



# *State Rehabilitation Council*

to the



Bureau of Rehabilitation Services

**Regular Meeting  
Minutes  
September 23, 2014 1:00-3:30 PM  
Crown Plaza, Cromwell, CT**

*Attendance:*

**SRC Members:** Jim Quick, Chair; Ellen Econs, Vice-Chair; Tom Boudreau, Secretary; Marisel DeCardova; Sharon Denson; Michele Fontaine; Gary Prushko; Bruce Stovall & Miriam Torres-Thorburn.

**BRS Staff:** Dave Doukas (Bureau Chief with BRS, Operational Support) & Evelyn Oliver Knight

**Ex-Officio:** Amy Porter, Acting BRS Director/Commissioner of DORS.

**Excused:** Jan Hasenjager, Treasurer; Roberta Hurley and Warren Stamp.

**Absent:** Mary Pierson Keating; Tanisha Minnis; Larry Robinson & Victor Xavier;

**Guests:** Kristen Winkle & David Morgana (SILC representative).

1) **Introductions** - Jim discussed the need to review the VR Plan today - there are enough SRC members to have a quorum. Everyone introduced themselves and members shared their connection to the SRC. Gary shared a positive experience that, with the help of BRS and the Kennedy Center, his son was able to get a job. An article was also written about his son. Michele shared that her term is ending and she is nominating Kristen Winkle (who also works at Community Health Resources) to replace her. David Morgana is the SILC representative to the SRC.

2) **Minutes** – Miriam moved to approve minutes of 6/18/14 seconded by Marisel. The minutes were approved unanimously without any changes noted.

**3) Budget** – Jan is on vacation so Evelyn reviewed the budget. Expenses since the last meeting included mileage reimbursements for the June meeting, the SRC membership for July 2013 through June 2015 (two years) to the NEAT Center, the Youth Leadership Forum (YLF) Scholarship and support of the YLF training. Bruce presented the scholarship at the event at UCONN. He briefly discussed the application and selection process.

Only 30% of the budget had been expended by September 23, 2014. The fiscal year will end September 30, 2014; 70% of the budget will be returned to BRS and used for other VR services.

**4) NCSRC Leadership Report** – Jim reported on the most recent teleconference with other SRCs around the country. The main topic was the development and distribution of SRC annual reports including the use of pictures with partnerships, having consumer stories and issues with publishing costs.

There was a discussion about leadership of the SRC and the upcoming need for new elections of Chair and Treasurer (served two terms) ... the Vice Chair and Secretary are not up for renewal with only one term served. There was discussion related to becoming an SRC member and how that is accomplished.

**5) Amy Porter BRS Acting Director/DORS Commissioner** –

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), was passed in the last session of Congress in Washington. Technical amendments will be added to the law before it is finalized. Regulations are due in January 2015. Legislative intent is for VR programs to use labor market info to help train consumers for available jobs. Priority will be on Transition cases with an expectation for a 15% of the VR budget to be set aside for pre-employment services. The November national meeting of the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) will focus on WIOA. Amy will attend this meeting with Dave Doukas and Kathy Marchione, Western Region Director.

Some questions were posed by members with an explanation of the WIOA such as the Rehab Act being maintained with flat funding. Other changes require states to determine eligibility for VR services within 60 days of application and that a unified State Plan will be submitted in conjunction with other programs that

provide employment services. While CT already meets the 60-day eligibility requirement for VR services, changes will occur in how the State Plan is submitted. The SRC will help BRS determine how to approach changes. Currently, CT does not expect major changes to how we provide services. Amy's goal is for BRS to continue to do what we do, only better.

Staff updates: the agency is still looking to refill most positions. There are challenges noted with securing interpreter positions and different pilots are being attempted to address these challenges.

Office locations and concerns such as parking and signage are being actively pursued. The administration is looking at signage to increase visibility with the new DORS title (from DSS) and elements related to lease agreements.

A discussion ensued regarding of how to meet and mitigate a high standard related to eligibility (within 60 days, written waivers for extension of time) and programming changes; including findings related to MOA/MOU for deliverables and other monitoring and agreements that need to be tweaked.

BRS statistics requested by the SRC will be shared at the next SRC meeting as it will occur after the close of the federal fiscal year. Statistics will be finalized and a complete overview of "where BRS is" along with comparisons of data will be presented.

The **VR Status Flowchart – Quick Guide** was reviewed. The chart showed codes that are applied to a VR case to indicate the status of the case from application through eligibility, development of the Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE), employment and case closure. The IPE defines the targeted job goal, all services needed to achieve it, and responsibilities of the consumer and BRS. There are 5,000 (plus/minus) active open case-loads throughout the year. BRS is no longer in an "order of selection". The number of applicants this year is 3,349 which is down from last year 3,380, (with a downward trend noted from 2012 with 3,500 applicants or 5.1% decrease). The average counselor case load is 80-100 with current averages 73 state-wide (but one area pulls the number up so actually closer to caseload averages in the 60's).

