

**Board of Vocational Rehabilitation (BVR)**  
**June 29, 2021**  
**Meeting Held Via ZOOM**

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Vicki Stewart, Jennifer Trenhaile, Jonathan Englund, Eric Weiss, Cole Uecker, Beth Schiltz, Brad Konechne, Bill McEntaffer, Kristina Allan, Lisa Merchen, Joe Vetch, Jolleen Laverdure, Brooke Lusk and Kevin Barber. **MEMBERS ABSENT:** Peter Bullene. **OTHERS PRESENT:** Bernie Grimme, Jordan Trumbo, Laura Stoltenburg, Emily Champa, Heidi Komes, Ruth Schlueter, Katie Gran, Kim Ludwig, and Colette Wagoner. Interpreters were Julie Paluch and Rick Norris.

**OPENING ACTIONS:** Cole Uecker, Chairperson called the meeting to order at 9:02 AM; he welcomed everyone and asked for introductions. Housekeeping items. Zoom features were reviewed e.g., mute, camera, and identifying oneself by name when speaking with use of interpreters. The voting process was outlined, with the need to conduct roll call with any action items, each voting member would be asked for their reply of yes, no, or abstain.

Approval of Agenda: Cole asked if there were any changes/additions to the agenda. **MOTION TO APPROVE THE AGENDA AS PRESENTED – MADE (M), SECONDED (S) AND CARRIED (C).** YEAS: Kristina, Beth, Lisa, Vicki, Joe, Jonathan, Brad, Bill, and Kevin. NAYS: None. Review/Approval of Meeting Minutes: Cole called for any changes/additions to the meeting minutes that were disseminated prior to the meeting; he asked for a motion to approve both sets of minutes, if there were no objections, **MOTION TO APPROVE THE MARCH 25, 2021, MEETING MINUTES AND THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES FROM JUNE 10, 2021, MSC.** YEAS: Kristina, Beth, Lisa, Vicki, Joe, Jonathan, Brad, Bill, and Kevin. NAYS: None.

**ANNOUNCEMENTS:** Cole invited announcements of any kind. He spoke to the Division’s Fall Conference which will be held October 26-28 in Deadwood. Kevin shared that South Dakota Association of the Deaf will host its biennial conference in Sioux Falls on July 9-11, 2021. Vicki shared information about events to be held in Sioux Falls to celebrate the 31<sup>st</sup> Anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act; a brief program on July 16<sup>th</sup> at the River Greenway Amphitheater and a “Re-Release of Accessible Ale” on July 26<sup>th</sup> at the Obscure Brewing Company.

**PUBLIC COMMENT:** There was no public comment provided at this time.

**DIVISION DIRECTOR’S REPORT:** Eric thanked members for their involvement and commitment of time serving on the Board and explained that the Board is an advisory unit to the Division regarding the vocational rehabilitation service delivery system. COVID Update: The majority of the Division’s work has returned to normal. Staff are

