Florida Rehabilitation Council

Andy Houghton, FRC Chair  
Tammy Davis, 1st Vice Chair, presiding  
Quarterly Meeting Minutes-May 9, 2023

Members in person (Tallahassee) and on Teams (virtually):
Michael Adamus, Tammy Davis, Brent McNeal, Delaina Parrish, Victoria Gaitanis, Allison Klein, Lisa Mason, Denny Clark

VR Staff:
Kim Thomas, Roy Cosgrove, Libby Moody, Wayne Olson, Drew Wann, Corey Parker, Victoria Aguilar, Pam Coleman, Roger Godwin, Monica Moye, Emilia Murphy, Derrinita Walker, Tami Oates, Andrea Schwendinger, Antionette Williams

Guests: Patricia Parrish, Serap Gorucu, Rosemary Miles, Tony Farinella, Jane Johnson, Joseph D’Souza, Jasmine, Matt Motko, Howard Bell, Jorge Hernandez, Val Kline, Tina Herzig, Lucas Halverson, Emily Hough

The following represents a summary of deliberations, advice, comments and motions that comprise this FRC quarterly meeting.

Call to order-Quorum established
Tammy Davis presided as Andy Houghton was not in attendance. Tammy thanked everyone for being on the call. The council voted and approved the agenda, action items, minutes, budget report/request and customer correspondence.

Director’s Report-Brent McNeal, VR Director

• Quarterly summary: $2 million was included in the budget for frontline staff which will lead to better outcomes for customers. Brent thanked the team who worked on the project. The bill is now awaiting the Governor’s signature. AWARE implementation is proceeding and the go-live date is at the end of June. Administrative burdens will decrease which will also lead to better outcomes. The ArtCIE grant is proceeding; contracts are being routed at this time.

• Customer Case Status Overview: Data is comparable to previous years, e.g., 77% of referrals have been received (through Q3) compared to last year. The agency is examining whether it may be advisable to remove itself from the Order of Selection as the waitlist is down to 18.

• Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) Delivery: It is expected that the agency will meet or exceed the numbers for Pre-ETS services compared to the last 2 years. Work-based learning experiences (WBLE) are only at half of what it was last year but that will increase in the spring and summer. 50% of
the workload is with transition-age youth. Delaina asked about the number of students with disabilities who VR is serving in the school system and Brent said they are analyzing that data. The preliminary numbers show that there are opportunities to increase the relationships with school districts.

- **Potentially Eligible (who later applied for VR services):** Students are encouraged to apply but it is not mandatory. The numbers are steadily increasing with approximately 900 for the year.
- **Expenditures by Category:** Numbers are comparable to last year with 50% going to purchased client services, employment and supported employment services.
- **Caseload and Staff Turnover:** There are fluctuations in the rates but caseload numbers have stabilized and the number of vacancies has slowed down.
- **Customers Entering Employment:** This is a measurement on the first day a customer enters employment. The agency is on pace to exceed last year's total. The focus has shifted to measuring the employment numbers in the 2nd and 4th quarters after exiting the program.
- **Employment Outcomes:** The agency is on target to do well by the end of the year.
- **Employment Programs Update:** VR is collaborating with partners at Career Source, DCF and Medicaid on the Aspire Initiative, which uses the Individual Placement and Support (IPS) model for mental health cases. They are in the process of choosing 3 new sites for the initiative. Budget revisions are completed for the ArtCIE grant and the final draft of the cooperative agreement has been submitted to RSA.
- **Business Relations:** The unit has provided services to 261 employers. Business representatives have been attending Apprenticeship Accelerator events throughout the state. Area 3 business reps organized a meeting with FloridaMakes to educate field staff on manufacturing apprenticeships. Kathy Davis was selected to participate in the VRTAC-QE Business Relations Learning Community, a technical assistance center funded at the federal level.
- **Additional Updates:** The legislature approved $250.5m for VR funding and over $2m for recruitment and retention. An additional 5% was approved for all state employees. The Ticket to Work (TTW) program will be doing a podcast for Disability Employment Awareness events. The “Expand your Workforce” website is proving to be beneficial; working with partners at the Moore Agency to target businesses and assist them in finding their next great hire. Delaina shared the website at the NCSRC conference and said the group was impressed. Brent thanked Derrinita Walker and her team for her efforts in getting the website going. The vendor rate study is moving towards completion and there will be new rates for providers based on the results of the report.
- **Ombudsman Updates:** Many requests are general questions from non-customers. They work closely with field staff to ensure issues are resolved timely.

