

**Board of Vocational Rehabilitation (BVR)
September 7, 2022**

Meeting Held Via ZOOM and DHS Hillsview Plaza/Conference Room

MEMBERS PRESENT: Vicki Stewart, Eric Weiss, Cole Uecker, Brad Konechne, Lisa Merchen, Chris Olson, Jennifer Trenhaile, and Kevin Barber. **MEMBERS ABSENT:** Joe Vetch, Bill McEntaffer, Jolleen Laverdure and Jonathan Englund. **OTHERS PRESENT:** Brooke Lusk, Bernie Grimme, Jordan Trumbo, Katie Gran, Kim Ludwig, Russell Thelin, Mary Kay Budmayer, Dan Rounds, Bev Petersen, Cate Diede, and Colette Wagoner. Interpreters were Julie Paluch and Rick Norris.

OPENING ACTIONS: Cole Uecker, Chairperson called the meeting to order at 9:06 AM. He welcomed everyone and thanked them for attending. Members were reminded to identify themselves by name when speaking because interpreters were being utilized. Voting will be conducted by roll call, each voting member will be asked for their reply of yes, no, or abstain.

Appointments and reappointments have not been made by the Governor as of this date. Two members were term limited, Beth Schiltz and Peter Bullene, and their replacements have not been appointed. Brooke Lusk's term ended June 30th and she expressed an interest in serving a second term, and she has not been notified of reappointment yet.

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: Vicki, Lisa, Brad, Kevin, and Chris. NAYS: None.

Review/Approval of Meeting Minutes: Cole asked for changes/additions to the meeting minutes from June 16, 2022. There were none. **MOTION TO APPROVE THE JUNE 16, 2022, MEETING MINUTES, MSC.** YEAS: Vicki, Lisa, Brad, Kevin, and Chris. NAYS: None. Cole moved onto the Executive Committee meeting minutes asking if there changes. **MOTION TO APPROVE THE AUGUST 15, 2022, MEETING MINUTES, MSC.** YEAS: Vicki, Lisa, Brad, Kevin, and Chris. NAYS: None.

ANNOUNCEMENTS: Cole invited announcements of any kind. Lisa shared information about a young adult social group that started recently in Rapid City. Various agency staff have been approached by individuals with autism, family members and others wanting to form a social peer group. Staff from SD Parent Connection, Black Hills Works, Autism Society of the Black Hills, VR, and Western Resources for Independent Living assisted with the initial start. The first meeting

included ten young adults with autism between the ages of 18-26. Individuals with other disabilities are welcome to join. The first meeting was facilitated by agency staff to assist the youth with getting better acquainted. The youth talked about what they wanted for the group, service work, outings, etc. The goal is to have the young adults meet on their own. Agency staff will promote it as a young adult social group for individuals with various disabilities to encourage others of this age group to attend.

Cole talked about two events Disability Rights South Dakota is hosting. The first meeting will be held on September 9th (10:00 – 12:00/noon) in Rapid City and the second meeting will be held September 16th (10:00 – 12:00/noon) in Pierre. The meetings will allow people to bid farewell to outgoing director, Tim Neyhart, and welcome incoming director, Cole Uecker.

PUBLIC COMMENT: There was no public comment provided at this time.

DIVISION DIRECTOR'S REPORT: Eric thanked members for joining the meeting today, recognizing their commitment of time and involvement. Quarterly Caseload Report: Eric referred to the report disseminated on August 30th. He spoke to the last quarter's information entered for the 4th quarter (April 1, 2022 – June 30, 2022). The information allows the ability to compare a year's worth of data to previous years dating back to 2017. Applications have been increasing since the 2019 4th quarter. The report identifies total applications, total eligibilities, total served, and closed case data. Applications are down as compared to five years ago and this has allowed VR counselors the ability to work on outreach activities to build upon referrals.

