

Board of Vocational Rehabilitation (BVR)
June 25, 2024

Meeting Held Via Zoom and DHS Hillview Plaza/Conference Room

MEMBERS PRESENT: Jonathan Englund, Kevin Barber, Betsy Drew, Brooke Lusk, Michael Kokesh, Sherry Van Liere, Shawn Lyons, Vicki Stewart, Jennifer Trenhaile, Chris Olson, Eric Weiss, and Cole Uecker. **MEMBERS ABSENT:** Jolleen Laverdure, Eric Larson, and Kara Schweitzer. **OTHERS PRESENT:** Bernie Grimme, Jordan Trumbo, Katie Gran, Kim Ludwig, Allison White, Lyle Cook, Renae Vinzant, Paige Krumwiede, Belle Samson, Lori Kwasniewski, and Dr. Faye LaDuke Pelster and Colette Wagoner. The interpreters were Julie Paluch and Alecia Barnes.

OPENING ACTIONS: Cole Uecker, Chairperson called the meeting to order at 9:00 AM. He welcomed everyone and thanked them for attending. A quorum was present. Housekeeping items were reviewed along with the voting process. Welcome & Introductions. Everyone present was asked to introduce themselves. Review & Approval of Agenda: Cole asked if there were any changes to the agenda. **MOTION TO APPROVE THE AGENDA AS DISSEMINATED – MADE (M), SECONDED (S) AND CARRIED (C).** YEAS: Brooke, Betsy, Michael, Sherry, Shawn, Jonathan, Chris, and Kevin. NAYS: None. Review & Approval of Meeting Minutes: Cole asked for changes/additions to the Board’s March 6th meeting minutes, there were none. **MOTION TO APPROVE THE BVR’S MARCH 6TH MEETING MINUTES AS DISSEMINATED, MSC.** YEAS: Brooke, Betsy, Michael, Sherry, Shawn, Jonathan, Chris, and Kevin. NAYS: None. Cole asked for changes/additions to the BVR’s Executive Committee minutes, there were none. **MOTION TO APPROVE THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES FROM MAY 30TH, 2024, MSC.** YEAS: Brooke, Betsy, Michael, Sherry, Shawn, Jonathan, Chris, and Kevin. NAYS: None.

PUBLIC COMMENT: Lyle Cook joined the meeting at this time. He introduced himself, noting he is the Director of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe Vocational Rehabilitation Program in Eagle Butte. He indicated he joined the meeting to listen to the conversation.

ANNOUNCEMENTS: Eric spoke to state employees being recognized for longevity in increments of 5-year periods. Julie Paluch was recently recognized for 25 years of service. Julie was congratulated and thanked for her service.

DIVISION OF REHABILITATION SERVICES (DRS) DIVISION DIRECTOR’S

COMMENTS & UPDATES: Eric welcomed everyone and thanked members for their time and service. Eric acknowledged Gaye Mattke who retired in early June. Gaye was

the Director of the Division of Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired. Quarterly Data Report provides information about the program year and quarter, the most recent quarter is the 2023, 3rd Quarter (January 1, 2024 – March 31, 2024). The report provides information on total applications, total eligibilities, total served and closed case data. This quarter shows a significant increase in applications and the number of closed cases show increases since the pandemic. He outlined the time involved between application for services, eligibility, developing a plan for employment, becoming employed, and closing a case as successful.

Eric shared that during the time period of October – December 2023, the Division served more youth than ever before. A total of 2,437 consumers served, 24.6% were under the age of 19, with an additional 35.6% under the age of 25. Over 60% of individuals served were youth with disabilities. Other information included 14.1% served were Native Americans; 41.9% were female and 57.9% were male. Over half of the participants served had cognitive disabilities identified as their primary disability and another third served identified mental illness as their primary disability. He reported that the employment rate for this quarter was 48% (the success rate of the participants who received VR services).

In terms of “Timeliness” the Division identified 95% of the Individualized Plans for Employment were developed within timelines, i.e., determination of eligibility within 60 days; 90 days to develop the plan for employment, unless extensions are agreed upon. The most recent performance for Program Year 2023 the Division received 98.1% rating for timeliness for eligibility decisions. This is a continued conversation with Division staff to move individuals through services as quickly as possible. Sherry offered situations with her work as a provider involving several consumers in terms of closing their cases and timeliness. She was encouraged to visit with the VR counselor, supervisor, or to reach out to Eric or Bernie to talk about the situations in more detail.

