

Approved Minutes
VERMONT STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL ANNUAL RETREAT
Thursday, October 1, 2020
9:30 AM – 3:00 PM
Via Zoom

Meeting called by:

Sarah Launderville, Chair, called the meeting to order at 9:35am.

Members Present:

- Ana Kolbach
- Gina D'Ambrosio
- Kristen Carpentier, non-voting
- Marlena Hughes
- Martha Frank
- Patricia Wehman
- Robin Ingenthron
- Rose Lucenti
- Sam Liss
- Sarah Launderville
- Nick Caputo
- Courtney Blasius
- Olivia Smith-Hammond
- Sherrie Brunelle
- Bill Meirs
- Brian Smith
- Diane Dalmasse, ex-officio, non-voting

Members Absent:

- Helena Kehne
- Cari Kelley
- Danielle Dubois

SRC Liaison:

James Smith

SRC Coordinator:

Kate Larose

Facilitator:

- Sharon Behar

Guests:

- Heather Batalion
- Cara Sachs
- Rocko Gieselman
- Asher Edelson
- Emily Ahtúnan

1) Approval of Agenda (Sarah Launderville)**Discussion:**

Sarah asked for any proposed additions or changes to the agenda. There were none. Sherrie moved to accept the agenda and it was seconded. No further discussion. All approved. Vote unanimous 13-0-1

Conclusions:

Motion passes: today's agenda accepted

2) Open for Public Comment (Sarah Launderville)**Discussion:**

No one from the public was present

3) Introductions (Sarah Launderville, Chair)**Discussion:**

Sarah framed up our day together by sharing the following words:

As I look back on retreats in the past we always find ourselves in a beautiful fall location. Vibrant leaves, maybe some water and rich smells of fall surrounding us. I invite you to try and bring up such an image that brings you comfort and beauty and a bit of relaxed thinking as we move into our day.

Today, for me is all about exploration, curiosity and learning from my fellow council members.

My wish for today is that everyone has a chance to put forward thoughts and experiences that will help us create a rich and deeply meaningful plan for the coming year.

I really appreciate the people that make up this council and I'm looking forward to our day together!

Those in attendance introduced themselves and answered the question below:

What draws you to this work?

- Support for individuals with disabilities
- SRC has made clear contributions and positive changes to the VR program, and it's definitely not just a pro forma group
- The conversations and the focus on how to improve outcomes for people with disabilities and especially for youth not just employment, but careers

- The work is transformational, and we make a difference in people's lives every day and the advocacy role that the SRC can play to create more positive outcomes at VR
- The sharing of ideas from different perspectives and VR's partnership and valuing of the SRC's input and guidance
- The work is critical, and we get to take creative approaches to this work
- The professional learning in this role helps and I am able to apply it to my work in reducing barriers to employment
- As a person with a disability I see as policy as disability policy and have a vested interest in disability justice
- Intersections in work with youth who are often seen as "troublemakers" as opposed to youth with disabilities and wanting to have more of a youth and trauma-informed lens in our collective work
- Learning and appreciating the collective wisdom of the group and understanding the mechanics of the "hows" and the "whys" of policies and procedures that we use with consumers, which are all so thoughtfully considered
- Understanding what's going on at the grassroots level
- The learning and growth that I get from involvement in the SRC are things I am able to immediately apply to my work with youth
- The innovation and hard work and the learning which I am able to apply in my work with people transitioning from corrections back into the community
- I hire 140 seasonal people a year and the staffing gives me a chance to support people who have barriers to employment and to help them find roles that they enjoy as well as longer term opportunities
- Personal connection as my son is transitioning out of high school
- I have a passion for working with individuals to ensure all have equal opportunity and working in partnership with and supporting VR as well as having the chance to get to know and work with all of the other members
- The advocacy components of the work and toggling back and forth between my work life and my volunteer life
- Excited about people finding their voice through employment and coming from personal experience of having case managers tell me I couldn't work when I was on benefits and seeing the hope and power of VR counselors supporting people in returning to work
- Working with people who have disabilities including psychiatric disabilities in how to be talk about it with employers for reasonable accommodations
- Seeing how employment supports people's recovery and the phenomenal work of this council
- Being better connected to the state and being able to share the experiences of our staff with disabilities and helping other employers feel more comfortable in hiring people with disabilities.

