

## DEPARTMENT OF ASSISTIVE AND REHABILITATIVE SERVICES

### MISSION

The mission of the Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services (DARS) is to work in partnership with Texans with disabilities and families with children who have developmental delays to improve the quality of their lives and to enable their full participation in society.

### SCOPE

DARS administers programs that ensure Texas is a state where people with disabilities and children with developmental delays enjoy the same opportunities as other Texans to live independent and productive lives. The Department has four program areas: Rehabilitation Services, Blind Services, Early Childhood Intervention Services and Disability Determination Services. Through these program areas, DARS provides services that help Texans with disabilities find jobs through vocational rehabilitation, ensures that Texans with disabilities live independently in their communities and helps children with disabilities and developmental delays reach their full potential.

Approximately 3,130 DARS employees, in offices throughout the state, work to improve the quality of the lives of Texans with disabilities.<sup>178</sup>

### CORE BUSINESS FUNCTIONS

DARS provides services to consumers through the following program areas:

- ◆ Division for Rehabilitation Services (DRS) provides services in the following program areas:
  - Vocational Rehabilitation. Program staff assist Texans with disabilities prepare for, find and maintain suitable employment.
  - Office for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services. Program staff work in partnership with people who are deaf or hard of hearing to eliminate barriers and improve communication access for people who are deaf or hard of hearing.

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<sup>178</sup> HHSAS Database, as of 8/31/11.

- Independent Living Services and Independent Living Centers. Program staff promote self-sufficiency despite significant disability by providing people with improved mobility, communication, personal adjustment and self-direction skills.
- Comprehensive Rehabilitation Services. Program staff assist persons with traumatic spinal cord and traumatic brain injuries by sponsoring intensive therapies to increase independence.
- ◆ Disability Determination Services (DDS) employees make disability determinations for Texans with severe disabilities who apply for Social Security Disability Insurance and/or Supplemental Security Income. Staff examine and review medical evidence provided by claimants or their medical providers and make the determination on whether or not a claimant is disabled under the law.
- ◆ Division for Blind Services (DBS) provides services through the following programs:
  - Vocational Rehabilitation. Program staff assist adult consumers whose visual disabilities (visual impairments or total blindness) may limit their ability to work in their current jobs or secure new jobs.
  - Business Enterprises of Texas. Program staff manage the program developed under federal law to provide food management opportunities for Texans who are blind or visually impaired.
  - Independent Living. Program staff assist adult consumers who are blind or visually impaired to learn adaptive skills to enable them to continue to live independently and confidently with vision loss.
  - Criss Cole Rehabilitation Center. Program staff provide a residential based intensive training in basic blindness skills for adult Texans who are blind or visually impaired due to a medical condition or accident which may progress to total blindness.
  - Blind Children's Vocational Discovery and Development. Program staff assist children who are blind or visually impaired to develop their individual potential.
  - Blindness Education, Screening and Treatment. Program staff assist in the prevention of blindness through education, screening and treatment.
- ◆ Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) Services employees coordinate a statewide system of early childhood intervention services for families of infants and toddlers, birth to age three, with disabilities or developmental delays. Services are provided through community centers, school districts, education service centers and private non-profit organizations.
- ◆ The DARS Autism Program champions excellence in the delivery of services for families of children with autism. Services are provided through grant contracts with local community agencies and organizations that provide applied behavioral analysis (ABA) and other positive behavior support strategies.

## WORKFORCE DEMOGRAPHICS

DARS is the smallest agency in the HHS System. The agency currently employs approximately 3,130 full and part-time employees, with the majority of DARS employees (about 83 percent) assigned to offices throughout Texas.<sup>179</sup> The remaining 17 percent are assigned to Central Office in Austin.<sup>180</sup> To better understand the agency's unique workforce, the following demographic categories are examined:

### Job Families

About 89 percent of DARS employees (2,776 employees) work in 10 job families, with the largest number of employees in Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor positions (675 employees or 22 percent).<sup>181</sup>

**Table 20: Largest Program Job Families and Average Salaries**

Job Family	Number of Employees	Average Salary
Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors	675	\$48,108
Claims Examiners	542	\$47,215
Rehabilitation Services Technicians	345	\$35,329
Clerical Workers	331	\$36,720
Program Specialists	324	\$62,388
Human Services Specialists	179	\$38,812
Managers	152	\$73,991
Administrative Support Workers	86	\$48,104
Rehabilitation Teachers	82	\$36,829
System Analysts	60	\$63,640

### Salary

DARS employees earn an average annual salary of \$48,396.<sup>182</sup>

### Gender

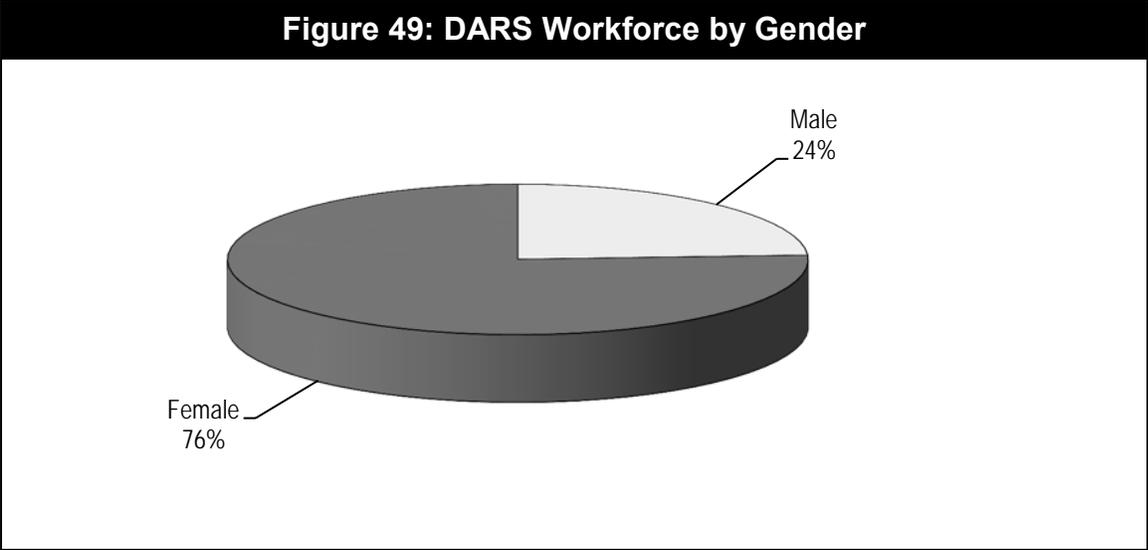
DARS employees are primarily female, representing approximately 76 percent of the agency workforce (2,395 employees).<sup>183</sup>

