



State of Rhode Island
Department of Human Services, Office of Rehabilitation Services
STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL
*To work with the ORS assuring that all Rhode Islanders with disabilities are able to
obtain and keep meaningful and satisfying employment.*



SRC Meeting March 9, 2021
Zoom Conference
3:30 PM – 5:30 PM

Present Members: Dr. Judith Drew, Chair SRC and Program Director, Rehabilitation Counseling Program at [Salve Regina University](#)
Catherine Sansonetti, Vice-Chair SRC, Attorney at [Disability Rights Rhode Island](#)
Jack Ringland, Secretary SRC, representing the RIDD Council and Co-Coordinator of [RI Cross Disability Coalition](#)
Christina Battista, representing the [RI Statewide Independent Living Council](#)
Melissa Brusso, Educational Advocate for the [Paul V. Sherlock Center on Disabilities](#)
Jennifer Doucette, Director of Regional Transition for West Bay Collaborative
Paul Harden, Director of the [RI Small Business Development Center](#) at URI
Nicole Rico Serrano, Project Director, Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor for the [Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation Vocational Rehabilitation Services](#)
Jane Slade, State Transition Coordinator at the [Department of Education](#)
Christine Yankee, Vice President of Program Services at [Goodwill Industries of Southern New England](#)

Office of Rehabilitation Services: Ronald Racine (Associate Director), Natalia Montoya (Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor II), Joseph Murphy (Administrator, Vocational Rehabilitation), John Valentine (Quality Assurance Supervisor) and Linda Deschenes, (Assistant Administrator of Operations)

Guest: Cathy Andreozzi, Founder of [Tori Lynn Andreozzi Foundation](#)
Kate McCarthy-Barnett, [FEMA Rhode Island](#)
Tracey Cunningham, Chief of [Employment Services at Division of Developmental Disabilities \(DDD\)](#)
Allison Hitte-Robinson, Program Coordinator, for the [Office of Disability Services at CCRI Knight Campus](#)
Tristan Pennell, Career Assessment Specialist at [Northern Rhode Island Collaborative](#).
Tanya Townsend, Program Director, [Communities for People, INC.](#)
Keri Rossi-D'entremont, Assistant Dean of Students, [Accessibility and Inclusion at Disability Services Rhode Island College](#)

1. Establish Quorum/Introductions Guests, ORS, and SRC – Quorum met.

2. Agenda Review/Additions or Deletions

3. Approval of Minutes from January 26, 2021

Motion Jack Ringland made a motion seconded by Dr. Judith Drew, and unanimously approved to accept the January 26, 2021 minutes. (Voting Members – Christina Battista, Melissa Brusso, Dr. Judith Drew, Paul Harden, Jack Ringland, Catherine Sansonetti, Nicole Rico Serrano, Jane Slade and Christine Yankee)

4. Summary of Follow-ups from Meeting

- Seeking Guest Speakers for the May Meeting
- Suggestions for the Rhode Island State Rehabilitation Council Outstanding Service Award

5. ORS Director's Report – Ronald Racine

- Waitlist – ORS has removed everyone from Categories I, II and III. There is a short waiting time for Category III. Currently those coming on in this category are waiting about one month for services to start. This is a significantly positive change from two years ago when the Waitlist had all categories closed.
- Personnel – There had been a hiring freeze, but now ORS will have an opportunity to post ten to twelve positions, primarily Counselors. In the first round, four Counselors and four Senior Counselor positions will be posted and then several staff positions will then be posted.
- [Rehabilitation Services Administration](#) (RSA) – There is a new Acting Deputy Commissioner, Carol Dobak who has replaced Commissioner Mark Schultz. It is disappointing to see Mark go because he was a former Director of the Nebraska Vocational Rehabilitation and President of SCAVR, and in tune with what was going on in all of the state VR agencies.

6. Transition Services & COVID-19 – Natalia Montoya, Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor II led a conversation highlighting some of the transition services used through the COVID-19 pandemic.

