**SRC-DVR Minutes**

**January 28, 2019**

**Present**: Cheryl Peabody, SILC; Dan Vigue, Goodwill Industries; Josh Howe, SWB; Sue Primiano, DVR Regional Manager; Chris Higgins, Walgreens; Scott Hebert, Hanger Clinic; J. Richardson Collins, Advocate; Mary Adley, DOE; Libby Stone-Sterling, DVR Director

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

**Members of Public Present**: Haley Atkinson, DVR Intern; Peaches Bass, Bureau of Employment Services; Veronica Swain, SRC Admin. Assist.

**Absent**: Nicole Achey, UMF; Wes Uhlman, VRC; Kathy Despres, CAP

**Meeting began at 1:01 pm**

Cheryl informed the SRC that Libby will be joining the meeting late due to a separate commitment; the meeting agenda will be changed to accommodate her schedule.

**Acceptance of Minutes**: All SRC members in attendance confirmed they received October’s minutes. There were no new corrections for October’s minutes; October’s minutes were accepted as corrected. All SRC members in attendance confirmed they received November’s minutes. There were no corrections to November’s minutes; November’s minutes were accepted as distributed.

**Goodwill/CRPs**: Dan gave a presentation to the SRC on the role of CRPs and CRP partnership with VR. Dan has been in the CRP business for roughly 18 years. CRPs (community rehab providers) help individuals in need of assistance pursue employment. Goodwill is one of many CRPs. CRPs who partner with VR are paid by VR funds. VR refers clients of theirs who would benefit from CRP services to CRPs. Client choice in selecting a CRP to work with is one of the many layers of client choice in the VR system. Clients interview CRPs and decide which CRP they will hire to provide employment assistance services. If necessary, VR helps clients develop appropriate questions to ask CRPs during the interview process. The client’s VR counselor will attend the interview between the client and the CRP if the client wants or needs them to. Some clients set up their own interview after being given a list of providers from their VRC. Some clients decide to meet with CRPs outside of DVR offices. Normally, a client will interview two or three providers, but sometimes there are not multiple CRPs available. After the interview, clients choose their preferred CRP from information gathered during the interview. After the client selects a CRP, VR sends a referral to the CRP with detailed information about the client’s background as well as the client’s IPE (individualized plan for employment). After the CRP receives the referral, they invite the client to another interview. Interview roles are now reversed; the CRP interviews the client about their current situation, transportation needs, etc.

*Mary Adley enters*

At this stage, the CRP also gathers legal documents such as releases of information. Clients need to sign a release form to allow their CRP to communicate with businesses or with their VRC. After the intake interview, the CRP formulates a plan with their new client to pursue the client’s goals. The ultimate goal is gaining employment. CRPs can help clients fine-tune resumes, market their skills, and prepare for job interviews. Dan noted that CRPs do not “get” people jobs, they help people pursue employment. CRPs give clients an upper hand because CRPs have a network of business contacts. CRPs can negotiate with the employer and offer some assistance to entice them to provide their clients with an employment opportunity. CRPs stand behind job seekers and ask businesses to give them opportunities, and let the businesses know the CRP will be working with the employee in training. Dan stressed that CRP relationships with businesses are paramount and take many years of regular contact to develop. Dan also stressed that the CRP has a two-way relationship with businesses; the business must get something of value from CRPs. When working with VR, CRPs typically have three to six months after a client gets a job to provide job support. Job coaching is typically minimal support provided for a short amount of time. Some clients have an option to receive long-term job coaching funded through Mainecare; not every VR client is eligible for this long-term job coaching. The Mainecare funded long-term job coaching is renewed yearly, with no specifically delineated end point. CRPs aim to work themselves out of long-term job coaching positions by decreasing support incrementally. The goal is for the client to become as independent as possible; this independence is often aided through accommodation from the employer. Employer accommodation is referred to as natural supports. Natural supports are one way CRPs work towards creating independence. If clients are not increasing independence from CRPs after a long while, the CRP organization internally reviews the job placement and questions whether it was a poor fit. Sometimes a lack of increasing client independence is due to unwillingness on the part of the employer to provide natural supports. Dan noted that roughly two decades ago, it was common for CRPs to market themselves to businesses as a two-for-one deal: the employer would get a permanent job coach and an employee. Dan noted that there was a shift in this way of doing business roughly a decade ago. Now it is generally understood that job coaching will not be permanent; the new model defines the client primarily as the business’s responsibility. Dan noted that it has been difficult to break away from the original model, but businesses are much more receptive to this now. Dan views this as a positive change. Dan also noted that clients can fire CRPs if they are unresponsive or unhelpful. Clients can ask for a different CRP through VR.