Budget/Expenditures: Eric spoke to the basic 110 VR grant which is the primary grant from Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) in addition to the Supported Employment (SE) grant which serves those with the most significant disabilities and who require ongoing supports. The Division must meet all federal requirements in year one of the grant in order to carry over funds for year two. The Division is on pace to expend all federal funds. The Division is exploring the need for an inflationary increase for the upcoming budget request. Grants management is especially important to determine where the grant funds expenditures are at and what might be needed, or if there is a need to return funds (reallotment process). Last year \$2 million of VR 110 funds were relinquished, as well as \$200,000 in SE funds. This year no VR 110 funds were relinquished, but \$200,000 in SE funds were relinquished. The SE funds are a challenge to expend as the criteria for expenditures are more stringent than expending the 110 funds. One criteria outlines that SE funds can only be utilized on/after the employment start date, not on job development. Plus, half of the SE funds specifically support youth with disabilities (and the adult portion expenditures cannot be higher than the youth expenditures. VR utilizes general 110 funds for job development leading up to the date of employment for the individual. He provided a national perspective for

the most recent reallocation process, which 22 VR agencies released a total of \$337 million with only 15 VR agencies requesting a total of \$87 million. Another important item was that the FFY 2021 funds (funds needing to be expended by the end of September 2022) only six VR agencies have spent all the grant year funds, this includes the two South Dakota VR agencies. A question was asked if this relates to more expenditures on youth with disabilities; more youth applying for services. There has been effective use of the DRS funds to support the Pre ETS training offered during the summer, and more schools taking advantage of Division funding. In response to a question, Eric noted that the CHOICES waiver and individuals supported by community support providers, the Division of Developmental Disabilities is restructuring with a focus on competitive integrated employment. Eric also spoke to provider capacity, CSP's need for staff, and need for employment coordinator specialists across the state to meet the needs. Upcoming Division Activities: October will be a busy month with communities hosting National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM) activities, Fall Conference, and Governor's Awards Ceremony.

COMPREHENSIVE STATEWIDE NEEDS ASSESSMENT (CSNA): Russell Thelin greeted everyone and stated he had a lot of information to cover. The goal of the CSNA is to identify the rehabilitation needs of individuals with disabilities; those with the most significant disabilities, minorities, those unserved/underserved, individuals with disabilities served through other workforce investment components, and youth and students with disabilities. He utilized a PowerPoint to share information on the work completed so far. He outlined the Board's role in conducting the CSNA; to review, analyze, and advise the Division regarding the findings and assisting with developing the State Plan's goals, objectives, and strategies in response to the findings.

He outlined the objectives which include analyzing and reporting the data findings and potential action strategies to address the needs. He spoke to the deliverables and outcomes. He outlined primary and secondary data sources reviewed. In addition, information was collected from community-based data; surveys conducted with VR staff, community support service providers, businesses, post-secondary disability resource coordinators; interviews conducted with staff, service providers and Workforce Innovation System partners. He shared information regarding South Dakota's current and projected population and persons with disabilities. The information included race/ethnicity and other demographics; the population notables included:

- The employment rate for South Dakotans with disability is more than one-third below the percentage rate for those without disability.
- The full-time year-round employment rate for people with disabilities is less than half that for people without disability.
- The percentage of people with disabilities at or below poverty is 2.5X higher than the population without disability at or below the poverty line.

- Less than a HS Diploma: The percentage of South Dakotans with disability is more than double that of South Dakotans w/o disability.
- While people with disabilities have a higher percentage with a high school diploma, they fall below the percentage of those without disability in having some postsecondary education and significantly behind those with a postsecondary degree.
- The SSA Supplemental Security Income (SSI) percentage is slightly below but roughly the same as the national percentage (15%).
- The SSA Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) percentage is lower than the national percentage (4.7%)

He spoke to the review of VR customer satisfaction remaining constant and relatively high. His review included satisfaction areas where significant improvement occurred and that there was overall satisfaction with the suitability and quality of services received, and the interactions with staff/providers. Staff and provider surveys reflected commonality in responses to questions asked of most unserved/underserved, disability, most significantly disabled population, geography, and age group. A common response from VR staff and providers regarding the question to the most limited/unprovided service was counseling and guidance. He spoke to the responses received from VR staff and providers to questions of barriers preventing or limiting services, and what can DRS do to better serve the unserved/underserved populations. Russel shared information obtained from interviews with VR staff, providers and Workforce Innovation System partners and input received from the post-secondary Disability Resource Coordinators focus group.

Emergent Themes for Potential Final Recommendations.

