

## **Draft Minutes**

VERMONT STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL (VTSRC)

Thursday, December 2, 2021, 1:00PM – 3:30PM

Waterbury State Office Building, Ash and Zoom

### **Meeting called by:**

Vice Chair Nick Caputo, filling in for Chair Sarah Launderville, called the meeting to order at 1:02 p.m.

### **Members Present:**

- Ana Kolbach
- Andrea Bacchi
- Asher Edelson
- Cara Sachs
- Cari Kelley
- Courtney Blasius
- Diane Dalmasse, ex-officio, non-voting
- Emily Marie Ahtúnan
- Gina D'Ambrosio
- Helena Kehne
- Kristen Carpentier, non-voting
- Laura Flint
- Laura Siegel
- Marlena Hughes
- Martha Frank
- Nick Caputo
- Patricia Wehman
- Robin Ingenthron
- Rocko Gieselman, non-voting
- Rose Lucenti
- Sarah Sterling
- Sherrie Brunelle

### **Members Absent:**

- Bill Meirs
- Calla Papademas
- Lexia Stanley
- Sarah Launderville

### **SRC Liaison:**

- Amanda Arnold

### **SRC Coordinator:**

- Kate Larose

**Interpreters:**

- Jen Rainey
- Patrick Galasso

**Speakers or Presenters:**

- Dianna Mitchell
- Liz Harrington
- Rich Tulikangas
- Shaun Donahue

**Guests:**

- Karen Gravlin
- Melissa Conly
- Rachel Seelig

**1) Introductions** (Nick Caputo, Vice Chair)**Discussion:**

Those in attendance introduced themselves. Nick welcomed the three newest appointees to the SRC and shared their bios listed in the [meeting packet](#).

**Conclusions:**

Thanks to everyone!

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

None

**2) Approval of Agenda** (Nick Caputo)**Discussion:**

Nick asked for any proposed additions or changes to the agenda. Sherrie moved to accept the agenda and it was seconded. No further discussion. All approved. Vote unanimous 19-0-0

**Conclusions:**

Motion passes: today's agenda accepted

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

None

**3) Open for Public Comment** (Nick Caputo)**Discussion:**

There was no public comment given.

**Conclusions:**

n/a

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

None

**4) Approval of Minutes for June 3, 2021 and October 7, 2021** (Nick Caputo)

**Discussion:**

Nick asked for any proposed changes or amendments to the June 3, 2021 or October 7, 2021 minutes. There were none. Courtney moved to approve the minutes and it was seconded. No discussion. All approved. Vote unanimous 19-0-0

**Conclusions:**

[Minutes from June 3, 2021](#) and [Minutes from October 7, 2021](#) were approved

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

Upload approved minutes to the SRC website, **Kate Larose**, 12/7/2021

**5) Consent Agenda** (Nick Caputo)

**Discussion:**

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

- [AOE Committee September 2, 2021](#)
- [Performance Review Committee June 3, 2021](#)
- [Policy & Procedures Committee September 2, 2021](#)
- [Steering Committee September 2, 2021](#)
- [Coordinator's Report December 2, 2021](#)

Sherrie moved to approve, and it was seconded. No further discussion. Vote unanimous 19-0-0

**Conclusions:**

Consent agenda items approved

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

Upload items to SRC website, **Kate Larose**, 12/7/2021

**6) [Director's Report](#)** (Diane Dalmasse)

**Discussion:**

Diane shared the [December Director's Report](#).

**Conclusions:**

Thank you, Diane, for the update!

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

n/a

## **7) Committee Chair Updates (Nick Caputo)**

### **Discussion:**

#### **A. Advocacy, Outreach, & Education Committee**

Asher shared that the November AOE meeting focused on working through the committee priorities established at the October retreat. The committee requested that last year's SRC statement of support for H.266 (the hearing aid insurance mandate bill) be updated and distributed.

#### **B. Policies & Procedures Committee**

Sherrie reported that Chapters 201 and 202 (referral and eligibility) were passed out of committee and will go through the public hearing process. The self-employment chapter review was moved to later in 2022. The committee is interested in working on transportation and collaborating with the AOE committee where possible.

#### **C. Performance Review Committee**

Nick shared that the PR Committee has had recent presentations on the consumer satisfaction survey, customized employment and job carving, and employer engagement. Topics for upcoming meetings include reviewing data for Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing people, as well as consumers experiencing mental illness.

#### **D. Steering Committee**

Nick As a result of the retreat it was clear that SRC members want to be more engaged during and between meetings. This includes legislative advocacy for issues of importance to VR and the SRC such as the hearing aid insurance mandate bill currently in the state legislature. To assist with this, the Steering Committee asked Kate to put together a list of contact information for Vermont House and Senate legislators to provide to council members along with the updated H.266 statement of support. These will be shared in the coming weeks.

