

# 2005 Annual Report



**Mississippi Department of  
Rehabilitation Services**

*Providing the freedom to live*



# Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services

*Providing the freedom to live*

Dear Governor Barbour and Members of the Mississippi Legislature:

As Executive Director of the Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services, I would like to thank you for the support you have given to the Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services (MDRS). We welcome your valuable guidance, advice, and encouragement in the agency's work to provide quality services to Mississippians with disabilities.

This year our agency has achieved many accomplishments for which we are very proud. The Offices of Vocational Rehabilitation and Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind have served over 20,000 clients and achieved outstanding ratings of client satisfaction on independent surveys. Our program was one of only six states' programs to exceed all performance indicators set forth by our federal partner, the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA).

Our successes this past year could not be achieved without the dedication and hard work by the staff of the Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation in consultation with members of the State Rehabilitation Council.

I invite your advice and comments regarding our Annual Report and our efforts to make a difference in the lives of individuals with disabilities. Our staff looks forward to this continued partnership and another year of successful outcomes.

H.S. McMillan, Executive Director  
Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services

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Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services

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# **The Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services**

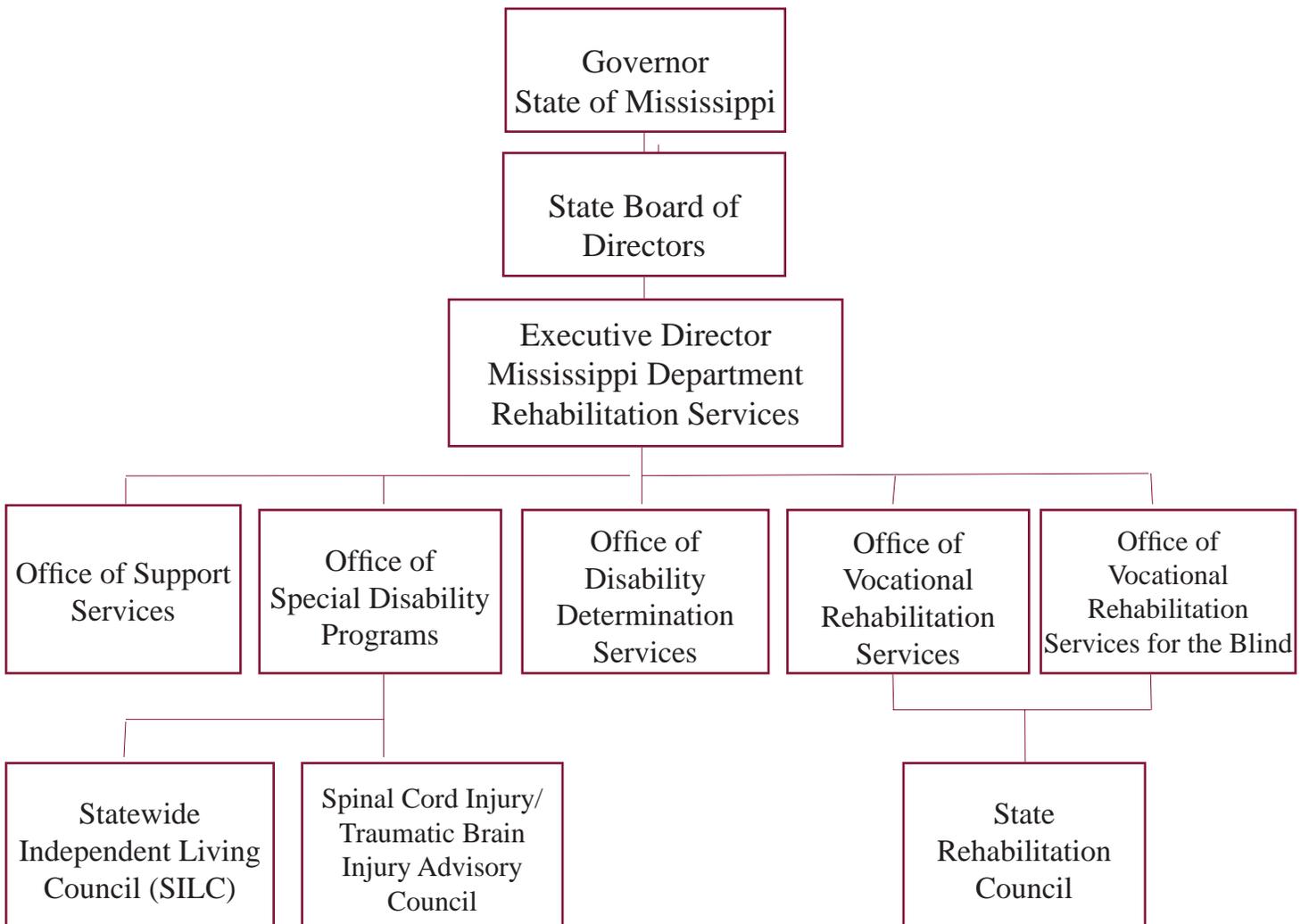
The Rehabilitation Act affirms the fundamental truths that disability is a natural part of the human experience, that people with disabilities can find their own way. These simple ideas, included in the 1992 Amendments to the Rehabilitation Act, are transforming the manner in which services are provided to Mississippians with disabilities.

The Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services (MDRS) is one of the largest agencies in state government committed solely to serving individuals with disabilities. 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).

Funding for MDRS comes primarily from federal sources including, but not limited to, the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) within the U.S. Department of Education, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, and the Social Security Administration. A total of 8.8% of the budget is appropriated by the Legislature and Governor from the state general fund. During 2005, the appropriated budget for MDRS totaled over \$125.7 million, approximately \$13.3 million in state funding, which included \$6.8 million in General Funds and \$6.5 million in Health Care Expendable Funds. The total budget included \$77.9 million in federal funds and \$34.5 million in “other” funding.

The Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services (MDRS) stands for a philosophy of consumer choice, self-help, self-determination, equal access and independence for individuals with disabilities.

## ORGANIZATION CHART



MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF REHABILITATION SERVICES  
BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Dr. Brian Amy	Dr. James E. Sardin	Jack Virden
Dr. Hank Bounds	Michael Sullivan	
Dr. Randy Hendrix	Colonel Don Taylor	

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION STATE ADVISORY COUNCIL

Rev. Bruns Myers, Chairperson	Jack Curry	Sammy Shute
Presley Posey, Vice Chairperson	Gail Fuller	Jim Staggs
H.S. McMillan, Ex-officio	John Wayne Jabour	Jim Stringer
Vivian Berryhill	Dan McGaughey	Martha Weston
Walter Blalock	Mary Meruvia	
Kerry Blythe	Kay Rucker	

STATEWIDE INDEPENDENT COUNCIL

Walter Blalock, Chairperson	Sam Gleese	Rev. Bruns Myers
Presley Posey, Vice Chairperson	Barbara Hadnott	Betty Patty
Michele Bahret, Secretary	Cindy Montgomery Haslob	Mandy Rogers
Paul Biggs	William LeRon Jackson	April Sharp
Brenda Coleman	Mary Lundy Meruvia	DeMarcus Wiggins
Chirsty Dunaway	Laura Mullins	

**State Office Building**  
 1281 Highway 51 North  
 Madison, MS 39110  
 Phone: 601-853-5100 or 1-800-443-1000  
[www.mdrs.state.ms.us](http://www.mdrs.state.ms.us)

Executive Director	Management Information Systems
H.S. McMillan	Paula Brown, Director
601-853-5200	601-853-5141
Deputy Director	Financial Management Services
Shelia C. Browning	Chris Howard, Director
601-853-5209	601-853-5220
Office of Vocational Rehabilitation	Human Resources Development
Gary Neely, Director	Rene Woodward, Director
601-853-5230	601-853-5260
Office of Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind	Assistive Technnology Division
Michael Gandy, Director	Kris Geroux, Director
601-853-5245	662-324-0285
Office of Disability Determination Services	Selected Social Security Services
Jo Ann Summers, Director	Rebecca Doyle, Director
601-853-5235	601-853-5332
Office of Special Disability Programs	Administrative Services
Lavonda Hart, Director	Tommy Browning, Director
601-853-5333	601-853-5151

