

**Department of Human Services
Office of Rehabilitation Services
State Rehabilitation Full Council**

Annual Meeting Minutes November 10, 2009

4:00 PM – 6:00 PM

**Department of Labor and Training ~ 1151 Pontiac Avenue ~ Cranston,
RI 02920**

Present from Council: Janice Belasco, Dr. Kate McCarthy-Barnett, Stephen Brunero, Rocco Bruno, Wheeler Clemmons, Kelley A. Conti, Cynthia M. Cote, Domenic DiOrio, Dr. Judith Drew, Dorothy Furlong, Jeanne Giroux. Anne LeClerc, Sandy Lupovitz, Lucille Massimino, Jeff Machado, Vincent Rossi, David Sienko, Jane Slade, Joan Vendetti, Mary Wambach

Present from the VR Agency: Laurie DiOrio, Kathleen Grygiel

Guests: Raymond Carroll, Marylin Gaudreau, Willa Truelove

1. Call to Order - David Sienko, Chair, called the meeting to order at 4:00 PM. Introductions of membership and guests followed. Welcome to the new members of the Council and an invite to anyone who wishes to attend the SRC meetings. Full quorum is met.

2. Additions/Deletions to Agenda - Move agenda items around to have the committee reports right after ORS report.

3. Approval of Minutes - The minutes were approved.

Motion

Domenic DiOrio made a motion seconded by Janice Belasco and approved with one abstention from Mary Wambach, to accept the minutes from the October 6, 2009 meeting.

4. Chair's Report - David Sienko

Welcome again to the new members, and a reminder that our meetings are always open. It is important to note that our meetings are public, they are posted on the Secretary of State's web site and the public is always welcome to attend. If you have friends, colleagues, or associates who have an interest in this area and they would just like to come and watch and see if this is something they would like to become involved in at some point, then that is a good way to become familiar with our work.

SRC/ORS Annual Report - I want to thank the committee Chairs for their reports; they came so promptly, just over two (2) weeks. This might be the fastest turn around we have made since I have been involved.

Committee Structure - The Comprehensive Needs Assessment supports our committee structure; this is something our Executive committee made a decision on many years ago, to create ad-hoc committees around certain standing items like By-laws. Where we don't necessarily need an active-standing committee but if something comes up we can convene the committee and work on the item. But in the meantime we have issues that are affecting Rhode Islanders getting jobs. Things like transportation needs, working to educate employers, and insuring that we have diversity represented on our Council. To those immediate issues all of our committees have been working on these things for sometime and it is impressive how well it helps this Council accomplish its work. Kate, if you do become the Chair your mailbox will be filled with State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) information from the other states. This will enable you to have access to about twenty (20) or thirty (30) annual reports from the other state councils. During my tenure as Chair, I have been able to see what the other states are doing and how we compare to them. Our progress is stunning compared to other SRC councils; this is because our work and committee structure is directly aligned with the needs of the folks we are trying to support. I think we are very unique in that experience. So that when issues affect Rhode Islanders we are ready to jump into action and I think that is a real compliment to all of the Council membership.

Those are some of the things I noted when reviewing the annual committee reports and how far we have come with those; the level of detail, the relationship between the committee members and the

Office of Rehabilitation Services (ORS) staff working together in partnership, is really impressive. I don't see that high level with other SRC councils when I read their reports. I think they are all striving for that but I think we set a benchmark for this. I just wanted to let you all know how impressed I am with your work, as usual.

Employer Honor Roll - The event was about a week ago and it is just a spectacular experience. It is so well coordinated and planned out thoroughly. I think those of us who have been around it for these many years look at it and see how much it has grown. There have been so many employers on the list of honor over the years. If you look at the individuals and employers who are honored each year, it is new and very powerful and moving to listen to their stories and experiences. I want to compliment everyone again; there are some particular people at ORS: Jan Verrechia, Monica Dzialo, and Kathleen Grygiel that lead the effort in the organization. But that does not diminish the work of the others at ORS, and Vicki Ferrara from the Sherlock Center who has done this masterfully over the years. My compliments to everyone, it is a wonderful event and we really appreciate it.