4) Celebrating Accomplishment and Lessons Learned (Group)

Discussion:

Small groups reviewed [committee accomplishments](#) and discussed and shared their responses to the following two questions:

What most excites you from this past year?

- Results of career initiative work, shift and focus in employment outcomes vs. long term career, post-secondary education programming for youth, conversation about opportunities and ways to break down barriers including accessibility as a result of COVID, technology and Zoom and how it breaks down barriers
- Advocacy, education, and outreach committee especially around transition services
- Satisfaction around PSE guidance that the policies and procedures committee worked on
- Shout out to Kate for support of existing and new members
- My experience as an AmeriCorps member and the added accessibility as a result of COVID
- Lower satisfaction rate for Hispanic consumers as we would like to improve that
- Working with CWS account managers.
- Remote work of VR and the success during that transition, and the voice SRC brought in helping determine parameters of work from home
- Had a positive experience in an AmeriCorps position at Resource this summer but because important safety measures were put in place quickly I had the flexibility to work from home
- Excited to have been asked to apply and have materials available to learn about what the SRC has been working on. Also excited to be benefiting from engaging with VR services
- The Market Decisions' survey finding that Hispanic VR consumers report a lower satisfaction rate which is important information for us to learn more about and work on
- Grants are in process for VR to collaborate more with mental health agencies to provide extra support
- The shift in DHR hiring managers openness to career exploration activities through CWS is encouraging
- Post-secondary education policy update

What are some lessons learned over these past 6 months that can inform our work moving forward?

- Changing model of working from home
- Doors are opening that were not there before
- All the strengths that we have are magnified
- The opportunity to repurpose some real estate with more people working from home
- Focus on higher wage employment and career ladders
- Looking into fears and barriers of hiring people with disabilities and developing FAQs or tools
- Looking at self-employment and the chapter the committee has been working on
- The employment outcomes for folks with psychiatric disabilities (as they are lower than others we serve)
- Work from home has opened up more opportunities for folks

- Flexibility of working from home and opening up more employment and career opportunities for folks
- We need to recognize when some tasks can't be done virtually
- Some businesses have been more accessible now that there is more social distancing
- What VR wants to take forward in their work
- The ability to work from home has been very helpful for employees and productive for employers. This could add flexibility for some state positions which could open doors
- Some assessments require being physically in the same room. Some tasks can't be done virtually
- Some businesses are more accessible now that there is a 6ft social distancing rule in place. Accommodations like mask wearing, ASL interpreters, and others are more visible now and less of an afterthought
- Telemedicine helps eliminate transportation issues. However, Montpelier is moving to micro transit and there is concern about if people with disabilities had a say in this change that will disproportionately impact them. Rerouting busses out of town will be challenging for people with physical disabilities

5) Current State: Needs Assessment Data and Trends (Group)

Discussion:

Small groups reviewed the data and were assigned questions from [the worksheet](#) which they shared back with the large group:

Question 1

According to American Community Survey data:

- 24% of Vermonters with disabilities report working full time for the full year
- 59.7% of Vermonters without disabilities work full time for the full year

Questions: What do think is behind this substantial difference? What could DVR do to close this gap?

- The benefits cliffs issues and fear of losing benefits
- Significant gaps in training opportunities that would
- Lengthy discussion about assistive technology, especially in school and not waiting until they transition out of high school, VR should have conversations with Jackie Fuller at AOE is often not written in to IEPs

Question 2

According to ACS data, the employment rate for people with disabilities has gradually increased since the end of the 2008 recession. See below data:

- 2013 34.6%
- 2014 36%
- 2015 41%
- 2016 41.4%
- 2017 45.9%

Questions: It is highly likely that the COVID-19 pandemic will greatly impact these numbers? What should we do to mitigate the impact of COVID-19?

(No group did this question.)

Question 3

The likelihood of a person with a psychiatric disability achieving an employment outcome with DVR is consistently lower than other disability groups.

Questions: What do you believe is behind this difference? What could DVR do differently to improve outcomes for individuals with psychiatric disabilities?

