

Providing THE FREEDOM TO LIVE



Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services
2008 Annual Report

Providing THE FREEDOM TO LIVE

Message from the Executive Director



On behalf of the citizens with disabilities we serve, let me sincerely thank you for the support you have given the Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services (MDRS). We are making great strides in serving Mississippians with disabilities and you are certainly a part of every success story that we have. We are continually working to improve our services to consumers and develop partnerships with other agencies, consumer groups, and businesses.

At MDRS, we provide a quality program of comprehensive rehabilitation services, independent living services, and disability determination services for people with disabilities that will result in social and economic independence, employment opportunities, improved quality of life, and integration into the community. The Office of Special Disability Programs continues to increase home and community based services to our consumers with severe disabilities. Without your help funding these services, many individuals would live in institutional settings instead of their own homes surrounded by their families and caregivers. The Offices of Vocational Rehabilitation and Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind have continued to meet or exceed all federal standards and indicators prescribed by the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) and were rated as the #1 combined state rehabilitation program in America. The Office of Disability Determination Services (DDS) continued to process a phenomenal number of cases with increased accuracy and with one of the best processing times in the country.

At MDRS, we are always working to serve Mississippians with disabilities in a timely and effective manner, mindful of our consumers' needs and concerns. Throughout our report, you will meet the many consumers and employers we have had the opportunity to serve and work with during 2008. I hope you enjoy reading about them and the accomplishments we have made together.

Sincerely,

H.S. "Butch" McMillan
Executive Director

Providing THE FREEDOM TO LIVE

Who We Are

MISSION

It is the mission of the Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services to provide appropriate and comprehensive services to Mississippians with disabilities in a timely and effective manner.

VISION

Since the earliest program that would become the Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services was established, there has been a singular goal: provide individuals with disabilities the freedom to live. This freedom is gained through the support and guidance of the Department Of Rehabilitation Services as well as its offices and community rehabilitation centers. This freedom is also gained through the determination of individuals with disabilities who are extraordinary people in their own right; people who envision a better life for themselves and work hard to attain it.

The Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services (MDRS) is one of the largest agencies in state government committed solely to serving individuals with disabilities in Mississippi. Each year, nearly one hundred thousand Mississippians receive services from four offices within MDRS: the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR), the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind (OVRB), the Office of Special Disability Programs (OSDP), and the Office of Disability Determination Services (DDS).

Improving the independence of our customers is our reason for existing. Our staff will be informed and valued, pursuing lifelong learning and striving to improve their professional skills. We will strive to create an environment where customers and staff work together to achieve their common goal.



Funding
for MDRS comes
primarily from federal sources
with only 9% of the budget received
from the state general fund.

During 2008, the appropriated budget for MDRS totaled over \$190.4 million. Approximately \$21.5 million was in state funding, which included \$17.8 million in General Funds and \$3.7 million in Health Care Expendable Funds. The total MDRS budget included \$90.6 million in federal funds and \$78.3 million in “other” funding.

Providing THE FREEDOM TO LIVE

What We Do

Vocational Rehabilitation Services - We help over 20,000 Mississippians a year overcome limitations imposed by physical or mental disabilities in order for that person to secure or maintain employment.

Community Rehabilitation Programs - We operate a network of 17 facilities, known as AbilityWorks, Inc., located throughout the state, to provide services such as vocational assessment, job training, and actual work experience for individual with disabilities.

Workforce Investment Act - We play a vital role in workforce development for our state to help ensure that Mississippians with disabilities are integrated into the workforce.

Transition Services - We work with eligible secondary school students with disabilities, their families, and school personnel to assure there is an integrated program of education and vocational training available to provide a seamless transition from school to work.

Deaf Services - We help people who are deaf, hard of hearing, or late deafened find employment, attend education and training programs, and learn more about their community resources.

Supported Employment - We assist individuals with the most significant disabilities who require intensive support services to prepare for, secure, retain, or regain employment.

Vocational Rehabilitation Services for the Blind - We specialize in working with individuals who are blind or visually impaired to ensure opportunities for inclusion into the workforce, community, and home.

Independent Living Services for the Blind - We serve individuals who are legally blind and either over the age of 55 or have a significant secondary disability by providing a variety of independent living services.

Business Enterprise Program - We provide support for self employment opportunities in the food service industry for Mississippians who are legally blind.

Disability Determination Services - We determine the medical eligibility of individuals with disabilities to receive benefits from Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) or Supplemental Security Income (SSI) directed by federal guidelines from the Social Security Administration.

Special Disability Programs - We assist individuals with more severe disabilities by providing supports which allow them to continue to live or move toward living independently in the home or community.

Selected Social Security Services - We help individuals with disabilities currently receiving Social Security Disability benefits explore employment opportunities without the fear of losing their benefits.

Assistive Technology - We provide evaluations and assessments assuring that customers of MDRS have maximum access to technology available for individuals with disabilities.

Providing THE FREEDOM TO LIVE

through Vocational Rehabilitation Services



At the age of 16, Heather Stewart of Carthage was injured in a car accident, receiving a broken neck, traumatic brain injury, and multiple lower extremity injuries. Her road to recovery included months of medical treatment and physical therapy at the Methodist Rehabilitation Center and Quest in Jackson. Of necessity, Heather's education was altered, resulting in Heather pursuing special education courses and graduating one year behind her class with a certificate of completion. This impacted Heather emotionally in a traumatic way because, up until the time of her accident, she was an honor student and an excellent athlete.

