

**Approved Minutes**  
**VERMONT STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL (VTSRC)**

Thursday December 7, 2023, 1:00PM – 3:30PM  
Virtual Meeting

**Meeting called by:**

Chair, Cari Kelley, called the meeting to order at 1:00 p.m.

**Members Present:**

Andrea Bacchi	Jacqueling Kelley
Courtney Blasius	Bill Meirs
Sherrie Brunelle	Brandy Reynolds, Non-Voting
Nick Caputo	Ana Russo
Diane Dalmasse, Non-Voting	Tara Shatney, Non-Voting
Gina D'Ambrosio	Laura Siegel
Laura Flint	Emily Wagner
Helena Kehne	Amanda Wheeler
Cari Kelley	

**Members Absent:**

- Abby Levinsohn, excused
- Nancy Richards
- Angela Allard, start next meeting

**SRC Liaison:**

- Amanda Arnold
- James Smith

**SRC Coordinator:**

- Janice Leonard

**Interpreters:**

- Jen Rainey
- Mareike Larson

**Speakers or Presenters:**

- Sarah Mueller, Sen Bernie Sander's Office

**Guests:**

- |                                  |                    |
|----------------------------------|--------------------|
| • Asher Edelson                  | • Cara Sachs       |
| • Sarah Launderville, Leave 3:00 | • Robin Ingenthron |
| • Cala Papademas                 | • Rocko Gieselman  |
| • Sarah Sterling                 |                    |

## **1) Introductions** (Cari Kelley, Chair)

### **Discussion:**

Those in attendance introduced themselves.

Welcome to the new Board Members here today and thank you to the Board members who have left the Board.

### **Conclusions:**

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

None

## **2) Approval of Agenda** (Cari Kelley)

### **Discussion:**

Cari asked for any proposed additions or changes to the agenda. Nick moved to accept the agenda and Laura seconded. No further discussion. All approved. Vote unanimous 14-0-0.

### **Conclusions:**

Motion passes: today's agenda accepted

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

- Upload approved agenda to SRC website, **Janice Leonard, 12/30/2023.**

## **3) Open for Public Comment** (Cari Kelley)

### **Discussion:**

There was no public comment given.

### **Conclusions:**

n/a

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

None

## **4) Approval of Minutes for**

### **A. June 1, 2023** (Cari Kelley)

#### **Discussion:**

Cari asked for any proposed changes or amendments to the June 1, 2023, minutes. There were none. Sherrie moved to approve the minutes and Andrea seconded. No discussion. All approved. Vote unanimous 10-0-4

### **B. October 12, 2023** (Cari Kelley)

**Discussion:**

Cari asked for any proposed changes or amendments to the October 12, 2023, minutes. There were none. Bill moved to approve the minutes and Nick seconded. No discussion. All approved. Vote unanimous 10-0-4.

**Conclusions:**

Minutes from both June 1 and October 12, 2023 approved

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

- Upload approved minutes to SRC website, **Janice Leonard, 12/30/2023.**

**5) Consent Agenda** (Cari Kelley)

**Discussion:**

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

- AOE Committee November 2, 2023
- Performance Review Committee November 9, 2023
- Policy & Procedures Committee November 2, 2023
- Steering Committee November 9, 2023

Laura moved to approve, and it was seconded by Sherrie. No further discussion. Vote unanimous 10-0-4.

**Conclusions:**

Consent agenda items approved

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

- Upload to SRC website, **Janice Leonard, 12/30/2023.**

**6) Sarah Mueller, Sen. Bernie Sander's Office, Disability Policy Director**

We were so happy to have Sarah with us today to speak on what's going on in Washington and Bernie Sander's Office. She is heavily involved in the Health Committee. She is on the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions.

She gave us an overview of her work and responsibilities and took questions from the group. She listened to what we had to say and answered our questions when she was able. Thank you!

Last night the Senate confirmed Dante Allen for Director of RSA.

