

**Rehabilitation Council of Texas (RCT)**  
**May 4-5, 2023**  
**1500 Broadway**  
**Lubbock, TX 79401**  
**In person and via Zoom**

**Council Members Present:**

Gennadiy Goldenshteyn, Chair, Dallas  
Dr. James Williams, Vice Chair, Leander  
Mark Baird, San Angelo  
Glenda Born, Austin  
Amanda Bowdoin, Forney  
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

**Council Members Absent:**

Jennifer Clouse, Temple

**TWC Employees Attendance:**

Chairman Bryan Daniel, Commissioner Aaron Demerson,  
Commissioner Albert Trevino, Ed Serna, Benigno Aceves,  
LaVonja Adetoro, Mendy Alread, Juanita Barker, Angela  
Bazaldua, Celeste Bickham, Karen Brajcki, Shelly Caillouet, Shu-  
Ching Chen, Daniel Clark, Heather Cooke, Lance Foss, April  
Garcia, Norma Garza, Lisa Godwin, Cindy Geisman, Mayra  
Gutierrez, Anne Hoscheit, Jamie Haywood, Tasheara Jennings,  
Rachael Klinger, Dennis Kutach, Summer Kutach, Tony  
Lawrence, Christy Lerche, Anna Lee, Susan Lindsey, Elyse Luke,  
Tammy Martin, Scott McCune, Cassandra Medrano, Julia  
Mercado, Geoffrey Miller, Brian Owens, Melinda Paninski, Claudia  
Peden, Elsa Y. Perez, Randall Pearson, Daniel Prado, Andrew

Ramirez, Audra Ressel, Summer Robinson, Ronnie Ronnie, Aissa Salazar, DaeEun Shin, Chris Speckhard, Melissa Sterling, Les Trobman, Belinda Valero, Sara Weems-Pena, Rikka Weintraub, Dawn White, Erin Wilder, Sue-Ellen Woodlief, Laura York, Alaina Zachmann, Nedra Zeno

## **Public Attendance: 26**

### **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

### **Brian Owens Chief of Staff for Aaron Demerson, Commissioner Representing Employers**

- Addressed the council

### **Region 1, Kandace Decker, Regional Director and Jonathan Perkins, Deputy Regional Director**

- Addressed the council and gave updates for TWC VR Region 1.

### **TWC VR Region 1 Partner presentation Texas Tech Burkhart Center for Autism Education & Research Presentation, Taylor Fidler, Director Connections for Academic Success and Employment (CASE) Program and Jared Burgoon, Program Coordinator Burkhart Center Transition Academy (BCTA)**

- Serves Students with Autism and Developmental Disabilities
- College Support
- Workshops & Social Events
- Degree and Career Development
- One-on-One & Group Support
- Individualized Supports to Navigate College

## **VR Division Report and Performance Update Cheryl A. Fuller, Director, TWC VR Division (VRD) and Geoffrey Miller, Director of Analytics and Evaluation**

- General Updates
- 88<sup>th</sup> Legislative Session Regular Session
  - Update during Membership and Education Report out
- RSA will conduct an offsite monitor for Texas 2023 August-September
- Presentation to RCT from TWC VR Divisions on projects for future meetings
- Update on Combined State Plan Goals, Strategies, and Success Measures (Full Report in Binder)
- 11 Success Measures
- 90 Activities/Projects, 31 complete, 53 in progress or ongoing, 6 in queue
- 23 Strategies
- 6 Goals
  - Goal 1 Improve provider recruitment, retention, and support.
    - Strategy 1.1 Streamline vendor requirements, processes, procedures, and documents. 74 pages of forms reduced Completed SFP 3 and Training
    - Strategy 1.2 Ensure payment rates are competitive and equitable, (Top priority). PCG Cost Survey and Time Study
    - 1.3 Endure that a process is established for regular rate review and updates, Pending 1.2
    - 1.4 Strengthen provider recruiting efforts, regrouping to clarify scope of remaining work.
    - 1.5 Enhance provider support and training, released 4 on-demand webinars
    - 1.6 Ensure internal systems for provider identification by a VR Counselor working with a customer are useful, current, and accurate. Complete
    - Geoffrey provided
      - Statewide Service Provider Activity Rates 2019 Q1 – 2023 Q1. 2023 has less available

