# State of Connecticut, Department of Rehabilitation Services; Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind, Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Program

**DRAFT**

**Annual Update on Services to Individuals from Minority Backgrounds**

Over the past year, the Vocational Rehabilitation Program continued to maintain a high priority on outreach to eligible individuals from underserved populations. These outreach activities included providing information on the Bureau and the Vocational Rehabilitation Program in the individual’s preferred language and mode of communication.

The Program continues to track individuals from underserved populations to ensure that they are engaged in services and fully understand the scope of available services that can be provided. Before any individual from a minority background is inactivated with an unsuccessful outcome, a supervisory review process is required. The Vocational Rehabilitation Supervisor confirms that the individual was provided with information in his or her preferred language and print medium. Additionally, the Supervisor reviews the case record of services to confirm documentation is present, substantiating that the individual was afforded the opportunity to make informed decisions in regards to participation in the Vocational Rehabilitation Program.

According to the 2010 data recently published by the US Census Bureau, 27.6% of the overall populations of Connecticut identify race or ethnicity from a minority background. This data further breaks down to 10.1% of the overall population as African-American, 13.4% as Hispanic, 0.3% as American Indian/Alaska Native, 3.8% as Asian, and 0% as Pacific Islander.

Analysis of the demographics of clients who achieved an employment outcome with earnings in fiscal year 2012 found that 26.3% indicated race or ethnicity from a minority background, closely mirroring the overall demographic for Connecticut. This can be further broken down as 11.7% identifying their race or ethnicity as African-American; 12.6% identifying their race or ethnicity as Hispanic; and 2% identifying their race or ethnicity as Asian. As this data infers, outreach efforts to underserved populations by the agency has been effective in reaching and serving individuals from traditionally underserved populations.

**Last year, the Vocational Rehabilitation Program hired a Vocational Rehabilitation Assistant Counselor who is bicultural and bilingual in English and Spanish. With this additional hire, the Vocational Rehabilitation Program once again has two Counselors who are bicultural and fluent in Spanish. These two staff members each serve half of the state (East and West) with each of these Counselors serving the Spanish-speaking clients within their assigned territory. These staff members also perform outreach to community-based organizations to distribute information about services offered by the Bureau. The Vocational Rehabilitation Program also employs a Counselor who is African-American and who serves a caseload in traditionally underserved communities.**

**Extensive outreach to community based organizations that work primarily with traditionally underserved populations has continued in the past year. Collaborations have included faith-based organizations such as Zion Baptist Church and Grace Baptist Church of Waterbury. Relationships continue with the organizations from the previous year that have demonstrated effective outreach strategies to underserved populations such as Catholic Charities Institute for the Hispanic Family, Hartford Community Action, Causa Inc., Latino Community Services, Home and Community Health Services Inc, Community Renewal Team, San Juan Center, Wow Community Center; NOW Inc., and Acts 4 Ministry.**

**The three Vocational Rehabilitation staff that work with the underserved populations continued to participate in the annual Community Provider Fair in Waterbury. There were over 40 community providers and hundreds of attendees at this community fair. The Vocational Rehabilitation Program had an outreach table at this fair, sharing information with residents from the city and neighboring communities. The Program staff also reached out to faith-based organizations with a goal of utilizing their linkages to the community to share information about services.**

**The two Bilingual and Bicultural Vocational Rehabilitation Assistant Counselors have been active participants on the statewide committee for Latino Counselors. They have been instrumental in planning an annual event with employers and providers working with the Latino population.**

**One of the Vocational Rehabilitation Assistant Counselors and the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor conducted an eight-week Job Seeking Skills program held at the WOW Center in Waterbury, focusing on including individuals from underserved populations as program participants. Spanish speaking translation services were provided. Topics covered in the Job Seeking Skills class included the Vocational Rehabilitation process, job readiness skills, utilizing community rehabilitation resources, and community based work experiences. This was concluded with attendance at a job fair to utilize the skills learned from the program.**

**One of the Vocational Rehabilitation Assistant Counselors conducted a one day job seeking skills seminar for individuals who are Hispanic, also providing translation services. This seminar consisted of community resources and strategies to find a job. A Benefits Counselor from the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services who is bilingual spoke to the group about disability benefits and employment.**

**In the forthcoming fiscal year, outreach to underserved populations will continue as a priority for the Vocational Rehabilitation Program to identify potential applicants for services. The Program will continue to monitor the effectiveness of these outreach approaches and identify areas where revision of existing strategies or the implementation of new approaches will ensure equal access to services.**