meeting with clients and providers in person, and if individuals identify concerns, staff will accommodate requests as best they can. Quarterly Data Report: The report shared with members reflects almost four years of data. The FY2020 program year for 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter reports total applications of 410, which is down a bit when compared to the same time period two years ago. The number of applicants is increasing now. He reviewed the descriptors that were added to the bottom of the report per a request from the last meeting. He spoke to the number of unsuccessful closures (i.e., individual no longer interested in services, unable to contact them) and the recent work to bring this number down. The number of successful closures varies each quarter because each individuals' plan for employment (IPE) is different (range in time from IPE to closure could be 90+ days to several years). He talked about the decrease in applications of 31% is due primarily to the pandemic, noting FY19 (October 1, 2018 through May 30, 2019) of 1023 applications; compared with FY20 (Oct 1, 2019 through May 30, 2020) having 1022 applications. Applications are on the re-bounce now. A question was asked if COVID impacted staff in terms of turnover. Eric replied that Division staff has been stable with low turnover over the last two years. BUDGET: In order for the state to receive federal funds for VR there is a required state match. A state can carry over funds from the first year if all requirements are met. A few months ago, the Division did not expect to expend all FY20 funds, however all funds were expended. The FY2020 Supported Employment (SE) funds will not be expended due to the lower number of participants served during this timeframe. Some SE funds will be reverted and re-allotted to other states that can utilize the funds. The Division is currently in the state budget request process and the request for general funds will remain the same as the past few years. Exploration of Meeting Formats: Eric talked about the use of Zoom to host board/council meetings and being a good medium. The Division is testing a hybrid meeting option with the use of ZOOM and DDN to host a meeting part in person/part video conferencing. He noted that the format must be accessible and support all members' ability to participate. Comments were made about COVID, individuals' hesitancy of joining/rejoining the workforce, goal of integrated employment, and the guidance and counseling process. Jennifer responded that the number of clients wanting to work from home has increased which brings forward other challenges; leading to discussions with clients regarding education, environment, and needed computer skills to support this type of work. Openings in this area i.e., call centers or similar type of businesses are seeking employees with experience. Other areas of discussion with clients includes daycare, reliable transportation, employer expectations and more. Jonathan noted more people are coming to the office in Spearfish, fewer people are wearing masks, and anxiety is lessening. He noted the need for individuals with technical skills. The Department of Labor and Regulation (DOLR) offers a job search workshop course, which is available virtually and in person. South Dakota has no shortage of job openings and work needs to be done to increase awareness of VR services as well as programs and services offered through DOLR. Eric added that work is being developing a brochure to highlight VR and services. It will be dropped off at

various locations (clinics, hospitals). A question was asked about Project Skills/SEARCH student participation, and Eric responded that the numbers are starting to rebound, and more information will be offered later in the meeting.

**SOUTH DAKOTA BENEFITS SPECIALISTS NETWORK:** Brooke Lusk provided this update. She explained that the benefits specialists provide planning and guidance to SSI and SSDI beneficiaries to increase their understanding of how employment will affect their benefits (i.e., SSI, SSDI, SNAP/food stamps, health care coverage/Medicare/Medicaid, housing assistance). Services include information and referral, benefits planning and counseling, benefits summary and analysis, trouble shooting issues such as overpayments, utilization of work incentives to maintain employment and long-term support to maintain employment. The network was established in 2001 with funding from Social Security Administration/SSA and the Division to support two staff. Current funding (SSA and Division) provides for 6 benefit specialists and one program director (part time). A map was displayed showing each benefits specialists' territory, serving the entire state. Recent data from July 2020 – March 2021 shows 807 beneficiaries received services of which 76% are referrals from VR. Tarra Bame/Benefits Specialist assists with the Medical Assistance for Workers with Disabilities (MAWD) program. MAWD extends healthcare coverage to working South Dakotans with disabilities whose income and assets would make them ineligible. MAWD allows enrollees to earn more money and save more of their earnings than traditional Medicaid limits.

Brooke spoke of recent changes to the benefits specialist network. Previously, funds from SSA were awarded to individual states. Now SSA will release funds to a consortium of states (South Dakota, North Dakota, Montana, Idaho), and available funds were cut in half. Brooke and Bernie worked with the other states in the consortium, and it was agreed that Montana State University would be the applicant. Funding from the Division focuses on benefits specialists working with individuals who are VR clients, or the individual is interested in working with VR. The application for funding to serve the consortium will be utilized to fund a half time FTE in South Dakota to work with individuals who are not VR recipients/not interested in working with VR. There is a Work Incentives Planning and Assistance (WIPA) Helpline that Social Security Administration staff answer. They can make referrals to the benefits specialists in South Dakota, as needed. Brooke shared the website - <https://bsnsd.org/> and the Facebook site <https://www.facebook.com/SDBenefitsSpecialistNetwork>. On the website, under the "Resources" tab the YouTube videos can be located as well as a link to the 2021 virtual work incentives trainings conducted in May. Funding from VR allows the benefits specialists to work with students not linked with VR (yet). A question was asked if PASS plans are utilized. Plan for Achieving Self Support (PASS) is a program which lets an individual set aside money from their monthly SSI or SSDI check to pay for items or services needed to achieve a specific work goal. Approved

PASS plans have been allowed for educational purposes (college, vocational training) or to start a new business. These are reviewed and approved by a SSA staff member termed a PASS Cadre. ABLE (Achieving a Better Life Experience) accounts (tax advantaged savings account that can fund disability expenses) were also discussed. More information can be found at the ABLE National Resource Center:

<https://www.ablenrc.org/>.

