

## **Draft Minutes**

VERMONT STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL (VTSRC)

Thursday, February 4, 2021, 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
- Kristen Carpentier, non-voting
- Marlena Hughes
- Martha Frank
- Nick Caputo
- Patricia Wehman
- Robin Ingenthron
- Rocko Gieselman
- Rose Lucenti
- Sam Liss
- Sarah Launderville
- Sherrie Brunelle
- Olivia Smith-Hammond
- Helena Kehne

### **Members Absent:**

- Danielle Dubois
- Brian Smith
- Calla Papademas

### **SRC Liaison:**

- James Smith
- Amanda Arnold

### **SRC Coordinator:**

Kate Larose

**Interpreters:**

- Virginia Clark
- Elizabeth Beauregard

**Speakers or Presenters:**

- Hib Doe
- Shaun Donahue
- Emily Shiels
- Meg Lidster
- Michael Kingsbury

**Guests:**

- Emily Marie Ahtúnan
- Laura Siegel
- Alex Hendricks

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

Those in attendance 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. The following changes were made:

- Move elections for chair and vice chair to after the consent agenda item
- Extend director's report to 20 minutes
- Move regional director reports to just before VR counselor panel
- Remove the Ticket to Work agenda item

Sam moved to accept the agenda and it was seconded. No further discussion. All approved. Vote unanimous 17-0-1

**Conclusions:**

Motion passes: today's agenda accepted

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

None

### 3) Open for Public Comment (Sarah Lauderville)

**Discussion:**

None

**Conclusions:**

n/a

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

None

### 4) Approval of Minutes for December 3, 2020 (Sarah Lauderville)

**Discussion:**

Sarah asked for any proposed changes or amendments to the December 3, 2020 minutes. There were none. Sam moved to approve the minutes and it was seconded. No discussion. All approved. Vote unanimous 17-0-1

**Conclusions:**

[Minutes from December 3, 2020](#) were approved

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

Upload approved minutes to the SRC website, **Kate Larose**, 2/9/2021

### 5) Consent Agenda (Sarah Lauderville)

**Discussion:**

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

- [AOE Committee January 7, 2021](#)
- [Performance Review Committee December 3, 2020](#)
- [Policy & Procedures Committee January 7, 2021](#)
- [Steering Committee January 7, 2021](#)
- [Coordinator's February 4, 2021 Report](#)

Rose moved to approve, and it was seconded. No further discussion. Vote unanimous 17-0-1

**Conclusions:**

Consent agenda items approved

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

Upload items to SRC website, **Kate Larose**, 2/9/2021

### 6) Vote: Chair (Sarah Lauderville)

**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 Lauderville as Chair of the SRC to say Aye. All those not in favor to say Nay. Hearing none, Sarah was elected as Chair. Vote unanimous 17-0-1.

**Conclusions: .**

Sarah Lauderville was re-elected Chair

**7) Vote: Vice Chair** (Sarah Lauderville)

**Discussion:**

Sarah asked for nominations or self-nominations from the floor. Nick Caputo was nominated by Martha Frank. Sam seconded. Sarah 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 Nick Caputo as Vice Chair of the SRC to say Aye. All those not in favor to say Nay. Hearing none, Nick was elected as Vice Chair. Vote unanimous 17-0-1.

**Conclusions: .**

Nick Caputo was elected Vice Chair .

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

**Discussion:**

Diane shared her written report and [this success story](#) video was shared.

**Conclusions:**

Thank you, Diane, for the update!

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

n/a

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

**Discussion:**

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

Sam shared that we will need to monitor the changes the Biden Administration is making regarding employment for people with disabilities. He urged all SRC members to read the most recent [legislative updates](#) shared by the AOE committee. Additionally he highlighted that the hearing aid insurance mandate is moving forward at the state level, and Sen. Sears recently introduced S.6 to reduce the loophole for sub-minimum wage for people with disabilities.

**B. Policies & Procedures Committee**

Sherrie referred members to the minutes for full updates. She said that the P&P committee is growing and the additional input from consumers and VR counselors has been incredibly beneficial.

