

**Maryland State Rehabilitation Council**  
**Minutes**  
**Workforce & Technology Center**  
**September 9, 2020**

**Members Present:**

Anil Lewis  
Scott Dennis  
Chris Conklin  
Cindy LaBon  
Denise Carter-McCormick  
Marsha Legg  
Christy Stuart  
Rene Averitt-Sanzone  
Tom Laverty

**DORS Liaisons to Council:**

Jody Boone, DORS – OFS Director  
Kim Schultz, DORS – Public Relations  
Jean Jackson – WTC Director  
Toni March – OBVS Director  
Darlene Peregoy – AFS Director

**Support Staff for Council:**

Sandy Bowser  
Patrick Peto

**Welcome/Introduction:**

Minutes from May 13, 2020 have been approved as written.

**DORS COVID Response Update – Scott Dennis**

At this time, DORS is working on Reopening Office Plans. Staff are teleworking and continue to provide services to consumers. Once we receive word to return to work, the offices will open and will maintain social distancing. In-person meetings are being conducted on a case-by-case basis.

Several new virtual services have been developed:

- Job Coaching
- Job Development
- Some Pre-Employment

These new virtual services will continue to be offered once we are back to a more normal operation.

At this time, we are not providing Pre-Employment – Work Based Learning Experience for students. This service will resume hopefully in the spring of 2021.

DORS partners have been asked to send in their Pre-Employment proposals for review. For the fall semester, we will continue to provide this service virtually. Once the school systems are running smoothly, we will revisit the plan to provide in-person services.

### **DORS Program Updates:**

Jody Boone, OFS Director

- The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Maryland School for the Deaf (MSD) and DORS has been amended to include virtual services, which include Explore-Work (<https://explore-work.com/>) and intensive Pre-ETS for MSD students who are deaf or hard of hearing.
- We are currently not funding in-person Pre-ETS; however, if/when local school systems (LSS) return to in-person learning, DORS will address requests for in-person services on a case-by-case basis in each county.
- Many of our community rehabilitation partners are continuing to provide virtual Pre-ETS, and have expanded those services statewide. The expanded virtual services have allowed students with disabilities, who live in remote areas, to receive services that may not normally be available in-person.
- Project Search Memorandums of Understanding and amendments to permit virtual services are in progress and should be finalized within the next few weeks. At this time, DORS and most project Search Employer partners are not supporting in-person internships for in-school youth; however, employers and providers are working to create virtual and simulated internship experiences for the students.
- The MOU template to be used for agreements between DORS and each Local School System have been drafted and are pending approval. Once finalized, training will be provided to LSS Transition Specialists and DORS TY Specialists.

Toni March, OBVS Director

- The OBVS Quarterly meeting took place on August 27, 2020. This was a shortened version of the regular quarterly meeting and was held virtually.
- All of OBVS staff are now teleworking.
- Staff continue to participate in multiple trainings while working from home.
- Many staff were able to attend the National NFB Convention in July. Hard work by many staff and DoIT resulted in the installation of Zoom on DORS staff computers to facilitate attendance.
- OBVS continues to work with Pendergrast, a community provider, to develop and implement an internship program for OBVS consumers. The process is nearing completion and we hope to have the program approved in the next 30 days.
- OBVS staff developed and provided a day long training to community programs that are not specific to blindness. This training as well attended and received. This program was developed to assist CRPs in serving consumers who are blind and vision impaired.
- OBVS is now offering a new program for Pre-ETS students. Explore Work is a program that was developed by our Technical Assistance Centers and is offered through multiple agencies. It includes modules on all 5 Pre-ETS categories: Self-Advocacy, Work Readiness, Career Exploration, Post-Secondary Exploration, and Work Based Learning.

This is a virtual service that is being provided by MD School for the Blind, Columbia Lighthouse for the Blind and BISM.

- Louisiana Center for the Blind is back in operation. We currently have one person in the program, with three more scheduled.
- Blind Industries has resumed some services and we are currently making referrals. Blind Industries is currently providing the Work Readiness Assessment in person and accepting referrals for CORE.
- Columbia Lighthouse for the Blind is providing their Pre-ETS Program LITE Program virtually. They meet with multiple students to discuss and complete activities around a pre-determined topic. They have also developed a Blindness Basics virtual training for consumers who are new to blindness.
- National Federation of the Blind continues to provide their mentoring program in a virtual environment.