Her email is: [sarah\\_mueller@help.senate.gov](mailto:sarah_mueller@help.senate.gov) (There us an underline between "sarah" and "Mueller")

Beth Stern is also a person to work us and is closer to ever be able to see us in person. Her email address is: [beth\\_stern@sanders.senate.gov](mailto:beth_stern@sanders.senate.gov)

## **7) Director's Report & Plaques for Members Ending their Appointment** (Diane Dalmasse)

### **Discussion:**

Diane gave recognition was given to the Board members completing their term and leaving the board. Thank you so much for your commitment and talent:

- Asher Edelson
- Rocko Gieselman
- Marlena Hughes
- Robin Ingenthron
- Sarah Lauderville
- Cara Sachs
- Sarah Sterling

Diane shared her Director's Report:

HireAbility Vermont continued to reap the benefits of our rebrand. Referrals are up. We identified a few areas of marketing focus for this past year. We developed materials to reach out to Vermonters with chronic health conditions. People who have a chronic health condition often do not consider themselves as having a disability, yet they may be eligible for HireAbility services. We obtained the input of health care providers, our community partners and people with chronic health care conditions in our materials and outreach strategies. I am happy to share our video and print materials with anyone who asks.

We are competing in a very tight labor market for the very best VR counselors. We wanted to share what a great place Vermont is to live and that HireAbility is a great place to work. We created a video showcasing actual HA counselors talking about what Vermont has to offer and how much they love working for HireAbility. This video is being shared across many rehabilitation counseling master's programs in New England and beyond.

We are in the second year of our 5-year DIF grant, the Vermont Career Advancement Project (VCAP). This is a system's change grant with the goal of assisting Vermonters with disabilities to move out of poverty and have choice in their lives. Every HA participant can have a career pathway of their choice leading to credential attainment and higher wage jobs. Our counselors are becoming Career Pathways Navigators. The grant is in total alignment with our dashboard's lead indicators which in turn are slowly improving our Common Performance Measures.

VCAP has enrolled 239 participants in the grant to date, half of whom are actively engaging in education towards their career goal including registered apprenticeships with 52 completed degrees, certificates, or

credentials. By the end of the grant, HireAbility will have developed a system of Earn-and-Learn opportunities and best practices for supporting participants and meeting the needs of the business customer. The results of this effort will lead to increased use of apprenticeship programs, credentials held by working Vermonters, and partnerships with business customers, education and training providers, and community partners.

HireAbility is entering year two of our commitment to Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Access. We have written an implementation plan with four main objectives:

1. Develop a workforce that reflects the diverse populations we serve.
2. Effectively reach all populations that are eligible for our services.
3. Ensure staff have access to the tools and knowledge and feel competent to serve all participants in a culturally appropriate way.
4. Strengthening our existing communication loops to ensure staff are informed and can contribute.

A stakeholder has been formed for each goal area to include HA staff and subject matter experts. Each group will complete an action plan with accountability measures and do the work.

HireAbility remains in a strong fiscal position drawing down significant reallocation funds for the third year. We have fully expended our award each year by investing in Vermonters with disabilities in a variety of creative ways with our community partners. Allowing HireAbility to assist Vermonters with disabilities to advance in their chosen career pathway.

As always, I look forward to continuing our robust and productive partnership with the Vermont State Rehabilitation Council.

Diane P. Dalmasse, Director, HireAbility VT

**Conclusions:**

Thank you, Diane, for the update!

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

Andrea Bacchi would like to be part of the DEIA steering Committee that Diane spoke of and also would like to have a copy of the video and print materials mentioned in the letter.

**7) Committee Chair Updates** (Cari Kelley)

**Discussion:**

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

## **B. Policies & Procedures Committee**

## **C. Performance Review Committee**

## **D. Steering Committee**

### **Conclusions:**

Thank you to the committee chairs for the updates!

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

n/a

## **10) Major Findings Needs Assessment (Amanda Arnold)**

### **Discussion:**

Amanda presented the Needs Assessment Major Findings:

After reviewing the data in the Needs Assessment, HireAbility and the SRC have identified seven primary findings. These findings are intended to help guide HireAbility's goals and priorities in the State Plan.

