

Department of Services for the Blind

Program Details

The Department of Services for the Blind (DSB) provides vocational rehabilitation services including information, assessment, and referral; vocational counseling including guidance, referral, and placement; and rehabilitation training in adaptive skills, job skills, and assistive technology. DSB also provides occupational licenses, tools, equipment, technological aids, and other goods and services that can be reasonably expected to help clients achieve successful employment outcomes.

To receive services, an individual must be legally blind or have a visual disability that causes an impediment to employment, and vocational rehabilitation services are required for the individual to prepare for, enter, engage in, or retain employment.

Every year, the Workforce Board measures the performance of key workforce programs. In this report, you'll find out more about the program and who is served, the metrics used to measure performance and how the program performed.

For this 2013 report, researchers studied the results of 225 clients who left DSB programs during the most recent reporting year.¹ The median length of program enrollment from application to exit was 13 months. Program participants were more likely to be white (74 percent) or multiracial (8 percent), and slightly less likely to be Hispanic (9 percent), or Asian (4 percent) than the general population of Washington.² Fifty percent of the DSB clients were women, the same as the prior program year. The median age upon applying for the program was 44, with one quarter under age 30 and another quarter over age 55.

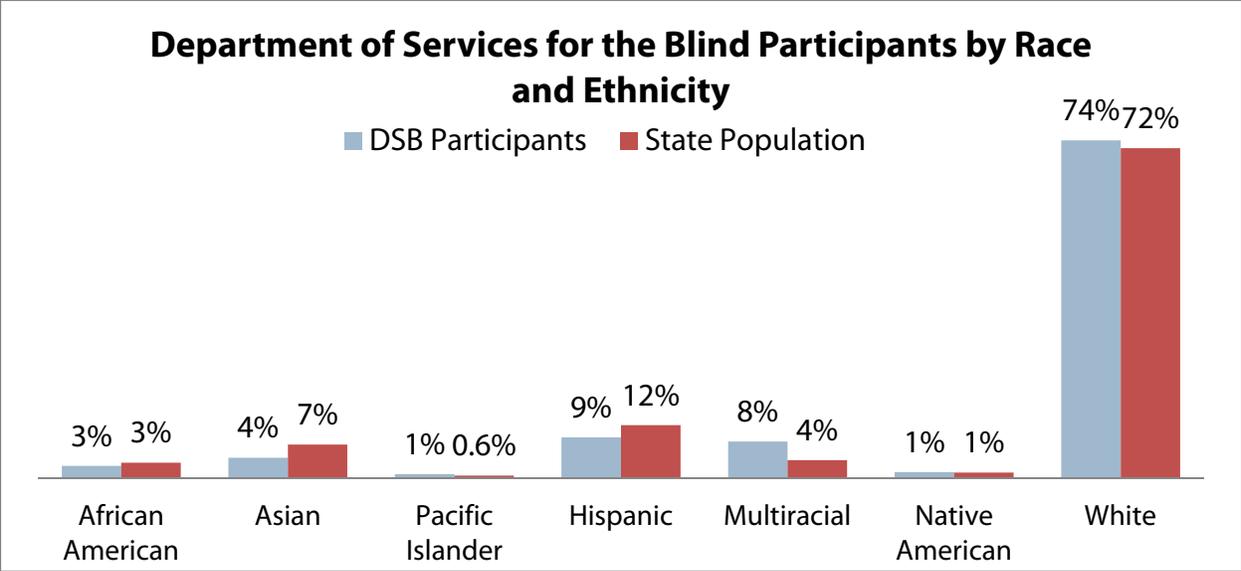
¹ The 2013 Workforce Training Results reports are based on data observed in 2011-12 for individuals exiting programs during 2010-11.

² In this report, unless otherwise stated, racial and ethnic minority groups are mutually exclusive; that is, an individual belongs to one group only. The groups include the following: Hispanics of any race (also referred to as Hispanics); non-Hispanic African Americans (also referred to as African Americans); non-Hispanic Asians (also referred to as Asians); non-Hispanic Pacific Islanders (also referred to as Pacific Islanders); non-Hispanic Native Americans and Alaskan Natives (also referred to as Native Americans); non-Hispanic multiracial (also referred to as multiracial); and non-Hispanic whites (also referred to as whites). According to the 2011 U.S. Census Bureau estimates for Washington from the American Community Survey, 72 percent are white; 3 percent are African American; 1 percent are Native American; 7 percent are Asian; 1 percent are Pacific Islander; 4 percent are multiracial; and 12 percent are Hispanic.

