

**NEEDS ASSESSMENT
UPDATE**

JANUARY 2000

**PREPARED BY:
NEW RIVER VALLEY
DISABILITY SERVICES BOARD**

INTRODUCTION

Background

The New River Valley Disability Services Board was formed in 1992 at the direction of the Virginia General Assembly. By statute, the Board's membership includes at least 30% consumers of disability services. Additionally, local government bodies, businesses, and the Virginia Department of Rehabilitative Services are represented. This diverse membership serves to ensure that the entire community is represented.

The New River Valley is located in southwest Virginia approximately 30 miles west of Roanoke. The New River Valley area is composed of four counties; Floyd, Giles, Montgomery, and Pulaski; the City of Radford, and numerous towns, the largest of which are Blacksburg, Christiansburg and Pulaski. Its 1,486 square miles lie generally along the New River within the great valley and are bounded by the Blue Ridge escarpment and the Appalachian Plateau. Elevations range from approximately 1,400 to 4,300 feet above mean sea level. The New River Valley is in transition from an area composed primarily of timberland to a more developed area. The most current Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service estimate of population is 156,500, which represents a 2.5% gain in population since 1990. The fastest growing areas of the region are Montgomery and Pulaski Counties. It is estimated that the population will exceed 165,000 by the year 2010.

Functions:

The functions of the New River Valley Disability Services Board are to provide:

Input to state agencies on service needs and priorities of persons with physical and sensory disabilities.

Information and resource referral to local governments regarding the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

Such other assistance and advice to local governments as may be requested

History

The New River Valley has a rich and varied history. Because of its close proximity to the East Coast and a continued westward expansion, the Valley was settled soon after settlements such as Jamestown. The New River Valley reflects pre-colonial times as well as the times relating to the Revolutionary and Civil Wars.

Montgomery County is the oldest county in the New River Valley, having been formed from Fincastle County in 1777. The County was named for General Richard Montgomery, a Revolutionary War hero. The first settlement was near what is now Blacksburg, the frontier of Southwest Virginia at the time. Christiansburg, the County seat, was incorporated in 1792 and was an important post of the old Wilderness Road.

Floyd County, which was formed in 1831 from Montgomery County, was named for John Floyd, Governor of Virginia at the time. The Town of Floyd serves as the County seat.

Giles County was founded in 1806 from Montgomery, Tazewell and Monroe County West Virginia, and was named in honor of William B. Giles, Governor of Virginia from 1827- 1830. The County was the site of several battles during the Civil War.

Pulaski County was formed in 1839 from Montgomery and Wythe Counties. The County was named in honor of Count Casimir Pulaski, a Polish officer in the Revolutionary War. In 1745, the first county seat was located near Dunkard's Bottom where a fort was built in 1756. From 1756 until 1895, Newbern was the location of the County seat. In 1895, the County seat was moved to Pulaski where it remains today.

The City of Radford was incorporated in 1884 and was formerly called Ingles Ferry. The City is centrally located in relation to the other four counties just described. Strong ties exist with the City and the surrounding counties. They share an equally strong heritage established by early settlers.

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Target Population in the New River Valley

The incidence of disabilities in the New River Valley population (as estimated by the U. S. Bureau of Census) is as follows:

| Locality | 1997 Population Estimate | 1990 Census Disabled Population Ages 16-65 | 1997 Working Disabled Population Ages 16-65 |
|-------------------|---------------------------------|---|--|
| Floyd County | 12,500 | 659 | 188 |
| Giles County | 16,500 | 1,018 | Not Reported |
| Montgomery County | 77,896 | 3,140 | 998 |
| Pulaski County | 34,500 | 2,574 | 531 |
| Radford City | 16,423 | 693 | 307 |
| Totals | 157,819 | 8084 | 2024 |

PURPOSE

The purposes of the data collection conducted and subsequent Needs Assessment are as follows:

Gather real time data in order to measure the effectiveness of the current service delivery system.

Provide an object basis for regional planning for the next biennium.

Meet requirements of Commonwealth of Virginia Code.

