

**Montana VR Council
Meeting Minutes
October 3-4, 2013**

Vocational Rehabilitation Council

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Disability Rights Montana--Helena

Members present: Amy Capalupo, Nina Cramer, Michael DesRosier, Char Harasymczuk, Rick Heitz, Jim Marks, Lois McElravy, Quentin Schroeter, John Senn, Mona Amundson, Chanda Hermanson, Tom Osborn, Rosalie Hollimon

Members absent: Prairie Bighorn, Marla Swanby, Mary Hall (excused), Kate Gangner (excused), Mike Woods (excused), Anna Gibbs (excused), Robin Johnson (excused), Shaunda Albert (excused), Dale Mahugh (excused)

Staff and visitors present: Peggy Williams, Barb Varnum, Mike Hermanson, Barb Schiedermayer (Thursday), Shawn Tulloch, Karie Whitlock, Marilyn Daumiller, Cynthia Hollimon, Last Chance Pow Wow Association representatives, Disability Rights Montana representatives

Thursday, October 3

Nina Cramer called the meeting to order and reviewed the Council Mission and Vision and the Operating Principles. On behalf of Disability Rights Montana, Chanda welcomed the Council to the Disability Rights Montana conference room. The July minutes were approved. There was no public comment.

VR Update

Jim Marks talked about the federal government shutdown. In our division, this will mostly affect Disability Determination Services which is totally federally funded. However, the Department of Public Health and Human Services has said that they will pay the costs for now, and then the federal government can reimburse the department. In the Rehabilitation Services Administration, the federal agency that governs Vocational Rehabilitation, only a few employees are working.

There is a good chance that sequestration will continue. For Vocational Rehabilitation, this is a cut of a little over 1%, and for Independent Living, the cut is a little over 5%.

Jim also discussed the progress of the federal reauthorization of the Rehabilitation Act. SB1356 is controversial, because different disability groups have differing views. For example the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation does not like the proposed move from the federal Department of Education to the Department of Labor and the reduction of counselor qualifications. Independent Living advocates like the idea of being separate from Vocational Rehabilitation. Thus the Senate is getting mixed messages. The bill has a 15% set aside for transitions, and the feeling is that Order of Selection will also affect transitions services, but Jim thinks we would still meet the 15%. Some Council members thought that Department of Labor was a logical place for VR to be. Jim stated that even if the federal program were moved to Department of Labor, the state program would stay with the Department of Public Health and Human Services. The bill also allows subminimum wage jobs to count as an acceptable employment outcome. In Montana last year, only four people were placed in subminimum wage jobs, and they were not counted as successful outcomes.

Jim mentioned that the state did receive the Promise Grant which affects kids age 14 – 16 who are on Supplemental Security Income. There will be both a control group and a group of people who receive services. This is a five year grant, and we are coordinating with Department of Labor and Office of Public Instruction. Our grant is part of a six-state consortium, led by Utah.

Field Services Update

Barb Varnum stated that VRB will be going to a new case management system in November and will be doing training for Order of Selection (OOS) in November also. Order of Selection is the process of prioritizing who will get services if VRB does not have enough money to serve everyone. Based on our budget and expenditures, we anticipate implementing Order of Selection sometime this year. Federal law requires that we serve the most significantly disabled people first, and VRB has developed a “disability level order” with three tiers. The draft OOS Frequently Asked Questions was sent out for review—comments are due October 20. The OOS policy was changed to note that anyone who had been accepted for service when the OOS was implemented would be served, as opposed to only serving those who had a plan written.

Barb talked about the fair hearing report she submits to the federal government. Last year there were 9 fair hearing requests all of which were dismissed. She also talked about the case review session that was held in August, where VRB brings supervisors and a few counselors in to review cases from across the state. The purpose is to see if there are any casework trends that need to be addressed.

Native American Presentation

The Last Chance Pow Wow Association prepared lunch, talked to the Council, and demonstrated drumming, singing, and dancing.

Futures Group

Barb Schiedermayer talked about VRB’s leadership program, Futures. The key to this program is the experiential component where members do a meaningful project. Currently they are working on a group project of rewriting the VRB policy manual. This is a huge undertaking, and the purpose is to make the policy manual more useful and user friendly. The policies are not being changed. In the new manual, the language will be simpler, and hyperlinks to the federal regulations and to the Rehabilitation Act will be provided.

Stats at a Glance

Peggy Williams went over the VRB Services statistics for the year ending September 30, 2013. The number of people who went to work increased from 830 last year to 896 this year. The average hourly wage of the people who went to work was \$12.16. VRB Services passed the federal Standards and Indicators and only missed one indicator (rehabilitation rate).

NCSRC (National Coalition of State Rehabilitation Councils)

The Council voted to join the National Coalition of State Rehabilitation Councils and to review this decision in two years. The Council would like to get information on the bi monthly teleconference calls, and Peggy will see that this happens. Peggy will also send out information on how to get on the NCSRC mailing list.

Friday, October 4

SRC Training Module

The Council reviewed the History of Vocational Rehabilitation module.

Governor's Report, Strategic Plan Update

Mike Hermanson passed out a summary of the Governor's Report recommendations, and the Council added one relating to Main Street Montana participation.

Mike went over the Strategic Plan update, and mentioned that the next meeting would have the final report of the 2011-2013 plan. Then we would start talking about the 2014-2016 plan.

Blind and Low Vision Update

Bev Berg reported that Cindy Letcher was hired as a counselor in Great Falls office in July. She is totally blind. The only person who is not blind in the Great Falls office is the secretary. We are learning about how many of our forms are not accessible. The current case management system is not accessible so Cindy needs to save those documents, i.e. plans, financials, journal entries, in Word documents.

The focus forum this year was held in Missoula. The questions we asked related to the experiences clients and former clients had related to learning about technology available to them, obtaining the technology, and learning to use the technology. This is being followed up with discussions at the staff meetings on how we can improve services related to technology.

Paul Suptic has been working with the staff in the Missoula office and Fuddruckers to make a cashier position accessible for a totally blind individual. Paul is working on modifying the computer system for taking orders, and he has had to work with the software company. Fuddruckers has been working hard to help this be successful. The employer cost will be \$50 a month to continue the software program.

White Cane day is October 15. The day relates to advocacy issue and safety.

Deaf Services

Shawn Tulloch gave an overview of deafness, discussing the different categories (Deaf culture, hard of hearing, late deafened, deaf-blind) and some of the advocacy organizations. She mentioned captioning on movies—Kalispell has a theater that has hand held captioning; Netflix does captioning with streaming. Shawn also shared some myths: You're speaking, therefore you can hear; you can read lips, so you understand everything (people only get 30% of the information when reading lips). She also mentioned that 90% of deaf people come from hearing families. She suggested that if a deaf or hard of hearing person is having a hard time understanding you, you should not increase your normal voice or over emphasize—you can always write.

Meeting Dates for Next Year

January 16-17, 2014

May 8-9, 2014

September 18-19, 2014

November 7—Teleconference

Note: We will try to hold one meeting at the Montana School for Deaf and Blind. Shawn will work to set it up.

Peggy will look into using Dropbox to send out the attachments.