### **1. The need to increase post-secondary education and training opportunities for all HireAbility participants**

Individuals with disabilities are much less likely than their peers without disabilities to enter and/or complete post-secondary education programs. Post-secondary education and credentialed training programs are essential for most participants to access high wage employment. Therefore, HireAbility needs to implement strategies to increase participation in these programs across all participants served. Creating an array of options, including "earn while you learn" options such as apprenticeship, pre-apprenticeship programs, and paid work experiences will provide onramps for participants to engage in education and training programs that fit their needs. These types of short-term credentialed programs, such as LNA, are often the starting point of high wage career ladders. Additionally, it may require the ability to be flexible about what counts as a credential. Some credentials such as ServSafe do not count as a credential under the Common Performance Measures but will provide participants with marketable skills. HireAbility might need to provide assistive technology, tutoring, and other strategies to help participants succeed in post-secondary programs. Increasing these post-secondary options will assist participants achieve long-term career success in quality employment.

### **Comments:**

HA is currently working on this issue.

## **2. As the HireAbility caseload trends younger, HireAbility must continue to innovate on how to best serve middle age and older participants**

As noted throughout the Needs Assessment, the HireAbility caseload has become significantly younger. About 50% of the caseload is under the age of 25. This is the result of the WIOA mandate to reserve 15% of funding to serve high school students with disabilities and is a trend that has been seen nationally in VR programs.

Whenever a federal mandate requires a program to reassign resources and capacity from one age group to another, there is inevitably an impact on the group losing resources. HireAbility currently has about 25% less counselor capacity to serve participants over 25 than we did in 2015. While HireAbility cannot change this reality, we can look for more effective and efficient ways to meet the needs of individuals with disabilities who are over the age of 25. This might include:

- Expanding partnerships with other workforce programs to serve some individuals who need fewer or less intensive services.
- Effective management of caseloads so services are targeted at individuals who are engaged in services and are most in need.
- Supporting adults achieving higher quality and more stable employment so they do not need to reapply for HireAbility services later.
- Developing new services and tools that meet the needs of HireAbility participants over the age of 25 such as “earn and learn” opportunities and access to non-traditional education that will better prepare participants to enter the workforce.

**Comments:** Funding for some of the funds has affected the service of those 25 and younger. With this shift we need to continue services for those over 25.

## **3. Implementing strategies to ensure cultural competency for HireAbility staff**

The demographics of Vermont are changing and the population is becoming more ethnically and racially diverse. These trends emphasize the need for HireAbility staff training around racial justice and cultural competency. HireAbility has contracted with a systems change vendor, Social Contract, and a subject matter expert in social change related to diversity, equity and inclusion, Karen Proctor. The Division will need to continue to implement strategies and invest in training for staff that increases cultural competency.

**Comments:** “Cultural Responsiveness” is a great term that was suggested from the Performance Review Committee.

#### **4. The need to implement strategies to improve outcomes for individuals with psychiatric disabilities**

HireAbility has long recognized that individuals with psychiatric disabilities often face substantial barriers to employment. In addition to their disabilities, there is the stigma of mental illness, combined with the fact that their conditions are invisible to others. The barriers are even greater for individuals with psychiatric disabilities who are offenders. National data suggests that at least 20% of incarcerated offenders have psychiatric disabilities.

HireAbility has historically taken the lead in promoting employment for people with psychiatric disabilities. HireAbility was instrumental in bringing the Individual Placement and Support (IPS) model to Vermont. IPS is the most widely accepted evidence-based approach to employment services for individuals with psychiatric disabilities. Unfortunately, IPS is only available to a subset of individuals served through the community mental health system CRT Program. It does not include individuals served through outpatient mental health services.

HireAbility needs to continue to explore opportunities to expand employment services for this population, in partnership with the community mental health system and the Department of Mental Health. The availability of reallocation funding may offer opportunities to try out new approaches or expand existing promising programs.

**Comments: None**

## **5. The need to prepare HireAbility participants to take advantage of career ladders**

Entry level employment is often a very important first step for HireAbility participants. This is especially true for high school students and youth with disabilities. However, entry level employment should not be the end goal for most HireAbility participants. HireAbility is developing strategies to help participants move beyond entry level employment. Supporting participants to engage in career assessments is one tool HireAbility staff are employing to help participants think more broadly about career paths and opportunities. Expanding access to post-secondary training and education options is another strategy that HireAbility will need to continue to focus on to create opportunities for career growth. Consistent follow-up with employed participants, post placement is another important piece to this puzzle. By following up with participants once they are employed, HireAbility can help these participants identify potential career ladders in their current jobs or explore other possibilities.