DATA COLLECTION

The New River Valley Disability Services Board continued its efforts this year to access citizen needs. These efforts included:

- 1) mailing of over 400 survey instruments to consumers of services in the New River Valley
- 2) distribution of survey instruments at service delivery sites; compilation of rider-ship data from New River Valley Senior Services, which provides transportation for both senior citizens and disabled persons
- 3) liaison with both public and non-governmental service providers. The survey instrument was designed to investigate consumer needs in the following areas:

Employment

Housing

Education

Transportation

Health

Personal Assistive Services

Case Management Services

Assistive Technology

ANALYSIS

Data collected by either survey or liaison are grouped into the eight subject areas identified on the previous page. Due to survey and data collection limitations (New River Valley data was not specifically broken out of the survey.) regional data vice specific New River Valley data has been used to complete the tables. It is expected that results will be similar. Regional data is compared and contrasted with data collected statewide in each of the eight areas surveyed in order to differentiate specific needs of consumers in the area which may require more emphasis in the New River Valley than in the Commonwealth as a whole. For ease of comparison, the data is presented in tabular format. Open-ended question responses and public forum comments are summarized after the presentation of the tables. While some correlations have been drawn from the data collected, a formal and detailed statistical analysis has not been completed on the data.

Employment

Employment for those disabled persons capable of working is a key goal of both the Disability Commission and the New River Valley Disability Services Board. The percentages presented below are, therefore, a cause for concern and emphasis during the next biennium. It is to be noted, however, that a satellite office of the Roanoke Center for Independent Living has recently opened in Christiansburg. This additional regional resource should be part of the solution and help lower the percentage of not working individuals in the area.

Table 1: Employment Status

| Status | State | Southwest Region |
|-------------|-------|------------------|
| Working | 29.9% | 15.6% |
| Not Working | 59.9% | 75.3% |
| Other | 10.3% | 9.1% |

In assessing the specific employment needs of southwest Virginia and the New River Valley, the Board found it useful to conduct a side-by-side analysis of statewide and regional barriers to employment. The data are as follows:

Table 2: Barriers to Employment

| Barriers | State | Southwest Region |
|--|--------------|-------------------------|
| In school | 7.9% | 2.6% |
| No transportation | 11.2% | 10.2% |
| Lack of jobs | 9.6% | 21.0% |
| No one to help find a job | 4.9% | 6.4% |
| Lack of job training | 8.4% | 9.0% |
| Don't want to give up Social Security & health care and medical benefits | 15.9% | 17.0% |
| Lack of assistive technology | 6.1% | 7.7% |
| Lack of workplace accommodation | 7.7% | 7.7% |
| Lack of personal assistant | 6.3% | 5.1% |
| Unable to work because of health | 32.3% | 46.1% |
| Unable to work due to child care responsibilities | 2.1% | 1.3% |
| Discrimination due to having a disability | 12.1% | 9.0% |

Examination of the data reveals three significant “outliers” for the region:

The percentage of the disabled population in the region in school is low in relation to the rest of the Commonwealth.

The percentage of the disabled population citing lack of jobs as a barrier to employment in the region is high in relation to the rest of the Commonwealth.

The percentage of the disabled population reporting that they are unable to work because of health problems is high in relation to the rest of the Commonwealth.

Implications for DSB action as it relates to this data are discussed in a later section of this report.

A statewide and regional breakdown of specific training or employment services received to assist disabled persons in obtaining non-sheltered employment follows:

Table 3: Training or Employment Services Received

| Programs | Statewide | Southwest Region |
|---|------------------|-------------------------|
| Community Colleges | 6.6% | 10.2% |
| Special Education | 12.2% | 5.1% |
| Vocational Technical Schools | 4.7% | 1.3% |
| Virginia Employment Commission (VEC) | 3.7% | 3.9% |
| Department of Rehabilitative Services | 25.0% | 19.2% |
| Sheltered Workshops | 10.7% | 3.9% |
| Supported Employment Providers | 5.6% | 2.6% |
| Department for the Visually Handicapped (DVH) | 5.6% | 6.4% |
| Centers for Independent Living (CILs) | 8.2% | 9.4% |

Significant regional outliers include Community Colleges, Department of Rehabilitative Services, and Sheltered Workshops. Detailed implications for DSB action are contained in a later section of this needs assessment.

