used in multiple states as a standard measure to assess service outcomes for individuals with intellectual & developmental disabilities (IDD) and their families. There are multiple NCIs conducted yearly, each targeting a subset of the US disability population. NCIs include the Adult Family Survey, the Family/Guardian Survey, and the IDD In-Person Survey.

#### **NCI Adult Family Survey**

The NCI Adult Family Survey is distributed to families who have an adult family member (aged 18 or older) with an IDD who lives with the respondent and receives at least one service in addition to case management from the state service system. Data from the 2020-2021 NCI Adult Family Survey follow.

In terms of education, 41% of Georgia respondents had completed a high school certification (NCI average: 33%), followed by high school diploma or equivalent, and had not completed high school. When asked about their family members' activities in the past two

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<sup>59</sup> <https://www.advancingemployment.com/employmentpolicy>

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[https://www.advancingemployment.com/\\_files/ugd/66a22d\\_b8d634eafa2144e4932ae41c3ac6e134.pdf](https://www.advancingemployment.com/_files/ugd/66a22d_b8d634eafa2144e4932ae41c3ac6e134.pdf)

weeks, the majority had not participated in: a paid individual job in the community (96%; NCI average: 88%); a paid small group community-based job (96%; NCI average: 95%); unpaid community activity (87%; NCI average: 85%); paid facility-based activity (94%; NCI average: 91%); unpaid facility-based activity (78%; NCI average: 83%); attending school (96%; NCI average: 91%); and other activities (61%; NCI average: 60%). When asked about services and supports received from ID/DD agencies, less than half had received day or employment supports (47%; NCI average: 42%); 8% shared that they need help planning for their family member's future with respect to employment (NCI average: 30%), and 3% need help planning for school (NCI average: 8%). Over half of respondents said they had enough supports for their family member to work or volunteer in the community (56%; NCI average: 57%).

### **NCI Family/Guardian Survey**

The NCI Family/Guardian Survey is distributed to families who have an adult family member (aged 18 or older) with an IDD who does not live with the respondent and receives at least one service in addition to case management from the state DD agency. Data from the 2020-2021 NCI Family/Guardian Survey follow.

In terms of education, 43% of Georgia respondents had completed a high school certification (NCI average: 33%), followed by had not completed high school, and high school diploma or equivalent. When asked about their family members' activities in the past two weeks, the majority had not participated in: a paid individual job in the community (92%; NCI average: 90%); a paid small group community-based job (97%; NCI average: 95%); unpaid community activity (85%; NCI average: 87%); paid facility-based activity (94%; NCI average: 88%); unpaid facility-based activity (73%; NCI average: 77%); attending school (98%; NCI average: 97%); and other activities (64%; NCI average: 70%). When asked about services and supports received from ID/DD agencies, only 24% shared that they need help planning for their family member's future with respect to employment (NCI average: 29%), and 4% need help planning for school transitions (NCI average: 3%). Over half of respondents said they had enough supports for their family member to work or volunteer in the community (62%; NCI average: 66%).

### **NCI-IDD In-Person Survey**

The NCI-IDD In-Person Survey is completed with adults with IDD age 18 and older receiving at least one paid service (in addition to case management) from the state DD service system. Data from the 2020-2021 NCI-IDD In-Person Survey follow. In terms of employment, 13% of Georgia respondents had a paid community job (NCI average: 15%). Of those employed, 47% of those in paid individual community jobs help jobs with publicly funded supports (NCI average: 37%) and worked an average of 25.8 biweekly hours for an average wage of \$9.39/hour (NCI averages: 28.5 hours, \$10.76/hour). 12% of respondents held group jobs (NCI average: 12%). The average length of employment was 87 months (NCI average: 66 months). Only a quarter of respondents received paid time off from work (NCI average: 31%). The most

common industry for employment was building or grounds maintenance (39%; NCI average: 21%). All respondents said they liked their jobs (NCI average: 91%); 26% indicated wanting to work somewhere else (NCI average: 24%).

Of those without a paid community job, 54% indicated they would like to have one in the future (54%; NCI average: 50%). Reasons for *not* wanting a paid community job included: liking what they currently do and don't want to change (50%; NCI average: 36%), "other" reasons (21%; NCI average: 23%), and health limitations (8%; NCI average: 11%). 13% had community employment as a goal in their service plans (NCI average: 27%).

In terms of additional employment-related activities:

- 30% take classes, training, or other activities to get a job or improve current performance (NCI average: 22%).
- 70% attended day programs or sheltered workshops (NCI average: 70%)
- 32% volunteered (NCI average: 28%)

For those attending day programs or sheltered workshops, 70% were happy with the amount of time they spend there (NCI average: 60%); 20% wanted to spend more time there (NCI 28%); 7% wanted to spend less time there (NCI average: 10%); and 4% wanted to spend *no* time there. In terms of additional services, 2% needed help planning for future employment needs (NCI average: 12%), and 4% needed help planning for education or training (NCI average: 12%).

## EMPLOYMENT SERVICES AND SUPPORTS

### AMERICAN JOB CENTERS

Established under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunities (WIOA) Act of 2014 and managed by the US Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration, American Job Centers<sup>61</sup> provide a centralized space for employment seekers to find employment-related services, including training referrals, career counseling, and job listings. There are over 2,400 AJCs across the United States, with 53<sup>62</sup> in Georgia. Of those, 68% of all job centers are located in non-rural counties (n = 36). Of the 53 AJCs in Georgia, 79% have a veteran's representative (n=42) and 30% have a youth service contact at their facility. The AJCs are further broken down into one of two types of programs.<sup>63</sup>

- The first type is **Comprehensive Centers**, which "provide a full array of employment and training-related services for workers, youth and businesses. These locations include the mandatory Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) partners on-site."

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<sup>61</sup> <https://www.dol.gov/general/topic/training/onestop>

<sup>62</sup> <https://www.careeronestop.org/localhelp/americanjobcenters/find-american-job-centers.aspx?location=Georgia&radius=25&ct=0&y=0&w=0&e=0&sortcolumns=Location&sortdirections=ASC>

<sup>63</sup> <https://www.careeronestop.org/Developers/Data/comprehensive-and-affiliate-american-job-centers.aspx>

- The second type is **Affiliate Centers**, which “provide limited employment and training-related services for workers, youth, and businesses. These locations do not include all the mandatory Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) partners on-site.”

## **ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY<sup>64</sup>**

Individuals with the most significant disabilities often need assistive technology and rehabilitation engineering services in order to perform tasks, access their environment, and live independently.

GVRA is one of the few state VR programs that prioritize Assistive Work Technology (AWT) services by having a dedicated internal unit of rehabilitation engineers, assistive work technologists and occupational therapists who provide direct services to VR clients throughout the state. Recommendations made by this unit addresses issues related to accommodations and/or assistive technology needed to drive independently, participate in training, perform essential job tasks or to improve accessibility within their home.

For a VR client to receive AWT services, the VR Professional overseeing the case must identify the need and initiate a referral to the AWT unit, as well as authorize the purchase of the equipment, services or other items that were recommended. During SFY 22, approximately \$480,476 was spent on services related to assistive technology and/or rehabilitation engineering. Note that this number may be higher as there are many services and purchases made on behalf of clients that may have been for AT purposes.

Housed at the Georgia Institute of Technology (Georgia Tech), Georgia Tools for Life (GATFL) is Georgia’s Assistive Technology (AT) Act Program. As required by federal legislation, Tools for Life provides AT demonstration, AT assessments, funding education, AT & durable medical equipment reuse, and training for individuals and groups. Additionally, in partnership with four organizations serving as AT Resource Centers, the Tools for Life Assistive Technology Network provides statewide AT lending services so that individuals can “try out” various equipment before purchasing. During 2019 GATFL assisted 66 individuals obtain financial loans to purchase AT devices, 36.4% (n=24) of which were related to daily living activities and 33.3% (n=22) was for vehicle modification.

University of Georgia’s Institute on Human Development and Disability (IHDD), is the administrator of Georgia’s AgrAbility Project<sup>65</sup>, which is a national assistive technology program funded by USDA. The goal of the grant is to help farmers with disabilities continue in or return to their production agriculture operation by providing assistive technology recommendations to improve farm accessibility, safety and independence in completing farm tasks. The Georgia AgrAbility Project works directly with field VR staff to facilitate the farmers in receiving the recommended assistive technology.

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<sup>64</sup> <https://www.advancingemployment.com/assistive-technology>

<sup>65</sup> <https://l-webserver-prod.fcs.uga.edu/ihdd/agrability>

## COMMUNITY REHABILITATION PROGRAMS

Contracted CRPs are currently the only providers who can provide job placement services, excluding supported employment. As a result, providers with service agreements tend to focus on “work readiness” types of services, which is illustrated in the graph below.

According to the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF), there are 135 individual community programs<sup>66</sup> accredited in Georgia that provide community employment support services, majority of whom have an affiliated or parent company they are housed within. Georgia currently has 14<sup>67</sup> CRPs holding 14(c) certifications.

