

Board of Vocational Rehabilitation (BVR)
December 17, 2020
Meeting Held Via ZOOM

MEMBERS PRESENT: Vicki Stewart, Jennifer Trenhaile, Jonathan Englund, Eric Weiss, Cole Uecker, Beth Schiltz, Brad Konechne, Brooke Lusk, Bill McEntaffer, Peter Bullene, Kristi Allan, Lisa Merchen, Joe Vetch, Jolleen Laverdure and Kevin Barber.

MEMBERS ABSENT: None. **OTHERS PRESENT:** Bernie Grimme, Jordan Trumbo, Kim Ludwig, Katie Gran, Jess Marlow, Brenda Schweitzer, and Colette Wagoner. Interpreters were Julie Paluch and Rick Norris.

HOUSEKEEPING ITEMS: Zoom features reviewed e.g., mute, camera, identifying oneself by name when speaking, and use of interpreters. Staff reviewed the voting process and the need to conduct roll call, each voting member will be asked for their reply of yes, no, or abstain.

OPENING ACTIONS: Cole Uecker, Chairperson, called the meeting to order at 9:04 am. He welcomed everyone and asked for introductions. **APPROVAL OF AGENDA –** Cole asked if there were any changes/additions to the agenda. **MOTION TO APPROVE THE AGENDA AS DISSEMINATED – MADE (M), SECONDED (S) AND CARRIED (C).** YEAS: Beth, Jolleen, Lisa, Vicki, Joe, Jonathan, Brad, Brooke, Bill, Peter, and Kevin. NAYS: None. **REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES:** Cole called for any changes/additions to the meeting minutes that were disseminated prior to the meeting; hearing none, **MOTION TO APPROVE THE SEPTEMBER 29, 2020 MEETING MINUTES AND THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES FROM NOVEMBER 24, 2020, MSC.** YEAS: Beth, Jolleen, Lisa, Vicki, Joe, Jonathan, Brad, Brooke, Bill, Peter, and Kevin. NAYS: None.

ANNOUNCEMENTS: Cole invited announcements of any kind, urging members to identify upcoming events or meetings. Bill reported that the Department of Labor and Regulation's (DLR) local offices remain closed to walk in traffic. Individuals can call and schedule appointments Monday through Friday. Appointments can be in person, virtually or held on the phone, depending upon the individual's preference. He encouraged people to refer individuals to the local offices across the state, as staff are available to provide assistance. In response to a question, Jolleen stated that the Lower Brule Oto Kaye Teca Vocational Rehabilitation Program takes appointments and people can enter the office; staff is following the COVID protocol measures.

PUBLIC COMMENT: Lisa encouraged individuals to check out the South Dakota Parent Connection website (<https://www.sdparent.org>) and share it with others as a number of videos and trainings have been added. Cole added that the Transition

Services Liaison Project has a number of upcoming events which can be found on their website: <https://tslp.org/events>

LOCAL PUBLIC TRANSIT PROVIDERS: Brenda Schweitzer, Brookings Area Transit Authority provided information on their program. Brookings Area Transit is a federally funded rural transit program and needs to apply for federal funding annually. There are a number of rural transit programs providing services throughout the state and information (i.e., providers, contact information) can be found on the Department of Transportation website: <https://dot.sd.gov/transportation/public-transit/rural-transit>. Brookings Area Transit has a 50-mile radius coverage area and has offices in Dell Rapids and Freeman. Focus and challenges for rural transportation providers includes educating community members, ridership, collaborators, city/county officials regarding changes in order to improve services and remain responsive to individual's needs. She explained that 'pre-COVID' rides cost \$10.63/per ride and the cost to the rider is \$3.00 per person for prescheduled in-town rides. Transit providers have to follow federal regulations which impacts how things can be accomplished. i.e., there is a taxi service in Brookings, and they cannot compete with this business. They are also a Medicaid provider. Fleet is accessible to individuals with varying needs. Demographic information is collected per rider, which is utilized with grant writing (age, disability). Communication is key with ridership, drivers, transit providers and other entities/organizations (scheduling, timing, cost, expectations of passengers and drivers). Ridership includes moving over 700 people a day. Cleaning protocols have been implemented due to COVID-19. Brookings has only had one driver impacted by COVID to date. Brookings transit utilizes tokens and vouchers (not fare cards). The need for collaboration is a pivotal piece for an individual in terms of employment, housing, medical needs, shopping, employers/workforce. Eric noted the VR program and conducting a comprehensive statewide needs assessment every three years. Transportation has been identified as a need on a consistent basis. The goals and strategies in the Division's state plan addresses transportation. Strategies speak to learning more about transit services and promoting transportation in rural areas. In reference to challenges in rural areas she noted the need for continued education as each transit provider is different, services vary, and individual circumstances vary as well. Logistics can be flexible, which reinforces the need for individuals to contact the transit provider and have conversations to identify possible solutions with their given circumstance(s).