Dan segued into presenting about the CRP organization he works for, Goodwill. Goodwill has many different programs; all of them focus on helping people find sustainable jobs. Dan believes Goodwill is somewhat unique as a CRP because they attempt to help clients with personal issues that contribute to employment problems, such as food insecurity, lack of transportation, legal issues, substance abuse challenges, or domestic violence. Goodwill attempts to offer all individuals who come to them for help some sort of assistance, even if the individuals do not have a way to pay for services. Goodwill offers micro Career Centers in some areas. In Portland, Goodwill offers “Job Connection,” a place for anyone to access computers and an employment specialist who can help individuals with some employment related concerns. Goodwill makes a variety of job placements, including office workers, electricians, janitors, customer service representatives, and direct support professionals. Goodwill relies heavily on collaboration/partnerships with various programs, especially VR. Internally, Goodwill has many resources available to draw upon; Dan believes ones of Goodwill’s strengths is the diversity within their organization. In Augusta, Goodwill does job development, supported employment, staffing contracts, works with homeless individuals, and provides a food supplemental employment and training program. Dan explained that Goodwills works towards self-sufficiency for clients, and noted that self-sufficiency looks different for different clients.

Peaches Bass asked Dan to explain what employment specialists do. Dan noted that there are two levels of employment specialists: ES1s and ES2s. ES1s perform job coaching only: they provide on-the-job support. ES2s are also known as job developers. ES2s also do job coaching work, but unlike ES1s, ES2s are responsible for interviewing the clients who choose to work with them, for going out in the community and developing relationships with businesses, and for placing their clients in jobs. ES1s work off from an outside caseload, whereas ES2s work from their own caseloads.

Riley commented on the shift in attitude regarding CRPs fading from job coaching. Riley noted that she has had quite a few clients who had one-to-one job coaching support for several years, and she noticed how that could result in an unstable situation for employees: the reliance on a job coach became a barrier for employees to being integrated into the workforce. She explained that some employers will communicate almost solely with the job coach, viewing their employee as the CRP’s responsibility. Riley noted that she is glad Dan raised this issue, and stated that she believes establishing client independence is extremely important. Dan noted that he also comes across businesses that will communicate with the CRP rather than the employee. Dan explained that it can be difficult for CRPs to implement fading because they are concerned with maintaining a positive relationship with the business. Dan believes that the shift in thinking came about because there are now more independent contractor CRPs who cannot access Mainecare funding and therefore do not provide ongoing job coaching support. When these contractors partner with a business, the business knows that their time is limited to roughly three to six months. Dan has talked with many independent contractors who refuse to work with businesses that will not provide natural supports. Chris stated that, from his experience working with CRPs, he believes there is some confusion with some CRPs on this issue. Chris described instances where job coaches approach him to ask questions about the employee; in response to this, he noted that the conversation about employee performance must be held with the employee rather than the job coach. Chris believes there should be more education on both sides around this issue.

