

AMERICAN SAMOA

State Rehabilitation Council

FFY 2019 Annual Report

October 1, 2018 – September 30, 2019

Office of the Governor

Office of Vocational Rehabilitation

Ms. Makerita Enesi, SRC Chair

Poumele Pete Galea’i, Director



Letter from SRC Chair

October 2019

Members of the American Samoa State Rehabilitation Council (AS-SRC) is pleased to present our 2019 Annual Report. This report documents the status of the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) Program and summarizes the activities of the State Rehabilitation Council.

It has been my great pleasure to serve as the SRC chair of American Samoa. As members, we are honored to volunteer our time to provide advice to the designated state unit (DSU).

Each of our members have their own story and unique experience, we are, to a person, committed to advancing what is right and just for people with disabilities, including advancing meaningful competitive employment. This report documents the AS-SRC activities during FY 2019. OVR continues their focus on the effective compliance with the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) as they expand collaborative efforts with workforce and education partners. The federally mandated changes look to promote quality services to citizens/residences with disabilities for years to come.

The American Samoa Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR), Department of Education-Special Education (SpED) and the Department of Human Resources’ Employment and Training Division (WIOA) continues to ensure the provision of pre-­employment transition services to students, working to provide that the evidence-based practice of direct employment experience for students is a priority service. OVR, Department of Human Resources’ WIOA division and the Department of Education – Division of Special Education School-to-Work (STW) program has helped students and their family members achieve or improve employment status and income over the past year, with conversations about sustaining effective elements for the continued STW program, now in it’s fourth year. OVR also assumed administrative oversight of the STW program. Project STW in American Samoa has realized an increase in employment outcomes. OVR continues to have a counselor assigned to each high school and collaboration continues with DHR-WIOA to provide leadership to strengthen relationships with businesses statewide as the workforce needs in the territory grow. The school-to-work program started with only twelve participants from two high schools and now all high schools are included with total participation of forty-six students. OVR is negotiating with SpED to include students aged fourteen and up, this would greatly increase the number of participants.

Looking ahead to 2020, the SRC will continue to review and analyze data to advise OVR in areas of challenge. One such area includes hiring and retaining highly qualified personnel to fill all positions to help ensure equitable services regardless of where a person resides in our territory. In addition to OVR counselors, the business and labor community depend on OVR for trained, job-ready applicants. The SRC will continue to work alongside OVR to recommend steps as part of an ongoing process to strive for the highest quality vocational rehabilitation services for all who are served.

Council members have deep appreciation for OVR’s hard work and we applaud OVR’s progress and achievements in 2019. We also take seriously our responsibility to convey OVR customers’ needs and concerns, and to advise OVR in areas of program effectiveness. To fulfill that role, we will continue to advocate and work for improvements that strengthen OVR’s ability to advance equity and achieve meaningful employment outcomes for those they serve.

Sincerely,

Makerita Enesi, SRC Chair



Letter from OVR Director,

The Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) of American Samoa continue to provide opportunities by providing a full continuum of services to the people with disabilities. We are dedicated in creating an environment where staff and consumers have the tools, resources, and supports they need to thrive.

Our Office is an integral part of our mission. It is my pleasure to provide you with its Annual Report for Federal Fiscal Year 2019.

OVR is charged with empowering individuals with disabilities who wish to obtain, retain, and maintain employment, economic self-sufficiency, independence, and full integration into society. OVR, Department of Human Resources Division of Employment and Training (WIOA) provide a myriad of resources and services which enhance the quality of life for people with disabilities.

Younger individuals with disabilities and their families work with Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors to make that important transition from school to post-secondary education and/or careers. The business and labor community depend on ORS for trained, job-ready applicants. Personalized services are provided when needed.

We are proud of the partnerships that our staff has developed with our citizen advisory councils, community partners, and customers, which has improved the quality of life for all those we serve.

Sincerely,

Poumele Pete Galea’i, Director

**SRC Mission**

The mission of the State Rehabilitation Council is to work on behalf of the residents of American Samoa with disabilities to review, analyze, and advise DVR regarding the performance of its responsibilities in providing quality services to people with disabilities and promoting a diverse workforce.

**SRC Goal**

Our goal is to ensure that people with disabilities are provided with an equal opportunity to receive the programs and services and supports needed. We work diligently in our pursuit for consumer satisfaction and endless ways in which services can be improved or developed.

