

# Bureau of Rehabilitation Services

## *At a Glance*

### **Bureau of Rehabilitative Services**

(re-named the Department of Rehabilitation Services on July 1, 2012)

**AMY L. PORTER, Commissioner**

*Established - 2011*

*Statutory authority - Public Act 11-44*

*Central office - 25 Sigourney Street, Hartford, Connecticut, 06106*

*Web address - [www.ct.gov/dors](http://www.ct.gov/dors)*

*Total employees - 440*

*Recurring operating expenses - This is a newly established agency, based on the merger of multiple business units from separate Departments. There was no baseline for operating expenses in SFY2012. The agency has an approximate revenue base of \$69,000,000, with approximately 75% federal funding, and 25% state funding.*

*Organizational structure - PA 11-44 created the Bureau of Rehabilitative Services, bringing together the programs that were formerly known as the Department of Social Services' Bureau of Rehabilitation Services, the Board of Education and Services for the Blind, the Commission on the Deaf and Hearing Impaired, the Workers' Rehabilitation Program and the Driver Training Program for People with Disabilities. Based on recent legislative changes, the Bureau is recognized as the Department of Rehabilitation Services (DORS) effective July 1, 2012.*

**The new Bureau creates the opportunity to better align existing resources and will improve services to Connecticut citizens with disabilities. The agency will continue to provide, without interruption, high quality services to support individuals with disabilities to work competitively and live independently.**

## **Mission**

The Connecticut Department of Rehabilitation Services provides a range of services to help Connecticut citizens with disabilities live independently and work competitively.

## **Statutory Responsibility**

The primary customers of the agency are individuals with disabilities, and in our employment-based programs, we also have business/employers as a dual customer. The Bureau

of Rehabilitative Services provides a wide range of services to individuals with disabilities, children, families, and individuals who need assistance in maintaining or achieving their full potential for self-direction, self-reliance and independent living. As described previously, a merger of agencies and programs occurred on July 1, 2011 as a result of PA 11-44, creating the Bureau of Rehabilitative Services. The Bureau has become a Department as of July 1, 2012, and will be reporting as the Department of Rehabilitation Services for the next state fiscal year. To avoid confusion, we will refer to the agency as the Department of Rehabilitation Services from this point forward in the report, as our current website and agency contact information will reference the Department of Rehabilitation Services (DORS) information.

The agency structure for SFY2012 included three major divisions:

1. The Bureau of Rehabilitation Services
2. The Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind
3. Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services

Our programs, policies and practices are designed to promote employment, independence, equal access, and self-sufficiency.

### **Public Service**

While each program has its own legislative requirements and program effectiveness standards, the agency as a whole focuses on continuous improvement. For our employment programs (Vocational Rehabilitation, Workers Rehabilitation), the measures of success center on employment wages and measures of self-sufficiency. For our Disability Determination Services program, the metrics center on processing time and accuracy, and for our Interpreting Unit, we focus on the number of requests we were able to fulfill.

As a new agency, we will be working to build a full complement of metrics to share in next year's annual report.

### **Significant Achievements for Fiscal Years 2011 – 2012**

Agency accomplishments will be reported here by program, organized around the three agency divisions: the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services, the Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind, and Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services.

#### **Bureau of Rehabilitation Services**

The Bureau of Rehabilitation Services ([www.ct.gov/brs](http://www.ct.gov/brs)) strives to create opportunities that enable individuals with significant disabilities to work competitively and live independently. Staff works to provide individualized services, develop effective partnerships, and share sufficient information so that consumers and their families may make informed choices about the rehabilitation process and employment options.

The Bureau hosts a number of programs:

- Vocational Rehabilitation Program
- Connect-Ability
- Connect to Work Project
- CT Tech Act Project

- Employment Opportunities Program
- Disability Determination Services
- Independent Living Program
- Driver Training Program for Individuals with Disabilities

Highlights from each of these programs are included below.

**Vocational Rehabilitation:**

BRS administers the Title I Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) and Title VI Supported Employment (SE) programs of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended. Consumers who have significant disabilities receive individual assistance in preparing for, finding, or keeping a job. BRS receives this federal funding from the Rehabilitation Services Administration, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, at the [U.S. Department of Education](#).