Tammy discussed that she is using the Expand Your Workforce campaign in her outreach efforts. Brent said to connect with the LinkedIn page to increase connectivity. He anticipates that there may be movement on membership since session is over. Allison Klein gave kudos to the Ombudsman unit for their work.

**Resource Center for Disability Solutions (RCDS)-Rosemary Miles, Center for Independent Living**
The organization is one of 15 centers throughout the state, providing services for individuals with disabilities to live independently. They are a non-profit, consumer-controlled (51%) organization created through the Rehab Act and have been in existence for 48 years. The RCDS provides services in Indian River and Brevard Counties. The model of service is driven by each individual’s needs and goals. Services in all centers include advocacy, peer support, independent living (IL) skills, information and referral, transition/diversion from institutions and youth transition. The center keeps a database to link individuals with organization, services and specialized equipment. They advocate for individuals when situations impact their independence. Additional programs include career counseling, transportation,
durable medical equipment, amplified telephones, accessibility assessments and notary services. They are looking to expand the home modification service by looking at the whole house for accessibility needs. Since the centers are consumer led, they have a lot of credibility with the disability community. Rose shared that they have employed a community outreach specialist so the community is aware of what they do and to connect with social media. Trisha Parrish suggested the Board of Realtors as a good resource in Brevard County. They purchase or work with other organizations to obtain equipment for consumers to borrow.

Evaluation and Planning-Michael Adamus, Chair

• **Customer Satisfaction Survey:** Libby Moody reported that the survey was sent out to 10,326 customers and former customers. 2,086 responses were received, a 20.2% response rate. It’s still too early to make any inferences. Orientation-51% attended in person; 90% said it helped them understand what VR does. Customer service-86% said staff treat with dignity. IPE development-80% said their counselor listens to them. Many positive responses were received on working with providers. 80% knew they could contact their counselor if they disagreed with a decision; 70% knew they could contact their sup; 66%-Ombuds; 72% knew they could appeal; 68% knew they could contact Disability Rights Florida (DRF). Overall, 80.3% would recommend VR; 75% were satisfied with VR services. Libby read several comments and recommendations from customers. Denny congratulated Libby on a great report and said it might be good to know what the top 5 things would be to work on. He asked if providers are as ethnically diverse as is in the state of Florida. Brent said they would look into and address. Libby said the CSNA is looking into the underserved populations but not provider diversity.

• **Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA):** Libby reported that there was a great turnout in feedback. They are currently working on the last schedule, in Area 7, which will be held at the end of May. Links will be posted on the external website and will be shared with the council to distribute as well.

• **VR 5 Year Performance Report:** Michael asked for all members to review the report, to be discussed further in the future. Delaina asked if there were any trends in the report that the council should be aware of that could assist in developing recommendations for the state plan and Libby said the overview charts are informative, e.g., the number of applicants. Brent added that it’s a good snapshot for the past 5 years but the data that’s provided in the Director’s report is more current. The table starting on page 9 may be helpful to pick out any outliers. Delaina suggested pulling out that section to review at the next meeting. Michael discussed the value of the return-on-investment data.

• **State Plan Recommendations:** Michael discussed the need for up-to-date responses from the agency on the state plan recommendations at the next quarterly meeting. Delaina asked about monitoring the recommendations on the state plan and Roy said an annual review of the progress may be helpful to the council. Delaina motioned to review the status of the agency’s responses to the council’s recommendations on an annual basis. The committee and council approved. Michael reviewed the timeline for the state plan. The committee approved the minutes from the previous meeting.

AgrAbility_Dr. Serap Gorucu, AgrAbility Project Director, University of Florida

Dr. Serap discussed that there are over 47,000 farms in the state with nearly 10 million acres of farmland. The average age of farmers is 59; 37% are 65 and older. 14% are veterans and 19,000 have a disability. The project, in 21 states, is funded by the USDA and provides education, assistance and support to farmers with disabilities and/or chronic health conditions so they can continue working in the farming industry. The most common types of agricultural enterprises are livestock, dairy and field/grain operations. Services are education, networking, direct assistance, referrals and marketing. The process is requesting assistance through the AgrAbility website or by calling directly, obtaining a worksite
assessment and receiving recommendations. They work with VR and obtain other grants and loans as they cannot provide direct funding or assistive technology equipment, only services. Roy will share a video with the council through email after the meeting. The advisory board meets twice a year and consists of many organizations around the state. The project is available for potential farmers as well as individuals currently employed in the industry. The team is currently working with 4-H groups. They do not loan equipment but assist folks in finding funding. The AgrAbility website offers more information and resources- https://abe.ufl.edu/agrability/. Brent offered assistance to the team as he would like to share it through the VR channels.

