

## **Rehabilitation Council of Texas (RCT) August 5-6, 2021 Zoom Virtual Meeting**

### **Present:**

Michael A. Ebbeler Jr., Chair, Austin  
Lisa Maciejewski-West, Vice Chair, Horseshoe Bay  
Amanda Bowdoin, Forney  
Matt Berend, Wichita Falls  
Jennifer Clouse, Temple  
Lisa Cowart, Beaumont  
Cheryl A Fuller, Austin  
Gennadiy Goldenshteyn, Dallas  
Bobbie Hodges, Fort Worth  
Paul Hunt, Austin  
Elizabeth Kendell, San Antonio  
April Pollreisz, Amarillo  
Joe Powell, Irving  
April Pollreisz, Amarillo  
Emily Robinson, Austin  
Rodrick Robinson, McKinney  
Karen Stanfill, Houston  
Crystal Stark, College Station  
Abdi Warsame, Irving

### **Absent:**

JoAnne Fluke, Abilene  
Lindsey Geeslin, Lorena

### **TWC Reps:**

Commissioner Julian Alvarez III, Gary Benner, Kimberly Berry, Rebecca Bilbrey, Terry Boyce, Kimberly Bradford-Brown, Shelly Caillouet, Nehtra Davis, Kandace Decker, Commissioner Aaron Demerson, Edward Fehrenbach, Marilyn Gilbreath, Lisa Godwin, Sara Kendall, Dennis Kutach, Laura LaCour, Christy Lerche, Joyce Leverenz, Susan Lindsey, Tammy Martin, Bonnie Martin-

Hudson, Scott McCune, Cassandra Medrano, John Hortman/Medrano, Geoffrey Miller, Sylvia Miller, Brian Owens, Melinda Paninski, Claudia Peden, Elsa Y. Perez, Laura Rook, Belinda Salazar, Ed Serna, Chris Speckhard, Laike Todd, Jason Vaden, Dr. Ekere Williams, Kelly Yarbrough

## **Guest:**

Laura Alter, Philip Aaron, Gabriela Arvizu, Valerie Blackmon, Glenda Born, Sandra Breitengross Bitter SILC, Ramona Brown, Laura Bruton, Christina Bryant, Joanna Burnett, Candace Carroll-Johnson, Edwin Castillo Disability Rights TX, Nicole Celestine, Tenika Combs, Liana Davis, Doug Demmel, Feliciano Garza, Jeanie Hanzal Disability Rights Texas, Frank Higginbotham, Mary Hodge, Larry Johnson, Jones, Aubrey Jones, Sonya Kelly, Shelly Lemman, Dorothea Lerman, T Lewis, Kaki Leyens, Christopher McCormack, Wade McMillion, Britni Miles, Steve Miller ASL, Joanne Mundy, Joseph Muniz, Morisa Myrick, Alena Newberry ASL, Christina Petrossi, Sandra Pierce, Dr. Sheila Pope, Kelly Quillen, Sonia Quintero, Susanne Ritter, Romania Roberts, Lisa Rodriguez, Brenda Roland, Karissa Sanchez, Will Smith, Julia Stotts, Jerold Terry, Karen Thomas, Mellissa Toler, Claudia Torres, Imelda Trevino, Tiffany Tubb, Tonita Watson, James Williams, Ebony Wingard, Caren Zysk, Polly CART Provider, Michelle CART Provider

## **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 the council.

## **Aaron Demerson, TWC Commissioner Representing Employers**

- Addressed the council.

**Liaison Reports** The full reports are included in the binders. Each representative will give an update.

- Client Assistance Program (CAP), Karen Stanfill
- Community Rehabilitation Provider (CRP), Bobbie Hodges
- Partners Resource Network (PRN), Lisa Cowart
- State Independent Living Council (SILC), April Poillreisz
- Texas Education Agency (TEA), Emily Robinson
- Texas Workforce Investment Council (TWIC), Lindsey Geeslin

## **Introduction of Chair and Vice Chair Nominees**

- Chair Michael A. Ebbeler Jr.
- Vice Chair Lisa Cowart and Gennadiy Goldenshteyn

## **Council Business**

- New Council Business
  - Election for RCT Chair and Vice Chair were held via Survey Monkey. Michael A. Ebbeler Jr. ran unopposed for Chair and Lisa Cowart was elected Vice Chair by majority vote.
  - RCT Strategic Planning for FY22 discussion was led by Karen Stanfill. It was agreed to conduct a Strategic Planning session in early **December 2021. Members that were interested in participating Karen Stanfill, Elizabeth Kendell, Jennifer Clouse, Abdi Warsame. Request a facilitator from TWC VR.**
  - VR success stories for the RCT Annual Report are due to Lisa Godwin by September 15, 2021.
  - Approve May minutes, Aril Pollreisz made a request to correct her attendance to absent only for the May meeting. All approved, amended May Minutes approved.

