**SRC-DVR Minutes**

**November 19, 2018**

**Present**: Kathy Despres, CAP Advocate; Josh Howe, SWB Acting Director; J. Richardson Collins, Advocate; Libby Stone-Sterling, DVR Director; Chris Higgins, Walgreens; Mary Adley, DOE; Suzanne Primiano, DVR Regional Director; Veronica Swain, SRC-DVR Admin Assistant

**On Phone**: Ann Long, MPF; Darcy Gentle, 121 VR Program Director

**Members of Public Present**: Wes Uhlman, DVR Counselor

**Members of Public on Phone**: Emily Brinck, UMF

**Absent**: Cheryl Peabody, SILC; Dan Vigue, Goodwill Industries; Scott Hebert, Hanger Clinic; Nicole Achey, UMF; Riley Albair, DRM

**Meeting called to order at 1:04 PM**

**Welcome and Introductions:** Kathy called the meeting to order and began introductions. She questioned if enough council members were present for a quorum. Chris noted that the membership committee subgroup can try to find out the exact number of council members needed to reach a quorum by next meeting**.**

**Acceptance of October’s Minutes:** October’s minutes mistakenly recorded Chris’s email address as **Chiggins@yahoo.com**. The correct email address to reach Chris at is **Chigggins@yahoo.com**. Voting on accepting October’s minutes is postponed until the next SRC-DVR meeting in December.

**Director’s Report**:

**Announcement**: Libby met Emily Brinck in Farmington last week; they spoke about Emily’s interests and how they might be able to work together going forward.

 *Wes Uhlman enters. Darcy Gentle calls in.*

**Rules**: The comment period for DVR rules is now closed. DVR is currently working with the Secretary of State’s Office on the final version of the rules. DVR hopes to go live with the rules on January 1st, 2019. This is a target date, not set in stone. There will be DVR staff training on the rule changes during the month of December 2018.

**RFP**: The RFP for CRPs update sent out by Chris Robinson to DVR staff was previously distributed to SRC-DVR members via Cheryl. DVR intended for the RFP to go out at the end of August 2018; the process has taken longer than first predicted. The RFP has gone to purchases and to the Governor’s office for review. DVR needs approval from the Governor’s office due to the amount of funds spent on the RFP. That process is underway; it is unknown how long it will take. It is also unknown if or how the administrative change in the Governor’s office will affect this process. In response to questioning by Kathy, Libby noted that she does not know how large this RFP is compared to other RFPs across the state. Libby explained that there is a relatively new way of carrying out purchases due to new staffing and different guidelines. An email will be sent out when there is an update on the RFP process.

**Staff Change at RSA**: DVR has a new technical assistance team at RSA as a result of staff moving at RSA. Some members of the new technical assistance team are known by DVR, some are unknown. DVR has been assigned entirely new people to work with regarding the fiscal piece of correction action. David Miller replaces Julia Doyle as the fiscal person. Doyle has been moved to a different team, not promoted. James Billy remains the state liaison for DVR. Bryan Miller will oversee James Billy. On November 21st, DVR will have a conference call with the new RSA team. The call will function as a meet and greet, and will give DVR an opportunity to go over some unanswered questions about monitoring and the corrective action plan. The call will also allow DVR to discover what the new team’s priorities are for DVR. Libby provided a summary of the status of RSA’s monitoring and corrective action. When DVR received their monitoring results from RSA, there were both fiscal and programmatic findings. DVR worked some with RSA on programmatic findings (regarding time to eligibility and time to plan). DVR established what their corrective steps would be and RSA accepted those steps. DVR began to do training around those steps and began reporting out on them. DVR sent RSA a description of the training process and the reporting process around the programmatic findings. DVR’s assigned team at RSA then changed, and as a result DVR has not heard anything in response to their latest submissions on the programmatic piece. DVR believed the programmatic piece could be resolved quickly, but it is currently still outstanding due to the lack of response from RSA. DVR will hear about RSA’s response to the programmatic piece on Wednesday during the conference call. Regarding DVR’s fiscal corrective action plan, DVR has heard nothing from RSA at all. DVR submitted their response to the fiscal corrective action to RSA months ago and have not received any feedback. DVR will hopefully get clarification about this issue during their call. RSA has been silent around the TWBL grant as well.

