

Draft Minutes

VERMONT STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL (VTSRC)
Wednesday, February 19, 2020, 12:30 PM – 3:30 PM
Waterbury Vocational Rehabilitation, Elm
280 State Drive, Waterbury, VT 05671

Meeting called by:

Sarah Launderville, Chair, called the meeting to order at 12:33pm.

Members Present:

- Courtney Blasius
- Nick Caputo
- Danielle Dubois
- Robin Ingenthron
- Helena Kehne
- Sarah Launderville
- Sam Liss
- Brian Smith
- Olivia Smith-Hammond (via Skype)
- Ana Kolbach (via Skype)
- Patricia Wehman (via Skype)
- Cari Kelley (via Skype)
- Kristen Carpentier, non-voting (via Skype)
- Diane Dalmasse, ex-officio, non-voting

Members Absent:

- Calla Papademas
- Marlana Hughes
- Sherrie Brunelle
- Gina D'Ambrosio
- Martha Frank
- Rose Lucenti
- Bill Meirs
- Deborah Tucker Boyce

SRC Liaison:

James Smith

SRC Coordinator:

Kate Larose

Interpreters:

None

Speakers or Presenters:

- Nancy Dwyer
- Hib Doe

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. Nick moved to accept the agenda and it was seconded. No further discussion. All approved. Vote unanimous 11-0-1.

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 December 5, 2019 (Sarah Launderville)

Discussion:

Sarah asked for any proposed changes or amendments to the December 5, 2019 minutes. There were none. Sam moved to approve the minutes and it was seconded. No discussion. All approved. Vote unanimous 11-0-1.

Conclusions:

December 5, 2019 minutes were approved.

Action Items, Person Responsible, Deadline:

Upload approved minutes to the SRC website, **Kate Larose**, 2/24/2020

5) Vote: Chair (Sarah Launderville)**Discussion:**

Sarah asked Sam to assume this agenda item. Sam asked for nominations or self-nominations from the floor. Sarah was nominated. Sam twice more requested nominations. Hearing none, and an Australian ballot not being necessary, voting was made by a voice vote. Sam asked all those in favor of electing Sarah Launderville as Chair of the SRC to say Aye. All those not in favor to say No. Hearing none, Sarah was elected as Chair. Vote unanimous 11-0-1

Conclusions:

Sarah Launderville was elected Chair

Action Items, Person Responsible, Deadline:

None.

6) Vote: Vice Chair (Sam Liss)**Discussion:**

Sam asked for nominations or self-nominations from the floor. Brian Smith was nominated. Sam twice more requested nominations. Hearing none, and an Australian ballot not being necessary, voting was made by a voice vote. Sarah asked all those in favor of electing Brian Smith as Vice Chair of the SRC to say Aye. All those not in favor to say No. Hearing none, Brian was elected as Vice Chair. Vote unanimous 11-0-1

Conclusions:

Brian Smith was elected Vice Chair

Action Items, Person Responsible, Deadline:

None.

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

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

- [Advocacy, Outreach, and Education Committee January 9, 2020](#)
- [Performance Review Committee December 5, 2019](#)
- [Steering Committee January 9, 2020](#)
- [Coordinator's February 6, 2020 Report](#)

There were none. Sam moved to approve, and it was seconded. No further discussion. Vote unanimous 11-0-1

Conclusions:

Consent agenda items approved.

Action Items, Person Responsible, Deadline:

Upload items to SRC website, **Kate Larose**, 2/24/2020

8) Committee Chair Updates (Sarah Launderville)

Discussion:

A. Advocacy, Outreach, & Education Committee

The card room event is happening April 2, 2020 at the Statehouse. We will plan out logistics and theme at next month's AOE and Steering Committee meetings. We may have an opportunity to testify. The SILC Olmstead Summit has been changed and will now happen on June 3rd or June 4th, 2020 at the Capitol Plaza. Several partnering organizations are committed, and Patrick Flood will be part of the event. It will take place from 10am-2pm with lunch provided and will be held in celebration of the 20th anniversary of the Supreme Court's Olmstead decision. Hillary Melton's [commentary about the Olmstead Decision](#) was recently published in VT Digger. We would like as many people to be at the event as possible.

Disability Awareness Day is March 12th at the statehouse. The morning will include training and the Spirit of the ADA award winners at Capitol Plaza. The late David Sagi will be honored on the floor of the house through a proclamation, and a resolution honoring Disability Awareness Day will be introduced by Rep. John Killacky.