<sup>179</sup> HHSAS Database, as of 8/31/11.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

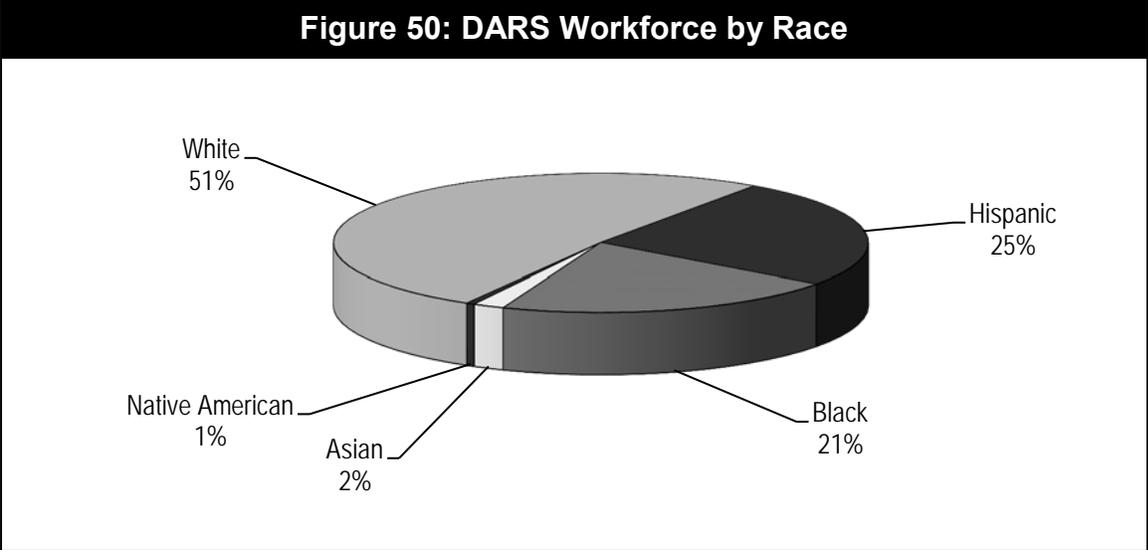
<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid.



**Race**

Approximately 1,611 or 51 percent of DARS employees are White, followed by Hispanic employees at 25 percent or 795 employees and Black employees at 21 percent or 651 employees.<sup>184</sup>

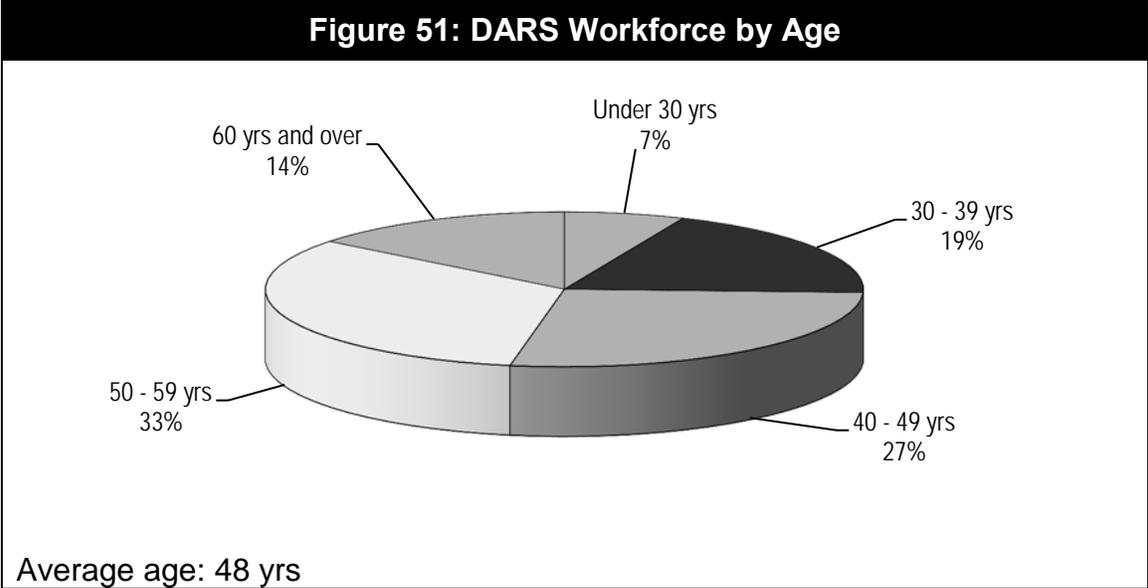


<sup>183</sup> HHSAS Database, as of 8/31/11.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid.

**Age**

Approximately 74 percent of DARS employees are age 40 or older, with the average age being 48 years.<sup>185</sup>



**Utilization Analysis**

Texas law requires that each state agency analyze its workforce and compare the number of Blacks, Hispanics and Females employed by the agency to the available state Civilian Labor Force (CLF) for each job category.

The utilization analysis indicated no underutilization within the DARS workforce.<sup>186 187</sup>

<sup>185</sup> HHSAS Database, as of 8/31/11.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid.

<sup>187</sup> CLF data – EEOC publications, "Job Patterns for Minorities and Women in State and Local Government, 2003" for Texas and "Job Patterns for Minorities and Women in Private Industry, 2003" for Texas. Modified 06/08/2005.

