

**Montana State Rehabilitation Council and
Montana Statewide Independent Living Council
Joint Meeting
Virtual & In-Person Meeting
May 13, 2021
Meeting Minutes**

Members present: Scott Birkenbuel, Barbara Davis, Kathy Hampton, Chanda Hermanson, June Hermanson, David Hood, Renea Keough, Molly Kimmel, Eliza Kragh, Michele Letendre, Tom Manthey, Denise May, Kathy Meier, Carlos Ramalho, Cheri Reed-Anderson, Marcy Roberts, Emma Rooney, Tom Sullivan, Allyson Talaska, Tom Thompson, and Scott Williamson.

Members absent: Scott Eychner (excused), Joel Peden (excused)

Staff and guests: Lacey Conzelman, Anna Gibbs, Darrel Hannum, Bill Harant, Sarah Seltzer, Jean Schroeder (subbing for Sandy Taylor), Shawn Tulloch, two sign language interpreters, CART transcribers

Welcome and Introduction: Marcy called the meeting to order. Shawn Tulloch reminded the Council of ground rules for virtual/in-person meeting. Introductions were made.

What is the SILC? Chair June Hermanson; she reported on what Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC) can do based on Title 10 of the 1979 Reauthorization of the Rehab Act. There are four Centers for Independent Living in Montana and all have a vote on the Council. Along with representatives from the IL centers, the Council is comprised of people with disabilities. The Council writes a 3-year plan. One of the responsibilities is to monitor the independent living services are provided to people with disabilities across the state. Membership on the council is very low – we are seeking people with disabilities to serve on the Council.

What is the SRC? Chair Marcy Roberts; she gave a brief overview about State Rehabilitation Council (SRC). SRC advises Vocational Rehabilitation and Blind Services on policy and program issues, delivery of services to consumers and methods for reaching potential consumers. The Council has 22 seats with various representations including former VR clients, business, Native American VR project, advocacy, independent living, etc. There are a few vacant seats. The Council must have a majority with disabilities. There are four sub-committees: Education & Membership, Planning & Review, Consumer Satisfaction & Needs Assessment, Policy, Procedure & Personnel Development, and SRC Employer of the Year.

Legislative Impacts, DETD Administrator Chanda Hermanson reported on that the State Legislative sessions are completed. The stakeholders worked hard to get the seven FTE positions back but were not successful. Montana Telecommunications Access Program (MTAP) has a special revenue that collects a 10-cent tax from every phone bill. They go to a saving account because one of these days, FCC will transfer the cost of interstate captioning rates to this State. The account had over \$750,000. During the 2019 Legislative Session, it was taken out to fund the Addictive and Mental Health Disorder Division, Developmental Services Division and Extended Employment program. It was presented to the 2021 Legislation that continuing removing from MTAP fund to support other programs can drastically reduce MTAP fund. This means there would be cuts in other programs. Extended Employment program had about \$1.4 million in 2017. When the wildfire hit, there was a Special Session which then swept most of it and left EE about \$900,000 in the budget. The House Bill 233 which is extending fund for high school education up to age 21. This might impact our budget for Pre-Employment Transition Services to continue providing the services longer.

Legislative Impacts, SILC Chair June Hermanson reported that SILC has a Legislative Advocacy Committee chaired by Tom Osborn. This committee meet every other week through the year and more often during State Legislation. The committee reviews all the bills pertinent to people with disabilities. For instance, one of the topics was the spenddown for the medically needy program which has been a priority for years and was successful this year. The committee will also lobby as needed. There are five other task forces that deal with specific legislative and policy issues such as transportation, self-determination, Indian country, etc. during Legislative Sessions, SILC host a Legislative Day and a Rally Day by providing lunch and talk with legislators by educating them about the issues.

Membership Committees Brainstorming/Q & A, Denise May shared tips on how to recruit potential council members. Having a committee to focus on recruiting members helps increase membership. The people on the committee have networks or have experience recruiting. Another thing that is helpful is explaining the purpose of the Council and how the Council is mandated to have specific representatives. Another helpful tip is to find potential members in Helena, so it is not much of a travel. Using virtual platform can be incentive for those far away and don't want to travel long hours for 1.5 day-meeting.

Federal & State level Report, Chanda Hermanson reported on the update with Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) which is up for

reauthorization. She offered feedbacks in various national level surveys on what are helpful in the reauthorization in different areas such as Pre-ETS, state management, fiscal management. She explained how the grant awards work. There is a state match of about 20% to go with about 80% fund from the Federal. According to the Maintenance of Effort, the fund must be spent or there would be penalty (a reduced fund later). With the new Governor's administration and new DPHHS Director, Adam Meier, the top priority is employment. There is a program called State Exchange on Employment and Disability (SEED) which focuses on policies and best practices to promote employment – both National Governors Association and Department of Labor are partnered on this. Chanda also talked about the Telework Assistance Grants which covers the cost of purchasing assistive technology equipment for those with disabilities to obtain and maintain telework opportunities (during COVID). The equipment does not need to be returned. Chanda talked about the Order of Selection. All three categories has been closed which put clients on a waitlist. Category One (which is the one with most significant disability) will be open soon, possibly at the end of this month. Federal Regulation mandates to pull people off the waiting list based on the application date and severity of disability. Over 3,000 people have been invited in for services (with application date of August 2018). The VRBS staff will be trained on the steps to follow (it has been nearly 4 years with all categories closed). The Category Two and Three will remain closed.

