

# Making Careers Possible



# State Rehabilitation Councils (SRCs)

*Joelle Brouner, Executive Director*

*Washington State Rehabilitation Council (used with permission)*

State Rehabilitation Councils were born out of the tradition of effective advocacy by people with disabilities committed to the success of the publicly-funded Vocational Rehabilitation program. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 was the first disability civil rights law to be enacted in the United States. The victory was marred when the Department of Health, Education and Welfare (HEW) delayed endorsement of the regulations needed to implement the law.

By April of 1977, frustration mounted and disability-rights advocates took direct action by leading sit-ins in Washington, D.C., New York, and San Francisco to pressure HEW to issue the regulations. While the protests in Washington and New York were short-lived, advocates in San Francisco persisted. They occupied the offices of HEW for four weeks.

As a consequence, Joseph Califano, the secretary of HEW, endorsed the regulations. The Rehabilitation

Act is the federal law that establishes the publicly-funded Vocational Rehabilitation Program as we know it today.

The advocacy did not end in 1977. Since that time disability-rights advocates have continued work in service of a system that affords opportunities for customers of the Vocational Rehabilitation program to have more choices on their journeys toward employment.

During the reauthorization process of the Rehabilitation Act in 1993, advocates built on their tradition of effectiveness by persuading Congress to create State Rehabilitation Councils (under Title I, section 105) as a mechanism to support people with disabilities receiving vocational rehabilitation services to take an active role in shaping the services they receive.



## Table of Contents

### Letters

From the Chair of the Vermont State Rehabilitation Council  
From the Director of the Vermont Division of Vocational Rehabilitation

4

### The Year in Review—Summary SRC Committee Reports

Advocacy, Outreach and Education Committee  
Performance Review Committee  
Policy and Procedures Committee

6

### Vermont State Rehabilitation Council Members, 2020

9

### VR's Contribution to Vermonters and Their Communities

Creating Opportunity, Creating Jobs

10

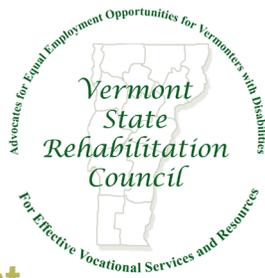
### The Vermont State Rehabilitation Council

Vermont's State Rehabilitation Council advocates for consumer-directed and effective vocational services and for the creation of resources and services that will result in equal opportunities for Vermonters with disabilities.

Under its mandate in the Rehabilitation Act, it "shall review, analyze and advise the designated state unit regarding the performance of the responsibilities of the unit...particularly responsibilities relating to...eligibility (including order of selection); extent, scope and effectiveness of services provided; and functions performed by state agencies that affect or that potentially affect the ability of individuals with disabilities in achieving rehabilitation goals..."

To meet its mission, the Council meets on a bimonthly basis five times a year. (There are no meetings in July or August.) SRC committees meet between full Council meetings to help conduct Council business, For more info visit: [www.src.vermont.gov](http://www.src.vermont.gov)

# Letters



## From the Chair of the Vermont State Rehabilitation Council

I'm pleased to present the FY2020 Vermont State Rehabilitation Council report. As we close out this year, I think about the excellent work of the SRC. This council is made up of highly dedicated members sharing their experiences, from the heart, to ensure that the services provided by VocRehab Vermont are the best they can be. This is especially important to acknowledge and highlight this year. This year, when so many are exhausted, our council continues to put in the time and energy to advocate and advise.

This year, council members were instrumental in advocating that this is the time to invest in employment and people with disabilities. This is the time to not cut much needed VR positions. That advocacy was heard and positions were unfrozen.

VR has continued to work towards programming that honors people with disabilities working towards careers. These conversations and goals towards careers shift the way individuals with disabilities and supportive counselors work together.

VR served more transition-aged youth this year than ever before and continues to grow programming to support young people as they transition. This work will change the future of employment for people with disabilities and the way society sees people with disabilities.

This year also marked a transition year in welcoming a new SRC Coordinator Kate Larose, who has guided and supported the work of our members with the highest level of skill. The SRC is able to do the important work together because of her expertise and support.

I'm honored to serve as the Chair of the VT SRC and present to you the important work in this report. A special thank you to our council members and to the Chairs of our committees who continue to lead from a position of disability justice and pride, and whose work is very much appreciated.

