

# NH State Rehabilitation Council

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## NH STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL

### MEETING MINTUES

April 25, 2024

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

### ZOOM Teleconference Meeting

**Attendees:** Lorrie Ripley Chair, Lisa Gerrard, Vice-Chair, Natalie Fortier, Heidi Dupre, James Ziegra, John Richards, Isadora Rodriguez-Legendre, alternate for DRC, Carrie Dudley, Ben Adams, Jessica Laurie

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

**Staff:** Richard Sala, Sue Roma, Ella McAllister, Tina Greco, Beth Keller, Joy Sabolevski

The meeting of the SRC was called to order by Chair Ripley at 1:00 pm.

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

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES:** The minutes of the SRC meeting of January 25, 2024, were approved unanimously.

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR:** Richard Salas, still new to the position of Director is learning day by day. He is pleased to report that staffing is up, which means new counselors requiring more training. He believes in getting back to the basics on applications, eligibilities, and IPE development, hoping that doing so will result in better outcomes for the agency as a whole.

He's been "on the road" a lot over the last three months, attending events on Pre-Ets, Earn & Learn, CSAVR and recently a two-day retreat with the VR Regional Leaders. His goal is to re-engage with the community. He is making himself available to anyone who wishes to meet and discuss VR related issues with him. Contact him if you wish to meet with him and he will make the time.

Richard announced that there are some internal moves occurring within the VR Central Office. The Concord Regional Office is moving to the third floor of the Walker Building. Staff are shuffling around on the second floor. There is hope of getting the Nashua Regional Office back into office space within their region and out of the Manchester office. More to come on that.

Richard updated the Council on the status of the "Virtual VR Office" contract with Abilities, Inc. of Florida. The feedback he has received thus far from both staff and participants has all been positive. He considers the program to be very successful. The Virtual Office is currently working on approximately 400 cases and are fully integrated into the VR team. The concept, although new to New Hampshire, has been used very successfully in the State of Florida for over 20 years. The Virtual Office consists of 4 counselors, a supervisor and rehab tech and intake office. The ultimate goal is to get this office worked into the agency budget if it continues to be beneficial to the NH VR Program.

Richard met with Beth Keller earlier and spoke about a variety of issues surrounding deaf services. The feedback from the **Deaf & Hard of Hearing Services (NDHHS)** is "We have been forgotten". Richard wants to remedy this.

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It has been brought to both Richard and Beth's attention that the videos on the VR website are not user friendly to the deaf and hard of hearing community. Beth and Richard are looking for a way to get the videos updated with ASL, perhaps using fees from the interpreter license account to accomplish this.

Beth has been working on hiring an open RCD position in the Manchester Regional Office. Last fall, she interviewed two candidates for this position, but both fell through. She has two additional candidates, one of which has a great history with the VR. The position will be primarily located in Manchester but may take some cases in other offices remotely. The plan is to do the hiring and let the dust settle to look at what we have vs. what we need before moving forward with additional hires.

Beth has done some deaf awareness trainings in the regional offices over the past few months and would be happy to do one for the SRC at the meeting in June.

Richard has secured a part time position for the Vending Stand Program in SBVI to help out the Vending Stand Coordinator, who has been on her own since cuts made when the order of selection occurred in 2018. This part-time position will allow the program to run more efficiently.

**ADAPTIVE DRIVING UPDATE:** Tina Greco was present today to give the Council an update on VR's Adaptive Driving Program. VR has been providing this service for over 20 years. The vendor we contract with will first evaluate the participant to ensure that they are a good candidate for driving and determine what type of modification would be needed to drive or be a passenger in a vehicle. The evaluation would take place in either a personal vehicle or modified vehicle owned by the vendor. Training would be provided to prepare the participant to take the licensing exam and learn to use the equipment and/or modifications to the vehicle. There are two types of modifications --- low tech (non-structural) or high tech (structural to the vehicle). The procedure followed at VR is that the internal staff are responsible for ensuring that the agency's process is followed and to manage any questions or issues that come up during the process. An external consultant provides technical assistance to questions and/or issues to the actual vehicle mod.

VR uses several vendors for adaptive driving:

- Eugene Blinken works with Mass Rehab and does the evaluation of the participant.
- Adaptive Driving Associates, Central Mass Safety Council, Drivability, and Northeast Rehab Hospital are vendors used for the evaluation and training.
- Mobility Works (formally Ride-A-Way) for the modification.

