

Meeting Minutes

Rehabilitation Council of Texas
April 28-29, 2014
Criss Cole Rehabilitation Center
Austin, Texas

Present

- Lori Henning, Chair, Austin
- Brent Pitt, Austin
- Elizabeth Gentry, Schertz
- Joe Tims, Justin
- John Cage, Helotes
- Joyce Taylor, Houston
- Karen Stanfill, Houston
- Mark Schroeder, Grand Prairie
- Martha Garber, Coppell
- Rames Gonzalez, Palmview
- Rene Gonzalez, McAllen
- Roger Cortez, Cedar Park
- Troy Myree, Houston
- Thelma Scott, Houston

Absent

- Manuel Lopez, Rosenberg
- Rana Anderson, Snyder
- Saul Herrera, Midland

DARS Reps

- Don Roy, DARS Council
- David Norman, DRS Liaison
- Elizabeth Freaney, DARS RCT Council Staff
- Jean Genevie, DBS Liaison
- Mel Fajkus, DBS Liaison

DARS Staff

- Alma Cantu
- Brandy Holt
- Christy Lerche
- Claudia Peden
- David Johnston
- Keisha Rowe

- Martha Bagley
- Michelle McCall

Guests

- Donna Holmes (TEA)
- Raul Ortiz (TWIC)
- Sandra Bitter (SILC)
- Janice Ferguson (TWC)

Welcome and Introductions

- Meeting was called to order at 9:00 a.m. by Lori Henning, Chair.
- Council members welcomed four new council members: John Cage, Rene Gonzalez, Troy Myree and Joe Tims.

Committee Meetings

The following committees met with their members: Policy, Procedures and Personnel Development, Membership and Education, and Consumer Satisfaction and Needs Assessment.

Consumer Success Story

Carson Peal was featured in the 2013 RCT Annual Report and was introduced. He received services from DARS Early Childhood Intervention as a child when he was diagnosed with autism. He spoke about the difficulty of having autism, such a making friends and paying attention. After graduating from high school, he received adult transition services. Thanks to help from DARS, and his parents, he is attending Austin Community College and has his first paying job. He is able to use the bus system and go shopping. His dream is to become a video game designer, or do art work for video games.

Public Comment

There was no public comment.

Conference Review

Joyce Taylor attended both the National Coalition of State Vocational Rehabilitation Councils (NCSRC) and the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) in Bethesda April 5-8, 2014. The NCSRC covered leadership training and state plans, and Joyce was impressed with the information exchanged and shared how RCT handled membership and mentoring. The CSAVR big issue was moving Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) from Department of Education to Department of Labor. The consensus seemed to be keeping RSA under the DOE. Thelma Scott mentioned she was in Washington at the same time with TRAN and was able to lobby for this issue. Another issue at CSAVR was training requirements for councils and that more is needed, not less.

DARS Strategic Plan

Octavius Bonaquisti from DARS Center for Policy and External Relations gave a high level overview of the planning process, which covers 2015-2019. The DARS strategic plan is part of the Health & Human Services Commission consolidated plan and includes internal and

external assessments, goal setting, and decision making. DARS will develop vocational rehabilitation strategies to serve more consumers and improve service delivery to meet the needs of students, unserved and underserved populations through five strategies:

- Increase VR services to disabled veterans and improve coordination with other state and federal entities providing veteran services
- Increase staff knowledge and skills with effective rehabilitation strategies for serving consumers who have developmental or intellectual impairments, mental health challenges, or who are blind, deaf-blind, or have additional disabilities
- Improve the effectiveness of transition services by expanding partnership with schools, community and technical colleges, and increase the availability of work experience for transition students
- Enhance statewide business relationships to improve employment outcomes for consumers, increase the quantity and quality of VR employment outcomes
- Increase the availability of technology that is key to consumer employment

The DARS strategic plan was just submitted today for review by the executive commissioner and team at HHSC and we should get feedback around May 12th. On May 13th DARS will hold a public hearing on the strategic plan in Criss Cole Rehab Center for 4-7:00 p.m. In addition to this public hearing, HHSC will also be holding one public hearing in Fredricksburg, as well as a video conference to urban locations. After feedback is received, DARS will make revisions and resubmit June 2nd to HHSC. On July 7th HHSC will submit the final, consolidated strategic plan.

Apprenticeship Program

Desi Holmes, Texas Workforce Commission (TWC), made a presentation on the Apprenticeship Program offered by TWC. She provided handouts and brochures on the program, which is under the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) Apprenticeship Program. TWC distributes funds to some registered training programs, which must be registered with DOL. Apprenticeship is paid, on-the-job training in skilled trade careers, such as electrician, plumber, roofer, pipe fitter, etc.

