

# State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind

June 11, 2021

Seattle, Washington

Attendance – all members attended via videoconference

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***Council Members Present:***

Andy Arvidson, Cathy Wilson, Christopher Zilar, Jacob Kamaunu, Jerri Clark, Jerry Johnsen, Julie Brannon, Kim Conner, Kristin Geary, Linda Wilder, Marci Carpenter, Michael MacKillop, Steve Fiksdal

***Council Members Absent:***

Chris Alejano, Corey Grandstaff, Sean McCormick, Sheila Turner

***Staff and Visitors Present:***

Meredith Stannard, Yvonne Grimes, Lisa Wheeler, Tricia Eyerly, Jeannie Brown, LaDell Lockwood, Kim Canaan, Alice Klein, Jennifer Bean, Alco Canfield, Carl Jarvis, Sheri Richardson, Ben Prowse, Keri Brent

**Call to Order and Agenda Review: Julie Brannon, Chair**

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Meeting was called to order at 9:01 AM. All parties on the call introduced themselves for the record. Julie reviewed the agenda for today's meeting. Meredith and Yvonne reviewed Zoom protocols and accessible commands.

**Approval of March 2021 Minutes:**

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Andy moved and Marci seconded to accept the March 2021 SRC Meeting Minutes. Motion passed.

**Acting Director's Report: Michael MacKillop**

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Michael thanked everyone for attending today's meeting, and he's grateful to have this diverse and passionate group of people supporting DSB and providing valuable input and feedback. Michael also noted that he may use some acronyms that are not familiar to everyone and to feel free to interrupt and ask for clarification if needed.

We're in an odd place of pandemic transition, but it's not over and done. It's been exciting news to hear that Seattleites are at 70% vaccinated. This means a return to some activities, and others will

be kept virtual as it has increased ease of participation. In-person is always best, but virtual is important for inclusion. We've learned that a lot of the foundational skills and training can be taught remotely. Computer training and Braille have been taught virtually with great success. The theory of O&M can be taught remotely, but you can't get the practice. In Youth Services it is critical to get them together in person to know they're not alone. Also gives more opportunities to do things on their own, for example the YES2 (Youth Employment Solutions) program is six weeks of the students being on their own learning independence and getting paid for working. YS programs will be virtual again this year, and back in person next year. All direct staff are now okay to provide in-person services. Only one on one contact with participants at this point, no group workshops or activities.

In-person teaching at the OTC has not resumed yet. It is a high priority to reopen the physical OTC program. Again, huge benefits to being in person, but have been able to succeed virtually. There will be an OTC graduate next week who has only received remote training. They have missed out on socialization, exploring local area, learning to advocate for themselves, etc. Opening the OTC would be easier if DSB could ask for proof of vaccination. Michael would like to know SRC members' opinion on this question. Currently a waiting list of 35+ people wanting to attend the OTC in person.

When will offices reopen? This is still uncertain. Agencies have been told to have plan in place by July 15 to re-open on August 15. Not impacting ability to offer services but DSB may appear closed for everything when office doors are locked. There are a lot of questions right now around what is and isn't okay in regards to masking and vaccines.

Julie asked- Would vaccines be required for all OTC students or resident only? Michael said for resident only at this time in the plan. If a resident student got sick with COVID it would bring a lot of challenges, whereas a commuter student can stay home.

There has been a 9% increase in services provided over same period last year. IL services have increased in cost, spending more for transportation, and it's probably a more realistic amount that can be managed for now. IL moving forward with Equipment Loaning Library. Talking with WTTBL to team up.

DSB has seen an increase in VR applications, especially in East King and Pierce Counties and Central Washington. It has actually been a little easier to manage VR caseloads between regions with the ability for cross-region teaming by VRCs to provide remote training to participants. Order of Selection (started in October 2018) had lowered application rate, with OOS release of all categories in January & February 2020 we saw increase until the pandemic hit and closed things down. The DSB budget is fine currently, with a bit of a cushion.

To explain OOS for those not familiar with the term, it is the only way for DSB to "save money" per Federal law. It requires that we put an eligible participant on a wait list until we know there is enough money available to serve the participant all the way through to the end of their plan with

DSB. It takes six months to implement the process, so OOS is still part of VR but with all categories currently open and no active wait list. It remains as a means to manage spending quickly if needed.

Really proud of the workshops that Youth Services have been offering and have planned for the summer programs. There are many opportunities for cross-state virtual connections to be made.