### **Conclusions:**

Thank you to the committee chairs for the updates!

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

n/a

## **8) VR Regional Manager Updates (Liz Harrington and Shaun Donahue)**

### **Discussion:**

Liz reported the following from the Newport and Saint Albans regions:

### ***How are your teams approaching our work in hybrid model?***

We have a robust team spirit in our regions! In Newport and St Albans we call ourselves the, "Dream Team" and "Team Awesome".

Support: Admin is providing solid foundation with suggesting clear guidelines for staff, indicating "telework" or "in-office" on Outlook Calendars. Staff is entering all appointments in Outlook Calendars with consumer name and contact info, including location. Admin calls each consumer the business day before scheduled appointments to complete screening questions related to COVID.

Flexibility: Staff has been willing to adjust plans for meetings, in-person arrangements or other pre-planned activities as required by mandates, rates of positive cases and restrictions. We have become more comfortable with video calls and troubleshooting when internet connectivity is poor/unstable.

Resilience: The hybrid model is the ultimate test of our resilience. We have successfully provided services in office based settings. The pandemic forced us to provide these same services fully remotely. The combination of these very different approaches to our work is a unique challenge. We have created an opportunity through telework requests for individual staff members to create a plan that meets their scheduling needs. With consistent support and flexibility, our staff has revealed an exceptional level of resilience.

### ***What is one success your region has had in delivering services remotely?***

Collaboration: Overall, our ability to team has expanded greatly. Internal and external partners are readily available via email, video calls, phone, and text. We eliminated travel time to and from meetings held outside of our physical office location. Fellow VocRehab and VABIR staff are accessible with a click!

Exploration and Experimentation with Technology: Our remote work allowed and required us to learn how to use the tools we have. We discovered Microsoft Teams wasn't that hard to open, we could share screens, and update data and documents in real time. We experimented with AWAREsign, One Sign, and DocuSign to streamline the process of gathering required signatures for releases, allowing for timely eligibility determination and IPE development and signatures. Some of us learned how to use Polly, a survey app to enrich our meetings. Time management skills were improved and we developed new ways to organize our email and appointments by color, font, and sender. Staff utilized MyAnalytics which compiles data from Teams chats, meetings, Outlook schedules, and emails to provide information about top collaborators, amount of time scheduled, and suggested focus time.

CORE Services Strengthened: The best highlight of remote work was discovering we can successfully deliver our VR core services effectively. In most cases, the

focus on maintaining excellent customer service became the most important thing. Our attention to getting back to basics became the norm. Staff got settled in home offices, got connected and re-oriented. Through all the changes and updates, our VR and VABIR staff made consumer contact & engagement the priority.

Shaun reported the following from the St. Johnsbury and White River Junction regions:

***How are your teams approaching our work in a hybrid model?***

Overall, the model has been implemented relatively smoothly in both offices. If we go back to mid-March 2020, the guidance to move to remote work was a bit of a surprise and something that most folks thought would last a few weeks, maybe a month. Given that, staff made what they thought would be temporary arrangements to get through what was believed to be a short-term affair. By late summer, it was clear we were in for a much longer duration than was anticipated, and regional leadership adopted the mantra of “this is the new permanent for the foreseeable future”, and worked with staff to ensure adequate space, technology and ergonomic work settings in the home. There was also a notable shift in staff acceptance of this new model as they saw the benefits of an enhanced quality of life resulting from the model. In retrospect, it’s no surprise we found many consumers also embracing this new service delivery model. There was a noticeable decline in no shows for scheduled appointments, and anecdotal reports showed that time spent with consumers was more efficient and as a result able to be completed in less time. We modified our orientation process and found that consumers responded well to the changes. I should note our admin staff were the key to the success of staff being able to manage paperwork and other administrative duties remotely. In particular I would mention Lauren Bertolini Dow the Administrative Services Coordinator in White River Junction who—throughout the remote work period—came into both of our district offices weekly to process mail, faxes, and provide supplies to the rest of the staff in their home spaces.

