

**Montana State Rehabilitation Council
Wilderness Conference Room
February 27 & 28, 2020
Meeting Minutes**

Members present: Monique Casbeer, Tiffany Costa, Chanda Hermanson, Coreen Faulkner, Kathy Hampton, Dale Kimmet, Michele Letendre, Denise May, Marcy Roberts, Tom Sullivan, Sandy Taylor, and Marvin Weatherwax, Sr.

Members absent: Barbara Davis and Kathy Meier

Staff and guests: Beverly Berg, Beth Brenneman, Lacey Conzelman, Anna Gibbs, Bill Harant, Brook Hodge, Eliza Kragh, Shannon Lewis, Kim Marchwick (CART), Cheri Reed-Anderson, Jeanne Stone, Shawn Tulloch, and two sign language interpreters

Welcome and Introductions: Council Chair Tiffany Costa called the meeting to order. Introductions were made around the tables. Tom Sullivan, Sandy Taylor, and Marvin Weatherwax are the newest members of the Council.

November Meeting Minutes: Motion made to approve the November 7 & 8, 2019 meeting minutes unanimously.

Announcement:

- Tiffany informed the Council that the SRC meeting date (October 23 & 24) conflicted with Montana Association for Rehabilitation conference dates (October 21 – 23). This will be discussed tomorrow.

Public Comments:

- Tiffany shared with the Council about the pay wage discrepancy – a person applying at Office of Public Assistance is starting out at \$20.23/hour and the VR counselors starts at \$16.65/hour. She would like the Council to do a salary study & comparable job description looking at the wages.

Federal/State updates & Field Services updates, Chanda Hermanson:

Chanda reported that this year is the 100th year of vocational rehabilitation programs (VR100 Celebration). October 6th is reserved for this celebration in Montana. Central Office is now fully staffed. Andrew Lowney has been hired as the Pre-Employment Transition Service specialist in Missoula. Chanda informed the Council that several positions are being posted.

Montana Telecommunication Access Program celebrated 30th Anniversary in the Rotunda with the Governor last week. Friends of Rehab is an email distribution for everyone – please contact if you have not received it or want to be on the email list. As of today, 430 people were invited off the waiting list. About 218 IPEs were written. Montana Accounting and Case Management Systems (MACS) is the case management that VRBS staff uses – it has been problematic for several years. DETD has been in contact with Wellsky to create a new case management system with a better internal control and many more functions. It will take time to build the program and to train the staff on how to use it – may take ten months. All the information about State Plan, comprehensive needs assessment, focus forum, information from employers, and feedbacks will be shared during the Strategic Planning session on May 13th. Council members are invited to attend it. Chanda talked about the need to update the Administrative Rules of Montana to make them more user-friendly; the Council will be a part of this update. Extended Employment program is explained for the Council members – this is for those who need long-term job support. Chanda also talked about the salary wage for the VR counselors. It is \$17.50/hour without a Master's. They are expected to earn their Master's while working full-time. Once they get a Master's, it goes up to \$18.90/hour. She and Anna are working to bring those up to \$20/hour for training position and then up to \$23.00/hour after earning a Master's. All the State jobs are being re-classified. The pay for counselor supervisor is low and Chanda is working on this issue as well.

Budget Report and Program Support & Operations Update, Anna

Gibbs: Anna presented the Budget in the visual aid format to the Council. She reviewed a couple points: VRBS received FFY 2020 grant award of \$9,281,550 which results \$1,392,232.50 set aside for Pre-Employment Transition Services. This is good news as we were expected to be penalized for the overspent in 2016, but we got more than we expected. The State Share is \$2,512,033. As of January 2020, VRBS has spent \$2,183,323 for the program (personnel services--salaries & benefits for employees, operating expenses--rent, telephone, computers, etc., and client benefits). Funds from RSA are distributed to states based on the statutory formula based on population and per capita income to determine the amount of Federal funds made available to states for VR program. If there is a penalty, the amount is deducted from the grant before it is awarded. For the State Share, Montana contributes 21.3% of the total program cost. VRBS also receives income for reimbursement of VR services to the clients that are SSI & SSDI recipients under the Ticket to Work program – we received \$765,340. Anna reviewed the data dashboards of the first quarter of program year 2019 (July – September). She covered measurable skill gains, employment outcome at exit, pre-employment transition services

(percentage of different types of services provided), competitive integrated employment outcomes, and the summary of VR participants.

