

Making Careers Possible



State Rehabilitation Councils (SRCs)

Joelle Brouner, Executive Director of the Washington State Rehabilitation Council; used by permission.

State Rehabilitation Councils were born out of the tradition of effective advocacy by people with disabilities committed to the success of the publicly-funded Vocational Rehabilitation program. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 was the first disability civil rights law to be enacted in the United States. The victory was marred when the Department of Health, Education and Welfare (HEW) delayed endorsement of the regulations needed to implement the law.

By April of 1977, frustration mounted and disability-rights advocates took direct action by leading sit-ins in Washington, D.C., New York, and San Francisco to pressure HEW to issue the regulations. While the protests in Washington and New York were short-lived, advocates in San Francisco persisted. They occupied the offices of HEW for four weeks. As a consequence, Joseph Califano, the secretary of HEW, endorsed the regulations. The Rehabilitation Act is the federal law that establishes the publicly-funded Vocational Rehabilitation Program as we know it today.

The advocacy did not end in 1977. Since that time disability-rights advocates have continued work in service of a system that affords opportunities for customers of the Vocational Rehabilitation program to have more choices on their journeys toward employment. During the reauthorization process of the Rehabilitation Act in 1993, advocates built on their tradition of effectiveness by persuading Congress to create State Rehabilitation Councils (under Title I, section 105) as a mechanism to support people with disabilities receiving vocational rehabilitation services to take an active role in shaping the services they receive.



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The Vermont State Rehabilitation Council

Vermont's State Rehabilitation Council advocates for consumer-directed and effective vocational services and for the creation of resources and services that will result in equal opportunities for Vermonters with disabilities.

Under its mandate in the Rehabilitation Act, it “shall review, analyze and advise the designated state unit regarding the performance of the responsibilities of the unit...particularly responsibilities relating to...eligibility (including order of selection); extent, scope and effectiveness of services provided; and functions performed by state agencies that affect or that potentially affect the ability of individuals with disabilities in achieving rehabilitation goals...”

To meet its mission, the Council meets on a bimonthly basis five times a year. (There are no meetings in July or August.) SRC committees meet between full Council meetings to help conduct Council business.

Letters



From the Chair of the Vermont State Rehabilitation Council

It has been a pleasure to continue to serve as the SRC Chair for a second year and on behalf of the Vermont SRC, I'm pleased to submit the 2019 Annual Report.

The majority of the work is completed at the committee level and you will see from the reports submitted that our council is engaged and continues to work towards a strong system of supporting individuals with disabilities in employment.

I'm so proud to be connected to the work of our council as we have so many dedicated council members focusing on VR programs. The volunteer time is appreciated as those hours go into questioning, exploring and advising VocRehab Vermont on the programs that support individuals with disabilities when returning to work.

Our council continues to grow and we focus on recruitment at all of the steering committee meetings ensuring that we have a strong membership that is a balance of people representing different areas which translates into differing opinions and rich conversations at our meetings.

On a personal note, I want to express my deep gratitude to the members of the SRC and to Vice Chair Brian Smith for filling in when I was unavailable for some time during the year.

Finally, we will be saying goodbye to our Coordinator Debra L. Kobus – a behind-the-scenes, hard worker who keeps our council going. She will be greatly missed. We wish her all the very best in the future.

*Sarah Launderville, Chair
Vermont State Rehabilitation Council*



From the Director of the Vermont Division of Vocational Rehabilitation



As part of the Careers Initiative, VocRehab Vermont continues on the journey from quantity to quality performance measures. In 2019, the new VR Dashboard was rolled out to staff and partners. We identified five lead indicators that we believe will positively impact WIOA's Common Performance Measures: career assessments, teaming, higher wage vocational goals, education and training, and follow-along post placement and post closure. The dashboard tells counselors how they are doing and tells managers how their offices are going on the indicators. The dashboard is being integrated into supervision, performance evaluations and staff meetings. We anticipate that the dashboard will drive positive practice changes for counselors and partners.

In 2019, we launched BOSS, Better Option than Social Security. We are piloting the project in two offices by creating two teams including the VR counselor, benefits counselor, and employment consultant serving consumers who receive social security benefits and are interested in moving off the benefit rolls. We are working with a marketing firm to assist us to reach out to Ticket holders in partnership with VABIR. In this robust economy and very tight labor market we think it is an ideal environment to assist beneficiaries to leave the rolls with supports. We are planning to sustain the project and go statewide using increased Ticket to Work revenue.

