

Rehabilitation Council of Texas (RCT) February 3-4, 2022 Zoom Virtual Meeting

Council Members Present:

Michael A. Ebbeler Jr., Chair, Houston
Lisa Cowart, Vice Chair, Sour Lake
Mark Baird, San Angelo
Glenda Born, Austin
Amanda Bowdoin, Forney
Jennifer Clouse, Temple
Michele Dobbins, LaPorte
Cheryl A Fuller, Austin
Lindsey Geeslin, Lorena
Gennadiy Goldenshteyn, Dallas
Bobbie Hodges, Fort Worth
Elizabeth Kendell, San Antonio
Lisa Maciejewski-West, Horseshoe Bay
April Pollreisz, Amarillo
Joe Powell, Irving
April Pollreisz, Amarillo
Emily Robinson, Pflugerville
Rodrick Robinson, McKinney
Karen Stanfill, Houston
Abdi Warsame, Wylie
Dr. James Williams, Leander

Council Members Absent: None

TWC Employees Attendance:

Chairman Bryan Daniel, Commissioner Julian Alvarez III,
Commissioner Aaron Demerson, William Belz, Matt Berend,
Kimberly Berry, Christina Bryant, Shelly Caillouet, Rae
Champagne, Kandace Decker, April Garcia, Lisa Godwin, Cindy
Geisman, Jenna Hall, Betsy Hawkins, Esperanza Hernandez,
Tasheara Jennings Gobert, Dennis Kutach, Summer Kutach,

Laura LaCour, Tony Lawrence, Christy Lerche, Anna Lee, Susan Lindsey, Tammy Martin, Scott McCune, Cassandra Medrano, Molly Meyer, Geoffrey Miller, Brian Owens, Melinda Paninski, Claudia Peden, Elsa Y. Perez, Daniel Prado, Andrew Ramirez, Glenda Rodriguez, Audra Ressel, Laura Rook, Belinda Salazar, Aissa Salazar, Jonas Schwartz, Chris Speckhard, Laike Todd, Les Trobman, Jason Vaden, Rikka Weintraub, Sue-Ellen Woodlief, Diane Yoder

Public Attendance: 58

Welcome

- The meeting was called to order at 9:00 a.m. by Michael A. Ebbeler, Jr., Chair.

Chairman Bryan Daniel, TWC Chair and Commissioner Representing Public

- Addressed the council.

Commissioner Aaron Demerson, Commissioner Representing Employers

- Addressed the council.

VR Division Report and Performance Update Cheryl A. Fuller, TWC VR Division Director and Geoffrey Miller, Manager of VR Program Reporting and Analysis

- General Updates
 - TWC VR Jan 1 has implemented a hybrid operations plan.
 - Aira available free to all TWC VR offices, CCRC, and TWC Main Campus.
 - Implementation of RSA 107 Monitoring Report, Corrective Action Plan
 - 87th Texas Legislature, Implementation Update

- SB 1, Article VII, TWC, Rider 48 – report on apprenticeship and internship opportunities for people with disabilities
- SB 50, relating to a competitive and integrated employment initiative for certain Medicaid recipients
- Draft Combined State Plan Goals, Update on Success Measures
 - Six Goal Areas Geoffrey Miller provided a report and tables on each of the goals.
 - Improve provider recruitment, retention, and support. Table: Statewide Service Provider Activity Rates. Success will be measured by:
 - An increase (accounting for seasonality) in the percentage of active VR service providers and total number of available providers:
 - statewide:
 - by integrated service area (VR region): and
 - by RSA service type category.
 - Streamline VR policy, processes, and tools to facilitate timely service delivery. Table: State wide Median Days from Initial Contact to Participation and Statewide Participant Creation Rate. Success will be measured by:
 - a decrease (accounting for seasonality) in median time from initial contact to participant status in the VR program; and
 - an increase (accounting for seasonality) in the percentage of those determined eligible who move into an individualized plan for employment (IPE).
 - Recruit and retain VR Staff. Success will be measured by
 - a decrease in annual turnover rate
 - an annual increase in the proportion of Qualified VR Counselors (QVRC).
 - Improve and develop additional user-friendly resources to maximize customer choice. Success will be measured by
 - an increase in the proportion of SSI or SSDI customers who receive benefits counseling or

counseling on work incentives and an increase in the percentage of customer's indicating they agree (that is, responding "yes") that they have input in choosing service providers in the quarterly customer satisfaction survey (Westat).

