

**Board of Vocational Rehabilitation (BVR)**

**June 25, 2020**

**Meeting Held Via ZOOM**

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Lisa Sanderson, Eric Weiss, Cole Uecker, Beth Schiltz, Kim Ludwig, Colleen Moran, Brad Konechne, Brooke Lusk, Bill McEntaffer, Peter Bullene, Kristi Allan, Kendra Gottsleben, and Kevin Barber. **MEMBERS ABSENT:** Jolleen Laverdure, Kristi Eisenbraun, and Joe Vetch. **OTHERS PRESENT:** Bernie Grimme, Jordan Trumbo, Vicki Kerkvliet, Jennifer Trenhaile, Jonathan Englund, Dr. Faye LaDuke - Pelster and Colette Wagoner. Interpreters were Julie Paluch and Rick Norris.

**OPENING ACTIONS:** Lisa Sanderson, Chairperson, called the meeting to order at 9:10 am. She welcomed everyone and asked for introductions. An invitation was extended to new members to participate in today's meeting, this included Vicki K, Jonathan E, and Jennifer T. Their terms will start July 1<sup>st</sup>. **APPROVAL OF AGENDA –** Lisa asked if there were any changes/additions to the agenda. The Post-Secondary Outcomes Indicator 14 Survey Results agenda item will be moved to 11:00 am; the other items will be moved up. **MOTION TO APPROVE THE AGENDA AS AMENDED – MADE (M), SECONDED (S) AND CARRIED (C).** YEAS: Cole, Kristi, Beth, Kendra, Colleen, Brad, Brooke, Bill, and Kevin. NAYS: None. Abstained: Peter. **APPROVAL OF MARCH MINUTES –** Lisa asked for changes to the draft March 2020 minutes, hearing none, **MOTION TO APPROVE THE BOARD'S MARCH 5, 2020 MEETING MINUTES AS MAILED, MSC.** YEAS: Cole, Kristi, Beth, Kendra, Colleen, Brad, Brooke, Bill, and Kevin. NAYS: None. Abstained: Peter. **APPROVAL OF EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES FROM MAY 27, 2020.** Lisa noted that the Board approved financial assistance to the 2020 Lighting the Way Conference and the Youth Leadership Forum, and both were cancelled due to COVID-19. The funds will remain in the Board's strategic planning line item. **MOTION TO APPROVE THE MAY 27, 2020 EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES AS PRESENTED, MSC.** YEAS: Cole, Kristi, Beth, Kendra, Colleen, Brad, Brooke, Bill, and Kevin. NAYS: None. Abstained: Peter.

**ANNOUNCEMENTS:** There was none.

**PUBLIC COMMENT:** There was none.

**DRS DIRECTOR'S REPORT:** DIRECTOR'S COMMENTS: Eric spoke to the utilization of ZOOM as a meeting platform for the Board and that it provides a great option in light of the COVID-19 pandemic situation and social distancing. He welcomed new members and thanked them for joining today. Lisa Merchen has been nominated to the board as the parent, training and information center, however, no word has been received regarding her appointment. He thanked members who are terming off as of

June 30<sup>th</sup> for their time and commitment to the Board. COVID-19: Eric spoke to the Governor's executive order and having most state employees work from home effective March 16<sup>th</sup> through the end of May. This provided opportunities as well as challenges for the Division. The majority of staff were working a full work week in light of daycare closures and taking care of other dependents. Majority of staff had laptops which assisted in the process of working from home. Counselors were able to access files electronically, and IT staff worked to resolve issues to ensure all remained connected. Counselors provided services remotely, with some services being difficult to provide due to social distancing. Other challenges included the decrease in availability of jobs, business closures, and other labor market changes. The Division is phasing in the opening of its doors while providing flexibility for some staff needing to work from home. Staff travel is very limited at this point. The Division is exploring how to "re-engage" with the public to include individuals with disabilities, employers and other customers. The Division is utilizing "DocuSign" which is an easy to use digital transaction platform which allows consumers to sign necessary forms/documents securely. A question was asked of the Division and Bill (Department of Labor and Regulation/DLR) if there were any technology issues/troubleshooting areas. Bill responded that the unemployment division's work was different as most employees needed to go into the office/the call center and work with the mass volume of claims being filed, as well the need for staff to follow up with either the individual or employer to address individual situations. DOLR is now open and individuals can come into the office on Tuesdays and Thursdays by appointment only. Kendra spoke to the situation and hoping more businesses/employers will explore various options to include hiring individuals with disabilities e.g., part time vs. full time employment, identify areas/needs that can be addressed by individuals working remotely. Eric announced the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the signing of the Americans with Disabilities Act will be July 26<sup>th</sup>. The Department of Human Services (DHS) will be conducting an awareness campaign utilizing radio/media/social platforms. If there are other events or activities, please pass these along to Eric and he can assist with promoting these events.

