

**Draft Minutes**  
VERMONT STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL (VTSRC)  
Annual Retreat  
Thursday, October 7, 2021, 9:30 AM – 2:30PM  
Waterbury State Office Complex and Zoom

**Meeting called by:**

Sarah Launderville, Chair, called the meeting to order at 9:32 a.m.

**Members Present:**

- Ana Kolbach
- Asher Edelson
- Bill Meirs
- Calla Papademas
- 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 Siegel
- Marlena Hughes
- Martha Frank
- Nick Caputo
- Olivia Smith-Hammond
- Patricia Wehman
- Robin Ingenthron
- Rocko Gieselman, non-voting
- Rose Lucenti
- Sarah Launderville
- Sherrie Brunelle

**Members Absent:**

- Danielle Dubois
- Sarah Sterling

**SRC Liaison:**

- James Smith

**SRC Coordinator:**

Kate Larose

**Interpreters:**

- Trudy Gilbert
- Jen Raney

**Speakers or Presenters:**

- Nat Piper
- Hib Doe
- Betsy Choquette

**Guests:**

- Andrea Bacchi
- Laura Flint
- Kevin Stapleton

**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. Asher moved to accept the agenda and it was seconded. No further discussion. All approved. Vote unanimous 18-0-1

**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) Welcome****Discussion:**

Sarah and Diane welcomed members and shared examples of the positive impact the SRC has made in the past year.

**5) Getting to Know You****Discussion:**

Three rounds of paired conversations were had. In each round participants discussed one of the following questions:

- *What's your favorite autumn activity?*
- *What brought you to the SRC?*
- *What's one talent, skill, or driving value that you bring to this work?*

**6) The Role of the SRC and Members****Discussion:**

Sarah provided this [brief history/overview of the SRC](#). We broke out into small groups and discussed the following questions. Highlights of conversations were shared with the large group.

*What makes for a strong SRC?*

- Diversity of the council
- Perspective we bring in as different sector representatives
- Having members who are not afraid to challenge the status quo
- Open communication
- Divergent viewpoints
- Education and awareness of the issues
- Every voice has the opportunity to be heard
- Ability to turn crucial information to action
- Good support system and readily accessible resources
- Collaboration - not domination by limited number of participants
- Even when disagreement it's a learning experience for all
- Ability to see big picture not just individual perspective
- Positive communication among the council, flexibility, listening even with different opinions, support of each other and mindfulness- what we're bringing forward
- Having 51% people with disabilities on the council makes sense because of the experience. Nice to have backgrounds in all areas
- Active and engaged, diverse membership.

- Page 21: Recruiting new members. Who have a wide variety of experiences within the system. People who are at different points in the process of the system and at different points within VR. Getting services to completed.
- Differing types of disabilities.

*How do SRC members bring value to the work of the council and committees?*

- Personal experience, their knowledge
- We bring it back to the organizations we work for and improve the organizations as a result
- Diversity leads to richer discussions
- Members are not afraid to challenge the status quo
- Representation directly from people with disabilities
- Lends a lens to the work that VocRehab does
- Wealth of perspectives
- Ability to make oneself visible and share openly vulnerabilities & lived experience
- Commitment to mission of DVR
- Willingness to participate in conversations/discussions
- Connections with community partners
- Reality testing – not the theory, but actual lived experience. Vision of the world we want as people with disabilities.
- Diverse backgrounds of consumers as well as people working in the community and VR program itself.
- Diversity of the lived experience and work experiences.

*What questions does it provoke for you about the role of the SRC and your role as a member?*

- How can we create new relationships?
- How well known is VocRehab and the SRC?
- How can we make a bigger difference in Vermont?
- How can SRC encourage and support participants?
- What can members do between meetings?
- How can we provide resources to members of the SRC that they can use them in activities/work outside of SRC (e.g., creation of a resource database)?
- What impact is there on participation resulting from so many virtual meetings due to Zoom burnout?
- How can SRC help with community outreach so more people know about DVR?
- Are we missing out on the perspective of people who are at the beginning of thinking of possible employment and barriers people face when seeking VR services.
- Struggling with and continue to wonder what our actual role here is, and how that input effects policy etc. and then how to bring that back

out to our networks. Am I here because I'm disabled and there is a vacancy or am I here because I have something to bring to the SRC, and is there a way that I can bring that back into the community or just pop back in next month?

- As someone who has limited energy and is very busy it's even more important to know what the value is in investing my time and energy in this. What outcome can we see from this work and being able to connect to that which is really valuable for folks?
- Especially if not as part of your regular work life: Is there more that we could be doing?? Can it be more inclusive?

