DEED / Vocational Rehabilitation Services

VRS Community Rehabilitation Program Advisory Committee

Session Notes from Friday, January 26, 2018 – 9:00 am – 2:00 pm at the VRS St Paul Fairview Office

# Session Notes:

**Committee Objective**

The purpose of the VRS Community Rehabilitation Program Advisory Committee is to provide strategic advice and consultation to DEED/VRS on topics and issues affecting the mutual provision of DEED/VRS and CRP/LUV services to Minnesotans with disabilities. Our efforts to understand issues and to work collaboratively will build and nurture the capacity of Minnesota’s rehabilitation community to advance the employment, independent living and community integration of Minnesotans with disabilities.

Specifically, the VRS Community Rehabilitation Program Advisory Committee will:

1. Represent the perspectives and interests of CRP/LUVs in advancing rehabilitation and employment issues while fostering dialogue and engagement on critical issues throughout the greater rehabilitation community
2. Promote innovative service practices to accelerate the adoption of best practices at a systems level and foster equitable access to quality services on a statewide basis
3. Provide strategic level advice and consultation to DEED/VRS on matters affecting CRP/LUVs
4. Identify key topics and issues affecting CRP/LUVs and DEED/VRS
5. Consider input from subject matter experts and strategic partners in issues affecting economic development, state demographics / population trends, and promising practices
6. Engage in active reflection, spirited discussion and strategic dialogue on critical topics affecting CRP/LUVs and DEED/VRS services to persons with disabilities in Minnesota
7. Provide a forum for the review and discussion of critical VRS and CRP/LUV service delivery topics including, but not limited to: current service delivery practices; new and emerging service needs; identifying best practices; and the consideration of statewide service needs and resources

**2018 Community Partner Members (*listed alphabetically)*:** Lena Balk, Heather Deutschlaender, Josh Howie, Kassia Janezich, Jolene Juhl, Lisa Parteh, Andrea Pearson, Julie Peterschick, Robert Reedy, Krista Stafsholt, Sarah Timmerman, Bobbi VanGrinsven,

**VRS Members:** Kim Babine, Jay Hancock, Jeri Werner, Mimi Schafer, Dee Torgerson

**Sponsor:** Kim Peck, VRS Director

**Co-leaders:** Chris McVey and Jan Thompson

**Facilitator**: Holly Johnson

**2018 Schedule:** Jan 26, Mar 23, Apr 27, May 18, Sep 28, Oct 26, and Dec 7

## January 26, 2018 Session Objectives:

1. Welcome and introduction of new advisory committee members
2. Review of the current 2017 VRS CRP Advisory Committee charter in preparation for 2018 charter development and adoption
3. Engage in advisory dialogue on the state of job coaching services
4. Provide a conduit for sharing relevant, important and timely updates and information for the benefit of vocational rehabilitation community and consumers
5. Develop key messages from the meeting to share with the VR community

**January 26, 2018 Attendees** (*listed**alphabetically*): Kim Babine, Lena Balk, Heather Deutschlaender, Jay Hancock, Josh Howie, Kassia Janezich, Jolene Juhl, Chris McVey, Lisa Parteh, Andrea Pearson, Kim Peck, Robert Reedy, Mimi Schafer, Krista Stafsholt, Jan Thompson, Sarah Timmerman, Dee Torgerson, Bobbi VanGrinsven, and Jeri Werner

**Not in attendance:** Julie Peterschick

**Facilitator**: Holly Johnson

**Agenda Topics:**

1. Welcome / Overview
2. Strategic Dialogue: Job Coaching Services in Minnesota
3. Charting Our Advisory Committee’s Course for 2018
4. Vocational Rehabilitation Community Updates
5. Wrap Up: Next Steps and Key Messages

Adjourn @ 1:45 pm

## Meeting Highlights:

* The Advisory Committee welcomed five new members: Kim Babine (VRS Extended Employment Director), Kassia Janezich (metro region), Robert Reedy (metro region), Krista Stafsholt (northern region) and Sarah Timmerman (southern region).
* The Advisory Committee discussed job coaching services in Minnesota. They identified some of the major challenges and generated possible approaches for increasing the standard of quality and capacity development to meet the increased demand for job coaching.