Data Report: Eric referred to the data report that was disseminated prior to the meeting. He focused on the 2019 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter line item. In comparing this time period with the previous quarter, the number of applications decreased by over 120. The numbers of eligibilities and closures were also down significantly. He noted that the next quarter's numbers should also show a significant drop, but none of this is a surprise with the impact of COVID-19, e.g., business closures, people filing for unemployment. As things slowly open up for business, he is hopeful that things will change and individuals will seek assistance from VR. Budget: He noted that the first eight months of the state fiscal year the Division was expecting to exceed last year's case service expenditures. However, during the last three months and the situation brought upon by COVID-19, the Division has spent \$400,000 less than the same time period the previous year. He explained a 2% inflationary increase was approved for

rates/providers. A focus will be needed for grants management to ensure that the Division meets grant requirements/expenditures. A question was asked whether the Division was concerned with expending the required 15% of federal funds on students with disabilities/transition areas. Eric replied that he did not think it would be an issue this budget cycle, however, it could impact future budget cycles. A question was asked about direct service providers i.e., job coaches, employment specialists and if the Division was seeing/hearing from them in terms of such limited contact with individuals with disabilities due to the pandemic. Providers working for a Community Support Provider or other rehabilitation provider is not/was not as impacted as an independent contractor. Those working for a provider could work on other assigned duties, attend meetings/trainings. He is hopeful things will change for the better with businesses opening, the need for employees as well as individuals with disabilities seeking employment will improve.

Code of Conduct and Conflict of Interest Policy for Use by State Authority, Board, Commission, and Committee Members: Eric disseminated a copy of this item to the full Board as an informational item. He noted there is language under the Rehabilitation Act for both the Board of Vocational Rehabilitation and Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC) about conflict of interest. This handout identifies what the state has established in terms of a set of minimum ethical principles and guidelines specific to contract restrictions, retaliation, and anti-harassment/discrimination. Again, this handout is informational only. Lisa asked about including this with the new member orientation materials. It was agreed that would be appropriate.

**VR PROGRAM INITIATIVES: Project SEARCH:** Bernie referenced the “Project SEARCH Employment and Outcomes” handout. Funding to support these initiatives meets the 15% requirement towards pre employment and transition areas for students with disabilities. He noted the data is for all years up to the Spring of 2019; and that outcomes are evaluated one year after completion. Aberdeen and Teachwell started Project SEARCH the Fall of 2010; Brookings started Fall of 2013; and Rapid City/Black Hills started Fall of 2016. The handout identified the number of students in each program, average hourly wages and hours worked weekly, and the employment rate for closed cases. COVID-19 caused issues with Project SEARCH, e.g., hospitals were reduced to essential employees only, students completed their last internship as best they could, and classroom work was needed to be finalized remotely. Currently, all the business sites are planning to return this fall as Project SEARCH business host sites. The Sioux Falls school district reached out to the Division recently about implementing a Project SEARCH site with an assisted living/nursing home as a joint partner; this program will start this fall. Yankton school district is also having conversations with Avera Hospital, which hopes to start a program the Fall of 2021.

18-21 Grants: Bernie talked about four new grant awards to initiate new 18-21-year-old programs. These resulted from the Request for Proposal which was disseminated in November 2019 to schools or educational cooperatives to establish or expand a transition services' program. These grants provide up to four years of funding for direct and due costs, with a decrease for personnel costs and match is involved. Grants were awarded to the Huron school district, Harrisburg school district, Teachwell, and Mitchell school district. Each of these has hired staff and has students enrolled. The grants will start this fall with expenditures to come in November or December. He explained that the Division is required to provide a match for the federal dollars and these establishment grants assist with obtaining this match.

State Plan: Bernie noted that the Division's State Plan is a section of the Unified State Plan. The Unified State Plan includes sections for the state plans for Division of Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired State Plan and the Department of Labor and Regulation. He noted that a comprehensive statewide needs assessment was conducted with the involvement of Robert Jahner. Robert worked with the Division and the Board's Consumer Services Committee to identify goals/objectives and strategies in the plan. Public meetings were held to solicit public comment on the Unified State Plan. The Unified State Plan was submitted the end of March and the Division received approval on May 27<sup>th</sup>. The Division's section of the State Plan can be viewed on its website, located at: <https://dhs.sd.gov/rehabservices>.