### GEORGIA VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION AGENCY

#### VR Clients

##### *Georgians with Most Significant Disability*

The number of GVRA clients identified as an ‘Individual with a Most Significant Disability’ in SFY 22 was 9,612, which is 57.5% of total VR clients for that year, per reports received from GVRA (n = 16,727). According to GCDD, the population of people with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities in 2022 was estimated to be 170,640. However, in a recent State of the States report<sup>68</sup>, there were an approximate 226,00 caregiving families in Georgia supporting someone with ID/DD.

##### *Intellectual Disabilities/Cognitive Disabilities*

VR client data for FY22 listed Cognitive Impairments as the primary impairment for VR clients (38 percent, n = 6,423). Intellectual Disability was the second most common cause of primary impairment for VR clients (14 percent, n = 2,342), with the first being Autism (14.5 percent, n = 2,425), and an additional 7.5 percent listed Developmental Disability-related conditions as the primary cause (Cerebral Palsy and Congenital/Birth Conditions). See the table below for information on closure outcomes for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) served by GVRA.

| Disability Cause                  | Closure Outcome          |               |              |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------|--------------|
|                                   | Other Than Rehabilitated | Rehabilitated | Grand Total  |
| <b>Grand Total</b>                | <b>1,400</b>             | <b>489</b>    | <b>1,889</b> |
| Autism                            | 496                      | 184           | <b>680</b>   |
| Cerebral Palsy                    | 71                       | 24            | <b>95</b>    |
| Congenital Condition/Birth Injury | 237                      | 68            | <b>305</b>   |
| Intellectual Disability           | 596                      | 213           | <b>809</b>   |

<sup>66</sup> <http://www.carf.org/advancedProviderSearch.aspx>

<sup>67</sup> <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/workers-with-disabilities/section-14c/certificate-holders>

<sup>68</sup> <http://www.stateofthestates.org/>



### **Individuals Age 65 and Older with Disabilities**

As shown below (table), only 3.5 percent of VR eligible clients in FY22 were over the age of 65.

| Age       | # GA IWDs<br>(n = 1,374,380) | # VR Clients<br>(n = 16,727) |
|-----------|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Age 65-74 | 233,205 (16.9%)              | 546 (3.3%)                   |
| Age 75+   | 265,670 (19.3%)              | 51 (0.2%)                    |

### **Sensory Impairments**

Among the total FY22 VR clients, 1,111 had a primary impairment that was vision-related. See table below for closure outcomes across previous fiscal years. Of those 232 cases that had been closed in FY23, only 42 of them were successfully closed and resulted in rehabilitation of the client (18 percent), with the remaining 82 percent ending in some unknown outcome other than rehabilitation.

|                           | FY 2020 |       | FY 2021 |       | FY 2022 |       | FY 2023 |       |
|---------------------------|---------|-------|---------|-------|---------|-------|---------|-------|
|                           | Other   | Rehab | Other   | Rehab | Other   | Rehab | Other   | Rehab |
| <b>Visual Impairment</b>  | 281     | 101   | 285     | 50    | 308     | 61    | 190     | 42    |
|                           | 74%     | 26%   | 85%     | 15%   | 83%     | 17%   | 82%     | 18%   |
| <b>Hearing Impairment</b> | 298     | 203   | 220     | 120   | 347     | 99    | 161     | 53    |
|                           | 59%     | 41%   | 65%     | 35%   | 78%     | 22%   | 75%     | 25%   |

\*Other means "Other than rehabilitated." Rehab means "Rehabilitated"

### **Individuals with Significant and/or Complex Disabilities**

**Multiple Sclerosis:** Among the individuals eligible for VR services in FY22, 81 had MS listed as the primary cause of impairment, which is 0.5 percent of the total clients.

**Spinal Cord Injury/TBI:** Percentage of individuals on VR caseload during FY22: 1.9 percent of total VR clients (n = 326).

**Schizophrenia and other Psychotic disorders:** Percentage of individuals on VR caseload during FY22: 5.2 percent of total VR clients (n = 858).

## **Veterans**

Of the 16,727 VR clients in SFY22, 539 were identified as being veterans, accounting for 3.2% of total VR clients for that year. Additionally, 70% (n = 375) of the veterans receiving VR services in SFY22 identified as being male, and 45% (n = 243) had a psychosocial or cognitive impairment listed as their primary disability. The average age of veteran clients was 49 years of age, and the majority were Black/African American (53%, n = 288), followed by multi-racial (25%, n = 137), and White (20%, n = 109).

The three most common service categories amongst veterans were: Diagnosis and treatment of impairments (n = 187), Assessment (n = 156), and Transportation (Public; n = 100). Twenty veterans received Supported Employment services through GVRA. Of the Veterans whose VR case was successfully closed in employment (n = 28), four (4) had received Supported Employment in using the Individual Placement and Supports model, which is the evidence-based model for those with severe and persistent mental illness.

The occupations employing the most number of veteran VR clients were: Accountants and Auditors, Combined Food Preparation and Serving Workers, Janitors and Cleaners, and Stock Clerks. Those with cases successfully closed in employment worked an average of 33.64 hours weekly and earned an average of \$16.88 per hour.

## **Gaps in Services for Minorities**

As noted in the table below, among the total VR clients in FY22, 95% identified as either White (45%) or Black/African American (51%). Individuals with disabilities who identify with other races or ethnic backgrounds make up the remaining 4%, which is well below the state population estimates for both the general population and the population of individuals with disabilities.

| <b>Race/Ethnicity</b>                     | <b>% Georgia Population<br/>(n = 10,321,846)</b> | <b>% Georgia IWD Population<br/>(n = 1,349,161)</b> | <b>%VR Clients<br/>(n = 16,727)</b> |
|---|--|---|-------------------------------------|
| American Indian or Alaskan Native         | 0.90%  | -   | <1%                                 |
| Black or African American                 | 32%  | 31%   | 51%                                 |
| Hispanic/Latinx                           | 10%  | 5%  | 5%                                  |
| Multi-Racial                              | 3%   | <1%   | 2%                                  |
| Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander | 0.10%  | -   | <1%                                 |
| White                                     | 57%  | 58%   | 45%                                 |
| Asian                                     | 4.13%  | 2%  | 2%                                  |

## ***Students with Disabilities***

Among all potentially eligible students (5,106), 1,844 students (36%) aged 14 through 24 applied for VR services, which is the age range of youth with disabilities and transition services. Of those, 1,563 were determined to be eligible for services (85%).

In regard to the impairments of those being served through the VR program, individuals are most likely to have a cognitive impairment, which includes Intellectual Disability, Specific Learning Disability, and ADHD.

| <b>Disability Prevalence</b>   |      |
|--|------|
| <b>Recipients of Pre-ETS services (Students with Disabilities) SFY22</b> |      |
| Null   | 724  |
| Blind/Low Vision Impairments   | 13   |
| Cognitive Impairments  | 2126 |
| Communicative Impairments (expressive/receptive)                         | 84   |
| Deaf-Blindness   | 0    |
| Deaf/Hard of Hearing Impairments   | 29   |
| Mental Health/Psychosocial Impairments                                   | 403  |
| No Disability  | 21   |
| Orthopedic Impairments   | 44   |
| Physical Impairments   | 61   |

## **Services**

### ***Supported Employment through GVRA***

According to GVRA's VR Program Policy Manual, Supported Employment Policy (416.2.01): "Supported Employment is competitive work performed on a full-time or part-time basis; in an integrated work setting that is paid at or above minimum wage, but not less than the customary or usual wage paid by the employer for the same or similar work performed by individuals who are not disabled. Placement in an enclave or group setting is not considered employment in an integrated setting." GVRA utilizes three models of supported employment (SE) for which to provide SE services:

- **Traditional Supported Employment** which is used for individuals who qualify for supported employment services and need intensive job coaching, ongoing supports and extended supports but are not in need of job carving/job negotiation.
- **Customized Supported Employment** is for those who have the most significant disabilities, who would not likely benefit from or have been unsuccessful in the past with traditional supported employment and will require individually negotiated employment. CSE emphasizes a person-centered discovery process that leads to competitive integrated employment that was negotiated/carved to best meet the job seeker and employer's needs.

- **Individual Placement and Supports (IPS)** is a specific evidence-based model that was developed for individuals with severe and persistent mental illness. This model places an individual into employment as soon as possible, as it is believed that employment is an essential component of recovery. Supported Employment services are integrated and coordinated with mental health treatment and vocational rehabilitation services.

According to reports provided by GVRA, a total of \$4,558,725 was spent on SE services which were provided by 72 vendors throughout the state in SFY 2022. Through GVRA's SE programs, 1,398 individuals with significant disabilities received services. The traditional supported employment model was utilized for 54% of the total VR clients receiving SE services in SFY22 (n=751), 39% received evidenced-based SE services (Individual Placement and Supports (IPS); n=539), and 6% received customized supported employment services (n=98). Of the VR clients receiving SE services in SFY22, 1,218 cases were closed successfully in employment, which accounts for 10% of all successful closures in SFY 19 (n = 12,489). Jobs obtained were most commonly in occupations related to Office and Administrative Support Occupations (n = 343), Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations (n = 182), and Building and Grounds Cleaning and Maintenance (n = 128). VR clients receiving supported employment services in GVRA's District 4 account for 16% of all supported employment VR clients statewide. Counties within Service Area 3 include Union, Towns, Rabun, Lumpkin, White, Habersham, Stephens, Banks, Hall, Franklin, Hart, Jackson, Madison, Elbert, Barrow, Clarke, Oconee, Oglethorpe, Greene, Walton, Newton, and Morgan.

