

## **Draft Minutes**

VERMONT STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL (VTSRC)

Thursday, December 3, 2020, 1:00PM – 3:30PM

Zoom

### **Meeting called by:**

Sarah Launderville, Chair, called the meeting to order at 1:02pm.

### **Members Present:**

- Ana Kolbach
- Asher Edelson
- Bill Meirs
- Cara Sachs
- Cari Kelley
- Courtney Blasius
- Diane Dalmasse, ex-officio, non-voting
- Gina D'Ambrosio
- Helena Kehne
- Kristen Carpentier, non-voting
- Marlena Hughes
- Martha Frank
- Nick Caputo
- Patricia Wehman
- Robin Ingenthron
- Rocko Gieselman
- Rose Lucenti
- Sam Liss
- Sarah Launderville
- Sherrie Brunelle

### **Members Absent:**

- Olivia Smith-Hammond
- Danielle Dubois
- Brian Smith

### **SRC Liaison:**

James Smith

### **SRC Coordinator:**

Kate Larose

### **Interpreters:**

- Christine Bricault
- Jennifer Raney

**Speakers or Presenters:**

- Jess DeCarolis
- Tara Howe
- Marianne Langelo
- Cindy Seguin
- Nancy Dwyer

**Guests:**

- Emily Marie Ahtúnan
- Laura Siegel
- Sarah Sterling

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

Those in attendance introduced themselves. Sarah referenced the section of the meeting packet with the bios of our new members (below) and officially welcomed them to the SRC:

***Asher Edelson***

*Hello fellow SRC members! My name is Asher, and I am a proud resident of Vermont. I am passionate about many issues, including equity for people with disabilities. It is my goal to be the best help that I can be for the SRC and to learn all that I can in order to be the change that I seek. My disability is Tourette's Syndrome. Thank you all so much.*

***Rocko Gieselman***

*Rocko Gieselman has been a VocRehab Transition Counselor in Washington County since 2018 and was a VABIR Youth Employment Specialist for two years prior. They were excited to join the Transition Program Coordinator team in 2020 and have enjoyed supporting their fellow TCs across the state. They earned their undergrad degree from UVM and will soon have their Masters in Counseling from the University of Southern Maine. If you're on a zoom call with Rocko you will likely see their beloved furry friend, Tucker the cat. Rocko loves to chat about goats, cheese and the delicious combo of the two!*

***Cara Sachs***

*Cara Sachs is a certified life coach working with chronically ill folks. She has a B. A. in Psychology and two certifications from the Institute for Professional Excellence in Coaching. Cara's passion stems from life-long severe chronic pain and other issues from Ehlers Danlos Syndrome, MCAS (Mast Cell Activation Syndrome) and TBM (Tracheobronchomalacia). She helps clients live their best life while caring for their health.*

**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. She requested to move the Working with Disability Report to the Director's Report agenda item. Sam moved to accept the agenda and it was seconded. No further discussion. All approved. Vote unanimous 15-0-1

**Conclusions:**

Motion passes: today's agenda accepted

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

None

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

**Discussion:**

None

**Conclusions:**

n/a

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

None

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

**Discussion:**

Sarah asked for any proposed changes or amendments to the June 4, 2020 minutes. There were none. Sherrie moved to approve the minutes and it was seconded. No discussion. All approved. Vote unanimous 16-0-1

**Conclusions:**

[June 4, 2020 minutes](#) were approved

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

Upload approved minutes to the SRC website, **Kate Larose**, 12/8/2020

**5) Approval of Minutes for October 1, 2020** (Sarah Launderville)

**Discussion:**

Sarah asked for any proposed changes or amendments to the June 4, 2020 minutes. There were none. Nick moved to approve the minutes and it was seconded. No discussion. All approved. Vote unanimous 16-0-1

**Conclusions:**

[October 1, 2020 minutes](#) were approved

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

Upload approved minutes to the SRC website, **Kate Larose**, 12/8/2020

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

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

- [AOE Committee November 5, 2020](#)
- [Performance Review Committee October 8, 2020](#)
- [Policy & Procedures Committee November 5, 2020](#)
- [Steering Committee November 5, 2020](#)
- [Coordinator's December 3, 2020 Report](#)

Sam moved to approve, and it was seconded. No further discussion. Vote unanimous 16-0-1

**Conclusions:**

Consent agenda items approved

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

Upload items to SRC website, **Kate Larose**, 12/8/2020

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

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

Diane and Sarah walked through the new [Working with Disability Report](#).

Cari asked about work from home opportunities for people with disabilities and if there are large organizations that are hiring. Diane shared that RDI based in the Newport area has been doing a significant expansion of work from home opportunities and VR invited them into multiple district meetings which resulted in many consumers being hired. Diane shared that more can certainly be done here. Robin shared that Good Point Recycling also has opportunities available.