- Improve VR staff knowledge and system capacity to enhance service delivery to customers. Success will be measured by
 - an increase in the percentage of customer's indicating they agree (that is, responding "yes") that VR staff provides the guidance the customer needs in the quarterly customer satisfaction survey (Westat).
 - an increase in the percentage of customer's indicating they agree (that is, responding "yes") that the counselor maintains communication with them regarding the process of their case in the quarterly customer satisfaction survey (Westat).
 - an increase (accounting for seasonality) in VR engagement rate (that is, arranged, provided, or purchased VR/Pre-ETS/CCRC services; counseling and guidance; started or amended plan; employment (90-day clock); successful closure; or enrollment in education/training).
- Increase and enhance partnerships with employers to 1) better understand employer needs when hiring people with disabilities and working with VR, and 2) build awareness about the benefits of hiring people with disabilities to increase employment opportunities for VR customers. Success will be measured by:
 - an increase in the number of employers participating in disability awareness and inclusion activities, including through the Texas HireAbility and We Hire Ability campaigns; and
 - an increase in the number of employers participating in training and work-based learning opportunities for students and adults.

- Draft Combined State Plan Goals, Update on Implementation of Strategies. Six Goal Areas, Cheryl Fuller provided the strategies
 - Improve provider recruitment, retention, and support
 - Streamline vendor requirements, processes, procedures, and documentation. Partially Complete
 - Ensure that payment rates are competitive and equitable. Partially Complete
 - Strengthen provider recruiting efforts. In Progress
 - Enhance provider support and training. In Progress
 - Ensure that internal systems for provider identification by a VR Counselor are useful, current, and accurate. Partially Complete
 - Streamline VR policy, processes, and tools to facilitate timely service delivery.
 - Streamline or redesign policy, procedure, forms, and approval processes to improve ease of navigation and application for VR staff. In Progress
 - Facilitate coordination of services with providers and improve responsiveness to customers. In Progress
 - Improve workflow processes and business systems to improve timeliness, efficiency, and consistency of VR service provision. In Progress
 - Recruit and retain VR Staff.
 - Identify and implement strategies to improve staff recruitment and retention, including options for remote work, opportunities for professional development, staff recognition, and other activities that promote a positive, engaging work environment. In Progress
 - Redesign training and resources for new counselors and new rehabilitation assistants. In Progress
 - Establish management development training, specific to VR program management, for new, current, and aspiring VR managers. In Progress
 - Improve and develop additional user-friendly resources to maximize customer choice.
 - Provide training and resources for VR staff on labor market information and tools. Partially Completed
 - Develop and enhance tools to aid VR staff and customers in the identification of available providers. Partially Completed

- Update training, tools, and policies related to work incentive programs and benefits counseling and provide user-friendly resources and/or fact sheets to help customers make decisions. In Progress
- Improve VR staff knowledge and system capacity to enhance service delivery to customers.
 - Provide additional training and resources for VR staff to strengthen and increase expertise and specialization in serving customers with specific disabilities and those with multiple disabilities. In Queue
 - Develop, pilot, and replicate innovative approaches to implementing the VR process, including standardized workflow and new methods for deploying staff and resources that maximize staff capacity and expertise. In Development
 - Enhance and increase training for Transition VR Counselors and other VR Counselors with school assignments regarding services to students with disabilities, including pre-employment transition services. In Queue
 - Review TVRC and VRC capacity and structure and adjust as necessary to strengthen capacity to serve students with disabilities. In Queue
 - Provide training, tools, and resources to assist staff with implementing process improvements, including standardized workflow. In Progress
 - Enhance options for remote service delivery. In Progress
- Increase and enhance partnerships with employers to 1) better understand employer needs when hiring people with disabilities and working with VR, and 2) build awareness about the benefits of hiring people with disabilities to increase employment opportunities for VR customers.
 - Continue and expand efforts to raise awareness among employers of the benefits of hiring people with disabilities and the services available through TWC/VRD to support them. In Progress
 - Implement and expand employer partnerships that increase employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities through training and work-based learning

