

Department of Human Services
Office of Rehabilitation Services
Rhode Island State Rehabilitation Council

Crowne Plaza
801 Greenwich Ave.
Warwick, RI 02886

Minutes - Tuesday, May 8, 2007
8:30 A.M. – 11:00 A.M.

Present from State Rehabilitation Council: Janice Belasco, Raymond Carroll, Linda L. Deschenes, Domenic Di Orio, Susan Donovan, Dr. Judith L. Drew, Joseph Ferreira, Steven A. Florio, Jeanne M. Giroux, Alexandra LaPlant, Anne LeClerc Gary J. Levine, Dr. Mona Dorsinville-Phanor, Lorna C. Ricci, Vincent Rossi, J. David Sienko

Present from Agency: Stephen Brunero, Kathleen Burrell, Ronald Racine, Roberta Greene, Laurie DiOrio

Guests: Dorothy Hodge, Christine West

1. Call to Order and Introductions - The Chair called the meeting to order at 9:00 A.M.

1. Additions or deletions to the Agenda – There were none.
2. Approval of Minutes

Motion

J. Drew made a motion seconded by D. Di Orio and unanimously approved, to accept the minutes from the March 13, 2007 meeting.

2. Old Business

1. State Plan Policy Committee - Report on the State Plan – J. Ferreira

Our committee met last month and I'd like to thank my committee members, C. Sansonetti and G. Levine as well as K. Burrell and S. Brunero, for all their time and help with this process.

Comments on the State Plan 2008

1. VR counselor as teacher at Salve Regina University

This might not be a good use of counselors' time given the shortage of VR Counselors.

- The Policy committee raised its concern as an inquiry as to Counselors working in Colleges. Is this a viable use for them?

2. The SRC is concerned with the Bill for licensure of VR Counselors and how the exemption for State Workers from licensure would affect the VR program. Remove exemption if possible.

3. How many IPE's in 2006 had short-term goals versus career type foals?
Counselors teaching at colleges

Next Step

The Policy committee will send the comments to ORS and will await their response. Then we (Policy committee) will review their comments.

J. Drew questioned the reasoning for the concern of Counselors used to teach at colleges.

G. Levine explained the committee's reasoning as given the shortage of personnel, the budget crunch and heavy caseloads, the question is whether in this situation is this a viable use of the Counselor's time?

D. Sienko added that since we have heard month after month from R. Carroll that staffing is an issue, this does seem like a valid point for the committee to bring to ORS so that they may address it and the dialogue will then become part of the State Plan.

If the question was not justified or is based on misconstrued information then this will be addressed by ORS.

2. Public Hearing – Broadening Public Input

The Chair and N. Baker put a survey together and it will be given to everyone who attends the public hearing.

The Plan is on the website now and the public has been notified that they may comment.

The purpose of the survey is to find out if there are other ways we can reach out to the public.

3. Letter to the Providence Journal

H. Weiss and the Chair spoke on the phone this past week, and agreed that an op-ed piece instead of a letter to the editor would be best. They will be meeting over the next month to craft another draft of the letter for the Council to review.

J. Drew suggested that since it is so far removed from the actual situation perhaps we could weave it in with the upcoming anniversary of the signing of the ADA.

This was an idea agreed to by the Council.

3. Annual Report

The report is available to everyone on the ORS web site. Copies were distributed to membership at the last meeting. Anyone wanting additional hard copies let N. Baker know.

3. New Business

1. ORS Administrator Report – R. Carroll

Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR): meeting in Washington was a wonderful forum to update on National happenings. It also gives us an opportunity to visit our Congressional Delegation.

Workforce Investment Act is up for reauthorization. But in talking with the Delegation in DC, the conventional wisdom seems to be to not reauthorize it. Probably the Workforce Investment Act will move into the next session of Congress, which means for five (5) years this law has not been reauthorized.

The biggest need for growth in the VR Program is Transition. We at ORS believe that we are doing a good job but we are hardly meeting all the needs. Senator Kennedy is trying to propose two-hundred (200) million towards Transition Programs but it is more than likely that it will end up being one-hundred (100) million.

National VR- business network: the vision is to create a coordinated approach to serving business customers through a national. Every state has a point of contact. M. Dzialo is ORS' contact person for this network.