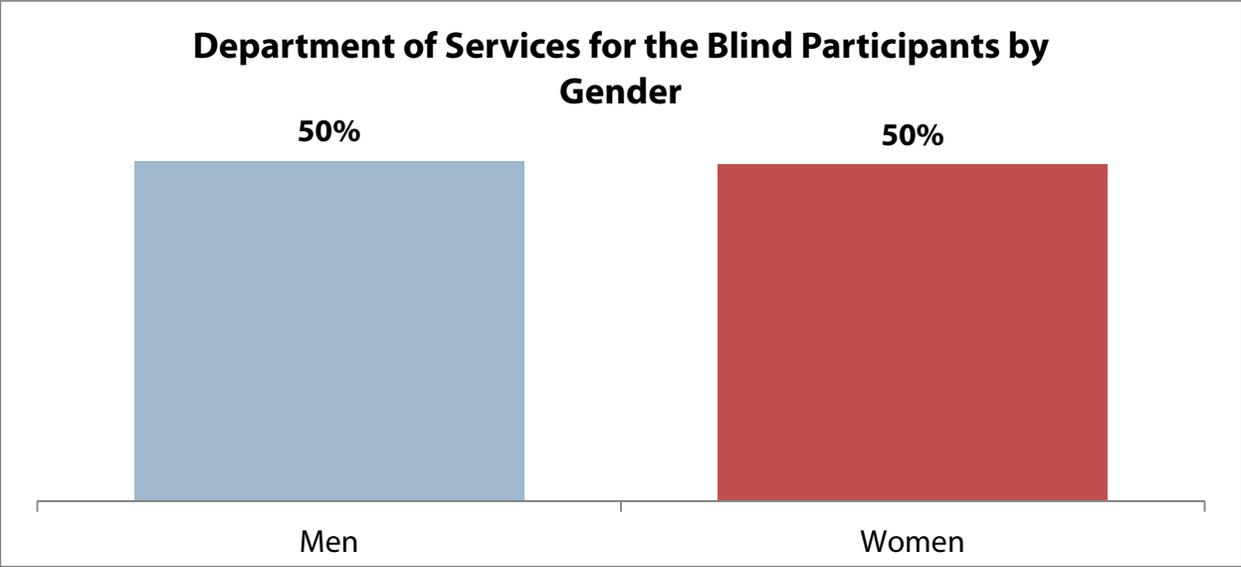
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Source: Department of Services for the Blind Administrative Records and 2011 U.S. Census Data from the American Community Survey.



Source: Department of Services for the Blind Administrative Records

When they applied for the program, 32 percent had not previously received postsecondary education, 24 percent had postsecondary education but no degree or certificate, 15 percent had an associate’s degree or a vocational certificate, and 30 percent had a bachelor’s degree or higher.

Tracking DSB Progress

The Workforce Board routinely measures the performance of our state's largest workforce programs. As a customer-focused advocate for Washington's workers and employers, the Workforce Board strives to provide performance accountability, verifying whether worker education and training programs provide a return on investment for participants and taxpayers.

The Workforce Training Results report seeks to answer five core questions:

- Did participants get the skills they needed?
- Did participants get a job and how much were they paid?
- Were employers satisfied with the preparation workers received?
- Has the program made a difference in the participant's success?
- Did participants and the public receive a return on their investment?³

Data Comes From State Wage Files

The 2013 Workforce Training Results includes information obtained from Employment Security Department wage files in Washington, Idaho, and Oregon, and federal employment records for 2011-12.

Did Participants Get the Skills They Needed?

Some 65 percent of DSB clients were classified as rehabilitated upon leaving the program (that is, they were working for at least 90 days prior to leaving the program), two percentage points higher than the last report.

Did Participants Have a Job and How Much Were They Paid?

To find out whether participants had jobs and how much they earned, participant records were matched with Employment Security Department wage files from Washington and neighboring states.⁴ Record matches found 42 percent of DSB clients had reported employment three quarters after program exit. Among those who were considered rehabilitated upon leaving the program (that is, those who had been working for 90 days prior to exit), 57 percent still had reported employment the third quarter after exit, about 7 percentage points lower than for the last cohort of participants. Among participants who were working during the third quarter after leaving the program, the median hourly wage

³ Due to small sample size and difficulty in identifying a comparison group, DSB participants were not included in the 2010 Net Impact Study and Cost-Benefit analysis that detailed the performance of several of Washington's workforce programs by comparing participant outcomes with non-participants. Also, DSB participants were not included in the Workforce Board's 2012 Employer Survey, which provides feedback on how well workforce program participants perform in the workplace in areas such as job skills; reading, writing and math, and teamwork, among others.

