

Rod Blagojevich
Governor

Jack Lavin
Director

December 26, 2008

To the Honorable Members of the 95th 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 2007 (July 1, 2007--June 30, 2008). This report is based on information obtained from the Local Workforce Investment Areas, the Illinois Department of Employment Security, and the Illinois Department of Human Services/Division of Rehabilitation Services. It highlights the commitment of the state to increasing workforce services to individuals with disabilities.

During this program year, DCEO completed the statewide rollout of **Illinois workNet™** 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 being available at physical locations, workforce services are available on-line so they can be accessed from home, local libraries, churches, chambers of commerce and community based organizations, allowing Illinois workNet Centers and their community partners to be available to every customer in Illinois needing workforce services.

A second major initiative that supports increasing workforce services is **disabilityworks**. **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. This year, the former Disability Program Navigator project was fully integrated into **disabilityworks**, with eight **disabilityworks** Resource Coordinators (dRCs) in strategic locations throughout the state. In addition to ensuring that all Illinois workNet Centers have access to **disabilityworks'** resources, dRCs are 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.

With the recent changes in the Social Security Administration's Ticket to Work regulations, it will become easier for Illinois workNet Centers to become Employment Networks (ENs), thereby generating opportunities for greater collaborations with DHS/DRS, as well as with community service organizations to provide employment and training services to a greater number of individuals with disabilities. dRCs have been instrumental in providing information and resources to Illinois workNet Centers regarding the potential benefits of becoming an EN. As more Centers apply for EN certification, it is anticipated that they will begin to see an increase in the number of customers with disabilities requesting and receiving Illinois workNet Center services.

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,



Jack Lavin

Internet Address <http://www.commerce.state.il.us>

620 East Adams Street
Springfield, Illinois 62701-1615

217/782-7500
TDD: 800/785-6055

James R. Thompson Center
100 West Randolph Street, Suite 3-400
Chicago, Illinois 60601-3219
312/814-7179
TDD: 800/785-6055

2309 West Main, Suite 118
Marion, Illinois 62959-1180

618/997-4394
TDD: 800/785-6055

2008 WIA Annual Report

Individuals with Disabilities Served

Prepared by:
Bureau of Workforce Development



ANNUAL REPORT TO THE GOVERNOR AND GENERAL ASSEMBLY

December 31, 2008

Introduction

As the State agency responsible for the oversight of Title I of the federal Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA), the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity offers the following report on services provided through Illinois workNet Centers to people with disabilities. This annual report is provided to the Governor and General Assembly as required under Illinois Public Act 093-0639. The information provided is for the period of July 1, 2007 through June 30, 2008.

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. Services are delivered through 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, 2007 through June 30, 2008:

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)	380
Number of individuals with disabilities served by the workforce system	13,950
Number of individuals with disabilities served under Title I of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA)	1,388
Number of individuals with disabilities placed in jobs by the workforce system	4,384
Number of individuals with disabilities referred by the workforce system to the Department of Human Services /Division of Rehabilitation Services	918

Efforts to Improve Workforce Services to Customers with Disabilities

Although 13,950 individuals with disabilities were reported to have been served by the workforce system during this program year, it is likely that a more representative number of workforce customers with disabilities continue to be under-counted. Potential reasons for this discrepancy include:

- Undercounting occurs because Illinois workNet Centers are not required to register customers who participate in self-service or informational activities (known as universal services). Consequently, customers with disabilities who receive universal services are not counted. DCEO has issued a policy letter, effective 7/1/08, that will assist LWIAs to more efficiently track potential customers with disabilities.
- Individuals with disabilities are not required to disclose that they have a disability. They are advised however, of potential eligibility for additional services, should they decide to disclose. But the ultimate decision is theirs.

- The recent rescissions in WIA funding have had a significant impact on the capacity of LWIAs to meet workforce service needs, including those of individuals with disabilities. It is anticipated that a potential funding option for workforce centers may be found in the new changes in the Social Security Administration's Ticket to Work regulations. 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. DCEO is currently working with the U.S. Department of Labor to encourage LWIAs to consider the option of becoming ENs in order to take advantage of this possible source of additional funds

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

- The 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, are becoming models for other states. In addition to these efforts, DCEO as well as our partner agencies of the Illinois Department of Employment Security and Illinois Department of Human Services/Division of Rehabilitation Services 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 WIA, it is located at the Chicagoland Chamber of Commerce in order to provide a strong business presence and commitment to the **disabilityworks** mission.

