

State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind

June 10, 2022

Seattle, Washington

Attendance – all members attended via videoconference

Council Members Present:

Andy Arvidson, Chris Alejano, Christopher Zilar, Corey Grandstaff, Jacob Kamaunu, Jerri Clark, Jen Bean, Julie Brannon, Kim Conner, Kristin Geary, Linda Wilder, Marci Carpenter, Michael MacKillop, Sheila Turner, Steve Fiksdal

Council Members Absent:

Sean McCormick

Staff and Visitors Present:

Meredith Stannard, Yvonne Grimes, Tricia Eyerly, Jeannie Brown, Lisa Wheeler, Kim Canaan, Jim Tunj, Alco Canfield, Shelby Satko, Kris Colcock, Maria Bradford

Call to Order and Agenda Review: Julie Brannon, Chair

Note: Julie was in attendance but had laryngitis today, so Meredith chaired the meeting in her place.

Meeting was called to order at 9:00 AM. All parties on the call introduced themselves for the record. Meredith and Yvonne reviewed Zoom protocols for asking questions and accessible commands. Meredith reviewed the agenda for today's meeting.

Jen clarified that the copy of the revised By-laws that was sent out with the meeting packet did not reflect the correct name of her committee. Yvonne will update and resend; and also have website updated to the corrected By-laws.

Approval of March 2022 Minutes:

Linda moved and Marci seconded to accept the March 2022 SRC Meeting Minutes. Motion passed.

Acting Director's Report: Michael MacKillop

For the Tribal land acknowledgement Michael said that Christopher's presentation at the last meeting has stayed with him. He wants to acknowledge the Spokane Tribe's perseverance through many tragedies and the impacts that they made on the tribe.

There are difficult times out in the world right now, and we need to remember to take time to make moments of joy.

The RSA monitoring process continued through the end of March, and while intended to be a process to identify issues where they can provide technical assistance, there still seemed to be plenty of "gotchas" along the way. There were some good conversations and it's always helpful to have perspective from outside the program. Michael thanked everyone who attended and observed. DSB has had the exit interview with a summarization of their monitoring and now we wait to receive the final report.

The review needs to be intensive due to the time in between, the last review was in 2013, and the one previous to that was in 2007. Often agencies have reported having findings on internal controls, and DSB took time to update policies and procedures over the past couple of years. Agency received kudos and acknowledgement for having done that work during the review.

Had a concrete example to show impact of process improvement with Measurable Skill Gains (MSGs) last year. Agencies need to report the percent of participants in education programs that show MSGs as part of their progress. It was complicated and took a lot of time, investigation, and work with Technical Assistance. Had to make updates to Aware to be able to document, train on the changes, and then follow-up on training as needed. This measure is co-reported with DVR who has a low percentage, so it benefits the state for DSB to be high performing in this measurement. MSGs reported went from 7% to 68% after the change. Michael said one of the important takeaways is that to do important process changes it takes time, it's not possible to make all the changes necessary at once, each one will take time to implement plus training.

One of the areas we know needs improvement, and was confirmed by RSA, is our ratio of participants who exit with employment outcomes versus those who do not. A new measurement being provided to VR agencies this year is the percentage of participants who exited with an employment outcome and are still employed at the 2nd quarter after exit and the 4th quarter after exit.

Looking at the data, DSB has good results at quality of job, wages, and range of types of jobs, but have really low numbers of rehab exits with a much higher number of non-rehab exits. Ratio is about 38% right now and needs to be much higher. We know there were impacts from being in Order of Selection (OOS) and the pandemic, but that doesn't account for all of it. Need to explore why people exit without employment. Suspect some of it is due to lack of engagement, so how do we engage more frequently and meaningfully? RSA says DSB needs to change culture to have less focus on rehabilitation and more on employment. People come to DSB for stuff and not a job.

Michael thinks this could be an old view of VR services as we did have a higher ratio prior to OOS and the pandemic.

More supports to participants during job search process is part of the answer. A third of participants do well at using the traditional model for finding work, and DSB wants to look at more creative ways to connect participants to jobs. Looking for work is exhausting and how can we provide more support to participants during that process. Explore different ways to connect participants to careers through work experiences, internships, apprenticeships, etc. There are a number of pathways available.

