

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

**Meeting Minutes March 9, 2010  
4:00 PM – 6:00 PM**

**Department of Labor and Training ~ 1151 Pontiac Avenue ~ Cranston, RI 02920**

**Present from Council:** Janice Belasco, Dr. Kate McCarthy-Barnett, Rocco Bruno, Stephen Brunero, Wheeler Clemmons, Cynthia M. Cote, Domenic DiOrio, Jeanne M. Giroux, Margaret Hoye, Anne LeClerc, Sandy Lupovitz, Jeff Machado, Vincent Rossi, Catherine Sansonetti, Jane Slade, Juan Troncoso, Joan Vendetti, Mary E. Wambach

**Present from the VR Agency:** Karen Davis, Laurie DiOrio, Kathleen Grygiel, Ronald Racine, Melanie Sbardella

**Guest:** Paul Malloy, the Director of Employment Services at Corliss Institute

**1. Call to Order** - Kate McCarthy-Barnett, Chair, called the meeting to order at 4:00 P.M. Introductions of membership and guests followed. Quorum was met.

**2. Additions/Deletions to Agenda** – There were none.

**3. Approval of Minutes**

**Motion**

D. DiOrio made a motion seconded by J. Machado and unanimously approved, to accept the minutes from the February 9, 2010 meeting.

**4. Chair's Report** - Kate McCarthy-Barnett

- Annual SRC/ORS Report - Is completed and has been sent out to the membership and our partners. I want to thank everyone involved in the efforts to get this out in a timely way.
- Road to Compliance - Sandy Lupovitz, the Employment committee, and the Business Leadership Network had a successful gathering a few weeks ago. It was an excellent forum and a great opportunity to start discussion in areas of employment and for businesses to network. A topic to come out of this was the prescreening of applicants on line, for example Home Depot, Walmart, were some of the companies using this method. This type of prescreening may not be the best-case scenario for individuals with disabilities. That is an issue that we might bring back to our Employment committee to talk about strategies at the Council level and to make sure things are equal across the board. Steve Brunero and I had a conference call on this last week and he will touch on this gathering further in his report.
- Nomination of New Members and Guest Speakers - The Nominations committee had presented an overview for some strategies for recruitment of new members and guest speakers and we will be bringing this to the Executive committee to review and then back to the membership at our next meeting.
- Fiscal Climate - The fiscal climate remains a concern. We will continue to discuss and identify strategies as we move forward with the guidance from the Office of Rehabilitation Services (ORS). And if there is anything we can do from our role we will move as quickly as we can.
- Council Connections - In my new role as Chair, I have gone through notes from David Sienko and I have started to review the websites he recommended and look at different ideas. At the next meeting I want to share a quick analysis of some of the best practices that are out there for State Rehabilitation Councils. I anticipate as information comes down nationally, I will be able to update the Council.

**5. Office of Rehabilitation Services Director's Report** - Stephen Brunero

- Budget - There is a two hundred (200) million plus budget deficit for this year. This is the first time I have seen cuts in the Title I Grant Federal funding. The State cuts will continue to come down the road because we are looking at a four hundred forty (440) million dollar deficit for the next fiscal year. Rhode Island is not as bad off as many other states, we have gotten our state-match to get the Title I Grants this year but many states have not. Most states are on a strict Order of Selection. I will be meeting with my colleagues later this month to strategize ways to keep the funding coming. Even

though the President has come out and said he believes in this Program and wants to support it, this is the first year I can remember that we are not getting a cost of living increase, which we are estimating could be as much as a two hundred fifty (250) thousand to four hundred (400) thousand dollars in cuts. The bottom line is, despite the cuts, we need to maintain the integrity of programs that provide services to our clients.