- Apprentices must usually be 18 and high school graduate
- Some training programs require more, such as aptitude testing, work experience, etc.
- Texas active training programs: 393, plus 7 newly added programs
- Texas active apprentices: 11,260; plus 1,575 newly enrolled apprentices
- Texas apprentices that completed program this year: 612
- Texas top occupations: electrical, plumber, pipefitter, sheet metal, carpenters, iron workers, HVAC
- DOL has website called My Next Move
- Some areas of the state have high interest in this program, other areas little interest

Roger Cortez said the Department of Veterans Affairs has a similar program, and the Department of Defense has a mentor program. Both are designed to assist disabled veterans in apprenticeship programs. Ms. Holmes said if the person can do the job skills, TWC works to be inclusive.

The group asked if DARS counselors are aware of this apprenticeship program. Assistant Commissioner for DRS, Cheryl Fuller, responded that counselors are aware of registered apprenticeships and the opportunity to connect with that program. Some managers have been very interested in referring more consumers. One area manager for DRS sits on the Texas Workforce Investment Council, which has a technical advisory committee around apprenticeship, and is able to bring that information back to DRS. Ms. Holmes provided her contact information if individual counselors need help with the program.

Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment

DRS and DBS contracted with the University of Texas, School of Social Work, to take a more focused and scientific approach to conducting the CSNA. David Norman introduced Dr. Monica Faulkner and Dr. Beth Gurlock from UT, and Elaine Eisenbaum from the Texas Center for Disability Studies. The CSNA report is not finalized, so highlights were presented:

- Reviewed CSNAs from other states and created methodology from that
- Not a program evaluation, rather a broad assessment of disability needs in state
 - What are rehab needs of Texans with disabilities
 - What are the specific populations
 - What are the needs of those with most significant disabilities
 - What are needs of minority populations
 - Are there any underserved populations
- Data used from Town Hall meetings, surveys from DARS staff and stakeholders, and from Census Bureau and the American Community Survey
- Only 150 stakeholders responded; 59% DARS counselors responded
- Discussed findings related to race, gender, age
- Discussed DRS and DBS findings separately

Two populations that consistently emerged as underserved include youth transitioning from public schools and individuals with mental illness. Undocumented immigrants were a concern. DARS does not serve undocumented workers; however, DBS has a children's program for anyone the public schools serve.

Common barriers to employment include housing and transportation as well as lack of appropriate jobs and loss of benefits.

RCT agreed with UT that the key is getting more people to respond to the survey, which is essential to getting more accurate results.

Committee Reports

Planning & Review Committee

Chair Martha Garber – This committee is responsible for reviewing the state plan. Every council member is a member of this committee because the state plan is a major responsibility for the RCT. For the new council members, it was explained that the state plan for vocational rehabilitation services and its supported employment supplement is a federal document, a contract between the state of Texas and the federal government for the money that Texas receives. It describes what DARS Division for Rehabilitation Services (DRS) and Division for

Blind Services (DBS) is going to do with the millions of dollars that it receives in federal funds. Council then reviewed the DARS state plan action plan with its assignments and deadlines, and the technical assistance circular (TAC) 14-02 from the Rehabilitation Services Administration regarding submission of the state plan, due July 1, 2014. It was noted that we started the review last year in February, but this year we started in May due to the DARS Sunset review. Martha then scheduled weekly conference calls to review DARS attachments to the state plan, and those are scheduled every Thursday at 10:00 a.m. through June 5th. Live captioning is available if needed. Council reviewed the following attachments:

4.8(b)(1) – Cooperation with Agencies that are not in the Statewide Workforce Investment System. Joyce Taylor is the RCT lead. The attachment submitted by DARS DBS had one change from last year, and that was the date. It was noted that the attachment doesn't provide much information, and should more be provided regarding other groups that DBS is working with, such as SILC or Dept. of Agriculture, or leave it very general. The DBS representative commented that she will forward these comments. She also mentioned that there's a contract that VRS (?) had related to getting assistance to farmers and ranchers with disabilities that has been used a couple of times. It was also asked if DBS used state use contracting, such as TIBH, but CRP's do that. Recommendation: Consider adding activities and collaboration with other agencies such as SILC. Also recommended that DARS note other possible collaborations. DARS should get credit for what they are doing.

4.8(b)(2) – Coordination with Education Officials to Facilitate the Transition of Students with Disabilities. Brent Pitt is the RCT lead. Attachments were submitted by both DRS and DBS. The DRS representative stated that the DRS attachments this year will be totally revised and it doesn't lend itself to be a track-change document. After comparing to last year's plan, this year's plan has 2 additional pages, including one page of projects and more on House Bill 617, which Brent will address tomorrow in his report. There does not appear to be any significant differences in either DRS or DBS.