**Legislative and Public Awareness Committee-Tammy Davis**

- **Chair report:** Tammy reported that she has been making contacts with business leaders and that the brochures and LinkedIn page have been really helpful.

- **VR materials:** Tammy said that the Higher Education flyer and other brochures have been effective tools and Brent agreed.

- **Constant Contact:** Tammy encouraged those who hadn’t sent in their stories about why FRC and VR is important to them, to send them in. Derrinita discussed the suggestions members had made and asked for more specific language for the Constant Contact articles. It’s too late to submit anything for approval for the August meeting but could try for October. She needs the council’s language and suggested using the same process as is done with the state plan.

- **Annual Report:** Derrinita discussed getting the language related to state plan recommendations routed separately from the actual report to avoid any possible hold-ups. The division would then provide an update on each recommendation as it relates currently. The council will vote on the proposed language on the June full council call. Derrinita will need comments at least a week prior to the call in order to prepare. Derrinita will provide action item dates.

- Derrinita is working with the Able Trust and Art Thread to get artists for the cover for this year’s report. Delaina suggested having the theme in alignment with technology and the arts, e.g., “Are You In? with Inclusive Employment”. The tag line could incorporate words relating to creativity and that start with ‘I’, e.g., Inspiring and Innovating the Future of Florida’s Workforce for People with Disabilities. Derrinita liked the idea but both she and Brent were hesitant to tie it in with the ArtCIE grant. Derrinita said she would provide information to help anyone apply to have their artwork selected for the cover. Tammy suggested discussing the themes at the next Legislative/PA meeting and bringing back to the council at the June full council meeting for a vote. Michael suggested that in the future, the council may want to create the theme first and then ask artists to create artwork in line with the theme. The invitation to artists is set to go out the week of June 5th; be open for 2 weeks, then VR will have a week to whittle down the numbers. The council will vote on the covers at the August 8 meeting. Trisha said the report got a lot of positive feedback at the recent NCSRC meeting.

**Area 3 Update-Wayne Olson, Area 3 Director**

Wayne discussed Pre-ETS activities in Area 3. From October-April, Area 3 spent 646k on Pre-ETS, the most being spent on WBLE. Seminole County greatly expanded their Pre-ETS program, spending 212k last month. The School-to-Work program in Orange County has been a little more hesitant, but VR still spent 113k in Pre-ETS last month. In the Kissimmee office (146k last month), the cases are spread out between all the counselors, which has worked out well and will be continued. In unit 12G, serving Lake and Sumter counties, 43k was spent, where Pre-ETS customers are made eligible before receiving Pre-ETS services. The West Orange unit, run by Service Source, spent 73K last month. 20A in St. Lucie County spent 160k; 13A in Brevard county-26k and 13B-77k; Lakeland and Winter Haven unit-150k; and Arcadia, Desoto, Highlands and Hardee counties (1 unit)-17k. The BRICK program is being expanded to the rural,
southwest counties this summer where they will work with Habitat for Humanity on 2 construction sites. They hope to employ 5 participants, 18 yrs. and up. A similar program has been developed for welding. Wayne said the Titusville office closed during the pandemic. It was a small office and he said it’s difficult to find affordable property. They added cubicles in the Cocoa office until they can find appropriate space. Titusville and Cocoa counselors are better connected being in the same office. Wayne said he is hopeful that a more centrally located office will enable customers to be served efficiently from both Titusville and Cocoa. Delaina asked if any surveys address how office closures affect customers and Wayne said that was not addressed on the Needs Assessment but he is confident it will be resolved in time. He does not want to lose any customers from Titusville; it’s on his radar. Brent discussed co-locating with workforce partners like Career Source and using technology to meet virtually.

Caseloads:
Seminole County-1,117 cases in one unit, a reflection of the work being done with the school system.
Orange County-864 and 945 cases. They have put 939 individuals into employment since April.
Kissimmee-711
Leesburg-371
Private unit in west Orange-750
North Brevard-599
South Brevard-703
Lakeland/Winter Haven-968
Arcadia/Wachula/Sebring-677
Port St. Lucie-1097
Wayne feels like it’s trending in a positive direction.

