

NH State Rehabilitation Council

NH STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL

MEETING MINTUES

September 22, 2022

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

ZOOM Teleconference Meeting

Attendees: Isadora Rodriguez-Legendre, Vice-Chair, Ben Adams, Lorrie Ripley, Holly Cadwallader, Dawn Breault, Natalie Fortier, Kelly Nye-Lengerman, Maureen O'Donnell, Dawn Breault, Heidi Duprey, Andrea Kaneb, Carrie Dudley, Scott Lagios

Members Excused: Christopher Purington, Lauri Jean Pevear, Brandy Pappas, Lisa Gerrard, Jessica Laurie, Courtney Lockwood

Staff: Lisa Hinson-Hatz, Sue Roma, Ella McAllister, Jim Piet

Guests: Kelly Haines, ICI, Allison Taylor, ICI, Susan Foley, ICI, Melissa Alford

The meeting of the SRC was called to order by Vice-Chair Rodriguez-Legendre at 1:03 pm. Chair Purington could not attend today as he is out of state on business.

A roll call was made of those present, and the agenda was reviewed.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES: The minutes of the SRC meeting of June 23, 2022, was approved after the spelling correction of Scott Lagios' name.

Report of the Director: Lisa Hinson-Hatz has a few big updates to share. VRNH is currently in a vacancy "crisis", especially in the Manchester office where there are 3 vacant counselor positions. Lisa is reaching out to recently retired VR counselors to see if they are willing to temporarily return to the agency, via contract, until we can hire for these positions. A plus to this strategy would be that these counselors would be seasoned and not in need of any training. In addition to the vacancies in Manchester, there is a vacant RC in Portsmouth, one in Nashua and one in Keene. There are also several vacant rehab tech positions. If SRC members know of anyone who may be interested in working for VRNH, please send them our way.

Vacancies in state government as a whole are a real concern at this time. Work is being done with the Division of Personnel to revamp the pay scale making it more competitive to surrounding states. We have no specifics on this but can send out the current job descriptions for our vacant positions to anyone interested. The average counselor caseload in New Hampshire currently hovers around 100.

Dawn Breault suggested reaching out to Assumption College graduates as well as including remote work as part of the sales pitch to attract candidates.

LBA Audit Update: Lisa commended the VR staff as being instrumental in moving the LBA audit work forward. For the benefit of the new members present, she gave the background of the audit, which began back in 2018. Quarterly updates are made to the Fiscal Committee on progress made against the findings.

VRNH has been working under contract with **The Stephens Group**, focusing on the 6 areas identified in the audit:

- Eligibility Determination: A pilot program with STOUT providing eligibility assessment services is underway in our Manchester and Nashua offices which is helping move customers through the

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process more rapidly and freeing up counselor time. Our rehab counselors or office supervisors still perform the final eligibility determination. The advantages of the STOUT contract include quality eligibility determination and consistency in the work. If all goes well with the pilot, we can expand the program across the agency.

- Plan Development: The audit found consistency throughout the agency to be an issue.
- Case Closure: Making sure case closure happen in a timely and consistent manner. Offices are being provided training on closure codes.
- Authorizations & Services: Making sure internal controls are in place.
- Program Information & Policy and Procedure Updates: Work is being done to make sure the policy manual is in the same format. We have policy and procedures for all areas. Rewrites went live on September 1st. Courtney Lockwood, chair of the SRC Policy Committee, moved this through.

We are hoping that all work products are completed by January of 2023 and implemented by May of 2023.

The final report back to the LBA is due by June of 2023. Once this is all behind us, we look forward to focusing on the future.

Other items of note:

- Mandatory Change Management Training to increase efficiencies for all staff is planned for the fall.
- The agency conducted a "Pulse Survey" of the entire agency to get a feel for how staff are feeling about their work in the agency. We are hoping to increase satisfaction internally to help people want to stay in their jobs to decrease turnover.
- Vendor Management RRP – we are looking at ways to manage all vendors of the agency in a consistent way. Proposals to put a new system in place are being reviewed now.
- SARA, the virtual job assistant, is being set up now. Testing will follow.
- RFP for a Strategic Plan and Business Plan: Working on getting this work completed by the Spring of 2024. Lisa would like the SRC to be part of this.

CSNA Update: Kelly Haines and Allison Taylor from ICI, University of Massachusetts, was present today via ZOOM to review the results of the CSNA with council members. It is hoped that the results will enhance the work that VR is currently doing.

ICI heard from 11 individuals, 6 state agency partners, 11 businesses and 70 VR and CRP staff members. Additional input was provided by national data sets and the recently conducted customer satisfaction survey.

The number of persons with disabilities has increased within the state in the last ten years across all age groups. Significant gaps in education and employment earnings exist in this group compared to those without disabilities. Looking at the data from VRNH's AWARE system, there is a high percentage of persons with limited work history. More men than women are being served and there is not much racial or ethnicity diversity within the state.

Of the people who were interviewed in depth throughout New Hampshire, several were involved in the system, ranging in age from 16 to 70 with a range of disabilities. Findings found that most people prior to applying had

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not heard about VR. Many were confused about how and when to apply for services being overwhelmed with all available systems in the state. Transportation was a large barrier across the board statewide.

The final report, highlighting the need for awareness, access to services and the quality of services, will be out next week.

CAP Update: Lorrie Ripley is currently following up on 8 to 10 calls, most involving transition age customers. She is seeing an uptick in calls around capacity and lack of CRPs to do the work. Lorrie noted that she is seeing it everywhere, not just with VR. It is very frustrating to all, especially to parents of transition age youth. The theme that is becoming apparent is that parents what to know who is doing what between the schools, VR and CRP's. Lorrie will keep the SRC updated at next meeting.

REPORT OUT FROM COMMITTEES: There was no updates from Committee chairs as neither Membership, Policy nor State Plan have met since last meeting.

CALL FOR NOMINATIONS: Both Chris Purington and Isadora Rodriguez-Legendre are terming out in the coming months. Anyone who is interested to learn what it means to serve on the Executive Committee are encouraged to reach out to Isadora or Lisa Hinson Hatz.

OLD BUSINESS/NEW BUSINESS: Isadora announced that unfortunately the Employment Awards for 2022 will not be held in person this year. The committee received 21 employers for recognition this year. Highlights of the employers selected for recognition will be available via virtual videos at a later date.

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

The next meeting of the SRC will be:

February 23, 2023 (Rescheduled from January)

1:00 pm to 3:00 pm

Room 100 Walker Building & ZOOM option

21 South Fruit Street, Concord, NH, 03301