

**Montana VR Council
Meeting Minutes
January 17-18, 2013**

Vocational Rehabilitation Council

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Board of Investments Room--Helena

Members present: Shaunda Albert, Amy Capalupo, Nina Cramer, Michael DesRosier, Anna Gibbs, Mary Hall, Char Harasymczuk, Rick Heitz, Rosalie Hollimon, Robin Johnson, Dale Mahugh (Thursday), Jim Marks, Lois McElravy, Quentin Schroeter, John Senn

Members absent: Mona Amundson, Prairie Bighorn, Kate Gangner, Chanda Hermanson, Marla Swanby, Mike Woods

Staff and visitors present: Peggy Williams, Barb Varnum, Mike Hermanson, Beverly Berg, Barb Schiedermayer (Friday), Shawn Tulloch, Donna Harris

Thursday, January 17

Nina Cramer called the meeting to order and reviewed the Council Mission and Vision and the Operating Principles. The October minutes were approved. There was no public comment.

Directors report—Jim Marks

On the federal side, Jim talked about the fiscal cliff—federal cuts if Congress can't reach an agreement on spending cuts. Most of VR's funding is from the federal government. Congress did pass some legislation to avoid the major cuts, but some cuts will still occur in March. VR is expecting a cut of about 7.8%—about \$1.3 million of federal funds unless Congress makes some last minute changes. These cuts, referred to as sequestration, would force Montana into order of selection.

Regarding the Affordable Care Act, national studies have shown that about 13% of VR expenditures are spent on physical restoration (medical costs) and diagnostic costs. There is a good chance that many of those costs will be picked up by the Affordable Care Act. This will depend on the essential benefits that Montana decides on—that is, the floor for benefits. Montana is also looking at a Medicaid expansion, moving from serving people at 133% of poverty to 138% of poverty. This expansion would be covered by the federal government.

On the state side, Montana has a new governor, Steve Bullock, and a new department director for the Department of Public Health and Human Services, Richard Opper. Vocational Rehabilitation's budget will be heard in the legislature (Joint Health and Human Services Subcommittee) on February 5 at 8:00 am in room 102. During the hearing, the subcommittee will consider two decision packages—a budget increase for the Montana Telecommunications Access Program (MTAP) relay service, and a cost of living increase for some of the VR service providers. In addition, another item was already put into the initial copy of the budget—a contingency fund for the MTAP program for when the federal government moves some video relay costs to the states. The legislative subcommittee has already deleted most of the state's cost of living adjustments from the Governor's proposed budget. These would include rent adjustments for state facilities and employee pay adjustments that were made last year. Jim stated that he didn't expect further cuts at the division level.

Jim discussed a proposed name change for the program. Montana Vocational Rehabilitation and Blind Low Vision (MVR/BLV) Services (the current name) are located in the Disability Employment and Transitions Division in the Department of Public Health and Human Services. MVR/BLV is a mouthful, and we are looking at shortening it and making it more meaningful and friendlier. A priority is to include the word “Blind” in the name. Jim asked the Council for ideas. Suggestions included using the word “services” rather than “program”, because it sounds friendlier to people outside state government. Another suggestion was to Google the acronym to see if other entities were using the same acronym. Use of “vision” or “visual” instead of “blind” was mentioned, but Jim pointed out that the blind community prefers “blind”. Jim will take the suggestions, and come up with a name.

Field Services Update—Barb Varnum

Barb talked about Order of Selection (OOS). OOS means deciding in what order to serve people with disabilities when VR does not have enough resources to serve everyone. The Rehabilitation Act states that if this occurs, states will serve the most significantly disabled people first. Each state can set up criteria to determine who is most significantly disabled. Montana already has four categories established for the different levels of disabilities. Current clients who have been determined eligible or who are currently in a plan are grandfathered in and will continue to receive services. Montana VR is currently serving all people who have applied, but is expecting that there will not be enough resources to serve everyone in the future. Therefore, the agency is working on plans to implement OOS when it is needed.

LR121 was passed by 80% of voters in November. This will affect Vocational Rehabilitation and a number of other state programs. LR121 says that people need to provide proof they are a US citizen or a lawful alien before they receive certain state services. However, a group has filed for a temporary restraining order to prevent this law from being implemented, and the hearing for this will be on February 7. Barb has drafted a plan modeled on the plan that Medicaid has in place. An estimated 5,000 illegal aliens reside in Montana.

As a result of the Rehabilitation Services Administration review last spring, Barb is working on a corrective action plan to address the deficiencies. Specifically, VR needs to come up with a system to make sure that all individual plans for employment are developed within 120 days. This is hard to do in rural areas when a counselor may only visit the client once a month. Barb is working on a new policy to make sure this will occur. The new case management system will make this easier to monitor. Also, VR must revise its agreement with the Office of Public Instruction, and Jim will work on this.

