
WIA Annual Report on Individuals with Disabilities Served

Prepared by: Bureau of Workforce Development

ANNUAL REPORT TO THE GOVERNOR AND GENERAL ASSEMBLY

October 31, 2005

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' One-Stop Career 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, 2004 through June 30, 2005, unless otherwise noted.

One-Stop Delivery of Services to Individuals With Disabilities

As mandated by the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (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 One-Stop Career Centers and satellite offices located in each of the state's twenty-six local workforce investment areas (LWIAs).

The following table displays service information for the period of July 1, 2004 through June 30, 2005:

How Individuals with Disabilities are Served Through the One-Stop System	Number Served
Number of individuals referred to the One-Stop system by the Department of Human Services Office of Rehabilitation Services	587
Number of individuals with disabilities served by the One-Stop System	18,720
Number of individuals with disabilities served under Title I of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA)	4,771
Number of individuals with disabilities placed in jobs by the One-Stop system	2,846*
Number of individuals with disabilities referred by the One-Stop system to the Department of Human Services Office of Rehabilitation Services	905**

*Note: This number includes data from PY2003 (1,982), as IDES was unable to provide PY2004 data by the reporting deadline

** Note: These numbers were obtained from 20 of the 26 local Workforce Investment Areas who provided figures for this report.

It is important to note that the numbers provided undercount the true service levels to people with disabilities, with the extent of the undercount impossible to determine. It is a common understanding among One-Stop partner programs that people with disabilities oftentimes choose not to self-disclose and are, therefore, not included in counts of services to people with disabilities. On the other hand, should they decide to disclose, they must provide documented evidence of their disability or disabilities, which they may not have access to. (This policy is currently under review and revision.) Additional undercounting occurs because One-Stop 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 and benefit from One-Stop services are also not counted. Through anecdotal observations, we are beginning to see an increase in the number of people with disabilities who are utilizing universal services, as community providers are becoming aware of the services available at the One-Stop Career Centers, through the marketing and outreach efforts of the Disability Program Navigators.

Efforts to Improve One-Stop Services to Customers With Disabilities

Virtual One-Stop

The Illinois Workforce Investment system has evolved since the inception of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA). A major initiative that is currently underway to improve customer access to services is the creation of virtual One-Stop Career Centers, also known as the One-Stop Redesign Project. Although there have been significant achievements in ensuring that One-Stops are physically and programmatically accessible to people with disabilities, these do not guarantee that all services are available to all One-Stop customers at all times. Issues such as physical proximity, availability of transportation, and resource room congestion are only a few factors which continue to limit full accessibility to One-Stop services. To address these concerns the Virtual One-Stop has been created and is currently being pilot-tested in Chicago, Peoria and Marion, with subsequent pilot-testing scheduled for additional areas. At the center of the Virtual One-Stop is Illinois WorkNet, a web site for job seekers, businesses and service providers to post, review, and search for jobs, as well as a comprehensive repository of employment related resources and links, which is intended to be fully accessible to people with disabilities. A key component in the assessment of the effectiveness of the Virtual One-Stop is its evaluation, both by individuals with disabilities and by providers of services to people with disabilities. The first phase of this evaluation has been completed and the recommendations to make the Illinois WorkNet web site more accessible to people with disabilities are now being incorporated. Once these are completed, a second evaluation will be conducted, and those recommendations will also be incorporated into the web site.

"disabilityworks"

A comprehensive pilot project to enhance the employment opportunities of people with disabilities in the Northeast Economic Development Region will be launched in November. "disabilityworks" is a partnership of state agencies (DCEO, DHS/DRS, ICCB, IOHE, IOES and IHFS), the City of Chicago and the Chicagoland Chamber of Commerce. It is comprised of the following seven strategies:

- 1) Increase opportunities for middle school students to become familiar with and choose healthcare careers.

- 2) Expanding employer outreach and engagement through the Chicagoland Business Leadership Network (CBLN).
- 3) Expanding small business development opportunities for people with disabilities.
- 4) Expanding employment opportunities in the non-profit sector.
- 5) Expanding awareness of and access to work incentives and supports.
- 6) Expanding access to workforce development services through the Virtual One-Stop system.
- 7) Expanding participation of postsecondary education and other regional providers through the Chicagoland Provider Leadership Network (CPLN).

Although the pilot is currently limited to the Northeast Region, the eventual goal is to build upon the successes of this pilot and expand them into a statewide initiative.