**Table 21: DARS Utilization Analysis Results**

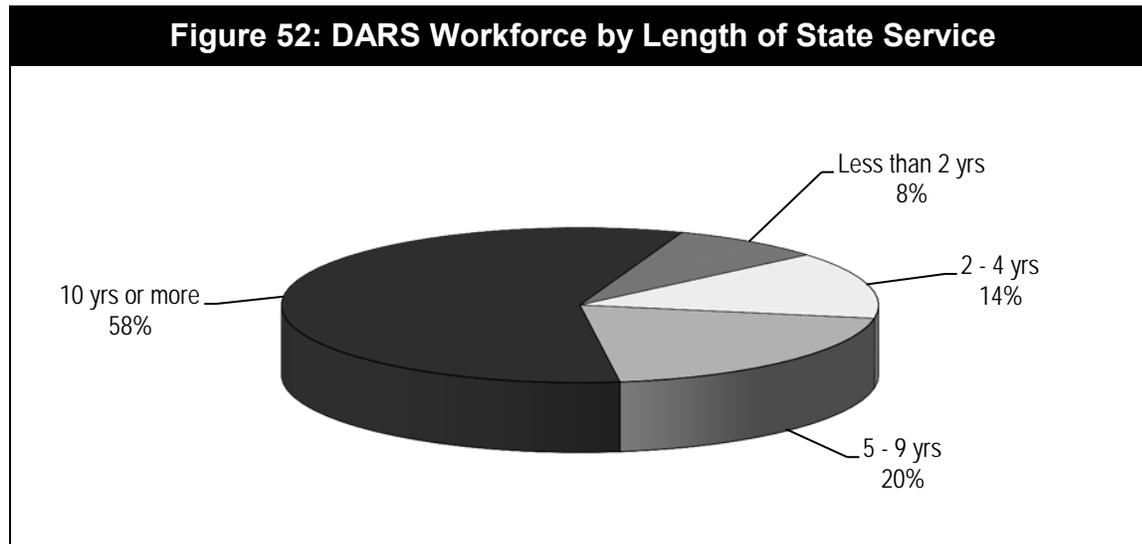
Job Category	Black			Hispanic			Female		
	DARS %	CLF %	Underutilization (If Yes, # needed)	DARS %	CLF %	Underutilization (If Yes, # Needed)	DARS %	CLF %	Underutilization (If Yes, # Needed)
Officials/ Administrators	15.5%	7.2%	No	18.1%	12.3%	No	50.3%	32.6%	No
Professionals	20.2%	9.4%	No	23.5%	11.6%	No	75.7%	49.0%	No
Technicians	4.8%	13.9%	N/A	23.8%	19.7%	N/A	52.4%	42.1%	N/A
Protective Service	0.0%	18.0%	N/A	0.0%	23.1%	N/A	0.0%	21.6%	N/A
Para-Professionals	28.2%	14.3%	No	32.1%	25.7%	No	93.1%	56.3%	No
Administrative Support	24.4%	19.4%	No	39.2%	26.8%	No	91.5%	78.8%	No
Skilled Craft	0.0%	14.7%	N/A	80.0%	35.2%	N/A	20.0%	16.5%	N/A
Service Maintenance	72.7%	20.4%	N/A	0.0%	43.7%	N/A	54.5%	44.4%	N/A

Note: "N/A" indicates that the number of employees in this category is too small (less than thirty) to test any differences for statistical significance.

### State Service

DARS has a stable, long tenured workforce, with about 92 percent of the workforce having more than two years of state service, and almost 60 percent having at least 10 years of state service.<sup>188</sup>

**Figure 52: DARS Workforce by Length of State Service**

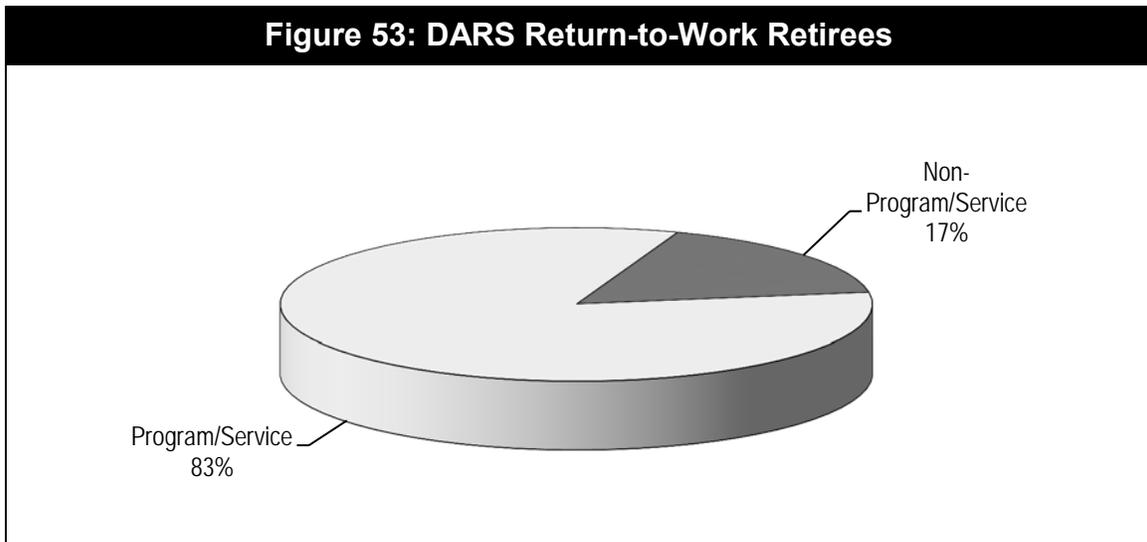


### Return-to-Work Retirees

DARS employs 149 return-to-work retirees, representing about five percent of its total workforce. The majority of these retirees (83 percent) work in program/service related areas.<sup>189</sup>

<sup>188</sup> HHSAS Database, as of 8/31/11.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid.



## TURNOVER

The DARS turnover rate during fiscal year 2011 was 9.9 percent, the lowest of all HHS agencies. This rate is significantly lower than the statewide turnover rate of 16.8 percent. The majority of these separations (approximately 86 percent) were voluntary separations from state employment.<sup>190</sup> This low turnover rate contributes to having a highly-tenured, well trained workforce.<sup>191</sup>

**Table 22: Reason for Separation**

Reason	Separations	Percentage <sup>192</sup>
<b>Voluntary Separations</b>		
Personal reasons	135	41.9%
Transfer to another agency	25	7.8%
Retirement	116	36.0%
<b>Involuntary Separations</b>		
Termination at Will	2	0.6%
Resignation in Lieu	7	2.2%
Dismissal for Cause	34	10.6%

<sup>190</sup> State Auditor's Office (SAO) FY 2011 Turnover Statistics.

<sup>191</sup> HHSAS Database, FY 2011 data.

<sup>192</sup> Death accounted for 0.9% of separations.

Table 23 indicates the job families essential to the delivery of agency services and/or shortage occupations that have experienced significant employee losses during fiscal year 2011.<sup>193</sup>

<b>Table 23: FY 11 Turnover for Significant Job Families<sup>194</sup></b>			
Job Family	Average Annual Headcount	Separations	Turnover Rate
Human Services Technicians	38	9	23.5%
Program Supervisors	17	4	23.2%
Accountants	40	7	17.7%
Directors	41	7	17.2%
Rehabilitation Teachers	84	14	16.8%
System Analysts	65	9	13.9%
Rehabilitation Services Technicians	360	44	12.2%
Vocational Counselors	688	70	10.2%
Claims Examiners	576	55	9.6%

## RETIREMENT PROJECTIONS

Currently, about 17 percent of the DARS workforce is eligible to retire from state employment. Over the next five years, approximately a third of the DARS workforce will reach retirement eligibility.<sup>195</sup> These eligibility levels are the highest of all HHS agencies.

<b>Table 24: DARS Projected Retirement Eligibility through Rule of 80 (FY 11 – FY 16)</b>		
Fiscal Year	Cumulative Number of Eligible Employees	Percent of Workforce
2011	522	16.7%
2012	618	19.7%
2013	729	23.3%
2014	849	27.1%
2015	948	30.2%
2016	1,075	34.3%

<sup>193</sup> HHSAS Database, FY 2011 data.