- With multiple sources indicating lack of knowledge of availability of VR services as a most significant barrier, especially post-COVID, identify means and ways to make information on services and how to access or connect with VR services available.
- Investigate options to partner between Tribes, community providers, and others to make VR and related services more available on tribal lands.
- Brainstorm, analyze, and select a strategy to enhance the partnership between VR and MH at all levels for support services for mutually served individuals
- Research root causes behind the limited/unprovided rehabilitation counseling and guidance. Considerations might be:
 - Duties and task priority
 - Comfort and skill level of counseling staff
 - Cultural misalignment of duties (implicit and explicit expectations)
- Consider further analysis of increasing unsuccessful after IPE (28) closures for “no longer interested/no further services” reasons

- Counseling and Guidance tie?
- Engagement issues (timeliness)?
- Consider the agency “brand” (how you are seen by others) in consideration of
 - Counselors feeling that they are viewed as a funding source
 - Counselors reporting not being recognized as provider of rehabilitative or ameliorative services
 - Reports of lack of teaming, communicating, and sharing information
- Consider options to:
 - Help existing CRPs retain staff and reduce rapid turnover
 - Increase consistent availability of CRPs in rural and tribal areas of the state
- Provide more informational materials (and some additional essential forms) available in other languages (Spanish, Native, Somali, and Vietnamese languages specifically mentioned)
- With a significantly higher percentage of disability to population, consider connecting with the Asian community to make DRS services and resources known
- Consider starting or continuing cultural humility/intelligence training for VR staff and partners, if possible, for better culturally responsive services.

Russel invited questions, comments, or input at this time. Comments included surprise with some findings i.e., information regarding the counseling and guidance, as VR counselors with smaller caseloads (pandemic) should have more time to spend with consumers. The use of virtual meetings/cell phones/texting might impact guidance and counseling, appearance of perpetual issues i.e., transportation, collaborative partnerships. One member spoke to their surprise of how often that cultural awareness/diversity was brought up. Next steps will include providing a final report to the Division and Board for review and input prior to finalizing the CSNA report. He again invited feedback and comments from members.

TRANSITION SERVICES LIAISON PROJECT (TSLP): Dan Rounds provided this update noting the TSLP project was a result of a systems change project conducted in 1995 -1999. He spoke to the purpose of the project which is to improve and expand high school options for students with disabilities. The project is funded by the Division of Rehabilitation Services and the Office of Special Education. TSLP staff provide technical assistance, resources, and training to students with disabilities and families, educational staff and to other agency staff. Dan introduced Bev Petersen (Sioux Falls) and Cate Diede (Aberdeen), TSLP Liaisons and they each spoke to the area of the state they cover. Dave Halverson (Sturgis) and Miah Gillen (Mitchell) were unavailable. He provided an overview of activities to include hosting the Youth Leadership Forum, Catch the Wave, regional transition forums, Let’s Talk Work events, managing a website, participating in interagency councils, and providing Indicator 13 workshops. Work is conducted year-round to support YLF, which is a five-day leadership and self-

advocacy training for high school juniors and seniors with disabilities. Students must apply, interview and be selected to attend. During the week of the event, over 80+ individuals are involved in assisting to make the event possible, and over 30 groups or organizations are involved as well. The student delegates are from across the state and have various disabilities.

TSLP hosts 4 to 6 Catch the Wave events each year to help students with disabilities prepare for the transition from high school to post-secondary education. These events are held on college or technical college campuses involving the Disability Services Coordinators, and panels includes student presentations, adult agency presentations, and financial aid information. The Let's Talk about Work workshops are one day events, which focus on employability skills and supports. Resources are shared, discussion of needed skill development, by utilizing members from the business community, VR, Career and Technical Education staff to talk about preparing for employment (soft skills, interviewing, resume development). Regional forums are held which are interactive meetings for transition age students, families, and service providers. Students and families are introduced to local resources, and transition topics are discussed, i.e., transfer of rights, guardianship, informed decision making, SSA benefits, benefits counseling, person centered thinking and LifeCourse training. IEP workshops focus on the transition IEP, transition assessment, measurable secondary goals, coordinated activities, annual goals, student involvement and outside agency involvement. Monitoring Indicator 13 involves reviewing transition IEP files and working with education specialists, providing technical assistance and follow-up, and in-service training to school districts.