**How VR Helped Someone**: Sue briefly presented on an individual named “John.” His case has been successfully closed; he is currently employed. John sought out VR services after he had a stroke. He had been working asa janitor at a college for a very long time, but was unable to work in that position after his stroke. He liked this job and was sad that he could not continue. John did PT for a short period of time, but could not receive PT for as long as he wanted due to his insurance coverage. VR helped him to receive more PT, as well as cognitive rehabilitation. John regained a considerable amount of function. After this improvement, John’s VRC contacted his old employer because John had communicated that he missed his old job. His old employer was cautious, but agreed to rehire John. VR negotiated the concept of job coaching with his employer as a condition of John’s rehiring. However, VR could not find a job coach at first. An available job coach was eventually located after a period of time. The employer worked with VR, was flexible with John and gave him additional time to learn what he needed to do. VR helped John get adaptive equipment for work and provided job coaching for a period of time. John is now successfully employed in his old job.

**Committee Work**: The committee consisting of Kathy, Riley, Mary, Darcy, Sue, J., and Josh did not meet today; no new developments to report. The committee planned to bring issues before the full SRC in December, but the meeting was cancelled due to weather. They will meet again and regroup. Chris spoke about the committee consisting of himself, Scott, Dan, Ann, Nicole, and Cheryl. This committee did not meet today either. Chris distributed a list of the current SRC seats and dates of term expiration to all those in attendance. Chris received this information from Kathy via email. J. noted that he is not fulfilling the advocate position he holds because he is no longer serving on another advisory body outside of the SRC-DVR. He asked if he should return to his previous seat as former or current VR recipient. Chris agreed that he should, but was unsure at this time how the SRC makes this change. Mary Adley noted that the list Chris distributed records her as having served one month only on the SRC. Chris explained that if SRC members take over a vacated seat, the new member only carries out the remainder of the term rather than serve a full two years. Mary noted that she would have liked to have been informed of this when she was first accepted as a member. The letter from the governor appointing members does not record the term timespan. The SRC needs to get clarification on what two full terms means for SRC membership. Members are unsure whether finishing out a term already partially served counts as serving one full term. SRC members who hold expired seats can continue in their seats as voting members until their seat is otherwise filled. There are currently 3 SRC seats open for advocates, two seats open for CRPs, and two seats open for labor/business representatives. Chris suggested that the SRC should work on filling these empty seats; perhaps current SRC members could provide leads on individuals they know who might be interested. Chris also noted that if SRC members are only permitted to serve two terms, some current members will not be able to serve much longer. Cheryl informed the SRC that the SRC application process has changed. In the past, one contact person received all the applications and forwarded them on to Boards and Commissions. Now, all applications will go to Chris, who will send them to Libby. Libby will then send the applications on to the DOL Commissioner’s Office, who will send them to the Governor’s Office for approval. Cheryl initially stated that DOL Commissioner Fortman will vet the applications; this is later corrected by Libby. Cheryl received this information from DVR staff. J. raised his concerns on adding outside vetting to the SRC application process, noting that the SRC is supposed to exist independently. Josh noted that there is no information on the SRC-DVR website about bylaws or processes governing appointment. Mary raised the issue that applicants have to provide personal information such as work history, recommendations, social security numbers, and tax records; the change in process means this information will now go through multiple channels. Josh was also concerned that this information will be going outside the state firewall.

**SRC breaks until Libby arrives. Break at 1:54 pm, resumes at 2:10 pm**

**SRC Application Questions**: Libby confirmed the change in application process, but clarified that she does not believe the commissioner will be vetting the applications. Libby is not certain why Commissioner Fortman requested this change; Libby believes it may have to do with her awareness of past SRC nominees being ignored or declined by the Governor’s Office. Commissioner Fortman may want to be informed of the applicants who are going through to the Governor’s Office so she can be aware if this situation occurs again in the future. She may also want to be informed in the case that she is asked questions about specific applicants by the Governor’s Office. Libby believes that she and Commissioner Fortman will both serve a shepherding rather than vetting role in the application process. Libby does not believe the change has any affect on the Governor’s approval process. J. stated that the new process appears inconsistent with the intended process of SRC appointment. J. noted that he understands the concern around applications being ignored or denied by the Governor’s office, explaining that one council he held an advocate seat on could not continue to operate because all applications that had been submitted during a specific period of time were handed back unreviewed. J. stated that the current intent behind Commissioner Fortman’s actions could be beneficial, but noted that it could turn into a vetting process under a different commissioner. Libby suggested inviting Commissioner Fortman to a future SRC meeting to answer SRC questions and clarify her intent. It is unknown if the change will be permanent or temporary. Mary reiterated that passing all application information through multiple channels is concerning in regards to privacy. Chris noted that he does not want to receive confidential information through his email outside the state firewall. Chris suggested that applicants could inform him of his application without sending him their full information. J. noted that not everyone will have secure ways of sending information. Cheryl will inform Commissioner Fortman of SRC concerns and invite her to next SRC meeting to converse about the issues.