**DEPARTMENT OF LABOR AND REGULATION:** Bill reported that Governor Noem recently announced that South Dakota terminated its participation in the federal government's pandemic related unemployment assistance programs. This included:

- No longer participate in the federal Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation (PEUC) program, which affected claimants who have exhausted their traditional 26 weeks of regular State unemployment compensation.
- No longer issue supplemental \$300 weekly payments to claimants under the Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation (FPUC) program. This payment was made to all claimants who were receiving unemployment benefits regardless of the program under which they are being paid.
- No longer participate in the federal Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) program. PUA provided benefits to the self-employed, the underemployed, independent contractors, and individuals who have been unable to work due to health or COVID-19-related reasons.

South Dakota will continue to pay regular State claims. All job service offices are open and ready to help support those returning to the workforce. Bill spoke about the perception of individuals not going back to work because of receiving benefits or stimulus checks. This is not the case as there are less than 2000 individuals on benefits. He talked about the high number of available jobs and businesses willing to provide additional training or offer flexible hours/scheduling. Employers are looking at various groups for recruiting/hiring (high school students, retirees). DOLR staff are working with Department of Corrections, Department of Social Services, and Department of Education to explore avenues to reach potential pools for new hires. He talked about businesses creating internships, job shadowing, and making videos of possible career paths.

He talked about the Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC). DOLR staff take applications from businesses to ensure eligibility. WOTC is a federal tax credit for employers who hire and retain qualified individuals from targeted groups that historically face barriers in securing employment (i.e., veterans, people with disabilities, TANF recipients, youth). He reported that in FY20 DOLR processed over 6,600 tax credits and in FY21 over 5,500 have been processed to date (FY19 there were over

9,500 processed). Information about WOTC can be found at:

[https://dlr.sd.gov/workforce\\_services/wotc/default.aspx](https://dlr.sd.gov/workforce_services/wotc/default.aspx)

Bill shared information about a meeting he attended with staff from Terex, a business in Watertown. This business designs, builds and supports products used in construction and manufacturing. Typically, employees with school/training are recruited, i.e., welding. They are wanting to grow their workforce from 700 to over 900 and are looking at offering hands on training to new hires. He shared this as an example of people not knowing or understanding what a business does and encouraged people to reach out to a business and ask questions which could lead to employment opportunities. He noted the need for businesses to share information of what they do/services provided. DOLR has funds to support youth ages 18 – 24, (can go as young as 16) to provide training or provide paid work experiences, (up to 24 hours a week). DOLR can assist with job matching in the private and non-profit sectors. If you know of a person or a business that needs assistance, communicate with DOLR staff, and they can assist with identifying workers, wages, etc. In response to a question regarding issues with daycare, DOLR can provide assistance with paying for costs associated with daycare, transportation, and/or rent in some situations, i.e., individual working on obtaining GED. Bill asked if there any questions about other programs/services at this time and there were none.

**DIVISION CASE FILE REVIEW:** Jordan Trumbo was available for this report. She stated the case file review was completed the week of May 3<sup>rd</sup>. This was the second year that the review was completed virtually. A total of 354 cases were reviewed, randomly selected from each caseload. The review focused on areas of the VR process: application, eligibility, Individual Plan for Employment (IPE), services provided and case closure. She referred to the handout that was disseminated prior to the meeting. Any area with a percentage of less than 90% is identified as needing improvement/needs to be addressed and highlighted in yellow. She spent time in reviewing a summary of recommendations: changes to the review process, edits to the case file review instrument, clarification in policy/training, and other topics that require additional conversation. A question was asked if the federal government (Rehabilitation Services Administration/RSA) reviews the work completed by Division staff. Bernie explained that in the past RSA has reviewed a sample of cases and RSA may review a sample of files in the future. The review instrument has been updated to reflect questions asked by RSA. The virtual review consisted of moving files electronically into “FileDirector” vs hauling paper files to the state office from locations across the state. A question was asked of what CRC means, an abbreviation in the case file report. It was explained that it is a process of certifying a VR counselor. To become a Certified Rehabilitation Counselor (CRC), VR counselors must meet eligibility standards to include advanced education, work experience, and passing the CRC examination. Certification comes from the Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification

(CRCC). VR counselors who are certified are eligible for promotion i.e., senior VR counselor.