Referrals continue to come into the Transition Department and during the pandemic ORS Counselors have had the ability to attend more meetings than before due to ZOOM and other internet interfaces. This has allowed for more contact and in many cases better communication with clients and parents. The concern is that when ORS moves back to in-person meetings; it will be difficult to attend as many meetings due to travel times. But for now, all services are virtual.

To help the students with work preparations, ORS has developed virtual and hybrid services with West Bay Collaborative Career Development Center. Some of the services available include: Virtual Job Exploration Services, Virtual Tri Employment Program, Career Chats, and Virtual Interview Skill Builder, which prepares students for interviewing, resume writing and development.

Joe Murphey added that Counselors are able to attend more of the IPE meetings, and moving forward ORS is working to keep this option available. For this summer, ORS is working with transition centers and vendor to see what works best for students as the vaccine is rolled out. The goal is to get students back into the community, if it is safe to do this. At this time, it appears it might still be a hybrid of in-person and virtual. ORS has started putting together more updated guidance to get things loosened up a bit and give more of an informed choice to clients and students who really want to get out into the community.

ORS is working with a group of educational administrators, school systems, providers, teachers of life skills and special education. Tony Antosh has put us together to hone collaboration efforts for the last two years of student's transition services. The goal is to accentuate what is already being done and improve on our reporting efforts so the Department of Justice can have a clearer assessment of what is already working in this process.

Jane Slade added that the RI Department of Educations (RIDE) has purchased Virtual Job Shadow licenses for schools, enabling the students to have some experiences, even though they are not community-based. RIDE is developing community practices to share with students, parents and educators.

On Monday we are having our first Virtual Capacity Building Transition Institute. Darrell Andrews will be the keynote speaker. This program will have breakout session: [Link to the day's events](#).

RIDE is also working on a Middle-School Transition Cohort Program focused on supporting middle-school teachers with information on work readiness and Pre-Employment Transition Services. ORS has been instrumental in helping establish and coordinate this new program.

Another virtual student event is slated for March 23, 24 and 25 and will highlight self-advocacy and self-determination, college and career readiness, and independent living and community participation.

Keri Rossi-D'entremont asked about the Prepare Rhode Island Program internships this summer and if they would be in conjunction with ORS.

Tracey Cunningham mentioned that there was another program called Propel RI. It sounded duplicative to Prepare RI.

ORS has some pilot programs with Skills for RI Future, and we are still assessing how this pilot is working. ORS does not want to have two alike but separate system for our students. ORS does not have the capacity to set another one up until we can assess how our existing pilot program is working in June. At that time ORS will determine if another pilot program can be successfully set up for next year. As it stands now, if a student self identifies then we can try to get them in our system.

7. 2021 Comprehensive Needs Assessment Overview – John Valentine, VR Quality Assurance Supervisor

(Power Point Presentation was distributed to membership before the meeting/the following are some highlights. This is still in the draft phase. Copies of the full report are not yet available)

- Purpose of the Comprehensive Needs Assessment

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, mandates the Office of Rehabilitation Services (ORS), in partnership with the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) to complete a statewide comprehensive needs assessment at three-year increments to determine the rehabilitation needs of Rhode Islanders with disabilities. There is an emphasis on the scope of responsibility, along with the mission of ORS to utilize this data and adapt accordingly.

There are two data sources for the CNA, Environmental Scans and Internal Methodologies (ORS & SRC). Today's presentation emphasizes the latter. Below are some key findings from the Internal Methodologies.

