Montana State Rehabilitation Council
Virtual Meeting
August 13 & 14, 2020
Meeting Minutes

Members present: Tiffany Costa, Barbara Davis (Friday), Scott Eychner, Chanda Hermanson, Coreen Faulkner, Kathy Hampton, Dale Kimmet (Thursday), Michele Letendre, Denise May, Kathy Meier, Cheri Reed-Anderson, Marcy Roberts, Tom Sullivan, and Sandy Taylor.

Members absent: Monique Casbeer and Marvin Weatherwax, Sr.

Staff and guests: Beverly Berg, Beth Brenneman, Lacey Conzelman, Anna Gibbs, Bill Harant, Brook Hodge, Dr. Tom Manthey, Kirsten Smith, Laura Smith, Shawn Tulloch, Susan (RCC - CART), and two sign language interpreters.

Welcome and Introduction: Council Chair, Tiffany Costa, called the meeting to order. Shawn Tulloch reminded the Council of ground rules. Introduction were made.

May Meeting Minutes: Motion made to approve the May 15, 2020 Meeting minutes unanimously. May 14th was a Joint meeting of SRC and SILC; thus, the May 14th Meeting Minutes was not ratified.

Announcements: n/a

Public Comments: Tiffany Costa asked about the public comment on the website. If people are not able to attend the Council meetings, they can write public comment on the website. Shawn mentioned that both eCalendar (on Montana.gov website) and SRC website have her contact if they want to join the SRC meeting via Zoom.

Federal/State update: Chanda Hermanson reported on the types of waivers or extensions that VRBS will get due to COVID situation. Rehabilitation Services Administration was asking questions and gathering information to write a letter to Congress. Right now, we are waiting to hear results which could be waivers of MOE or deadline extensions on career counseling & information referral services or extending deadlines for IPE development. Chanda talked about keeping partnership between Vocational Rehabilitation programs and Independent Living Centers and Special Education programs for the Youth Services. Chanda shared with the Council information about Extended Employment program which is a long-term job
coaching after VR case closed. If a client is not able to get support from other funding sources, EE can provide that. For years, DETD contracted with Rocky Mountain Rehabilitation for the EE. However, the contract cycle is up and DETD decided (after self-analysis) to do EE in-house with the new case management system starting in January. This change will save $50,000/year and we can serve more people. DETD continues to work on internal controls. One item Chanda described was how each field office process differently and it is challenging to monitor them with Supported Employment cases, Pre-ETS cases, etc. Similar to what RSA did to Montana VRBS last year, she and the staff did a monitoring review with Billings and Kalispell field offices and will do Helena field office next. They also looked at client reimbursements (must have proof of receipts before getting reimbursement). Another area of concern is the service category called “other” which is used very often. RSA noticed and inquired about it. DETD is looking into that to make sure it is not overused. Chanda asked if the Council is receiving the Friends of Rehab bulletin and if there were any feedbacks. Since October 2019, 1,086 people have been invited off the wait list for IPE development which resulted 443 IPEs. There are 154 active IPEs. Currently, the total wait list is 2,469. About six months ago, the total wait list was about 3,300. The COVID restriction impacts the wait list. More people are getting off the waitlist. All of the counseling sessions are provided visually now. Montana Telecommunication Access Program is experiencing more intake applications due to the virtual access. RSA has warned us to expect the increase of applicants because of the COVID-related permanent health issues. Chanda reported that DETD ordered thousands of clear masks. This kind of masks is appropriate for those working with deaf and hard of hearing or have cognitive difficulties or mental health issues or working with younger kids. If anyone needs them, please contact DETD. Chanda closed her report with a reminder of the upcoming VR100 Celebration in October and a possibility of switching to virtual celebration.

**Budget Report:** Anna Gibbs reviewed the 2019 Program Year the third quarter (January – March of 2019). Every quarter, we submitted data to RSA and they sent back dashboards which were statistics with visual charts and graphs. The total participants who are receiving services in IPE reported was 1,500. The bar graphs show the race/ethnicity, age, receiving career or training services breakdowns. Career services are job coaching, on-the-job support, customized employment, job readiness training while Training services are apprenticeship, 4-year college training, graduate school training. Chanda reminded the Council the dashboards only show what were reported when the bills are paid. Anna continued on showing bar graphs of WIOA Program involvement, barriers to employment, and the summary of education and training and measurable skill gains.
**Program Support & Operations update:** Anna Gibbs reported that the staff (Anna, Chanda, Brook, and Rachel Heaton, the business analyst) has been very busy working with Wellsky building a new case management to replace the current one (MACS). Anna hoped to show a demo for the Council at the next meeting. Creating this kind of program allows the staff to put in what are really needed such as Extended Employment program and State Wage Interchange System (SWIS). The additional features will help VRBS to receive data on clients. For example, clients often do not communicate with their counselors about their out-of-state jobs. With SWIS, the counselors can get document of their employment. SWIS also helps with Ticket to Work and Social Security claims for the reimbursement.

