**DVR-SRC Minutes**

**May 20, 2019**

**Present**: Cheryl Peabody, SILC; Libby Stone-Sterling, DVR Director; Sue Primiano, DVR Regional Manager; Kathy Despres, CAP; Chris Higgins, Walgreens; Josh Howe, SWB; Mary Adley, DOE

**On Phone**: Darcy Gentle, 121 VR Program

**Members of Public**: Jodie Hall, MPF; Veronica Swain, SRC Assistant; Emilie Montgomery, DRM; Adam Way, Empowers Employment Options;

**Absent**: Dan Vigue, Goodwill Industries; Wes Uhlman, VRC

**Welcome & Introductions**

Cheryl informed SRC members that Scott Hebert has left the SRC due to work responsibilities.

**Acceptance of April’s Minutes**: April minutes are accepted as distributed.

**Treasurer’s Report**: Chris will distribute the report to SRC members through email. The SRC is 40% through its budget overall. The current report includes the NSCVR Conference expenses, but not the surveys which have not been submitted.

**Background from Jodie, Emilie, Adam:** Jodie, Emilie, and Adam are interested in joining the SRC. Upon request from Cheryl, they summarize their background.Jodie Hall is from North Yarmouth, and joined Maine Parent Federation (MPF) in October as the southern Maine coordinator. She has a fifteen-year-old son with Downs Syndrome and accompanying diagnoses. Jodie is currently the lead trainer for MPF in central and southern Maine. Emilie Montgomery is from Portland and is an advocate at Disability Rights Maine (DRM). She works with many VR clients. She also works with an attorney on employment discrimination and ADA related cases. Adam Way started Empowers Employment Options thirteen years ago. Empowers Employment Options currently provides community rehab services to individuals in regions three and four. Adam hopes to fill one of the SRC’s open Community Rehab Provider (CRP) seats.

Cheryl reminded SRC members to avoid using acronyms without explanation for the benefit of newer SRC members and interested parties.

**Director’s Report**:

**Staffing**: Libby noted that DVR has recently had challenges with a number of interviewees not attending their scheduled interviews. Despite this, DVR has recently been able to fill some open positions. A position in central Maine has recently been filled and will be announced soon. DVR has recently filled two of the open RC2 positions in Lewiston but received a separate RC2 resignation today. DVR has hired a former CRP as RC1 in Portland. The RC1 position in Lewiston Mia Diplock previously held will be posted this week. DVR has had a difficult time filling the RC1 Transition Work-Based Learning (TWBL) grant position in Augusta. It is a two-year, entry-level, Kennebec county position. Overall, there are currently two vacancies in Augusta and Waterville, three vacancies in Lewiston, and one vacancy in southern Maine. DVR recently hired two new staff members in Southern Maine. An RC2 named Jeff recently moved from the Bangor Office to central Maine to work as a rehab consultant; another RC2 recently moved to Eastern Maine Community College. Both RC2 positions will be posted soon.

Jodie asked Libby to describe the difference between an RC1 and RC2. Libby explained that the RC1 position is more flexible than the RC2 position and does not require a bachelor’s degree, whereas as a requirement under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) RC2s must have a bachelor’s degree in a field related to workforce development or vocational rehabilitation and need at least two years experience supporting people with disabilities. In regards to RC2 positions, DVR prioritizes applicants who have a master’s degree or Certification for Rehab Counselors (CRC).

**Monitoring Report**: DVR has had recent conversations with RSA on a number of different topics, but have not heard anything more regarding their corrective action.

**TWBL Grant RSA Monitoring**: RSA was recently at DVR to do monitoring on the TWBL Grant; DVR has not heard any feedback yet. Libby noted that the visit seemed to go well, and she is not anticipating any issues. All funds for the five-year TWBL Grant were previously granted to DVR upfront.

