

Montana State Rehabilitation Council
Meeting Minutes
September 10 - 11, 2015

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September 10-11, 2015
VRBS Conference Room, Billings

Members present: Rick Heitz, Anna Gibbs, Char Harasymczuk, John Senn, Linda Zermeno, Tom Osborn, Jim Marks, Mona Amundson, Michelle Pickell, Amy Capalupo, Dale Mahugh, Quentin Schroeder, Coreen Faulkner, Donna Marie Robnett

Members absent: Robin Haux, Frank Podobnik (excused), Tiffany Costa (excused), Mike Woods (excused)

Staff and visitors present: Peggy Williams, Chanda Hermanson-Dudley, Sally Sjaastad

Thursday, September 10, 2015

Billings Welcome—Sally Sjaastad

Sally, the Billings VRBS Regional Manager, welcomed the Council to Billings. The Billings region serves the largest metro area in Montana in addition to some very rural counties. They serve about 1500 people a year, and have two offices, one in Billings and one in Miles City. They are working on a number of projects with the schools: (1) an e-mentoring project where students with disabilities at MSU-Billings are paired with high school students with disabilities; (2) counselors are working in some rural schools teaching soft skills and working with the Montana Career Information System; (3) transitions meetings with the independent living center to get more Pre-Employment and Transitions Services in the schools.

State and Federal Update—Jim Marks

Jim mentioned that the state's Labor Day Report shows that there will be more jobs than job seekers in ten years. The unemployment rate will decrease. This might mean that VRBS will have smaller caseloads.

VRBS is hitting a rough patch. The new federal law, WIOA (Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act) has about 100 changes that affect us. The new emphasis is on services to youth, competitive integrated employment, and alignment of VR with workforce development. The state plan for VRBS will now have two parts, one a combined plan with Department of Labor and Adult Basic Education, and secondly a plan just for VRBS. In August, the partners had a large meeting to kick-off the relationship, and a meeting on writing the plan is scheduled for later in September.

Jim also talked about his personal philosophy. He is a change agent and believes the most important thing is informed choice, not a paternalistic medical model. Budgets are not the most important aspect of the program. They can be modified to adjust the highest priority. We must deliver quality services and not deny services based on budget if the services are reasonable and necessary.

We have a huge problem with our new case management system, MACS. It seemed to work in the test environment, but sometimes things are mysteriously added or deleted; a job that previously took 5 minutes can now take 3 hours (no exaggeration); promised reports are not available or are inaccurate; and many functions from the old system are still not available. We are working with the vendor to get these things corrected.

Another issue is that WIOA requires that 15% of our federal grant must be set aside for Pre-Employment Transitions Services (PETS) for high school students. This amounts to being able to spend only 85% of the grant on the people we used to serve—and the grant did not increase. We may need to go to Order of Selection (waiting list) to solve this.

Jim talked about the VRBS mission statement—it has been changed to more accurately reflect the wording in WIOA. In the past we've always done grass roots development of the mission. Now days, WIOA is top down. Our mission is about maximizing employment for people with disabilities, not just equalizing the playing field. This is a civil right for people with disabilities. Chanda suggested adding “Real jobs with real wages”. [this was added later]

Movin' On Report—Amy Capalupo

Nineteen students attended the four day workshop at the University of Montana. Disabilities included 3 people who were hard of hearing, 3 students with vision impairments, 3 students with mobility impairments, and others who were LD, ADHD, ASD, chronic health impairment, and psychiatric disability. Students stayed on campus, and attended presentations on disability rights, history and culture, how to request reasonable modifications and assistive technology. They also attended two college classes, used public transportation, and participated in fun activities on campus.

Brochure Draft and Community Rehabilitation Program—Michelle Pickell

Michelle presented an employer brochure she had been working on and got feedback from the Council. The brochure could be given to an employer in conjunction with a verbal message. Council ideas (none voted on) included leave out assessment, but put in more on accommodations; maybe use 8 ½ X 11 paper to make it easier to file; keep it simple; put it on line; use real photographs; may be too busy looking. Everyone agreed it was a great start and appreciated Michelle's initiative on this. Chanda agreed to work with Michelle on this.

Michelle also suggested sending out a survey to the Community Rehabilitation Providers (CRPs) to help cement the relationship between VRBS and the providers. Michelle agreed to help put this together. Tom mentioned that the SILC is doing a survey mostly on subminimum wages. Jim mentioned that in the future (maybe next summer) VRBS will no longer contract with CRPs that are 14c (subminimum wage) providers. Schools are not allowed to contract with 14c providers for services to students.