This is my last item of my last meeting as a member of the Council and its Chair. It has been eight (8) years since I came to the Council to serve as Vice for Tom Scott. A few years back you all honored me with your vote for Chair and at that time I promised to do whatever I could to organize our work successfully. Because of all of you, I

believe we have been very successful at obtain that goal.

At the end of my tenure, there are a couple of thoughts I want to share with you. The first is the Vision of the Council; our role is working with the Agency (ORS) as advocates for employment and independence for Rhode Islanders with disabilities. There is a clear mission and we work in partnership with the Agency to accomplish that mission. But it is important to think about the times that maybe our vision as a Council, and the demands and pressures of the Agency, are not in sync. There are times where we ask challenges of the Agency, there are times when the Agency is under pressures from Federal requirements and other things, and there are times we may not always see eye to eye. But I have been here long enough to see how we can handle those stressors productivity and how at times those pressures can be deterrents to working together. And this group we have right now, our Executive committee, our members and staff, and the staff of ORS, its leadership and front line employees, works in an incredibly powerful relationship based on respect, diplomacy, and support. And as long as we maintain this relationship we will move forward. No one is in this room to be ineffective, we may have different views at times but we must maintain a positive and respectful relationship.

To the Council I would remind; it is important for us to push, it is important for us to ask questions, it is important for us to learn about the Evaluation Standards and Performance Indicators for the

Vocational Rehabilitation Services Program and how they translate to the lives of the individuals we care about. But at the same time we have to respect the work that the Agency staff does, they have to fight that battle every day. They have to deal with the Feds, and reporting requirements, I know because I work in bureaucracy; there are incredible stressors in there. I believe that understanding has and will continue to help us be successful and productive together as a group. I think we have that climate right now and my hope is that we can keep it going forward.

To the next Leadership Team that will come forward tonight after elections, there is a lot of information and resources available to you. The National Coalition of State Rehabilitation Council will be a resource of wealth going forward. The Agency staff are very knowledgeable and have incredible amounts of experience. The thing that impresses me about the Agency staff is that they have all been Rehabilitation Counselors; they have been on the front line working with people in the struggle to become employed. I think we have to know that that is in their hearts and what got them into this business in the first place.

And I want to recognize Nancy Baker. When I became the Chair, Nancy and I made the point to meet in between Council meetings. The organizational skills that she brings to our work are fantastic, unless you sit there and do it you don't know what goes on behind the scenes. You walk in here and the materials are prepared, letters and

communications are done, the Secretary of State's Office isn't calling, everything is taken care of. I can't tell you how many times she has fixed my work, I send stuff to her and she sends stuff back with suggestions and she is so nice about it, not forgetting the little things. So it is not only about the work and the quality of work for the Council but the care and feeding of the Council, and Nancy ensures that everyone is taken care of, that everyone's needs are met. She worries about people; the last thing she said to me before the meeting was that someone was not here and she was concerned about them. That is the kind of support you get from the staff person for this Council so I want to recognize Nancy and thank her.

I want to thank everyone, the leadership and membership of the Council, past, present and future, the committee Chairs for their hard work, the Executive committee who put up with my jokes during our meetings. The leadership of ORS, Ray it is so nice that you could be here tonight. Steve, and the leadership team of the Office of Rehabilitation Services and the staff, everyone has been so wonderful over the years. I think we have created an incredibly effective and efficient organization with this Council. We have come a long way! We are really focused on clear goals and measurable outcomes. I think back to when I first started on the Council and some of the things we would get hung-up on. One of my favorite stories was arguing about parking spaces on Fountain Street, and it would take up so much of our time. It was something that was not even within our control as a Council; we could write letters but not make them

created spaces. We have moved beyond that.

Ø We've moved on to fostering meaningful employment outcomes for people.

Ø We have focused on the issues that are affecting Rhode Islanders with disabilities with accessing employment.

Ø We have created an ad-hoc committee focused on transportation because it is a need. Not because it is required to have a committee on that but because it is a barrier to so many Rhode Islanders.

Ø We have worked hard to engage employers through the Employment committee.

Ø We have worked with accountability systems through the State Plan, Quality and Policy committee.

Ø And we are developing diversity and an active membership, which fostered through outstanding work from our Nominations and Leadership Development committee.