- providers than 2019 but the activity rate has increased from 2019 43.20% to 2023 63.29%.
  - Ad Hoc request to provide customer load per provider.
  - Discussion about looking into types of providers by region
- Goal 2 Streamline VR policy, process, and procedure and improve workflow processes and tools to facilitate timely services delivery.
  - 2.1 Streamline or redesign policy, procedure, forms, and approvals process to improve ease of navigation/application for VR staff. VRSM Phase 1 complete; Phase 2 underway
  - 2.2 Facilitate coordination of services with providers and improve responsiveness to customers. Quarterly call with providers; final SP 5 report and implementation planning
  - 2.3 Improve workflow processes and business systems to improve timeliness, efficiency, and consistency of VR services provision. Rollout of SARA underway; release 1 of 3 of renovate RHW complete.
  - Geoffrey provided
    - Median days from contract to program participation stable since 2019, Median Day 101-107, 1,000 additional participates 2023 from 2019
    - Increase in participation creation rate of 10% 2023 from 2019
- Goal 3 Recruit and Retain VR staff.
  - Identify and implement strategies to improve staff recruitment and retention, hiring process review
  - Redesign training and resources for new counselors, complete
  - Redesign training and resources for new rehabilitation assistants. (Online library in 3.2 also available to RAs) CPA Basic purchasing training in progress
  - Establish management development training specific to VR program management, for new, current, and aspiring VR managers. 2<sup>nd</sup> Cohorts launched in April
  - Geoffrey provided

- Turnover rate for counselors 2019-2023 and the percent meeting requirements.
- Goal 4 Improve and develop additional user-friendly resources to maximize Customer Informed Choice.
  - 4.1 Provide training and resources for VR staff on labor market information (LMI) and tools. Complete
  - 4.2 Develop and enhance tools to aid VR staff, and customers in the identification of available providers. Complete
  - 4.3 Update training, tools, and policy related to work incentive programs and benefits counseling and provide user-friendly resources and/or fact sheets to help customers make decisions. 3 benefits planners hire, 5 BP contracts executed
- Goal 5 Improve VR Staff Knowledge and System Capacity to enhance service delivery to customers.
  - 5.1 Provide additional training and resources for VR staff to strengthen and increase expertise and specialization in serving customers with specific & multiple disabilities. BVI Training Conference in March; Foster Youth Conference in April; DHH curriculum under review; Peer Support Specialist RFP posted.
  - 5.2 Develop, pilot, and replicate innovative approaches to implementing the VR process. Region 4 project launched
  - 5.3 Enhance and increase training for TVRCs/VRCs regarding services to students with disabilities, including Pre-ETS. Regional Capacity Building Conferences in progress (4 to date)
  - 5.4 Review and enhance capacity/structure to serve more students with disabilities. In queue (green star for money)
  - 5.5 Provide training, tools, and resources to assist staff with implementing process improvements. Planning pilot of improved invoices process
  - 5.6 Enhance options for remote service delivery. Hybrid Operations Plan Updated. TWC launches ZenDesk
- Goal 6 Increase and Enhance Employer Partnerships with employers to 1) understand employer needs, and 2) build

awareness about the benefits of hiring people with disabilities

- Continue and expand efforts to raise awareness among employers of the benefits of hiring people with disabilities and the services available to support them through TWC/VRD. BRC participation in 5 Texas Conferences for Employers
- 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. 3 new Project SEARCH sites in development; 1 new STEP site.
- State FY Q1 2023 VR Performance Update, Christopher Speckhard
- Full Report is included in the binder.
- SYF Q2 2023 State Measures Results
- Success Rate Increases across all disability categories
  - R4Q period for Participant counts and successful closure rate: March 2022-Feb 2023
  - Compared to the same R4Q last year (March 2021-Feb 2022), the number of participants decreased slightly, and the success rate has increased notably to 53%.
  - Region 2 (DFW Area) maintained the highest growth in successful closure rate this R4Q (around 7%).
  - Compared to PY21, success rates increased across all disability categories this R4Q, with the most improvement for Legally Blind (over 6 percentage points).
- Successful Closure Rate
  - See a recovery trend
- Successful Closure Rate by Primary Category of Disability
  - Note Legally Blind increase almost 7%
- High Growth in Median Earnings
  - R4Q period for Employed/Enrolled and Median Earnings Q2 Post-Exit: Jan 2021-Dec 2021 (Calendar Year 2021)
  - Compared to the same R4Q last year (Jan 2020-Dec 2020, or CY20), Q2 median earnings increased by 9.7% to \$6,102 from \$5,562
  - Compared to PY20, median earnings for all disability categories increased this R4 (except for Legally Blind, which dipped slightly). Physical disabilities earnings saw the largest increase of almost \$400.

