

Governor's State Rehabilitation Council (SRC)
Full Council Meeting Minutes
May 7, 2020

Members Present

Dan Martinez, Chair
Scott Lindbloom
Dave Cheesman
Danita Applewhite
Jill Pleasant
John Gutierrez
Melissa Wojtak
Paula Seanez
Judith Castro
Ana Nunez
Carol Carr
Kristen Mackey

Members Absent

Kathy McDonald
Sheri Carparelli

Staff Present

Lindsey Powers

Guests Present

Call to Order and Introductions

Dan Martinez, Chair, called the meeting to order at 1:10 pm. Introductions were made and a quorum was present.

Approval of February 6, 2020 Meeting Minutes

Danita Applewhite moved to approve the minutes of the February 6, 2020 SRC Full Council meeting. Judith Castro seconded the motion. The council approved the meeting minutes by unanimous voice vote.

SRC Chairperson's Report

Dan Martinez stated the disability community would be facing challenges due to COVID 19 and he was concerned regarding employment of individuals with disabilities. Mr. Martinez stated he had been an advocate for individuals with disabilities for over 30 years, and it was disheartening to see the community take some steps back. He noted the community would need to rededicate their efforts towards increasing employment of individuals with disabilities and to be aware of that struggle.

RSA Administrator's Report

Kristen Mackey stated that once Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) received the Executive Order from Governor Ducey regarding the directive to stay at home, she was able to instruct staff to telework. Ms. Mackey noted that the majority of RSA staff were teleworking and were able to access Libera, the case management system, and Google, and were therefore able to continue eligibility determinations, and entering authorizations for client services. Kristen Mackey stated she sent a notice to staff, providers, and vendors to avoid initiating closures of services due to a loss of contact or participation. She noted that some clients were likely experiencing technology barriers and were unable to communicate with their counselors and should not be penalized. Kristen Mackey stated she also anticipated seeing a dip in exits with employment during the pandemic, although she did not want clients to feel they were losing their support systems, or to have to reapply for services if they became unemployed. Kristen Mackey stated that in the past, Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) staff were required to obtain electronic signatures, although due to technology needs, counselors could accept electronic approvals from clients. Kristen Mackey stated RSA was unsure regarding the budgetary impact of COVID 19 would be, and the agency would continue to monitor the situation. Kristen Mackey stated a substantial amount had been allocated towards Unemployment Insurance. She noted RSA experienced an increase in overhead costs due to staff equipment and emergency leave pay out, although there had been a decrease in client services costs. Kristen Mackey stated RSA was considering the technology needs of clients needing to participate in services and education in the future. Ms. Mackey stated Secretary DeVos sent a waiver request to Congress requesting the Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) 15% set-aside be waived for an additional year. She noted that RSA was given two years to obligate and spend those funds, and the waiver request asked for an additional year to expend those funds. Kristen Mackey stated a waiver request was also sent regarding the 10% match requirement for supported employment. Kristen Mackey stated the CARE Act allocated additional funds to the Centers for Independent Living (CIL) and RSA would work with the Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC) regarding those funds. Kristen Mackey stated RSA was loaning 20-25 staff members to help process UI claims. She noted the Department of Economic Security (DES) sent out surveys to staff inquiring about increased telework opportunities and how to best serve the needs of the public.

Danita Applewhite expressed her concern regarding the working students with disabilities especially veterans that needed technology and Internet access. Kristen Mackey stated RSA was reaching out to workforce and community partners that could assist non-VR clients in obtaining the necessary resources. Danita Applewhite stated she had not received any calls from individuals in VR indicating a need for resources. Melissa Wojtak requested clarification regarding counselors not initiating closures. Kristen Mackey stated that RSA would send a letter to clients that had not been in contact with their counselor indicating that clients would have 15 days to contact their counselor prior to initiating closure. Kristen Mackey stated that in March, she instructed staff not to initiate closures due to clients' lack of access to technology or communication methods. Ms. Mackey stated she had not identified an end date, and would reconsider when the access barriers had been removed. John Gutierrez inquired whether staff experienced challenges in connecting with their clients while teleworking.

Kristen Mackey stated the majority of supervisors had not indicated challenges in communicating with clients, although clients in rural areas did experience issues due to a lack of Internet or broadband services. Judith Castro stated the transition to teleworking went smoothly. Ms. Castro stated staff were able to transfer calls from the office to their work phones. She noted that in the lobby of her office, she included the contact numbers for her staff, so clients could reach out to them directly. Judith Castro stated staff also received instructions and trainings for teleworking procedures such as checking voicemail remotely, and accessing the various systems.