**WINTAC Training**: DVR is working with the Workforce Innovation Technical Assistance Center (WINTAC) on common performance measures, peer mentoring, and apprenticeship. WINTAC was previously at DVR to do manager/supervisor training; DVR will have a followup meeting with WINTAC this week. DVR is partnering with the Bureau of Employment Services (BES) to move ahead on an Apprenticeship Pilot, which is aimed at including more people with disabilities in apprenticeship. DVR is doing a pilot in the Lewiston/Auburn area in the hospitality industry. Peter Diplock, assistant director at DBVI, is the lead for Bureau. He is doing the pilot for both DBVI and DVR and working with different staff in each of the offices. The hospitality industry was chosen because of employer preference. DVR was approached by WINTAC about peer mentoring because of DVR’s pilot program with AlphaOne Center for Independent Living with youth in southern Maine. DVR aims to go statewide with peer mentoring. In June, DVR will roll out a webinar to provide more information. The webinar will explain DVR’s peer mentoring model, how the training will work, etc. DVR is considering having peer mentoring be a fee-for-service model available statewide. WINTAC will come at the end of the summer to do training for agencies that want to be peer mentoring host agencies. The training curriculum is already established and in use by other states. DVR aims to stay in the transition age range as a starting place. Libby will share the date for the webinar with members when it is determined. DVR has heard from roughly 25 organizations expressing interest in peer mentoring.

**RFP Updates**: VR has made awards for CRP employment services in regions one, two, and three, and were unable to make awards in regions four and five. In region one, VR awarded employment services to Maine Medical Center Vocational Services; in regions two and three the award went to Goodwill. There are currently around 40 CRPs currently under contract with DVR. DVR is in the process of meeting with all CRPs currently under contract to speak with them about opportunities that exist for CRPs to continue to partner with DVR, and to be mindful of the transition for individual clients. Some agencies have informed DVR they will end their services at a certain date; other CRPs have expressed that they are willing to work as long as their service is needed. Libby noted that there may be some pre-employment transition services (pre-ETS) contracts, while other current CRP work may sit outside the contract. DVR had a number of meetings last week; Libby believes they were helpful for both DVR and CRPs. To address the needs of regions four and five, Libby noted that DVR plans to speak with current providers who have capacity and explore other options. Right now, business will go on as usual in regions four and five, but DVR will be making changes. The appeals process expires tomorrow. Libby will be able to talk more about plans for regions four and five at next month’s SRC meeting.

*-Mary Adley Enters-*

DVR aims to hold regional stakeholder meetings, probably in mid to late June. These sessions would provide an opportunity to talk more about the transition and discuss any questions people have. These meetings will be open to the public.

**NTACT Conference**: NTACT is the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition. NTACT began with a focus on special education and transition. With the passage of WIOA, it began to also examine best practices between VR and special education. Libby has gone to the NTACT conference multiple times. Last week Libby attended, along with a team from DOE. They focused on their goal of a youth advisory group as part of inter-agency collaboration. Inter-agency meetings based around moving forward with the idea of a youth advisory group that functions as a portable voice of youth with disabilities have been going on for the last few months. DVR, MPF, Department of Corrections, Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS), Office of Aging and Disability Services (OADS), Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services (SAMHS), Education; the State Assistive Technology Provider Coordinating Center, and the Center for Community Inclusion and Disability Studies have all been involved in the conversation. The group is looking at a model achieved in Vermont around youth engagement and youth voice to see if Maine can do something similar. The group has drafted a survey that would go out to DVR and DBVI clients seeking individuals interested in serving on the youth advisory group. Training would be provided for those interested. At the NTACT conference, DVR and DOE were able to get some technical assistance from Vermont and heard presentations from Connecticut’s youth group. Maine has many different disability advocacy groups that could benefit from an increased youth voice. DVR and partners would like a team or teams of people around the state to speak about the concerns of youth with disabilities and foster a generation of advocates and leaders. The individuals who become part of the group could attend SRC meetings or could answer questions brought to them by the SRC.

**Young People’s Caucus**: The Young People’s Caucus is a new initiative take on by Muskie at USM that involves efforts to speak directly to legislators around concerns surrounding young people (substance abuse, juvenile justice reform, etc) and ensuring that legislators are hearing directly from the voice of youth.

**Reconfiguration of the Children’s Cabinet**: Libby went with the Commissioner to the inaugural meeting of the Children’s Cabinet and will be going back to be part of a staff work group. The focus is on early intervention for young children as well as on the population of older teens who are not connected with services and who get caught up in the criminal justice system, are homeless, etc. DVR hopes to get disability voice on the Children’s Cabinet, as a significant percentage of homeless youth and youth in the criminal justice system have disabilities. Libby noted that 80 to 90 percent of youth in South Portland Youth Corrections have disabilities.