Marbeth Carter, VR Counselor, was first called in to work with Heather at the Individual Education Planning (IEP) meeting her teacher held with Heather and family members. After reviewing her options, Heather determined that her best course of action would be to pursue special education. Her ultimate vocational goal, however, was to become a nail technician. After graduation, it was determined that Heather would benefit the most from services offered at a Community Rehabilitation Center. Marbeth sought assistance for Heather through AbilityWorks of Kosciusko, where Heather received job readiness training. She was also given a work evaluation to identify work-related problems and determine if any work accommodations would be necessary. Heather completed driver's training at MMRC and was then assisted by VR in obtaining a great achievement---her driver's license.

Heather's next goal was to get her GED, so she transferred to AbilityWorks in Philadelphia and attended GED classes at East Central Community College. Since Heather had been an honor student who completed the 10th grade, her teacher was hopeful that, with repetitious training, she could pass her GED. Heather passed the reading component of the tests only. This, however, did not discourage Heather, but served instead to make her even more determined to reach her goal.

After learning that she could receive a high school diploma with distance learning through Continental Academy, she pursued that option. Heather took her final exam without assistance at AbilityWorks and passed, receiving her diploma at last. Her next step was to attend Nail Technician training through the Magnolia College of Cosmetology, which she successfully completed. Special accommodations were made for Heather in preparation for the State Board testing; and she passed with flying colors.

With the help of MDRS, Heather is now employed at M2M Nail Salon in Jackson. Her salary is dependent on her customer base, which Heather is slowly building. The VR staff is very proud of Heather for her success due to her enduring spirit and "never give up" attitude.

In
2008, the Office of
Vocational Rehabilitation Services
assisted over 20,115 Mississippians with
disabilities in receiving services including, but
not limited to; counseling and guidance in adjustment
to disability, vocational exploration, physical and mental
restoration, job training, assistive technology, and job
placement.

Individuals served by OVR have a wide array of disabilities
including: hearing loss or deafness, amputations, mental and
emotional disorders, epilepsy, developmental disease and
disorders, traumatic brain injuries, orthopedic impairments,
residuals from cancer, and speech impairments to name a
few.

The total number of successful employment
outcomes for our VR consumers in
2008 was 4,553.

Providing THE FREEDOM TO LIVE

through Job Assessment and Training



In June 2007, Jacob Grenn was awarded the AbilityWorks employee of the month. Shown above: Jacob (left) as he is receiving his award from production manager Tobias Pace (right).

AbilityWorks
provides vocational
assessments, job training,
and actual work experience for VR
consumers.

In 2008, AbilityWorks served 2,412 consumers
placing 762 in employment opportunities
resulting in 631 successful employment outcomes.

AbilityWorks are located in Brookhaven,
Columbus, Amory, Kosciusko, Hattiesburg,
Tupelo, Olive Branch, Jackson, Corinth,
Oxford, Laurel, Philadelphia, Meridian,
Greenville, Greenwood, Gulfport,
and Starkville.

When he first came to MDRS, Jacob Grenn was a 19 year old with a ruling of autism and a language impairment who attended Oak Grove High School. Although Jacob was very committed and tried hard in all of his classes, he struggled academically among his peers in his occupational diploma classes. His teachers and counselors stived to help him reach the goal listed on his Individualized Education Plan as his Desired Post-School Outcome. "After graduation, mom would like to see Jacob successfully live in an apartment or group home and be as independent as possible."

Jacob was receiving SSI benefits and had no previous job experience or history. He was referred to AbilityWorks to be assessed for vocational abilities, aptitudes, strengths, and limitations. At first, his MDRS Evaluator and VR Counselor considered referring Jacob to Supported Employment. However, after two months he was the fastest producing client in the workshop.

He demonstrated great work habits as he attended everyday with zero absences. He got along well with others, accepted supervision, stayed on task and followed directions. Jacob lacked certain social skills and basic communication skills, but with the assistance of the AbilityWorks staff, his VR Counselor, and Transition Specialist, Jacob skills improved.

When the team felt he was ready, Jacob was recommended for an On the Job Training with Chili's. He successfully completed 40 hours of OJT and began working as a Kitchen Helper. Since he began working at Chili's, Jacob has gotten promoted and his responsibilities have increased. His mother states that had it not been for MDRS her son would not have experienced the successes he has achieved.



"The job placement has been wonderful! His self-esteem has shot through the roof! He absolutely loves all his co-workers. And it puts my heart at rest to know he has a job where he is cared for so well," says Jacob's mother, Lee Roblin.

Providing THE FREEDOM TO LIVE

through Employment Partnerships

Employment for vocational rehabilitation consumers is achieved through a variety of programs and partnerships working in coordination with a VR counselor. In addition, the federal Workforce Investment Act (WIA) of 1998 created a nation-wide one-stop delivery system of employment service, known as the Workforce Investment Network (WIN) in Mississippi. Vocational Rehabilitation is a mandated partner in WIA, or WIN in Mississippi, and plays an active role at the state and local levels. As partners, MDRS is responsible for developing jobs for our consumer by working with Mississippi businesses. Ten (10) Employment Coordinators work to build long term relationships with employers with the purpose of developing jobs for VR consumers. MDRS also operates WIA funded programs for youth with disabilities in 3 of the 4 local workforce investment areas in Mississippi. Employability Skills Training (EST) provides intensive services to youth who will be eligible for vocational rehabilitation services to help them prepare to enter the workforce. The Disability Coordination Program operates in the Twin Districts Workforce Area and assists youth providers in meeting the requirements of WIA and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Disability Coordinators ensure programmatic access and inclusion of youth with disabilities through training, technical assistance, and service coordination.

