

Governor's State Rehabilitation Council (SRC)

Full Council Meeting Minutes

August 28, 2023

Attendance

Members Present

Lisa Livesay, Chair
Adam Robson
David Carey
Paula Seanez
Kristen Mackey

Members Absent

Diana Meza
Melissa Wojtak
Ceci Hartke

Staff Present

Lindsey Powers

Guests Present

Linda Fischer
Mathew Nevarez
Stephanie Johnson

Minutes

Call to Order and Introductions

Lisa Livesay, Chair, called the meeting to order at 1:06 pm. Introductions were made, and a quorum was present.

Approval of May 11, 2023 Meeting Minutes

Adam Robson moved to approve the minutes of the May 11, 2023 SRC Full Council meeting. Lisa Livesay seconded the motion. The minutes were approved by unanimous voice vote.

SRC Chairperson's Report

Lisa Livesay stated the council continued to focus on recruiting council members and providing onboarding for new members. Ms. Livesay thanked the unofficial members for continuing to participate in council activities.

SRC Membership Discussion

Lisa Livesay encouraged council members to remain in contact with individuals they had recommended applying to and continue to invite them to meetings. Lisa Livesay stated there were national resources available for new members that could be incorporated into onboarding materials for new members. She noted that she had reviewed some of the videos, which addressed legality issues, membership, and ways to participate on the SRC. Adam Robson stated that he might have some previous training materials that he could share also. Mr. Robson stated the council could also consider inviting someone from a comparable SRC to discuss their successes in recruiting new members. Lisa Livesay stated the council was also trying to recruit a member to serve as the Workforce Board representative, and an email had gone out to that council. Lisa Livesay stated the Office of Boards and Commissions had verified receiving some of the recent member applications, although members could follow up with Lindsey Powers for more updates if needed. Ms. Livesay noted the office was also now interviewing potential members, which could account for some of the delay in appointing new members.

RSA Administrator's Report

Mathew Nevarez stated the Ombudsman's Office was in the process of compiling data and he would be able to provide a full report at the next Full Council meeting. Mr. Nevarez noted there were 25 informal reviews in which about half went to mediation and half went to fair hearings. He stated there are about 20 fair hearings currently, which was the average amount. Mathew Nevarez stated the fair hearing process was somewhat slower due to client postponements, or the ALJ staff, and not due to RSA. Linda Fischer inquired whether RSA ever declined a client's request for mediation. Mathew Nevarez stated RSA would honor a client's request for mediation.

Lisa Livesay stated the Program Review Committee had reviewed the fair hearing decisions from 2020-2023 and had some questions regarding the decisions. Lisa Livesay stated that some of the Federal regulations cited were not related to the individual's service or appeal. She noted that the ALJ Robert Nall tended to use rigid reasoning and did not allow exceptions for cases. Lisa Livesay stated the majority of the cases did provide sufficient support, although the officers might need additional training. Lisa Livesay inquired how counselors communicated with the clients so that they were aware of the appeals process. Linda Fischer agreed that some of the ALJs used a generic reference to the Federal codes and did not allow for any exceptions. She noted that comparable benefits, for example, would not include Assistive Technology (AT), or that transportation was not permitted at the high school level. Kristen Mackey stated the ALJs received their own training, although RSA had offered to provide additional training in the past. Ms. Mackey noted that Mathew Nevarez reviewed all case decisions by region, looking for any trends, and met with the Policy Unit to identify any need for clarification in policy language. David Carey inquired whether there was a way to avoid going to mediation and whether clients could be supported before that process. Kristen Mackey stated that staff honored clients' requests for mediation. She noted that some clients requested mediation because their services did not meet employment goals, or their request for transportation was denied due to not meeting economic need. Mathew Nevarez noted there had been a high turnover rate of ALJs, although the current presiding Judge might be open to additional training from RSA. Kristen Mackey stated the SRC could recommend that ALJs receive additional training. Mathew Nevarez stated that when a client requested an appeal, the counselor would provide them with information about the process including a flow chart to let them know where they were in the process. He noted they would also suggest the client request their records prior to the appeal as well.

Kristen Mackey stated the Rehabilitation Technician (RT)s grade and pay had increased to a tiered salary. She noted that RSA held a mass hiring event through Facebook live to fill the 25 open RT positions and had 41 interviews scheduled for positions in Maricopa and northern Arizona. David Carey inquired regarding the number of open counselor positions. Kristen Mackey stated there were typically about 30 open counselor positions at any given time. She added that the Department of Economic Security (DES) was advertising positions on Linked In, and she was able to post hard to fill positions on other job sites as well. Kristen Mackey stated the Rehabilitation Instruction Specialists that mostly worked in the Older Individuals Who Are Blind unit, were able to receive an in-grade salary adjustment, and an increase in pay. Lisa Livesay inquired whether staff were eligible for additional training or continuing education. Kristen Mackey stated that RSA would partner with organizations offering events and would provide reimbursement for CRC credits or the renewal of credits.

Kristen Mackey stated RSA was expanding the ATEI program with Northern Arizona University, which allowed AT vendors to provide evaluations, training, and the purchase of AT equipment for clients. She stated RSA hoped to expand the pilot project tentatively in January. Linda Fischer inquired whether clients would still have a choice regarding the vendors they used. Kristen Mackey stated that clients would receive a list of the vendors and could choose the vendor.

Ms. Mackey stated that RSA had expanded operations positions and noted that Brandi Coffland had moved to a new position that would assist in fiscal activities as well as the implementation of the new case management system. Kristen Mackey stated that Stephanie Johnson had been hired as the Strategic Initiatives Coordinator and would be assisting with customized employment and increasing outreach efforts. Stephanie Johnson stated that she had worked in behavioral health, high school Transition services and post-secondary education. Ms. Johnson noted that her formal training was in SMI services, and she also worked with Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DHOH), Blind and Visually Impaired (BVI) and individuals with Combined Vision and Hearing Loss (CVHL).