### ***Transition Services***

According to GVRA reports, a total of 14,497 individuals received one or more services funded by VR during FY22. Of those, 4,723 individuals aged 14-21 (transition age) were served, accounting for 33% of total individuals receiving one or more funded services by the VR program. Services utilized most (according to dollars spent) were Job Placement, Job Readiness Training, and Sensory Services.

### ***Pre-Employment Services***

As previously reported, VR programs are mandated to<sup>69</sup> "provide or arrange for the provision of pre-employment transition services (Pre-ETS) for all students with disabilities in collaboration with the local education agencies involved, who are in need of such services, regardless of whether they have applied or have been determined eligible for Vocational Rehabilitation Services."

Of the individuals connected with GVRA during SFY 19 aged 14-24 (n = 8179), 22.54% (n = 1844) were Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) students who had not yet applied for VR services, which is 2.6% of the total number of students with disabilities under an IEP (n = 71,036) in grades 9 through 12, according to GDOE special education enrollment reports for the 18-19 school year.

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<sup>69</sup> <http://www.wintac.org/topic-areas/pre-employment-transition-services/laws-regs-and-policy/laws/section-113-provision-pre>

Based on GVRA reports regarding service payments for FY22, over \$2.3 million was spent on Pre-ETS services. Furthermore, 3,867 students received one or more pre-employment transition services during that time frame. The most utilized Pre-ETS services were: Workplace readiness Training, Job exploration counseling, and Work-based learning experiences.

According to WIOA legislation, “Pre-Employment Transition Services” consist of five (5) required activities:<sup>70</sup>

- **Job exploration:** Activities which help students identify viable career options or solidify careers that a student may want to explore further. Of those who received Pre-ETS services during FY22, 40 percent participated in job exploration counseling (n = 1,544).
- **Work-based Learning:** Using the workplace or real work to provide students with the knowledge and skills that will help them connect school experiences to real-life work activities and future career opportunities. Of those who received Pre-ETS services during FY22, 27% participated in work-based learning experiences, which was one of the most frequently utilized services for Pre-ETS students (n = 1058).
- **Counseling on Post-Secondary Education Options:** Increasing understanding of options that are available for higher education, including comprehensive transition programs, along with the requirements for attending, skills needed for success, accommodations that are available, and financial aid. Only 4 students with disabilities received these services.
- **Work Readiness Training:** Training to develop social/interpersonal skills, soft skills, independent living skills, and employability/job readiness skills, all of which are commonly expected in the world of work. Of those who received Pre-ETS services during FY22, 68% received job readiness training, which was the most utilized service provided (n = 2,639).
- **Instruction on Self-Advocacy:** Instruction for developing student’s ability to effectively communicate needs, interests and desires so that they can, direct their own lives, pursue the things that are important to them and experience the same life opportunities as other people in their communities of those who received Pre-ETS services during FY22, 11% received self-advocacy related personal social adjustment training services (n = 414). GVRA discontinued personal social adjustment training at the end of SFY 2021.

### ***Employment Outcomes: VR Transition Age Youth***

VR clients under the age of 25 account for 37% (n = 455) of all VR cases closed successfully in employment during FY22. GVRA reports indicated that at the time their VR case was successfully closed, they worked an average of 28 hours per week and earned an average of \$12 per hour. The top 3 occupational job groups were in: Office and Administrative Support Occupations (n = 123), Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations (n = 84), and Transportation and Material Moving Occupations (n = 42).

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<sup>70</sup> <https://gvs.georgia.gov/transition-school-work/pre-employment-transition-services>

### ***Training and Career Services***

Among the 14,497 VR clients receiving VR-funded services in FY22, a total of \$3,721,634 was spent on training- and career-related services for 1,624 distinct cases. See the table below for the percentage of funds allocated to each set of services. 19% of VR clients received funding for education and training, 19% received job readiness training, 8% participated in community work adjustment services, and 34% received vocational assessment services, to include Discovery.

| <b>Service</b>                     | <b>% Spent on Each Service<br/>(n = 3,721,634)</b> | <b>Distinct Count of Cases<br/>(n = 1,624)</b> |
|------------------------------------|--|--|
| Assessment/Vocational Education    | 8%   | 560  |
| Job Readiness Training             | 8%   | 316  |
| Community Work Adjustment Services | 6%   | 130  |
| Education and Training             | 57%  | 305  |
| Rehabilitation Technology          | 21%  | 313  |

GVRA reports for FY22 indicate that among VR clients aged 14-24 who received a funded service, 44 received post-secondary education, 6 participated in community work adjustment training, and 182 received vocational assessment services.

### **COMMUNITY SERVICE PROVIDERS IN GEORGIA**

GVRA utilizes community services providers for the direct provision of specific vocational rehabilitation services to individuals with disabilities. These providers can be community rehabilitation programs, self-employed vendors or other organizations; all of whom must meet the minimal provider standards and qualifications set forth by GVRA; as well as have a service agreement or contract in place for the specific services they are intending to provide. The provider management process is completed at the VR Program state office level utilizing field staff assigned to the relevant geographic area when needed.

Accessing VR services is reliant on the assigned Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor or other Rehabilitation Professional to first identify the need for the service, determine availability of service providers, complete the referral process, then authorize payment for the service(s).

Similarly, services funded by the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities are obtained through approved providers that have met specific accreditation and qualification standards set forth by DBHDD, which are often based on Center for Medicaid Services (CMS) criteria. The provision of these services is administered through field offices located in each of DBHDD's six (6) regions, which are the first point of contact for consumers. Additionally, core services funded by either the state DD program or Behavioral Health program, are primarily provided by Community Service Boards (CSBs) organizations located in each of DBHDD's regions, or by a contracted provider.

Community service providers for GVRA, DBHDD including their CSBs, as well as providers contracted with the Area Aging Agencies and the Local Workforce Development Area, often have contracts or service agreements with multiple applicable agencies; however, there is minimal public information available for consumers to access regarding which entities the providers are contracted with, the specific program requirements related to employment, provider performance, service area, expertise of provider staff, or the steps a consumer has to take in order to receive quality services.

As of FY22, there were 229 VR service providers with either an agreement to provide one or more employment-related services, a supported employment agreement, or were one of the 37 contracted community rehab programs. The contracted “CRPs” vary in size and geographic location and have the option of delivering a full range of employment services which are listed in their contract.

### **Employment Services**

Contracted CRPs are currently the only providers who can provide job placement services, excluding supported employment. As a result, providers with service agreements tend to focus on “work readiness” types of services. According to the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF), there are 135 individual community programs<sup>66</sup> accredited in Georgia that provide community employment support services, majority of whom have an affiliated or parent company they are housed within.

Over the past 11 years, DBHDD and GVRA have made concerted efforts to encourage supported employment providers to be duly approved with both agencies so that individuals could get long-term support following their successful transition from VR services. As a result of these efforts, 20% of VR clients who received SE services did so through a DBHDD CSB organization (n = 274). During FY22, there were a total of 205 employment service providers who were funded to assist VR clients throughout the state, many of whom were among the 48 with service agreements to provide Pre-Employment Transition Services to students with disabilities.

## Community Rehabilitation Program Services for Sensory Population

Based on the information provided by GVRA, the table below depicts VR providers utilized by impairment. In total, 82 providers were utilized by those with visual and hearing related disabilities, of which 14 were private community rehabilitation programs.

| Disability Impairment                        | Other Private Service Provider | Other Public Service Provider | Private Community Rehabilitation Program | Grand Total |
|--|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|--|-------------|
| <b>Grand Total</b>                           | <b>59</b>                      | <b>9</b>                      | <b>14</b>                                | <b>82</b>   |
| Blindness                                    | 34                             | 8                             | 11                                       | 53          |
| Deaf-Blindness                               | 2                              | 1                             | 1  | 4           |
| Deafness, Primary Communication Auditory     | 7                              | 1                             | 1  | 9           |
| Deafness, Primary Communication Visual       | 17                             |                               | 4  | 21          |
| Hearing Loss, Primary Communication Auditory | 7                              | 1                             | 2  | 10          |
| Hearing Loss, Primary Communication Visual   | 2                              | 1                             | 1  | 4           |
| Other Hearing Disabilities                   | 2                              |                               | 1  | 3           |
| Other Visual Disabilities                    | 13                             | 1                             | 7  | 21          |
| Other visual impairments                     | 18                             | 3                             | 7  | 28          |



## PUBLIC PK-12 EDUCATION DATA

### Prevalence of Disability Based on SPED Enrollment in Georgia

During the 2022-2023 school year, 229,405 Georgia K-12 students were enrolled in special education (SPED) services, which is approximately 13% of all students enrolled during that school year (n = 1,751,168). Eligibility for special education services is based on the disability and its impact on the student's learning and education.