## Next Steps:

1. **Preparation of Key Messages for Distribution to CRP/LUV partners:** The facilitator will work with the Committee leaders to develop key messages from today’s meeting for distribution to the entire distribution list of CRP/LUV partners on the GovDelivery list within one week of the meeting. To verify/add your email to this list please contact Karla Eckhoff at Karla.Eckhoff@state.mn.us
2. **Document Session Notes:** The facilitator will document the complete session notes, including the Key Messages, for VRS Co-leadership review and approval for distribution to key audiences including the CRP Advisory Committee, VRS, and CRP/LUV partners.
3. **Next Meeting:** March 23rd at the VRS Fairview Workforce Center location.

# Welcome and Opening

The facilitator opened with a brief overview of the meeting objectives and agenda. Jan Thompson and Chris McVey welcomed five new advisory committee members:

* Kassia Janezich, Tasks Unlimited
* Robert Reedy, RISE
* Krista Stafsholt, Occupational Development Center
* Sarah Timmerman, Ability Building Center
* Kim Babine, VRS Extended Employment Director

# Strategic Dialogue: Job Coaching Services in Minnesota

VRS Director Kim Peck opened the conversation noting that major system transformation drivers including WIOA legislation such as Section 511 and Pre-ETS, along with other changes, are bringing a significant new infusion of adults and transition youth with multiple significant disabilities to seek VR services. As a VR community, this has brought an urgent need to explore strategies to increase support services that meet the increased demand for services. Part of the purpose of the strategic dialogue on job coaching is to help illuminate the current state of support services being provided in Minnesota, how well and consistently those services are being provided, and the satisfaction of the individuals and employers who are seeking and/or receiving the services.

Traditionally many staff do not receive much training in job coaching. With the ongoing system transformation toward competitive, integrated employment a new emphasis has stressed the importance of person centered philosophies and practices which in turn has led to enhanced training options such as Customized Employment and the level components: DISCOVERY, Job Development and Systematic instruction. Chris McVey shared that participating in the northern region CE training at Mountain Iron was an amazing experience. She was impressed with the methods used for the Systematic instruction component that focused on learning about the job first, taking the job tasks apart to elemental pieces as the job coach, and then using that learning to provide work site support including job coaching. For individuals with intellectual disabilities, it’s about taking it to a level they can understand and absorb. Students in the training reported they felt empowered to learn by the hands-on approach.

Jolene Juhl agreed that the Systematic Instruction was an amazing experience. She watched as the trainers brought in student learners to learn a 30-step task within a 10-minute training with very few prompts. Jolene said it was incredible to watch how they break it down with a non-verbal approach. Krista Stafsholt, who also participated in the training, said that the student learners seemed to really appreciate being able to try things and learn by trial and error with gentle modification and without feeling ‘judged’. After experiencing the Systematic Instruction training, Chris, Krista, and Jolene all expressed their belief that most staff could benefit from systematic instruction as part of professional development.

Despite a nationwide shortage of placement and job coaching professionals, it is difficult to get fully trained job coaches. Even with WINTAC, Y-TAC funds and a grant from ODC offering scholarships for free and full training participation for interested CRP/LUVs, 13 CRP staff who originally expressed interest which led to 10 who began the training for certification and now two months later that number has dropped again to only three who are still on track for certification. With the turnover of staff, there is even greater challenge to train and retain job coaches for individuals who are moving from center based into community-based employment.

Kim stated that in keeping with their value proposition, VRS strives to be a step ahead scanning the horizon to ensure we understand the challenges providers are encountering, and to be responsive and support resolutions for the benefit of both providers and the individuals VRS is responsible for serving. Kim asked providers for their perspectives on the willingness and capacity of employers to provide natural supports. She talked about the need to move from a ‘special services for special individuals’ mindset to helping employers/communities think more broadly about the steps to assist individuals who may have more unique needs then they are used to seeing.

Krista noted that she is seeing a broad range of approaches and wide variation in the perceived job duties for job coaching. On the more passive side, there are job coaches who view their job as “I’m here to make sure something ‘bad’ doesn’t happen to the individual and the employer and that’s the extent of it” while more active job coaches see themselves as much more involved in developing person centered supports.

Kim asked the advisory what employers are looking for when it comes to job coaching services. Lisa Parteh responded that it depends on the employer. On one end, there are employers who prefer to handle everything themselves, and on the other end, there are employers who want a job coach 100% there whenever the individual is on site.

The committee discussed the need to differentiate among the levels of job coaching service quality to retain and reward higher-level job coaches. The Systematic Instruction training piece can be a differentiator. Advisory members believe that staff with the training generally have greater expectations, skills and pride in their work, and that these factors may improve staff retention. Jay Hancock added that the job coach can play a valuable role in transitioning the individual and the employer into a successful situation. They can also help raise the awareness and implementation of natural supports.