Division Budget: the last day of the State Fiscal Year is June 30th. Division staff are working with the Bureau of Finance & Management staff to close out the fiscal year. In terms of forecasting expenditures, the Division is in good shape to spend all allowable funds in the prescribed time. Eric reported that in the last few months the Division has experienced an increase in expenditures. If expenditures continue to increase at this rate the Division will request more funds through the federal reallocation process. If funds are awarded through this process, more state dollars will be required for the match. The Department of Human Services is supportive of this. Eric responded to a question about the increase in students with disabilities applying for services. He talked about activities that have contributed to serving more youth, federal mandates, outreach efforts, working with schools, teachers, families, Project SEARCH opportunities.

DIVISION'S VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION (VR) INITIATIVES: Bernie invited members to be in touch about agenda topics for future meetings or for additional information about any program/service. He described the State Plan as a four-year document which requires certain sections to be updated every 2 years. The 2024-2028 Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Combined State Plan can be found on the Department of Labor and Regulation's website located at: https://dlr.sd.gov/workforce_services/wioa/default.aspx. The change in the name from the WIOA Unified State Plan to the WIOA Combined State Plan included the addition of the Veterans State Grants and the Senior Community Service Employment Program. Since uploading the Division's information into the online portal, RSA requested minor changes which were corrected/added.

Performance Indicators: Bernie asked Jordan Trumbo, Division's Policy/QA Specialist, to speak to the report shared with members. She explained that Measurable Skills Gains is the percentage of program participants who are in an education or training program and are making progress towards obtaining their goal (i.e., credits, grades, progress reports). Credential Attainment is measured once the participant has completed the training program. This is more difficult to track and may take several years of tracking. This is measured as the percentage of participants enrolled in education or training program who attain a recognized post-secondary credential or secondary school diploma, or its recognized equivalent. The report reflected obtained levels in four of the five categories: Employment 2nd quarter after exit; Employment 4th quarter after exit; Median Earnings 2nd quarter after exit; and Measurable Skills Gain. The Credential Attainment Rate negotiated rate by RSA was 35% and the obtained rate was 34% for Program Year 2022. The Division does not obtain credit for the Credential Attainment until the participants case has been closed for 18 months. The employment 2nd quarter and 4th quarter after exit identifies the participant is still employed. Jordan explained that the Division is able to obtain wage data from the Department of Labor to verify if the person is employed. She explained that these indicators help define and show success for the Division. Program Year 2022 is based on the state fiscal year, July 1, 2022, through June 30, 2023. Bernie explained the suggested levels by DRS/DHS and RSA estimated levels for Program Years 2024 and 2025.

The Division encourages employment support providers to obtain their certification, to become Certified Employment Support Professionals. A certified provider is reimbursed at a higher rate. Testing is required and is now made available online only. Testing was not offered in the state, so Division staff offered testing in Pierre last month. Four providers tested and all passed. There were approximately 100 certified providers and now that number is down to 69. The Division is planning to offer testing at least annually to increase the numbers of certified providers.

Jordan provided an update on SARA (Semi-Autonomous Rehabilitation Assistant) digital assistance software the Division purchased last spring to assist with rehabilitation counselors with day-to-day communications or tasks with clients. Training was conducted with all staff on the use of SARA. There is a workgroup in place to solicit feedback on the use of SARA to assist with identifying guidance for staff. Division staff are creating short videos to demonstrate different uses of SARA. Jordan will share a video at an upcoming meeting for members to view. The Service Descriptions for Providers Document was updated and disseminated to all providers. Updates were made to ensure it aligned with what is communicated to providers and new sections were added i.e., training options, informed choice.

Katie Gran, VR Transition Specialist spoke to Project SEARCH, a business-led transition program for students/interns with disabilities providing competitive, community employment. There are four Project SEARCH sites in South Dakota (Rapid City/Monument Health, Brookings/SDSU, and two sites in Sioux Falls/Avera McKennan and Dow Rummel). A new site will start August 2024 in Yankton working with Avera Sacred Heart and Mouny Marty University.

