

Minutes

VERMONT STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL (VTSRC)

Thursday, February 3, 2022 1:00PM – 3:30PM

Waterbury State Office Building, Ash and Zoom

Meeting called by:

Chair Asher Edelson called the meeting to order at 1:00 p.m.

Members Present:

- Ana Kolbach
- Asher Edelson
- Cara Sachs
- Courtney Blasius
- Diane Dalmasse, ex-officio, non-voting
- Emily Marie Ahtúnan
- Gina D'Ambrosio
- Helena Kehne
- Kristen Carpentier, non-voting
- Laura Flint
- Laura Siegel
- Marlena Hughes
- Martha Frank
- Nick Caputo
- Patricia Wehman
- Rocko Gieselman, non-voting
- Rose Lucenti
- Sarah Lauderville
- Sarah Sterling
- Sherrie Brunelle

Members Absent:

- Andrea Bacchi
- Bill Meirs
- Calla Papademas
- Cari Kelley
- Lexia Stanley
- Robin Ingenthron

SRC Liaison:

- Amanda Arnold
- James Smith

SRC Coordinator:

- Kate Larose

Interpreters:

- Sabrina Seeger
- Jen Rainey

Speakers or Presenters:

- Cindy Seguin
- Kristy Malone
- Hib Doe

Guests:

- n/a

1) Introductions (Asher Edelson, Chair)**Discussion:**

Those in attendance introduced themselves.

Conclusions:

Thanks to everyone!

Action Items, Person Responsible, Deadline:

None

2) Approval of Agenda (Asher Edelson)**Discussion:**

Asher 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 16-0-0

Conclusions:

Motion passes: today's agenda accepted

Action Items, Person Responsible, Deadline:

None

3) Open for Public Comment (Asher Edelson)**Discussion:**

There was no public comment given.

Conclusions:

n/a

Action Items, Person Responsible, Deadline:

None

4) Approval of Minutes for [December 2, 2021](#) (Asher Edelson)

Discussion:

Asher asked for any proposed changes or amendments to the [December 2, 2021](#) minutes. There were none. Martha moved to approve the minutes and it was seconded. No discussion. All approved. Vote unanimous 16-0-0

Conclusions:

Minutes from December 2, 2021 were approved

Action Items, Person Responsible, Deadline:

- Upload approved minutes to SRC website, **Kate Larose**, 2/8/2022

5) Consent Agenda (Asher Edelson)

Discussion:

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

- [AOE Committee January 6, 2022](#)
- [Performance Review Committee December 2, 2021](#)
- [Policy & Procedures Committee January 6, 2022](#)
- [Steering Committee January 13, 2022](#)
- [Coordinator's Report February 3, 2022](#)

Rose moved to approve, and it was seconded. No further discussion. Vote unanimous 16-0-0

Conclusions:

Consent agenda items approved

Action Items, Person Responsible, Deadline:

- Upload to SRC website, **Kate Larose**, 2/8/2022

6) Director's Report (Diane Dalmasse)

Discussion:

Diane shared the following:

VR went back to remote work which will likely be extended to the end of February with exceptions being made for people who need in-person appointments. On the financial front, VR is in great shape and we are in the position to implement innovative projects and will be able to continue funding Pathways—services specifically for consumers with chronic mental illness—into next year. We look forward to continuing our exciting work. We are getting more experience with paid training and work experiences and learned early on that a shorter term of four weeks of paid experience with the possibility of renewal for an additional four weeks makes the most sense. But we are seeing that paid training is a game changer. The Summer Career Exploration Program (SCEP) held its kickoff meeting last week and there is lots of excitement. We are already reviewing students and caseloads to identify candidates for the upcoming year and recently finished our SCEP how-to manual which

incorporates lessons learned and feedback from field staff who participated in the inaugural program last summer. We served 150 students last year through 110 employers. VR is currently awaiting approval from Joint Fiscal Committee and the Governor's office to accept innovation fund grant money which was awarded in late September. In the interim, Rich Tulikangas is working on the Vermont Career Advancement Project implementation plan. It's some of the most exciting systems change work we've done in the last few decades. Our rebranding initiative is underway, and we have rolled out our internal communications plan and held community meetings for youth and adult community partners and have been getting overwhelmingly positive feedback. And finally, VR's last federal audit from Rehabilitation Services Administration was in 2013 so we have been selected for a weeklong monitoring visit which will take place in May. VR is already working on pulling together advanced documentation, including large amounts of data from our AWARE system. It will likely include conversations with SRC members and we will share information as we have it.

Conclusions:

Thank you, Diane, for the update!