<sup>194</sup> Turnover is calculated as follows: The total number of employees who terminated during the period DIVIDED BY the average number of employees on the last day of each quarter in the period plus the employees that terminated during the quarter TIMES 100 to produce a percentage.

<sup>195</sup> HHSAS Database, as of 8/31/11.

## EXPECTED WORKFORCE CHALLENGES

With over 25 million residents, Texas is one of the faster growing states in the nation. In a one year period, April 1, 2010 to July 1, 2011, the population of Texas increased by about half a million, the largest population increase in the country.<sup>196</sup> By 2020, the Texas population is expected to reach 30 million residents.<sup>197</sup>

This population growth is expected to directly increase the number of consumers receiving DARS services. Projected trends that support this increase include the following:

- ◆ The number of children born with severe visual impairments and blindness is growing.<sup>198</sup> With advances in modern technology, medicine and science, more children with multiple disabilities are surviving. These children have complex physical, mental health, mobility and societal needs and require a variety of service delivery options.
- ◆ The number of blind and visually impaired children who receive special education services through the agency's Blind Children's Vocational Discovery and Development Program is increasing. Blind and visually impaired students increased by 487 from fiscal year 2009 to 2011.<sup>199</sup>

More individuals who are blind or visually impaired are applying for services through the agency's Vocational Rehabilitation, Independent Living and Blind Children's programs. As a result, caseload sizes continue to increase. The ability to hire and retain a sufficient number of qualified, direct service delivery staff is essential to meet the needs of this population. Without adequate staff, the Division for Blind Services (DBS) will no longer be able to provide timely and effective services for persons who are blind or visually impaired. Within the next five years, more than a third of DBS employees will be eligible for retirement.<sup>200</sup> DBS anticipates being challenged with having to replace experienced staff with less experienced employees.

Another major challenge to the agency is the continuing recruitment difficulties experienced by the Division for Disability Services (DDS). For fiscal year 2012, the Social Security Administration (SSA) anticipates operating under an ongoing Continuing Resolution and/or limited funding for the Disability program, either of which will include a mandatory hiring freeze. As a result:

- the Texas Division for Disability Services (DDS) cannot fill or hire for any position(s) that is posted as an external hire;

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<sup>196</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, December 21, 2011, web page. <http://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/population/cb11-215.html>, last accessed on 3/29/12.

<sup>197</sup> Office of the State Demographer, Texas State Data Center.

<sup>198</sup> Brigitte Volmer, et al., "Predictors of Long-term Outcome in Very Preterm Infants: Gestational Age Versus Neonatal Cranium Ultrasound," *Pediatrics*, November 2003.

<sup>199</sup> DARS Annual Reports for Fiscal Years 2009 and 2011.

<sup>200</sup> HHSAS Database, as of 8/31/11.

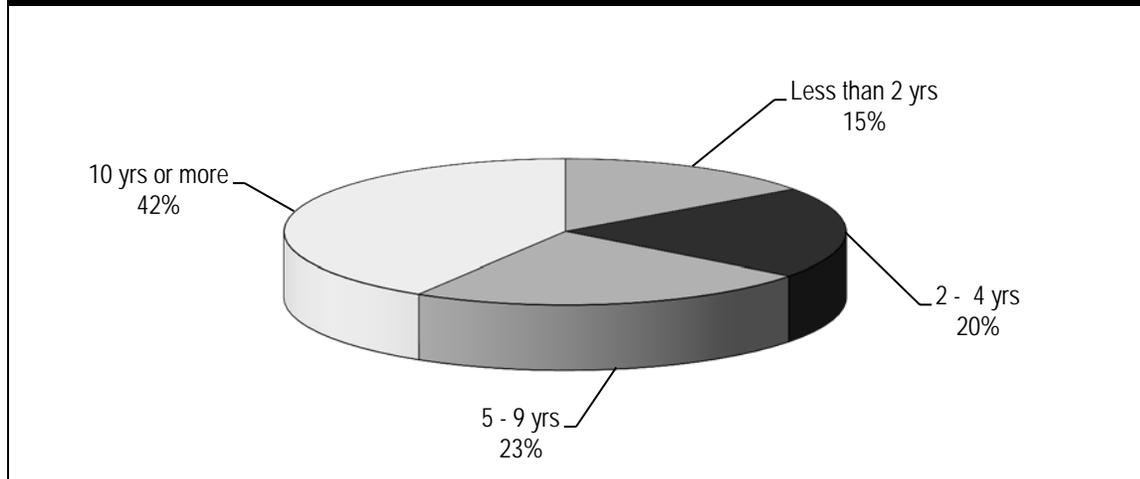
- the attrition at the Texas DDS of Disability Specialist (DS) positions continues to increase, which will eventually lead to backlogged caseloads; and
- the inability to hire critical positions could negatively impact service delivery.

To meet the needs of this expanding population of consumers and to compensate for the potential loss of over a third of the agency's highly skilled and tenured workforce, the agency will need to aggressively recruit and retain its highly skilled direct-delivery Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors, Claims Examiners, Independent Living Workers, Blind Children's Specialists and Rehabilitation Teachers.

### Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors

As of May 2010, there were 129,800 rehabilitation counselors in the U.S. By 2020, this workforce group is expected to increase by 28 percent.<sup>201</sup> Within DARS, 675 Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors are employed in the Division for Rehabilitative Services (DRS) and the Division for Blind Services (DBS).<sup>202</sup> These counselors have an average of 10 years state employment and an average age of approximately 45 years.<sup>203</sup>

**Figure 54: Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors at DARS – Length of State Service**

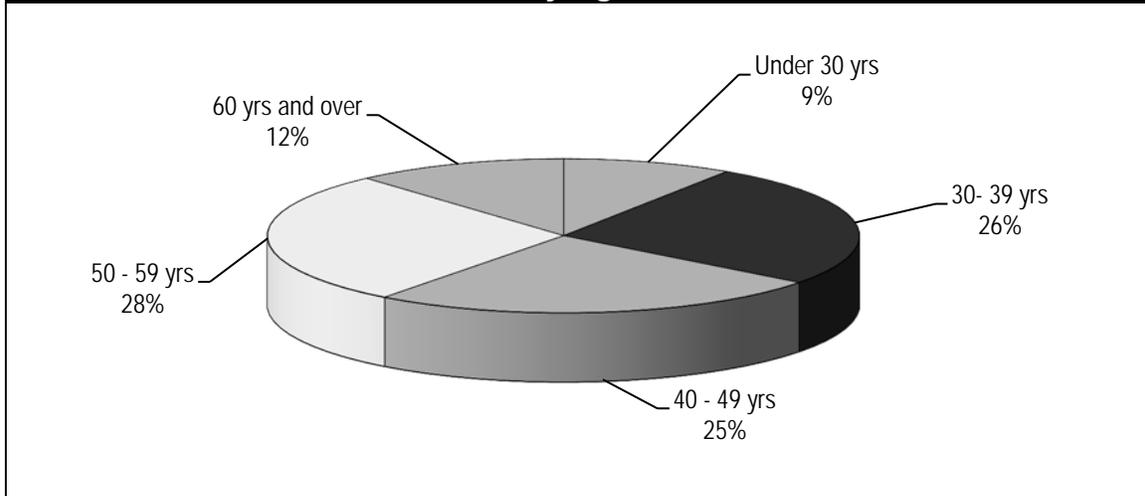


<sup>201</sup> U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Selected Occupational Projections Data, web page <http://data.bls.gov/oep/noeted/empoptd.jsp>, Period: May 2010; last accessed on 3/30/12.

