

# STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES

OCTOBER 29, 2024

## ATTENDEES:

Brandi Fitch  
Cara Di Giovanni (virtual)  
David Zrostlik (virtual)  
Diane Hernandez  
Dr. James Williams  
Eva Castillo  
Kelsey Teeter  
Lisa Schneider  
Margee Woywood  
Pam Woebler  
Rich Phelan  
Victoria Keith (virtual)  
William Stumpf

## IVRS Support Staff:

April Stotz  
Ashley Banes  
Brandy McOmber  
Bob Hendrickson  
Eric Evans  
Jeff Haight  
Sandy Ostendorf  
Tyler Hanson  
Victoria Carrington  
Vienna Hoang  
Wendy Solano

## PUBLIC/GUEST:

Mari Brown  
Brandon Rumier  
Teresa Dolph  
Greg Bal  
Amy Desenberg Wines (virtual)  
Jessica Flannery (virtual)

## ABSENT:

Linda Rouse

## CALL TO ORDER

Eva Castillo called the October 29, 2024, State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) meeting to order at 10:34 a.m.

## QUORUM

A quorum was established at 10:36 a.m.

## ADOPTION OF AGENDA

Motion by Rich Phelan, Second Lisa Schneider – approved agenda for October 29, 2024, meeting at 10:38 a.m. (SRC Chair, Eva Castillo, informed attendees that due to the change of this meeting from the fourth Tuesday to the fifth Tuesday of the month, agenda items will be reordered to allow flexibility for presenters with scheduling conflicts)

## **APPROVAL OF JULY 2024 MEETING MINUTES**

Motion by Rich Phelan, Second Kelsey Teeter – approved July 23, 2024, meeting minutes at 10:40 a.m. with amendment moving Kelsey Teeter from the VR Support Staff column to the Attendees column

## **PUBLIC COMMENT**

COMMENT: updates requested regarding changes with VR as the designated state agency for the State Independent Living Council and counselor minimum requirements

COMMENT: information requested regarding the change in the Iowa Blueprint for Change backbone moving from UCEDD to IVRS, in regards to approach and capacity

## **INTRODUCTIONS**

All meeting attendees gave introductions

## **TRAINING FOR NEW MEMBERS - DR. JAMES WILLIAMS**

- Purpose of the SRC
- SRC member responsibilities
- VR responsibilities
- Subcommittees
- A copy of the “yellow book” (regulations that govern the SRC) will be ordered for each SRC member

## **EXPANDING ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES BY FULLY FUNDING STATE VR - CASTILLO**

- Explanation of how funding of VR works
- Discussed Transition Alliance Programs, cash match contracts and State funding
- VR’s need to draw down all monies available at the Federal level

## **POLICY DISCUSSION, WAITING LIST, RSA GUIDANCE - MCOMBER**

- Clearing of the waiting lists and impact on VR budget
  - July 1st, 1,302 individuals released from the waiting list
  - August 1st, 956 individuals released from the waiting list
  - Around September 1st, final release of 90 individuals from the waiting list
  - The waiting lists helped VR navigate the budget, no longer able to use this technique
- Significant policy changes may help manage VR budget and ensure job candidates receive the services needed and also maintain dollars to continue operation of the VR program

- Policy areas where large spending increases were seen over past few years: Post-secondary education, Driver's training, Self-employment, Home and Vehicle modifications
- VR budget cannot sustain these increased costs indefinitely
- Must stay within regulatory guidelines for any policy changes
- VR will seek guidance from SRC when considering policy changes
- Technical Assistance Circular from RSA with zero participation rate expectations for those on SSI and SSDI affected VR budget greatly