Sam recently spoke with Congressman Welch's office regarding work disincentives and two proposals. More information to come as those move forward.

There was temporary reauthorization of Money Follows the Person through May 22nd. The hope is that this time the reauthorization will be permanent, including spousal impoverishment protections.

Diane shared that she learned about a recent increase in homelessness in people over the age of 55. Brian shared that it is a national trend and data is available through HMIS (homelessness management information system). Brian shared that there is no county in any state in the US where someone can afford to live off of SSDI unless they have a housing subsidy. Sam shared that there are pending bills in Congress to update and modernize SSI benefits but he does not think they are moving forward at this point.

Sam shared updates regarding SSI reviews, SSA rulemaking, and social media no longer being used in decision making. (Refer to AOE minutes from [January 9, 2020](#).) He also shared that NCIL is promoting employment for people with disabilities but that they don't want that to get confused with people being able to retain their rightful benefits. Advocates were successful in extending the public comment period which went through the end of January and resulted in approximately 200,000 comments.

Sam shared that the family and medical leave bill was vetoed and fell short of an override by one vote, and that it is expected to see similar legislation next session. The minimum wage increase was also vetoed by Gov. Scott. The Senate has overridden the veto and the House vote has not yet happened. There are concerns about the impacts of benefits cliffs as well as state budgets for designated agencies. It was shared that advocates are hoping that income and asset limits will not be part of the Attendant Services Care program.

B. Policies & Procedures Committee

The January meeting was cancelled, and the committee chair was not able to attend today's meeting. The next meeting will be in March.

C. Performance Review Committee

The Performance Review committee that was cancelled due to weather was unable to be rescheduled to this morning given member availability. Instead, the committee presentation on data, demographics, and trends will be included in today's full SRC meeting.

Conclusions:

Thanks everyone.

Action Items, Person Responsible, Deadline:

- **Brian Smith** will follow-up with Diane regarding data for homelessness and age in Vermont.

9) Director's Report (Diane Dalmasse)

Discussion:

Diane reported the following:

Kessler Foundation Award – We were in fact awarded roughly \$500,000 over two years from the Kessler Foundation. The grant award will fund **Vermont Works 2.0**, an initiative to support people who receive SSDI benefits to work at a level that ceases their benefits. Teams consisting of a VR Counselor, a Benefits Counselor and a VABIR Employment Consultant in Rutland and Burlington will support 200 people over two years (including SRC member Kristen Carpentier). We will be adding a 6th Benefits Counselor which will get us back to one BC for each region. We have two very strong teams who are committed to and excited about doing this work. We will be reviewing current caseloads, reaching out to people closed as working and still receiving SSA

benefits and marketing to Ticket holders who may never have heard about VR. We are working with Spike a professional marketing firm to develop our marketing strategies. We plan to open recruitment April 1st. Stay tuned. We think this work will have national significance.

WIOA Unified State Plan – James and staff are in the final stages of writing the VR State Plan. James shared the Goals and Priorities Section and has integrated your feedback for a final vote during this meeting. There is a State Workforce Development Board meeting on February 20th where they will approve the entire plan for submission. We anticipate setting targets with VDOL and AOE for the Common Performance Measures.

Progressive Education – We have reinvigorated the Progressive Education Charter and created 3 new goals: (1) Ensure staff have the training and support framework for career planning, (2) Each district will have routine connections with education and training providers in their community, and (3) Business account Managers and Employment Consultants identify career ladders, in-house trainings and opportunities for advancement within the businesses they serve. Meeting the 35% statewide target for participation in education and training on the dashboard is a priority for this year.

Performance Management Training – Supervisors and managers attended a day long training designed to provide them with tools for recognizing and retaining our high performers. It was very well facilitated by Sharon Behar, our organizational development specialist. Staff feedback has been exceptional.

The **Individual Development Plan** was reviewed as part of this training. Feedback from the Employee Engagement Survey was that we did not ask staff about or support career development. So, the IDP will be done annually coinciding with the performance evaluation. We are excited to roll this out and it will hopefully be by July 1st to improve staff satisfaction.