**Director’s Report**:

Roughly a week ago, Libby attended a Bureau meeting with the DOL commissioner and deputy commissioner concerning programs and initiatives occurring in VR. Libby described the meeting positively. The commissioner was particularly interested in several topics, and perhaps will want to speak more about said topics with the SRC.

**Consumer Handbook**: DVR is in the process of updating their consumer handbook. Sam Fenderson is guiding this project. DVR would like SRC assistance in the update; if anyone has an interest in providing feedback, email Cheryl. The current consumer handbook is online, and was last updated in 2014/2015.

**Corrective Action Plan**: DVR has received no new update or response from RSA. DVR has upcoming calls scheduled with RSA on other topics. DVR is continuing to move forward on the programmatic side of corrective action. DVR has heard nothing from RSA in response to the fiscal side of corrective action for months.

**Staffing**: DVR has received approval to post roughly ten or eleven positions that were stalled at the Governor’s Office before the new administration assumed power. There have been some retirements in the past months, and a few staff members will be retiring soon. Multiple vacancies around DVR’s Worker’s Comp project; one VRC retired at the end of December 2018, while VRCs John D’Amour and Doug Dieckmann in the Houlton Office have been approved by the Worker’s Compensation Board to provide services to the Worker’s Comp population. There will also be multiple vacancies surrounding DVR’s Transition Work-Based Learning Grant. Barbara Lunsford, an RC1 in Augusta, will be retiring at the end of this week. A staff member who has served as a half-time business account manager in the Bangor office will also be leaving DVR. DVR will look to fill these positions as quickly as possible. New counselor training is scheduled for the end of March.

**Government Shutdown**: Because DVR’s funding was already passed in the education budget, DVR was not directly affected by the federal government shutdown. However, Libby noted that one effect of the shutdown was that VR staff who had computer problems were not able to find workers available to fix them.

**TWBL Grant**: The Transition Work-Based Learning grant team evaluators will be here in March (28th-29th), and around that same time they will be releasing year two evaluations of DVR’s TWBL project. Libby will share that information with the SRC when it is released. Libby attended a TWBL grant meeting December 10th. This was a mid-grant cycle meeting; all the DVR staff involved in the TWBL grant met in Bangor to take stock of progress and challenges, share successes, and prepare for the last two years of the grant.

**Maine Med/ Financial Literacy**: DVR was able to use funding from TWBL grant as well as WIOA money to help support a financial literacy program that Maine Medical Center is developing. DVR staff will attend these spring train-the-trainer trainings and examine the financial literacy needs for the transition population DVR serves. Often with that population there is a concern around losing benefits. More information will come out later this spring, no dates for the trainings yet.

**Summer Work Experience**: Planning for Summer Work Experience is currently occurring. A number of schools have signed on to do projects with DVR around Summer Work Experience. DVR also develops individual placements for Summer Work Experience.

**Application to Eligibility and Eligibility to IPE**: All following data was previously distributed to SRC members. Application to Eligibility and Eligibility to IPE standards are the two programmatic elements VR has to follow as part of their corrective action plan. December 2018 figures are the most recent. Across the state, the average for Application to Eligibility was well below the 60-day standard, and the average time for Eligibility to IPE was well below the 90-day standard. DVR is meeting both targets. To meet these standards, DVR has to remain fully staffed. SRC will examine early exiter data next month.