The following table reflects the special education enrollment for all public-school systems in Georgia, including state schools and charter schools. As shown, Specific Learning Disability is the most prevalent impairment for which special education eligibility is established, followed by other health impairment (16%), autism (13%), and speech/language impairment (12%).

| Special Education Enrollment by SPED Category (2023) |                    |                    |
|--|--------------------|--------------------|
| SPED Eligibility Category                            | Number of Students | %<br>(n = 229,405) |
| Mild Int. Disability                                 | 9,896              | 4.31%              |
| Moderate Int. Disability                             | 4,918              | 2.14%              |
| Severe Int. Disability                               | 1,247              | 0.54%              |
| Profound Int. Disability                             | 344                | 0.15%              |
| Emotional/Behavioral Disorder                        | 8,781              | 3.83%              |
| Specific Learning Disability                         | 79,318             | 34.58%             |
| Orthopedic Impairment                                | 693                | 0.30%              |
| Hearing Impairment                                   | 1,397              | 0.61%              |
| Deaf   | 328                | 0.14%              |
| Other Health Impairment                              | 36,231             | 15.79%             |
| Visual Impairment                                    | 643                | 0.28%              |
| Blind  | 76                 | 0.03%              |
| Deaf and Blind                                       | 42                 | 0.02%              |
| Speech/Language Impairment                           | 28,564             | 12.45%             |
| Autism   | 29,374             | 12.80%             |
| Traumatic Brain Injury                               | 385                | 0.17%              |
| Significant Dev. Delay                               | 27,168             | 11.84%             |

## Transition Students in Georgia

During the 2022-2023 school year, there were a total of 71,036 special education students in grades nine through 12, making up 31 percent of all SPED students. Information on disability by grade was not available due to privacy (FERPA) rules. The table below shows the number of SPED students by each grade for the previous three school years.

|                  | 2020   |                             | 2021   |                             | 2022   |                             | 2023   |                             |
|------------------|--------|-----------------------------|--------|-----------------------------|--------|-----------------------------|--------|-----------------------------|
|                  | #      | % of Total<br>(n = 225,062) | #      | % of Total<br>(n = 221,655) | #      | % of Total<br>(n = 223,037) | #      | % of Total<br>(n = 229,321) |
| Pre-K            | 11,299 | 5.02%                       | 9,316  | 4.20%                       | 9,288  | 4.16%                       | 10,121 | 4.41%                       |
| Kindergarten     | 10,933 | 4.86%                       | 9,831  | 4.44%                       | 9,926  | 4.45%                       | 10,626 | 4.63%                       |
| 1 <sup>st</sup>  | 13,210 | 5.87%                       | 12,483 | 5.63%                       | 12,386 | 5.55%                       | 13,603 | 5.93%                       |
| 2 <sup>nd</sup>  | 14,856 | 6.60%                       | 14,166 | 6.39%                       | 14,290 | 6.41%                       | 15,102 | 6.59%                       |
| 3 <sup>rd</sup>  | 16,392 | 7.28%                       | 15,614 | 7.04%                       | 15,750 | 7.06%                       | 16,545 | 7.21%                       |
| 4 <sup>th</sup>  | 17,738 | 7.88%                       | 17,020 | 7.68%                       | 16,712 | 7.49%                       | 17,495 | 7.63%                       |
| 5 <sup>th</sup>  | 19,384 | 8.61%                       | 18,359 | 8.28%                       | 18,076 | 8.10%                       | 18,071 | 7.88%                       |
| 6 <sup>th</sup>  | 19,720 | 8.76%                       | 19,290 | 8.70%                       | 18,531 | 8.31%                       | 18,432 | 8.04%                       |
| 7 <sup>th</sup>  | 19,510 | 8.67%                       | 19,686 | 8.88%                       | 19,473 | 8.73%                       | 18,869 | 8.23%                       |
| 8 <sup>th</sup>  | 18,753 | 8.33%                       | 19,373 | 8.74%                       | 19,577 | 8.78%                       | 19,421 | 8.47%                       |
| 9 <sup>th</sup>  | 20,350 | 9.04%                       | 20,522 | 9.26%                       | 22,225 | 9.96%                       | 22,314 | 9.73%                       |
| 10 <sup>th</sup> | 16,178 | 7.19%                       | 17,670 | 7.97%                       | 17,519 | 7.85%                       | 18,777 | 8.19%                       |
| 11 <sup>th</sup> | 13,048 | 5.80%                       | 14,148 | 6.38%                       | 14,552 | 6.52%                       | 14,762 | 6.44%                       |
| 12 <sup>th</sup> | 13,691 | 6.08%                       | 14,177 | 6.40%                       | 14,732 | 6.61%                       | 15,183 | 6.62%                       |

## Preschool Disability Services

The Preschool Disabilities Services program, administered by GDOE, provides funding to local school systems to support the inclusion of preschoolers, ages three and four, who have disabilities, in general education settings. In SFY 22<sup>71</sup>, this program served 9,318 preschoolers with disabilities. In the 2022-2023 school year, there were 10,121 Pre-K students enrolled in SPED.

## State Schools Serving Youths with Sensory Disabilities

State schools serving students with sensory disabilities, grades 1-12, include the Atlanta Area School for the Deaf (AASD), the Georgia Academy for the Blind (GAB), the Georgia School for the Deaf (GSD), and the Georgia Parent Infant Network for Educational Services (GA PINES), an early intervention program for children under five with a suspected hearing or vision impairment.

| State Schools Serving Youths with Sensory Disabilities |      |      |      |      |
|--|------|------|------|------|
|  | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 |
| Atlanta Area School for the Deaf                       | 174  | 165  | 154  | 137  |
| Georgia Academy for the Blind                          | 91   | 89   | 92   | 95   |
| Georgia School for the Deaf                            | 68   | 73   | 74   | 71   |

## Diplomas Awarded by Type

The table below shows the total number of diplomas awarded to Special Education Students by diploma type across the previous three school years. The overwhelming number of diplomas awarded were General High School diplomas, followed by Special Education diplomas and Certificates of Attendance. There has also been a rising trend in the number of diplomas awarded each year, with almost a 30 percent increase in the total number of diplomas awarded.

| Total Number of Diplomas by Type      |              |               |               |
|---------------------------------------|--------------|---------------|---------------|
| Diploma Type                          | 2020         | 2021          | 2022          |
| Certificate of Attendance             | 23           | 30            | 28            |
| General High School Diploma           | 8,967        | 10,880        | 11,894        |
| Special Education High School Diploma | 338          | 250           | 188           |
| <b>Total</b>                          | <b>9,328</b> | <b>11,160</b> | <b>12,110</b> |

<sup>71</sup> [https://www.gadoe.org/Curriculum-Instruction-and-Assessment/Special-Education-Services/Documents/Federal%20Data%20Reports/FY22/B\\_FY22%20LEA%20Child%20Count%20Totals%20Ages%203-21.pdf](https://www.gadoe.org/Curriculum-Instruction-and-Assessment/Special-Education-Services/Documents/Federal%20Data%20Reports/FY22/B_FY22%20LEA%20Child%20Count%20Totals%20Ages%203-21.pdf)

## Diplomas Awarded by Race/Ethnicity

The table below lists the total diplomas awarded by race to SPED students across the previous three school years. The group with the highest representation is Black students, followed by White and Hispanic students.

| Total Diplomas by Race/Ethnicity |              |               |               |                      |                      |                      |
|----------------------------------|--------------|---------------|---------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Race/Ethnicity                   | 2020         | 2021          | 2022          | % of Total<br>(2020) | % of Total<br>(2021) | % of Total<br>(2022) |
| Hispanic                         | 1,044        | 1,515         | 1,794         | 11.19%               | 13.58%               | 14.81%               |
| American Indian                  | 20           | 19            | 30            | 0.21%                | 0.17%                | 0.25%                |
| Asian                            | 88           | 159           | 217           | 0.94%                | 1.42%                | 1.79%                |
| Black                            | 4,099        | 4,897         | 5,081         | 43.94%               | 43.88%               | 41.96%               |
| Pacific Islander                 | 8            | 10            | 7             | 0.09%                | 0.09%                | 0.06%                |
| White                            | 3,780        | 4,207         | 4,603         | 40.52%               | 37.70%               | 38.01%               |
| Two or More Races                | 289          | 353           | 378           | 3.10%                | 3.16%                | 3.12%                |
| <b>Total</b>                     | <b>9,328</b> | <b>11,160</b> | <b>12,110</b> | -                    | -                    | -                    |

## SPED Withdrawals

During the 2021-22 school year, there were a total of 9,305 withdrawals by students in the special education program across all Georgia schools. While the overwhelming majority of reasons for withdrawal are unknown (77%), the next most common reason is removal for lack of attendance (17%).