In Solidarity,

*Sarah Launderville, Chair  
Vermont State Rehabilitation*



## From the Director of the Vermont Division of Vocational Rehabilitation



We continue our journey to assist our customers to have a career and not just a job. 2020 began with the economy booming. We were on our way to full implementation of our Career's Initiative. Then, COVID 19 struck our nation. In mid-March we all went home to work remotely. It was a remarkably successful transition due to our using AWARE as our electronic case management system in the cloud and accessible from anywhere and most importantly, given the agility, flexibility and commitment of our staff. We have learned how to maximize the use of video platforms with consumers, partners and each other. We will continue to work remotely through the end of the year and perhaps longer.

Governor Scott has done an amazing job of keeping Vermonters safe and controlling the virus. Vermont has the lowest infection rate in the country. With such low numbers, he was able to slowly and safely reopen the economy. Our Business Account Managers have kept employer outreach and job placement going throughout the last six months. The unemployment rate is declining, and employers are expanding their hiring.

In 2019, we rolled out our performance dashboard. The dashboard has continued to evolve. Our dashboard was developed in response to a total change in our performance measures dictated by the passage of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act by the US Congress. The Common Performance Measures, as defined in WIOA, are very lagging measures and we

needed to define leading indicators that counselors could implement that would positively impact the lagging federal measures. We have been improving the dashboard over time and we are beginning to see positive impact on the six Common Performance Measures.

Our Transition Counselors continued to provide services to students and families virtually and have learned how to provide career exploration in a variety of ways. Last spring, we prioritized seniors as their plan A for post high school transition needed to morph into plan B and we were there to assist and support. Schools have reopened this fall to a hybrid model of in person and remote education. We contracted with Market Decisions to do a youth survey. The survey results in combination with a total review of our service delivery system for youth and young adults has caused us to expand the number of transition counselors and the age range they serve. 50% of our total caseload is under the age of 25.

The State Rehabilitation Council has supported and advocated for VR consumers and services during these uncertain and frightening times. They helped unfreeze VR counselor positions, so we had the capacity to serve Vermonters with disabilities who had lost their jobs and needed support to re-enter the labor market. We will continue to have a robust and productive relationship with our State Rehabilitation Council. We value their input and advice.

*Diane P. Dalmasse, Director  
Vermont Division of Vocational Rehabilitation*

# The Year in Review — Summary SRC Committee Reports



## Advocacy, Outreach, and Education Committee

*Sam Liss, Chair*

As far as the SRC AOE Committee agenda and activities are concerned, Federal Fiscal Year 2020 posed many challenges – as it did for all of us. The year began with many initiatives and much hope. The COVID-19 pandemic altered plans and priorities but hope – even enthusiasm – for a better future remained and buoyed us all.

Throughout, the AOE Committee has monitored relevant Federal and State legislation, as well as Federal and State administrative actions. In addition, the Committee has been kept abreast of and actively participated in events around the State that pertain to people with disabilities vis-à-vis furthering employment opportunities.

The Committee has been following Congressional legislative progress on the ABLE Age Adjustment Act, the Money Follows the Person (MFP) Medicaid demo project reauthorizations (along with Home and Community-based Medicaid spousal impoverishment protections) and other bills. It has been monitoring with keen interest State budget items and dedicated legislation such as a hearing aid insurance mandate, unfreezing the general-funded attendant services program and the proposed First Responders Commission.

Social Security Administration (SSA) rulings were followed as they pertain to benefits vis-à-vis employment, as well as Federal reports that highlighted the importance of integrated, competitive employment for people with disabilities.

Events within the priority agenda of the Committee included the Governor's Transportation/Employment Summit, the SRC annual Card Room event at the Statehouse, the VFN Youth Summit(s) and the Statewide Independent Living Council's (SILC) Olmstead Webinars and Networking Breakfast. Committee members actively participated in all of these events to the extent appropriate and possible.

Indeed, collaboration with other entities was reinvigorated with planned presentations and interactive discussions with the SILC, Vermont Family Network, State Agency of Education and others.

Serendipitous grant opportunities and awards have been discussed all along, such as the budding Transitioning to Economic Self-Sufficiency (TESS) State pilot.

With heightened excitement, the AOE Committee listened to updates and strongly supported the advancement of the "Working with Disability" project and roll-out of the resulting initial report. We are all hoping and expecting that the dedicated work by the Public Assets Institute and so many others on this project will reap huge benefits for all of Vermont society.