## **THE OFFICE OF VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION**

The Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) serves nearly 20,000 Mississippians each year. Services offered by OVR are designed to assist eligible individuals in overcoming the limitations imposed by physical or mental disabilities in order for that person to secure or maintain employment. An individual eligible for services is one who :

- Has a physical or mental impairment which constitutes or results in a substantial impediment to employment;
- Can benefit in terms of an employment outcome from vocational rehabilitation services; and
- Requires OVR services in order to prepare for, enter, engage in, or retain gainful employment.

Eligible clients work with local vocational rehabilitation counselors to develop an individualized program of services and goals, which will lead to employment. Each client is actively involved in choosing the goals and services which are right for him or her.

Some of the services that may be provided through OVR include:

- Counseling and guidance in adjustment to disability, vocational exploration, and planning for return to work;
- Evaluation to determine individual vocational strengths and weaknesses, leading to plans for services and employment alternatives;
- Physical and mental restoration services necessary for the individual to secure employment;
- Training for those who may need to change employment or develop specialized skills to meet their vocational goals. Training may be provided in colleges, vocational-technical schools, or in direct placement on the job;
- Job placement with the counselor and client working together to secure rewarding and productive employment.

Individuals served by OVR have a wide array of disabilities including: hearing loss or deafness; amputations; mental and emotional disorders; endocrine disorders; epilepsy; developmental disease and disorders; genitourinary conditions; traumatic brain injuries; orthopedic impairments; residuals from cancer; respiratory disabilities; speech impairments; and the like.

*The total number of individuals served in 2005 was over 18,500, and the total number of successful employment outcomes was 3,965, an increase from 2004. After receiving services through MDRS, the average client income increased by \$10,000. The total increase in income for all VR clients was \$46 million.*

## **Community Rehabilitation Programs (AbilityWorks, Inc.)**

The Office of Vocational Rehabilitation operates a network of seventeen (17) community rehabilitation programs (CRP), AbilityWorks, Inc., located throughout the state. These centers provide vocational assessment, job training, and actual work experience for individuals with disabilities. *During 2005, AbilityWorks served a total of 2,146 MDRS clients and placed 907 of those clients into competitive employment.*

MDRS is committed to ensuring that all facilities are accredited by CARF, a national accreditation body for community rehabilitation programs. It is of the utmost importance for the assurance of quality service provision that the facilities attain the high standards required by this nationally recognized and respected accreditation body. Presently, all of the AbilityWorks locations are accredited for the specific programs of Comprehensive Vocational Evaluation Services and Employee Development Services.

Locations of AbilityWorks facilities are as follows: Brookhaven, Columbus, Corinth, Greenwood, Harrison County, Hattiesburg, Jackson, Kosciusko, Laurel, Meridian, Monroe County, Olive Branch, Oxford, Philadelphia, Starkville, Tupelo and Washington County.

## **Workforce Investment Act**

The federal Workforce Investment Act (WIA) of 1998 created a nation-wide one-stop delivery system of employment services, known as the Workforce Investment Network (WIN) in Mississippi. MDRS is a mandated partner in WIA, or WIN in Mississippi, and plays an active role at the state and local levels. MDRS is represented on the State Workforce Investment Board and all four Local Workforce Investment Boards that govern the WIN system. MDRS has five certified Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Counselors and three Counselor Assistants located in three WIN Job Centers on a full-time basis. Additionally, MDRS has fifteen (15) VR Counselors co-located on a part-time basis in 15 different WIN Job Centers throughout the state. At WIN Job Centers where a VR Counselor is not co-located, information and referral services pertaining to MDRS are available.