Another big change that's been difficult to accept is that the Feds have said no to any Pre-ETS money spent on youth under 14 years old, rather than "early as necessary" being open to interpretation. Michael believes services can't start too young. RSA agrees, but not using Pre-ETS money. The younger aged workshops already scheduled for this summer will continue and then end. Will be surveying age 9-13 youth and their parents to see what programs they found most valuable and what they would like to see in the future. DSB will prepare and submit a decision package asking for state money to provide funds for youth from Birth-13. DSB is required to set aside 15% of all VR money to serve Pre-ETS, and how it can be spent is very prescriptive. This makes it challenging to spend the money, and will be more so with not being able to spend it on the younger age group.

At a recent Workforce Board meeting there was a lot of discussion about youth and preparation for careers. Businesses and the Chair of the Board commented that High School is too late to start having these conversations, they need to start earlier in Elementary School. At the next Board meeting in July, Michael and DVR are going to present about youth services and hope to garner some support for the youth DP.

Christopher had a comment in chat: TVR has the same issues, sometimes employees forget that TVR is not a social service agency here to prop people up. And on the RSA side is the worry that TVR just gives out stuff and forgets to focus on employment. What they seem to forget or not understand is that sometimes participants need that support and propping up before they are able to move forward with the employment process.

Jerri commented that this topic intersects with her work! She said it might help in conversations about youth career planning to know that it is a WA state requirement for the "High School and Beyond" planning process to begin in Middle School for all students in the state. It is required to align with the student's IEP Transition Plan. It's required to be completed by the school year when the student turns 16, however there is nothing that says it can't start sooner. Jerri said, in her opinion, the state is doing a terrible job of enforcing the importance of this plan and often there is very little time actually spent on it. When it is used it can be invaluable for preparing the student for what happens next after High School because they've already been exploring and learning about their likes/dislikes, skills, and career options for several years. They've also already been making relationships and connections to allow for a warm hand-off to the next step.

Michael appreciates and agrees with Jerri's comment. VI youth literally can't observe all the work taking place in the community around them. Broadening their understanding of what jobs are out there and that anyone can do them, including themselves, is critical. It can also be very challenging to start the work with a youth already 14-16 years old who has been overprotected their whole life.

Marci said she agrees with Jerri and DSB's position. What she heard in the RSA Monitor is that WA was the only state serving youth under 14 years old with Pre-ETS money. Going forward, let her know however she can help with the budget request. She also asked if the RSA report will be shared. Michael said yes it will, and explained the review and amend process that it will go through before the final report with findings is issued.

Andy asked if the informational interview process is still being taught and used? Michael said yes, he knows it is still important to VR participants and to the OTC as part of Careers class. Lisa added that we're also learning how to do it remotely. Business Engagement Manager Carl Peterson is enhancing the process with the VRCs and the OTC by bringing in consultants and WIOA partners to discuss doing these kinds of interviews.

Andy also added that he always corrects the assumption that DSB is good for getting stuff when he hears it, and reiterates that you go to DSB to get a job.

Michael talked at length about screening and that it's a delicate balance sometimes to determine if folks are coming to us for help that will lead to them looking for work or they just want the support and tools but no desire to work. Sometimes participants will exit with no employment but then will come back to DSB and be successful the 2nd or 3rd time.

Michael said he hoped everyone is reading the SRCB Quarterly Report and enjoying the report. There's a beautiful story from the IL Program about services received from Lilac and the importance of magnifiers, and it also talked about the WA Talking Book and Braille Library (WTBBL). The report is shared with all agency staff along with the approved minutes after each quarterly meeting.

The BEP update indicates that a lack of customers continues to impact almost all of the vendors in the program, with only a few sites able to re-open. DSB did receive funds from the Legislature for an overhaul of the BEP facilities over the next four years. DSB just hired a consultant to help with Project Management, and established a Steering Committee with a charter to assist with making decisions around the project. At the same time, asking vendors to close again or remain closed in order to remodel the sites has a huge impact on them.