- The Race to the Top Fund - Provides competitive grants to encourage and reward states that are creating the conditions for education innovation and reform. Rhode Island is one of fourteen (14) states still in the running.
- H.R. 2847 Hiring Incentives to Restore Employment Act - Title I: Incentives for hiring and retaining unemployed workers - (Sec. 101) Amends the Internal Revenue Code to: (1) exempt for-profit and nonprofit employers.  
*Executive summary - H.R. 2847 contains a suspension of payroll taxes for employers that hire new workers that had been unemployed for the previous 60 days, a \$1,000 tax credit for retaining employees, increased expensing of new equipment purchased by small businesses in 2010, and expanded tax credit bonds sold by local government and private entities and subsidized by the government. In addition, the legislation includes an extension of surface transportation programs through December 31, 2010, and includes a \$19.5 billion transfer from the general fund to the Highway Trust Fund (HTF) to compensate for the projected FY 2010 shortfall. The following analysis is based on the House amendment to H.R. 2847.*
- Road to Compliance - Was held on February 25<sup>th</sup> after originating from the SRC Employment committee. Representatives from the SRC, ORS, the Equal Employment Opportunity Center, the ADA Technical Center from Boston, and the Human Rights Commission were in attendance. There were excellent presentations and as a result of the meeting there was some discussion around the potentially discriminatory practices that employers use in screening out individuals, primarily with on-line forms that might screen out folks with intellectual deficits, language deficits, and others who potentially have disabilities. The lawyers felt this was a violation of the ADA and asked us to provide information on those practices. We will let you know how this plays out and we will do what we can to assist with this. It was a very well attended event and the competency of the panel was impressive.
- Personnel - We have approval to post five (5) Disability Determination Counselors and we are interviewing for those positions. We have posted one (1) of the two (2) vacancies for Rehabilitation Teachers. We have posted for Support Staff positions, Rehabilitation Counselor positions, and an Assistant Administrator position that will be working on the ATAP Grant, and working with the Interns at ORS, and also covering the transition activities.
- 2008 - 2009 Office of Rehabilitation Services Comprehensive Needs Assessment. This assessment, according to the Federal regulation, must be done every three (3) years. I want to acknowledge that Linda Deschenes has done a great job on this in-depth assesment. (Passed out to attendees)
- Rhode Island Works - Kathleen Grygiel

The Department of Human Services' Rhode Island Works Program (RIWorks) offers temporary cash assistance, health coverage, childcare assistance, and help with job training or job securing. This program has stringent time frames on how long a person can be on assistance and how many times in a lifetime they can receive assistance. Once a person starts getting assistance they must aggressively seek employment. ORS in collaboration with DHS and DLT is working to help many of these recipients obtain employment.

There have been challenges since this program started. When the program was being planned, ORS proposed a separate unit for people with disabilities but the staffing for this never came to pass due to the State's financial situation. Even though we did not get the staffing, ORS wants to be a good partner in this program. We are obligated and must be responsive to the needs of the population but with no new resources it is increasingly difficult to do this. As a result of this program we have had an influx of one thousand seventy nine (1, 079) referral events from DHS between July 1, 2009 and January 14, 2010. Each referral event requires a lot of work from our Agency. Of that number three hundred twenty one (321) attended an intake meeting, completed an application, and then became a client of ORS. There is a large population of folks that could take advantage of our Agency but are not taking it. And in all honesty, if every single referral followed through, we would be in a crisis to manage the resources needed for that number of people. We will be meeting this week with all the Field Supervisors to critically look at the systems we have in place to manage the flow of referrals.

## 6. Guest Speakers Program

1. Karen Davis (Region 4 & Region 6 Supervisor South County & Deaf & Hard of Hearing)

Karen spoke about some of the things ORS is working on with the Deaf and Hard of Hearing region:

- Expand vendors that work with our clients on a statewide level.

- Working with the School for the Deaf, recently approved vocational evaluations for a work prep program (internships). This program had a 100% placement rate.
- Develop closer working relationship with the Collaboratives regarding vocational evaluations and situation assessments for the Deaf especially in the South County area.
- Supportive Employment Program development with Corliss Institute.
- Sensitivity Training to help other State departments e.g. DLT work with Deaf individuals.
- Independent living needs, partner with OSCIL.
- Employer Assistance, evaluation for them to help the worker; e.g. Adaptive Telephone Equipment Loans (ATEL), and education for employers and employees.