**Financial Literacy**: DVR is working on an effort with Maine Medical Center Benefit Counseling Team around financial literacy for youth with disabilities. DVR is contracting Maine Med to put together a financial literacy curriculum. The draft curriculum is a train-the-trainer tool targeted at serving populations of youth with disabilities. Libby will get out further information to SRC members. Maine Med will be doing three pilot initiatives with DVR with youth across the state; Libby will share the dates when they are determined. Syntero will do a webinar in June to provide a financial literacy curriculum overview. It will be $5.00 to access the Syntero webinar for non-members. DVR may have the fee waived if possible. The tool will be available on DVR’s website and DVR will be sharing the tool with other agencies. DVR wants the training to be available to other organizations as a resource to increase the financial literacy of youth with disabilities.

Peaches noted that WIOA Title 1 B has a youth component and a suggested service element of financial literacy. She added that many of her Title 1 B Services colleagues work with a high percentage of youths with disabilities; some have done similar projects in the past. Peaches also noted that the Younger Workers Committee at the State Workforce Board (SWB) may want to utilize the information on financial literacy as well. Libby explained that DVR asked Maine Med to compile the best of the existing information on financial literacy using the most accessible tools. They aim to remove inaccessible barriers. Peaches noted that the Universal Access Workgroup met last week and spoke about designing accessible tools with add-on and removal possibilities. Peaches stressed the importance of building tools using accessible design principles.

**Training**: DVR’s regional two-day communication training just ended. It centered around best practices for DVR’s staff communication with clients, stakeholders, and among themselves. The training aimed to provide additional communication tools. Libby and Sue noted they have heard positive reviews from staff regarding this training. DVR has additional training planned in the near future around supervisor training. This project has been worked on by Sam Fenderson w/ HR. Transition to Leadership is an existing HR training on general concepts, but DVR wanted more targeted training. This training will be held on September 25th, and on a few days in October. Sue will represent DVR at USM Rehab Counseling Program’s Advisory Board.

**Data Reports**: DVR has had their first meeting with Deputy Commissioner Kim Smith, and are getting regular meetings started with the new administration. DVR is sorting through current data reports to see if all are necessary, or if other data points need to be collected. Some reports that were running monthly will now be run quarterly. DVR is being asked by the federal government to provide more data points; this change should go into effect in 2020. VR’s Systems Improvement Quality Assurance is constantly examining the requirements. DVR must pay to have their case management system changed in order to collect new information or remove current collected data points. DVR uses the Aware program for case management and data collection. Many other states use Aware as well. Alliance is the company responsible for the Aware system. Libby attended a meeting with Alliance in April and they spoke about new cross-state capabilities Alliance will be rolling out in the future. Currently, the amount of data required by the federal government is less than what is required by the Aware case management system due to the way it is set up.

**How VR Helped Someone**: Sue spoke about a young man with significant learning disabilities who was going to college in Northern Maine. He did not pass college and came to VR as a new client. His counselor worked with him to do testing and career exploration. They identified that he is a hands-on learner and that he was interested in pursuing a career in the shipping industry. He completed an apprenticeship with the Seafarer’s International Union, was paid apprenticeship wages, and received a license with the Union. As part of his training, he completed a 90-day cruise with Norwegian Cruise lines out of Hawaii. He will have full-time union status after seven weeks of continued training and four more months on a ship. This will be a well-paying, highly valued position.

**Committee Work**:

The committee consisting of Kathy, Josh, Darcy, and Sue did not meet today and have not done any work in between meetings. Kathy noted that going over the State Plan during SRC meetings has been helpful for their committee.

**Membership/Consumer Satisfaction Committee**: Chris sent out the most recent membership list to all SRC members. Cheryl has not reached out to Boards and Committees because no new SRC applications have been looked at since applications that require legislative confirmation are being prioritized. SRC still has two members with expired terms: Darcy and Sue. Sue noted that she submitted her application directly to the contact. In the future state employees who apply on their own should inform Chris of their application. The SRC has nine open seats: three disability advocacy group seats; three business/industry/labor seats; two CRP seats; and one current/former recipient of VR services seat.

