

Maryland State Rehabilitation Council
Minutes
November 18, 2020

Members Present:

Anil Lewis, Chair
Scott Dennis
Chris Conklin
Cindy LaBon
Denise Carter-McCormick
Christy Stuart
Rene Averitt-Sanzone

Members Not Present

Marsha Legg, Co-Chair
Tom Laverty

DORS Liaisons to Council:

Derick Serra, DORS (attending for Jody Boone – OFS Director)
Kim Schultz, DORS – Public Relations
Jean Jackson – WTC Director
Toni March – OBVS Director
Darlene Peregoy – AFS Director

New Members Awaiting Appointment

Hunter Whitt
Andrea Landry
Mindy Lipsey
Dr. Katherine Jones
Calvin Doudt
Tassie Thompson

Support Staff for Council:

Sandy Bowser
Patrick Peto

Welcome/Introduction:

Scott Dennis and the Council welcomed the new members to the Maryland State Rehabilitation Council (MSRC):

- Mr. Calvin Doudt – Mr. Doudt is a High School Principal at Maryland School for the Deaf in Frederick, Maryland.
- Ms. Andrea Landry – Ms. Landry is a Facilitator Trainer at Helping Other People Through Empowerment in Baltimore City.
- Dr. Katherine Jones – Dr. Jones is the Executive Director for the Bay Area Center for Independent Living, Inc. in Salisbury, Maryland
- Mr. Hunter Whitt – Mr. Whitt is a recent graduate from Wright University and also completed an internship at DORS as a Rehabilitation Specialist.
- Ms. Tassie Thompson – Ms. Thompson is a Self-Employed – Licensed Blind Vendor through the DORS Business Enterprise Program for the Blind (BEP).
- Ms. Mindy Lipsey – Ms. Lipsey is a parent of two DORS consumers.

All the new members expressed their excitement in joining and working with the Maryland State Rehabilitation Council.

Ms. Michelle Day was unable to attend tonight's meeting but was also introduced as a new member.

- Ms. Michelle Day – Director, Workforce Development for Frederick County Government

Approval of September 9, 2020 Minutes:

The minutes were approved with one correction - National Federation for the Blind should read as National Federation of the Blind. After this correction is made, the September minutes will be posted on the MSRC website.

SRC Meeting Dates – 2021:

February 10, 2021

May 12, 2021

August – Executive Retreat – Date and location to be determined

September 8, 2021

November 10, 2021

All meetings will be held on Wednesday's, 4:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.

DORS Planning Meeting – October 7, 2021

The Meeting Schedule will be emailed to all State Rehabilitation Council Members and a calendar invite will also be sent for 2021 meetings.

DORS Program Updates:

Office of Field Services (OFS) Report – Derick Serra

The Office of Field Services staff continue to provide VR services remotely, and since remote services are offered to consumers statewide, many consumers are able to participate in services that may not have previously been available in their geographic area.

The Office of Field Services is considering requests for in-person Work Based Learning Experiences on a case-by-case exception basis; decisions are based primarily on whether or not the county schools are operating in-person or virtually.

Hank Passi, Statewide Coordinator for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services will retire December 31, 2021; his last day is December 17th. Jody Boone and Scott Dennis have already met with the Department of Disabilities staff to discuss ways in which we will work closely with them to prepare for the recruitment of the next statewide coordinator.

The Acquired Brain Injury Consortium has restarted their meetings. The first meeting was held November 17th.

Office for Blindness and Vision Services Report – Toni March

All Office for Blindness and Vision Services staff are now teleworking. Staff continues to provide all services allowed under COVID restrictions. The Office for Blindness and Vision Services is receiving and following up on referrals, taking applications, working on eligibility & plans, providing virtual services, in-person Orientation and Mobility (O&M), delivering equipment and working with our vendors to provide services everyone is comfortable with while following Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines.

Email to text messages have been rolled-out. Staff will now be able to text consumers from their email, including training for all staff.

Transition Coalition Meeting was held on October 27, 2020. There was good discussion on what areas of transition services need to be addressed. There was initial discussion about a Transition Day to be held in early spring.