We are starting to develop programs internally for an interviewing and four (4) day work readiness workshop. We are working on getting interpreters for job interviewing as part of this workshop.

## 2. Melanie Sbardella (Region 7 Supervisor Services for the Blind - Vocational Rehabilitation Unit)

Services to children from birth through age twenty one (21)

Services include:

- Counseling and guidance to children with visual impairments and their parents
- Medical and educational planning
- Advocacy
- Vocational guidance
- Summer camp program

Adults; in order to promote employment and independent living opportunities for adults with visual impairments, these units employ rehabilitation counselors, social workers, rehabilitation teachers, and mobility instructors so when someone comes to us we can assist them in a very person-centered way.

- Assessment, counseling, and guidance
- Training in mobility, daily living skills, and communication (including Braille)
- Vocational training
- Adaptive equipment
- Job development and placement

## Business Enterprises Program

The Business Enterprises Program [BEP] of ORS/Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired offers training and employment for qualified persons who are legally blind. Licensed blind vendors operate vending facilities at seventeen (17) locations found throughout the state.

## Independent Living Program for the Older Blind

ORS coordinates a federal program of independent living services for those who are blind and visually impaired over the age of 55. Services included are service coordination, information and referral, counseling, orientation and mobility instructions, provision of a white cane, instruction in activities of daily living, communication training, evaluation, and limited provision of adapted or specialized equipment. Specialized services are available for individuals who are deaf/blind.

The goal is to provide services to allow the individual to live as independently as possible in their own homes and communities with a maximum degree of self-direction.

This program also conducts in-service training sessions once a month at facilities and organizations around the state to improve public understanding of the capabilities and needs of older individuals who are blind and visually impaired. Additionally, an annual training conference for social service and direct care staff is held every fall.

## 7. Committee Reports

### Nominations and Leadership Development - Domenic DiOrio

#### **Motion**

K. McCarthy-Barnett made a motion seconded by S. Lupovitz and unanimously approved, to submit Paul Harden's name to the Governor for appointment to the SRC

The Nominations and Leadership Development committee has been working for sometime now on establishing time-lines for the Council membership to actively be involved in submitting names for potential new members as well as speakers for the Guest Speaker Program. The committee feels it is important that the membership be a strong and active part in the selection of new members and the guest speakers with ORS. This will help the membership to expand the vision of the SRC and they will

be able to gain updated information and better understanding of the needs of the population served. We will get feedback from the executive leadership on our strategies before presenting them to the full council.

Employment - Sandy Lupovitz

Our committee is concentrating on one of our proposals; increasing the involvement of business people in what we want to accomplish in terms of employment.

I found that in doing mock interviews, that the resumes were not very helpful, and that we as the interviewer had to draw information out of the candidates. This can be frustrating. I think that this is something we have to start working on with employers. I have spoken to Monica Dzialo about this and at this point we are working on putting a plan together.

Transportation - Anne LeClerc

We have not met since last meeting and we are rescheduling our next meeting with outside agencies.

State Plan, Policy & Quality Assurance - Catherine Sansonetti

Ongoing tasks from year to year with two (2) components, one is a reactive component, we wait for policy and State Plan updates and review to see if they are comports with Federal law. The other is the quality assurance piece and that is more proactive where we work with the Agency to try to improve upon the statistic; job outcomes. We have been doing this by participating in the Comprehensive Needs Assessment.

The Public Hearing for the State Plan is on May 27, 2010 from 1:00 P.M. – 3:00 P.M. at Warwick Public Library, Room 101 and all members are welcome to come and make comments.

**8. Public Comments** - There were none.

**9. Adjournment** - The meeting was adjourned at 6:00 P.M.

Respectfully Submitted,



Nancy L. Baker, Staff  
State Rehabilitation Council

**The next full-Council meeting is Tuesday, May 11, 2010**