Other activities coordinated by staff include the Transition Summer Institute, disability services coordinators meeting, employment and SSA benefits workshops, and coordinating workgroups for new initiatives. TSLP hosts events via virtual platforms i.e., Transition Sharing Roundups, and recorded for viewing later. A listing of upcoming events will be shared with members. Lisa made a comment about attending a few TSLP events and how positive they were, and encouraged others attend. Dan noted that the BVR was responsible for bringing YLF to the state because of the role and advocacy efforts of Richard Hicks, who served as a BVR member in the late 1990s.

STATEWIDE INDEPENDENT LIVING COUNCIL (SILC): Eric reported that the SILC is a standing agenda item for the BVR. In order for each state to receive IL funding, it must have a SILC. The SILC is responsible for developing and monitoring the State Plan for Independent Living (SPIL). The SILC is called to coordinate activities with other entities such as the BVR. Eric serves as an appointed SILC member. The July 14th meeting agenda included a report from the Division's IL specialist, Centers for Independent Living (CILs) reports from both Independent Living Choices (ILC) and Western Resources for Independent Living (WRIL), updates provided on ILC's summer

transition camps, Dr. Kurtz, Center for Disabilities provided an overview of their 5-year strategic plan, and SILC committee updates. The next meeting is scheduled for September 22nd which will include a presentation from DakotaLink and the Champion of Independent Living Services Award presentation. Work will start soon the next 3-year SPIL which is due June 30, 2023. Information about the SILC can be found at: <https://boardsandcommissions.sd.gov/>, i.e., meeting agenda, council members, minutes.

STAFF UPDATE: BVR/SILC Appointments: Colette referenced the earlier discussion of appointments noting that neither the BVR or SILC have received appointments or reappointments. The BVR needs three vacancies filled and the SILC needs four vacancies filled. Once word is received on appointments a new member orientation will be scheduled.

National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM): The majority of communities hosting NDEAM events have finalized details, and some are nearing completion. A list is being developed of all events being held statewide and will be shared with board and council members once finalized. The list will contain registration information or links to join virtually. One event will be held in early November. The US Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP)'s website was shared for additional information, and it includes access to the 2022 poster. The website is: <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/odep/initiatives/ndeam>. Lisa made the comment she attended a few events last year, noting good information was shared, and it was helpful that some events were offered virtually.

Governor's Awards Ceremony: Word has been received from the Governor's office regarding finalization and approval of the award recipients for 2022. Planning for the ceremony and reception has begun and all recipients have been contacted. The ceremony will be held October 26th with plans for the Governor to present the awards. A reception will be held at the Drifters Bar & Grille in Ft. Pierre. Notification was disseminated to all BVR/SILC and B/SBVI members which included an invitation to the ceremony and reception. Notification announcing the award recipients and categories was disseminated to all those who provided a nomination, those who contributed letters of support, and all those who were nominated. Work is being done to have the ceremony viewed via livestream, and if this can be done, the link will be forwarded to board/council members.

Budget Update: Colette referenced the budget update that was sent on September 2nd. Expenses are shown for BVR meeting expenses and strategic planning. It was noted this budget is on a calendar year. Expected expenses for the Governor's Awards and NDEAM will fall under strategic planning and expenses related to members who attend the Fall Conference in October will be coded to member travel.

Fall Conference: The Fall Conference is scheduled on October 11-13th in Sioux Falls. Members are encouraged to attend the conference. If a member would like to participate, please let staff know. Members' expenses (registration, lodging, mileage, per diem) will fall under the BVR member travel line item. To date, eight members have expressed an interest in attending. Bernie forwarded the *Agenda at a Glance* to staff, and this will be forwarded to members.

