

Rehabilitation Council of Texas (RCT) **November 5-6, 2020** **Zoom Virtual Meeting**

Present:

Michael A. Ebbeler Jr., Chair, Austin
Lisa Maciejewski-West, Vice Chair, Horseshoe Bay
Amanda Bowdoin, Forney
Matt Berend, Wichita Falls
Jennifer Clouse, Temple
Lisa Cowart, Beaumont
Cheryl A Fuller, Austin
Lindsey Geeslin, Lorena
Gennadiy Goldenshteyn, Dallas
Bobbie Hodges, Fort Worth
Paul Hunt, Austin
Elizabeth Kendell, San Antonio
Joe Powell, Irving
Emily Robinson, Austin
Karen Stanfill, Houston
Crystal Stark, College Station

Absent:

Abdi Warsame, Irving
JoAnne Fluke, Abilene
Rodrick Robinson, McKinney

TWC Reps:

Commissioner Julian Alvarez III, , Kimberly Berry, Gary Benner, Paula Brunson, Shelly Caillouet, Bryan Daniel, Kandace Decker, Commissioner Aaron Demerson, Maria Flores, Cindy Geisman, Lisa Givens, Lisa Godwin, Lisa Gomez, Mayra Gutierrez, Carey Hajovsky, Tasheara Jennings, Alyssa Kee, Dennis Kutach, Laura LaCour, Tony Lawrence, Adam Leonard, Christy Lerche, Susan Lindsey, Tammy Martin, Scott McCune, Cassandra Medrano, Molly Meyer, Geoffrey Miller, Kevin Miller, Sylvia Miller, Carrie Mills, Joel Miranda, Asha Mookala, Dawn Natalino-White, Brian Owens, Melinda Paninski, Claudia Peden, Elsa Y. Perez, Daniel Prado, Ana Richie, Laura Rook, Belinda Salazar, Jonas Schwartz, Ed Serna, Chris Speckhard, Melissa Stirling, Laike Todd, Les Trobman, LaVonja Tryon-Adetoro, Jason Vaden, Hugh Yasumoto, Clarissa Zamora

Guest:

Deana Armstrong, Soundra Ashford, Sandra Breitengross Bitter SILC, Christina Bryant, Darleane Buckhanan, Dr. Lisa Burrell, Edwin Castillo Disability Rights TX, Kristen Dacres, Liana Davis, Bill Dean, Denise Ellis, Deborah Erwin, Dawn Evans-Malley, Monique Flores-Navarrete, Roni Frazier Consulting, Keri Garza Consulting, Chris Gereke Education, Lauren Gerken TCDD, Mike Gilliam Manufacturing, Jeanie Hanzal Disability Rights Texas, Tracie Harrison UTA, Nicole Hawk HHSC, Corey Henderson Stars and Stripes, Frank Higginbotham, Anna Holderberg, Natalie Hulsey Consulting, Sharon Jones, Camelia Joseph, Cynthia Julun, Robin Kuntz Education, Tonya Lane, Kaki Leyens, Chris Masey, Stephanie McClellan, Elayne, McNeil ACTS Houston, Steve Miller, Jerry Montoya, Troy Murrain, Christina Petrossi, Sandra Pierce, April Poillreisz SILC, Sherman Rhodes, Brenda Roland, CC Rowe, Suzanne Saenz, Karina Salas, Eva Salazar, Karissa Sanchez HHSC, Peggy Schmidt, Connie Simon TJJD, Marsha Simple Education, George Smith Education, Suzie Stein, Rita Stevenson, Jerold Terry Disability Rights Texas, Melvina Terry, Tiffany Tubb, Giaberto Vanzant, Vanessa Vera, Tiffany Walker, Sonia White Education, Denise Whitsel, James Williams, Beanca Williams, Patches Wilson DSHS,

Welcome and Introductions

- The meeting was called to order at 9:00 a.m. by Michael A. Ebbeler, Jr., Chair.
- Announcements
 - New member replacing Susie May is Emily Robinson representing TEA
 - Reappointed members Amanda Bowdoin, Lindsey Geeslin and Rodrick Robinson.
 - April Pollreisz has applied to replace Colton Read as SILC representative. She will be attending the meetings going forward.

Aaron Demerson, TWC Commissioner Representing Employers

Addressed the council and gave an update on HireAbility. An update was given on working with the Chamber of Commerce, employer incentives for hiring veterans and persons with disabilities.

Julian Alvarez III, TWC Commissioner Representing Labor

Addressed council and gave an update on successful hiring of persons with disabilities.

Ed Serna, TWC Executive Director

Addressed the council and spoke about reaching out to people that need VR services. He thanked the RCT Members for being a good source of ideas and direction for VR.