SRC members discussed the issue of seat names, and whether or not the SRC can change seat names. Libby noted that she is concerned about the lack of consumer voice on the SRC. Kathy made a case to change some advocacy seats to consumer seats. Federal regulations call for at least one CRP, four business/industry/labor representatives, at least one current or former recipient, representation from 121, representation from education, representation from SWB, the DVR Director, and the chair of SILC to be SRC members. Adam asked whether a disability advocacy group must be official in order to sit on the SRC. Disability advocacy groups are not a part of federal regulations. SRC will aim to change bylaws to allow for more of a consumer voice.

Chris distributed drafts of SRC information cards to hand out to interested parties. The cards aim to solicit membership by providing information on meetings and contact information.

Chris brought the 400 prepared Consumer Satisfaction Surveys ready for DVR to address. Veronica has been given the mailbox key and will begin checking the mail. The surveys will be mailed directly to consumers whose cases have been closed in the last year. They are randomly addressed to a proportional distribution across the state. There is a survey link on the DVR website as well. Cheryl raised the idea of in the future adding something in the envelope that spoke SRC membership opportunities.

**Goal Two of the State Plan**: Cheryl previously sent out state plan to attendees. Libby reminded SRC members that the goals are not final and will likely change in the next State Plan. Libby walked the council through the objectives and strategies of goal two of the previous State Plan. Goal two is as follows: “DVR will serve all individuals with the most significant disabilities in a timely manner, which means determining eligibilities within 60 days and developing plans for employment for all consumers within the new 90 day time frame. DVR will continue to maintain no wait list for those individuals in categories 1 and 2, and will monitor the ability to again serve those in category 3 in the future.” The 60 and 90 day standards are federal requirements. These requirements will continue on to any future State Plan. Category 3 of selection remains closed; DVR does not currently have the resources to reopen it.

**Objective One:** The first objective of goal two is to reduce the average time in plan development from 217 days in FFY 2014 to the federal standard of 90 days in FFY 2016. Libby noted that DVR is under the 90 days, but continue to have outliers that need to be worked on. Strategy one for achieving objective one is to increase use of the Career Exploration Workshop, which has been shown to decrease case length time. The career exploration workshop is a two-day process. The workshop makes use of the World of Work Inventory and the Employment Readiness Scale. Heidi Holst, the new supervisor in Bangor, was recently sent to World of Work Inventory training and is certified to train trainers. Strategy two for achieving objective one is to work closely with the Maine Department of Education to ensure implementation of the joint Cooperative Agreement and best practice guidelines on referral and timely application for transition age students. DVR has renewed their MOU with DOE and recently met with new director for Special Services DOE Ann Belanger to discuss the MOU. Strategy three for achieving objective one is to deliver staff training and supervision on best practices in IPE plan development and Order of Selection (OOS) determination. In the past year, Sam and Libby have traveled around the state to speak about best practices according to federal government feedback. This has been carried out over the last few years.

**Objective Two**: The second objective for goal two is to determine if there could be efficiencies in how DVR processes the work of providing services across the state by building on the recommendations of a process mapping report completed for DVR in summer 2015. Libby noted that DVR was able to implement recommendations, but not others. The project mapping report was shared with the SRC at the time. Strategy one for achieving the second objective is to convene a steering team made up of a representative from the State Rehabilitation Council, at least one clerical staff, three VR counselors, three casework supervisors, the three regional managers, and four Central Office staff. Strategy two for achieving the second objective is to, beginning in January 2016, establish and launch five work groups to review DVR processes in the following areas: case flow process; clerical support work flow; technology; training and communication; and review of policies and procedural directives. Libby noted that DVR had financial issues at this time and was unable to complete some of the recommendations. This report is available if SRC members are interested in viewing it.

