

Approved Minutes
VERMONT STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL (VTSRC)
Thursday, April 1, 2021, 1:00PM – 3:30PM
Zoom

Meeting called by:

Nick Caputo, Vice Chair, called the meeting to order at 1:01pm.

Members Present:

- Ana Kolbach
- Asher Edelson
- Bill Meirs
- Cara Sachs
- Cari Kelley
- Diane Dalmasse, ex-officio, non-voting
- Gina D'Ambrosio
- Kristen Carpentier, non-voting
- Marlena Hughes
- Martha Frank
- Nick Caputo
- Patricia Wehman
- Robin Ingenthron
- Sherrie Brunelle
- Helena Kehne
- Emily Marie Ahtúnan
- Sarah Sterling
- Rose Lucenti

Members Absent:

- Olivia Smith-Hammond
- Brian Smith
- Sam Liss
- Sarah Launderville
- Danielle Dubois
- Courtney Blasius
- Rocko Gieselman
- Calla Papademas

SRC Liaison:

- James Smith
- Amanda Arnold

SRC Coordinator:

Kate Larose

Interpreters:

- Rachel Cahill
- Elizabeth Beauregard

Speakers or Presenters:

- Nancy Dwyer
- William Pendlebury
- Michael Adams
- Steve Crafts

Guests:

- Laura Siegel

1) Introductions (Nick Caputo, Vice Chair)**Discussion:**

Those in attendance introduced themselves.

Conclusions:

Thanks to everyone!

Action Items, Person Responsible, Deadline:

None

2) Approval of Agenda (Nick Caputo)**Discussion:**

Nick asked for any proposed additions or changes to the agenda. Sherrie moved to accept the agenda and it was seconded. No further discussion. All approved. Vote unanimous 15-0-1

Conclusions:

Motion passes: today's agenda accepted

Action Items, Person Responsible, Deadline:

None

3) Open for Public Comment (Nick Caputo)**Discussion:**

None

Conclusions:

n/a

Action Items, Person Responsible, Deadline:

None

4) Approval of Minutes for February 4, 2021 (Nick Caputo)

Discussion:

Nick asked for any proposed changes or amendments to the February 4, 2021 minutes. There were none. Martha moved to approve the minutes and it was seconded. No discussion. All approved. Vote unanimous 15-0-1

Conclusions:

[Minutes from February 4, 2021](#) were approved

Action Items, Person Responsible, Deadline:

Upload approved minutes to the SRC website, **Kate Larose**, 4/6/2021

5) Consent Agenda (Nick Caputo)

Discussion:

Nick asked for any proposed changes or amendments to the following consent agenda items:

- [AOE Committee March 4, 2021](#)
- [Performance Review Committee February 4, 2021](#)
- [Policy & Procedures Committee March 4, 2021](#)
- [Steering Committee March 4, 2021](#)
- [Coordinator's April 1, 2021 Report](#)

Cari moved to approve, and it was seconded. No further discussion. Vote unanimous 15-0-1

Conclusions:

Consent agenda items approved

Action Items, Person Responsible, Deadline:

Upload items to SRC website, **Kate Larose**, 4/6/2021

6) [Presentation: VR Marketing Plan](#) (Michael Adams and Steve Crafts)

Discussion:

Steve and Michael joined us from The Place Creative, the firm that VR hired for rebranding and marketing efforts. Diane shared that it has been over 10 years since we've updated our marketing plan and that changes such as WIOA and moving from jobs to careers have happened in the meantime which future plans need to reflect. Steve walked through the [final VR Marketing Plan](#) and highlighted focus group findings from adults, youth, and employers which led to audience insights that helped to craft brand recommendations.

James shared that at a recent training on diversity and inclusion that VR staff had this week it was reinforced that graphic or illustrated symbols in marketing are more inclusive. Steve shared that success stories of consumers' experience, in addition to use of conceptual illustration, will help target audience members to connect.

He said that plans moving forward are to bring CWS and VR under one umbrella name as well as rebranding the language of "rehabilitative employment" or "rehab" as it carries a negative connotation and we want the focus to be on hope.