**Recommendations and Feedback from the NCSRC-Delaina Parrish**
Delaina discussed that the conference was a valuable experience. There was representation from as far away as Guam. The purpose of the conference is to share strategies to improve the councils. NCSRC has a new website: [https://www.ncsrc.us/](https://www.ncsrc.us/). The council is looking for more members in leadership roles and Delaina encouraged anyone interested to reach out to them. An annual strategic planning session was discussed as it increases productivity and outcomes; it could be as robust as the council determines. SRCs are autonomous from VR. She discussed possibly aligning the strategic goals to direct feedback on the state plan. She asked if there may be a benefit to review other states’ state plans as well as the Division of Blind Services’ plan. Jose said it would be beneficial to communicate with FRCB as they have the same challenges. Jorge Hernandez (FRCB) said there are opportunities to collaborate on awareness campaigns, by-laws, anything to participate together. Delaina said they are lucky to have staff to assist as some states do not. The majority of states discuss and review the by-laws annually and she recommended the FRC do the same. She presented the RSA benchmarks compared to the national average. Brent said they are pleased with meeting the targets established with RSA and that he would like to report on them more frequently. Delaina learned that the agency sends the report to RSA quarterly. She suggested that the Evaluation Committee review the key indicators and request that they be reported on in the next Director’s Report along with where Florida is nationally.

**Legislative advocacy**-Delaina reported on a presentation of how council members can advocate on behalf of the agency and summarized the difference between advocacy and lobbying. The role of the SRC is to raise awareness of VR with legislators through education.

**Committees:** Other states place additional responsibilities on their Executive Committees to speed up processes; others give the committee decision-making power in between meetings but bring the more significant issues to the full council. How can Florida VR mirror the efforts of CSAVR, which are recruit
and retain through professional development, streamline processes and raise public awareness? This could be discussed during an Evaluation Committee meeting.

**Annual Report:** The annual report can be used to recruit new members and council members can distribute to their networks. Delaina said everyone at the meeting wanted one of the FRC’s reports.

**Participation:** There was discussion on strategies to increase participation, particularly for increased accessibility, e.g., the Meeting Owl. Following up on action items is difficult due to Sunshine Law. She suggested a workflow document on ShareFile to outline the order of business.

**Discussion:** Delaina suggested a timeline for outlining goals prior to making recommendations for the state plan in order to improve alignment. Roy recommended the Executive Committee develop the initial process on a conference call and move to another committee if needed. Michael agreed and said he likes the idea of having an active file to review at any time.

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**Executive Committee/Full Council**

- **Appointments:** Brent said they are waiting for the Governor’s office to make appointment recommendations. Tammy suggested reaching out to the applicants to let them know they may be hearing from the Governor’s office soon. Brent said FRC information could be provided at the Family Café, as Victoria Gaitanis will be attending. Brent said he and Beth Myer are working on a representative from FILC and that he will reach out to Career Source again.

- **Wise Award:** Jessica Dollard, VR Counselor, was nominated by Michael Robinson. Lori Fahey was nominated by Chip Byer and Lixon Nelson was nominated by Yvette Harris. The awardee receives a plaque and medallion; the annual award plaque is kept at HQ. The council voted to hold off on voting until the June conference call when members can do further research on the nominees.

**Partner Reports**

**Able Trust—Joey D’Souza** discussed working with VR to support the needs of VR, particularly with community outreach. They are expanding High School High Tech by 2 sites, which provides students with disabilities career and college exploration opportunities and serves 1,200 annually. They are getting ready to launch a grant focused on collective impact, working with a local VR office, employment services providers and education stakeholders, to create a more seamless transition into the workplace. They hope to bring the model to other parts of the state. Brent thanked Joey and the Able Trust for being a great partner in helping individuals with disabilities in Florida.

**Allison Klein, Disability Rights Florida (DRF), Client Assistance Program (CAP)**—Allison reported that in their 2nd quarter, they had 98 cases; 78 with VR; 16 Title 1; and 4 with the CILs and other Rehab Act cases. Area breakdown: 1-8 cases, 2-11, 3-16, 4-13, 5-7, 6-13, 7-10. Of the 78 VR cases, 48 were regarding referrals; 19-services to be provided; 8-communication; 5-other. Allison asked how customers are impacted during the fiscal shutdown. Brent said the intent is not to impact services and for vendors to continue getting paid. They are trying to minimize the impact and will delay the AWARE start date, if necessary. Contingency plans are in place as they move through the process.

**Jorge Hernandez and Jose Morales, FRCB**—Jose said they discussed future collaborations, what both councils are working on and how different council members could rotate attendance. Jorge said they spoke to FRCB members about having other members attend in person, which would be beneficial to both councils. Jorge said he will attend the FRC meeting in Miami in person.

**Public Forum:** No one from the public was in attendance.

**Adjourned**