<sup>202</sup> HHSAS Database, as of 8/31/11.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

**Figure 55: Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors at DARS – Distribution by Age**



DARS Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors earn an average annual salary of \$48,108.<sup>204</sup> The State Auditor’s Office 2010 market index analysis found the average state salary for Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors ranged from three to 10 percent behind the market rate.<sup>205</sup>

This highly skilled and tenured group of employees is also nearing retirement age, with 22 percent of current counselors eligible to retire in the next five years.<sup>206</sup> To maintain current service levels to the expanding population of consumers, DARS must provide incentives to retain current counselors, provide succession planning opportunities to develop existing staff and aggressively recruit new counselors.

The educational and certification requirements for the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor positions (a federally mandated Comprehensive System of Personnel Development [CSPD] program) have made recruitment difficult and challenging. Entry-level counselors must have a college degree and meet eligibility requirements for Certified Rehabilitation Counselors (CRC) within seven years and nine months of hire. Counselors must also satisfy extensive training requirements after their hire, making the retention of these highly skilled employees both critical and costly to the agency.

Due to the comprehensive and specialized training program, as well as the ongoing training that newly hired counselors must take, retention of these employees is crucial. Currently, agency counselors are separating from employment at an annual

<sup>204</sup> HHSAS Database, as of 8/31/11.

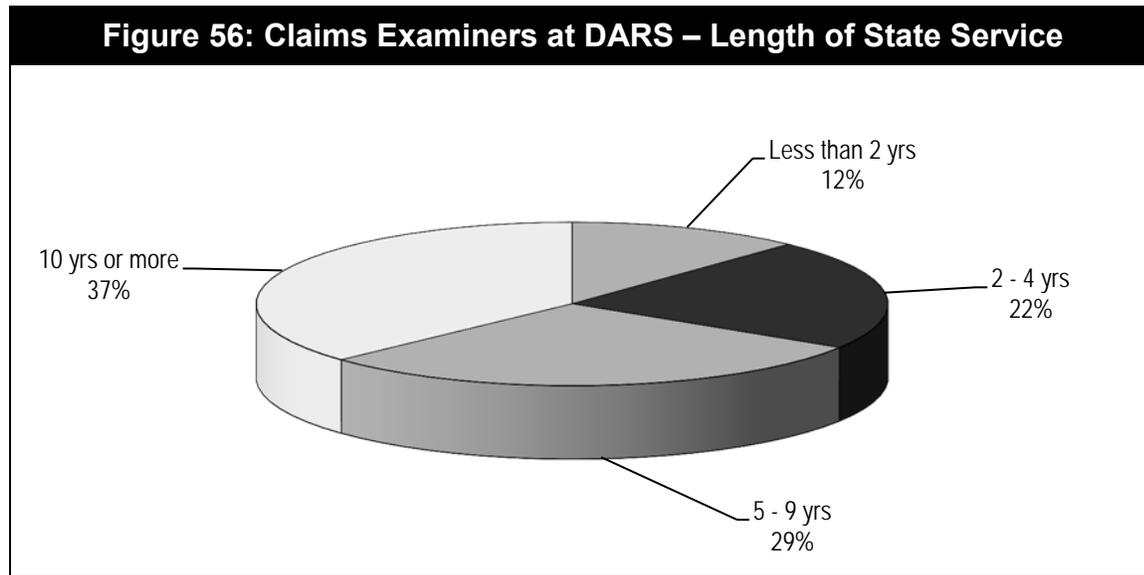
<sup>205</sup> State Auditor’s Office, “A Biennial Report on the State’s Position Classification Plan,” August 2010, Report No. 10-708, web page <http://www.sao.state.tx.us/reports/main/10-708.pdf>, last accessed 4/2/12.

<sup>206</sup> HHSAS Database, as of 8/31/11.

rate of 10.2 percent.<sup>207</sup> Though low, this loss rate should be closely monitored to identify any trends that may develop.

### Claims Examiners

Within DARS, 542 Claims Examiners are employed in the Division for Disability Determination Services (DDS).<sup>208</sup> DARS Claims Examiners have, on average, about 10 of state service, with an average age of about 42 years.<sup>209</sup> About 20 percent of current examiners will be eligible to retire by the year 2016.<sup>210</sup>

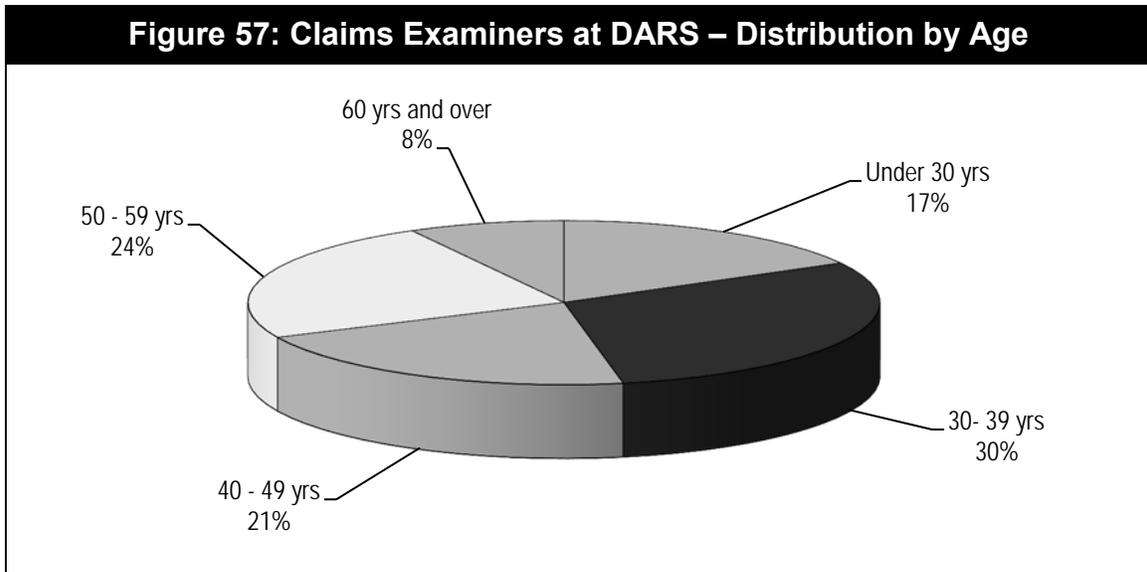


<sup>207</sup> HHSAS Database, FY 2011 data.

