

VRS Community Partners Committee (CPC)

Key Messages

Meeting Date: February 15, 2023

What Ramping Up in 2023 So Far

- **Update on Minnesota's Subminimum Wage Taskforce** – Chris McVey
 - VRS Deputy Director of Disability Services and CPC Co-leader Chris McVey provided an update on Minnesota's Subminimum Wage Taskforce. Historically, Minnesota has had one of the highest rates of subminimum wage jobs for people with disabilities. Elimination of subminimum wage jobs has been the topic of intense legislative policy debate at the federal level. To prepare for a potential federal mandate to eliminate subminimum wages, Minnesota commissioned a state taskforce of critical stakeholders to develop recommendations for the legislature on how a smooth transition might occur.
 - As a taskforce member, Chris provided a high-level summary of the recommendations which include a phased, rather than abrupt, transition occurring over several months with a complete phasing out by August 2025. The taskforce is also recommending strengthening day services, increasing benefits planning and training, endorsement of PCA support to provide transportation services, and more support for case management and job coaching.
 - The taskforce recommendations address collaboration, as well as specific actions, for the primary agencies involved in subminimum wage services: the Departments of Human Services (DHS), Employment and Economic Development (DEED) and Education (MDE).
 - The Subminimum Wage Taskforce's report was presented to the legislature on February 15. A list of taskforce members and other taskforce information can be found at: <https://mn.gov/dhs/partners-and-providers/news-initiatives-reports-workgroups/long-term-services-and-supports/task-force-on-eliminating-subminimum-wages/>
- **E1MN** – Amanda Jensen Stahl
 - E1MN was officially launched through an interagency partnership among DHS, DEED and MDE on July 2021. VRS Manager of Interagency Partnerships and Business Engagement Amanda Jensen Stahl, provided a few updates on the ongoing implementation work.
 - DHS and DEED hosted the first joint employment liaisons meeting that focused on connecting staff in key roles supporting E1MN at the county level around the state. With limited state level staff, local collaborations are critical for achieving successful teaming with E1MN participants seeking competitive integrated employment. At the joint meeting, county and VRS liaisons had opportunities to meet face to face, identify specific opportunities, and develop local plans to strengthen services.
 - Amanda shared that work is underway building the E1MN curriculum and communication plan to help with multiple training needs including onboarding and refresher options for those supporting people on waivers. Training is being designed to increase understanding of E1MN overall as well as provide more in-depth curriculum by role.

- Use this link for a list of local liaisons and other information about E1MN:
<https://disabilityhubmn.org/for-professionals/work/supporting-people-on-waivers/>
- **Introduction to the new VRS GoMN! Grant** – Chris McVey and Amanda Jensen Stahl
 - Last fall VRS was awarded one of Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA), Disability Innovation Funds (DIF) grants. The grants are open to application by state VR programs and funded by unused state allocations.
 - VRS was awarded a 5-Year, \$13 million grant, for a project called GoMN! focused on piloting ways to better serve those currently on, or at risk of earning subminimum wages. The grant will serve both adults and transition youth/students.
 - The grant criteria required identification and partnership with an industry. With GoMN!, VRS is partnering with the State of Minnesota’s Transportation Center for Excellence to explore and expand competitive integrated employment for people with disabilities in a wide range of transportation modes, businesses and roles over the course of the grant.
 - Year One (2023) of the grant which will be entirely focused on planning and design of demonstration project pilots anticipated to run in Years Two through Five with a goal of supporting 1,200 individuals over the course of the grant period. Pilot locations will be selected based on multiple factors including a mixture of geographic locations/regions.
 - The GoMN! Project team is partnering with the University of Massachusetts Boston Institute for Community Inclusion (ICI) who will provide training and Technical Assistance on ‘Progressive Employment’ a dual customer approach which is grounded in the premise that ‘everybody is ready for something’ as it relates to employment.
 - In its early stages, GoMN! Grant project planning will continue through 2023 with more updates along the way.
- **Community Partner Updates** – Community Partner representatives
 - The urgent staffing crisis continues to impact both VRS and community partners capacity to provide services - particularly those requiring long term supports such as job coaching. Community Partners cited long waiting lists in some locations and for some services.
 - Partners shared staff and/or services additions in customized employment, benefits planning, and Pre-ETS.
 - Partners are pursuing and being awarded grants to assist in areas including transportation as well as employment exploration for individuals served by 14c subminimum wages.
 - Strategic planning efforts are looking at how to sustain wage increases given to attract and retain talent as well as address challenges with subminimum wages and increased waiver services.