Currently, the Sioux Falls School District works with Dow Rummel Retirement Village as the host business. Dow Rummel can only accept 4 student interns. The Division and the Sioux Falls School District have been working to switch host businesses. Starting in December 2024, Sanford Health will provide 1-2 internship opportunities during the 2nd and 3rd rotations while the classroom and other internship opportunities will continue at Dow Rummel. Sanford Health will become the sole host business in August 2025, providing classroom space and hosting all internships.

A national Project SEARCH staff member visited the Sioux Falls School District and Yankton sites. The purpose of the visit was to host manager meetings at each host business location, provide an overview of the Project SEARCH program, and to explain the benefits of Project SEARCH for interns and the host businesses. During the site tours the groups were identifying potential internship possibilities and will work with those department leaders to coordinate opportunities for future interns.

Youth Leadership Forum (YLF): The annual YLF was held June 2-6, 2024, in Aberdeen at Northern State University and hosted by Transition Services Liaison Project (TSLP). YLF offers students with disabilities the opportunity to learn from each other and successful adults with disabilities who are recognized leaders/role models. Students learn about their disability, analyze their strengths and weaknesses, learn about disability laws, and much more. There were 44 students with disabilities who attended as delegates with more students/adults with disabilities serving as team leaders, assistant team leaders, mentors, MC, and videographer.

YLF included Starr Chief Eagle who performed Native American dances and Linda McQuillen, Aberdeen's chapter of League of Women Voters spoke on how attendees could get more involved in local politics. Patrick Schwarz presented on the importance of learning and understanding about one's disability and setting goals. Mary Beth Holzwarth, SD DCI Human Trafficking Coordinator, talked about staying safe on social media. Activities for student delegates included volunteering at the Salvation Army, Aspire, Journey Home, Red Rooster Coffee House, Safe Harbor, and Aberdeen Area Senior Center. Students learned employment-related tasks while learning the importance of being active in one's community. Students learned from agencies about available services, i.e., Vocational Rehabilitation, DOL, DakotaLink, Independent Living Choices, SD Parent Connection, Community Service Providers, SD Benefits Specialist, SD DROP, and Disability Rights SD. The Richard L Hicks Awards Ceremony was available via live stream. Two awards were presented during the awards luncheon. The Richard L Hicks award recognized Ben Bartling for leadership qualities and being a positive role model. Ben attended YLF as a delegate in 2013 and served as a team mentor. Ben participated in Project Skills while in high school at a local hardware store. Ben is now the manager of the hardware store and works with the high school special education staff in providing additional Project Skills work experiences. The "Friends of YLF" award acknowledges a special supporter of YLF. The award was renamed to 'The Cindy Kirschman Friends of YLF' award. This award was presented to Joe Barnett, who has performed a magic show for YLF for the past 10 years.

Kim Ludwig, DRS Business Specialist, spoke to her role with providing training to businesses and/or associations to promote employment opportunities for persons with disabilities. A result of VR working with the State Library, a Bureau of Human Resources (BHR) staff member sought training for all BHR HR managers and generalists regarding the VR program. The training included work experience programs for students and adults with disabilities, and the payroll process. Dialogue during the training involved VR office locations, referrals, sharing job openings, offering work experience opportunities and reasonable accommodation requests. Vicki Stewart and Kim provided training for NorthWestern Energy Customer Associate and Risk Analyst leadership staff. Training focused on topics from the WINDMILLS program. Kim and Vicki also provided training during the Mental Wellness Conference held in Yankton "Taking the Emotion out of Mental Health Disabilities".

Kim provided an update on the Division's Request for Proposal, Rehabilitation Consulting for Employers. The Division has contracts with Employment Disability Resources (EDR) and the Workplace Disability Network of the Black Hills (WDBNH) to provide education, awareness, resources, and training on hiring/retaining employees with disabilities. EDR and WDBNH are in their last year of a 5-year contract cycle. The Division issued the RFP and proposals were due on May 20th. Both EDR and WDBNH submitted proposals and met the RFP requirements and new contracts will be issued.