BRS assisted 8,441 consumers in Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2011. BRS assistance in the amount of approximately \$9.2 million helped these consumers to prepare for employment opportunities. These expenditures covered a broad range of services including community rehabilitation providers; adaptive technology like home and vehicle modifications, prosthetics and assisted listening devices; programs and supplies to complete training; tuition, fees, and books needed for college education; evaluations and treatments for physical, psychological, and psychiatric conditions; and other services needed to maintain progress toward individual goals. BRS assistance helped 1,171 individuals with disabilities to enter or maintain competitive employment.

In addition to assisting consumers to prepare for, obtain and maintain employment, BRS also assists employers seeking qualified candidates for employment. BRS led several efforts to improve the process of helping consumers find work or to improve the climate in which consumers interacted with employers and community rehabilitation providers, while seeking training and employment. Several projects and programs used in that effort are described below.

The BRS **Employment Division** has created Industry Specific Training and Placement Programs (ISTPP) to work closely with employers to find the best candidates for jobs. ISTPPs are tuition-based workforce development programs that provide job seekers with disabilities the skills needed for employment in a particular profession or type of business. BRS is currently engaged in ISTPPs with the following employers:

- CVS Retail (Western CT Stores)
- HomeGoods Distribution Center (Bloomfield, CT)
- Lowes Distribution Center (Plainfield, CT)
- Mohegan Sun (Uncasville, CT)
- Walgreens Distribution Center (Windsor, CT)
- Walgreens Retail (Statewide Stores).

In September 2011, BRS hosted **Consumer Prep Rallies**, a series of day-long events designed to prepare consumers to successfully navigate a job fair and succeed in on-the-spot interviews. Small group instruction and individual readiness preparation were provided. Consumers participated in a job fair, practiced skills presented in the training, and received

feedback on their efforts. Consumers received copies of their resumes that had been reviewed and revised as a part of the training. The hiring events were held in Stamford and Torrington, enabling several job ready consumers to attend. This innovative approach prepared consumers to participate in jobs fairs around the state and interview with hiring businesses. Connect-Ability partnered with BRS to help promote the prep rallies and develop materials for the events.

The Vocational Rehabilitation program has also been working to increase access to its programs and services. Through the **CRP Differential Rate Pilot Program**, community rehabilitation providers increased their knowledge of the deaf culture and increased their ability to provide services in American Sign Language (ASL) so consumers who are deaf can better access suitable services. The number of CRPs who provide services to consumers who are monolingual ASL users increased from four to nine. The number of employment Specialists among CRP staff who meet the BRS advanced ASL criteria increased from eight to 18.

BRS has installed 20 **video phones** to provide better access to consumers who are deaf and hearing-impaired. Video phones in the following offices are available for the public to use for work related issues: Bridgeport, Danbury, Danielson, Hartford, Manchester, Middletown, New Britain, New Haven, Norwich, Stamford, Torrington, and Waterbury.

The rehabilitation counselors for the deaf collaborated with community work incentive coordinators to deliver a series of **benefit counseling workshops for deaf consumers** in Bridgeport, Hartford and Waterbury.

Through the **CRP Differential Rate Pilot Program**, community rehabilitation providers increased their knowledge of the Hispanic culture and increased their ability to provide services in Spanish so Hispanic consumers can better access suitable services. The number of CRPs who provide services to consumers who are monolingual Spanish users increased from zero to six. The number of Employment Specialists who meet the BRS advanced Spanish criteria increased from zero to 12.

### **Connect-Ability:**

Connect-Ability maintains a technical assistance center, funded by the Medicaid Infrastructure Grant from the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, that strives to reduce barriers to employment by creating a strong competitive employment infrastructure. Staff assists key stakeholders (job-seekers, employers, state agencies, and disability advocates) in navigating Connecticut's employment system for job-seekers and employees with disabilities. The following is a sampling of the SFY2012 accomplishments:

- Through a marketing campaign, Connect-Ability created one new video presenting the business case for employers working with BRS and Walgreens and created one new print ad, internet banner ads and also continued to update its website: [www.connect-ability.com](http://www.connect-ability.com).
- Staff responded to 400 calls for technical assistance.
- 20,500 unique visitors sought information from the website.