Jess Marlow, River City Transit Services (Pierre) was available for this update, focusing on the goal to improve people's lives in all facets. He spoke to the history, mission, and structure of River City Transit, with Ron Baumgart, as the director. In 2019, a total of 293,843 total trips were made for a total of 913,805 miles driven. River City Transit is a demand response service, 24/7 hours, and 365 days a year. Ride share is \$2.25/ride for prescheduled rides with a fleet of over 100 vehicles. The

numbers of rides dropped between 40-60% and are slowly rising now. COVID has caused them to adapt on the fly, implementing cleaning protocols to ensure the safety for all. River City Transit (headquarters in Pierre) manages an operation in Phillip, contracts with Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe to provide services throughout their territory, a Highmore shuttle service (veterans, job transfer/employment) manages Yankton transit (provides the vehicles), and a contract in Sioux Falls to provide rides to individuals receiving services through DakotaAbilities and LifeScape, as well a new contract to provide non-emergency Medicaid rides with Sioux Falls. Ridership includes elderly, baby boomers, veterans, oncology patients, and youth. They have a fairly new veteran program to serve veterans located in highly rural areas which covers 35 counties. River City Transit has participated in several recent community events i.e., art design contest for kids (signs would be displayed on vehicles) and a fundraising event for the loss of a local deputy sheriff. A question was asked about how or what VR could do to assist transit providers i.e., persons with disabilities to serve on local transit boards, sharing of success stories, and partnerships. Another resource offered Dakota Transit Association website: <https://dakotatransit.org>. Each transit agency has a board of directors, VR counselors could encourage persons with disabilities who utilize the service to serve on these local boards. A question was asked about work done with employers and coordinating transit for a pool of employees. Jennifer offered what was explored in the Yankton/Vermillion area and it was not cost effective to continue. Both transit representatives spoke to discussions, communication, and problem solving as coordinated transportation is a condition of funding, so different situations would need to be discussed, factoring in funding restrictions as well. Eric offered the Division as a resource to both providers. Members thanked them for attending, the dialogue and sharing information.

Discussion continued after the two providers signed off regarding the Board's role and what members could do in regard to transportation needs, what to pursue/do they need to do more in this area. Transportation needs vary greatly depending upon where you live; an example was brought forth of employers paying for transportation costs for employees (to and from work). Jennifer stated the Yankton and Vermillion area had these conversations and it was cost prohibitive for employers to make it work (not enough employees to make it worthwhile). Yankton has challenges with transportation as transit services does not operate on the weekends and shuts down at 6:00 pm Monday – Friday. Eric encouraged members to attend local transit board meetings in their area, listen to the conversation and get involved with the discussions.