<sup>208</sup> HHSAS Database, as of 8/31/11.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid.



Entry-level Claims Examiners must have a Bachelors degree and complete a two year training program before they can begin to perform their job duties. It typically takes a minimum of two years for DARS examiners to be fully competent in their work.

Though Claims Examiners are separating from employment at an annual rate of only 10 percent, the vacancies that have occurred tend to remain open for months.<sup>211</sup> In addition, about 20 percent of these employees will be eligible to retire in the next five years.

These employees are currently earning an average annual salary of \$47,215.<sup>212</sup> The State Auditor's Office 2010 market index analysis found the average state salary for Claims Examiners ranged from three to 18 percent behind the market rate.<sup>213</sup>

Due to the current external hiring freeze and cost of this extensive training that newly hired examiners must take to become fully competent in their job, continuous monitoring of retention of these employees will remain a priority for agency management.

DDS is currently addressing strategies which include reassignment of various positions within DDS to Claims Examiner positions, modifying unit sizes, and utilization of contract workforce.

<sup>211</sup> HHSAS Database, FY 2011 data.

<sup>212</sup> HHSAS Database, as of 8/31/11.

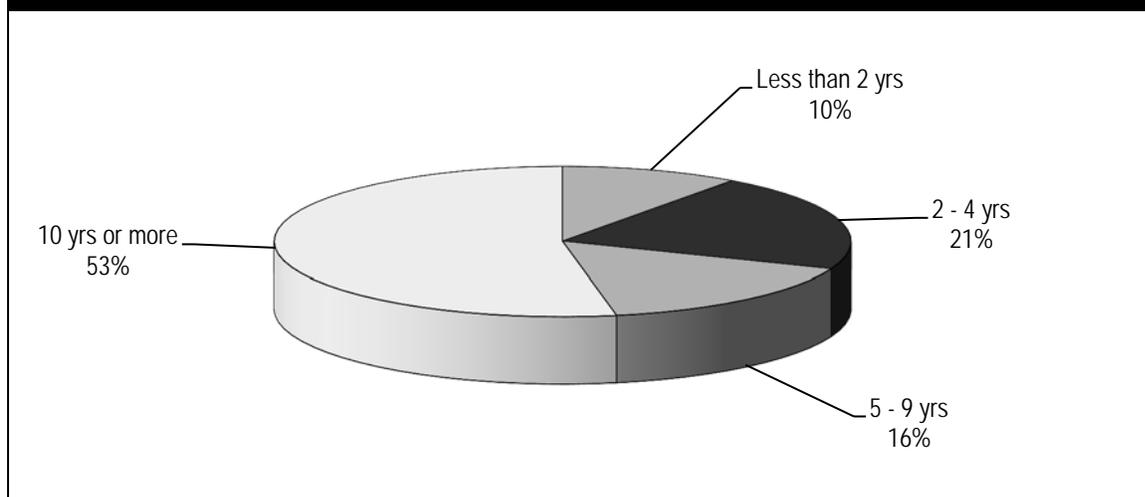
<sup>213</sup> State Auditor's Office, "A Biennial Report on the State's Position Classification Plan," August 2010, Report No. 10-708, web page <http://www.sao.state.tx.us/reports/main/10-708.pdf>, last accessed 4/2/12.

### Independent Living Workers

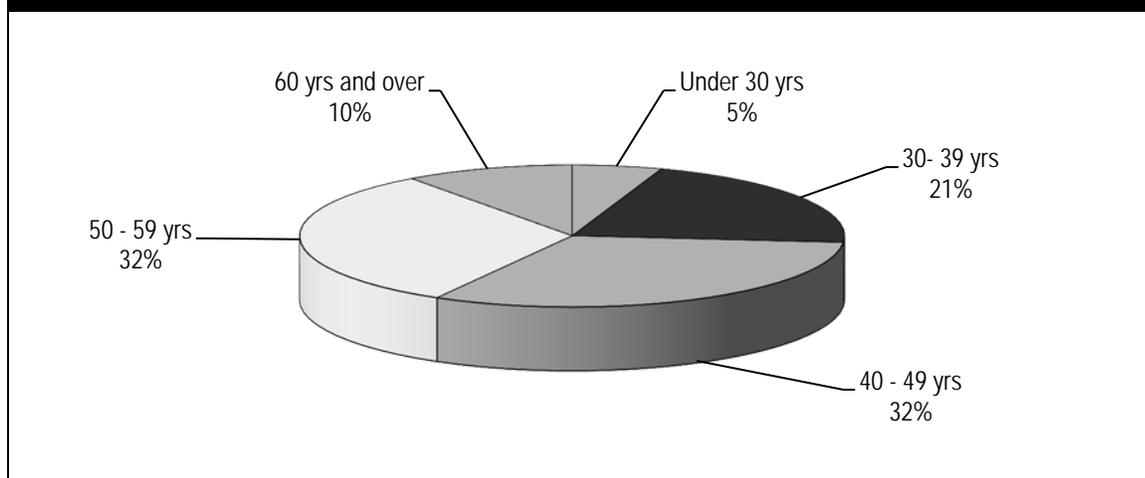
Within DARS, 19 HHS Program Coordinators, Human Services Specialists and Rehabilitation Teachers are employed as Independent Living Workers for the Division for Blind Services (DBS). These workers assist individuals who are blind or visually impaired to live as independently as possible within their community by adjusting to blindness through the development of travel skills, skills of daily living, communication skills, support systems and quality of living.

DARS Independent Living Workers have, on average, 13 years of state service, with an average age of 48 years.<sup>214</sup>

**Figure 58: Independent Living Workers at DARS – Length of State Service**



**Figure 59: Independent Living Workers at DARS – Distribution by Age**



<sup>214</sup> HHSAS Database, as of 8/31/11.

The agency has historically had difficulty recruiting qualified applicants statewide, especially in remote geographic locations.