The Office for Blindness and Vision Services is working with Helen Keller National Center on services for persons who are deaf/blind to be provided virtually.

The Office for Blindness and Vision Services is working with Pendergrast on an internship program for individuals who are vision impaired or blind.

Staff provided training for Community Rehabilitation Programs (CRPs) interested in serving consumers who are blind or vision impaired, to assist with ensuring an understanding of the needs of this population and the expectations for services provided.

Staff attended the National Federal of the Blind (NFB) the weekend of November 6th.

The National Federation of the Blind announced a DORS Resolution. The specific concerns raised regarding services were:

- The quality of training provided for OBVS staff.
- The variety and availability of career training for OBVS consumers.
- The recommendation that DORS be moved from the Department of Education to the Department of Disabilities.

OBVS will work with the NFB and other partners regarding training for OBVS staff.

Exploration of additional career training programs that would benefit OBVS consumers will be explored.

AFS Report – Darlene Peregoy

The DORS 2020: Life's a Beach virtual event was held October 30th. This was the first time DORS produced a meeting of this size for all staff. Some of the SRC members participated. Overall it seemed to go well and we learned some things through the process relative to the WebEx platform we used. The event included updates by Scott Dennis and the Executive Team, awards, and entertainment. Everyone seemed happy to be able to connect with others they have not seen for months. Our next event, which replaced our usual holiday party, will be a *Goodbye 2020, Hello 2021* virtual event on January 8th.

Seth Masley was promoted to the Staff Specialist III position for Program Evaluation and AWARE Case Management Support. We are awaiting approval to recruit to backfill his Staff Specialist II position for data analytics.

Connie Street has returned to DORS as the Accounting Supervisor, and we are in the process of recruiting for an Accountant II position, which primarily supports Business Enterprise Program for the Blind (BEP).

The automated processes we have developed for our once paper-driven processes are going well. We continue to tweak the various portals that have been developed for the secure submission of invoices, sharing of information to and from vendors and Community Rehabilitation Programs, and sending of confidential information between staff and consumers, businesses, schools, parents, etc.

The creation of an Internal Payment Exception Report that tracks discrepancies between invoices received through the portal, AWARE and Accounting system has proved to be very helpful in catching and correcting problems. The report tracks payments that have not been put in the system, wrong information, identified if payments were made in the system but were not released for payment by accounting, and addresses backlog issues. This is another internal control to ensure that payments are made in an accurate and timely manner.

Over the last six months, Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) has begun consolidating some business services, and that has resulted in two DORS Procurement staff and six Personnel staff being transferred to MSDE headquarters organizationally. They are still located at DORS headquarters and support DORS but report to the MSDE Business Services and Human Resources respectively. So far, we have seen little to no effects on the support they provide to DORS. We will not support their salaries indirectly.

The Facilities Maintenance staff continue to work on various COVID-19 related projects, such as fabricating temporary and permanent plexi-glass health shields for offices.

In addition to the state building access screening questionnaires, the Security staff are now conducting temperature checks on everyone entering the Workforce & Technology Center (WTC).

DORS participated in a coordinated state response along with the Department of Disabilities and Department of Labor to Social Security Administration's (SSA) request for information relative to the possibility of moving the Ticket to Work Program from SSA to the United States Department of Labor.

We are moving to complete electronic case files and will be conducting scanning of current or closed cases that need to be retained over the next several months using both a contractor and Workforce & Technology Center staff. We have residential advisors who are unable to perform their normal tasks since the dormitories are closed, so they have been assisting with various projects.

Workforce & Technology Center Report – Jean Jackson

Forty-eight staff had been assigned to agency projects such as assisting field counselors with caseloads, providing initial intake and application interviews for Vocational Rehabilitation referrals, inventory control, processing Pre-Employment Transition Students (Pre-ETS) consumers, and eligibility determination for Social Security Income/Social Security Disability Income (SSI/SSDI) recipients on the DORS waiting list. A group of staff developed new services and provided staff training on how to complete their jobs in a virtual environment to include On-line services as follows:

- Auto training instruction
- GED and Driver's permit tutoring
- 30 hours of Drivers Ed classes
- Assistive technology assessments
- Individual computer Skills Development Training
- Pre-Employment Autism Support and post-secondary options for individuals with Autism
- A virtual job skills platform for consumers statewide to utilize in order to maintain their job search and connect with employers.

