

**Results of Comprehensive Statewide Assessment of the Rehabilitation  
Needs of Individuals with Disabilities and Need to Establish,  
Develop, or Improve Community Rehabilitation Programs  
[Attachment 4.11(a)]**

Louisiana Rehabilitation Services (LRS) assists eligible individuals with disabilities to prepare for, achieve and retain employment in an integrated community setting. LRS administers the general Vocational Rehabilitation program in Louisiana for the Rehabilitation Services Administration. This comprehensive needs assessment focuses on the Vocational Rehabilitation program and the needs of individuals eligible for those services.

The purpose of the statewide comprehensive assessment, conducted jointly with the Louisiana Rehabilitation Council (LRC), is to describe the rehabilitation needs of individuals with disabilities residing within Louisiana, particularly the vocational rehabilitation services needs as outlined in the 34CFR Part 361.29, as follows:

- (A) Individuals with the most significant disabilities, including their need for supported employment services;
- (B) Individuals with disabilities who are minorities and individuals with disabilities who have been unserved or underserved by the vocational rehabilitation program carried out under this part;
- (C) Individuals with disabilities served through other components of the statewide workforce investment system as identified by those individuals and personnel assisting those individuals through the components of the system; and
- (D) An assessment of the need to establish, develop, or improve Community Rehabilitation Programs within the State.

This assessment is in response to the requirements stated in 34 CFR part 361 (361.29) Statewide assessment; annual estimates; annual State goals and priorities; strategies; and progress reports. As mandated, LRS and the Louisiana Rehabilitation Council (LRC) jointly planned and conducted this Comprehensive Statewide Assessment.

The comprehensive assessment was developed, conducted, and compiled in 2006 and also includes some secondary data gleaned from other activities and records from the agency. The findings enclosed in this report will be used to help in planning the future goals and directives concerning LRS' service provision to our consumers. LRS will use this information in developing goals and updating the agency's Strategic Plan for 2007 and beyond, components of which are included in other attachments of this State Plan and include: Strategies [State Plan Attachment 4.11(d)], and Criteria to Evaluate Progress and Reports of Progress [State Plan Attachment 4.11(e)(2)].

LRS will conduct a comprehensive statewide assessment every 3 years per federal regulations; and conduct annual updates in the interim, as applicable. LRS' next

comprehensive statewide assessment will be conducted jointly with the LRC in 2009. The results of this assessment will assist LRS in planning the agency's goals and objectives for the next 3 year cycle (2010-2012).

## **METHODOLOGY**

Louisiana Rehabilitation Services (LRS) utilized a variety of modalities and methodologies to research and collect data to assess and identify the rehabilitation needs of individuals with disabilities, as well as the need to establish, develop, or improve community rehabilitation programs (CRPs).

LRS accessed a range of publicly available resources including survey information from the United States Census Bureau, reports from a comprehensive review of services provided by community rehabilitation programs, and recent statewide assessments carried out in Louisiana examining services delivered to people with disabilities.

### **Louisiana Rehabilitation Council (LRC) Joint Collaboration**

This assessment is the result of a joint effort between LRS and the LRC. LRS requested input, feedback, and assistance from the LRC throughout the assessment process. The LRC/LRS liaison represented the LRC in the preliminary stages by participating in a workgroup to develop the model and methods of research and data collection. The liaison distributed the draft survey instrument at a focus group meeting conducted by the LRC to test the instrument's validity and solicit input. The LRC's comments and suggestions contributed to development of the final survey that was mailed to LRS consumers. The LRC also provided input relative to the development of data collection.

### **Target Populations**

The comprehensive assessment involved soliciting and receiving feedback from the following target populations:

1. LRS Consumers and Family Members (including potential consumers)
2. LRS staff
3. Other workforce partner agencies and the consumers with disabilities they serve
4. Community Rehabilitation Programs

### **Consumer Surveys**

LRS randomly selected 1,280 consumers and potential consumers to receive surveys. This was a stratified random sample to assure representation from all eight (8) regions, racial/ethnic minorities, and unserved/underserved populations. The sample was taken from the following service status categories within the agency: referral, application, eligible, service, closed rehabilitated and closed other. The surveys were mailed and included a cover letter from the LRS Director soliciting participation. The mail out also included a stamped envelope addressed to Louisiana Rehabilitation Services in order to return the survey. Additionally, LRS' Workforce Partners distributed 290 surveys to a random sample of their consumers.