In PY 2007, **disabilityworks** began to implement its statewide expansion strategy through the integration of the Disability Program Navigator (DPN) project. Supported by a collaborative effort between the U.S. Department of Labor (USDOL) and the Social Security Administration (SSA), the DPN project's primary mission was to guarantee that all customers, with or without disabilities, had access to the full array of available workforce center services. The role of the DPN was to create, facilitate, and assimilate systems change activities that assured comprehensive and seamless services for all workforce center customers. The approved integration plan included centralizing the administration of eight DPNs and one Lead DPN within **disabilityworks**, assigning DPNs (now called **disabilityworks** Resource Coordinators) to specific economic development regions throughout the state and expanding their responsibilities beyond workforce center-based duties.

During PY 2007, **disabilityworks**:

- Collaborated with Southern Illinois University to facilitate the creation and further development of the Tri-State Business Leadership Network;
- Developed and maintained an ongoing relationship with the Central Illinois Business Leadership Network;
- Networked with local Small Business Development Centers (SBDCs) in each of their Economic Development Regions, explaining the services that **disabilityworks** Resource Coordinators (dRCs) and **disabilityworks** can provide as a resource to persons with disabilities who wish to explore the possibilities of starting a small business;
- Established regular dRC and Illinois workNet Center rotation schedules so that dRCs will be available for staff training, resource information, assistive technology orientation and other disability-related requests;
- Identified 401 service providers which have been compiled into a comprehensive statewide I&R database;
- Was actively involved in local Disability Mentoring Day activities;
- Conducted presentations at McHenry Community College, Kishwaukee Community College, the Rockford Illinois workNet Center, as well as at the DOL National Youth Symposium, on healthcare careers for students with disabilities;
- Presented at the IDES Statewide Veterans Conference in Fairview Heights IL.

- Participated in the annual statewide Interagency Coordinating Council Transitions Conference in Effingham;
- Conducted Disability Sensitivity training for statewide Small Business Development Center (SBDC) Directors.

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, frequently asked questions, and the opportunity to contact **disabilityworks** staff for assistance or further 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.

Economic Impact Study

disabilityworks has also been instrumental in publicizing and promoting the results of a groundbreaking study that assessed the economic impact to businesses employing people with disabilities across employment sectors. The positive results of two previous studies, conducted by individual companies as internal assessments, have been frequently cited to encourage businesses to employ people with disabilities. This study not only supports, but reinforces those results.

The Economic Impact Study, commissioned by DCEO and conducted by researchers from DePaul University, examined the economic costs and benefits of workers with disabilities within three sectors (healthcare, retail, and hospitality). The project included two phases of research: focus groups and cost-benefit surveys.

The focus group phase revealed the following central themes:

- Disability employment agencies and disability advocates were critical for recruiting and hiring workers with disabilities.
- Managers were viewed as having biases against workers with disabilities and concerns with the cost of accommodations.
- Promotion opportunities were limited for workers with disabilities with many identified as holding and remaining in entry-level positions.
 - Costs associated with workers with disabilities were minimal and worth the expense.
- Benefits associated with workers with disabilities included having dedicated and reliable employees and a more diverse workforce.

Further, the study confirms that, in the relatively few circumstances where accommodations were requested, the average cost was \$313. The issue regarding the cost of accommodations in the past has been a concern for businesses. However, in the retail sector, employees with and without disabilities reported that accommodations were provided by their employer to help them perform the essential functions of their job, with “changes to the work schedule”, an accommodation requiring minimal, if any, cost, ranking first.