Finally, the SRC AOE Committee has been continuously informed of pertinent pandemic developments regarding program, service and related benefit issues and, all along, has been duly responsive in advocating for the Vocational Rehabilitation program in Vermont and its critical importance for employment of people with disabilities.



## Performance Review Committee

*Dominick Caputo, Chair*

The Vermont State Rehabilitation Council's Performance Review Committee (PRC) is responsible for reviewing, analyzing, and advising the Vermont Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) on its performance in fulfilling its mission and responsibilities. This year the PRC focused on reviewing and providing feedback on the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act's (WIOA) Unified and Combined State Plan, and the Comprehensive Needs Assessment. The PRC also reviewed data, and provided input, on several reports that directly affect the needs of DVR consumers.

### WIOA Unified and Combined State Plan

The State Plan for program year 2020 started on July 1, 2020 and concludes on June 30, 2021. DVR's updated plan was submitted on April 1 of this year. The PRC focused on the State's Goals and Priorities section of the plan. It is within the State's Goals and Priorities that the needs and desired outcomes of the program year are outlined. Since the WIOA measures are extremely lagging, most of the desired outcomes occur well after DVR services conclude. To this end, the PRC reviewed DVR progress on achieving prior Goals and Priorities to assist us with the development of updated Goals and Priorities for the 2020 program year.

### Comprehensive Needs Assessment

The SRC plays a role in developing summary findings of the Needs Assessment. To help the full SRC develop these findings the PRC reviewed several pieces of data that related to:

- Population data from the American Community Survey
- Minority individuals who are eligible for DVR services
- The need for Supported Employment services
- Adults with psychiatric and developmental disabilities
- Unserved and underserved individuals with disabilities
- Older Vermonters with disabilities
- Individuals with physical disabilities
- Individuals with Traumatic Brain Injuries
- Rehabilitation needs of youth and students with disabilities
- Vocational rehabilitation services for students and youth
- VR Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS)

The PRC's major findings after reviewing the available data were:

- DVR should develop strategies to respond to the impact of Covid-19 on DVR consumers
- As DVR's caseload skews to younger workers, DVR must continue to innovate on how to best serve middle-aged and older workers
- DVR should continue to increase post-secondary education and training opportunities for students and youth
- DVR should implement strategies to ensure cultural competency training for staff
- Outcomes for individuals with psychiatric disabilities need to be improved
- DVR should prepare consumers to take advantage of career ladders



- DVR should engage employers about the potential of DVR consumers to fill higher skill, higher wage positions

The PRC also reviewed the federal indicators used to evaluate the DVR program, development of long-term career goals, and case service expenditures.

### The Work Ahead

As we move toward 2021 the PRC expects that COVID-19 will continue to have a major effect on DVR and its consumers. We will be reviewing the challenges in supporting the consumers and as a committee we will look at potential changes in practice given the pandemic.

### Policy and Procedures Committee

*Sherrie Brunelle, Chair*

It's been a challenging year for all Vermonters with the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 significantly impacting our lives. Businesses were shut down and many lost their jobs. Most of us were advised to stay home to prevent the spread of the virus. Those businesses and agencies that need to provide essential services needed to figure out how to do their jobs remotely.

Despite all the challenges, the Policy and Procedures Committee continued to meet and work on developing policies and procedures that provide clear and consistent guidance for VocRehab staff supporting individuals with disabilities. Following are some highlights of the work this committee has undertaken this year.

- Learning more about the diverse community VR serves and how that diversity impacts the work VR does including how VR can support individuals with differing gender identity and gender expression.
- Revising Chapter 311 (Post-Secondary Education and Training) focusing on two primary elements. First, credential attainment outside of higher education leading to higher paying jobs without substantial time and debt for the consumer. Second, emphasizing progressive career pathways consistent with the expectations and intent of the Workforce Innovation & Opportunities Act (WIOA).
- Revising Chapter 313 (Audiology Services) to make clearer what support VR can provide and under what circumstances, particularly as it relates to VR funding for hearing aids
- Deciding that we need to develop a separate chapter that focuses on the unique circumstances of consumers who receive Social Security benefits.
- Continuing our work on revisions to Chapter 308 (Self-Employment).

A highlight for me was adding new consumer members to the committee who will provide invaluable input and perspectives to the work of the committee as do the VR counselors who serve on this important committee. My thanks to each member of the committee.