**Conclusions:**

Thank you, Diane, for the update!

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

- Share Aflac contact with James, **Cari Kelley**, 12/15/2020

## **8) VR Regional Manager Updates: Managing consumer services during COVID-19** (Cindy Seguin and Nancy Dwyer)

### **Discussion:**

### **Cindy Seguin reported the following:**

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

Staff is doing well thanks to central office and the agency as a whole.

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

We have our administrative coordinators do personalized orientations with everyone who calls in and then consumers are invited to do an interest inventory. This is set up the following week with their counselor. Once they connect with a counselor we find that consumers are very engaged and this is due to there being lots of personalized experiences up front.

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

Consumers are not having to wait for appointments any longer as the conversations start as soon as they call in. The interest inventory helps consumers to generate and consider potential career paths.

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

Employers still need employees. What we've been doing is having employers speak to counselors at virtual career link meetings to talk about their hiring and COVID practices, and what the career ladders are within their organizations. This helps us understand if placements will be safe for consumers. For example, one employer in Morrisville shared how they completely moved around their manufacturing layout to keep people safe and away from one another and walked us through their daily safety protocols.

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

It took some time to adjust as people thought it would be short term only. But now that we realize this is for the long term, people have settled in especially with the tools that have been provided such as technology and ergonomic assessments of home workspaces. Everyone seems to be adjusting to working from home well, and are good about speaking to consumers in confidential space

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

One of our counselors who is part of the pilot for SSA has been working with a consumer from 2017 who is enrolled in a master's in counseling program. The school and counselor supported her through some challenges, and she was able to successfully complete her program through part time attendance. She is now

employed as a therapist and is working closely with her counselor and a benefits counselor as she is looking at working her way off of benefits as she grows her client base.

**Nancy Dwyer reported the following:**

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

Regionally and in the district offices we are managing remarkably well. Despite the hardships of this period of time, morale is generally excellent as is productivity. It is notable that there are few complaints. We are maintaining regular times to check in with each other, to continue to take the pulse of the offices and to communicate information. We are doing meetings regionally when possible in order to facilitate frequent interactions and teamwork.

Staff settled into remote work faster than I might have imagined would be the case at the beginning of COVID. I remain impressed by the level of ongoing staff commitment to provide great services to our customers and their ability to engage with our other partners such as VDOL to help people move forward toward work and education. There are some things that are inherently more complicated due to not having ready access to the resources in the office such as fax machines, printers, but with the commitment of central office to support staff in working remotely, we manage to resolve most issues that come our way that impact our work.

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

Flexibility is key when delivering remote services to our VR consumers. Though using computer or phone is the preferred method of contact with consumers, staff are utilizing all available means of communication in their work. Staff have tried to remain as flexible as possible to accommodate the needs of their consumers as they balance their own family, school, and work needs. Staff are utilizing the IT set-aside to help consumers purchase the equipment, internet connection, etc. in order that they can engage in VR services, job search and furthering their education or training. Team meetings between VR, consumers and VABIR are happening to support customers with assessment, job search and/or educational goals and to plan for next steps. Transition staff are in regular communication at least weekly with school personnel, attend IEP meetings and CORE teams continue to happen. Meetings are still happening virtually with students, either during school hours, or after school. When possible, informational interviews, job shadows or company tours are arranged in a virtual format.

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

Being able to meet virtually with consumers has removed some of the barriers for them in terms of difficulties getting transportation to the office, concerns about childcare etc. and this has made it easier for some of our consumers to

more fully engage in services. Many have expressed gratitude that VR and VABIR staff have reached out to them, particularly early on in the pandemic are appreciative of that support. Some consumers have moved full-steam ahead toward employment or further education, while others have decided to put things on hold for the time being. There are some who have not been able to willing or able to engage due to a variety of factors.

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

The employer response has largely remained positive to our efforts to get people employed. They in most instances have been very open to doing work experiences and have remained so even while we are not able to do them in-person. They have also been willing to do informational interviews and some tours virtually. Some employers continue to reach out to our BAMS and employment staff. Much of the available opportunities have been in retail and manufacturing. As the pandemic has gone on, experienced that larger companies with HR departments are quicker to respond than smaller companies in which there are far fewer staff and all hands-on deck. Noticeable that communication has been somewhat different or less frequent in the last month since the surge. Employers have responded well to participating in virtual job fairs and the virtual career panels that were happening during the summer, allowing participants to learn more about specific careers. Staff view that this is an opportunity to continue the development of relationships with employers that will be of great benefit of all once the pandemic eases.

