

## **Draft Minutes**

VERMONT STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL (VTSRC)

Thursday, April 9, 2020, 12:30 PM – 2:30 PM

Teleconference: 1 (802) 828-7667,,738204955#

### **Meeting called by:**

Sarah Launderville, Chair, called the meeting to order at 12:34pm.

### **Members Present:**

- Ana Kolbach (via Skype)
- Calla Papademas (via Skype)
- Cari Kelley (via Skype)
- Danielle Dubois (via Skype)
- Deborah Tucker Boyce (via Skype)
- Diane Dalmasse, ex-officio, non-voting (via Skype)
- Gina D'Ambrosio (via Skype)
- Kristen Carpentier, non-voting (via Skype)
- Marlena Hughes (via Skype)
- Martha Frank (via Skype)
- Patricia Wehman (via Skype)
- Robin Ingenthron (via Skype)
- Rose Lucenti (via Skype)
- Sam Liss (via Skype)
- Sarah Launderville (via Skype)
- Nick Caputo (via Skype)
- Courtney Blasius (via Skype)
- Olivia Smith-Hammond (via Skype)

### **Members Absent:**

- Sherrie Brunelle
- Bill Meirs
- Brian Smith
- Helena Kehne

### **SRC Liaison:**

James Smith (via Skype)

### **SRC Coordinator:**

Kate Larose (via Skype)

### **Interpreters:**

None

**Speakers or Presenters:**

- Shaun Donahue
- Mark Ciociola

**Guests:**

None

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

Those in attendance went around the table and introduced themselves.

**Conclusions:**

Thanks to everyone!

**Action Items, Person Responsible, Deadline:**

None

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

Sarah asked for any proposed additions or changes to the agenda. There were none. Sam moved to accept the agenda and it was seconded. No further discussion. All approved. Vote unanimous 12-0-1.

**Conclusions:**

Motion passes: today's agenda accepted.

**Action Items, Person Responsible, Deadline:**

None

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

No one from the public was present.

**Conclusions:**

n/a

**Action Items, Person Responsible, Deadline:**

None

**4) Approval of Minutes for February 19, 2020** (Sarah Launderville)

**Discussion:**

Sarah asked for any proposed changes or amendments to the February 19, 2020 minutes. There were none. Danielle moved to approve the minutes and it was seconded. No discussion. All approved. Vote unanimous 12-0-1.

**Conclusions:**

February 19, 2020 minutes were approved.

**Action Items, Person Responsible, Deadline:**

Upload approved minutes to the SRC website, **Kate Larose**, 4/14/2020

**5) Consent Agenda** (Sarah Launderville)**Discussion:**

Sarah asked for any proposed changes or amendments to the following consent agenda items:

- [Advocacy, Outreach, and Education Committee March 5, 2020](#)
- [Policy & Procedures Committee March 5, 2020](#)
- [Steering Committee March 5, 2020](#)
- [Coordinator's April 9, 2020 Report](#)

There were none. Sam moved to approve, and it was seconded. No further discussion. Vote unanimous 12-0-1.

**Conclusions:**

Consent agenda items approved.

**Action Items, Person Responsible, Deadline:**

Upload items to SRC website, **Kate Larose**, 4/14/2020

**6) Director's Report** (Diane Dalmasse)**Discussion:**

Diane reported the following:

3/16 – decision made that all VR staff would telework from home. Inventory of phone and IT equipment needed. Initial guidance provided on shifting work with consumers from face to face to phone, Skype, Facetime and texting. All supervisory sessions, staff meetings, Career Links meetings continue via Skype or Microsoft Teams. Employer outreach all shifted to remote methods. Division remains open for business. AWARE is hosted in the cloud and makes it possible for all staff to work from home. Citrix tokens and VPN make it possible to use personal computers for work.

