



REHABILITATION SERVICES

The fundamental organization of state programs addressing individuals with disabilities changed in the early 1990s. Before 1993, these services were under the purview of the Department of Human Services. A separate agency, the Department of Rehabilitation Services (DRS), was created in 1993 to work specifically for individuals with disabilities.

DEPARTMENT OF REHABILITATION SERVICES

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 20.6% of Oklahoma's 3.3 million Oklahomans – 688,040 individuals – have some level of disability, which is defined as a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one of a person's essential activities. The mission of DRS is to provide opportunities for individuals with disabilities to achieve productivity, independence and an enriched quality of life. DRS provides a myriad of services to individuals with disabilities through five program divisions.

- **Division of Vocational Rehabilitation:** serves consumers with all types of disabilities except those with visual disabilities.
- **Division of Visual Services:** provides services for people who are blind or visually impaired.
- **Oklahoma School for the Blind in Muskogee (Parkview School):** offers comprehensive residential, pre-school and outreach education to Oklahoma children and youth.
- **Oklahoma School for the Deaf in Sulphur:** provides residential, satellite pre-school, outreach and early intervention education services.

- **Disability Determination Division:** assesses a person's medical eligibility for two Social Security Administration programs: Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI).

PROGRAMS

Employment Services

The preeminent goal of DRS is to remove barriers to employment for people with disabilities. While this goal permeates each of the agency's divisions, it is the essence of two divisions: the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and the Division of Visual Services. From FY'98 to FY'99, the two divisions increased the number of clients with disabilities who found work during the year from 2,271 to 3,026, an increase of 33% and 755 people. DRS officials estimate that by moving those clients closer to self-sufficiency, taxpayers began saving about \$1.5 million in federal annual disability benefits and social services costs. The number of disabled clients, on disability benefits, going to work that year is the highest since establishment of these services in 1925.

Among the employment services offered by these two divisions are the Supported Employment Program, the Transition School-to-Work Program and the Business Enterprise Program.

Other Services

Other important programs offered by DRS programs include:

- **Independent Living:** This program provides services to consumers who have a strong potential to leave institutions or to individuals who need assistance to live at home.
- **Transitional Living Center:** This residential facility in Oklahoma City provides employment and independent living services to young deaf and hard-of-hearing consumers.
- **Older Blind Independent Living Services:** These programs target clients aged 55 and older.
- **Library Services:** The Oklahoma Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped provides unique access – books in Braille, audio books, etc. – to individuals in Oklahoma City. The division also sends materials to clients and public libraries in other parts of the state.

Schools for the Blind and Deaf

The Oklahoma School for the Blind in Muskogee, and the Oklahoma School for the Deaf in Sulphur provide unique services to students from across the state. In addition, both schools have outreach and satellite pre-school programs that allow even more students and families to have access to specialized programs.

As part of the schools' residential education programs, students have opportunities to participate in activities similar to a typical public school, including student organizations and interscholastic athletics. Course work mirrors classes at any public school but is enhanced with specialized instruction such as Braille, sign language, adaptive technology and equipment, orientation and mobility, etc. Both residential programs serve pre-kindergarten through twelve grades. Both schools transport residents home for weekends and holidays.

DRS BUDGET

The federal government provides more than 70% of DRS's funding. Since DRS was created as a separate agency, state appropriations for DRS services have remained fairly static.

DRS Appropriations and Total Budget Expenditures
FY'93 through FY'01