# Vermont State Rehabilitation Council Members - 2020

## **Steering Committee**

Sarah Launderville, *SRC Chair*  
Brian Smith, *SRC Vice Chair*  
Sam Liss, *Advocacy, Education, and Outreach Committee Chair*  
Nick Caputo, *Performance Review Committee Chair*  
Sherrie Brunelle, *Policy and Procedures Committee Chair*  
Diane Dalmasse, *VocRehab Vermont Director*  
James Smith, *VocRehab Vermont Budget and Policy Manager\**

## **Advocacy, Outreach, and Education Committee**

Sam Liss, *Chair*  
Courtney Blasius  
Sherrie Brunelle  
Diane Dalmasse  
Asher Edelson  
Martha Frank  
Helena Kehne  
Cari Kelley  
Ana Kolbach  
Sarah Launderville  
Bill Meirs  
Cara Sachs  
Olivia Smith-Hammond

## **Policy and Procedures Committee**

Sherrie Brunelle, *Chair*  
Kristen Carpentier  
Rocko Gieselman  
Helena Kehne  
Olivia Smith-Hammond  
Patricia Wehman  
James Smith, *SRC Liaison\**

## **Performance Review Committee**

Dominick Caputo, *Chair*  
Sherrie Brunelle  
Gina D'Ambrosio  
Danielle Dubois  
Marlena Hughes  
Robin Ingenthron  
Rose Lucenti  
Bill Meirs  
Brian Smith  
James Smith, *SRC Liaison\**

## **2020 SRC Members in Alphabetical Order with New Appointments**

Courtney Blasius  
Sherrie Brunelle  
Dominick Caputo  
Kristen Carpentier  
Diane Dalmasse  
Gina D'Ambrosio  
Danielle Dubois  
Asher Edelson  
Martha Frank  
Rocko Gieselman  
Marlena Hughes  
Robin Ingenthron  
Helena Kehne  
Cari Kelley  
Ana Kolbach  
Sarah Launderville  
Sam Liss  
Rose Lucenti  
Bill Meirs  
Cara Sachs  
James Smith, *SRC Liaison\**  
Brian Smith  
Olivia Smith-Hammond  
Patricia Wehman

# VR's Contribution to Vermonters and Their Communities

## Creating Opportunity, Creating Jobs

The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation's mission is to help Vermonters with disabilities prepare for, obtain, and maintain meaningful employment and to help employers recruit, train, and retain employees with disabilities. Consumer choice and self-direction are core values that drive DVR's approach to providing services and developing new programs. DVR's ability to help jobseekers succeed also depends on clearly understanding the needs of our other customers: employers. To that end, DVR plays an important facilitating role in Creative Workforce Solutions, an Agency of Human Services initiative that builds on DVR's initial employer outreach work.

### Creating Career Pathways for DVR Consumers

In 2014 the US Congress reauthorized the Rehabilitation Act via the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). WIOA is the first legislative reform of the public workforce system in more than 15 years. WIOA introduced new Common Performance Measures (CPM) that core partners including DVR will be measured on. The measures are:

- Job retention six months post program exit
- Job retention 12 months post program exit
- Median earnings six months post program exit
- Credential attainment
- Measurable skills gains
- Employer satisfaction

Prior to WIOA, DVR had been measured primarily on how many people the program assisted in getting a job. This shift from quantitative to qualitative measures required a major paradigm shift in our service delivery system. To respond to the paradigm shift, DVR implemented the Careers Initiative, a series of strategies to align program services with the new measures.

The new strategies include:

- **PROMOTING POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION AND TRAINING:** DVR has realigned case service resources to support more consumers in post-secondary education and training, both of which will help them achieve credentials in high-demand, high-wage fields.
- **CAREER ASSESSMENT:** DVR is promoting the use of modern career assessment tools that help consumers see beyond entry-level employment and identify potential career paths.
- **SUPPORTING PRACTICE CHANGE:** DVR has updated policy and practice to promote consumers achieving longer-term career goals.
- **TEAMING TO SUPPORT THE CONSUMER:** DVR encourages counselors to pull in other team members to support consumers in achieving their employment goals. This might include the employment consultant, the benefits counselor, or the assistive technology specialist.
- **FOLLOW-UP AFTER PLACEMENT:** DVR requires regular follow-up with consumers post-exit to promote job retention and career advancement. This can be critical for consumers who are struggling to retain their jobs.