**Objective Three**: The third objective for goal two is to increase the number of individuals with significant intellectual disabilities who access the available waiver employment support for long term employment support needs after closure from BRS. Strategy one for achieving objective three is for DVR to continue to work with the Maine Department of Health and Human Services to ensure that all individuals who have the waiver – but have not taken advantage of employment services – are aware of employment supports open to them through coordination between the two Departments. Libby explained that part of DVR’s ongoing collaborative work is ensuring staff has information and clients at DHHS have information. The Pathway to Employment tool has been shared. As of April 30, 2019, there are no more sub-minimum wage providers in Maine. Sub-minimum wage continues to exist in law, but the federal government has made it more difficult to utilize. Individuals who have been in sub-minimum wage positions need transitions, DVR and other partners have been involved in the change. Strategy two for achieving objective three is for DVR to continue to provide access and training to the BRIDGE –Career Exploration Workshop, appropriate for individuals with intellectual disabilities. This workshop was developed with feedback from individuals with intellectual disabilities and DHHS and is available online for all to use.

**Objective Four**: The fourth objective of goal two calls for Maine DVR to undertake efforts to continue to embrace and implement an “Employment First” philosophy during the next year as documented by a decrease of 5% in the statewide unemployment rate of people with intellectual disabilities. Strategy one for achieving objective four calls for DVR to continue to participate in work of Employment First Maine’s coalition, which includes targeted goals to improve employment outcomes for individuals with significant disabilities. Libby noted that the BRS state-wide conference collected additional updates and recommendations. DHHS is bringing back resources to do more work around Employment First recommendation implementation. DVR is paying close attention to recommendations as part of their ongoing work. Strategy two for achieving the fourth objects state that, by October 2016, Employment First Maine coalition will present a report or “roadmap” for how Maine will move forward to address this goal.

Libby explained that DVR is under a different model than in prior years with the unified State Plan under WIOA. The VR State Plan needs to fit within the context of wider WIOA unified State Plan. To ensure feedback from the SRC, all concerns and questions are captured in SRC meeting minutes. As the State Plan is being developed, SRC ideas and strategies can be reflected in the minutes. Conversations at SRC meetings are part of the preparation around formulating the State Plan.

Josh noted that the message of WIOA concerns better integration: the State Plan should integrate VR services into itself. He explained that the goal is to educate DVR partners and relevant organizations to work with people with disabilities, thereby allowing VR to work primarily with significantly disabled individuals. There is an option of integrating the TANF program. Last year, DVR did not receive guidelines on the State Plan until roughly a month prior to submission. There is a public comment component to the plan. Libby asked the SRC to share ideas for the next State Plan on ways to meet unmet needs, strategies for collaborating with partners, and any other relevant ideas they may have.

**New Business:**

**CAP**: Kathy noted that hears from many clients desperate for systemic change. As part of their process, CAP will address these clients to Libby to provide feedback. Kathy raised the idea of having the SRC function as an avenue of consumer concern, noting that other states have something similar. Kathy explained that not all consumers feel like DVR is hearing them; SRC could create a method for consumers concerns to be heard outside of the DVR system in a public way. This would also add to the consumer voice at SRC. Josh noted that consumers need realistic ideas of what the SRC can do for them. Cheryl questioned whether this is within the scope of the SRC. Kathy believes it is. Chris noted that the SRC already welcomes members of the public to attend meetings. Cheryl suggested possibly adding a public comment period to agenda, as SRC-DBVI does. Kathy noted that there should be rules around the feedback process to limit feedback to systemic concerns. Josh stated that this could raise issues of confidentiality, and may also propagate the idea that the SRC is useless for consumers. DVR staff would be unable to provide information to SRC about client cases. Kathy reiterated that her idea is for clients to voice only systemic concerns rather than personal situations or individual concerns. A concern could go to a subcommittee to be vetted as appropriate for entire SRC to hear. Council members questioned how to differentiate between individual and systemic issues. Libby noted that the SRC will not be able to discriminate if they have a public comment period. Libby also voiced a concern around a subcommittee holding onto data about clients. Chris questioned whether the SRC would hear enough examples of relevant information to be able to recognize recurrent issues. Cheryl noted that the SRC needs to do specific work around recruiting more members with disabilities. Emilie noted that DRM hears many issues that contain common themes. Adam stated that the SRC and DVR could identify complaints as areas of opportunity, noting that some clients will bring legitimate concerns to the table. A discussion on this topic will be added to next month’s agenda.

**121 Program**: Darcy announced that VR’s 121 Program is out for renewal and has sent out letters requesting support. Libby noted that DVR and DBVI will be writing letters in support of the 121 Program.

**Meeting adjourned at 3:11 pm**

**Next Meeting: June 17th, 2019**