

State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind

September 9, 2022

Seattle, Washington

Attendance – all members attended via videoconference

Council Members Present:

Andy Arvidson, Cathy Wilson, Chris Alejano, Christopher Zilar, Corey Grandstaff, Jacob Kamaunu, Jen Bean, Julie Brannon, Kim Conner, Linda Wilder, Marci Carpenter, Michael MacKillop, Sheila Turner

Council Members Absent:

Jerri Clark, Steve Fiksdal, Kristin Geary, Sean McCormick

Staff and Visitors Present:

Meredith Stannard, Yvonne Grimes, Tricia Eyerly, Lisa Wheeler, Deja Powell, Nohemy Solorzano-Thompson, Doug Burkhalter, Bek Moras, Jill McCormick, Julie Harlow, Larry Watkinson, Kris Colcock

Call to Order and Agenda Review: Julie Brannon, Chair

Meeting was called to order at 9:00 AM. All parties on the call introduced themselves for the record. Meredith and Yvonne reviewed Zoom protocols for asking questions and accessible commands. Julie reviewed the agenda for today's meeting.

Proposed dates for the 2023 SRCB meetings:

March 10, June 9, September 15, and December 8.

Approval of June 2022 Minutes:

Marci moved and Corey seconded to accept the June 2022 SRC Meeting Minutes, with one correction noted: remove "Acting" from Michael's title. Motion passed.

Exiting Members Acknowledgement: Julie Brannon

Julie acknowledged and thanked the following exiting Council members: Steve Fiksdal, Jerri Clark, Kim Conner, Marci Carpenter, Corey Grandstaff, and Sheila Turner. She added Steve had served for nine years and was chair for one year.

Kim said she started at the September 2017 meeting right after she was hired to the WASILC. She enjoyed working on the Survey Committee.

Marci has enjoyed her time on the SRC. She was chair of the council also, and worked most recently on the Policy Committee She wanted to say to potential members who were in attendance: Need to know what's happening at the agency, so read the entire meeting packet. Know that Michael is available and open to feedback.

Corey said it was a pleasure serving and learning about DSB. He served on the Membership Committee and appreciated Linda's leadership when she became chair of that committee.

Executive Director's Report: Michael MacKillop

Michael asked the Council for feedback on doing a land acknowledgement at the meetings. He wants it to be meaningful and not rote. Currently there are efforts to rename geographic sites back to native names. Recently in the San Juan Islands, Harney Channel has been renamed to Cayou Channel, after a Lummi tribal member who was a fisherman and served as a San Juan County Commissioner.

Michael acknowledged the SRCB members who are leaving. He said it is sad to see people leave, but he's excited to see potential members joining the meeting today.

Jerri – Michael said he understands Jerri didn't always feel that she was contributing to the Council, but he feels that any information/feedback she shared from her perspective was phenomenal and was valued when it was given.

Michael thanked Kim for keeping the Council informed and for her thoughtful contributions to Council discussions.

Marci has given so much to the SRCB and to Michael, he really honors her time spent on the Council. Same for Corey, hard to believe six years have passed already and appreciates his contributions.

Many things to cover today including follow-up on the RSA monitoring, decision packages that have been submitted, staff mood, community feedback, and governor rescinding COVID Emergency Order at end of October – what does this mean for DSB and its services?

No new information on the RSA monitoring. DSB has stopped providing Pre-ETS for those under 14 years old. The minor fiscal issues found have been corrected. No final report with findings issued yet. When it is issued then DSB has 30 days to respond, and it goes back to RSA for review again.

Then the final report will be issued. Some RSA news is that they have not had a commissioner since 2020 and a nominee has been put forward for the position.

