

# NH State Rehabilitation Council

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## NH STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL

### MEETING MINTUES

September 23, 2020

#### ZOOM Teleconference Retreat

**Attendees:** Chris Purington, Chair, Isadora Rodriguez-Legendre, Vice Chair, Ben Adams, Holly Cadwallader, Lorrie Ripley, Theresa Wilkomm, Dawn Breault, Kristin McGraw, Courtney Lockwood, Brent Cote, Carrie Dudley, Jo Moncher, Laurie Jean Pevear, Kim Phillips

**Members Excused:** David Morgan

**Advisory Non-Voting Present:** Peter Darling

**Staff:** Lisa Hinson-Hatz, Ella McAllister, Tina Greco, Sue Roma

**Guests:** Frank Edelblut, Commissioner of Education, Christine Brennan, Deputy Commissioner of Education

The meeting of the SRC was called to order by Chair Purington at 11:00 am. The Covid-19 pandemic necessitated today's meeting occur remotely via Zoom.

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES:** After a review of today's agenda, Chair Purington called for a roll call vote for approval of the minutes of the SRC meeting of June 25, 2020. The minutes were approved with 2 members abstaining.

For the benefit of the new member on the SRC and those who may need a refresher, Lisa Hinson-Hatz presented a power point on the role of and core functions of the SRC. The SRC works in partnership with the VR agency and is federally mandated in Section 105 of the Rehabilitation Act. Every VR state in the union must have a SRC to be eligible for federal funding. Members, representing a broad range of individuals with disabilities and organizations interested in individuals with disabilities are appointed by the Governor for a maximum of 2 full three year terms. Functions of the SRC include:

- Review, analyze & advise the designated State unit's responsibilities under the act
- Develop, agree to and review state goals and priorities
- Evaluate the effectiveness of the VR program & submit progress reports to the Commissioner of RSA
- Advise and assist in the preparation of the VR State Plan portion of the Combined State Plan and Amendments, applications, reports, needs assessments, and evaluations
- Conduct a Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA) every 3 years
- Review & analyze the effectiveness of and the consumer satisfaction of the designated state agency, and
- Prepare an annual report to the Governor and Commissioner of RSA on the VR Program status 90 days after the end of the federal fiscal year.
- Coordinate with other councils, such as the SILC, DD Council, State Workforce Development Board to avoid duplication and enhance numbers served.

For the coming year, Lisa would like the SRC to review where we are on membership and to make sure we are compliant regarding the representation of the various factions mandated by

# NH State Rehabilitation Council

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the Act. She also believes that an area we can look to improve is coordination with other state councils.

**Commissioner Update:** Commissioner Edelblut joined the meeting. He and the VR team continue to frequently review VR's operational data in terms of the front end of the process, back end of the process and the pipeline of how people connect with VR to keep it all moving in a positive direction. Referrals and applications are down since the outbreak of COVID, understandably as the general population is cautious about the virus. Although we are seeing an increase in the front end, it is coming up slow. Commissioner Edelblut is wondering if there are ways to increase these numbers. It was noted that of those people on SSI/DI, there are currently 63,000 plus eligible individuals in NH and only 4,000 open tickets. Is there a better way to connect with these people directly? Outreach and benefit counseling is key, particularly when people on benefits can learn about supports. Lisa Hinson-Hatz has agreed to follow up with the Disability Determination Unit to see if there is a way we can identify ways of increasing referrals from DDS.

SDS Counselors are in the schools but are having difficulty connecting with students due to the virus. This is another area that the Commissioner would like ideas on how to improve, as SPED kids are back in school for the most part and those are the ones we need to connect with. A suggestion was made that kids work better later in the day. SDS counselors can try reaching out later in the day and be flexible in their work to catch students when they are at their best. As this particular subject is worthy of further discussion, Tina Greco will invite the SDS counselors to the next SRC meeting to brainstorm with the Council.

Increased engagement with area agencies who provide referrals to VR could be an important step in moving forward. Likewise, attendance at the monthly meetings of the ELO's, where upwards to 40 to 50 people are in attendance would be beneficial to get the VR message out.

Kimm Phillips would like to see increased marketing to families to inform them about the services VR provides. She mentioned that there is not a lot of family friendly material currently available to pass on. Lisa will keep this in mind as the agency moves forward with its marketing campaign and invited Kimm to be become involved once it is off the ground.

Regarding the back end of the process, it was noted that employers are more open in terms of how people are getting hired and getting jobs done. This can be seen as a major opportunity, specifically as it relates to VR's pool of applicants. Remote work is becoming much more common and now can be the time to step out of our comfort zone and create opportunities that will work for our customers.

The Commissioner looks forward to continuing this discussion and hearing more ideas from this council.

**Goals & Priorities of the Current VR State Plan:** Ella McAllister gave a brief presentation of the current goals and priorities of the State Plan, formulated over the course of the last two years with the help from this council. They are:

1. Quality competitive integrated employment outcomes for persons with disabilities in NH
2. Effective and efficient use of resources
3. Focus on Career Pathways with NH Sectors

# NH State Rehabilitation Council

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4. Promote an environment that supports the Participant-VR Counselor relationship
5. Develop and implement marketing and outreach materials.

Discussion followed on how these goals are measured and if there was a way for the SRC to check-in sporadically as a more hands on approach to be involved in the process. Typically, the outcomes are reported in the next state plan, but Ella stressed it is up to the Council to see how much they would like to be involved in the monitoring progress. More discussion can be had at the October meeting to develop some measureable outcomes for each of the 5 areas and revisit during the life of the plan to keep it a living document.

**Review of Policy Data:** Lisa Hinson-Hatz reviewed the VR Dashboard as it stood on 9/6/20 when the data was pulled. The quarter officially does not end until September 30<sup>th</sup> so the numbers do not reflect the full picture of the quarter. The dashboard will be updated for the October meeting.

## Items of Note:

- As mentioned earlier, referrals are down since the beginning of Covid but we are working to bring them up to pre-Covid levels;
- Applications are down but are trending up;
- Eligibilities and plans are obviously down because of the number of people coming into the system;
- Case notes, activity dues, direct service hours, and services authorized are seeing an increase. The % of cases with a case note have consistently been in the high 90% range since the spring;
- For the current quarter there are 2,910 open cases, 29 counselors and 6 vacancies due to the state hiring freeze;
- Average caseload is 127, which is lower than recommended due to the number of new counselors and vacancies.

A waiver to the hiring freeze has been requested of all vacant positions. Two have been approved so far; the rest are pending. If not approved, the agency may have to look at re-entering the OOS for lack of staff to service all individuals. An update will be provided at the October meeting.

**Financial:** New Hampshire, as well as several other states, have asked RSA for a waiver for increased time to spend down our grants due to Covid. We still have a full grant to spend from last October, along with \$553,000 in SS reimbursement money. As such, we will not be asking for any reallocation money for this year due to the decrease in spending. Balances are monitored on a weekly basis. We have \$2.1 million left in our '19 grant to spend by September 30<sup>th</sup> and a full grant of \$11.6 million from FY-20.

Due to the late hour, the 2 remaining items on the agenda, VR Action Steps and SRC Involvement and Committee Work and Membership Development will be discussed at the October meeting. Chris Purington would like to set up action steps for the committees and follow their progress through the year.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:00 pm.

The next meeting will be on **October 22, 2020, most likely a ZOOM teleconference.**