Customized Employment: Jordan Trumbo provided this report explaining that the Division is in its final round of hosting training sessions held across the state. The last session is for community support provider staff located in the western and central parts of the state. She is working on sustainability planning for customized employment which includes continued training, mentoring for providers, gathering community practice efforts, and identifying providers who can support/mentor/train newer providers. Customized employment includes creating an individualized employment relationship with employee and employer, in order to meet the needs of both. The Division will continue its working relationship with Griffin-Hammis Associates to provide training to CSP providers and VR counselors, and to explore credential options for providers. She is working with other states to identify best practices in order to develop the most effective plan to meet our state's needs.

## **COMPREHENSIVE TRANSITION PROGRAM DISCUSSION/AUGIE ACCESS**

**UPDATE:** Lisa explained that the Consumer Services Committee was unable to coordinate a meeting with Augie Access staff to continue dialogue on the transition program. Thus, there is no update or recommendations from the committee at this time. The committee was going to continue discussions on current barriers of the program and the need for changes in order for VR to provide support of students with disabilities to attend/participate. This included program success rate, appropriate levels

of funding, comparable benefits, consumer choice, measurable gains, and would program benefit an individual in terms of an employment outcome. She explained that the committee will continue working on this item. Lisa has had conversations with Jessica Lamb, Augie Access staff, and she is willing to provide an overview of the program to the Board and/or committee, if interested. Lisa inquired about other programs offering comprehensive training programs for youth with disabilities in the state. Bernie responded that Dakota Wesleyan University offers a program for secondary students with disabilities in partnership with schools. Some VR clients are involved with this program. Again, she noted that an overview of a comprehensive transition program could be provided to members at a future meeting, noting this a national effort to provide post-secondary opportunities to youth with disabilities. (Colleen had to leave the meeting at this point). This topic was referred to the committee.

**BUSINESS SPECIALIST REPORT:** Kim referred to the items that were disseminated to members. VR Business (employer) Contact Cheat Sheet: item developed for VR staff to utilize when introducing themselves and vocational rehabilitation services to employers. Vocational Rehabilitation (VR)/Department of Labor and Regulation (DLR) Business Engagement Staff Training Update: Division is working with Maher and Maher, a consulting firm on business engagement and techniques to improve working relationships with the business community. Trainings sessions will be offered virtually as well as an in-person training in September to VR/DLR and Adult Education and Literacy staff. This will involve approximately 85 VR staff. Business Led Entities: The Division contracts with the Business Resource Network (BRN) and the Workforce Diversity Network of the Black Hills (WDBNH) to provide education, resources and training on hiring and retaining employees with Disabilities. Each has a full-time executive director (BRN/Vicki Kerkvliet and WDBNH/Catherine Greseth). Division staff works with them on a regular basis; currently exploring virtual training events and topics. WINDMILLS Virtual Train the Trainer Certificate Training: Kim, Catherine Greseth and Vicki Kerkvliet are participating in the train the trainer sessions consisting of 12 training curriculums. Information will be utilized to assist businesses to become more inclusive of individuals with disabilities in the workplace. Ability for Hire Initiative: this initiative was created to identify outreach methods to reach employers and provide resources and information to employers. Kim showed the Ability for Hire website and talked about each page and its contents and available resources. The contact page provides a person the ability to submit questions or request assistance and she follows up on this. She reviewed the audience, acquisition and demographic analytic sheets. Business Brochure Update: She referred members to the business brochure rack card and the testimonial card and noted pending changes with these tools. The Board's Public Awareness Committee reviewed these items last month and provided feedback for changes. These items should be finalized in July.