- **Transition Focus Group** - Youth currently receiving services from ORS and parents of youth receiving services from ORS.
 - a. Students were typically referred to ORS through IPE meetings and special education school department.
 - b. ORS materials (written and online) are easy to understand.
 - c. ORS counselors maintain communication with, and respond to students in a timely manner. Students and parents do not always have a clear understanding of the array of services ORS can provide.
 - d. Prior to meetings, parents would like to receive an email notifying them of what will be discussed and potential options for next steps.
 - e. Parents reported achieving independence, long-term support and "check-ins" from ORS counselors is critical in maintaining student engagement.
 - f. Students reported achieving a "dream job" and opportunities to explore various jobs to find a "good fit" will keep them engaged with ORS.
- **Community Rehabilitation Providers (CRP)** – Had a 37% return rate, this is similar to previous surveys.
 - a. Social skills, personal issues, job skills match, individual expectations, family expectations and insufficient job search prep were identified as the top individual barriers to employment.
 - b. Job availability, transportation, availability of job development and retention and cost of accommodations were identified as the top systemic barriers to employment.
 - c. Financial Barriers, fear of losing SSI/SSDI, losing subsidies and losing medical benefits were identified as the top financial barriers to employment.
 - d. Developmental, blind and mental health were viewed as the most underserved populations in RI.
 - e. Help agencies meet needs of consumers: Increased awareness of resources through ORS and the workforce development system (WDS), increased awareness of employer resources and increased communication with ORS regarding changes to policies would help their agencies better meet consumer needs
- **Employer** - A survey was provided to and completed by 13 employers from varying businesses in the RI community.
 - a. Candidates with qualifications are the primary motivator when hiring people with disabilities (PWD's).
 - b. Diversity, work ethic and performing the job duties are the greatest reward in hiring PWD's.
 - c. Time off, dependability, injuries and potential lawsuits are the major concerns when hiring PWD's.
 - d. Information on an individual's skill set, job experience, capabilities and strengths would be most helpful in recruiting PWD's.
 - e. Proper job training, interview skills, advocacy and communicating an individual's capabilities to an employer are the most important benefits ORS could provide to employers.
 - f. Marketing through public announcements, commercials, signs, a larger online presence and a website directory of job candidates is what ORS could do to be seen as a viable workforce resource.
- **ORS Personnel** - ORS conducted three staff surveys throughout 2019 and 2020. The surveys consisted of the top three areas of training needed by ORS staff, improving business practices with CRP's, and an assessment of services for consumers and needs of the community.
 - a. Employment trends/LMI, business engagement and job development are the top needed areas of training.
 - b. 66% indicated ORS should provide "in-house" services such as job development, VOC evals, resume writing, etc.
 - c. 56% indicated they were satisfied with vendor services.
 - d. Training, strengthening communication and assisting with how to write reports are the needed areas where ORS can assist vendors.
 - e. Mental health is overwhelmingly a population not adequately services by ORS, or the WDS.
 - f. Counseling, job development, interagency collaboration, vendors, VOC training involvement with employers have been most successful in helping PWD's become employed.
 - g. 78% indicated services for youth are very good to excellent, with 3% indicating fair and 0% indicating services are poor.
- **ORS Monthly Consumer Satisfaction Surveys** - ORS and SRC collaborated to update and re-design the ORS consumer monthly surveys. Beginning in April 2019, ORS mailed monthly surveys to consumers with open cases rather than closed cases. This led to exponentially higher numbers of consumers receiving surveys and having the opportunity to provide feedback.

Response rate rose to 16.4% over the first year (6% increase from previous practices). In the first year, surveys were mailed to 1,662 consumers (132 were “undeliverable”) and 251 consumers responded.

- a. Ages 14-24 were largest group of respondents (40%).
- b. Response rate among minorities rose since the 2017 CNA.
- c. Mental health, developmental and cognitive were the most indicated disabilities.
- d. Supported Employment (SE) was the most important service, followed respectively by job placement, job coaching, job development, education and training.
- e. 74% indicated they would recommend ORS to family and friends.
- f. 77% indicated they received services in a timely manner.
- g. 75% indicated their ORS counselor responds to their outreach attempts within 2 days.
- h. 72% indicated they are better prepared to enter employment since working with ORS.