Budget Report, Anna Gibbs, Bureau Chief of Program Support & Operations, reported on the budget for VRBS: The VRBS FFY 2020 grant award was \$9,281,550 which resulted a set aside for Pre-ETS of \$1,392,232. That left \$7,889,318 for General VR. The State General Funds Match was \$2,512,033. The VRBS program expended \$6,813,851 of the FFY20 grant as of March 31, 2021. The program is carrying forward the FFY20 (\$7,000,811) to September 30, 2021. The projected program expenses for the remainder of the FFY20 award is broken down into three categories: Personal Services (\$1,631,086), Operating Expenses (\$2,094,796), and Client Benefits (VRBS General Client Benefits \$1,065,772 plus Pre-ETS \$188,078 = \$1,253,850). The FFY21 grant award is \$12,700,045 which results a set side for Pre-ETS of \$1,905,007 which leaves \$10,795,038 for General VR. The State General Funds Match is \$3,437,242. The VRBS program expended \$4,400,602 of the FFY21 grant as of March 31, 2021. The goal of the program is to carry forward approximately \$7 million from the FFY21 award into the FFY22 award when VRBS is expecting a large Maintenance of Effort penalty. The VRBS program receives program income for reimbursement of VRBS services provided to clients that are SSI and SSDI recipients under the Ticket to Work program. The Ticket to Work reimbursements we collected in State Fiscal Year 2020 from 7-1-19 to 6-30-

20 were \$1,245,362. The Ticket to Work reimbursements we collected in State Fiscal Year 2021, from 7-1-20 to present are \$829,465.

VRBS Field Services Report and Waiting List Status, Brook Hodge, Bureau Chief of Field Services, reported on the vacancy of VRBS positions. Cheri Reed-Anderson was hired as the new Business Services Specialist. There will be an All-Staff training webinar next week Thursday – the topic is Diversity. Council members are welcome to attend. Brook and Lacey are working on a national strategy to train staff on the Individualized Placement and Support Model (IPS) and that the combined training with Addiction and Mental Health Disorder staff and VRBS staff will be happening in September virtually and that we would welcome council members to attend this training. The average caseload is around 60 cases statewide except for Missoula, which is averaging between 90 and 100. The goal of rapid engagement and moving people into an IPE quickly as they only have 90 days to develop an IPE once the counselor makes contact with the client. The applications are starting to increase likely due to COVID immunity and people are returning to workforce. Many staff continue to telework in a hybrid model. Each counselor is required to participate on at least one VRBS team: Assistive Technology, Business Services, Customized Employment, Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Policy and Procedure, Youth Services, Quality Services, and Self Employment. Council members are welcome to attend – please contact Brook.

Blind and Low Vision Services Report, Darrel Hannum reported that he has been busy learning the ropes as the new Bureau Chief of BLVS since March. He gave an update on the Business Enterprise Program (BEP). He is seeking guidance from RSA on restrictions to receive fund for small businesses that can be provided for BEP. Regarding CWIC, three staff completed the training. A procedure is written out for CWIC process.

Pre-Employment and Transition Services Report, Tammy Hogan, Bureau Chief of Pre-ETS, explained that Pre-ETS are services provided for students with disabilities. They must be in school or approved education programs for 14 – 21 years old. The types of services include job exploration, counseling, work-based learning, counseling on post-secondary programs, workplace readiness training, and instructions on self-advocacy. The staff are a Bureau Chief, Pre-ETS specialists, and a data technician. There is a vacancy for Pre-ETS specialist in Havre. The Pre-ETS specialists meet in-person and virtually with the students and parents and school staff to help them transition out of high school setting. Pre-ETS also partnered with Independent Living programs, Community Rehabilitation Programs, and other specialized programs such as Montana Youth Leadership Forum and Movin'On Program. The staff gave presentations about Pre-ETS to Montana

Deaf-Blind Project and to National Center for Disability Education and Training at University of Oklahoma. Tammy is the leader of Youth Service Team that meets monthly. SRC members are welcome to attend. Working with MSUB, a survey was developed and will be given out to youth when existing the Pre-ETS program.

Wrap-up:

- Chanda Hermanson shared with the Councils about the value-based initiatives. Based on the Strategic Planning sessions last year, the leaders of VRBS aimed to remind all of the vision, mission and value statements. Mission statement is placed at top of agenda at each meeting and is the guide for any decisions made. There are general VR staff, BLVS staff, and Pre-ETS staff sharing office space. All gets to choose a Canvas to display in the office. Darrell talked about a business card showing mission statement on one side and values on the other side. He also shared an idea of a challenge coin. Each staff member would have one. They can "challenge" each other by asking questions (do you have your coin? What is the mission statement, etc.). This is a fun way to keep remembering mission statement and values.
- June Hermanson thanked the Councils for coming together. It was a good exchange of ideas and feedbacks regarding recruitment of members and budget.