

***New River Valley
Disability Services Board***



**Montgomery County
Pulaski County
Floyd County
Giles County
Radford City**

2003 Needs Assessment

Submitted March 14, 2003

By

**New River Valley Disability Services Board
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MISSION

The mission of the New River Valley Disability Services Board (NRVDSB) is to provide input to state and local agencies on service needs and priorities of persons with physical and sensory disabilities, to provide information and resource referral to local governments regarding the Americans with Disabilities Act and to provide such other assistance and advice to local governments as may be requested.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The New River Valley Disability Services Board would like to thank all of the gracious agencies that assisted in the survey distribution and data collection. The following agencies should be commended for their assistance in this needs assessment:

- Blue Ridge Independent Living Center, New River Valley Satellite Office
- Goodwill Industries of the Valleys
- New River Senior Services
- New River Valley Agency on Aging
- Floyd County
- Giles County
- Montgomery County
- Pulaski County
- Radford City
- Department of Rehabilitative Services, Christiansburg Field Office
- Blacksburg Transit Services

INTRODUCTION

The New River Valley Disability Services Board (NRVDSB) covers the full geographic area of the New River Valley Planning District, PDC 4. The geographic area includes the counties of Floyd, Giles, Montgomery, and Pulaski and the City of Radford. The New River Valley Planning District Commission staffs the NRVDSB.

Jurisdictions are represented on the DSB by three members from each locality, one being from the jurisdiction’s administrative office and two members from the community. The DSB is also proud of its connections and relationships with other human service agencies that also have a similar mission of assisting individuals with disabilities. These agencies act as liaisons to the DSB. The current members of the DSB are as follows:

| New River Valley Disability Services Board (As of January 2003) | |
|--|--|
| Jurisdiction | Current Representatives |
| Floyd County | Terri Morris, ADA Coordinator (Gov’t Representative) Ned Bane, Citizen Representative |
| Giles County | ADA Coordinator – Currently Vacant (Gov’t Representative) John Stanley, Business Representative Sarah Wheeler, Citizen Representative |
| Montgomery County | Stephania Munson, ADA Coordinator (Gov’t Representative) Virginia Reilly, Business Representative Jean Brickey, Chair, Citizen Representative Barbara Smith, Vice-Chair, Citizen Representative |
| Pulaski County | Sally Quesenberry, Dept. of Social Services (Gov’t Representative) Gary Heinline, Business Representative Jeananne Dixon, Citizen Representative |
| Radford City | James Hurt, ADA Coordinator (Gov’t Representative) Bonnie Hess, Business Representative <i>(Citizen representative position is currently vacant)</i> |
| Liaisons | Kristin Beindorf, Brain Injury Services of Southwest Virginia Cheryl Cooley-Newman, Voluntary Action Center Nell Doss, Department of Blind & Visually Impaired Judy Harkrader, Department of Rehabilitation Services Vanessa Thompson, BRILC-New River Valley Satellite Office Robert Wright, BRILC-New River Valley Satellite Office |

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. According to the 2000 Census, the population of the New River Valley is 165,146, which represents an 8.1% gain in population since 1990 (Table 1). The fastest growing areas of the region are Montgomery and Pulaski Counties, while only the City of Radford had a loss of population (0.05%).

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 is named for General Richard Montgomery, a Revolutionary War hero. The first settlement was near what is now Blacksburg, which was considered part of the frontier of Virginia's Southwest at the time. Blacksburg was incorporated as a town in 1871. Christiansburg, the county seat, was incorporated in 1792 and was an important post on the Wilderness Road.

Giles County, formed in 1806 from Montgomery, Tazewell, and Monroe (WV) Counties, is named in honor of William B. Giles, Governor of Virginia from 1827 through 1830. The County

was the site of several battles during the Civil War. The County seat is Pearisburg, which was incorporated in 1914.