- **Next Steps**

- a. ORS Continuous Quality Improve Committee will review the draft of the 2020 CNA.
- b. The draft will be sent to SRC for review.
- c. ORS and SRC will collaborate to discuss draft, conclusions, recommended actions, acknowledgments, next steps, etc.

Questions about CNA

Will ORS consider to use evidence-based models when working with DD clients?

ORS looks at both the Individual Placement and Support (IPS) model and the Place-Train model and other different aspects of placed supported employment. It is best if an agency does really well with IPS and if that is the model they choose to use, ORS will make sure they have all the training and technical assistance that they need. IPS can be a difficult model to use, employment is required right away and if it doesn't work out, it is not a bad thing but a new job needs to be found. Another way to approach job placement would be to first find a suitable job match and then support the person in that job. How the placement is done does depend on what meets our needs as a state. ORS is willing to train technical assistance providers based on their needs.

8. Chair's Report - Dr. Judith Drew

- RSA Update and what it means for RI. We are going to start to share these updates when they come in. The updates have timely and informative information about legislative initiatives that are taking place and they often have pertinent research articles.
- Meeting Locations - Hopeful that by the fall we can be meeting in person and for free. Our meeting locations need to be on bus line and centrally located. Please offer suggestions for meeting location to Nancy.
- May Breakfast – 8:30 AM – 11:00 AM. More than likely meeting will end at 10:30.
- Please recommend people for the SRC award.
- Membership training meeting in June. Think about locations. Have the committee get together and talk about it. Some location suggestions; Simpson and Barry Halls have been renovated. Goodwill Industries. CCR Knight Campus. ORS has a large training room on the 8th floor. Please send all ideas to Nancy and we'll talk more about this over the summer.

Tristan Pennell, Career Assessment Specialist at Northern Rhode Island Collaborative spoke briefly about how their agency has dealt with COVID-19.

We have been working with students virtually, and have seen a great engagement with students and parents. In fact, only two students since September have not complete our program. The virtual ways of doing things have allowed us to build different relationships, and looking more interactions with the family. It has been very positive. We have opened up services.

Outreach to Employers – For the most part, employers have been willing to jump on virtually, but are eager for us to get back into the community.

9. Membership Update – Nancy Baker gave an update of membership. She will be getting in touch with members regarding their status.

10. New Business - The Olmstead Plan

(Materials were disseminated to membership electronically before the meeting)

Mental Health Association of RI wants Rhode Island to have an Olmstead Plan. Briefly; Olmstead refers to the U.S. Supreme Court's 1999 landmark ruling in *Olmstead v. L.C.*, which found that segregation of people with disabilities is discrimination under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The court decided that states have a legal obligation to ensure that individuals with

disabilities have the opportunity to live, work, and receive services in the community in the least restrictive setting permitted by their disabilities.

Mental Health Association is informing the rehabilitation community that many people with co-occurring disabilities are homeless and do not have access to jobs, education and training. The Federal Government has required that these people have access to all of these to help them find employment, and for many this will help them find safe housing.

The Council has had a chance to review the material Nancy sent, and if not, please take some time to do this. My question to the Council; Does the Council have an advocacy role to support this legislation, or do we do this as individuals with our communities to push to get the Legislators to set some money aside for this plan? Membership is going to have to ponder this and we will address this at a later meeting.

11. Public Comments - There were none.

12. Correspondence - There were none.

13. Adjournment - The meeting was adjourned at 5:15 P.M.

Motion – *Jack Ringland made a motion seconded by Jane Slade and unanimously approved to adjourn the meetings. (Voting Members – Christina Battista, Melissa Brusso, Dr. Judith Drew, Paul Harden, Jack Ringland, Catherine Sansonetti, Nicole Rico Serrano, Jane Slade and Christine Yankee)*

Respectfully Submitted,
Nancy Baker
Nancy Baker, Staff, RISRC