⁴ These files contain quarterly earnings and hours-worked information on those individuals with employment reported for UI benefits purposes (approximately 90 percent of in-state employment, with self-employment, active duty military, and those working for religious nonprofit organizations being the major groups of employers not included).

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was \$14.81 and the median annualized earnings were \$22,802.⁵ As expected, rehabilitated clients had better employment and earnings outcomes than all clients combined.

Employment and Earnings for Department of Services for the Blind Participants, 2013

Performance Measure	Results
Employment Rate* (State Records)	42%
Full Time Employment **	48%
Median Hours Worked Quarterly	370
Median Hourly Wage***	\$14.81
Median Annualized Earnings***	\$22,802

** These figures apply to those with employment reported to state employment agencies six to nine months after leaving the program. Rate does not include self-employment, employment outside the Northwest or military service and thus understates total employment by approximately 10 percent.*

*** Full-time employment averages 30 or more hours per week.*

**** Earnings/wages expressed in first quarter 2012 dollars in order to account for inflation.*

Earnings of DSB Participants

To better gauge the financial effectiveness of Washington’s workforce programs, it helps to frame income levels. One common yardstick is the federal poverty level. In 2012, the federal poverty level for one person was \$11,170 per year.⁶

In 2013, DSB participants were able to support a median 4 people at the poverty level—meaning they could support themselves plus three other people. They could support themselves plus a tenth of another person (1.1) at the 200 percent of poverty level.

⁵ Annual earnings are calculated as third quarter earnings multiplied by four. Quarterly earnings are the result of hourly wage rates and the number of hours worked in a calendar quarter. All wages and earnings are stated in first quarter 2012 dollars.

⁶ Poverty levels from 2012 were used in this edition of Workforce Training Results to measure the results of workforce programs on participants observed in 2011-12. The federal poverty level is determined by the Department of Health and Human Services. The level varies according to family size. The number is adjusted for inflation and reported annually in the form of poverty guidelines. Public assistance programs typically define eligibility income limits as some percentage of the federal poverty level.

Number of People Supported at Poverty Level by Participant Income

	2006		2008		2010		2011		2012		2013	
	All	Rehab.										
Number of people supported at poverty level	4.7	5.3	3.0	3.3	3.9	5.1	3.7	4.1	4.4	4.5	4.0	4.3
Number of people supported at 200 percent poverty	1.4	1.8	0.6	0.8	1.0	1.7	1.0	1.1	1.3	1.4	1.1	1.1

Department of Services for the Blind Participants Receiving Benefits from Employers

Performance Measure	2006	2008	2010*	2011	2012*	2013*
Self-Reported Medical Benefits from Employer	56%	58%	N/A	57%	N/A	N/A
Self-Reported Retirement Benefits from Employer	39%	37%	N/A	39%	N/A	N/A

**Due to budget limitations, the Workforce Board's Participant Survey was not conducted for the 2010, 2012, or 2013 reports.*

The following table shows employment and earnings information over the course of six study periods. Employment rates among all DSB participants have declined since 2006, currently sitting at 42 percent as of 2013. Earning levels among all participants have fluctuated since 2006.