Through special grant programs, MDRS houses various staff in the WIN Job Centers located throughout the state including 4 Community Work Incentive Coordinators (CWICs) in Pearl, Tupelo, Gulfport, and Oxford. The CWICs work with Supplemental Security Income and Social Security Disability Insurance beneficiaries to counsel them about the available Social Security work incentives to help them transition from benefits to employment. The Gulfport WIN Job Center houses 3 MDRS staff of the Mississippi Model Youth Transition Innovation Project who work with youth with severe disabilities transitioning from school to work.

In 2007, MDRS completed implementation of two subgrants with the Mississippi Department of Employment Security, the state's administering entity for WIA. In these subgrants, MDRS received funds to continue projects regarding agency activities in the WIN Job Centers. These projects included funding of Disability Program Navigators (DPNs) in 9 centers throughout the state. MDRS Navigators helped people with disabilities access appropriate services in the WIN system. This project came to a conclusion in June 2008.

MDRS
has 8 Vocational
Rehabilitation Counselors,
1 Vocational Rehabilitation for
the Blind Counselor and 6 Counselor
Assistants located in 6 WIN Job
Centers on a full time basis. OSDP
has 3 counselors and 3 counselor
assistants in 3 WIN Job
Centers.



The Delta Workforce Investment Students Education Leadership Employment Citizenship Training (DWIA SELECT) Program students and staff chose the Anderson family as recipients for their "Make a Difference Day" project. Their hard work resulted in a wonderful Christmas for the Andersons.

Providing THE FREEDOM TO LIVE

through Transition Services

Students transitioning from school to work may experience difficult vocational decisions. These career choices are among life's most difficult decisions and are especially so for students with disabilities. In order to make the process easier, transition services are provided to eligible high school students with disabilities in their final year in the school system. After evaluation and assessment, a Transition Counselor determines if the student meets necessary qualifications for participation. If eligible, a counselor works directly with the student, his/her family, and school personnel to assure that there is an integrated program of education and vocational training available to help provide a seamless transition from school to work. To accomplish this, the counselor works with the classroom teacher to implement a career exploration curriculum for the student. When students leave the school system, they continue to work with the Vocational Rehabilitation system until such time that the individual is successfully employed.

In addition to maintaining an Interagency Agreement with the Mississippi Department of Education, MDRS maintains over 140 Cooperative Agreements between our District Offices and local School Districts that define procedural guidelines and methods of working cooperatively to provide services to students.

Examples of transition services are vocational-technical training, vocational evaluation, work adjustment training, on the job training, job search skills, and work experience programs.

These services may be available to students both on and off campus or at one the the 17 AbilityWorks as a part of their school day.

In 2008, the number of students receiving transition services was 2,311. Successful employment outcomes resulted for 333 students.

On April 18th and 19th, MDRS hosted 'The Next Step Retreat,' a two day, one night retreat for transition students and their parents. The purpose was to help them 'explore life after high school.' The retreat was held at Twin Lakes Camp and Conference Center in Florence and was sponsored by AbilityWorks, Inc. Many MDRS personnel were enthusiastic about assisting with this inaugural retreat for high school students. Parents, school teachers, and principals made sure that the retreat was a success by transporting students and serving as chaperones.



Arriving at noon on Friday, the attendees settled in, ate lunch, and got started. They attended sessions and heard speakers on a wide variety of topics. Issues such as planning for the future, healthy social relationships, and understanding the social security system were just a few of the subjects up for discussion. Donny Frazier, program coordinator, said "It was wonderful to see parents and students captivated by some of the information that was presented."

With over 100 people in attendance, the retreat was deemed a success. Deborah Simpson, the parent of a student in attendance, said "I first enjoyed it as a student, then as a parent. Now I am going to use it to teach others."

Providing THE FREEDOM TO LIVE

through Deaf Services



Ben Wagenknecht assumed the position of Director of Office on Deaf and Hard of Hearing on February 1, 2008. Ben began working with MDRS in 2005 as a Rehabilitation Counselor for the Deaf in Starkville and Olive Branch. In addition Ben, who is deaf, was appointed by Governor Barbour to serve on the State Rehabilitation Counsel.

Before beginning his career with MDRS, Ben graduated from Gallaudet University where he majored in Social Work. After graduation, Ben worked in Maryland as a Residential Counselor and Social Worker.

When asked, Ben states, "The most enjoyable part of my job is meeting so many wonderful people. It's great being able to assist our consumers when I can." He also adds, "The Office on Deaf and Hard of Hearing plays a very important role in assisting the population of deaf and hard of hearing. Plus it is really pleasing to work with several different Deaf/Hard of Hearing organizations, such as the Mississippi School for the Deaf, Mississippi Association for the Deaf, and Mississippi Register Interpreter for the Deaf."

Ben states that above all, he enjoys the opportunity to work with consumers of all ages, from young to senior citizen. Ben concludes, "This position is probably the most interesting and gratifying position I've ever held."

Originally from New Orleans, Michael Holmes, who was born with a hearing loss, uses the American Sign Language (ASL) as his main method of communicating. When Hurricane Katrina destroyed his home and ended his employment there, he resettled in Tylertown, Mississippi.



Business managers in this rural community were unfamiliar with the value of people with disabilities, making it difficult for Michael to obtain a job. For this reason, Michael contacted AbilityWorks of Brookhaven.

At AbilityWorks, Michael quickly gained the respect of his evaluators and instructors. With proof of Michael's capabilities, Counselor Hugh Brown began to open the eyes of everyone in Tylertown to see Michael's abilities, instead of his disability. Hugh provided Michael with hearing aids for sound awareness, glasses for vision correction, and an interpreter for aid with interviews. Hugh established a network of contacts within the community and then visited the businesses, arranging interviews for Michael. Tyler Tool Co. was impressed with Michael and entered him into a job tryout program for observation. He was hired one month later. According to his supervisor, Michael has more than proven his abilities and demonstrated how valuable a person with a disability can be to a business.

