

NH State Rehabilitation Council

NH STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL

MEETING MINTUES

September 26, 2024

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

ZOOM Teleconference Meeting

Attendees: Lorrie Ripley Chair, Nathalie Fortier, Brandy Quinn-Richards, Heidi Duprey, James Ziegra, Isadora Rodriguez-Legendre, alternate for DRC, Ben Adams. Andrea Kanab, Dawn Breault, Carrie Dudley, Jessica Laurie, Lisa Gerrard

Guests: Carrie Duran

Members Excused: John Richards

Staff: Richard Sala, Sue Roma, Beth Keller, Joy Sabolevski

Interpreters: Laurie Meyer, Laurie Shaffer and Denise Garcia

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

APPROVAL OF MINUTES: The minutes of the SRC meetings of April 25 and June 20, 2024, were approved unanimously.

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR: Richard, participating in the meeting remotely today due to illness, reported that unfortunately the agency did not receive the RSA Disability Innovation Grant that it applied for earlier in the year. Most of the approved applications were from private agencies and organizations, with only 1 VR agency among them. Richard said that VRNH will apply again next year.

VR has finalized the purchase of the vehicle for the adaptive driving program. We are now looking for an entity to house the vehicle. This entity should be a certified person/organization who will also be used for training our customers. It will be a complicated contract and right now we are not sure if it will be a sole source or RFP as there is a very small pool of people available qualified to provide the training. It is important to get the right people to respond to the RFP if that is the way we move forward.

There is good news in terms of agency data. This month the agency, as a whole, were compliant on 94% of eligibilities and 81% for plan development. Some offices were at 100% in eligibility determination. We will continue to work on the plan developments but glad to see that the trend is upward.

Richard and the VR Central Office team members recently participated in a Governor's Commission on Disability meeting. He reported that it was a good meeting both entities look forward to working together in the future.

TRANSITION SERVICES UPDATE: Joy Sabolevski was present today to update the Council on VRNH's transition services and where we are in the strategic priorities / key performance indicators.

The strategic priorities for transition focus on 6 priorities –

- Build Awareness & Effective Communication

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- Advance Partnerships & Collaboration
- Invest in our staff, pre-ets vendors and community partners
- Focus on student outcomes & create service value
- Sound fiscal management
- Exception customer service and continuous quality improvement

Some highlights against the plan include:

Over the past year VRNH has sponsored career events along with the Community College system. Two additional events, “*Level Up*”, are scheduled for October 18 at Great Bay Community College and at River Valley in Claremont on November 1st. “*Level Up*” began at NHTI but plans are to expand it to all colleges statewide.

VRNH has 5 student transition specialists for the entire student state population. We are currently recruiting for two additional full-time positions to cover Nashua and share in the north country’s schools.

VRNH is looking to get away from paper and moving towards an updated on-line portal for transition referrals. Added features of the portal will allow schools to review the current status of students referred and allows pertinent materials to be uploaded to aid in the movement through the VR process.

Lots of internal staff trainings have occurred including using the IEP for determining eligibility, tracking pre-ets time, and standards for case notes.

It was suggested to include VR in all student fairs, not just those geared towards students with disability in an effort to outreach to all families who may not be reached otherwise.

In looking at the referral data of students with disability, in PY 2023 (7/1/23 – 6/30/24), Manchester, Berlin, Concord and Portsmouth had the highest levels. The total number of students with disability during this period referred to VR was 2,923, vs. 2,492 the previous program year. Out of the 2,923 referred students in PY 23, 1047 received a Pre-Ets service. The goal for each regional office for this measure is 50%. As an agency VRNH reached 43% in PY 23 vs. 44% in PY 22.

It was mentioned that as it relates to students, the name “Vocational Rehabilitation” may sound more like a medical than an educational program to students and their families, thus keeping referrals from coming in. It was suggested the agency investigate the feasibility of changing its brand to keep up with the times. Vermont recently renamed their program “**HireAbility Vermont**” and North Carolina’s VR program is now known as “**The Division of Employment and Independence for People with Disabilities**”.

Council members are encouraged to reach out to Joy if they have any questions regarding the transition services presentation.

DEAF AWARENESS: September is “**Deaf Awareness Month**”, and Beth Keller is attending today to give Council members a refresher on issues surrounding deafness. Members were able to view the UTube video [What Does Deaf Mean?](#) Deafness is not just one definition; there are several categories of people who are deaf or hard of hearing with a huge variation in between. Beth suggests when encountering a person who is deaf or hearing impaired to ask how they identify, keeping in mind that diversity does occur within the deaf and hard of hearing community.

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In terms of employment, there are several reasons why deaf and hard of hearing individuals do not get hired for jobs. Most are communication barriers and lack of awareness on the part of employers.

Educationally, parents of deaf and hard of hearing students have a right to expect a quality education for their children. The question is how do we improve? Parents need to be empowered to access services for students, so they don't "fall through the cracks". Networking is key in getting deaf and hard of hearing students referred to the right people. Access to language and positive role models allow this population to thrive in schools.

It is important to note the differences between deaf and hard of hearing individuals for accommodations. Be respectful and ask people what they need.

CAP UPDATE: Lorrie Ripley reported that over the last quarter she has met with Richard a couple of times and feels they have a good working relationship.

She is currently completing the end of year CAP Annual Report. It will be available on the RSA MIS site by the end of the year.

The Governor's Commission on Disability is currently recruiting for a statewide ADA Coordinator. They still have not found the right person to fill this position. Lorrie encourages council members to send anyone their way if they come across someone who may qualify.

The GCD social media presence is strong, and council members are invited to send event postings to her to share on their space.

COMMITTEE UPDATES: Lorrie would like the SRC committees to regroup and get active once again. Ella McAllister needs to be replaced on the State Plan Committee. Membership on the full SRC needs to be addressed.

OLD BUSINESS/NEW BUSINESS: Carrie Dudley reported that the SILC State Plan has been approved by RSA.

Elections for SRC officers will be held at the meeting in November. If anyone is interested in serving in a leadership role, please reach out to Lorrie Ripley or Sue Roma.

Due to the late hour, a motion was made to adjourn. The meeting was adjourned at 3:15 pm.

The next regular meeting of the SRC will be:

November 14, 2024

1:00 pm to 3:00 pm

Room 100 Walker Building & ZOOM option

21 South Fruit Street, Concord, NH, 03301