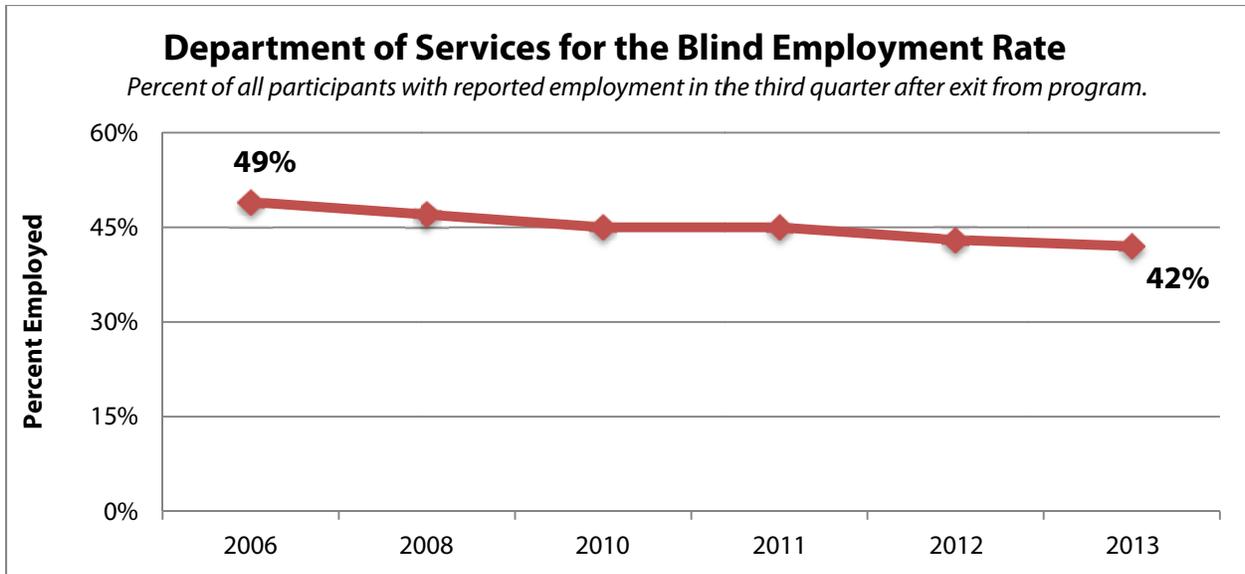
Employment and Earnings Trends for Department of Services for the Blind Participants

	2006		2008		2010		2011		2012		2013	
	All	Rehab.										
Employment Rate* (Self-Reported)	67%	-	64%	-	N/A	-	60%	-	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Employment Rate* (State Records)	49%	72%	47%	71%	45%	60%	45%	63%	43%	64%	42%	57%
Full Time Employed**	55%	55%	51%	49%	50%	51%	59%	60%	57%	56%	48%	49%
Median Quarterly Hours	411	425	389	384	388	387	441	450	424	423	370	374
Median Hourly Wage***	\$14.96	\$15.33	\$13.03	\$14.70	\$15.13	\$16.76	\$13.13	\$14.10	\$16.22	\$16.84	\$14.81	\$15.19
Median Annual Earnings***	\$25,681	\$28,134	\$19,001	\$20,205	\$22,446	\$27,333	\$21,912	\$23,178	\$24,441	\$25,065	\$22,802	\$24,003

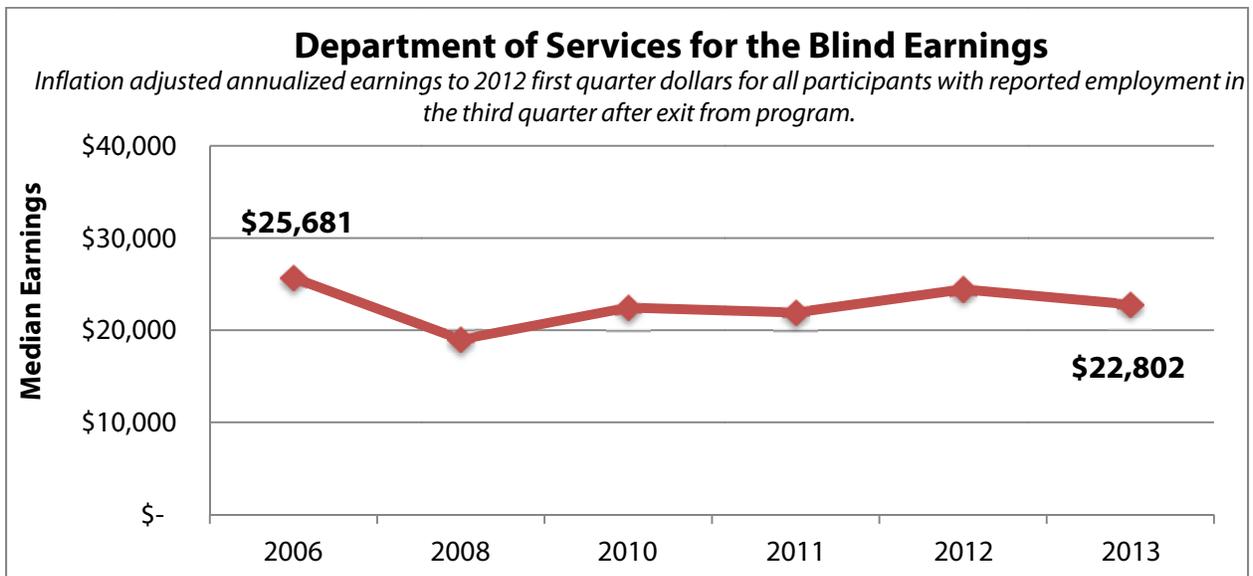
**These figures apply to those with employment reported to the state's Employment Security Department six to nine months after leaving program. Rate does not include self-employment, employment outside the Northwest or military service and thus understates total employment by approximately 10 percent.*

