

Maryland State Rehabilitation Council
Workforce & Technology Center
September 19, 2007

Members – Present

Larry Abramson
Robert Burns
Joyce Callahan
Charles Crawford
Niles Ellingson
Beth Lash
Carol Lewis
Kali Mallik
Mary Manzoni
Terri Massie-Burrell
Jerry Pantaleo
Michael Shaw
Al Sonnenstrahl
Josie Thomas
Terri Uttermohlen
Jennifer Whitcomb

Members Unable to Attend

Tom Barkley
John Brennan
Andrea Buonincontro
Tim Daly
Ross Edwards
Anne Rea

Support Staff – Present

Polly Huston
Donna Lippa

DORS Liaison – Present

Jean Jackson
Donna Lettow
Kathi Santora
Susan Schaffer

Guests - Present

Catherine Drake, DORS, Prince Frederick office
Derick Serra, DORS, Office for Blindness and Vision Services
Louis Smith, DORS, Office for Blindness and Vision Services
Carol Wheatley, DORS, RTS
Ronald Winter, DORS, Director, Office of Field Services

Introduction, Council Recognition and Approval of Minutes

Minutes of the 9 May 2007 meeting were approved as written. In the absence of Chairperson, Andrea Buonincontro, Vice-Chairperson, Kali Mallik welcomed guests and members.

The Council recognized Terri Massie-Burrell who has completed two full terms on the Maryland State Rehabilitation Council. Terri has served as both Vice Chair and Chair of the Council during her term and was very involved in national issues in the development of a national network of SRCs. Terri currently works with students with disabilities at Towson University, and links in with the VR field program. Terri has been a tremendous resource to DORS and the Maryland State Rehabilitation Council...

Mr. Burns announced that the Council would like to recognize Dr. Seamus Flynn, who has been a member of the SRC for the past three years. Dr. Flynn has been associated with the Workforce & Technology Center since its inception and recently retired from the University of Maryland Medical Systems. Mr. Burns stated that Dr. Flynn has serious

health concerns and not able to attend the meeting because of the treatment he is receiving.

The Council would also like to recognize Larry Abramson for his service as Chairperson of the Council for two years. Mr. Burns stated that RSA identified and recognized the Maryland SRC for its effectiveness and partnership, the shared leadership with DORS, philosophy brought to that Council, and the quality of people that we engage as members on the Council.

Mr. Burns stated that at each meeting, the Council recognizes DORS counselors for outstanding performance. At today's meeting, the Council recognizes Derick Serra, DORS counselor, Bel Air Office and Louis Smith, both from the Office for Blindness and Vision Services (OBVS). Derick Serra has successfully closed 34 cases, 170% of his goal. Derick serves as a transitioning counselor in OBVS as well as a business liaison. Derick has worked on a very intensive and valuable project for OBVS. In conjunction with Lou Smith, he reviewed all the general employment websites that the Division generally gives to consumers. Each site was reviewed for accessibility and tips for navigating the sites with screen readers were provided. Derick and Lou then went to each OBVS district to provide training on their findings.

DORS 2008 Budget – Impact and Implications (Robert Burns)

DORS over-the-target request of \$4.1 million –. State Board of Education approved as its #1 priority the DORS Waiting List Initiative for \$4.1 million; budget proposal will now go to the Department of Budget and Management and the Governor; Bob Burns distributed an open letter to our community partners on the status of this budget initiative.

Since 2001 Maryland's public vocational rehabilitation (VR) program has become grossly under-funded by the US Department of Education. Federal funding for Maryland's VR program has only increased by a total of 6.7% over the past 8 years; less than one (1%) percent annually. At the same time, the State of Nevada received a 54% increase in federal funding for its VR program; Wyoming a 44% increase and Arizona a 39% increase.

This past summer an aggressive restructuring plan for the Maryland VR program was implemented. A target was set to save 4.5 million dollars in the current year that began July 1, 2007 and to achieve these savings by June 30, 2008. Thirty-four positions have been abolished. This represents about 7% of our workforce. Of those 34 positions, 14 staff members were laid-off effective September 30, 2007. Twelve of the 14 layoffs were at the Workforce & Technology Center (WTC).

In addition, the following training programs have been closed at the WTC: (1) Assisted Living Unit (ALU), (2) Accounting program in Office Technology and (3) the Cosmetology training program. DORS will also eliminate a number of contractual positions. Computers and state vehicle will not be replaced this year. We have eliminated catering at WTC and bottled water dispensers for staff.

Update of Order of Selection/Waiting List – Effective July 1, 2007, all categories under the Division’s Order of Selection were closed. The Division continued to honor its commitment of resources to Individualized Plans for Employment (IPEs) that were approved prior to July 1, 2007. The full range of VR services could be provided to individuals who were in service status (approved IPE) prior to July 1, 2007. DORS counselors shall continue to accept referrals and process applications and may provide assessment services to establish eligibility and priority category in the Order of Selection.