**Field Services update:** Brook Hodge reported on the new hiring in the field services: a counselor supervisor in Billings, a counselor and an administrative support staff in Butte, two counselors and an administrative support staff in Great Falls, a counselor in Helena, a counselor in Kalispell, and a counselor in Miles City. Missoula office has two staff resigned (counselor and administrative support staff). The Pre-ETS positions are filled. Brook talked about the upcoming training topics for the staff: Virtual Job Shadow program, updates with MACS, SWIS, customized employment, presentation from Developmental Disabilities program, our case review tool, & performance evaluation tool, VR101 with George Washington University, and Foundation training (for the newly hired staff). All staff completed the PASS training (Plan to Achieve Self-Support) and the Discovery Training with Mark Gold & Associates. All staff members are encouraged to join at least one of the state-wide teams: Youth Services, Business Services, Customized Employment, Assistive Technology, Quality Services, Internal Control, Policy & Procedure, Deaf & Hard of Hearing, and Self-Employment (recently added). These teams meet at least once a month for an hour or so. The counselors are thrilled to see more clients getting off the waitlists. Brook reported on focusing on the collaborating with Pre-ETS to improve delivering services to high school students.

**Consumer Satisfaction Survey:** Lacey Conzelman explained the purpose of the Consumer Satisfaction Survey – it goes out to all the individuals exiting the vocational rehabilitation program to get their input on their experiences in the program. Questions covers a variety of areas such as their experience with their counselor, their IPE, were they informed about CAP or not, and any additional comment not covered in the questions. Montana Center has been chosen to create survey for VRBS. The survey will be created for specific groups: Pre-ETS, BLVS, general VR, and Older Blind. BLVS, general VR, and Older Blind are in development stage. Dr. Tom Manthey (Director of Montana Center) worked with Tammy Hogan (Pre-ETS
Bureau Chief) on the Pre-ETS survey. He was advised to come up with questions in five service categories: job exploration & counseling, work-based learning, counseling on comprehensive transition or postsecondary educational programs, workplace readiness training, and instruction in self-advocacy. Youth would respond favorably to access the survey either on computer or on mobile device and to answer the 15-question survey by clicking on a face icon (green smiley face, light blue less smiley face, etc.) with words (strongly agree, agree, etc.). This survey will be tested first with students to get their feedbacks – possibly in October.

**June 2020 Strategic Planning update:** Lacey Conzelman thanked the Council members for participating in the Strategic Planning sessions last June. She introduced Kirsten Smith to report on the final products. Kirsten talked about how the Planning Session is started with introduction among those involved and their explanation of why they are in VR and history of VR in Montana. Then she led this group to discuss goals and objectives which brought them to deciding on Vision (idealized idea of the future) and Mission (what we do, for whom we do it and what difference it makes) of the program. Core values were discussed. The group came up with five goals: access & quality, youth engagement, equity, coordination, and organizational sustainability. Under each goal has a list of objectives. Lastly, she showed the work plan which includes details of who will do what and when to accomplish the goals.

**Blind & Low Vision Services update:** Beverly Berg reported that the BLVS counselors are in the WIPA training (Work Incentives Planning and Assistance). BLVS therapists and mobility specialists have not been able to work directly with clients due to COVID restrictions (unless the clients showed up at the door). Instead, they were able to make monthly/quarterly phone calls to the older blind clients, to do assessments over the phone, to mail or drop off magnifiers or other equipment, to have virtual meetings with clients, to help clients filling out I Can Connect forms, etc. There were a few clients that needed a brush up with orientation & mobility skills (need a route or starting classes at a new university, etc.); the O & M specialists were able to help them out. The BLVS staff is taking online classes from various programs. Other things they did during down time were organizing Low Vision rooms, cleaning/sterilizing equipment, maintaining contacts with vendors, and researching different community resources.

**Reports from the Committees:**
- **Education & Membership (Denise May):**
  - There are four vacancies in Business, Industry, and Labor and two vacancies in Disability Advocate. We are currently waiting
for the governor to appoint two applicants who will fill the Disability Advocate seats.

- Tiffany Costa and Coreen Faulkner’s second term will expire this fall which leave their Disability Advocate seats vacated.
- The Business seats have been vacated for so long. It is a challenge to get a businessperson interested to serve on the Council. We are thinking to look for someone in Helena area which may be easier to get them on the Council than someone who would have to travel far and less likely to serve.
- We are working on revising the New Member Orientation PowerPoint slides to make them more friendly and easier to follow. If any of the Council members have feedbacks, please send to Denise. One thought was to add Vision/Mission statements and goals from the Strategic Planning sessions – that show more what SRC is really about. Extra time may be needed for the new members to review the SRC binder.
- There are 22 seats on the Council and 50% of them must have a disability. Survey Monkey has been sent to Council members but not all answered them (we don’t know who since it was anonymous). One idea is to have a question on the application asking if have a disability or not. Shawn will check with the Office of Governor about this.
- Another possibility is to have an award ceremony recognizing business hiring people with disability.

