

NH State Rehabilitation Council

NH STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL

MEETING MINTUES

July 13, 2023

21 South Fruit Street, Room 100, Concord, NH and

ZOOM Teleconference Meeting

Attendees: Lorrie Ripley, Interim Chair, Lisa Gerrard, Interim Vice-Chair, Ben Adams, Natalie Fortier, Heidi Duprey, Andrea Kaneb, James Ziegra, Marcia Bagley, John Richards, Jessica Laurie, Pam Stiles

Members Excused: Scott Lagios, Dawn Breault, Brandy Quinn-Richards

Staff: Lisa Hinson-Hatz, Sue Roma, Ella McAllister, Beth Keller, Joy Sabolevski

Guest: Christine Brennan

Interpreters: Laurie Meyer, Jola Lindstrom

The meeting of the SRC was called to order by Interim Chair Ripley at 1:10 pm.

A roll call was made of those present, and the agenda was reviewed. It was announced that Marcia Bagley from GSIL has replaced Maureen O'Donnell, who recently retired. Marcia was introduced to the council and gave a brief synopsis of her background. She looks forward to her time on the SRC.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES: The minutes of the SRC meeting of April 28, 2023, were unanimously approved.

Report of the Director: At the last meeting in April, Lisa reported that the agency had personnel challenges due to vacancies of front-line personnel. Since that time, it has been up and down. We have been using many workforce strategies to fill the vacant positions. Current vacancies include rehab tech positions in Portsmouth, Manchester, Concord, and a part time in Nashua. Counselor vacancies exist in Manchester, Concord, and Nashua. This month state employees in NH saw a 10% pay increase across the board. We are hoping this helps in future recruitment efforts.

Along with the staffing challenges, we are seeing more referrals coming in. It's been an "all hands-on deck" situation with everyone who can be working on cases.

Data: Along with the increase in referrals, the number of active participants has gone up. At the end of last quarter, we had 2,709 open participants, compared to 2,522 the same quarter a year ago. Our average caseload hovers around 100, which is where we want to see this number. It is nice to see our numbers increasing.

We are starting off the state fiscal year strong financially. We still have the whole grant of 5 million dollars from the 2022 grant. We are optimistic that we will spend all of these dollars. The agency is looking at increasing the amount of dollars allowed for college each year as well as looking at what we spend on hearing aids. Along with cost increases for staffing, RFPs are being considered to expand outreach in schools and increase trainings in pre-ets services as well as expanding services with interested CRP's and vendors.

What has been frustrating is we did send some money back to the feds due to noncompliance with spending pre-ets money (15% of our federal grant). We are working with our Business Office in developing policy and procedures to address this to make sure all monies are spent in the future. As the pre-ets issue is happening across the nation, New Hampshire is not the only state to relinquish dollars.

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Lisa wrapped up her report by informing the SRC that the contractor that is working with VRNH on its Strategic Plan (BerryDunn) is having a “Strategic Plan Feedback” session for SRC members on Tuesday, September 19th. Members are encouraged to mark their calendars. An agenda for the session will be forthcoming.

Update on QA Work with Stephen Group: Joy Sabolevski was present today to give the council an update on where we are with the QA work. The contract with the Stephen Group wrapped up in February of 2021. There were 46 observations in 6 different areas: Governance and Fiscal Management, Authorizations and Payments for Services, Program Management, Eligibility, IPE, and Case Closure. 85% of the observations are totally managed. One major piece still open is vendor management. RFPs went out to address this issue, but nothing came back that will meet our needs. The plan will be to design something in house.

The Stephen Group provided consultation and tech assistance in development of our QA and Improvement System. Joy noted that QA is not just VRNH internally, but also to insure good outcomes for our customers. As an example, our contract with STOUT University is intended for counseling staff to spend more quality time with customers as STOUT does eligibility determinations freeing up counselor time. One of the roles of the QA group is to look at this process to see if works out for all.

Chantel Hogan is the VR QA lead and can make herself available at a future SRC meeting to give updates on the QA Advisory Board activities and what they are seeing as they move through the process in terms of data points and barriers as they address the QA focus areas.

Transition Services Communication Plan: Joy Sabolevski presented VRNH’s “Transition Services Communication Outreach Plan”, which began in August of 2022. The plan focuses on 6 priorities:

- Build Awareness and Effective Communication
- Advance Partnership & Collaboration
- Invest in our Staff, Pre-Ets Vendors and Community Partners
- Focus on Student Outcomes and Create Service Value
- Sound Fiscal Management
- Exceptional customer service & Continuous Quality Improvement

Each priority is measured by key performance measures. The transition advisory committee, which oversees the plan, reports out on the progress made each quarter. Joy feels that staff are making good progress on each section.

3 key messages have been established for schools with the goal of improving relationships between VRNH and schools. Strategies to communicate our message to our stakeholders include developing an electronic and hard copy media kit, creating a talking point presentation to targeted audiences with success stories, and create a campaign at beginning of school year.

Joy will share a copy of her presentation to SRC members after today’s meeting.

CAP Update: Lorrie Ripley reported that calls to her office are up, most around ADA issues and not necessarily VR. She does have a handful of VR cases at various points in the process that she is just monitoring.

Once again, many calls she receives are about “expectations” that customers have about VR after talking with other people who have gone through the program. It is acknowledged that it is hard to combat those issues.

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Lorrie mentioned that the Governor's Commission on Disability has a strong social media presence and invited those in the room to send items their way for posting if you have programs or issues you wish to generate interest from the public.

Lorrie's experience with the remote option in meeting with persons with disability has been a real plus and she advocates that the SRC keep this option available moving forward.

REPORT OUT FROM COMMITTEES:

State Plan Committee: Ella McAllister announced that the feds recently sent out a new state plan template for the combined WIOA state plan, of which VR is a part. The template has been revised and is less repetitive than the previous. Ella will reach out to the State Plan Committee members regarding the work that needs to be done to complete the plan. She is hoping that this committee will be revitalized this year.

Regarding the Strategic Plan process with BerryDunn, Ella indicated that they will be sending out a survey to SRC members to gather information. As the timeline is short, SRC members are encouraged to respond quickly.

Lisa Gerrard noted that there will be a public comment forum on July 31st at 9:30 am for revisions to the combined WIOA State Plan. Written comments will be accepted for 31 days afterwards until August 30th. There are focus group sessions planned throughout the state as well. It is hoped that with the revisions to the plan, the document will be utilized more than it is currently and seen as a "working document".

OLD BUSINESS/NEW BUSINESS: None

There being no further business on the agenda, a motion was made to adjourn the meeting at 3:00 pm.

The next regular meeting of the SRC will be:

October 26, 2023

11:30 am to 1:30 pm

Room 100 Walker Building & ZOOM option

21 South Fruit Street, Concord, NH, 03301

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