opportunities for students and adults with disabilities. In Progress

- Update on FY 2022 Operating Budget and Expenditures
 - Cheryl Fuller provided a high overview of the TWC VR Operating Budget Total \$274,735,985
 - Salaries & Wages (includes Employee Benefits) \$114,414,775
 - Travel \$2,336,721
 - Operating Expenses \$9,949,598
 - Client Services \$148,034,891
- Ad Hoc Updates and Reports (including Customer Satisfaction Survey Results) Geoffrey Miller provided reports, charts, graphs, and tables
 - Number of Unique Active VR Services Provided
 - Average Number of Days from Purchase Order to Receipt of Report from Provider
 - Number of Onboarded and Exited Providers

Public Comment was given by

- Roni Jo Frazier

VR Innovation and Expansion Projects, Project One: Employment First, Presenters: Cindy Geisman, Jason Vaden, Rikka Weintraub

- PowerPoint was provided to RCT Members.
- **Employment First**
 - Is the first and preferred option for individuals with disabilities who are receiving publicly funded benefits
 - Presumes that a person with a disability can work until proven otherwise
 - Employment in the general workforce is preferred – typical work settings within the community, with colleagues who do not have a disability, earning competitive wages and benefits

Julian Alvarez, TWC Commissioner Representing Labor

- Addressed the council.

RCT Member Training, Karen Stanfill

- Karen provided information on resources available to the RCT through RSA rsa.ed.gov Find RSA Programs, State Vocational Rehabilitation Services Programs, VR Program Reference Guide also available State Rehabilitation Council and ncsrc.net National Coalition of State Rehabilitation Councils (NCSRC).

RCT Committee Reports

- Customer Satisfaction and Needs Assessment, Gennadiy Goldenshteyn, Chair
 - Reviewed SFY Q1 2022 VR Customer Satisfaction Survey Results (Oct-dec 2021) and SFY Q1 2022 VR Performance Update
 - Audra Ressel consolidating historical data (Gary Benner's files)
 - Survey responses
 - Westat completed 3,144 satisfaction surveys, or 21.4 percent of the annual target. For comparison, last year for the same quarter Westat completed 4,057 satisfaction surveys, or 27.6 percent of the annual target. The overall survey response rate for quarter one was 22.0 percent, which is the lowest response rate we have seen.
 - Prior successful use of on-line surveys
 - CSNA Town Hall
 - VR Needs Survey conducted by Texas A&M for TWC
 - State of Utah (benchmarking)
 - Recommendation: explore implementation of multi-mode survey (phone + web / email)
 - Action: Audra Ressel reaching out to Westat to understand vendor experience and capabilities
 - Key takeaways, Customer Satisfaction Survey Highlights

- In general responses are reverting to 2019 (pre-pandemic) levels.
- Most Favorable:
 - 94.8% (open cases) and 94.6% (closed cases) agreed they were treated in a caring, friendly, and respectful manner.
 - 89.88% (open cases) and 91% (closed cases) agreed they had input in setting the Employment Goals, with 93.4% (open cases) were in agreement with the Employment Goals Chosen.
 - For closed cases, 92.3% were satisfied with job overall, and 92.9% were satisfied with Employee Benefits (for those who have them).
- Least Favorable:
 - 67.8% (open cases) and 66.0% (closed cases) reported being less likely to have input choosing providers
 - 21.3% (open cases) and 20.5% (closed cases) indicated lack of response NLT next business day
- Provider choice and availability continues to be an issue.
 - Scott McCune carried out benchmarking on provider choice across 14 states.
 - Action: Gennadiy Goldenshteyn and Scott McCune to review benchmarking off-line and present results at a committee session. Incorporate learnings Informed Choice for VR customers assessment project (currently in planning and development phase).
- Discussion Key Takeaways – COVID-19 Impact
 - 28.9.9% of customers with open cases reported an interruption in services due to the pandemic, on par with Q4 response of 29.9% and an improvement over Q3 response of 38% of customers

