

**Vermont State Rehabilitation Council's
12th Annual Retreat
Thursday, October 3, 2019 from 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.
Trapp Family Lodge, 700 Trapp Hill Road, Stowe, Vermont 05672
Mozart Conference Room**

Retreat Called to Order by:

Brian Smith, Co-Chair, called the meeting to order at 9:30 a.m.

Members Present:

- 1) Courtney Blasius
- 2) Sherrie Brunelle
- 3) Nick Caputo
- 4) Diane Dalmasse (VR) , ex-officio, non-voting
- 5) Martha Frank
- 6) Marlena Hughes
- 7) Robin Ingenthron
- 8) Sam Liss
- 9) Bill Meirs
- 10) Brian Smith
- 11) Olivia Smith-Hammond

Members Absent:

- 1) Christopher Kane
- 2) Cari Kelley
- 3) Sarah Lauderville
- 4) Rose Lucenti
- 5) Calla Papademas
- 6) Michelle Paya
- 7) Deb Tucker Boyce

SRC Liaison:

James Smith

SRC Coordinator:

Debra Kobus

Interpreters:

None

Speakers or Presenters:

1) Brian Robertson, Market Decisions Research

Guests:

- 1) Max Barrows (recent/prior member)
- 2) Maria Burt (recent/prior member)
- 3) Kristen Carpentier (new member – pending approval)
- 4) Mark Ciociola
- 5) Gina D’Ambrosio (new member – pending approval)
- 6) Hib Doe
- 7) Shaun Donahue
- 8) Nancy Dwyer
- 9) Brian Guy
- 10) Amanda Kohle
- 11) Lee Reilly
- 12) Cindy Seguin
- 13) Bill Sugarman

1) Welcome and Introductions (Brian Smith)

Discussion:

Those in attendance went around the table and introduced themselves.

Conclusions:

Thanks to everyone!

Action Items, Person Responsible, Deadline:

None.

2) Ice Breaker (Brian Smith)

Discussion:

Sam Liss sang a lovely rendition of Edelweiss that helped kick off the Ice Breaker! Brian asked everyone to go around the table and let us know why they came here today! Comments included: external perspective of what Voc Rehab does; helps us think more holistically about what we do; these meetings help us refocus our priorities; it is nice from a system’s perspective to find out what would be most effective; Governor’s Summit on Transportation is an example of something that the SRC can partner with others for relevant advocacy; employment is so important to everyone but very important for people with disabilities; I hire over 100 people a year and gaining ; as a service provider, I want to thank

everyone in room for the work that you do; in Corrections we prepare people for work and this is a wonderful avenue to assist people to get back into employment; has been opportunity to use other skills and really appreciates connecting with others; loves being part of this group and how Voc Rehab helps young people in Vermont; helps those with a disability to get back to work!

Conclusions:

None.

Action Items, Person Responsible, Deadline:

None.

3) 2019 Summary of Committee Accomplishments, Goals, Opportunities and Challenges

Discussion:

- **Advocacy, Outreach and Education – Sam Liss**
Our charge is to discuss relevant event opportunities and have thoughtful discussions about other topics.

We educate each other on how to advocate before the State legislature. We have informed each other how to remove employment disincentives. We have also explored legislation like the improvement of social security benefits and removing barriers to work. We pay attention at a State level to items like unfreezing the attendant services program which is quite important to people who need such services so as to avoid becoming impoverished.

We have taken the lead in setting the agenda at the annual Card Room Event. We are involved with Disability Awareness Day, Youth Summit, and Youth Core Transition Events. We are looking to partner with our sister council, State Independent Living Council (SILC).

It is important to note that The David Sagi Award will be given out today by the Governor's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities (GCEPD).

We have had lively debates with varying differences of opinion about the Perky Planet Café and appropriateness of their hiring and marketing policies.

We are thankful to Marlena Hughes for being our SRC representative to the Vermont Coalition of Disability Rights (VCDR).

- **Performance Review Committee** – Marlena Hughes
This past year our focus has been on the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), Loss of Re-Allotment Funding, Satisfaction Surveys, SAMSA Grant application, a deep dive into Aware, Central Case Review and the Quality Assurance process.

For next year we will be looking at the State Plan to make sure we met last year's plan requirements and to consider adding new targets. The Comprehensive Needs Assessment will also be on the agenda for next year.