**Staffing**: DVR has moved the Rockland supervisor line to Bangor. Two new supervisors will be beginning in Bangor on the week of Nov 26th, 2018. One of the new supervisors is Maynard Jalbert, a previous supervisor for DHHS. Heidi Holst will be the other new supervisor, and in the process will leave her previous position as an Augusta VRC. This creates a staffing need in the Augusta office, compounded by the resignation of VRC Diane Vinyl. Diane Vinyl filled the Clubhouse role; that position may be empty for a period of time. Sue noted that Clubhouse members are generally more supported than other VR clients, so if any position must be unfilled for a period of time, she would rather it be that position. New hire Jennifer Eager will begin filling the transition position in Augusta beginning on December 3rd, 2018. This position was recently moved from Rockland to Augusta and was briefly filled and then vacated. DVR is also in the hiring process for Sue Primiano’s previous position as casework supervisor, and will finish interviews this week. The casework supervisor position was posted internally; if it is successfully filled internally, it will create another new vacancy. DVR has recently hired new RC1s and RC2s in Portland. DVR is currently filling a position in Lewiston as well. DVR continues to use the process of going to the Governor’s office for approval to fill positions. The Rockland DVR Office is coming under the supervision of the Augusta Office. The Hinckley Office will soon be supervised out of Bangor; DVR will make this change once staff training is complete. DVR is also using a new hiring system through the State of Maine that makes it easier to submit online applications. This is generating more applications.

**Data**: Libby distributed hard copies of DVR data previously sent out by Cheryl via email. Libby also distributed data on DVR transition cases. Libby will email Cheryl this transition data as well. DVR wants to pay attention to transition data for their own purposes. Libby noted that a month-by-month snapshot does not reveal trends in the same way a year-long breakdown does. Josh suggested presenting the data in a scatter plot; this would reveal outliers that skew averages. DVR has to be accountable for outliers, and cannot just look at month to month averages. Libby explained that DVR used to have two sets of data reports; one reflected people who came into the system before DVR put in place it’s corrective action plan. That report is gone, and DVR has had all cases presented on one report for some time. DVR must meet the 60- and 90-day standards regardless of outliers. DVR continues to watch the data around time to plan and time to eligibility.

**Time to eligibility/time to plan:** DVR must meet a 60-day standard for application to eligibility. The data shows that in October 2018, DVR met this standard in Central and North regions, but not in the South. A vacancy in the South during the late summer and early fall may have caused this. DVR will keep an eye on time to eligibility in conversation with staff in the South. DVR must meet a 90-day standard for time to plan, and this standard is being met throughout the State.

**Time to eligibility/plan in transition data**: For transition cases, time to eligibility in the South is under 60 days. The Rockland office vacancy caused the Central region to be over the 60-day standard. Sue noted she is positive that this number will be improved next month. Libby noted that while RSA does not care about the context around not meeting time to eligibility or time to plan standards, it is helpful for DVR to know whether or not there is a short-term issue regarding staffing vacancies that will resolve itself. Regarding time to plan averages in transition data for October, the South was at 87.9, Central at 97.7, and North at 109.8. DVR is watching the time to plan numbers; they are higher than usual. This may be reflective of the beginning of school year, a lot of activity going on for students, and more applications.

**Waitlist**: 33 transition-age individuals are in delayed Category 3 status, out of the approximately 400 people on the waitlist. Pre-ETS recipients who apply for VR and are found to be in Category 3 can continue to get Pre-ETS, but if transition-age individuals apply for VR and are found to be Category 3 and are not in Pre-ETS already, they cannot receive Pre-ETS. DVR is encouraging people to use Pre-ETS as much as possible so they are not excluded from services.

**Early Exiter Performance Data:** Early exiters are individuals who leave VR service before finding employment. Early exiters include people who request closure as well as those who are non-responsive. DVR previously had to label these cases unsuccessful closures; going forward DVR will be able to look at wage data of early exiters. This will illustrate how many early exiters are employed. Under the old system, DVR did not receive credit for aiding early exiters with skill or confidence building or experience. Over the last 3 years, there have been less early exiters for both transition and non-transition clients. Overall, this year had fewer early exiters, but the number for this last 4th quarter was higher than DVR would like to have seen. DVR will keep an eye on this and see what it could mean going forward. Hopefully, more transition activities will translate into more engagement, but could also lead to more early exiters due to skill building. DVR will look at the numbers on a quarterly basis. About one-third of early exiters are transition cases; transition clients are almost 40% of VR’s clients. Baseline data in 2013/14 showed that transition cases had disproportionately high levels of early exiting.