#### Darlene Peregoy, AFS Director

- Throughout the pandemic, the Facilities staff have been working on-site at WTC. The maintenance and housekeeping staff have taken advantage of the building being empty and completed some major cleaning and maintenance projects. They finalized the upgrades to the cafeteria and have stripped and waxed all the floors throughout the building. We are following all DGS and CDC guidelines for COVID-19. Security staff at WTC and local supervisors are following screening protocols for everyone entering DORS offices to help keep COVID-19 out of our workplace.
- Working virtually has forced us to automate many of our processes that were once paper-driven, particularly our payment system. Improvements have been made to our payment system for our vendors and providers in ways in which we share information while protecting confidentiality and PII. An invoice and report portal was developed for vendors to submit invoices. Two other portals were developed to allow for counselors to send authorizations and attachments to CRPs and sending of confidential information between staff and consumers, businesses, schools, parents, etc., to increase our ways to communicate with consumers, we also have email to text capacity.

#### **Invoice and Reports Portal**

Original Portal: February – July 2020 – 4,730 submissions

New Portal: July – present – 2,660 submissions

Total: 7,180

#### **Authorizations and Documentation Portal (DORS sending out)**

Original Portal: March – July 2020 – 1,864 submissions

New Portal: July-present – 1,571 submissions

Total: 3,435

#### **Confidential Information to DORS Portal (Consumers, business associates, schools, parents, etc., sending documentation to DORS)**

July – present – 240 submissions

**Retaurus Mail2SMS** – 291 messages sent from DORS

Staff that currently have access to this tool:

All Transition Counselors

All OBVS Staff

All Region 5 Staff

All Region 1 Staff

In addition, to ensure payments are being paid in a timely manner and that any issues are addressed in the payment process, MIS created an Internal Payment Exception Report that tracks any discrepancies between invoices received through the portal, AWARE and Accounting system. The report tracks payments that have not been put in the system, wrong information, identifies if payments were made in the system but were not released for payment by accounting, and addresses backlog issues. This report will help managers identify payment problems.

We will also be developing a vendor and CRP application portals to ensure a smooth application process and tracking.

The Annual DORS/MRA Conference was cancelled this year and plans are to hold it next year at the same venue. On October 30<sup>th</sup>, the Agency is holding a virtual event entitled ***DORS 2020: Life's a Beach***. This will provide an opportunity for Scott Dennis and the Executive Team to provide program updates and acknowledge and celebrate the accomplishments of our staff and consumers; and we hope to have some fun in the process.

While we are still on a hiring freeze, we have been able to identify priorities and submit hiring exceptions to MSDE. For example, we are holding interviews for our AWARE Staff Specialist position the week of September 21. Those interviews were previously scheduled the week after we went on telework. Hopefully, we will be able to begin recruiting for some of our other vacancies in the near future.

Jean Jackson, WTC Director

WTC Driving School is providing online Driver's Education classes. DORS has just received permission to provide the 6-hours Behind-the-Wheel sessions for consumers who participated in the 30-hour online classes.

The Work Readiness team completed a successful pilot of virtual Pre-ETS services for a small group of individuals in August and will run for four weeks.

Academic Instructors have been providing tutoring virtually and over-the-phone.

The Sephora Warehouse Training program will run its first session in September for 9 weeks. This is an on-site, paid training that will lead directly to employment at the end of the program.

Autism Services is piloting a new program entitled Virtual College Autism Mentoring Program 9VCAMP. This is a remote mentoring program to help students on the autism spectrum transition into and navigate college. This program is available to individuals attending in-state

and out-of-state, two or four-year colleges. The program focuses on assisting the student with developing and increasing their self-advocacy and social skills in order to be successful in the college environment.

Patrick Peto, Program Manager Quality Assurance, Policy & Planning

Policy updates have been made to the Home Modifications Program effective July 13, 2020, in order to streamline the process.