The waiting list for services is currently approximately 4,700 individuals. In October 2007, we will begin to open for services category I (most significant) followed by individuals with significant disabilities.

Questions:

Will DORS fill any of the vacant counselor positions? Mr. Burns states that VR counselor positions and DDS Examiner positions are considered mission critical and were taken off the table for abolishment. All caseload carrying positions will be filled.

What % of the budget comes from ticket-to-work program? About 2 million dollars or 10% of the case service budget. All of this money goes into case services.

Do you anticipate having to close category I again once it is opened since a significant amount has been spent with everything closed? We are hoping to never close this category completely as we continue to roll cases off.

Council members had concerns regarding transitioning students who may be waiting to apply because of the temporary closing of all categories. Mr. Burns stated that he and Secretary Catherine Raggio will be part of a presentation at the “Transitioning Forum” Annual Conference , November 28-29, 2007 titled “Listening Post”. This may be a good time to get the word out to transitioning counselors.

Mr. Burns announced that DORS is aggressively pursuing the following funding initiatives:

- The DORS over-the-target request of \$4.1 million which would go directly into case services.
- Aggressively pursuing reallocation of federal money. RSA has a policy that States that do not meet the CPI (Consumer Price Index) are the first in line to get reallotment. Maryland is one of the first states in line to get reallotment.
- Positive trendline on Social Security reimbursement which all goes into case services.
- President’s Budget submission for 2008. Hoping that this budget is not accepted by Congress which level funds the national program.
- Aggressively pursuing other kinds of revenue streams from special populations. Will provide more information about these revenue streams at a later meeting.

SRC Strategic Federal and State Legislative Action Plan (SRC Executive Committee)

After much discussion, the Council developed the following action plan to address the VR funding deficits:

Federal Action Plan

- Letter to Edward Anthony, Acting RSA Commissioner, regarding concerns about funding resources for the VR program in Maryland in light of the monitoring plan that has been developed with DORS. Copy congressional delegation.
- Letter to the federal Office of Management and Budget to confirm that the VR funding formula is being applied correctly. Revisit Department of Education, vocational Rehabilitation State Grants spread sheet to see which states are in the same financial position and cc to SRC Chairs in those states. Copy congressional delegation. Staff will develop letter from the Council Chair and Vice Chair.
- Letter to Senators Mikulski and Cardin requesting an inquiry to the Government Accountability Office requesting a review of the formula for VR funding and the apparent inequity and disparity in funding – disproportionately impacts some states. Staff will develop letter from Council Chair and Vice Chair.

State Action Plan

- Contact Governor O'Malley and Secretary Raggio MDOD regarding the DORS Waiting List budget initiative. This initiative should be the number one priority of the Council. Staff will develop letter from the Council Chair.
- Every SRC member contacts the Governor, their state representatives [senator and delegate(s)] regarding the DORS Waiting List Initiative. Staff will provide a script and who to contact. Staff will develop letter for Council members to use and also contact list of email and street addresses of Maryland delegation. Members would cc the Chairperson of the Council in their letters for tracking purposes. Goal would be that each member send 20 letters. Will need to accomplish this by October 30th.
- SRC members will use their own professional networks and contacts to ask for support of the DORS Waiting List initiative.
- Council should acknowledge those who get involved in this action in order to build a network.

Committee Reports

Policy and State Plan Development Committee, Beth Lash

Beth Lash presented the following activities of the Policy and State Plan Development Committee:

DORS Policy changes:

- Independent Living Program – Financial Need Policy (sliding scale) applies to individuals in IL who receive SSI/SSSI. It already applies to IL consumers not on benefits.

- With the Independent Living Program, vehicle modifications will be considered for individuals in the independent living program only involving access to a personal vehicle as a passenger; an exception to provide modifications to enable driving requires the approved of the Office Director.
- Purchase of goods and services – DORS bases financial assistance for goods and services on the least-cost good/service that meets the rehabilitation needs of the individuals, with consideration of informed choice. Individuals may choose to pay the additional cost of a good or service exceeding the cost determined to meet their rehabilitation need.
- Consideration is now given to providing the service of vehicle modifications no more frequently than every seven years. Exceptions require the approval of the Director of DORS.
- Vehicle modifications will only be made to vehicles meeting safety standards once modified.

Public Relations and Quality Assurance Committee, Jerry Pantaleo

Jerry Pantaleo reported on the activities of the Public Relations and Quality Assurance Committee.

- The committee met today before the full Council meeting and welcomed Jennifer Whitcomb to the committee.
- MSRC 2007 Annual Report – Concern this year as to how to address both the RSA recommendations in the report and also how to deal with some of the negative aspects that the Division is currently facing. Would like to meet with the State Director to get his guidance. Would like to present a positive, optimistic report, but also a report that shows a realistic view of what is happening this year. Two important themes that should be focused on this year are the results of the RSA Review, which sets a blueprint on where we are going to go in the next couple of years, and to deal with the issue of resources and waiting list.