Housing

Affordable, accessible housing is key to enabling disabled persons to live independently. Tables 4,5 and 6 summarize and compare statewide and southwest Virginia housing data.

Table 4: Current Living Arrangement

| Arrangement | Statewide | Southwest Region |
|--|------------------|-------------------------|
| At home with parent | 24.2% | 18.0% |
| At home with spouse | 26.2% | 33.3% |
| At home - no residential services or supports | 13% | 11.5% |
| At home with other family member who is head of household | 4.8% | 7.7% |
| Independent (with or without personal assistance services) | 19% | 18.0% |
| Group home | 3.2% | 1.3% |
| Supervised apartment | 1.8% | 1.3% |
| Foster home | 0.2% | 0.0% |
| Licensed/Adult home | 1.1% | 0.0% |
| Nursing home | 0.9% | 0.0% |
| Residential school | 0.4% | 9.0% |
| Other | 5.3% | 0.0% |

Data for southwest Virginia differed from state data in three areas, one of which is considered significant. Fewer southwest Virginians with disabilities lived at home with parents (18.0% vs. 24.2%) and more at home with a spouse (33.3% vs. 26.2%). The number living at home with a close family member (51.3% vs. 50.4%) was virtually identical to the statewide data. A much larger percentage (9.0% vs. 0.4%) of southwest Virginians with disabilities lived in a residential school. The following tables summarize the housing findings of the 1999 survey data.

Table 5: Problems Finding Satisfactory Place to Live

| Response | Statewide | Southwest Region |
|-----------------|------------------|-------------------------|
| Yes | 29.4% | 16.0% |
| No | 71.0% | 84.0% |

This data indicates that it is significantly easier for a disabled person in southwest Virginia to locate a satisfactory place to live than is the case elsewhere in the state. The survey data conflicts with data collected from service providers in the region. The data in Table 6 indicate that there are problems finding satisfactory housing.

Table 6: Major Problems in Finding Satisfactory Place to Live

| Response | Statewide | Southwest Region |
|--|------------------|-------------------------|
| No houses/apartments/rooms available in desired location | 16.0% | 0.0% |
| Waiting list too long | 18.2% | 33.3% |
| Too expensive | 24.0% | 25.0% |
| Need home/apartment modified | 12.0% | 16.7% |
| Need help to take care of house | 12.0% | 16.7% |
| Need help to take care of myself | 8.0% | 0.0% |

Several differences are notable between state and southwest regional data. First, fully one-third of all respondents in the southwest region survey pool reported that waiting lists were too long. This could be indicative of a shortage of suitable housing in the area. Additionally, one-fourth of all southwest respondents reported that satisfactory housing was too expensive. Significant differences were also noted (16.7% vs. 12.0%) in needing modifications to the housing (this could also be indicative of a shortage of suitable housing) or assistance required in caring for the house.

Education

Survey participants were asked if they or someone in their family were involved in the development of an Individualized Education Plan to help identify services they would need after exiting school. A majority of the respondents (70%) indicated that they were not involved or did not have an Individualized Education Plan. This percentage, while high, is not surprising since a number of the respondents were older individuals with adult onset disabilities. When asked if they needed further training, a third of the respondents indicated no. This figure corresponds with the number of older respondents who are no longer part of the working population and the number of individuals who indicated that they were unable to work because of health issues. Respondents indicating a need for additional training and the type of training requested are summarized in Table 7. (Note: Data presented is statewide data.)

Table 7: Academic or Vocational Training and Education Needs

| Training | Percent |
|--------------------------------|----------------|
| Need vocational training | 20.0% |
| Need training in living skills | 14.0% |
| Need academic training | 14.0% |
| No additional training needing | 34.4% |

Transportation

By far, the most prevalent means of transportation for disabled persons in the southwest region was by either personal vehicle or friend or family member. Due to lower population density and longer travel distances to access medical, educational, training and shopping facilities, a significantly higher percentage of disabled persons in the region indicate that there is no accessible transportation. New River Senior Services provides lift equipped van service in the New River Valley. However, the availability of this service is limited by two factors: 1) the small numbers of available vehicles and drivers and 2) the requirement to also provide transportation service to seniors who may not be disabled. Transportation data are summarized in tables 8, 9 and 10.