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

The area presently known as Pulaski County was explored by Abraham Wood in 1654, but it was not settled until 1745 by a group of German settlers known as Dunkards. This settlement became known as Dunkard’s Bottom and is presently covered by Claytor Lake. This territory was under the jurisdiction of the County of Fincastle until 1777, when Montgomery and Wythe Counties were partitioned from Fincastle. Pulaski County was formed in 1839 from Montgomery and Wythe counties and was named in honor of Count Casimir Pulaski, a Polish patriot and an American Revolutionary War hero. From 1756 until 1895, Newbern was the location of the County seat. In 1895, the County seat was moved to the Town of Pulaski where it remains today.

Radford was incorporated as the town of Central City in 1887 from the two communities of Lovely Mount (to the east) and Central Depot (to the west). In 1890 the town was renamed for Dr. John Blair Radford (1813-1872) and received its city charter in 1892. The City of Radford has been home to two Virginia Governors, John Hoge Tyler (1898-1902) and John Nichols Dalton (1978-1982.). The City is centrally located between the four counties that comprise the New River Valley.

The population for the New River Valley has increased over the past decade, making this needs assessment all the more important.

| Table 1: Population of the New River Valley | | | | | |
|--|------------|---------|---------------------|--------|----------------------------------|
| | Population | | 16-64 Disabled Pop. | | % of 2000 16-64 Population |
| | 1990 | 2000 | 1990 | 2000 | |
| Floyd County | 12,005 | 13,874 | 1,626 | 1,667 | 20.5% |
| Giles County | 16,366 | 16,657 | 2,137 | 2,309 | 23.8% |
| Montgomery Co. | 73,913 | 83,629 | 5,890 | 6,988 | 14.4% |
| Pulaski County | 34,496 | 35,127 | 5,124 | 4,530 | 21.7% |
| Radford City | 15,940 | 15,859 | 1,189 | 1,241 | 14.8% |
| New River Valley PDC | 152,720 | 165,146 | 15,966 | 16,735 | 17.5% |

Source: US Census, 1990 & 2000

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.

PURPOSE OF THE NEEDS ASSESSMENT

As required by the Code of Virginia, Section 51.5-48, the purpose of this needs assessment is to provide updated information and input to state and local governments on the service needs and priorities of persons with physical and sensory disabilities in the New River Valley Planning District. The assessment of needs is the first step of a process to mobilize resources to fill gaps in services for people with physical and sensory disabilities in the New River Valley and should act as a good resource to assist the NRVDSB with the development of goals for the next several years.

DATA COLLECTION

The following methods were used to gather data for this needs assessment update:

- **Consumer Survey:** A survey was distributed to the homes of persons with physical and/or sensory disabilities. Several agencies assisted in the distribution of the surveys. They include the Goodwill Industries of the Valleys, Blue Ridge Independent Living Center's New River Valley Satellite Office (BRILC-NRV), New River Senior Services, New River Valley Agency on Aging, Brain Injury Services of SWVA and the five local Departments of Social Services of the New River Valley. Each of these agencies

distributed the survey instrument to all clients that have physical and/or sensory disabilities. Also, several of these agencies have incorporated these surveys into their initial intake application process when a new client comes in for services. A copy of the survey instrument is included in Appendix 1.

- **Soliciting Comments:** The NRVDSB made use of the many cable bulletin boards throughout the NRV. Information advertisements were displayed on each of the area’s cable access channels, in order to gauge the needs of the disabled community. The NRVDSB has gotten positive input from a number of the area’s residents due to this strategy.