**Comments:** None

## **6. The Need to improve services and outcomes for participants with opioid use disorder**

Vermont has seen a dramatic increase in the number of opioid related deaths since the beginning of 2020. HireAbility needs to continue to develop systems and teams to outreach to participants with opioid use disorder to engage them in employment as part of their recovery effort. Two pilots are currently underway, in the Northeast Kingdom and Chittenden County, to attempt to increase the number of participants with substance use disorder that HireAbility is serving. The pilots have already had great success so it will be important for HireAbility to secure funding streams that allow for the expansion of these services statewide.

**Comments:** There is advocacy talk about being mindful of those we serve who just need opioid prescriptions that aren't getting them. We need to start using "Opioid Mis-use disorder" instead of use disorder.

## **7. The need to engage employers about the potential of HireAbility participants to fill higher skill, higher wage positions**

HireAbility has excellent employer outreach through the Workforce Development Teams. Currently, HireAbility has active relationships with about 2,500 employers statewide. As HireAbility supports more individuals pursuing higher wage and higher skill employment, it is important that employers see the agency as a source of higher skilled employees. One avenue HireAbility is investing significant resources into our “earn while you learn” options such as apprenticeship or pre-apprenticeship programs. It might be that HireAbility, partnering with other workforce agencies, needs to develop specific training programs in response to the workforce needs of a specific sector. Business Account Managers will need to work with employers to identify career ladders within their organizations and the training associated with this career progression. HireAbility can support participants to advance up these career ladders by providing tailored training and supports.

### **Conclusions:**

**Movement:** Amanda asked for any other comments or suggestions. There was further discussion. Upon conclusion of the discussion Cari asked for a motion to accept report. Sherrie moved to give HA our approval of this outcome report, Gina seconded. No discussion. All approved. Vote unanimous 10-0-0.

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

## **11) Goals and Priorities (James Smith)**

### **Discussion:**

James reviewed the VT State Goals and Priorities Report and Powerpoint. The “State plan” is our contract with the Federal Government for our funding. The parts of this report include: 1. Needs Assessment and 2. Goals and Priorities based on the needs assessment as well as a 3. Report Out.

James reviewed the report with this Full Council. He also presented his power point. See the attachments for all the information.

### **Conclusions:**

It was suggested that we have someone come to speak to us about the DOL funding vs HA funding and how they work together.

Make sure it is clear that the discussion / title for our Pilot Program is for Opioid Mis-Use Disorder.

A deeper discussion of the Stay in Order of Succession can be held later if wanted. (Our Priorities)

**Movement:** James asked for any other comments or suggestions. There was further discussion. Upon conclusion of the discussion Cari asked for a motion to accept the report. Gina moved to give HA our approval of this outcome report, Sherrie seconded. No discussion. All approved. Vote unanimous 9-0-0.

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

**14) Round Table** (Group)

**Discussion:**

We ran out of time and had to skip this part.

**Conclusions:**

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

**15) Other Business & Agenda Setting for February 1** (Cari Kelley)

**Discussion:**

- Rebuilding Together (Serves people with disabilities and elderly with home repairs) to come in and talk about their organization.
- Braided funding of DOL & HA presentation.
- Topic discussion of a member disability or other informational topic
- A few contracts are coming through with training contracts – Neuro Diverse component.
- Apprenticeships / Approved Apprenticeships presentation

**Conclusions:**

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

Upload draft Agenda to the SRC website, **Janice Leonard, 12/30/23.**

**16) Adjournment** (Cari Kelley)

Cari called the meeting adjourned at 3:30 p.m.

**Meeting Action Items, Person Responsible and Deadlines:**

- Finalize agenda and upload to SRC Website, **Janice Leonard, 1/25/24.**

- Draft minutes for this meeting, send to Committee Chair for comment then upload to SRC website, **Janice Leonard, 12/30/23.**
- Finalize approved minutes for last meeting and upload to SRC website **Janice Leonard, 12/30/23.**