## BREAK

**POST SECONDARY OUTCOMES – INDICATOR 14 SURVEY RESULTS:** Beth introduced Dr. Faye LaDuke - Pelster (Black Hills State University) to talk about the survey results. The Department of Education/Office of Special Education established a baseline for Indicator 14, student exiters in 2008-09. Exiters are students who left high school by graduating with a diploma, aged out, or dropped out. Indicator 14 identifies the percent of youth who are no longer in secondary school, had an Individualized Education Program (IEP) in effect at the time they left school, and were enrolled in: higher education; higher education or competitively employed; 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. Dr. LaDuke - Pelster reviewed the definitions for higher education, competitive employment, other post-secondary education or training, and other employment. There were 313 total respondents of which 53 were enrolled in higher education, 168 were engaged in competitive employment, 10 were enrolled in some other post-secondary education or training, and 26 respondents were engaged in some other employment (those not counted in the previous areas). The 2017-18 exiter data met all target areas. The data is informative as it provides information for respondents by disability, ethnicity, and gender. Of the 313 respondents: 136 respondents had learning disabilities; 31 were respondents had emotional disturbance; 49 respondents had intellectual disabilities; and 97 respondents were in the “all other disabilities” category. Diversity for ethnicity was very low (white/215 respondents, Hispanic/Latino/17, black or African American/10 and American Indian/Alaskan Indian/58). Twice as many males responded than females (males/212, females/101. Difference between target levers and respondents showed that the last year’s drop-out rate was statistically higher. Improvements and slippage for yearly comparison showed: lower number of respondents who were disengaged when comparing 2017-18 to 2016-17 data, and an increase for respondents competitively employed increased (54 respondents vs. 38.5 respondents). In summary, the findings for 2017-18, South Dakota reported the fourth highest engagement percentage since data was first collected in 2008-09; the percentage of disengaged respondents decreased 4.4% this year; and South Dakota exceeded targets for three measures. A question was asked if it was possible to compare SD’s data with other states. Dr. LaDuke - Pelster responded that this could be achieved; and she would work on some comparisons and share it. In response to other questions, she explained that there is a strong correlation between respondents contacting a service or entity and that the engagement rate is higher (contact with VR, participation in YLF, Catch the Wave). Members were asked to contact Beth or Dr. LaDuke - Pelster with other questions. Beth followed up noting the Part B State Annual Performance Report which provides additional information on the Indicator 14 data. Beth explained that the Office of Special Education is exploring the possibility of developing an online survey for respondents to complete.

**CASE FILE REVIEW UPDATE:** Jordan Trumbo provided this update explaining that the case file review recently completed by the Division looked very different from previous reviews. The review was completed remotely, reviewing files electronically due to the pandemic. Overall, the review went very well, a few things were noted to be done differently in the future. The data is not all compiled yet, and information will be shared once it is finalized. Information known to date included the need to review and/or modify policies, provide needed explanation of specific policies, training needs were identified, and a need to report data consistently among counselors, e.g., documentation, skill gains. The Division will provide training on best practices which will also reinforce consistency and quality assurance for all staff/field offices. Unsuccessful closures were looked at more closely and the Division is examining client engagement practices and how to improve services. Division staff will continue looking at areas in need of improvement. A question was asked about anything that stood out from the review, or biggest take away. The response included need for guidance regarding documentation for all staff and sharing of best practices.

**PILOT PROJECT – RAPID CITY OFFICE/USE OF CELL PHONES:** This pilot project was implemented in the Rapid City office as a means of reducing the high rate of unsuccessful closures/unable to contact. Seven VR counselors received cell phones with texting options in March, which timed well with COVID-19 and closing of offices. The Division disseminated information and magnet business cards with contact information as well as information about staff following up during business hours, what/who to contact in case of an emergency, and appropriate vs non appropriate texts, etc. In reviewing data for one-month billing, data reflected an average of 100 texts per counselor and 99 minutes of phone usage/per counselor. Feedback from counselors who utilized cell phones found it helpful to maintain contact with students, and that they were much more responsive when contacted. Cell phones also provide “hot spots” allowing for connectivity for staff located in remote areas. Bernie processed a request to purchase cell phones for the remaining counselors located in other offices. These should arrive in July. Guidance and Counseling is an importance part of the VR process and the Division is hopeful the cell phones will improve communications between counselors and consumers on their caseloads.

**STATEWIDE INDEPENDENT LIVING COUNCIL (SILC) UPDATE:** Eric explained that the Rehabilitation Act requires each state to establish a Statewide Independent Living Council in order to receive funds through the Administration of Community Living to support independent living services. The SILC is responsible for developing the State Plan for Independent Living, which was submitted earlier this week. The SPIL was required to be submitted prior to the end of June, and once approved it would become effective October 1, 2020. SPIL activities included drafting goals and objectives, releasing a consumer satisfaction survey, and hosting a public forum in April. Eric

serves as a member on the SILC. The SILC met on June 4<sup>th</sup> via Zoom and is scheduled to meet again most likely in September. Regular reports include quarterly reports from DRS, BVR, DSBVI, workgroup updates and Centers for Independent Living reports. The SILC is called to coordinate activities with other entities, specifically the Board. During the last meeting, officers were elected: Alan Adel/Chairperson, Mark Koterwski/Vice Chair, Tasha Jones and Mark Sternhagen as Members-At-Large. Outgoing members included Craig Eschenbaum, David Scherer, Jackie Juhala and Kathy Rutten.