The goal of this overhaul is to increase their profitability with fewer customers on site. Once the new model is shown to be successful then it will give the program to ability to go into other areas of the state. Traditionally, BEP has been unable to serve Eastern WA because of the lack of customers in government buildings, but the new BEP model can open up this possibility. This is our

goal and there may be some additional financial pain for the BEP vendors in the process of implementing it. The impacts will be mitigated as much as possible, but some may be unavoidable.

VR applications are going up, and it seems people have become more willing to engage again. Employment outcomes are going up too and have seen an excellent variety of successful jobs located.

It's exciting to have Youth Services (YS) programs in-person again this summer after two years of virtual only. The many benefits to in-person services outweigh the risks at this point. YS offered a ten-week Pre-prep course for YES 2 students this year. Students were able to learn about being on a job site, workplace expectations, how to ask for accommodation, meeting the employers, and doing interviews with them. This is a new course offering, and Michael believes it's really going to speed up the success of those students attending YES 2.

In addition, DSB has filled the Youth Services Specialist positions that were open in Vancouver and Spokane. Matt Hines in Vancouver, and Ryan Scott in Spokane; both are pretty phenomenal, and Youth Services has a full team now.

To Michael, the OTC story in the Quarterly Report really pointed out the importance of activities, learning self-defense, doing the challenge activities that help the participant figure out who they are and what they actually can do. The OTC is going strong with almost full apartments, and have recently added a Wellness Instructor, Alice Klein (previously worked for the IL Program with Kim Canaan), to work on the skills of stress management, self-advocacy, and managing conflict.

Michael discussed the recent creation of the new Pro-Equity Anti-Racism (PEAR) team at the agency as required by [Governor Inslee's Executive Order 22-04](#), with a baseline plan due to the Office of Equity in September. DSB is looking for external partners to join the PEAR team if anyone on the Council is interested.

Yvonne read chat comments:

From Kris Colcock regarding Rehab vs non-Rehab exits, she said that there's also a fear of losing benefits with employment. There is a lack of understanding around how the benefit system works, and participant education is needed about the impact of going back to work part-time or full-time. Michael said yes, he agrees. DSB is looking to develop benefit counseling resources for participants where we can. There is a lack of these services and he's grateful whenever DSB adds a new vendor who can also provide benefits counseling. They are critical services for participants, and it's complicated to understand all of the impacts of going back to work when you receive benefits such as SSI and SSDI.

From Christopher regarding participant screening, he said in TVR it's rare for them to screen people out, they are more likely to screen themselves out when they realize the focus is on employment.

Jen said she always appreciates Michael's comprehensive report, and that he included the good and the bad from the RSA monitoring.

Jacob added that there are some BEP facilities that may not re-open at all. Michael confirmed this is true; a number of agencies are either shrinking their physical offices or closing their state facilities due to the success of telework and have no plans to return to an office setting.

Michael handed off to Lisa Wheeler who shared a brief overview about recent VR training that's been taking place at DSB over the last couple of years. Worked for a year on updating the VR Procedure manual, and then Lisa has been holding monthly discussions with VRCs on the revisions, chapter by chapter. The training includes looking at the policies that inform the procedures. CAP attended the training that went over Eligibility. These training discussions have been very well received, by both VR and non-VR staff who have attended, and she plans to continue doing them. Lisa wants to replicate this process with the YS group as there are a lot of new staff. Currently working on updating the YS Procedure manual.

VR management started having quarterly case reviews in 2020. Each time they focus on a different piece of the VR process such as eligibility, case closures, etc. They look for any inconsistencies with procedures across the state, trends, training opportunities, etc. In addition, the RAMs get weekly reports on all of the WIOA-related and VR milestones. OTC and YS managers get monthly reports to review for trends, training opportunities, etc. The RAMs meet monthly with their regional VRCs to discuss maintaining consistency with processes across the regions.

Carl Peterson has been hosting a monthly meeting for the VRCs and YS Specialists to provide information on the WorkSource system, labor market analysis, apprenticeships, job trends, etc. He is also providing similar content to the OTC's Careers class, and will be working with Alice Klein on training as 20% of her time is dedicated to business engagement activities for the OTC. DSB's WIOA performance indicators show there is room for more training on these aspects, and for the VRCs to make the connection of the data to the work they are doing.