- Governor Malloy recognized six top employers at the June 2012 **Connect-Ability Top Employer Summit** for their commitment to employing people with disabilities.
- Connect-Ability collaborated with 55 employers to participate in **National Disability Mentoring Day**, an initiative that provides workplace skills and experiences to students and jobseekers with disabilities. Over 100 students participated in activities such as mock interviews, company tours, and company overviews.
- Connect-Ability staff collaborated with staff from BRS and the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS) to create the Distance Learning Initiative, a free online training resource for individuals with disabilities, family members, educators, and employers. As of July 2012, 38 training modules have been created and more than 400 users have registered for the training.
- Connect-Ability coordinated and conducted five transportation workshops in collaboration with the Connecticut Association for Community Transportation (CACT) and the Kennedy Center. These workshops helped to increase awareness of existing transportation options, networking, advocacy, and exposure to Connect-Ability and CACT.
- Connect-Ability partnered with CACT to host the annual legislative transportation forum at the State Capitol.

### **Connect to Work Project:**

The **Connect-to-Work Project** within BRS provides a single access point for information about the impact of wages on federal and state benefits. Benefits specialists provide comprehensive benefits analysis summaries to help people with disabilities maximize income by working and using federal, state and community resources appropriately to enable sustained employment and increased self-sufficiency. Project staff counsel individuals as well as host numerous workshops for Social Security beneficiaries and professional staff who serve them.

Staff enrolled five participants in its **Individual Development Account (IDA) pilot project** to assist people who have low- and moderate- incomes to save money and receive significant matching funds that will help them increase their assets and financial stability. As they become financially stable, they may relinquish their dependency on Social Security. Enrollment began in Connecticut in July 2011 after funding for matching monies was obtained through the State of Connecticut Department of Labor. Participants in IDAs must be employed or must plan on becoming employed, and receive a Social Security benefit due to disability. The participants have all completed financial education and have access to ongoing supports to reach their saving and budgeting goals. These IDA accounts will enable participants to buy a vehicle needed for work, pay for post-secondary school expenses or provide funds to start or grow a small business.

This pilot, developed in partnership with a community non-profit, Co-opportunity, Inc., was designated as an **“Innovation Champion” for 2010** by the Corporation for Enterprise Development, a national organization. This program will be self-sustaining, based on its tie-in with Social Security’s Ticket to Work program and may be replicated around the country. Social Security will provide Ticket payments to community providers when IDA account holders earn at the level required for payments to be made. Co-opportunity, Inc. will be able to use the Ticket

payments for future IDA account matching funds for people with disabilities. This will insure that slots will be available for IDAs as additional funding won't need to be obtained from grant programs. It also will insure that cars can be a savings goal, contrary to the most common IDA slots currently funded by the federal government. In Connecticut, lack of transportation is the number one barrier to employment for people with disabilities who want to work.

### **CT Tech Act Project (CTTAP):**

The mission of the Connecticut Tech Act Project is to increase independence and improve the lives of individuals with disabilities through increased access to and acquisition of Assistive Technology (AT) devices for work, school, and community living. Connecticut Tech Act Project services include:

- AT device demonstrations;
- AT device loans;
- AT recycling and refurbishment;
- Assistive Technology Loan Program, which provides low-interest financial loans for individuals with disabilities to buy AT devices and services;
- Training and Technical Assistance for counselors and consumers regarding the use of AT in employment settings; and
- Information and Referral

The Connecticut Tech Act Project continues to provide recycling through the website [www.getATstuff.com](http://www.getATstuff.com), where devices can be listed and obtained for free or for a lower cost. Additionally, the Connecticut Tech Act Project continues to engage followers with information on Assistive Technology devices and services through our page on Facebook.