In late spring and early summer of 2021 after more than a year of remote work, we began the planning for our eventual return. It was no surprise that staff who a year earlier couldn’t wait to get back to the office and hated working from home were now quite settled and reluctant to consider returning to the office. In all fairness, it needs to be noted that the pandemic was by now full blown and VT—which had been a leader in mitigation efforts—was beginning to look more like other parts of the country with increased cases and not much indication of relief in sight. Thanks in large part to VR leadership support for a hybrid model, we have been able to minimize staff time in the office and ease into the return. Local leadership encouraged staff beginning in July to spend time in the office to re-acclimate themselves to the routine of being in the office and also determine what they needed to be successful in maintain two work spaces in the home and the office. Many staff in both districts took advantage of this opportunity and

spent anywhere from a few hours to a few days a week in the office. This did make the transition a little smoother when we re-opened in November. Our foundational staffing model has a minimum of four people scheduled into each office on any given day including a front office person. This has proven to be important as there have been a number of days where one or two people have not been able to come in for a variety of reasons including being sick, sick family members, child care for young children whose schooling has been interrupted, and all the other more typical reasons a person might be out. By having four people scheduled we are able to manage those absences without leaving us in a situation where the office is either un-staffed, or a staff person is there alone. We have set up several spaces in each office that allow for meetings with consumers in safety, including social distancing, plexiglass barriers and mask availability. For meetings with multiple players, our admin staff schedule additional folks via Teams or Zoom. Our admin staff schedule all in-person meetings so as not to overlap consumers, and they do health screening at three intervals for all in person meetings: at the time the appointment is scheduled, the day before the appointment when confirming, and when the consumer arrives for the appointment. Counselors are encouraging consumers to continue to meet remotely and as a result we have only had a handful of in person meetings this past month.

***What is one success your region has had in delivering services remotely?***

Greg is in his mid-50s and he came to us after a significant medical event that required him to leave his professional employment because he was no longer able to perform the duties he had previously. Greg went from earning 60k a year to nothing, was just applying for disability, and only had limited resources left. Through a process of clarifying his disabilities and determining how they functionally impacted him, we arrived at several possibilities including self-employment options. In a short period of time his business was created, a preliminary business plan was done, and contracts were being forged with local school districts. Greg has worked hard, and his wife has joined him in his business that is generating around 20k a month already. He has also turned into an employer of people with disabilities, offering flexible scheduling and independence to his employees that fits their needs.

Beth made the decision that she wanted to pursue a career as a Certified Nursing Assistant. When the pandemic started most of the training programs shut down. The Business Account Manager found and shared a mostly on-line version of the training she needed and Beth was very successful in completing this training with support from VR and VSAC. It was a challenge to schedule the certification exam she needed because of disruptions related to the pandemic, but Beth was persistent and eventually passed the exam on her first attempt.

After completing her training, Beth obtained a job in her chosen field. She worked with our Benefits Counselor to understand the impact of income from employment on her benefits. She has been able to obtain more satisfactory and stable housing, a car, and has shared examples of how her quality of life and self-confidence have improved with her success. Beth showed great determination in achieving her vocational goal. Her success also illustrates the great teamwork that happens every day between VR and our partners.

In April of 2021, VR reached out to a Regional Operations Manager at Vermont Department of Forests & Parks, with questions regarding the needed and valued skills required of a state park employee. VR shared a potential employee with a Master Gardener certification and was connected to Lesley Porter, a Park Operations Manager. While in the midst of the busiest hiring season, Lesley took the time to encourage the potential employee to apply for a position, and then welcomed her onto a supportive team. Lesley and her team created an environment that allowed the new employee to have a job, to be successful, and to be paid for something for which she is exceptionally gifted and enjoys. The new employee was not only successful at her new job, but she was also voted Outstanding Employee of the Year. The only employee that didn't nominate her was herself. VR also nominated Lesley Porter at Vermont Department of Forests & Parks for the 2021 Spirit of the ADA Award.

**Conclusions:**

Thank you, Liz and Shaun, for the updates!

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

None

**9) [Presentation: VCAP Grant Overview](#) (Rich Tulikangas)**

**Discussion:**

Rich shared [this presentation](#).

Diane added that VCAP is designed not as a research project, but rather as a systems redesign. It's in perfect alignment with our careers initiative and where we want to go in terms of moving people out of poverty and into meaningful employment at or above livable wage.

Gina asked if creating new training programs will be a part of VCAP. Rich said that they anticipate that new apprenticeship program development will be part of this.

Marlena shared that it is programs like this that provide so much hope to the people she works with in corrections in thinking about and working towards their futures.



Martha thanked Rich for a great presentation and asked how youth learn about this opportunity. Rich replied that there will be career pathway navigator positions to streamline this process and that VR staff and BAMs will assist in identifying consumers to become part of this program. Martha wondered how more people—particularly those not already connected with VR as they exit high school—can learn more. Rich said that Core Teams and transition staff will support this, and Diane added that the branding initiative that will be launched in January could possibly include a fact sheet on VCAP.

**Conclusions:**

Thank you, Rich for the presentation!

