

Rehabilitation Council of Texas (RCT) August 13-14, 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
JoAnne Fluke, Abilene
Cheryl A Fuller, Austin
Lindsey Geeslin, Waco
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

Absent:

Crystal George, Argyle
Colton Read, New Braunfels
Abdi Warsame, Irving

TWC Reps:

Commissioner Julian Alvarez III, Ron Ayer, Kimberly Bradford-Brown, Gary Benner, Kim Berry, Shelly Caillouet, Commissioner Aaron Demerson, Cindy Geisman, Lisa Godwin, Adam Leonard, Christy Lerche, Scott McCune, Tammy Martin, Geoffrey Miller, David Norman, Brian Owens, Claudia Peden, Daniel Prado, Elsa Y. Perez, Jonas Schwartz, Belinda Salazar, Ed Serna, Chris Speckhard, Les Trobman, Jason Vaden,

Guest:

Kaki Leyens TWIC, Steve Aleman, Philip Aaron, Jeanie Hanzal Disability Rights Texas, Joey Gidseg, Robin Orłowski MCPD, Jasmine Franks Development Operations

Welcome and Introductions

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

Julian Alvarez III, TWC Commissioner Representing Labor

- Addressed council and gave an update on Pre-Ets, Deaf and Hard of Hearing, and HireAbility campaigns.

Aaron Demerson, TWC Commissioner Representing Employers

Addressed the council and recognized the 30th anniversary of Americans with Disabilities Act and White Cane Day.

Ed Serna, TWC Executive Director

Addressed the council and spoke about the way things are changing to virtual formats and being able to take advantage of technology due to the pandemic and how to move forward with these changes.

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

- Mrs. Fuller acknowledged the support of leadership and colleagues in moving into remote work and remote service delivery.
- Respond to the pandemic moving forward with remote work and remote service delivery
 - Ensure that the number of new VR customers applying for services continues to grow using outreach and awareness strategies. Using social media and rebranding. VR has been added to the TWC chat bot. VR is working on a video to inform

potential customers about VR services. This video will include ASL. Local VR Offices are also reaching out to community organizations referral sources. VR has implemented an office locator email to assist those who may not know what office to contact. We have also established a rapid engagement team that will take a customer's initial contact information and assign it to the management unit closest to the customers zip code.

- Insuring that VR Counselors are engaging with customers whose service may have been put on hold due to the pandemic.
- A question was added to the customer survey if they had a COVID related job loss.
- VR is participating in virtual job fairs.
- Making sure VR staff have the technology they need to engage customers. This included laptops and iphones and using Microsoft teams soft phone.
- The providers have been working very hard to provide remote services delivery as well.
- VR Projects
 - Provide electronic forms, report and invoices for provider.
 - Temporary exception to policies and procedures and business processes for both staff and providers have been extended through August. Some of these procedural exceptions will be going into the VR manuals so that they become standard practice and others that are still temporary will be extended through the end of this year.
 - Student Summer Projects
 - Summer Earn and Learn was cancelled due to the pandemic
 - Some projects were able to move to virtual format such as, Five of the nine Explore STEM camps, five of the group skills trainings, Texas School for the Deaf, A&M Project LEAP, and Live and Learn at Wise College.

- VR purchased a few licenses to virtual career fair platforms and planning to launch career fairs across the state in August and September.
- Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment
 - 523 attendees at the virtual town halls
 - Good response also in surveys and key informant interview.
 - VR will develop strategies based on the needs identified in the CSNA and will bring this to RCT for discussion. VR will develop strategies and use this to modify the combined state plan
 - How we can streamline our policies, procedures and standards, so that we can expedite service delivery and reduce administrative burden and improve the flow of the service delivery process.
 - Vehicle Modification - a team was put together that included staff from in and out of the division. This team reached out to customers, representatives from community organizations, vehicle modification vendors and staff. One of the key policy recommendations will be not to prioritize public transportation as we do now when considering a vehicle modification.
- VR Provider engagement strategy - Jason Vaden, A new series of quarterly meetings for VR Providers, the first meeting was held via Zoom on June 16th with over 200 attendees. The next meeting will be held September 15th at 1:00. This prompted us to also work with smaller groups of providers to be able to dig into certain issues. Mr. Vaden thanked RCT member, Ms. Hodges for work on this project.
- Update on Brain Injury, VR's partnership with Health and Human Services Commission CRS program is a big success in helping these customers. Where the challenge is in open

enrollment process to get new provider, who will provide under this model. The open enrollment solicitation has been modified and improved and will be reposted.