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

- General Updates
 - FY 2021 Priorities: Customer F.I.R.S.T.
 - Report Published – Occupational Skills Training for Individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities
 - Link to this report is included in Mrs. Fuller's full report. RCT should review. If RCT would like additional information let Mrs. Fuller know and she will report. She would also like RCT feedback on this report. Appendix D provides a list of 15 programs that provide post-secondary opportunities for students with IDD.
 - Update on RSA 107 Monitoring Report
 - TWC VR was monitored in 2019.
 - Draft report was provided in August 2020. Final report expected to be received by end of the year. TWC VR will have 45 days to develop a corrective action plan.

- RCT will be provided the final report and the corrective action plan once it is available.
 - Update on VR Waivers Requested by the Secretary of Education
 - Congress has not approved the request to date, nor has it approved other similar proposals proposed by members in various COVID stimulus bills.
 - **RCT Lisa Maciejewski-West is working on a letter of support from RCT.**
- Process and Procedures Update
 - On September 1, 2020 numerous exceptions were created in response to COVID-19 they were incorporated into standard process in the VRSM and SFP.
- Outreach and Awareness
 - Updates to VR website pages have been made to emphasize availability of staff and continuation of services, including remote service exceptions. Updates are continuous including at least one video including ASL.
 - Social Media Platforms- follow TWC on LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram.
 - Texas HireAbility Campaign – VRD coordinated with TWC Communications to produce a video that features two former VR customers now successfully transitioned to employment.
- Solutions to Support Customer Access and Remote Service Delivery
 - Service Now - VRD is enhancing the ability for a customer to be able to complete an online self-referral for VR services by using a platform called Service Now.
 - Softphones-VRD purchased softphone licenses (part of Microsoft TEAMS software) to be installed on laptops of identified staff.
 - SARA –this is a pilot for an automated attendant system that enables ongoing communication between counselors and customers, and documents that communication in the customer's case file.

- Office Locator – customer enters their zip code and the closest office populates.
 - Virtual Career Fairs for Students with Disabilities - TWC-VR purchased four licenses for the Easy Virtual Fair (EVF) platform. This is available for hosting a variety of events including job and career fairs, transition events, training sessions, and other. VRD staff have conducted more than 30 events around the state since September.
- In-Person Service Delivery by VRD Staff
 - VR is working with the workforce boards around the state to provide some in-person services once they reopen.
 - VRD continue to work on protocols for staff to provide in-person services.
- TWC VR Budget Reports
 - FY 2020 total obligations (expended and encumbered) represent 79% of the total budget. Expenditures were significantly lower due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which resulted in a decrease in new customers and delayed services for existing customers. Due to COVID-19, the Summer Earn and Learn (SEAL) initiative was cancelled in FY 2020; however, the total obligated amount still reflects \$9.3M encumbered for this initiative.
 - The FY 2021 budget is 16% lower than last year's budget. The adjustment was made to ensure the budget more accurately aligns with projected expenditures. If client services expenditures are higher than projected, VRD will work with Finance to increase the budget. Client services expenditures will be affected by the degree of recovery in FY 2021 from the ongoing effects of COVID-19.
 - The FY2021 travel budget is almost half of last year's budget. VRD anticipates continued use of remote meeting technology for VRD staff and continued remote service delivery for VR customers. Travel will occur as necessary for in-person service delivery and is anticipated to pick up in the second half of the fiscal year.
- Questions

- Question from Paul Hunt, Have you considered getting Assistive Technology Unit (ATU) out of the Criss Cole Rehabilitation Center? There is no access to the ATU when CCRC is closed down. Also, not all customers that access ATU are residents of CCRC. Mrs. Fuller answered, we will definitely give that some thought.
- 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.
- Question Gennady Goldenshteyn,
 - Do you have any indicators of closures over total participation or closures over total cases?
 - What was the trends for earnings for DVR participants? Does that follow or how closely does it follow the trend for the earnings for the overall Texas Workforce? Was it faster, slower?
 - Response: Adam Leonard TWC is gathering information on labor market and career information group around median earnings and average earnings. Then we will be able to find data points that match up to the periods that we are doing and present those as comparatives.

Public Comment

- James Williams provided public comment
 - Kudos to TWC for the work on supported employment redesign. I appreciate the quarterly meetings and communication from Bobbie Hodges. I feel much more connected to rehab in Texas.
- Liana Davis provided public comment
 - First, Mrs. Fuller's goal to have at least one video on the TWC website that is in ASL. I would like to see that number be at least five or ten. Second, when you speak of customer first it

appears there is a lot of funds available for a person with a disability to get back to work. But, when I'm in a meeting with a counselor, funds seem to be a point of concern. It doesn't make the customer feel like the funds are actually there.

Presentation on Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Emily Robinson, MS, Texas Education Agency, Department of Special Education Programs

- Ms. Robinson provided information on Texas School for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing and day programs.

Presentation on VR Services for Customers Who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing, Jonas Schwartz, TWC VR Program Manager Target Populations

- Post-secondary education opportunities
- Communication access services
- Training initiative for counselors that serve customers who are deaf and hard of hearing.

