

Rehabilitation Council of Texas (RCT) February 2-3, 2023 via Zoom

Council Members Present:

Gennadiy Goldenshteyn, Chair, Dallas
Mark Baird, San Angelo
Glenda Born, Austin
Amanda Bowdoin, Forney
Jennifer Clouse, Temple
Lisa Cowart, Sour Lake
Michele Dobbins, LaPorte
Cheryl A Fuller, Austin
Lindsey Geeslin, Lorena
Joe Powell, Irving
April Pollreisz, Amarillo
Emily Robinson, Pflugerville
Rodrick Robinson, McKinney
Peggy Schmidt, Lucas
Daniel Solcher, Allen
Karen Stanfill, Houston
Abdi Warsame, Wylie
Dr. James Williams, Leander

Council Members Absent: None

TWC Employees Attendance:

Chairman Bryan Daniel, Commissioner Aaron Demerson,
Commissioner Albert Trevino, Ed Serna, Benigno Aceves, Mendy
Alread, Holly Aspan, Juanita Barker, Angela Bazaldua, William
Belz, Karen Brajcki, Kimberly Berry, Shelly Caillouet, Heather
Cooke, Kandace Decker, Larry Elliott, Julia Foree, Lance Foss,
Marsha Fuller, April Garcia, Lisa Godwin, Cindy Geisman, Julie
Gunter, Carey Hajovsky, Lauren Hargrove, Leigh Ann Godinez,
Jamie Haywood, Malcolm, Ifoezeh, Tasheara Jennings, David
Johnston, Kirstin Johnson, Pam King, Rachael Klinger, Dennis
Kutach, Summer Kutach, Laura LaCour, Christy Lerche, Anna
Lee, Susan Lindsey, Jordan Locke, Elyse Luke, Teryl Lynn,
Samantha Ma, Tammy Martin, Cynthia McCabe, Scott McCune,
Deanea, McWaters, Cassandra Medrano, Asha Mookala, Dawn
Natalino-White, Melinda Paninski, Claudia Peden, Elsa Y. Perez,

Randall Pearson, Jonathan Perkins, Daniel Prado, Andrew Ramirez, Summer Robinson, Belinda Salazar, Aissa Salazar, Chris Speckhard, Les Trobman, Rikka Weintraub, Erin Wilder, Sue-Ellen Woodlief, Kelly Yarbrough, Chen Yitao, Laura York, Alaina Zachmann

Public Attendance: 80

Welcome

- The meeting was called to order at noon by Gennadiy Goldenshteyn, Chair.
- Welcome and opening comments.

Chairman Bryan Daniel, TWC Chair and Commissioner Representing Public

- Addressed the council

Aaron Demerson, Commissioner Representing Employers

- Addressed the council

Alberto Trevino III, Commissioner Representing Labor

- Addressed the council

Edward Serna, TWC Executive Director

- Addressed the council

Region 4 East Texas, Dennis Kutach, Regional Director and Malcolm Ifoezeh, Deputy Regional Director

- Addressed the council and gave updates for TWC VR Region 4.

VR Division Report and Performance Update Cheryl A. Fuller, Director, TWC VR Division (VRD) and Christopher Speckhard, VRGIS Team Manager

- General Updates
 - RSA Monitoring
 - 2019 – All findings were resolved. RSA officially closed the corrective action plan on Oct 28, 2022.
 - RSA will conduct an offsite monitor for Texas 2023 August-September

