

**Approved Minutes**  
SRC POLICY AND PROCEDURES COMMITTEE  
Thursday, September 3, 2020  
10:00 AM – 12:00 PM  
Zoom

**Meeting called by:**

Sherrie Brunelle, Chair, called the meeting to order at 10:05 a.m.

**Members Present:**

- Helena Kehne
- Kristen Carpentier
- Sherrie Brunelle
- Deborah Tucker Boyce
- Patricia Wehman

**Members Absent:**

- n/a

**SRC Liaison:**

- James Smith

**SRC Coordinator:**

- Kate Larose

**Interpreters:**

- Patrick Galasso

**Speakers or Presenters:**

- Bill Hudson
- Donna Curtin
- Elizabeth Bull

**Guests:**

- Rocko Gieselman
- Cara Sachs

**1) Introductions** (Sherrie Brunelle)

**Discussion:**

Those in attendance went around the table and introduced themselves.

**Conclusions:**

Thanks to everyone!

**Action Items, Person Responsible, Deadline:**

None

**2) Approval of Agenda** (Sherrie Brunelle)

**Discussion:**

Sherrie asked for any proposed additions or changes to the agenda. There were none. Deb moved to approve the minutes and it was seconded. No discussion. Vote unanimous 3-0-0

**Conclusions:**

Motion passes: today's agenda accepted.

**Action Items, Person Responsible, Deadline:**

None

**3) Open for Public Comment** (Sherrie Brunelle)

**Discussion:**

No one from the public was present.

**Conclusions:**

n/a

**Action Items, Person Responsible, Deadline:**

None

**4) Approval of Minutes for July 13, 2020** (Sherrie Brunelle)

**Discussion:**

Sherrie asked for any proposed changes or amendments to the July 13, 2020 minutes. There were none. Helena moved to approve the minutes and it was seconded. No discussion. All approved. Vote unanimous 3-0-0

**Conclusions:**

July 13, 2020 minutes were approved.

**Action Items, Person Responsible, Deadline:**

- Upload approved minutes to the SRC website, **Kate Larose**, 9/9/2020

**5) Draft Review: Post-Secondary Training and Education** (James Smith)

**Discussion:**

James shared and walked through the [draft of Chapter 311: Post-Secondary Education and Training](#), noting that federal statute changed in 2014. Prior to 2014 VocRehab was measured solely by numbers of people returned to employment instead of measures relevant to their long-term success. After 2014 this

changed to more qualitative measures including things such as median earnings and achievement of credentials. The previous policy manual needed to be changed as a result. In the new chapter we are starting off with all the ways people can get credentials without traditional college programs, apprenticeships, and on the job training programs, noting that the average starting wage is \$18 an hour for those completing apprenticeships.

We then move into spending guidelines which has a \$3k allocation for PSE education training programs leading to a credential though there are exceptions for every spending guideline to consider people who need more to be successful or for people who are on SSI/SSDI and cannot be asked to contribute. Other examples of spending guideline exceptions include travel back and forth to their home to the training site or funds for basic living expenses when people may need to give up part time employment in order to participate in training.

The second part of the chapter is all about post-secondary education. One of the things we have wrestled with over the years is that schools see us as a post-secondary funding option such as VSAC but that's not what we are. Rather, VR funding should be used for clients engaged in the full VR program and services and the employment goal needs to come first, and post-secondary education needs to fit in to that. We also state our spending guidelines which is \$300 a semester for someone going to school on a part time basis (which, again, can have exceptions). Also new to this version is outlining how VR can pay for supported education which provides direct support on the college campus to help people be successful (examples include College Steps or Project Search).

Kristen shared that she was impressed with James' ability to succinctly summarize such a large piece of policy.

Sherrie requested that we go through the policy section-by-section to provide comments and questions.

Sherrie suggested that we add a definition of post-secondary education in the definitions section.

Rocko added that we should include the language "accredited".

Sherrie noted that documentation requirements were removed.

James shared that he appreciates the paradigm shift that VR will be supporting all consumers in considering post-secondary education and training options.

Sherrie shared under general policy, item #3, she wondered about adding a line to complete the sentence along the lines of: "...leading to higher wage employment". In the next section she wondered about adding additional language about SSI/SSDI and PASS plans (item #1). She wondered if that section was the best placement for that language.

Cara shared that her PASS plan was approved in February and that it was a difficult process given the rule changes. As a result, the PASS plan feels very high risk to consumers and they likely may not know about those obstacles and risks in advance. For example, she had to start from scratch and go through a whole new disability determination and she was not told that before she applied. James shared he will follow-up with the benefits counseling team to learn more about that.

James shared that in the past VR has had a number of consumers who have used PASS plans to pay for education and he would somehow like it referenced in the chapter.

Sherrie asked if Community Kitchen Academy (under Section 3 b) is a statewide option. If not, she suggested using the language "trainings such as Serve Safe". She also requested that on page 5 under spending guidelines that we change "funding" to "funds" in the second bullet, and in the last bullet change to "DVR can provide funds for ancillary supports up to..."

Sherrie stated that it would be helpful to have an introductory statement in Section IV: about what OJT is and to also add "DVR can support that person through an on the job agreement". She also noted that the word "agreement" should follow OJT in each of the bullet points.

Sherrie will provide her track changes document with Kate and James.

Rocko wanted to ensure that we could consider something as a pre-apprenticeship without a classroom component. James shared that pre-apprenticeship is federally defined with formal standards that we need to follow per the Department of Labor.