- Mental Health conditions and the struggle in stability as well as in employment engagement. Sometimes those occur with substance use disorders, so they co-occur. Mr. Powell will speak on this later in the meeting.
- Update on waivers for VR, Secretary of Education CARES Act report to congress:
 - The waivers included allowing VR additional funds, additional carryover period with the funds, waiving the 15% requirement.
 - Also, the ability to use the VR funds to help the Randolph Shepard vendors to restock as they come back.
 - This is being watched but not seeing much movement at this time.
- Lisa Maciejewski-West asked Mrs. Fuller to talk about how RCT could support the Waiver request to Secretary of Education regarding the CARES Act report. Lisa Maciejewski-West will draft a letter to the Texas delegation that will be signed by the RCT Chair and Vice Chair. Any TWC employees will not take part in this recommendation.
- **Motion made by Lisa Maciejewski-West to have the RCT draft a letter of support** asking our congressional leaders of the Texas delegation for an extension of the FFY2019 VR grant through the end of FFY 2020, and a waiver of the 15% set aside requirement for the FFY 2020 grant.
 - Chairman Michael A Ebbeler, JR. read the motion
 - Seconded by Paul Hunt
 - Discussion, a discussion was held with the question as to what FY years were included. Mr. Fuller will email Lisa Godwin the CARES act to share with the RCT to have the exact waiver request information.
 - Chairman Michael A Ebbeler, JR. vote on motion to have RCT draft a letter asking Texas congressional leaders for an

extension on the FFY 2019 grant through the end of FFY 2020 and a waiver of 15% set aside requirement of FY 2020 grant all in favor raise their hands.

- Chairman Michael A. Ebbeler, JR. The ayes have it. The motion is moving forward There may be some adjustment on the dates only, not the language.

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.

Intro to Mental Health and Addiction Recovery/VR, Joe Powell, President and CEO of the Association of Person's Affected by Addiction

- MR. Powell held a conference call with Mrs. Fuller and others at TWC VR for a discussion on peer to peer services path and how they can work with VR.
- Mr. Powell gave a history of the organization and provided some examples of the work they provide.

Public Comment

- Mr. Joe Powell provided public comment
 - Big Texas Rally for Recovery website will hold a virtual rally this year in September 17-19. The rally is three hours a day for three days noon – 3:00pm

RCT Committee Reports

- Customer Satisfaction and Needs Assessment, Lisa Cowart, Chair
 - CSNA Town Hall Report, 523 attendees which included TWC VR Staff, RCT Members, VR Customers and VR Providers, Representatives of Disability Advocacy Groups,

and Government Agencies. Holding the meetings virtually allowed greater attendance and participation in the town halls. Two areas that were consistent with the 2017 CSNA are communication and collaboration, and disability training. The disability category with the most mentions were mental health and substance abuse. The second was blind and visually impaired and neuro developmental. Customer choice move up from number 8 in 2017 to number 4 this year. Number 3 concern was TWC VR staff turnover. There were 13 key informed interviews conducted in April and May. Texas A&M conducted the Needs Survey online assessment of the needs of VR participants. Participation was increased from 3,000 in 2017 to 8,600 in 2020. The highest-ranking challenges mentioned in this survey were concerns over loss of government benefits, lack of affordable childcare, housing or transportation. The full report for CSNA will be available maybe in the fall.

- Reviewed the Customer Satisfaction report. Some of the numbers on this report is a direct effect of COVID19. Such as job loss, onsite services not available or transitioning to virtual.
- **The committee discussed getting more employers involved with the VR System. We will be working on exploring employer's knowledge of VR, their knowledge of hiring individuals with disabilities and how are they being outreached. What are specific pain points that are keeping employers from jumping into this process. Helping employers understand VR language. JoAnne Fluke suggested have a VR section within the city chamber of commerce. Cheryl Fuller will check into involvement with the Chamber of Commerce as fees can't be paid**

from federal funds. Suggested to have Melinda Paninski and Lisa Givens to present at the next RCT meeting on employer engagement with VR as a starting place for RCT involvement. This committee will also hold a conference call with Commissioner Demerson's office, reach out to Brian Owens. Mrs. Fuller offered support in this project. Mrs. Kendell mentioned Project Ability Task Force in San Antonio as something to look into.

- Education and Membership, Bobbie Hodges, Chair
 - Membership Update for October 2020
 - Reappointments Rodrick Robinson, Amanda Bowdoin, Lindsey R Geeslin
 - Termed out Susie May, recruited Emily Robinson
 - Termed out not replacing Crystal George
 - Training for future RCT meetings
 - Melinda Paninski & Lisa Givens, Employer Relations
 - Emily Robinson, Deaf and Hard of Hearing
 - Elections for RCT Chair and Vice Chair will take place today using Survey Monkey.
- Policy, Procedure & Personnel Development, Karen Stanfill, Chair
 - Policies
 - The committee has reviewed several proposed policies that VR is making to allow some of the changes there were made for COVID to become permanent such as electronic signatures, remote services and some contract exceptions.
 - Basic living requirements changed when VR moved to TWC that if you fall below a certain level you are still required to participate in paying for services. Karen has reached out to RSA for clarification with no results. She has looked at other states that

compare to Texas in size and number of people such as California, New York, and Florida. They all have a voluntary financial needs test and if you fall under a certain poverty level or are on food stamps or TANF you are not required to participate in the cost of services. **Karen will work with Cheryl Fuller on clarification.**

- VR staff salaries were discussed and there was a salary comparison completed by VR that determined that salaries are in line with the average salary for a VR professional. VR may want to remind staff that they provide tuition reimbursement as a way for staff to move up in the agency and retain employees. VR Counselors that move to Texas from other states and have VR Counselor experience are currently hired on at a level 1. This is being looked into to be able to hire them in at a higher level due to their education and experience from another state. VR has reported hiring more staff than losing staff which is a first in about two years.
- VR Staff Training has moved to remote training and will continue.
- IHOs there were two that were reviewed, and the committee agreed with the agencies findings in both of these.