***Full-time employment averages 30 or more hours per week.*

****Earnings/wages expressed in first quarter 2012 dollars in order to account for inflation.*



Source: Workforce Training Results 2006-13 reports. Rate does not include self-employment, employment outside the Northwest or military service and thus understates total employment by approximately 10 percent.



Source: Workforce Training Results 2006-13 reports.

Ninety percent of employment among DSB clients is in five industry groups, starting with 49 percent employed in social services, 11 percent in public administration, 10 percent in manufacturing, 10 percent in retail trades, and 10 percent in financial activities.

DSB Employment by Industry

Industry Group	
49%	Social Services
11%	Public Administration
10%	Manufacturing
10%	Retail Trades
10%	Financial Activities
5%	Wholesale Trade
2%	Natural Resources and Mining
2%	Transportation and Warehousing and Utilities
1%	Construction
1%	Information

Source: Matches with Employment Security Department data in third quarter after exiting program. Industry groups based on North American Industry Classification System codes.

Relationship of Training to Employment

In 2011, the Workforce Board surveyed DSB participants who had left their program in 2009-10. The survey provided data on employment and participant satisfaction with the training. The survey was conducted by telephone and was completed by 111 participants.

To measure the extent to which a participant's education program and training related to employment, we asked participants three questions:

1. How related was the program to their job?
2. How important was the training in getting hired?
3. Are the skills they learned useful in their job?

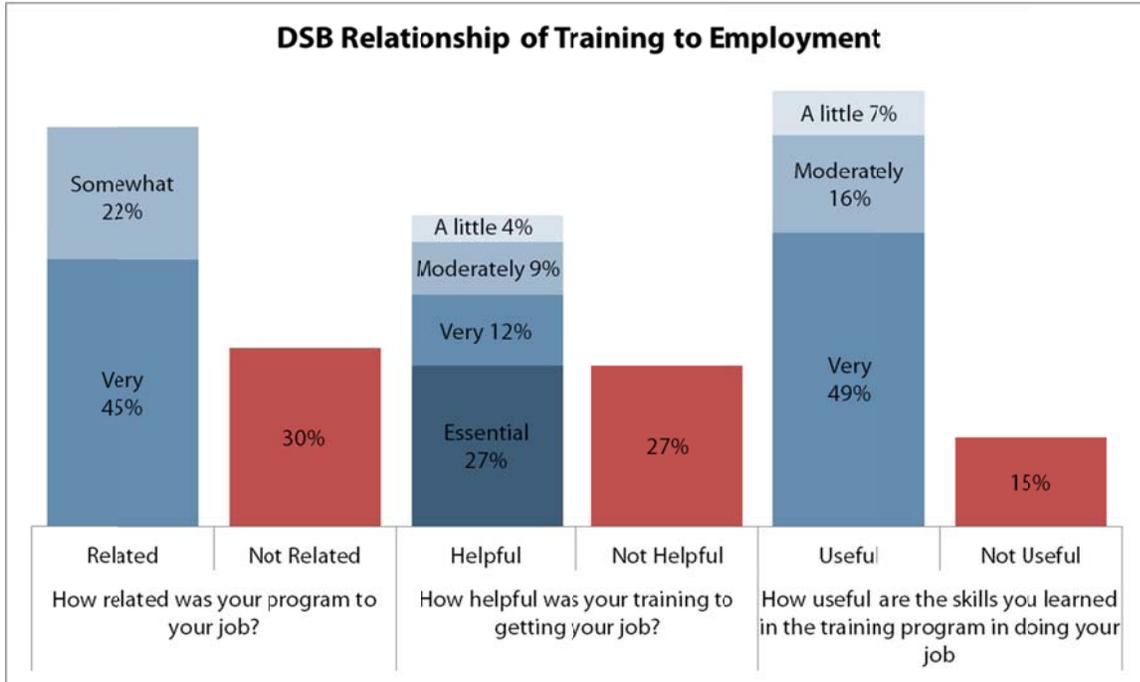
Asking about the relationship between training and employment in different ways can produce more complete information. For example, some participants said their training was not related to their job, but nevertheless found the skills acquired were useful on the job.

