



**State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations  
STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL**

*To work with ORS assuring that all Rhode Islanders with disabilities are able to obtain and keep meaningful and satisfying employment.*

**Full Council Minutes May 14, 2013**

**8:30 A.M. – 11:30 A.M.**

Radisson Hotel Warwick 2081 Post Road, Warwick, Rhode Island 02886

**Present:** Christine Botts, Rocco Bruno, Stephen Brunero, Wheeler Clemmons, Lea Colardo, Kelley Conti, Cynthia Cote, Linda Deschenes, Laurie DiOrio, Sharon DiPinto, Dr. Mona Dorsinville-Phanor, Dorothy Furlong, Liz Graves, Kathleen Grygiel, Maryellen Hagerty, Paul Harden, Roger Iannetta, Diana Kriner, Jeffrey D. Machado, Aracelis Maria, JoAnn Nanning, Dan Pieroni, Ronald Racine, Jack Ringland, Catherine Sansonetti, Juan Troncoso, Willa Truelove, Kim Wennermark and Nancy Baker, Christina Battista, Margaret Benz, Janice Belasco, Jeanne Giroux, Gail Lawson, Anne LeClerc, Nicole McCarty, Jessica Mowry, Grace Pires, Sharon Thistlewhite-Morra, Marilyn Walaska

**Excused:** Cory Allard, Bryant Lemus Berganza, Dr. Kate McCarthy-Barnett, Wheeler Clemmons, Dr. Judith Drew, Dr. Mona Dorsinville-Phanor, Joan Fino, Margaret Hoye, Aracelis Maria, Jane Slade,

1. **Call to Order** - Jeffrey D. Machado, the Vice-chair, called the meeting to order. Quorum met.

2. **Additions/Deletions to Agenda** - Chair's report suspended, Chair unable to attend.

3. **Approval of Minutes** - Motion to accept the February 12, 2013 minutes unanimously approved.

4. **Honorees Awards** - Stephen Brunero presented the following members awards honoring their dedication and service to the mission of the SRC, Janice Belasco for serving 4 full terms; Anne LeClerc, Herb Weiss, Rocco Brunno, Vincent Rossi, Dr. Mona Dorisville-Phanor and Catherine Sansonetti for completing 2 full terms.

5. **ORS Report** - Steve Brunero Reports:

Steve thanked membership and the ORS team for all their efforts to grow and keep the Council moving forward with its mission.

\* While in DC Steve met with Jim Langevin's office; they expressed concern about the Work Incentives Planning and Assistance Grant due to its cancelation, however since this meeting the SSA has informed us that the funding is coming back in August. Kathleen Grygiel has written a grant and is moving forward because benefit planning is a very important component to helping people with disabilities.

\* Federal government cutbacks, sequestration, are affecting our federal oversight agency, however in RI no cutbacks on staff workdays or client services. We are losing approximately a half million dollars but offsetting that through reallocation and consumer price index increases.

\* National Conference September 16<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup> in RI - The 6th Annual Summit on Vocational Rehabilitation Program Evaluation and Quality Assurance 9/16/2013-9/17/2013 Omni Providence Hotel. Everyone here is invited to attend.

\* Personnel - Staffing at ORS VR and SBVI is in good shape. Disability Determination Services (DDS) is still under-staffed due to federal hiring freezes.

\* ORS Building - Ron Racine has been working on Workplace Safety at ORS. In order to accommodate our clients we have taken over space on the first floor for a reception area, office space, and conference rooms.

\* The Governor presented an Executive Order to increase employment opportunities in State Government for underserved populations. The Order didn't specify people with disabilities; however we would like to have an executive order specifically recognizing people with disabilities and employment opportunities. We have reached out to the Office of Diversity to send names of people with disabilities out when offering candidates for job placements.

National Governor's Association has a major initiative to hire people with disabilities. And a number of people from RI, including Ron Racine, Bob Cooper are a few, went to a conference to promote initiatives for better employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

\* RI Best and Emerging Practices that are national recognized – ORS' Cooperative Agreement with RIDE including the Summer Work Program, and Asperger Syndrome Initiative that identifies providers trained to work with people who have Asperger Syndrome.