Advisory Input: Community Partner Access to Workforce One (WF1)

- VRS Community Partnership Program Specialists Jess Outhwaite and Janeen Oien, together with Director of Community Partnerships and CPC Co-leader Kim Babine, provided an overview of the Workforce One (WF1) Partner Access Project including the high-level plan for 2023 implementation.

- In 2023, VRS staff and VRS Community Partners will transition to using VRS’s case management system - Workforce One (WF1) - to transmit documents with confidential data that would otherwise be transmitted via email. VRS Community Partners will be assigned limited access to Workforce One. The transition to using WF1 is referred to as the “WF1 Partner Access Project.”
- The WF1 Partner Access Project is necessary to protect the confidential data of the individuals we serve. Access will also increase privacy and security on other regular email correspondence. Jess and Janeen shared an overview of the information to be shared within WF1, affected parties, and business process changes.
- VRS Offices and Community Partners will be “onboarded” in five groups over the course of 2023. The rollout schedule detailing which VRS offices and Community Partners will be onboarded in which month is still being finalized. VRS field offices and affected Community Partners will be notified via email when it is time for their region to be trained and gain Partner Access to WF1.
- Training and support will be provided to both VRS staff and Community Partner staff prior to, and throughout, onboarding. If a Community Partner serves multiple VRS field offices, they can expect to be trained once the first office they serve is impacted.
- WF1 Community Partner Access information will be communicated via email to VRS Staff and Community Partners soon. Feel free to contact any of the members of the WF1 Partner Access team (Laura.Cheney@state.mn.us, Janeen.Oien@state.mn.us, Jessica.Outhwaite@state.mn.us) or any of the Community Partnership Program Specialists for information.

Moving Beyond Reactive to Proactive Service Leadership

- VRS State Director and Committee Sponsor Dee Torgerson expressed her gratitude to the CPC for their sustained collaboration over the recent years of extended, intensive change starting with the transformational forces of the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) in 2014 which included the prominent inclusion of services for transition youth. WIOA changes were followed by other major changes including hiring freezes which lifted in 2019 and closed service categories which reopened in 2020. Then beginning early 2020, we faced a tidal wave of tremendous difficulties and complexities associated with the first global pandemic in our lifetime.
- While challenges persist, there are growing signs that progress is being made with sustained focus. For example, thanks to huge collaborative efforts, VRS Program Year 2023 was the first time Minnesota met their Pre-ETS 15% federal funding set aside goal.
- As we keep leading forward into 2023, Dee expressed hope and excitement for moving beyond the reactive and taking on a more proactive leadership role together with Minnesota’s community partner network and VRS staff and teams across the state to make positive employment and community a reality for more people with disabilities.

Next meeting

Next meeting of the CPC is on Wednesday, March 15, 2023.

For More Information

For more information on the CPC, please go to the [CPC page on VRS’s website](#).

2022-2023 VRS Community Partners Committee Members *In alphabetical order:*

- Anisa Ali, Lead the Way MN / Metro Region
- Kim Babine, VRS Director of Community Partnerships – Committee Co-Leader
- Michelle Basham, VRS Deputy Director of Service Operations and Partnerships – Co-Sponsor
- Dana Eisfeld, Kaposia, Inc. / Metro Region
- Vanessa Gallagher, Tran\$Em / North Region
- Jennifer Germain, VRS Rehabilitation Area Manager / Metro Region
- Melissa Grover, KCQ / South Region
- Jay Hancock, VRS Regional Director Representative - South Region
- Kassia Janezich, Tasks Unlimited / Metro Region
- Amanda Jensen-Stahl, VRS Manager of Interagency Partnerships and Business Engagement – Committee Co-Leader
- Denise Johnson, PHASE Industries / North Region
- Randa Lundmark, VRS Rehabilitation Area Manager / North Region
- Chris McVey, VRS Deputy Director of Disability Employment Services – Co-Sponsor / Co-Leader
- Julie Peterschick, Productive Alternatives / North Region
- Robert Reedy, RISE / Metro Region
- Alanna Rice, Leading Prospects / Metro Region
- Karla Tauer, VRS Rehabilitation Area Manager / South Region
- Sarah Timmerman, Ability Building Center / South Region
- Dee Torgerson, VRS State Director – Committee Co-Sponsor
- Sheila Ward, WCI / South Region

Facilitator: Holly Johnson, Lanterna Consulting Inc.