Field Services Update, Brook Hodge: Brook reported on the hiring update: Central Office is fully staffed; vocational counselor positions in Great Falls & Miles City are advertised; vision therapist position in Great Falls is also advertised. Additionally, administrative support positions in Kalispell and Bozeman are advertised. Interviews for the Missoula's vocational rehabilitation counselor is in progress and someone has been hired to fill the VR counselor position in Bozeman. Brook will post more job positions soon: administrative support in Butte, VR counselor in Helena, and orientation & mobility specialist in Great Falls. Brook has been working on two projects: customized employment and benefits counseling. In order to provide customized employment services to the clients, certification is required. We are contracted with Marc Gold & Associates to give a 3-day training on Discovery which will happen on April 6-8. This will help us to figure out what are the skills that the client has, what are their strengths, and so forth. It is more observation than assessment. After the client goes through the Discovery process, there will be a meeting with the client and family and support providers to review the results. This will help lead the client toward employment. A question was asked about how to access the customized employment. VR can refer the client to a certified provider and Developmental Disabilities Program can provide this as well. Brook asked Beverly to give update regarding the benefit counseling (more on this in BLVS report). Brook also talked about a couple procedures: one is the American Job logo needs to be on all VRBS documents, second is the computer purchase, comparable benefits and invitation off the waitlist (Order of Selection).

Overview & Descriptions of the State Plan (YouTube videos from RSA); Tiffany Costa: these 4-part videos can be found under National Clearinghouse of Rehabilitation Training Materials on YouTube.

Combined State Plan; Lacey Conzelman, Anna Gibbs, and Shannon Lewis: Anna explained that there is about 60 pages of Vocational Rehabilitation portion of the State Plan. It consists of what our Federal partners want us to report on how much the money was spent on, what are the data, who we are serving, how are we performing, etc. All of this according to the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act in 2014 required us to do. Shannon Lewis (Director of State Workforce Innovation Board) explained that WIOA requires partners to work on Combined State Plan which includes Title I – IV and other programs. The first goal is making the workforce and talent development system accessible for all Montanans including youths and those with barriers to employment. The next goal is to

align the programs so that all customers receive the services. Lastly, the programs are accountable for the clients' success. Lacey Conzelman explained the VR portion of the State Plan. SRC came up with a list of ten recommendations for the Governor's Report. Lacey informed the Council that VRBS has written responses to each of the recommendation in section A of the Title IV. Lacey reviewed each section such as cooperative agreements with other programs, coordination with employers, statewide assessments, state goals & priorities, order of selection, plans for distribution of the funds, etc. Lacey is also scheduling a Strategic Planning session on May 13th – the Council is welcome to attend.

Committees' Reports:

- Education & Membership
 - Denise May reported that there are four vacancies under business, industry, & labor, one vacancy under SWIB (although there may be someone interested in this), one vacancy under VR counselor (four has applied), two vacancies under disability advocates. The Committee will review the VR applicants and send a recommendation to the Council for their approval. The Committee also has some names to fill the business seats.
- Planning & Review
 - Tiffany would like the committee to look in improving the Governor's Report. She has seen other states' reports that are really cool.
 - Anna reported that the Committee will start reading the case stories to be shared with the Council. That is part of the Governor's Report.
- Consumer Satisfaction & Needs Assessment
 - Bill reported that Committee discussed the low returns on the survey and how to increase the returns. One idea is to give the survey during the closure interview. They also discussed having another survey during the process instead of just one at the end.
- Policy, Procedure, & Personnel Development
 - Kathy reported on the Ticket to Work program and how many people are not understanding it (this was during the time when program manager position was vacated). There will be staff meeting on March 30 – 31 and the new staff will learn the policy/procedures. The Committee also talked about reaching out to the clients on the waitlist – try different methods such as FaceBook or texting.

Windmills Training, Jeanne Stone of Missoula VR office and Cheri Reed-Anderson of Miles City VR office:

The Council participated in an activity.

Blind & Low Vision Services, Beverly Berg:

Beverly reported that there are three vacated positions: vision rehabilitation therapist and orientation & mobility specialist in Great Falls and a driver in Billings. If anyone interested in applying for the positions, they can go to Job Service links. Beverly also talked about benefit planning. But first she explained that due to WIOA, there have been some changes such as no homemaker services and no physical restoration (less referrals). More clients are having eye issues toward to the end of their career or already retired. That is where an idea for the BLVS staff to do the benefit planning. They are at the beginning stage – still working out details on training, how the referrals will be made, etc. Beverly moved on to Older Blind program (age 55 and up). There were 638 cases in 2010 – the number of cases went down to 355 last year. Types of services for them are: low vision assessment, assistive technology devices, O&M, communication, daily living, advocacy, counseling, and information & referral. The cases close when the client maintains independence.

Wrap-up:

- ⇒ Michele Letendre is voted as the Vice-Chair of the Council.
- ⇒ SRC meeting on August 13 & 14 in Browning is a go!
- ⇒ Council voted on changing the October SRC meeting dates to a ½ day on October 6th and a full day on October 7th. The ½ day on the 6th will allow time for VR 100 Celebration.
- ⇒ Chairs of SRC and SILC will meet to discuss agenda items for the Joint meeting on May 14th.
- ⇒ Possible agenda items for the next time:
 - Review case stories
 - Review consumer satisfaction survey results (Lacey Conzelman)
 - Overview of the May 13th Strategic Planning session (Council is invited to attend)
 - Joint SRC & SILC meeting on May 14th in the Wilderness Room.
 - SILC – State Plan