**BVR NOMINATIONS:** Eric provided an update on the BVR nominations. Nine nominations were received as a result of the statewide solicitation. The nominations were forwarded to the Governor for her review, consideration and action. Four individuals were reappointed (Joe, Cole, Brad, and Bill), in addition to receiving three new appointments to date. The Board is still waiting for approval on the parent, training and information center representative, who will replace Lisa. Current members will serve through June 30<sup>th</sup> and new members' terms are effective July 1<sup>st</sup>. He spoke to the need to solicit other individuals who would have an interest and willing to serve on the Board. There is a nomination form on the Division's website which can be completed and submitted at anytime throughout the year.

**GOVERNOR'S AWARDS PROCESS:** Staff reported that 34 nominations were received. These awards highlight and uplift individuals with disabilities and employers who have hired people with disabilities. There is a workgroup comprised of BVR, BSBVI and SILC members who met on May 26 to review the nominations. The workgroup's recommendations were forwarded to the Division/Department requesting that the recommendations be forwarded to the Governor for final review and consideration. Some of the reviewers' comments included: this was a very difficult task; the number of nominations received has increased; nominators have been more diverse; and please ask nominators to submit a nominee again if their nominee is not chosen this year. Kendra noted that when nomination forms are made available on a website it assists with sharing/disseminating this information to others statewide.

**NATIONAL DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT AWARENESS MONTH (NDEAM) UPDATE:** Twelve communities were approved for financial assistance to host events in October. Communities are continuing plans to host events to include identifying the speaker and related topics. It is very difficult to determine if face-to-face meetings will be held due to COVID-19 at this point. Some communities are visiting with speakers about plans to host the event virtually if they cannot host the meeting face to face. Additional information will be shared once dates/locations are confirmed. Kim shared that the theme for NDEAM was announced this week through the US Department of Labor/Office of Disability Employment Policy office. This information will be shared with members.



**ELECTION OF OFFICERS:** Lisa turned this section of the meeting over to Eric. He explained that the Executive Committee was bringing forth a slate of nominations for the three positions – Kevin Barber for Member–At-Large: Brad Konechne for Vice Chairperson and Cole Uecker for Chairperson. The process began with Eric calling for further nominations for Chairperson, he called for nominations three times. Hearing None – **MOTION TO CEASE NOMINATIONS AND ELECT COLE UECKER AS CHAIRPERSON - MSC.** YEAS – Kristina, Beth, Kendra, Brad, Bill, Kevin, and Cole. NAYS - None. ABSTAINED – Peter.

Eric then moved to calling for further nominations for Vice Chair, three times. Hearing none – **MOTION TO CEASE NOMINATIONS AND ELECT BRAD AS VICE CHAIRPERSON – MSC.** YEAS – YEAS – Kristina, Beth, Brooke, Kendra, Brad, Bill, Kevin, and Cole. NAYS - None. ABSTAINED – Peter.

Next, Eric moved to calling for further nominations for Member-At-Large, three times. Hearing none – **MOTION TO CEASE NOMINATIONS AND ELECT KEVIN AS MEMBER-AT-LARGE – MSC.** YEAS – Kristina, Beth, Brooke, Kendra, Brad, Bill, Kevin, and Cole. NAYS - None. ABSTAINED – Peter. At this point, Eric handed the meeting back over to Lisa to continue with the meeting agenda.

**HONORING OUTGOING MEMBERS:** On behalf of the Executive Committee, Lisa and Eric each thanked the members who were terming off the board. This included: Kendra Gottsleben, Kim Ludwig, Lisa Sanderson, Colleen Moran and Kristi Eisenbraun. Lisa thanked them for their time, expertise, and commitment. Eric thanked them for their service and leadership, noting the time commitment of attending meetings, typically held in person. Each will be presented with a piece of art from the Suzi Cappa Art Center located in Rapid City. Departing comments were shared by several outgoing members.

**OTHER BUSINESS:** Lisa asked if there was any other business, there was none.

**CLOSING ACTIONS:** Future agenda items: Augie Access; Ability for Hire final products, e.g., brochure, rack cards, and new member orientation. Schedule Next Meeting: staff will disseminate a doodle poll to obtain possible dates for a meeting that works for the majority of members. Adjourn: **MOTION TO ADJOURN – MSC.** Meeting adjourned at approximately 12:20 pm. YEAS: Cole, Kristi, Beth, Kendra, Brad, Brooke, Bill, and Kevin. NAYS: None. Abstained: Peter.