Another area Lisa wants to continue building in is internal controls per the RSA monitor, not just analyzing the data but how is the information getting carried forward to staff. In training and also as a resource guide. In the past couple years with the number of staff leaving the agency, it's become critical to create desk manuals and Lisa wants to complete that work. Staff needs a resource they can access immediately, that's not on an email stored somewhere in their mailbox. She also wants to include information in the manuals to show the connections to the wider VR picture that includes our local, state, and federal partners. She received feedback from her staff after the RSA monitoring that it really helped to see more of the bigger picture and how their work fits in, and they would like to understand more.

Meet New HR Liaison and DEI Program Manager: Nohemy Solórzano-Thompson

Nohemy introduced herself to the Council, and explained to us how to pronounce her name, “no a ME” with emphasis on the last syllable. She shared that she is the daughter of Mexican and Nicaraguan immigrants, and grew up speaking Spanish at home and learned English in school. Prior to coming to work for the state she worked in higher education as an Administrator and also as an ADA Coordinator. Nohemy is very attuned to the intersectionality of diversity and disability. She explained that intersectionality refers to all of the different parts of our identity, for example she is a woman, a Latina, and all of her other identities all at the same time. Diversity includes disability access, it’s one of the core principles.

As DSB’s HR Liaison Nohemy works with DES-HR because we are a small agency. Many HR functions, such as payroll, leave, hiring, etc. we don’t process it, but collect the data and then send to DES-HR to be actually processed. Due to the pandemic, there are a lot of employee processes that have been moving online, and Nohemy checks them for accessibility and helps train employees how to use them. This change to digital processes will ultimately free up some of Nohemy’s time to focus on the other part of her job.

As DEI Program Manager Nohemy works closely with the Office of Equity. Each state agency has been directed to create a PEAR (Pro-Equity Anti-Racism) team and to prepare a baseline Equity Impact Review (EIR) for the agency. The PEAR team also includes external partners and customers. The EIR will help us know where we are currently at the agency when it comes to issues of equity. The good news is that DSB already meets or surpasses the state’s requirement for diverse hiring in the measures of hiring people of color, hiring people with disabilities, and hiring veterans. The team is waiting to receive the PEAR Strategic Plan booklet, which is 200 pages long, as the next item due for each agency is their own PEAR Strategic Plan. The desired outcome is that the state’s workforce truly reflects its actual demographics. DSB’s PEAR team members currently: Michael MacKillop, Tricia Eyerly, Nohemy, Liz Tunison, Michael Skog, and Monirul Hawke.

Kim welcomed Nohemy and said she’s glad to have Nohemy on board at DSB for this important work.

Michael reiterated that DSB is still looking for external partners to join the DSB PEAR team, anyone who is interested let him know.

Jen asked if Michael has an idea of the time commitment. Nohemy said right now it’s about 1-2 hours a week, and she’s happy to work with other’s schedules when possible. May be more time needed during August and September when working on the strategic plan and the EIR.

Executive Committee Report: Julie Brannon

Julie reported that the April meeting focus was a discussion on the RSA Monitor in March. At least one member from the Executive Committee was able to attend each of the RSA meetings so there

was a lot to discuss. At the May meeting it was decided to meet jointly with the DSB Executive Team on a quarterly basis on the 2nd Tuesday of the month prior to the quarterly SRCB meeting. At the June meeting they went over the quarterly council meeting agenda to check for any updates. Michael shared some information about the audit that he will share at the council meeting. Also, VR has recently sent out a satisfaction survey to current program participants, and Lisa Wheeler will share results of that at the September SRCB meeting.

Membership Committee Report: Linda Wilder

Linda reported that the SRCB has five positions that will be open in September and November. The committee is working hard on finding people to fill those positions, let Linda know if anyone knows someone who might be interested. Two of the meeting guests today, Kris Colcock and Jim Tuni, are possibly interested in joining. The five positions open are: one State IL Council representative; one business, labor, and industry representative; one current or past participant of VR services; one member of a blind consumer group; and one person representative of blind and multiple disabilities. Linda said there are five people who need to renew their application, this is due to changing some expiration dates to spread them out more.