- SB50, TWC and HHS are in the final stage of executing a Memorandum of Agreement/Data Sharing. Afterwards, an implementation plan will be developed.
- CSAVR –Spring conference Bethesda the format will be different. There will be a hands on training April 17, 18 and 19.
- Combined State Plan Goals, Strategies, and Success Measures Major Projects
 - 11 Success Measures
 - 90 Activities/Projects, 30 complete, 54 in progress or ongoing, 6 in queue
 - 23 Strategies
 - 6 Goals
 - Goal 1 Improve provider recruitment, retention, and support.
 - 29 Projects/Activities: 21 Complete, 8 In Process or Ongoing
 - Reduced 74 pages of forms, in progress
 - PCG to conduct Survey and Time study with providers
 - Increase the activity rate of active providers and clean up the active provider list.
 - Suggestion from Gennadiy, look at capacity of providers not just activity.**
 - Goal 2 Streamline VR policy, process, and procedure and improve workflow processes and tools to facilitate timely services delivery.
 - 17 Projects/Activities: 3 Complete, 12 In-Process or Ongoing
 - VR Services Manual (VRSM) redesign project, review VR Standards for Providers (SFP) manual, VRD completed a Supported Employment (SE) project. SARA roll out in May to all management units along with redesign of case management system, also working on external collaboration portal, how providers work with staff to exchange information, invoices etc.
 - Goal 3 Recruit and Retain VR staff.
 - 13 Projects/Activities: 6 Complete, 7 In Process or Ongoing
 - Goal 4 Improve and develop additional user-friendly resources to maximize Customer Informed Choice.
 - 8 Projects/Activities: 4 Complete, 4 In Process or Ongoing

- Goal 5 Improve VR Staff Knowledge and System Capacity to enhance service delivery to customers.
 - 19 Projects/Activities: 2 Complete, 16 In Process or Ongoing
 - Working with Specialty Courts, substance abuse can be referenced to VR. VR need and employment.
 - Deaf and Hard of Hearing working with counselors and stakeholders and providers to develop a training to better understand the needs of these customers. This will roll out in May.
 - Office of Blind Services capacity building to serve these customers. Training at a statewide conference.
 - Peer Supports as a service from VR, for customers with mental health, substance abuse. VR is drafting criteria and standards for providers.
 - Brain Injury conference in October 2022 for providers and VR Staff to discuss how to work together as a team to serve these customers. Including those with spinal cord injury.
 - Customized employment services, VR is working on a procurement for help/expertise in different disabilities.
 - There are several different pilot programs that is in progress at different regions.
 - VR has met with Texas AM to conduct focus groups around the state. VR is also holding regional and statewide conferences with VR staff in schools serving younger students.
 - Foster youth to partner with permanency courts.
 - Amanda Bowdoin suggested that VR use the VI survey that schools provide to the state.
- Goal 6 Increase and Enhance Employer Partnerships
 - 8 Projects/Activities: 0 Complete, 0 In Process or Ongoing
 - Implement and expand employer partnerships that increase employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities through training and work-based learning opportunities for students and adults with disabilities. STEP, SEAL and Project SEARCH
 - Gennadiy commented to ask employers what VR could do better.
- State FY Q1 2023 VR Performance Update, Christopher Speckhard
 - Full Report is included in the binder.
 - Explained timelines on the data

- Success Rate Increases Across all Disability Categories
 - R4Q period for Participant Counts and Successful Closure Rate: Dec 2021—Nov 2022
 - Compared to the same R4Q last year (Dec 2020 – Nov 2021), the number of participants decreased by 2.4%, while the success rate increased significantly to 53.7% from 47.6%
 - Region 2 (DFW Metro) showed the largest increase in success rate this R4Q (over 8 percentage points compared to PY 21).
 - Success rates increased across all disability categories this R4Q, with the most improvement for Legally Blind (over 6 percentage points compared to PY 21).
- High Growth in Median Earnings by FFY
 - R4Q period for Employed/Enrolled and Median Earnings Q2 Post-Exit: Oct 2020-Sep 2021 (Federal Fiscal Year, FFY 2021)
 - Compared to the same R4Q last year (Oct 2019 – Sep 2020, or FFY 20) Q2 median earnings increased by 9.5% to \$5,945 from \$5,427, representing the highest FFY year-on-year increase in the past ten years.
 - Compared to PY 20 (July 2020 – June 2021), median earnings dipped slightly overall during this R4Q, however certain disability categories reflected growth, including Other Visual, Auditory & Communication, Intellectual & Learning, Physical.
 - Request from RCT to preform a study as far back as possible to gather data to identify types of jobs/job codes post VR. Are customers getting better job vs career placement? Also, to compare this to general trends.
 - This could be a part of the CSNA, per Christopher, RCT agreed.
 - April asked about advancement after job placement. Insure customers know how to advocate for themselves once they exit the program.
- Employment Retention Rate: Further Signs of Post-Pandemic Recovery
 - The R4Q for Employed/Enrolled Q2-Q4 Post-Exit: April 2020 – March 2021
 - Compared to the same R4Q last year (April 2019-March 2020), this employment retention measure has returned to