McClure Foundation - Our Development Team is hard at work identifying opportunities for new revenue, specifically to integrate best practices from our Linking Learning to Careers grant into the core VR program for youth in transition. We submitted a Letter of Intent to the McClure Foundation earlier this month to sustain LLC post-secondary options for youth,

VR Priorities – The VR Senior Management Team spent a half a day updating our Wildly Important Goals (WIGs) spread sheet for this calendar year. It was very affirming to see what we accomplished last year and to identify our goals for this upcoming year. I will pass around a copy of the document so you can get a sense of the work ahead.

Motivational Interviewing - We are contracting with Trevor Manthey, our original MI trainer to return to do advanced MI training with staff and to re-engage the management team with MI. We are also going to bring Stephen Andrews here for a two-day intensive training for our MI coaches. We are also contracting with Stephen to do coding and scoring on audio tapes for proficiency.

Invest EAP – Steve Dickens and Marc Adams are working on two new initiatives. A partnership with Blue Cross Blue Shield to provide behavioral health screening and a partnership with SHRM to develop a certification program for Recovery Friendly Work Places.

New VR Staff Training Program – Heather Batalion, VR Staff Development Coordinator, will be working with CCV to finally complete an on-line training program for VR staff with a focus on VR Counselors. CCV will develop this program on their e-learning platform and host it for us.

Process Mapping – The Expanded VR Management Team will met last week to debrief the VR process mapping that was completed over calendar year 2019. We shared the ahas that happened locally, reflect on the experience, discuss statewide changes and the use of process mapping going forward.

Sarah shared an overview of a project on researching Vermonters in the workplace between Public Assets Institute, the Developmental Disabilities Council, Vermont Center for Independent Living, and other partners. An initial focus group was held in Burlington and another will take place in Central Vermont. These results will help Public Assets Institute to create public policy briefs by September which will share the story of employment, gaps in the workforce, and how hiring people with disabilities strengthens communities.

The intended audiences for these briefs include policy makers, advocates, people working on employment, and the business community. This conversation has been happening for a few years and the partnering organizations have come together to help fund the project. Sam added that the briefs will help to dispel the myth that people with disabilities are liabilities in the workplace as it's just the opposite and they are strengths.

Conclusions:

Thank you, Diane, for the update!

Action Items, Person Responsible, Deadline:

- Include EAP representatives Steve Dickens and Marc Adams on next Steering Committee agenda to discuss full SRC presentation, **Kate Larose**, 2/20/2020

- Motivational Interviewing training information to be shared with SRC members, **Kate Larose**, 2/24/2020

10) VR Regional Manager Updates (Hib Doe and Nancy Dwyer)

Discussion:

Hib is the regional manager for the St. Albans and Newport VocRehab offices. He shared the following:

St Albans has a different economy and we are seeing smaller caseloads which allows us to focus on the career side of things and spend more time with consumers. Both offices are fully staffed and we welcomed a recent new hire. St. Albans will soon host their annual job fair. In order to participate, employers must be actively hiring. This year the event will include a prep day for the general public in partnership with Vermont Department of Labor (VDOL) to work on mock interviews and resumes. This past summer we had a successful project through the Franklin Grand Isle Restorative Justice Center funded by Vermont Department of Corrections (DOC) for people transitioning back into the community around construction work. This project was able to pay for needed things like IDs, tools, toolbelts, and WIOA funds through VDOL helped to ensure participants had a minimum wage while going through the training. Additionally, monetary bonuses were provided by the City of St. Albans for work on construction projects at Hard'Ack and Martha's Kitchen. Nine people graduated through the program with national credentials and were hired at wages above the minimum wage. There has been some attrition but that is to be expected. There is already another round scheduled for this summer and a planning grant has been awarded to expand reintegration work. We have also been working with the industrial park as well as the medical center to expand partnerships. Brian asked how we might be able to link these projects to the funds available for environmental conservation projects. Hib shared that they have worked with the Vermont Youth Conservation Corps in the past. Hib also shared that they are doing more assessment. After a counselor has an initial interview with the client there are several referrals that are now made and counselors are able to focus more in-depth on employment plans.