Recommendation: Remove the specific number of participants in Project Search, rather have a range, so the state plan doesn't have to change every time there is a change in participants.

Discussed concerns expressed to the RCT and at Town Halls regarding the difficulty of the number of people that are eligible for transition services through DRS in high schools that don't get these students. Concern was expressed if the DRS plan is adequate. There are five DRS specialists for five huge regions. Are we doing everything we can? DRS responded that there are 95 transition counselors in the schools

Claudia Peden spoke for DRS on transition, and introduced Erin Wilder as the new program specialist for transition. In addition to the 95 transition counselors assigned to the schools, there are many other general adult vocational rehabilitation counselors who are also assigned as liaisons to the other high schools. DRS is currently discussing transitions in regards to the strategic plan, state plan, and business plan to make sure all are aligned and working closing with the Texas Education Agency, our high schools, our regional offices, and our field staff who are out there serving the schools and working with consumers. Project Search and Project Hire are possible projects that can be replicated statewide, if and when appropriate. Erin discussed participant numbers, which actually came from the current number of students at each site

now. The range is from 10-12 students, which seems to be the most cost effective for business. RCT expressed concern about not exploring options. So much of the attachment is devoted to a few projects that are serving only a few people; what happens to the rest of the students. DRS responded that the rest of the state plan talks about additional strategies to increase that coordination. DRS held a couple of focus groups and met with stakeholders to get feedback. The goal is to have a consistent message around transition statewide. This message includes awareness of policies, appropriate timeframe for taking applications, appropriate information to determine consumer eligibility, types of services offered whether vocational rehabilitation or independent living services, as well as partnership in schools. DRS will continue listen to feedback and take that into consideration.

RCT is interested in the outcome being an increase in the number of transition students. It was noted that after attending national meetings, this problem is not just in Texas but nationwide. It was said that if we served every transition student who is eligible, we couldn't serve all of them, and we couldn't serve anybody else.

RCT noted that while Project Search and Project Hire have been highlighted, only about 100 kids are being served through for two programs. However, there are 87,284 transition-aged eligible students in Texas public schools. The impact of those two projects is too little.

Council member Rames Gonzalez noted that he is from the Laredo school district in south Texas. Students come to him and tell him they are not getting services, so they drop out.

Brent Pitt said he will send some links to the RCT about where to find of the numbers of high schools in Texas, the kinds of information that's publicly available.

Martha Garber will send out a summary of comments to the RCT. There is not enough time on the agenda to review DBS's version of 4.8(b)(2).

Consumer Satisfaction & Needs Assessment Committee

Chair Elizabeth Gentry – David Norman reported for this committee. New council members on this committee were briefed on the process for obtaining consumer satisfaction results, both for open and closed cases and for DRS and DBS. Second quarterly reports were discussed, and DARS looked good not only in overall satisfaction, but in key areas of consumer choice and responsiveness to inquiries from consumers. Also talked about the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA), both background and approach, and anticipation of the report from UT.

Membership & Education Committee

Chair Joyce Taylor – Six committee members met and discussed that 9 new members were appointed by the governor's office, including some renewal appointments. Ms. Taylor will continue to work with Gabby at that office since we have members rotating off the council in October. They also discussed the education component, and if there are education issues the council wants to know about, they want to provide that. An orientation manual has been created and orientation for new members will be held after this regular council meeting.

Policy, Procedures & Personnel Development Committee

Chair Karen Stanfill – There was a large turnout for this meeting. Discussed:

- Counselor qualifications-counselors have 8 years to obtain their Master's degree as VR counselor. That qualifies them to sit for national certified rehabilitation counselor (CRC) accreditation. DARS pays for this education.
- There are 19 DBS counselors who have this certification out of approximately 105 counselors.
- DRS will send that information later to Ms. Stanfill. There are hundreds more DRS counselors.
- There is concern about incentives for counselors to get their certification, and what is being done about counselors who are not progressing towards certification.
- Dr. Gonzalez added his concern that counselors should remain CRC instead of LPC, even though LPC is higher. CRC credentialing is tied to the profession, and CRC folks are specifically trained counselors
- There is also counselor turnover in DRS, about 10 new counselors being hired a month. DRS will send that information as well. Discussed increasing the number of people served, which may increase case load and low morale. What is the goal 10 years from now?
 - Ms. Stanfill said 10 years ago Disability Rights Texas testified to Legislature that DARS needed to reduce caseload sizes and reduce closures, as DARS 25,000 closures were more than any other state. There were made-up cases because counselors were trying to close consumers that didn't exist.
 - Ms. Garber suggested that this committee closely review the Comprehensive System for Personnel Development (CSPD) portion of the state plan, which is a 5 year projection. This would be the appropriate time for providing input.
- Committee continued policy discussion on Social Security (SS). Policy has stated that since SS is supposed to be the funds a person lives on, it should be used to pay for dorms or other housing. The policy committee discussion has been centered on the law that states a person on SS should not be required to participate in the cost of the VR plan. Therefore, if college is part of their VR plan, they should not be required to use their SS to pay for part of the VR plan. DBS shared some proposed changes and this will be discussed further, as well as increasing the amount for an apartment, currently set at \$275 per month.