Personnel -The personnel situation in March looked grim but since then we have been allowed to continue our recruitment. We have hired five new counselors, a new supervisor for a region, and some support staff. We are also trying to place into our resources, Case Aides.

Temp employees, Smart Staffing employees and Consultant's contracts are ending on June 30th. The Legislature and Governor's office are feuding as to what will be done regarding employment for the future. These Contractors are very critical to our Program, so we are watching this closely.

State Budget - this month the Legislators will conference to get a sense of what the picture will look like.

State Plan – this Plan is longer and more detailed than it has been in the past. Some of the commentaries from the Policy Community are helpful.

The Federal Financial Analyst - has come to visit ORS for a few days. We had a good exit interview and they gave us some clues as to what to be expecting for an outcome of the review.

The Rehabilitation Service Administration (RSA) - is coming in June. We have no agenda yet and it is frustrating because their visit is only a month away. We do know they want to have a lot of Stakeholders involved in the review, but without an agenda it is difficult to plan.

2. ORS Presentation on Work Incentives Planning and Assistance Program (WIPA) - R. Greene

Benefits Planning and Assistance - many People mistakenly believe that once they have been awarded SSI or SSDI benefits by the Social Security Administration, they must not attempt to work. They fear that to do so will immediately put their benefits at risk.

In reality, the Social Security Administration encourages people who receive disability benefits to attempt to work through the provisions of work incentives. Use of these work incentives often allows individuals to improve the quality of their lives through satisfying employment. Work Incentive may also allow individuals to keep their Medicare or Medicaid benefits while they work.

Work Incentives – What do they all mean?

The Office of Rehabilitation Services recently entered into a cooperative agreement with the Social Security Administration to provide Work Incentive Planning and Assistant services throughout Rhode Island to individuals receiving SSI or SSDI on the basis of disability who wish to become more financially independent.

The previous project, Ticket to Work 1999 Act, gave Consumer choice and the right to have options to get services. In 2006 it ended. ORS was then awarded the WIPA Project. Originally it was to last three (3) years but given the Federal Fiscal situation, it is now running for Ten (10) months, and then eight (8) months. We are currently in the seventh month of WIPA and the cooperative agreement will end May 31.

Social Security was supposed to be an active partner in setting up outreach activities, however that has not happened. My staff and myself are Certified Benefits Counselors, to provide Work Incentive planning and Assistive Outreach services. We are required to work with Disability Training, Department of Education and the DLT.

Eighty percent (80%) of our time is to be provided to individuals that want to use Work Incentives to stay employed. We act more like case management as they work through the steps of going back to work.

Overpayment and loss of medical coverage are the biggest concerns for many of the people returning to work. Fortunately in Rhode Island, Medicaid Buy-In was enacted.

In Rhode Island forty-four (44) thousand receive these benefits. Providence, Pawtucket, and West Warwick have the largest populations of recipients.

Questions: how do they learn about this?

Some individuals received a Ticket to Work.

Social Security is also supposed to be telling their recipients about the Program.

Our team also goes out and provides information to mental health centers, the VA, developmental groups, and The Point,

Social security is looking to us to provide a lot of services and we really have a small budget. This year it was sixty-six (66) thousand.

Question: how long does it take someone to get off SSI or SSDI when they are in the program?

SSI and SSDI have different work incentives so it varies.

Some people get off of these programs, work for a while and then find they can't make it and they go back on benefits.

People also are supplementing their benefits, not ever really becoming fully employed. So with this new program we try to be more specific in working with people as case management to help them through the entire process.

Question: how many people do you actually work with in a year?

We have a smaller caseload than in the past. Let me get back to you with a more specific answer.

The Council would like to thank R. Greene and ORS for giving this informative presentation.

3. Chair's Report

1. Request to expand our mailing list for the Annual Report. We will follow up on this at the next executive meeting.

2. RSA Visit - If there are any Council members who wish to take part in this please let me know. And as soon as they solidified their agenda we'll let you know.

4. Sub committee Caucus – the reports will be distributed to membership and the RSA at the June meeting.

4. Public Comment – None.

5. Adjournment – The meeting was adjourned at 11:00 A.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Nancy L. Baker

Nancy Baker, Staff
State Rehabilitation Council