Decision packages are submitted by state agencies to ask for funds not already part of the current budget. Previously DSB has not asked for much prior to last year's ask for the BEP Rebuild. Need to ask for more funds for BEP due to inflation impacts, some items have increased 50% or more in cost, and supply chain issues adding delays of six months plus to receive goods after ordering. The project management from ISG has been great, they understand DSB and BEP. However their cost was not part of original ask, and we missed adding sales tax to cost estimates. Have shuffled the timing of the projects since not sure of future plans for some of the buildings. Michael believes there continues to be support in the Legislature for BEP. Return of staff to the buildings where BEP has locations is unknown. The ask will probably be for another \$9 million.

There are no funds for ages 9-13 from anywhere else, we have to ask the state for it. It's also support for the families of children who are blind or low vision. It is critical to get this funding. It will add one position specific to under 14, and then cover a percentage of all the Youth Services staff to be able to work with under 14. The ask is for about \$360k per biennium.

Independent Living (IL), asking for more money to serve folks over 55 years old. Currently they get a small amount, but it's not enough and consistently need to create a wait list as funds start to run out. IL can often serve to get someone skills (especially someone newly blind or low vision), and then they do apply for VR services once they believe they can do something. The other IL need is for recruitment and retention of IL service providers. Some have retired and others have large areas to cover with increased costs. Asking for increase of \$900k per biennium.

DSB has asked for funding to add a new position of Accessibility Coordinator. Many staff are blind or low vision, and they need to be supported. One person responsible for testing of new systems and software before they roll out. Would serve as a point of contact between DSB and other agencies for help with their applications and forms. Asking for \$350k per biennium.

Deadline for submitting decision packages is September 20th. They go to the Governor for review to include in his budget, then goes to the Legislature. The WA State WorkForce Training and Education Board is supporting our under 14 ask.

Linda asked – As a former VRC she can attest to how much it helped participants find work as adults when they had been encouraged to be independent as kids and teens, and to partake in career exploration. Did RSA ask for any repayment of Pre-ETS funds? Michael said no they did not, they knew we were doing it and we had tacit approval.

Kim asked – Regarding the under 14 ask, all disabilities need support from Birth. If the WASILC can support the ask somehow to let them know and they'll be on it. She also asked, what is the IL budget for adults under 55? Michael said it is \$49/k a year from the State Plan for Independent Living (SPIL). Have been able to augment it with Social Security reimbursements occasionally. Lastly Kim asked if unspent Pre-ETS money has to be returned. Michael said yes, and having to

separate out the under 14 youth will make it even harder to spend it all going forward. Michael is confident that RSA will figure this out eventually. DSB will return approximately \$300k at the end of September.

Kim wondered how could DSB partner with the Centers for Independent Living (CILs) to help spend Pre-ETS dollars? CILs are mandated to help provide Pre-Employment Transition Services but no funds are provided. Michael said it would be good to schedule a discussion with Kim, Bek, Lisa, and Deja to start a conversation about this.

Marci asked if the last Social Security reimbursement went to IL. In general, it would be good for the Council to know where the reimbursement money goes. What was the M365 training listed on the budget? They were funds secured from the state for training to staff who use adaptive software when the state upgraded to Microsoft 365. It would be helpful to locate the Pre-ETS financial table with the other fiscal tables in the quarterly report rather than having it in the Pre-ETS section.

Julie B. asked – What can the Council do to show support for these decision packages? Michael is creating a letter template for support and will send it out to the Council members. Feel free to change it however they want.

Andy asked – How is the line drawn at age 14? Youth are future leaders and need to start education earlier, what else can they do to show support? Michael said people can educate their own networks about it, and he will advise the Council if there are other things they can do.

Julie Harlow asked – Why is RSA making this change? Michael explained the law says the minimum age is based on how your state interprets the IDEA, and the WA Administrative Code (WAC) states “transition services must be in place by age 16 or as early as necessary”. DSB has used “early as necessary” to justify use of Pre-ETS funds for those age 9-13. Really not sure where age 14 comes into it as not mentioned anywhere. This stricter interpretation could be due to having no permanent RSA commissioner in place, hoping that will change.

