

# STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES

*JANUARY 28, 2025*

## **ATTENDEES:**

Brandi Fitch  
Cara Di Giovanni (virtual)  
Diane Hernandez  
Dr. James Williams  
Eva Castillo  
Kelsey Teeter  
Lisa Schneider  
Pam Woelber (virtual)  
Victoria Keith  
William Stumpf

## **IVRS SUPPORT STAFF:**

April Stotz (virtual)  
Ashley Banes  
Brandy McOmber  
Bob Hendrickson  
Jeff Haight  
Mary Jackson  
Sandy Ostendorf  
Tyler Hansen  
Vienna Hoang  
Wendy Solano

## **PUBLIC/GUEST:**

Angela Young  
Ann Lebo (virtual)  
Brooke Lovelace (virtual)  
Director Beth Townsend  
Dr. Allison Levine (virtual)  
Georgia Van Gundy  
Greg Bal (virtual)  
Jesse Dougherty  
Jessica Miller (virtual)  
Mari Brown (virtual)  
Sara Bath (virtual)

## **ABSENT:**

David Zrostlik  
Linda Rouse  
Margee Woywood  
Richard Phelan

## **CALL TO ORDER**

Eva Castillo called the January 28, 2025, State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) meeting to order at 10:34 a.m.

## **QUORUM**

A quorum was established at 10:34 a.m.

## **ADOPTION OF AGENDA**

Motion by Lisa Schneider, Second Kelsey Teeter – approved agenda for January 28, 2025, meeting at 10:35 a.m.

## **APPROVAL OF OCTOBER 2024 MEETING MINUTES**

Motion by Kelsey Teeter, Second Lisa Schneider – approved minutes October 29, 2024, meeting minutes at 10:36 a.m.

## **PUBLIC COMMENT**

None

## **STANDING COMMITTEE REPORTS**

### **Outreach Committee** (Diane Hernandez)

- For next year's legislative reception, discussed having the opportunity to work with APSE and the DD council, etc., which gives SRC a louder voice when combining efforts with these groups
- Reviewed the 2024 annual report, and discussed possible ideas for next year, including in the survey results a breakdown of how IVRS serves recipients
- Reviewed talking points for discussions and which legislators are important to reach tomorrow at the SRC legislative reception

## **VOTE TO SELECT CHAIR FOR OUTREACH COMMITTEE**

Nomination by Lisa Schneider of Diane Hernandez for Chair for Outreach Committee, Second Tori Keith – nomination passed by unanimous vote at 10:39 a.m.

### **VR Service Delivery Committee** (Lisa Schneider, Eva Castillo)

- Eva received email from VR recipient discussing different experiences received when involved with the VR program on separate occasions. Committee answered questions and shared the process recipients go through during VR services and how that can look different depending on the needs of each individual at the time of service. Eva felt a better understanding of this and will be able to guide others who contact her in the future and be more knowledgeable in general.
- Previous topic led to discussions about CAP and those services, and how VR offers information on reaching CAP consistently throughout the program
- Lisa reports CAP's philosophy, as written in federal regulations, starts services at the lowest level, talking with the JC, determining issues and informal solutions, negotiations with VR, and only formal processes, such as mediation, when necessary
- Discussed bylaws, last updated in 2017. Discussions in support of reviewing the bylaws for possible updates. Lisa shared resource from NCSRC to support guiding SRC through this process. Will discuss further and possibly assign sections to sub-committees in relation to topics.

### **Business Services Committee** (Eva Castillo)

- Eva Castillo the only member present today

- Dave Zrostlik has requested to step down from SRC, has a replacement in mind and directed her to apply to the Talent Bank
- Diane Hernandez has someone in mind who would be good candidate to add to this committee. This was encouraged and the need to get more businesses engaged and to the table discussed. Share information with Brandy McOmber so recommendations can be made to Governor's office at time of appointments.

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

- Update on federal issues
  - No changes made to RSA yet; currently no Commissioner
  - Bill in session to dissolve Department of Education and move programs to Department of Labor mentioned at last SRC meeting, currently has no movement
  - Asking questions, but no answers yet regarding the executive order issued last night for the freezing of Federal grants and loans
  - WIOA not reauthorized under previous congress, not taken up officially yet by the current congress, but active discussions about doing so. VR's portion of WIOA would not be reauthorized in this reauthorization, but two drafts of the bill have significant reductions in funding for Title I, providing an indirect effect to the VR program as far as capacity and supports for VR job candidates from partners
  - CSAVR does track all orders and bills and provides timely updates to James, which are shared as they are received
  - Regarding executive order involving DEI programs across the federal government, IWD Legal is analyzing to determine impact. Other protected classes, but not disability, mentioned in the order. Grant language, required statements in parts of VR policies being revised to comply with the order.
- Update on State issues
  - Currently only tracking one bill that could have impact on VR at the State level relating to comprehensive transition programs, basically providing \$5,000 in funding for students with disabilities to attend comprehensive transition programs. VR involvement would be limited to helping develop the criteria used to determine what programs qualify.
- Office updates
  - Will open second VR office in Des Moines, located at 525 SW 5<sup>th</sup> Street, on Friday. New office will house majority of VR counselors, though VR will continue to have a presence at the Army Post location with approximately four rotating VR staff at all times. Official open house will likely be held in near future.
  - Working on new Fort Dodge location. Currently office located at local community college, and VR was asked to vacate in the next year or so
  - Waterloo, the American Job Center (AJC) and VR office are being combined. Space is currently being remodeled.