## **LUNCH BREAK (11:20 AM – 12:20 AM)**

**VR PROGRAM INITIATIVES:** 2021 Annual Fall Conference “The Challenge of Change”: is scheduled October 26-28<sup>th</sup> in Deadwood. Bernie Grimme reported that registration will be available on July 1<sup>st</sup>. He reminded members who are interested in attending, costs will be covered through the support agreement, i.e., mileage, per diem and registration. A pre-conference session will be offered on October 26<sup>th</sup> (The Oyate’ Circle). Conference presenters will include Jim Warne, Wayne Weston, Haley Moss, Doug Crandell, Hasan Davis, Russ Thelin, and Tim Gard. Request for Proposal: The Division issued a request for proposal on June 4<sup>th</sup> to establish four Employment Specialists Coordinator positions to increase provider capacity. These positions will be located in the local VR offices and fall under the supervision of the district supervisor. The Division does not want to compete with other providers; this is an effort to help coordinate services, work on job development/coaching, outreach to employers, provide choice to consumers, and fill in areas that are remote/rural that do not have coverage. Proposals are due July 25<sup>th</sup> and having a contract in place in October.

Jordan Trumbo was available and spoke to the provider training contract with Griffin-Hammis Associates which started in January. Monthly community of practice meetings have been held to host discussions with private providers to identify training needs and provide networking opportunities. Monthly training sessions have also been held on identified training topics. A survey was disseminated in May to obtain feedback from providers, what they like/what could be done differently. Positive feedback was received, i.e., ability to network/communicate with other providers, good training and information received. A management group will review feedback, incorporate changes as needed, and plan for ongoing training. The provider training contract also includes competitive integrated employment training which will take place in August and September. This training will help providers with obtaining their “Certified Employment Support Professionals” (CESP) certificate. Work is being done to schedule an employment services/supervisor leadership training later this fall targeting mid-level management and leadership of provider organizations with the goal of building upon provider and employment services development. Next year, another round of customized employment trainings will be offered targeting mental health providers.

Jordan is working on ‘New Counselor Training’ which will be offered virtually. Last fall the Division purchased a learning management system which allows the storage of videos and creating trainings as needed. Training can be targeted to the specific needs of the staff member depending on where they are at, i.e., new hire, six weeks, six months. The staff member can be assigned videos to watch, complete assignments,

and participate in group discussions. Examples of trainings include navigating the case management system, case note documentation, Ticket to Work. A question was asked about the two handouts – Monthly Provider Training Schedule and the Community of Practice Training Schedule and if members could attend these. Members were invited to attend the monthly provider trainings if they were interested.

Kim Ludwig, Business Specialist spoke to trainings for businesses. The Division, Business Resource Network (BRN), and the Workforce Diversity Network of the Black Hills (WDBNH) co-facilitated virtual WINDMILLS trainings on May 18<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup>. The WINDMILLS training is highly interactive training that equips employment professionals to help businesses to become more inclusive of individuals with disabilities in the workplace. The May 18<sup>th</sup> training focused on examining how stereotyping of people with disabilities may impact employment decisions. There were 65 attendees. The May 25<sup>th</sup> training focused on participants exploring reactions to mental health disabilities and how businesses (employers) are more effective at brainstorming reasonable accommodation ideas for people with physical and/or sensory disabilities rather than for individuals with mental health disabilities. There were 47 attendees. The feedback was positive and participants appreciated the ability to have these discussions.

DRS, BRN, and WDBNH will host trainings in August. August 17<sup>th</sup> training will focus on workplace situations, raise awareness of respectful etiquette and language to create a more comfortable work environment for employees, and to familiarize them with disability employment laws. August 24<sup>th</sup> training will focus on identifying reasonable accommodations, interactive communication process to develop accommodations, and provide an overview of the ADA Amendments Act's definition of a reasonable accommodation. DRS, BRN, and WDBNH will also conduct an in-person training during the 2021 SD Society of Human Resources Management State Conference in September in Sioux Falls. The training will highlight the difficulties managers and supervisors can have dealing with a problem without the inclusion of an employee with a disability. It will allow participants to illustrate the importance of understanding a company's goals, such as affirmative action and what a supervisor's responsibility is.