3/23 – all VR staff working from home. Offices doing daily check-ins with staff. CO staff checking in 3x per week. VR managers checking in 3x per week. Administrative staff check-in regularly. Guidance centrally developed and disseminated on casework procedures, i.e. signatures and administrative tasks, mail and scanning, etc. We are striving for as much normalcy as possible during

this time. We think we will learn lots about ways to work that will be helpful after the crisis subsides.

All VR managers and teams continue to resolve issues as they come up. Schools closed, day care centers closed, businesses closed, leading to complex issues for staff to manage families and work during this time. Flex time is encouraged and there is an option for some staff to code their time to COVID 19. We are encouraging the use of EAP counselors to manage stress and other issues. We are encouraging staff to find a “work at home rhythm” – take breaks, get outside, stay connected with co-workers in fun ways.

Regular communication seems critical to keep services available to our customers and staff morale up. Staff report consumers appreciate being contacted and supported during this time. Transition Counselors are prioritizing seniors for planning purposes. TCs are staying connected with Special Education Case Managers and Tara Howe is connected with the Agency of Education. We continue to work with our partners including VT Department of Labor, designated agencies, CCV, and other training providers. Managers are communicating what’s working and what the challenges are in telework.

Staff continue to focus on the five lead indicators contained in the dashboard. Now is the time to do assessments. Now is the time to engage consumers in progressive education. Now is the time to follow up with consumers post-placement. We should see the dashboard dial go up.

Business Account Managers are maintaining relationships with both businesses who are hiring and those that are closed during the crisis. Some consumers are choosing to go to work and others are inclined to wait until the situation improves. We are working to make sure consumers are making an informed choice about the risk of going to work.

We are settling into our new way of working and hope we will be back in the office as soon as it is safe to do so. Stay safe and healthy!

Sam asked how VocRehab leadership feels about the possibility of waiver requests to IDEA and the Rehab Act coming out of federal proposals. Diane shared that she has concerns about waiving IDEA requirements because it means that many students will no longer have access to an equitable education. Sam shared concerns that it might be used as an excuse to do away with favorable programs. Martha shared that Vermont Family Network is also paying close attention to this. Martha also shared that there are enormous resources available for online learning through the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition. Diane agreed that these are useful and shared that many of these are being shared internally.

**Conclusions:**

Thank you, Diane, for the update!

**Action Items, Person Responsible, Deadline:**

- None

**7) VR Regional Manager Updates: Managing consumer services during COVID-19** (Shaun Donahue and Mark Ciociola)**Discussion:**

Shaun shared the following:

**How is your region managing the current crisis?**

The current situation highlights the strength and resilience of VocRehab. As an office staff they were able to pull supplies and resources together quickly to move people to teleworking and move meetings to virtual meetings utilizing Microsoft Teams and staff hallway conversations through instant messaging. The frequency of one-on-one conversations with team members through video chats and phone calls has been increased. The one piece that is still getting pulled together is how the mail is handled and Wendy in Central Office is spearheading efforts here and doing an incredible job.

**How are you delivering services remotely for VR consumers?**

For many people services are uninterrupted using telephone or Facetime. For others there were some initial challenges around consumers not accepting blocked calls. But now that all staff have state issued cell phones this is no longer a problem. Our youth staff have done a phenomenal job serving students and schools are primarily using Zoom. It provides a great time to address two of our leading indicators: assessments and in short term training given the resources available online.

**How are VR consumers responding to the situation? Are they continuing to engage?**

The response has been across the board. There is a small percentage of consumers who are saying they would rather wait on services until things quiet down. But on the other hand, for consumers who are constantly challenged by transportation we have seen a real increase in their participation. Overall we are seeing an equal level of engagement now as we have previously seen. Youth have been more responsive to VABIR staff, primarily as they report they are bored.

**How are employers responding? Are employers still seeking workers?**

Business that are deemed essential are hiring like crazy. Some people hire the same day they take an application. Furloughed or laid off employees might find other opportunities when businesses are closed and that is a concern for businesses. At their office they are wondering how they can best position

consumers to fill this need. Staffing agencies are also very hungry to bring new hires aboard.