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

None

**10) Presentation: Loan Forgiveness** (Dianna Mitchell)

**Discussion:**

Dianna Mitchell from VSAC introduced herself and shared [this presentation](#).

Nick asked what the success rate is of this loan forgiveness process. Dianna shared that it has gone more smoothly than the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program and that the process seems to be working for the majority of applicants.

Nick asked how long the program has existed. Dianna said it's been around since the 90s but that there have been some streamlined changes over the years to make it easier. She also added that VSAC's private loans tend to mirror federal loans in this respect.

Sherrie asked what happens if a loan is discharged under this program and then the borrower later wants to return to school. Dianna shared that—depending on how long ago the loan was discharged—the loan may potentially be reinstated.

**Conclusions:**

Thank you, Dianna for the presentation!

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

None

**11) Paired Discussions**

SRC members were asked to share the follow in paired discussion groups:

- *Thinking back to the presentations you've heard today, what gives you hope about the year ahead for VR and VR consumers?*

## **12) Vote: SRC Chair Election**

### **Discussion:**

Nick asked for nominations or self-nominations from the floor. Asher Edelson was nominated by Nick Caputo. Nick twice more requested nominations. Martha Frank was nominated by Marlana Hughes but Martha declined. Nick asked one more time for nominations. Hearing none, and an Australian ballot not being necessary, voting was made by a voice vote. Nick asked all those in favor of electing Asher Edelson as Chair of the SRC to say Aye. All those not in favor to say Nay. Hearing none, X was elected as Chair. Vote unanimous 18-0-0.

### **Conclusions: .**

Asher Edelson was elected Chair

## **13) Vote: SRC Vice Chair Election**

### **Discussion:**

Nick asked Sherrie to assume this agenda item. Sherrie asked for nominations or self-nominations from the floor. Sherrie nominated Nick Caputo. Marlana Hughes nominated Gina D'Ambrosio. Nick said that he would like to support Gina's nomination and declined his nomination. Sherrie twice more requested nominations. Hearing none, and an Australian ballot not being necessary, voting was made by a voice vote. Sherrie asked all those in favor of electing Gina D'Ambrosio as Vice Chair of the SRC to say Aye. All those not in favor to say Nay. Hearing none, Gina was elected as Vice Chair. Vote unanimous 18-0-0.

### **Conclusions: .**

Gina D'Ambrosio was elected Vice Chair

## **14) Other Business (Nick Caputo)**

Asher requested that members email him if they are interested in helping draft the revised statement of support for H.266.

## **15) Round Table (Group)**

### **Discussion:**

Attendees were asked to share their response to the following question:

*What's one thing you appreciated about our time together today?*

- The VCAP program and what it will mean for consumers.
- VCAP and having a liaison and navigator to help shepherd people through resources along with new development opportunities.
- The overview of the loan forgiveness program and learning about the differences with the changes implemented in August.
- Learning about the work that is happening around the state and meeting new people and learning about the great things they are doing.
- The Kessler grant and the focus of helping consumers.

- New programming and expansion.
- Would love to learn a little more about the overlaps and differences of VCAP and current VR services and programming.
- The opportunities for outreach that are happening with the new programs at the same time of the rebrand and the positive impact marketing efforts will yield.
- Excited to hear about new money coming in and more awareness that people need higher paying jobs. I'm also excited that as the focus becomes getting off benefits that more people will become aware of the systemic issues presented by benefits cliffs and they will hopefully be addressed.
- Very impressed with VR finding grants, applying to them, and being awarded them and it's inspiring to see how it brings in new opportunities to the state for consumers.
- Hoping that the marketing and rebranding efforts will help remove the negative stigma around VR and help with referrals from physician's offices.
- When I talk to my CAP counterparts around New England and hear about the struggles they are having with their VR agencies I am continually impressed with the strength of the VR/CAP partnership here in Vermont.
- I'm curious how WorkVT 2.0 and VCAP are integrated and work together.
- The continued momentum around careers and the energy put into understanding the importance of a career instead of just jobs.
- The additional opportunities and accessibility that will be made available to people with disabilities.
- I want to give a shout out to the two regional managers who shared their reports and talked about how they moved to a hybrid model. The resilience and dedication of the staff from those offices filled me with hope.
- Hopeful about the legislative issues on the horizon and being able to move those forward.

#### **14) Adjournment** (Nick Caputo)

##### **Conclusions:**

Nick called the meeting adjourned at 3:35pm

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

- Draft minutes uploaded to SRC website, **Kate Larose**, 12/7/2021
- Draft minutes emailed to Committee members, **Kate Larose**, 12/7/2021
- Minutes approved, **Committee**, 2/3/2022
- Approved minutes uploaded to website, **Kate Larose**, 2/8/2022