ANALYSIS

A fairly detailed analysis was performed with the use of a computer-based database program. Each time a survey respondent answered “no” when asked if a particular need was “Affordable”, “Accessible”, or “Available”, a point was given for that response. A tally of points would thus show which of the services were of highest need. Demographic information was also asked of each respondent. Below is a list of tables showing the demographics of the survey respondents.

| Age Group | Percentage |
|------------|------------|
| 20 & under | 7% |
| 21 - 40 | 27% |
| 41 – 64 | 41% |
| 65 & older | 25% |

| Living Arrangement | Percentage |
|-------------------------|------------|
| Own | 23% |
| Rent | 34% |
| Parent/Friend (no rent) | 16% |
| Nursing Home | 27% |

| Gender Group | Percentage |
|--------------|------------|
| Male | 43% |
| Female | 57% |

| Education Level | Percentage |
|-------------------------|------------|
| No High School Diploma | 41% |
| High School Diploma/GED | 34% |
| Some College | 2% |
| College Degree | 23% |

SUMMARY OF RESULTS

The Disability Services Commission adopted 12 core service areas that need to be addressed in each needs assessment. They are as follows: Assistive Technology, Case Management, Counseling, Education, Employment, Family Support Services, Housing, Independent Living Services, Medical & Therapeutic Services, Personal Assistance Services, Training, and Transportation. A Statewide Needs Assessment Committee was formed for the creation of this year's needs assessment survey form. They requested that an additional service area be added to gauge the need of, Accessibility. Below is a summary of the data for each of these 13 service areas:

1. *Personal Assistance Services*: There is a push in the New River Valley to steer toward the nursing home as the median age of residents rises. A large number of respondents declared that they have to resort to depending on family or friends, many times with those family or friends losing employment, simply to take care of the disabled. The nursing home care is not an option for many residents, mainly due to the cost of such care.

Also, there is a critical shortage of CNAs (Certified Nursing Assistants) in the New River Valley, due to a large number of factors, ranging from a low salary scale to training affordability.

Navigating the system to attain access to personal care services is difficult. Insurance often does not cover services required by people with disabilities in their homes. People in their sixties who are unable to work and have no private insurance coverage are too young to qualify for Medicare. Without adequate in-home care, the condition of people with a disability can quickly turn for the worse, causing a need of more intensive and expensive care. However, it may be more cost effective in the long-term to provide in-home care services, helping people with disabilities to live more independently in their own home.

2. *Housing*: According to the responses, only 23% of the disabled community in the New River Valley owns their home. An astounding 50% either rent or live with a parent or friend. The remaining 27% of the respondents are in a nursing facility. It can stand to reason that if accommodations were available, some of the nursing home residents would be able to live out in the community, going back to the need for in-home personal care services.

Accessible housing and home modifications have also been identified as housing needs in the New River Valley. Most disabled residents wish to be able to live in their own homes as long as possible. If a home is not built to be fully handicapped accessible, then housing modifications should be the next option. However, this alternative is not always possible, due to the expense of some modifications. Some modifications, such as grab bars, are relatively inexpensive, whereas others, such as wheelchair ramps and the widening of doors throughout the home, may be cost prohibitive, unless other funds become available. The BRILC-NRV office makes good use out of donated labor and materials. Nevertheless, they can only do so much, before their own donated cash supply runs dry. They have made good use of the Rehabilitative Services Incentive Fund for the past several years, but that money too, will not be available after May 2004. There is a need to request funds from each jurisdiction, but with the current budget each county, city and town is facing, it may not be a likely proposition.

There has been a push toward the idea of “visibility”, which means making all new housing ADA accessible. This is still a new idea in the NRV, but it is beginning to take on many supporters. Builders and apartment landlords need education on universal design. Even when aware of the ADA and local building code requirements, builders aim to satisfy the bare minimum requirements, which may not be sufficient to address all of the needs of people with disabilities. Builders do not have sufficient incentive to exceed minimum requirements for quantity of units or specification standards for design and construction.