- Budget Report FY21 Budget \$58,350.00 with a current balance \$52316.25. There is an open PO for CART Services \$10,000. Tab two is the TWC report for RCT budget.
- ASL Services for the RCT meetings are being paid by TWC VR budget.
- Unfinished Council Business:
  - Rodrick provided an update on the Ad Hoc Committee Hybrid RCT Meetings. TWC VR is setting up Room As Service (RAS) to accommodate the Hybrid meetings. These rooms will be available to RCT to conduct their meetings. RCT will not need to purchase any equipment. VR is hoping to have this in place by November 2021.

## **Speaker Sara Kendell, TWC VR provided a presentation on Medicaid Waiver and Extended Supports**

- Her PowerPoint presentation was provided in the meeting binder.

## **Public Comment**

- Liana Davis provided public comment

## **RCT Member Training – TWC State Plan and RCT’s Role, Claudia Peden, Program Manager for Policy Development, Quality Assurance & Program Evaluation and Karen Stanfill RCT Member**

- Presented training on TWC State Plan and RCT’s Role. The PowerPoint presentation is included in the meeting binder.

## **Amanda Bowdoin, RCT Member**

- Shared her experience of speaking at the Forney Chamber Meeting.

## **ED Serna, TWC Executive Director**

- Addressed the council.

## RCT Committee Reports

- Customer Satisfaction and Needs Assessment, Lisa Cowart, Chair
  - Chris Speckhard reported that the CSNA Report is ready to be shared with the RCT. The committee reviewed the report during their committee meeting.
  - Gary Benner provided a review of the Customer Satisfaction report with the RCT. The full report was reviewed with the Customer Satisfaction and Needs Assessment during their committee meeting.
    - Gennady would like to know how does RCT use this data. Mrs. Fuller explained that this data drives the state plan.
- Education and Membership, Bobbie Hodges, Chair
  - Membership Update
    - Reappointments and New Members term Oct 29, 2021, Joe Powell, Lisa Cowart, April Pollreisz. All applications have been submitted.
    - Member that will term out in Oct 2021 JoAnn Fluke, Paul Hunt, Matt Berend and Crystal Stark.
      - Replacement for those terming out have been identified and have made their application. The Governor's office is working on reviewing the applications.
  - Training for future RCT meetings
    - Karen Stanfill will be leading quarterly RCT education and training.
    - November speaker TEA Dyslexia
    - RCT Member Mentorship program
      - Outline will be modified and provided to RCT Chair for approval.
      - Hoping to roll this out in November 2021
    - New Member Orientation is set for November 2, 2021.

- Policy, Procedure & Personnel Development, Karen Stanfill, Chair
  - Comprehensive System of Personnel Development
    - VR Counselors there are 668 filled positions, 442 of these meet the CSPD requirements and 202 do not. 147 of these are not yet working to meet the requirements and 81 of them are in their first year of employment.
    - There are 60 VR Counselor positions vacant and 27 Rehab Assistant positions vacancies of the 353 totals.
    - In June 2021 TWS provided a guidance memo that shows salary for new hires is up 3%, and the salary ranges have increased. If a person applies to TWS-VRS with previous experience in VR, they can also start at a higher salary range. Other salaries were adjusted to bring current employees up to the salary in the new salary range.
  - Policies
    - Several policies have been reviewed since the last RCT meeting resulting in some of the changes seen in the VRSM and the standards for provider's manual in July. In addition, some of the comments the council has made to VR include removing the rates set to assist with tuition for college. We have asked that they pay the full tuition costs for public institutions for all clients. (After financial aid is applied). Also, since VR does not pay the full amount to all clients, asked that the IPE, or other written means, that the client is informed specifically what amount VR will be assisting per semester.
    - We additionally are looking at the approval process. Policies for the past year have asked that all contract