WIOA created Pre-Employment Transition Services more than four years ago. We shifted our service delivery system to create VR counselors

dedicated to serving students in all of Vermont's high schools. We have created a transition charter group to take stock of how we are delivering transition services including Pre-ETS. Transition counselors have done a time study. Strong Transition teams have done process maps of their work. We are contracting for a texting survey of students and a phone survey of families and school personnel. We are confident that we will be establishing best practices. We are also rolling out a transition dashboard.

Vermont is the second oldest state in the nation. We have recently hired a Mature Worker Coordinator to focus on serving this population. We will be providing training to all staff on what older workers need and want in employment settings. The coordinator will be reframing aging for the business community in this tight labor market and organizing mature worker job fairs.

In 2019, all leadership teams were trained in LEAN and all offices have used LEAN to complete process maps of the rehabilitation process in their offices. There have been immediate "ahas!" and changes made to office processes, as well as longer-term issues identified for resolution at a statewide level.

As always, we continue to have a robust, productive relationship with our State Rehabilitation Council. Members have contributed significantly to updating our policies to come in line with our shift from jobs to careers.

*Diane P. Dalmasse, Director
Vermont Division of Vocational Rehabilitation*

The Year in Review — Summary SRC Committee Reports



Advocacy, Outreach and Education Committee

Sam Liss, Chair

The Advocacy, Outreach and Education (AOE) Committee of the Vermont State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) has, per its charge, explored both State and Federal legislation relevant to employment issues for people with disabilities (PWD) and, most specifically, to the needs of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR). In addition, the committee has regularly discussed relevant event opportunities for SRC members. As appropriate topics arise, the Committee has also held thoughtful discussions to those ends.

The AOE Committee has also emphasized to its members the importance of up-to-date knowledge of issues important to VR in relation to their ability and readiness to inform, advocate and testify (e.g. before the State legislature).

Federal legislative initiatives discussed include those that would remove employment disincentives for PWD at/above (Social Security) retirement age – particularly important in a state with a markedly aging population and the needs within that population to maintain employment (with supports, if necessary).

Raising the age of eligibility, based upon age of onset of disability, for tax-free ABLE account was also discussed, as was potentially enhanced tax incentives for employers who hire people with disabilities. Legislation to reauthorize the Money Follows the Person (MFP) program, along with protections against spousal impoverishment for spouses of those found eligible for home and community-based Medicaid, was followed closely. The Committee was also informed of and discussed legislative plans to reduce the occurrence of long-term unemployment within

targeted populations and, specifically, to create Federal grants to be awarded to VR agencies to implement such initiatives.

The committee also reviewed Federal legislation that would phase out sheltered workshops and subminimum wage exceptions within the Fair Labor Standards Act (although Vermont had eliminated the practice several years ago).

An idea that originated in the AOE Committee [...] was the creation and implementation of a “Governor’s” Transportation Summit.

Also discussed was employment implications for PWD within the proposed Social Security 2100 Act, as well as within the relatively broad Disability Integration Act (DIA).

On a State level, much attention was paid to attempts by advocates for PWD to unfreeze (to potential new applicants) the general-funded Attendant Services Program (ASP) – aka Personally-directed Attendant Care (PDAC) program. Various approaches to legislative advocacy for this initiative were highlighted for session 2020. Peripheral but important

discussions centered around background checks for personal care attendants and statewide numbers of those with developmental disabilities in nursing homes.

The Committee followed progress on legislation to raise the State minimum wage and institute a family leave policy. (Both measures were deferred to session 2020.) In addition, the proposals by the MS Society to enhance opportunities for home modification projects for PWD were elucidated.

The Committee has been active in planning agenda and representation by the SRC for the annual cardroom event at the Statehouse. It has also actively discussed SRC participation in the annual Youth Core Transition event. In addition, all were informed about such relevant upcoming events as the annual Youth Summit, Vermont Family Network (VFN) upcoming annual meeting, Disability Awareness Day at the Statehouse, the Hope and Resilience Conference, the Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC) Networking Breakfast and Quarterly meeting(s) and the SILC-sponsored Olmstead Summit.

An idea that originated in the AOE Committee breakout session of the SRC Annual Retreat of 2018 was the creation and implementation of a “Governor’s” Transportation Summit. That idea has come to fruition with a set date of Dec. 2nd, 2019 at the Doubletree at the Hilton Hotel in South Burlington. At time of writing, agenda is close to finalization and other final preparations are under way.

