**DVR-SRC Minutes**

**June 17, 2019**

**Present:** Cheryl Peabody, SILC Rep; Libby Stone-Sterling, DVR Director; Kathy Despres, CAP; Mary Adley, DOE; Dan Vigue, Goodwill Industries; Chris Higgins, Walgreens; Sue Primiano, Regional Manager DVR

**Members of Public Present:** Veronica Swain, SRC Assistant; Emilie Montgomery, DRM Advocate

**Members of Public on Phone**: Jodie Hall, MPF; Emily Brinck, UMF

**Absent:** Josh Howe, SWB; Darcy Gentle, VR 121 Program Director; Wes Uhlman, VRC

**Welcome & Introductions**

**Acceptance of May Minutes**: May minutes are accepted as distributed.

**Treasurer’s Report**: Chris distributed hard copies of the treasurer’s report. The SRC has gone over budget in printing and copying due to the Consumer Satisfaction Surveys. There have been no costs spent for the Disability Awareness Conference (Annual Empowerment Forum) or for accommodation. The Annual Empowerment Forum will not take place this year. Website maintenance will be a one-time fee that will come out later. The SRC has roughly $15,000.00 left to spend by the end of the year. The SRC budget for next year must be in place by October 1st, 2019. Dan motions to accept the treasurer’s report, Kathy seconds. The treasurer’s report is approved with no abstentions or objections.

**How VR Helped Somebody**: Sue spoke about a client VR helped become self-employed. This client came to VR after suffering a head injury in a car accident. Due to the accident, the client has issues with cognitive processing and needs to take frequent breaks in work. The client did career exploration and came up with a business plan centering around windshield repair and similar auto work (polishing headlight covers, etc). VR referred him to the Small Business Development Committee to continue to develop his business plan. The client did a lot of marketing on his own; VR helped him by purchasing marketing materials. VR also helped him develop a website, get liability insurance and tools, and locate a book keeper. The client’s goal is to work himself off Social Security, and he is headed that direction.

**Director’s Report**:

**Staffing**: DVR is currently hiring new staff. An individual who was supposed to start working in Lewiston decided to take another job. Shannon Fleming, a former counselor who left Rockland VR, has been hired for the Augusta/Waldo area. Three positions are posted and will be closed on June 26th. There are three vacancies in the Rockland area. Rockland currently has one full-time counselor and one clerical staff. DVR plans to move the Rockland office and have staff travel to Rockland to meet with Rockland clients. DVR is still hiring in Lewiston, Bangor, and Portland. Some staff have recently moved up from RC1 positions to RC2 positions, leaving open a few RC1 positions. Starting pay for an RC1 is $33,155 and can go up to $44,304. Staring pay for an RC2 is $37,648 and can go up to $51,001.60 There are eight steps within each pay range. Libby noted that because the hiring market is competitive, DVR’s pay rate poses a challenge in retaining employees. However, increasing staff payments would necessarily mean decreasing case spending. Emily Brinck noted that Libby can send job opening links to UMF to put on their website. Libby will send out the current staffing report to SRC members.

**RSA Monitoring Report**: DVR has heard nothing back from RSA regarding the monitoring report. DVR will be making changes to their data reports. Cheryl previously distributed the new reports that look different from previous reports on time to plan and time to eligibility. The methodology RSA was using to look at time to plan and time to eligibility was different from DVR’s methodology of looking at averages; DVR changed their data reporting to come into alignment with RSA’s methodology. DVR is now looking at quarters and the number of individuals found eligible rather than the days to eligibility. The second page of the report illustrates how DVR did getting clients to eligibility across the region and across the quarter. The new reports will also have a change in terminology: PY (Program Year) will be used instead of FFY (Federal Fiscal Year) for some reporting elements. PY will refer to the beginning of the year rather than the end of the year as FFY does. The reports are not finalized; if SRC members have questions or suggestions for improvement, let Libby know.

**WINTAC Training/Common Performance/ Peer Mentoring/ Apprenticeship**: The quarterly leaders meeting will take place on June 25th. It will revisit common performance measures and discuss standards for DVR staff. Libby noted that she hopes the SRC will put something about Common Performance Measures terms on the agenda by their October Training. Peer mentoring will be held on June 28th; the webinar is from 1 pm to 2 pm. DVR wants to go statewide with peer mentoring. Roughly 25 organizations have expressed their interest in peer mentoring to DVR. DVR is envisioning a fee-for-service program and are hoping to roll out the program around the beginning of the school year in September. The Apprenticeship pilot in the hospitality industry is currently running in western Maine. Libby suggested the SRC reach out to Peter Diplock if they are interested in receiving more information on the Apprenticeship pilot.

**RFP Updates**: DVR made conditional awards in regions 1, 2, and 3. DVR was unable to make awards in regions 4 and 5. Work Opportunities Unlimited made an appeal. The hearing date was originally set for June 19th but due to Work Opportunities request for a delay, the hearing is now scheduled for July 10th. DVR is continuing to move forward with contract negotiations in regions 1, 2, and 3; nothing will be finalized until after the hearing. Hearing officers will have ten days to make a decision. Almost all CRPs who have been contracted with DVR have met with or are scheduled to meet with DVR. Libby noted that DVR is currently limited to making changes in regions 4 and 5 due to the appeal. A hearing officer may decide to rule on something relative to the entire RFP. The hearing process does not involve the team that scored the RFP. DVR is in conversations with CRPs in regions 4 and 5: asking CRPs if they would be able to expand services. DVR will be holding community stakeholder meetings, dates are tied to what happens with the appeal. DVR has held productive meetings in regions 4 and 5. Libby noted that there are different ideas DVR has been thinking of internally. DVR needs to ensure individuals in regions 4 and 5 have the same access to services as others across the state. Dan attended the Lewiston CRP meeting, and he noted that there has not been a CRP meeting in Augusta for a while.