- Karen Stanfill ask that TWC VR watch the decrease for Legally Blind as studies show states that have a separate blind agency have higher closures with higher pay than state that have a combined agency. So, want to insure that doesn't happen here.
- Median Earnings Q2 Post-Exit
  - Positive news across most categories.
- Employee Retention Rate Further Signs of Post-Pandemic Recovery
  - The R4Q for Employed/Enrolled Q2-Q4 Post-Exit: July 2020-2021
  - Compared to the same R4Q last year (July 2019-June 2020), this employment retention measure has grown four percentage points from 83.41% to 87.67%.
  - Compared to the same R4Q last year, Intellectual & Learning and Psychosocial & Psychological disabilities reflected the highest respective increases in employment retention.
  - Employed/Enrolled Q2-Q4 Post-Exit
    - Increase in most categories, with a slight decrease in legally blind.
- 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.
  - On the other hand, Stroke/Acquired Brain Injury exiters have had higher median earning than TBI exiters (difference of around \$1,300 this R4Q).
  - This R4Q, TBI exiters recorded the highest retention rate (Q2-Q4 employed/enrolled) of 91.4% in the past five years.
  - TBI and Stroke Participants and Success Rate. RCT has concerns over the continued decrease in numbers on this slide. Cheryl Fuller addressed the concerns.

## Public Comment

- Sandy Shelton for Tatum Shelton - VR Customer
- Tatum Shelton – VR Customer
- Bobby Shelton – VR Customer Parent

## Adjourned for the day

## Day 2 Meeting Resumed

### Alberto Trevino III, Commissioner Representing Labor

- Addressed the council

### TWC 101 and Legislative Update, Edward Serna, TWC Executive Director

- Overview of the TWC Agency
- Overview of the Texas Legislative Session

### RCT Committee Reports

- Customer Satisfaction and Needs Assessment, Lisa Cowart, Chair
  - Statistics full report is in the binder
    - Overall customer satisfaction survey response this quarter is up. For Blind and visually impaired it is small decrease.
    - Over all closed case 23.24% response rate, on target.
    - Westat contract is renewed
      - Omni approach, more opportunity to respond via text and other methods. Beginning at new Fiscal year.
  - Amanda Bowden shared her experience with SARA. How she didn't respond because she didn't know who Sarah was. Once she did respond it was an easy process. Just the initial contact maybe overlooked as she didn't know who it was. Thought SARA was a person not the TWC VR System. Need more awareness of SARA.
  - Hoping that SARA will help with the satisfaction of customer service.
  - Review the survey questions and update. Now is a good time.
  - Maybe multiple tear so you don't get 20 questions all at one time.
  - CSNA 2023 Virtual format with onsite option.
    - 4 of 5 Town Halls completed 92 people attend
    - Last one tomorrow



- Texas AM is doing the letters for response 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> week of April with response due by June.
  - Key informant interviews still
  - Fewer responses and less passionate
  - In person in the major metropolitan area next time for better attendance.
- Membership and Education, Lindsey Geeslin Chair
  - Election for RCT Chair and Vice Chair in August, Nominations due in June, newly elected officers will start at the November meeting.
  - Want to add nominee's bio and a video of why they would like to hold this position.
  - Reminder that the RCT Bylaws need to be updated, left over from parking lot from Strategic Planning. Roles of Chair and Vice Chair
  - Create a list of previous RCT Members to contact for vacant positions.
  - Ed Serna will present at several of upcoming meeting. Cheryl Fuller will help with getting local presenters at upcoming meeting.
  - Reappointments and Members terming out in October 2023. Three members that will term out and need to fill these positions.
  - Create a spreadsheet with previous members to contact for reappointment or referrals for new applicants. This will be added to SharePoint for all members to add to the list.
  - In person meeting with the appointment's office with RCT Chair, Vice Chair and Membership Chair to create a relationship.
  - Lindsey to send email to all members with to upcoming member needs.
  - Mentorship program, led by Joe Powell on going as we get new members. Working with the two new appointees to insure their needs are being met
  - Request the best method of communication from all RCT Members and collect emergency contact information for all members.
  - Update New Member orientation video with CARTS and ASL
  - Follow 88<sup>th</sup> Legislative Session Cindy Geisman
    - 40 Bill that TWC VR analyzed and 181 Watch Bills