DRS/BRN/WDBNH and the South Dakota Retailers Association co-sponsored a two-part virtual training series in March and April with presenters from the Rocky Mountain ADA Center. Training topics addressed service animals in workplaces and embracing disability etiquette and awareness into the workplace culture. A total of 78 individuals participated in each training session. The recordings of all the trainings are available on the Division's website, under the Business Resources tab, within the Trainings section. The Yankton Area Mental Wellness showed the recording of the service animals training during the Yankton Area Mental Wellness Conference that was held virtually throughout the month of June.

**DRS Outreach Flyer:** Kim is working on an outreach flyer which will provide an overview of the Division and services available to job seekers with disabilities and employers. It will include contact information for local VR offices to learn more and/or apply for services. Once finalized, the flyer will be distributed to healthcare facilities located through the state, community organizations, and businesses. DRS is obtaining a quote from Pheasantland Industries to assist with the graphic design and finalizing it. The flyer will be utilized to increase the public's awareness of the VR program and to increase referrals/applications. The flyer will be shared with members when finalized.

**Work Opportunity Tax Credit/VR's Process:** Kim spoke about WOTC, the federal income tax credit, from VR's perspective. VR counselors discuss the WOTC with clients, and if the client chooses to proceed, there is a referral process that takes place. VR counselors complete a referral letter and give it to the client and/or provider, which is taken to the local DLR office, and they receive a conditional certification voucher/paperwork. The paperwork is given to an employer after they accept an employment offer. The paperwork consists of an ETA 9062 and IRS 8850 forms which employers need to complete and mail the paperwork to DLR's State WOTC Coordinator in Aberdeen. Completed forms must be mailed within 28 calendar days after the employee's start date. (DLR determines and verifies individuals who qualify for the WOTC based on the specified target groups, it does not guarantee that employers will receive the credit for approved individuals as there are circumstances that have to be met). Employers give the certifications received from DLR to their tax consultants when filing their yearend taxes. Tax consultants will gather the information they need to determine the amount of credit the employer will receive.

VR clients that participate in VR's work experience programs, Project Skills, and the Employment Skills Program, are able to receive qualification for WOTC and employers can receive the WOTC based on the number of hours they have worked, even if they are not paying their wages. Individuals must work at least a minimum of 120 hours for employers to receive the tax credit.

Katie Gran talked about the Youth Leadership Forum (YLF) that took place in Aberdeen June 6<sup>th</sup> – 10<sup>th</sup> on Northern State University's campus. Thirty-five student delegates (high school students with disabilities) participated of the 42-total invited. There were 14 individuals that served in roles as Team Leaders, Assistant Team Leaders, MC, Mentors in addition to the Transition Services Liaison Project staff available the entire week. Staffing also includes interpreters and 24-hour nursing care. There were multiple presenters throughout the week in addition to scheduled activities. Student delegates learned about their disability, self-advocacy, career awareness, analyzed their strengths and weaknesses, organizational skills, leadership styles, legislative process, disability related laws, etiquette, how to influence others, and much more. Scheduled activities included: picnic, dance, park activity, and on-site volunteer



opportunities. The Richard L. Hicks Awards event was livestreamed for the first time allowing more individuals and family members to watch in the midst of the pandemic. Thought will be given to livestreaming the awards session in the future to allow more participation. Katie referenced a 9-minute YLF video and provided the link: [YLF 2021 - Unmask Your Potential!.mp4](#)

Summer Pre-Employment Transition Services Camps: Katie reported that 15 organizations submitted responses to a request for proposal and were awarded. Three of the 15 had to cancel their camps due to lack of interest/signup. Goodwill is trying to move the June session and reschedule in August and Black Hills Works cancelled their June camp but will proceed with the July and August camp dates, per participation.