Christopher said he always appreciates hearing the director’s report, and also enjoys reading the quarterly report. He appreciates the case scenarios that are shared. He believes the focus on age 14-16 is about working and living independently. Under 14 may seem outside of that scope to RSA? He would be interested in any of the self-advocacy materials and programming mentioned in the report. Lastly, he would like to talk to Michael sometime about the Social Security reimbursement. TVR doesn’t get to ask for that and it’s baffling.

Michael asked Deja to pull together YS curriculum on self-advocacy to share with Christopher.

Marci added that in context of WIOA, WA was the only state that went for under 14 services. SRCB has sent a letter of support for DSB in the past. The Policy or other committee creates it and then brings back to the Council for approval.

Jen said CAP fully supports the ask for under 14, and they can write a letter too.

Kim added that the quarterly report talked about DSB's social media support of the WASILC survey. That call out resulted in 72 people responding to the survey who identified as blind or deafblind, which was 20% of their total respondents.

Customer Services Report: Lisa Wheeler

Lisa thanked LaDell for her help administering the recent participant survey, and to Jen for her feedback on the survey questions. In 2020 DSB sent a survey to participants about the rapid rollout of virtual services in response to the pandemic. The recent survey was also sent to current participants, and questions were added this time about participant job readiness and their job search. Interested to see if any changes in this area since adding Carl Peterson as Business Engagement Manager a year ago.

The survey was sent out in late April and early May to roughly 900 participants, and have received 227 responses. Responses were fairly equal per office and region.

- Over 75% were satisfied and felt supported by their counselor
- About 65% were satisfied with their adjustment to blindness services
- About 50% were satisfied with their Rehab Teaching services
- Over 65% were satisfied with their Assistive Technology services

Questions around Impact of Covid on participant services.

- Over 40% stopped using public transportation
- Over 75% were comfortable with virtual meetings and remote services
- About 60% were satisfied with remote and virtual services
- 30% have not started job search yet
- 31% put job start/search on hold due to Covid
- 35% comfortable working during pandemic
- 43% satisfied with labor market reports provided. Large percent had no opinion, may not understand the benefit of the information to them yet.

Majority of survey takers felt staff has been responsive and supportive of them during Covid. Themes seen in the three offices with more turnover – impacted rapport, consistent communications, frequency of appointments, etc.

The VR team has reached out to provide personal responses to those who reported feeling unsupported. Looked through all comments for areas to improve. Overall, Lisa feels the survey showed that DSB is doing well given circumstances and turnover.

Lisa added that Jen from CAP has been very helpful with the process, and suggestions on consolidating surveys. Jen gave her thanks to the Customer Satisfaction Committee too.

What is the WA State Independent Living Council? Introduction to new WASILC Director, Rebekah 'Bek' Moras: Kim Conner

Kim introduced Rebekah Moras (goes by Bek) who has been hired as the new WASILC Executive Director. She will take Kim's place on the Council as the WASILC representative. Bek is from Alaska and has a background in disability studies. She will also be an Accessible Document Specialist soon. Kim added that Bek is very familiar with the Centers for Independent Living (CILs) and worked with the SILC in Alaska, which is valuable experience in her new role.

The Washington State Independent Living Council (WASILC) was created in the 1980s with the reauthorization of the Rehab Act in the 1980s. It was created to support the Centers for Independent Living (CILs). Focus is on advocacy, starting with self-advocacy and all the way up to the Federal level.

The individual CILs promote the IL philosophy, which came out of the civil rights work done in the 1960s. 51% of each CIL's staff and Board of Directors must identify as having a disability. The five core services provided by the CILs are:

- Independent Living Skills
- Advocacy
- Peer to peer support
- Information and referrals
- Transition – including youth to adulthood, people with disabilities coming out of institutions back into the community, and keeping folks from having to go into an institution

Prior to the creation of the SILCs this advocacy work was being done in their local communities only and not statewide. There are now 56 SILCs across the country and territories, and they were designed to do the advocacy and education piece of disability, and sharing the disability voice coming from the grassroots level. They cannot provide any direct services to individuals with disabilities so as to avoid competition with the CILs, they are in partnership with them instead.