A request for targeted input to the State Plan for Independent Living (SPIL) was made at an AOE Committee meeting as the SILC considered an updated strategic plan.

The Committee was informed of the Governor’s Committee for Employment of People with Disabilities (GCEPD)-sponsored Spirit of the ADA Awards – most specifically, the creation of the David Sagi Award in memoriam to the late State ADA Coordinator and long-time VR Regional Manager. It also discussed the possibility of inviting the Executive Director of the SILC to discuss areas of mutual interest and potential for collaboration.

Finally, very thoughtful discussions were held regarding the recently opened Perky Planet Café in Burlington. Various opinions were expressed as to the impact of the restaurant’s hiring, personnel and marketing policy on the disability right movement. All agreed that Perky Planet Café’s intentions were good, but opinions varied as to whether it promotes or deters established employment and integration goals.

All throughout, Marlena Hughes, SRC member and liaison to Vermont Coalition of Disability Rights (VCDR), has been reporting out, as much as possible, on relevant discussions at VCDR meetings.



Performance Review Committee

Marlena Hughes, Chair

The Vermont State Rehabilitation Council's Performance Review Committee (PRC) reviews, analyzes, and advises the Vermont Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) on its performance in fulfilling its mission and responsibilities.

This year the PRC reviewed and made recommendations on a broad range of topics affecting DVR's effectiveness, including the following:

Overview and Purpose of Casework Practices (Chapter 209) as a result of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA).

PRC reviewed the Federal indicators used to evaluate the DVR Program, development of IPEs (long-term career goals), and case service expenditures.

Loss of Re-Allotment Funding on DVR Services as a result of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA).

WIOA created pre-employment transition services for high school students who were on 504 plans or had IEPs. WIOA required that chunks of funding be moved from one program area to another for direct services. PRC engaged in a comprehensive discussion about DVR's consumer population changes since the enactment of WIOA.

Satisfaction Surveys of Employers, Consumers, Youth, and Partners.

PRC gave feedback on the phone surveys being performed by Market Decisions Research who were contracted by DVR in order to perform these surveys. Market Decisions Research presented the results of the Employers and Consumers Satisfaction Surveys to

the full SRC at the October 3, 2019, SRC Annual Retreat.

- Employer and Consumer Satisfaction Surveys (phone) – PRC reviewed the telephone survey, posing questions, suggestions were documented, and incentives for consumer and employer participation were discussed.
- Youth Survey (texting) – will be developed utilizing the Youth Advocacy Committee and include school personnel.
- Partner Survey (online) – for partners including alternative programs.

SAMHSA Grant Application: "Vermont Works for Recovery: an evidence-based supported employment project."

The PR Committee reviewed the proposal. The grant requests revenue for Supported Employment Services for Outpatient Clients, including wrap-around services through a pilot program with mental health services.

AWARE Case Review Tool.

The AWARE Case Review Tool was extensively explored by the PR Committee. This tool helps improve services through consistency, utilizing best practices, and reducing audit findings. PRC completed a comprehensive review with presentations, including counselor feedback.

Central Case Review Presentation.

PRC reviewed the process for documentation of consumer barriers, strengths, and interests, along with the defining assessment measures.



Documentation of the consumer needs, progressive employment, education, and credentials go into AWARE. Reports from counselors indicate that the process is appreciated and helpful.

Quality Assurance (QA).

PR reviewed the QA process and its data from White River Junction's Central Office Case Review Summary. The process was shown to encourage clarification and decrease counselor anxiety around case review. It was shown that information, garnered through conversations during meetings with counselors, hone and inform the documentation process, ensuring relevant data gets entered into AWARE.

Policy and Procedures Committee

Sherrie Brunelle, Chair

Fall is here and with it comes beautiful foliage, apples, pumpkins, and holiday gatherings. It is also a time to reflect on our accomplishments at the close of the 2019 fiscal year. As Chair of the Policies and Procedures (P&P) Committee, I am proud of the work that this small but dedicated group of VR staff and SRC members have accomplished.

The work this group has done over the past fiscal year has resulted in significant changes to Chapters 204 (Case Closure) and Chapter 209 (Casework Practices) of the P&P Manual. These revisions provide counselors with clear guidance and resources as they make decisions in each consumer's case. A goal of the revisions is to ensure consistent practice by VR staff

across the state. Another goal is to ensure that the rights of consumers are protected as they navigate the VR system. Training and guidance in the implementation of the changes is ongoing. So far, field staff and managers have been supportive of the changes. These revisions also will make navigating the VR process clearer for consumers seeking services.

