

Director's Report

HireAbility Vermont accomplishments in the last year:

VT Career Advancement Project: Full roll out of a five-year federal grant to further advance the systems change effort to move from assisting people with disabilities to find a job to finding a career pathway. Six new Career Pathways Navigators hired, a VCAP Governance Team and Employer Advisory Group created, contracts for Student Advisors at CCV and VTC executed.

Summer Career Exploration Program: Developing, implementing and evaluating the SCEP for the second year and launching third year. Each year has improved the experience for all involved staff, employers and most importantly students and their families.

HireAbility Vermont Rebranding and Marketing Initiative: Partnering with the Place Creative to develop a new name, brand and look and feel for the division. Completion of a major cross media marketing effort that was extremely well received by staff, community partners, and the general public. Continuing that effort with outreach efforts to Vermonters with Chronic Health Conditions, a staff recruitment video and materials, and a video to promote apprenticeships and learn and earn opportunities.

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Access Effort: Committing to a multi-year effort to achieve workforce diversity and cultural competence through a contract with Social Contract and Leadership Development work with Karen Proctor. An assessment has been done and delivered, vision statements created and the development of a blueprint for the work begun. We are breaking new ground and the work is difficult and rewarding.

Opioid Employment Pilots: The legislature in the last session funded two pilot projects to provide HA VT services to Vermonters in recovery towards the goal of education and training, employment and continued recovery. This project was part of the Governor's recommended budget. The pilot in Newport and Burlington are fully staffed and enrolling participants. A strong partnership with VDH is established and relationships with the Recovery Centers and the Hub and Spoke entities.

Performance Management: HA VT has maintained a strong focus on continuous improvement and performance management through staff development, data driven decision making and quality assurance. We have continued to improve staff onboarding, creation of Individual Development Plans, promoting from within wherever possible, and creating vehicles for staff to believe their input is vital to HA. We continue to refine

our Dashboard, our case review process, and our customer and employer satisfaction surveys.

Greatest challenges facing HireAbility Vermont in the last year:

RSA Monitoring Review: RSA scheduled a three-day on-site audit of HA VT in June of 2022. While required to review the agency every three years their last review was in 2013. A five person team was on site meeting with a core group of CO, select field personnel and Business Office staff. They were following their 100-page RSA Monitoring Guide. They scheduled three 2-hour Teams meetings in advance of the site visit. The preparation for this audit was massive, stressful and refocused key CO personnel for two plus months. The RSA team left without an exit interview so we were on our own to determine what their findings might be. We focused on about 10 to 12 items we identified as potential findings. We received the draft report in late November. There were no programmatic findings but several findings related to the fiscal management of the program with programmatic implications. We and the DAIL Business Office were alarmed by one of fiscal findings which questioned the accuracy of our financial reporting and threatened to put our grant at risk. Bill Kelly and Linda Ducharme engaged with RSA to provide further information about our Federally Approved Cost Allocation Plan. We wrote our response to RSA regarding the remaining findings. We were then asked to respond to the fiscal finding which Bill and Linda did in collaboration with the AHS fiscal staff. We continue to wait for RSA's final report. We continue to work on our anticipated Corrective Action Plan in response to the remaining findings.

DHR: The lack of timely responses and clear decisions to personnel matters by DHR has created stress for both CO staff and the field. Disciplinary and performance management plans are critical to improved overall performance. Vacancies create significant burdens on remaining staff. DHR is chronically short staffed and those with authority to make decisions create bottlenecks that are very disruptive to division operations.

What are the HireAbility Priorities in the coming year:

All six areas of accomplishment identified in question 1 are priorities needing attention in the coming year. The **DEIA work** is a major focus and requires strong leadership at all levels to implement successfully. There is much work to be done in the recruitment, hiring and retention of staff from diverse backgrounds. The development and delivery of cultural competency training will require a comprehensive effort. Perhaps most importantly ensuring the leadership needed is available to create work environments that are safe and welcoming for all staff and consumers alike.

Shifting the service delivery system to assist people with disabilities to successfully access the career pathway of their choice and obtain higher wage jobs. We have made much progress and there is a long way to go. My priority is to hold that vision in front of staff, consumers, partners and all stakeholders and to hold everyone accountable to move toward this goal.

Continuous improvement and performance management are an ongoing effort for all. Increasing the skills of managers to review, analyze and act on data is a priority for the CO leadership. The use of the probationary period, performance evaluations, written supervisory feedback, progressive discipline, the merit bonus system and other reward and recognition strategies are all foundational to having a high performing organization. Improving our internship pipelines and recruitment strategies, i.e. new video currently under development, are key efforts to recruiting highly qualified candidates.