Work in partnership and collaborate with stakeholders to maximize employment and independent living for people with disabilities. The SRC advocates and advises OVR on issues facing consumers. The SRC also acts the voice of the consumer and other stakeholders/partners.

**SRC Responsibilities and Functions**

A State having an SRC is established in Title I, Section 101(a)(21) of the Rehab Act of 1973 and in Title 34 Part 361.16 of the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR).

**SRC Accomplishments**

• Held four quarterly Council meetings.

• Prepared, reviewed, approved and submitted SRC Annual Report for FY 2018.

• Assistive Technology presented to the council.

Assistive technology is assistive, adaptive, and rehabilitative devices for people with disabilities or the elderly population. People who have disabilities often have difficulty performing activities of daily living independently, or even with assistance. Assistive technology promotes greater independence by enabling people to perform tasks they were formerly unable to accomplish, or had great difficulty accomplishing, by providing enhancements to, or changing methods of interacting with, the technology needed to accomplish such tasks. For example, wheelchairs provide independent mobility for those who cannot walk, while assistive eating devices can enable people who cannot feed themselves to do so. Due to assistive technology, people with disabilities have an opportunity of a more positive and easygoing lifestyle, with an increase in "social participation," "security and control," and a greater chance to "reduce institutional costs without significantly increasing household expenses."

• OVR Director discussed with the council on VR’s need to conduct a comprehensive statewide needs assessment (CSNA) with the council. Council members asked who will be commissioned to conduct the assessment. Director stated SDSU-WINTAC has been contracted to conduct the needs assessment. Dr. Chaz Compton attended our council meeting that day. He explained that the assessment was based on recommendations from RSA and presented a power point demonstration of the three assessment types e.g. assessment for consumers, staff and service providers. After the power point demonstration council members asked to participate by filling out the needs assessment that pertained to them. Dr. Compton also facilitated a one-day workshop to VR consumers, service providers and staff on the comprehensive statewide needs assessment, held at the Election Office conference room. Participants were asked to complete the CSNA pertaining to them during the question and answer period.

• Council was informed by OVR Director that staff began handing out the CSNA to their consumers, businesses, and service providers during the month of August 2019. SDSU WINTAC is now compiling the data. Results should be out by January 2020.

• Council members requested an update on the school-to-work and the Summer Youth Employment program. OVR reported that they are serving all high schools, when this project began there were only twelve participates from two high schools and now that they are serving all high schools they have for this school year fifty participants; these same participants were referred to the “summer youth employment program”.

• Council continues their working relationships with other disability related Councils and agencies such as: Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC), Client Assistance Program (CAP), Parent Network, Local Workforce Development Board (WIOA), Governor’s Advisory Committee for Persons with Disabilities, UCEDD, DDPC and LBJ Mental Health under the auspice of Department of Public Health, just to name a few.

• Council quarterly meetings are open to the general public and consumers to engage a broad representation of individuals to hear their thoughts and feedback. Individuals with open cases receive an invitation to share their OVR experiences with Council members, VR counselors and supervisors.

• The council was told by OVR’s Director that they were experiencing issues concerning their submittal of the RSA 911 yearly reports. The RSA 911 report contains data required by RSA on each active OVR case. Council asked the Director if he had resolved the problem; Director suggested sending the individual responsible for the report to attend the CSAVR meeting and connect with an RSA representative for assistance while attending the conference. Council agreed but also asked what happens if the individual attending the CSAVR conference is still experiencing problems after requesting assistance from RSA? Director replied he may have to reassign the individual. Council commented that would be at the Director’s discretion but suggested he have a plan B in place for a substitute who can at least complete the RSA 911 report to the satisfaction of RSA

• SRC, DHR-WIOA, ASDOE-Special Education Division and OVR continues to collaborate with the implementation of the School-to-Work and Summer Youth Employment program for federal fiscal year 2019 to 2020.

• employer, and staff tools. Version 17 also features a completely redesigned mobile-friendly interface with a simplified dashboard for easy navigation. The system provides an integrated solution for all federal workforce programs in compliance with WIOA and U.S. Department of Labor regulations.

