



Pat Quinn
Governor

Warren Ribley
Director

December 23, 2009

To the Honorable Members of the 96th General Assembly:

As required by Public Act 093-0639, I am submitting the enclosed report on the progress of the Illinois workforce system in serving individuals with disabilities for Program Year 2008 (July 1, 2008--June 30, 2009). This report is based on information and data obtained from the Illinois Workforce Development System (IWDS), Local Workforce Investment Areas (LWIAs), the Illinois Department of Employment Security (DES), and the Illinois Department of Human Services/Division of Rehabilitation Services (DHS/DRS). It highlights the state's efforts and commitment to increasing workforce services to individuals with disabilities. As this data will show, we are beginning to see evidence of systems change resulting from the initiatives and efforts summarized below and discussed in this report.

During this program year, DCEO implemented the recommendations from a 2008 **Illinois workNet™** Usability Study with people with disabilities to more directly reflect our commitment to a fully inclusive approach to workforce development services. **Illinois workNet** is a groundbreaking development that is providing comprehensive workforce programs and services to all customers, utilizing state of the art technology to eliminate many of the physical barriers to accessibility. In addition to the 47 physical Illinois workNet Centers, workforce services are also available on-line so they can be accessed from home, local libraries, churches, chambers of commerce and community based organizations.

A second major initiative that supports increased access to workforce services is **disabilityworks**, Illinois' nationally recognized collaboration among the State of Illinois, City of Chicago, the Chicagoland Chamber of Commerce, and businesses and community service organizations to expand and improve employment and training opportunities for people with disabilities. In addition, there are currently seven **disabilityworks** Resource Coordinators (dRCs) in strategic locations throughout the state. Their responsibilities include ensuring that all Illinois workNet Centers have access to **disabilityworks'** resources, establishing relationships with local chambers of commerce, promoting the results of the DCEO-funded Economic Impact Study on the benefits of employing people with disabilities to businesses and conducting disability awareness and sensitivity trainings across Illinois.

These initiatives will also be instrumental in addressing the vocational reintegration needs of our returning veterans, both with and without disabilities. Illinois now ranks 7th in the country in the number of veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, and our ability to facilitate access and foster collaborations will enable us to effectively meet the challenges, as well as create new opportunities, for this growing population.

The Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity remains committed to increasing workforce services to customers with disabilities, in full inclusion models, so they will have access to the same information, resources, and assistance as customers without disabilities. With the aggressive pursuit of these initiatives, DCEO and Illinois will continue to set the standard for the rest of the country.

Sincerely,

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2009 WIA Annual Report

Individuals with Disabilities Served

Prepared by:
Bureau of Workforce Development



ANNUAL REPORT TO THE GOVERNOR AND GENERAL ASSEMBLY

December 31, 2009

Introduction

The Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) is the State agency responsible for the oversight of Title I of the federal Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA), and offers the following report on services provided to people with disabilities through Illinois workNet™ Centers. Both the Department of Employment Security (DES) and the Department of Human Services/Division of Rehabilitation Services (DHS/DRS) provided additional data and program information. Illinois Public Act 093-0639 requires submission of this annual report to the Governor and General Assembly. This report covers the period between July 1, 2008 and June 30, 2009.

Workforce Delivery of Services to Individuals with Disabilities

As mandated by WIA, local entities responsible for administering separate workforce investment related programs collaborate to create a local service delivery system that increases opportunities and improves outcomes for customers. Service delivery occurs through the Illinois workNet Centers and affiliates located in each of the state's twenty-six local workforce investment areas (LWIAs).

The following table displays available service information for the period of July 1, 2008 through June 30, 2009:

How Individuals with Disabilities are Served Through the Workforce System	Number Served
Number of individuals referred to the workforce system by the Department of Human Services/Division of Rehabilitation Services (DHS/DRS)	355
Number of individuals with disabilities served by the workforce system	18,202
Number of individuals with disabilities served under Title I of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA)	4,431
Number of individuals with disabilities placed in jobs by the workforce system	4,108
Number of individuals with disabilities referred by the workforce system to the Department of Human Services /Division of Rehabilitation Services	472

There was over a 30% increase in the number of individuals with disabilities served by the workforce system this year over PY 2007. Factors that may have contributed to this increase include:

1. The efforts of disabilityworks Resource Coordinators to provide training to Illinois workNet Center staff regarding disability awareness and sensitivity, as well as resources available to individuals with disabilities.
2. The economic downturn, which has led to an overall increase in the number of individuals using workforce services, regardless of disability; and
3. The implementation of WIA Policy Letter 05-PL-04, Change 1: Reporting Requirements of Individuals with Disabilities Served by Illinois workNet Centers (8-20-08), which is assisting LWIAs to more efficiently track customers with disabilities.