Barb talked about the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation meeting she attended in November. The federal Talent Acquisition Portal will be coming soon which will advertise federal jobs in states. Another item discussed was a survey conducted in California that showed the effectiveness of on-the-job-training (OJT). California found that OJT services doubled the rate of employment, and it was most effective among people with mental illness and substance abuse. Another survey showed that among people who are legally blind, people who used Braille, had a cane, and had more education had a higher employment rate and better pay.

Independent Living—Rick Heitz

Rick gave an overview of independent living services and the programs that are offered by his center in Kalispell. He specifically mentioned Living Well with a Disability, Working Well with a Disability, peer advocacy, self-directed personal assistance, disability awareness training, and independent living skills.

Governor's Report, Unserved/Underserved Analysis, Strategic Plan Recommendations—Mike Hermanson

Mike handed out the Governor's Report, and he mentioned that it is also on the website.

Mike discussed the unserved/underserved reports that he had prepared. He stated that Native Americans and people with psychological disabilities had lower successes (status 26—got jobs). He stated that the information relates to “cases” not “persons”—persons can have more than one case, and some disabilities may be more likely to have more than one case. He will be looking at the total cases per person and calculation the cost per person.

The annual public hearing will be March 22. In addition, there is a spot on the website to provide information.

Mike also led the group in a discussion of the goals in the state plan. Some of the comments were:

- Is the IPE goal of development within 120 days realistic?
- Having the new Polson office should help speed things up there.
- Maybe VR could access information like Medicaid automatically.
- Counselor should not impose road blocks—clients need to decide.
- Some smaller offices may feel isolated –maybe use Skype
- Survey the counselors to see how they feel about their jobs, but use different media like online, verbal, Survey Monkey.
- Give counselors immediate feedback when they do well or when they have a problem.
- Offer specialty support, like for autism.
- Satellite offices need more support.
- Figure out a way to get consistent way of looking at client feedback for Community Rehab Programs.
- Use electronic files more.
- Participate in Community Management Team meetings.
- Monthly meetings between VR counselor and 121 counselor work well in Polson.
- Use other resources-beyond the school network-to get involved with youth.
- Get involved quickly with youth before graduation.
- Counselors need training on how to effectively participate in IEP meetings.
- Promote the agency more. One person on the Council had never heard of Vocational Rehabilitation until he was on the Council.
- Promote more self employment
- People think they have to work full time if they want services from VR.

Business Enterprise Program—Donna Harris

Montana VR/Blind and Low Vision contracts for three vending routes run by people with visual impairments. These are located in Helena, Missoula, and Billings. Donna Harris, the Helena vendor, started her vending route in 2003, and she currently has 105 beverage and snack machines. She contracts out some of her work (in the prison and in Warm Springs). She has one employee and a driver. She works close to full time-- 3 days a week on her route, and then does paper work the other two days. Her prices are comparable to those in a convenience store. Last year her income was down significantly because of the economy.

Blind and Low Vision Update—Beverly Berg

Beverly discussed the consumer organizations for people who are blind. The Montana Association for the Blind recently dis-affiliated with the National Federation of the Blind. They will continue to offer the summer school for the blind and the loan programs. A new chapter of the National Federation of the Blind has been started in Montana. This organization will concentrate on national blind issues and will have more of a political focus. There is another Montana organization with just a few members—American Council for the Blind. Blind and Low Vision Services will talk with all the organizations.

Blind and Low Vision Services will be developing a training video as part of the Money Follows the Person grant. The video will be useful in helping people who are blind/low vision become more independent.

Friday, January 18

Training Module—Peggy Williams

Peggy went through the Quality Assurance module in the training series.

Deaf Services Update—Shawn Tulloch

Shawn has put together a list of qualified interpreters, and she will update it every few months. Last week she teleconferenced with the VR counselors who serve people who are deaf or hard of hearing. She also is working on video remote interpreting (VRI) where an online interpreter will sign for a meeting between people who are deaf and non-deaf. The cost is about \$80 per hour. An in-person interpreter is always the first choice, but this is a solution when an in-person interpreter cannot be found. Some of the VR offices have equipment set up for VRI and can use it. Shawn is also looking at iPhone applications for people who are deaf. She is researching drug and alcohol programs that serve people who are deaf (none in Montana), post secondary programs that are deaf-friendly, and sign language classes (MSDB, MSU-Billings, online).

Training, Transitions, and Futures—Barb Schiedermayer

In the area of training, Barb is working on getting counselors qualified (getting their masters degrees) and helping staff stay qualified (continuing education). Currently four staff are working on their master's degrees and three are applying for graduate school. For continuing education, Barb arranges bimonthly webinars, the spring staff meeting, and outside training (transitions conference, Montana Association of Rehabilitation). The spring staff meeting will cover the Employment First Initiative, motivational interviewing, evolving rehabilitation goals, I Pads and applications, Order of Selection, and our new case management system.