DRS Assistant Commissioner Report

DRS Assistant Commissioner Cheryl Fuller provided these updates:

- Ron Fleming has been hired for the Houston regional director position
- DRS and DBS will participate in a monitoring review from the Rehabilitation Services Administration in fiscal year 2015. RCT will also participate in this review, which happens about every five years. Hopefully, it won't overlap with legislative session, which runs January-May 2015.
- Ms. Fuller has traveled around the state to meet with staff and stakeholder groups and will continue to do so.
- DRS is focusing on getting back to basics, which is helping consumers find and retain employment that leads to a career that can sustain them.

Ms. Fuller noted that the number of DRS consumers served has dropped over the last 10 years. They are making a very concerted effort to find out why and to improve services to increase those numbers. It is a top priority for her to serve more consumers, and to serve them well. It is important to her to provide quarterly reports to the RCT because she is aware that is how oversight authorities evaluate how successfully DRS is serving consumers.

DRS has a target in their state performance measures and the number for 2014 is 84,388 consumers. They are putting strategies in place to turn around the decrease in consumers, although it may take 15-18 months to turn it around. There is not a population breakdown on consumers served less, but appears to be across board. As DRS was making an effort to improve quality of service, over time the caseloads declined. Senior management is looking at setting an optimal caseload size for DRS.

RCT member Dr. Gonzalez asked if DRS has seen an increase in recipients with social security benefits like SSI or SSDI. Ms. Fuller will get back to the council with that consumer information.

DRS is looking at staff performance, customer service and consumer engagement. They are reviewing policies and procedures to make sure they are clear and concise. RCT has been helpful in sharing some policy concerns. Clear policy help establish expectations for staff performance. Also, managing expectations between consumers and counselors is critical.

Business planning is another avenue DRS is reviewing, coordinating all the high level responsibilities from the strategic plan, the state plan for VR, and the operational plan for HHSC. DRS is reviewing those commitments to prioritize and track those goals and strategies. DRS got started later this year on the VR State Plan due to Sunset and strategic planning, but appreciates RCT feedback. DRS plans to create a framework for DRS and RCT to work together on both the planning and evaluation portion of the document.

DRS has been working closely with DBS on the Sunset review process.

The strategic planning process begins in November when DRS identifies strategic priorities for 2015-2019 for inclusion in the HHC strategic plan. Goals and direction must be consistent between the HHS strategic plan and the VR state plan. RCT will be able to comment on these priorities. Some examples are:

- Improve outcomes for consumers with IDD or autism, and mental health conditions
- Improve outcomes, partnerships and service delivery for transition students
- Partner with state and federal agencies to seamlessly serve veterans with disabilities
- Improve business relationships by identifying business needs and workforce needs at the regional level

Co-share Agreement – DRS and DBS created a plan on working together when there is a consumer that both divisions serve. After review by the DARS Commissioner, it will be drafted into policy.

Embedded Training – In 2007 DARS began working with Walgreen’s offering on-the-job training for consumers. DRS then received stimulus money and provided funding for about 6 more community rehabilitation programs (CRPs) to train consumers on the employer’s work site, and this program was expanded across the state. However, an internal audit identified some potential risks with this model so contracts for this program were halted so the agency could revisit the model and address the risks. DRS consulted with RSA and they concurred that the model had some potential risk. They suggested DARS continue to use standard VR services like on-the-job training for the time being. Texas is not the only state looking at different options for work-based learning, and RSA has advised DRS that they are putting together a technical assistance circular. The circular will provide guidance for states on best ways to approach this type of service. DRS is rescinding the current policy and standards until further guidance is issued from RSA. DRS still believes work-based learning is important and is researching other similar practices, but embedded training has been discontinued.

DBS Assistant Commissioner Report

DBS Assistant Commissioner Barbara Madrigal provided these updates:

- Complimented Jean Genevie’s great work for years in DBS; Jean has now moved to DRS.
- Sunset – The report will be released May 22, and there will be a 2-day public hearing June 24-25.
- Strategic Plan – DARS is to post its draft portion of the HHS strategic plan on April 30 and HHSC will also post the entire HHS enterprise strategic plan on the internet for public comment. There will be public hearings and comment will be received April 30-May 22. On July 3rd HHSC will post the final version.
- LAR – Legislative appropriation request process just beginning.