While this increase is significant, current policy on disclosure prevents a truly accurate picture of the number of individuals with disabilities who actually utilize workforce services, particularly at first contact. Individuals who receive only core

services may choose whether they want to disclose a disability. However, at the point of enrollment into WIA services, disclosure is requested for eligibility purposes, which allows a more accurate count of those served.

To address this discrepancy, strategies are needed that will provide more information during the application process regarding the possible benefits (additional services and supports, etc.) so that a potentially reluctant applicant who has a disability will be able to make a more informed choice. These strategies are being developed as part of Illinois' Medicaid Infrastructure Grant Strategic Plan (See Medicaid Infrastructure Grant below.)

Efforts to Improve Workforce Services to Customers with Disabilities

This past year, DCEO, DES DHS/DRS and their workforce partners continued to administer the following programs, to improve services for people with disabilities:

- The continued statewide expansion of the **disabilityworks** initiative;
- Ensuring that **Illinois workNet** is physically and programmatically accessible, as well as linked to **disabilityworks.org**;
- Ensuring that Assistive Technology in Illinois workNet Centers is working and individual assistance is available;
- Promoting the Disabled Veterans Outreach Program (DVOP) to address the increasing number of returning veterans with disabilities;
- Ensuring that individuals with the greatest needs receive DHS/DRS services

These, as well as related programs from other workforce partners, will not only result in long-term systems change approaches to the employment and training of people with disabilities, they are also becoming models for other states. In addition to these efforts, DCEO and our partner agencies have also accomplished the following to improve services to customers with disabilities.

Statewide Expansion of disabilityworks

disabilityworks is Illinois' unique, innovative partnership of state and local agencies, businesses, service providers, educational institutions and disability advocacy organizations. Its continuing mission is to develop and implement strategies to enhance employment and training opportunities for people with disabilities throughout Illinois. Funded by DCEO, it is located at the Chicagoland Chamber of Commerce in order to provide a strong business presence and commitment to the **disabilityworks** mission.

Through the integration of the Disability Program Navigator program in 2007, **disabilityworks** was able to expand into a statewide initiative. This has allowed **disabilityworks** to establish and facilitate collaborative relationships throughout Illinois.

During PY 2008, **disabilityworks**:

- Collaborated with the Northbrook Chamber of Commerce, State Senator Susan Garrett's office and the Department of Employment Security to organize a business luncheon entitled, "Putting People with Disabilities to Work", that was attended by over 100 guests. This event was so successful that it was used as the model for a series of regional "Chamber Summits" that will be presented across the state during 2009 as part of the Illinois Medicaid Infrastructure Grant Strategic Plan (below).
- Worked with LWIA staff to assess the functional status and current Assistive Technology needs in Illinois workNet Centers, and provided information regarding available resources to assist in obtaining recommended upgrades;
- Continued to provide training, resource information, assistive technology orientation and other disability-related requests to Illinois workNet Center staff.
- Identified over 2000 service providers which have been compiled into a comprehensive statewide Information and Referral (I&R) database.
- Was actively involved in local Disability Mentoring Day activities across the state.
- Developed a customizable curriculum for, and conducted presentations on, disability awareness and sensitivity to businesses, providers, community colleges and other interested organizations.
- Established relationships with Veterans organizations, Re-Entry programs and Homeless shelters to provide information regarding workforce services to those populations.

- Participated in the annual statewide Interagency Coordinating Council Transition Conference in Peoria.
- Continued to work with Small Business Development Centers (SBDCs) to promote small business opportunities for people with disabilities.