Liaison Reports The full reports are included in the binders

- CAP, Karen Stanfill
 - CAP has been meeting with TWC VR staff, Tammy Martin, Claudia Peden and Jason Vaden every other week to share observations or difficulties that have arisen due to COVID19.
- PRN, Lisa Cowart

- PRN moved to virtual setting in April due to COVID19. PRN is continuing to provide full service. It appears that things are going maybe better due to the virtual environment. PRN has held a few symposiums and conferences virtually that worked out very well. People from all around the world participated. They have held youth camps virtually with great student participation.
- SILC, Colton Read – No Report Lisa Godwin will reach out to Colton Read
- TEA, Susan May
 - Shared resources at TEA.Texas.Gov Coronavirus COVID link. There is a lot of great information and guidebooks to help during the pandemic.
- TWIC, Lindsey Geeslin- No report provided verbal or written.

Council Business

- RCT Chair and Vice Chair Elections
 - Nominees were given an opportunity to speak prior to the election.
 - Nominees for Chair Paul Hunt, Lisa Cowart, and Michael A. Ebbeler, JR.
 - Nominees for Vice Chair Paul Hunt, Rodrick Robinson and Lisa Maciejewski-West
 - Election results Lisa Maciejewski-West as Vice Chair by majority vote, and Michael A. Ebbeler, Jr. as Chair by majority vote.
- Approve May minutes, Paul Hunt made a motion to approve the May Minutes, Lisa Maciejewski-West seconded. All approved, May Minutes approved.
- Meeting dates FY21
 - November 5th & 6th, 2020
 - February 4th & 5th, 2021
 - May 6th & 7th, 2021
 - August 5th & 6th, 2021

- Members were asked if they liked the way the August virtual meeting was held, and they agreed to use this format for the November agenda.
- **CSAVR, NCSRC and NCSAB conferences in Fall will be virtual. RCT Executive committee to discuss sending all RCT members that want to attend.**
- Budget Report
 - Balance Operating Expenses \$5,202.50, Travel Expenses \$27,064.35. Larger balances due to no travel since March 2020. New budget will start on September 1, 2020 SFY21. Mrs. Fuller commented that the RCT budget will remain consistent with previous year, understanding the anomaly this year and maybe even going into next year. VR will not recommend a reduction in RCT's budget on that basis.
 - 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 amend the original motion that we made yesterday that said that RCT would ask Congressional leaders for an extension of the FFY VR grant through the end of FFY2020 to a letter of support asking our Congressional leaders for an extension of the FFY VR grant through the end of FFY2021.
 - Michael A. Ebbeler, Jr. RCT Chair
Mrs. Maciejewski-West. What I hear is that you are requesting an amendment to the original motion regarding the letter that we're sending to the Congressional leadership of Texas regarding the FFY VR grant. And the language is going to change from 2020 to 2021 it's just the year, from 2020 to FFY 2021. So, the full language will be a letter of support asking your Congressional leaders for an

- extension of an FFY VR grant through the end of FY2021.
- Paul Hunt seconded the amendment.
- Discussion was offered, no discussion
- Amendment was voted and unanimously approved.
- Lisa Maciejewski-West asked for an update from the Ad Hoc Committee for virtual public comment.
 - Rodrick Robinson Chair of the Ad Hoc Committee gave the following updates
 - Committee was created to explore platforms for virtual public comment.
 - RCT meetings have been being held via Zoom and we would like to move forward with using this platform for public comment once in person meeting resume. It shouldn't be an issue to plug into the microphone system but may need to discuss if RCT would like to add camera/video.
 - There was a discussion as to if a motion was made to form the committee or to actually provide virtual public comment.
 - Michael Ebbeler asked the committee to provide a comprehensive procedure and any obstacles concerning digital divide situations. Mr. Robinson asked for TWC's help in identifying any legal issues.
 - Paul Hunt brought up providing the entre quarterly meeting to virtual format for public participation. Mr. Robinson agreed that is something to consider in next steps. Mr. Robinson commented that the participation from VR customers and providers was greatly increased in the virtual CSNA Town Halls, so it

is proven that this is something that customers and stakeholders really want. Mr. Ebbeler reminded everyone that the original motion was for virtual public comment, so if they are considering entire meeting going virtual there will need to be an amendment or another motion.

- It was determined that the motion will be pushed forward to November meeting and the Ad Hoc Committee will present at that time.
- **Lisa Godwin will add to the meeting timeline to have Lisa Givens send a GovDelivery notice for the RCT Quarterly Meeting about three weeks prior to the meeting.**
- Adjourn