BREAK FOR LUNCH

DISABILITY RIGHTS SOUTH DAKOTA, Partners In Policymaking: Mary Kay Budmayer was available to provide information on Partners in Policymaking. Mary Kay talked about preparing for the 31st year of Partners. Partners provides leadership and advocacy training to individuals with disabilities, family members and others. Each Partner commits to actively utilize skills learned to challenge or change areas in their communities by creating awareness, sensitivity, accessibility, and inclusion for all. Partners attend two-day training sessions over a six-month period. Session topics include history of the disability movement, advocacy strategies, IDEA/inclusion, legislative process, community services, city/county/tribal government, assistive technology, employment, parliamentary procedures, and abuse and neglect. All expenses are provided for participants. Partners is funded by the SD Council on Developmental Disabilities, USD Center for Disabilities and SD Parent Connection. Applications are due October 3rd. The application and more information can be found at: <https://drsdlaw.org/resources/partnersinpolicymaking/>

South Dakota Advocates for Change: Mary Kay also coordinates SD Advocates for Change Program. This is a network made up of adults with disabilities who live in and are a part of their community, living a full life. Advocates learn how to speak up for themselves, problem solving, and reaching out to ask for help when needed. They have participated in leadership training, learned about advocacy and disability rights/laws and have become trainers. They provide training, recently they presented during the Partners in Policymaking graduation weekend conducting a breakout session on coping with stress during COVID. In June, they presented at the Lighting the Way Conference on the topic of transition. Advocates were recently involved in developing a video on voting (registering to vote, process of voting, accessibility of the polling site). The video will be shared soon on social media. More videos will be completed and shared to help educate others on specific topics. The videos are captioned and will be available on Disability Rights webpage.

VR PROGRAM INITIATIVES: Bernie reported that the Fall Conference has 272 individuals registered to date. Registrants include VR, DOL, CILs staff, providers, and Long-Term Services and Supports staff.

Katie Gran: Summer Pre Employment Transition Services (Pre ETS) Camps: Nine camps have been completed with 80 students with disabilities participating. Division funds were utilized to support these camps offered through various agencies (Groton School, BHSSC, Teachwell, LifeQuest, Independent Living Choices, Oyate' Circle and CSD). The Oyate' Circle camp was recently conducted and CSD will host their camp this weekend. Final invoices and documentation are expected once the camp has been conducted.

Lowering the Age Requirement for Students with Disabilities – Definition Update: The Division is in the final states of completing the Transition Cooperative Agreement, originally started in 2014. The Department of Human Services (DHS) works with the Departments of Education, Social Services and Labor to outline responsibilities for each department to ensure quality transition services are being provided to students with disabilities. This document is reviewed and updated every 3 years, however, VR wanted to begin providing Pre-ETS to students who are 14/15 years old and track services towards the required 15% spending of federal funds. Currently, if VR staff are communicating with students who are 14/15, the only way to enter them into the system is by taking an official application for services. Students are not always ready to make this step, and with this change, VR staff can open the case as “Potentially Eligible” which does not require an official application. Counselors will be required to maintain monthly contact with the students and provide limited services. The hope is to build students and family members’ understanding of VR services, and that they eventually apply for more extensive services like Project Skills. Once final revisions are incorporated, the document will be routed for signatures.

Project Skills Update: The Project Skills monthly report was updated. This report is completed by teachers to identify progress made the student in their Project Skills placement. The update was finalized and distributed to teachers and VR staff to begin using. Information about Project Skills and the report can be found on the Division’s website at <https://dhs.sd.gov/rehabservices/projectskills.aspx>. Positive feedback has been received from both teachers and agency staff. And, as of July 1st the Project Skills wage increased to \$11/hour.

A Project Skills satisfaction survey was disseminated to students, including those participating in the Employment Skills Program (ESP). It was mailed to 319 students and there was a 17% response rate (51 returned by mail/2 online returns). Six questions were asked regarding satisfaction of specific areas. Satisfaction of work placement matched with employment goal; 23 respondents picked strongly agree, which was 44% of total responses); support from the job coach was adequate; 25 respondents picked strongly agree, (47%); support from the VR counselor was adequate, 26 respondents picked strongly agree, (50%); support from

employer was adequate, 26 respondents picked strongly agree (49%); hours worked per week was adequate, 24 respondents picked strongly agree (45%); this experience was beneficial, 31 respondents picked strongly agree (58%). And the written comments received were mostly positive.