Project SEARCH Update: There were 31 students who participated in the program last year. South Dakota State University/Brookings was the only site that allowed students to complete their internships in comparison with the other sites that are medical in nature (i.e., hospital) due to COVID. A meeting was held last month with all the Project SEARCH site coordinators, and they reported that all business host sites will welcome students back in August. Location restrictions vary with mandatory mask wearing and/or vaccination requirements for student participation. Project Skills: a program that runs October 1 through the end of September. Katie reported that as of April 1<sup>st</sup> (October 1 – March 31<sup>st</sup>) VR paid \$256,000 in wages/benefits compared to the same time period in 2019/20 it paid \$291,000. For the FY 19/20 school year VR paid \$410,706 as compared to the FY 18/19 school year, VR paid \$514,000. The difference of \$104,000 was largely due to COVID. There was a decrease in student participation in Project Skills, but now the Division is seeing a return to pre COVID payouts.

Summer Transition Placement: The Division started a pilot program in June for students with disabilities wanting summer employment to enhance soft skills. Counselors can authorize job placement packages to providers to assist students with an employer paid work experience. This will count towards the Division's 15% funding requirement for Pre-ETS. Hours worked under the summer transition placement is not figured into the 250 hours maximum for the annual Project Skills placement. These placements will allow the student to explore different experiences, build soft skills, and can be independent of the employment goal, and is considered an IPE service.

**VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION CASE STUDY/SCENERIO:** Eric explained that feedback was received from a member about having a case study/VR participant speak to the process and services received. Eric introduced Heidi Komes, parent of a student with a disability (VR participant) and his VR counselor (Emily Champa). Heidi spoke about her son, Cody who is a person with ADHD and has been on an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) since he was four. She spoke to his uniqueness, his high points and how ADHD impacts him in terms of functional limitations. She described him as a hard worker with a mind that goes 100 miles a minute; he has no behavioral issues typically associated with ADHD. He had no idea of what he wanted

to do until he started high school and got into the machining and mechanics class and loved it. He and his family were referred to VR at this time through the school system. Cody and his VR counselor explored his likes/dislikes and after a search identified Richter's Tire and Exhaust Services in Sturgis. This employer was open to Cody coming to work through Project Skills, a paid work experience program. Cody had a job coach who was provided through the school system. The job coach (Kim) provided assistance to Cody on the job with learning job tasks/expectations. Heidi explained this has been an amazing journey for Cody due to the employer and co-workers on the job site. Cody now wants to attend Western Dakota Technology and study in the area of diesel mechanics. This has been an amazing experience for Cody and without it, he might not have considered post-secondary education. Richter's is also willing to hire him once he completes the maximum hours for Project Skills.

Ruth Schlueter, VR counselor, was asked to share another example with members. She described the participant she works with "Mona" as a person with physical health and cognitive challenges. When she started working with Mona, she was forty-four years old, had never worked before and was living off an inheritance. VR conducted some testing because any previous testing was not available. The testing results reflected an intellectual disability. Initially, some situational assessments were conducted with a provider to identify her work skills, interests, strengths, weaknesses, and types of accommodations needed, if any. During this timeframe, Mona had surgery and temporarily stayed in Denver to be closer to family to assist her with recovery and to assist with a time of housing insecurity. While in Denver, Ruth maintained contact with Mona because she wanted to return to Rapid City. Mona was referred to Western Resources for Independent Living (WRIL), a center for independent living. WRIL staff assisted her with budgeting, finding low-income housing, and applying for SSI. VR paid for a work adjustment training program for Mona at Goodwill. This program was utilized to develop soft skills and work tolerance/hardening skills; and she also learned how to utilize transit. Mona did not like transit and wanted to be able to walk to work. An employment skills program (ESP) was discussed and utilized which VR could provide up to 250 hours of paid employment to help the participant gain work experience, training, and basic job skills. A gas station was identified near her apartment and within walking distance. Mona worked with a job coach for a period of time learning how to stock shelves and clean. When the program ended, Mona was hired. She works 10 hours a week with periodic follow-up with the job coach and VR counselor. When Mona contacts Ruth they talk about the importance of work, earning money, goals, and the ability to purchase things with the money she earns. Mona was referred to and continues to work with a benefits specialist as well. A question was asked about the number of hours she works a week, and it was noted that every person is different and the need to look at the person's disability in terms of functional limitations. Perhaps as Mona develops work tolerance her hours might increase. Ruth was thanked for sharing this information of a participants' story.

