

State Rehabilitation Council

Division of Vocational Rehabilitation

Maine

October 1, 2019 – September 30, 2020

Message from the SRC Chair

It has been an honor and privilege to serve as the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation State Rehabilitation Council (SRC-DVR) Chair for the past three years. On behalf of the SRC-DVR, I am pleased to submit the 2020 Annual Report. Our Council is engaged and continues to work towards a strong system of supporting individuals with disabilities. I am so proud to be connected to the work of our Council as we have so many dedicated members contributing to our vocational rehabilitation programs. The volunteer time put in by our members are appreciated as those hours go into working in partnership with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitationd. I have learned a lot, grown a lot and I am a better person for working with such wonderful people!

 *Cheryl Peabody, Chair*

 *SRC-DVR*

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STATE OF MAINE



DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

DIVISION OF VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION

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GOVERNOR

Director’s Message

Dear Reader,

After a year that has been so full of challenges, it is my pleasure to look back on some of the year’s accomplishments. More than ever before, Maine’s Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) was called upon to serve Maine people with disabilities in innovative and creative ways and I am happy to report that Maine DVR staff rose to that challenge!

After quickly pivoting to remote delivery of services in March, most DVR staff have continued to work remotely while conducting in-person meetings when clients’ needs could not be met in other ways. Always keeping the individual in mind, DVR developed and expanded new tools and resources to continue to support youth and adult clients on their pathways to employment. The online tool **Virtual Job Shadow** became a platform to host counselor-created lessons for delivery in Maine high school classrooms, a **Virtual Job Club** offered over the telephone became a way to continue to connect adults for skill building activities as they waited for when it was safe to return to employment, and the long-established **Career Exploration Workshop**, went virtual with VR counselors across the state working across office lines to offer the curriculum together. DVR’s **Step Up** summer college prep program for students with disabilities on the Autism Spectrum went virtual too and was a success with nine young people successfully completing college level coursework, virtual career exploration activities, social skills instruction and college prep seminars in collaboration with the University of Maine’s Center for Community Inclusion and Disability Studies. The RSA-funded **Transition Work Based Learning Model Demonstration Grant** was slowed but not stopped by the pandemic and is yielding early findings that are very promising!

While some individuals did need to pause services, others were able to take advantage of new opportunities in employment (while safely using personal protective equipment) leading to many success stories around the state. Community Rehabilitation Providers rose to the challenge too, delivering employment supports virtually and in the community. Employers continued to reach out to DVR for assistance in meeting their workforce needs. As Maine DVR works with its Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) partners, new opportunities are being realized leading to increased credential and skills gains for DVR clients.

Through the year, it has been my honor to work with Maine’s State Rehabilitation Council as we have faced the unique challenges of this time . I look forward to our continued work together as we move into a post-pandemic world taking the lessons we have learned as a springboard to new and improved more equitable ways to support individuals with disabilities to reach their employment goals.

 Sincerely,

Libby Stone-Sterling

Libby Stone-Sterling, PhD

Director

SRC Mission

The mission of the Council is to partner with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation in the development of state goals, priorities, policy, and practice; and to review and analyze the Division’s results and performance in support of securing and maintaining integrated employment, through a process of informed choice, for individuals with disabilities.

SRC Responsibilities

The SRC is tasked to: review, analyze and advise regarding responsibilities under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by WIOA (2014), particularly related to:

* Eligibility and Order of Selection
* Extent, Scope and Effectiveness of Services
* Functions Affecting Individual Achievement of Employment Outcomes
* Application, Reports and Evaluations

SRC Members

Cheryl Peabody – SILC Representative

*Cheryl has a BS in Psychology from the University of Maine. She worked for the Social Security Administration for 17 years as a Disability Claims Adjudicator. She currently devotes her time doing volunteer work with several Governor-appointed councils and non-profit organizations involving education and advocacy for individuals with disabilities.*

Jodie Hall – Parent Information & Training Network

 *Jodie Hall is a Parent Trainer for Maine Parent Federation. She updates, creates, and implements workshops, runs parent support groups and provides outreach for Maine Parent Federation. She is also the parent of a child with a disability and draws from her personal experience to shape her professional work.*

Julia Endicott – Client Assistance Program (pending)

*Julia Endicott is a CAP advocate at Disability Rights Maine.  Julia grew up in Rockport, MA and attended Colby College, where she graduated with a B.A. in Global Studies.  She then moved to Colorado, where she worked as a paralegal focusing on civil rights, employment discrimination, and immigration cases.*

Suzanne Primiano – Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor (unavailable)

Kelly Osborn – Community Rehabilitation Provider

*Kelly Osborn is the Senior Vice President of Client Services at Goodwill of Northern New England. Kelly is responsible for oversight of all workforce programs as well as healthcare services at Goodwill.*