Kim Ludwig spoke to the results of the employer work experience survey. There was a total of 418 surveys disseminated with 194 completed/returned by mail and 29 returned online, resulting in a 53% response rate. The following information was gathered in terms of six questions asked and responses. The work experience program was clearly explained to you before the participant began their employment, 147 respondents picked strongly agree, which was 67% of total respondents; the work experience was beneficial for the participant, 131 respondents picked strongly agree, (60%); support services from school/provider were adequate to train the participant, 123 respondents picked strongly agree (56%); there was adequate communication from the school/provider on checking on the participant's work, 126 respondents picked strongly agree (58%); the amount of hours worked per week were adequate for the business and participant, 110 respondents picked strongly agree (50%); and, I would be willing to continue to host future individuals with disabilities in this work experience program, 131 respondents picked strongly agree (60%). Written comments were positive, i.e., great program, would love to have more individuals with disabilities working with us, participant has been an excellent addition to our team.

Training for Businesses: Kim outlined working with Vicki Stewart, Business Resource Network (BRN) and Catherine Greseth, Western Diversity Network (WDN) of the Black Hills to provide Windmills and other training opportunities. Most recently, virtual training was provided on Traumatic Brain Injury in August. The training had 46 attendees and it addressed the disability, functional limitations and how it may impact work performance, and strategies to work effectively with individuals with TBI in terms of providing accommodations. They will provide a series of training sessions (September through April) for state government employees. Kim will also partner with Vicki and Lisa Winkler (employment specialist) to conduct training in Yankton on October 18th at the Southeast Society for Human Resource Management (SESD SHRM).

VR Performance Measure for Effective Employer Supports and Services (known as Indicator 6): States are required to collect data necessary to determine levels of performance for each of the 6 core programs, one of which is the VR program. VR measures two approaches: retention with the same employer; and repeat business customers (percentage of employers who receive services that use core program services more than once). Kim reviewed types of employer services and number of requests for Program Year 2021, total services provided was 861. Total employers served for program years 2019, 2020 and 2021 were calculated, each year the number has grown.

Jordan Trumbo: The Division started providing 'policy of the month training' to staff. In reviewing case file review findings or if areas are identified as needing improvement, staff wanted to take a different approach to training. Four trainings have been conducted to date and four more are scheduled. Feedback will be obtained from staff to gauge if this style of training is helpful, what other topics they are interested in or need training on. She talked about how some services were tweaked over the last year, and instead of emailing instructions about the changes, training was held for VR staff and providers to review the changes. This medium allows anyone to ask questions or seek clarification regarding the changes. Staff has also created a 'frequently asked questions' document to share and disseminate with specific areas.

Provider Training Update: The Division has been working with Griffin Hammis & Associates Inc., to provide training for providers. Griffin-Hammis is utilizing different trainers which provides different training styles, approaches and perspectives. Positive feedback has been received with the changes. Early next year customized employment (CE) training will be scheduled in the fall for providers and early in the new year for VR staff, training will target the roles of each. There are plans to host competitive integrated employment training, which provides basic training for providers to assist them with becoming certified. These will be offered in the fall virtually and next year as well. Griffin-Hammis also created a 6-part Ethics Training Series with a provider focus. These were conducted this summer and are now available on the Division's website. The contract with Griffin Hammis & Associates is being reviewed, and a new contract will be put into place in January. BIT projects: Jordan spoke to work being done to transition Division staff away from utilizing Microsoft access databases to Microsoft Power BI. Her and staff are utilizing it now and will help train other staff how to utilize it. The Division will be utilizing the Sara Virtual Assistant program to assist counselors to maintain routine contact with clients. The Rapid City office staff are utilizing it now as a trial run to see what functions are most appropriate for staff use. Year End Data: The Division will need to submit the annual data report to RSA. Data is collected through the end of September regarding case services as well as measurable skill gains and credential attainment gains. This is due October 3rd.

OTHER BUSINESS: There was none at this time.

CLOSING ACTIONS: Future Agenda Items: One item for the next meeting will be finalizing the BVR's Annual Report. Cole reminded members that if they have an interest in a topic or an idea for agenda item to please let him or staff know. Scheduling next meeting: Staff will disseminate a doodle poll to identify a meeting date that works for the majority of members. Adjourn for the day: The Chair asked if there was any objection to adjourn, there was none, he adjourned the meeting at 2:12 pm.