

## **Director's Report**

**April 1, 2021**

### **Pandemic Update:**

We continue to work remotely through 3/31/21. As the vaccination roll-out accelerates, we anticipate further guidance going forward in late May (if not before) about a return to the offices in a hybrid model. We have encouraged managers to have discussions with staff in each of the offices focusing on staff preferences and world class services to our customers. We are hoping for maximum flexibility. There are many questions to be answered. The Middlebury state office building will be "test case" for hoteling stations and a smaller office footprint.

**Budget:** We continue in very solid fiscal shape.

### **Career Advancement Grant Proposal:**

We committed to responding to the RFP from RSA. Rich Tulikangas and James have worked 24/7 to produce an extremely well-done proposal. Mathematica, CCV and VTC are key partners and contributed to the effort. We propose to hire six VR counselor/navigators who will serve specialized caseloads and team with training providers, BAMs, benefits counselors to develop on-ramps to learn and earn opportunities in high wage occupational sectors. We are targeting construction, health care, financial services, IT, and advanced manufacturing. In addition, we have developed a partnership with VR agencies in Maine and Connecticut around six common elements and evaluation and dissemination of results. We are very excited about the possibilities and hopeful about being awarded.

### **Kessler Foundation Grant:**

Tomorrow we will begin a full launch of the project in Rutland and Burlington. The enrollment period ends September 30<sup>th</sup>. We will be outreaching to all active and closed VR consumers who meet the screening criteria and receive SSA benefits. We will also be able to access all Ticket to Work holders via VABIR's employment network list for the first time ever. If you recall, the goal is to support beneficiaries to find career pathways and leave the rolls. The goals are consistent with our Careers Initiative and we expect to learn a great deal that can be replicated and expanded.

## **The Place Creative:**

We have a meeting very soon to hear from The Place staff what their recommendation are for re-branding and marketing VR and CWS. Very excited! We will share with the SRC for their feedback as we roll this effort out.

We are also working with The Place Creative to launch the white paper *Working People with Disabilities*. The partners hosted a focus group with representatives from the target audiences which provided a lot of insight into branding and focus. I have tremendous hope that this effort will gain traction and continue for years to come.

## **DS/VR Transition Project:**

We reviewed all the proposals and selected four designated agencies to fund: RCMH, HCRS, LSI and CCS. I will translate at the meeting 😊. A community of practice will be formed so each agency can learn from each other. These pilots are designed to support students with a developmental disability to exit school with a job that becomes part of their home and community-based waiver.

## **Other Youth in Transition Initiatives:**

**Youth Employment Specialists:** Eight to ten schools have responded to an RFP to have VR fund a YES in their high school. Funding would phase out over time. This model exists in Newport and has worked extremely well to support work experiences and post school employment.

**Summer Career Exploration:** We are accepting applications from students who are VR consumers for our summer employments program. The intent is to serve 120 youth this first year. We will be paying minimum wage and supporting a classroom component. Business Account Managers will be finding placements. We hope to build on our first year and continue over time. It is being featured as a part of Governor Scott's *Summer Enrichment Activities for Youth*.

## **Intro to Identity, Social Justice and Anti-Racism:**

We had our first session Monday and Tuesday this week. It was powerful. We are doing a staff survey. We have two more sessions over the next month. We will keep the SRC informed. We want to make this effort actionable and ongoing. How can we welcome everyone to our services and how can we diversify our workforce?