**SRC-DVR Minutes**

**March 18, 2019**

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

**Absent**: Darcy Gentle, VR 121 Director; Scott Hebert, Hanger Clinic

**Members of Public Present**: Veronica Swain, SRC Admin Assistant; Adam Way, Empowers Employment Options; Peaches Bass, Bureau of Employment Services; Emilie Montgomery, DRM; Laura Fortman, DOL Commissioner

**Members of Public on Phone**: Jodie Hall, MPF

**Welcome & Introductions:** Meeting began at 1:02 pm, attendees introduce themselves for the record.

**Acceptance of Minutes**: January’s DVR-SRC meeting minutes are accepted as distributed. January’s Emergency SRC meeting minutes are accepted as distributed.

**Treasurer’s Report**: Chris will provide updates quarterly.

**Director’s Report**:

**Proposed Budget**: Regarding the proposed budget around VR funding, some cost of living increases will be likely. Other programs through the Rehab Services Administration (RSA) are flat funded, like the Client Assistance Program (CAP).

*DOL Commissioner Laura Fortman enters*

**Commissioner Fortman Q&A:** The SRC welcomes Commissioner Fortman with introductions. Commissioner Fortman was previously Maine’s DOL Commissioner from 2003 to 2011 and subsequently worked at the Francis Perkins Center in Damariscotta. Commissioner Fortman also worked under the Obama Administration in the USA DOL as the Deputy Administrator for DOL’s Wage and Hour Division, which was responsible for roughly 135 million workers throughout the USA. When the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) was being finalized, Commissioner Fortman was a member of a group that examined employment issues for people who worked with disabilities. After the Commissioner finished explaining her background, she asked for questions. SRC members raised their concerns around the changes made to the SRC application process. There will be a new step in the process; applications will be sent to Commissioner Fortman before they go on to the Governor’s Office. SRC members are mainly concerned about having personal tax information and social security numbers go through multiple channels. The Commissioner noted that Boards and Commissions may be asked to weigh in on applicants and should for that reason know what applications are going to the Governor’s Office. Commissioner Fortman noted that all the information she would like concerning applicants are the names and organizations the applicants are connected with, what council seats are available, and what council seat applicants would be filling. All this information could be compiled onto a cover letter. The Commissioner noted that she does not want to receive tax information or other private data. Commissioner Fortman also informed the SRC that there is a state-wide backlog around appointments, and any seat requiring Senate confirmation is being prioritized. There are currently at least 90 more Senate-confirmed positions to go through; until Senate-confirmed seats are filled, other seats will not be filled.

*Commissioner Fortman exits*

**Director’s Report Resumed**:

**Supported Employment**: DVR currently receives $225,000 in Supported Employment funds. Supported Employment is for individuals with significant, ongoing needs. These individuals generally transfer to long-term supports. Prior to WIOA, Supported Employment grant money went into regular VR funds and was targeted for the same goals. Under WIOA, the money from the Supported Employment Grant is split in half, with half of the funds targeted for adults and half targeted for transition students. DVR can only spend as much of the adult funds as they spend of the transition student funds. WIOA also dictates that DVR can only spend Supported Employment funds on individuals already in employment. Before WIOA, DVR was able to spend Supported Employment funds on preparing individuals for employment. Libby noted that due to WIOA’s restrictions, many states were unable to spend all their funds last year, including Maine. DVR has many individuals they could spend the adult funds on, but they cannot spend these funds until they spend an equal amount of the transition age funds. DVR needs help advocating around this issue. Last week, DVR received an email that proposed getting rid of Supported Employment grants altogether. It is unclear where these funds would be moved to.

**Consumer Handbook**: The committee that is working on updating DVR’s Consumer Handbook met. The updated Handbook will follow the client’s progress throughout the stages of services. Cheryl recommends SRC members look at the Handbook. Libby noted that she and Sam Fenderson would like the updated Handbook to include the voice of the consumer in their own language.

