

## Rehabilitation Council of Texas (RCT)

May 21, 2020

### Zoom Virtual Meeting

**Present:**

Michael A. Ebbeler Jr., Chair, Austin  
Lisa Maciejewski-West, Vice Chair, San Angelo  
Amanda Bowdoin, Forney  
Matt Berend, Abilene  
Jennifer Clouse, Temple  
Lisa Cowart, Beaumont  
Cheryl A Fuller, Austin  
Lindsey Geeslin, Waco  
Crystal George, Argyle  
Gennadiy Goldenshteyn, Dallas  
Bobbie Hodges, Fort Worth  
Paul Hunt, Austin  
Elizabeth Kendell, San Antonio  
Susie May, Austin  
Joe Powell, Irving  
Rodrick Robinson, McKinney  
Karen Stanfill, Houston  
Crystal Stark, College Station  
Abdi Warsame, Irving

**Absent:**

Colton Read, New Braunfels  
JoAnne Fluke, Abilene

**TWC Reps:**

Carrie Alexander, Ron Ayer, Gary Benner, Kim Berry, Shelly Caillouet,  
Commissioner Aaron Demerson, Lisa Godwin, Commissioner Julian  
Alvarez III, Adam Leonard, Tammy Martin, Geoffrey Miller, David  
Norman, Belinda Salazar, Chris Speckhard, Jason Vaden, Cindy  
Geisman, Les Trobman, Melissa Stirling, Vivian Godwin, Claudia Peden,  
Laura LaCour, Kimberly Bradford-Brown, Carrie Mills

## **Guest:**

Kaki Leyens TWIC, Christina Bryant, Virginia Jones, Ashlee Onyia, Craig Davis, Latricia Lindsey, Philip Aaron, Sharon Jones, Kingsley Ogbogu, Edwin Castillo, Aubrey Jones, Christina Scott, Sandra Bitter, Karissa Sanchez, Jeanie Hanzal, Joey Gidseg,

## **Welcome and Introductions**

- The meeting was called to order at 11:30 a.m. by Michael A. Ebbeler, Jr., Chair.
- New Members were announced by the Chair.

## **Aaron Demerson, Commissioner Representing Employers**

Addressed the council and gave an update on Unemployment for Texas

## **Julian Alvarez III, Commissioner Representing Labor**

- Addressed council

## **RCT Members introduced themselves and provided their representation on the council.**

## **VR Division Director's Report Cheryl A. Fuller, TWC VR Division Director**

- Mrs. Fuller thanked TWC Commissioners and Executive office for their support with changes during the pandemic.
- Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in Texas, Vocational Rehabilitation Division (VRD) has transitioned VR staff to remote work. Thanks to the outstanding support of TWC's Information Technology and Business Operations departments, almost 100% of VRD staff are working remotely and continuing to provide services to customers.
- Temporary exceptions have been implemented to the VR Services Manual and Standards for Providers.
- Counselors have reached out to the customers to let them know how to contact them and that services are still being provided. This information is also available on the TWC VR Website.

- Providers were informed of the revisions for exceptions for services. With the help of Bobbie Hodges TWC VR will be providing quarterly conference calls with the VR Providers.
- Summer programs for students have been cancelled.
- Next steps are planning on how to phase back into the offices and in person service delivery.
- VR is looking at making changes in VR standards and VR service manual to promote service delivery in electronic processes.

The full VR Division Director's Report was provided in the meeting binder.

## **Performance Update, Adam Leonard, TWC, Director of Division of Operational Insight**

**Adam presented a PowerPoint presentation that was included in the meeting binder.**

- Gennadiy Goldenshteyn requested a report on median earnings trends for the Texas Workforce outside of the career and training pool.
- Joe Powell requested the measures for traumatic brain injuries to be included in the quarterly report.

## **Public Comment**

- Kingsley gave public comment. There needs to be more uniformity with the VR counselors across the regions and across the state so that people with varying disabilities get the same treatment. He provided his experience with the VR program and difficulties getting job placement.

