

## **SRC-DVR Business Meeting Minutes**

July 13, 1PM-3PM

Zoom Meeting

**Council Members Present:** Jenny Ardito, Alyssa Brazier, Kathy Despres, Samantha Fenderson, Darcy Gentle, Hailey Howard, Jennifer Kimble, Patty Ngara, Meghan Ryan, Andrew Smith, Dylan Sullivan, Joshua Weidemann, Allison Wiest

**Council Members Not Present:** Leora Byras, Lynn Feely, Chris Quint

**Others Present:** Laura Fussell, Program Manager of Employment Services for the Deaf, Communication Service for the Deaf (CSD)

**Scribe:** Meridy Lippoldt

**Next Business Meeting:** September 14, 1:00 pm-3:00 pm

### **Introduction**

- The meeting was called to order by Chair Allison Wiest at 1:02 p.m.
- A quorum was established with 10 voting members in attendance
- Members introduced themselves and participated in an ice breaker activity by sharing how they beat the heat during these hot Maine summer months.
- No additions to the Agenda were proposed

### **Minutes**

- The Council revisited the issue of whether to record Business Meeting deliberations going forward in light of a proposal put forward by the Chair that the meetings be recorded solely for minute-taking purposes after which the recordings would be deleted. A motion was made to put the issue to a vote, and seconded and the Council then adopted the proposal to record meetings by a unanimous show of hands.
- The Council had before it a copy of the draft March Business Meeting minutes and there being no proposals to amend them, a motion was made to vote on their adoption, and seconded. The vote passed by a unanimous show of hands and the March minutes were adopted.

- The Council had before it a copy of the draft May Business Meeting minutes and the Chair asked if there were any objections to approving the minutes in their current form. Treasurer Jennifer Kimble requested that the budget datasheet included in the draft minutes be replaced with a budget snapshot datasheet that she would forward for inclusion. A motion was made to vote on adopting the minutes, and seconded, and the minutes were approved as amended by a vote of 9 yeas with 1 member abstaining.

### **CAP Report**

Meg Ryan reported that work was ongoing on developing in-person training for staff and individuals with disabilities interested in engaging in post-secondary education and VR services.

### **How VR Helped Someone**

Alyssa Brazier shared a success story at DVR about a client who was already engaged in services when she began working as a VR Counselor. The client faced multiple health-related barriers and faced several mental health challenges which they worked very hard to overcome and with the help of progressive employment the client is now working toward a successful closure.

### **Director's Report**

- Sam provided an update on the recent announcement that the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) is moving from Department of Education to the Department of Health and Human Services, though she noted that no changes are expected for the current federal fiscal year at the state level. Sam said that VR services would not be affected by the transition and DVR will continue to provide its current level of services, for now. The Council discussed concerns about potential legal challenges to the interagency agreement, with Dylan sharing that Senator Collins indicated the arrangement might not be sustainable.
- Sam also reported progress on resolving data inconsistencies in their RSA 911 reports, which stemmed from issues with their AWARE case management system, and mentioned they had identified and addressed several errors in the data collection process.

- Youth Summer Programs

Sam detailed several ongoing summer programs for youth including:

- Try a Trade, a new week-long summer event based out of Thomas College. Fourteen students are currently enrolled. Each day the students get hands-on exposure and experience learning about different trades like plumbing, carpentry and the like. The program includes an interactive day at DVR where the students engage in a virtual reality exercise organized by Maine-based businesses like Bath Iron Works, Safety Works and Maine Motor, among others.
- Thomas College Program, enrolling 10 young adults who are taking an online course in how to assimilate to college life that is taught by USM staff.
- Southern College Youth Corp, where students visit a variety of college campuses and share campus experiences
- VIBE Program, where youth learn independent living skills including information about entering the labor market
- Northern and Southern Tours
- Allison asked about how the career exploration activities translate into post-secondary education or employment opportunities and the appropriate pathway for taking advantage of the programs, and Samantha recommended that the best place for a young person to start would be with the VIBE program which helps them identify their interests before pursuing other programs like the college bus tour as they reach their junior or senior year of secondary education. Meg recommended that the students have in place an IEP.