exceptions or 3742 have to be reviewed by Ms. Fuller. The Policy committee has responded with suggestions to allow other parties to be able to review for an exception, or to change the contract language, since we understood this was occurring due to language in the contract. VR staff looked into it and discovered it was not in the contract to require Ms. Fuller to do so but was as a result of an internal audit in 2018. At this meeting we were provided guidance VR has as guides to set policy including CFR 200, the government code chapter for bids and The Accuracy and Timeliness of Payments audit (internal audit from August 2018 was mentioned and will be obtained. Our goal is to look at these factors influencing the decisions being made and see if we can make suggestions that will still meet internal control concerns but provide smoother and timely services to clients.

- VR also has an internal approval policy group that has made previous recommendations and will continue to meet twice a year to continue to review and make recommendations.
- Training
  - Tammy Shaw from TWC VR attended the meeting and provided an update on the VR Counselor trainings. They are currently interviewing for the new manager.
  - Since the Pandemic, new counselor training has gone virtual. New Counselor training has three components: 1. Fundamentals covering policy and procedure 2. Impact covering quality and case noting, and 3. Core essentials. Additional trainings are also available.

- A list of Certified Rehabilitation Counselor (CRC) certification/hours offered will be set to the committee.
- Immersion training was put on hold due to COVID.
- Outside training is available with manager approval.
- IHO there were no IHOs to review.

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

- General Updates
  - Plans to transition to post pandemic operations. VR continues to implement a hybrid approach to delivering services to VR customers.
  - 87<sup>th</sup> Regular Session of Texas Legislature
    - SB 50 was passed. TWC VR is working with HHSC to improve the processes to refer individuals.
    - SB 1917 is not VR related but wanted to share as it is relating to a public outreach campaign for aging adults with visual impairments.
    - SB 1 – Article VII, TWC, Rider 48 relates to Apprenticeship and Internship Opportunities for People with Disabilities.
    - Special Session HB 97 was refiled. This bill is related to the provision of certain co-navigation services to persons who are deaf blind.
  - Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment, the summary report has been completed. There were three primary findings consisting of providers, administrative complexity, and staff turnover. Two additional categories are Assistance to customers in making informed choices and Staff resources and capacity building. Next steps and goals were shared with the RCT.
  - Start My VR is an online self-referral from that offers a convenient way for prospective VR and OIB customers to inquire about services and be connected to a VRD staff member.



- Outreach Activities
  - We Hire Ability The We Hire Ability program was launched in April 2021. This program recognizes employers who have a Texas based integrated workforce that includes, at minimum, 10 percent individuals with disabilities.
  - Texas HireAbility An internal workgroup consisting of the Vocational Rehabilitation Division and TWC's Strategic Outreach staff has been meeting to discuss Texas HireAbility's next steps.
- Priority Project Updates
  - Summer Earn and Learn program on July 15 this program had over 1700 students participating.
  - Explore STEM summer camps for offer a variety of Pre-ETS activities to students with disabilities.
  - The Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment identified the top three area that need work, providers, administrative complexity, and retention/staff turnover.
- TWC VR Provider Engagement Jason Vaden, TWC Deputy Division Director of VR PPS
  - Recognized Mrs. Hodges (RCT Member) for her willingness to provide significant amount of time and support with the VR Provider community. As well as working on some of these global changes to help drive improvements that address some of the issues that were mentioned in the CSNA.
  - The Provider Meetings have recently focused on relevant updates and training that apply to all providers.
  - Informed Choice overview training was provided. We also partnered with the University of North Texas to develop a free training for our providers around informed choice. Contract modification process changes was another training provided.
  - Another project that is being worked on is the Provider engagement and retention.

- Bobbie Hodges reported that there is a representative for each of the six regions and they are very active in communicating with the providers. They are waiting for updates on supported employment and different other projects going on.
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- The full VR Division Director's Report was provided in the meeting binder.

## **Performance Update, Geoffrey Miller, Manager of VR Program Reporting & Analysis**

Geoffrey presented a PowerPoint presentation that was included in the meeting binder.

**Motion to adjourn was given by Karen Stanfill and seconded by Rodrick Robinson. All approved.**

## **Adjourn**