**How are the staff managing they day to day work remotely?**

For some employees there was no transition time needed, and for others they are more attuned to the face to face contact with consumers and cold calling consumers is an adjustment. For parents with young children this is also a transition and alternative schedules are being encouraged. Technology wise we are in good shape and have done well.

**Can you share a success story that occurred during this crisis?**

We have a young woman we've worked with off an on for a long time in our St. Johnsbury office and she has worked for five years at McDonalds as a shift supervisor on the second shift. A new opportunity came from Cabot Creamery at \$24 an hour which was a significant increase in income and got her on the day shift which helped her with childcare. Another consumer experienced success being hired through a temp agency. She was the primary childcare provider in the house and they were able to offer her a very flexible schedule, allowing her to flex her hours. When her husband was furloughed from his job he was brought on board with same company and now they are both able to flex their schedules and bring income into their household.

We have a phenomenal staff who are very resilient. This is an unusual way to work in very short order and they have been reaching out to consumers to help them to continue their engagement with VR resources.

Marlena thanked Shaun for his report and noted that they clearly have a compassionate way of working with employees and consumers.

Mark shared the following:

**How is your region managing the current crisis?**

Overall the flexibility of the staff has been phenomenal. Before the shutdown we did an inventory to make sure staff had supplies, computers, etc. and that has been very useful. Both offices continually meet virtually on an ongoing basis: daily in Burlington (which provides a place for water cooler conversation and feedback), and three days a week in Middlebury. We have attempted to keep as many meetings as possible and there were some initial bumps in figuring our Skype but those have since been smoother out. Regular meetings continue including Motivational Interviewing, dashboard reviews, and Career Links. Yesterday we had a virtual lunch regional meeting followed by a discussion with EAP on how to support consumers and one another during this crisis which was well received. Some folks are scared, and hearing from us asking how we can connect with them and that we are thinking about them has been valuable. We are also using Microsoft Team to help folks stay connected.

**How are you delivering services remotely for VR consumers?**

Referrals have dropped off considerably which is not surprising. Recently we've seen one referral in Middlebury and three in Burlington. Over the phone orientations are now happening. Staff continue to make phone calls with varying degrees of success. Assessment is the primary area of interest. Even when consumers don't have a computer at home we are finding ways to make this possible (for example, last week a counselor talked over phone with a consumer and recorded responses directly on their end into the computer).

**How are employers responding? Are employers still seeking workers?**

The greatest need that Business Account Managers are reporting are employers who are essential businesses such as grocery stores. Many employers are willing to do informational interviews during this time such as the City of Burlington. Burlington VR and VDOL are currently working on marshaling their mutual resources for what we consider to be the oncoming wave of consumers and plan to do a process mapping exercise to jointly utilize shared resources.

**How are the staff managing their day to day work remotely?**

General expectations are that staff reach out to three-five consumers a day and they show this on their Outlook calendars for supervisors to see. Supervision meetings are happening at least once a week. Our Aware database shows that work is being done by our employment counselors via case notes. With the slowdown in referrals this has been a good opportunity for staff to update case notes, as well. In our transition work core teams are still happening virtually and our Middlebury office just completed a resource sharing guide with the team which has been well received. Some students have been responding, and we find that communication through texting helps. And frankly many students and their families are struggling with layoffs and the current situation as well.

Gina shared that Howard Center, as the designated agency in Burlington, has a Corona Virus anxiety workbook and will share it out to SRC members.

Diane shared that they had their monthly meeting with developmental services folks and though she's not surprised it is fairly dramatic that designated agency customers who are part of developmental services supportive employment programs have been pulled off their jobs for safety reasons. That means that 1,500 to 2,000 people with developmental disabilities who had been employed are now not employed and it is overwhelming to think about the work that will be required to get back to this level again.

Sarah shared that one person she knows who works with a designated agency has underlying medical conditions and cannot be reassigned and is facing layoff because of it; reasonable accommodations are not being provided for at this point.