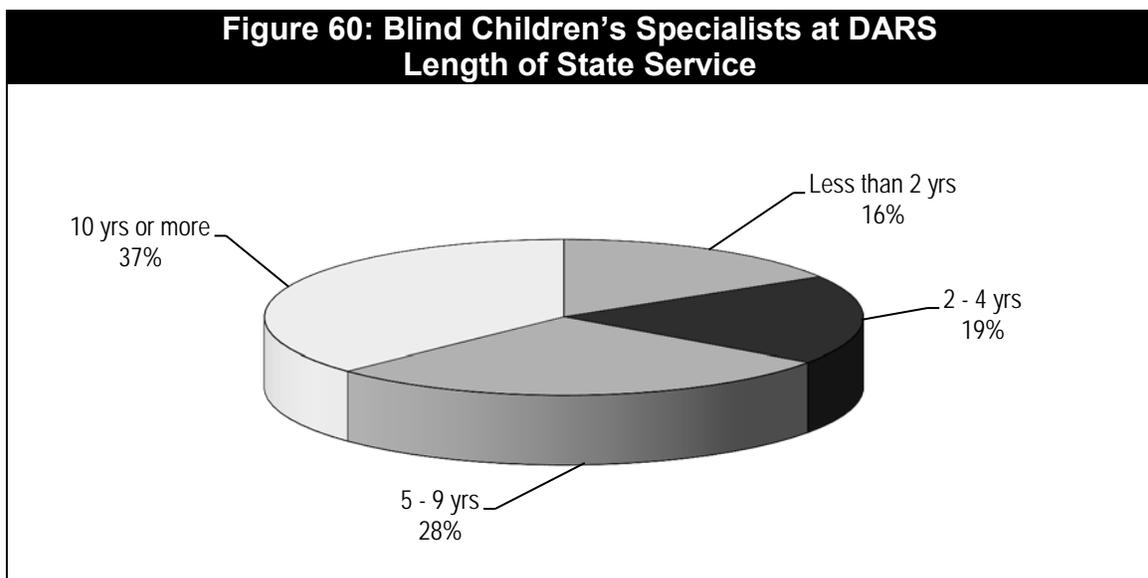
There are currently no college programs for this occupation and few individuals in the labor market possessing the knowledge and experience in working with individuals who are blind. To partially offset these limitations, new employees are required to complete an extensive two year training program to become competent in their job.

With six Independent Living Workers (or 32 percent) eligible to retire in the next five years, the agency will need to develop creative recruitment strategies to replace these highly skilled and tenured employees.<sup>215</sup>

### Blind Children’s Specialists

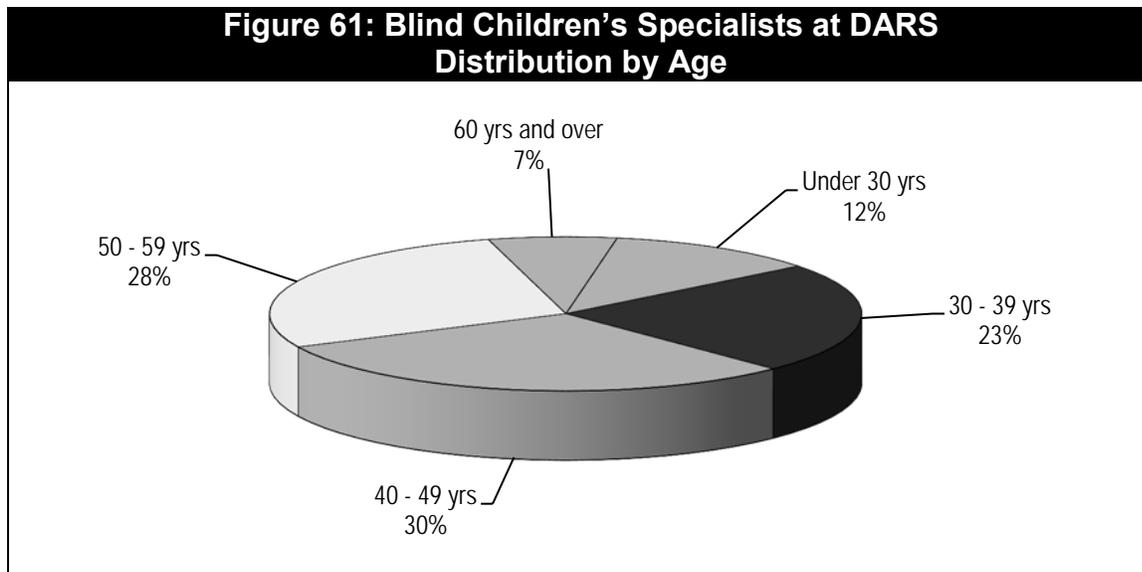
Within DARS, 43 of the agency’s Rehabilitation Teachers, HHS Program Coordinators, and Human Services Specialists work in the Division for Blind Services (DBS) as Blind Children’s Specialists. These employees assist blind children and their families with counseling, information, support, training and guidance that foster vocational discovery and development while promoting the blind or visually impaired child’s self-sufficiency.

Blind Children’s Specialists have, on average, 11 years of state service, with an average age of 45 years.<sup>216</sup>



<sup>215</sup> HHSAS Database, as of 8/31/11.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid.



The agency may face significant recruitment challenges in the next few years to replace those tenured employees who are eligible for retirement. Almost a quarter of these employees (23 percent) will be eligible to retire in the next five years.<sup>217</sup>