Disability Program Navigator Project

We are beginning the third year of the DPN project and have also received a commitment from USDOL for partial funding of a fourth year. The DPN project is jointly funded by DOL and SSA to increase the capacity of physical One-Stop Career Centers to serve people with disabilities in the same way as they serve customers without disabilities. This is accomplished through the following strategies:

- 1) Ensuring that the One-Stop is physically and programmatically accessible.
- 2) Marketing One-Stop services to individuals with disabilities and community service providers
- 3) Conducting outreach to businesses to educate them on the benefits of employing people with disabilities.

The Disability Program Navigator initiative has already made a significant difference in the capacity of One-Stop centers to serve customers with disabilities. Disability Program Navigators provide One-Stop Career Center staff with disability awareness/sensitivity information and training to improve the services provided to customers with disabilities. They also report on disability issues at One-Stop Career Center partners and staff meetings. Disability Program Navigator sites have been provided with web cams from the Illinois Assistive Technology Project so that they have the capacity to offer immediate and effective communication via Video Relay Services (VRS) to customers entering the One-Stop who are deaf. Many of the Disability Program Navigator sites have a Tech Team, consisting of staff from the One-Stop Career Center's Resource Room, local Center for Independent Living, and other mandated and/or non-mandated partners. The Tech Teams are familiar with the available Assistive Technology (AT), participate in refresher trainings, and ensure that the Assistive Technology remains in working order.

The third year will focus on the marketing and outreach strategies, as the grant from DOL is now directly tying the DPN initiative to performance outcomes in the One-Stops where they are assigned. Another component of the third year of the grant is direct DPN involvement in the assessment/recommendations in order to ensure that all of Illinois' 46 comprehensive One-Stop centers are in compliance with Section 188 of the Workforce Investment Act.

Department of Employment Security

The Department of Employment Security (IDES), a partner in the One-Stop Career Centers, recognizes that persons with disabilities are a part of the total population served by the agency and addresses their needs accordingly. For example, where the State is the leaseholder of a local One-Stop center, the agency continues to improve physical accommodations to make the offices accessible. Assistive Technology has been purchased through Workforce Investment grants for the One-Stop Career Centers, including trackball mouse, large print keyboard labels, large monitors, closed circuit television, audio tape players, screen magnification software, web page reading software, headphones, adjustable keyboard trays, enlarged keyboards, scanning/reading software, and scanners. In addition, some One-Stop Career Centers have extra equipment including height adjustable tables, large button telephones with amplification, Zoom Tex software, and Braille printers, as well as a subscription to "Textnet" a web-based TTY. One-Stop Career Center staff have been trained on the use of Assistive Technology (AT) equipment, enabling staff to provide better service to customers with disabilities. Staff has also received training on methods of assisting persons with disabilities in a professional manner, always respectful of their dignity and sensibilities. Possible future initiatives include expanding the availability of information in media other than print to all One-Stop Career Centers. Examples are the use of Braille and tapes to describe programs and services.

IDES also works with the National Federation for the Blind and the US Department of Labor in promoting the Jobline system to bring employment services to persons with visual impairments. Jobline, reached via a national toll-free number, provides individuals unable to read computer screens with an audio version of America's Job Bank, the US Department of Labor's online labor exchange system that currently lists over 2 million job openings nationwide. Jobline guides the jobseeker through the steps that allow them to create their own employment profile and search for jobs based on location, job titles and keywords.

The Disabilities Service Act of 2003 mandates the formation of a Disability Services Advisory Council (DSAC). The purpose of this advisory group is to ensure compliance and to improve service to persons with disabilities. The Department of Employment Security will be a participant, represented on the council by the Equal Opportunity Officer. IDES looks forward to this avenue as a way to expand on current accommodations and practices.

Department of Human Services/Division of Rehabilitation Services

Due to a protracted debate in Congress, the Division of Rehabilitation Services' (DRS) projected finances were in jeopardy of running out before the end of the year. In response, DRS was forced to reconsider the number of new customers they would be able to serve. For a six week period, they closed service to all categories of disability. During that period, new customers were placed on a waiting list. Since referrals to the One-Stops are tracked during the application process, and since no applications were processed during this period, it is most likely that individuals were referred to the One-Stops, but there is no existing documentation to support it. Therefore, the number of reported referrals does not accurately reflect the actual number of referrals from DRS to WIA.