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

Nick highlighted the presentation from the Vermont Assistive Technology program, which can be found in the minutes from the December meeting.

### **D. Steering Committee**

Sarah shared that recent focus areas for the Steering Committee have been recruitment, orientation, and training for SRC members.

### **Conclusions:**

Thank you to the committee chairs for the updates!

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

n/a

## **10) VR Regional Manager Updates: Managing consumer services during COVID-19 (Hib Doe and Shaun Donahue)**

### **Discussion:**

Hib Doe reported the following:

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

It is not optimal. It was a bit of a scramble in March. Looking back we are amazed by how seamless that transition to working from home was. We had great support from Central Office that made it possible for people to do their work virtually, and now it seems that staff are in a groove. It is not ideal, but it is workable. Early on we received good guidance on how to work with consumers during the pandemic and how to protect staff, and ongoing guidance continues to be issued based on changes in the current situation. As vaccinations increase, more socially distant face to face interactions with consumers will be possible.

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

The transition counselors at the Saint Albans office report that 60% of services by video and 40% by phone. VR counselors for adult consumers report the for their population it's the reverse: 60% of services by phone and 40% by video. Newport had five referrals in just the last week, and Saint Albans has also seen an uptick in referrals recently. Between April and December, Newport helped 60 people go to work even during the pandemic.

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

Consumers would love to have in person services but for people who are located further away from offices (such as the distance between Canaan to Newport), not having to travel more than an hour in one direction is something that many find helpful.

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

We have more employers looking for employees than are not. Our business account managers are inundated with need, which is great for VR consumers.

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

Our wellness committees in both offices are really engaged and we are doing our best to support folks.

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

One of our counselors in the Newport office shared the case of a 55-year-old consumer with anxiety and a high school diploma. She was in a low wage job and her long-term goal was to do administrative work and she needed some college classes to reach that goal. She needed a just for now job to plan for both the short term and long term goals concurrently. She first became a personal care attendant and then transitioned to working at an insurance agency and is now making \$16 an hour and is able to support herself. EAP also offered some short-term counseling and follow-up support which she found useful.

Shaun Donahue reported the following:

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

Bottom line—when all is said and done—we are operating, and it is business as usual. There were some hiccups along the way and our priority has been our consumers so community-based partnerships could use some additional nurturing as they fell by the wayside at the start of the pandemic. One example of this is working more closely with our regional Department of Labor to ensure that we can better serve our joint consumers. The Saint Johnsbury office is currently fully staffed, and we have a solid plan to serve youth even better. In White River we had a recent resignation of a VR counselor who is accepting a job closer to home. We are currently in recruitment for that position. Elizabeth Bull recently accepted a position out of state, and we are doing statewide recruitment. In Hartford we recently brought on a new youth employment staff and will have a second youth employment staff member this summer.

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

We are also seeing that adults are more inclined to use telephone, whereas youth prefer video calls. Anecdotally, youth are also saying that they are Zoomed out given the number of video calls they need to do for school. We are running a number of groups at the moment for of six-eight youths at a time via virtual platforms.

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

Many of our consumers experience transportation challenges and barriers and one of the positives that have come out of this is increased engagement for

those who had a difficult time coming into the office. Moving forward, we are looking forward to keeping hybrid options available.

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

We are running our pipeline reports to better match consumers with jobs but there is no doubt about it—employers need employees right now.

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

Once we realized that the pandemic was stretching out longer than anticipated, we saw that people were working on making their home offices more conducive to a longer term set up such as online ergonomic assessments, chairs, monitors, etc. Some of the concerns I have about people working from home is that people are not taking needed breaks and vacation requests are down. We spend a lot of time in supervision focusing on self-care.

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

Kathleen has a bachelor's degree and she attained a Masters from Harvard and came back to work at Mt. Ascutney Hospital. We put her on the list for a modified van as she uses a wheelchair. When COVID started she no longer had access to transportation and had to rely on her parents. But along the way she was able to save some money, buy a van, and asked if it would be possible to modify her van. VR was able to do that and now Kathleen will be able to use her Masters without having to be confined to jobs close to home.

**Conclusions:**

Thank you, Shaun and Hib, for the updates!