Everyone has contributed to this and all of those pieces fit together to make us an affective, coherent group. We don't have all the answers but we are certainly in a position to influence the policies that will positively affect the people we care about. The final message is that we have done this together as a team, ORS staff and Council members working together as a team to overcome these obstacles. With that, I would like to thank you all for your teamwork and wish you the best for the future.

5. The Office of Rehabilitation Services (ORS) Administrator's Report - Stephen Brunero gave a summary of events at ORS since the last meeting on October 6, 2009.

Welcome to the new members of to the Council. I got started on the SRC about the same time as David and he is absolutely correct; we have come a long way. I think David and the Council has done a marvelous job building a relationship with the State Agency. I have been to a lot of national and regional conferences where there are not as productive relationships as we have here. This Council is very actively involved in creating our State Plan, and in every single policy and procedure that we develop. This is an important body and we appreciate the work that is done. I also want to echo David's comments on Nancy Baker; she has been doing a marvelous job for us. With the State financial situation being as it is we never know if we can keep this position. And for the last two (2) years it has been touch and go for Nancy and ourselves as well, not knowing if we are going to get funding. But she has been a trooper throughout and we are fortunate to have her onboard.

It was only four (4) weeks ago that we met and I gave you a detailed report of our activities at that time. Today I will give you a general overview.

Case Management System - Is one of the activities we are using to

improve our service delivery system at ORS. We have selected a vendor and we are still doing some more reviews. They are coming in a few weeks to do a trial run of this system. It is a versatile, secure, web-based, interactive system that will allow Counselors to work in the field, making things more efficient.

SWEEP - A summer work experience program geared to placing youth in real jobs through partnership with agencies within the community. The six (6) week program was piloted this summer, offered to ninety nine (99) youths, and was a real success.

LEEP - Learn to Earn, a pre-vocational program targeting low-literacy and low-work experience individuals through RIWorks referrals and supported by Goodwill Industries. This is an on-going program and it continues to expand.

Job Developers - Over the last five (5) years the number of clients that have developed Employment Plans has increased by approximately 30% yet we have fewer Counselors available. ORS utilized Craig's List and résumé's on file as a successful alternative while hiring three (3) individuals. Looking more efficiently at restructuring fees by paying an hourly rate opposed to fee for service.

Personnel - There is a freeze on State hiring. We still have a number of vacancies that will, for now remain unfilled.

Outcomes - There was concern we were not going to make our

numbers since we were down so many staff but as a tribute to our personnel our numbers for last year are in and look good. Last year we had two thousand three hundred fifty seven (2357) New Applicants. This year we had two thousand four hundred sixty two (2462), an increase of one hundred five (105). We have had a thirty percent (30%) increase over the last three (3) years. In 2003 we had about one thousand seven hundred (1700) people come in and this year almost two thousand four hundred (2400) hundred so that is about seven hundred (700) increase in the last five (5) years.

New Eligibilities increased by sixteen (16) this year from last year. This year two thousand one hundred twenty nine (2129) were found eligible.

Employment Plans was the only category that we dipped a little. We had a decrease of twenty two (22). Last year we had one thousand five hundred eleven (1511) this year one thousand four hundred eighty nine (1489) but it is still about a thirty (30%) percent increase over the last five (5) years.

Successful Outcomes is the goal that the Feds pay the most attention to. It is the number of people with disabilities who achieve competitive employment after going through our system. Last year we had seven hundred fifty one (751) and this year we had seven hundred fifty six (756), which is about a (20%) percent increase over the last five (5) years.

I don't know if folks know this but last year we were one of only four (4) states that made every Standard and Performance Indicator. And one (1) of those four (4) states did not make it this year so we are one (1) of only three (3) states that achieved this goal for the last six (6) years. The other states are Alaska and Mississippi.

The numbers are increasing dramatically I think we have had six (600) or seven (700) hundred new referrals just from the RIWorks program alone, and that is going to continue to increase over the next few years. But the number of staff that we have is actually less then we had four (4) or five (5) years ago.

The Council has done a marvelous job advocating with the State Legislature, the Governor's Office, letters to the Editor of the Journal, to help us fill and maintain some of those positions and that is something we look forward to you continuing in 2010. It is important we have enough staff to help with the increased needs of Rhode Islanders.