ASPIRE Update—Mary Taylor

ASPIRE is a federally funded research study of 14-16 year old students who are on SSI. Montana is part of a six state consortium participating in the study. Montana must enroll 130 students, half for the control group and half for the services group. Fifty students are enrolled so far. There are 3 case managers working on the enrollment. The project has signed contracts for parent training (PLUK), financial training (Rural Dynamics), self-determination training (centers for independent living) and benefits counseling (centers for independent living and MSU-Billings). If someone knows of a student who is on SSI and between the ages of 14 and 16 who might want to participate, they can contact Mary.

Parents Let's Unite for Kids (PLUK)

In the afternoon, the Council went to the PLUK office where Roger Holt, PLUK director, and some of his staff presented on the services PLUK provides. PLUK offers peer to peer services, facilitator services, and coaching services. Staff are located in all major Montana communities, and anyone can call PLUK about anything.

Friday, September 11, 2015

Training, Transitions, and ACES—Mark Mahnke

Mark reported on the agency training activities. There will be a webinar on September 16 on the Pre-Employment Transitions Services which will focus on services to schools and how VRBS staff will be involved. The November webinar will be about ACES (Adverse Childhood Experiences). The department's goal is that we will become a trauma informed agency. Mark is the facilitator for VRBS.

Governor's Report Recommendations, Personal Adjustment RFP—Peggy Williams

Mike was unable to attend the meeting, so Peggy facilitated the discussion:

RECOMMENDATIONS

INTERNAL CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

- Review VRBS quality assurance procedures. The procedures should focus on measuring results.
- Reduce staff overload. Review staffing to see if assignments can be adjusted to be more efficient. While adding new staff does not seem to be an option in the near future, perhaps there should be a review of potential staffing needs, so the agency is ready to act should the opportunity for new staff positions arise. Review the potential for temporary services options in staff overload areas.
- Make the problems related to the new case management system (MACS) a short term emergency priority and develop an action plan to alleviate impact on staff as much as possible.

PROVIDE 21st CENTURY QUALITY SERVICE

- Make sure consumers can financially benefit from going to work. Assist consumers in understanding the ramifications that working has on their various benefits in order for them to make an informed choice on whether to work and how much to work.
- Improve the VRBS image in electronic media. Consider quick reference codes and hash tags. Consider developing an app and utilizing social media networks. The agency should contract with someone with significant web development and social media experience to assist with the update.
- WIOA is a significant change in direction for VR nationally. VRBS needs to develop a clear set of statements on VRBS's plans related to the primary changes. The messages developed needs to be used consistently in communication with the public and stakeholders. The messages should be made available on the agency website.

NETWORK WITH OTHER AGENCIES AND EMPLOYERS

- If VRBS again closes categories of service due to Order of Selection, consumers should be given as much direction as possible on what other agencies may be able to assist them.
- VRBS should partner more with education.
- Complete a brochure targeting employers in order to make them aware of employer services available to them through VRBS.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- The Council was renamed the Montana State Rehabilitation Council to align more closely with language in WIOA.
- The Council developed a new mission statement was developed and approved to align more closely with WIOA.
- The Council held a meeting at the Parent Training Center, Parents Let's Unite for Kids.
- The Council held a joint meeting with the Special Education Advisory Council.
- The Council had more interaction with other agencies and stakeholders such as the Developmental Disabilities Program and Society for Human Resources Management (SHRM).
- The Council assisted with plans for more presence in the schools.
- A Council representative attended the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) and the National Coalition of State Rehabilitation Councils (NCSRC) national meetings.

PERSONAL ADJUSTMENT RFP

VRBS is planning to issue a Request for Proposals (RFP) to provide PETS-type services to young people aged 14-21 who are not enrolled in high school and who have the most significant disabilities. Services to be provided would include job exploration counseling, work based learning experiences, counseling on opportunities for enrollment in post-secondary education, work place readiness training, and self advocacy training. The plan would be for one contract per region to be awarded.

Blind and Low Vision Lab—Shannon Payne and Stacy Ferguson

Shannon and Stacy demonstrated some of the low vision supplies and equipment that are used with blind and low vision consumers.

Field Services Report—Chanda Hermanson

Chanda talked about the 3 appeals since she started: (1) a client requested his case be closed and changed his mind the next day—case was settled; (2) eligibility decision—overturned at an administrative review; (3) HIPAA violation—dismissed because it was the wrong venue.

She also mentioned morale (bad because of the problems with the new case management system; case reviews (coming up in September); policy manual (language update-but no changes-by the Futures Group—not published yet); and local town hall meetings (4 meetings) to discuss WIOA changes (this will be a dialog).

Miscellaneous

- Michelle Pickell was selected to represent the Council at the NCSRC, CSAVR, and NCSAB meetings in Seattle in November.
- Next meeting will be November 12—all day, in person, in Helena.

The meeting was adjourned.