

**Board of Vocational Rehabilitation (BVR)
September 18, 2024**

Meeting Held Via Zoom and DHS Hillview Plaza/Conference Room

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

OPENING ACTIONS: Jonathan Englund, Chairperson, called the meeting to order at 9:05 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: Jonathan 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, Sherry, Kara, Shawn, Vicki, Cole, and Jolleen. NAYS: None. Review & Approval of Meeting Minutes: Jonathan asked for changes/additions to the Board's June 25th meeting minutes, there were none. **MOTION TO APPROVE THE BVR'S JUNE 25TH MEETING MINUTES AS DISSEMINATED, MSC.** YEAS: Brooke, Betsy, Sherry, Kara, Shawn, Vicki, Cole, and Jolleen. NAYS: None. Jonathan asked for action on the BVR's Executive Committee minutes. **MOTION TO APPROVE THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES FROM AUGUST 22ND, 2024, MSC.** YEAS: Brooke, Betsy, Sherry, Kara, Shawn, Vicki, Cole, and Jolleen. NAYS: None.

PUBLIC COMMENT: There were none.

ANNOUNCEMENTS: There were none.

DIVISION OF REHABILITATION SERVICES (DRS) DIVISION DIRECTOR'S COMMENTS & UPDATES: Eric welcomed everyone and thanked members for their time and commitment to the VR program. The Quarterly Data Report provides information about the program year and quarter, the most recent quarter identified was 2023, 4th Quarter (April 1, 2024 – June 30, 2024). The report provides information on total applications, total eligibilities, total served and closed case data. The report has 4 years of information dating back to April 2020 (the start of the pandemic). Overall, the report shows a slow steady growth in applications, eligibilities, total served, and closures, all information is positive.

Division Budget: Division staff worked with the Department of Human Services (DHS) in preparing the SFY 2026 budget request for the VR program. The request included an inflationary increase for state dollars for needed match for federal dollars. DHS has submitted its recommended budget request to the Bureau of Finance and Management and this information will be included in the Governor's budget address and then action will take place during the upcoming legislative session in March.

Reallotment: Eric explained the reallotment process which allows federal partner agencies to reallocate federal funds to other grantees to maximize the use of federal funds, under the Rehabilitation Act. Agencies can either give back funds (relinquish) or request additional funds through the reallotment process. The Division submitted its reallotment request prior to August 15th and requested \$400,000 to meet the long-term projections forecasted. The reallotment request was approved. These dollars are subject to the 15% set aside to be utilized for Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre ETS) for youth with disabilities. Eric explained that under the Supported Employment (SE) program, the Division relinquished \$200,000 in funding. SE funds are used to supplement funds provided under the State VR Services Program to provide services to those with the most significant disabilities. These funds are more difficult to spend because SE funds may only be utilized once an individual has been placed in competitive integrated employment and half of the allotment must be provided to youth with the most significant disabilities.

Division's Outreach Campaign: Eric provided an update on the work with The Sampson House (TSH), a marketing partner to launch an outreach campaign. The Division's goal is to deploy a marketing campaign to increase outreach and awareness. TSH conducted research, issued and collected survey results from VR staff and clients, and analyzed current market data to identify trends for people with disabilities in our state. TSH brought forward improvement suggestions, insights, and key takeaways for the Division's consideration. During the previous BVR meeting, TSH brought forward creative concepts and campaign imagery, placement ideas, i.e., website landing page, social media, testimonial videos, email newsletters, printed information, and digital video ads. TSH is working on deliverables to include materials, gathering testimonials, and key messaging to be utilized on the Division's website.

Staffing: Eric reported that Jordan Trumbo has accepted a position with a different agency and is leaving the Division after 10 years of service. Individuals wished her well with future endeavors.