**CSAVR**/**Hill Visits**: In April, Cheryl, Kathy, Libby, and Brenda Drummond from DBVI will be at the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) meeting, and attending Capitol Hill visits with Senators and Representatives. Libby noted that DVR plans to share the Bureau of Rehab Services (BRS) highlights document, information around youth work, and the Transition Work-Based Learning Grant (TWBLG). Kathy asked SRC members if they would like those attending Hill Visits to relay any information or suggestions to the Senators and Representatives. Peaches raised two issues for attendees to mention to Congresspeople. Peaches would like a discussion around requiring individuals to undergo a credit check for employment, regardless of the job, as this seems to have a negative impact on people with disabilities. Secondly, Peaches believes that SSDI income should be exempt when individuals apply for other public assistance programs. SSI is exempt, but SSDI is counted for most public assistance program. Peaches also voiced a desire for less regulations around spending disability employment funds.

**Staffing**: DVR has many jobs posted; a number of applications are being sent in. Haley Atkinson has been hired in the Augusta Office. New Counselor Training will begin March 25th.

**Peer Mentoring**: The Workplace Innovation and Technical Assistance Center (WINTAC) will be conducting training on March 28th and 29th specific to common performance measures under WIOA and apprenticeship. DVR will also be working with WINTAC on peer mentoring. WINTAC has a standard curriculum around peer mentoring training, and will also design a training around the way Maine decides to deliver peer mentoring. DVR has been conducting a small pilot program with Alpha One for three years which has involved two or three peer mentors with disabilities going into roughly eight schools in southern Maine to serve as role models. There are many different models for peer mentoring; peer mentoring can be for adults or youth. DVR sent out a peer mentoring survey to get a sense of what organizations might be interested in peer mentoring along with Community Rehab Providers (CRPs). The survey just closed; DVR received roughly 26 responses. DVR is considering conducting peer mentoring under a fee-for-service model statewide.

**RSA**: No updates from RSA on DVR’s Corrective Actions.

**RFP** **Updates**: Annette Stevens, coordinator for the Request for Proposal (RFP) concerning CRP services, sent out an email about the RFP process last week. There are no new updates from Libby. Opportunity Alliance are closing as of April 1st. Dan noted that Goodwill will still provide supported employment in Portland, but not job development. Kathy raised her concern around rights violation of waiting for services. Libby explained that DVR is prioritizing working on a transition plan for each person who has lost CRP services. Kathy asked how DVR is tracking individuals who are trying to get CRP services but are unable to. Libby noted that each regional manager is aware of the clients who are not being served. DVR does not have a list of total individuals not receiving services but does have a list of the clients who have lost services as reported by CRPs. DVR hears from CRPs when they give notice about any change in their services. Some of the services provided by CRPs can be provided in other ways, such as through workshops or VRCs. Sue explained that some VRCs are able to do job development and job placement. Kathy noted that she has several clients that cannot get CRPs who she is unable to find service providers for. Kathy also raised the issue of clients who are being turned away from services. Dan added that there are clients who do not have a choice as to their job coaching services. Libby noted that this has all happened consistently over the last few years and that this lack of coverage is one of the main reasons behind the RFP decision. Adam stated that he believes the problem will become worse before it becomes better. He noted that he has considered closing his service, Empowers Opportunity Alliance. Adam believes that the RFP is creating a larger problem instead of fixing the issue. Kathy noted that she believes tracking client numbers will be important throughout the process. Josh reiterated that there are a variety of ways to meet the needs of clients outside of CRPs.

**Annual Training**: SRC-DVR members agreed that they would like to conduct their annual training jointly with SRC-DBVI. Cheryl asked SRC members to notify her of any specific topics they would like to see addressed at the training. Annual training will not be held at the Goodwill Office on Washington Avenue in Portland because Goodwill is moving out of this office. Chris noted that Walgreens has space the SRCs could potentially use for their Annual Training, and he will look into this further. The committee consisting of Kathy, Mary, Darcy, Sue, and Josh will be in charge of coordinating the annual training.