James and Diane attended all the focus groups. James was moved by how uplifting and inspirational the experiences were and Diane underscored the tremendous commitment from VR staff to the people that they serve.

Cari and Martha shared they were happy to hear that we will be shifting away from "rehab" terminology. Michael and Steve said that they will be working through the summer to get ready for an autumn rollout.

Sherrie asked about how we identify the people who we serve. There are a variety of terms such as "customer" or "consumer" and wondering if there are terms that would feel more hopeful. Steve shared that "customer" feels transactional and that they have been using the term "client" or "the people we serve". He said that shifting the focus from the third person to the first person (i.e., "we want to help *you*") will be good moving forward. Helena shared that the term "peers" has also been used within other organizations. Cara added that there are connotations with the term "peer" that imply that the person working with you also has a disability which is not always the case in VR. She also added that "client" makes sense in situations when people have a choice of service providers and where they feel like they are in the driver's seat. Robin shared that temporary employment agencies use the term "client". Emily shared that she likes client or partner, and Bill added that he likes the term partner and that it would require more definition as VR works with several partners. Laura added that it would make sense to ask people what terms they would like to be referred to as. Marlana echoed this and added the word "patron" for suggestion.

Emily asked how many individuals with disabilities were part of these focus groups and said that their input should be key in deciding upon any future terminology. Helena and Cara agreed.

Cara shared that moving away from "rehab" would feel more open and inclusive as people with chronic illnesses are not going to be rehabbed. She also said that we should not shy away from the term "disabled".

Sherrie echoed Emily's comments and said that she would like to see focus groups comprised of consumers.

Emily wondered how we would communicate conceptual illustrations and encouraged accessible design throughout the process.

Nick wondered if the consumer satisfaction survey would be an appropriate venue for asking people about preferred terms.

James shared that we are early in the process and that once materials are developed to react to it would be a great time to get consumer feedback.

Cari shared that her 23-year-old daughter who uses a wheelchair prefers the term "differently-abled". Cara shared that she finds the term infantilizing when she has experienced it being used in various contexts.

Conclusions:

See above

Action Items, Person Responsible, Deadline:

n/a

7) Director's Report (Diane Dalmasse)

Discussion:

Diane walked through her [April Director's report](#).

Nick asked about the impacts of home internet access. Diane shared that they made the decision to support people with internet upgrades and routers.

Martha shared that she is happy to see the careers focus and also hopes that post-secondary experiences (such as College STEPS) will continue to be promoted to youth so they and families become aware of the options. Diane shared that communities of practice will be set up and VR will ensure that post-secondary options will continue to be on the table.

Bill added that the State of Vermont's current employee engagement survey is happening, and that high engagement and response rates will help to shape the future of remote work with the state.

Conclusions:

Thank you, Diane, for the update!

Action Items, Person Responsible, Deadline:

n/a

8) Committee Chair Updates (Sarah Launderville)

Discussion:

A. Advocacy, Outreach, & Education Committee

Asher referred to the minutes from the last two AOE meetings and shared highlights. The February meeting focused on the legislative handout that was

created, including how to use it in outreach to legislative officials. The March meeting included an overview of American Rescue Plan monies coming to Vermont as well as H.266 which would have VT join the rest of NE in providing a hearing aid insurance via mandate.

B. Policies & Procedures Committee

Sherrie shared that the P&P Committee made some changes to the audiology chapter based on RSA feedback to ensure that there are no indications of spending caps. She said they have also been working on the self-employment chapter as well as changes to assistive technology. James said that VR has been wanting to update self-employment for years and Sherrie has done more than 90% of the work in drafting this chapter and he is grateful for her efforts.

C. Performance Review Committee

Nick reported that the PR Committee transitioned from James to Amanda as the VR liaison, and they've had some great presentations including the effects of COVID on consumers and Linking Learning and Careers. At their next meeting they will be focusing on the consumer satisfaction survey.

