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2-1-2010

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Recommended Citation

Smith, Frank A. and Lugas, Jaime, "Data Note: Vocational Rehabilitation Employment Outcomes for Transition-age Youth with Autism and Other Disabilities" (2010). *Data Note Series, Institute for Community Inclusion*. 12.

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Vocational Rehabilitation Employment Outcomes for Transition-age Youth with Autism and Other Disabilities

By Frank A. Smith and Jaime Lugas

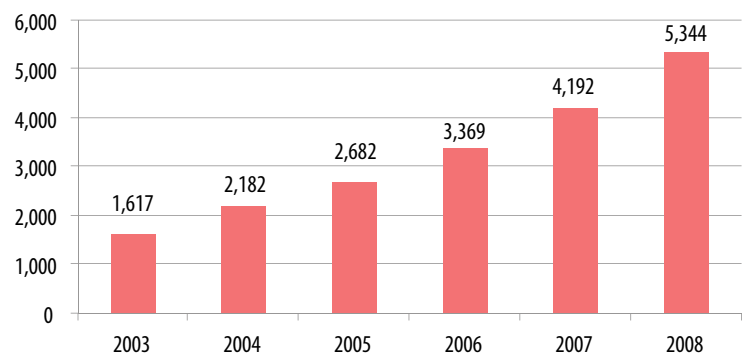
Youth with autism, like youth from other disability subgroups, often participate in state Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) programs to obtain employment. While youth with autism represent a small percentage of all VR closures, the number with autism who closed out of VR more than tripled between 2003 and 2008 (see figure). In this Data Note, we compare employment outcomes for two subgroups of youth who exited VR in FY 2008, those with autism and those with all other disabilities.

For this analysis, youth are defined as *individuals who applied for VR services between the ages of 16 and 26*. The subgroups were delineated based on VR counselor indications of primary and secondary disability in Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) 911 case record data. All individuals with autism indicated in either the primary and/or secondary disability field were included in the autism subgroup. All remaining youth were included in the all other disabilities subgroup.

The table below summarizes four VR employment outcomes for the disability subgroups: number of closures into employment, rehabilitation rate¹, average weekly hours worked, and average weekly earnings. Youth with autism make up 3% of all youth who exited VR with an employment outcome in 2008 (N=2,093). Youth with autism had a higher rehabilitation rate (63%) than youth with all other disabilities (55.6%). Looking at this outcome, it appears youth with autism fare better than their counterparts with other disabilities. However, if we focus on the weekly hours worked and earnings data, we see youth with autism have less favorable outcomes than youth with other disabilities, working eight fewer hours per week and earning \$120 fewer per week on average.

These data show that researchers, policymakers, and practitioners should focus on multiple outcomes when analyzing the success of VR services. Analysis of VR outcomes needs to consider not only employment but also the number of hours VR customers are working and the degree to which employment offers the opportunity for greater economic self-sufficiency through earnings.

Number of VR Closures 2003-2008, Youth with Autism



VR Employment Outcomes for Transition-age Youth with Autism and All Other Disabilities

	Autism	All Other Disabilities
Number of VR Closures into Employment	2,093	68,364
Rehabilitation Rate	63.0%	55.6%
Average Weekly Hours Worked	24	32
Average Weekly Earnings	\$196	\$316

¹ The rehabilitation rate is the percentage of all persons who received VR employment services after signing an IPE that exited the VR system with an employment outcome.

Suggested Citation: Smith, F. & Lugas, J., 2010. Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Employment Outcomes for Transition-age Youth with Autism, and Other Disabilities. DataNote Series, Data Note XXVI. Boston, MA: Institute for Community Inclusion.