Currently, DCEO and **disabilityworks** are promoting the new changes in the Social Security Administration's Ticket to Work regulations as a potential funding option for workforce centers. These changes will make it easier for Illinois workNet Centers to apply to become Employment Networks (ENs). Once they receive EN certification, centers will be able to provide paid services to customers with disabilities who hold "Tickets" through a more user-friendly and timely reimbursement process. The U.S. Department of Labor is strongly encouraging LWIAs to consider the option of becoming ENs in order to take advantage of this possible source of additional funds

With the increasing number of returning veterans from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, many with disabilities, DCEO and **disabilityworks** are also collaborating with Easter Seals, as well as veterans' services agencies, on a project that will market the benefits of employing veterans with disabilities directly to businesses, thereby increasing their access to employment and training opportunities. It is anticipated that this project will be implemented by January, 2010.

disabilityworks.org

A key component of the **disabilityworks** initiative is **disabilityworks.org**, a comprehensive employment information and referral resource for job seekers with disabilities, employers looking to hire people with disabilities, and service providers. It is directly linked to **Illinois workNet™**, the "Virtual One-Stop" portal in Illinois. Its three targeted sections (Employers, People with Disabilities and Service Providers) include statistics, resource links and frequently asked questions.

Each section offers visitors the opportunity to register to receive e-mail updates on the activities of **disabilityworks**, and disability and employment-related news. People with disabilities and service providers can sign up to receive job leads, and employers can sign up to receive job fair information. Additionally, **disabilityworks.org** features pages where visitors can find information on upcoming events and related news stories, including a page where visitors can contact **disabilityworks** staff with questions not answered on the website, or for individualized referrals.

Illinois workNet™

Illinois workNet is a Web Site Portal and Program that simplifies the process of connecting individuals, businesses, and workforce professionals to local and statewide resources that had only previously been available within the physical Illinois workNet Centers. The Portal is a consumer-friendly and accessible web interface to the resources and services provided by WIA mandated partners. The Program provides workforce professionals with the resources and training needed to integrate and effectively utilize the Portal. Together, the Portal and Program have created a virtual format that Local Workforce Investment Boards (LWIB) and Local Workforce Investment Areas (LWIA) use to promote local resources.

In addition to the completed statewide rollout of its Portal and Program to all 26 Local Workforce Investment Areas, **Illinois workNet** has expanded local access to workforce and economic development resources beyond the traditional "one-stop system" throughout the state. As of June 30, 2009, there were 687 active Illinois workNet sites. These are comprised of:

- 47 (6.8%) Comprehensive Illinois workNet Centers;
- 74 (10.7%) Illinois workNet Satellite offices;
- 566 (82.3%) additional sites. These include libraries, community-based organizations, faith-based groups, education entities, and social service agencies.

A critical component of the **Illinois workNet** design is to ensure that individuals with disabilities have full access to the Portal. **Illinois workNet** not only meets web accessibility standards, it also provides a more viable and cost-effective alternative to arranging for transportation to physical locations in order to obtain specific resources and services for individuals with disabilities. A Usability Study with people with disabilities was completed in June 2008, and its findings resulted in the following recommendations:

The key areas of potential improvement fall into five general categories:

- Use consistent navigation menus through clear and consistent section navigation menus;
- Simplify the program search function by allowing users to search by either a combination of keyword and category, or by keyword only;

- Consistently position and label search results, displaying them at the top of the content area on all pages and add a "Results" heading before them;
- Integrate the site search and display results in the same window, while removing unnecessary links within the results;
- Optimize the registration process through clarification of labels and error messages.

During PY 2008, these recommendations were implemented on the "Individuals" Pathway on the Illinois workNet Portal.

Illinois workNet also provides direct access to its partner, disabilityworks.org. Conversely, users who access disabilityworks.org can also easily link to **Illinois workNet**. While continuing to maintain their individual identities, **Illinois workNet** and disabilityworks.org will be fully integrated so that people with disabilities will be able to access all of the benefits of both sites through one, easy to use, completely accessible site.

Medicaid Infrastructure Grant

The Medicaid Infrastructure Grant Task Force created the comprehensive strategic plan that focused on promoting employment for Illinois residents with disabilities. This plan approved by the United States Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) includes the following goals:

1. Expand workplace inclusion and retention;
2. Shift the perception of employers, parents, educators, and people with disabilities regarding employment opportunities for people with disabilities
3. Communicate and coordinate information regarding work incentives and benefits planning;
4. Develop data systems to measure the effectiveness of work incentive programs;
5. Recommend revisions to federal and state policies that directly affect employment opportunities for people with disabilities;

By the end of 2009, DCEO will have completed the following activities:

1. Establish a benefits planning page within the **Illinois workNet** web system for people with disabilities
2. Plan and conduct a minimum of 10 regional employer conferences in conjunction with statewide and local Chambers of Commerce, including the provision of web-based resources (training materials) for employers

The task force is comprised of individuals with disabilities, employers, disability advocacy organizations, leaders from participating state agencies and other businesses interested in promoting the employment of people with disabilities.