This Economic Impact Study will continue to be used extensively by DCEO and **disabilityworks** across Illinois to support the business case for the employment of people with disabilities. The full report, as well as the Executive Summary can be accessed through ***disabilityworks.org***

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 make the most of 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 PY 2007, **Illinois workNet** completed its statewide rollout of the Portal and Program assuring access in all 26 Local Workforce Investment Areas in Illinois. In addition, **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, 2008 approximately 441 Illinois workNet sites had been established. These sites include comprehensive Illinois workNet Centers, satellite sites, community-based organizations, faith-based groups, education entities, social service agencies, and other non-traditional partners. Of these sites, 61 (or 14%) are comprehensive centers.

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 option to arranging for transportation to physical locations to obtain specific resources and services for individuals with disabilities. In order to ensure that Illinois workNet continues to meet accessibility standards, a follow-up accessibility study will be conducted during Program Year 2008 that will focus on users who require assistive technologies such as JAWS®, ZoomText Magnifier software and alternative keyboards.

Illinois workNet also provides direct access to its partner, [**disabilityworks.org**](http://disabilityworks.org). Conversely, users who access [**disabilityworks.org**](http://disabilityworks.org) can also easily link to **Illinois workNet**. While continuing to maintain their individual identities, **Illinois workNet** and [**disabilityworks.org**](http://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

During this period, Illinois was awarded a Medicaid Infrastructure Grant (MIG) for 2007. This grant provided \$500,000 in federal funding to develop a strategic plan to reduce or eliminate barriers to employment for people with disabilities. The application for this grant was collaboratively developed by DCEO, the Department of Healthcare and Family Services (DHFS) , the Department of Human Services (DHS) and **disabilityworks**, as well as disability advocates and individuals with disabilities.

This grant stipulates that the strategic planning process must also include businesses, people with disabilities, and disability advocates. To ensure a strong business presence in the development of the strategic plan, and that it complements what has already been accomplished by **disabilityworks**. The Strategic Planning Leadership Committee (SPLC) that was designated to develop the state plan functions as a subcommittee of the Illinois Workforce Investment Board (IWIB), Also, individuals with disabilities were represented on the committees not only as consumers, but as business owners and service providers. The SPLC researched data both on the national and state level while obtaining information from stakeholders in Illinois, through surveys and interviews, to develop the state plan, which was based on five identified barriers to employment:

1. Perception that people with disabilities do not have a choice of jobs;
2. Skeptical attitudes regarding the potential of people with disabilities to become and stay employed;
3. General lack of awareness of work incentive programs by people with disabilities, parents, and some service providers as well as the availability of necessary employment supports and work expectations;
4. Perception that people with disabilities will lose benefits if employed;
5. Lack of transportation to get to and from work.

The state plan was approved by the IWIB and subsequently submitted to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Department of Employment Security

The Department of Employment Security (IDES), 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 49 Illinois workNet Centers and 13 satellite offices in Illinois. Although the majority of workNet Centers are located in IDES offices, 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. In an effort to expand availability of information in media other than print, IDES has some publications in audio and Braille formats.

Funded by the Federal Jobs for Veterans Act, IDES 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 help them conduct their job search. IDES provides priority of service to veterans and particularly to disabled veterans. In order to maximize employment services for disabled veterans, IDES 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 disabled veterans that help them enter employment once they have completed training under VR&E. IDES stations DVOPs at two veterans' hospitals in the Chicago metropolitan area. IDES 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. IDES Veterans representatives and hospital managers co-present workshops for these clients.

The Equal Opportunity Officer for IDES is part of the Interagency Committee on Employees with Disabilities (ICED) which seeks to help individuals with disabilities secure employment in state government. IDES 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
- 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, the workforce system in Illinois continues to provide greater access to people with disabilities. 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 the change in the reporting policy, effective as of July 1, 2008, will improve our ability to track individuals who utilize Illinois workNet Center services. Also, the policy covering the issue of disclosure is in the process of being reviewed and modified to emphasize the potential benefits of voluntary disclosure, especially in light of the new Ticket to Work regulations.

Finally, as Illinois workNet Centers begin the process of applying to become Ticket to Work Employment Networks, they will also have the opportunity to develop collaborative relationships with DHS/DRS, as well as local community service providers, resulting in a comprehensive array of services to customers with disabilities.