STATEWIDE INDEPENDENT LIVING COUNCIL (SILC) UPDATE: Eric explained that in order for the state to receive independent living (IL) funds from the Administration for Community Living (ACL), the state must have an established SILC. More information can be found on the state's boards/commission's website located at <https://boardsandcommissions.sd.gov/>. The SILC met on June 11th via Zoom. The agenda contained Centers for Independent Living (CILs) reports, updates on CIL Onsite Reviews and contracts, and State Plan for Independent Living (current plan and draft State Plan). Final action was taken on the draft SPIL for FY2025 - 2027 and it was submitted to the Administration for Community Living for review and approval. The SILC held its annual election of officers which resulted in the following: Ryan Groeneweg/Chairperson, Matt Cain/Vice Chairperson, Brett Glirbas and Kendra Gottsleben/Members-At-Large. The SILC also recognized outgoing members: Tasha Jones, Ronda Williams, Syndee Jundt, and Eric Weiss. The SILC is currently waiting for appointments/reappointments. The next meeting will be held on September 5th.

BVR STAFF UPDATE: National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM): The Office of Disability Employment Policy/ODEP (under the US Dept of Labor) announced the 2024 theme "Access to Good Jobs for All". The 2024 NDEAM Poster and other resources will be available soon on ODEP's website:

<https://www.dol.gov/agencies/odep/initiatives/ndeam>. As a reminder, there were 10 funding requests approved for a total amount of \$34,951.11. Planned activities will occur in Aberdeen, Brookings/Volga, Madison, Mitchell, Mobridge, Rapid City, Sioux Falls, Sisseton, Vermillion, and Yankton. Several communities have identified speakers and contracts are being developed or have been routed for signatures. Plans are continuing in the other communities to identify and finalize details. Information will be shared with BVR, B/SBVI and SILC members once the details are finalized.

Governors Awards: The 2024 solicitation for nominations received a total of 39 nominations, which includes 2 nominations received for same person/same category. There is a Governor's Review Committee with representatives from the BVR, B/SBVI, and SILC. Members who serve on this committee include BVR/Cole Uecker, Jolleen Laverdure, SILC/Kendra Gottsleben, CJ Moit, Joe Vetch; B/SBVI/Ryan Groeneweg and George Seamon. The review committee met on June 18th and their task was to review all nominations and provide a recommendation for one recipient in each category. The committee's recommendations were forwarded to the Division and the Department and will be forwarded to the Governor for review, consideration, and final action. Once word is received from the Governor's office work will continue to coordinate the ceremony and reception. The date will be scheduled in the Fall and is dependent on the Governor's schedule and availability. Information will be disseminated to all BVR, SILC and B/SBVI members once arrangements are finalized along with an invitation to attend the awards ceremony and reception.

Budget Update: A copy of the budget was disseminated to members prior to the meeting. The budget identified expenditures through the month of May. As a reminder BVR and SILC staff support is provided through an agreement between the Division of Rehabilitation Services and Black Hills Special Services Cooperative. Expenses are tracked separately for BVR and SILC items to include BVR member travel, BVR meeting expenses, and BVR Strategic Planning. The majority of expenses will occur in October, November and December which are related to the National Disability Employment Awareness Month expenses, Governor's Awards Ceremony, BVR travel expenses related to members attending the Fall Conference. Staff reminded members that the Fall Conference will be held October 29-31 in Deadwood at The Lodge. Seven members have expressed interest in attending to date. If a member is interested in attending let staff know as soon as possible. Members have received the Save the Date information and now more information can be found on RehabACTion's website: <https://www.sdrehabaction.org/fall-conference/2024-fall-conference>