- Education that people are great employees, how to work with people and accommodate, more education
- We are wondering what the source of this data is: does it mean employers are less likely to hire or employees are less likely to have tenure and stick with employer? Depending on that answer, individuals may need more supports or employers may need more education
- Create a guidance document or FAQ- offer an employer the security of being able to hire and also know how to handle when it doesn't work out
- The question is individual-specific, case by case basis, ask the consumer
- Stigma and what employers are willing to do in terms of reasonable accommodation and the additional barriers of having a hidden disability
- Trauma informed care and education on behalf of employers
- How much do we know about this from perspective of consumers?

Question 4

National data indicates that about 20% of offenders have a psychiatric disability. DVR is required to track offender status as a potential barrier. Below are the percentages of consumers with a psychiatric disability who are also offenders:

- SFY 18 15.1%
- SFY 19 17.1%

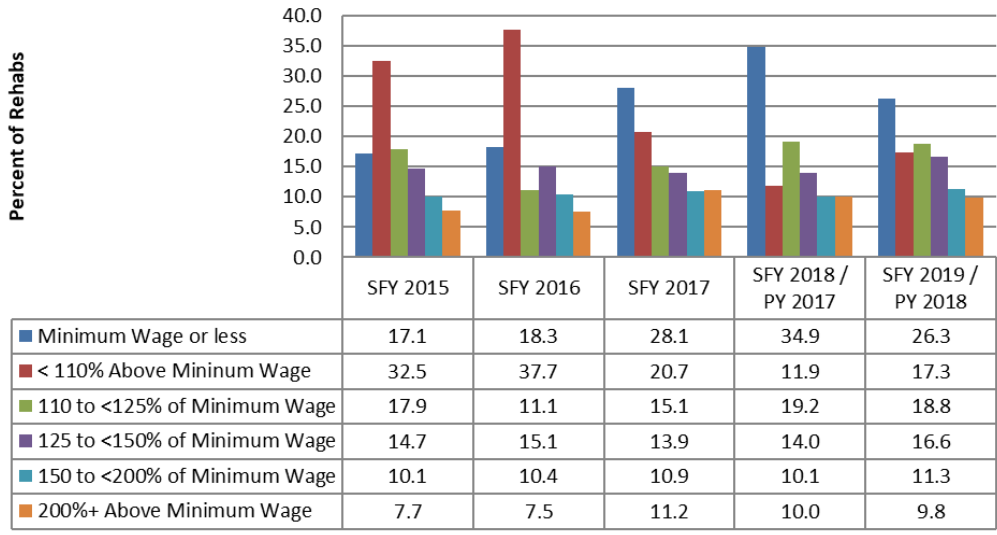
Questions: Does this data surprise you? What challenges are there serving this population? Are there things we should be doing differently?

- Access to mental health services is abysmal (know people who have attempted suicide in hopes of getting access to a therapist)
- People with psychiatric disabilities should not be incarcerated they should be where they can get services; to make matters worse, sometimes they are shipped out of state where there are no services
- Some people are being held in ERs instead of getting mental health services
- If above is addressed, will be seeing lower incarceration
- Appalls me but not surprising
- Asking people this data encompasses what would be impactful for them
- Police education- de-escalation and how to support people in crisis, cultural shift in how we support people

Question 5

The following chart shows the hourly earnings of DVR consumers and closure over the past five years as measured against minimum wage.

**Case Distribution by Wage as a Percent of Minimum Wage
For Successful Closures, SFY 2015 to SFY 2019 / PY 2018**



Questions: What is your reaction to the hourly wages data? What do you think VR should do to help more participants earn higher wages?

- Encourage more people to use PASS plans and continue supporting people in attaining education/degrees/training for higher wage jobs
- Ongoing participation in advocacy efforts to raise the wage

Question 6

In the customer satisfaction survey conducted by Market Decisions, VR received a very high satisfaction rating. There were no differences in consumer satisfaction found based on race or ethnicity, except for people who identify as Hispanic or Latino. While Hispanic or Latino consumers make up a small fraction of DVR consumer base (1.4%).