**Conclusions:**

Thank you, Shaun and Mark, for the update!

**Action Items, Person Responsible, Deadline:**

- Gina will forward the Corona Virus workbook for Kate to share with SRC members.

**8) Committee Chair Updates (Sarah Launderville)****Discussion:****A. Advocacy, Outreach, & Education Committee**

A lot of both state and federal initiatives not directly tied to COVID are on hold. Sam was able to speak with Dick Sears and he was very clear that they had to scramble to alter appropriation considerations due to the COVID-19 crisis. As such, a lot of what we had hoped for on the state level is now on hold. These important initiatives will come up again in the next session. A report from the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) will come out soon so stay tuned. Otherwise I would like to highlight one thing: how do we best lay the groundwork for people with disabilities to come back into the workforce once the crisis subsides. We don't know yet when hiring is reinvigorated if people with disabilities will be overlooked initially and it will be very important for this be monitored at the national level. There is expected to be at least one or two more stimulus packages from Congress and we want to see if there will be provisions of employment disincentives in these packages. Money Follows the Person and spousal impoverishment protections have been extended from May 22 to Nov 30<sup>th</sup>. Though this is good news, it is not permanent as advocates had wanted. There is chance that the ABLE age adjustment act in addition to Senior Care Act for Medicaid buy-ins can also be tacked on to next stimulus package, which will likely be in May. The main thing would be to monitor at least administrative rulemaking and laws that people with disabilities are not discriminated against when hiring picks back up. During this time when people are working at home, Public Assets Institute's Setting the Record Straight project is moving forward. We've had one stakeholders meeting and will have a funders meeting next week. Once the interviews conclude and data is recorded and analyzed, the results will be shared out to stakeholders, policy makers, employers, and people with disabilities. Even during this time of crisis, very real progress is being made on this project.

**B. Policies & Procedures Committee**

Minutes are provided in packets.

**C. Performance Review Committee**

Marlena shared that at today's meeting James presented needs assessment data which was great to learn more about and we will dig deeper into these data at the June meeting. The presentation can be accessed on the website. Elections for committee chair were held today and Nick Caputo was nominated and elected. Congratulations to Nick!



## **D. Steering Committee**

At the last meeting the committee revisited membership requirements. As a reminder, by statute at least 51% of members on the SRC must be people with disabilities. Additional details are provided in the minutes, but other agenda items included recruitment work and working on agenda setting and speakers for upcoming meetings.

## **Conclusions:**

Thanks everyone.

## **Action Items, Person Responsible, Deadline:**

None

## **9) Other Business (Sarah Launderville)**

### **Discussion:**

#### **A. Other**

Martha: We had a Save the Date out for our Youth Summit and changes have been made. Alternatives are in the works so stay tuned!

Sarah: VCIL is working with Tara Howe on their Youth Transition to determine how to best continue services (such as through Google Hangouts). The workshops we generally do in the school will be online so we are hoping for possibly an even wider audience than normal; we will share these opportunities with all as they are firmed up.

Sam: VR, VCIL, and SILC have all stepped up in the crisis. SILC's membership has grown with many competent and hardworking people and Tom Hamilton has stepped up a great deal and SILC is working on many fronts to see to it that both systems advocacy and independent living services are provided during this crisis. The SILC has made available to employers an emergency preparedness kit digitally and hard copy which is specifically designated for people with disabilities and seniors. It is written by experts so has language that is very accessible to people with developmental disabilities. It includes resources necessary for sheltering in place or evacuation, and there is a section that people can complete that they can give to emergency responders if needed. It is located on [DAIL](#) and other websites.

Robin: There is a need for advocacy and workplace discrimination does happen. At the same time, he knows from experience that employers hate to bring someone onboard only to say it doesn't work four-six weeks later. As an employer it has been useful it has been useful to work with VR to ensure that- if job placements don't work out- people do not feel like it was due to prejudices.

Sarah: Though it is not yet known how much money is being provided for through the stimulus to VCIL, they currently have a COVID 19 staff member.

