



State of Connecticut

Department of Rehabilitation Services

State Rehabilitation Council (SRC)

March 15, 2017

SRC Meeting Notes

Note: this meeting took place via conference call due to the snowy road conditions.

Attendance:

SRC Members: Marisel DeCordova Chair; David Morgana, Jr.; Gary Prushko; Kate Travis; Joe Wendover; and Kristen Winkle, Secretary

Non-Voting Members: David Doukas, BRS Director

BRS Staff: Evelyn Oliver Knight

Excused: Thomas Boudreau; Kerri Fradette; Jan Hasenjager; Patrick Melfi; Beth Reel; Andrea Richardson; Warren Stamp; Bruce Stovall;

Volunteers: Kim Beckett; Vicki Hill; Shannon McCann

Guests: Chris Blake (SARAH, Inc.) Consumer

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12:00-1:00 – SRC Subcommittee Meetings: didn't occur due to road conditions for this meeting.

Brief Introductions – Everyone

Minutes (January 18, 2017) – Kristen Winkle: reviewed, Approved

Budget – Gary Prushko: Same as the last meeting, everything is good and up-to-date, still have funding for everything we need this year. Approved

SRC Leadership – Marisel DeCordova, Chairperson: She thanked Dave Doukas for including items immediately that SRC has asked BRS to do with trainings and success stories. Marisel noted that this may be her last meeting, due to Protection & Advocacy will be private after June 30, 2017 and her job there will be ending. Her plan is to attend the next SRC meeting. According to the BRS contract, an individual who works for CAP needs to be on the SRC and that is why she was serving on the SRC. The new agency will be Disability Rights CT, they are aware that a representative from CAP needs to be on the SRC. She will be working with the individual to prepare them for the job. She was complimented by SRC for all of her hard work!

BRS Update – David Doukas, BRS Director

- SRC Request for Agency Training: BRS has scheduled training next Wednesday and the entire leadership team, including Administrative Assistants, is going to be attending. The training will be on sensitivity/cultural sensitivity, communicating with clients and co-workers.
- CSAVR Update: April 1-5 Council of State Administrators for Vocational Rehabilitation Conference in Bethesda, MD. BRS has consolidated with the Bureau of Education Services for the Blind (BESB) to present the VR program to Legislative staff on Capitol Hill. They will review the values and accomplishments in CT. Also, provide a breakdown of what is done in each district and tell a success story from every district.
- Level Up Update/Pre-Employment Transition Program: BRS is working with Section 301 students. Section 301 of Social Security protects students who will lose SSI benefits when they turn 18 as long as they are working with VR. Statistics show that these individuals have poor employment outcomes as adults if they are not working with VR. Colleges and Universities are putting together research studies about this

issue. BRS and Benefits Counseling are talking to the schools about projects related to the populations. Level Up Counselors process those consumers (Section 301) into VR as soon as possible and this generates reimbursement dollars/program income for BRS.

- For Section 511, the students/families are deciding if competitive work is possible or if they need Wage Certificates (granted by DOL) to work at less than minimum wage. The counselors are being trained to partner with DOL. Part of Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), is to find out if someone is employable. BRS has questions to RSA about individuals who say that they don't want to work competitively; they are waiting for the answer from RSA. Chris Blake brought up the difficulty with this issue for individuals, all the factors involved with it. Dave acknowledged that some barriers are difficult to overcome, for example transportation, but BRS will give best shot to reduce barriers. Currently there are 3,000 CT individuals operating under wage certificates. BRS has hosted 511 fairs to explain the issues and make services available. Marisel has attended both fairs and they have been great.
- New performance metrics for Level Up staff has been established; BRS has reviewed it with management and the Union. Dave has spoken to the staff for feedback on the measurements for their performance and he is hoping to implement it soon.
- For Level Up, there are 1,500 consumers in the program. A number of services have been developed that are required under WIOA. They have a group of vendors that were selected for services that are waiting at the Attorney General's office. The contract template was approved last week; it had been waiting for approval since November 2016. They are in the process of being in contact with the vendors. There will be over 20 vendors approved, across four different services to do the work for Level Up. He thinks that it will be settled by this summer, before the next academic year.
- The Work Based Learning program for this year has \$800,000.00 to \$850,000.00 for funding this summer. That should provide 30 or 40 hour work experiences for 600 to 800 kids (perhaps a short internship for each student). Hope to start in June. They have been assigning the individuals for the program, depending on factors, for example, if they have

participated before. If there aren't the majority of kids they thought participating, they can extend the hours for the individuals taking part in the program. They are in good shape to meeting the 15% requirement. There have been a lot of successes, the students do well and there is lots of engagement with the majority of the schools.