- pre-pandemic levels, rebounding by over five percentage points to 87.2% from 82.1%.
- Legally Blind and Other Visual disabilities reflected the highest respective increases in employment retention this R4Q, (around one percentage point compared to CY 20).
- TBI and Stroke Comparison
 - Participant counts, success rates and 2Q post exit employment rates have been historically higher for Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) compared to Stroke/Acquired Brain Injury.
 - During this R4Q, compared to PY 2020, exiters with stroke disabilities experienced significantly high median earnings increase of 8.4%, compared to an increase 2.4% for TBI.
 - During this R4Q, compared to CY 2020, Q2-Q4 employed or enrolled (employment retention) rates increased markedly for TBI exiters, by over 5 percentage points, to 89.7%. At the same time, this rate dipped to 87.28% for exiters with stroke disabilities.

RCT Committee Reports

- Customer Satisfaction and Needs Assessment, Lisa Cowart, Chair
 - Data report provided earlier in the meeting by Christopher Speckhard
 - CSNA 2023 Virtual format with possible on site option.
 - Proposed dates
 - Test Run possible dates last week of March
 - April 11 Tuesday 11:30am-1:00pm
 - April 20 Thursday 6:00pm-7:30 pm
 - April 25 Tuesday 6:00pm-7:30pm
 - April 27 Thursday 11:30am-1:00pm
 - May 6, Saturday 9:30am- 11:00am
 - Set up a Survey Monkey for input for those who many are not able to attend a Town Hall
 - Need 2 RCT members to volunteer to facilitate each meeting
 - If onsite looking at rural areas
 - Input gathered by many options not just through Town Hall.
 - Questions same as 2020 with the exception of one added question.
 - Documents translated in Spanish will take a week

- One registration question, current customer, former customer, provider, TWC employee staff.
- Membership and Education, Lindsey Geeslin Chair
 - Update the New Member Orientation Video, make a plan to keep it updated
 - Follow 88th Legislative Session Mrs. Fuller spoke on some of this earlier.
 - November 14th bill prefilng date
 - January 10th first day of session
 - March 10th bill filing deadline
 - May 29th last day of regular session
 - Senate Committee on Finance hearing Feb 14th SB 1, the General Appropriations Act for Article VII agencies including the Texas Workforce Commission
 - Follow Bills that were passed in previous session as they will sometimes be brought back up in current session
 - Senate Bill 50
 - HB728, HB729 and SB 524, statewide interagency aging services coordinating council, filed in previous sessions that didn't pass.
 - Education
 - Committee with work with RCT Chair to coordinate for future meetings.
 - Membership
 - Reappointments and Members terming out in October 2023.
 - Mentorship program, led by Joe Powell on going as we get new members.
 - Two new appointees, insure they are in the correct committee
 - Asked that each committee to identify a mentor. If you have not identified a mentor, the chair of that committee would be considered the mentor.
 - Karen mentioned the RSA Modules for new members. Karen will provide this information to Lindsey to disburse.
- Policy, Procedure & Personnel Development, Karen Stanfill, Chair
 - Increase TWC VR employment retention.
 - TWC VR will provide clarity on the Councilor position being able to advance to Councilor 2 or get merit raise if not accepted into the master's program, after 12 months.

- Recruit in a digital format to insure contact with the younger generation.
- VR survey for active staff and exit survey to identify what is working and not working. Goal to help gather information to retain employees.
- Purchasing and Auditing
 - Lots of compliments that some of the complaints and issues that we have been working on have been resolved.
 - VR has made changes in the Standards for Providers manual that providers will not be flagged if blanks are left in the forms.
- CSAVR Conference
 - Message from RSA recommend doing away with the financial needs test to provide full tuition and spend the funds. Example Pennsylvania raised the family income level to \$100,000 before anyone would have to contribute to services. The council will make a motion tomorrow to follow this example.
- No IHO to review.
- Request the curriculum for New Counselors to discuss at next meeting.