Federal Review - I will be meeting with the Feds next week. As most of you know we have two agencies, the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) and The Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSCAVR). This might be our year for a monitoring review from the RSA. Our last review was in 2006. A team of officials will come and review our work to make sure we are up to

snuff. I mention this because the Council is involved in that review and they will be asking you for assistance.

Third Party Match -We have third party contracts with other State agencies, RIDE, NHRH, and there is going to be a lot of discussion around these types of programs. Right now the fiscal climate is very difficult, we used to have carry-over funds but now we don't have as much. And with servicing more clients the cost of doing business is going up. Third party cooperative agreements are a way to get more State dollars, so we will be talking about ways to maximize dollars.

December 17, 2009 will be ORS' Marketing committee meeting. We invite members from the employment committee to sit in on this meeting, which will be to look at different ways to market the ORS Program.

Ethics Training - We have two classes coming up for our staff.

Veterans Outreach - We are partnering with a couple of other agencies. The number of veterans coming back from Afghanistan and Iraq with disabilities is increasing dramatically, and we are trying to open up new job opportunities. Patricia Keating, one of our Senior Counselors, attended that meeting this week.

Employer Honor Roll - Hopefully you all will have the chance to come to this meaningful event. In the future, we will probably do this every

two (2) or three years (3) years.

We really want to recognize David tonight. Although we have had some rocky times in the past, with the State Rehabilitation Council; he has really created a diverse, and well-run Council. I am very proud of the things that we have accomplished over the last few years. And we want to acknowledge that and give David a certificate of appreciation.

Raymond Carroll Report – Ray said a few words honoring David Sienko. David has served with distinction on the Council for the past eight (8) years and I have worked with him for six (6) years. He is a consummate, multitalented positive advocate for people with disabilities. And as David noted many of our staff started as practitioners and moved up to administrative duties. And if I remember, David started as a practitioner at Blackstone Valley so it gives you a better understanding as well of how difficult the work can be. David has been a wonderful diplomat, who is organized, witty, and has a fantastic sense of humor that helps at difficult times.

When the Council began in 1991, it was set up with the intention to work in partnership with the State Agency. When we put an ad in the paper for membership, we had one hundred fifty (150) applicants. We ended up being the smallest state with the largest Council of thirty nine (39) members. Meetings tended to get off-theme. But over time we have had our trials and tribulations but when he came on the

scene with his integrity, knowledge, and facilitating skills, he has really meshed the talents of the Council members. He has set a standard for us to continue to build on. I really appreciate the work that you have done, thank you so much for your professionalism. Raymond presented David with a proclamation from the Governor.

David: Thank you Ray, Steve, I appreciate this, it is awfully kind but this is symbolic as the work we have done as a group. I can't say enough about everyone's efforts on this, ORS staff, Nancy, the Executive committee, the Chairs of the committees. It is one thing to try and organize and lead the conversations and move towards productive work groups and teams, but folks need to be with you on that and everyone here has been so supportive. This is a testament to all of our work. So thank you and I appreciate that.

6. Committee Reports

Transportation - Dr. Judith Drew

Our committee brainstormed what would we like to do differently regarding transportation needs in RI, how we could eliminate the fragmentation and lack of coordinated communication throughout the State regarding transportation needs. We decided to coordinate a transportation statewide consortium. We invited twenty two (22) organizations, the response has been positive and we expect a high turnout. We will keep you informed after we meet.

State Plan, Quality Assurance and Policy - No updates right now.

Employment - Sandy Lupovitz

Our committee is working along the same path as the transportation committee, we thought about trying to coordinate different employers to try and zero in on needs. One thing, employers are sometimes rattled by agencies that work with employees, so with that in mind we are working to plan a function in February, where we would have a panel, EEOC, ADA, State Human Rights Commission. Let these organization and any other agencies active in rehabilitation services present. The other half is to try to get employers there to question them. I will try to get agencies to co-sponsor that event. That would serve as a vehicle to get them in a room to plan for the future.

Nominations and Leadership Development - Domenic DiOrio

The Nomination and Leadership committee recommends the following Slate of Officers for one (1) year terms. The committee feels that these candidates go a step further to keep and expand upon the leadership that David Sienko has established.