The Consumer Survey instruments were designed to:

- Be easily read and understood
- Be completed by the individual or a caretaker
- Gather pertinent demographic information
- Determine disability
- Determine desire for employment
- Determine specific needs to assist in obtaining employment
- Provide a mechanism to encourage completion and return of the form (a self-addressed stamped envelope was supplied)
- Provide anonymity

### **LRS Staff Surveys**

LRS sent Employee Response Forms (surveys) via email to 342 employees which included all agency staff. This population included administrative, support, and direct service delivery staff persons. The majority of the survey questions were open-ended to allow for a wide range of responses. The survey included general questions for all staff to respond to and a set of specific questions for rehabilitation counselors only. To maintain confidentiality and anonymity, the staff was instructed to print and complete the survey and return the completed form by mail.

### **Focus Groups**

Representatives from LRS' Workforce Partners were invited to participate in two focus group sessions to provide information regarding the needs of consumers with disabilities they serve. The focus group questions were developed (open-ended) and structured to generate discussion and solicit input from the participants. Neutral facilitators were used to minimize bias; one of the facilitators was a member of the LRC. Responses were reviewed, analyzed, and emerging themes documented. Representatives from ten (10) agencies and organizations participated in the focus group discussions, to include, Benefits Planning, Medicaid Purchase, Department of Labor, Department of Education, Office of Family Support, Office of Mental Health, Social Security, Families Helping Families, Office for Citizens with Developmental Disabilities, and the Louisiana Developmental Disabilities Council.

### **Community Rehabilitation Program (CRP) Site Reviews**

LRS selected twenty-five (25) community rehabilitation programs for site reviews. The reviews measured compliance with the agencies' CRP Standards and included an assessment of the CRP's organization and management, governing body, staff development, accessibility, vocational modules, and employment outcomes. The review also included face-to-face consumer interviews, as applicable.

The following provides a comprehensive summary of the information gathered from the comprehensive assessment. The contained statistical information represents what consumers, workforce partners and the consumers they serve, agency personnel and others are saying about LRS' Vocational Rehabilitation Program; their needs and their suggestions regarding the provision of services and service delivery.

### **Implications and Recommendations**

There are many people in Louisiana with disabilities that could benefit from services designed to help them achieve and retain employment in integrated community settings. To meet this need, LRS maintains 8 eight regional offices located statewide; employs a skilled workforce to help individuals plan what services they need; funds community rehabilitation programs to deliver services; and collaborates with multiple agencies and community businesses to promote employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities.

Based on the Louisiana Rehabilitation Counsel's consumer satisfaction survey results individuals who receive LRS services are generally satisfied with how they are treated and the assistance they are provided. However, the comprehensive assessment has identified areas of improvement the agency needs to focus on in order to better meet the rehabilitation needs of consumers in Louisiana. Some of the more obvious needs this assessment indicated are the need for the agency to:

- provide more direct assistance to consumers during the job placement process;
- expand, improve outreach, marketing, and public relations activities;
- to continue to provide training to staff so that they may have a good working knowledge of all community resources available to assist consumers;
- further develop partnerships with fellow agencies and business to develop innovative program in areas currently unserved/underserved.

It is clear that LRS must examine the current approaches and strategies utilized in the provision of job development and employment services and revise our approaches and methods to better meet the needs of consumers.

The information presented from the focus group meetings of the Workforce Partners clearly indicates a desire and need for interagency communications to be improved to include such things as:

- Cross-training of staff regarding the services provided each of the agencies
- Improving the understanding of other agencies and physicians regarding the VR referral and service delivery processes
- Ongoing contact with the consumer, the family, and referring agency
- Increasing the awareness of LRS presence in the community
- Raising the profile of VR among those persons without disabilities, employers and other community service groups
- Increasing team effort and collaboration of effort by partners and VR, particularly in the area of transition services
- Increasing employment services to include more placement assistance and more supported employment with longer/closer follow along

A wealth of information has been compiled from this statewide comprehensive assessment. LRS must review the information and findings from this assessment further and as appropriate initiate other efforts and or activities to address the issues and concerns as they relate to the findings presented. In order to ensure that these findings and results are effectively utilized to improve services to consumer with disabilities, these results will be distributed statewide to all agency staff, LRC and other LRS key workforce partners and involve personnel at all levels. This information will assist in driving the agency's short and long-range planning.