Darcy Gentle – 121 VR Program Representative

*Darcy Gentle is a member of the Maliseet Community. Darcy attended the University of Maine in Augusta. She graduated with a bachelor's degree in Mental Health and Humans Services, an associate's degree in Social Services, and her MHRT-C. IDarcy also graduated from the University of*

*Southern Maine with a Master of Science in Counseling Rehabilitation. She has worked for the Maliseet Tribe for the last five years and provided Vocational Rehabilitation services to the Maliseet Tribe, The Micmaq Tribe, and the Passamaquoddy Tribes. The program has been very successful and will continue to be successful with the support and collaboration from all the programs that provide direct services to native communities.*

Mary Adley – State Educational Agency

*Mary Adley, Med, is the Coordinator for State Agency Programs at the Department of Education, and has served as the Governor appointed DOE seat on the State Rehab Council since 2017. Mary collaborates with all state agencies including the Bureau of Rehabilitation, Department of Labor; on behalf of children and adults with disabilities. Mary has been an educator working in both the public and private sector as an instructor and administrator for students in grades K-12 for 33 1/2 years.*

Joshua Howe – State Workforce Development

*Joshua is a Program Coordinator with the State Workforce Board. He holds a BA in Psychology and English Literature from Clark University and an MA in Rehabilitation Counseling from Assumption College. He has spent most of his career working with and for people with disabilities in mental health and rehabilitation and has been with the State for 18 years.*

Libby Stone-Sterling – VR Agency Director

*Libby Stone-Sterling, PhD has served as director of the Maine Division of Vocational Rehabilitation since 2018. Prior to becoming director, she served as the assistant director for eight years. Libby strongly believes in the importance of VR’s mission and is particularly committed to supporting young people with disabilities to reach their goals.*

\*\* Our membership Committee is working diligently to recruit new members.

SRC-DVR Activities – A Year in Review FY2020

The SRC met monthly with the exception of July. At he annual training, the SRC puts a work plan for the year in place, including going over tasks the SRC is mandated to do with committee assignments. Committee reports and updates on agencies/organizations represented on the Council by members were given at each meeting.

The priority of the SRC was to build capacity of the Council in order to come into compliance with the Rehabilitation Act, as amended by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) (2014). Much time was devoted to brainstorming ideas of how to bring in individuals with disabilities to serve as Council members; where to post information about the SRC-DVR; and how to gain traction through word-of-mouth. Suggestions included: posting recruitment materials about the SRC-DVR on the websites of the Council member’s (MDOL) facebook page and twitter page; CareerCenters; and provide the materials to DVR staff to be disseminated to clients. In November of 2019, a Council member suggested holding meetings through videoconferencing to help those with mobility impairments and transportation issues. One thing that affected the SRC in recruiting new members was the Governor’s Office did not make any appointments to the SRC-DVR in FY2020. [Of note, subsequent to September 30, 2020, the Governor approved the pending SRC applications]

Client Success Stories: At each SRC meeting, there is a section called “How VR Helped Someone”. This is time for DVR staff to tell how empowering VR services can be. One success story evolved around a 30 year old woman. With the help of VR and the Clubhouse, she was able to get a landscaping job. She was a hard worker who paid attention to detail. This was not her passion. It was discovered that she loved baking, a self-taught skill. She was able to get a job baking and is now following her dream and living her passion.

The SRC had some presenters for meetings. These included:

Christine Robinson, Director of the Division of Systems Improvement & Quality Improvement (SIQA) spoke about the new common performance measures.

Peter Diplock, Assistant Director of the Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired, spoke about the Apprenticeship Program.

Geoffrey Reid, SIQA*,*presented on the WORK Services.

Sitara Sheik, VRC, spoke about the Maine Educational Center for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing summer program.

The SRC-DVR received reminders for all National Coalition of State Rehabilitation Council (NCSRC) national calls. The NCSRC spring conference was cancelled due to the pandemic.

The SRC supported the Chair sending a letter to Maine’s Congressional Delegates in support of USDOE Secretary DeVos’ letter to Congress dated April of 2020 requesting fiscal flexibilities in VR spending in light of the pandemic.

The State Plan: The SRC worked in partnership with DVR in planning and reviewing the State Plan. Comments from the SRC were given and included in the State Plan.

VR Program – A Year in Review FY2020:

In late February, the Rehabilitation Services Administration provided additional guidance concerning allowable services and expenses under Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act-mandated Pre-Employment Transition Services. Maine’s lower than average youth population coupled with the limitations caused by the COVID-19 pandemic have made reaching the required 15% funding set aside quite challenging.