Criss Cole Rehabilitation Center is starting an intensive college prep program July 14-24 in Austin. Some things consumers will learn include college readiness tips and strategies, financial aid services and tuition waivers, enrollment process, and accommodations and services available at college level during an on-site visit.

The average tenure in DBS is 13.5 years, which is above average, and Ms. Madrigal’s direct reports average 20.5 years. She announced her retirement in the fall, and the retirement of some field directors. DARS has created a cross agency classification project to clarify and make recommendations regarding salary and positions between the divisions.

DBS program staff will be move into the Brown Heatly Building and only DARS admin staff will be housed in the Admin Bldg. This will be the first time that DBS will be all together on the same floor. DBS and DRS will be located in the same building and that will help continue collaboration and communication.

Annual statewide staff training conference will be held at the Embassy Suite in San Marcos September 10-12, 2014. The keynote speaker on September 11 is Dr. Fred Schroeder, former RSA Commissioner. Janet LaBreck, current RSA Commissioner, has also accepted the

invitation if her schedule permits. During this conference DBS will be adding to their “Wall of Honor” at Criss Cole Rehab Center and adding a surprise honoree to this wall.

HHSC has a summer internship program, and both DBS and DRS received one paid internship position for consumers. Eligibility requirements include being 18 years old and enrolled in a technical school, community college, four-year institution or professional school.

DBS is striving to raise the bar with competitive employment, increasing weekly earnings. Staff met with HHSC and HR staff to discuss employment opportunities. HHSC has hired many DARS consumers, both DBS and DRS, and was happy to work with DBS. DBS used to have an employment specialist focused solely on state employment, and they are making an effort to re-focus on state jobs. Some ideas to promote hiring consumers includes publishing in the HHSC newsletter the stories of consumers that have successfully achieved employment with the state. DBS is planning on approaching the federal government as well.

Ms. Madrigal introduced Cecelia Berrios, Director of Consumer Services Support in DBS, and described her credentials. Ms. Berrios reported that there was a Transition Program Statewide Training Conference March 30-April 2 in San Antonio. Information was shared on best practices, group skills training, caseload management, serving the needs of consumer with multiple disabilities, and summer employment experiences. Participants learned about Project Hire, a DRS initiative with the Texas Council for Developmental Disabilities, and also about Project Search.

Work Matters is another DBS initiative to assist consumer to achieve high weekly earnings. Case closures have been declining over the past four years and DBS is committed to maximize salaries. Things they are looking at include:

- Identify and capitalize on opportunities to make stronger business partnerships and opportunities missed
- Examine how we build on existing employment partnerships, including working with DRS

Doug Wilson, a consultant has been hired to assist the 8-member workgroup. This workgroup has identified five different sub-projects:

- Building external partner relationships with business
- Internal development-counseling, critical thinking around employment, and data to engage consumers to identify their optimal vocational goals
- Maximize consumer potential and capabilities based on job readiness
- Increase job placement vendor’s effectiveness in matching consumer’s abilities and employment opportunities
- Aligning internal DBS performance matrix and performance indicators

The workgroup has created seven teams to help increase employment. Those teams are looking at job opportunities in these areas:

- State Government – more than 50,000 health & human services jobs
- Federal Government – has a 7% goal of hiring people with disabilities
- Private Sector – in particular Wells Fargo and Michael’s

- Job Retention – increasing consumer confidence and skills
- Marketing – educating employers, outreach with existing vendors
- Paid Internships
- Texas Workforce Commission

The RCT actually recommended last year that vendors come for supported employment training and DBS is planning that.

Ms. Stanfill said that a couple of years ago the Client Satisfaction Committee noticed that DBS had higher weekly earning than DRS, and asked what is the salary target DBS is striving to achieve? Ms. Madrigal replied DBS has seen a dip of 8.5% in weekly salaries, and that the number of homemaker positions has increased quite a bit. They want to stop both. Mark Schroeder asked if DBS counselors were aware of the federal program called Schedule A, a federal employment program for people with disabilities. Ms. Madrigal replied yes, and counselors have used it.

NEW MEMBERS

DARS Commissioner Veronda Durden greeted new council members and gave a brief update on DARS activities.

- DARS celebrated its 10 year anniversary in March. The celebration included profiling the assistant commissioners and key areas of the agency throughout the month.
- Commissioner Durden attended the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) in April, as well as the National Council of State Agencies for the Blind (NCSAB).
- The Health and Human Services Commission has created an Office of Mental Health Services, and the associate commissioner is Sonja Gaines. There is an 8-hour training that we may be able to offer our counselors.
- DARS is also working with Dr. Susanna Hupp, Associate Commissioner of the Office of Veterans Services, to better assist veterans trying to get back into the workforce.
- Beginning in fiscal 2015 DARS will be expanding autism program to serve more children. This will include a focused behavioral intervention program for these children.
- DARS and the Texas Education Agency (TEA) will be working together to improve partnerships with school districts.
- DARS expects to get its Sunset report in May and will hold public hearings in June.
- Commissioner Durden continues to travel the state to visit DARS offices to receive input from staff and stakeholders.