- Agency Update (Staffing, Offices, Other): Dave has been speaking to all offices and outlining the priorities for the next 3 – 9 months. There has been a lot of grey with WIOA. Staff has expected big changes about their jobs. WIOA is still the priority. Dave has been talking about committees, Education, Unified Recording, Service Line and Delivery, and Business Service and Engaging with Employers in CT. They are all geared towards tying the system together. He and some of his staff have been participating in the work groups and taking advantage of what it has to offer. Dave has been talking about how they are going to move from a model, working with consumers to obtain employment as quickly as possible, under WIOA. There are education and skills that they are going to be setting them up for their future employability, earnings and progression. Dave noted that there are employers that are willing to work with BRS; he reports that they do a good job with engaging with employers and employers are working with other agencies similar to BRS. Collaboration network is to be figured out to assist with this issue. They are going down the road for a new management system. BESB and BRS working together. Bond funds are available for a new case management system. They hope system will provide minimal time needed for paper work to maximize the amount of face-to-face time counselors have with consumers. Dave and Brian are meeting with DOL leaders to improve access to American Job Centers (AJC). Acknowledged that each office of AJC is different. Shannon McCann mentioned that AJCs use Prove It (software). Dave explained that BRS has bought the Prove It software for consumers to use to at BRS. Right now he said it is 1-2 months of piloting it to determine how to use, is it effective, and how does it fit with what BRS plans to do.

- Dave reported that BRS has a budget problem in the near future. They have to make adjustments with downsizing staff through attrition, purchase of service budgets and cutting administrative expenses. He is looking at the cuts to be revenue neutral. BRS has a \$9 million dollar deficit and may be able to cut to about \$5 million dollars deficit to survive. BRS may have to move to an Order of Selection (OOS – serving only consumers with the most significant disabilities – MSD first) due to their deficit. He doesn't want to do that because, it will really hurt the program. They are working on the adjustments needed to be in place to avoid OOS. BRS does may receive a reallocation award (as a result of some states returning funds to RSA because they can't meet their state match) that will make a big difference in the immediate future. Also, BRS is trying to improve their service deliveries, communication and mixed messages have gone out. BRS is working on communication with CRP's, for example when making a referral to a CRP. Shannon McCann recommends that new counselors spend time with CRP's to get an idea of how CRP's operate with consumers.
- BRS has reduced their Regional Supervisors from three to two. Also, they have moved one supervisor position to Level Up. An individual retired from a position from Central Office and they are now hiring an individual for a trainer for staff. They lost a Level Up Counselor and they will hire another individual. Also, BRS lost 2 positions, an Employment Consultant; they will hire one and may hire a second. They are hiring an Interpreter Coordinator, to hire for interpreters and coordinate the activities and scheduling their services. He noted that they are saving by not contracting out for this. **[Please note: The Governor has imposed a hiring freeze due to the state budget. All hiring is now on hold.]**
- BRS opened the Torrington office last week at 30 Peck Road, Building 1, Unit 1102. They moved out of DSS and into their own lease. They closed the Ansonia office at the

end of February 2017, due to an insufficient number of consumers in the area. Staff has been absorbed in the Bridgeport and New Haven offices; they are able to be mobile to meet consumers in the community.

Consolidation of offices that they are looking into includes the South Eastern part of the state. Dave continues to monitor signage issues to address, as needed. He noticed that the Enfield BRS office needs signage outside.

Currently, BRS is seeking the landlord's permission to put a sign on the door, in the lawn and in the front of building that has an American Job Center sign.