Things look a little different in Newport. They are seeing lots of referrals—Newport has the highest referral rate in the state for counselors—and as a result, we now have a new temporary employee there to help provide additional capacity. Newport is hosting a job fair similar to the one in St. Albans with 40 employers already signed up, and they have adopted a similar model for assessment. We've started doing reminder calls the day before appointments. It has resulted in decreasing no-show rates and freeing up counselors when cancellations happen, and it's a good customer service practice. Sam asked about the impacts of substance use disorders. Hib shared that they work with a recovery coach, medically assisted treatment programs, and that Congressman

Welch also recently visited the area based on this topic. Danielle asked about large employers in the area. Hib shared that there are employers who are hiring but there is less diversity in the labor market in that region (*i.e.*, the focus is on manufacturing vs. the additional opportunities for service sector employment such as the federal government jobs that exist in the St. Albans region).

Nancy is the regional manager for the Brattleboro and Springfield offices. She shared the following:

We will soon be fully staffed in Springfield with the return of Matt Trieber given his resignation from the legislature. This office has had a lot of turnover in recent years and now it feels like we are at a point of stability. We have a robust transition team and they are out in the field doing their work. The greater Springfield area was just awarded a [Working Communities Challenge Grant](#) from the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston which will serve to enhance the work taking place and help in planning future projects. Their annual career expo will take place April and the Business Account Manager (BAM) has been working on the planning. We just completed our process mapping and as a result we are developing a menu to clarify communication and expectations of working with VABIR. We have a new VDOL regional manager (Cindy Delgado), and recently had a meeting with Department of Corrections

The Brattleboro office is co-located with VDOL. As a result of our process mapping in this region we now have a new caseload review structure that integrates our dashboard review indicators. Our benefits counselor has been with us about a year and she recently shared a few of her successes: one of our long-time consumers recently received \$39k in child back payments as a result of a paperwork oversight that was corrected. Another consumer who was homeless had an issue with not being able to get medication refills and the benefits counselor was able to assist him in getting signed back up for health insurance through the Economic Services Division. Our job coach has been able to assist several of our consumers who are Deaf to find and retain employment opportunities that are a good match. Our project work with the hospital has been successful and speaks to the strength of partnership with environmental services, VDOL, CCV, VR, the local Brattleboro Workforce Development Board, and others.

Conclusions:

Thank you, Nancy and Hib, for the update!

Action Items, Person Responsible, Deadline:

- Include discussion of benefits counselors presenting to SRC meeting on next Steering Committee agenda, **Kate Larose**, 2/20/2020

11) Vote: State Plan Presentation (James Smith)

Discussion:

James walked through the [Vermont State Plan, Program Year 2020 Goals and Priorities](#) and the 11 goals therein. He shared that, for context, when WIOA was passed VR was given new performance measures which placed an emphasis on higher wages and increasing skills, whereas the old measures focused solely on employment. The shift has resulted in also looking at the quality of employment. The goals include the following:

- DVR will align services to support consumers in achieving the WIOA Common Performance Outcome Measures
- DVR will increase the percentage of consumers earning more than minimum wage at closure
- DVR will increase consumer opportunities to participate in post-secondary education and training and gain industry recognized credentials
- In partnership with VDOL, DVR will create more opportunities for DVR consumers to participate in apprenticeship programs and pre-apprenticeship programs
- DVR will establish a Charter Group to determine how to improve transition services for youth and implement those improvements
- DVR will improve outcomes for students and youth with emotional/behavioral disabilities served through the JOBS Supported Employment Program
- DVR will explore and implement strategies to better serve job seekers with disabilities who are 55 and older
- DVR will continue to expand efforts to effectively serve employers through Creative Workforce Solutions (CWS)
- DVR will continue to seek opportunities to expand and/or improve services for underserved populations including individuals who need supported employment
- DVR will continue to track consumer satisfaction with the program's services through the bi-annual consumer satisfaction survey. DVR will also implement strategies to assess student and youth satisfaction with vocational rehabilitation and pre-employment transition service
- Identify the goals and priorities in carrying out the VR and Supported Employment programs

Sarah asked for any proposed additions or changes to the state plan document. There were none. Sam moved to approve the state plan as presented and it was seconded. No further discussion. All approved. Vote unanimous 11-0-1

Conclusions:

Motion passes: state plan approved.

Action Items, Person Responsible, Deadline:

None

12) Presentation: VR Program Services and Outcomes Trend Data 2017 to 2019 (James Smith)

Discussion:

James started by inviting SRC members who enjoy data to join the SRC Performance Review Committee. By statute every three years VR and the SRC are required to do an assessment of the needs of Vermonters with disabilities for VR services. In statute there is no required format for how to do a needs assessment. The hope for this conversation is that it will stimulate conversation and ideas, and we will bring these to the next Performance Review meeting for synthesis.