LIAISON REPORTS

DARS Council – Don Roy reported DARS Council met March 7 and April 25. He has kept RCT vacancies and recruitment efforts visible to that council. He also mentioned the approval process with Gabby at the Governor's Office and how that has to be kept moving. He commended Joyce Taylor for her work getting new members appointed to RCT. Commissioner Durden recognized two employees for their outstanding work at DARS: Assistant Commissioner Barbara Madrigal and Assistant Commissioner Mary Wolfe. Other topics mentioned were DARS 10th Anniversary, ten years of increasing VR services to consumers and partnering with businesses, introduction of new staff members, status of DARS admin

building, the timely and high completion rate for disability determination services, strategic plan and priorities, extensive overview of Early Childhood Intervention, and the Comprehensive Rehab Services by Cheryl Fuller. A CRS provider for consumers with traumatic brain injury made a moving presentation. The Council did receive a briefing on the Board for Evaluation of Interpreters (BEI) for deaf and hard of hearing services, and also on the autism program.

Partners Resource Network

Rana Anderson was not able to attend due to inclement weather, but her report is in the RCT meeting notebook.

Texas Workforce Investment Council

Joyce Taylor said the council meeting was held March 14 at the Criss Cole Rehab Center. The Council approved the funding formula for the apprenticeship program, which included the hourly rate for apprenticeship training programs, funding for established programs and apprenticeship instructor training programs. Council was also briefed on the strategic planning process that will commence in September. Council participated in a listening session with DARS and Commissioner Durden and other DARS staff.

Topics discussed include the purpose, goal and structure of the RCT and the role of the VR counselors. Also mentioned was DARS strategic priorities and business partnerships. The Council also heard from representatives from H-E-B and Diversified Staffing who discussed their partnerships with DARS. These listening sessions will assist the TWIC as it begins to prepare its six year workforce strategic plan for Texas. The next meeting will be June 6 in Austin.

Client Assistance Program

Karen Stanfill reported CAP is continuing discussion with DARS legal and policy departments on limited liability corporations (LLC). For new members, the history on LLCs is DRS policy had not allowed a person who is interested in self-employment to become a LLC. CAP sent research to DARS and is waiting on a response from their legal department. Ms. Stanfill hopes to report this issue has been resolved at the next RCT meeting. DARS DRS did put appeal information on the website, as well as the "Can We Talk" brochure under the "Your Rights" section. This will help a dissatisfied consumer learn about the appeal process.

CAP is also working on the one client/two consumers problem that has been an issue for years. The history is that originally DRS and DBS were not allowed to serve the same consumer at the same time and the computer system was set up to prevent that from occurring. However, other states have been serving consumers with multiple medical problems and RSA has recommended that DARS allow this, as a result of a RSA audit. This has not yet happened. CAP had a case where a gentleman was both blind and quadriplegic who needed services from both divisions but DARS was not able to provide. After much conversation between divisions and legal, an agreement was drafted between DRS and DBS to serve one consumer at the same time. A copy of this agreement is in the RCT notebook. The current hold-up is changing the computer system. David Norman from DRS said it is not known how long the computer change will take. Frustration was expressed by council members and also from parents at Town Hall meetings that the RCT facilitated.

CAP also wanted to know if RCT wanted to get involved in another project between DRS and DBS. That issue is to develop more effective trial work experiences. This part of the vocational rehabilitation process doesn't seem well understood by counselors so it's not well implemented. Cases are being closed out when they shouldn't be. When a person applies for services and if the counselor is not sure if that person has the potential to be successfully employed, the regulations and the law and the policy allow that person to go through trial work experience. It may take several of those experiences over various lengths of time in order for the counselor and consumer to know if employment will be successful. Sometimes counselors that are not sure about eligibility will tell the client they need to get a job and if works out, then DARS can help them. Or they will send consumers to a facility like Goodwill and the case is concluded. The way the regs are written, trial work experience can be on-the-job training, internship or supportive employment, and it should be in the consumer's area of interest. It does present some problems for employers when it may not be a permanent job placement. Most of the people who go through this are on Social Security. Ms. Stanfill has talked to DRS about this for a while, as well as the previous administrator, and they say it is really hard to piece this program together. They acknowledge it has been difficult. Ms. Garber commented that this issue seems timely with the recent employment first legislation, which means all state agencies should start looking at employment as the first option for folks with disabilities. CAP has offered to assist DRS in developing a more effective trial work experience policy and options for counselors and consumers.