| # Overall Withdrawals |       |       |
|-----------------------|-------|-------|
| 2020                  | 2021  | 2022  |
| 7,178                 | 9,733 | 9,278 |

| Withdrawal Reason              |              |        |              |        |              |        |
|--------------------------------|--------------|--------|--------------|--------|--------------|--------|
|                                | 2020         |        | 2021         |        | 2022         |        |
|                                | #            | %      | #            | %      | #            | %      |
| Marriage                       | 0            | 0.00%  | 1            | 0.01%  | 0            | 0.00%  |
| Expelled                       | 28           | 0.39%  | 35           | 0.36%  | 54           | 0.58%  |
| Financial Hardship/Job         | 19           | 0.26%  | 31           | 0.32%  | 22           | 0.24%  |
| Incarcerated                   | 63           | 0.88%  | 74           | 0.76%  | 84           | 0.90%  |
| Low Grades/School Failure      | 7            | 0.10%  | 18           | 0.18%  | 11           | 0.12%  |
| Military                       | 0            | 0.00%  | 2            | 0.02%  | 0            | 0.00%  |
| Adult Ed/Post-Secondary        | 310          | 4.31%  | 404          | 4.14%  | 400          | 4.30%  |
| Pregnant/Parent                | 18           | 0.25%  | 16           | 0.16%  | 18           | 0.19%  |
| Removed for Lack of Attendance | 811          | 11.27% | 1,731        | 17.75% | 1,558        | 16.74% |
| Serious Illness/Accident       | 30           | 0.42%  | 31           | 0.32%  | 35           | 0.38%  |
| Unknown                        | 5,910        | 82.13% | 7,410        | 75.98% | 7,123        | 76.55% |
| <b>Total</b>                   | <b>7,196</b> | -      | <b>9,753</b> | -      | <b>9,305</b> | -      |

### The Department of Juvenile Justice School System

Through Georgia's Department of Juvenile Justice school system, youths who are serving short- and long- term detentions attend classes at one of 29 Georgia Preparatory Campus' across the state, which are located in Regional Detention Centers, Youth Developmental Campuses, and Education Transition Centers. According to GDOE enrollment data, 290 youth offenders received special education services during the 22-23 school year.

| # SPED Students Department of Juvenile Justice |      |      |      |
|--|------|------|------|
| 2020   | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 |
| 336  | 230  | 293  | 290  |

## SOCIAL SECURITY

The Social Security Administration pays disability benefits to individuals who are unable to work due to a mental, physical, or medical condition that is expected to last more than a year or result in death. Social Security Disability Income (SSDI) is the benefit individuals with disabilities would receive if they have worked long enough and paid Social Security taxes. Supplemental Security Income (SSI) pays benefits based on financial need and is generally for those with limited work history. Some recipients receive both benefits.

According to the Social Security Administration, in 2020, 291,326<sup>72</sup> individuals aged 18-64 received SSDI based on having a disability and 230,219 received SSI during 2020.<sup>73</sup> Also, that year, 5,966 individuals<sup>73</sup> under 18 received SSI child benefits based on their disability. The average monthly cash benefit for SSDI in 2020 was \$1433.80<sup>74</sup> and \$556.17 for SSI recipients.<sup>73</sup>

| Youth with Disabilities<br>Age 0-17, 2020 |                          | Adults of Working Age with Disabilities<br>Age 18-64, 2020 |                          |                           |
|---|--------------------------|--|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| Est. Youth with Disabilities              | Percentage receiving SSI | Est. Population w/ Disability (s)                          | Percentage receiving SSI | Percentage receiving SSDI |
| 109,607                                   | 38.3%                    | 677,890  | 33.96%                   | 42.97%                    |

### SSDI & SSI Recipients in Georgia

Based on the estimated population of individuals in Georgia with a disability age 18-64 (n=677,890), in total, 75.93% received one or both entitlement benefits in 2020, as a result of their disability (See table above). Of those, an estimated 43% received SSDI and 34% received SSI. Additionally, during 2021, only 3.5% (n=8,033) of the SSI recipients age 18-64 in Georgia were employed while receiving benefits.

Among the 8,033 workers who received SSI during 2021, there were:

- 4 users of the Plans for Achieving Self-Support (PASS) incentive (.10%)
- 116 users of the Impairment Related Work Expenses (IRWE) incentive (1.7%)
- 16 users of the Blind Work Expenses (BWE) incentive (.22%)

<sup>72</sup> [https://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/statcomps/di\\_asr/2020/di\\_asr20.pdf](https://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/statcomps/di_asr/2020/di_asr20.pdf)

<sup>73</sup> <https://drive.google.com/open?id=1CPpfD-PGHJuiSXIoEihPByxZb6sNA5pa>

<sup>74</sup> [https://drive.google.com/open?id=1LE25kKlTyDvWHWyIP-3VdzNwPCo\\_Vv8k](https://drive.google.com/open?id=1LE25kKlTyDvWHWyIP-3VdzNwPCo_Vv8k)

**Employment and Work Incentive Program Participation for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) Beneficiaries**

|  | 2012    | 2013    | 2014    | 2015    | 2016    | 2017    | 2018    | 2019    | 2020    | 2021    |
|--|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Total number of SSI recipients with disabilities   | 224,454 | 230,162 | 233,202 | 235,349 | 235,368 | 236,270 | 236,080 | 235,661 | 234,885 | 229,670 |
| Number of SSI recipients with disabilities who are working                                     | 5,915   | 5,774   | 5,938   | 6,488   | 6,859   | 7,350   | 7,854   | 8,184   | 7,366   | 8,033   |
| Percentage of SSI recipients with disabilities who are working                                 | 2.6%    | 2.5%    | 2.6%    | 2.8%    | 2.9%    | 3.1%    | 3.3%    | 3.5%    | 3.1%    | 3.5%    |
| SSI recipients with disabilities who received Plans for Achieving Self-Support (PASS) benefits | 17      | 10      | 3       | 7       | 9       | 8       | 7       | 8       | 7       | 4       |
| SSI recipients with disabilities who received Impairment Related Work Expenses (IRWE) benefits | 134     | 115     | 102     | 114     | 116     | 133     | 149     | 163     | 124     | 116     |
| SSI recipients with disabilities who received Blind Work Expenses (BWE) benefits               | 35      | 25      | 20      | 23      | 18      | 15      | 11      | 13      | 16      | 16      |

As of December 2021, 252,274 Georgians with disabilities received Supplemental Security Income (SSI), of which 3.2% (n=8,033) worked while receiving benefits. Among those working, 33.6% were individuals whose eligibility was based on their intellectual disability.

According to GVRA data for FY22, 2,589 VR clients (15% all VR clients) aged 18-64 indicated that they relied on public benefits (SSI, SSDI, or TANF) at application. As shown in the graph below, there is a considerable gap between the number of VR clients identified as receiving public benefits, compared to the number of recipients reported by the Social Security Administration.

| Comparison of Percentage of IWD Receiving SSI/SSDI, 2020, and FY22 VR Clients |     |
|---|-----|
| IWD Age 18-64 w/ SSDI   | 43% |
| IWD Age 18-64 w/ SSI  | 34% |
| IWD Age 18-64 w/ VR clients   | 15% |

### **Ticket to Work Program**

Social Security Administration’s Ticket to Work program, is a free program for individuals aged 18-64 who receive SSDI and/or SSI and want to work. These services include benefit counseling, career planning/ counseling, job search and placement, ongoing employment supports, training programs, legal support and advocacy, and others. Individuals who choose to participate in this program, assign their “ticket” to one of several types of service provider, depending on their needs. Provider types include Employment Network service providers (EN), Workforce Employment Network service provider (WF), which is the state’s public workforce system, the state’s vocational rehabilitation program, the Work Incentive and Planning Assistance (WIPA) program or the state’s Protection and Advocacy for Beneficiaries of Social Security (PABSS) program.

Currently, there are 102<sup>75</sup> EN’s who provide services in Georgia, some of whom are national organizations and others are local community providers. Social Security Administration’s WIPA program is one that provides community-based Work Incentive expertise and benefit counseling to recipients of SSDI or SSI benefits based on their disability. The goal of the Work Incentives Planning and Assistance (WIPA) program is to provide beneficiaries with the information needed so that they can make an informed choice regarding employment.

<sup>75</sup>

[https://choosework.ssa.gov/findhelp/result?p\\_sort=distance&option=2&resStr=en,wf&zipcode=30038&stateStr=GA&p\\_pagesize=25&p\\_pagenum=1](https://choosework.ssa.gov/findhelp/result?p_sort=distance&option=2&resStr=en,wf&zipcode=30038&stateStr=GA&p_pagesize=25&p_pagenum=1)



GVRA and The Shepherd Center both have SSA-funded WIPA programs. The Shepherd Center provides benefit counseling services in 40 counties in and around Metro Atlanta, as well as in the northwestern and Northwest and northeastern part of the state. GVRA provides benefit counseling to individuals living in the remaining 119 counties in the state. Information regarding utilization of Employment Network services or WIPA services in Georgia could not be located.

The Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities (DBHDD) also has a benefits counseling program called SOAR (SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access and Recovery), which is specifically geared for individuals who are homeless or at risk of homelessness and have a mental health impairment and/or substance abuse disorder. According to DBHDD's website, SOAR trained staff are available in each of DBHDD's six regions throughout the state.