\* ADA Investigation in RI: The United States Department of Justice is looking at violations of The Americans with Disabilities Act, primarily with sheltered workshops and supportive employment programs for people with intellectual and developmentally disabilities.

**Upcoming Events**

May 22 stakeholder event at OSCIL

Dare to Dream Conference. May 22 at URI

State Plan Hearing May 23 at Warwick Public Library from 3PM-5PM

(Link to draft of State Plan) - <http://www.ors.ri.gov/StatePlanUpdates/2014%20State%20Plan%204.29.13.pdf>

## 6. Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors - Grace Pires, Sharon Thistlewhite-Morra

Grace Pires has worked for ORS; Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired for the past 9 years, before that she was a client with the program. Because of her experiences as a client she feels she has a better understanding of what it is like to go through the process. She came to this country at 10 years old and didn't know what she would do for school and eventually employment; her language barriers and disability contributed to her uncertainty. She had never known a blind person who worked besides celebrities! But her parents came to this country to give her a better chance for a productive future, one where she would be able to excel at whatever she wanted. But she did not know what she wanted. It was crucial to have a counselor to help her find goals for work and ORS made that difference in focusing in on her goals. Jerry Shapiro and Monica Dzialo were her counselors and they set the bar high. Her experiences as a young person working with ORS help her better understand her clients today so they can accomplish their goals as she did. Today she shows people the possibilities and inspires them to reach for what they might feel is beyond their disabilities. She now inspires her clients as he counselors once did!

Sharon Thistlewhite-Morra's path in getting to her current position started when she was young; bringing home those people who needed help. As she matured, she worked in domestic violence shelters, hot lines and then in the court system before receiving her Masters and started working with ORS in 2004. In 2008 a sudden mysterious illness sparked a journey to figure out what was wrong with her health. And it was at this time roles reversed and she became a client of ORS. Diagnosed with Fibromyalgia and Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, medications and therapies became a struggle making it hard to work regular hours. ORS let her come back part time. Her journey of learning eventually lead to a holistic approach, going on a special diet of raw, organic, and no GMO foods. All this happened in 2008 and since then she has come back to work full time and is a Senior Counselor with ORS making the necessary accommodations for her along the way. A 'practice what you preach approach'! She feels strongly that everyone's journey is different and that ORS takes the individual and everything that comes with each person as top priority.

Stephen Brunero added some thoughts about the number of people with disabilities that work at ORS and how the agency works hard to support them professionally. ORS is a model state agency for hiring people with disabilities being the first agency to use voice mail and user technology with our website and even have a website.

7. **Subcommittee Breakouts** - Committees worked to finalize plans for summer, only Nominations and Leadership reported to full Council.

### Nominations & Leadership Development

The Nominating Committee has been very active with recruitment since the last full council meeting in preparation for nominations this year:

Dr. Judi Drew: Nancy has spoken to her and she wishes to be re-appointed to the Council.

Motion made by Rocco Bruno seconded by Jeffrey D. Machado to re-appoint Dr. Judith Drew to the Council unanimously approved.

Of the other members who are on term breaks, we will speak with them this fall; none are eligible until the fall to come back on the Council.

Six dynamic candidates were interviewed and presented for the Council's vote to appointment.

Motion made by Rocco Bruno seconded by Jeffrey D. Machado to appoint Jack Ringland, Margaret "Peggy" Benz, Jessica Mowry, Nicole McCarthy, Gail Lawson, Marilyn Walaska and Christina Battista unanimously approved.

Appointment letters will go to the Governor's office this fall until then members are officially seated as per SRC By-laws.

8. Liz Graves representing SILC called attention that they are running a representative drive for new membership on SILC. She said they need a diverse variety of people on their council, which is an active organization statewide. If anyone knows someone who wishes to work on SILC please let Nancy or Liz know.

9. **Adjournment** - Meeting motion to adjourn by Jeffrey D. Machado seconded by Jack Ringland and approved at 11:30 A.M.

Respectfully Submitted,



Nancy L. Baker, Facilitator, SRC