

## Board of Vocational Rehabilitation (BVR)

March 6, 2024

### Meeting Held Via Zoom and DHS Hillview Plaza/Conference Room

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Brooke Lusk, Kara Schweitzer, Michael Kokesh, Eric Larson, Sherry Van Liere, Shawn Lyons, Vicki Stewart, Jennifer Trenhaile, Jolleen Laverdure, Chris Olson, Eric Weiss, and Cole Uecker. **MEMBERS ABSENT:** Jonathan Englund, Kevin Barber, and Betsy Drew. **OTHERS PRESENT:** Bernie Grimme, Jordan Trumbo, Katie Gran, Kim Ludwig, Allison White, and Colette Wagoner. The interpreter was Julie Paluch.

**NEW MEMBER ORIENTATION:** Orientation was offered to new and more recently appointed members. Division staff provided an overview of organizations: Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA), Department of Human Services (DHS), Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS), other divisions under DHS, and how the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC)/Board of Vocational Rehabilitation (BVR) fits in. Information shared about the BVR included composition, meetings, staff support, open meetings, and voting.

### BOARD OF VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION QUARTERLY MEETING:

**OPENING ACTIONS:** Cole Uecker, Chairperson called the meeting to order at 10:32 AM. He welcomed everyone and thanked them for attending. A quorum was present. A few housekeeping items were reviewed in addition to 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, Michael, Eric L, Sherry, Kara, Shawn, Vicki, Chris, and Jolleen. NAYS: None. **Review & Approval of Meeting Minutes:** Cole asked for changes/additions to the Board's December 5<sup>th</sup> meeting minutes and the February 21 Executive Committee meeting minutes. There were none. **MOTION TO APPROVE BOTH SETS OF MEETING MINUTES AS DISSEMINATED, MSC.** YEAS: Brooke, Michael, Eric L, Sherry, Kara, Shawn, Vicki, Chris, and Jolleen. NAYS: None.

**PUBLIC COMMENT:** There were none.

**ANNOUNCEMENTS:** Cole reported that Disability Awareness Day was held last week on February 28<sup>th</sup>. He thanked those that were present at the Capitol and provided information; this demonstrated collaboration and partnerships of disability related organizations from across the state, and he thanked those that attended. Cole referred

to Allison White, new employee with Disability Rights and the agencies' intent for Allison to take over Cole's position on the BVR next year.

## **DIVISION OF REHABILITATION SERVICES (DRS) DIVISION DIRECTOR'S**

**COMMENTS & UPDATES:** Eric welcomed everyone and thanked members for their involvement. He noted a great turnout for the new member orientation held earlier.

Quarterly Data Report provides information about the program year and quarter, the most recent quarter is the 2023, 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter (October 1, 2023, through December 31, 2023). The report provides information on total applications, total eligibilities, total served and closed case data. The numbers reveal a slow and steady increase in applications and eligibilities for VR services. The number of successful closures is at its highest in comparison with numbers over the past 3 years since COVID.

Budget Update: Eric spoke to the federal monies coming to the state from Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA), state matching funds, and utilizing the federal fiscal year. The Division is on track to expend all its case service funds. The Supported Employment (SE) grant is a much smaller grant (\$300,000) and more difficult to expend due to the federal restrictions placed on these funds. SE dollars target individuals with the most significant disabilities, including youth with the most significant disabilities who require supported employment services following the achievement of a supported employment outcome. Program funds may be used to provide supported employment services once an individual has been placed in supported employment. Plus, a state is required to reserve and expend 50% of its allotment on youth with the most significant disabilities. The Division has relinquished some SE funds the past few years.

Legislative Session: The Department of Human Services had one bill this session, Senate Bill 46. This bill would allow DHS staff to disclose information to referring individuals and entities, for the purpose of relaying the status of their referral. It allows the confirmation of a referral but not sharing of PII/personal identifiable information or HIPAA related information. The bill was signed by the Governor on February 27<sup>th</sup>. There is also a proposal to offer a 4% inflationary increase to providers.

**DIVISION'S VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION (VR) INITIATIVES:** Katie Gran, Transition Services, described the work involved to finalize a Memorandum of Understanding between the Department of Human Services and Department of Education to establish a procedure for sharing data between the entities in order to complete federal data reports.

