

Director's Report

Pandemic Update:

We continue to work remotely through 3/31/21. I expect an extension of the work at home order through the summer. We have issued updated COVID-19 Guidance that staff who have received both vaccinations and completed the waiting period can resume in person work with consumers continuing masking and social distancing practices. We have created a work group to develop criteria for a hybrid model of working going forward. We are not supporting 100% remote work.

Budget: We continue to be in very solid fiscal shape. As you will hear from James during our meeting, we have many worthwhile projects in the pipeline using reallocation funds. We are pleasantly surprised that the state budget is in good shape for fiscal year '22.

Career Advancement Grant Opportunity: A request for proposals has come out from the Rehabilitation Services Administration for a five-year grant award to develop apprenticeships and pre-apprenticeships for people with disabilities. We are very excited about the opportunity and committed to submitting a proposal. We will partner with CCV and others to make these learn and earn options a reality for our customers. They lead to meaningful employment with higher wages in high demand occupations.

Kessler Foundation Grant: After waiting a year, the administration and the legislature has approved our accepting the \$500,000 if funding for our VT Works 2.0 project to assist people receiving Social Security benefits to work their way off benefits. We are launching the project full on in Rutland and Burlington. We are adding a sixth benefits counselor so each VR region will now have a full-time benefits counselor. Also adding two VABIR employment consultants.

The Place Creative: We are working with this marketing firm to rebrand and market VR and CWS. We are segmenting our marketing efforts to youth, adults and employers. We will develop a new "name" to brand both VR and CWS which is a very big deal! We are very pleased with firm's work with us to date and excited about the media materials and outreach.

Working People with Disabilities: Setting the record straight: We partnered with DBVI, the DD Council, VCIL, the SILC to fund Public Assets Institute to write a series of white papers on the status of Vermonters with disabilities. The first one was recently released. The link is on all the partners websites. It is very well done. We modeled the effort around Change the Story about women in the workplace. Sam approached me with the idea over two years ago and we persevered until completion. We are going to work with a marketing firm to do a major release early next year.

Advance Vermont:

VocRehab is thrilled to share that we are moving forward to formalize a partnership and sponsorship with AdvanceVT as they continue to develop “MyFutureVT”, a one-stop online resource that will provide Vermonters with the information they need to make informed and empowered decisions about their education and career pathways. Supporting consumers to find and participate in post-secondary education and training opportunities has been a major focus of VocRehab over the last few years. However, connecting Vermonters to these types of education and training opportunities has been difficult as there has never been a clearinghouse where this type of information can be collected, stored, and easily searched.

With the rollout of “MyFutureVT” scheduled for late 2021, Vermonters will now have access to a resource that helps organize and make sense of the plethora of opportunities that are available within our state. The portal will provide information, guidance, and assistance to access learning opportunities that will advance individual’s careers, strengthen their employable skills, and create income stability. The initial focus of the portal will be on the state’s high-pay, high-demand jobs as identified by the McClure Foundation. VocRehab has and will continue to serve on AdvanceVT’s steering committee for the portals development and looks forward to utilizing the tool with many of its consumers later this year.

DS/VR Transition Project: An informal request for proposals has gone out to the designated agencies for proposals to ensure more students with developmental disabilities exit high school with a job. We plan to fund three sites with time limited funds to develop and implement practices in partnership with VR

Transition Counselors and local school staff to assist these youth to identify career interests and find work. We believe this could be foundational to making work a part of their post school life and their home and community-based waiver program. Very excited to see project go live!