

Draft Minutes
VERMONT STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL (VTSRC)

Thursday June 6, 2024, 1:00PM – 3:30PM
Virtual Meeting

Meeting called by:

Vice Chair, Andrea Bacchi, called the meeting to order at 1:00 p.m.

Members Present:

Angela Allard	Laura Flint
Andrea Bacchi	Helena Kehne
Courtney Blasius	Jacqueling Kelley
Sherrie Brunelle	Brandy Reynolds, Non-Voting
Nick Caputo	Tara Shatney, Non-Voting
Diane Dalmasse, Non-Voting	Laura Siegel
Gina D'Ambrosio	

Members Absent:

- Emily Wagner, excused
- Bill Meirs, excused
- Cari Kelley, excused
- Angela Allard, excused
- Amanda Wheeler, Excused
- Nancy Richards, excused
- Ana Russo,

SRC Liaison:

- Amanda Arnold
- James Smith

SRC Coordinator:

- Janice Leonard

Interpreters:

- Bobbi Gravier
- Nicole Comtois

Speakers or Presenters:

- David Stapleton
- Ross McDonald
- Melissa Conley, RM STJ/WRJ

Guests:

NA

1) Introductions (Andrea Bacchi, Vice Chair)

Discussion:

Those in attendance introduced themselves.

Diane gave an announcement: Tuesday of this week a 30th anniversary celebration of JOBS programs was held in Montpelier. A great community feeling and heart-felt remarks. Lara Flint and Gina D'Ambrosio received awards. Congratulations!!!! We're proud of you.

Conclusions:

Action Items, Person Responsible, Deadline:

Great group of members here. Great to have everyone here.

2) Approval of Agenda (Andrea Bacchi)

Discussion:

Andrea asked for any proposed additions or changes to the agenda. Sherrie moved to accept the agenda and Nick seconded. No further discussion. All approved. Vote unanimous 10-0-0.

Conclusions:

Motion passes: today's agenda accepted.

Action Items, Person Responsible, Deadline:

- Upload approved agenda to SRC website, **Janice Leonard, 6/30/2024.**

3) Open for Public Comment (Andrea Bacchi)

Discussion:

There was no public comment given.

Conclusions:

n/a

Action Items, Person Responsible, Deadline:

None

4) Approval of Prior Meeting Minutes (Andrea Bacchi)

Discussion:

Andrea asked for any proposed changes or amendments to the Minutes from April 4, 2024. There were none. Nick moved to approve the minutes with an adjustment in times to accommodate David Stapleton Sherrie seconded. No discussion. All approved. Vote unanimous 10-0-0

Conclusions:

Minutes approved.

Action Items, Person Responsible, Deadline:

- Upload approved minutes to SRC website, **Janice Leonard, 6/30/2024.**

5) Consent Agenda (Andrea Bacchi)**Discussion:**

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

- AOE Committee
- Performance Review Committee
- Policy & Procedures Committee
- Steering Committee

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

Conclusions:

Consent agenda items approved

Action Items, Person Responsible, Deadline:

- Upload to SRC website, **Janice Leonard, 6/30/2024.**

6) Director's Report (Diane Dalmasse)**Discussion:**

Diane shared her Director Report with the group. See the written report, it is part of the Governor's Weekly Report. This reviews the past several months of information. This report is attached.

Diane Dalmasse, the Director of Higher Ability, provided an update on several key initiatives, including the successful launch of the 4th year of the Summer Career Exploration Program, the active Employer Advisory Group for the Vermont Career Opportunities Program, and the National Governors Association project on disability policy that Amanda Arnold is leading.

- Diane shared that there's an Apprenticeship Success Story Video being created. It's about a woman interested in working with animals, worked the summer with a vet. She was interested in veterinary services and is now pursuing a degree as a vet technician.

- There is a very active advisory group from our Vermont Career Opportunities program. The members represent the five occupational areas that our grant is focused on and we have representatives from four-vit hall factories, Construction, Mascoma Bank, Vermont Veterans Home, Copley Hospital, RER, Company, Beta Technologies, Husky, Davis and Hudson CPAs. They meet every other month to really advise us on our career advancement project and particularly around learning and apprenticeship opportunities.