- Pathways to Partnership Grant update: This is a 5-year grant program awarded by the US Department of Education that is currently in its 4th year. The grant focuses on 3 age groups, 10-13 year-olds, 14-18 year-olds, and 18-24 year-olds and aims to foster collaborative projects that improve transition services for children and youth with disabilities. The evaluating team for the grant is Northwestern University. Becky Alliton and Sam recently attended a conference to see what other states are doing with their grants. DVR is currently looking for a VR Counselor I for the grant, and Sam invited Council members to let her know if they knew of a suitable candidate.

- WILAC Conference, organized to disseminate information about VR Programs

- A DVR Data Days initiative was recently launched at DVR to address the Division's ongoing gaps in data collection. The RSA requires a 45% success rate which DVR has been able to reach this year after having started at a rate as low as 12%. It is important to reach RSA requirements because failure to do so triggers a mandatory action plan mandate from the RSA.
- Update on the RSA 20-year rollback requirement regarding federal funding of DVR capital improvements: DVR surveyed 200 buildings and 35 clients and after doing so submitted their findings on June 24 to RSA showing 4 reports for leases and 0 for clients. DVR is awaiting feedback from RSA.
- CSNA Survey or Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment is conducted every 3 years and is coming due again starting this year. The survey is planned to get under way starting in the Fall. DVR is using the same contractor as in years past who is charged with contacting clients by phone to ask the questions included in the survey. Most questions have been retained from survey to survey although DVR is able to submit additional questions as it sees fit. Sam said she would forward to the Council the list of current questions and asked Council members to submit ideas for possible other questions to include on the survey. Sam thought it would be feasible to add an additional 5 or 6 questions to the 20 or so ones currently proposed which include a few questions added at the time when COVID began. Hailey had one suggestion which was to ask consumers whether they preferred to do an intake virtually or in person, and Sam said she would add this to the list of questions. Allison shared that at the national conference of the NCSRC in Washington DC the idea of engaging other stakeholders besides clients like CRPs and employers was raised and Sam took this idea on board. She added she hopes the contractor will be able to do a presentation to the SRC on their findings. In past surveys, one of the concerns consumers contacted raised most was the inconvenience of having multiple VR Counselors. Finally Jenn asked whether the Survey made any mention about the SRC and its role and whether a consumer would be interested in learning more about us?

## **Priority Topics**

- **Membership Appointment Recap**  
Allison reported that the Boards and Commissions Office recently approved 7 of the 11 SRC DVR membership applications that we submitted some time ago. Allison is not sure why the applications of Jenny, Dylan, Josh, and Meg are still pending and she intends to look into the matter with the Boards and Commissions Office and will report back to the Council.
- **NCSRC Conference Recap**  
Allison briefed the Council on the NCSRC Semi-Annual Conference in Washington DC she attended in April. She shared that members discussed issues they were facing and that many relayed similar challenges with membership recruitment including business representatives that we experience here in Maine. She commented that Maine's collaboration with its Vocational Rehabilitation partner is exemplary and seems to be much stronger and better than what some other states experience. Other items discussed at the Conference was the idea of using social media like Facebook to advertise SRC activities and highlight success stories. One of the presenters at the Conference was a youth member of one of the SRC's in attendance. Allison suggested that we might want to consider having a youth voice on the Council here in Maine. She complemented Sam's commitment to giving the Council an active say in how to implement the CSNA which was also a topic of discussion. Then there were announcements by the RSA, and a focus on how states are doing their outreach to fill their Business Representative seats. Allison noted that some states seem to have been more active on this matter than Maine has.
- **Joint SRC DVR/DBVI Annual In-Person Training**  
This joint in-person meeting has now been scheduled to take place on Tuesday October 20 at the conference center at 90 Blossom Way in Augusta, and Council members were asked to please save the date on their calendars. Allison added that the SRC Leadership members had met to discuss potential topics for discussion at the training and that she has reached out to the NCSRC for possible speakers.
- **Discussion on How to Best Engage Business and Industry Seat Representatives & Meeting Structure**  
The Council addressed a longstanding issue of ongoing concern which was how to recruit and engage potential Business and Industry member seats to fill the 3 spots currently vacant on the DVR SRC