D. Steering Committee

Nick shared that Steering has been focusing on training, membership, and recruitment as well as focusing on presentations at full SRC meetings that highlight the impact as well as the opportunities that COVID has had and brings to VR and consumers.

Conclusions:

Thank you to the committee chairs for the updates!

Action Items, Person Responsible, Deadline:

n/a

9) VR Regional Manager Updates: Managing consumer services during COVID-19 (Nancy Dwyer and William Pendlebury)

Discussion:

Nancy Dwyer reported the following:

VR has been working on the Careers Initiative for some time now. What changes have you seen in how your office provide services? What is going well? What areas still need work?

We continue to plug along with our dashboard, have our follow-ups set, and are focusing on assessments. We are focusing on customers' employment goals and have more information about trainings and career ladders that are being added to our pipeline reports by BAMs. We are meeting as a regional to determine the best strategies to move this work forward.

How is the transition of transition services going in your region?

We've been in the thick of it for two months in Springfield and Brattleboro and have recently hired two transition counselors (one new to the field, and one who is a veteran). The teams meet weekly together, and we have already met with all the schools we will be serving. We are making progress when it comes to summer employment and we are meeting regionally to share ideas on a monthly basis.

Is there a customer success story you want to share?

One of our counselors in Springfield met with someone who was a nurse who experienced a psychotic breakdown at work and was no longer able to be at her job. Though she was able to get to a place of medical stability the consumer had anxiety that kept her from even entering a place of employment. After supporting her after a while, the consumer not only entered a place of employment, but applied and interviewed on the spot to get a job. After some time had passed the consumer said that she hoped to return to her old job and they worked through expectations and what those conversations could look like. She was rehired at her previous position and VR was able to help her with transportation by helping to pay for a vehicle.

How might provision of services change after COVID? For example, what aspects of remote services might you continue?

We are finding that it is now much easier to meet with people as people are not always on the road traveling between meetings and it's easier for consumers as they aren't having to ensure the hardship of finding transportation into the office. We are currently exploring what a hybrid model can look like for moving forward.

William Pendlebury reported the following:

VR has been working on the Careers Initiative for some time now. What changes have you seen in how your office provide services? What is going well? What areas still need work?

We have taken time in both Rutland and Bennington to review the five leading indicators and what they might mean. We review the data and discuss cases during team meetings so that we can brainstorm strategies to help consumers move forward with their careers. For example, we have been doing very well with teaming up so that consumers get "wholistic" services from our staff. We have been boosting our workforce development efforts within the community so that we can provide consumers with additional training opportunities. We have our Assessment Specialists and leaders meeting regularly to strategize so that we can provide staff with support around doing assessments. Rutland recently re-launched their Career Start (Orientation II) with the intention of helping new referrals understand the labor market so that we can help them decide what to do next when it comes to employment and training. We will be doing the o'net assessment during Career Start & using results as the new referrals move forward with VR VABIR. More work is left but we have been effective when it

comes to embracing the idea of supporting consumers with careers not just jobs.

How is the transition of transition services going in your region?

Going well overall. Both offices have been meeting weekly to determine roles, school coverage and case transfers. I have been joining TCs during school visits so that we can educate local educators about the changes and expected benefits. We expect the shift to be complete this spring so that we can be ready for the 2021-22 school year.

Is there a project or partnership that is going really well in your region?

We have quite a few projects going on such as Project Search, Price Chopper Hiring Advantage, the Bennington Workforce Education and Development Committee, etc. We had great success with COMPASS (what used to be College Steps). We were able to identify 15 customers who were able to receive additional one-on-one support with peers for tutoring. We saw both immediate and long-term success as the result of this pilot which has now expanded statewide.

Is there a customer success story you want to share?

Back in 2016, we worked with a student who was told by her high school SPED team that she would not be able to become a nurse because of her learning disability. She was very down and did not feel hopeful about her future. VR helped her enroll in the WIB Step It Up program so that she could get LNA training and eventual work at a local nursing home. She then signed up for College Steps through Castleton. The team helped her with some college level classes and skills. As she made progress, she also got additional training so that she could get full time employment as a Medical Tech at RRMC in Rutland. She is now enrolled in VTC's nursing program. Mike Kingsbury continues to work with her closely. This is a good example of progressive employment and education. We also team up with partners.

