

# **2019 MONTANA'S STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL**

## **GOVERNOR'S REPORT**

- 1964 Individuals served by Vocational Rehabilitation and Blind Services (VRBS)
- 4562 Individuals served by Independent Living Services
- 354 Individuals served by Older Blind Services
- 240 Individuals served by Extended Employment Services

### **VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION & BLIND SERVICES (VRBS) SUCCESSFUL JOB PLACEMENTS**

- 2019: 213
- 2018: 292
- 2017: 511

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Alternative accessible formats of this publication will be provided upon request. For further information call 406-444-2590.

For more information on VRBS, please visit our website:  
[www.vocrehab.mt.gov](http://www.vocrehab.mt.gov).

### **STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL (SRC)**

**Members:** Monique Casbeer, SRC Chair Tiffany Costa, Barbara Davis, Ex Officio Chanda Hermanson-Dudley, Coreen Faulkner, Kathy Hampton, SRC Vice Chair Brook Hodge, Andy Kemp, Dale

Kimmet, Michele Letendre, Denise May, Kathy Meier, and Marcy Roberts

**Mission Statement:** The State Rehabilitation Council advises the Vocational Rehabilitation and Blind Services program to improve policies, programs, and delivery of services through a collaborative effort with other agencies.

### **MESSAGE FROM THE STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL**

It has been an honor to serve as the Chair for Montana's State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) for 2019. The purpose of the Montana State Rehabilitation Council is to advise the Vocational Rehabilitation and Blind Services (VRBS) program on policy and program issues, delivery of services to consumers, and methods for reaching potential consumers.

This report highlights many of the activities and accomplishments of the SRC and includes success stories of vocational rehabilitation consumers. I am proud to say that the SRC has successfully implemented workgroup committees this year for education and membership; planning and review; consumer satisfaction and needs assessment; and policy, procedure, and personnel development.

The SRC's accomplishments include securing a national trainer from the National Disability Rights Network (NDRN) to assist the council in training new members. The training was focused on the roles and responsibilities of SRC members in reviewing and analyzing data to determine the effectiveness of the Consumer Survey. Members were also trained on the development of the State Plan and Annual Report, and the process of listening to the consumers' needs and assisting them with the VRBS process.

The VRBS program serves thousands of Montanans with disabilities statewide by providing supports to help them thrive in their community. The success stories illustrated in this report are made possible through the dedication of VRBS staff, providers,

local businesses, and other key stakeholders who offer their steadfast support.

I look forward to 2020 and continuing to serve as a disability advocate and the Chair for Montana's State Rehabilitation Council.

*Tiffany Costa, SRC Chairperson*

### **State Rehabilitation Council Achievements:**

- Continued to participate in the Windmills module workshops.
- Actively recruiting members to serve on the Council.
- Continue to review and provide guidance to VRBS on changes necessary to meet the challenges of WIOA and Montana's State Plan.
- Committees continue to meet: Planning and Review; Consumer Satisfaction & Needs Assessment; Education & Membership, and Policy, Procedure, & Personnel Development. Committees meet at each Council meeting to work on current Council projects.
- Training with Cheryl Harris-Bates of the National Disability Rights Network: "the Role of the Advocate and State Rehabilitation Council."

### **VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION BLIND SERVICES (VRBS) SUCCESS STORY**

This case is an example of how VRBS can change a person's life. Ms. P's case was a success because she was committed to changing her life regardless of her past and ongoing fears and vulnerabilities. She began working with VRBS in late 2015 and was dealing with numerous issues including unstable housing, unreliable transportation, longstanding unemployment, difficulty maintaining sobriety, struggling with mental illness, loss-related trauma issues, oppression related to her sexual orientation, and legal problems among others.

Over the course of six years, VRBS provided the following: four years of college training; vocational counseling and guidance;

referral to mental health professionals for medication and therapy; assistance in getting vision screening and obtaining corrective lenses; bus passes, gas allowances, and car repairs; a phone and phone plan; Licensed Addition Counselor (LAC) application and license exam fees; and a laptop computer for school and work.

Ms. P. completed her college training, a major life accomplishment not possible without VRBS and her personal dedication, perseverance, and hard work. In addition, she obtained employment as a LAC and her case was successfully closed on February 5, 2018.