Texas Education Agency

Brent Pitt noted that Senate Bill 1226 amended Texas government code and added employment first policy and a task force, which has already been selected. The first meeting was in April. House Bill 617 amended Texas Education Code to add requirements related to developing a transition and employment guide. This guide is simple, easy for parents and youth transitioning into the workforce to understand, to know what kinds of benefits are available to them and how to access those benefits. TEA had a stakeholder meeting in March and a draft of that guide will be reviewed at a stakeholder meeting in June, then it will be posted on TEA site for comment in September. The second part of HB 617 required a transition designee at each of the school districts to collect, update and report. A letter of instruction has been sent to each school district with this information.

State plan indicators 13 and 14 relate to youth aged 16 and above and whether they are being appropriately prepared for transitioning into postsecondary opportunities. TEA collects data on indicator 13, which looks at their IEPs to determine whether there are appropriate transition goals and planning being discussed. Indicator 14 measures a year out, whether students who graduated last year are successfully in postsecondary education, the workforce, or both. This is data TEA collects annually.

State Independent Living Council – Saul Herrera was not available and Rebecca Coleman reported. SILC has two vacancies, Mark Gold and Amy Kantoff have left. The next meeting is July 17-18 in Amarillo. Some activities council members participated in:

- SILC Congress in San Diego; Sandra Bitter and Jim Brocato now represents Region 6
- TBI Advisory Council Retreat
- Access board meeting in Washington
- Civil Rights event in Austin

- CPR certification

TCDD Health and Fitness project is starting its third year. Each CIL continues to encourage consumers to live healthy and independent lifestyles. TCDD released its 2013 Annual Report with good information and pictures and can be viewed online.

SILC Outreach Update – the PAC meeting was held March 29, and the annual conference was March 30 in Corpus Christi. More than 245 people attended and 29 exhibitors featuring information about accessibility products.

TxDOT Transportation Works Update – Disability in Action launched the Transportation Works website April 15 with barbecue party for consumers, press, and government officials. SILC designed the marketing materials for this launch.

A training presentation was developed by Disability in Action and the SILC created a PowerPoint and posted on web. SILC developed a marketing campaign that DIA was able to implement.

State Plan for Independent Living Update – Two public hearings will be held regarding independent living. SILC board starting process to determining expansion area should additional state or federal funding become available.

It was suggested in the joint RCT-SILC meeting in January that a committee be formed to coordinate focus groups and town hall meetings for needs assessment purposes. Chair Lori Henning said RCT is waiting on the results of the needs assessment just completed. Based on feedback and recommendations from UT, perhaps in the January 2015 joint meeting we can move that forward.

BOOK REVIEW

Mark Schroeder created a PowerPoint on the SRC-VR Partnership book to review RCT goals and expectations for new members as well as refresh current members. This helped clarify the history, law, purpose and goals of a SRC, and Texas VR in particular. Some highlights:

- 1992 RCT changed from an advising role to a partnering role with DARS
- RCT and DARS must jointly develop, agree to and review the CR state plan goals & objectives
- Number of terms a RCT members can serve is two 3-year consecutive terms; however a member can leave and come back
- The CAP is an exception, membership is permanent
- The Governor makes all appointments to RCT
- www.vocrehab.com is a great source of information
- DARS has provided dedicated staff to the RCT
- It's difficult finding RCT members from business, industry and labor because they don't understand what we do, and they lose money when away from work
- Mission statement should state what the council wants to accomplish
- Meetings are held at least four times a year
- Committee structures can be changed
- Bylaws address conflicts of issue

- RCT reviews, analyzes and advises DARS
- Challenges members face are that everyone is a volunteer, most everyone has full-time jobs. Also, term limits and meeting occurrences are a challenge as well as detailed knowledge of the RSA and rehab act.
- DARS provides reports and information in a timely manner so that DARS may assess and analyze what DARS is doing
- DARS regularly consults with RCT in the development and revision of policies and procedures. Members need to get up to speed on applicable regulatory requirement in order to review policies.
- Order of Selection – when full range of services cannot be provided to all individuals, if more people are demanding services than resources allow. Discussed most significant disabilities. Federal regulations define it as (a) individual with a significant disability, and (b) a severe physical or mental impairment that seriously limits functional capacity.
- Texas is not under an order of selection and DARS would collaborate with RCT if that needs to be implemented in the future.
- RCT and DARS needs to be completing financial information on a yearly basis on the RSA-2 Report Card. 75% must be spent directly on consumers and consumer services. This report card has never been done. Ms. Garber suggested we review the last three years. David Norman will look into this for our next meeting.

