# 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**

A high priority of the Vocational Rehabilitation Program at the Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind is to serve and provide outreach to eligible individuals from underserved populations. These outreach activities include providing information on the Vocational Rehabilitation Program to individuals in their preferred language and mode of communication.

Individuals from underserved populations are tracked in the Vocational Rehabilitation Program 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 from the program 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 2013 data recently published by the U.S. Census Bureau, 30.2% of the overall populations of Connecticut identify race or ethnicity from a minority background. This data further breaks down to 11.2% of the overall population as African-American, 14.2% as Hispanic, 0.5% as American Indian/Alaska Native, 4.2% as Asian, and 0.1% as Pacific Islander.

Analysis of the demographics of clients in the Vocational Rehabilitation Program for fiscal year 2013 found that 33% indicated race or ethnicity from a minority background, slightly exceeding the overall demographic of 30.2% for Connecticut. This can be further broken down as 17.1% identifying their race or ethnicity as African-American; 13.1% identifying their race or ethnicity as Hispanic; 2.3% identifying their race or ethnicity as Asian, and less than 1% identifying their race or ethnicity as American Indian/Alaska Native or Pacific Islander. As this data infers, outreach efforts to underserved populations by the Bureau has been effective in reaching and serving individuals from traditionally underserved populations.

The Vocational Rehabilitation Program has two Counselors who are bicultural and fluent in Spanish. These two staff members each serve half of the state, 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. New collaborations this year with faith-based organizations included the Society for Increase-Ministry in Hartford and Jewish Family Services in West Hartford.**

**Also, continued collaboration with Zion Baptist Church, which has demonstrated effective outreach strategies and resulted in providing work evaluations and internships for clients has continued into this fiscal year.**

**In this past fiscal year, a new site was located to provide training and job seeking skills. Opportunities Industrialization Centers of Waterbury is located in a highly underserved area, close to downtown Waterbury. There has also been a reestablished relationship with the Work Force Alliance in New Haven and the One Stop in Hartford to offer an opportunity to use the Work Centers at those locations.**

**Some of the new collaborations in the Hartford area also included Khmer Health Advocates and Advocacy Unlimited. Also, there have been some newly formed relationships with providers in the Bridgeport area, such as the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce and Neighborhood Studios.**

**The Vocational Rehabilitation Assistant Counselor in Bridgeport has been working closely with the Community Relations Coordinator at South West Community Health Center which provided several resources for the Latino community in Bridgeport that the Counselor is pursuing.**

**One of the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors is on the planning committee for a city-wide Church Provider Fair to be held in Waterbury in May. This is the first year that the Bureau has been involved in this fair. Information will be provided through an outreach table.**

**The Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors that works with the underserved populations continued to participate in the annual Waterbury Community Resource Team Provider Fair. The Vocational Rehabilitation Program has 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 and Job Development groups throughout the state. A job seeking skills class is being planned for fiscal year 2014.**

**The Vocational Rehabilitation Assistant Counselor for the greater Hartford area was interviewed on cable access channel 18 for a program titled “Analeh.” This program is run on the Spanish Channel and it also airs on YouTube. The interview focused on services available through the Bureau and also discussed various eye conditions that are most frequently associated with legal blindness. There was also an opportunity to demonstrate some of the adaptive devices provided to clients to use in employment, training and activities of daily living.**

**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.**