## **CSNA Town Hall Report, Lisa Cowart Chair Customer Satisfaction and Needs Assessment Committee**

- 1 in person meeting took place prior to the shutdown due to COVID-19.
- Attendance for all four virtual Town Hall Meetings was 523.

- There were 419 questions asked in the Q&A box.
- There were 106 responses to the online survey.
- Additionally, there were at least 4 email responses.
- Participants included CRPs from Disability advocacy groups, state and local government attendees, CRPs from Education Services Centers, High Schools, SPED, Colleges, CRSs from Medical and Pharmaceutical and other Vendors and VR Customers.
- RCT members gave their takeaway from the Town Halls:
  - Inconsistency in VR Counselors' knowledge of their job, more training and retention
  - Lack of Informed Choice
  - Add Questions to CSNA that are directed to Deaf/Blind and neurodevelopmental/TBI
  - Ability for VR Counselors to make decision without have to get approval from supervisor
  - Providers, Customers not having access to specific vendors

## **Council Business New**

- Approve February minutes, Karen Stanfill made a motion to approve the February Minutes, Paul Hunt seconded. All approved, February Minutes approved.

## **Round Table to discuss any challenges associated with COVID-19**

- Lisa Maciejewski-West shared her personal success with moving to virtual trainings and suggested that VR hold virtual fairs for providers to give them an opportunity to voice the issues they are having. Bobbie Hodges shared that she has been working with Mrs. Fuller to do just that. Quarterly conference calls are being set up to give CRPs this opportunity. The first meeting will be held in June.
- Bobbie Hodges also shared success with Goodwill Industries holds virtual trainings and camps.

- Mrs. Fuller thanked Ms. Hodges for partnering with TWC VR to hold the quarterly provider conference calls.
- Karen Stanfill reminded everyone that she is with the Client Assistance Program (CAP) and they are there to help individuals who are receiving services from the VR program. If they have any concerns or questions CAP is there to help. CAP is working with VR to suggest permanent changes to the way VR services are provided. To continue to provide services remotely after the pandemic.
- Paul Hunt suggested to hold all town halls virtually as it saved money, time and have much higher participation. He also shared that he became a VR Customer as he was talking to a VR counselor about not being able to provide his services and she suggested that he apply for VR services. He did apply and is getting help with items he needed to be able to work.
- Amanda Bowdoin shared that she is a teacher and has been participating in Texas School for the Blind Coffee Hour that is held three times a week. People from all over the world share ideas. This has opened her eyes to other possibilities. She was asked to write stories on Paths to Literacy to share with parents.
- Joe Powell shared his work with mental health and addiction recovery services and the challenges with COVID-19. He mentioned that isolation contributes to mental health challenges and addictions and there will be an increase in this population after COVID. He is looking at how to connect with TWC VR and Community partners to help this population.
- Matt Berend shared some good things that have come out of this. TWC has provided the VR field offices with the tools they need to continue to provide services to VR customers. TWC VR staff are adjusting to the challenges of remote work. Some of the same challenges as others such as working from home while teaching their children that are also at home and they have rose to the challenge. He said that he is very delighted in his staff and also wants to give a shout out to TWC VR state office for being proactive in initiating

exemptions to provide services. He also mentioned to keep communication open with VR services as there are challenges with the turnover in counselors and there is a lot for them to learn and changes that have come along with COVID.

- Michael A. Ebbeler Jr. spoke with Matt Berend and one of the challenges was that not all TWC VR employees had a state issued cell phone. When the employees would call customers from their personal phones, they would block caller ID as to not give out their personal phone numbers. This was causing an issue with customers not answering the phone as they didn't know who was calling. This prompted TWC VR to order work cell phones for all TWC VR Counselors to insure they kept in contact with the customers. Laptops and cell phones are now standard issue for all counselors.

### **Adjourn**

Paul Hunt made a motion to adjourn. Karen Stanfill seconded. All approved.