Kristen Mackey stated that Client Customer Satisfaction surveys had been distributed to open and closed clients beginning in April. Ms. Mackey stated the surveys included an option for clients to provide additional information to RSA staff, in which a non-VRC would respond to those clients. Kristen Mackey stated that all RSA staff attended Customer Service training, in an effort to increase client satisfaction. Kristen Mackey stated RSA continued to develop Standard Work for each step in VR, and would begin working on eligibility determination and Order of Selection determination. She noted that a group was working on the Standard Work procedures, which would likely be implemented in August. Kristen Mackey stated there was a staff vacancy in southern Arizona that RSA would try to fill quickly. Kristen Mackey stated the HR processes were focused on hiring 200 UI staff to assist with the massive increase in unemployment insurance claims due to the pandemic.

Kristen Mackey stated the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services (OSERS) and RSA were working on increasing data driven decisions. She noted that she and about 4 other VR Directors had been meeting to discuss the metrics that would help the agencies to make better decisions regarding services. Kristen Mackey stated the group would develop data dashboards that would help to manage business. Kristen Mackey stated for the first year, RSA was required to negotiate performance metrics. Ms. Mackey stated the previous year, RSA met a measurable skill gain of 15% and in years 2020 and 2021, and RSA would be expected to meet skill gains of 20% and 22%. She noted the leadership team had developed instruction for staff to help meet those goals and planned to offer webinar training as well on how to accurately enter the data. Ms. Mackey stated the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) partners were typically in the 40-45% range, and RSA was therefore encouraged to reach beyond the 22% skills gain, although a 22% increase would be a considerable improvement. Kristen Mackey stated the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment was completed and she was developing a compilation of the recommendations and actions underway. She noted RSA used the recommendations to develop the State Plan, which had been submitted and was under Federal review. Kristen Mackey stated RSA received the Federal Monitoring Report, which included findings of eligibility determination timeliness, IPE determination timeliness, an agreement with the Arizona Department of Education (ADE) was not finalized at the time, and the written policies and procedures had not been completed at the time. Kristen Mackey stated since the Federal visit, RSA had implemented a significant amount of internal controls and tracking and the IPE compliance was consistently at 95% or higher. Kristen Mackey stated RSA's agreement with the ADE was complete and she anticipated that finding would be resolved quickly. Kristen Mackey stated there was no update on the VR State Rules. Ms. Mackey stated last quarter; there were 21 informal reviews, 7 mediation requests, and 3 Fair Hearings. Kristen Mackey stated the Ombudsman provided a workshop for staff and was in the

process of developing a flow chart and a Standard Work for Fair Hearings.

Scott Lindbloom inquired whether RSA could partner with the Behavioral Health Planning Council. Kristen Mackey stated RSA had an agreement with Behavioral Health and RSA staff did work in behavioral health clinics as well as with the Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD). Scott Lindbloom inquired how RSA could assist individuals that had been incarcerated obtain employment. Kristen Mackey stated RSA worked with Second Chance Centers for individuals exiting correctional facilities. She noted RSA tried to work with employers that were willing to employ individuals exiting correctional facilities. Scott Lindbloom inquired how RSA could assist individuals that required tutors and were unable to go to their campuses. Kristen Mackey stated RSA was considering purchasing laptops and equipment so students could continue their education and noted that tutors were a contracted service to individuals. Scott Lindbloom inquired whether RSA could partner with Aging and Adult Services. Kristen Mackey stated DES was pursuing the grant with the Division of Aging and Adult Services. John Gutierrez stated that Brian Miller, who was the State Liaison for Arizona, had unfortunately passed away from COVID 19.

Committee Reports

Program Review Committee

Dave Cheesman stated the rehabilitation technology policies had been assigned to the committee members to review and discuss at the next meeting. Ana Nunez stated the Program Review Committee had planned to meet in person, although that meeting had been delayed due to the pandemic. Dave Cheesman stated the committee would be reviewing the vehicle modification, adapted driving, home modification and client equipment policies. Kristen Mackey stated the home modification; adaptive driving and vehicle modification policies would undergo extensive changes, and would be presented to the SRC and other councils for review once completed. Ms. Mackey noted that all RSA policies would be reformatted to look similar to the DES policies, and would not likely undergo extensive changes.

Employment and Community Partnerships Committee

Carol Carr stated the Employment and Community Partnerships Committee continued to work on development of the Arizona Employer Toolkit and she hoped to have toolkit available for SRC review in May and for public review in August/September.

Membership Organization Updates

SILC

Scott Lindbloom stated that Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC) had a new Chair and was working on obtaining funding and professional development.