Through special grant programs, MDRS houses various other staff in the WIN Job Centers, including: four Benefits Planning, Assistance, and Outreach (BPAO) Specialists located at WIN Job Centers in Pearl, Tupelo, Hattiesburg, and Oxford. These BPAO Specialists counsel beneficiaries of Supplemental Security Income and Social Security Disability Insurance about the effect employment will have on their benefits. Two members of the Mississippi Model Youth Transition Innovation staff work with severely disabled youth who are transitioning from school to work. MDRS also operates WIA-funded programs for youth with disabilities, known as Employability Skills Training, in three of the four local workforce investment areas.

During State Fiscal Year 2005, MDRS continued implementation of two sub grants with the Mississippi Development Authority-Employment Training Division, the state's administering entity for WIA. In the sub grants, MDRS received funds to continue two projects that began in 2004 and established three new projects regarding agency activities within the WIN system. Those projects include:

- 1) A project to address accessibility issues for people with disabilities visiting WIN Job Centers;
- 2) A project to design and implement a model individualized case management system for use in the WIN system;
- 3) A project to oversee the activities of MDRS within the WIN system and foster coordination between all projects in the sub grants;

There are currently nine (9) Navigators located in nine WIN Job Centers throughout the state. The Navigator's duties revolve around helping individuals with disabilities who visit the WIN Centers access appropriate services.

## **Deaf Services**

The MDRS Deaf Services Program continues to promote excellence by striving to assist new RCD's (Rehabilitation Counselors for the Deaf) to reach the required communications skills level on the Signed Communication Proficiency Interview (SCPI), an American Sign Language assessment developed by the Rochester Institute of Technology. Adequate communication skills are a pre-requisite to meaningful counseling and guidance with people who are Deaf and use manual communication. ***This skill, along with other specialized training for RCD's has been a vital factor in the successful rehabilitation of 566 persons with most significant disabilities during this past year.***

Furthermore, seven (7) staff interpreters are available to assist consumers and staff members and use American Sign Language to insure accessibility throughout the rehabilitation process.

## **Transition Services (School-to-Work for Secondary Students with Disabilities)**

Students transitioning from school to work experience difficult vocational decisions. These career choices are among life's most difficult decisions and are especially so for students with disabilities. To help provide a seamless transition from school to work, Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Counselors work directly with school personnel, students, and their families to assure that there is an integrated program of education and vocational training available to students who are eligible for VR services.

In addition to maintaining an Interagency Agreement with the Mississippi Department of Education, MDRS maintains 142 Cooperative Agreements between our local District Offices and local School Districts. These agreements clarify and define procedural guidelines and methods of working cooperatively to provide transition services to students.

Through direct service funds by forty-two (42) VR Counselors throughout the State, provide transitional services such as vocational-technical training, vocational evaluation, work adjustment training, on the job training, job search skills, and work experience programs. These services may be available both on and off campus or at one of the 17 AbilityWorks near their school as a part of their school day.

*The Transition Program served approximately 1,979 students in FY 2005 and placed 567 in successful employment outcomes.*

### **Supported Employment (SE)**

The Supported Employment Program serves individuals with the most significant disabilities who require intensive support services to prepare for, secure, retain, or regain employment. Competitive employment is based on the individual's unique strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, interests and informed choice. Supported Employment is for individuals for whom competitive employment has not traditionally occurred, or has been traditionally interrupted or intermittent as a result of severe disability.

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. These teams work in tandem with the Department of Mental Health's Mental Retardation/ Developmental Disabilities programs, school districts, and other programs in their respective areas to ensure that a full array of services is available to support clients in their goal of successful employment in the community.

Multiple services are available to clients and typically include all or a combination of the following: individualized assessment, person centered planning, job matching, development of natural supports in the workplace, job development, job placement assistance, job trainer, assistive technology assessment and devices, counseling and guidance, development of sponsorship for extended services.

*During 2005, 634 individuals received Supported Employment services and 182 resulted in successful employment outcomes.*

## **OFFICE OF VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION FOR THE BLIND**

Each counselor within the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind (OVRB) serves a four or five county area, visiting each county periodically to interview clients, accept new referrals, and conduct job placement and job development activities. These counselors work within the same administrative structure as the counselors in the general OVR program, but specialize in working with persons who are visually impaired. Their goal is to ensure opportunities for inclusion into the workforce, community, and home for individuals with blindness or visual impairment. *In Fiscal Year 2005, OVRB served 1,936 clients and achieved successful employment outcomes for 575.*

### **Statewide Facility System**

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 the independence and self-reliance of those with severe visual impairments.