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

None

**11) Presentation: Presentation: VR Counselor COVID Panel (Panel)**

**Discussion:**

Emily Shiels, Transition Counselor, Barre  
Meg Lidster, Senior Counselor, St. Albans  
Michael Kingsbury, Senior Counselor, Rutland

*What was it like for you and your DVR customers when we first went to remote services? What is it like now?*

**Meg**

- We thought we would be coming back in a week and here we are now a year later. It was chaotic at first, but we were able to work it out and had great support from Central Office. Our consumers were also experiencing these transitions, so it helped to build that relationship as we experienced this together. In some ways it even gave us more time to connect with consumers. As staff we went from trial and error, to figuring it out, to

now having a flow to our work. For clients we had never met before it was extra challenging.

**Emily**

- I agree that the pandemic was a shared experience. For me it was a smooth transition since I already traveled frequently to schools. The new culture of meeting via Teams and Zoom is working.

**Michael**

- It took awhile for things to sink in but that has happened in the past month. The referrals in the past few weeks have really increased.

*What was helpful to you and your customers when we went to remote services? What were challenges or barriers to providing good services?*

**Emily**

- I just want to reiterate VR's willingness to meet consumers where they are at and having the time to talk through things was needed vs. a heavy focus on meeting indicators. The focus on maintaining and deepening relationships early on helped us get to the point of moving forward with many consumers.

**Meg**

- Being able to provide resources to consumers was huge such as being able to access Pandemic Unemployment Insurance or resources to pay utilities. Having access to resources from Central Office was very helpful to VR counselors. Some consumers needed more engagement, and we had the time to offer that, and it was also important to honor folks who needed space and providing that in a way that also included periodic check ins. COVID guidance was also helpful especially for people who are at a higher risk and it also presented a dilemma as—for most consumers—if they didn't go to work they couldn't pay their bills; that was a dance we had to figure out.

**Michael**

- Hib mentioned that we are helping people with technology. It is so important right now and has opened a world of opportunities for consumers. Early on when we went remote a truck took down the phone lines on my street and my internet went out for four days. So finding ways to work through these sorts of circumstances with consumers was also something we found ourselves routinely doing.

*What did you do to try and support your customers through the stress of the pandemic?*

**Michael**

- I am working with people in a few different states: folks who are thriving in these times and it has allowed for a lot of focus. For example, one consumer told me today that the pandemic helped him to think about his values and he now has a desire to focus on the human services field. Another group of consumers are in a place of just needing to maintain engagement and we are letting them know that we are ready when they



are ready and there is a fine balance there. It is always great to be part of this organization but especially in these times it feels amazing to be part of the work that we do.

**Meg**

- EAP counselors were so helpful as we had consumers who needed to process the added stressors and anxiety of dealing with the pandemic.

**Emily**

- For my caseload—which tends to be later high school to early 20s—a lot of what was needed was talking about dreams for the future or how things are going in the moment. We are putting in the work upfront to build the relationship so that when they have needs that come up related to work they know that we are here for them. It continues the engagement and they know that we are ready for them when they are ready to take the next step.

*What has surprised you about providing services remotely? What lessons have you learned that you want to carry forward?*

**Emily**

- The lesson that I want to carry forward is to reevaluate how we conduct our services and asking what we are upholding just because we have always done it that way. One example is in-person meetings given the transportation barriers. Meeting virtually with people who would not have been able to come to our office or who would have to take a day off of work has been really valuable.

**Meg**

- Accessibility is huge as we can now reach out to folks who were unable to come in. The importance of work-based learning experiences is something we miss, and we are seeing just how valuable they are now that we are not able to fully access them. This has been a great opportunity for process improvement especially when it comes to paperwork and the administrative pieces of signing releases and processing it as this frees up time for other things.

**Michael**

- I discovered how valuable motivational interviewing is as a therapeutic and counseling practice. I was not sure at first how well this would translate to virtual settings. But just going back to the basics of MI with using open ended questions, reflections, and listening with intent has helped me to develop and deepen rapport with consumers.

Sam asked if counselors were seeing an increase in opportunities for remote work for people with disabilities.