TWC Employer Relations, Melinda Paninski and Lisa Givens

- Partnership with OFCCP
- Project SEARCH
- VR and Board Partnership, virtual job fairs
- Texas HireAbility – videos for employers
- RCT Webpage to feature employer resources section
- Hiring Red, White and Blue Event

RCT Committee Reports

- Customer Satisfaction and Needs Assessment, Lisa Cowart, Chair
 - Reviewed the Customer Satisfaction report.
 - Reviewed 2020 CSNA comparisons to 2017.

- Gennady suggested combining Adam's report with the CSNA and Customer Satisfaction Report for a more powerful insight.
- Education and Membership, Bobbie Hodges, Chair
 - Membership Update for November 2020
 - Reappointments upcoming Oct 2021, Joe Powell, Lisa Cowart
 - Member that will term out Oct on 2021 JoAnn Fluke, Paul Hunt, Matt Berend and Crystal Stark. Hope to have recruit identified by May 2021.
 - Current vacancies SILC Rep April Poillreisz is waiting appointment
 - Training for future RCT meetings
 - Karen Stanfill will be leading quarterly RCT education and training.
 - Employment First
 - Diversity and Inclusion
 - RCT Member Mentorship program
 - VR Providers Quarterly conference calls are being held to enhance the provider relationship with VR.
 - A request was made that a report of the calls be presented quarterly at the RCT Meetings.
- Policy, Procedure & Personnel Development, Karen Stanfill, Chair
 - Comprehensive System of Personnel Development
 - Lowest number of open positions for VR Counselors in maybe two years. There are only 38 open positions.
 - There are still some complaints with WorkInTexas website but not as many since the site was updated.
 - It was suggested that VR Managers and staff are made aware of the simplified process of hiring a Vet.
 - VR is looking into salary for experienced new hires for counselors' positions to determine if they can be

hired in at a higher rate and not have to start off at the bottom of the pay scale.

- Policies
 - Financial Needs Test policy, the committee suggested providing examples for clarification on the limits on rates.
 - Vehicle Modifications policy, the committee was happy to see the changes made to the policy and will provide comments next week.
- Training
 - Some of the college programs have added classes that will teach counselors how to provide services remotely.
- IHO there was one IHO reviewed.

Liaison Reports The full reports are included in the binders

- CAP, Karen Stanfill
 - CAP has continued to meet with TWC VR staff, Tammy Martin, Scott McCune, and Jason Vaden every other week to share observations or difficulties that have arisen due to COVID19.
- PRN, Lisa Cowart
 - PRN has four centers in the state of Texas with Partners Resource Network as the umbrella for 34 years. The grants are five-year grants and expect to have these continue for the next five years.
 - PRN is continuing to provide workshops virtually.
- SILC, April Poillreisz
 - Ms. Poillreisz is the Chair of the SILC. RCT Chair recognized Ms. Poillreisz as the SILC representative. The RCT is waiting her appointment to the RCT.
- TEA, Emily Robinson

- House Bill 548 is related to language acquisition for children who are deaf and hard of hearing age zero to eight and could have an impact on students and their future preparing for VR services.
- TWIC, Lindsey Geeslin
 - Next TWIC virtual meeting will be in December.
 - Middle Skill STEM Occupations and benchmarks surrounding, and demographics are being discussed.

Council Business

- Approve August minutes, Paul Hunt made a motion to approve the August Minutes, Gennady Goldenshteyn seconded. All approved, August Minutes approved.
- Budget Report
 - FY21 Budget \$58,350.00 with a current balance \$57,260.00. There is an open PO for CART Services \$10,000 and ASL Services \$10,000. Tab two is the TWC report for RCT budget.
 - Karen Stanfill requested that RCT continue to receive VR budget expense report for services as a part of Mrs. Fuller's report.
- Unfinished Council Business:
 - Lisa Maciejewski-West made a motion to table the motion made in August for RCT to draft a letter of support asking our Congressional leaders of Texas delegation for an extension of the FFY VR grant through the end of FFY2021 and a waiver of the 15% set aside requirement for the FFY2020 grant.
 - Elizabeth Kendall seconded the motion.
 - Discussion was offered, one question was asked and answered about the when the motion would be brought back up.

- Tabling of the motion was voted and unanimously approved.
- A discussion was held to edit the letter in the above tabled motion.
- The letter was rewritten and discussed
- Paul Hunt made a motion to accept the language as written and that we add all the council members who can be added to this letter without causing a conflict of interest with the state. The letter will be sent to the Texas delegation with the RCT chair's signature.
- Amanda Bowdoin seconded the motion.
- Discussion was offered.
- A discussion was held to insure all RCT members understood their position to abstain from voting due to state and/or federal funding to their employer.
- Vote was held by roll call. Motion was approved by majority vote.
- Report: RCT FY20 Exp by Srvc Category and by Region
 - Karen Stanfill lead a discussion on this report provided by Mrs. Fuller. RCT would like to continue to receive this report quarterly and may request additional breakdowns from this information.
- Pushed to February: Update on Ad Hoc Committee for virtual public comment update.
- Adjourn