**Case Count and Expenditures Report:** The left hand column tracks DVR’s budget along the state fiscal year; the middle column illustrates vacancies (vacancies are not up to date, report is from the end of October); and the right hand column illustrates case counts. Libby noted that a challenge for DVR, especially heading into a new administration, concerns how DVR uses data reports to meaningfully talk about what VR does. How can data be used to tell the VR story? SRC has an important role in this topic. DVR will likely make changes to the case count/expenditures report in order to make it more user-friendly.

**Closures:** The closure goal for this last year was 1,000. The current number of total closures for this year is 737. This number is lower than expected, but unsurprising due to Category 3 remaining closed. There is a shifting mindset in DVR. DVR is moving away from looking solely at case closures and moving toward paying more attention to career paths, skill attainment, wages, wage growth, etc. Case closure will continue to be important, but case closure will no longer be the only important number or the only way to measure DVR’s success.

**New Case Applications:** There were 315 new applications in October 2018. Applications are lower than they have been in the past. The economy affects the number of case applications. A strong economy generally translates into fewer applications.

**TWBL Grant**: Libby noted that Cheryl had previously asked about updates from the TWBL grant. TWBL is a 5-year grant, DVR is currently in year 3. DVR will be doing an all grant staff meeting December 10th, 2018 in Bangor. Libby will provide an update to the SRC following that meeting.

End of Director’s Report.

**Committee Work**: At the last SRC meeting (the annual training), SRC members broke into two subcommittees to work on different tasks throughout the year. Cheryl previously emailed SRC members the lists of subgroup members and tasks. The subcommittee consisting of Kathy, Riley, Mary, Darcy, Sue, and Josh is responsible for the State Plan, Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment, Order of Selection, Annual Meeting/Yearly Schedule, By-Laws, Legislative Updates, and Policies/MOUs. J. Richardson Collins decided to join this subcommittee. The subcommittee consisting of Chris, Scott, Dan, Ann, and Nicole is responsible for the Consumer Satisfaction Survey, Membership Orientation, Business Committee work, Informed Choice, and Fair Hearing. Cheryl and Emily will join this subcommittee. Non-SRC members can be part of committees; Wes will choose to join one subcommittee after more consideration. Committee meetings are at 12 PM, one hour before the regular SRC meeting at 1 PM. To phone in, call the regular SRC-DVR number. The State Plan subcommittee will also meet via Zoom for an hour during the first Monday of every month at 11 AM. Kathy asked if Libby wants to be cc’d in emails sent to the State Plan subgroup. Libby said she would like to receive email updates as things progress, as well as receive a neat summary of all the information afterwards. Libby is invited to join subcommittee meetings; she will let the subcommittee know before hand if she will attend or if she thinks someone else should attend. Josh notes that the SWB will be doing an update on the State Plan and Title I for the Legislature and Governor at the end of December. DVR does not have to report an annual update for VR for Title IV. SRC-DVR will hold an executive committee meeting about possibly adding website duties to Veronica’s current admin duties. Libby asked subcommittees to let her know if they want to hear more about the business side of things regarding DVR. Chris noted that the business committee would welcome more engagement and exchange of information with DVR. The committee work done throughout the year will be arranged in a packet for Cheryl to put in her annual report.