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 training. *During Fiscal Year 2005, the McBryde Center provided training to 119 individuals.*

The REACH Center for the Blind in Tupelo, formally called Allied Personal Adjustment Center, began the provision of structured discovery training in 2003. This method involves the use of sleep shades (blindfolds) for all students at all times, increasing self-reliance and reducing recidivism. With the initiation of the REACH Center, Mississippi became the only state in the nation with two centers operating under the two prevailing methods of training for individuals with blindness or visual impairment. *During Fiscal Year 2005, the REACH Center provided training to 29 individuals.*

By means of a contract relationship, MDRS works closely with Mississippi Industries for the Blind placing persons who are blind in competitive, integrated employment. *Over the past year, MIB has averaged placing one consumer per month in competitive, integrated employment.*

## **Independent Living Services for the Blind**

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

*During 2005, the Independent Living Program for the Blind provided services to 716 consumers who are legally blind and either over age 55 or diagnosed with a significant secondary disability.*

## **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. *During 2005, these services were provided to 79 consumers in Mississippi.*

## **Business Enterprise Program (BEP)**

The Business Enterprise Program (BEP) provides full-time self-employment opportunities for about 40 legally blind Mississippians. These BEP entrepreneurs, more commonly known as blind vendors, operate a variety of businesses including vending machine routes, snack bars and even cafeterias on military bases. In 2005, BEP was successful in securing the food service contract for the Meridian Naval Air Station and a federal permit to operate a vending facility at the new Medium Security Unit at Federal Correctional Complex at Yazoo City. Hurricane Katrina demolished the Armed Forces Retirement Home and Biloxi Post Office federal vending facility locations as well as one in the state-owned Bolton Building (old Biloxi Hospital). Time will tell if these locations can be re-established.

*In 2005, six (6) individuals were provided initial training, licensed, and placed as BEP vendors.*

## **OFFICE OF SPECIAL DISABILITY PROGRAMS**

### **Independent Living Services**

Independent Living Services are provided through a Federal grant program which MDRS administers through its Office of Special Disability Programs. Independent Living Services are designed to assist individuals with the most significant disabilities. Individuals with a significant disability are those with a severe physical, mental, cognitive or sensory impairment whose ability to function independently in the home or community is substantially limited. Independent Living Services improves their ability to function, continue functioning or move toward functioning independently in the home or community. The Office of Special Disability Programs has 18 counselors specializing in providing Independent Living Services. Some Independent Living Services that are provided to eligible consumers include but are not limited to, home modifications, vehicle modifications, and durable medical equipment. *During Federal Fiscal year 2005, the Office of Special Disability Programs provided independent living services for 2,026 individuals with significant disabilities.*

### **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. Many times, individuals receiving these services are able to continue in competitive employment.

### **Independent Living Waiver**

In 1994, through a cooperative agreement with the Mississippi Division of Medicaid, MDRS implemented the Independent Living (IL) Waiver, a home and community-based services program. This program allows MDRS to provide personal care services to eligible individuals who have severe orthopedic and/or severe neurological impairments that render the individual dependent upon others, the use of assistive devices, or a combination of both to accomplish the activities of daily living. In addition, individuals served must be medically stable. Medical stability is defined as the absence of any of the following:(a) An active, life threatening condition (e.g. sepsis, respiratory, or other condition requiring systematic therapeutic measures); (b) IV drip to control or support blood pressure; and (c) Intracranial pressure or arterial monitoring. Recipients must be able to communicate effectively with caregivers, personal care attendants, case managers, and others involved in their care. Without this service, these individuals would be at risk of nursing home placement. *During 2005, a total of 671 individuals received services through the IL Waiver.*