They have a council also, like the SRCB, and in Washington the WASILC staff is dedicated 100% to support the work and advocacy of their council, although technically they are employees of DSHS/DVR. In the Rehab Act it states that the SILCs should not have the undue influence of any one agency. This gives them the capacity to advocate in a way, hopefully, without fear of retribution or being involved in state politics, or the state wanting things to go a certain way. Kim said she's grateful that in Washington there is more collaboration and partnership between the SILC and the state agencies, because that is not the case in many other states.

Per the Rehab Act, the WASILC is represented on both the SRCB and the general SRC. Currently the WASILC Executive Director sits on the SRCB, and a council member volunteers to sit on the general

SRC. Kim commented that this is a lot of volunteer time, up to 16 days a year to attend four (two-day) quarterly meetings at both councils.

WASILC is responsible for writing the State Plan for IL (SPIL) in conjunction with the CILs. This plan is to ensure the people of Washington with disabilities are getting the IL services they want and need, and they are aware of IL services available as well as partner service providers. There are two Federal funding sources; the first is the contracts that the CILs hold directly with the Federal government to provide services, and the second is the Part B funding which is a much smaller amount. These funds total a little more than one million dollars a year, and there has to be an approved SPIL in place in order to receive the funds. A portion of the Plan B funds go to DSB for the adults under 55 IL program. Also, for the first time, the council has gotten a small portion of the funds and can look at creating programs at the state level. Their funding from DVR is primarily to cover operational costs and they've not had any money to plan and create statewide programs.

Kim feels the purpose of WASILC on the SRCB is to promote collaboration across councils, and to support DSB and vice versa. She talked about an effort in the past where the WASILC was able to advocate on behalf of the VR programs to continue the 4:1 grant match from the state when there was talk of discontinuing it. Lastly, she mentioned one of the long term goals for the WASILC is to expand CILs and IL services into all 39 counties in the state as they currently serve only 21 counties directly.

Executive Committee Report: Julie Brannon

This committee meets once a month and is made up of the chairs of the other committees. New council members will be asked to join a committee of their choice. It is suggested that committees try to meet once a month or at minimum once a quarter in between the quarterly meetings. The current committee information is listed on the agenda. She suggests new members contact the committee chair if they'd like more information about that committee. Members can let Julie know their first and second choices for committee assignment, and they'll be announced at the December SRCB meeting.

Membership Committee Report: Linda Wilder

Linda thanked Jerri and Corey for their work on the membership committee. Looking forward to welcoming new Council members; there were six openings and six applicants! Some of the newer council members have been asked to renew this year and that is to help stagger the member end dates. The TVR and CAP positions have no term limit, but members are asked to renew each term that they serve on the Council.

Christopher asked if members could serve on more than one committee? Linda said there's nothing in the By-laws to prevent it, but it would double someone's volunteer time commitment.

Customer Satisfaction Committee Report: Jen Bean

Jen reports this has been an active and engaged committee. They were able to review the recent VR survey results for trends and recommendations. She would like feedback from Council members at the December SRCB on the current Customer Satisfaction survey sent after a case is closed. Are there ways to make it more applicable? Maybe fewer cycles, include current and not just closed cases. Also, appreciates ability to consult with Nohemy to identify a couple of DEI questions to include in the survey. Jen feels there's a good partnership between the SRCB and DSB. As Kim shared when talking about the WASILC, this is not always the case in every state. Jen feels that Washington leads the way on this type of support and collaboration within Voc Rehab.

Jen appreciated the survey overview from Lisa. She agrees with the analysis and appreciates that changes have been made already. Overall there were mostly satisfied participants. One thing she noticed was feedback from deafblind participants that DSB was not really prepared to adequately support them. Jen asked if the executive summary of the VR survey could be shared with all of the Council, and Lisa said yes, she can do that. Jen said it's helpful to compare the questions that were included on the VR survey with the Satisfaction Survey.