Dr. Kate McCarthy-Barnett for Chair

The Chair asked the body three (3) times if there were any nomination from the floor at this time. No nominations from the floor were presented.

Motion

A motion was made and approved, with one (1) abstention from Dr. Kate McCarthy-Barnett, to elect Dr. Kate McCarthy-Barnett as Chair for a one (1) year term.

Dr. Judith L. Drew for Vice-Chair

The Chair asked the body three (3) times if there were any nomination from the floor at this time. No nominations from the floor were presented.

Motion

A motion was made and approved, with one (1) abstention from Dr. Judith L. Drew, to elect Dr. Judith L. Drew for Vice-Chair for a one (1) year term.

Catherine Sansonetti for Secretary

The Chair asked the body three (3) times if there were any nomination from the floor at this time. No nominations from the floor were presented.

Motion

A motion was made and unanimously approved, to elect Catherine Sansonetti as Secretary for a one (1) year term.

7. Round -Table

Mary Wambach

1. Without knowing that Bob Cooper has already been drafting legislation about a 'set aside' or required statewide quota of state bid allocations for Disability Business Enterprise companies, I mentioned last week in a DBE training that if RIEDC, the State Rehab Council, ORS and the Chamber of Commerce(s) in RI would support this legislation, it would be much more likely to pass. I also commented that I do not think such a 'set aside' should be grouped with the 5% 'Minority/Women' set aside: this would reduce allocations for those groups and also dilute the critical issue: RI needs to actively participate in the notion and the reality of employing people with disabilities. (Kate McCarthy was going to find out if there are timelines, etc. and the opportunities to have input into this legislation.)

2. Current RI state contract bids as well as federal contract bids are available to DBE companies. Two problems: many such companies are too small to compete for even the smaller bids; and even when such contracts are awarded to DBE companies, we wind up with 'enclaves', which are the ugly foster children of Supported Workshops, which are technically illegal. My idea: create/construct means by which DBE's and other companies can 'share' or co-bid for contracts that would result in integrated projects and workplaces.

3. In the past, most notably in the 5 - 6 years after Workforce Investment Act (WIA) passed, there was funding available at federal

and state level (note: at that time there were few if any "Workforces" or "One Stop Centers", as these entities were created and enacted through WIA) for innovative projects, demonstration projects, training projects (for people with disabilities, people who had not graduated from H.S., disenfranchised home-makers, these who required re-training in order to maintain or find employment, etc.) and I personally know of several such grants and projects that were amazingly successful. For whatever reason during the past Administration, most of these funds have been targeted (at state and federal level) for employers who already have workers, and more specifically, for the training or re-training of such workers. (This is the part that I discussed with Congressman Langevin at the meeting).

My idea is that with involvement of official and community disability groups and advocates, the Business/Economic Sector, ORS, the Council, etc., there could be a shift back to funding for training and re-training that included people with disabilities. (I am not advocating for removing funding for employers, I support the need for these grants, but want to level the playing field for agencies and community groups and those they serve.) In RI, our impact would be on the grants that are made available through the Workforce, and the structure by which the funds are allocated to RI.

Dorothy Furlong

I want to say thank you to this Council and ORS. I have been involved with ORS since the eighties. I always wanted to work but when it came to school I could not go move further along because I could not

write. I met Steve Brunero and he changed my life. I learned that I had a learning disability.

Over the years Steve Brunero and I have worked on things together, and one of the things that has come out of this was a learning disability project. As the years have passed the need for ORS' help has not gone away.

I am now a Social Care Coordinator for Neighborhood Health Plan. One of the things we need to do is serve these people who are older than twenty one (21) and are disabled and not working. So I want to try and figure out a way to get the information that the State already has through Neighborhood and United and RITE CARE, and use the assessment information and connect this information to help ORS use it.

I am offering a gift, to pay back all those people that helped me in the past. I want you all to know that your work is not in vain and there are a lot of people like me out there. Thank you.

8. Public Comments – There were none.

Motion

Domenic DiOrio made a motion seconded by Dr. Judith L. Drew and unanimously approved to adjourn the meeting.

9. Adjournment - The meeting was adjourned at 5:30 P.M.

Respectfully Submitted,

Nancy L. Baker, Staff

State Rehabilitation Council

The next full-Council meeting is Tuesday, February 9, 2010