Public Comment

- George Bland - VR Customer
- Aubri Simpson – Parent of Children that is VR Customer
- Liana Davis – Provider

Continue Committee Reports Discussions

- April Pollreisz, Combined State Plan, Question does the state plan drive the material in the monitoring report? Are they seen as two separate items?
 - Cheryl Fuller explained monitoring. The state plan is reviewed in the monitoring but not the guide. The monitor focus is national.
- Karen Stanfill, Message from RSA recommend doing away with the financial needs test to provide full tuition and spend the funds. Example Pennsylvania raised the family income level to \$100,000 before clients would have to contribute to services. The committee agreed to make a motion to the full council.
 - Discussion

- Mrs. Fuller commented that VR is having these same discussions, and this will be something that the RSA team will be looking at during the monitoring.
- Gennadiy asked if there were any concerns.
 - Mrs. Fuller, currently no concerns with funds but over time VR may need to revisit this for sufficiency of resources.
 - Karen Stanfill, financial needs test maybe outdated. In the past this was a need. However, today VR agencies are giving back unspent funds.
 - Glenda Born, concern if agencies keep giving back funds the budget will be cut.
 - Motion Encourage Vocational Rehab to follow RSA's guidance and recommendation to increase family income so they spend more money on services which
 - Motion: Karen Stanfill, motioned that the council write a letter to TWSVR encouraging them to review the financial needs test and the financial contribution and raise the amount that the family can make or the client can make before they would have to contribute to the cost of services. Motion was seconded by Glenda Born; Motion carried unanimously

Gennadiy Goldenshteyn motioned to adjourn for the day, Joe Powell seconded the motion, Motion carried unanimously Meeting **Adjourned for the day**

Day 2 Meeting Resumed

Liaison Reports The full reports are included in the binders. Each representative gave an update.

- Client Assistance Program (CAP), Karen Stanfill
 - TWC VR Rules review, CAP submitted comments and TWC agreed with many of them which were adopted in 12/2022.
 - At the request of Gennadiy, Karen provided the role of CAP.
- Community Rehabilitation Provider (CRP), Peggy Schmidt
 - At the request of Gennadiy, Peggy provided the role of CRP
- Partners Resource Network (PRN), Lisa Cowart
 - At the request of Gennadiy, Lisa provided the role of PRN

- Oct – Dec 2022, 151 Workshops for parents and professionals, 3 regions symposiums in each of the 20 ESC and one regional conference, 57 clinics, 11,000 INR (information and referral), 450 Technical assistance and some of these same services for youth as well.
- State Independent Living Council (SILC), April Poillreisz
 - At the request of Gennadiy, April provided the role of SILC
 - Eva Storey, Interim Executive Director
 - Projects: PAL, Covering All of Texas, Inclusive Services for Survivors in Texas, Public Health Workforce Work Plan: COVID-19, State Plan for Independent Living
 - Next Meeting March 2023
- Texas Education Agency (TEA), Emily Robinson
 - At the request of Gennadiy, Emily provided the role of TEA
 - Texas Commission on Special Education Funding
 - Annual Statewide Language Acquisition Report for Deaf or Heard of Hearing and Deafblind Students
 - Continuing Advisor Committee for Special Education
- Texas Workforce Investment Council (TWIC), Lindsey Geeslin
 - At the request of Gennadiy, Lindsey provided the role of TWIC
 - Dec 2022 Meeting the council took action to approve the Evaluation 2022: Accomplishments and Outcomes of the Texas Workforce Systems and the Strategic Plan Architecture.
 - Next meeting March 10, 2023, Austin TX