Table 8: Transportation Used Most of the Time

| Transportation | Statewide | Southwest Region |
|------------------------------------|------------------|-------------------------|
| Personal car | 44.4% | 41.6% |
| Public system | 8.8% | 4.0% |
| Special Vans or Buses | 17.0% | 13.0% |
| Friend or family member | 22.0% | 32.5% |
| Transportation by group home, etc. | 2.0% | 0.0% |
| Cabs | 2.1% | 3.1% |
| Subway | 0.2% | 0.0% |

Table 9: Accessible Transportation in the Community

| Transportation | Southwest Region |
|---|-------------------------|
| Lift equipped buses | 30.8% |
| Specialized “curb service” transportation | 19.2% |
| None | 18.0% |
| Don’t Know | 32.1% |

Table 10: Greatest Need for Transportation in the Community

| Transportation | Southwest Region |
|---|-------------------------|
| Lifts on public buses | 8.0% |
| More vehicles and longer hours for specialized “curb service” | 46.7% |
| Don’t know | 6.7% |

The need of more vehicles and longer hours for “curb service” is very strongly felt by survey respondents.

Personal Assistance Services

Over forty-six percent of respondents surveyed indicated a need for personal assistance services. Greater than one-third of the disabled persons responding indicated that services were paid for using personal funds. Fewer than one-fourth reported receiving Medicaid assistance to fund these needed services. Tables 11 and 12 summarize statewide findings.

Table 11: Assistance Needed for Personal Care

| Response | Percent |
|----------|---------|
| Yes | 46.3% |
| No | 53.7% |

Table 12: Source of Payment for Personal Assistance Services

| Source | Percent |
|---|---------|
| Vocational Rehabilitation | 8.0% |
| Department of Rehabilitative Services personal assistance services through Centers for Independent Living | 7.0% |
| Medicaid | 24.3% |
| Own Funds | 33.5% |

Case Management Services

The need for Case Management services remains acute, and seems to be felt most strongly among young persons with disabilities. The recently completed Statewide Survey of Future Service Needs of Students with Disabilities Exiting Public Schools provides perhaps the strongest evidence to support this need. Results of the individual assistance services and supports needed are summarized in Table 13.

Table 13: Services and Supports Needed - Individual Assistance

| Specific Service/Support | Percentage Expressing Need |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Case Management Services | 67% |
| Independent Living Services | 51% |
| Special Recreation Services | 48% |
| Advocacy Training | 41% |
| Assistive Technology | 36% |
| Peer Counseling | 28% |
| Mental Health Counseling | 24% |
| Respite Care | 24% |
| Interpreter Services | 9% |

Assistive Technology

Nearly one-half of the survey participants statewide use technology for mobility. Over one-third of those responding need assistive devices for hearing or for independent living. About a quarter of the respondents stated a need for technology to assist in their reading, writing or learning. One-third of respondents reported experiencing accessibility problems in the community.

Table 14: Assistive Technology Used by Consumers

| Assistive Technology | Percent |
|---|----------------|
| Mobility (wheelchair, crutches, scooters, etc.) | 47.3% |
| Hearing | 14.1% |
| Vision | 37% |
| Reading, Writing, or to assist in learning | 26.0% |
| Devices used at work | 8.0% |
| Devices for independent living | 36.6% |

SUMMARY OF RESULTS

Employment:

- Employment opportunities for disabled persons in the New River Valley remain limited. Recent legislation at the federal level allowing disabled persons to keep health care benefits when they obtain employment may increase opportunities.

Housing:

- Accessible housing remains a problem in the New River Valley. Greater than 50% of survey respondents indicated that they had experienced difficulty in obtaining suitable housing due to either a long waiting list or high expense. As many disabled persons in the New River Valley live with parents, this problem is expected to grow worse as the population ages.