DVR tracks implementation of our new strategies through a new Performance Dashboard. The Dashboard provides real-time information for staff and managers at the counselor, district, and statewide level. The Dashboard provides them with a useful frame of reference to judge how they are doing, so they can focus on what they need to do to achieve desired outcomes.

Dashboard data already shows how DVR's Careers Initiative is changing practices, services, and outcomes. In the last year DVR has seen the following:

- A 10% increase in DVR consumers participating in post-secondary education and training.
- A 20% increase in DVR consumers with higher wage employment plan goals.
- A 23% increase in DVR consumers earning over 125% of minimum wage at program exit.
- A 9% increase in the number of DVR consumers achieving an employment outcome.

### Number of People Served

- A total of 6,610 individuals were served in SFY 2020. 8,074 were served in SFY 2019.
- 5,709 people were served in the core DVR program in SFY 2020. 6,756 were served in SFY 2019.
- 1,583 high school students were served through the Pre-Employment Transition Services program in SFY 2020. 1,318 were served in SFY 2019.
- SFY 2015-2019 (post-WIOA) 26% of all VR youth served received a work-based learning experience.

### How Well We Served Them

The DVR Consumer Experience Survey is conducted every three years to determine consumers' overall satisfaction with the program. The survey is conducted by a third-party research firm, Market Decisions Research (MDR), who have an extensive background in working with VR agencies nationwide. Seven hundred consumers were contacted to provide information for our 2019 survey.

The overall results were positive. Market Decisions Research found that of the consumers surveyed:

- 81% reported that they were satisfied or very satisfied with DVR.
- 96% said that they would recommend that their friends or family members seek help from DVR.
- 92% of consumers responded that they are satisfied with their experience working with DVR staff and DVR counselors; this is a two percent increase from our 2016 survey.

Consumers also reported consistently high rates of satisfaction about their treatment by DVR staff. In the 2019 survey, 98% of consumers reported feeling that they were treated by DVR staff with dignity and respect. The largest improvement in customer experience was seen in the ability of consumers to communicate with their DVR counselors. In 2016, 88% of consumers were satisfied with their ability to contact their counselors; in 2019 this percentage rose to 91%, an all-time high.

## Employer Satisfaction

In 2019 DVR contracted with MDR to develop a survey that would determine employer satisfaction with DVR services. In 2019 MDR surveyed 200 employers that had contact with a Creative Workforce Solutions (CWS) team member(s) within the last 18 months. The survey found that:

- 77% of employers were satisfied with CWS services
- 94% would be open to working with the CWS team in the future.

One area of improvement that was identified in the survey results, is that employers would like to be contacted more frequently. The information the survey provided is invaluable as we continue to improve our services to employers and develop more connections to best serve DVR customers.

## Youth and School Staff Satisfaction

In 2020 DVR contracted with MDR to develop two surveys to determine the satisfaction of youth with DVR transition services and evaluate school and partner satisfaction. Consumers included in the sample were youth who were currently receiving or had received transition services within the last year.

Of the 104 youth respondents:

- 75% were satisfied with services
- 78% found working with their transition counselor helpful.

Of the 189 school and partner staff respondents:

- 96% were familiar with DVR transition services
- 93% felt confident they know how and when to refer a student for services.

Overwhelmingly both surveys found that satisfaction with transition services is high.

However, one area for improvement that was identified is to increase the number of counseling staff that serve transition age youth. This would allow youth to have more regular contact with their counselors and for school staff and partners to collaborate more frequently to provide the most comprehensive services.

## How People are Better Off

The most immediate measure of how people are better off is their employment status when they leave the program.

In State Fiscal Year 2020, 621 individuals closed their DVR case with successful employment. This means they:

- Met their individual employment goal; and
- Were employed for at least 90 days and were stable.
- 289 or 47% had a wage above 125% of the minimum wage.

Vermont's VR programs also received data for the first time, on the WIOA Common Performance Measures and how we compared to national averages. These data show that:

- Vermont VR consumers are achieving measurable skills at a much higher rate than the national average.
- The employment rate two quarters post exit improved from 49% in SFY 2019 to 51.1% in SFY 2020.
- The median earnings two quarters post exit increased from \$3,516 in SFY 2019 to \$3,900 in SFY 2020.



The Vermont State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) is appointed by the Governor. We seek new members who have a wide range of interests and talents to help improve the services offered by the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation to the citizens of Vermont with disabilities. If you are interested in applying to become a member of the SRC, please contact Kate Larose.

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