- COVID-19 impact effects seen VR performance data, with successful closure rate at 47.53%
 - Across all regions and disability categories
 - Less interest in VR during pandemic is a national trend
 - Discussion Key Takeaways – Ad-HOC Report Request
 - Committee is making a request for ad-hoc report for Deaf-Blind disability classification across the VR Performance categories for the next quarterly meeting
 - Need to understand all Primary Disability / Secondary Disability combinations where Deaf-Blind may fall in
- Education and Membership, Bobbie Hodges, Chair
 - Membership – four upcoming vacancies October 28th. Disability Representative, CRP (One Application has been received), two vacancies for Business, Industry and Labor
 - If you have a recruit contact Mrs. Hodges,
 - Lindsey Geeslin accepted the position as Chair for this committee. She will take on this role in May
 - Training for future RCT meetings – Dyslexia speaker has been identified. Lindsey Geeslin will reach out to her contact for training on New Construction and ADA. If you have a suggestion for training contact Mrs. Hodges.
 - RCT Mentorship guide has been approved by RCT Chair. Joe Powell and Lindsey Geeslin provided an overview of the Mentorship program.
- Policy, Procedure & Personnel Development, Karen Stanfill, Chair
 - Policies
 - Sara Kendell gave a presentation on the proposed benefits counseling changes. Changes are being made to the TWC VR Policy Manual and Standards for Providers Manual to allow payment for outside

sources to help. If RCT Members would like a copy and to provide feedback let Karen know.

- January 2022 there were 13,200 clients with plans that were also beneficiaries of Social Security.
- Payments and invoices for providers, rules and processes were reviewed. The committee suggested to provide training to staff on the importance of timely payment to providers.
- Comprehensive System of Personnel Development
 - The committee reviewed staff retention. There are currently 63 counselor vacancies, 19 new hires November to January 1st. There was a 2.7% turnover rate in the first quarter which is a reduction from past reports.

Liaison Reports The full reports are included in the binders.

Each representative will give an update.

- Client Assistance Program (CAP), Karen Stanfill
- Community Rehabilitation Provider (CRP), Bobbie Hodges
- Partners Resource Network (PRN), Lisa Cowart
- State Independent Living Council (SILC), April Poillreis
- Texas Education Agency (TEA), Emily Robinson No written report was provided
- Texas Workforce Investment Council (TWIC), Lindsey Geeslin

Council Business

- New Council Business
 - Gennadiy Goldenshteyn made a motion to provide a VR performance report for the Deafblind disability classification and relevant classifications across all VR performance categories for the next quarterly meeting. Chairman Michael Ebbeler recognized the motion and opened for discussion. Ms. Glenda

Born seconded the motion. The motion was put to vote.

Approved unanimously.

- Approve December minutes, RCT Chairman Michael Ebbeler asked for approval of December minutes as recorded. With no edits being noted December Minutes were approved by the RCT Chairman Michael Ebbeler under unanimous consent.
- FY22 Budget \$58,350. The current balance pending travel expenses for TWC conference \$54,502.40
- ASL Services for the RCT meetings are being paid by TWC VR budget.
- Unfinished Council Business:
 - Ad Hoc Committee Hybrid RCT Meetings
 - Planning May2022 meeting in hybrid format. Athens will be contracted to provide the virtual A/V needs
 - Equipment is still procurement process, pending quotes from vendors
- Joe Powell made a motion to adjourn. Karen Stanfill seconded the motion, Motion approved by majority.

Adjourn