How might provision of services change after COVID? For example, what aspects of remote services might you continue?

We have been discussing the hybrid model concept with staff. Last week we reviewed ideas around best practices and what might be ok to do remotely & in person. Staff have been providing good feedback. For example, we might do some staff meetings remotely long-term, but we might do other meetings in person such as initial interviews and important outreach meetings.

Conclusions:

Thank you, Nancy and Will, for the updates!

Action Items, Person Responsible, Deadline:

None

10) Update: [Reallotment Summary](#) (James Smith)

Discussion:

James provided updates and highlights to reallotment including the following:

- Technology- VR has an RFP out to hire a technology coach for consumers. We also need support in identifying what are the best and most cost-effective options.
- Flex Fund- Can be used beyond spending guidelines to provide extra resources to consumers enrolled in training such as childcare.
- Wages for Work Experiences- We are currently developing a contract with VABIR so that consumers can now be paid wages—which goes beyond an offset or stipend—so that they can receive minimum wage for short term work experiences.

Diane mentioned that financial literacy training, transportation, and district level projects are other items VR is focused on.

Conclusions:

See above.

Action Items, Person Responsible, Deadline:

- Include reallotment summary as a recurring agenda item, **Kate Larose**.

11) Other business

Discussion:

A. VR Management Structure

Diane congratulated Will on his new position as Field Services Manager with VR Central Office. She said that a second Field Services Manager position was created and Hib Doe was hired for that role. Diane referenced the [new organizational chart](#) and said the intent is to provide opportunity for leadership development and succession planning.

B. Upcoming Events

Martha shared the following two upcoming events that Vermont Family Network is offering at no cost:

- [April 8th and 9th VFN Annual Conference](#)
The theme this year is “Imagine, Inspire, Innovate”. Rachel Callander and Karen Gaffney will keynote. The conference will be held via Zoom and registration is free at the link above.
- [Youth Summit](#)
The annual youth summit will be held on May 20th. More information will be shared as it becomes available

Conclusions:

None

Action Items, Person Responsible, Deadline:

n/a

12) Closing Thoughts (Group)

Discussion:

Nick invited people to share their favorite part of today's meeting or something we learned:

- Enjoyed the VR Regional Manager updates, especially the success stories.
- Appreciated the discussion around marketing materials and the ability to discuss and digest that information in this forum.
- Success stories put a personal touch on things and I am excited about reallocation funds being made available for summer employment of young people.
- Appreciated the discussion around marketing materials and I think it is one of the more active conversations we have had at the SRC and I always enjoy the success stories and hearing what is going on in various regions.
- Appreciate being part of the SRC and learning more.
- Learning about rebranding and am excited about how it can open doors for people.
- Rebranding was great and it is a delicate dance, and I am excited to see the end result.
- Our discussions around language when it comes to rebranding as it can pull in more people.
- I look forward to reading through the minutes as I was late, but I do always love the success stories.
- Loved hearing about the marketing plan and I particularly loved the part about our work being about offering hope. And that "work doesn't have to suck".
- It was nice to see the marketing presentation.
- The engagement that we had today and hoping we create more opportunities for engagement moving forward at our meetings.
- Appreciate having Amanda as the PR Committee liaison and wonder about bringing the LLC presentation to a full SRC meeting.
- Kate has expanded her role with us to include success stories and they make the work come alive and we are excited to have her doing this to memorialize and catalog these stories.

13) Adjournment (Nick Caputo)

Conclusions:

Nick called the meeting adjourned at 3:21pm

Action Items, Person Responsible, Deadline:

- Draft minutes uploaded to SRC website, **Kate Larose**, 4/6/2021

- Draft minutes emailed to Committee members, **Kate Larose**, 4/6/2021
- Minutes approved, **Committee**, 6/3/2021
- Approved minutes uploaded to website, **Kate Larose**, 6/8/2021