Client Assistance Program (CAP): Following recommendations from the Rehabilitation Services Administration and a Request for Information (RFI) and public comment period, Governor Janet Mills designated Disability Rights Maine as the Client Assistance Program in June 2020.

The Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS) launched a new website called Workforce Opportunities, Referrals and Knowledge (WORK) Services. It’s a joint website that will bring together Bureau of Employment Services, DVR, Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired and Adult Education. It is an online project to help those interested in education and training. Depending on how individuals answer questions, it will direct them to the services they want. If they want to apply for VR services, they will be able to fill out an application from the website. The users will be able to give consent to have reports done by one agency go to another right on the website.[Of note, subsequent to September 30, 2020, this platform was discontinued.]

DVR submitted resources which were accepted for inclusion in the National Clearinghouse for Rehabilitation Training Material (NCRTM). These included videos of youth participants using the Progressive Employment model as well as a Financial Literacy Guide for Transition-Age Youth with Disabilities.

DVR continues to work closely with Clubhouses across the state. A VRC provides services to the Clubhouse. The program is based on the psycho-social model and focuses on a work-oriented day. Clubhouse staff reach out to local businesses and work with them to hire Clubhouse members. Clubhouse staff provide job coaching as needed. Work experiences are usually six to nine months duration. .

The Step-Up program is for youth on the Autism Spectrum who wish to go on to post-secondary education. This 5 week summer program provides social skill instruction to aid with communication, along with a 3-credit college course, college prep seminars and work experience. Students in the program get a taste of what college life is like before going off to college full-time. The Step-Up program was done virtually due to the pandemic.

Apprenticeship Program: Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS) started the development of the Apprenticeship Program pilot in Maine in one of Maine’s urban areas (Lewiston/Auburn area). The Apprenticeship Program team worked with WINTAC and VR staff from other states who already had programs in place. To be in a registered apprenticeship, one has be at least 16 years of age, meet the employer’s criteria and work either part-time or full-time. Participants received a paycheck with wages that will increase as skill level increases. The focus for this pilot program was in food service and hospitality. In December of 2019 and January of 2020, Maine BRS did presentations for staff on the Apprenticeship Program statewide with Community Rehabilitation Providers and other states in attendance. It generated a lot of interest. The benefits of this program to employers included: reduced turnover costs, higher productivity and connection to training funds. The benefits to participants included: increased skills, getting paid and mentoring while learning. The program received several referrals with the first VR client signed up by December of 2019.  The program went statewide by February of 2020. BRS worked with the Maine Apprenticeship Program and the Bureau of Employment Services to get grants to secure funding for the program. In August of 2020, it was announced that a grant was awarded in the amount of $450,000.

The Maine Educational Center for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing is a program dedicated to providing improved educational outcomes for post-secondary deaf and hard of hearing students. This year, the focus was on providing services remotely. Students can share information of work experiences, virtual job shadowing and soft skills training.

Transition Work-Based Learning Grant: DVR was awarded this 5-year RSA-funded grant in 2016. Partners on the grant included Jobs for Maine Graduates (JMG), the Institute for Community Inclusion (ICI) at the University of Massachusetts Boston, American Institutes for Research (AIR) and the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR). The project has implemented JMG and Progressive Employment as interventions for participants in the Augusta and Bangor areas. Additionally, participants will complete two paid work experiences. Evaluation of the project will lead to increased knowledge about effective strategies to promote post-secondary employment and education outcomes.

 The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on DVR. Agency staff quickly went to remote intakes, assessments, Individualized Plan for Employment development and other services such as Virtual Career Exploration Workshops (VCEW) and Virtual Job Shadow. Early in the pandemic, DVR held weekly meetings with stakeholders to keep them informed. The restrictions had eased a bit toward the end of FY2020 and DVR staff had the option of working remotely and in the office; seeing clients remotely, or, if client need necessitated, seeing clients in person. All of this was done following the CDC safety guidelines.

Consumer Data for PY2019

For BRS, Major Disabling Conditions:

* Blind/Visually Impaired = 3.7%
* Deaf/Hard of Hearing = 11.7%
* Physical Disability = 11.7%
* Cognitive Disability = 30.7%
* Mental Health Disability = 32.1%

DVR New Applications = 2,702

DVR Individuals Placed in Competitive Employment = 668

Age at Application:

* 15-22 = 39.9%
* 23-54 = 45%
* 55-64 = 11.3%
* 65 snf Older = 3.8%

Education Level at Closure:

* Less than High School = 19%
* High School Graduate = 58.6%
* Some College = 13.6%
* College and More = 8.8%

Contact Information

Cheryl Peabody, Past Chair,

DVR-SRC

July 2018 – October 2020

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Kelly Osborn, Chair,

DVR-SRC

October 2020 – Present

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