The van that is used for the evaluation is about 20 years old and has been significantly damaged by two accidents making it unavailable for continued use. This, along with the rising cost of vehicles and supply chain and vendor staffing issues has impacted the delivery of services to potential customers in a large way. VRNH has been scrambling to find ways to continue this service by being creative with resources and with the vendors available to us. One idea is for VRNH to purchase a vehicle outright and modify it so we have a vehicle for any customers that would come in for evaluation. We might do an RFP to house the vehicle. We need more vendors for the program to be self-sustaining. Richard is looking at the idea of partnering with neighboring states through an MOU to pool resources. There are currently 14 people in the pipeline in NH waiting to move forward with this service. The goal is to shrink this pipeline and get a "win".

The Council will be updated as to the progress made as we move forward with solutions. If anyone has any comments or suggestions that would help, please feel free to forward them onto Richard or Tina.

**CAP UPDATE:** Lorrie Ripley reported that calls are up, and complaints have increased, mostly, in her opinion, due to staff turnover. Lorrie believes moving forward with the virtual office idea is a good thing and could alleviate some of the issues she is hearing about.

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Lorrie's counterparts in neighboring states are seeing the same issues. During a recent call, CAP staff discussed the challenges of managing customers respectfully who are difficult. Sometimes it is hard to have complicated conversations with people.

Lorrie has increased her role in transition meetings trying to be a resource to both the group and parents. This is a big topic of late. Again, it comes down to managing expectations with customers coming in that don't understand the process.

The Governor's Commission on Disability has a new interactive website. Council members are encouraged to check it out and give the GCD feedback.

The flexible savings plan is coming along. Communication continues in order to get the information out to more people who could benefit by enrolling.

The part time ADA Coordinator position has been posted again. If anyone knows of someone who would be a good fit for this position, please have them contact the GCD.

CAP currently has ZERO cases going to fair hearing. There have been several cases going through the process, but they have all been resolved before reaching the hearing officer.

## REPORT OUT OF COMMITTEES:

**Membership** - Lorrie Ripley and Isadora Rodriguez-Legendre have met since the last meeting to discuss ways to increase the membership on the SRC. Lorrie would like to challenge current members to bring forth the name of one person who they think may be a good candidate for membership. The Council is short on current for former consumers and members from the business and industry community. They would like to perhaps get everyone on a regular cycle of membership whereby recruitment would be done once or twice a year instead of when someone terms off randomly. Lisa Gerrard suggested reaching out to the members nominated for the *Employer Leadership Awards* to increase numbers from business and industry. Virtual participation would be a plus in recruitment efforts of persons outside the Concord area. Richard has someone he will contact to see if they are interested in applying for membership.

**Policy:** A few weeks back, Ella McAllister sent out an email to all members of the policy committee outlining the activities contained in the policy workplan for 2024. Back in 2020/2021 when the policy update project was developed, the agency instituted a 3-year review cycle of existing policy. This year is the first-year policies in place at that time need review. The plan outlines the hope of reviewing 27 policies throughout the year. Four policies need staff review before May 1<sup>st</sup>. By our next meeting in June, it is hoped to have them ready for implementation. Ella asks that the policy committee keep an eye out for the review information.

**State Plan:** The updates to the WIOA combined State plan were submitted in early March. We are waiting to hear back from RSA if any changes need to be made on the VR piece. We expect this to occur in either May or June.

The CSNA, which was last completed in 2022, needs to be updated by December of 2025. The vendor selected, **Market Decisions**, is ready to survey stakeholders. **Market Decisions** will be invited to a future SRC meeting to keep the Council updated on the CSNA activities.

**OLD BUSINESS/NEW BUSINESS:** Carrie Dudley, as chair of the SILC is just back from attending a public drop-in session on the State Plan for Independent Living (SPIL). She was impressed by the array of people who attended. The purpose of the sessions is to gather public input on the needs of New Hampshire's persons with disability before writing the plan. There is another in person session scheduled for Monday, April 29<sup>th</sup> 3:00 to 4:00 and a Zoom session on April 30<sup>th</sup> at 5 pm. Council members are encouraged to attend a session if they are interested.

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There being no further business on the agenda, a motion was made to adjourn the meeting at 2:40 pm.

The next regular meeting of the SRC will be:

**June 20, 2024**

**1:00 pm to 3:00 pm**

**Room 100 Walker Building & ZOOM option**

**21 South Fruit Street, Concord, NH, 03301**