Action Items, Person Responsible, Deadline:

n/a

7) Committee Chair Updates (Asher Edelson)

Discussion:

A. Advocacy, Outreach, & Education Committee

Asher reported that Cari Kelley was AOE's newly elected chair but unable to attend today due to illness. He said that AOE has finalized the updates to this year's legislative priorities and H.266 statement of support, which we will delve more into later in today's agenda. He also shared that an adhoc workgroup on transportation is in the works and more information will be shared about this at next month's AOE meeting.

B. Policies & Procedures Committee

Sherrie reported that Chapters 201 and 202 (referral and eligibility) were passed out of committee and will go through the public hearing process. The self-employment chapter review was moved to later in 2022. The committee has shared their interest in collaborating with the AOE committee on the development of a transportation adhoc workgroup and Sherrie and Cari met earlier this week to get the planning process started.

C. Performance Review Committee

Nick shared that the PR Committee had a presentation in December on customized employment, job carving, and employer engagement. At today's meeting Nick was re-elected committee chair. Topics for upcoming meetings

include reviewing data for Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing people, as well as consumers experiencing mental illness.

D. Steering Committee

Asher invited members to check out last month's meeting minutes. Topics included membership succession planning, the possible establishment of roles for past chairs as well as the creation of committee vice chairs, transparency of SRC meetings, reasonable accommodations, and bylaws revision.

Conclusions:

Thank you to the committee chairs for the updates!

Action Items, Person Responsible, Deadline:

n/a

8) VR Regional Manager Updates (Cindy Seguin and Kristy Malone)

Discussion:

Cindy reported the following from the Burlington and Middlebury regions:

What is one thing that's new or exciting in your region right now?

WorkVT 2.0 is a pilot program that provides supports to individuals who receive social security benefits. The benefit of enrolling in this pilot is to have a team who is supporting you while you are making training, educational and employment decisions. The team meets with each consumer to discuss their employment goals, social security benefits, and risks. (More information is available via [the website](#) and [introductory video](#).)

One might ask why is this different than any other referral to VR. The benefit in working with this team is when a consumer starts to explore educational or employment opportunities, they are engaging in conversations with the team to fully understand their benefits and wage impact. The individual has wraparound services from the initial appointment, and this continues.

We have found it can be important to go slow to go fast, this means if someone needs to take a break from their educational or training path to work on wellness, the team is there to support them during their needed break. Or if someone has completed a training and they're exploring employment opportunities the team will have discussions with this individual regarding how one might maintain a job should their needs change. The team helps to identify one's supports before they are needed.

We've learned some lessons during the enrollment period. One lesson learned was that some of us may have been guarded when thinking about people losing their benefits. The lesson learned is provide education about one's benefits so they can make the best decision for their situation. If one chooses to leave a

benefit program for a high paying temp job and we are sure they understand the long-term risks, we will support them in their journey.

When someone goes to work, it is important for our team to support the individual in learning how to report their earnings to the proper agencies and to provide them with ongoing support while they are in the initial phases of trying employment. This can include frequent check ins as one starts their employment. The team will also work with individuals to develop a support plan so they are prepared should things not work out as they had planned.

We have seen more people engage in higher education and are finding jobs that are flexible and support their wellness needs. An example of this is where an individual is earning at a much higher rate of pay, in a job where they have a consistent schedule, but have also found ways to be physically active while driving long haul trucking routes. Another story is where an individual can provide their service virtually to support their wellness while having a higher wage where they don't need to work 40 hours to maintain their lifestyle.

Current outcomes include:

- 49 enrolled individuals.
- We are working with 8 individuals who have moved into trainings or completed trainings. The trainings include but are not limited to CDL, solar installation, Program Coding, PCA training, massage therapy, culinary arts.
- We have 6 individuals enrolled in college and 3 who have completed master's degrees. 2 of those who have completed their master's programs are employed in their field of choice in higher wage employment.
- 10 seeking employment on their own
- 9 seeking employment with EC supports

I'm super excited about this program because I believe we are supporting individuals towards their goals while providing them with wrap-around supports. The team meets often to go over every case and they provide the needed supports as quickly as possible. We are offering consumers who receive social security services an opportunity for them to be hopeful and reach towards some of their dreams.

Kristy added that recently consumers have signed up for massage therapy and phlebotomy, and one client now works for a computer company in a higher wage, remote position. Kristy said that the conversations with consumers have shifted from preserving benefits to a more holistic picture of what are your goals and what would it look like if you were able to get off of benefits.

James asked if the goal achievement payments have made a difference. Kristy said that they have helped as a bonus and some consumers have reported being able to use it towards paying a bill or getting ahead by building it into savings.

Sherrie asked how healthcare has been impacted by people going off benefits. Kristy said that it has been an individual-by-individual conversation with support from a benefits counselor and that losing healthcare is a fear for many.

Martha asked what happens after the pilot is over. Diane said that the lessons learned will be integrated into the Vermont Career Advancement Project as the goal is about moving into higher wage careers and out of poverty. James shared that the team approach is key and the pilot has already been expanded to more regional offices around the state.