It's really good to get direct advice and consultation from employers in the community who are dealing with hiring people and promoting people every day.

- Amanda is leading a National Governor's Association project on disability policy. Tackling employment policy changes in order to try to improve and enhance the employment of people with disabilities in this state. We also have representatives from Community College, the Department of Labor, the State Workforce Development Board.

Conclusions:

Thank you, Diane, for the update!

Action Items, Person Responsible, Deadline:

n/a

9) Presentation: Transportation Updates (Ross McDonald)

Discussion:

Ross MacDonald from VTTrans presented an overview of Vermont's public transit system, including the Older Adults and Persons with Disabilities (O&D) program, the mobility committees, and upcoming pilots for microtransit and community-based transportation services. He discussed the challenges of sustaining and expanding services given budget constraints.

- Looking to us to share gaps, needs for the transit program in Vermont.
- There is a transit provider and mobility committees locally.
- We see that the needs to be addressed include:
 - Hours, weekends, jobs
 - Currently, perceived as for elderly and disabled.

Conclusions:

There is still a lot that needs to be done but resources continue to make this a challenge.

Action Items, Person Responsible, Deadline:

None

8) HA Regional Manager Updates (Melissa Conley)

Discussion:

RM for WRJ/ STJ

Melissa Conley, the Regional Manager for the St. Johnsbury and White River Junction offices, shared two success stories - a self-employment venture in the Northeast Kingdom and the Project SEARCH program at Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center, which is graduating 7 students this year.

- Staffing
 1. St. J is fully staffed as of Monday, very exciting
 - Just welcomed Sean, a new General Adult Counselor to the team. He's on day four and fits in really well with the team.
 2. WRJ is difficult to keep fully staffed and are taking the opportunity to talk about the culture we want in the office for both staff and clients. Due to staffing, we cannot offer a summer career program this year.
- St. J has a robust summer program ready to kick off. We have 11 youth from five different high schools.
 1. St. J has traditionally run a single site model. We work with Burke Mountain Ski Resort who hosts our summer program. The students rotate around through different departments to get a nice exposure to different career opportunities. None of this would be possible without the support of Ross, White River Tri Valley transit and RCT.
- Success Story:
 1. Christine and Denzel started working with higher ability in the summer of 2023. The couple had a grand idea to bring a therapeutic massage studio to northern Vermont. Higher ability worked with them to enroll in massage therapy school, which soon turned into the desire for them to open and run their own business in the northeast kingdom. So just a few months ago, they opened the doors to what's called the alchemist laboratory up in northern Vermont. They offer a variety of massage therapy, aromatherapy and holistic services. Just after two weeks of opening their doors, their books were overflowing with appointments, and they've really been embraced by the community. They both continue to work with higher ability and have an interest in additional training and working with us to develop their business a little further and to give back to higher ability participants down the road as well, which is really nice.

2. Project Search Program at Dartmouth. Project Search is a job training program for individuals with disabilities at Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center.

Project search is a one-year school to work program that happens entirely in the workplace, and it's a nice collaboration between the Hartford School District, Lincoln Street Incorporated, Dartmouth-Hitchcock, New Hampshire Voke Rehab, and HireAbility Vermont. Next week, we'll be graduating seven students from project search, which we're really excited about, and really cool, we already have 13 students enrolled for next year's cohort who are fully funded, which is a first for a couple of years to be ready with a cohort of students who are actually ready with funding and transportation all set up, so that's really exciting. Project search serves youth with intellectual and developmental disabilities. In high school, up through the age of 26, it's a combination of classroom instruction around soft skills and skills that students might be needing in the workforce and competitive employment is really the goal at the end of this year at project search.

They have some targeted internships that they do throughout the year. And I've had the pleasure of being involved in that interview process this year.

- a. They spend time in 10 weeklong internships.
- b. The goal of Project Search is competitive employment. During the training they taught them how to be an employee. taught them how to be a co-worker to take on responsibility and then they put them in place where they could exercise all the time. those things.
- c. When they're with us they're working with everyone else in the team. doing a lot of the same jobs. I work up on the four east floors helping the nurses ambulate patients around the rooms, getting them up to their chair, moving trays, and assisting the nurses and discharging patients down to the east entrance.
- d. HA vt and NH and will be graduating 7 students and already ready for the next round for 13.
- e. Melissa shared a video on Project Search
- f. 5 out of 7 of this year's graduates have received competitive employment

Conclusions:

- Thank you for the updates Melissa!