Department of Employment Security

The Department of Employment Security (DES), a partner in the Illinois workNet Centers, promotes employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities and encourages employers to consider them for their job openings. These services are provided through 47 Illinois workNet Centers and 13 satellite offices in Illinois. Although the majority of DES offices are located in Illinois workNet Centers, a few are located in separate sites. Where the state is the leaseholder of a local Illinois workNet Center, the agency continues to improve physical accommodations to make the offices accessible. Assistive technology has been purchased through Workforce Investment grants for the Illinois workNet Centers, including trackball mice, large print keyboard labels, large monitors, closed circuit television, audio tape players, and screen magnification software, web page reading software, headphones, adjustable keyboard trays, enlarged keyboards, scanning/reading software, and scanners. In addition, some Illinois workNet Centers have extra equipment including height adjustable tables, large button telephones with amplification, Zoom Text software, and Braille printers, as well as a subscription to "Textnet", a web-based TTY. Illinois workNet Center staff have been trained on the use of assistive technology equipment, enabling staff to provide better service to customers with disabilities. Staff have also received training on methods of assisting persons with disabilities in a professional manner, while always remaining respectful of their dignity as individuals. Auxiliary services, such as sign interpreters for individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing, are available upon request.

Funded by the Federal Jobs for Veterans Act, DES has almost 30 full-time Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program (DVOP) staff in Illinois workNet Centers around the state to perform outreach and provide one-on-one services to disabled veterans. The DVOP staff assists disabled veterans to develop their interviewing and resume writing skills, and helps them conduct their job search. Along with all other state agency partners, DES provides priority of service to veterans and particularly to veterans with disabilities. In order to maximize employment services for veterans with disabilities, DES has

maintained a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA) – Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E). This MOU provides intensive services to veterans with disabilities in order to assist them to obtain employment, once they have completed training under VR&E. DES also stations DVOPs at two veterans' hospitals in the Chicago metropolitan area. In addition, DES and USDVA are collaborating on the implementation of REALifelines, a program which provides employment services, including intensive services, to seriously wounded and/or injured veterans who served in Operation Iraqi Freedom or Operation Enduring Freedom. DES Veterans representatives and hospital managers co-present workshops for these clients.

The Equal Opportunity Officer for DES is part of the Interagency Committee on Employees with Disabilities (ICED) which seeks to assist individuals with disabilities to secure employment in state government. DES looks forward to this avenue as a way to expand on current accommodations and practices.

Department of Human Services/Division of Rehabilitation Services

DRS continues to provide services to customers with Most Significant Disabilities (i.e., the disability seriously limits at least **three or more** of the individual's functional capacities) and those with Very Significant Disabilities (i.e., the disability seriously limits **two** of the individual's functional capacities). Functional capacities include mobility, self-care, self-direction, work skills, work tolerance, interpersonal skills and communication. By restricting the Order of Selection, DRS serves customers who are more highly impacted by their disabilities and who are generally less able to take advantage of the more generic type of services provided at Illinois workNet Centers.

It should also be noted that referrals to Illinois workNet Centers are tracked only during the DRS application process. Individuals who may have come into the DRS office for information, or for whom DRS services were not applicable, are most likely not reflected in this count.

Summary

The Illinois workforce system remains committed to ensuring that all customers, whether or not they have a disability, receive the same level of service in all Illinois workNet Centers. Through the innovative initiatives, programs and activities described above, DCEO continues to proactively promote Illinois workNet services to all of its citizens. However, as stated previously, the numbers reflected within this document may undercount a more thorough and accurate representation of the total number of people with disabilities who utilize Illinois workNet Centers. We anticipate that encouragement and emphasis on the potential benefits of voluntary disclosure, especially in light of the new Ticket to Work regulations, will have a positive impact on the number of individuals with disabilities served through the Illinois workNet system.