### Rehabilitation Teachers

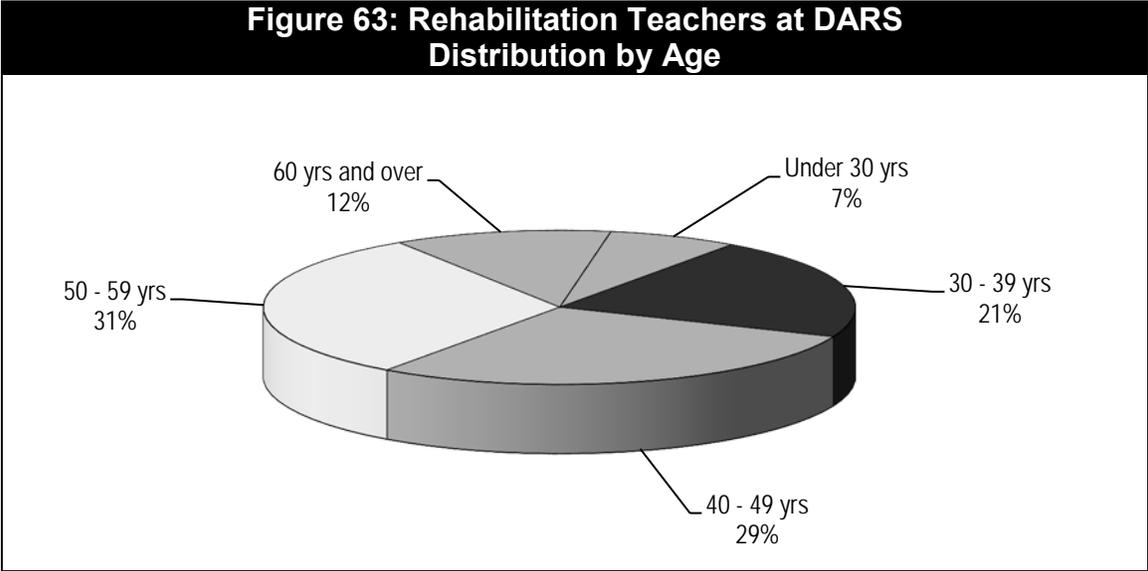
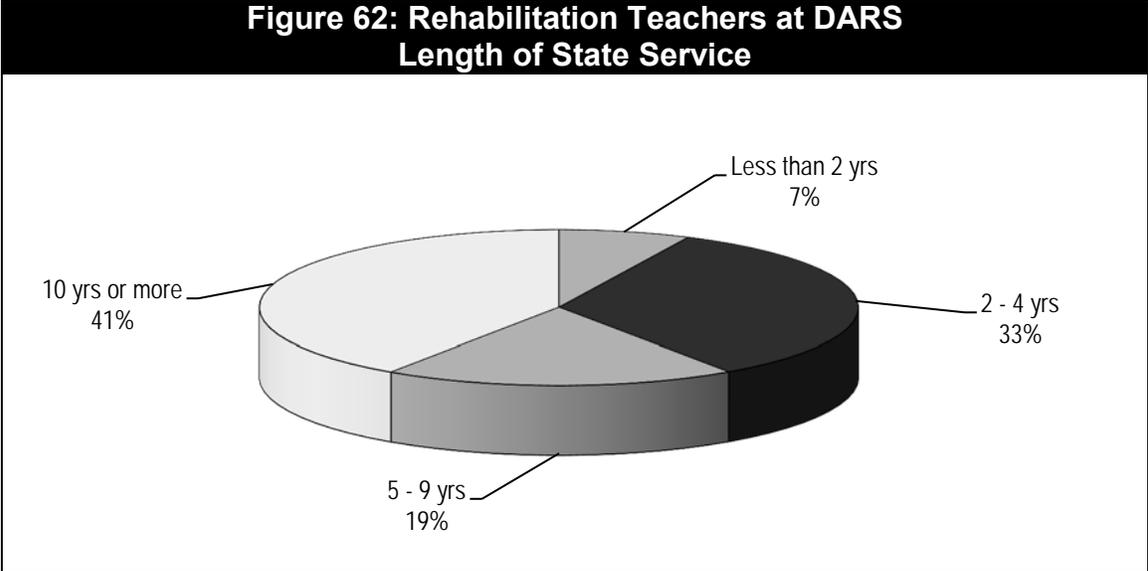
Within DARS, 42 Rehabilitation Teachers, HHS Program Coordinators, Rehabilitation Services Technicians, and Human Services Specialists are employed as Rehabilitation Teachers in the Division for Blind Services (DBS) and the Division for Rehabilitation Services (DRS).<sup>218</sup> These employees assist consumers who are visually impaired and/or multi-disabled in developing, achieving, and maintaining essential independent living and employment objectives.

Rehabilitation Teachers have, on average, 10 years of state service, with an average age of 46 years.<sup>219</sup>

<sup>217</sup> HHSAS Database, FY 2011 data.

<sup>218</sup> HHSAS Database, as of 8/31/11.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid.



The agency may face significant recruitment challenges in the next five years, as over 26 percent of these employees become eligible for retirement.<sup>220</sup>

<sup>220</sup> HHSAS Database, FY 2011 data.

## **DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES TO MEET WORKFORCE NEEDS**

### **Recruitment Strategies**

- ◆ Continue to allow supervisors to use the full salary range when posting vacant positions, maintaining the flexibility to set the starting salary based on an applicant's education level, certification and related work experience.
- ◆ Continue to work closely with colleges and universities offering graduate degrees in rehabilitation counseling by:
  - Working in partnership with university advisory committees;
  - Maintaining/establishing intern programs and training placement positions for Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors;
  - Making site visits and classroom presentations to familiarize prospective graduates of career opportunities; and
  - Sending DARS Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor vacancy announcements to the universities.
- ◆ Continue to use internet job posting/recruitment websites, professional publications, newspapers and trade associations to announce job vacancies.
- ◆ Explore expanded use of social media resources; e.g. LinkedIn.
- ◆ Work with the Social Security Administration on a national recruitment and retention strategy for Disability Determination Services (DDS) nation-wide implementation.
- ◆ Continue to review current job descriptions to ensure the essential job functions are in alignment with division/programmatic needs and an ever changing environment.
- ◆ Employ the new DARS Workforce planning process to provide DARS management with accurate, complete, timely and relevant staffing and workforce information for future recruitment, training, retention and related workforce planning activities designed to meet needs of consumers today and into the future.

### **Retention Strategies**

- ◆ Evaluate the results of future surveys of Employee Engagement and address identified employee and management issues that could potentially improve retention.
- ◆ Identify trends or recurring reasons employees separate from employment with DARS to determine whether strategies can be developed to improve retention.
- ◆ Hire employees with values that are in alignment with established DARS values.

- ◆ Continue to promote the use of internal postings within DARS and encourage managers to promote from the internal applicant pool when filling vacant positions.
- ◆ Continue to award career ladder promotions when appropriate.
- ◆ Continue to encourage professional development through Certified Rehabilitation Counselor (CRC) Certification by providing a financial incentive (e.g. when a counselor is eligible to take the CRC exam, the agency pays the cost of the application fee, examination fee and in-state travel expenses to take the exam).
- ◆ Develop, implement and make training available to Claims Examiners that focuses on the key skills of assessing symptoms, credibility of medical information, weighing medical options and analyzing a person's ability to function.
- ◆ Make training available to Vocational Rehabilitation staff to ensure that work is in compliance with federal regulations, is of high quality and is documented in a clear, concise manner.
- ◆ Increase Professional Skill Enhancement Training.
- ◆ Evaluate the potential of including Claims Examiners in Social Security Administration succession planning/career development training opportunities.
- ◆ Make full use of agency-wide recognition programs and benefits to identify and reward top performers.
- ◆ Employ flexible work schedules and/or telework to attract or retain employees in positions that lend themselves to this flexibility.
- ◆ Use aggressive and creative recruitment and retention strategies will be necessary to ensure the agency maintains a fully employed, qualified workforce.
- ◆ Develop and deploy management training that capitalizes on the strengths and differences of a multi-generational workforce who must work together toward a common purpose.