DIVISION DIRECTOR'S REPORT: Eric referenced the quarterly report handout, noting it contained three years of data. The most recent quarter (July 1, 2020 – September 30, 2020) shows total applications at 319, total eligibilities at 272 and total served at 2,224. The previous quarter the Division had 162 applications, so applications are increasing in the midst of COVID-19. In response to questions regarding the budget and the

impact of COVID, it was explained that the Division will most likely not be able to spend all dollars, therefore some funds will be relinquished through the reallocation process. Case service expenditures are now similar to this same time period last year. The Division is expending FY2020 federal funds and its questionable if all the funds will be expended. The same is true of the Supported Employment (SE) funds; some SE funds will be reverted. There are additional requirements with expending SE funds that have made it more challenging to expend that grant. Division staff are working closely with Budget and Finance to utilize the federal funds appropriately and timely. A service enhancement workgroup was created to obtain feedback from field office staff to improve services i.e., increase paid work experience wages for youth and adults with disabilities, increase employer/school interest. Staff feedback has outlined the need for loaner computers for individuals with disabilities to conduct career exploration/job search.

Eric spoke to the Division of Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired (DSBVI) as the other VR agency in the state, as some states have a general agency and a blind agency compared to states that have a combined agency. There are only 22 states that have blind agencies. The Board of SBVI and BVR are similar, have similar composition requirements however the B/SBVI requires one position to be filled by a person who is blind or visually impaired. He spoke to their staff, co-located offices, use of policy/program guides, and having a collaborative working partnership.

He spoke to the impact on services because of COVID-19 which has led to the Division providing the majority of services virtually. Some challenges related with COVID and how services would be provided needed to be worked out or discussed, i.e., some services can only be provided in person, remote work/issues with technology, and maintaining confidentiality. The use of cell phones has allowed counselors to remain in contact with consumers and keep them engaged. The majority of information is maintained electronically allowing counselors to work remotely. In response to a question asked about the ability to meet the goal of expending the 15% of funds on pre-employment transition services, and not providing specific services i.e., YLF. Eric noted that it has been more of a challenge with COVID, but the Division is in good position with Project Skills, Project SEARCH and having these in place prior to COVID. A question was asked about any legislative issues or bills that the Division might have that the Board needs to be aware of. Eric stated the Department is not bringing forth any bills that would impact the Division to date. Bill was asked a similar question of DOLR, and he knew of nothing at this time.

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM INITIATIVES: Katie Gran, Transition Specialist provided this report. A Request for Funding Proposal (RFP) was issued in November to establish or expand the 18-21 transition programs. Three letters of intent were submitted, and she was contacted by a few other interested entities. The RFP's

are due December 21st. Last year four entities were approved and these are going well. Another RFP was issued to conduct pre-employment transition services during the summer of 2021; this RFP is due in February. A transition workgroup involving DRS and SBVI counselors was initiated and they will review transition related curriculum and provide recommendations to staff. A monthly newsletter will be issued to VR staff which will highlight youth activities/transition services, information, and resources to share with youth and family members. Virtual transition service programs are being shared with VR counselors to utilize with students with disabilities - applications such as eTrac and virtual job shadow - virtual platforms utilized to explore soft skills, work tasks, career exploration, job shadowing. The TSLP project has been doing very well partnering with the Department of Education and hosting a number of activities virtually, i.e., Let's Talk About Work and educational videos. She spoke to the 2021 YLF and stated that student applications for YLF are due.

Jordan Trumbo/Policy & Quality Assurance: Jordan spoke to the RFP proposal issued in September to establish a training program for service providers who work with people with disabilities. Three proposals were received. The RFP was awarded to Griffin-Hammis and Associates. They were selected because of their outlined training plan, familiarity with SD providers and provider training needs. They have been utilized to conduct training in the state previously. They also outlined activities to continue with customized employment training which was not outlined as a need in the RFP. She is convening a focus group involving staff to continue discussions of customized employment training to better understand what is working, and areas that could be improved. Griffin-Hammis will also work the Division to explore credentialing for providers. Other work groups and activities she has been working with have included reviewing the Division's financial need policy, counselor manual, service enhancement, and general training. In addition to making updates to policy and procedures, the workgroup is looking at items to make them more user friendly and to simplify processes. The Division will be offering a comprehensive learning management system through an on-line virtual platform for staff.