Julie H. commented that as a deafblind person she has attended the OTC and also Helen Keller. In her opinion she felt that the OTC and DSB do a better job. And there can always be improvements.

Client Assistance Program Report: Jen Bean

Jen really appreciated CAP being included in the RSA monitoring sessions, especially for her as the new Director of CAP. RSA was blown away by the CAP working relationship with DSB, DVR, and the two SRCs. She found it hard to believe that RSA didn't fully understand the impact of the pandemic in Washington state on DSB's services, and it helped with the DVR monitoring that RSA had heard it from DSB already.

Jen also appreciated that DSB involved CAP with the VR Procedure Manual rewrite, and with new policies and revisions, all are much easier to understand now. This is critical with so many new staff members, especially folks without a VR background.

98% of DSB CAP cases involve participants with multiple disabilities. Jen can tell that DSB makes improvements based on CAP feedback because they have fewer DSB cases.

Best practices CAP sees that influence customer satisfaction:

- Understand the VR process and what DSB can do
- Timely and clear communication explaining both parties responsibilities, expectations, and next steps, to include sending follow-up and reminder emails
- Issues relating to vocational assessment, where educational and job goals are discussed. See it more often with multiple disabilities due to:
 - VRCs not probing

- Participant not disclosing

Christopher commented in the chat that in the Tribal VR world they see the same issues, reduced applications, not meeting their goals, etc. But they don't have the issue of RSA not understanding, because for a period of time some tribes had the highest incidence rates of COVID, and some tribes are still shut down. He agrees with Jen that WA State has strong inter-relationships across the VR world. We will always be able to see where we fall down and need to improve. But he hears from his colleagues across the USA and some of my colleagues' problems with their state counterparts are elementary in comparison to ours. Tribal VR programs are required to report on the MOUs with their states. There are tribes whose states are resistant to even having an MOU, or that have MOUs only because it's a requirement, that it's just a piece of paper that has no value or meaning. He is proud to be a part of this state.

Julie B asked – Does CAP do a survey? Jen said no, but it's obvious how participants are feeling. 75% of cases are resolved at the lowest level. Less than 10% choose to go elsewhere. Often the choice made with the customer's case was the right one, and it's a matter of explaining it to the customer. Jen stressed that the relationship CAP has with DVR and DSB is almost unheard of in any other state, and it's a big part of why they have such successful outcomes. Her colleagues across the country do not have that experience.

Kris asked about a specific scenario of someone in their mid-50s starting at the OTC due to losing vision later in life and then deciding or realizing that they don't want to go to work. Their case was closed at that point, and they could not continue at the OTC. What are their options at that point? Both Jen and Michael talked about the requirement of having a job goal in order to receive VR services. The best option in this case would be to seek IL services which do not require a job goal to receive. Sometimes when people gain skills through IL then they realize or decide they do want to go back to work and can open a VR case.

Public Comment

None offered.

Wrap-Up

Kris asked to clarify something about IL, is there a wait list for that or how does someone apply for the services? Michael explained how there is money for folks over 55 who are not looking for a job. The average age for this group is 82-83 years old, and they usually want help with a specific thing such as cooking or reading. There is enough money to serve this group and there is no wait list. For adults under 55, DSB has a small amount of money to use, thanks to WASILC and the SPIL, but it is not enough to serve all of the folks who apply, and they do have a wait list. The budget ask is to secure more funding for IL for the under 55 group.

Reminder of next meeting on December 9th. Will hold elections for Chair and Vice Chair. Yvonne will include By-laws which contain the election process with December meeting packet.

Proposed SRC 2023 Meeting Schedule

Proposed dates for 2023 SRC-B: Fridays, March 10, June 9, September 15, and December 8

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

Meeting Adjourned

Meeting was adjourned at 12:00pm.