### **WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM**

The Technical College System of Georgia's (TCSG) Office Workforce Development (OWD) is the administrator of WorkSource Georgia, the state's WIOA Title I Adult, Youth and Dislocated Worker programs, which are regulated by the U.S. Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration unit. The focus of WIOA's Title I programs include 1) provide job training and career services to unemployed or underemployed low-income individuals, 2) meet the workforce needs of businesses in high demand industries, and 3) facilitate access to the American Job Centers in each state.

WIOA Title I youth services focus on assisting out-of-school youth and in-school youth with one or more barriers to employment with preparing for Post-Secondary education or employment, attaining the educational and/or skills training credentials needed for specific industries, and securing employment. To be eligible for WIOA Youth Services, out of school youth must be between the ages of 16 and 24, not attending school, and have one or more barriers to employment. In school youth must be between the ages of 14 and 21, attending school, low income, and have one or more barriers to employment, which includes having a disability.

The majority of the Title I funds are allocated by the OWD to 19 local workforce development areas (LWDA) for the provision of services that are tailored to the specific workforce and labor needs of that area. Additionally, WIOA requires local areas spend at least 75 percent of WIOA Youth program funds on the out of school population, and at least 20% must be spent on providing work experience opportunities. Under WIOA legislation, WorkSource Georgia has served 49,235 individuals.<sup>76</sup> The following tables indicate how many individuals with disabilities were served under Worksource Georgia's WIOA Title I Programs

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<sup>76</sup> <https://www.tcsg.edu/worksource/>

### Total by Program Year

The table below details the total number of individuals served by program year through all Worksource Georgia WIOA Title I Programs. In terms of participants served, there has been a decreasing trend across the past three years. However, for reportable individuals, there was a 28.8% increase from PY20 to PY21.

|                        | PY19          | PY20          | PY21          |
|------------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| Participants Served    | 19,112        | 14,692        | 11,823        |
| Reportable Individuals | 787           | 1,267         | 1,632         |
| <b>Total</b>           | <b>19,899</b> | <b>15,959</b> | <b>13,455</b> |

## Total Participants Served by Local Workforce Development Area

### Adult Program

The table below shows total participants for the adult program by workforce development area. Overall, the Atlanta Region accounted for the majority of participants (17.7%), followed by DeKalb County (11.27%), Three Rivers (8.95%), and Southern Georgia (8.53%).

|                                | PY19          | PY20         | PY21         | Total |        |
|--------------------------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|-------|--------|
| 01 Northwest Georgia           | 726           | 580          | 497          | 1,803 | 7.72%  |
| 02 Georgia Mountains           | 578           | 368          | 226          | 1,172 | 5.02%  |
| 03 City of Atlanta             | 650           | 237          | 310          | 1,197 | 5.13%  |
| 04 Cobb County                 | 564           | 415          | 329          | 1,308 | 5.60%  |
| 05 DeKalb County               | 1106          | 863          | 662          | 2631  | 11.27% |
| 06 Fulton County               | 274           | 248          | 230          | 752   | 3.22%  |
| 07 Atlanta Regional            | 1629          | 1428         | 1075         | 4132  | 17.70% |
| 08 Three Rivers                | 881           | 693          | 516          | 2090  | 8.95%  |
| 09 Northeast Georgia           | 742           | 431          | 452          | 1625  | 6.96%  |
| 10 Macon-Bibb County           | 162           | 61           | 49           | 272   | 1.17%  |
| 11 Middle Georgia              | 310           | 202          | 94           | 606   | 2.60%  |
| 12 Central Savannah River Area | 204           | 149          | 124          | 477   | 2.04%  |
| 13 East Central Georgia        | 90            | 70           | 76           | 236   | 1.01%  |
| 14 Lower Chattahoochee         | 69            | 57           | 61           | 187   | 0.80%  |
| 15 Middle Flint                | 119           | 96           | 72           | 287   | 1.23%  |
| 16 Heart of Georgia            | 266           | 130          | 48           | 444   | 1.90%  |
| 17 Southwest Georgia           | 428           | 392          | 330          | 1150  | 4.93%  |
| 18 Southern Georgia            | 851           | 651          | 488          | 1990  | 8.53%  |
| 19 Coastal Georgia             | 441           | 269          | 272          | 982   | 4.21%  |
| <b>Total</b>                   | <b>10,090</b> | <b>7,340</b> | <b>5,911</b> |       |        |

### ***Dislocated Worker Program***

The table below shows total participants for the dislocated worker program by workforce development area. Overall, the Atlanta Region accounted for the majority of participants (17.49%), followed by DeKalb County (12.90%), Cobb County (11.70%), and Coastal Georgia (9.68%).

|                                | <b>PY19</b>  | <b>PY20</b>  | <b>PY21</b>  | <b>Total</b> | <b>%</b> |
|--------------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|----------|
| 01 Northwest Georgia           | 153          | 98           | 63           | 314          | 5.48%    |
| 02 Georgia Mountains           | 46           | 33           | 24           | 103          | 1.80%    |
| 03 City of Atlanta             | 39           | 43           | 75           | 157          | 2.74%    |
| 04 Cobb County                 | 163          | 254          | 254          | 671          | 11.70%   |
| 05 DeKalb County               | 291          | 261          | 188          | 740          | 12.90%   |
| 06 Fulton County               | 97           | 114          | 69           | 280          | 4.88%    |
| 07 Atlanta Regional            | 390          | 327          | 286          | 1003         | 17.49%   |
| 08 Three Rivers                | 82           | 68           | 54           | 204          | 3.56%    |
| 09 Northeast Georgia           | 49           | 32           | 38           | 119          | 2.07%    |
| 10 Macon-Bibb County           | 36           | 8            | 2            | 46           | 0.80%    |
| 11 Middle Georgia              | 155          | 172          | 60           | 387          | 6.75%    |
| 12 Central Savannah River Area | 93           | 98           | 69           | 260          | 4.53%    |
| 13 East Central Georgia        | 76           | 52           | 23           | 151          | 2.63%    |
| 14 Lower Chattahoochee         | 75           | 56           | 37           | 168          | 2.93%    |
| 15 Middle Flint                | 0            | 1            | 2            | 3            | 0.05%    |
| 16 Heart of Georgia            | 189          | 146          | 105          | 440          | 7.67%    |
| 17 Southwest Georgia           | 26           | 21           | 21           | 68           | 1.19%    |
| 18 Southern Georgia            | 27           | 24           | 15           | 66           | 1.15%    |
| 19 Coastal Georgia             | 240          | 152          | 163          | 555          | 9.68%    |
| <b>Total</b>                   | <b>2,227</b> | <b>1,960</b> | <b>1,548</b> |              |          |

## Youth Program

The table below shows total participants for the youth program by workforce development area. Overall, the Atlanta Region accounted for the majority of participants (13.04%), followed by DeKalb County (9.52%), Northwest Georgia (8.70%), and Georgia Mountains (8.00%).

|                                | PY19         | PY20         | PY21         | Total | %      |
|--------------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|-------|--------|
| 01 Northwest Georgia           | 482          | 462          | 469          | 1,413 | 8.70%  |
| 02 Georgia Mountains           | 525          | 448          | 327          | 1,300 | 8.00%  |
| 03 City of Atlanta             | 113          | 176          | 218          | 507   | 3.12%  |
| 04 Cobb County                 | 257          | 225          | 167          | 649   | 3.99%  |
| 05 DeKalb County               | 692          | 504          | 351          | 1547  | 9.52%  |
| 06 Fulton County               | 149          | 215          | 228          | 592   | 3.64%  |
| 07 Atlanta Regional            | 1090         | 669          | 359          | 2118  | 13.04% |
| 08 Three Rivers                | 389          | 251          | 291          | 931   | 5.73%  |
| 09 Northeast Georgia           | 361          | 298          | 250          | 909   | 5.59%  |
| 10 Macon-Bibb County           | 123          | 142          | 98           | 363   | 2.23%  |
| 11 Middle Georgia              | 298          | 268          | 237          | 803   | 4.94%  |
| 12 Central Savannah River Area | 116          | 74           | 58           | 248   | 1.53%  |
| 13 East Central Georgia        | 125          | 135          | 131          | 391   | 2.41%  |
| 14 Lower Chattahoochee         | 48           | 38           | 21           | 107   | 0.66%  |
| 15 Middle Flint                | 40           | 47           | 26           | 113   | 0.70%  |
| 16 Heart of Georgia            | 315          | 270          | 197          | 782   | 4.81%  |
| 17 Southwest Georgia           | 303          | 228          | 204          | 735   | 4.52%  |
| 18 Southern Georgia            | 526          | 329          | 278          | 1133  | 6.97%  |
| 19 Coastal Georgia             | 647          | 519          | 441          | 1607  | 9.89%  |
| <b>Total</b>                   | <b>6,599</b> | <b>5,298</b> | <b>4,351</b> |       |        |

## Total by Title I Program

### *Participants Served*

The table below shows total participants served by Title I program over the past three years. The majority of those served were in the Adult program, followed by Youth and Dislocated Worker programs.