Kim Ludwig, Business Specialist: Kim reported the Division will conclude working with Epicosity with the Ability for Hire website initiative. Information from this website will be transitioned to the Division's website. This includes content to ensure that employers and businesses have access to variety of information and resources. A quarterly newsletter will be developed to provide articles, testimonials, trainings/identifying sites/recordings for virtual trainings for staff. Kim is involved with the Business Engagement Workgroup and they will be identifying opportunities for staff to increase efforts/interactions with business partners and DOLR staff. The workgroup will also focus on the Division and meeting its performance measures, review employer modules, and identify other marketing/outreach efforts. Partnership with SD Retailers Association will continue having ongoing conversations and to identify specialized

training needs. Future trainings will be offered for the hospitality industry staff. This includes the Division partnering with the Rocky Mountain ADA Center and offering two trainings: March 23/Service Animals and April 14/Disability Etiquette. Once this information is confirmed, information will be shared with BVR staff to disseminate.

Before moving on, Bernie Grimme asked members if there are areas, they would like more information on, and if so to let Division staff know. Items can be added to meeting agendas. Bernie spoke to upcoming training for VR staff and the Center for Independent Living (CIL) directors on January 11th, and it will outline how to better coordinate services between the two service delivery systems (IL and VR), payer of services, equipment needs, ramps, and training needs. Bernie also noted that the Division will need to develop policy and procedures with the recent passage of state legislation to legalize marijuana, both medical and recreational use. Areas need to be reviewed to address areas of self-employment and other services as the Division cannot spend federal funds on anything related to use of marijuana. The Division will also need to separate hemp growing from marijuana as hemp is legal under federal regulations.

FAIR HEARING DECISION: Bernie referenced the handouts disseminated to members adding that language from the Rehabilitation Act requires the Division to share copies of due process hearing decisions with the Board. One document outlined the appeals procedures to include the administrative review, mediation, and fair hearing. During FFY2020, five requests were made for administrative reviews; 3 individuals requested mediation; three cases were being processed at the fair hearing level (1 case completed/2nd handout; 1 person did not submit the request to continue, and the 3rd person is still within the process to make the request for a fair hearing). The second handout referenced a final decision rendered for one appellant with all confidential information removed. The fair hearing decision was in favor of the Division noting that the finding outlined that the Division is not designed to provide continuing medical care. There is one more fair hearing scheduled to be heard in January. Bernie outlined the importance of individuals knowing their rights and access to due process. A question was asked of Jolleen and the Native American Tribal VR program and if this was similar. She responded that an appeals decision is made to the VR program director, and if the consumer is not happy with the decision rendered, the consumer can involve Disability Rights SD and appeal. She thought in her 7 years with the Tribal VR program that only two cases were appealed.

“100 YEARS OF PARTNERSHIP” FALL CONFERENCE FOLLOW-UP: Bernie spoke to the work involved with hosting this conference; changing it from in person to being held virtually (conference site, speakers, contracts, technology needs). The conference had over 339 individuals registered with over 250 participants attending a session. The downside is that the Division is unable to track the number of individuals

who watch sessions that have been recorded. Bernie referenced the handout outlining evaluations and the ratings for each session. The IL track had a larger number of attendees plus higher ratings (hoarding and adverse childhood experiences). Positive comments were made about the conference, presenters, low cost, convenient time offerings, and virtual booths. The next conference is scheduled for October 26-28 in Deadwood. A question was asked about the ability to showcase sessions virtually if the event is held in person, and the response was that the Division is exploring options of how to offer sessions in a blended format.

CONSUMER SATISFACTION SURVEY UPDATE: Bernie referenced the handout reflecting data collected through 12/02/2020. He outlined the four survey instruments (postcards) utilized targeting consumers at different stages of the VR process. The surveys each contain six questions targeting satisfaction with: informed choice, services, employment outcomes, and unsuccessful closures. He reviewed the responses and ratings for the surveys. Survey 34 was implemented FFY 2020. Overall, the majority of respondents reply through the postcards, other options include online and telephone. Majority of responses reflect responses falling into the strongly agree/agree with satisfaction of services. The largest respondents' category is higher for individuals who have been closed successfully.