3. *Family Support Services:* A strong need for various family support services has been identified that may not have been in the past. Many of the survey respondents have indicated the need for more support groups through out the NRV. A few of the suggestions include support groups for stroke victims, brain injury survivors, and for the families of persons with disabilities. There are many groups in the New River Valley; however, the fact is that many people with disabilities do not know that they exist. Coordination between the Carilion and Columbia Hospitals and the local agencies that serve people with disabilities is imperative in order to form a useful and productive support group network. Also, the Blue Ridge Independent Living Center's New River Valley satellite office has been asked on numerous occasions to help in the creation of a support group network. They are currently in the midst of starting a few groups, which will hopefully become a catalyst for a future group network.

4. *Education:* Table 5 shows a deeply troubling statistic, 41% of the survey respondents do not have a high school diploma or GED. This hinders the employability of the disabled community. A high school diploma, or equivalent, is the basic necessity, when looking for employment. This has a decidedly large impact on the school systems of the NRV. An awareness campaign is necessary in order to educate the educators of this issue and to work towards a solution. A possible partner would be the Virginia Assistive Technology Service (VATS) has an area office located at Virginia Tech. This agency, along with the Board for People with Disabilities can be strong partners with the DSB, when confronting the school system about this concern.

5. *Transportation:* A lower than expected number of survey respondents claimed a need for transportation services. Many noted a need of more funding in order to make the transportation services that currently exist more affordable. The New River Valley Agency of Aging offers para-transit services to the disabled community. The Agency on Aging is fortunate enough to receive funding from each locality in the NRV; however, these funds do not fully cover the costs necessary for operating the

program. Thus, the remainder of the cost falls onto the consumer, many of which are on a fixed income (either on Social Security Disability, or SSI).

It should be noted that the five local jurisdictions of the New River Valley (Floyd, Giles, Montgomery and Pulaski Counties and the City of Radford) currently support the transportation program at the New River Valley Agency on Aging through the Disability Services Board. Each locality provides funding annually to help make this program affordable for people with disabilities. One of the largest factors that such a small number of the respondents reported transportation as a need is largely due to this support. Over the past decade, transportation has repeatedly ranked either first or second in priority of need. It can be said that this need is finally being met with, and only with, the support of these five localities.

6. *Independent Living Services*: A satellite office of the Roanoke-based, Blue Ridge Independent Living Center is located in Christiansburg (Montgomery County). This office currently has 2 full-time employees. The main goal of this office is to become an independent agency (aka, New River Valley Independent Living Center). This agency offers a vast array of services, including advocacy, counseling, home modification (as funds allow), information and referral services, and benefits planning.

The BRILC-NRV was awarded funding through the RSIF (Rehabilitative Services Incentive Fund) to provide direct services (i.e., home modifications) to residents of the New River Valley, but due to the state's vast budget deficit, this funding was frozen with only 1/3 of it being spent. Should this funding be renewed, it would go a long way toward meeting several goals established in this needs assessment.

According to the survey respondents, the independent living center also needs to be able to extend its services into the more rural areas of the New River Valley, such as Floyd and Giles Counties. Another need that the independent living center could expand upon is the desire of the disabled residents of the New River Valley to form a

support group network. As stated previously, many of the survey respondents requested that more support groups become available, for issues such as stroke victims, brain injury survivors, for the families of the disabled community. The Brian Injury Services of Southwest Virginia is an agency that has been working toward the development of the brain injury survivors network. The independent living center should play a vital role as a partner in that development.

IMPLICATIONS FOR DSB ACTION

The most pressing needs emphasized by the data gathered for this Needs Assessment have been basic needs, focusing on the day-to-day functioning of people with disabilities. These needs can be divided into two categories, ¹⁾ Needs in the Home and ²⁾ Needs in the Community.

1- NEEDS IN THE HOME

- a. There is a high need for assistive technology devices in order to make homes accessible and usable to people with disabilities. Items such as wheel chair ramps, grab bars, and other home modifications are needed to permit safe movement around the home and to allow people with disabilities to get out of their homes.
- b. There is a severe shortage of personal care assistants, nursing assistants, and certified nursing assistants to provide daily assistance in the New River Valley. These services are necessary in order to enable people with disabilities to live fairly independently outside of the nursing home.
- c. An affordable and accessible housing stock is also a strong need for people with disabilities in the New River Valley. Many landlords may not be aware of the ADA and building code requirements.