DRS OUTREACH CAMPAIGN UPDATE: Eric reported that the Division issued a Request for Proposal seeking a marketing partner to launch an outreach campaign. The Sampson House (TSH) received the contract early in 2024. It is a 5-year agreement for a total of \$450,000. Renea, Paige, and Belle, staff from TSH introduced themselves and provided this update. TSH worked on research which consisted of issuing and collecting survey results from VR staff and clients and analyzing current market data to identify trends for people with disabilities in our state. The next phase will be deploying a market campaign to increase outreach and awareness across the state about the VR program. Research included the review of: VR applicants by year dating back to FY 2014; VR closures; disability population growth, and market size. The target market is the 2,546 unemployed South Dakotans with a disability. Staff survey findings outlined VR strengths, opportunities, common barriers for individuals not reaching employment goals, and common reasons for leaving the VR program. TSH spoke to the trends and insights. The client survey findings included demographics, how individuals learned about VR, how individuals rated the ease of enrolling in the VR program, satisfaction with types of services offered to reach their goals, what services they valued most, and what are the biggest challenges in finding employment. TSH discussed improvement suggestions, insights, and key takeaways. Creative concepts and campaign imagery were outlined. Placement ideas were listed, i.e., website landing page, social media, testimonial videos, email newsletters, printed information, digital video ads, and more. Four concepts were presented, and members were invited to vote on their preference. Concept 1: "From Obstacles to Opportunities" Your Path to Employment Starts Here. Concept 2: "Where Every Ability Finds Its Place" Discover Your Potential with Vocational Rehabilitation. Concept 3: "I'm Capable: More than My Disability" Build a Rewarding Career with our Support. Concept 4: "Together We Thrive" Employment Services Tailored to Your Unique

Needs. Eric will receive the results and will share the outcome with members following the meeting. Board members were encouraged to provide feedback regarding the information presented. Cole thanked Eric for arranging the presentation and providing Board members the opportunity to provide input/feedback. TSH staff were thanked for attending and sharing the information and progress made to date.

LUNCH BREAK:

POST SECONDARY OUTCOMES/INDICATOR 14 SURVEY RESULTS: Lori Kwasniewski works for the Department of Education (DOE), Office of Special Education as the Transition Program Specialist. She spoke of the partnership between the Office of Special Education and Black Hills State University and the work involved with this survey. Lori turned to Dr. Faye LaDuke Pelster (BHSU), to speak to the Indicator 14 Survey results. Dr. Faye LaDuke Pelster summarized the data obtained by the survey, which targeted the 2022 graduates from high school.

Indicator 14 specifically targets the percent of youth who are no longer in secondary school, had Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) in effect at the time they left school and were enrolled in:

- a. higher education
- b. higher education or competitively employed
- c. higher education or in some other post-secondary education or training program; or competitively employed or in some other employment within one year of leaving high school.

The study tries to find out what the student is doing one year after leaving high school (graduated, aged out or dropped out). Did they go to post-secondary school; were they competitively employed; did they seek other training or employment such as working on the family farm, where they not engaged at all after leaving high school? This information is important because it is felt that transition planning in high school helps students become engaged or stay engaged once they leave high school.

This study involves a two-step process. Appendix A information: School districts provide information about students once they leave high school (IEP information about transition goals and activities and family contact information). Appendix B information: independent contractor collects survey information. Data is collected through a telephone survey which consists of volunteer callers from school districts and hired callers. The response rates are significantly higher when students are contacted by someone they know. An attempt is made to contact all student exiters.

Higher education includes youth who have been enrolled in a full or part time basis: in a community college (2-year program) or; college/university (4 or more year program);

or in a vocational technical education program (2 year program); for at least one complete term, at any time in the year since leaving high school. Other post-secondary education or training includes youth who have been enrolled in a full or part time basis for at least 1 complete term at any time in the year leaving high school; in an education or training program (e.g., Job Corps, adult education, workforce development program, vocational technical school that is less than a 2-year program).

Competitive Employment includes youth who have worked for pay at or above minimum wage; in a setting with others who are nondisabled; for a period of 20 hours a week; for at least 90 days at any time in the year since leaving high school (includes military employment). Other employment includes youth who have worked for pay or been self-employed for a period of at least 90 days at any time in the year since leaving high school. This includes working in a family business (farm, store, fishing, ranching, catering services)

Exit data included 340 total respondents (received 49 more responses compared to last year's response rate); 58 respondents were enrolled in higher education (17%); 179 respondents were engaged in competitive employment (53%); 8 respondents were enrolled in some other post-secondary education or training (2%); and 32 respondents were engaged in some other employment (9%). Target levels were exceeded this year, and the hope is that things continue to improve with future years.

Respondents' largest grouping was those competitively employed at 179 respondents/53%; the 2nd largest grouping was those enrolled in higher education, 17% of total respondents. There were 63 respondents (19%) that were not engaged. Of the 340 total respondents, 246 received their high school diploma, 18 respondents aged out and 76 respondents dropped out. Two areas of concern included the group that aged out of school (18 respondents) and 44% of them were not engaged; and students that dropped out (76 respondents) with 29% of them not engaged.