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. Fall Conference: the conference announcement has been disseminated and registration is open. He spoke to members who are attending and the need for hotel sleeping rooms. Members who have not

indicated an interest in attending can still do so. The Division has available sleeping rooms, if needed for BVR or SILC members who would like to attend. The agenda at a glance was displayed. Bernie reviewed the agenda including sessions, speakers, and agenda topics. Speaker information, registration and vendor booth information can be found on South Dakota RehabACTion's website: <https://www.sdrehabaction.org/>. The 2025 Fall Conference will be held in Sioux Falls (October 14-16, 2025) and work is being done to identify a location for the 2026 Fall Conference.

Section 511 (subminimal wage, sheltered workshops) was added to the Rehabilitation Act with reauthorization in 2016, which impacted schools, employers and agencies who held special wage certificates. The certificates are required for employers/agencies to hire youth with disabilities at subminimum wage or to continue to employ individuals with disabilities of any age at the subminimum wage level. The change in law prohibited schools from contracting with sub-minimum wage providers to operate a program for youth with disabilities to engage in subminimum wage employment. The updated language reads that before a youth with disabilities can be paid less than minimum wage, the individual must receive pre-employment transition services, apply for VR services, and receive career counseling and information on employment resources. Bernie referenced the Section 511 Reviews document and highlighted that in SY2017 there were 916 employees working at subminimal wage compared to 36 employees currently. A majority of the 36 individuals are served by Northern Hills Training Center and all 36 individuals must have an annual review conducted.

Katie Gran spoke to the 2024 Summer Pre ETS programs that were approved in response to the Division's Request for Proposals. There were 19 programs approved and a majority of the programs were conducted over the summer. The programs offer job exploration activities, workplace readiness training, social and IL skills, self-advocacy, post-secondary training/college exploration/prep and planning services, and information about available programs/services for persons with disabilities (VR, IL, DOL). A total of 112 students participated so far with total expenses at \$87,515 (all expenses paid towards these programs goes towards the required 15% that the agency must reserve for the purpose of providing/arranging of pre-employment transition services). Katie spoke about the programs conducted by BHSSC, CORE (Corsica), Independent Living Choices (programs offered in 8 communities), Warner School District, SD DROP, Freeman School District, North Central SPED COOP, Milbank School District and USD Center for Disabilities/Oyate Circle (programs offered through Lakota Tech and in Todd County). Katie shared a few comments received from students who attended the programs and spoke about work needed to update the Division's Request for Proposal which will be disseminated in November.

Jordan Trumbo spoke about how the Division performed overall in terms of meeting the agencies Performance Measures as determined by Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA). She reminded members of the 5 areas of measures: consumers who continue to be employed following the 2nd quarter and 4th quarter after exit/after the individual's case has been closed; median earnings; measurable skill gains; and credential attainment. She reported that the Division exceeded all the expected levels except in the area of credential attainment. Following last year and the review of levels, this was not a surprise for Division staff. Credential attainment cannot be counted until the individual's case is closed for 18 months. So, this measure takes a much longer period of time to measure. Work has been done to improve this measure including staff training and better management of these data points. Also, the Division now has a Memorandum of Understanding in place with the Department of Education which will allow access to data, therefore the ability to report credentials of secondary students should improve the results for this measure. Overall, the Division is doing very well, data shows that consumers are successful, making good wages, and obtaining education in different fields, reflective of the good work staff are doing.

Kim spoke to Business and Organization Partnerships. The Division has developed a working relationship with the South Dakota Retailers Association, a membership organization of over 4,000 retail businesses. SDRRA publishes the Retail Prophet which is distributed to all their members. SDRRA focused on workforce issues in the June and July newsletters and featured various state and federal programs that provide assistance with workforce strategies for employers, e.g., VR, Project Skills, Employment Skills Programs. Business Outreach and Workforce Support: staff provides technical assistance and support to businesses throughout the state in terms of recruitment, hiring, and retention efforts. Kim worked with Builders FirstSource with distributing full time development positions in order to recruit potential candidates from across the state. Work continues with Horton, Inc., a manufacturing company located in Britton, to connect VR staff and providers with their Human Resources Department. This involved a recent tour of the facility to learn more about the workplace and open positions. Upcoming Training: Kim spoke about an upcoming virtual training for National Disability Employment Awareness Month. The Division is partnering with Employment Disability Resources and the Workplace Disability Network of the Black Hills to host training on website accessibility on October 23rd. Mychelle Garrigan, Firelink Digital Marketing will provide an overview of website accessibility, legal aspects of accessibility, and how people with various disabilities utilize websites. She shared her screen and displayed the training flyer.