**Rehabilitation
Counselors for the Deaf
(RCDs) possess required communication
skills level on the Signed Communication Proficiency
Interview (SCPI), an American Sign Language assessment
developed by the Rochester Institute of Technology.**

**This skill, along with other specialized training, has been a vital
factor in the successful rehabilitation of 647 persons with deafness
or significant hearing loss.**

**In addition, 5 staff interpreters are available to assist
consumers and staff members and use American Sign
Language to insure maximum assessability
throughout the rehabilitation process.**

Providing THE FREEDOM TO LIVE

through Supported Employment

Penny Burchfield and success are synonymous. Penny's tenacity and courage has enabled her to reach personal and vocational goals despite many obstacles along the way.

Penny was born December 1968, the third of four children in a loving, supportive family. As an infant Penny experienced breathing problems and developed pneumonia in the first week of her life. She was diagnosed with Down Syndrome, scoliosis, and significant hearing loss in both ears for which she now wears hearing aids. She had heart surgery at five years of age to correct a congenital heart condition.

With assistance from Ellisville State School and the Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services, Penny has been working in competitive employment since 1996. With the assistance of a job coach and other Supported Employment services, she began her career at K-Mart in Columbus, Mississippi. She works in the receiving department where she opens boxes, prices and hangs clothing for display on the floor.

In November of 2007, Penny began a second career as a stock clerk at the Shoe Department in Columbus. In addition to her duties as a stock clerk, she also works on the floor in the children's department where she assists with fitting children's shoes. Penny has recently learned how to operate the register and often rings her customers up, entitling her to receive commission in addition to her base salary. Many customers ask specifically for Penny upon entering the Shoe Department.



The
Supported
Employment Program
serves individuals with the most
significant disabilities who require
intensive support services to prepare for,
secure, retain, or regain employment.

Each MDRS district has a Supported
Employment Team consisting of a specialized
VR/SE counselor, and a Vocational Training
Instructor who oversees the work of Job
Trainers working on site with our consumers.

During 2008, 776 individuals received
Supported Employment services,
124 resulting in successful
employment.

Ms. Stokes at the Shoe Department and Ms. Rushton at K-Mart state that Penny has become an integral part of the operation and success of both companies. In addition to her ability to perform her job tasks efficiently, her bubbly personality and always positive attitude has distinguished her as a role model for other employees.

On a personal note, Penny is much beloved in the community and in her home church, Fairview Baptist in Columbus. She is involved in Sunday school and always performs in Christmas and Easter dramas as well. Despite continuing health problems related to Down Syndrome and Scoliosis, Penny is always eager, whether at work, church or home, to be the best she can be.

Providing THE FREEDOM TO LIVE

through Blind Services



Debi McKissack came to the REACH Center in Tupelo while employed as a teacher by the DeSoto County School District. She worked with “at risk” students, helping them to overcome scholastic deficiencies. Debi realized she needed blind skills training when she could no longer see the numbers on her flash cards.

She sought help at the REACH Center, where her dedicated efforts enabled her to excel in every area of instruction and also serve as a very effective mentor to other students. Unfortunately, during her training, Debi began to experience transient blindness in one eye.

After going through the normal grieving process, she finished her training at REACH. As a result, Debi obtained a new position with the DeSoto County School District as an art teacher. Director Carol Conyers states, “We, the REACH staff, fondly cherish our time with Debi and know she’ll go on to achieve even greater goals.”

Karen Powell, a former aircraft pilot, noted that she began losing sight in June 2005, was totally blind by April 2007. With the loss of her sight final and her future uncertain, the reaction of people around her to her sudden blindness was an eye opener that created in her the desire to make some changes. Karen sensed her blindness was regarded by employers as a severe liability. It became her mission to help those around her become more aware of the abilities of individuals with blindness or vision impairments. Karen’s message to employers was simple: “Losing one’s eyesight does not alter a person’s capacities or skills. There are ways to ‘see’ without having eyesight.”

That message is reiterated everyday by the dedicated staff of the Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services. With the advancements and help of Assistive Technology (AT), individuals with blindness

or visual impairments are able to perform job tasks at peak capacity. Karen was previously employed in the computer field so her counselor, Bryce Upshaw, thought she could adapt this work experience in her future career. At the Addie McBryde Rehabilitation Center for the Blind, she successfully completed training as an Emergency Dispatcher. With Karen’s determination, she’ll be successful in any job or mission she undertakes, for her motto is, “I will either find a way or make one!”



In
2008, OVRB served 2,066
consumers who received services such as
counseling and guidance in adjustment to disability,
vocational exploration, orientation and mobility training,
job training, and assistive technology.

The total number of successful employment outcomes for
our VRB consumers in 2008 was 593.

Providing THE FREEDOM TO LIVE

through Personal & Vocational Adjustment



Three facilities around the state serve blind individuals and assist them in making personal and vocational adjustments to blindness. The goal of these facilities is to increase and improve independence and self-reliance of those with visual impairments.

ADDIE MCBRYDE REHABILITATION CENTER FOR THE BLIND

The Addie McBryde Rehabilitation Center for the Blind provides traditional intensive evaluation, training, and adjustment services on the campus of the University of Mississippi Medical Center. This training capitalizes on remaining sight with the use of magnifying devices and software as a part of an individual's training. Also, the state's first autonomous Deaf-Blind Program was established in 2001 for high functioning individuals who are both deaf and blind. In 2003, this program was consolidated at the Addie McBryde Center.