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Among DSB participants employed six to nine months after leaving the program, 45 percent said their training was “very related” to their job. A further 22 percent reported the training was “somewhat related” to their job. In 2008, lower rates of employed participants reported their training was “very related” to their job (36 percent).



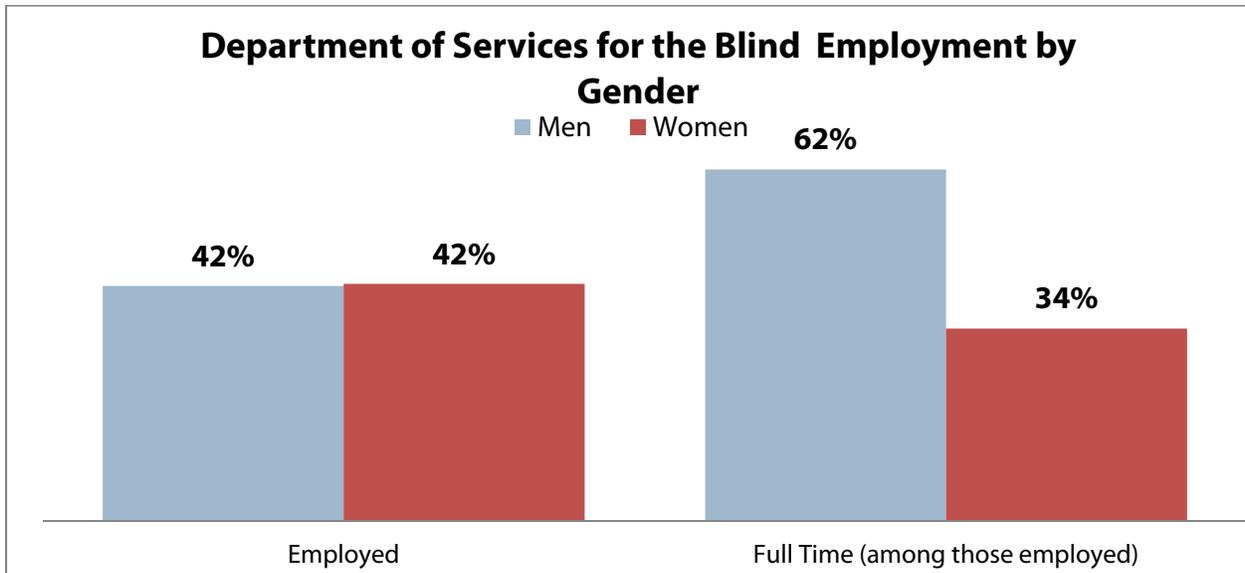
Source: Workforce Board’s Participant Satisfaction Survey 2011.

Participants interviewed in 2011 also indicated the training was helpful to them in getting their job. Of those participants, 27 percent indicated their training was an “essential requirement,” another 12 percent indicated it was “very important,” and 9 percent reported it was “moderately important.” Only 27 percent indicated their training was “not important at all” to getting their job.

Most participants said the skills they learned in their training program were useful in doing their job. Some 49 percent of participants indicated the skills were “very useful,” 16 percent said “moderately useful,” and 7 percent “a little useful.” Only 15 percent of participants who were employed indicated the skills were “not useful at all.”

Wages and Employment Results by Population

Employment and earnings can vary by gender, race and ethnicity, and disability status. Women were just as likely to be employed as men (42 percent), but women were less likely to be employed full time than were men (62 percent vs. 34 percent). Women's hourly wages were lower than men's hourly wages (\$13.66 vs. \$16.20). Women's earnings were also lower than men's (\$14,715 compared to \$30,512). Women's earnings were lower during this reporting year compared to the previous year (\$14,715 compared to \$19,920), while men's earnings were higher (\$30,512 this year vs. \$24,487 last year).



Source: Matches with Employment Security Department data.