In addition to these major accomplishments, the P&P Committee made a short-term adjustment to Chapter 311 (Post-Secondary Education). The revision clarifies that short-term training focuses on training over a period of up to 2 years rather than 6 months. This adjustment brings the VR policy in line with current VR practice. The P&P Committee will undertake a more in-depth review of this Chapter in the coming year.

For the third year, the P&P and VR staff have continued their efforts to revise and update Chapter 308 (Self-Employment). The task has been more challenging than initially thought. But everyone in the work group has diligently explored what other states are doing and considered whether we want to incorporate various elements from those states into the revised Chapter 308. We have a starting framework for what we think will work in Vermont. But more discussion, drafting, and vetting of proposed changes is ahead of us in the 2020 fiscal year.

It is hoped and expected that the work done this fiscal year will result in clearer, more consistent, and efficient use of VR's limited resources while improving outcomes for consumers wanting to enter, return, maintain, or advance in competitive, integrated employment.

Vermont State Rehabilitation Council Members - 2019

Steering Committee

Sarah Launderville, *SRC Chair*

Brian Smith, *SRC Vice Chair*

Sam Liss, *Advocacy, Outreach and Education Chair*

Marlena Hughes, *Performance Review Committee Chair*

Sherrie Brunelle, *Policy and Procedures Committee Chair*

Diane Dalmasse, *Division of Vocational Rehabilitation*

Director

James Smith, *SRC Liaison, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Budget and Policy Manager**

Advocacy, Outreach & Education Committee

Sam Liss, *Chair*

Max Barrows

Sherrie Brunelle

Diane Dalmasse

Martha Frank

Marlena Hughes

Cari Kelley

Sarah Launderville

Bill Meirs

Calla Papademas

Michelle Paya

Olivia Smith-Hammond

Policy & Procedures Committee

Sherrie Brunelle, *Chair*

Courtney Blasius

Jessica Brennan

Maria Burt

Marlena Hughes

James Smith, *SRC Liaison**

Performance Review Committee

Marlena Hughes, *Chair*

Max Barrows

Jessica Brennan

Sherrie Brunelle

Chris Kane

Nick Caputo

Robin Ingenthron

Rose Lucenti

Bill Meirs

Brian Smith

Deb Tucker Boyce

James Smith, *SRC Liaison**

2019 SRC Members in Alphabetical Order with New Appointments

Max Barrows

Courtney Blasius

Jessica Brennan

Sherrie Brunelle

Maria Burt

Nick Caputo

Diane Dalmasse

Martha Frank

Marlena Hughes

Robin Ingenthron

Christopher Kane

Cari Kelley

Sarah Launderville

Sam Liss

Rose Lucenti

Bill Meirs

Calla Papademas

Michelle Paya

Brian Smith

Olivia Smith-Hammond

Deb Tucker Boyce

James Smith, *SRC Liaison**

*SRC Liaison with Voc Rehabilitation

VR's Contribution to Vermonters and Their Communities

Creating Opportunity, Creating Jobs

VocRehab Vermont's core mission is to realize human potential by putting meaningful work within reach of Vermonters with significant disabilities. We help VR consumers figure out what work will work for them through careful assessment, counseling and guidance from our expert staff. We capitalize on our extensive networks in the employer community to create job opportunities and make good placements that match employer needs with jobseeker skills, and help employers retain staff with disabilities. We use our financial resources within Vermont communities to support our consumers as they transition to stable employment, and our employers as they try out new workers.

Consumer Experience Survey

The DVR Consumer Experience Survey is conducted every three years to determine consumers' overall satisfaction with the program. The survey is conducted by a third-party research firm, Market Decisions Research (MDR), who have an extensive background in working with other VR agencies nationwide. Seven hundred consumers were contacted to provide information for our 2019 survey.

The results from our 2019 survey were outstanding. MDR found that of the consumers surveyed, 96% said that they would recommend that their friends or family members seek help from DVR; this is up one percent from the 2016 survey. Another area of strength was identified by 92% of consumers reporting that they are satisfied with their experience working with DVR staff and DVR Counselors; this statistic has also risen two percent from our previous survey in 2016.