In the area of transitions, Barb noted that VR had 24% more successful closures in 2012 than in 2011.

In the area of Futures, Barb reported that a meeting is scheduled for later this month. Participants will look at temperament and traits and how they relate to employment; work on revising the VR Policy Manual to make it more user friendly and useable; and discuss the Sharepoint site (which can be used to store documents).

RSA Reports—Peggy Williams

Peggy went over all the reports that VR submitted to the federal government in FY 12.

Legislative bills—Peggy Williams

Peggy also briefly described the bills before the Legislature that affect people with disabilities. An updated list is attached to the minutes.

Other business

Nina asked if anyone was interested in attending the VR spring staff meeting in April. Nina will attend, and one other person could go. Nina asked anyone interested to tell Peggy by January 25.

Nina also asked if anyone was interested in attending the CSAVR meeting and NCSRC training in Washington DC. Lois said she was interested.

Election of Officers

Nina Cramer was elected chair, and Rick Heitz was elected vice-chair.

Next meeting

Next meeting will be May 9-10. Items for the agenda include independent living joint meeting, veterans rehab program, and VRI demonstration

Legislation We Are Following

1-28-2013

Disability Related Bills

HB 123—Revise developmental disability laws. This bill updates the terminology from mental retardation to intellectual disability.

SB 101—Revise qualifications to obtain a permit to hunt from a vehicle. This bill revises the current law which allows certain people with disabilities to hunt from a vehicle. It tightens the restrictions so that fewer people would qualify and it is supported by many in the disability community.

HB 179—Allow certain hunting licenses for disabled armed forces members. This bill allows armed forces members who have a disability access to the same hunting licenses that disabled veterans have.

HB 113—Provide Medicaid coverage for orientation and mobility services. This bill would require Medicaid to pay for orientation and mobility services for children up to age 18. Some advocates oppose this bill because it is not a medical service and currently special ed pays for the services. It appears that this bill will be withdrawn, and DPHHS will go ahead and pay for the services with Medicaid (it doesn't require a law change).

HB 108—Revise registration and proof of identity requirements for voting. This bill would require a picture id for voting, rather than the currently allowed non-picture id options. It is not supported by the disability community, and it was tabled in committee on January 25.

HB 30—Revise late registration laws—This bill would eliminate same day voter registration and require that all registrations be completed by noon Friday before the election. This bill is opposed by disability groups, because fewer people will be able to vote. This bill passed in committee on January 25.

SB 185—Revise veteran public employment hiring laws. This bill clarifies the order of preferences between disabled veterans, people with disabilities, and others eligible for a hiring preference.

Transportation bills

HB 316—Revise fuel tax revenue to fund local public transportation. This bill would help fund transportation in communities.

LC 1416—Remove PSC authority over motor carriers and transfer certain duties. This bill would mean that taxi companies would no longer be governed by the Public Services Commission.

Independent Living Priorities

Community first choice: refinancing services that help aging and disabled Montanans live at home—This budget item includes \$17 million in federal spending authority to be used to refinance and enhance Montana's system of Medicaid funded in-home personal assistance services. This is in the Governor's budget, and was discussed recently at the Senior and Long Term budget hearing. This is not an expansion—no new people will be added, but it will improve the services for those people currently on this program.

Personal assistance services funding—This budget item will avoid a 2.22% reduction to the personal assistance program. It was funded last biennium on a “one time only” basis, meaning that funding will end on July 1, 2013. Last session the Legislature proposed a cut to the program by reducing the amount of time PAS consumers have available to them for meal preparation to four hours per week. Later during the legislative session, a deal was worked out to restore the cut, but only until July 1, 2013. Independent living advocates are trying to get this amount permanently restored. It is not in the Governor’s budget, but it was talked about during the Senior and Long Term Care budget hearing.

Health care for health care workers—This program was initially approved during the 2007 Legislature, and helps fund the health care insurance for direct care workers. This program will expand the program and allow it to serve more workers. The cost is about \$1.7 million in total funds over the biennium (\$362,000 in state funds). It is included in the Governor’s budget.

Provider rate increases—This proposal is included in the Governor’s budget and would increase the amount that the state pays for certain services. It will affect many areas in the department, including nursing homes, personal assistance, and home and community services. Similar proposals have been included in the Developmental Services Division and the Disability Employment and Transitions Division (some providers). The amount of increase being proposed is 2% per year.

Montana Youth Transitions—This funding would help pay for the transitions conference, disability mentoring day, and the MY Transitions web site. It is not included in the Governor’s budget. The Legislature funded this program on a “one time only” basis during the 2009 legislative session. Since the proposal was introduced, the Governor’s office has directed to pay for the program during the current fiscal year, and it is not yet clear whether money will be available for the upcoming biennium or whether a bill will be needed to be introduced.