DEED / Vocational Rehabilitation Services

VRS Community Rehabilitation Program Advisory Committee

Friday, April 26, 2019 – 9:00 am – 2:30 pm

VRS St Paul Fairview Office

# VRS CRP Advisory Committee – Meeting on April 26, 2019

Key Messages for the Greater Vocational Rehabilitation Community:

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

**Strategic Topic: Understanding and Adapting to the Changing VR Landscape**

* Director Larry Vrooman provided a data-informed overview of the changing vocational rehabilitation services landscape since 2012. The overview included a review of VR’s federal regulatory agency, Rehabilitation Services Administration’s (RSA), program performance indicators, as well as Minnesota’s VR program data trends.
* The six-year data trend period shows the progression leading up to and following the enactment (2014) and preliminary implementation regulations (mid-2016) of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). WIOA, along with other major judicial and legislative forces such as the Olmstead Decision and Minnesota’s Employment First policy, are driving significant transformation throughout the entire disability services system.
* Larry also explained that information shared at the recent national council of VR programs (CSAVR), shows a record number of state agencies (41of 78) on some level of Order of Selection, 13 state agencies with only 1 open category and 9 state agencies with no open categories, due to insufficient funding to address a system that has become increasingly overburdened by the transformation forces.
* The program data trends clearly illustrate and affirm the significant increase in the complexity in the disability types of the people VR is serving in Category One, the remaining open service category. The six-year trend shows a 90% increase in the percentage of total served with a primary disability of Intellectual Disability and a 100% increase in the percentage served with a primary disability of Autism.
* Other notable data trends:
	+ The higher number and complexity level of individuals seeking services in the post WIOA landscape – without corresponding funding appropriations to address - is causing a decrease in the number of individuals VRS can serve with the limited resources.
	+ The trends also show that serving fewer individuals with higher needs seem to be positively correlated with increased time and expense in securing placements and a reduction in hires.
	+ Job Placement for the more complex caseload is consuming a higher percentage of total annual expenditures and a reduction in training services.
	+ Program Year 2015 was the first year where the number of youth clients was greater than the number of adult clients served. This trend has continued to grow since 2015 in part due to the WIOA budget requirement for 15% mandated for Pre-Employment Transition Services.
	+ VRS’s rehabilitation rate has declined from 57% in 2012 to 46% percent in 2018.
* As part of the changing VR landscape analysis, the advisory committee discussed the crucial connections and interdependencies that must be in place across Minnesota’s network of agencies, counties and schools. Interagency cooperation and coordination between DEED/VRS and SSB agencies and DHS/DDS, is especially critical for Minnesota to more fully realize the goal of access to competitive, integrated employment for individuals with disabilities who want to work.
* Greater alignment of interagency efforts will provide better service to Minnesotans with disabilities and assist the broad array of disability employment services providers who work with multiple agencies on behalf of their clients.
* The CRP Advisory Committee discussed the current, fragile state of the VR system and noted the system pressures that will require greater collaboration and resources in order to expand access and outcomes. With its unique history and expertise, VRS is perhaps best prepared to provide technical assistance to other agencies in their work to assist individuals in their programs to secure competitive, integrated employment.
* The Committee also highlighted the urgency in addressing the system challenges while Minnesota is still operating within the extended positive employment/low unemployment environment, rather than during the next recession/economic downturn when competition for resources tends to be intensified.
* VRS Director of Strategic Initiatives, Chris McVey, and VRS Rehabilitation Program Specialist, Amanda Jensen Stahl, provided an overview of a national presentation by the Social Security Administration (SSA) on the Ticket to Work (TTW) program.
* The TTW presentation included speakers from multiple states who shared their experiences securing more income for their programs and helping CRPs in cultivating their own capacity to increase income. Florida, Maryland, and Virginia are all accessing multiple cost reimbursements from the TTW Program. Amanda noted that the TTW program is compatible with other funding services including Extended Employment (EE).
* VRS gathered advisory committee perspectives on opportunities to work together and with the Social Security Administration (SSA) to identify additional ways to maximize program income and reimbursement from Social Security and Ticket to Work (TTW).
* The advisory committee also discussed the various pros and cons of the TTW program based on their own experiences. Several CRP members noted that they have discontinued TTW in their organizations due to intensive staff time demands for background checks, program administration, etc. that did not generate enough return for the investment.
* Next, the Committee discussed ways Minnesota might apply what other states are doing to draw additional SSA monies based on placements of people who are already being served by VRS and community partners as another potential strategy to increase program income and help keep Minnesota’s VR program open.
* Over the next few months, VRS will be gathering additional information from SSA Technical Assistance, as well as VR program staff in other states, to further explore opportunities for greater program income from SSA and the Ticket to Work program.
	+ If you have Ticket to Work ideas or experiences to share that might benefit Minnesota’s capacity to provide competitive, integrated employment please contact: Amanda Jensen Stahl at: 651-259-7356 or Chris McVey at 651-259-7357.

*End of Key Messages*