An area where DVR has enjoyed consistently high rates of satisfaction is in consumers feeling that they were treated by DVR staff with dignity and respect. In the 2019 survey, 98% of consumers reported feeling that they were treated by DVR staff with dignity and respect. The largest improvement in customer experience was seen in the ability of consumers to communicate with their DVR Counselors. In 2016, 88% of consumers were satisfied with their ability to contact their counselor; in 2019 this percentage has risen to 91%, an all-time high for the agency.

Students & Work-Based Learning

The WIOA legislation mandated that VR agencies significantly shift their priorities to providing PreEmployment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) to high school students with disabilities, starting services as early as the freshman year. The goal of Pre-ETS is to engage students with disabilities earlier to improve their long-term employment and post-secondary educational outcomes.

DVR has fully implemented Pre-ETS statewide to serve all of Vermont's 59 supervisory unions. In SFY 2019, DVR served 2,280 high school students statewide, approximately 42% of the eligible student population.

A key element in serving youth is providing real work-based learning experiences in real employment settings. It's one of the most effective ways to prepare students and youth for long-term success. DVR's investment of time and resources in providing these opportunities for students and youth has grown substantially:

- SFY 2011-2014 (pre-WIOA) 15% of all VR youth served received a work-based learning experience.
- SFY 2015-2019 (post-WIOA) 26% of all VR youth served received a work-based learning experience.

Resources for Growth, for our Future

VocRehab Vermont is funded primarily by the Rehabilitation Services Administration in the U.S. Department of Education. About 80% of our funding is federal money which goes into the local economies of Vermont towns—to local stores to purchase work tools and clothing; to health care providers and medical equipment suppliers; to community colleges and technical training programs; to transportation providers; and to Vermonters in community agencies who provide support services for workers with disabilities.

Youth Advocacy Council

In collaboration with several state agencies and community partners, DVR initiated a Youth Advocacy Council in the Fall of 2018. The Council is comprised of individuals between the ages of 14 to 26 with differing abilities who expressed interest in leadership and training opportunities; the focus is to increase transitional experiences after high school.

Members connect with other students, advocate for youth resources, and serve as leaders while providing a community service. Participants learn about state and local initiatives that support Vermonters with disabilities and they have the opportunity to provide valuable feedback. Members also identify areas of personal concern in which they would like to affect change.

Example topics of interest from the past year include employment, self-advocacy, transition to adulthood and bullying/harassment. The Council also plans an annual statewide Youth Summit that focuses on topics and resources specific to the needs of youth and young adults in Vermont.

Spirit of the ADA Awards

During National Disability Employment Awareness Month, the Governor's Committee on the Employment of People with Disabilities (GCEPD) selects Vermont businesses who excel in recruiting, employing and retaining Vermonters with disabilities. Nominations come from the public, state stakeholders and community members.

2019 Award Winners

These winners were recognized at on-site award presentations attended by the nominator(s), legislators, community members, and GCEPD members, and received exposure through media coverage of the events. The award for EM Brown & Son in Barton was attended by Governor Phil Scott, as well as DAIL Commissioner Hutt, and Acting VDOL Commissioner Harrington.

- Topnotch Resort & Spa, Stowe
- Price Chopper, West Rutland
- Vermont Energy Investment Corporation, Burlington
- Commonwealth Dairy, Brattleboro
- EM Brown & Son Inc., Barton
- Maplefields, St. Albans
- Bennington County Coalition for the Homeless, Bennington
- Canterbury Inn, St. Johnsbury
- Willow Farm Pet Services, North Springfield
- Inn at Baldwin Creek/Mary's Restaurant, Bristol

New this year was the **Sagi Accessibility Spirit of the ADA Award** to commemorate the legacy of David Sagi. David's approach to advocating for accessibility was practical, non-confrontational and cooperative. He encouraged and convinced many that accessibility is for all, and benefits all. The 2019 Sagi Accessibility Award, awarded to Ultravations in Poultney, recognizes employers who view accessible workplaces as a win-win to obtaining and retaining employees with disabilities.



The Vermont State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) is appointed by the Governor. We seek new members who have a wide range of interests and talents to help improve the services offered by the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation to the citizens of Vermont with disabilities. If you are interested in applying to become a member of the SRC, please contact Kate Larose, Coordinator.

Kate Larose, Coordinator
Vermont State Rehabilitation Council
Vermont Division of Vocational Rehabilitation
HC 2 South, 280 State Drive, Waterbury, Vermont 05671-2040
kate.larose@vermont.gov
(802) 760-0574