In 2008, the Addie McBryde Center provided training to 151 consumers. REACH Center for the Blind provided training to 40 consumers. Both centers experienced an increase in the number of consumers served from 2007.

REACH CENTER FOR THE BLIND

The REACH Center for the Blind in Tupelo began in 2003 under the provision of structured discovery training. This method involves the use of sleep shades (blindfolds) for all students at all times, increasing self reliance and reducing recidivism.

Mississippi is the only state in the nation to use publicly funded rehabilitation centers to provide personal adjustment training to blind consumers under both of these methodologies, traditional and structured discovery.

*P*roviding THE FREEDOM TO LIVE

through Blind Services

INDEPENDENT LIVING SERVICES FOR THE BLIND

Independent Living Services for the Blind enable individuals with blindness to meet their independent living goals. Through these programs, eligible consumers receive adjustment services, peer group counseling, assistive technology evaluation, orientation and mobility training, personal adjustment instruction and training in techniques for daily living. Eligible consumers may receive home, office or community instruction, assistance with transportation, aids and appliances, and therapeutic treatment even though their potential for returning to work may be limited.

In 2008, the
Independent Living Program for
the Blind provided services to 923
consumers.

ITINERANT TEACHER PROGRAM

Itinerant Teachers are specially trained to provide services to consumers who are blind or visually impaired. Working with the area counselor, teachers provide itinerant services in the consumer's home, community or work environment. Teachers work closely with counselors to coordinate services, evaluate client needs, develop living-needs plans and instructional materials, and provide onsite training.

In 2008,
Itinerant Teachers
were provided for 94
consumers.

BUSINESS ENTERPRISE PROGRAM (BEP)

The Business Enterprise Program (BEP) provides full-time self-employment opportunities for about 35 legally blind Mississippians. These BEP entrepreneurs, more commonly known as blind vendors, operate a variety of businesses including vending machine routes, snack bars and cafeterias on military bases. Also a Interstate Highway Rest Area Vending Pavilion on I-55 near Batesville is managed by a BEP vender.

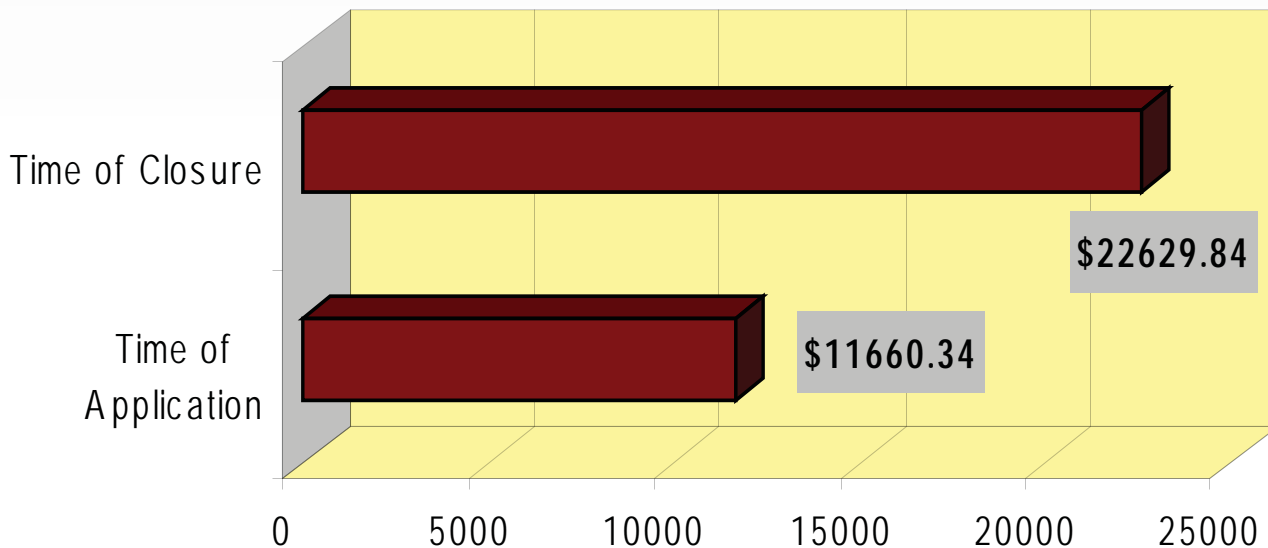
In 2008, three (3)
individuals were provided initial
training, licensed, and placed as
BEP vendors.

Providing THE FREEDOM TO LIVE

Facts At A Glance

Consumers with severe disabilities served	20,115
Consumers who were closed rehabilitated	4,553
Total earning of rehabilitants' first year earning	\$103,033,639
Estimated taxes paid by rehabilitants' first year earning	\$25,758,409
Increase in earnings of rehabilitants after services	\$49,944,130
Percent of increase in total earnings	194%
Mississippi's successful rehabilitant rate	73%

ANNUAL INCOME OF CONSTITUENTS (BEFORE AND AFTER SERVICES)



Providing THE FREEDOM TO LIVE

through Disability Determination

The Office of Disability Determination Services (DDS) is 100% federally funded through the Social Security Administration (SSA) and establishes medical eligibility for Mississippians with disabilities that apply for Supplemental Security Income and/or Social Security Disability Insurance. Applicants file for disability benefits in Social Security field offices throughout the state and these claims are forwarded to our office where criteria set forth by SSA is used in developing the claim and making the disability decision. When a claim reaches DDS, it is assigned to a Disability Examiner. An examiner is responsible for developing the claim and recommending a disability decision, based on SSA criteria. In order to carry out this process, the examiner develops the medical and vocational evidence required to evaluate the extent of the applicant's limitations. Contacts by fax, mail and/or telephone are made with the claimant and treating sources to secure pertinent information. If the available medical information is incomplete, the examiner may request a consultative examination (CE), at no cost to the applicant.