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION (VR) CASE FILE REVIEW: Jordan spoke to the case file review conducted by Division staff. The purpose of the review is to ensure that Division staff are meeting the federal and state guidelines. The review ensures quality assurance and provides opportunities to discuss ways to improve services, identify

policy clarification/training needs and identify best practices. It also serves as a training opportunity for staff, allowing them to see how other district offices approach different situations, learn different techniques, and see areas of difficulty in other areas of the state. Overall, the goal is to improve casework and consistency between offices. She spoke about the review preparation utilizing practice cases to introduce staff to the review instrument to ensure quality assurance/consistency of the reviewers. Each year 350-400 cases are reviewed, with a number of cases selected from each counselor's caseload. Each case type is reviewed (case closed before IPE, closed after IPE but before services, closed unsuccessful, successful, currently open cases and ineligible cases). Reviewers consist of state office staff, district supervisors and VR counselors. The review has been conducted virtually, allowing discussion through the use of Teams chat/check in meetings. Following the review, the involved staff met as a group to discuss recommendations for changes or needed clarification, questions about policy(s), training needs, and future planning steps. She outlined post review activities, steps available to staff to question results/final determinations. A final report is generated to show outcomes of the review for all staff. The report identifies areas that scored low and provides recommendations for improvement in policy or training topics to increase counselor knowledge. The 2024 results were reviewed to include improved areas and areas that need clarification in policy and training needs.

VR CONSUMER SATISFACTION SURVEY RESULTS: Jessica Sehnert provided information on the results of data from July 1, 2023, through June 30, 2024. VR agencies are required to review and analyze the effectiveness of programs, and it is also a function of the Board to review/analyze the effectiveness of VR services. There are four different surveys, each has six questions. The surveys are disseminated on a quarterly basis to a random sample of participants through the use of VR Faces/case management system. Surveys are disseminated via email and postcard, and there is an option for the consumer to call in. Questions focus on informed choice, satisfaction of received services and employment outcomes. The first survey is sent to consumers six months after they started their initial plan for employment. There were a total of 1251 surveys disseminated with a 15.4% response rate. Response data was displayed for each question in terms of strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree. The majority of responses reflected consumers strongly agree/agree with the questions, i.e., options in choosing employment goal, choices, explanation of available service, information presented in understandable manner, and full partner in the decision-making process. The second survey is disseminated to consumers who have been in the VR program for a longer period of time and have had an opportunity to experience a variety of services. A total of 659 surveys were disseminated with an 18% response rate. Questions focus on suitability of and quality of services as well as interactions with providers and staff. Responses were positive with the majority of responses indicating strongly agree and agree with questions (95% of responses chose strongly agree or agree). Questions related to services assisted with reaching

my employment goal, services were timely, guidance and counseling was helpful, satisfaction with services received and were accessible. The third survey is sent to consumers who were recently closed as successfully rehabilitated and evaluates satisfaction of employment and involvement in the VR program. This survey had a 21.2% response rate with a total of 452 surveys disseminated. This survey asks about satisfaction of employment goal, wages, benefits, I like the people/place where I work. In terms of satisfaction with the employment I have as a result of VR services, received an 11% response rate in the categories of disagree and strongly disagree. This will be an area the Division will look into to identify ways to improve this area. The fourth survey is sent to consumers who have recently been closed as unsuccessfully employed in order to evaluate satisfaction with services and involvement in the VR program. The response rate with this survey was less than 7% because a number of individuals move/cannot be located and other reasons. This survey offers individuals to respond to questions, i.e., what is a VR service that could have assisted them with employment (training, placement, supports, IL and other) and to answer why they chose to stop receiving VR services (found job on my own, VR did not meet my needs, health condition worsened, job would change my social security benefits and decided not to get a job). Cole thanked Jessica for the update and complimented the Division for sending out Client Assistance Program information with letters to consumers.