Race/Ethnicity Plays Role

Although data from other chapters provide evidence that employment rates, wages and earnings vary among racial and ethnic groups, the sample size for non-white program participants was too small to make valid statistical inferences among DSB participants.

Competency Gains

Based on Participant Survey results, most DSB clients (75 percent) enrolled to get equipment they needed because of their disability. Some 56 percent of all clients enrolled to learn skills for a new job and 56 percent to get job search help.

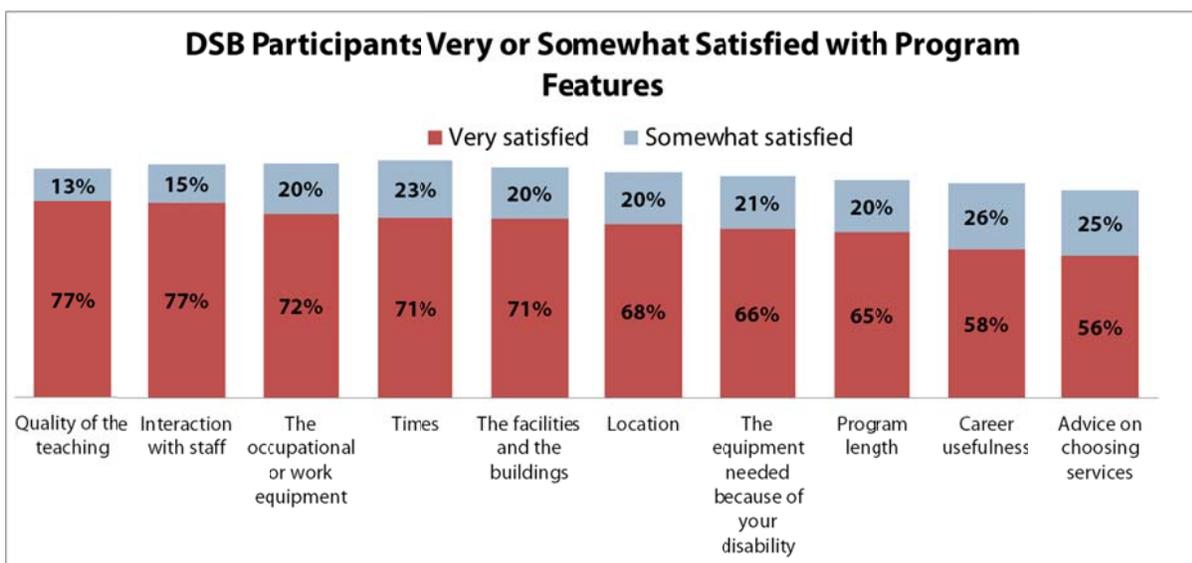
DSB clients were more likely to report receiving training in job skills, such as machinery operation (30 percent) or learning skills for a new job (34 percent), rather than general workplace skills, such as work habits (10 percent) or teamwork (14 percent).



Source: Workforce Board's Participant Satisfaction Survey 2011.

Participant Satisfaction - Did Participants Get the Skills They Needed?

Some 63 percent of DSB clients were classified as rehabilitated upon leaving the program (that is, they were working at least 90 days prior to exit). This is 8 percentage points higher than reported in 2008. Some 81 percent of clients said they were “very satisfied” or “somewhat satisfied” with their DSB program, down from 89 percent of the DSB clients in the last participant survey. Over three-quarters of the respondents were “very satisfied” with the teaching quality and the level of interaction with staff. Relatively few participants were “very satisfied” with career usefulness (58 percent) and advice on choosing services (56 percent).