**Case Count & Expenditure Report**: Cheryl asked Libby what her thoughts were on the North spending half their budget before the halfway point of the fiscal year. Libby noted that this is due to a few different variables. DVR moved the Hinckley Office formerly in Skowhegan to under the Bangor Office; this is not reflected on the current data, but is having an impact on the budget. A significant amount of work experience is done under the Bangor Office; this contributes to the data as well. The Bangor Office has also been more fully staffed than other offices. DVR is keeping an eye on the North’s budget.

**Vacancies:** This specific vacancies report is not reflective of the current situation; a number of changes have occurred since the report was put together. DVR currently has roughly 12 vacancies across the state right now in a variety of different positions. Statewide, all casework supervisor and manager positions are currently staffed.

**Case Counts**: DVR is looking at adjusting their closure goal. DVR will be doing more work with WINTAC (Workforce Innovation and Technical Assistance Center) around the performance measures on WIOA. DVR will be doing training for senior staff around measuring what success looks like going forward. DVR is in the process of transitioning the way they measure success to incorporate different types of outcomes, moving away from simply placing clients in jobs and closing cases.

**New Applications by Month**: Applications were down significantly in December. The data for October, November, and December records a trend of a dropping number of applications. Unknown if this trend will hold over the next few months. December is typically a slower month. The holidays and weather can affect applications.

**Updates on DOE Rules Comments**: Chapter 101 State Special Education Law was recently put out for public comment by DOE; both DBVI and DVR made public comments. DOE then withdrew the planned update, and will revisit it in the coming year. DVR will continue to look at this issue. Libby noted that DVR and DBVI have a good MoU with DOE. DVR would like their rules to line up well with the federal and state special education rules; they are not currently. WIOA contains specifications about how VR will work with schools, but Special Education Law does not mirror this language. If the 101 State Special Education Law goes out again, DVR will continue to pursue making comments and discussing changes to help strengthen the partnership between Special Education and VR. Mary confirmed that the 101 will go out again. She explained that based on the feedback DOE received during their public comment period, they decided it would be best to withdraw and incorporate all the feedback into the document at a time when it could be worked on more purposefully. Jan Breton, head of Special Education Services, is retiring next week. Mary believes the new DOE Commissioner will be a good fit, describing her as student-oriented. Libby noted that the new DOE Commissioner has a background in alternative educational programming and may be more receptive about different ways young people with disabilities can demonstrate proficiencies and skills.

**Maine Calling on Foster Care for Older Youth**: Earlier today, Maine Calling did a broadcast on older youth aging out of foster care. Libby was prepared to get on the call, but was instead asked to send an email containing links to resources. DVR has established foster care liaisons in each of the DVR offices and are doing more work with this population. DVR is also beginning to track data on students in foster-care. Libby noted that there is a significant overlap in populations; many children in foster care have disabilities. J. asked if homelessness rates of youth who age out of foster care have improved. Libby noted that this topic came up on the Maine Calling broadcast; rates have improved slightly. The discussion on Maine Calling also dealt with possibly expanding out the age limit for services. DVR transition students range from 15 to 24 years old; in contrast, DHHS currently only provides youth services to those under the age of 21.

**Questions**: Cheryl asked if Libby could comment on the SRC letter concerning the RFP for CRPs sent to Commissioner Fortman. Libby responded by noting that the commissioner is gathering information to better understand the issue.

**Announcements**:

**Honorarium**: Honorarium is $50 for SRC members not otherwise compensated for attending meetings. Members can only receive $50 per day; even if members attend multiple SRC meetings in one day, they can only apply for one $50 stipend.

**Emails**: Send emails to Veronica at srcscribe@gmail.com. All information on website updates should be sent to Veronica as well.

**Wabanaki VR:** Tomorrow, January 29th, DBVI director Brenda Drummond and Libby will meet with Darcy Gentle to review DVR and DBVI’s MoU with Wabanaki VR.

**Meeting Adjourned at 3:03pm**

**Next Meeting February 25th**