Kim Conner advised that of the categories that are open, the State Independent Living Council (SILC) position is designated by the SILC itself. Kim can help with her replacement, and added that this position being designated by the SILC is not noted in the SRCB Bylaws. Something to consider for the next Bylaws review.

Jen commented that she thinks the SILC appointment is an important distinction to add to the Bylaws since it's different from how the other positions are appointed. Similar to how they added clarification that the CAP and TVR positions are not subject to term limits.

Jacob asked for clarification on the SILC. Kim explained she is the Executive Director for the SILC, which is another Governor-appointed council. They are a cross-disability, statewide, advocacy and education organization. The SILC is tied closely with the Centers for Independent Living (CILs) that provide services throughout the state; as well as taking the lead in developing the state plan for IL. This is a document that spells out how a certain type of funding that comes into the state is distributed, and some of this money goes to DSB for their IL program.

Marci asked to confirm her term date, Meredith said it's November 13. September will be her last meeting as a council member.

Customer Satisfaction Committee Report: Jen Bean

Jen wanted to acknowledge this committee's work and to thank Nohemy for joining their recent and future meetings. The committee met with Nohemy to work on making the customer satisfaction survey results more accessible. Jen talked about the survey results presentation

changes, and asked for feedback at next SRCB meeting. They're working on new questions for the survey, including several that are Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) related. Committee members shared the results for the past quarter and talked about the new version of the report. Jen wanted council members to keep in mind that the survey goes to a small group/sample, participants who have closed their case during the previous month, and that on average there are only two to four survey responses received each month.

Jacob commented that he was able to get through the survey results, although it was a little challenging at first. He said the information in the new version is clearer and easier to read than the previous one, and he appreciates the change.

One question that came up – Who should be getting copies of the survey results? Yvonne said it currently goes to the SRCB, DSB E-Team, and the DSB Leadership Team which includes all program managers.

Jen asked for feedback on any additional questions or areas of interest that council members would like to see included in the survey.

Andy commented that perhaps DSB occasionally sets up unreasonable expectations of what participants will receive or achieve as part of their VR plan. This can lead to greater disappointment for the participant and leaves them feeling like they didn't get enough help to reach their goal.

Christopher thanked Jen and the committee for their work on the survey; and he asked if there is follow-up when specific staff are named in the survey. Michael said yes, there is follow-up to specific comments/feedback, in addition to looking for trends or training opportunities. Specific names should be redacted before the report is shared with the public. (Reminder to Yvonne to redact specific names from the report before it's shared.)

Michael added that he appreciates the time everyone spent going through the survey results and he really values the Council's perspective on the information.

Public Comment

Kim suggested adding time on the agenda again for council members to share what's happening in their world. Hard to know how/when to share information and/or updates that may be useful to other members.

Kim also shared that she will be leaving as the WA SILC Exec Director in early October. Should have a new person hired before then who she can introduce to the council at the September meeting. The new ED will likely be the new SILC representative designated by their council. Kim also thanked everyone and said she has enjoyed her time on the SRCB, it's been a good experience.

Marci agreed with Kim about adding time for member updates like we did previously, wouldn't have to be at every quarter. She will be terming off the council too, but plans to be attend future meetings as a member of the public so she won't be going far.

Sheila commented that she is also terming off the council, and after nine years it's hard to believe she won't be on it anymore. She would like to be involved with the PEAR group. Nohemy will follow-up with her.

Meredith expressed her thanks for the hard work of all of the members terming off, and the members staying too. Everyone has been very active on the Council, and it's deeply appreciated.

Linda added thanks to the Membership Committee members for the work this past couple of years getting all positions filled. She also announced that WCB has scholarship money available for students who are blind and in school, need to get applications in by June 15.

Meredith added a Happy Birthday today to Kristin Geary!

Wrap-Up

Reminder of next meeting on September 9th.

SRC 2022 Meeting Schedule

Fridays, September 9th, and December 9th

All meetings scheduled on Zoom from 9:00am – 12:00pm unless otherwise communicated.

Meeting Adjourned

Meeting was adjourned at 11:53am.