## **VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SERVICES/ABERDEEN DISTRICT OFFICE**

**OVERVIEW:** Laura Stoltenburg was introduced by Eric. She is the district supervisor of the Aberdeen office. She utilized a PowerPoint presentation to share information. The Aberdeen district office has two district locations (Aberdeen and Pierre); serves 22 counties and 47 school districts. FY Data 2020 showed this district office served a total of 911 clients, a success rate of 39%. This office works with four reservations and the four Tribal Vocational Rehabilitation programs. She outlined the staff in each office, as well as others co-located with them. The Aberdeen office also houses the Division's business specialist, Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired (SBVI) staff, CSD staff, SD Parent Connection staff and a transition liaison staff member. The Pierre office houses a SBVI rehabilitation counselor/rehabilitation teacher position.

Challenges for this office include limited provider services, employment specialists and long term supports, i.e., transportation. Equal engagement challenges of finding the new normal in terms of COVID and what people are ready to do/not do/change, etc. Pre-ETS and transition services can be lacking in very rural areas and obtaining buy in from other providers/partners with trying new things/approaches, exploring ideas, creative scheduling can be time consuming. The economy has been a challenge due to uncertainties raised by the pandemic; variances from community to community, i.e., job market, employer needs are so unique to each community. Successes have included creative approaches for guidance and counseling, utilization of Pre-ETS, motivational interviewing and Person Centered Thinking Tools. Other successes have included teamwork and mentoring, Project SEARCH (Avera St. Luke's Hospital) is going into its 9<sup>th</sup> year and being the host community of where YLF is offered. Laura invited members to be in touch if they have questions or stop in for a tour if in the area.

**STATEWIDE INDEPENDENT LIVING COUNCIL (SILC) UPDATE:** Eric reminded members that the Rehabilitation Act requires each state to have a SILC in order to receive federal funds. The Act outlines the need for the SILC to develop a State Plan for Independent Living in addition to language of coordinating activities with other entities such as the BVR and Council on Developmental Disabilities. The SILC met on June 3<sup>rd</sup> and agenda items included an overview of CSD and Independent Living Choices programs/services and Rapid City's Rapid Transit System. Standing agenda items include a review of the SPIL goals/objectives and indicators, CIL quarterly reports, follow-up on the FY21 Onsite Review, Division of SBVI and SBVI Board and BVR updates, and staff report. The election of officers took place as well as honoring outgoing members. The SILC is undecided at this point of how the next quarterly meeting will be conducted, options are being explored to identify the best way to meet, meeting all members' needs for full participation. The meeting will be scheduled sometime in September.

**BVR STAFF REPORT:** BVR/SILC Nomination Process: Staff reported that two members' terms expire the end of June of which one is interested in serving a second term (if appointed) and one member is unable to do so at this time. Information regarding nominations has been routed through the Division/Department in order to forward to the Governor for her consideration and action. No word has been received to date regarding appointments. National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM): Staff reported that 12 communities are proceeding with plans to host NDEAM events. Some communities will have speakers and conduct face to face meetings, some will continue with hosting speakers via virtual platforms, and some are conducting a social/media blitz. Staff is working with local community planners on needed speaker contracts. The 2021 NDEAM theme is "America's Recovery: Powered by Inclusion". Information can be located on the Department of Labor/Office of Disability Employment Policy's website in addition to ordering this year's poster: <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/odep/initiatives/ndeam>. Governor's Awards Nominations: Nominations were due May 3<sup>rd</sup> with a total of 36 nominations received. There is a Governor's Review Committee, comprised of BVR/SILC/SBVI members who met earlier in June to review the nominations. The committee's recommendations are routed through the Division/Department onto the Governor's office for final review and consideration. Once we hear from the Governor's office regarding her selections, the recipients will be notified. Following this, information will be disseminated to all nominators and those who wrote letters of support identifying the 2021 recipients. Plans will proceed with planning the awards ceremony. Budget update: A new budget was put in place effective 1 January 2021 through December 31, 2021. A budget report was disseminated prior to the meeting which identified expenditures for the time period of January 1, 2021, thru the end of May. To date there have been limited expenditures under the meeting expenses line item (pro-rated cost of Zoom renewal and outgoing member gift). Staff anticipates future expenditures to support Board member's expenses to attend the 2021 Fall Conference. There are eight members who have expressed an interest in attending the Fall Conference. Staff has obtained hotel rooms for those needing overnight accommodations. Bernie will invoice staff for registration costs. Mileage and per diem will be reimbursed to members after their attendance.