## **COUNSELOR CHANGES TO MINIMUM QUALIFICATIONS**

- Public meeting was held
  - Received comments and questions, Q & A can be found on the IVRS website
  - Recording of most of the public meeting can also be found on the website (technical issues ended the recording a few minutes early)
  - VR supports and encourages the hiring of Master's level counselors and provides incentives for staff and applicants to obtain their master's
    - One-time special credential pay increase for those who achieve their master's while working for VR
    - Master's level counselors have ability to earn salary at the top of the pay scale, where bachelor's level counselors are capped at 85%
    - As applications are scored, master's level applicants receive more points and a higher rank, and therefore have a better chance to be offered an interview
    - Offering staff a way to move up the ladder assists with retainment of employees
  - This decision widens the pool of applicants, especially in rural areas where VR has few to zero master's level applicants for open counselor positions
- VR had no comments in the public meeting on the change in the SILC DSA (Designated State Agency) from VR to HHS; VR has no control over this decision

## **RSB BUREAU CHIEF REPORT - ERIC EVANS**

- NDEAM events have been successful across all 13 offices around the state with great attendance
- VR had five supervisor changes this year, which is quite uncommon
  - All are growing and doing well in their new positions
  - Culture shifts have been seen in their offices
  - Staff retention has increased
- Des Moines office
  - VR's largest office by far and still growing
  - The VR leadership team put heads together on how to adapt

- Started a remote team of two Counselor Specialists who are senior staff and can respond anywhere in the state as needed
  - Recently the remote team has focused efforts in Des Moines due to staff shortages
  - Applicants are now getting served immediately
  - Retainment of staff has increased significantly, morale is up
  - Des Moines will have an added location with more space, as this was also needed due to growth
- This model has produced excellent results
- VR is adding another remote counselor to the team and will assist with staff absences, medical and maternity leaves, etc resulting in less stress on the local office staff not having to pick up the slack

### **ADMINISTRATOR REPORT – DR. JAMES WILLIAMS**

- The Council Bluffs office is now fully integrated with the AJC (American Job Center)
- VR's focus over the last year has been making VR responsive to job candidates where they are at; making progress, still more work to do
- VR has asked IA APSE to lead efforts for Employment First across the state and to be the unified voice
- Starting to move forward on credentialing for VR providers
  - Goal to create training and credential that is a common foundation for delivery of VR services (different than CRP staff training by partners)
  - Low cost, based on research and good practice
  - Use VR's newly purchased YesLMS training platform
- Office updates
  - Four significant projects
    - Des Moines office
      - Staff have been double-stacked in cubicles, no room for new hires
      - Working with DAS to lease a space west of Principal Park (community feedback showed services needed in the downtown area)
      - Staff will be strategically placed in each location
    - Fort Dodge
      - Current office is leased through the community college and they need the space, not renewing lease
    - Waterloo
      - Currently being reconfigured to integrate fully with the AJC
      - January 6th is target date for completion with the construction company
    - Dubuque
      - Very early stages of integrating with the AJC
- Policy revisions
  - Post-secondary training

- Want to make sure if VR is supporting, it leads to better outcomes for job candidates and better paying jobs
  - Home modifications & Vehicle modifications
    - VR should only provide funds if it is related to work and needed to reach the employment goal
  - Drivers Training
    - Basic drivers training is the responsibility of the parent
    - VR can support specialized drivers training when it makes sense and is needed to reach the employment goal
  - Inflation has caused increased dollars spent for services without increase in funding
  - Policy changes can assist with VR slowing down spending and being intentional with dollars spent
- Utilizing AI a big push at the CSAVR conference
  - Iowa DOMDoIT formed a workgroup to create policies related to AI
  - New policy will be released statewide
  - VR will determine how to use AI in the agency and with service delivery following that release
- Please vote and encourage people with disabilities to do the same