Education:

- Forty-eight percent of respondents indicated need for additional training. Twenty percent desired vocational training, while fourteen percent desired living skill training and fourteen percent desired academic training.

Transportation:

- The need for suitable transportation remains acute in the New River Valley. Public transportation is only available in Montgomery County, and there the service is limited to Blacksburg and Christiansburg. New River Senior Services provides curbside service to the entire New River Valley, but the scope of services provided is severely limited by the number of vans available and funding constraints.

Health:

- A significantly higher percentage of southwest residents (46.1% vs. 32.3%) reported inability to work due to health.

Personal Assistive Services:

- Almost half of respondents indicated a need for personal assistive services. Of those receiving services, approximately one-third reported paying for services out of personal funds.

Case Management Services:

- Fully two-thirds of all respondents indicated a need for more case management services.

Assistive Technology:

- Nearly one-half of disabled persons are mobility impaired. One-third report accessibility problems.

IMPLICATIONS FOR DSB ACTION

Employment:

- The relatively low percentage of employed disabled persons in the New River Valley as compared to state data is troubling. The DSB should work closely with training and educational providers to ensure that disabled persons in the region have the opportunity to obtain relevant job skills. The DSB should also work with employers in the New River Valley to ensure that they view disabled persons as a valuable pool of potential employees.

Housing:

- The DSB should work with area builders to educate them as to the market advantages of building to accommodate disabled persons.

Education:

- The DSB should encourage continuing education as both a means to independent living and self-fulfillment. To this end, the DSB should work closely with the new satellite Center for Independent Living, Radford University, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University and the Community Colleges in the New River Valley to conduct outreach to disabled persons and assist them in attaining their highest potential through continuing education.

Transportation:

- The DSB should continue its efforts to obtain increased public and private funding support for New River Valley Senior Services. It should also assist in coordinating the efforts of non-profit and volunteer groups which provide transportation to disabled persons in the New River Valley.

Health:

- The DSB should promote increased communication with the disabled community in the New River Valley to ensure that they are aware of available health services. In particular, the DSB should ensure that disabled persons actively seeking employment are aware of changes to federal law which may enable them to keep their medical benefits.

Personal Assistive Services:

- The DSB should work with local non-profit and community groups to ensure that a sufficient number of trained personal assistance providers is available to meet the needs of the disabled community in the New River Valley. The DSB should also assist the Center for Independent Living in establishing and maintaining current a listing of qualified service providers in the area.

Case Management Services:

- The DSB should actively seek local government assistance in obtaining a state funded full time case coordinator for the New River Valley.

Assistive Technology:

- The DSB should work with local governments, the Department of Rehabilitative Services and local non profits to assist members of the disabled community in obtaining assistive technology.

IMPLICATIONS FOR STATE-LEVEL ACTION**Employment:**

- The Commonwealth should ensure that the Department of Rehabilitative Services and the Virginia Employment Commission cooperate closely in identifying local employer needs through job specific training utilize the disabled community as a valuable part of the labor pool to meet those targeted needs. Current tax incentives for newly hired disabled persons should be extended and publicized.

Housing:

- The Commonwealth should consider tax incentives and/or loan guarantees to encourage new construction and retrofit accessible housing.

Education:

- The Commonwealth should consider a “Hope” type scholarship program for disabled students who graduate from high school with and maintain a 3.0 GPA while enrolled in Virginia institutions of higher learning.

Transportation:

- The Commonwealth should consider matching grants to encourage local governments to subsidize curbside transportation services for the disabled.

Health:

- The Commonwealth should conduct an active outreach program to ensure that members of the disabled community receive health services to reach and maintain the highest possible quality of life.

Personal Assistive Services:

- The Commonwealth should consider maintaining a web-site listing of individuals and service providers offering personal assistive services.

Case Management Services:

- The Commonwealth should establish more full time case coordinators as rapidly as revenue growth allows.

Assistive Technology:

- The Commonwealth should establish a review board to evaluate all new assistive technology and make recommendations for funding.

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