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

Staff are performing their regular duties, managing the shifts that have been needed for consumer meetings and coordinating joint meetings with other team members. In some instances, there are more frequent, shorter check-ins with consumers depending upon the work that is happening. Weekly peer and monthly staff meetings have continued with similar format as prior to remote work. Staff are making use of data cleanup days for the ongoing AWARE and case management tasks. Referrals have generally been down overall for several months, however with the smaller caseloads, staff have the opportunity to do more in-depth work with consumers. Staff are able to see most new consumers for intake between 5-7 days.

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

We worked with a customer who had previously been an LNA. She experienced a psychotic break while at work and was let go due to some of her behavior during this time. She tried several different jobs, but her employment was brief due to her severe anxiety. The customer eventually was able to engage with mental health counseling and a prescriber and gradually stabilized. She came to VR hoping to work in the healthcare field but knew that she could not return to work in direct care. VR did the Career Scope to assist the customer to learn about some other options. VRC teamed with the VABIR EC to assist this person

in their job search. Through the support provided from VR and VABIR, the customer eventually was able to reach the point where they felt ready to search for employment. The customer applied at a pharmacy, was interviewed immediately and was offered the job. On the first day of work, the customer became extremely anxious while working in the front end of the store, but was able to tell her supervisor that she was having a hard time and was able to complete her shift. That evening, VRC and VABIR had a joint call with the customer to review her first day. The customer was able to relate that they felt they had been able to manage their anxiety and could remain at the job. That was two and a half months ago. VR and VABIR have continued to provide flexibility for meetings at unconventional times to continue to support this person and their employment. Though this job was not a dream job for the customer, her employment is acknowledged by staff and customer to be an important first step, not a dead end. Now they are helping the customer to move forward to explore options and to prepare for eventual training in the field medical coding.

**Conclusions:**

Thank you, Cindy and Nancy, for the update!

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

None

**9) Committee Chair Updates (Sarah Launderville)**

**Discussion:**

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

Sam shared there is broad coalition support in passing the hearing insurance mandate. COVE has made it their top legislative priority. They will be holding a strategy meeting on December 10<sup>th</sup> which will include VLA, AARP, and the healthcare ombudsman along with Sam. Vermont is currently the only New England state without a mandate. Studies clearly show that uncorrected hearing loss is associated with earlier onset of dementia and hearing aids are less expensive than the costs associated with dementia. Secondly, President-elect Biden's disability plan has been released. A summary has been prepared by NCIL and shared with VR and SRC. The Biden transition team is accepting suggestions at present for qualified people to fill subcabinet-level positions and Judy Heumann has been suggested by many for positions.

On January 26<sup>th</sup> from 10am-12pm the SILC is sponsoring their Olmstead Webinar with a focus on housing. Hilary Melton from Pathways Vermont will emphasize the Housing First model and the chronic homelessness related to incarceration in the corrections system. All are invited to attend.

**B. Policies & Procedures Committee**

Sherrie shared that the committee recently revised the audiology and hearing aids and post-secondary education and training chapters. Additionally, they

reviewed the spending guidelines to ensure that realities match our current pandemic world.

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

Nick stated that the major findings from the needs assessment has been a focus area. He also encouraged members to look at the presentation on the consumer satisfaction survey from Amanda Arnold which is [on the website under the October meeting](#). This is the first time the survey has been done, and Vermont is only the second state to conduct the survey. Overall it is clear that all consumers want more contact with VR. At today's meeting the committee had presentations from the Assistive Technology Program and Corrections.

### **Conclusions:**

Thanks everyone.

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

- Kate to forward Olmstead invitation when available, **Kate Larose**

## **10) Presentation: Dual Enrollment (Panel)**

### **Discussion:**

#### **Jess DeCarolis, Dual Enrollment, Agency of Education**

Jess provided an overview of flexible pathways for all Vermont students. [Click here for presentation that provides an overview](#).

She also shared the most recently published data available from [last year's legislative report which can be viewed here](#). The new legislative report will be published later this month and she will share that link once available.

She reported seeing an increase in participation overall—not just in total, but also in terms of parity. It is unclear what impact virtual learning has had on dual enrollment participation. There are a number of compounding factors including the shift to blended learning which may not be reflective of the best learning environment to the student. At the same time the pandemic has created an opportunity for students to try out blended learning options that—though they existed prior—there may have been reticence at the district level previously.

Martha shared that she is hearing from families and students that they are not aware that this is an option as schools are not making people aware.

At the conclusion of the presentation, Jess provided links to the resources and data sources mentioned in her presentation:

- [Interesting read on cultivating hope and student outcomes](#)
- [DE and FF differences](#)
- [Crosswalk of Plans](#)
- [PLP Process resources](#)

- [VT Portrait of a Graduate](#)
- [NESSC Common Data Project](#)

**Tara Howe, Transition, VR**

Walked through [this presentation on College Steps and College Compass](#).