American Indian VR Projects

Paula Seanez stated all programs had been teleworking after the Executive Order issued

on March 16th, which had been extended through May 17th. Paula Seanez stated staff experienced challenges with Internet access to perform work and to connect with clients. Ms. Seanez stated that staff were ensuring that students had the necessary technology to continue their education online. Paula Seanez stated the Navajo Nation had been hit hard by COVID 19, and there were curfews nightly and on weekends. Paula Seanez stated the focus had been on staff well being and safety and noted staff performed wellness checks on clients frequently. Paula Seanez stated the Navajo Nation received donations and were assisting the community by issuing supplies to individuals in need. She noted the Navajo Nation was also offering mental health support to individuals that lost family members and needed someone to talk to. Paula Seanez stated the Federal RSA continued to request the deadline for proposals of May 21st for competitive grant applications. She noted that CANAR wrote a letter requesting that tribes in their 5th year of funding be extended for an additional year due to the technology and communication constraints.

Client Assistance Program

John Gutierrez stated he spoke to several VRC's and noted that services were going well. He noted that he had been working from home for 8 weeks, and looked forward to returning to work.

AzTAP

Jill Pleasant stated she had been promoted to the Associate Director, and she would continue to manage the AzTAP and AT initiatives. Jill Pleasant stated that all AzTAP staff except for Clayton Guffy, was working from home, and continued to distribute equipment to individuals. Ms. Pleasant stated AzTAP was not able to lend large numbers of technology to students, however, AzTAP did partner with Achieve, which offered refurbished computers at reduced prices. Jill Pleasant stated the AzTAP Conference had been cancelled, although the agency was considering offering virtual presentations and offering CRCs to attendees. Jill Pleasant stated the Sonoran Center for Excellence in Disabilities would be offering a webinar on "Adapting Virtually to Provide Employment Support". Jill Pleasant stated there were issues with adults and children whom were DDD clients that required augmented communication devices and had been denied their requests. Ms. Pleasant stated that approximately 400 individuals were waiting for technology. Jill Pleasant noted that state universities were unable to fill staff positions, and NAU intended to resume classes in the fall while observing social distancing. John Gutierrez inquired whether AzTAP had enough computers for VR clients that needed technology. Jill Pleasant stated AzTAP could provide a computer to a student trying to identify the appropriate AT, although AzTAP did not have enough computers for students to use long term. Scott Lindbloom stated that students could use smart phones to access their courses. Jill Pleasant agreed, although the screen would be much smaller. Ms. Pleasant stated that AzTAP was unable to use Federal funds for personal use.

Community Rehabilitation Providers

Carol Carr stated Achieve was a provider of essential services, such as providing cleaning services to border patrol offices. Ms. Carr stated her hope that the community recognize the importance of the individuals providing the custodial services and offering

those essential services. Carol Carr stated those Federal contracts were providing a quality of care and providing the essential services necessary for day to day operations. Dan Martinez agreed and noted that Arizona Industries for the Blind (AIB) continued to provide for the needs of the Department of Defense (DOD) and for healthcare workers. Carol Carr stated the custodial workers were required to clean the isolation areas to make the areas secure for the border patrol workers.

Agenda Items and Date for Next Meeting

The next meeting of the SRC Full Council will be on August 13, 2020 from 1:00 to 4:00 pm.

Announcements

Scott Lindbloom stated SILC would hold an Emergency Conference meeting on September 4th. Scott Lindbloom stated he was working with county attorneys to assist individuals with felonies obtain employment.

Ana Nunez stated the Transition Conference had been cancelled and she could confirm that information with community partners.

Public Comment

A call to the public was made with no response forthcoming.

Adjournment of Meeting

Scott Lindbloom motioned to adjourn the meeting. Judith Castro seconded the motion. The meeting stood adjourned at 2:30 pm.

Vocational Rehabilitation Scorecard – April 19, 2020 – April 25, 2020

The total number of individuals in VR program was 12,411

The average number of days from eligibility was 26 days

The eligibility determination compliance within 60 days was 95.7%

The average number of days from eligibility to IPE implementation was 82 days

The IPE implementation compliance within 90 days was 86%

The total number of individuals in OOS Priority 2 and 3 was 0

The total number of individuals in Priority 2 was 0

The total number of individuals in Priority 3 was 0

The average hourly wage of successful employment outcomes was \$16.80

The number of job placements was 22

The number of clients closed with employment was 23

The average days to obtain employment was 780

The average days from referral to application was 45

The average days from job-ready to placement was 46

The average cost of closure with placement was \$30,666.81

The average cost of closure without placement was \$40,299.49