• Continued participation in the Annual Senior Fair – This fair, which is led by the Office on Aging targets senior citizens and provides them with an opportunity to discuss how they are

being impacted within the community and how to receive access to services that enhance

their lives e.g. hot lunches, food vouchers, etc.

• Again the council invited businesses to our quarterly meetings to foster collaboration among all the related service providers and employers (public and private, for-profit and nonprofit). To encourage coordinated training and orientation of employers, employees and co-workers and to determine and address the employment needs of business and industry.

• Continue to foster interagency collaboration by inviting service provider to attend quarterly meetings.

• Counselors of OVR participated in high school career fair and provided an update to council.

• Dr. Chaz Compton provided training to VR staff, some council members also attended along with SpED Resource Specialist, Department of Human Resources, Employment and Training Division (WIOA). Training consisted of: Implementation of Section 511 governing the use of subminimum wage; Provision of resources and strategies to help individuals with disabilities achieve competitive integrated employment, including supported and customized employment; Integration of the public VR program into the Workforce Development System.

• Council members participated in a recent activity at ASCC “White Cane Day” to promote the use of white canes and awareness of what the use of white canes are for.

• Council discussed the 2020 combined state plan, request feed back from VR staff as to their expectations for 2020 and the future of OVR office and consumers. Prefer they submit their recommendations in writing to the Director of VR and he will share with the council in one of their meetings before the new year. Director responded he will present a submit to council members by emailing them before our next meeting.

• OVR reported they exited thirteen cases for FY 2018, these were successful closures. Problem is that is a decrease from last year’s report of twenty-one closures, council inquired about the decrease in exits as compared to prior year. Is there a shortage in counseling staff? How long have your counselors been at VR? Did the Director ask why there was a significant decrease in exits? Please inquire of the Counselor Supervisor these questions so council can make recommendations to OVR. Please present in next council meeting.

**OVR Outcome**

This year there were 13 exited/successful closures. Thirteen obtained an employment outcome, this is a decrease of eight for this fiscal year. OVR assisted majority of these that exited clients as entrepreneurs. These established businesses included transport services, mini-stores, laundry-mats, bakery, equipment rentals, farmers, etc.

This office provided pre-employment transition services during fiscal year 2019 to fifty high school students. They participated in work based learning experiences within the community as well as off-campus. These same individuals also participated in the Department of Human Resources’ Employment and Training division’s (WIOA) Summer Youth Employment Program.

OVR has a total case load of eight hundred five for FY 2019, with thirty new applicants this fiscal year.

**Summary**

During FFY’19, the State Rehabilitation Council continued to work cohesively and productively, partially as a result of renewed emphasis on the tools at hand, utilizing an updated committee structure, staff and member dedication and focus on staffing to achieve maximum employment outcomes. SRC members represent the state agency to a broad array of partners such as employers, parents, educators, community rehabilitation programs, and other stakeholders in the VR program. They reinforce the value that individuals with disabilities are able to achieve quality employment outcomes and become contributing members of society. Though mandated by federal law, the partnership between SRCs and VR extends beyond the shared accomplishment of mandated tasks. Specifically, the partnership is a call to action to advocate for and to hear the voices of the people served by VR. The partnership must be a commitment and priority for the partners in order to make the VR system a change agent whose goal is to assist people with disabilities to become employed in integrated, competitive employment!

The State Rehabilitation Council has benefited from the support and cooperation of the American Samoa Office of Vocational Rehabilitation. The Council looks forward to another year of challenges and successful outcomes for persons with disabilities who seek employment and other services through OVR.

SRC Future Plans 2020

• Continue to review, analyze, and advise OVR regarding its performance of responsibilities that affect the ability of consumers to achieve employment outcomes;

• Continue to review and analyze the effectiveness of the VR program and consumer satisfaction;

• Continue to support on behalf of persons with disabilities;

• Continue to develop, agree to and review State goals and priorities;

• Continue to assist OVR in the preparation of the State plan, amendments to the plan, and needs assessment;

• Continue to prepare and submit the SRC Annual Report to RSA and Governor;

• Increase consumer awareness of transportation options;

• Continue to promote Transition Services and Pre-employment transition services;

• Continue to expand and promote stake holders and public/private sector participation in serving and providing employment for the disabled population;

• Increase youth/student participation in Transition services and pre-employment transition services.