In addition, vehicle and residential modification services were provided; support groups were continued such as low vision, autism, employment support and dealing with addiction issues.

New virtual and online services have been developed in the provision of career assessment, training curriculums and a variety of academic services.

Jobs have been found and maintained and a new source of Warehouse Training was developed with Sephora. A nine-week paid training program leading directly to employment, which will begin on November 30, 2020.

Currently, programs and services provided include:

- A six hour behind the wheel class
- Virtual College Autism Monitoring Program, which is offered to autism students attending in or out of state two and four year colleges who are not participating in the Pathways Program
- The Work Readiness Virtual Program which began on November 16, 2020 and will run for four weeks.
- Instructors for Automotive, Food, and Environmental Training Programs will be working on a fifth week of virtual learning to be added to work readiness to consist of career exploration.
- Academic instructors have been providing daily tutoring virtually for everything from Drivers Ed test prep to GED and academic remediation for students enrolled in training and those preparing to enter training.

The WTC gradually re-opened in October with a limited number of day students in Automotive and Environmental training, Work Readiness, behind the wheel and other individual services.

Quality Assurance & Policy – Patrick Peto

FY 2020:

1,145 Successful Outcomes

\$13.74 Average Age at Exit

26.8 Average hours worked per week

FY 2020 – Quarter 1

2nd Quarter - Wages after exit – 43.5% (1,549)

4th Quarter – Wages after exit – 39.3% (616)

445 Retention Same Employer 2nd and 4th Quarter after Exit

545 Employment in Quarter 2 and Quarter 4

The New Referral process will roll out December 1, 2020. All referrals will be entered through the new referral instrument to maintain consistency in meeting initial referral contact standards within 10 days. Application materials will be mailed from DORS Headquarters and will include a Self-Addressed Stamped Envelope to return documentation. Additionally, we are currently refining procedures at DORS Headquarters to receive, scan, and attach completed application materials received during this updated referral process.

Part 2 of the DORS Planning Meeting will be held on November 19, 2020. The three groups that will meet:

- Case Management/Electronic Processes
- Resource Management
- Pre-Employment Transition Services

AWARE testing the week of October 19th, included alternative internet browsers. Recently upgraded AWARE November 1st. The new version includes several efficiencies and navigation improvements. DORS is exploring new functionality to collect electronic signatures through AWARE Sign Product.

The Quality Assurance process will resume in January 2021. We will bring Q/A to closely examine virtual case management and service delivery. The Q/A manual will accompany the instrument to ensure consistent evaluation of elements reviewed.

Policy Updates:

- DORS Policy in accordance with Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) -TAC 10-02, pertaining to Prior Written Approval request for case services and administrative equipment and software purchases.
- DORS Policy regarding Comprehensive Transition Program, including definition and clarification of circumstances where DORS may support students or adults.

AWARE Sign – will allow just to capture signatures in conjunction with our AWARE Case Management System. – Accessible electronic signature - Anil and NFB will be happy to look at AWARE Sign for accessible issues

Director Report - Scott Dennis

Status of State Budget – at this time, the revenue is holding up and we have not been asked to take any budget cuts and are on track to maintenance of effort and match requirement. DORS is on track to meet both for FY20 and FY21.

DORS has experienced quite a bit of retirements and resignations during this past year. Since staff are working virtually, we have been able to shift cases across jurisdictions to help with high vacancies in a specific region. Some examples include – shifting a number of cases that were managed in Region 5 (Baltimore, Harford, Howard, and Cecil County) to Region 3, Baltimore City and moving cases from Region 6 (Washington DC suburbs) to Region 1 (Hagerstown and Cumberland).

Future Physical Footprint for DORS – Since DORS is now teleworking and does not need the amount of office space as in the past, we are looking to cut down to smaller offices. Staff will begin to share offices.

The Council of State Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) will hold 2 virtual conferences in 2021 and will consist of 5 days of training for directors and staff. The spring conference will be held April 9-16.

Respectfully Submitted
Sandy Bowser
MSRC Staff Support