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. He noted that his term on the SILC expired in June, and he intends to continue attending meetings. If there are no concerns, he is willing to continue providing the quarterly updates to the BVR. The SILC met on September 5th via Zoom. The agenda included a Division report on the status of the Centers for Independent Living (CILs), consumer satisfaction survey report, status of CIL contracts, funding status and summary of CIL quarterly report information. Each CIL director provides an update on activities and staffing levels. This meeting included the presentation of the Champion of Independent Living Services Award to Shelly Pfaff. Shelly is a long-time advocate for persons with disabilities. She worked in the disability field for over 40 years, and served as the Executive Director for the SD Coalition of Citizens with Disabilities before retiring. A presentation was conducted by ILC staff on the Summer Transition Programs held this summer. A total of 8 programs were held in different communities. A student who participated spoke of his experiences, meeting people of similar age with disabilities, and what he liked/disliked. His parent spoke of activities that engaged her son, learning to ride transit, cooking, cleaning, and outings. The next SILC meeting is December 19th, and it will be held via Zoom. He referenced the state's boards/commission's website and how to find information about the SILC and BVR, located at <https://boardsandcommissions.sd.gov/>.

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TRANSITION SERVICES LIAISON PROJECT (TSLP) UPDATE: Dan Rounds initiated this item, speaking about the mission of the project which is to prepare high school students with disabilities in the transition from high school to be life ready. TSLP was a product of a Systems Change Grant from the 90's, to improve/expand transition options and services for students with disabilities. Project staff serve as a liaison to students with disabilities, their families, teachers, schools, providers, and others. The project is funded through the Division of Rehabilitation Services and the Office of Special Education Programs. Dan is the coordinator of the project and there are four transition liaisons in other regions of the state. Dan turned it over to Cate Diede, to talk about the TSLP activities. These include developing linkages with schools, families, service agencies, BIA entities; providing training and technical assistance; promoting youth development/self-advocacy activities, developing linkages with partners (post-secondary disability coordinators), working with the Office of Special Education with conducting quality assurance/compliance reviews with the schools (Indicator 13) and coordinating the Youth Leadership Forum.

Events held by TSLP include Youth Leadership Forum (YLF), an annual five-day leadership and self-advocacy training for high school students with disabilities on the campus of Northern State University. Students must apply, all applicants are interviewed, and then selections are made. Attendance is limited to approximately 45 students. Over 80+ individuals are involved during the week to support the event.

Catch the College Wave (4 to 6 events held annually) brings students with disabilities and family members together on a college or technical college campus to assist students with figuring out what they need to do to get into college, and what is needed to be successful. Panel presenters include disability services coordinators, adult agency presentations, and students with disabilities attending college. Part of the time includes information about financial aid. Virtual recordings are available on the website: <https://tslp.org/events/>.

Transition Forums bring various agencies together to present to students with disabilities and family members to talk about available services. These are informal meet and greet meetings for transition age students, their families and service providers. Meetings provide opportunities to meet local service providers, heighten awareness of TSLP events and activities, and students learn about services available to youth and adults with disabilities. These are often held in conjunction with parent teacher conferences.

Let's Talk Work events will be held in the spring. The focus is on employability skills and supports. These are a collaborative effort, where employers from the area are

utilized as panelists to talk about interviewing/applying for a job, skills, in addition to providers from VR, DLR, and Career and Technical Education/CTE discussing career awareness, skill development and available resources.

Monthly Transition Roundups came about during COVID. Staff utilize virtual platforms to reach teachers, VR counselors and students. There are 6-8 round ups held during the school year. These are recorded sessions and made available on the website. The first one will be September 25th and SD Parent Connection will address available services/resources.