- **Policy and Procedures Committee** – Sherrie Brunelle
We worked really hard this year on three major policies that significantly impacts on how VR delivers services and guides staff on the steps they need to take. We made significant changes to Chapters 204 (Case Closure) and 209 (Casework Practices). In addition, a short-term adjustment to Chapter 311 (Post-Secondary education) was made that extends short term training up to 2 years rather than 6 months. Sherrie has enjoyed working with all those involved in this endeavor. It has been very helpful to have received perspectives from a broad spectrum of individuals including consumers and Voc Rehab counselors.
- **SRC** – Brian Smith
Individuals who work on these committees are the most productive people we have! If the subject matter of a committee intrigues you, please contact the committee chair for more information. James Smith also said that we are very open to making the work that we do more accessible and make the meetings easier to attend, via Skype for example. Please contact James or Committee Chairs!

Conclusions:

Thank you committee chairs/ co chair.

Action Items, Person Responsible, Deadline:

None.

4) Presentation Employer's Satisfaction Survey (Brian Robertson, Market Decision Research)

Discussion:

Brian Robertson of Market Decisions Research began his presentation by saying there was good news to present.

The target populations were Vermont employers that had some contact with Voc Rehab including Creative Workforce Solutions (CWS) and Progressive Employment. Employers were willing to talk to us!

We also found there were large differences between service regions and employers did not see a distinction between CWS and Progressive Employment.

The goals of the employer survey were intended to identify:

- The satisfaction with services being offered to employers that have worked with and are currently working with DVR/CWS across domains identified by DVR.
- Areas for improvement in the services currently being provided by DVR/CWS.

Survey Findings:

- Familiarity with and Use of Creative Workforce Solutions (CWS) Services
- Satisfaction with CWS Services
- Communications with CWS Staff
- Use of and Satisfaction with Progressive Employment Activities
- Likelihood to Engage in Progressive Employment Activities

When asked what worked well employers were most likely to mention candidates being matched to employer needs (13%) and the helpfulness of CWS staff (13%).

Three quarters (76%) of those who used CWS services were satisfied with how well they were kept up-to-date and informed.

Lack of communication was mentioned by those that were not satisfied.

Almost all (94%) of employers using CWS services said they were very or somewhat likely to use CWS services in the future.

Of those employers who had experience with CWS services, 27% had not met or spoken with a representative in more than a year while 27% had met or spoken with a representative in the past month.

Comments: The tight labor market could be impacting an employer's view. Employers who have had bad employee experiences could also impact the survey.

Conclusions:

The full presentation is available on the SRC website <https://src.vermont.gov/document/presentation-employers-satisfaction-survey>.

Action Items, Person Responsible, Deadline:

None

5) Presentation Consumer's Satisfaction Survey (Brian Robertson, Market Decision Research)

Discussion:

Brian Robertson of Market Decisions Research began his presentation by explaining the target population was current and former consumers of VocRehab Vermont and that 700 surveys were completed among VocRehab Vermont consumers.

Over nine in ten (94%) say completing an application for VR services is easy, its highest level since the survey was begun in 2003.

Consistent with prior years, 97% report the VR office is accessible for their type of disability.

Up from 2016, nearly half (48%) say they are able to access benefits counseling through vocational rehabilitation.

Two thirds indicate their benefits counselor helped them with identifying community agencies providing services, better understand existing benefits, and fill out paperwork and forms.

99% of those receiving benefits counseling find the services to be valuable.

94% of those receiving benefits counseling agree somewhat or strongly that they feel more confident about being able to work and increase their wages after meeting with a benefits counselor.

78% are satisfied with the job placement services they received, slightly higher than in 2016.

Among those dissatisfied with job placement services, the largest percentage indicate that the services did not help them find a job.

92% are satisfied with how VR's coordination of job placement services with their VABIR representative.

Among those 25 years of age and younger, more than half (56%) recall working with a VR transition counselor to make the change to post-high school life.

Nearly all (97%) say working with a transition counselor is somewhat or very helpful.

Only 11% experienced a problem while working with a transition counselor.

Youth indicate that more meetings, communication and information would improve the process of transition.

Among those with unsuccessfully closed cases, 70% agree with the reason while 25% are unaware their case had been closed.

Lack of communication is the main factor that consumers who disagreed with the reason or were unaware of case closure thought their case was closed.

80% say they are still able to receive services when their counselor was unavailable.

Only 44% of consumers report having had more than one VR counselor.

Almost all (96%) consumers say their counselor consulted them about long-term goals.