The Mississippi DDS has a Medical Unit staffed with medical and psychological consultants who provide expert medical knowledge about the functional limitations imposed by the impairments present. When all medical and vocational development is complete, the examiner recommends a decision regarding disability. When all case processing actions are completed, cases may be randomly selected for internal quality review within the department (QA) and/or for review by the Office of Quality Performance (OQP), in SSA's Regional Office in Atlanta, Georgia.

The DDS handles the claimant initial application for disability as well as the first level of appeal. We are also responsible for "re-evaluating" individuals currently receiving Disability benefits to assure they continue to meet the definition of disability as defined by the Social Security Administration. The DDS has also assisted with cases currently pending Office of Disability and Adjudication Review, previously referred to as the Administrative Law Judge, to expedite decisions pending at this level of appeal.

Mississippi DDS continues to demonstrate national and regional leadership in its efforts to meet regional and national goals. In 2008, Mississippi DDS exceeded many goals in measurable performance elements and, in several of the categories, including processing times, cost effectiveness, quality, presumptive disability rate and electronic transfer of records, the Mississippi DDS was in the top achievers nationally. The leadership and dedication of the Mississippi DDS is reflected in our willingness to participate in new endeavors, and work with other organizations in a cooperative spirit. The Mississippi DDS has faced adversities and challenges in hiring and recruitment, but has never wavered in our commitment to serve the public. The Mississippi DDS is the best in the nation and exemplifies our dedication to public service.

The
Mississippi
DDS continues to
be one of the best in the
nation, processing over 75,000
claims this year, which result
in more that \$149 million in
federal payments made to
Mississippians per
month.

Providing THE FREEDOM TO LIVE

through Disability Determination



ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Highest productivity in the region, with Production Per Worker Year (PPWY) 37 points above the national average and 30 points above the regional average
- Performance accuracy of 96.2%, above regional and national averages
- Overall processing time more than 6 days below the regional average, and 8 days below the national average
- Both overall cost per case and medical cost per case are the lowest in the region and one of the lowest in the nation. The lowest cost-per-case in the Region (\$78 below the Regional average)
- A Presumptive Disability rate four times the national average and twice the regional average--this reflects a commitment to expediting payments to the most needy citizens
- Continued outstanding partnerships with the Area Director Office, Social Security Office, and Disability Adjudicative Review offices in Mississippi, assuring the smooth flow of cases in the new electronic process
- Continued national leadership in the Electronic Records Express (ERE) project, with percentage of electronic records more than 11 points higher than the national average
- Assisted other states in the Region in the medical review of disability claims



DDS
staff members
are always helpful
when discussing issues with
claimants filing for Social
Security benefits. In 2008,
DDS staff processed
76,245.

Providing THE FREEDOM TO LIVE

through Independent Living Services

Penny Buckley, a 36-year old female from Harrisville, felt helpless as she lost control of her truck, hydroplaning across the road. Suddenly, she was violently hurled across the back seat and through the rear windshield, landing in a creek filled with water. Trapped beneath her truck, she found that she was paralyzed and unable to get out of the raging creek. Fortunately, a local minister heard the crash and came to her rescue, holding



her head above the water until the paramedics arrived.

Today, thanks to the efforts of the Office of Special Disability Programs,

Penny is able to live as independently as possible at home. The Traumatic Brain Injury/Spinal Cord Injury Medicaid Waiver provides funding for personal care attendants to assist her 7 days a week, plus supplies, such as catheters, diapers and other necessary hygiene items. Her OSDP Counselor ensures Penny's needs are met.

Ms. Buckley is thankful to be alive and excited to be home with her son and daughter. She states, "The worst is over, and I do plan on walking again one day, even though the doctors say I won't be able to." As she looked at her daughter, now 9, she joyfully said, "I had to come home; I'm all my kids have!"



Jeremy Wilson is a 16 year old with Blount's disease. Blount's disease is a growth disorder that causes the lower legs to angle inward. The cause is unknown but the disease is progressive and the condition worsens.

Jeremy was referred to our agency from a social worker whose main focus was acquiring home modifications.

During the initial visit with

Jeremy, which was conducted by Shella M. Head, District Manager and Betty Coleman, Office of Special Disability Programs Counselor, they found that he needed much more.

Jeremy was in the 8th grade, but was unable to attend school at the time due to his disability. He was obese and had outgrown his wheelchair; therefore, he was unable to ambulate. Jeremy was bed bound and unable to leave the living room. Due to narrow doors in his home, he couldn't enter into his bedroom or bathroom. After the first visit, Ms. Head and Ms. Coleman were determined to do whatever was needed to make a difference for Jeremy and his family. First, they were able to coordinate services to provide Jeremy with a custom wheelchair. Ms. Head and Ms. Coleman also worked with the AT specialist and contractor to provide Jeremy with access to his entire home environment. This included a roll in shower, widened doors, grab bars, and other modifications. On the day his home modifications were completed, the contractor called Ms. Head to let her know how happy he was to be involved in Jeremy's case.

Finally, Ms. Head and Ms. Coleman met with the Operations Manager and the Director of Special Services where Jeremy attended school. They explained that Jeremy had a great desire to return to school but

modifications would have to be made to accommodate his

needs. The school district staff immediately modified the school and Jeremy was able to return. Today, Jeremy is a 9th grade honor student at Greenville-Weston High School. Jeremy's mother said that his overall attitude has improved, and he is a very happy person. His overall quality of life has improved as a result of MDRS services provided.