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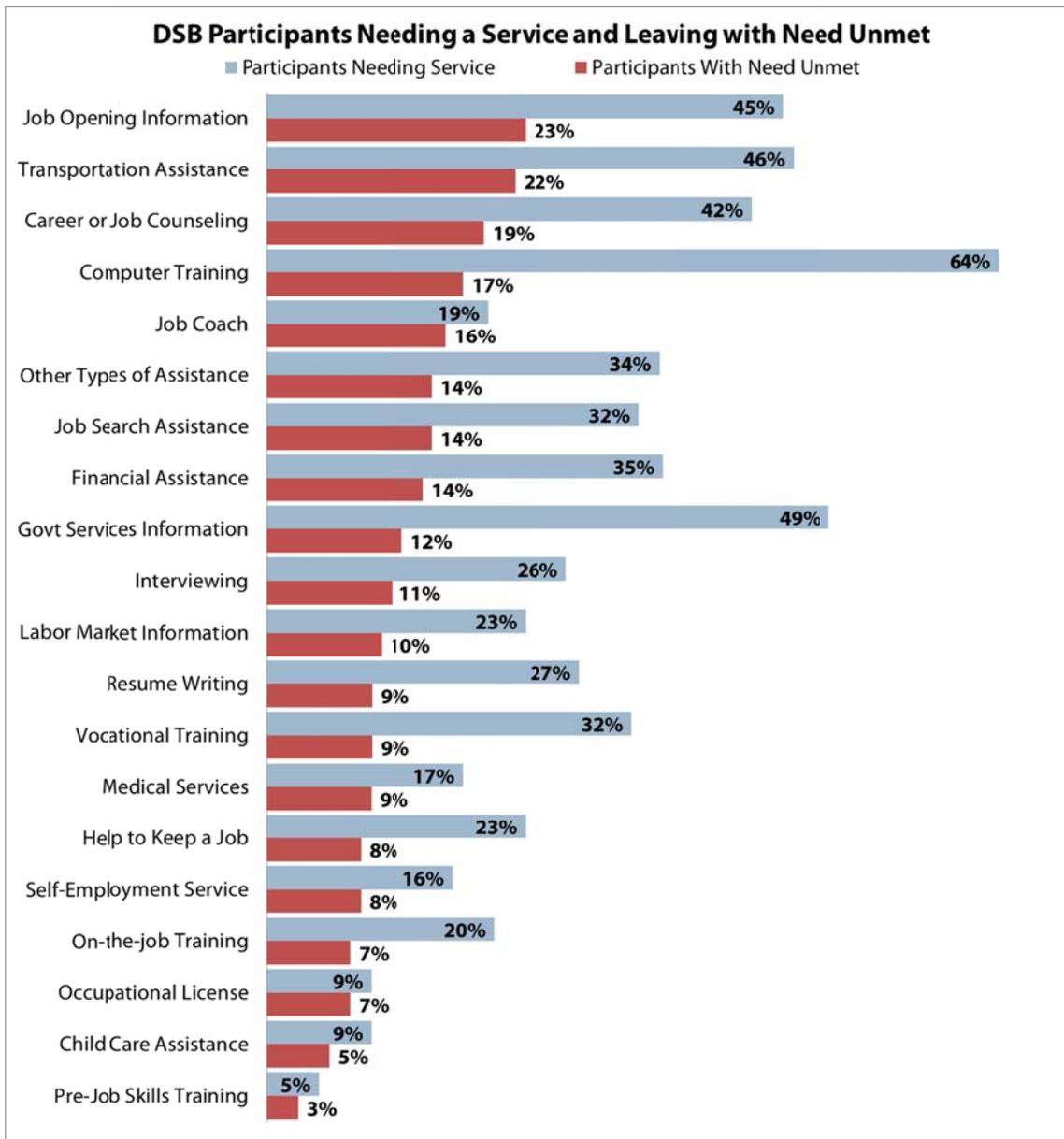
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Source: Workforce Board's Participant Satisfaction Survey 2011.

Similar to two years ago, DSB clients indicated computer training, information about government services, transportation assistance, and information about jobs as the support services most needed while participating in the program. Also similar to two years ago, a relatively high percentage left with an unmet need⁷ for information about job openings (23 percent) and other job related services (career counseling 19 percent, job coach 16 percent, interviewing 11 percent). In addition, 22 percent left with an unmet need for transportation assistance.

⁷ Unmet need refers to cases where the student reports that either they did not receive the required service or what was provided did not meet their needs.



Source: Workforce Board's Participant Satisfaction Survey 2011.

Summary and Areas for Improvement

DSB serves individuals who are legally blind or have a visual disability that causes an impediment to employment. Although their level of prior educational attainment tends to be high (45 percent have a college degree) this population faces serious challenges. DSB's results should be interpreted in this light. The employment and earnings results are relatively low (42 percent reported employment and median earnings of \$22,802). The median earnings for women are especially low--\$14,715. We do not know, however, if these results represent positive net impacts compared to what happens to similar individuals who do not take part in a workforce development program. It was not feasible to construct a comparison group because of the unique characteristics of the participant population.

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DSB participants report high degrees of satisfaction with the services they receive. The top three areas that could be stronger, based upon the participant survey, are providing information on job openings, transportation assistance, and career counseling.