Action Items, Person Responsible, Deadline:

- None

10) Our Time is Now (Dave Stapleton)

Discussion:

David Stapleton, a retired economist, introduced his work to update a report called "Our Time is Now" on changes in job opportunities, employer willingness to hire/retain workers with disabilities, and relevant policy/program changes since 2014 and the COVID-19 pandemic. Also since the 2014 Workforce Investment Opportunity Act. He invited SRC members to participate in interviews to inform his research.

- Focusing on how things have changed since the 2014
 1. Reporting on how have job opportunities changed (including chronic health conditions and recovery from addiction)
 2. What Changes in willingness of employers retain or hire employees with disabilities train those with disabilities
 3. Policy changes in private and public
 4. He would like both public and private discussions. Please contact him at d.stapleton@comcast.net or 802-999-1478. Willing to meet in person. He lives outside of Waterbury.
 5. Could at the next full SRC meeting, give him 45 minutes to say anything.
- Timeline is flexible but would like to finish interviews over the summer.

Conclusions:

- He believes, so far, that there has Never been a better time for people with disabilities to obtain work. We're making progress! Now we will get the statistics.

Action Items, Person Responsible, Deadline:

- Contact him if interested in being interviewed: email: d.stapleton@comcast.net or call: 802-999-1478.

8) National Governors Association Learning Collaborative Update (Amanda Arnold)

Discussion:

Amanda Arnold provided an update on Vermont's work with the National Governors Association to develop policy recommendations in three areas: employer engagement, the state as a model employer, and accessibility of training/education programs.

- Three goals to this program being worked on:

1. Employer engagement, how do we engage employers and help educate them and give them the things that they need to help employ people with disabilities.
 2. Reinvigorating. It's not something new to the state of Vermont, but really reinvigorating the state as a model employer initiative where we're able to create more opportunities for apprenticeships within the state and just different entry points so that it's more accessible to people with disabilities.
 3. Addressing the accessibility of training and education programs within the state of Vermont. So within those three goal areas, the state as a model employer, again, because that's not something entirely new to the state, we have some goals and targets
- We'll start tackling at some point and make some recommendations to the governor, for instance. We hope that he will renew an executive order that was written by Governor Shumlin back of the day that gave hiring managers in the state permission to engage in this idea of state as a model employer. What the program is, does is allow employers to apply for reimbursement, has to be reimbursement for any accommodations that they've provided to help someone retain their employment with them.

Conclusions:

We look forward to updates

Action Items, Person Responsible, Deadline:

None

13) Committee Chair Updates (Andrea Bacchi)

Discussion: Only one chair here to share. P&P Chair.

A. Advocacy, Outreach, & Education Committee

B. Policies & Procedures Committee

- a. Self-Employment Policy is done as steps for final approval. There will be training as well as a guidebook for staff. Roll out started this week.

C. Performance Review Committee

D. Steering Committee

Conclusions:

Thank you to the committee chairs for the updates!

Action Items, Person Responsible, Deadline:

n/a

15) Other Business (Andrea Bacchi)

A. Agenda Setting for October 10, 2024, Annual Meeting

Saturday is the Women's Economic Development Conference. Senator Welch is sponsoring it. 9-3. Great networking and information.

Conclusions:

Next meeting is the Annual Meeting in October, the Steering Committee will plan for this.

Action Items, Person Responsible, Deadline:

Upload draft Agenda to the SRC website, **Janice Leonard, 6/30/24.**

16) Adjournment (Andrea Bacchi)

Sherrie moved to adjourn, and it was seconded by Courtney. The vote was unanimous. Andrea called the meeting adjourned at 3:23 p.m.

Meeting Action Items, Person Responsible and Deadlines:

- Finalize agenda and upload to SRC Website, **Janice Leonard, 6/30/24.**
- Draft minutes for this meeting, send to Committee Chair for comment then upload to SRC website, **Janice Leonard, 6/30/24.**
- Finalize approved minutes for last meeting and upload to SRC website **Janice Leonard, 6/30/24.**