What is one thing that that is challenging?

The biggest challenge is hiring a transition counselor. The position has been posted since June and is still not filled so hiring continues to be a challenge.

Conclusions:

Thank you, Cindy and Kristy, for the updates!

Action Items, Person Responsible, Deadline:

None

9) [Vote: State Plan Goals & Priorities](#) (Amanda Arnold)

Discussion:

James shared that, under WIOA, VR submits a full state plan every four years. And every two years VR submits a smaller plan which adjustments to previous goals and priorities.

Amanda shared [this presentation](#) that was delivered to the Performance Review committee earlier in the day.

Sarah Launderville thanked Amanda for the presentation and asked how dual enrollment is reflected in the plan. Amanda said that it is integrated into post-secondary education and training and that dual enrollment will one of the strategies to meet the goal.

Asher emphasized the need for diversity from BIPOC, LGBTQIA+, and people with disabilities.

Sherrie moved to approve the goals and priorities section of the state plan and it was seconded. No discussion. All approved. Vote unanimous 17-0-0

Conclusions:

State Plan goals and priorities approved. Thank you James and Amanda for the presentation!

Action Items, Person Responsible, Deadline:

None

10) Presentation: New Brand Launch (Hib Doe)

Discussion:

Hib shared [this presentation](#) and stated that the launch will likely happen around March 1st.

Laura asked if consumers who are Deaf, Hard-of-Hearing, or DeafBlind are represented in the campaign. Hib shared that there was a consumer who was going to do the video but was unable to at the last minute, but the hope is that there will be representation moving forward.

Martha said that integrating dual enrollment language into some of the recruitment materials would be great to have and that VFN could help promote on their social media channels.

Marlena said that highlighting people transitioning out of corrections would be useful for a video.

Sherrie added that incorporating in paid work experiences and training would be useful in a video.

Cara said that she appreciated the videos and that they are essentially testimonials. She suggested messaging that focuses on the problem solved with HireAbility Vermont using plain speech and not attempting to introduce new concepts into the videos.

Laura asked if there will be videos produced for an employer target audience. Hib shared that one has already been filmed and is forthcoming.

Conclusions:

Thank you, Hib for the presentation!

Action Items, Person Responsible, Deadline:

None

11) Discussion: Legislative Outreach and Toolkit (Group)

SRC members were asked to share the follow in paired discussion groups:

- *What are two ways you will use these materials in the next month?*

Ideas shared in the large group included emailing and calling legislators, sharing at internal agency meetings to bring other staff up to speed, and setting up times to meet with legislators virtually.

Laura inquired about any guidelines for state employees pertaining to political engagement on and off work time. Kate followed up with the resources below, along with a caveat that there may be differences based on funding sources and position type/bargaining unit.

- [Human Resources Policy](#)
- [VSEA Agreement Articles 39 and 41](#)

Ana requested additional information about how to track a bill. Kate said she would update the guide with that additional information.

Conclusions:

See above.

Action Items, Person Responsible, Deadline:

- Update legislative toolkit to include bill tracking, **Kate Larose**, 2/8/2022

12) Other Business (Asher Edelson)

Laura shared that she will soon be testifying on [S.147](#). She also shared the two resources that she helped create:

- [Vermont Language Justice Project - YouTube](#)
- [Accessibility \(vermont.gov\)](#)

13) Round Table (Group)

Discussion:

Attendees were asked to share their response to the following question:

What's one thing you appreciated about our time together today?

- The legislative outreach toolkit is useful
- Really enjoyed the new HireAbility Vermont materials
- I really appreciated the materials put together for the legislative toolkit and the breakout time to get to talk to others about it
- Excited about the rebranding efforts and how the media might shift the number of people accessing services and wondering what data is being kept on that
- Exciting to see Amanda's presentation about HireAbility's goals for the coming year
- More wraparound services, supporting people for a longer amount of time, and the progress in WorkVT 2.0
- Appreciated the print and website rebrand along with the new videos. And for the 55 and older community it's great that the spots will be played on tv stations.

- A shoutout to the document Laura shared about accessibility in civic engagement.
- Really excited about the rebrand, HireAbility looks great, really enjoyed Hib's presentation.

14) Adjournment (Asher Edelson)

Conclusions:

Courtney made a motion to adjourn and it was seconded. Asher called the meeting adjourned at 3:21pm

Action Items, Person Responsible, Deadline:

- Draft minutes uploaded to SRC website, **Kate Larose**, 2/8/2022
- Draft minutes emailed to Committee members, **Kate Larose**, 2/8/2022
- Minutes approved, **Committee**, 4/7/2022
- Approved minutes uploaded to website, **Kate Larose**, 4/7/2022