Katie provided an update on the new payroll services, a project the Division is working on with Career Match Solutions. The new service will allow students participating in

Project Skills (and other VR consumers) to utilize an electronic timekeeping system (ADP system) for payroll which will allow biweekly pay periods vs. running payroll through the State of SD's Bureau of Human Resources. Students from the Sioux Falls School district enrolled with Project Skills are using the new system along with the support of VR staff. The Division wants to work out any issues prior to rolling it out statewide. The state's Bureau of Information and Telecommunications (BIT) needed to be involved with this online system dealing with security issues of the website because it involves personal identifying information with different forms, i.e., I-9, W-4s, selective service form, direct deposit. The Division is expecting to roll it out later in the Spring.

2024 Summer PRE Employment Transition Services (Pre ETS) Initiatives: Funding proposals were received in response to the Division's Request for Proposals. The request outlined the need to offer specific work readiness skills training for students with disabilities. Proposals must include curriculums in the following areas: job exploration activities; workplace readiness training to develop social skills and independent living; instruction in self-advocacy; post-secondary training/college exploration, preparation, and planning services; and information about VR services and other programs. A total of 10 entities (agencies and schools) submitted requests to host a total of 19 camps, which was an increase in school districts applying. Contracts are being routed for signatures and the scheduled start date is April 1<sup>st</sup>.

There are four active Project SEARCH sites in the state. Project SEARCH is a business led program which provides students with disabilities the opportunity to explore career interests while developing transferable job skills. The goal for the program is identifying competitive community employment for each participating student intern. There are four active sites. Two are located in Sioux Falls, one involves the Sioux Falls School District and Dow Rommel (nursing home) and the second is with East Educational Cooperative with Avera McKennan Hospital as the host business. A project is located in Brookings with the host business site of South Dakota State University, and in Rapid City with Monument Regional Health as the business site. A new site will start in Yankton with the school district and Mount Marty University and Avera Sacred Heart Hospital as the business sites. Yankton School District will provide the project search coordinator and Ability Building Services (ABS) will provide the employment skills trainer. New staff are planning to attend the National Project SEARCH Conference, in addition to two Division staff. It was noted that the majority of these expenses count towards the 15% requirement; the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) requires VR agencies to set aside at least 15% of federal funds to provide pre-employment services to students with disabilities who are eligible or potentially eligible for VR services.

Jordan Trumbo, Policy/QA Specialist, spoke to the Division's performance measures, noting that the Division did very well in meeting all the performance measures set by

RSA. Division staff continues to monitor and track data to ensure it is meeting the measures. Measurable Skill Gains are currently reported at 30-40%, and May should reflect more gains. Measurable Skills Gains is the percentage of program participants who, during a program year, are in an education or training program that leads to a recognized post-secondary credential or employment. The Division is focusing on Credential Attainment now and reminding staff of resources, reports of clients that may be obtaining a credential, and providing additional guidance to staff. Credential attainment is more difficult to track and at times takes several years of tracking as this is this is the percentage of participants enrolled in an education or training program who attain a recognized post-secondary credential or secondary school diploma, or its recognized equivalent.

Jordan spoke to work being done on the Service Description for Providers document, which is forcing staff to look at other guidance to ensure consistency and lessen redundancy (this includes the counselor manual, provider information, policies, and program guides). The goal is to finalize the services description document and forward it to providers along with the new service rates information this summer.

Kim Ludwig, Business Specialist, spoke to a quarterly e-newsletter for businesses, first disseminated in January. The newsletter will provide information and resources on disability related topics, VR supports, and spotlights on businesses who have hired individuals with disabilities. Training for businesses continues. Staff was recently requested to conduct training on the VR program for the state's Bureau of Human Resources HR managers and generalists. Topics will include an overview of the VR program, Project Skills, Employment Skills Program, and an overview of the payroll program for those participating in the work experience programs.

Kim provided an update on the Workplace Disability Network (WDN) of the Black Hills. The Division contracts with WDN to provide education, awareness, resources, and training on hiring and retaining employees with disabilities to businesses in the western part of the state. This is similar to the Employment Disability Resources (EDR) organization that Vicki Stewart works for in Sioux Falls. Heidi Mecham was hired as WDN's new executive director on January 18<sup>th</sup>. Vicki Stewart and Kim traveled at the end of January to meet with Heidi and provide comprehensive training. Kim explained that the Division contracts with both EDR and WDN and each are in the last year of a 5-year contract cycle. The Division will be issuing a Request for Proposals which will provide an opportunity for EDR, WDN and other entities to submit an RFP this Spring.