James [provided this presentation](#), which walks through the following:

- Demographic data on populations served
- Service data
- Expenditure data
- Outcome data at program exit
- WIOA Common Performance Outcome data

Council members noted that TANF participation has declined and it was shared that the grant funding for the project ended. It was noted that substance use disorders declined, and members wondered why this was the case. Diane stated that calculating the minimum wage data is tricky given the timing of increases of minimum wage and program year timelines. It was noted that there was a decrease in maintenance and transportation expenses, and it was shared that a decrease in these expenses, especially maintenance, is a good thing as it means that more funds are being utilized directly towards employment related expenses. Sam asked if there was a way to assess the need for transportation related to employment. Brian shared that the 53-10 program through the regional planning commissions may be a source of data or partnership for this. Hib shared that some questions related to transportation are asked at intake.

A number of questions were raised that will be followed-up on:

- It was shared that, for consumers in supported employment, 20 hours a week tends to be the high end of average weekly hours and has an impact on the overall average across the caseload. Is it possible to dig deeper and break out average weekly hours for supported employment consumers separately?
- Is it possible to break down average weekly hours by age category?
- Is there any way using existing data sources to assess the extent of lack of transportation being a barrier to employment? (Hib mentioned that there are a few questions related to transportation at intake.)
- Are there additional data points that would be relevant for the committee to review in regards to the decline in substance abuse as a specific source of disability? (For example, alongside age distribution of caseload over time?)

- Is there anything the committee should know in regards to the impacts of potential and ongoing increases in the minimum wage and calculating and tracking those data?
- Are there additional data points that would be relevant for the committee to review in regards to the decline in TANF participation?

Conclusions:

Thank you James for the presentation!

Action Items, Person Responsible, Deadline:

- Follow up with Alice and James about specific questions , **Kate Larose**, 2/20/2020
- Include discussion of comments and questions above on the next Performance Review Committee agenda, **Kate Larose**, 3/23/2020

13) Other Business (Sarah Launderville)

Discussion:

A. Other

Sam shared that SILC meetings are open meetings and the next one will take place the third Wednesday of March from 10am-3pm with Commissioner Hutt at the Waterbury State Office Complex.

Conclusions:

n/a

Action Items, Person Responsible, Deadline:

None.

14) Round Table (Sarah Launderville)

Discussion:

I personally missed the SILC presentation, but we will reschedule that. I think for too long people have not understood this relationship and why they are required to work together in the rehab act and how employment contributes to independent living and I look forward to that at the next session; Appreciate that it was facilitated well by Sarah; Want to welcome new members; Like the data, it's exciting to learn from what you're doing and how you can do it better; It's good to get out of my regional manager hat and the data makes me think about where we've been over the past few years, the massive change and where we are going; Appreciate being able to come to this and hear the SRC perspective, the council members serving in this capacity helps make VR regional managers jobs easier; Congrats to Brian and Sarah in their continuing roles; Appreciated hearing about successes around the state and joining the performance review committee and I think data tells us a lot about our narrative and how we want to frame them; Had a great time listening and getting a better idea of what the council is about and am excited to be an SRC member; Thought

it was another good meeting and appreciated hearing the data; Really appreciate people coming for the reschedule and Kate's diligent efforts in tracking folks down to make quorum possible; Enjoyed the presentations as a data enthusiast and hearing from the different districts and the projects they are working on and reflecting how different geographic areas can be so different; Always really love hearing the regional managers' and director's report and appreciate everyone's presentation; This type of meeting reaffirms the quality of leadership at VR which I appreciate.

Conclusions:

n/a

Action Items, Person Responsible, Deadline:

None

15) Adjournment (Sarah Launderville)

Discussion:

Sarah asked if there was a motion to adjourn. Brian moved to adjourn, and it was seconded. No further discussion. All approved. Vote unanimous 11-0-1

Conclusions:

Motion to adjourn approved at 3:27pm

Action Items, Person Responsible, Deadline:

- Draft minutes uploaded to SRC website, **Kate Larose**, 2/24/2020
- Draft minutes emailed to Council members, **Kate Larose**, 2/24/2020
- Minutes approved, **Council**, 4/9/2020
- Approved minutes uploaded to website, **Kate Larose**, 4/14/2020