

**Department of Human Services
Office of Rehabilitation Services
State Rehabilitation Council**

**Minutes
Tuesday June 12, 2007
4:00 P.M. – 6:00 P.M.**

Present from State Rehabilitation Council: Janice Belasco, Rocco Bruno, Raymond Carroll, Rick Costa, Susan Donavon, Dr. Judith L. Drew, Dr. Mona Dorsinville-Phanor Joseph Ferreira, Jeanne M. Giroux, Margaret Hoye, Anne LeClerc, Gary J. Levine, Lucille Massemينو, Catherine Sansonetti, J. David Sienko, Herbert Weiss Vincent Rossi

Present from Agency: Ronald Racine

Guests: Charles Sadler, Joseph Doney, Yann-Yann Shieh

1. Call to Order and Introductions - The Chair called the meeting to order at 4:00 P.M.

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

Motion

J. Ferreira made a motion seconded by J. Belasco and approve with one (1) abstention from C. Sansonetti the minutes were approved from the May 8, 2007 meeting.

2. Old business – D. Sienko

1. Mailing list for the Annual Report – H. Weiss is going to craft an editorial to the Providence Journal. We will review the mailing list and add this letter along with the Annual Report to those persons on it. Including Legislators, City Mayors, as well as social services community.

An email announcement for the Annual Report to the mailing list would be an idea for the future.

R. Carroll: in the past we focused on the disability community but what the SRC seems to be heading towards is broadening the list of those getting the annual report.

2. Survey from the Public Hearing – our concern is to find out if we are doing everything we can do to get comments on the state plan.

The Chair read the survey aloud so everyone would have access to it. There were seven surveys returned from those in attendance at the Public Hearing.

The suggestions were good and they can help guide us. It would be good to do this as an ongoing process for all our future events. The Executive committee will look at this for further discussion and strategies.

Suggestion from J. Drew: we have the Crossroads data base, we could use it to survey people regarding the State Plan and also use the data base to send the notices for the State Plans hearing.

This will be discussed further by Executive committee.

3. New Business

Rehabilitation Service Administration (RSA) Presentation – C. Sadler thanked the Council for inviting them. The team has been out to several states doing their on-sight monitoring. It's nice for us to meet with people who are so closely tied to Rehabilitating Services from a Stakeholder's point of view. We administrate from Washington D. C. and don't often have the opportunity to connect on a personal level. The team is broken into five parts, a technical assistant, a Vocational Rehabilitation Specialist, a statistician, an IL Specialist, and a Financial Specialist.

Another initiative C. Sadler is working on is to coordinate a national SRC organization. Essentially the SRC's are starting to join together to empower themselves. The RSA is helping with teleconferencing, and perhaps in the future a National conference might be held

The National SRC Cooperation is looking to pick out four (4) or five (5) major issues, and through their numbers they will lobby Congress, as well as the SCAVR for more time to discuss issue of mutual concern.

The second important ongoing initiative involves making the training materials available on-line. Additionally we would like to hold regional meetings for the SRC Chairs to get together in order to participate in a role-out of the training materials. So while we didn't fund the national conference the SRC's originally wanted, we'll fund these other initiatives.

Finally, the National TA Needs Assessment initiative is underway. The facilitating contractor is contacting all VR Agencies and all SRC Chairs to ask them what they pick out to be the most important technical assistance areas they need help with. Then the contractor will compile the information and we will determine how best to meet those needs. It is hoped this will be completed by early 2008.

Monitoring Process – J. Doney

In 2005 the RSA consolidated and closed regional offices and undertook a new initiative for monitoring the states. We look at the agencies to see if they successfully delivered service in compliance with Rehabilitation Act. Once this was completed a report was generated. However, the RSA wanted to redesign the process to improve the outcomes for consumers. The monitoring protocol will now be reviewed every three years. Rhode Island is one of the states in the first round of this new protocol.

The prior process took about two weeks with the preliminary work. IN the past as much as three (3) days were spent looking at actually service records to determine, in a vacuum, what the Agency was doing. Service record reviews have been put aside with this new process.