YLF Follow Up will be held this Saturday in Pierre. Topics will include disability history and culture, a tour of the capital, and meeting with state leaders.

IEP Workshops provide professional development for teachers with a focus on transition/emphasis on indicator 13 compliance. Review areas include transition assessment, measurable post-secondary goals, course of study, coordinated set of services/activities, annual goals, student involvement and outside agency involvement.

Monitoring Indicator 13 is the review of IEPs of transition aged students. TSLP staff join the education specialists during the IEP file review. Approximately 30 school districts are monitored each year. Technical assistance and follow-up are provided in addition to in-service training for school districts.

TSLP also hosts the Transition Summer Institute, hosts an annual meeting with the Disability Services Coordinators from Post Secondary schools, maintains the TSLP website and social media. Staff also started a Stakeholder workgroups/interagency collaboration. TSLP is also working on Teen Talks, similar to Tik Toc videos and making these available on social media.

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 are available on ODEP's website located at:

<https://www.dol.gov/agencies/odep/initiatives/ndeam>. Planned activities will occur in Aberdeen, Brookings/Volga, Madison, Mitchell, Mobridge, Rapid City, Sioux Falls, Sisseton, Vermillion, and Yankton. The majority of communities have identified speakers and contracts have been routed for signatures. Plans are continuing in the Mobridge area to bring a speaker in to work with middle and high school students. Colette referenced a document that highlighted the scheduled NDEAM events across the state. This document will be shared with BVR, SILC and B/SBVI members which identifies dates/locations of events as well as registration information. Each community has an individual listed as a contact so if there are questions.

Governors Awards: The Governor's Awards Ceremony is scheduled to take place next week on September 24th at the State Capitol. The Governor will be available to present the awards, and a reception will be held following the ceremony. Seven recipients will be honored, this includes:

1. Michael Svatos/Mitchell, OUTSTANDING EMPLOYEE WITH A DISABILITY
2. Justin Minnaert/Madison, OUTSTANDING INDIVIDUAL WITH A DISABILITY
3. Dakota Fluid Power/Rapid City, OUTSTANDING SMALL PRIVATE EMPLOYER
4. Compass One Healthcare/Rapid City, OUTSTANDING LARGE PRIVATE EMPLOYER
5. Prairie Lakes Wellness Center/Watertown, OUTSTANDING PUBLIC EMPLOYER
6. Cherie Hill/Onida, OUTSTANDING TRANSITION SERVICES AWARD
7. Arlene Poncelet/Ft. Pierre, DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARD

The ceremony will be livestreamed and made available through the South Dakota Network website at <https://www.sd.net/>. You should see Upcoming Events, scroll down click on the "Governor's Awards." Sign language interpreters and closed captioning will be made available during the livestream.

Budget Update: A copy of the budget was disseminated to members prior to the meeting. The budget identified expenditures through the month of July. 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. The current agreement and budget started January 1, 2024, and it will end December 31st. Expenses are tracked separately for BVR and SILC items to include BVR member travel, BVR meeting expenses, and BVR Strategic Planning. To date the expenses are related to the Zoom meeting subscription renewal and interpreter services for meetings. The majority of expenses will occur in October, November, and December these consist of expenses related to the National Disability Employment Awareness Month expenses, Governor's Awards Ceremony, BVR member travel expenses related to members attending the Fall Conference. There were no questions.

OTHER BUSINESS: There was none.

CLOSING ACTIONS: Future Agenda Items: staff spoke to the BVR annual report, which will be presented in draft format for the Board's final review and action, and if new members are appointed, a new member orientation might be held in conjunction with the December meeting, if time allows. Next Meeting: Staff will disseminate a doodle poll in order to identify a date in December that works for the majority of members. Adjournment: Jonathan asked if there were any objections to adjourning the meeting, there were none. The meeting ended at 12:22 PM.