|                   | <b>PY19</b>   | <b>PY20</b>   | <b>PY21</b>   | <b>Total</b>  |
|-------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| Adult             | 10,281        | 7,383         | 5,917         | <b>23,581</b> |
| Dislocated Worker | 2,232         | 1,947         | 1,548         | <b>5,727</b>  |
| Youth             | 6,599         | 5,362         | 4,358         | <b>16,319</b> |
| <b>Total</b>      | <b>19,112</b> | <b>14,692</b> | <b>11,823</b> | -             |

### *Reportable Individuals*

The table below shows total participants who were reportable individuals served by Title I program over the past three years. The majority of those served were in the Adult program, followed by Dislocated Worker and Youth programs.

|                   | <b>PY19</b> | <b>PY20</b>  | <b>PY21</b>  | <b>Total</b> |
|-------------------|-------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Adult             | 506         | 732          | 1,229        | <b>2,467</b> |
| Dislocated Worker | 197         | 489          | 317          | <b>1,003</b> |
| Youth             | 84          | 46           | 86           | <b>216</b>   |
| <b>Total</b>      | <b>787</b>  | <b>1,267</b> | <b>1,632</b> | -            |

### *Total Participants Served by Gender*

The table below shows the total participants served by Title I programs by gender over the past three years. The majority of those served were female.

|              | <b>PY19</b>   | <b>PY20</b>   | <b>PY21</b>   | <b>Total</b>  |
|--------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| Female       | 11,600        | 8,919         | 7,257         | <b>27,776</b> |
| Male         | 7,461         | 5,734         | 4,539         | <b>17,734</b> |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>19,061</b> | <b>14,653</b> | <b>11,796</b> | -             |

### ***Total Participants Served by Race / Ethnicity***

The table below indicates the total participants served by race and ethnicity. Across the three most recent fiscal years, over half of all participants served were Black or African American (56%), followed by White (32%) and Hispanic/Latino (6.22%).

|   | <b>PY19</b>   | <b>PY20</b>   | <b>PY21</b>   | <b>Total<br/>(n = 48,693)</b> |
|---|---------------|---------------|---------------|-------------------------------|
| Hispanic / Latino                         | 1,236         | 1,004         | 791           | <b>3,031</b>                  |
| American Indian or Alaskan Native         | 226           | 174           | 135           | <b>535</b>                    |
| Asian                                     | 318           | 257           | 215           | <b>790</b>                    |
| Black or African American                 | 11,348        | 8,777         | 7,266         | <b>27,391</b>                 |
| Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander | 68            | 53            | 46            | <b>167</b>                    |
| White                                     | 6,684         | 5,034         | 3,885         | <b>15,603</b>                 |
| More Than One Race                        | 481           | 374           | 321           | <b>1176</b>                   |
| <b>Total</b>                              | <b>20,361</b> | <b>15,673</b> | <b>12,659</b> | <b>-</b>                      |

### ***Adult Program Participants Served by Type of Service***

The table below shows the total number of adult program participants by type of service across the most recent fiscal years. The majority of participants were served through training services, followed by being enrolled in multiple core programs, and career services.

|  | <b>PY19</b>   | <b>PY20</b>  | <b>PY21</b>  | <b>Total</b>  |
|--|---------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|
| Training Service                       | 9,072         | 6,642        | 5,241        | <b>20,955</b> |
| Career Services                        | 1,209         | 741          | 676          | <b>2,626</b>  |
| Enrolled in More than One Core Program | 2,870         | 1,752        | 2,272        | <b>6,894</b>  |
| <b>Total</b>                           | <b>13,151</b> | <b>9,135</b> | <b>8,189</b> | <b>-</b>      |

### **Youth Program Participants Served by Type of Service**

The table below shows the total number of youth program participants by type of service across the most recent fiscal years. The majority of participants were served through enrollment in multiple core programs.

|  | PY19         | PY20         | PY21         | Total        |
|--|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Training Service                       | 1,098        | 937          | 816          | <b>2,851</b> |
| Enrolled in More than One Core Program | 1,822        | 716          | 1142         | <b>3,680</b> |
| <b>Total</b>                           | <b>2,920</b> | <b>1,653</b> | <b>1,958</b> |              |

### **Total Participants Served Who Self-Identify as Having a Disability**

The table below shows the number of Worksource Georgia participants who self-identified as having a disability. Recent numbers in self-identification indicate a decrease in the number of individuals being served.

|                              | PY19 | PY20 | PY21 |
|------------------------------|------|------|------|
| Self-Identifying as Disabled | 840  | 636  | 566  |

### **CTAE GEORGIA (CAREER, TECHNICAL, AND AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION)**

Every school district in Georgia offers CTAE pathways for students. The mission of CTAE is “To educate Georgia’s future workforce by providing experiences for Georgia students that will prepare them for workplace success.” The vision for the program is that it will provide educational experiences of superior quality and value for students that drive economic prosperity for all.”<sup>77</sup>

During the 2019-2020 School Year, there were 47,913 students with disabilities participating in CTAE programs, and 2,500 completed a CTAE pathway. During the 2020-2021 school year, 24,867 students and more than 11,000 employers participated in work-based learning. About 97% of CTAE completers graduated from high school, which is 14% points higher than the state average graduation rate.<sup>78</sup>

- Other Two “intervention” programs for Special Populations<sup>79</sup>
  - Career and Technical Instruction (CTI)
    - Specifically, for people with disabilities

<sup>77</sup> <https://ctaedelivers.org/>

<sup>78</sup> <https://ctaedelivers.org/2020-2021-annual-report-executive-summary>

<sup>79</sup> <https://www.gadoe.org/Curriculum-Instruction-and-Assessment/CTAE/Pages/Special-Populations.aspx>



- “support high school students with disabilities that are enrolled in CTAE career pathway courses.”
- Coordinated Career Academic Education (CCAЕ)/Project Success (PS)
  - “support students in special populations groups who are determined to be “at risk” of failure and/or dropping out of school”

## BEST PRACTICE MODELS IN EMPLOYMENT

### EMPLOYMENT FIRST

Employment First is a nationwide, systemic framework centering on the belief that all individuals, including those with the “most significant disabilities,” are capable of participating in Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE).<sup>80</sup> This means that publicly funded day and employment services prioritize finding employment opportunities for youth and adults with significant disabilities where they work in their own communities, interact with coworkers & other individuals without disabilities, and are paid at or above minimum wage.<sup>80,81</sup>

In May 2018, Georgia signed into law the Georgia’s Employment First Act. As stated in the bill, “The General Assembly finds and declares that competitive integrated employment, including self-employment, in the general workforce is the first and preferred option in the provision of publicly funded services for all working age citizens with disabilities, regardless of the level of disability” (Georgia House Bill 831, 2018, p. 1). The bill also created a 14-person Employment First Council to monitor the state’s progress.

A good example of the Employment First approach in action is in Tennessee. In 2016, Tennessee introduced the Employment and Community First (ECF) CHOICES program to gradually further align the state’s employment services with the goals of Employment First and achieve more CIE outcomes.<sup>82</sup> ECF CHOICES is a collaborative program between TennCare, Tennessee’s long-term services and supports program under the Medicaid waiver, and the Tennessee Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (DIDD).<sup>82</sup> The new program implemented new categories of funding for individuals, including “supported employment services that feature discovery, job development, job coaching, and career advancement, among other related services that lead to CIE. Services also include Integrated Employment Path Services, which are designed to introduce CIE as an individual employment goal for individuals who are uncertain about CIE as an option. ECF CHOICES also features a tiered structure of rate reimbursement to providers in order to account for different levels of support that may be needed by individual job seekers.”<sup>82</sup>

### STATE AS MODEL EMPLOYER

State as Model Employer (SAME) is a policy framework that would require states to adopt a strategic plan for the recruitment and retention of persons with disabilities into state agencies for employment.<sup>83</sup> This policy aims to make state agencies leaders for what employment of persons with disabilities can and should look like in other organizations throughout the state.

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<sup>80</sup> <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/odep/initiatives/employment-first>

<sup>81</sup> <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/odep/program-areas/cie>

<sup>82</sup> Mank, D. & Luecking, R. (2017). *Employment first state transformation guide: 10 critical areas to increase competitive integrated employment*. <https://leadcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/E1st-State-Transformation-Guide.pdf>

<sup>83</sup> <https://www.advancingemployment.com/state-as-model-employer>

State as Model Employer initiatives have been enacted through executive orders and legislation in states across the country, but the Southeastern U.S. is lacking in states that have enacted SAME policies—the only Southeastern state to enact SAME policies thus far has been Louisiana (codified into state law in 2022).<sup>84,85</sup> With the enactment of this law, all state agencies in Louisiana are required to:

1. “Implement and maintain a Voluntary Self-Identification of Disability Form for all agency employees for purposes of effective data collection and analysis as to the disability status of its workforce.”<sup>85</sup>
2. “Prepare and submit a SAME Agency Plan by December 1st of each year that includes the strategies and goals for the upcoming year, and the progress and outcomes for the current year, related to employment of individuals with disabilities.”<sup>85</sup>

Another example of SAME policy in action comes from Washington state. According to a 2016 report on workforce development for people with disabilities, the state of Washington set a goal of having 5 percent of state employees be individuals with disabilities by 2017.<sup>84</sup> To achieve this goal, they created a task force for the purpose of “supporting recruitment and retention of employees with disabilities in state government, requiring every cabinet-level agency to dedicate staff to the effort and put a plan in place addressing staff underrepresentation.”<sup>84</sup>

## **ENDING SUB-MINIMUM WAGE EMPLOYMENT**

Recent efforts both nationally and at the state level have been aimed at phasing out 14(c) and subminimum wages. As of March 1, 2023, 13 states<sup>86</sup> have passed legislation to eliminate subminimum wages and 14(c) certification (Alaska, Maine, Maryland, New Hampshire, Oregon, Washington, Hawaii, Colorado, California, Delaware, Tennessee, South Carolina, and Rhode Island). Further, both the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights<sup>87</sup> and the National Council on Disability have made recommendations for phasing out the legislation and placing restrictions and/or complete bans on holding 14(c) certification.