2- *NEEDS IN THE COMMUNITY*

- a. Many people with disabilities describe the need for a network of support groups. This network should be set-up as a starting block to enable people with disabilities to get more informed of services in the NRV for them.
- b. Procedures for certification as a person with a disability can be confusing, burdensome and time consuming.
- c. The market demand for barrier-free housing has not been documented or can it be accurately determined, however, subjective findings suggest a shortage of accessible housing. In most cases, building code requirements are unclear or incomplete and can lead to features that do not adequately serve the needs of people with disabilities.
- d. The employment potential of people with disabilities has not been fully tapped due to a lack of awareness on the part of employers, transportation issues and the lack of accessible housing stock convenient to the employment centers.
- e. Many people with disabilities, especially the elderly population, do not consider themselves disabled even though they have a significant impairment in mobility, sight, or hearing. Data that relies on self-reporting of disabilities may be significantly underestimated. Many of the services available today, regulate themselves to people with documented disabilities. Many people deny themselves of these services by failing to define themselves as disabled.
- f. Many people with disabilities have trouble identifying and accessing services available to them.
- g. Medical personnel are not always properly trained about definitions, procedures or available resources to assist their patients in documenting their conditions and seeking assistance through programs or agencies.

ACTION PLAN FOR THE DSB

- Continue to work with area agencies and non-profits organizations to address the need for ramps and other home modifications;
- Work with area agencies, non-profit organizations and higher education institutions to address the shortage of personal assistants, nursing assistants, and certified nursing assistants;
- Develop a process to create a database of people with disabilities in the New River Valley;
- Work with area agencies and non-profit organizations to address the need of a support group network;
- Work with area agencies and non-profit organizations to develop mechanisms to assist people with disabilities to navigate the certification process;
- Develop and distribute materials to better educate medical professionals of the availability of services for the disabled patients;
- Develop and distribute materials and conduct workshops to assist consumers, employers, agencies and organizations interpret regulations and locate available resources;
- Continue to work with and support the five jurisdictions of the New River Valley (Floyd, Giles, Montgomery, and Pulaski Counties and the City of Radford) in order to maintain their support of the transportation program offered by the New River Valley Agency on Aging.