## **7) VR's Big Priorities in the Year Ahead**

### **Discussion:**

Diane and Amanda provided an overview of VR's current position and what's on the horizon. Diane shared that VR is in the best position they've ever been in, and large grant was recently awarded to support career advancement. The Department of Disabilities Aging and Independent Living (DAIL), Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) was awarded a \$6.5 million grant from the US Department of Education to support the Vermont Career Advancement Project (VCAP). VCAP will establish a robust partnership between DVR, the Vermont Department of Labor (VDOL), the Community College of Vermont (CCV), Vermont Technical College (VTC), and secondary Career and Technical Education Centers (CTEs), to build on-ramps enabling individuals with disabilities to pursue high quality, good paying careers. The project will embed dedicated Career Pathways Student Advisors in these post-secondary programs for intensive support to VCAP participants. VCAP will also partner with other work force development organizations, including ReSource, to expand paid, credentialed occupational training programs in response to employer needs.

Utilizing the best available employment projections for high quality, high wage career pathway opportunities in Vermont, the VCAP has identified the following five career sectors for the project: Advanced Manufacturing, Financial Services, Healthcare, Skilled Construction Trades, and Information Technology. VCAP will utilize its extensive network of employer contacts through its Business Account Managers to engage employers in offering opportunities in these sectors. CCV and VTC, which have extensive program development experience and expertise, will provide required Related Instruction for apprenticeships and other credentialed programs. These programs will be linked directly to secondary and adult programs offered through the state's 17 Career and Technical Education (CTE) centers.

The project will enroll 500 participants, of whom 375 will earn Industry Recognized Credentials and 75 will enroll in Registered Apprenticeships. 75% of participants will exit their programs employed and earning at least 150% of the state's minimum wage. This will be transformational in terms of educational

attainment, higher wage jobs, and careers.

Diane also mentioned the work that VR has been doing on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI). VR has put out an RFP and interviewed bidders as part of their commitment. A firm has been selected to support VR on the journey and she will be sharing more in the future as the work is rolled out. It is an initial two year investment and with plans for sustainability into the future.

Participants were invited to jot down their thoughts to the following question in their packet as they listen to the three presentations:

*How might this inform the work of the SRC and your committee?*

### **Progressive Education, Nat Piper**

Nat provided an overview of progressive education. In-depth information can be [found here](#).

### **VocRehab Rebranding, Hib Doe**

Hib presented the slides linked above.

- SRC Members shared how much they loved the rebrand
- Andrea suggested having a presence on LinkedIn
- Laura requested participating in efforts around creating materials for and targeting Deaf and Hard-Of-Hearing consumers/potential consumers.
- Sherrie asked how CAP can collaborate with VR on the rebranding in getting information about to people.

### **WorkVT 2.0, Betsy Choquette**

Betsy walked through the presentation linked above.

## **8) Committee Breakouts**

### **Discussion:**

Committee chairs facilitated breakout discussions. Participants read through committee descriptions and accomplishments and discussed questions from the participant packet. They provided the following report outs to the large group:

### **AOE Committee**

*What would you like the priorities of your committee to be in the year ahead?*

- New branding work, important for the committee to help advertise and promote with consumers, and handing materials out
- VFN is having an in person meeting next year in Chittenden County and would like to promote and attend that gathering.

- We miss seeing people in person and it would be good to see people in person again. Would like to consider a hybrid model for meetings.
- Would like to address the red-tape of being a consumer of VR (for example in order to get a PASS plan one needs to prove all over again that they're too disabled to work), of Social Security, state programs, and other benefits. Navigating it all is a full-time job and people would get further if the systems were simplified and less overwhelming. AOE could join with other groups to attempt to collaborate on an advocacy plan to demand bureaucratic reform.
- To assist with the above, AOE could invite Betsy Choquette and James Smith to come to a meeting and provide a historic perspective/context and help us prioritize which aspects to work on first and we could work with our Congressional delegation. VR's benefits counselors are also a resource that could help.
- We want to ensure that VR stays within DAIL.
- AOE wants to focus on opportunities for advocacy and outreach efforts in communities and around the state and re-align with the mission statement: How can we be more active and engaged? We want to help more and not exactly sure how to do this. We want to focus on a structural piece of this, create plans and execute plans.
- We would like a closer relationship with VCDR and move things on that platform that are important to this committee.
- Create an update of our Legislative priorities for the year
- Continue to host a card room event at the state legislature
- Support the roll out and promotion of "Our Time is Now".

*What are the goals and action steps to get there, and what should be the roles of committee members?*

- Connect more with VCDR and tie into their work.
- Focus on a vision of a changed world- we need a vision of what that world will be and work backwards to meet that. Our group can have immense power to benefit VR consumers and removing barriers.
- Use the rebranded material to educate the general public about VR issues and to advocate to the legislature.
- We want to follow how elected officials are voting on pieces of legislation.
- Getting the word out that VR even exists and making connections in schools as many families are not familiar with VR.
- Ensuring that we have at least one person at all VCDR meetings.
- Cari and Courtney are interested in connecting to VCDR moving forward.