Josh Howie said job coaching has traditionally been paid by waivers and that provides an inadequate level of compensation. He shared his concern that training alone will not increase job coach retention unless we can also increase the compensation that job coaches are earning for the work. Providers simply cannot compete with employers like Target and Kwik Trip who pay higher hourly wages than CRPs/LUVs can afford with the current reimbursement rates.

Kim thanked the advisory committee for highlighting some of the major challenges. She reminded the committee that at any given time VRS is serving approximately 12,000 people. It is vital for VRS to understand what’s occurring and what the challenges are, so we can do our best to help ensure that VR clients have access to the services they need throughout the state.

Robert Reedy added that part of the job coaching challenge is a capacity issue. He shared that as a provider, they don’t always have staff available for job coaching because staff also have other responsibilities. Because the margin is so thin, the business model can’t support ‘leaving capacity on the table’ so when a request comes in with a short lead time, it’s not always possible to find the capacity e.g. 20 hours next week. Bobbi Van Grinsven agreed and added they also experience challenges with having to change who the job coach is because of staff availability/utilization. Other members agreed that it is challenging to have staff fully dedicated to job coaching given the fluctuations in timing and demand.

Sarah Timmerman noted that while they used to have dedicated job coaches, those staff were ultimately absorbed into the other programs. Today they try to pull from other programs when/as the needs arise because of the difficulty in having dedicated staff when you can’t forecast the need and budget.

In response to the advisory dialogue on job coaching capacity challenges, Kim asked the committee if it would it make sense for VRS to expand internal placement coordinator capacity to take on job coaching to meet the needs in situations where there were no local provider services available. Sarah said that the key will be for VRS to continue to first reach out for available providers for ongoing supports as the first step and then to tap into VRS staff to fill client needs if no immediate capacity is available from providers. The advisory committee agreed this approach would be consistent with a person-centered approach to service.

Kim Babine asked the committee about their perspectives on Extended Employment and job coaching. Lisa shared that their case managers also fulfill the job coaching twice a month required by EE. She added that individuals who need job coaching more than twice a month are served by two staff who flex and fill job coaching needs. Like earlier provider observations, these two staff are also cross trained in other programs, so they can be utilized across multiple services. Bobbi added that EE is helpful for situations where minimal supports are needed. It’s less helpful when the individual wants new employment or needs more intensive job coaching than the two visits per month.

Robert added that in situations where someone misses a meeting, a provider can spend a lot of time rescheduling and working with the employer to help individuals keep their jobs. Sometimes they can’t get the second meeting and then they don’t get paid. Robert suggested there may need to be additional service options for individuals in crisis. Kim acknowledged the complexity of coaching needs and noted that as a relatively small program, VRS can only expand EE services with additional resources. She noted that historically when more funds have been available there is resistance from current EE providers to expanding the program to new providers. Rather, most current providers voicing preference ask VRS to apply any additional funds to existing overproduction.

Some of the biggest challenges related to job coaching services include:

* **Wide range of job coaching mindsets and skillsets:** Job coaches vary widely in terms of the perceptions and skill levels they bring to the work ranging from the more passive ‘I’m here to observe and make sure nothing bad happens to the individual or the employer’ to ‘I’m actively engaged in supporting job success for the individual and employer, and I have many skills and approaches I can use depending on the individual situation’. Training deficits also plays a big role in this challenge.
* **Service reimbursement and staffing:** Low reimbursement rates make it difficult to hire and retain qualified staff for job coaching.
* **Unpredictability and inability to budget and staff:** The unpredictability of job coaching services demand and non-traditional work hours makes dedicated staffing and budget/business planning difficult.
* **Training overload and expenses:** While there was considerable support for a ‘Job Coaching 101’ equivalent training, several advisory members noted that the training docket for staff is already significant in terms of both time and expense.

Ideas discussed to increase the quality and availability of job coaching services in Minnesota include:

* **Advanced training options:** We see the opportunity to increase our effectiveness in understanding and working with more complex individuals through specialized training options such as Customized Employment’s component on Systematic Instruction. Can we develop the equivalent of a ‘Placement 101’ for advanced job coaching skills?
* **Flexible, cross-trained staff:** Cross training staff in other programs so an individual can be utilized across multiple services within a CRP/LUV. Some providers have moved from the ‘specialist model’ to more of a generalist model where staff do everything from placement to job coaching. This has helped increase understanding of what supports are needed and eliminated many of the problems that occur with handoffs. Staff still work as a team when they run into capacity peaks for any one individual.
* **VRS staff as a stopgap solution when there is no CRP job coaching capacity available:** Explore the possibility of developing some VRS job coaching capacity to fill person-centered needs after first reaching out to providers for ongoing supports and finding no provider capacity available to serve them.
* **Other capacity extension ideas:** The advisory talked about the potential of pools of students and/or retirees that could be tapped to help ‘educate’ employers and/or provide job coaching.
* **Higher wages:** Compensation must be more competitive to attract and retain the staffing quality and quantity we need to provide job coaching services. There is an interagency effort working on recommendations to address the reimbursement levels. Advisory members voiced strong support for any efforts that help ‘move money to follow services’ and for sufficient funds to support the new DHS employment services as well as funding to fulfill WIOA mandates.
* **Increasing employers’ understanding and use of natural supports:** There are employers who do this extremely well and we want to find ways to encourage more employers to use natural supports to help attract and retain talent to their organizations. Typically, the businesses who are the most difficult to work with have already had a ‘bad experience’. Some employers don’t want job coaches because they perceive it as training two people instead of one. This further highlights the need to help employers understand and provide natural supports.

# Vocational Rehabilitation Community Topics

## VRS Updates:

### Kim Peck, VRS State Director

* The federal government has passed a continuing resolution which means VR continues to receive funding per the Rehabilitation Act.
* RSA recently provided VRS with information on what can be included in the 15% set aside for Pre-ETS. As part of the new information, the federal funder has said that third-party assessment services will not be eligible for inclusion in the 15% set aside requirement for Pre-ETS expenditures. VRS is currently analyzing the implications of this new information for assessment services being authorized and will provide updates to the VR community via webinar or similar tool.
* VRS will continue to monitor the evolving technical assistance on WIOA and to provide updates on any impacts for the VR community via webinar or similar tool. VRS is developing a plan to ensure Minnesota’s VR program meets the 15% set aside requirement per the new technical guidance.

### Kim Babine, VRS Extended Employment (EE) Director

* VRS will soon be proposing changes to the state rules that govern the Extended Employment (EE) Program. The rule is being revised to reflect principles such as Minnesota’s commitment to person-centered practices, informed choice, and Minnesota’s Employment First policy—especially its focus on competitive, integrated employment. The revision will also align the program with new practices in the broader disability services system driven by the federal Home and Community Based Services rule, the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, and stepped up enforcement of the Olmstead decision.
* One major policy change is to prioritize funding to provide services for individuals in competitive, integrated employment. This proposed change would cap funding for non-competitive employment and phase out funding for center-based (workshop) employment. Additionally, the proposed rule changes clarify that for a job to be truly competitive and integrated, the employer cannot be an individual’s service provider. Other proposed changes aim to make operating the program as simple as possible by streamlining processes and using plain language, while providing the highest quality services.
* The EE rule revision process began almost 4 years ago. It included 18 months of work by an advisory committee and eight public forums for stakeholders to engage in the development of the proposed changes. VRS expects the proposed rule revision will be published in late March or early April, followed by a 30-day public comment period to gather additional input from individuals, community rehabilitation providers, advocacy organizations for individuals with disabilities, and others. After the public comment period, DEED expects to adopt the revised rule so that it would take effect in the next state fiscal year beginning July 1, 2019.
* On January 9, 2018, the EE staff convened current EE providers via Webinar to share an overview of rule changes that DEED will likely propose in the formal rule revision process and give providers an opportunity for input. If you have questions about the Extended Employment Program or the rule revision process, contact Kim Babine, Amanda Jensen-Stahl or Lonie Goldsberry.

## CRP Updates:

### Bobbi VanGrinsven, Lifetrack Resources

Curtis Knutson has been named interim CEO at LifeTrack Resources replacing President and CEO Trixie Golberg who has transitioned to a board support role after 11 years of service.

### Heather Deuschlaender, ProAct

In January, ProAct expanded to another location. ProAct has acquired New Options services in Shakopee. The location will be under the name New Options ProAct. ProAct recently celebrated their seventh “Connect 700” placement. They are hoping to hire two more Employment Specialists and to hire a replacement for a talented job coach who just left for another position after completing systematic instruction.

### Lisa Parteh, Functional Industries, Inc

After expanding into the Blaine/Anoka area last year, Functional Industries will be expanding into the Onamia/Princeton/Mille Lacs area this year. They have hired a specialist in Princeton. They recently started a peer specialist program in the IPS program to help keep individuals engaged. Functional is ending its center-based Extended Employment program which means less CARF certification going forward.