BEP is still very challenging, with no workers/customers in the buildings with BEP sites. Jim and his team have been successful at finding as many grants and funds as they can for the vendors.

However, none of it has been enough to cover the total earnings the vendors have lost. Received money in the state budget to hire a consultant to re-design BEP to support vendors with a profitable business model in current and future conditions. Outcome can help with the ask to the Legislature for money in the supplemental budget to actually make changes to the program. Good support for the ask from DSB's OFM budget analysts.

DSB staffing is currently a challenge. Upcoming retirements include Mark Adreon, Business Relations Manager, and Debbie Brown, Youth Services Manager. Anticipating several more retirements to be announced before year-end. DSB now has a number of new employees who have only worked remotely so far.

The Workforce Board put together a task force of about 40 people who have discussed and written their recommendations to Senator Patty Murray's office regarding the reauthorization of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) from 2014 which requires VR agencies to hold back 15% of their VR grants for specific Pre-ETS services only. There are four recommendations that are most important to DSB.

- DSB wants to offer services to youth "as early as necessary", and has argued that this can mean as young as nine years old, even though our Workforce partners are okay with starting at 16 years old and don't see a need to start earlier.
- Need for more flexibility on how to spend Pre-ETS funds. Restricted to five specific services now, which doesn't allow for services such as transportation or language interpretation.
- Fully fund the Pre-ETS program instead of taking 15% away from the adult VR grant.
- Make Tribal VR programs permanent and ongoing. Currently they issue TVR programs five-year "demonstration" grants to try it out and prove they work. These grants have been being issued since 1978, the program has proven it works and should have stable funding.

Christopher Z mentioned that he meets occasionally with Sen. Murray's Legislative Assistant in Spokane, and he asked Michael what would be the one thing he'd like Christopher to mention next time they meet? Michael said two things are critical, offering services at an age "as early as necessary" and spending flexibility with Pre-ETS funds.

## Policy Review and State Plan: Michael MacKillop

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The State Plan is our agreement with our federal partners in the Dept. of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services (OSERS), and in the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA). Michael explained that since 2014 when WIOA passed, DSB has to work together with state partners to create a combined State Plan, in addition to a separate attachment for DSB. It starts with SRC-B input on the direction and goals for DSB, with response from the agency on each point. A new plan is due every four years, and has to be refreshed every two years. January 2022 is the next due date for the two year refresh.

The VR State Plan only addresses VR. It does not include Youth Services, Independent Living, or a Business Enterprise Program.

DSB is working out a data share agreement with Office of the Superintendent for Public Instruction (OSPI) for documentation on Measurable Skill Gains (MSG). MSG is the only way DSB is currently measured by the federal government so it's a big win to get this data and report on it.

Other things in the plan will include:

- Staff Development, will likely see a 40% staff changeover in the next 2-3 years
- Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment
- Do we have equitability in services? Outcomes?
- Keeping OOS active so we can react if large increase in applications
- Performance measures, such as MSG
- Employer engagement, adding this as a measurement

Andy – Commented about increasing reach of services.

Jerri C – Agrees with importance of starting services before age 16. State WACs require students start High School planning while still in Middle School. DVR Transition services can start at age 14.

## Congratulations and Thank You to Jerry Johnsen: Julie Brannon

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Jerry Johnsen is retiring from the Client Assistance Program (CAP) and this was his last SRC meeting after serving on the council for 18 years. Many congratulations were offered. Jerry shared a number of stories and anecdotes. Everyone was encouraged to watch Jerry's history of VR for the state's VR100 Celebration that was held in 2020. Jerry's part starts at 05:50 after Michael's introduction. [VR100 Celebration Video on YouTube](#)

Jennifer Bean will take Jerry's place as the Director of CAP, and the CAP representative on the SRC.

## DSB Rehabilitation Teachers Presentation: Beth Sutton, South Region; Lena Norton, East Region; and Donna Lawrence, North Region (OTC)

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Beth Sutton said that when she saw her office mate at the Tacoma field office packing everything up last March that she did the same thing. For the first time ever she packed up every item that she uses to do her job as a Rehab Teacher and took it home with her. Her next thought was “Now, how do I do this?”. Beth looked at her schedule and started to change how her upcoming tasks could be done in the virtual world. She made visual acuity tests to send out to participants. Then she attended a webinar with a Low Vision professor and found out she had been doing it exactly right. She has learned that some things can be taught effectively remotely, and likes the hybrid model. Beth said she is more efficient and can serve more people with remote services. She has improved her descriptive skills, and said that she will keep some of her new tools such as using walkie talkies at loud intersections.