**Marianne Langello, Contracted Classes, VR**

Marianne introduced herself. She is a VR Counselor and Career Consultant for the Linking Learning to Careers (LLC) program working with students supported by an IEP or 504.

**Describe the contracted course you organized for your students with CCV**

The LLC program it is a five-year research project to determine if, by providing additional supports and services, students can be even more successful with post-secondary education and employment. The CCV contracted course, Exploratory Workplace Experience, was offered specifically for LLC students. The purpose was to apply classroom learning to experience in a workplace setting. The requirement was 15 hours of class time and 80 hours of employment.

- We collaborated with CCV, promoted the course and recruited students; our local LLC team met on a regular basis to discuss placements for employment.
- An orientation was organized with our staff and CCV to help students feel comfortable, meet each other, provide tours and review course expectations.

**Describe how the students and how they perceived themselves before enrolling in program**

We had a total of 10 students enrolled. Of these, 50% of the students did not have prior work experience, and several were not interested in college as a goal after high school due to their barriers. Many reported a lack of confidence and skills for employment

**Describe the students experience in the class and the impact it had on them**

The exciting part of offering this course is how the students were impacted before, during and after their experience. This is best described in a short video I'll be showing about a student who completed the class and allowed us to interview him about his experience. I met Liam three years ago in 10th grade, he had limited communication skills and his mother attended meetings to help him. Last year after the contracted class, his mother stopped attending meetings. Liam blossomed with stronger communication skills, gained confidence, independence and even his driver's permit! Since the time of the video, he was hired in October at the Vermont Country Store in the shipping department, is planning on taking another dual enrollment course and attending Landmark or Castleton University. [Marianne then showed a video not currently available to share with the general public. Contact Kate if you would like the video link.]

I hope the video portrayed the spark that we see in Liam now, how the course inspired and empowered him to have so much self confidence that he was able to share his story through the interview, gain employment and continue with college. The experience of other students was similar; many who were not interested in attending college and lacked work experience, gained confidence through employment activities. One student had struggled at school socially and academically and his insecurities made it difficult at times to develop relationships. Through his classroom and work experience the student has matured, became connected to a sports team that accepted him and is now excited about his future and attending college, which he didn't think of as an option when I first met him.

The students who completed the contracted course have been actively involved in thinking about their future and what opportunities they may not have considered are now available to them. They are exploring short term and long-term employment goals and pursuing college. As a result:

- 9 of the 10 students continue to be engaged in services
- 80% continued college, enrolling in a degree program, taking dual enrollment courses or a college class, which otherwise may not have happened

**Conclusions:**

Thanks everyone

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

Jess will share legislative report with disparities information

**11) Vote: Needs Assessment (James Smith)**

**Discussion:**

Every three years VR, in partnership with the SRC, is required to complete a needs assessment. This is intended to be very broad assessment of people who need VR services in the state of Vermont. James walked through the process of how the Needs Assessment and Major Findings were developed:

- In the fall of 2019 the Performance Review Committee developed a schedule of data sets they wanted to review
- Between November 2019 and June 2020 the committee reviewed multiple sets of data
- Based on that review the committee identified some key data points to review with the full SRC at the retreat.
- Based on the full SRC's comments and feedback the PR committee developed 7 major findings.

James walked through the two documents shared with the SRC in advance of the meeting:

- [Needs Assessment Major Findings](#)
- [Needs Assessment Draft](#)

Cara asked that the following edit be made: "peers *without* disabilities". James said it was a typo that would be corrected.

Nick moved to approve the Needs Assessment Draft and associated Major Findings Document and it was seconded. No further discussion. All approved. Vote unanimous 15-0-1

**Conclusions:**

Documents approved

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

- Submit final document and share with the SRC, **James Smith**, 12/31/2020

**12) Closing Thoughts** (Group)

**Discussion:**

Sarah invited people to share their favorite part of today's meeting in the chat box:

- Thank you, Nick and Marlena, for all your hard work as chairs
- Thank you all for participating today and loved our presenters! Happy New Year!
- I loved the VR presentations. So informative!!!
- Jess, Tara, and Marianne's presentations!
- Appreciate all the information. Very helpful.
- Presentations were great. Happy holidays everyone.
- VR presentations were very interesting.
- Education panel. Our top priority.
- Presenters were great and enthusiastic to share their successes.

**13) Adjournment** (Sarah Launderville)

**Conclusions:**

Sarah called the meeting adjourned at 3:31pm

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

- Draft minutes uploaded to SRC website, **Kate Larose**, 12/8/2020
- Draft minutes emailed to Committee members, **Kate Larose**, 12/8/2020
- Minutes approved, **Committee**, 2/4/2021
- Approved minutes uploaded to website, **Kate Larose**, 2/9/2021