The Connecticut Tech Act Project also operates the AT Device Loan Program for BRS consumers. BRS consumers may borrow an AT device from the inventory to use while they engage in working evaluations, on-the-job training or employment. The purpose of this loan program is to allow the consumer, VR counselor and employer to determine if the AT device will remove barriers and increase independence for the consumer as they perform their job duties and to make an informed decision about the device. Since the start of this program in June 2010, 32 devices were loaned to BRS consumers.

Other Connecticut Tech Act Project (CTTAP) highlights for FY2011 include the following:

- 12 AT Loans were approved, for a total of \$335,354; 8 loans for vehicle modifications, 1 for environmental adaptations and 2 for mobility.
- 821 devices were recycled/refurbished
- 184 devices were loaned to all CTTAP consumers
- 451 devices were demonstrated to a total of 705 individuals.
- 6482 individuals participated in trainings and public awareness events;
- Public awareness activities include printed materials, such as newsletters, brochures, postcards; the CTTAP website; and the CTTAP's page on Facebook reached approximately 17,908 individuals;
- The CTTAP Program Director continues to act in the role of Assistive Technology Consultant to VR counselors and consumers and participates on the BRS Case Conferencing Team to provide guidance around AT needs for VR consumers

### **Employment Opportunities Program (EOP):**

The Employment Opportunities Program (Conn. Gen. Stat. §17b-666 and implementing regulations) serves persons with the most severe disabilities who would be unable to maintain employment without ongoing support services. Because of the severity of the disability of participants, it is unlikely that they would be accessing generic employment resources. In addition, services under the program do not generally commence until the individual has been on the job for a period of time and initial intensive training completed. In order to be eligible, person must be determined to require support services as long as he/she will be employed. Therefore, funds must be allotted for each participant on an annual basis if the person is to remain employed. Virtually all participants are referred to this program by BRS staff. Employment Opportunities funding is used in tandem with other BRS services.

The Program currently supports 269 individuals in employment and another 107 are approved to be supported when they become employed successfully.

### **Independent Living**

Through the five **Centers for Independent Living (CIL)** --the Center for Disability Rights, West Haven; Disabilities Network of Eastern Connecticut, Norwich; Disability Resource Center of Fairfield County, Stratford; Independence Northwest, Naugatuck; and Independence Unlimited, Hartford -- individuals with disabilities had access to four core independent living services: advocacy, information & referral, peer counseling, and independent living skills training.

Some specific highlights from this state fiscal year include the following:

- Independence Unlimited funded a resource book for housing developers and consumers as a part of its Visit-Ability initiative.
- Four centers created fully accessible, highly technical computer work stations for use by consumers who are blind or visually impaired and consumers with other significant physical disabilities. These new community resources help consumers to access services at the following centers: Disabilities Network of Eastern CT, Independence Unlimited, Independence Northwest, and the Disability Resource Center of Fairfield County.

### **Driver Training for People with Disabilities**

As part of Public Act 11-44, the Driver Training Program for People with Disabilities was relocated from the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) to BRS. This program provides training services to any qualified permanent Connecticut resident who requires special equipment in order to operate a motor vehicle. Vehicles are equipped with the following equipment:

- Push/Rock Hand Control for operation of Gas and Brake pedals;
- Spinner Knob Steering Control;
- Left Foot Accelerator;
- Right Hand Turn Signal Lever;
- Instructor's Dual Brake;

- Automatic Transmission; and
- Power Steering, Brakes, Seats, Windows and Mirrors.

### **Disability Determination Services**

Disability Determination Services (DDS) staff processed approximately 40,000 client applications for Social Security Disability Insurance and Supplemental Security Income during State FY 2012. The Connecticut DDS ranks as one of the highest nationally in productivity, effectiveness, and public service. The DDS was awarded the Regional Commissioner's Superior Public Service Award in recognition of its excellence in providing timely and accurate disability determinations to the citizens of Connecticut. Additionally, the outstanding performance of a unit supervisor, Howard Bloomfield, was recognized with a Regional Commissioner's citation.