STATEWIDE INDEPENDENT LIVING (SILC) UPDATE: Eric displayed the SD Boards and Commissions website (<https://boardsandcommissions.sd.gov>) showing members information about various boards and commissions falling under state government. He displayed the SILC's page, i.e., agenda, minutes, members, and reports. Eric talked about the SILC, regulations, functions and duties, meeting quarterly, responsibility for developing the State Plan for Independent Living (SPIL) and coordinating activities with other entities (BVR, Council on Developmental Disabilities). The SILC met on December 8th and a majority of agenda items focused on the State Plan for Independent Living, i.e., review of goals/objectives, IL Network, finalizing forms to be utilized by the members/staff and the CILs for information gathering to track progress being made towards the activities laid out in the state plan. The SPIL for FY 2021-2023 was approved by the Administration of Community Living. The SILC's next meeting will be held in March. The SILC's executive committee will be exploring available formats to convene future SILC meetings. There is currently a vacancy on the SILC. Member recruitment has been difficult with identifying individuals interested in serving and meeting composition requirements due to hosting meetings in person and the need to travel.

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION YANKTON DISTRICT OFFICE OVERVIEW: Jennifer utilized a PowerPoint presentation. The Yankton district office has 3 office locations (Yankton, Mitchell, Chamberlain); serves 19 counties and 46 school districts. The slides outlined the staff in each office, counties and school districts each serve,

and partner agencies that each office works with. Challenges for this office include limited providers in rural areas, and providers not willing to travel outside of their areas (especially harder now due to COVID). Providers serve “targeted” populations, i.e., individuals with intellectual disabilities and mental health center clients. Transportation is very limited and not available in some rural areas. In areas where transportation is available, it is limited to Monday through Friday, functions only 8:00 am – 5:00 pm, with limited range coverage. Some employers are located farther out of town which is more expensive to get to and from work. The Yankton office recently celebrated ‘successes’ with having three employer recipients of the 2020 Governor’s Awards submitted by staff from the Yankton offices.

BVR STAFF REPORT: Annual Report: Colette referenced the Board’s annual report which was sent to members in draft format. Edits need to be submitted to staff no later than December 23rd with the intent of submitting the report to the Governor and RSA Commissioner by December 29th. National Disability Employment Awareness Month: a debriefing meeting was held earlier in the month with the local community planners to talk about what worked/positive things/what could be improved upon. The notes were disseminated to the BVR, B/SBVI and SILC. Representatives from the boards/council to serve on the 2021 NDEAM workgroup includes: BVR/ Beth S and Lisa M; SILC/Mark S; and B/SBVI/Jenny A. The 2021 Request for Proposal packet will be disseminated to the local planners prior to the end of the month. Governor’s Awards: Staff reported that the following representatives agreed to serve on the Governor’s Awards workgroup: BVR/Vicki S, Jolleen L; SILC/ CJ Moit and Patty K, and B/SBVI/ Cole U. The 2021 nomination packet will be disseminated mid-March with a due date for nominations early in May. BVR Budget Update: Staff outlined the expenditures within the Boards budget through the end of October. Expenses were outlined under the Strategic Planning line item. More bills have been processed in November for NDEAM events with only one or two remaining expenses to come in which are not reflected on this budget. Registration costs were coded to the BVR travel budget line item for members (Lisa, Vicki, Cole, and Joe) to attend the Fall Conference.

OTHER BUSINESS: There was no other business at this time.

CLOSING ACTIONS: Future Agenda Items: Beth asked about having an update on the Post-Secondary Outcomes/Indicator 14 Survey Results. Schedule Next Meeting: Staff will disseminate a doodle poll to ascertain a date in March that works for the majority of members. Adjourn: **MOTION TO ADJOURN THE MEETING, MSC. YEAS:** Kristina, Beth, Jolleen, Lisa, Joe, Jonathan, Brad, Peter, and Kevin. **NAYS:** None.