Kristen Mackey stated that RSA had supported staff in attending the IHD Conference, including tribal VR staff. She noted that RSA continued to tentatively schedule the implementation of the new case management system in October 2024. Ms. Mackey stated RSA continued to review the data elements entered and to ensure that all fiscal departments knew how to report the data accurately. She stated there were 407 data elements entered on clients quarterly, and there had been an 80% reduction in errors on reporting. Kristen Mackey stated RSA continued to educate counselors on how to enter the data to ensure that all services were accurately reported Federally. Lisa Livesay inquired whether the new case management system would reduce the errors in reporting data. Kristen Mackey stated that she was hopeful, although some of the information would come from other organizations.

Kristen Mackey stated that she anticipated level funding for the year, and an increase of 7% in Federal funding, which would require RSA to make up the difference through other agreements. She noted that RSA received a Federal 107 monitoring letter regarding RSA's expenditure of 8.5% of the required 15% for Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS). She stated the reduction in spending was largely due to counselors not having access to schools during COVID as well as the high turnover rate of school staff. Kristen Mackey stated that RSA likely spent the required 15%, although it was not accurately recorded. Lisa Livesay inquired whether there was a projected date for the next Unified State Plan. Kristen Mackey stated the date had not been announced yet, although it would likely be in September or October. She noted the council could review their previous input and recommendations in preparation for the

report. Linda Fischer inquired whether there were any ideas for customized employment for clients. Stephanie Johnson stated that she had performed research regarding other states' customized employment and how to put those processes into practice. She noted that she was also reviewing the language and any forms to ensure they aligned with Employment First initiatives, consumer language, and were clear to vendors. Kristen Mackey stated RSA was also partnering with Sonoran UCEDD on customized employment, which could then move to the Managed Service Provider. Linda Fischer inquired whether there were any examples of customized employment opportunities. Stephanie Johnson stated that through her research, she found examples of individuals working in home builder show rooms and assisted customers in interior design. She added that some states also observed the clients in their homes and would collect data regarding what the individual was capable of doing rather than relying only on self-reporting. Adam Robson inquired whether the vendors could obtain additional training regarding customized employment. Kristen Mackey stated the State Procurement rules would not allow RSA to pay for vendors to receive additional training for providing a service, although they could receive additional training under certain credentials.

Committee Reports

Executive Committee

Lisa Livesay stated the Executive Committee was reviewing onboarding materials for new council members and encouraged members to continue to invite individuals to attend meetings while they waited to be appointed to the council. Adam Robson stated that he had an old PowerPoint about RSA and inquired who could update that information. Kristen Mackey stated that Adam Robson could send the PowerPoint to Lindsey Powers to be shared with her and Stephanie Johnson for updates. Lisa Livesay stated the committee had also discussed reaching out to the SRC State Liaison or other representatives for support in appointing new members. Kristen Mackey stated that she would have some contacts that could potentially provide support in the appointment process.

Program Review Committee

Lisa Livesay stated the Program Review Committee had reviewed the fair hearing decisions and would follow up with any recommendations. She noted the committee would also support any additional training for ALJ staff.

Employment and Community Partnerships Committee

Adam Robson stated that many of the new council members would participate on the Employment and Community Partnerships Committee and could assist with committee activities. Mr. Robson noted the Employer Handbook, for example, included several non-working website links and the committee could work on updating that information.

Membership Organization Updates

SILC

David Carey stated SILC continued to provide Emergency Preparedness training across the state and provided monthly webinars. Mr. Carey stated SILC received the Health Equity Grant and was working with the rural communities to bring in partners and individuals with disabilities to discuss different topics such as transportation and access to services. David Carey stated SILC held listening sessions to identify the barriers individuals experienced when trying to obtain various services.

American Indian VR Projects

Paula Seanez stated the Navajo and Hopi tribes had received their Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)s from RSA and were in their 3rd year of the grant. Ms. Seanez stated there were several job developer and RT positions open in VR currently. Paula Seanez stated they were currently working with NAU in developing a new database, which she hoped to be completed by October 1st. David Carey inquired whether there was a set aside of funds for tribal VR. Kristen Mackey stated the only required set aside was for Pre-ETS services, although tribal VR did receive different Federal funds. Paula Seanez stated that tribal VR continued to work with Sonoran UCEDD on providing Transition services to youth as well as work-based learning opportunities.

CAP

Linda Fischer stated that Client Assistance Program (CAP) staff had co-presented at the Transition Conference, which was widely attended. Ms. Fischer stated the reasons that many clients requested assistance were due to issues such as not having the necessary textbooks for school, and not knowing what they needed. She added that CAP was also monitoring employers that were paying less than minimum wage, although many 14C holders had stopped those practices.

ADE Updates

Lisa Livesay stated the IDEA Conference had been held the previous week and received a lot of great feedback. She noted that ADE continued to work on capacity building with VR, and an increase in career engagement. Lisa Livesay stated that ADE would work to increase the number of students to complete the first workshop and would establish pilot projects moving forward. She added that the ADE was working with Sonoran UCEDD on compiling feedback and the content data share agreement.

Agenda Items and Date for Next Meeting

The next meeting of the SRC Full Council will be on November 2, 2023 from 1:00 to 4:00 pm.

Announcements

There were no announcements.

Public Comment

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

Adjournment of Meeting

David Carey motioned to adjourn the meeting. Paula Seanez seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned at 3:40 pm.