- Towards the end of this year, Dubuque AJC and VR office will be moving all into one space
- Dual customer relationships
  - James' priority to make sure VR is serving businesses and job candidates
  - Push in legislature to reduce unemployment tax rate, which generally leads to hiring
  - Recently developed process and flow chart to make sure businesses are being served, in the process of implementing
- Policy redesign
  - Need to be mindful of budget related to service delivery
  - VR uses a sustainability model, a projection of the state of VR budget in the future. Model trending down more negatively than expected due to rising service costs.
  - Serving more people. Costs have risen with inflation. RSA guidance states SSDI/SSI recipients should not pay any part of VR service costs. State appropriations have remained flat and federal funds have decreased.
  - VR controls budget in three ways; through policy revisions, order of selection (waiting list), and staff cuts.
- RFP for pre-ETS (pre-employment transition services) curriculum
  - Heard from staff and school personnel, serving more students, delivering more pre-ETS services
  - Services need to be of quality, and meet the needs of all students
  - RFP will be released to find a vendor to provide curriculum for VR staff to use
  - Training for staff to improve delivery of instruction of curriculum will be included
- Case management redesign
  - Next step is to contact vendors and set up demonstrations
- E1 (Employment First) taskforce
  - Meeting scheduled to gauge interest and identify interested parties
  - Those interested will apply; plan to have 1-2 representatives from multiple organizations
- Non-delegable training with boards
  - To better understand how VR is unique, workforce boards across the state will attend training
- Psychologist position
  - In-house psychologist would assist VR in speeding up the eligibility process for many applicants
  - State pay range for this field is not competitive, but VR is listing the position and will see what happens
- Areas of CRP shortage
  - If you are aware of an area of the state where there is a shortage of CRPs, or CRPs have long waiting lists or are not taking referrals, please let VR know
  - VR services stop in their tracks when these situations arise; VR wants to actively look at ways to resolve these issues

- SRC Annual Report included in packet
  - Please review and reach out with any questions
  - Thank you to Eva, Jesse, and the IWD Comms team for creating the report
- VR Administrator vision and priorities
  - Ensuring efficient use of VR dollars and resources
    - High quality VR counseling and guidance
    - Hold vendors accountable to better serve job candidates
    - Enhancing and maximizing good quality pre-ETS services
  - Enhance partnerships with AJCs
  - Case management system
- Finance
  - Looking at ways to organize team and make payments more efficient
    - Have seen delays in reimbursements, payments to vendors
    - Identified issues, discussed staff strengths, reorganized duties

#### **RSB BUREAU CHIEF REPORT – MARY JACKSON**

- Splitting Des Moines Area Office into two separate offices sometime in March
  - Supervisor Kali Troe to be supervised by bureau chief Mary Jackson
  - Supervisor Kathy Davis to be supervised by bureau chief Eric Evans
- YesLMS training software platform
  - Being rolled out across the state for staff use to provide consistency in training
  - Platform comes with standard modules, Planning & Development Team adding trainings specific to their content areas
  - Contracted staff have access to trainings on this platform as well

#### **SRC ANNUAL REPORT AND BYLAWS – JESSE DOUGHERTY**

- Jesse Dougherty, IWD Communications Teams presented
- Staff of six serving 1000+ employees of Iowa Workforce Development
- What's new to help the public better understand the role of the state's workforce system for all job seekers
  - Improved branding, materials and messaging
  - Expanded resources for Workforce programs and divisions
  - Refocused the process of collecting stories and sharing successes
- What's new in supporting VR
  - Consolidated and refreshed websites – ongoing
  - Unified communications staff
  - Began overhaul to documents and stories
- Developed new SRC logo
- Updated report in relation to the overall issues of how things tie together to serve Iowans
- Adding focus that ties VR to the overall message of building a better system
- Every page/every document checked for accessibility due to new federal rule on accessibility

- More ways to tell VR's story including featuring videos of success stories and podcasts, shared example of Kwik Star as employer highlight
- Question from Lisa Schneider regarding building ADA compliance
  - James shares each AJC has been evaluated for accessibility
  - Building management teams, and sometimes DAS consulted
  - This is also a service provided by VR to our business customers
- SRC staff encouraged to notify Comms team if any issues with website are found, including broken links, accessibility to access not found, etc.