- They are less positive across the entire spectrum of core metrics
- They are more likely to experience problems
- In their feedback, they are more likely to report:
 - They need more information about programs and services
 - They need more support or services, had to fight to obtain services, or need more guidance
 - The VR program is not effective in helping customer or helping customer meet goals
 - They need transportation assistance, did not receive needed transportation assistance
 - There are issues with accessibility and condition of VR facilities
 - They had to wait to receive services, have not received services

Questions: What do you think might be the reasons behind these results? What does DVR need to do as a program to improve services for this population?

- Wondering if there is a language barrier
- Outreach individually or focus group to find out more as we do not have enough info from the customer satisfaction survey to dig deeper into this issue

- Being able to identify a group or touch point to reach out to this specific population
- Vermont Workers Center or other groups might be a good place to start
- Group would like more information about the survey and wondering if there needs to be more questions or different questions
- More training for staff from Mercedes Avila or Amanda Garces
- Having greater cultural competence from VR staff

Question 7

DVR Services for youth 16 to 24 who have exited high school.

DVR served 1,385 out of school youth in SFY 19

- *About 300 were served through the JOBS supported employment program*
- *333 were participating in post-secondary education and training programs*
- *199 participated in a work-based learning experience*

Questions: Why are there not more youth participating in post-secondary education and training? What should we do to increase youth participation in some of these activities?

- Helping students identify their needs and wants so that they can set their growth and direction
- Already have great connections with PSE opportunities and wanting to expand these, getting students connected to alumni to talk about these experiences on a peer to peer basis
- Knowing that a student's self-esteem is important and helping them explore their strengths as it will open doors in their own lives
- Information for families about public benefits and getting benefits counseling earlier on in the VR process to help families start to imagine a different future
- Family collaboration and making sure that schools are a place that families feel welcome in coming to the table as advocates

6) Priorities (Group)

Discussion:

Small groups discussed the following question and shared back with the group:

Given your own perspective and we talked about this morning, what is emerging as most important for the SRC to focus on this coming year?

- With COVID we are going to be in this for awhile and it's important to build protocols and processes to support people with disabilities in the most supportive way- brainstorm what those are to be ready
- Ensuring access to DBVR services in the current environment
- Ensure all policies are clear, understandable, and usable by VR counselors and consumers so it is clear what VR can and cannot do
- Make sure our four new members get the support they need to actively participate in the year ahead
- Develop guidance document of FAQs to support employers to successfully employ people with disabilities, or invite employers who've successfully retained consumers to be part of the video that Business Account Managers do for potential employers

- Destigmatize psychiatric disabilities through providing trauma-informed training with CWS or providing education on this to employers
- Cultural competency training as it plays out in how services are planned, provided, and offered to VR and SRC members
- Educate and gain support from educators on transition planning before age 16, and the critical need to develop self-advocacy skills on issues such as dual enrollment
- Training VR staff on new PASS plan changes so that they can be explained well to consumers
- Helping clients to develop self-advocacy skills
- How can we increase the number of people completing PSE?
- Transportation statewide: what can we do to advocate at the legislature?
- Increasing outreach and services to underserved populations including people of color, consumers with psychiatric disabilities, and Hispanic populations?
- Training for all VR staff around racial justice from hiring to day to day service delivery and examining every level of our organizations.
- Dual enrollment opportunities, getting a presentation on this at the full SRC, and not waiting until junior year to discuss options with students.
- Look at the amount of hoops and bureaucracy that is there for people returning to work and see what can we do to reduce these
- Supporting people of all ages within the organization, not just youth
- Looking at COVID pandemic implications- where people are at and in what ways do we need to shift as we move forward
- What can we learn where the teams are working closely together like a core team model and where there are opportunities to learn and improve
- Working with the disabilities report from VCIL that will be released soon and determining what VR would like to do in terms of the rollout
- SILC will have funds available for affordable housing and youth in transition and we should explore partnership opportunities
- Consider an additional survey or another way of gathering additional information from consumers with psychiatric disabilities to learn what they would find to be supportive and useful
- Developing higher wage career ladders for consumers
- Supporting folks in PSE and training as this is directly related to higher wages
- Supporting people through case management and other types of support
- Ensuring that consumers in the 30-50 age range are aware of VR services (and that medical providers are aware of the services and making referrals)
- Improving or looking at marketing and web materials to position VR as a resource that can be used for recruitment and outreach
- Providing access to assistive technology for students early on so they have the skills they need when they transition from high school