Council. Current Business Rep Kathy Despres offered the opinion that the current format of and subject-matter addressed in the meetings fell short of what she thinks a potential Business representative would find of interest and worthy of their time. She urged the Council to consider the need to change the content of the meetings to include more information targeted specifically to the needs of business people. Sam offered that one idea would be for the DVR business team to attend meetings to provide briefings on issues of interest to businesses such as how to find employees, etc. Jenn noted that HR departments wrestle with this very issue and it might be helpful if the SRC could offer a potential business recruit an education on how to better engage with DVR and learn more about how it works. Perhaps the Council should consider holding a few of their meetings every year that would be devoted strictly to employers/businesses? Allison supported the idea adding that maybe we could start at our annual training in October. Could businesses and clients working with VR be added to the agenda to begin sharing stories and discussing the hiring and job retention of people with disabilities. Sam also shared potential training agenda items might include Education of ADA and accessibility, along with having a discussion about the business's needs and how VR can help. Jenn observed that she has witnessed a trend where younger people coming onto the job market are good self advocates and employers may not necessarily be well-positioned to handle specific accommodations and/or accessibility. She urged the Council to think hard about what it wants to get from employers who join the SRC and not only what employers might take away from being a member. Clarity of message was key. Sam noted in this regard that it would be helpful for the Council to receive feedback from businesses on their experiences recruiting people with disabilities and what are some of their key concerns such as what are the top soft skills needed to be successfully employed in their businesses? She suggested that DVR might be able to help organize something in this regard to help capture this business intelligence. Another idea would be to hold 2 Business Focus Meetings a year devoted to the employment side that Council Business Reps could be expected to attend. Kathy said a good place to identify potential recruits could be the local Chambers of Commerce. Jenn had a concern about how to maintain momentum after meetings and suggested that it would be helpful to have Business Engagement Officers attend the meetings to ensure a

follow-up after the meetings. Sam noted that DVR has a Business Engagement Officer (BAM) who could be invited, with Jenn adding that the BAM might be helpful to us in identifying potential recruits too. Sam recommended holding an ad hoc meeting before our Annual Meeting to discuss these ideas with a view to share ideas at the Annual Joint SRC Training/meeting in October.

## **Announcements**

- Disability Pride Event: Meg announced that the Disability Pride Event originally scheduled for Friday, July 17th has been cancelled due to the death of Stacy Converse.
- Consumer Handbook Revision: The Committee working on the Consumer Handbook has not met again since the last report out, but will be scheduling a meeting and continuing to work to revise the Consumer handbook. In addition, Jenn and Andrew shared with the Council a mock-up of a Membership Rack Card they had been able to create in response to input received from Council members at the June Focus Meeting. It is intended as a marketing tool to recruit new Council members. They asked the Council to weigh in on the content and design of their proposed rack card. Jenny recommended adding that former and current DVR clients would be welcome to serve on the Council too, and everyone agreed this was a good idea. Members further liked the idea of using the colors of the State of Maine as a color scheme and spelling out the name of SRC in lieu of using the current logo on the card. Sam offered to have her AV staff put the card in final form and it was agreed that Andrew would make the proposed changes and forward the card to her.
- Honorarium Requests
- Meeting reminders:
  - Focus Group: August 10, 1:00 pm - 3:00 pm
  - Business Meeting – Monday, September 14, Pre-Meeting-12:30 p.m. followed by Business Meeting from 1:00 - 3:00 p.m.
  - Additional working group meetings on the DVR Consumer Handbook to be scheduled, and possible meetings on the organization of the SRC Annual In-person meeting, and on the issue of Business Engagement to be determined.

No public comment was provided and the meeting was adjourned promptly at 3:00 p.m.