## **IOWA BLUEPRINT FOR CHANGE UPDATES – ASHLEY BANES**

- Ashley Banes, Project Director for the DIF (Disability Innovation Fund) grant, Resource Manager for VR special programming
- Iowa one of 14 states awarded the DIF grant, with the purpose of moving individuals in subminimum wage environments to CIE (competitive integrated employment)
- Shared success story of individual who would typically be transitioned into subminimum wage, who worked with VR to gain CIE
- Five out of five providers left in Iowa who are 14C certificate holders, have agreed not to renew the certificates, meaning there will no longer be agencies who pay less than minimum wage
- IBC collective meetings
  - Last meeting had 96 participants from various agencies
  - Walk the Walk community of practice, series of six trainings will be presented during IBC collective meetings
- Shared IBC provider map, gap in services across the state
- Shared statistics of year two successes and costs
- Shared comment from provider regarding experience
- Updated IBC website in year two
- DB101 Disability Benefits 101
  - DIF creating website to help anyone receiving SSDI/SSI benefits understand how working affects their benefits
  - Connects users to VR services, along with other resources
- NEON (National Expansion of Employment Opportunities Network)
  - Provides subject matter experts who assist
  - Accessing individuals in dayhab and changing those policies
  - Promotes community inclusion and improved work opportunities for people with disabilities

## **CSNA UPDATE – DR. ALLISON LEVINE**

- Dr Allison Levine presented information on the analysis process of the CSNA data
- Community partner data processed, setting up focus groups
- Described survey and how it works
- Employers perception: little or no work experience, disability-related transportation needs, barriers

- Discussion on barriers, how VR addresses them
- Shared IVRS staff confidence in helping various populations

## **POLICY**

- Sandy Ostendorf shared process for updating policy
- Attempting to consolidate policy and procedures into one location for staff
- Feedback, comments, suggestions from this council should be provided to Brandy McOmber within the next two weeks
- Computer Request Policy and Computer Purchase Guide
  - Field staff requested updates for this outdated policy to match today's technology
  - Removed references to Independent Living process
- Rehabilitation Technology Policy
  - Clarified services and added procedural information for staff
  - Added definitions for different types of driver's training programs
  - Updated requirement for vehicle modifications to be provided by vendors who agree to adhere to the guidelines of the National Mobility Equipment Dealers Association (NMEDA) Quality Assurance Program (QAP)
  - Increased exception amount of \$5,000 to \$10,000 for home modifications, due to rising costs of construction and materials
- Post-Secondary Financial Assistance Policy
  - Feedback came from the field stating this policy was cumbersome and hard to understand
  - Also needed to consider budget issues during these updates
  - Requested much feedback from RSA
  - Policy updated to include an in-state public educational institution preference
  - Added an out-of-state or private institution addition to the IPE will require bureau chief approval
  - James adds this will ensure a thorough conversation with the JC is taking place, the exception to policy will show justification and appropriateness
  - Will be collecting data over the next year and the Executive Leadership Team will review to determine necessity of the exception to policy
- Benefits Planning Services Policy
  - Angela Young, resource manager for benefits planning provided updates
  - Nothing very major, updated information on when to refer to EN when closing files
- Authorizations & Billings Policy
  - Main change was adding procedures to the policy, minimal changes
- Status 18 Policy
  - This is a general landing page for training status, updated links in relation to other updated policies, few changes
- Other Training Policy
  - Previous training policy included a flat rate, with a maximum
  - Clarified guidance and procedures, and encourages the exploration of all forms of training

## **COMMITTEE REPORT/UPDATES**

- **IL Contracts – Bob Hendrickson**
  - The transition of the DSA (designated state agency) to Aging and Disability Services at Health and Human Services is complete
  - All state and federal and contracts have been terminated
- **Financial Overview – Jeff Haight**
  - Reviewed various statistics for previous quarter
  - Compared statistics to same quarter of last year
  - Noted changes in data and provided possible reasons for changes
- **CAP Update – Lisa Schneider**
  - CAP assists recipients of VR services with navigating the process, understanding the policies, and appeals if necessary
  - Main issues are questions with case file closures and accommodations
  - JCs also have questions about benefits counseling, Lisa will be referring these individuals to VR's Resource Manager specializing in benefits planning
  - Currently due to the government realignment, Lisa's cell phone number and email address will be the CAP contact information until further notice, the 800 number goes directly to her cell phone
  - James mentions VR received feedback from the Ombudsman office, meeting is scheduled; Lisa will be invited hoping to educate them on VR and CAP services
  - CAP is prohibited from being involved in class action lawsuits against VR

## **MEET PDT (PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT TEAM) MEMBERS, PREP FOR RECEPTION**

- Introductions of IWD Director, Deputy Director, PDT members and other VR staff attending the SRC Legislative Reception tomorrow
- Brandy shared itinerary for tomorrow's Reception

## **SERVICE DELIVERY DISCUSSION**

- Discussed during service delivery committee

## **ADJOURNMENT**

Meeting was adjourned at 2:48 p.m.

The next SRC meeting is April 22, 2025.

Meeting minutes approved by the Council on this date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signed by SRC Chair – Eva Castillo \_\_\_\_\_