Bernie provided an update on the VR offices. The Sioux Falls office will be moving into a new facility in 2025 that will house a number of state agencies and will include over 60 DHS employees. The Division has 11 offices located across the state with 8 of them being co-located with other agencies, i.e., Department of Labor (DOL) staff. This past

September, DOL announced the closing of some offices or only seeing individuals by appointment only in some offices. This has or will impact VR offices in some locations, i.e., Brookings, Madison, Mitchell. In some locations this has freed up office space, it may require the public to utilize another entrance, or the need to install an intercom system. A question was asked about the Sioux Falls office and whether transit will serve the new office. The response was that there are 2 transit routes with stops close to the building and it was noted that the City of Sioux Falls was working on this. Plus, the building will host over 800 employees and projecting hundreds of visitors to the building on a daily basis. The driver's license program will have the largest volume of traffic. The Division will keep members apprised of the impact of changes on offices, spaces, and services.

## **LUNCH BREAK:**

**VR PROGRAM GUIDE – VR APPLICANTS AND INDIVIDUALS BEING SERVED BY MULTIPLE STATE PUBLIC VR AGENCIES:** The program guide was revised and updated to provide guidance on multiple state public vocational rehabilitation programs serving one individual. Included in the policy is the requirement that applicants of VR are to be authorized to work legally in the US. It was noted that VR does not require any resident requirement or proof of residency for eligibility for services. Services may be provided to those eligible who are present in the state. It was noted that individuals can receive joint services from the Division and another state VR agency. Eric does not feel this will happen often, however the Division will be watchful of possible trends with the implications that could result from this program guide, i.e., if another state starts referring a large volume of consumers, i.e., attend post-secondary education in South Dakota and the Division bears fiscal responsibility. Again, the Division does not expect it to have a significant impact in the near future but will be watchful. **MOTION TO SUPPORT THE DRAFT PROGRAM GUIDE “VR APPLICANTS AND INDIVIDUALS BEING SERVED BY MULTIPLE STATE PUBLIC VR AGENCIES” AS DRAFTED ALLOWING THE DIVISION TO FINALIZE IT, MSC.** YEAS: Michael, Eric L, Sherry, Kara, Vicki, Chris, and Jolleen. NAYS: None.

**STATEWIDE INDEPENDENT LIVING COUNCIL (SILC) UPDATE:** Eric provided this update and noted it as a standing agenda item. He explained that in order for the state to receive independent living (IL) funds from the Administration for Community Living, the state must have an established SILC. Eric is an appointed member to the SILC and shares updates with the BVR. He spoke of the composition requirement of the Board requiring a SILC member representative, which he currently fills. Eric stated he will term off the SILC at the end of June and asked whether anyone would be interested in serving on the SILC, and if so, please let him know. The timing is perfect as nominations are being solicited for the SILC and will be forwarded to the Governor for

consideration. Again, if any member is interested in serving on both entities, please let Eric or staff know.

The SILC's last meeting was held on December 19<sup>th</sup> via Zoom. The agenda contained Centers for Independent Living (CILs) reports, updates on the State Plan for Independent Living, and a presentation on Human Trafficking from the Division of Criminal Investigation staff. The upcoming March 19<sup>th</sup> meeting will include similar reports, plus finalizing the State Plan for Independent Living (SPIL) and a presentation on SD Helpline. Eric displayed the State's Boards/Commissions portal and walked members through screens and how to find the Statewide Independent Living Council and the Board of Vocational Rehabilitation. Information for each can be found on this portal, i.e., previous meetings, upcoming meetings, agendas, membership listing, and other reports. The link is <https://boardsandcommissions.sd.gov/>.

**BVR STAFF UPDATE:** BVR & SILC Solicitation for Nominations: Staff reported that the solicitation for BVR and SILC nominations was disseminated in the middle of January. Information was mailed to board/council members, B/SBVI, Council on Developmental Disabilities, and the Family Support Council. Information was also disseminated to disability related organizations statewide and posted on various social media sites, i.e., SILC, Center for Disabilities, BHSSC, Council on Developmental Disabilities' Facebook pages and on the Division's website. Nominations were due February 23<sup>rd</sup>. The Board will have two upcoming vacancies. One member is interested in being reappointed, and another member will term off at the end of June. The BVR received 9 nominations (5 nominees were individuals w disabilities). The SILC will need six vacancies filled which are due to occur at the end of June. Two members are interested in being reappointed, and four other vacancies will need to be filled. The SILC received 8 nominations (3 nominees were persons with disabilities).