APPENDIX A

New River Valley Disability Services Board Needs Assessment Summary Sheet

| Disability Commission Core Areas | Priority Ranking | Identified Needs | Barriers to Meeting the Needs | Outcomes/Future Efforts |
|---|-------------------------|--|---|---|
| Assistive Technology | 8 | Hearing Aids, wheelchairs, accessibility features in homes, Braille materials, etc. | There are several agencies working together to meet the need, however, funding always becomes an issues with this type of assistance. Also, it is apparent that the population has not been informed of these available resources. | The Blue Ridge Independent Living Center's New River Valley satellite office (BRILCNRV) has created a list of information and resources for consumers and to be distributed at public gatherings and workshops. |
| Case Management | 12 | Lack of communication for case management services for those with physical and sensory disabilities | Many respondents believe that the Department of Rehab Services (DRS) only offers services to those individuals that may be able to return to work only. BRILCNRV offers a minimal amount of services, largely due to small staffing. | Work towards a fully independent Center for Independent Living within 2 years. Also, the DSB and other agencies need to work toward a better marketing campaign of services that are provided by each agency. |
| Counseling | 10 | Professional assistance with personal problems, especially for those with a "new" disability, rather than with a "life-long" disability | Awareness of available agencies and financial assistance. | Services are available through New River Valley Community Services, and other support groups throughout the NRV. |
| Education | 11 | Education to include High School diploma and continuing education after high school, especially for those with multiple disabilities | Must have knowledge of opportunities available. | Radford University, Virginia Tech and New River Community College all provide programs for disabled students. Virginia Tech has an annual summer program in which disabled students are invited to stay on campus for the weekend to experience "college life". Need more advertising. |
| Employment | 6 | Transition from school to the work place; Job search and preparation; Making the workplace "Disability Friendly"; 70% of respondents are unemployed | Small number of accessible workplaces; potential loss of benefits | Need to educate consumers of the changes in Medicaid and Medicare, earn up to a certain amount of money without loss of benefits. More publicity is the goal. |
| Family Support Services | 3 | Respite care for family members; Support groups for those with disabilities and family members of disabled individuals | Requires a central agency to be responsible to coordinate activities and meetings for support groups; Also requires funds to publicize the availability of the meetings | Coordinate with hospitals, BRILC-NRV, and other area agencies to create support group network for people with disabilities and their families. |
| Housing | 2 | Affordable & accessible housing, preferably with a subsidy | Affordable housing may not be accessible housing; Long waiting list for Section 8 vouchers; Housing modifications are needed (wheelchair ramps, bathroom grab-bars, etc) | Partner with Section 8 agencies (Social Services, Housing Authorities, etc.) to create network of housing partners that offer accessible housing that could possibly be subsidized with Section 8 vouchers. |
| Independent Living Services | 5 | Training and information services to increase level of independence | Must have knowledge of available services; These available services need to be extended out into under-served areas (rural sections of NRV) | Assist the BRILC-NRV with a marketing campaign to increase awareness of services; Assist the BRILC-NRV to work toward becoming a fully independent agency (AKA, New River Valley Independent Living Center); Work toward creating a private donations fund that would help fund needed projects, such as wheelchair ramps, accessibility upgrades within the home, and other assistive technology needs. |
| Medical & Therapeutic Services | 9 | Prescription and medical coverage assistance, especially for those without MEDICAID or private insurance | Medicaid does not cover individuals with "moderate incomes"; This population goes without medical insurance completely because it is far too expensive, thus not receiving medical attention, as they should. | Work toward a MEDICAID Buy-In Program that is affordable and attainable, in order to keep many individuals out of the nursing homes and in their own homes, most likely cheaper than nursing home care. |
| Personal Assistance Services | 1 | Assistance with funding these services; Need help to getting up and around the house, medication administering; Need of more in-home care-givers (get away from nursing home if at all possible) | Small number of workforce interested in being "personal assistants"; Loose network of providers; Trained workforce (aka, nurses) are not affordable for most persons with the need; Most of respondents reply on family and friends. | Work with Department of Social Services to create better publicized network of individuals interested in providing service; Find innovative ways to fund such as program, at least partial funding |
| Training | 4 | Interpreter training; In-home caregivers training; Need more doctors in the rural areas; Vocational training. | Personal assistant workforce may not be properly trained to provide services (nursing care); Many disabled individuals have to travel just to see a doctor for regular care; Transportation to vocation training is either expensive, or not available, depending on where the individual lives | Work with hospitals to help attract more doctors into the rural areas |
| Transportation | 7 | Knowledge of para-transit services throughout NRV | Unaware of the para-transit programs currently being provided by New River Senior Services and Blacksburg Transit; Blacksburg Transit in confined to Blacksburg area. | Work with local governments in order to continue to meet the transportation needs of the disabled community in the NRV through their funding support to ensure the ongoing operation of the New River Senior Services transportation program; Form a partnership with Blacksburg Transit Services in order to explore program expansion |
| Accessibility (not a core area) | N/A | Homes, stores, and businesses may not be accessible; Need education to employers and business owners about "Accessibility" | Many business owners still may not be aware of ADA regulations; Awareness and sensitivity training is needed throughout the NRV | NRVDSB responds to concerns with letters to businesses, educating them on ADA and accessibility issues. |