## **Traumatic Brain Injury and Spinal Cord Injury Waiver**

In 2001, through a cooperative agreement with the Mississippi Division of Medicaid, MDRS implemented the Traumatic Brain Injury/Spinal Cord Injury Waiver, a home and community-based services program. This program allows MDRS to provide personal assistance services, home modifications, specialized durable medical equipment/supplies, and respite services to individuals determined eligible. Waiver services are limited to individuals with traumatic brain injury and traumatic spinal cord injury. Traumatic brain injury is defined as an insult to the skull, brain, or its covering resulting from external trauma, which produces an altered state of consciousness or anatomic, motor, sensory, or cognitive/behavioral deficits. Traumatic spinal cord injury is defined as a traumatic injury to the spinal cord or cauda equine with evidence of motor deficit, sensory deficit, and/or bowel and bladder dysfunction. The lesions must have significant involvement with two of the above three. In addition, individuals served must be certified as medically stable by their primary care physician. Medical stability is defined as the absence of any of the following: (a) An active, life threatening condition (e.g. sepsis, respiratory, or other condition requiring systematic therapeutic measures); (b) IV drip to control or support blood pressure; (c) Intracranial pressure or arterial monitoring. The recipient's primary care physician must provide certification of traumatic injury and medical stability. *In 2005, a total of 500 individuals received services through the TBI/SCI Waiver.*

## **Traumatic Brain Injury/Spinal Cord Injury (TBI/SCI) Trust Fund Program**

In 1996, the Mississippi Legislature established the TBI/SCI Trust Fund. The goal of this program is to enable individuals who are severely disabled by a traumatic spinal cord injury or a traumatic brain injury to resume the activities of daily living and re-integrate into the community with as much dignity and independence as possible. These funds are 100% special funds generated by surcharges on moving traffic violations and violations of the Implied Consent Law. **During 2005, a total of 818 persons received services through the TBI/SCI Trust Funds.**

## **OFFICE OF DISABILITY DETERMINATION SERVICES**

The Office of Disability Determination Services (DDS) is 100% federally funded through an agreement with the Social Security Administration (SSA). Disability claims for Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) are processed for Mississippians with disabilities through the Mississippi DDS.

The Social Security disability program has a long history of extending protection to individuals with disabilities by providing benefits for workers and their dependents, Medicare coverage, and Supplemental Security Income payments. Disability benefits are meant to partially replace previous earnings and also include payment for the spouse and children.

The guidelines for determining disability are determined by law and Social Security Administration regulations. Medical evidence is gathered from attending physicians and other treatment sources. Other examinations may be purchased at no cost to the claimant if more specific information is needed.

The first consideration in determining eligibility for benefits is to determine whether the impairment is medically severe and to what degree the impairment limits the applicant's work related functioning. If the applicants cannot return to work, further decisions are made regarding his/her ability to do other kinds of work. Factors considered in vocational decisions include the applicant's job skills, age, and education.

The DDS also processes periodic reviews of the previously allowed claims as required by the Social Security Administration. Before these benefits can be ceased, it must be shown that there has been work-related medical improvement since the last favorable decision.

The DDS receives cases electronically from SSA offices throughout the state. Medical and non medical evidence is scanned or downloaded into the electronic folder and a DDS examiner and medical consultants review medical evidence on line and complete electronic ratings forms. When cases are closed, all electronic forms and closure documents are uploaded into the electronic folders. The electronic process is designed to provide improved customer service to Americans with disabilities.

*The Mississippi DDS continues to be one of the best in the nation, processing over 76,000 claims this year, which result in more than \$100 million in federal payments made to Mississippians per month.*

## **SELECTED SOCIAL SECURITY SERVICES**

### **Ticket to Work Program**

Ticket to Work is the centerpiece of legislation signed into law by former President Bill Clinton as part of the Incentives Improvement Act of 1999. This legislation increases choices in obtaining rehabilitation and vocational services for beneficiaries receiving social security disability benefits; removes barriers that required people with disabilities to choose between health care coverage and work.