During 2008, the Office of Special Disability Programs provided independent living services for 3,296 individuals with significant (severe) disabilities.

Providing THE FREEDOM TO LIVE

through Home and Community Services

STATE ATTENDANT CARE PROGRAM

In 1985, the Mississippi Legislature created the State Attendant Care Fund. This program provides personal care services to individuals with Significant (Severe) Disabilities. The provision of a personal care attendant allows an individual to function as independently as they can in the home or community. Often times, individuals are able to continue in competitive employment.

INDEPENDENT LIVING WAIVER

Through a cooperative agreement with the Mississippi Division of Medicaid, MDRS administers this home and community based program which allows us to provide an array of services to eligible individuals. Eligible individuals are those with severe orthopedic and/or severe neurological impairments that render them dependent upon others, assistive devices, other types of assistance or a combination of these to accomplish the activities of daily living. In addition, these individuals must

**In 2008,
a total of 1,677 individuals
received services through the Independent
Living Waiver.**

be medically stable and able to communicate effectively with caregivers, personal care attendants, case managers, and other involved in their care. Without this service, these individuals would be at risk of nursing home placement.

TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY AND SPINAL CORD INJURY WAIVER

Through a cooperative agreement with the Mississippi Division of Medicaid, MDRS administers this home and community based program which allows us to provide attendant care, respite care, limited home modifications, medical equipment and supplies, and transition assistance services to individuals determined eligible. Eligible individuals are those with traumatic brain injury and/or traumatic spinal cord injury who are certified as medically stable by their primary care physician. Without this service, these individuals would be at risk of nursing home placement.

**In 2008, a
total of 545 individuals
received services through the
TBI/SCI Waiver.**

TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY AND SPINAL CORD INJURY TRUST FUND PROGRAM

In 1996, the Mississippi Legislature established the TBI/SCI Trust Fund. These funds are 100% special funds generated by surcharges on moving traffic violations and violations of the Implied Consent Law. The goal of this program is to enable individuals who are severely disabled by a traumatic brain injury or traumatic spinal cord injury to resume the activities of daily living and re-integrate into the community with as much dignity and independence as possible.

**In 2008,
a total of 128 individuals
received services utilizing funding through
the TBI/SCI Trust Fund.**

Providing THE FREEDOM TO LIVE

Selected Social Security Services

TICKET TO WORK PROGRAM

Ticket to Work Program increases choices in obtaining rehabilitation and vocational services for beneficiaries receiving social security disability benefits and removes barriers that required people with disabilities to choose between health care coverage and work. The Social Security Administration (SSA) issues tickets to beneficiaries with disabilities. These tickets may be used to obtain vocational rehabilitation services, employment, or other support services from a SSA approved provider of their choice.

Almost
178,000 tickets have
been issued in Mississippi. As
of 2008, 2,232 clients receiving
vocational rehabilitation services
have assigned their Tickets
to MDRS.

MISSISSIPPI PARTNERS FOR INFORMED CHOICE

In November 2000, MDRS was awarded a five-year cooperative agreement for the Mississippi Partners for Informed Choice/Benefits Planning, Assistance and Outreach (MPIC/BPAO) program from SSA as a result of the Ticket to Work and WIA. In 2006, SSA changed BPAO to Work Incentive Planning and Assistance and M-PIC received the WIPA grant. The goal of the M-PIC program is to better enable individuals with disabilities to make informed choices about work and their benefits. The M-PIC Project is recognized as one of the best in the nation.

From
M-PICs inception in
2001 through 2008, a total of 6,344
beneficiaries have been served. There are four
(4) CWICs housed in the following WIN Job
Centers: Pearl, Tupelo, Gulfport and
Oxford.

Through outreach activities and referrals, MDRS Community Work Incentives Coordinators (CWICs) provide direct planning and assistance support to SSA beneficiaries. They also provide accurate information to qualifying individuals to help them understand the impact of earnings on SSA benefits.

The CWICs advise SSAs beneficiaries with disabilities on how and when to best utilize their Tickets. Outreach efforts are conducted by CWICs to connect with beneficiaries and their families who are potentially eligible to participate in federal or

state work incentives programs. CWICs also help identify SSA employment supports that will aid SSAs beneficiaries with disabilities in entering or re-entering the workforce. All of these services are accomplished through work in cooperation with federal, state, and private agencies and nonprofit organizations that serve beneficiaries with disabilities.

MISSISSIPPI MODEL YOUTH TRANSITION INNOVATION PROJECT

In September 2003, MDRS was awarded a five-year, \$500,000 per year, youth demonstration cooperative agreement by the Social Security Administration. Along with MDRS, mandated partners in the Mississippi Model Youth Transition Innovation Project (MYTI) include the Department of Education, the Division of Medicaid, and the Department of Labor. The students are being served through interventions such as customized employment while using discovery, vocational profiles, student budgets, employment plans, and benefits planning in assisting with the transition process. The project will address the elimination of the barriers that affect transition at the local, state, and federal levels through the use of these interventions and collaboration with other entities. The project further addresses new and innovative interventions such as student budgets and Individual Development Accounts.

With the
end of the MYTI
program, 210 students were
enrolled in the program, and
118 unique work experience
opportunities were provided
for the students.

The goals of MYTI are to reduce dependency on Social Security Disability Income (SSDI) and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits, to accrue savings to the Social Security Trust Fund using interventions, to increase employment experiences and outcomes for students, and to identify different uses of public resources to achieve positive outcomes for students with disabilities.