Advocates have been making calls to see how people are doing and there are reports that people we work with who are homeless who live in the woods are going deeper in the woods—all the people wanting to help at once actually run the risk of making it worse for people due to the overwhelming volume. People needing access to food, medical supplies, and the Meals on Wheels program has skyrocketed in the last few weeks. For people who are not eligible for Meals and Wheels or cannot otherwise access food, they are able to use funds to help them access food through COVID funds. We are also exploring how we might bolster our fund that helps people access technology and also possibly expanding the fund that can help people to pay for basic needs. Once the award letter is received from the federal government we will have a better idea of the specifics, but for now we are also thinking about advocacy, communication access for deaf and hard of hearing populations, and the emergency personal attendant services gap, among other needs.

**Conclusions:**

n/a

**Action Items, Person Responsible, Deadline:**

- Kate to share the SILC emergency preparedness kit.

**10) Round Table (Sarah Launderville)**

**Discussion:**

Very interested in the data James was talking about regarding Native Americans with disabilities as they have seen similar trends in special education data; Surprised at how engaging this meeting felt given that it was just voices; Thank you Marlena for great meeting this morning and for being a great chair and excited about Nick as the new chair; This meeting was great and really enjoyed listening to the information about how everyone is working remotely and we are not alone in our frustration with technology; The United Way of Northwest Vermont has started a COVID-19 fund and all dollars raised going back out to community partners and have already raised \$184k with more coming in, which then goes right back out to programs doing direct service work in response to the pandemic. The third quarter payments to all funded programs has been opened up to be used for whatever they need it for such as staffing; I am still in Florida and don't know when we will be able to come home but we are feeling safe here which is good and I was excited to hear the regional managers' updates—it really is amazing how the coordination is taking place to keep services running smoothly; I want to echo Shaun's accolades of staff- in less than a week we were able to move 140 state employees and VABIR employees to remote work to their home and staff deserve praise for going the extra mile; This was a helpful meeting and I appreciated being part of it and the updates gave me some ideas about follow-up with local VR counselors; I want to thank everyone for their flexibility during this very hard time and appreciate being part of this group and seeing how hard everyone is working and I invite people to look at the VFN newsletter and to connect with family consultants around special

education questions and service delivery; Today was a great way to stay updated and as a newer member on the council I would love to do this via video conference if possible; I am going to send Kate some alternative free video conferencing apps that may be useful; I always learn a lot in these meetings and wanted to share that there are virtual town halls for employers and claimants on the VDOL website (70k claims by last count, working seven days a week to process claims); Having served multiple terms on the SRC I am not the least bit surprised that VR leadership stepped up and handled this better than probably any other VR agency in the country; Thank you to everyone and to Kate for being flexible with the coordination with virtual meetings; Thank you for the information and resources shared; I enjoyed the meeting and hearing how everyone is handling the new circumstances and would also echo that having video would be good to have at a future meeting; I am happy to be part of this meeting and always feel welcomed when I am here and it feels incredibly supportive of our work; I appreciate everyone's humor as humor is a great leveler that keeps us sane; I have been on a lot of phone meetings this week and you guys nailed it and I always appreciate hearing Diane's vision, the regional manager updates, and Kate gluing it all together.

**Conclusions:**

n/a

**Action Items, Person Responsible, Deadline:**

None

**11) Adjournment** (Sarah Launderville)

**Discussion:**

Sarah asked if there was a motion to adjourn. Robin moved to adjourn, and it was seconded. No further discussion. All approved. Vote unanimous 15-0-1.

**Conclusions:**

Motion to adjourn approved at 2:20pm.

**Action Items, Person Responsible, Deadline:**

- Draft minutes uploaded to SRC website, **Kate Larose**, 4/14/2020
- Draft minutes emailed to Council members, **Kate Larose**, 4/14/2020
- Minutes approved, **Council**, 6/4/2020
- Approved minutes uploaded to website, **Kate Larose**, 6/9/2020