**New** **Business**: J. Richardson Collins noted that his experience with a current VR worker has been markedly different and more positive than his past experiences with other VR workers. J. explained that his current VR worker is able to match the nature of the challenges J. has, and is able to incorporate this into their interactions with each other. The VR worker is also being mindful of what J.’s challenges mean about pursuing and staying in employment. Much of the positive experience J. has had with this VR worker centers around skilled communication, and specifically around how communication is managed and phrased. The VR worker is skilled at making sure that J. is understanding them, and alerting J. if he’s not being understood. J. noted that a lot comes down to the “how” of communication—talking about how communication is occurring. J. wondered how his experience could be used to inform and potentially benefit how VR workers work with other clients who have similar challenges. Libby noted that DVR is working on a series of topics right now related to staff training. What might be helpful for other staff to hear about regarding J.’s experience? The answer can be particular and based around a particular need or disability, or it can be more generally based around communication practices. What can be gleaned out of J.’s experience and incorporated into training practices? Council members continued to discuss this issue. Josh agreed with J. in emphasizing the importance of explicit communication. Communication between VRCs and clients not only enhances the counselor-client relationship, it can also be a teaching moment and help clients more broadly with their relationship and communication skills. Communication between clients and VRCs can also help clients learn to be explicit about their communication needs. Josh spoke about how he learned to be explicit about his needs as someone with a hearing impairment. Kathy recalled that during one of the first Empowerment Forums, there was a panel of people with disabilities who spoke about how they self-advocated. In each person’s story, a shift occurred when they learned to self-advocate. J. responded to this topic by asking where the shift occurs for VR workers in not waiting for clients to self accommodate or advocate, but in instead moving toward their clients. Like in the self-advocacy stories, a shift occurs. Where does the shift occur for VR workers in moving towards their clients and helping them reframe? Chris asked if there is a mechanism in place between clients and counselors where DVR looks to see which counselor is the best fit for a particular client. Sue answered that applicants land in the case files of whoever manages the geographical area, but noted that counselor assignments can be changed if there are any issues. Sue explained that as a supervisor, she considers who might fit best with each person based on certain variables. Sometimes counselors do self-govern and place clients with specific VR workers. Kathy agreed that DVR is typically good about changing counselors based on requests. J. added that he believes DVR has gotten better at this over the years. Libby noted that DVR’s focus is on making sure all counselors have the same basic skill set; there should not be too much variation between VRCs. Every VRC needs to have good communication skills and be able to meet clients where they are. SRC members will think more about this topic and consider how J.’s experience could be used to benefit other VR workers and clients. This topic will be addressed as old business at the next SRC meeting.

**Announcements**: Libby announced that the Special Ed rules are open right now at DOE, and noted that it is likely that DVR and DBVI will be making some public comments on the rules. There is a lot of crossover with Special Ed rules and the impact they have in VR. DVR had some discussion about possibly being able to reflect pieces about WIOA in the Special Ed rules, but this year does not seem like the right year to do so. It is something DVR are keeping an eye on going forward. The public comment period for the Special Ed rules is open until December 3rd, 2018. Libby will give the SRC a brief overview on comments made by DVR and DBVI at the next SRC meeting. All the learning standards are also out for public comments right now. DVR made comments on career and education standards; DBVI and DVR went in together on comments. The comments were not on anything extremely consequential, but gave some input on things they might be considering. Kathy noted that it would be good for the SRC to see how all these groups and issues interconnect. Mary noted that she was shocked at the small amount of people who showed up for the public hearing on Special Ed rules. There was nobody from DRM there. Mary also noted that most of the concerns people raised were fairly minor, and most of the changes being made are also fairly minor. She explained that the two key topics concerned child development services and the transfer of preschool-age kids, and the transfer of responsibility for the provision of free and appropriate public education (FAPE) for kids who are state agency clients. State agency clients are children whose biological parents retain their guardianship and have all decision making, but who get placed out of homes to receive treatment. Parents can choose where to place children out of a few different options. Mary’s recommended that children should not to be moved out of their communities. Ann noted that MPF attended the public hearing and made comments on different areas of the rules. Kathy announced that the Special Ed rule change and comments will be on the agenda for the next SRC meeting. Libby, Mary, and Ann will speak about the comments made on the rules as much as they relate to VR.

**Honorarium**: An honorarium is available for those not otherwise compensated. Pays $50 per meeting and for travel to and from. Send requests to Chris at **Chigggins@yahoo.com**.

**Reminder about Emails**: Wes is not currently receiving the emails regarding SRC-DVR; add Wes to the email list.

Next SRC-DVR Meeting is on December 17th, 2018. The subgroup meetings begin at 12 PM, the full SRC meeting begins at 1 PM.

Kathy announced that she will take a motion to adjourn. Chris motioned, Mary seconded.

**Meeting Adjourned at 2:37 PM**