Providing THE FREEDOM TO LIVE

Assistive Technology



PROJECT START STATISTICS

Device Exchange--3

Savings to Consumers \$1,510

Device Recycling/Refurbishment/
Repair Activities--224

Savings to Consumers- \$155,954

Device Loans--234

Device Demonstrations--927

Number of Referrals for Assistive
Technology Services-- 647

Trainings Around the State--54

Technical Assistance--2

Rapid changes in technology are constantly expanding opportunities for those with disabilities to participate in their communities and in the work place. MDRS has assumed the lead in assuring that Mississippi citizens with disabilities have the maximum access to this technology. The Assistive Technology Division of MDRS includes an Assistive Technology Coordinator, Administrative Assistants, Rehabilitation Technology Specialists, and Rehabilitation Technologists, enabling the agency to provide evaluations and assessments for customers of MDRS throughout the state. Types of services are based on the individual's needs. Such services may include: agriculture accommodations; augmentative/alternative communication; auditory accommodation; adaptive computer access; home modifications; environmental control; job site accommodations; vision aids; seating and mobility; adaptive driving; and vehicle modifications.

PROJECT START

Project START (Success Through Assistive/ Rehabilitative Technology) is a federally funded grant program created to increase the awareness of, and access to, assistive technology for individuals with disabilities. The project focuses on providing training, information, and technical assistance in all parts of the state. Together with its sub grantees, the project conducted training sessions, provided technical assistance, and served over 9,000 consumers and service providers. The project will continue to work with underserved and minority populations to assure that assistive technology information and services are available to individuals with disabilities at their home, school, and in the workplace.

Through
the increasing
equipment loan program,
Project START loaned over 200
pieces of equipment to individuals
with disabilities, schools, and
organizations for people with
disabilities.

In
State Fiscal
Year 2008, Project
START sub grants
provided over one thousand
assistive technology
evaluations.

Providing THE FREEDOM TO LIVE

Field Office Locations

In order to provide the best service to clients of MDRS, the state has been divided into ten (10) districts. District managers report to the regional manager over their area. Each district includes general counselors and assistants, as well as specialized staff for blind and deaf counseling services, independent living, supported employment services, and transition services. Service information can be obtained through any of these offices or by calling toll-free 1-800-443-1000.

District I

1111 West Jackson Avenue
Oxford, MS 38655
OVR: (662) 234-2723
OVRB: (662) 234-6092
OSDP: (662) 234-6086

District II

2620 Traceland Drive
Tupelo, MS 38803
OVR: (662) 842-1010
OSDP: (662) 287-6964

615-A Pegram Drive
Tupelo, MS 38801
OVRB: (662) 844-5830

District III

201 Highway 7 South
Greenwood, MS 38930
OVR: (662) 453-1542
OVRB: (662) 455-1432
OSDP: (662) 455-2706

District IV

207 Industrial Park Road
Starkville, MS 39760
OVR: (662) 323-9594
OVRB: (662) 328-8807
OSDP: (662) 324-9646

District V

3895 Beasley Road
Jackson, MS 39213
OVR: (601) 898-7004
OVRB: (601) 898-7042
OSDP: (601) 898-7028

District VI

1032 Center Pointe Boulevard,
Suite A
Pearl, MS 39208
OVR: (601) 709-5601
OVRB: (601) 709-5625
OSDP: (601) 709-5651

District VII

1003 College Drive
Meridian, MS 39304
OVR: (601) 483-3881
OVRB: (601) 483-5391
OSDP: (601) 483-5394

District VIII

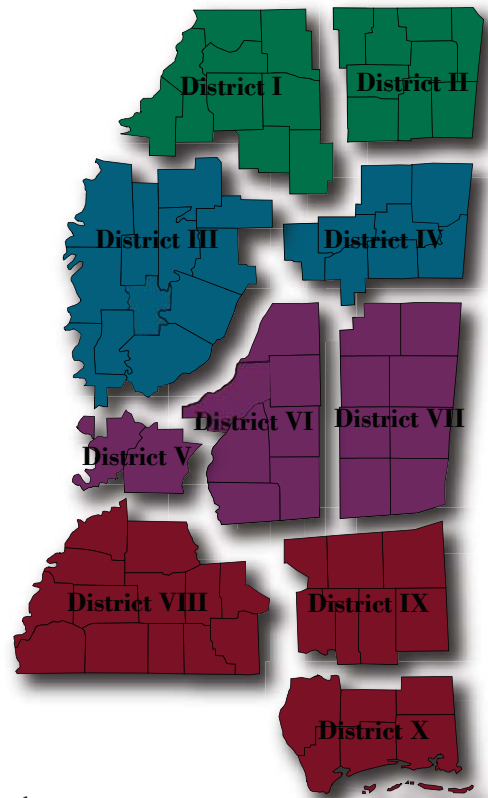
1400-A Harrison Drive
McComb, MS 39649
OVR: (601) 684-1265
OVRB: (601) 442-7322
OSDP: (601) 249-4646

District IX

#18 John Merle Tatum
Industrial Drive
Hattiesburg, MS 39401
OVR: (601) 545-5619
OVRB: (601) 545-5613
OSDP: (601) 544-4860

District X

13486 Fastway Lane, Suite D
Gulfport, MS 39503
OVR: (228) 575-3789
OVRB: (228) 575-3788
OSDP: (228) 575-3785



MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF REHABILITATION SERVICES

STATE OFFICE BUILDING

1281 HIGHWAY 51 NORTH
MADISON, MISSISSIPPI 39110

POST OFFICE BOX 1698
JACKSON, MISSISSIPPI 39215-1698

1.800.443.1000

WWW.MDRS.STATE.MS.US



**Mississippi Department of
Rehabilitation Services**

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