Sherrie shared that parts of Section VI seemed redundant and wondered if someone in PSE is already doing an IPE. Rocko shared this is not necessarily the case and gave an example of supporting a high school youth through the process.

James shared that he looks forward to reviewing Sherrie's edits and reflecting on the best way to write this chapter. He also shared that the primary audience for the chapter is VR counselors who will be using this in their work.

James shared the next steps in the process and hopes to post it before the next committee meeting.

Deb made a motion to approve the draft policy with the addition of any of the suggested edits from Sherrie. Helena seconded. No discussion. All approved. Vote unanimous 3-0-0

## **Conclusions:**

See above

## **Action Items, Person Responsible, Deadline:**

- Email suggested edits to Kate and James, **Sherrie Brunelle**, 9/8/2020
- Share final policy with committee, **James Smith**, 12/1/2020

## **6) Chapter 313: Audiology Services and Hearing Aids (Group)**

### **Discussion:**

Bill shared the [draft of Chapter 313: Audiology and Hearing Aid Services](#) and provided an overview of audiology services. He shared that he and the 11 designated hearing aid counselors at each regional office have been working from this document as a guideline for quite a while, and that it was decided to be included in policy in order to have consistency for counselors around the state. To be eligible a consumer needs to go to an audiologist for an audiogram (which they prefer be less than one year old). In addition, they also look at the workplace communication assessment tool—which is currently 10 pages long, and which they hope to reduce down to five pages—which identifies areas of functional loss. For example, Elizabeth might ask, “Tell me about your worst day at work in terms of not being able to hear?” Elizabeth shared that the assessment is invaluable as it includes functional loss as well as what the consumer knows about their hearing loss, and serves as a guiding document. Bill shared that they also work with people who have one-sided hearing loss and tinnitus.

James asked about Meniere's disease. Elizabeth shared that it is a disease that impacts the inner ear, and as a result it impacts hearing and balance.

Bill said they strongly suggest that clients use a licensed audiologist, especially for first time hearing aid users. In Vermont we have tried for years to include that hearing aids be covered by insurance through legislation, but we have not had success with this. A hearing aid can run \$2k-\$8k each (excluding the costs of audiologists) so they can be quite pricey. VR uses a state hearing aid contract that currently includes three vendors around the state. Once they have the costs, VR works with the consumers to consider their options and they generally like to provide three different models.

Sherrie shared obstacles of reusing hearing aids. Elizabeth shared that this is often the case for propriety reasons or software access issues for audiologists. Elizabeth shared that they anticipate hearing aids to last five to seven years, but that hearing changes. Bill shared that there have been cases where a consumer has been able to reuse hearing aids, but it is not common, and they try to avoid crossing over hearing aid manufacturers with other audiologists.

VR will pay up to \$750 for the cost of one hearing aid, and up to \$1,000 for two hearing aids. They tend to not pay for costs associated with the exam and hearing fees, but this might happen on a case by case basis. Bill shared that in addition to financial support options from the audiologist or hospital, they connect people with Opportunities Credit Union which provides loan options. Medicaid will cover costs.

Bill said that they also walk through insurance and warranty options with consumers as theft and damage does happen.

Deb shared that her new hearing aids were life changing. Bill shared that he and Elizabeth see consumers have dramatic changes when they get hearing aids including how it addresses mental health such as anxiety and depression, and even neck and back pain from the strain of trying to hear all day.

Bill shared that he and Elizabeth started a hearing loss training about four years ago for consumers and that it will be moved to video for future use as he will be retiring next month.

Sherrie asked about exceptions when providers are not licensed audiologists. Bill shared that some of the current vendors are not licensed audiologists and this decision was made to ensure consumers have access in their regions, but that they hope to change this with the next contract as St. Johnsbury may soon have a licensed audiologist.

Sherrie shared that in one part of the document it states that an audiogram should be less than one year old, and in another section, it states that it should be less than 12 months old. She suggested that the language be consistent in both places.

Deb shared her experience going to Costco and the price difference. Elizabeth shared that it illustrates informed consumer consent and choice which they support. Bill also reiterated that they recommend that first time hearing aid users work with audiologists.

Deb made a motion to approve the draft policy with provision for further editing for formatting and clarity. Sherrie seconded. No discussion. All approved. Vote unanimous 3-0-0

Conclusions:  
See above.

**Action Items, Person Responsible, Deadline:**

- Share final policy with committee, **James Smith**, 12/1/2020

**7) Other Business (Group)**

**A. Agenda Setting – November 5, 2020**

**Discussion:**

Agenda items for the next meeting to include:

- Self-employment working group update
- Standalone SSI/SSDI Chapter

Carry forward list for future meetings include

- Rehab technology- Phil and Assistive Technology project
- Transportation

- Maintenance
- Review spending guidelines survey data

**Conclusions:**

See above

**Action Items, Person Responsible, Deadline:**

- Touch base about self-employment and the standalone Social Security chapter, **James Smith and Sherrie Brunelle**, 10/16/2020
- Speak with Phil to determine the best way to proceed, **James Smith**, 10/23/2020
- Present proposed agenda, **Kate Larose**, 10/16/2020

**8) Adjournment** (Sherrie Brunelle)

Sherrie called the meeting adjourned at 11:59 a.m.

**Action Items, Person Responsible, Deadline:**

- Draft minutes uploaded to SRC website, **Kate Larose**, 9/9/2020
- Draft minutes emailed to Committee members, **Kate Larose**, 9/9/2020
- Minutes approved, **Committee**, 11/5/2020
- Approved minutes uploaded to website, **Kate Larose**, 11/10/2020