**Michael**

- We have had several consumers employed part and full time from their homes at RDI. The set-up is reasonable as only a portion of their home needs to be set aside as office space. Several folks I work with who were not employed for some time are now employed successfully. They do need a certain internet speed and some clerical skills, but it is working well. Vermont Country Store also employs people to work from home for the customer service call center. I am anticipating that we will see more opportunities in the future. There will also be some opportunities because of the closing of the College of Saint Joseph. The Rutland library is looking to move to the campus, along with other employers as there is a lot of state-of-the-art building space.

Laura asked about transportation since services are being moved from downtown to the outskirts. Michael said that these are part of the discussions.

Marlena asked if they foresee this additional level of support to be ongoing, especially as it is so useful for people with emotional disturbances. Diane shared that we will likely be looking at a hybrid model to reopening, and we want to take our lessons learned into our new way of working. Diane added that there is a set-aside for the purchase of technology, and we are asking counselors to do an inventory as consumers come in to ensure that people have internet services, training, or whatever else they need to be proficient online.

Meg shared that the districts are excited about having a technology coach. In the Saint Albans office, they partnered with Technology for Tomorrow to offer a digital literacy class to support people in navigating the use of technology. This included one-on-one sessions with clients ahead of time to ensure they could join Zoom. We had seven students over the course of eight weeks and the response was overwhelmingly positive and consumers are already looking for the next option. It built skills, and more importantly, it helped to build self confidence in engaging and taking advantage of the trainings that are out there.

## **12) Update: [Reallotment Summary](#) (James Smith)**

### **Discussion:**

James walked through the list of projects and suggested that it would be a good idea to keep reallotment as a recurring agenda item to provide updates on an ongoing basis.

### **Conclusions:**

See above.

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

- Add reallotment summary as a recurring agenda item, **Kate Larose**.

## **13) Other business**

**Discussion:**

Diane shared that Monica Hutt will be moving on to the Governor's office. She was one of the best commissioners in terms of being an advocate for vocational services and we are sad to see her go. DAIL will have a new commissioner, likely in the coming weeks. Sam seconded this and said that Monica was a support for SILC as well. Martha shared that Monica speaks from the heart and it comes out loud and clear.

Martha shared that the registration for the [dual enrollment webinar](#) is open and urged SRC members to help spread the word.

**Conclusions:**

None

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

n/a

**14) Closing Thoughts (Group)****Discussion:**

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

- Loved the presentations!!
- Thank you, panel!
- I loved hearing the success stories of clients and how they have adapted during the pandemic.
- Lots of great content to keep us thinking about how we can improve our service delivery to our customers.
- Great meeting! Loved hearing from all around the state and the video presentation was awesome. Thank you!
- Exceptional video which highlighted how much VR can help consumers toward a real career!
- Great meeting...always so impressed with the work and commitment VR has...always thinking on the best way to meet folks needs!
- Great meeting today and many thanks to Diane for sharing the video!
- Was really moved by the video Diane shared. I want to share this with state hiring managers (when we know it is appropriate to do so) to show the value of these programs.
- Really good to hear about the positives coming from the pandemic. I appreciate the presentations!
- Thanks for allowing guests to sit in. I'm learning a lot about how the SRC works. It's great to hear from so many people about the different services of VR. You're all wonderful!
- Helpful to hear the success stories!
- Some great information today. Really helpful to hear from the panel.

- I appreciated the information and the excellent work that VocRehab continues to do. So impressed with the excellence of the counselors.
- Good meeting, thank you!
- Lots of good things- the opening video, the counselor panel and the introduction of the reallocation is exciting.
- Found regional updates helpful. Glad to hear that the pandemic hasn't been a wash for consumers.

### **13) Adjournment** (Sarah Launderville)

#### **Conclusions:**

Sarah called the meeting adjourned at 3:22pm

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

- Draft minutes uploaded to SRC website, **Kate Larose**, 2/9/2021
- Draft minutes emailed to Committee members, **Kate Larose**, 2/9/2021
- Minutes approved, **Committee**, 4/1/2021
- Approved minutes uploaded to website, **Kate Larose**, 4/6/2021