BRS Success Stories – Kerri Fredette: shared by Evelyn Oliver Knight

- ARC, Meriden: Left a voicemail about how WIOA is doing what it is intended to do. ARC has placed 17 people in competitive employment since last spring.
- New Haven consumer: Started off as a paid intern. Consumer will be hired by company for full-time trade work. Consumer was given compliments by employee and praised BRS for their service.
- Level UP consumer: sent to Explore Your Future at Rochester Institute of Technology. Student was encouraged to attend and enjoyed the experience, they socialized with others who are also hearing impaired and presented as more confident after the experience. He is going to apply to the school. The family is pleased with the experience.

SRC Update – Evelyn Oliver Knight, Liaison

- NCSRC Conference: She is working with other board members to plan the training. Evelyn will help present information the segment of the law and who has to serve on the SRC. For the first time in a number of years, there won't be a Connecticut SRC member attending the conference. Marisel won't be attending due to her current job status. Officers were asked about attending but, aren't able to attend due to their schedules.

- Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA): Evelyn thanked all who participated. She noted that they are moving forward with it, hoping it will be concluded soon. The Executive Summary of the CSNA will become a section in the Unified State Plan. The CSNA will be published on the SRC website. A lot of research was done by Dave Johnson for the survey. Consumer and partner feedback was collected by several methods including online surveys, face-to-face focus groups and paper surveys mailed to current and former consumers.
- SRC Leadership: Marisel DeCordova may need to step down soon, Gary Prushko: has agreed to act as Interim SRC Chair Person when she can no longer participate.
- SRC Appointments by the governor: Beth Reel has been appointed. Shannon McCann needs to get her application notarized. Andrea Richardson, unknown if she has received anything. Kim Beckett is waiting to hear about her appointment. **Ray Oneglia, Jr.,** has resigned from the State Workforce Investment board and is no longer eligible for SRC. Kristen Winkle confirmed that she let Goodwill know about SRC, dropped off application and information, and hasn't heard back and doesn't think they are interested at this time.
- The SRC Secretary position continues to be open.
- Postcard: Empowering people with disabilities: People living independently in the community, this is informative for the community.
- SRC Annual Report: SRC has received it electronically and it has been shared electronically. Let Evelyn know if paper copies are needed.

Committee Reports

- **Business Partnership** – Kate Travis, Chair: Committee was planning to meet today in regards to the post card but, due to the meeting change, an email was sent within committee to discuss. Also, Kate shared an article with the

committee via email, in regards to working with employers. The committee agreed to move forward with utilizing the same entity who did PR work for Connect-Ability. Kerri Fredette has shared marketing ideas.

- **Consumer Satisfaction** – Vacant, Chair, CSNA reported by Evelyn, previously during meeting.
- **Intercouncil/Nominations** – Vacant, Chair, No activity reported.
- **Legislation, Policy & Planning** – Tom Boudreau, Chair: No activity reported.

Questions/Comments: David Morgana noted that the governor is going to cut independent living centers out of the budget. Reviewed how individuals went to the Capitol to talk about this issue. Discussed how there is a possibility that a lot of the money has been cut out of the budget because of the cuts for day and employment services, this will effect hundreds of individuals. Also, money was cut money for residential programs. No one knows what the budget is going to look like and people are not going to be getting services. Dave M. noted that Independent Living centers save the state money and it is going to cost the state more money.

Kim Beckett is from SARA, Inc. (note: guest today Chris Blake is part of SARA, Inc., he gave input about this issue, too.), a Community Service Provider, she commented about how this would have a direct impact. She said that they have day support group and independent living programming. They are trying to make sure that people are aware of this issue. Kim noted that this happened previously and she personally advocated for her son due to the state isn't actually saving money with this plan. She said that the Legislature is aware of this and she is making sure people are aware to reach out to Legislature members. She reviewed how this will affect the students and parents. She commented that parents will leave their kids at home and that it isn't safe.

2:40 P – Adjourn

Next Meeting - May 10, 2017 – Ability Beyond, 4 Berkshire Boulevard, Bethel, 203-948-2694); Kate Travis will be our host.

Respectfully Submitted,
Kristen L. Winkle, SRC Secretary