- Two Bills headed to the Governor's desk for consideration.
  - HB109 Requires insurance provider to cover the cost of hearing aids for a health condition, accident, or sickness.
  - SB464 Designates October 17<sup>th</sup> as Entrepreneurs with Disability Day.
- Two that still have a chance
  - HB728 Statewide interagency aging services coordinating council
  - HB729 establishes a statewide intellectual and developmental disability coordinating council
- Policy, Procedure & Personnel Development, Karen Stanfill, Chair
  - Increasing Purchasing, small group within the committee that will meet separately to look deeper into the purchasing state rules and laws that affect the VR program, in efforts to identify easier process for VR to purchase items for customers. Request for VR to look at length of time for home and job modification approvals.
  - Monitoring Process, a small group will meet with VR and some provider to share how the this process works.
  - Policies that the committee encourage the agency to look at increasing or changing to help in an effort to help spend more money. One was amount paid for maintenance. Current rate is \$55 a week hasn't changed in over 30 years.
  - Noted an increase in people asking for training for service animals. This is not in the policy as a provided service.
  - Look into increasing the rates paid for assistive technology evaluators. Hasn't changed since 2010.
  - These are some items that could be updated now while VR is waiting for the analysis report to be completed.
  - Request for an update on the letter to VR from RCT asking to consider raising the amount of money a family can earn before they would have to participate in the cost of services. Mrs. Fuller gave an update that this is at the top of the list, they have requested data from I3 team so they can begin to formulate a proposal.

- Tuition Rates VR has acted on. If you attend a state university or college in Texas and don't have other federal grants VR will pay the full tuition amount.
- Increase TWC VR employment retention.
  - TWC VR will provide info for discussion about position does not 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. James is working on this and would like to ask any VR staff that might be interested in helping with this.
  - VR survey for active staff and exit survey to identify what is working and not working. We have asked for a copy of the survey.
  - Employee morale, membership in a professional organization such as National Rehabilitation Association.
- Training the new training catalog was sent to us for review.
- IHO Decision
  - One to review the customer didn't attend the hearing.
  - Sixteen appeals filed so far this year with only three formal hearings. Most were resolved either informally or in mediation.
- Policy request regarding insurance rates for durable medical equipment to cover the cost.
- Ad-Hoc Public Engagement Committee, Gennadiy Goldenshteyn
  - Modernize the RCT website, social media presence, and lately meeting, events to participate.

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

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

## **Council Business**

- New Council Business

- Approve February minutes, RCT Chairman Gennadiy Goldenshteyn Motioned to approve February RCT Minutes as is. April Pollreisz seconded, voted on and approved.
- FY22 Budget \$58,350. The current balance \$30,427, no concerns
- Strategic Planning, Committee suggested September 18-19, 2023, considering College Station as location. Meeting 1 and ½ day. Request to come up with 2-3 locations and let the Council vote.
- RCT Quarterly Meeting Locations
  - RCT Quarterly Meeting August 3-4,2023 Austin.
  - RCT Quarterly Meeting November 27, 2023, Region 5 office Houston Monday one day only in conjunction with the TWC Preconference and TWC Annual Conference. Committee Breakout week prior to meeting. RCT will have a booth at the TWC Conference.

## VR Project Highlights, Jamie Haywood

- Comprehensive Rate Review
  - TWC-VR has contracted with Public Consulting Group LLC (PCG) to perform an analysis (Data Review, Interviews, and Survey) of the current TWC-VR fee structure and associated payment fees that serve as the basis for compensating providers who deliver services to TWC-VR customers.
  - Final Report July 31
    - Synthesis of the Analysis
    - Peer state fee structures
    - Options and recommendations for TWC-VR fee structure and provider compensation modifications, enhancements, and/or changes
    - A recommended methodology for annual fee structure and rate review
    - Strategies for augmenting the provider base in underserved areas of the State (e.g. payment incentives)
    - Full list of the services being looked at are on the slide
      - Employment Services, Blind and Visually Impaired Services, Special Populations, and others
- Work-Based Learning for Students with Disabilities
  - Summer Earn and Learn (SEAL)
    - Board partnership kicked off SEAL 2023 in March
  - Paid Work Experience (PWE)

- Board partnership that provides a paid work skills and work experience while students are paid
- WBL Project with the Texas A&M Center on Disability Development (CDD)
  - LEA created with community involvement
  - A&M and VR review application (VR reviewing for Pre-ETS categories)
  - A&M provides TA, logistics support, outcome reporting, etc.
  - 5 applications have been accepted, +25 in the que
  - Represented in all 6 Regions
  - VR provides \$10k to LEAs for “start up” and additional \$ to A&M for administrative work associated with this program.
  - Fields: Hospitality, Agriculture, Industrial, Retail, and Custom Printing

### **Adjourn**