- Architectural/Residential Modifications are now called Home Modifications
- All Home Modification services must be included on the IPE and the Administrative Approval completed.
- A roll-in shower enclosure may be considered if it does not involve fundamental alterations to the physical structure, and is not located in a unit within a multi-unit or multi-dwelling building.
- Modification within the residence should be essential to achieve an employment goal.
- DORS will not authorize funding for home modifications that do not fully comply with the current ADA Accessibility Guidelines.

Psychometric Solutions, LLC has been awarded the DORS contract to facilitate and provide day-to-day direction and oversight of the RISE (Reach Independence through Self-Employment) Program effective June 3, 2020.

The DORS Annual Financial Participation Policy has been revised to align with WIOA regulations regarding credential attainment and State of Maryland procurement practices to improve consistency statewide for determining and applying individual/family annual financial participation.

Several additional updates relating to establishing Virtual Services:

- Temporary Employee Development Services/Work Adjustment Training – DORS staff can now provide EDS/WAT services virtually during the COVID-19 pandemic. Virtual EDS/WAT programs are designed to assist individuals in learning appropriate work behaviors, attitudes and ethics through small group participation of virtual instructional activities.
- Temporary Career Assessment Services: Investigative Assessment – DORS staff now has a sixth option to provide a new Career Assessment Option called the Investigative Assessment. This Investigative Assessment will focus on assisting the individual to consider career interests and develop areas that may warrant additional exploration.
- Pre-ETS Opportunity: Explore-Work Program – Explore-Work was developed by the Workforce Innovation Technical Assistance Center as a resource for states to use when delivering Pre-ETS virtually/remotely to students. Explore-Work has five modules covering all five Pre-ETS categories. DORS will work with approved providers to facilitate and support student participation in Explore-Work lessons.

Training has been provided to WTC staff to assist field offices with VR services and Pre-ETS services.

Eligibility/Order of Selection training has been completed for all staff.

Measureable Skills Gains – Program Year 2019:

- 440 individual goals achieved
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter after exit wages reported for 1,289 participants
- 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter after exit wages reported 1,109 participants
- Wages reported for 2<sup>nd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup> Quarters 707 participants; of those with 2<sup>nd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter wages, 586 had the same employer for both quarters reported.

### **Chairperson/Vice Chairperson Report – Anil Lewis/Marsha Legg**

Anil and Marsha expressed their gratitude for DORS! They are very happy with the way DORS has conducted business throughout the pandemic.

Kudos to DORS for moving quickly and implementing virtual services for consumers.

### **Director Report – Scott Dennis**

The DORS Planning Meeting will be held virtually on October 8<sup>th</sup>. The Agenda is still being worked on. SRC members are encouraged to attend; please let Kim Schultz know and she will send you an invitation.

DORS has requested and received \$1.843 million in re-allotment funding.

The State Budget for FY20 has ended; DORS had to give some state money back to the Comptroller's Office but we were able to retain enough money to meet Match and Maintenance of Effort. At this time, DORS has not received any FY21 budget cuts.

There is a high number of individuals who are SSI or SSDI beneficiaries that are on the DORS Wait List. WTC staff are working on these cases, making sure we have the most current information and trying to take them off the wait list and put into Category I.

DORS is now managing cases virtually all across the state. Cases are being shifted all over the state to even out counselor caseloads. One Thousand Five Hundred cases from Central MD and the DC Suburbs have been transferred to Baltimore City and Western Maryland. Counselors all over the state are working together and sharing resources to help with the transferred cases.

### **Membership Discussion**

Policy & Quality Assurance – Tom Laverty – no major changes over the last 3-4 months.

Blindness & Vision Services – the committee met with a number of individuals from the community and reviewed what is going on in OBVS, discussed DORS policy and shared the different things that are going on in their communities. Maryland School for the Blind is working with local school systems throughout the state to provide services.

**Council Sharing**

Parents Place has served over 300 families of transitioning in the coffee and conversation meetings. Please visit [www.ppmd.org](http://www.ppmd.org) for more information.

The next MSRC Meeting will be November 18, 2020, 4:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted  
Sandy Bowser  
MSRC Staff Support