### Tennessee

Modeling a promising way forward for the ending of subminimum wage and sheltered workshops, Tennessee has had recent successes in these areas. In 2012, the sheltered workshop SRVS in Shelby County, Tennessee committed to moving roughly 20% of the people

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<sup>84</sup> Whitehouse, E., Ingram, K., & Silverstein, B. (2016, December). *Work matters: A framework for states on workforce development for people with disabilities*. The Council of State Governments and National Conference of State Legislatures. [https://seed.csg.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/SEED\\_Report\\_2016\\_WEB.pdf](https://seed.csg.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/SEED_Report_2016_WEB.pdf)

<sup>85</sup> <https://www.doa.la.gov/doa/office-of-state-ada-coordinator/state-as-a-model-employer/>

<sup>86</sup> [https://apse.org/state-14c-legislation/#:~:text=14\(c\)%2Fsubminimum%20wage%20legislation&text=Note%3A%20The%20following%20states%20have,%2C%20South%20Carolina%20%26%20Rhode%20Island](https://apse.org/state-14c-legislation/#:~:text=14(c)%2Fsubminimum%20wage%20legislation&text=Note%3A%20The%20following%20states%20have,%2C%20South%20Carolina%20%26%20Rhode%20Island)

<sup>87</sup> <https://www.usccr.gov/files/2020/2020-09-17-Subminimum-Wages-Report.pdf>

they served into competitive, integrated employment. In 2013, the workshop committed to fully moving all its beneficiaries into integrated employment; the workshop officially closed in 2015. Of the 110 beneficiaries they served, 42 are successfully employed, and 62 are receiving services and supports to work towards employment. The remaining six transitioned to other home- or facility-based providers. With a change in services and business model, SRVS continued to provide support to people with disabilities, including customized and supported employment through the state vocational rehabilitation agency.

## South Carolina

Able South Carolina, a Center for Independent Living (CIL), has been a trailblazer in championing successful employment outcomes for youth with disabilities in the state. In 2016, Able SC made history as the first Center for Independent Living to secure a Partnerships in Employment (PIE) Systems Change Grant. This five-year grant drives collaboration among state agencies and organizations to enhance employment outcomes, expand competitive integrated employment, and refine statewide policies and practices for youth and young adults with I/DD. As the lead for the South Carolina Disability Employment Coalition, Able SC initiated a transformative effort to address employment barriers for people with disabilities. The coalition quickly expanded, incorporating key partners from various state agencies and organizations, and now comprises over 35-member agencies and organizations. The coalition launched a pilot program aiding 50 students with intellectual and developmental disabilities in high schools, aiming to provide them with work experience during their education. Furthermore, the coalition actively educates employers, hosting an employer summit on hiring people with disabilities and helping them navigate ADA provisions. One noteworthy initiative is the #HireMeSC social media campaign, giving young adults a platform to share their work experiences and why employers should hire them. Moreover, the coalition achieved a longstanding goal by establishing a state Association of People Supporting Employment First Chapter, increasing training opportunities for employment professionals. Able SC's partnership with the coalition and the PIE grant has not only enhanced their relationship with state agencies but also positioned them as a sought-after source of expertise in disability-related matters.

## **PARTNERSHIP MODEL**

According to a 2012 research brief on disability and work, “a growing number of employers have established initiatives to increase the participation of employees with disabilities within their companies as a component of their workforce planning and diversity strategies.”<sup>88</sup> In order to accomplish their goals of increasing the participation of people with disabilities within their companies, employers “typically establish partnerships with local workforce and disability service organizations to source for talent.”

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<sup>88</sup> Katz, E. O’Connell, M., & Nicholas, R. (2012, July). *Strategies to support employer-driven initiatives to recruit and retain employees with disabilities*. [https://www.nod.org/wp-content/uploads/04\\_employer\\_driven\\_initiatives.pdf](https://www.nod.org/wp-content/uploads/04_employer_driven_initiatives.pdf)

One example of a successful disability employment initiative came from Walgreens in 2007. The company established the goal that 30% of the approximately 800 workers at their Anderson, South Carolina distribution center be employees with disabilities.<sup>88</sup> This goal was achieved and surpassed because the company established partnerships with local disability service agencies, developed a training curriculum to teach individuals with disabilities the needed skills for jobs at the center, tailored job supports to employees with disabilities, and “coordinated the efforts of staff from multiple agencies into a single instructional and support operation.”<sup>88</sup> By the time the center was fully operational, it was operating “20% more efficiently than other centers in its system.”<sup>88</sup> Because of the success of the Walgreens distribution center in Anderson, South Carolina, other companies such as Lowe’s, Proctor and Gamble, Best Buy, and Toys R Us to explored and replicated this partnership model in their own distribution centers.<sup>88</sup>

## **CUSTOMIZED EMPLOYMENT**

According to the National Disability Institute, Customized Employment (CE) is defined as “an approach to hiring, retention and return to work that matches a job seeker’s strengths, the conditions under which they will be successful and their interests to the needs of an employer.”<sup>89</sup> Customized employment is described as a “win-win” strategy because of its ability to meet the needs of both employers and job seekers. The benefits of investing in customized employment initiatives are visible. As the National Disability Institute states, “because CE jobs are a good fit for the person and the employer, there is greater employee satisfaction and productivity, resulting in enhanced retention and profitability for employers.”

An example of successful implementation of Customized Employment is Griffin-Hammis Associates, “an internationally recognized pioneer in the field of customized employment services for people with disabilities,” located in Atlanta, Georgia.<sup>90</sup> Griffin-Hammis Associates won the National Best Practices Award from the National Association of People Supporting Employment First (APSE) in 2010.<sup>90</sup> Griffin-Hammis Associates describes their Customized Employment process in their own words below:

*“The heart of our work is GHA’s unique process of Discovering Personal Genius. Discovery is premised on the idea that tests alone – or even the observations of long-time helping professionals – cannot always be the best predictors of the skills, interests, and motivations of the individual. Rather, GHA begins its inquiry by meeting people where they feel most comfortable, which leads to the discovery of new skills and interests as well as supportive relationships that are crucial to helping that person transition to employment.*

*Discovery culminates with the development of a vocational profile and the identification of vocational themes that become the foundation for connecting the individual with unique community employers. GHA provides comprehensive training, coaching, and*

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<sup>89</sup> <https://www.nationaldisabilityinstitute.org/employment/discovery-and-customized-employment/>

<sup>90</sup> <https://www.griffinhammis.com/who-we-are/company-background/>

*support on Discovery, customized job development, on-site work support, and discusses tools for long-term career development.”<sup>90</sup>*

## **INDIVIDUAL PLACEMENT AND SUPPORT (IPS)**

The Individual Placement and Support (IPS) model of employment is a model of supported employment for people with severe and persistent mental illness and co-occurring disabilities (e.g. schizophrenia spectrum disorder, bipolar spectrum disorders, and depression).<sup>91,92</sup> The IPS model promotes a “recovery through work” philosophy where clients achieve competitive integrated employment (CIE) while receiving ongoing support services. A unique aspect of this model is that the effectiveness of IPS teams and their integration into the host agencies that adopt IPS is assessed using a “scientifically validated” fidelity scale.<sup>91</sup>

This model is based on eight principles, including:

- a focus on competitive employment
- rapid job search
- eligibility based on client choice
- attention to client’s preferences in employment services and supports
- the integration of employment and clinical services
- time-unlimited support
- systematic job and employer relationship development.

One example of the IPS model in action takes place in North Carolina. The state implemented the IPS model to support its goal of expanding supported employment services to 2,500 individuals with serious mental illness by 2019. To support this goal using IPS strategies, 30 service teams were dispersed throughout the state to provide IPS-based services. Each team received technical assistance to implement services and used the IPS fidelity scale to evaluate the “supported employment services delivered by each of the service teams.”<sup>93</sup> An external evaluation conducted through the North Carolina Results First Initiative concluded that IPS is “effective at increasing employment and reducing psychiatric hospitalization.”<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> <https://ipsworks.org/index.php/faq-items/what-is-the-difference-between-traditional-supported-employment-and-ips/>

<sup>92</sup> <https://ipsworks.org/index.php/what-is-ips/>

<sup>93</sup> <https://leadcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/E1st-State-Transformation-Guide.pdf>

<sup>94</sup> <https://www.osbm.nc.gov/individual-placement-support-rf-summary/download?attachment>