Lena Norton works out of the Spokane field office and has a huge eastern Washington territory. With the lack of personal and public transportation for her participants she is used to taking everything with her to see participants, so when the offices closed she packed everything up into her own car. Lena said she had many opportunities to get creative with doing Low Vision evaluations (LVE), and she really appreciated the ways that Beth had come up with for doing fully remote LVEs. In one instance, Lena helped a new mom who has Low Vision with marking her newborn’s bottles with higher contrast and measuring out the formula. Since she couldn’t go into the apartment, Lena helped her participant in the parking lot of her apartment. Lena says her car has become her office on wheels and is continuing to work in the field as much as possible, while incorporating remote services wherever it’s applicable. Saves a lot of time from not driving long distances while still being very successful at providing services.

Donna Lawrence teaches Home Ec in the OTC. It was a very big shift to go to remote teaching. She expressed her appreciation to fellow ROMERs for their problem-solving that show innovation and dedication and passion. Donna said she started teaching remotely two weeks after the shutdown. The OTC has had eight virtual terms so far with 16-18 students each term, and have graduated eight students. They’ve also held two remote Family and Friends events. They held their first ever virtual OTC experience for newly hired staff at DSB. They have had two interns, and are creating a future virtual Open House and OTC Tour. They have found Zoom has worked well for these remote events, people seem more willing to share and be involved in discussion.

Donna was initially worried about remote teaching, but saw it was really important for participants who were isolated. The OTC worked as a team to plan how to make this work for all of the classes. They sent packages of tools out to each student with everything they would need to successfully participate in each class. One big challenge for her Home Ec course has been hoverers at home who are reluctant to let the participant be completely independent with using a knife, the stove, etc. Donna said everything she teaches has a process, so teach the process, learn the process, and

then execute the process; and she has found that the challenge to do this successfully has brought out many best practices.

Kristin commented that she would like to learn some of Donna's tips and tricks to help her with remote youth instruction.

Michael added that these skills taught by DSB's Rehab Teachers are a unique aspect of DSB and one of the reasons why it needed to stay its own agency separate from DVR.

## Public Comment

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Sheri Richardson said thank you to the presenters and appreciated the reports they gave.

## Feedback and Discussion of April Training: Marci Carpenter

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Marci asked for feedback on the April training session. How was it? Are there other things that should be included?

Kristin – It was good to see an overview and learn how the SRC works with DSB to affect positive change. Likes to hear from other parts of the agency.

Jacob – Good information. Helps him with presentations for BEP to see how entities are connected.

Cathy – Learned about the SRC, understands what it is and can talk about it better now.

Andy – Liked seeing how it all fits together, and that he gets to have a voice as a user/citizen. Not a top down organization.

Steve – Would like to see more time spent on the council's role next time.

Julie – Requested everyone continue to give input on what might be added to the training or a council meeting.

Jerry

Kim Conner – Appreciated the training, even after five years on the council.

## Update on Committees: Julie Brannon

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Julie announced the new membership on all the committees. She said the goal is for each committee to meet at least once in between quarterly council meetings to discuss goals and objectives. Then have readouts from each committee at the quarterly meetings. Chairs of each committee will contact new members and set up a committee meeting.

Executive Committee – Julie Brannon, Linda Wilder, Jen Bean, Marci Carpenter

Satisfaction Survey & Annual Report Committee – Jen Bean (Chair), Sheila Turner, Kim Conner, Jacob Kamaunu, Kristin Geary

Membership Committee – Linda Wilder (Chair), Jerri Clark, Corey Grandstaff, Andy Arvidson, Christopher Zilar

Policy Committee – Marci Carpenter (Chair), Chris Alejano, Steve Fiksdal, Sean McCormick, Cathy Wilson

## **SRC 2021 Meeting Schedule**

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Friday, September 10<sup>th</sup>; and Friday, December 10<sup>th</sup>

All meetings scheduled on Zoom from 9:00am – 12:00pm unless otherwise communicated.

## **Meeting Adjourned**

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Christopher moved to adjourn and Linda seconded. Motion carried. Meeting was adjourned at 12:00 PM.