Council Business

- New Council Business
 - Public Comment Results
 - Glenda Born asked what happens with the information provided in Public Comment. Tammy Martin responded that TWC VR takes note on public comment and follows up with customers on complaints. April Pollreisz asked if Public Comment is being tracked for systemic issues. With the different channels the RCT Members are connected to along with public comment together this should bring systemic issues to light. When registering for public comment on the Zoom link is the register provided with information such as you will only have three minutes and you will not be provided feedback. Lisa Godwin to follow up by email to those who register for public comment with expectations of public comment. Add expectation to the

- RCT Webpage as well. Note Public Comment can be provided in writing.
- RCT Communication/PR/Information Gathering
 - Discussion was held regarding the need for a forum where RCT can receive information from customers? Increase RCT awareness, social media (add polls), update RCT webpage. Awareness of broader VR trends. Provide customers where to find help.
 - Gennadiy created an Ad Hoc Committee to address this concern.
- RCT Annual Report Update by Lisa Godwin
 - Completed and submitted electronically on Dec 28, 2022 to RSA and Texas Governor via email.
 - Printed copies are available.
- Approve October minutes, RCT Chairman Gennadiy Goldenshteyn Motioned to approve October RCT Minutes as is. Karen Stanfill seconded, voted on and approved.
- FY22 Budget \$58,350. The current balance \$32,964.01, Additional items paid for by VR \$2,779.75.
- RCT Quarterly Meeting Locations
 - RCT Quarterly Meeting May 2023 Panhandle Region 1 voted Motion April Pollreisz, Gennadiy 2nd all approved. Region 1 Asst Director accepted to host the RCT Meeting.
 - RCT Quarterly Meeting August to be held in Austin
 - Michelle Dobbins Region 5 Houston is very interested in hosting an RCT meeting and has a large conference room. Oct/Nov
- Karen asked that members receive meeting material at least one week in advance.
 - Barriers getting the reports in a timely manner
 - Suggested to set up a SharePoint for RCT and add reports to the binder as they come in. This would allow members more time to review all reports.
 - Members will have access to the SharePoint and will download the binder/documents as needed. This will eliminate the need for the binder to be emailed.

Conference Reports NCSRC, CSAVR, NCSAB and TWC Annual Conference

- Texas was the host state and this allowed many of the RCT members to attend these conferences.
- NCSRC
 - Clear that Texas has a very good relationship between SRC and VR, where other states struggle.
 - Great opportunity to hear suggestion from other SRC and make those connections.
 - Seeing Texas VR and SRC in action.
 - Talk about peer support for SRC
- CSAVR
 - Challenges are nationwide not just in Texas
 - Benefit to hear solutions other states have used
 - Most shocking message in 20 years from RSA about the amount of money being returned and not being matched. RSA reported out numbers from 2017-2019. This is nationwide issue.
- TWC Annual Conference
 - Realize the amount of work TWC does that is relevant to VR, Texans with disabilities entering the workforce. Realize how RCT can help with these efforts.
 - Success story from Judge Mays
 - Commissioner Alvarez's good bye
 - VR Counselors stayed for the entire conference this year and they felt more included.
 - RCT to consider having a table at 2024 conference
 - Take away for next TWC Conference
 - Insure accessibility at all conferences including description of floor layout.
 - Seen the strength of VR throughout TWC

System Partnership and Service Coordination Project Update, Strategic Priority 5, Melinda Paninski and Lauren Hargrove

- Purpose – develop recommendation to improve how we partner with Boards and their contractors, VR, Adult Education and Family Literacy (AEL) and Child Care and Early Learning (CC&EL)
- Goal – improve how we each serve our mutual customers, and specifically to improve referral and services coordination processes and between Workforce Solutions partners.
- Common Findings
 - Strengths:

- Colocation of staff seems to improve the coordination between partners
 - Existing partnership programs (SEAL, SHN, PWE)
 - Local level coordination and communication improves overall service delivery
 - Collaboration on shared projects (job fairs, HireAbility events, community engagement)
- Challenges:
 - No standard process for referral and exchange of information
 - No standard process for serving co-enrolled customers
 - Need for additional information across programs related to eligibility and services
 - Need for improved coordination when working with employers
- Shared vision for successful system partnership and service coordination
 - Our system shares our customers.
 - We will need cross-training and outreach efforts across programs.
 - We will support field staff who will be responsible for implementation.
 - We strive to streamline entry points to access services.
 - We value the sustainability of processes (built to withstand staff turnover/role changes).
 - We will identify success indicators that can be tracked and/or measured
- Subgroup Recommendations
 - Referrals and Intake Processes
 - Services Coordination and Co-enrollment
 - Employer Services and Coordination
 - Prioritized Recommendations
 - Develop tools to help employers understand the full range of services the workforce system offers.
 - Create professional development opportunities for staff to build consistency in quality of services to employers.
 - Develop a common intake/referral form that can be utilized by WF and VR.
 - Improve the VR and WF customer experience during initial contact and application for services

- Develop a standard two-way release form to be used by VR and WF and a common system to share information between partners
- Identify and develop resources to help staff better understand partner programs and services for shared customers.
- Ensure clear processes for smooth shared customer handoffs and co-enrollment are in place.
- Build strong working relationships with clear understanding of expectations among staff serving employers to create trust and respect (WF & VR).
- Next Steps
 - November - February 2023
 - Core Group has received final report and prioritized recommendations
 - Co-Chairs will brief TWC leadership on report/recommendations
 - Co-Chairs will brief Boards on report/recommendations
 - Following briefings, prioritized and “quick win” recommendations will be selected for implementation in 2023

Project SEARCH Evaluation Results and Performance, Geoffrey Miller, Director of Analytics and Evaluation (A&E), Information, Innovation, and Insight (I|3) Division, Samantha Ma, Data Scientist, and Anna Lee, Data Analyst

- Project SEARCH is a one-year business-led pre-employment training program that takes place entirely at the workplace.
- Serves transition-age students and youth with disabilities, including those with significant intellectual and developmental impairments, with the aim of achieving competitive integrated employment.
- Purpose of the evaluation is to investigate whether participation in Project SEARCH results in better VR program outcomes.
- Measures: Success rate, Q2-Q4 employment post-exit (retention rate), and Q2 earnings post-exit (median wage)
- 452 Project SEARCH participants compared to 452 VR participants with same variables for FFY 2015-2019
- Outcomes 2015-2019
 - Case Closure Unsuccessful Comparison Group 179, Project Search 57
 - Case Closure Successful Comparison Group 273, Project Search 395

- Q2-Q4 employment post-exit Not Employed Comparison Group 166, Project Search 134
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- Q2-Q4 employment post-exit Employed Comparison Group 286, Project Search 318
- Project SEARCH participants are 45% more likely to have a successful case closure and 11% more likely to be employed Q2-Q4 after exiting the VR program compared to other VR participants with similar demographic characteristics.
- Median earnings for SEARCH were not statistically different from median earnings for standard VR.
- However, more people in the SEARCH group were earning after exit.
- Over 16 quarters, including eight quarters before and after exit, the median wage for Project SEARCH participants grew by about \$2600, versus around \$2100 for the comparison group.
- Conclusion:
 - Participation in Project SEARCH generates better program outcomes than other traditional methods of serving this population in terms of success rate and retention rate.
 - Recruiting additional host employers and increasing the number of SEARCH sites across the state would significantly increase the number of successful employment outcomes for students and youth with disabilities in Texas.
 - If all the statewide SEARCH target population were to have been offered the program from FFY 2019 to 2022, the impact on job seekers with disabilities in the VR program (assuming findings from this study) would have been an additional 2,198 successful employment outcomes.
 - During FFY 2021 to 2022, the average number of SEARCH exiters was around 240 compared to a maximum potential capacity of 290 to 350, given 10 to 12 participants per internship site.
- Gennadiy
 - Observation for first two charts if data is accurate, there a concern that participants of Project SEARCH have an advantage of getting the job but can retain them?
 - Apply this methodology to other programs of VR
 - Is there specific performance improvement from project SEARCH that could be copied in other initiatives/programs.

Abdi Warsame RCT Member farewell.
Gennadiy motion to adjourn, Joe Powell 2nd all approved.

Adjourn