80% strongly or somewhat agree that their counselor helped them explore local higher paying jobs based on interest and ability.

88% say their counselor spoke with them about education or training they would need to pursue jobs of interest.

87% strongly or somewhat agree that their counselor offered opportunities to learn about the knowledge, skills and abilities associated with jobs of interest.

83% felt they receive the support needed to be successful in the long term, a small increase from 2016.

Only 15% of consumers experienced problems with VR or the services they receive.

Among those reporting problems, the most common issues are communication difficulties with staff and VR personnel who are unprofessional, rude or apathetic.

22% of those who experienced problems say VR worked to resolve the situation.

Nearly half of consumers who provided feedback say they had issues communicating with staff or counselors. Others report difficulty with paperwork, and some need more services or help from their counselors.

71% say they were informed of the option to address problems with the Client Assistance Program.

One in ten consumers that experienced problems contacted the program about their concerns.

55% of consumers are working full or part time with another 41% actively looking for employment or receiving training or education.

89% of employed consumers are satisfied with their current employment.

The overall trends continue to be positive.

VR counselors and staff continue to shine and are a key influence on the positive consumer experience.

Outcomes continue to improve.

People are accessing benefits counseling and using job placement services.

Services provided to youth in transition are making a difference.

There is, of course, room for improvement. There are some differences in the consumer experience by District.

There is one group whose experiences was significantly less positive than others: Hispanics and Latinos.

There are some problems that remain unresolved.

- While the percentage experiencing problems is small (15%) and has declined, only 22% of those with problems indicate that VR worked to resolve the problem.
- Specific areas where these consumers feel problems weren't resolved include:
 - Listening to the customer, understand needs, wants, ability.
 - Counselor did not listen, dismissed concerns.
 - Didn't receive job search help.
 - Counselor did not return calls, emails or follow up.
 - Received no help in reaching plan or goals.
 - Time lags to get into the program.
 - Counselor is not helpful or supportive.

- Time lag to get services, appointments.

There are differences in feedback by District which may identify local foci for quality improvement.

Finally, while 70% consumers whose cases were closed unsuccessfully agreed with the decision for case closure but...

- 25% are unaware that their case was closed.
- 36% feel their case was closed due to a lack of communications.

Falling out of communications with VR is often a reason for case closure. This makes it difficult to inform consumers that their case has been closed or the reasons why. Finding ways to keep in touch with consumers may help reduce the number of unsuccessful cases overall.

Conclusions:

The full presentation is available on the SRC website <https://src.vermont.gov/document/presentation-employers-satisfaction-survey>.

Action Items, Person Responsible, Deadline:

None.

6) Change to 2020 SRC Meeting Schedule (Sam Liss)

Discussion:

We received a notification from the Vermont Sergeant of Arms that April 2, 2020 was drawn as the date that was available to the SRC for our Annual Card Room event. Unfortunately, this date conflicts with SRC's regularly scheduled meetings (Full SRC and Performance Review Committee) on April 2. Sam asked the group to raise their hands if they wish to move the Performance Review Committee and the Full SRC meetings previously scheduled on April 2, to the following Thursday, April 9, so SRC members and others can attend the Card Room Event on April 2. The majority of members raised their hands. The PR & Full SRC Meetings will be moved to April 9, 2020. Debra Kobus has already reserved the Ash Conference on April 9 for these meetings. For those interested in being involved with the Card Room Event, please contact Sam.

Conclusions:

The Performance Review Committee and the Full SRC will meet on Thursday, April 9, instead of its normally scheduled date of the first Thursday of the month. These rescheduled meetings will take place in the Ash Conference Room.

Action Items, Person Responsible, Deadline:

Update 2020 Meeting Schedule, Debra Kobus, October 8, 2019.

7) Order of Selection (James Smith)**Discussion:**

James said there is no need for discussion of revising an order of selection.

Conclusions:

n/a

Action Items, Person Responsible, Deadline:

None

8) Director's Report**Discussion:**

Diane summarized her FFY2019 annual report saying that staff management remain totally committed to Careers Initiative and helping people who want careers. We have launched BOSS in Burlington and Rutland. It's a perfect time to help people on benefits to move beyond benefits. We have a foundation grant which would supercharge and have national significance. We are taking stock of our transition services, preemployment services, best practices, what we should require, what we should let go. Vermont is second oldest state in the nation. Lastly, we trained our leadership teams on LEAN and are process mapping. Lastly, we value our great relationship with our State Rehabilitation Council!