- Planning & Review (Anna Gibbs reporting for Barbara Davis):
  - We have been reviewing the Governor’s Report to figure out what needs to be done. We will need the Chair’s letter, so Tiffany can work on that. We also worked on Council’s list of Recommendations and Achievements. For the next SRC meeting in October, we will need time for the Council to review the draft copy of the Governor’s Report.
  - The Council will review the case stories and vote on them. The Council suggested to have a page limit on the stories; perhaps a template for the counselors to use while writing the story. This committee will create one.
  - A group picture will be done at the next SRC meeting.

- Consumer Satisfaction & Needs Assessment (Tiffany Costa reporting for Bill Harant):
  - Had a discussion on the Pre-ETS survey and agreed that the survey was a bit too long and too wordy. They like the idea of audio as an option. Had a concern of someone else doing the survey for them – we want the students to fill out the survey themselves.

- Policy, Procedure, & Personnel Development (Brook Hodge):
Talked about collaborating with Stout Rehabilitation Institute to assist on rewriting our Administrative Rules (road map for VR services and Frequently Asked Questions). This is in draft format; once finalized, it will be sent to SRC for feedback.

Several procedures currently in progress (once completed, they will be sent to SRC for review):

- Annual review, loan agreement, training books, motor vehicle, employment verification, travel training, auxiliary aides, financial needs standards, maintenance, other service category, IPE form, self-employment, measurable skill gains, transportation, comprehensive assessment, client reimbursement.

**Review the Case Stories & vote:** Anna Gibbs led the review of the success case stories. The Council voted on one story (out of 3-4 stories) from each category: tribal, Pre-ETS, BLVS, and general VR. The Council will vote on a Case of the Year at the next meeting.

**Discussion on a list of questions:** Kim Schmidt of North Carolina SRC are seeking feedbacks from the SRCs. Tiffany asked the following questions and received answers from the Council:

1. What are some of the ways other states’ SRCs gather public inputs?
   a. People can send their comments in the website: [https://dphhs.mt.gov/detd/PublicComment](https://dphhs.mt.gov/detd/PublicComment)
   b. People are welcome to attend SRC meeting; Public Comment is on the agenda.
   c. Due to COVID restriction, we can emphasize virtual platform availability to the public.
   d. We have Friends of Rehab monthly news. This is for everyone who wants to know what is going in VRBS.
   e. We have Town Hall meetings every year.
   f. We have Consumer Satisfaction surveys (paper & Survey Monkey formats) and Focus Forum to gather inputs.

2. We are interested in knowing if other SRCs use social media platforms to advertise public input sessions.
   a. We do not have social media at this time, even though DPHHS has a FaceBook page. Other non-profit organizations would post announcements on their FaceBook.

3. Do SRCs host virtual public outreach events for access/feedback on services especially during this time of COVID-19?
   a. Town Hall meetings are both virtual and in person formats. Call-in telephone number is offered, too.
   b. It seems to be more people in the field than the general public attending the Town Hall meetings.
4. Do they record events?
   a. yes

5. What were the lessons learned from these sessions as to what worked or not worked?
   a. Return rate for the surveys is low – about 20%. It is hard to get VR clients to fill out the survey. We are hopeful for the phone app for Pre-ETS to be more successful. This is an ongoing discussion to find ways to increase the return rate percentage.
   b. Having someone to read out the survey questions helps the blind.
   c. We had someone from AmeriCorps to call people and do the surveys over the phone.
   d. People on the Council would have to do more on engaging the community about different issues – talking with elected officials and leaders about VRBS (same as Scott E. mentioned with workforce)

**Wrap-up:**
- The next SRC meeting is set for October 6 & 7 in Helena. DDS Conference Room is reserved for the Council on October 6th and Wilderness Room is reserved on October 7th. There will be a VR100 Celebration on October 6th in the afternoon. Be on the lookout if it gets changed to virtual format.
- Agenda items:
  o Vote on a Case of the Year
  o Review and discuss the Governor’s Report
  o Employer of the Year award
  o Election of SRC Chair & Vice-Chair
  o Invite MT Association of Rehabilitation to talk about IL’s list of legislative priorities.
- Voted on 2021 SRC meeting dates:
  o February 25 & 26
  o May 13 (Joint meeting with SILC)
  o May 14 (SRC only)
  o August 5 & 6
  o November 4 & 5
- Bill Harant informed the Council that there will be Legislative Day on January 14, 2021 and Rally Day on March 10, 2021 (sponsored by Centers for Independent Living). Bill will send out a draft list of legislative priorities.