### **BLIND AND LOW VISION SERVICES (BLVS) SUCCESS STORY**

This client, with diagnoses of blindness and Asperger's, applied for VRBS services in 2015. To reach his goals of independence in the home, BLVS staff completed a cane assessment, home assessment, and mobility training. Through mobility training, he learned how to navigate to various locations within his apartment complex and elsewhere as well as how to independently use the paratransit bus, including -- how to call for a ride, how and what time to be ready, and where to wait for pick-up.

Prior to receiving VRBS, all his daily living tasks were provided by his PCAs. Through training in his home on cooking, cleaning, laundry and other household tasks, he was able to gain more independence and cut back on his PCA services. These new skills also served a dual purpose of enhancing his employability.

Once referred by VRBS for work experiences in the community, he quickly started working as a dishwasher. VRBS staff then assisted with several other work experiences. He demonstrated that while he needs a little extra support to learn a task, he does well on his own once he learns them and thrives off of social contact in the work environment. He eventually secured

employment at a local restaurant and his case was closed successfully in August 2018.

### **VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION/TRIBAL VR SUCCESS STORY**

This VRBS client was a Social Security Disability recipient with a spinal cord injury and cognitive issues secondary to a motor vehicle accident. He used a wheelchair and is unable to walk, stand, lift or carry items, and experiences low stamina.

He was interested in VRBS assistance with engaging in the community to supplement his income. He wanted to open a computer repair shop because the closest comparable business from the reservation was 100 miles away.

Since the client was a member of the Northern Cheyenne Tribe, his VRBS counselor connected with the Tribal VR 121 Program and both programs worked together to serve the client. The client, VRBS, and Tribal VR 121 Program developed a business plan and decided what startup costs were needed. Those start-up costs were shared by VRBS and the Tribal VR 121. The case was closed successfully, and this shop remains open, serving the Northern Cheyenne community today.

### **HIGH SCHOOL TRANSITION SUCCESS STORY**

In 2013 this client, a high school student with ADHD and dyslexia, was found eligible for VRBS. He was struggling academically but had a desire to receive a welding certification. When he turned 18, he also faced housing issues, as his mother moved out of state, leaving him on his own.

In the fall of 2013, he started the two-year welding program at Dawson Community College and struggled with English and math classes throughout. He worked with a tutor for English and took remedial math, eventually passing both. By his third semester, the welding program was cancelled. Since he had recently

obtained a part-time job during the second semester making \$14.00 an hour, he chose to not return to school.

After attempting to join the Boilermakers Union, he decided to re-enroll in a welding program and obtained a part-time job with Pioneer Aerostructures welding on the weekends while he attended school. When he successfully completed his education in 2018, he was offered and accepted a raise and full-time position welding for Pioneer Aerostructures. He continues to work there today and says he loves his job. His case was successfully closed in 2018.

### **STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL RECOMMENDATIONS:** **INTERNAL CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT**

- VRBS needs to review current rules and make revisions that reflect WIOA values of:
  - Preparing youth with disabilities for meaningful careers,
  - Competitive/integrated employment for all persons with disabilities, and
  - Services to employers
- VRBS needs to engage staff in WIOA changes to enhance outreach to business partners.
- VRBS should enhance the staff's ability to assist all consumers in achieving competitive/integrated employment.
- VRBS needs to continue to handle the financial situation in order to proactively recruit qualified staff, to make corrective actions from RSA monitoring, and to continue to move off the Order of Selection.

### **PROVIDE 21<sup>st</sup> CENTURY QUALITY SERVICE**

- VRBS should coordinate with service providers, such as benefits planners, to make sure consumers can financially benefit from employment.
- VRBS, along with WIOA partners, should continue and improve outreach efforts to businesses.
- VRBS must continue to collect data and refine the approach to Pre-Employment Transition Services,

Competitive/Integrated Employment and Employer Services mandated under the WIOA.

### **NETWORK WITH OTHER AGENCIES & EMPLOYERS**

- With Order of Selection in place, VRBS should work to build strong relationships with other community partners to facilitate access to a broader array of services for Montanans with disabilities.
- VRBS should continue to partner with middle school, high school, and post-secondary levels of education.
- VRBS should continue its multiple contracts with high schools around the state to build on Pre-Employment Transition Services.