### Kassia Janezich, Tasks Unlimited

Tasks Unlimited has hired two new placement specialists and may be adding a third by year end. While they primarily provide services in Hennepin County, they have reached out to the greater metro area to provide access for those who need their services.

### Krista Stafsholt, Occupational Development Center (ODC)

ODC is reviewing DHS standards company wide. While this entails significant changes across the company, I am most familiar with the effects for consumers in Buhl where 60-80% of individuals are currently earning minimum wage each day. We are working on job skills with a few remaining individuals who are not able to make the transition from subminimum wage work. ODC has made significant progress in the transition from center based to more competitive, integrated employment. Several years ago, we served 60 people at our onsite work facility and about 20 in the community. Today services have transitioned to 30 people in center-based programs and 36 people in community-based employment. One of the biggest issues continues to be transportation. Some group homes are choosing not to subsidize transportation or staffing for part time employment which can create huge barriers to employment for their residents.

# VRS CRP Advisory Committee – Meeting On January 26, 2018

Key Messages for the Greater Vocational Rehabilitation Community

*Note: Key Messages are first distributed via .govdelivery approximately one week after the meeting, then posted on the DEED website and then included at the end of the official full session notes.*

* The CRP Advisory Committee welcomed the following new members (listed in alphabetical order):
	+ Kassia Janezich, Tasks Unlimited
	+ Robert Reedy, RISE
	+ Krista Stafsholt, Occupational Development Center
	+ Sarah Timmerman, Ability Building Center
	+ Kim Babine, VRS Extended Employment Director
	+ Click here for a link to the full committee membership list: <https://mn.gov/deed/job-seekers/disabilities/councils/crp-advisory.jsp>
* RSA recently informed VRS that third-party assessment services will not be eligible for inclusion in the 15% set aside requirement for Pre-ETS expenditures. VRS is currently analyzing the implications of this new information for assessment services being authorized and will provide updates to the VR community via webinar or similar tool.
* The EE Rule Revision is in the process of a complete rewrite focused on alignment with Minnesota’s Olmstead Plan, the requirements of WIOA, Section 511 and the changes that will exist within the Home and Community Based Services (HCBS). Another major objective of the rewrite is to increase the clarity and ease in understanding the rule and its processes. VRS anticipates the formal rule revision process and public comment will occur in March and April, with formal adoption of the rule in May or June 2018.
* The advisory discussed job coaching services in Minnesota:
	+ With a new infusion of individuals with multiple, significant disabilities that are seeking VR services because of WIOA, Section 511 and Pre-ETS, VR field staff are predicting, and already seeing in some places, an insufficient level of ongoing supports to meet the needs of the more challenging populations we are serving.
	+ The committee discussed the availability of job coaching services—both the quality of services being provided, and the challenges associated with retaining staff to do this work.
	+ Some of the biggest challenges related to job coaching services include:
		- **Wide range of job coaching mindsets and skillsets:** Job coaches vary widely in terms of the perceptions and skill levels they bring to the work ranging from the more passive ‘I’m here to observe and make sure nothing bad happens to the individual or the employer’ to ‘I’m actively engaged in supporting job success for the individual and employer, and I have many skills and approaches I can use depending on the individual situation’. Training deficits also plays a big role in this challenge.
		- **Service reimbursement and staffing:** Low reimbursement rates make it difficult to hire and retain qualified staff for job coaching.
		- **Unpredictability and inability to budget and staff:** The unpredictability of job coaching services demand and non-traditional work hours makes dedicated staffing and budget/business planning difficult.
	+ Some of the ideas discussed to increase the quality and availability of job coaching services in Minnesota include:
		- **Advanced training options:** We see the opportunity to increase our effectiveness in understanding and working with more complex individuals through specialized training options such as Customized Employment’s component on Systematic Instruction. Can we develop the equivalent of a ‘Placement 101’ for advanced job coaching skills?
		- **Flexible, cross-trained staff:** Cross training staff in other programs so an individual can be utilized across multiple services within a CRP/LUV.
		- **VRS staff as a stopgap solution when there is no CRP job coaching capacity available:** Explore the possibility of developing some VRS job coaching capacity to fill person-centered needs after first reaching out to providers for ongoing supports and finding no provider capacity available to serve them.
		- **Higher wages:** Compensation must be more competitive to attract and retain the staffing quality and quantity we need to provide job coaching services. There is an interagency effort working on recommendations to address the reimbursement levels.
		- **Increasing employers’ understanding and use of natural supports:** There are employers who do this extremely well and we want to find ways to encourage more employers to use natural supports to help attract and retain talent to their organizations.