The DDS has collaborated with community partners through the SSI/SSDI Outreach Access and Recovery (SOAR) program for people who are homeless in Connecticut. DDS staff works with treatment providers throughout Connecticut to increase access to SSI/SSDI income for people with mental illness who are experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness. This initiative has resulted in improved public service to this population.

DDS continued the Compassionate Allowance initiative and Quick Disability Determination Unit to expedite claims processing for applicants with the most severe disabilities. Claims that are referred to this unit by predictive model selection average a 5 - 10 day processing timeframe.

### **Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind**

*(formerly known as Board of Education and Services for the Blind)*

The Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind (BESB) is the state's lead program for the coordination and provision of services to Connecticut residents who are legally blind. Founded in 1893, BESB was among the first state programs in the nation for people who are blind and that proud heritage is reflected in an unsurpassed dedication to public service.

BESB has four separate service units which provide a full range of services to clients of all ages who are legally blind:

1. The Adult Services Unit serves as the central intake for clients and provides independent living training to adults.
2. The Children's Services Unit provides Braille instruction and support to children who are blind or have visually impairments and professional and technical assistance to school districts.
3. The Vocational Rehabilitation Unit helps adults who are legally blind obtain and retain employment.
4. The Business Enterprise Unit that offers entrepreneurial opportunities to people who are blind. The Bureau also includes the Workers' Rehabilitation Program that assists individuals with work-related injuries to return to the workforce.

The Board of Education and Services for the Blind (BESB) Program operates under the authority of Chapter 174 of the Connecticut General Statutes and maintains a confidential

registry of people who are blind in Connecticut as required by statute. The BESB Program provides comprehensive independent living services, adaptive aids and devices and volunteer supports, among other rehabilitative services, to adults who are legally blind or deaf-blind and children who are visually impaired, legally blind or deaf-blind, with a goal of maximizing independence and community inclusion. Under the provisions of Connecticut General Statutes Section 10-295, the Program provides to any school district upon written request the services of Teachers of the Visually Impaired to address the vision-related developmental needs of students who are blind, deaf-blind or visually impaired.

For fiscal year 2012, the client registry for the Bureau contained 10,744 Connecticut residents. A total of 678 newly blind individuals were added to the registry, 437 of whom, or 64 percent, were age 65 or older. Of that total number of new clients, 99 were children, bringing the total number of children on the registry to 1,098.

In fiscal year 2012, the Bureau increased the total number of hours of direct rehabilitative services provided to clients by 2.6 percent to over 28,000 hours, providing crucial educational assistance to children, career assistance to adults and transition-age youth, and improvements in independent living to clients of all ages. Additionally, over 6,400 hours of outreach, consultation and public education services were provided to educators, community providers, employers and vending locations in fiscal year 2012.

The Bureau provided nearly 4,400 hours of direct Orientation and Mobility services - an increase of 9.5 percent over the previous year - to teach safe travel techniques to children and adults, enabling clients to access their communities and participate in education and employment. In addition, the Bureau provided over 2,000 hours of Rehabilitation Teaching services to increase safety and independence in daily living tasks to children and adults. BESB Social Workers provided nearly 2,400 hours of independent living services – an increase of over 11 percent - including adjustment to blindness counseling and referrals to community providers. In collaboration with the National Federation of the Blind of Connecticut (NFB-CT) and the Connecticut Radio Information System (CRIS), services through NFB Newsline continued, with more than 1,000 subscribers who gained access to state and national newspapers through touchtone telephones. Subscribers accessed NFB Newsline nearly 25,000 times during the year, with more than 7,300 hours of news information delivered.