Membership Committee, Kali Mallik

Kali Mallik updated the Council on the activities of the Membership Committee:

- Subsequent to the Spring Council meeting, the Governor reappointed Joyce Callahan, Andrea Buonincontro, Anne Rea, Larry Abramson, and Kali Mallik. New appointments made by the Governor include Tim Daly, Carol Lewis, Jennifer Whitcomb, and Mary Manzoni.
- Today is the final SRC meeting for Terri Massie-Burrell who is completing her second 3-year term. We are very grateful for her participation and leadership and commitment to individuals with disabilities in Maryland.
- The Council will be requesting reappointment of the following members whose terms expire this month:

- Josie Thomas
 - Beth Lash
 - Mary Manzoni, (just recently appointed to complete an existing term)
 - Jennifer Whitcomb (just recently appointed to complete an existing term)
 - Michael Shaw
- Membership information on Erick Selzenow will be forwarded to the Governor's office for appointment. Mr. Selzenow is the new Executive Director of the Governor's Workforce Investment Board.

Resource and Program Planning Committee, Niles Ellingson

Niles Ellingson reported on the activities of the Resource and Program Planning Committee:

- Met on September 12, 2007 at the DORS Howard County Office. The committee discussed the primary duties of the committee and reviewed the attachment to the State Plan on Comprehensive System of Personnel Development. Melissa Pemberton, Staff Specialist, Human Resources, brought the committee up-to-date as to what was happening in that area. DORS is in the first year of a 5 year training grant. DORS is exploring the purchase of a Dell software package containing a program consisting of approximately 400 different staff training computerized programs which can be used both as an individual training module or with groups. The committee suggested that a demonstration of this system be provided at a future meeting.
- The committee began discussion about the public meetings which will be held in March 2008. Discussion took place about possible locations for the meetings. A suggestion was made to consider having one or two meetings for community rehabilitation programs. It was felt that sometimes the community rehabilitation programs do not get a chance to express their feelings or needs. The committee was able to see the operation at the DORS Howard County Office which is a one-stop consisting of about four different state divisions.

Employment/Career Development Committee, Robert Burns

Robert Burns stated that the Employment/Career Development committee will meet on October 24, 2007 at the State Highway Administration Building in Hanover, Maryland. The agenda for this meeting will be the (1) restructuring of the Workforce & Technology Center, and (2) dual customer philosophy and initiative that are customers with disabilities in businesses. A report on the streamlining and restructuring of the WTC will be an agenda item at the full council meeting in November, 2007.

Blindness and Vision Services Committee, Joyce Callahan

Joyce Callahan reported on the activities of the Blindness and Vision Services Committee.

- The committee reviewed the findings of the customer satisfaction survey report for OBVS was discussed and overall 85% satisfaction with the services from OBVS.

- Kathi Santora and Donna Lettow made a presentation about the DORS/OBVS website. They presented information and instruction on how to navigate different areas of the website using different kinds of accessible formats. Kathi Santora encouraged feedback from the committee regarding the website. She can be reached at 410-554-9435 or ksantora@dors.state.md.us.
- New OBVS office in Silver Spring at Easter Seals will open sometime in 2008. The Oxon Hill, Lanham and Wheaton OBVS staff will be moving there when it opens.
- The Maryland Blind Enterprise Program will be taking over the management of the cafeteria at the Workforce and Technology Center. Jim Papania will be the new manager.

Jennifer Whitcomb commented that the Council does not have a committee for deaf and hard of hearing services. Mr. Burns stated that the Council had no disability specific committees up until the creation of the new Office for Blindness and Vision Services at which time the Council created this sub-committee for that population. The Federal Rehab Act only permits specialized services, in terms of either a separate agency or separate division within an agency around blindness and vision services. Ms. Whitcomb requested that this be an issue that we revisit and consider. Mr. Burns suggested also that maybe one of the existing committees could be assigned to this focus area.

Director's Report (Robert Burns)

- RSA 107 Review – Indicated that Maryland had exemplary practices around transitioning youth, establishment and implementation of the Office for Blindness and Vision Services, evidence based supported employment in serving people with severe and persistent mental illness. Maryland is the national leader in employment of persons with severe and persistent mental illness.
- Governor's Interagency Transition Council for Youth with Disabilities – The Governor has issued an Executive Order establishing this Council. Cathy Raggio is the Chairperson and Bob Burns is the Co-Chairperson.

Adjournment

The MSRC meeting adjourned at 7:15 p.m. The next meeting of the Maryland State Rehabilitation Council will be Wednesday, November 14, 2007, 4:30 – 7:00 p.m., Room T-130, Workforce & Technology Center, Baltimore.

Respectfully submitted,
Donna M. Lippa, MSRC Staff Support