**Youth Advocacy Group**: DVR is looking for ways to get more youth feedback and has been working with 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 around coordinating a youth advisory group that functions as a portable voice of youth with disabilities. The first step was to send a survey out to DVR and DBVI clients; respondents will be vetted.

**Autism Step-up Project**: Runs July 8th for five weeks at UMaine Orono with eight young people. DVR is partnering with the Center for Inclusion and Maine Autism Group. The aim is to expose young people to college prior to their going to college. It is modeled on work DBVI has done with their college prep program.

**Financial Literacy**: Curated information compiled by the Benefits Counseling Team at Maine Med is available online. It contains the best information on financial literacy for young disabled people. It has been piloted out at Herman High school and Spruce Mountain High school. Any organization can use it as a resource. The draft tool was demonstrated during a Syntero webinar; this webinar will be archived.

**Prior Approval**: DVR currently must request prior approval for tasks DVR is charged to do as part of their requirements. This is a time consuming process. It would be helpful for DVR to have educated legislature members to speak about this issue. There has been some feedback and support for DVR around this topic from DOE.

**Consumer Handbook**: Sam Fenderson, Kathy, Cheryl and Jenn Ardito have been working on updating the VR Consumer Handbook. Kathy believes they are around halfway done. As soon as the handbook is finalized done, it will be brought to the SRC.

Kathy suggested that the SRC move the discussion on Goal 3 of the State Plan to the next meeting and skip down the agenda to the last two topics due to time constraints. Kathy noted that the SRC needs to make a decision about hiring an executive director in order to include it in next year’s SRC budget.

Libby notified the SRC that Goal 3 involves DVR working with Wabanaki VR. Wabanaki VR is in the process of reapplying for their grant; Libby suggested the SRC write a letter of support.

**Executive Director**: The SRC previously discussed the idea of hiring a paid executive director to help with SRC tasks. Kathy has researched the topic by speaking with three people so far. Kathy spoke with Washington state’s SRC executive director. She is a full-time employee and is housed down the hallway of director of VR. She sets SRC agendas, gathers data, and seems to do a lot of what Kathy does as a CAP advocate. The Washington DVR SRC’s annual budget is $268,000. Their executive director directed Kathy to the executive director who works for the SRC-DBVI in Washington, which is about the same size as Maine’s general VR program. Washington’s SRC-DBVI director works about 15 hours a week and is an hourly employee. She coordinates committee meetings and makes meetings run smoothly. Their SRC meetings occur quarterly and run for a full day, 9 am to 4 pm. Both of these executive directors would be happy to patch in to speak with the SRC, perhaps at the annual training. Kathy noted that both directors said that in order for the executive director to be immediately helpful, the SRC would have to hire someone who was very familiar with VR. The individual needs to be able to bring VR information to the SRC in an understandable way. Kathy also spoke to an executive director in Michigan on her way out of the position and wants to reach out to her again. Kathy wants to hear feedback from SRC members regarding whether she should pursue more information on the topic. Chris noted that an executive director could make committees more productive. Kathy noted that she is worried the SRC has lost members or potential members because of a perceived lack of productivity. Libby noted that DVR needs consumer input; if the SRC does not provide consumer input, DVR must go somewhere else to get it. Kathy noted that the SRC maintains consumer satisfaction surveys for DVR in some states, and added that an executive director could help DVR with other tasks. Chris suggested beginning with an executive director position consisting of a few hours a week with the potential to grow to more. Cheryl noted that having an executive director at SILC has helped SILC with capacity building and being able to reach out to others. Libby voiced her hope that the SRC will think about their frequency of meetings. Bimonthly or quarterly meetings may allow for more substantial discussions. The SRC is obligated to meet at least four times a year.

**Membership**: Chris distributed the membership list and list of minimum membership requirements for the SRC. Chris asked those who are in contact with clients to invite them to the August meeting as a way of attracting potential consumer voices to the SRC. Sue will mention it at the next VR regional meeting. Sue noted that she has asked some clients, but most have been hesitant. The SRC is currently not compliant with seating the number of required business/industry/labor representatives, disability groups, and applicants/recipients of VR. Individuals do not need to be on the SRC to be on a subcommittee or to attend meetings.

**Bringing** **Client Concerns to the SRC**: Kathy noted that CAP has clients who would like to have their voices heard regarding systemic issues within the VR process. An avenue within the SRC for written communication from consumers may be useful. The SRC could keep tabs on common themes among consumer concerns. Cheryl raised the idea of having a public comment period and inviting consumers with concerns to SRC meetings. Kathy is happy to provide reports from client complaints to the SRC, and can ask clients if they want to patch into an SRC meeting. Sue cautioned that consumers need to be aware that sharing their concern with the SRC will not lead to direct resolution of their individual issue. Kathy questioned whether the SRC should start logging consumer complaints or provide forms for them to fill out. Cheryl suggested adding an advocacy update to meeting agendas.

In conducting further research on the executive director position, Kathy will compile job descriptions and pay-ranges. Kathy motioned to authorize the executive committee to come up with an amount of money to put in for a request for an executive director budget; Chris seconded. The motion is approved without objections or abstentions.

**Meeting Adjourned at 3:02 pm**

**Next Meeting: August 19th**