

Director's Report

COVID 19: All VR and VABIR staff continue to work remotely. We now have all staff with a state issued cell phone. We are moving towards all staff having a state issued laptop. VABIR has 10 ZOOM accounts. We have access to Skype and Microsoft Teams video platforms. Heather Batalion, our Staff Development Director, has developed expertise in running ZOOM meetings which has been very helpful in running management team meetings and other trainings. We had been postponing planned training to when we thought we might meet in person. We have abandoned that strategy and are moving these trainings to virtual meetings. As I may have shared before, we are getting into a rhythm of working from home and becoming more effective in the process. The management team has begun to think through a return to state office buildings. Returning will be much more complicated than leaving. I think it may be late summer or fall before this return to offices will begin. We are finding the new normal which will be a combination of virtual and face to face work. There are real efficiencies in remote meetings that we want to continue. We continue to miss walking across the hall and resolving an issue or getting an answer. We continue to check-in with everyone on a regular basis and I think morale is good. There are staff who cannot wait to return to their office and those who are quite fearful of doing so.

As the economy is re-opened and assuming the COVID 19 infection rates stay level or decline we will be re-evaluating how we provide supports for both employers and people in jobs. Right now, we are not providing face to face work site supports or employer outreach. We will be updating our guidance every 30 days.

The loss of state revenues is very concerning in terms of next year's budget. A three-month budget is being developed for the end of June. There will be an economic forecast in mid-August and the budget for the rest of the year will be finalized for the end of September. Currently, we are in very good financial shape. We will watch very closely as the budget unfolds and reductions are required.

Invest EAP: Governor Scott included \$250,000 in his Economic Recovery Package for Invest EAP to provide EAP services to small businesses in Vermont struggling

to survive the pandemic. We are working out a roll out plan with the assumption that the legislature will approve the Governor's plan. Invest EAP provides high quality services and will provide much support to small business owners and their employees.

Youth Apprenticeship Grant: We recently submitted a proposal to the US Department of Labor in response to an RFP to grow apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship opportunities for youth. We are partnering with the VT Department of Labor, the State Workforce Development Board, the Community College of Vermont, VT Student Assistance Corporation, the Career and Technical Educations Centers and the Department of Children and Families to serve high risk youth. It is a four-year grant with an award of \$1.5 million. We should know soon if we have been selected for an award. This would fully integrate apprenticeships into our core program in a way they have not been before. We are hopeful. The turnaround was about 3 weeks and the team deserves much credit for the quality of the proposal submitted in the middle of a pandemic.

College Compass: We have been funding College Steps staff to provide on campus supports for young adults who have the potential to succeed in post-secondary education but not without additional supports. A pilot was done at Castleton University and then expanded to Northern Vermont University. The program works and is beginning to develop roots and the numbers for next fall look very good.

Benefits Counseling Program: Our benefits counselors have been very busy figuring out the impact on consumer's benefits from both the stimulus checks and Pandemic Unemployment Assistance. For low wage earners who receive SSI and are on Medicaid the PUA could derail their benefits without careful planning. ABLE accounts are being promoted.

GCEPD: The Governor's Committee on the Employment of People with Disabilities, with funding from VR, worked with a videographer to do employer testimonials from the Spirit of the ADA award winners. I will share with Kate so she can send out to all SRC members.

My boat will soon be in the water. Summer is finally coming to Vermont. Diane