The next SRC meeting is April 22nd. Libby and Mary will be late to the April meeting, due to a prior commitment. There will be no SRC meeting in July.

**Committee Work**:

**State** **Plan/Policy Committee**: Kathy previously emailed a modified version of the State Plan to SRC members. Libby passed out a hardcopy of another piece of the State Plan to all in attendance. Libby noted that she wants SRC members to be aware of how the document fits within the State Plan, and of how VR’s Plan fits in with the broader combined State Plan. The State Plan is scheduled to be done every four years. The State Plan details DVR’s goals and the strategies used to meet these goals. There are five goals in the updated 2018 State Plan. These goals are, briefly:

1.) To obtain at least 1000 successful closures for DVR clients in FFY 2018 and 2019;

2.) To determine eligibilities within 60 days and develop plans for employment for all consumers within 90 days;

3.) To ensure unserved, underserved, and minority populations have access to VR services;

4.) To ensure DVR will partner and collaborate with the larger work force development system; and

5.) To ensure DVR will partner with Adult Ed and the State Workforce Board (SWB) to incorporate and apply the new rules related to WIOA.

There are many objectives within these five goals. The SRC should comment on all goals. The State Plan currently has SRC comments from 2016, and the updated comments which were added in 2018. Kathy raised the idea of possibly changing some of the data the SRC receives and potentially moving the focus away from time to eligibility and time to plan standards. Libby noted that the list of goals will be modified going in to the 2020 State Plan. The goals will look different due to the shift happening with common performance measures. The goals will be broad enough to include all concerns. DVR would like input from the SRC on specific objectives and strategies. Comments can come through monthly SRC meetings. SRC members can also file comments formally. Libby suggested that the SRC could possibly comment on some of the challenges and concerns around DVR’s work, on the responses to the Consumer Satisfaction Survey, on potential unmet needs, and on any strategies or partnerships the SRC would like to see DVR develop. Libby would also like to hear individually from members from the perspective of the role they fill on the SRC.

Josh raised the question of what programatic success looks like for DVR, and how that will fit with the MaineSpark initiative, which aims to ensure that by 2025 60% of Mainers will have either a post-secondary degree or professional license/certification. Josh believes it is worthwhile to consider DVR’s role in the broader system that serves disabled individuals. He also discouraged SRC members from requesting new data points because measuring them is expensive and time consuming. Peaches stated that the SRC should focus on keeping what is useful, and throwing out or updating what is no longer useful. Peaches also believes common performance measures could be a starting point for a conversation around how to maximize the integration of disability employment services and how disability employment services can better work together to leverage each others’ resources. Kathy noted that the SRC could use the process of looking at State Plan as a starting point to discuss improving communication between DVR and the SRC. Libby asked SRC members to inform her of what items they are interested in learning more about. The SRC will go through the goals of DVR’s past State Plan sequentially to provide some scope of DVR’s priorities. At the next SRC meeting, Libby will report out on the first goal and the corresponding data points.

**Membership/Consumer Satisfaction Committee**: The cover letter to Commissioner Fortman with application information will be compiled by the Membership Committee. On the topic of data points and the State Plan, Mary noted that the SRC could use the Consumer Satisfaction survey to figure out data the SRC would like to focus on or let go of. The information from the Consumer Satisfaction Survey will be available in August 2019. The State Plan will need to be completed around March 2020. Kathy noted that the Markets Decision survey, as well as federal recommendations, may also contain useful information for the SRC.

**Announcements**:

**Honorariums**: SRC members who are eligible for an honorarium should email reimbursement forms to Chris at chigggins@yahoo.com.

**Emails**: If SRC members would like to distribute something to the entire council, send it to Veronica at srcscribe@gmail.com.

**Next Meeting: April 22nd, 2019**

**Meeting Adjourned at 3:00 pm**