7) Council Members Interest and Closing Activities (Group)

Discussion:

Participants were asked the following questions, which they shared with the large group:

***Where are your interests in your work with the SRC this coming year?
What is something you learned today?***

- Great retreat and enjoyed the breakouts. I look forward to staying with Performance Review Committee and delving in further. Learned that remote retreats can work and having questions ahead of time, and that we have to remain nimble and adapt to challenges as they come and balance the demographic focus areas that we focus on so there are gains all around but no losses.
- Continue to be interested in policies and procedures and I'm now even more interested in advocacy, outreach, and education.
- How the SRC operates and excited to be part of these priorities in the year ahead
- The breakout sessions and smaller groups were great and I continue to be interested in performance review.
- Edifying to see different priorities and approaches to different priorities and look forward to being part of this work.
- Breakout groups and connecting with new folks and supporting folks with disabilities with employment
- I love data so enjoyed diving into that and understanding the interconnectedness between different groups, and am wondering how to integrate what we talked about in IEP development
- Learned that I can endure a meeting of this length virtually. The structure was great and the ability to mingle with other members and the shared focus on consumers with people with mental health disorders.
- SRC is an amazing group of people doing needed work and I look forward to working to move these forward in committee work
- Got a better understand of the various issue areas and am impressed with how quickly we move and act on consumer level issues to statewide changes, and it was impressive how well run the retreat was and the pre-materials.
- Reminder of all the good work that's being done that I'm often not aware of but hearing the end results was wonderful to hear. Would like to continue working with the policies and procedures committee in the year ahead.
- I learned that Zoom can work efficiently, Sharon runs a wonderful meeting, and was reminded what great vessels of knowledge SRC members represent and we don't often get to tap into one another as often as I would like.
- Was valuable to hear firsthand experience of consumers and the focus on youth and would like to keep focusing on those in the year ahead including family involvement and people with psychiatric disabilities
- Gratifying to see new and veteran members connect with one another outside of committee membership and to get the chance to work with Sharon, and I look forward to playing a supporting role in reaching the priorities listed in the year ahead
- Relearned that adults with chronic health conditions might not know about our services and may not be reaching out to us. Moving forward the only true way out of poverty and towards self sufficiency is higher wages so the more ways we can support people towards this, the better.
- Importance of the SRC to the division in terms of the support and advice that we receive from members and am excited about the infusion of new

members and look forward to orientation and training being offered to new members. We need to distill down the priorities to a doable list so that the council can achieve concrete objectives

- Creating more connections with learning institutions (college, trade schools, etc.) for youth exiting high school by establishing lines of communication and partnerships. Optimally, this could be done by establishing ambassadors from the institutions based on the individual youth's career aspirations, preferably alumni, with a shared experience to give them a realistic picture of what their learning experience was. For something I learned from today, I knew that reliable transportation to work was an issue in VT, but hearing about it directly from people's personal experiences really underscored the need for VT to put more effort and attention into providing better transportation options, it seems like they may be reducing more than adding.
- I learned that I could sit through a six hour Zoom meeting- thank you for planning the breaks and group activities! I am also continuing to learn more about state policies throughout my appointment. I am looking forward to joining the AOE committee this year. Thank you all for a great meeting!

8) Adjournment (Sarah Launderville)

Discussion:

Sarah asked if there was a motion to adjourn. Martha moved to adjourn, and it was seconded. No further discussion. All approved. Vote unanimous 16-0-1

Conclusions:

Meeting adjourned at 2:52pm

Action Items, Person Responsible, Deadline:

- Draft minutes uploaded to SRC website, **Kate Larose**, 10/6/2020
- Draft minutes emailed to Council members, **Kate Larose**, 10/6/2020
- Minutes approved, **Council**, 12/3/2020
- Approved minutes uploaded to website, **Kate Larose**, 12/8/2020