The purpose of the review is to determine where the strengths and challenges are for the Agency. In conjunction with the Agency we will develop a process to help better the outcomes for consumers. We will collect effective practices and putting them into a database that the Agency can use. The Quality Assurance Program was one we looked at while here and it appears that Rhode Island is in good practice. These are the kinds of things we want to take and share throughout the country. This will benefit all states and ultimately the consumers.

The Chair asked since you are not doing the case review does that mean that systemically there are good things in place at ORS.

J. Doney said things are coming along well here. What we'll be doing is helping the Agency to establish an internal monitoring program that will encourage the agencies and put them into action on a quarterly, or biyearly review. It's more effective for the VR Agency to go through their own records, it's a learning thing for them rather than have someone come in and look at them.

The Chair said we look forward to getting the report. It's helpful, we call it a critical friend, and it gives us things to review with ORS. We often have lots of questions for ORS after we get your report.

Guest Presentations

Rhode Island Disability Law Center (RIDLC) - C. Sansanette

We are a federally funded non-profit law firm to help people with disability issues. (RIDLC provides free legal assistance to persons with disabilities. Services include individual representation to protect rights or to secure benefits and services; self-help information; educational programs; and administrative and legislative advocacy. The agency administers eight federally funded advocacy programs, each of which has its own eligibility criteria. We do an extensive outreach and ORS has been a responsive partner in this. We always look for ways to collaborate in addressing issues.

In order to really get the word out we produced a booklet called the CAP Guide to Services. If you flip through the booklet all of the law is in here for you to see, and in other places we give helpful hints to solving problems.

ORS Administrator's Report - R. Carroll

The State Plan Update: we have a working draft with the Policy committee, and we are working on feedback from DLC. I feel confident we'll get this done in time.

Rehabilitation Service Administration (RSA): this is the week for the on-site monitoring visit from the RSA. Rhode Island is among the twenty (20) states scheduled for the in-depth, comprehensive assessment this year. With these changes in the way the RSA monitors our Agency, the SRC will have a very meaningful and significant part in the Federal Monitoring.

The 2008 Budget: we are very concerned about the budget; the needs are greater than ever while the resources are very contained. Curiously our personnel situation has improved having filled five (5) Counselor positions. We still have a few vacancies in our support staff. The Governor's email outlined the Four Point Comprehensive Workforce Reduction Plan in fiscal 2008, a renegotiation for the health costs, putting out to bid for every state service that could be performed by the private sector, and lastly asking the General Assemble to freeze wages at current levels. Ironically amidst all this, the bargaining agreement has been just finalized for many of ORS workers.

There has also been a great deal of press in terms of employees hired by Smart Staffing. This contract has now been put out to bid by the State. For now they are going to extend the current contract with Smart Staffing until this situation works out. There is an organizational shift going on to move towards a more generalist model, which does not really work well for our Agency. This is all part of the Governor's plan of fiscal fitness. There could be some bitter medicine ahead for us. There is a significant budget shortfall in the State budget. There are plans to cut out social services safety nets that are there.

Our role is to focus on the assets we do have. We will do everything we can to carry out our mission. We can't get negative, we must push onward.

Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR): they have undergone a Futures Project to tweak the Program and make it more expeditious to use. There was a web-teleconference with a fair amount of discussion on the Order of Selection that every state has if there are insufficient staff to deal with the consumers. Rhode Island has been using this since the nineties. The VR Program is national and CSAVR wants to come up with a National Definition for Order of Selection.

Sub committee Work

Nomination and Leadership Development

The committee is meeting for three (3) interviews next week. The nomination goal is the recruitment of new members, including assessment of population sectors, representation and skills needed to fill the gaps still in Council membership.

The leadership goal is to empower consumers with disabilities, be strategic in our thinking, and build our representation to reflect the rich diversity of Rhode Island's populations.

Employment

Update on the chamber article will be going out this week and we believe it's a final version. And we've compiled a list serve to send this out.

State Plan, Policy & Quality Assurance

The committee commented on the State Plan at the last meeting and is in the process of getting a letter formatted up and out to ORS.

Transportation

The committee is done with the survey development but is having problems with Survey Monkey and the Crossroads database. Once the bugs are worked out we will move forward with our strategic plan.

5. Public Comment - None

6. Adjournment – The meeting was adjourned at 6:00 P.M.

Respectfully Submitted,



Nancy L. Baker, Staff
State Rehabilitation