National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM): A request for funding to conduct a NDEAM event was disseminated in December and requests were due in early February. Ten requests were received. The NDEAM Review Committee, which has representatives from the BVR, SILC and B/SBVI, met on February 26 to review the proposals. Kim Ludwig/Division and BVR staff assisted the committee with reviewing the requests. The 10 community funding requests received totaled \$34,951.11, for Aberdeen, Brookings/Volga, Madison, Mitchell, Mobridge, Rapid City, Sioux Falls, Sisseton, Vermillion, and Yankton. The committee is recommending approval of all the requests. Following the committee meeting, information was shared with the SILC and B/SBVI and each was asked to consider financial support. We hope to hear from both groups before the end of March. The goal is to provide information to the local community planners by the end of March/early April about the level of approved financial support. Proposed activities vary per community, i.e., host a screening of a film to broaden understanding of persons with disabilities in the workplace; followed by

dialogue with panel of guests of employers and providers; have Emily Shuman, Director of the Rocky Mountain ADA Center present on topics depending on the community targeted (Brookings, Madison, Sioux Falls, Sisseton, and Volga); recognition of annual employer and employee with disabilities with awards; host retreats for middle/high school students; and advertising campaigns; utilizing radio, newspaper, and other social media. **MOTION THAT THE BVR CONTRIBUTE FINANCIAL SUPPORT TO THE 2024 NDEAM EVENTS IN THE AMOUNT NECESSARY (UP TO \$25,000) TO COVER THE DIFFERENCE OF WHAT THE B/SBVI AND SILC PROVIDE, MSC.** YEAS: Brooke, Michael, Eric L, Sherry, Kara, Vicki, Chris, and Jolleen. NAYS: None.

Governors Awards Solicitation for 2024: The 2024 solicitation for nominations will be disseminated March 11, 2024, with a due date of May 3<sup>rd</sup>. BVR, B/SBVI, and SILC members who have agreed to serve on the Governor's Awards Review Committee to include: BVR/Cole, Jolleen, SILC/Kendra, CJ, and Joe V; B/SBVI/Ryan G and George Seamon. The Review Committee is tasked with reviewing all nominations and providing their recommendations for a recipient in each category to the Governor for consideration/action. The committee will convene in late May or early June to review the nominations. Similar to the last couple of years, we would expect the ceremony to be scheduled in the Fall depending upon the Governor's schedule and availability.

Fall Conference: The Division's annual conference will be held October 29-31 in Deadwood at The Lodge, the theme is "Don't Stop Me Now" (Queen). A few members have expressed interest in attending. Please let staff know if you are interested in attending as soon as possible to allow time to obtain the needed hotel rooms. A planning committee is convening – currently the committee is working on identifying topics, keynotes, breakout sessions, and presenters. Save the date or Mark your Calendar information will be disseminated by the end of March and registration will open at the end of July.

Budget Update: The BVR and SILC staff support is provided through an agreement between the Division of Rehabilitation Services and Black Hills Special Services Cooperative. The agreement started in January 2020, with the option of 4 one-year extensions. The current agreement started January 1, 2024, and it will end December 31<sup>st</sup>. The budget spreadsheet reflected the expenses for one month. Expenses are tracked separately for BVR items, i.e., BVR member travel, BVR meeting expenses and BVR Strategic Planning. The majority of expenses occur in October, November, and December. The Board's Strategic Planning line item provides support for the Governor's Awards Ceremony and National Disability Employment Awareness Month expenses. The SILC has similar line items, SILC member travel, meeting expenses and SILC strategic planning as well as Centers for Independent Living (CIL) staff training.

**OTHER BUSINESS:** There was none.

**CLOSING ACTIONS:** Future Agenda Items: an update on the Post Secondary Outcomes, Indicator 14 Survey Results with Dr. Faye LaDuke Pelster (BHSU) and Lori Kwasniewski, Transition Program Specialist/Special Education. The June meeting will host the election of officers. There are 3 positions: Chairperson, Vice Chairperson and Member At Large. Officers that have served are eligible to serve again, if elected. Next Meeting: The next meeting will be held June 25<sup>th</sup> via Zoom. Adjourn for the Day:  
**MOTION TO ADJOURN THE MEETING AT 2:25 PM, MSC.** YEAS: Brooke, Michael, Eric L, Sherry, Kara, Vicki, Chris, and Jolleen. NAYS: None.