The ticket legislation is the Ticket to Work Program requires the Social Security Administration (SSA) to issue 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. Nationally, the Ticket to Work Program was implemented in three phases that began in February 2002 and was completed in October 2004. Tickets were released in Mississippi, a second-round Ticket state, from November 15, 2002 through September 2003. Approximately 155,000 Tickets were issued to eligible Mississippians during the rollout period.

*As of 2005, 1,741 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 the Social Security Administration (SSA) as a result of the Ticket to Work and WIA. There are four (4) Benefits Specialists housed in the following WIN Job Centers: Pearl, Tupelo, Hattiesburg and Oxford. The goal of the M-PIC/BPAO 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 BPAO projects in the nation. MDRS Benefits Specialists through outreach activities and referrals provide direct planning and assistance support to SSA beneficiaries.

*From its inception in March 2001 through August 2005, Benefits Specialists have served 4,180 beneficiaries.*

The M-PIC program has Benefits Specialists who:

- Provide work incentives planning and assistance to SSAs beneficiaries with disabilities;
- Provide accurate information to qualifying individuals to help them understand the impact of earnings on SSA benefits;
- Advise SSAs beneficiaries with disabilities on how and when to utilize their Tickets;
- Help identify SSA employment supports that will aid SSAs beneficiaries with disabilities in entering or re-entering the workforce;
- Conduct outreach efforts to those beneficiaries (and their families) who are potentially eligible to participate in federal or state work incentives programs; and
- Work in cooperation with federal, state, and private agencies and nonprofit organizations that serve beneficiaries with disabilities.

## **SSA/VR Reimbursement Program**

The Social Security Administration administers a Vocational Rehabilitation Reimbursement program to help individuals with disabilities go to work. SSA's role in the process is to assure that individuals with disabilities are referred to the offices of Vocational Rehabilitation and Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind and given the opportunity to receive services. Under this program, SSA reimburses MDRS for the cost of VR services if the individual performs work at a specified earnings level and all. *Cost Reimbursement Revenue increased for the years 2004 and 2005, and is on target to increase in 2006.*

## **Mississippi Model Youth Transition Innovation Project (MYTI)**

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.

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.

*As the third year of MYTI gets underway, 106 students are enrolled in the program. Thirteen (13) are currently employed, and 38 jobs have been secured since the inception of the program.*

## **Disability Quality Assurance Program**

The Disability Quality Assurance (DQA) Unit provides oversight to ensure quality of the disability determination process for the Office of Disability Determination Services (DDS). DQA conducts a scientifically accurate random sample based on the formula used by the Disability Quality Branch (DQB) from the SSA Regional Office in Atlanta. This random review is applied to initial level cases only that are automatically pulled by the VERSA computer system used to process these claims. In-house accuracy is measured for the agency through the results of the review on these claims and is intended to highlight areas of weakness for improvement.

Reconsideration and Continuing Disability Review samples are based on variables as requested from the DDS Administration. High risk and special study reviews are based on prior quarter accuracy and DQB returns. Currently, in place of the high risk and special study end-of-line samples, the DQA is conducting inline reviews of multi-level claims at various stages of development to determine the appropriateness of different medical development issues. In addition, the DQA conducts training sessions in areas identified through the review process.

*In 2005, DQA reviewed 3,854 cases from their end-of-line supply.*

## **ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY**

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. In State Fiscal Year 2005, Project START sub grants provided over one thousand assistive technology evaluations. Also, through the increasing equipment loan program, Project START loaned over 100 pieces of equipment to individuals with disabilities, schools, and organizations for people with disabilities. 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.

## REGIONAL/DISTRICT OFFICES

In order to provide the best service to clients of MDRS, the state has been divided into four (4) regions and nine (9) 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 Offices