Demographics of the respondents included: male/210 and female/130 respondents; the most common disability category represented was those with specific learning disabilities (144 respondents) of which 59% were competitively employed. Those with Intellectual disabilities (47 respondents) of which 49% were competitively employed.

Ethnicity had a higher response rate of Native American respondents (57) when compared to last year's number of 45 Native American respondents. Dr. Faye LaDuke Pelster spoke to the "representativeness" of the respondents and described a chart with the national post school outcomes, response calculator for figuring out representativeness. The concern of whether the data is reflective for the specific categories. Two areas were identified as underrepresented, the categories were

female and rural. The rural category is the hardest to meet, with Sioux Falls and Rapid City being the only areas of the state not classified as rural.

A chart was shared that showed improvements or slippage when comparing data dated back to 2013-2014. For each year, calculations were made for total engagement rate, disengaged, those in higher education, those competitively employed, etc. The percentage for engagement only changed from 82% last year to 81%. She reported that the respondents who contacted VR last year compared to this year showed significant improvement.

This year's response rate was much higher than last year's, (contributing this to increased involvement from district personnel with contacting exiters; and exiters lives returning to normal after the pandemic). SD's data is representative in most categories identified by the National Post School Outcomes Center. Action steps to enhance response rates were effective in 2021 and continued in 2022. These types of reports are available on DOE's website:

<https://www.sdposthighsurvey.org/reports.statewide.php>.

Dr. Faye LaDuke and Lori were thanked for attending and sharing the Indicator 14 survey results.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS: Cole and Eric facilitated the discussion of election of officers. Cole spoke of stepping down as an officer at this time and about the Executive Committee's discussion and review of current members in terms of appointments/reappointments, eligibility, and interest of members in serving as officers. The BVR's officer positions consist of Chair, Vice Chair, and a Member At Large. The proposed slate of officers includes Shawn Lyons/Member At Large, Vicki Stewart/Vice Chair, and Jonathan Englund/Chair. All have indicated an interest in serving as an officer, if elected. It was emphasized that nominations can be made from the floor, noting that each position will be taken one at a time. Cole turned the meeting over to Eric to facilitate the election process.

Eric started with the position of Chairperson. He called for further nominations for the Chair position in addition to Jonathan's name, two times. Hearing none – **MOTION TO CEASE NOMINATIONS AND ELECT JONATHAN AS CHAIR – MSC.** YEAS: Betsy, Michael, Sherry, Shawn, Vicki, Jonathan, Chris, and Kevin. NAYS: None.

Eric moved onto the position of Vice Chairperson. Eric called for further nominations for Vice Chair, twice. Hearing none – **MOTION TO CEASE NOMINATIONS AND ELECT VICKI AS VICE CHAIRPERSON – MSC.** YEAS: Brooke, Betsy, Michael, Sherry, Shawn, Vicki, Jonathan, Chris, and Kevin. NAYS: None.

Eric moved to calling for further nominations for the position of Member-At-Large, twice. **MOTION TO CEASE NOMINATIONS AND ELECT SHAWN AS MEMBER-AT-LARGE – MSC.** YEAS: Brooke, Betsy, Michael, Sherry, Shawn, Vicki, Jonathan, Chris, and Cole. NAYS: None.

Eric passed the gavel back to Cole who passed it to Jonathan, as the newly elected Chairperson. Jonathan thanked Cole and welcomed Vicki and Shawn as officers.

HONORING OF OUTGOING MEMBERS: The BVR will lose one member due to term limits, effective June 30th; Kevin has served two successful terms. Eric thanked Kevin for his input and service to the BVR over the last 6 years. Kevin thanked everyone for their support. Cole thanked him as well for his work with the Executive Committee and in support of the Board.

OTHER BUSINESS: There was none.

CLOSING ACTIONS: Future Agenda Items: there were no topics offered at this time. Next Meeting: Staff will disseminate a doodle poll in order to identify a date in September that works for the majority of members. Adjournment: **MOTION TO ADJOURN, MSC.** YEAS: Brooke, Betsy, Michael, Sherry, Shawn, Vicki, Chris, Kevin, and Cole. NAYS: None.