### **Entrepreneurial Employment**

Opportunities for entrepreneurial employment in food service and retail operations at locations such as courthouses, government office buildings, community colleges, postal facilities and such popular tourist locations as Hammonasset Beach, Rocky Neck Beach and Gillette's Castle are provided through the Business Enterprise Program (BEP). This program is administered under both the federal Randolph-Sheppard Act and Connecticut General Statutes Section 10-303. The Business Enterprise Program is completely self-funded, with income derived from commissions on vending machine sales at federal, state, and municipal buildings and properties throughout Connecticut. Through these commissions, the program funds the opening of new locations and renovations to existing locations. In addition, funding from vending machine commissions is utilized to cover the cost of medical benefits for these entrepreneurs who are blind. Participants of the program receive training and support services

through Field Representatives from the agency. In total, 6,800 hours of training and support were provided during fiscal year 2012. There were 47 entrepreneurs who participated in the program during the past federal fiscal year. These entrepreneurs increased the number of employees to 76 workers within their operations, 21 percent of whom also had disabilities. Combined gross sales for these business ventures grew to \$4.9 million. Despite the challenging economy, the combined total net income of these 47 entrepreneurs exceeded \$1.2 million.

### **Teachers for Individuals with Visual Impairments**

BESB provided the services of its own Teachers of the Visually Impaired to 114 school districts across the state, at no cost to cities and towns, for direct instruction and consultation services to maximize the participation of children who are blind or visually impaired in public education. Over 8,200 hours of educational assistance were provided to students served by the agency in fiscal year 2012, an increase of 7 percent from the prior year. Of that number, 3,800 hours of direct Braille instruction were delivered. For the 18 school districts that directly hired or contracted for their own Teachers of the Visually Impaired, the program provided over \$1.1 million in funding reimbursements. Statewide, BESB served a total of 929 school-age students across Connecticut, 92 of whom use Braille as a primary or secondary reading mode. In addition, BESB served 65 children who are under the age of three and therefore not yet served by any school district.

### **Employment Outcomes**

Through the provision of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) services, authorized under Title I and Title 6, Part B of the federal Rehabilitation Act, as amended, for the past federal fiscal year ending September 30, 2011, 112 individuals achieved successful employment outcomes, an increase of 13 percent over the prior year. Cumulative annualized earnings for all vocational rehabilitation clients exceeded \$2.5 million. The Vocational Rehabilitation unit served 971 participants, with 168 new applications for services. Vocational Rehabilitation staff delivered over 1,300 hours of employer outreach services in state fiscal year 2012. In addition, the VR unit provided over 1,800 hours of direct vocational counseling services to clients served in the program. Transition school-to-work initiatives to prepare high school students for employment and post-secondary education included 10 summer programs in state fiscal year 2012, providing 117 opportunities in activities such as career exposure, mentoring, independent living skill development and leadership training.

### **Workers' Rehabilitation Services**

Workers' Rehabilitation Services provides training, counseling and job placement assistance to individuals whose work related injuries preclude them from performing their customary or most recent work. In fiscal year 2012 the Program served 1,973 clients. There were 925 new applications for services, and 174 rehabilitation plans developed. Through the efforts of the Program, 315 clients successfully returned to the labor force.

### **BESB Improvements and Achievements 2011-12**

- Camp Abilities, a collaborative effort with Channel 3 Kid's Camp, served 38 students with visual impairments in its second year, more than doubling the number of students who attended last year. Nine students developed leadership skills while serving as Counselors

in Training. Activities included wrestling, track & field, goal ball, soccer and a high ropes challenge course.