## **PR Committee**

*What would you like the priorities of your committee to be in the year ahead?*

- How well we are serving the population of people with social emotional disorders, including data about how many exit employed compared to other demographics, and feedback directly from these consumers
- Continue work on the consumer satisfaction survey as well as other surveys (including employer satisfaction and partner satisfaction)
- How well are we serving the Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing populations?
- How are we connecting/sharing info with others beyond core partners (other stakeholders and advocacy groups), and do we know who all these stakeholders are?
- Continue to review progress towards goals on WIOA performance measures
- Look at services provided to different age groups (not to compare them but to make sure we are offering adequate amount of services across the age spectrum)
- How do we engage with people who aren't coming to us?
- How are connecting with specific populations such as those with TBI or memory problems?
- Data on how well we serve our business partners
- How to translate our message to a busy business community- what do they need to hear and make it digestible for the business community?

*What are the goals and action steps to get there, and what should be the roles of committee members?*

- Being present and participating and following through as committee members
- Continuing on with the great presentations we've had to help us understand the programming and data
- Where do take the information we learn? Who's the messenger? How do we have an impact beyond just our conversations?
- Member education during and beyond SRC meetings-topics of interest, trainings to improve overall understanding

Emily shared that, if not for the pandemic, she wouldn't have been able participate in the SRC, go to work, or go to school as remote options made this possible. She suspects the same is true for many others as well and wonders how it will continue to shift VR services and consumer engagement.



## **P&P Committee**

*What would you like the priorities of your committee to be in the year ahead?*

- The committee shared priorities at their meeting in September and there was additional desire to emphasize transportation chapter as a key priority.
- We talked about the transportation summit that took place a few years ago
- Focusing on Rehab/Assistive Technology and how that has impacted people's ability to engage in employment and how remote options helped with the transportation barrier
- Would like to get self-employment chapter finished.

*What are the goals and action steps to get there, and what should be the roles of committee members?*

- We will focus on Rehab Tech and Transportation chapters out in advance of the November meeting
- In November we will create a workplan- what are we going to do, who's going to do it, when will we do it by
- Follow-up on the transportation summit, determine next steps
- Create an SRC whitepaper
- Connect members with opportunities to testify to the Legislature
- Consider how P&P might collaborate with the AOE committee on some of the topics

## **9) Closing Thoughts (Group)**

*What are you feeling energized about in terms of the work of the SRC and your role in the year ahead?*

- For the future of the AOE committee we want to make things happen and we have a good balance of idealism and pragmatism which will help us as we move forward with taking our priorities to the streets
- Advocating and education pieces, working on transportation issues, and being engaged with disability rights groups
- Pulling energy from everyone else and happy to hear about the rebrand and new messaging, excited to be part of the P&P committee
- Starting to address transportation as a high priority discussion and moving it to action
- Hearing all of the action steps we are taking which is an indication of the work being done to address the changing needs of the consumers being served
- Really appreciate being part of this group and the work of the SRC

- How much passion and energy everyone brings to meetings and working with one another here
- The commitment to action by members and VocRehab stands ready to support you all in taking these action steps
- Reviewing the self-employment policy and getting input from people who experienced the old policy as we create the new one
- The goals put forth by the committees and VR's rebrand
- The P&P committee's transportation goals
- Lots of new SRC members willing to push this work forward and the availability of funds within VR to make it happen
- Taking a deeper dive into the data we have about the services we provide to our dual customers and how we can improve
- Energized by a day of learning with more precision about what my committee does and what we hope to accomplish, and a bit about how we plan to measure it
- The future of the AOE committee and personally being more involved in the committee's priorities
- Everyone's perspectives and experiences and learning from one another
- Can't wait to get my new shirt with the new brand logo on it 😊
- Getting to meet new people today and getting to know others better. My fourth year on the SRC is seeming like it has a lot more traction
- Working towards the common goals of the SRC that involve a focus on social justice, independence, and quality of life for people living with a disability. It is energizing to work beside such wonderful people with creative and purposeful ideas. I do like data and am energized by looking more closely at that to support SRC's work. It is exciting to see what VR is doing across the state.
- The increased high-quality participation and great input from all!
- By our fellow members and how much I learn from all of you. I am looking forward to completing the goals we laid forth today.
- I am energized about the movement towards making transportation a priority for consumers as well as parents of consumers. Working towards providing transportation has potential to be a game changer for those without the ability to drive.

## **10) Adjournment** (Sarah Launderville)

### **Conclusions:**

Sarah called the meeting adjourned at 2:21pm

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

- Draft minutes uploaded to SRC website, **Kate Larose**, 10/13/2021

- Draft minutes emailed to SRC members, **Kate Larose**, 10/13/2021
- Minutes approved, **Council**, 12/2/2021
- Approved minutes uploaded to website, **Kate Larose**, 12/7/2021