Conclusions:

Diane's full report is available at

https://src.vermont.gov/sites/src/files/doc_library/2019-Voc-Rehab-Director-SRC-Annual-Report.pdf.

Action Items, Person Responsible, Deadline:

None

9) Committee Break Out – Discussion of Top 3 Priorities/Next Steps for 2020

Discussion:

Committees (Advocacy, Outreach and Education, Performance Review, Policy and Procedures) –

Participants moved to various parts of the room and lounge areas in order to discuss and then choose what the committee's top three priorities will be for 2020 and what the committee's next steps will be.

Conclusions:

None.

Action Items, Person Responsible, Deadline:

None.

10) Final Wrap Up – Committee's Top Priorities/Next Steps (Sam Liss, Marlena Hughes, Sherrie Brunelle)

Discussion:

Committees returned and reported:

Advocacy, Outreach and Education – Sam Liss, Chair

- 1) Card Room Event – April 2, 2020 – bring the media in such as Vermont Digger and a radio station.
- 2) Invite members of the Youth Advocacy Committee to SRC meetings and vice versa.
- 3) Determine how the SRC might best fit in with the SILC sponsored Olmstead meeting.
- 4) Advocate to increase the number of dual enrollment high school students on IEPs and 504 certificates wanting to enroll in the program.
- 5) Intensify relationship with Youth Core Transition Teams perhaps having a prototype meeting in central Vermont and invite legislators to meetings.
- 6) Usual updates on relevant legislation will continue.

Performance Review Committee – Marlena Hughes, Chair

The PR Committee will focus on two very big projects:

- 1) The **State Plan** that needs to be completed by April 2020.
Two meetings will be held discussing this.
- 2) The **Needs Assessment** will look at census data, population data, consumer satisfaction, and information from different programs that have been initiated. This will take six meetings. This information will inform the next State Plan due in 2022.

Policy and Procedures Committee – Sherrie Brunelle, Chair

- 1) **Chapter 313, Audiology Services and Hearing Aids.** The Hearing Aids Chapter will be reviewed again as a result of Maria Burt's recent discussion with an audiologist who wants specifics about eligibility. The State's Hearing Aid Contract will be changing as well so all these pieces should be brought together.
- 2) **Chapter 308, Self-Employment Chapter** needs updating.
- 3) **Chapter 312, Transportation** (car repairs, funding for traveling, lack of Car Coach).

Conclusions:

Thanks to everyone who participated in our planning for 2020!

Action Items, Person Responsible, Deadline:

None.

13) Round Table (Brian Smith)

Discussion:

Everyone went around the table and talked about what they thought about the retreat. Comments included: I so appreciate being on the Council; excited about the coming year; it is always great spending time with this group; interesting day; enjoyed learning about the satisfaction surveys; from a systems level it is great that people care about the people; very much appreciate the work done by the SRC; always appreciate getting together with this group and very much enjoy the CAP work that I am currently performing; appreciate all the staff and the consumers; I'm glad that I have been a part of this committee as this is my last meeting; appreciate what Brian Robertson does with the surveys; appreciate Marlena who carries on the PR Committee; appreciate

working with the folks at VR; I appreciate the Retreat in order to review what has occurred in the past and prepare for what is coming; very excited to be part of the group; enjoyed the presentation of the survey results; the holistic approach of the SRC to make the best experience for the consumers as possible; appreciate this very tolerant group because no one got up and left during my song; Vermont is a leader on employment of people with disabilities and hopefully Vermont will continue to be a leader in promoting employment as part of independent living, improving people's health, and cost effectiveness; a fine day and a wonderful group to work with; thanks, Brian, for a great presentation; really appreciate bringing together the leadership on the ground with the SRC leadership; my Commissioner is always very interested in what occurred at the last meeting I attended; a great day!

Conclusions:

None.

Action Items, Person Responsible, Deadline:

None.

14) Adjournment (Brian Smith)

Discussion:

Adjourned by consensus at 3:07 p.m.

Conclusions:

Adjourned.

Action Items, Person Responsible, Deadline:

- Draft minutes uploaded to SRC website, Debra Kobus, 10/8/19.
- Draft minutes emailed to Committee members, Debra Kobus, 10/8/19.
- Minutes approved, Committee, 12/5/19.
- Approved minutes uploaded to website, SRC Coordinator, 12/10/19.