- BESB was awarded a United States Association of Blind Athletes (USABA) grant for a Fitness Challenge program to promote physical fitness for youth with vision impairments. Thirty (30) students participated in the year-long initiative. Two students were selected to participate in the national USABA Challenge in Colorado Springs, CO.
- Individuals and organizations provided over 18,000 volunteer services hours to BESB and its clients during fiscal year 2012. BESB clients were directly assisted by volunteers with such daily living activities as grocery shopping and reading mail. Volunteers also assisted with transcribing books and materials into Braille. The estimated total value of these volunteer hours to clients and the state exceeded \$400,000.
- Over 2,000 hours of specialized adaptive technology services were provided to enable BESB clients of all ages to access education, employment and independent living activities in fiscal year 2012 with the use of speech, Braille and large font devices.
- Continuing support for the Business Enterprise Program was achieved through the placement and maintenance of 1,647 vending machines at 856 public locations. The revenues generated from the commissions at these locations enable the Program to be completely self-sufficient. Overall customer satisfaction with the level of vending machine services remains high, achieving 95 percent this year.
- In 2012, the Children's Services Braille Unit purchased 134 Braille books and 342 large print books for school districts in Connecticut to provide to students who are blind or have visual impairments. In addition to purchasing these materials, the Braille Unit was able to utilize Federal Quota funds to provide an additional 18 Braille books and 168 large print books. The Bureau's in-house Braille Library loaned 79 Braille books and 418 large print books to school districts for students to use in the classroom. The Braille Library now contains over 63,000 volumes of Braille and large print books, which are available to students in every school district in Connecticut.
- Braille Unit volunteers, along with inmates who are certified Braille transcriptionists at Cheshire Correctional provided 107 Braille books to school districts for use by students who are blind. This combined effort enabled the program and state to save over \$125,000.
- Through the provision of independent living services such as travel training, access to technology, rehabilitation teaching and low vision magnification, 331 clients achieved and maintained independence within their homes and communities.
- Results of an independent client satisfaction survey conducted by the Center for Public Policy and Social Research found that Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) clients remain very satisfied with the unit's services. More than 9 out of 10 of respondents would recommend BESB's Vocational Rehabilitation services to a friend.

- The Adult Services unit undertook more than 40 outreach activities, including training public transit bus drivers, Money Follows the Person transition coordinators, and staff in group homes, congregate living, mental health and skilled nursing facilities. Educational outreach presentations were also made to low vision support groups and at seminars and health fairs.
- BESB organized and conducted 10 full days of training throughout the year for school district classroom teachers, paraprofessionals, Birth-to-Three personnel, preschool teachers and other service providers who work with students who are blind, visually impaired or deaf-blind. A total of 400 professionals and paraprofessionals attended these trainings, increasing their understanding of visual impairments, and learning strategies and techniques for working with children from birth through high school.

### **Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services**

*(formerly known as Commission on the Deaf and Hearing Impaired)*

Connecticut has approximately 280,000 deaf and hard-of-hearing residents, including 17,000 who are profoundly deaf. Interpreting and counseling services are available to state residents who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services focuses on advocacy, policy development, and the provision of interpreting and counseling services. Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services also maintain an updated statewide registry of interpreters for the deaf. This requires monitoring the education and certification of interpreters working for compensation in the State of Connecticut, as per Conn. Gen. Statute Sec. 46(a)-33(a). The names of the interpreters who are qualified to work in the state are posted on the agency's website.

#### **Interpreting Unit**

The primary responsibility of the Interpreting Unit is to provide certified interpreting services for individuals who are deaf and hard of hearing in situations involving the person's legal and constitutional rights, health, safety, employment and educational opportunities. Currently, 59 percent of these services support other state agencies in working with individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing. Provision of these services also ensures multiple state agencies to be in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, and provides deaf and hard of hearing citizens of Connecticut with equal access to state services. Besides daily requests from the Judicial Department, the Department of Mental Health and Addition Services, Department of Children and Families, to name a few, the Interpreting Department also responds routinely to police and hospital emergencies on nights and weekends. This department is also the sole provider of interpreting services for the state university and community college educational systems. All interpreting services rendered by this department are reimbursable; those monies supplement the overall agency budget.

#### **Counseling Department**

The Counseling Department provides individual, family and group counseling, consultation services and outreach and advocacy to individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing. As there are only two full time licensed professional counselors employed by the agency, the counselors have

developed collaborations with other state and local community agencies to create a team approach to working with individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing that includes, but is not limited to employment support, case management, crisis management, and psychiatric and psychological services.

## **Information Reported as Required by State Statute**

### **Affirmative Action**

The Department of Rehabilitation Services submitted its first Affirmative Action Plan to the Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities (CHRO) on April 30, 2012. This Plan, approved by CHRO, establishes the agency's program goals and timetables. As it is the agency's first plan, it is an opportunity to ensure that Affirmative Action is embedded in agency practices, and that it moves us toward the achievement of workforce diversity. A critical self-analysis will be provided in the next affirmative action plan.