#### **LEGISLATIVE RECEPTION, OTHER - MCOMBER**

- Vote on new logo for SRC, members chose first option provided of five
- The next SRC meeting in January is the last meeting before the legislative reception
  - SRC meeting is January 28th, legislative reception is January 29th, 7:00 a.m. in the rotunda at the State Capitol with an opportunity to connect with legislators (additional information will be sent out)
  - Brandy and Eva will be meeting via zoom and will invite SRC members to assist with the planning (typically the Outreach subcommittee oversees the planning for the legislative reception)
- Updates on DIF grant - BANES
  - Ashley stepped into the role of project director, but has been working on the grant since last summer
  - Waiting on last signature for Registered Apprenticeship for Employment Specialist, look for emails to come from Ashely
  - Steering committee will be revamped a bit, giving power back to guide the grant and Collective based on their knowledge and expertise
  - Work groups will be revamped, focusing on outreach, IPS and policy
  - DB101, disability benefits planning website, development efforts to begin
  - Budget to include allocation of funds for purchase of new case management system
  - The change from UCEDD as backbone to VR occurred due to RSA expectations for the grant not being met and the need to restructure the grant and continue the important work being done

## **PRESENTATION - SKYLINE CENTER**

- Business presentation by Brandon Rumler, Executive Director, and Teresa Dolph, Supported Employment
- Presented on business history and services provided
- Shared struggles with finding qualified staff and reimbursement rates

## **STANDING COMMITTEE REPORTS**

### **Outreach Committee**

- Discussed outreach, legislative reception (most questions related to funding)
- Used time to review the SRC annual report, brainstorming ideas and discussion
- Discussed survey responses

### **VR Service Delivery Committee (Schneider, Ostendorf)**

- Policy changes to assist with the budget and rising costs
  - Post Secondary Training policy (multi-faceted)
    - Current process to calculate amount is labor intensive for VR staff, not completed with consistency by all staff
    - Goal to update to make more manageable for VR staff
  - Assessments
    - Iowa is only state in the nation that does not require a diagnosis for students to receive special education services
    - VR needs diagnosis for eligibility, shortage of clinicians causes delay in services
    - Discussed how to get accurate diagnosis for Deaf & HOH applicants
- CAP (Client Assistance Program) falls under RSA
  - JCs work with CAP to try to work out complaints or issues with the VR program
- Discussed services for Deaf and HOH JCs
  - Best practice is to always ask what their preferred method of communication is, not make assumptions
- Benefits Counseling
  - Service is needed up front and throughout the VR process (VR's quality improvement case review tool looks for benefits planning throughout the VR process)
  - Work can affect other benefits received by JCs besides SSI/SSDI
  - VR has benefits planners in each local office (Angela leads team)
  - Other entities provide benefits planning
- Self Employment
  - Discussed possible changes to policy regarding technical and financial assistance for the program

### **Business Services Committee (Hansen)**

- Discussed NDEAM events held statewide with IWD and other partners - committee would like to partner to enhance outreach to business
- Discussed the IWD/IVRS business engagement process
- Discussed partnering with associations for business outreach and education
- Discussed engaging champion businesses to join SRC and get more businesses at the table

### **COMMITTEE REPORT/UPDATES**

- **IL Contracts – Bob Hendrickson**
  - Transfer of the Independent Living Network Designated State Entity (DSE) role from IVRS to the Aging and Disability Services Division of the IA Dept of Health and Human Services (IHSS) should be completed within the first half of FFY 2025 (this is also indicated in the 2025-2027 State Plan for Independent Living - SPIL)
  - VR is currently updating the State and Federal contracts between the Centers for Independent Living (CILS), the State Independent Living Council (SILC), and IVRS, which will be impacted by the transfer of the DSE from IVRS to IHSS
  
- **Financial Overview – Jeff Haight**
  - Provided general financial information
  - Explained status codes for closures
  - Reviewed budgets, compared FFY differences
  - Discussed new measure of aligning job outcome at closure with the career sector VR funded postsecondary education services for
  
- **CAP Update – Lisa Schnelder**
  - See VR Service Delivery Committee Report

### **ADJOURNMENT**

Meeting was adjourned at 3:05 p.m.

The next SRC meeting is January 28, 2025.

Meeting minutes approved by the Council on this date: 1-28-25

Signed by SRC Chair – Eva Castillo: Eva M. Castillo