OLD BUSINESS

January 2014 RCT Minutes

Joyce Taylor made a motion to approve minutes as written, Martha Garber and Thelma Scot seconded, approved unanimously.

Review To-Do List

Executive Committee

- **CARRY FORWARD:** Resource Plan and Management Agreement between DARS and RCT. Lori Henning met with Commissioner Durden and shared the old agreement with her. Commissioner Durden thought it was a great idea and will have something in place for us by September.
- **DONE:** Chair to send letters to members not participating in council activities. After reviewing by-laws, after missing three consecutive meetings you are no longer on the RCT. No one has missed three, although some have missed two. A letter is on file should that occur. A reminder phone call will be made if someone misses two consecutive meetings. Missing a meeting periodically is understandable, but this is a 3-year commitment.
- **CARRY FORWARD:** Strategic Planning Session facilitator could be a DARS staff member. David Norman and Elizabeth will research this further.
- **ON-GOING:** Incorporate RSA website/rehab training at meetings. Mark Schroeder provided that today. We want to take 15-30 minutes to keep us up to date on our goals and responsibilities, our mission and why we are here.

- DONE: Committee chairs to send RCT coordinator due dates of committee assignments. Elizabeth will contact chairs directly to get that information. Committee chairs and committee members keep assistant commissioner up-to-date.
- DONE: Council member Joyce Taylor registered for NCSRC and CSAVR conference

Planning and Review Committee

- DONE: Schedule of conference calls established to review state plan.

Consumer Satisfaction Committee

- ON-GOING: Continue to monitor consumer satisfaction surveys

Membership and Education Committee

- DONE: Create spreadsheet of members terms, members rotating off, and applicants wishing to be on RCT
- ON-GOING: Recruit new members.
- On-GOING: Continue to frequently contact Gaby about RCT appointments.

Policy, Procedures and Personnel Development

- CARRY FORWARD: Elizabeth Gentry will provide paper copies of DARS training classes

For new members, committee chairs may contact you between meetings to let you know what is being worked on and what will be discussed at the next RCT meeting.

NEW BUSINESS

- Statewide Training Conference - DARS Division for Blind Services (DBS) invited the RCT to attend their annual statewide conference September 10-12, 2014 in San Marcos. Information was provided on the Embassy Suites Hotel reservations. The RCT meeting will start at 9:00 on September 10 at the Embassy Suites, prior to the start of the conference. Elizabeth Freaney will register council members, but you must make your own hotel reservation.
- Budget Update – The budget for the fiscal year is \$58,350. There is a spreadsheet for operating expenses to date, and a sheet for travel expenses to date. RCT is within its budget.
- Nominations for Council Positions – Membership Chair Joyce Taylor will be sending an email asking for nominations. Since we are not meeting in July, the election will take place in September.
- The Case for Inclusion – article by United Cerebral Palsy. Chair Lori Henning discussed the ranking for Texas and other states. Texas ranks 50 in a lot of areas, the very bottom of rankings. DARS is doing an excellent job, but it's interesting to see comparisons. Ms. Henning would like to see an hour set aside at each meeting for open discussion on ways to improve employment outcomes for people with disabilities, how we can be better at transitional services, and share different ideas or new information you may have that other council members are not aware. For example, how we can more effectively work with CRPs. Please email any ideas you would like to discuss to Ms. Henning to be added to the next agenda. Just a reminder, RCT cannot advocate for or

against any bills. As a private citizen, you can do that. Dr. Gonzalez was interested in qualifications for counselors and meeting the CRC. Ms. Garber suggested supportive employment, partnerships between community rehabilitation providers, and trial work experience.

- Sunset – Ms. Garber said we need to review the report as soon as it comes out in case there are issues we need to respond to. Elizabeth will send the link as soon as it is available. A conference call may be needed to discuss the results and draft any response we might want to make.
- Annual Report – If you have any topics for the annual report, let Elizabeth know. We're starting to work on that now. Photos would be a great addition if you attend a conference and represent RCT.

Mark Schroeder, Vice-Chair, and Lori Henning, Chair, reminded council members that we all come from different backgrounds and experiences and we all have special interests and concerns. The focus of the RCT is on what the RCT needs to do for DARS and for Texas. What do we need to do with the state plan? What are the goals and objectives as a RCT? We need to put our personal agendas aside and ask what is best for the Council. However, you may be connected to a community of people that have similar needs, or you have understanding of particular things such as credentialing, and you can bring that knowledge to the table. Things to leave behind including funding for a particular program you like or lobbying for a bill. The focus of the RCT is more of a strategic, statewide effort.

New council member orientation will begin immediately upon adjournment.

Adjournment

Meeting adjourned at 11:00 a.m., April 29, 2014.