**ELECTION OF OFFICERS:** Cole passed the gavel to Eric, asking him to speak on behalf of the Executive Committee regarding the election of officers. Eric explained that the Executive Committee was bringing forth a slate of nominations for three positions – Kevin for Member-At-Large: Brad for Vice Chairperson and Cole for Chairperson. Each member expressed interest in serving again, if elected. He stated nominations would be taken from the floor as each position is addressed. The process began with Eric calling for further nominations for BVR Chairperson, two times. Hearing none –  
**MOTION TO CEASE NOMINATIONS AND ELECT COLE AS CHAIR – MSC. YEAS:** Kristina, Beth, Jolleen, Lisa, Vicki, Joe, Jonathan, Brad, Bill, and Kevin. **NAYS:** None. Eric thanked Cole for his work as chairperson and his willingness to continue in this

position. Eric then moved to calling for further nominations for Vice Chair, two times. Hearing none – **MOTION TO CEASE NOMINATIONS AND ELECT BRAD AS VICE CHAIRPERSON – MSC.** YEAS: Kristina, Beth, Jolleen, Lisa, Vicki, Joe, Jonathan, Brad, Bill, and Kevin. NAYS: None. Eric congratulated Brad in this role and thanked him for his service. Next, Eric moved to calling for further nominations for Member-At-Large, two times. **MOTION TO CEASE NOMINATIONS AND ELECT KEVIN AS MEMBER AT LARGE – MSC.** YEAS: Kristina, Beth, Jolleen, Lisa, Vicki, Joe, Jonathan, Brad, Bill, and Kevin. NAYS: None. Eric thanked Kevin for his service and willingness to serve again as an officer. Eric encouraged members to think about serving in the capacity of an officer as elections are held every year.

**HONORING OUTGOING MEMBERS:** Eric spoke to Kristina’s three-year term on the board and thanked her for her service/commitment. Cole seconded what Eric said and affirmed her time serving in this advisory capacity. Cole thanked all members noting this is an advisory board and that each member volunteers to serve. He expressed his appreciation for members’ support and invited members to contact him with any concerns or questions. He thanked Brad and Kevin again for serving as officers. A gift was purchased for Kristina from the Suzie Cappa Art Center to demonstrate the Board’s appreciation. She displayed her gift and thanked the Board.

**OTHER BUSINESS:** Cole asked about any initiatives or projects that would be beneficial to hear about, a program or service that impacts the VR service delivery system. He identified the Board as being a champion or cheerleader for VR services. Eric recognized the value and importance of sharing VR stories and getting the message out with the hope of increasing awareness of services. A question was asked about success stories and posting these on the Division’s website. Eric stated that success stories can be found on the Division’s website located at:

<https://dhs.sd.gov/rehabservices/stories.aspx>

**CLOSING ACTIONS:** Future Agenda Items: Cole invited members to be in touch with him or staff if there is an item or topic they would like addressed on the agenda. Schedule Next Meeting: Eric talked about testing a hybrid meeting format of combining the use of DDN and Zoom, and the next meeting could be held via this format if it works. This could include the combination of a group of members meeting in one location and others accessing the meeting via Zoom. If a member feels strongly about the meeting format i.e., meeting in person, meet via Zoom or a combination of the two, please let Cole, Eric or staff know. Staff will send out a doodle poll to try to ascertain board members comfort level of how/when to meet and meeting formats, etc. Adjournment: Cole asked if there was anything else to discuss, and hearing none **MOTION TO ADJOURN THE MEETING AT 3:12 PM, MSC.** YEAS: Kristina, Beth, Jolleen, Lisa, Vicki, Joe, Jonathan, Brad, Bill, and Kevin. NAYS: None.