Discussion ensued with explanations as to understanding this downward trend: is it due to less senior staff, lack of referral rates, the age of the applicant, a culture of having employers be involved with an education for people with disabilities, or combination? The system is being examined... with hopes that having the data from the chart as one tool to help explain the trend and address concerns.

Eligible for services: the total number is 2,905, which is down 4.7% from last year. Although new plans being written are also down, there has been an increase of successful closures by 8%. The percentage of successful closures remains with significant disabilities.

**DORS Update:** The Department of Rehabilitation Services (DORS) consists of four Bureaus: BRS (Voc Rehab and Community Living), Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind (BESB), Bureau of Disability Determination, and Organizational Support (Fiscal Office and IT). Recruitment for the VR director and restructuring has been positive with work categories and training programs being shared with the governor.

**6) BRS/SRC Update** - Evelyn shared that Jan will represent the SRC at two upcoming conferences in Miami: the National Coalition of State Rehabilitation Councils (NCSRC) and the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) meetings. Evelyn shared that she is attending only the NCSRC conference.

In response to inquiries about the SRC conducting consumer surveys, Evelyn shared the info she received from the Central Connecticut State University (CCSU) Center for Public Policy and Social Research. There were two estimates:

- a. A mail survey of 2,000 consumers would cost \$10,554. If BRS handles the mailing for this survey, it would cost \$7,813.
- b. A phone survey of 500 consumers would cost \$14,875.

The SRC discussed details about the options, what kind of questions would be asked, what kind of response rate has been achieved in the past, cost (money is not a concern), vendors other than CCSU. Some members were confused and thought that this matter was already addressed and wanted to move forward.

Gary motioned to move forward with the consumer satisfaction survey through CCSU and Bruce seconded. It was agreed upon unanimously to move forward with plans for the phone survey. Several members agreed to meet with members of the Consumer Satisfaction Committee to develop draft questions for the survey.

SRC Nominations for new officers: next slate of nominations was discussed with a review of current members on the SRC completed. Five members will end their terms this year. The need for new members remains.

Nominations were proposed with Ellen Econs to become the new Chairperson; Marisel DeCardova – to become Vice-Chairperson; Tom Boudreau to remain as Secretary (still has one more year); and Jan Hasenjager to remain as Treasurer.

**2015 Calendar:** 11/19/14, 1/21/15, 3/18/15, 5/20/15, 6/17/15, 9/16/15, 11/18/15.

**7) Review of Administrative Hearings:** two cases were reviewed so SRC members can learn the issues and determine if trends indicate any recommendations to change BRS policy or procedures.

**Case I:** DORS 14-BRS-01 - the decision was overturned, BRS to provide vehicle modification paying for all costs except amount consumer received (\$4500) from sale of previous vehicle.

**Case II:** DORS-14-BRS-02 – the decision was upheld, BRS not responsible to provide specialized training.

All reports were returned to Evelyn for confidentiality with no concerns noted.

**8) Committee Updates:**

**I. Business Partnership**

- Roberta was not available. Ellen shared that the group has been doing trainings with Chambers of Commerce and hopes to complete them in different places throughout the state. A brochure was discussed to be completed by BRS.

**II. Consumer Satisfaction**

- Jim – shared the need to have a working meeting before the November 19<sup>th</sup> meeting to develop the Satisfaction Survey... agreed on October 15th 1-3 at CVH. (They later agreed to meet October 28<sup>th</sup>.)

### **III. InterCouncil/Nominations**

- There were three new members nominated and David Morgana (shared his history with disability community) and Kristen Winkle (shared her desire to be part of this and works at CHR with employment) available for interviews after the meeting with Jim, Ellen and Tom. Evelyn reviewed the process and some of the incidentals of the SRC with the governor making the final decision.

### **IV. Legislative Policy and Planning**

- Ellen attempt to chair a review with some new goals and objectives to be addressed - there is no new information to report. Continue to monitor elements for tracking of what we have accomplished and reviewed some elements.

### **9) Consumer Issues:**

Lee Nosal sent a letter to the SRC and requested it be reviewed by the council. Amy shared that she has responded to the letter and was able to explain some of the incidentals such as consumer choice being introduced. There is competitive bidding in place – due to state contracting standards. Members shared personal stories, and some of the challenges they have worked through. There was a discussion on how to make this process easier.

### **10) Other Business:**

Evelyn shared that it is the role of SRC to address patterns and to get information to be informed on how the council interacts with BRS.

### **11) Announcement:**

Bruce shared that Oak Hill opened an adaptive gym called Chapter 126 and has purchased Camp Hemlocks. Both are new adventures that Oak Hill has invested in

and are excited to share upcoming events and opportunities with the disability community.

**NEXT MEETING:** November 19, 2014; 1:00-3:30 PM

The location is to be confirmed: Southeastern Employment Services, Old Lyme.

Meeting was closed at 3:30pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Tom Boudreau – SRC Secretary