#### District I

51 County Rd. 166  
Oxford, Ms 38655  
VR/VRB: (662) 234-6086  
OSDP: (662) 234-2723

#### District II

2620 Traceland Dr.  
Tupelo, MS 38801  
VR/VRB: (662) 842-1010  
OSDP: (662) 840-9947

#### District III

207 Industrial Park Road  
Starkville, MS 39760  
VR/VRB: (662) 323-9594  
OSDP:(662) 324-9646

#### District IV

1003 College Drive  
Meridian, MS 39304  
VR/VRB: (601) 483-3881  
OSDP: (601) 483-5394

#### District V

17 J. Merle Tatum Industry Rd.  
Hattiesburg, MS 39404  
VR/VRB:(601) 545-5619  
OSDP: (601) 544-4860

#### District VI

625 Courthouse Road, Suite 113  
Gulfport, MS 39506  
VR/VRB:(228) 897-7601  
OSDP: (228) 897-7612

#### District VII

1400- AHarrison Drive  
McComb, MS 39649  
VR/VRB:(601) 249-2498  
OSDP: (601) 249-4646

#### District VIII

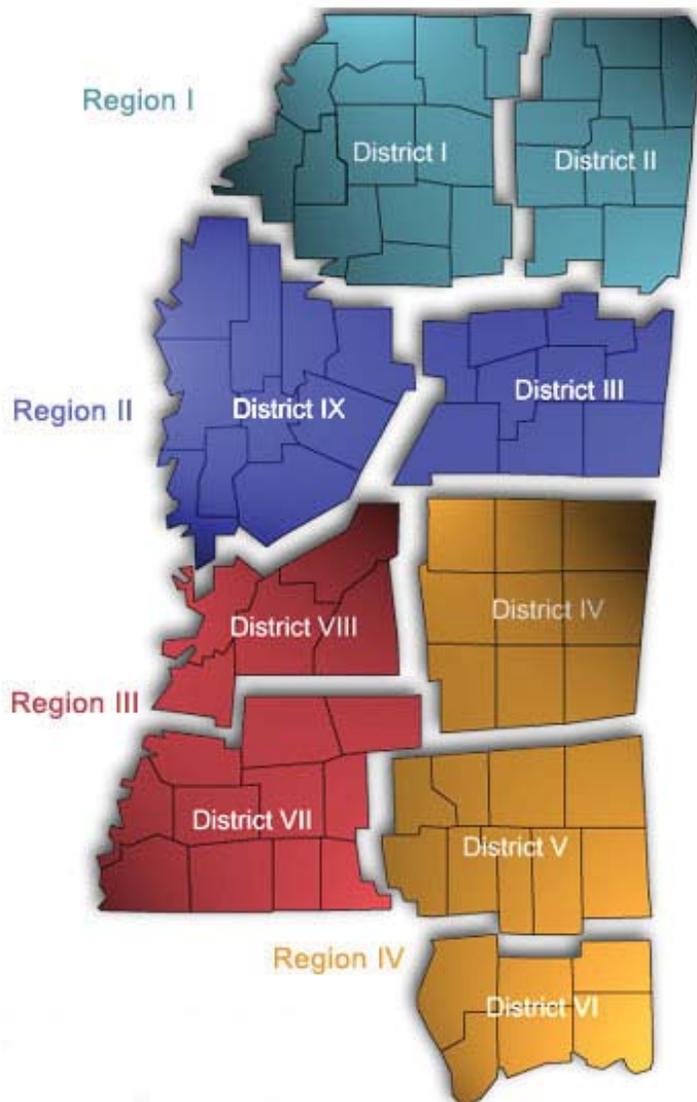
300 Capers Ave. Bldg. 4  
Jackson, MS 39203  
VR/VRB:(601) 351-1560  
OSDP: (601) 351-1525

AND

300 Capers Ave. Bldng. 3  
Jackson, MS 39203  
VR/VRB:(601) 351-1496  
OSDP: (601) 351-1490

#### District IX

706 Highway 49-82 Bypass  
Greenwood, MS 38935  
VR/VRB:(662) 453-6172  
OSDP: (662) 455-2706



### Regional Offices

#### Region I

8480 West Sandidge  
Olive Branch, MS 38654  
(662) 893-6917

#### Region II

2503 Browning Rd.  
Greenwood, MS 38930  
(662) 459-9795

#### Region III

300 Capers Avenue, Bldg. 3  
Jackson, MS 39203  
(601) 351-1495

#### Region IV

625 Courthouse Rd., #13  
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