

Meeting Minutes

Rehabilitation Council of Texas
October 20-21, 2014
Criss Cole Rehabilitation Center
Austin, Texas

Present

- Martha Garber, Chair, Coppell
- Joyce Taylor, Vice-Chair, Houston
- Brent Pitt, Austin
- Cheryl Fuller, Austin
- Elizabeth Gentry, Schertz
- Joe Tims, Justin
- Lori Henning, Austin
- Mark Schroeder, Grand Prairie
- Rene Gonzalez, McAllen
- Roger Cortez, Arlington
- Scott Bowman, Austin
- Troy Myree, Houston
- Thelma Scott, Houston

Absent

- John Cage, Helotes
- Karen Stanfill, Houston
- Manuel Lopez, Rosenberg
- Rames Gonzalez, Palmview
- Rana Anderson, Snyder
- Saul Herrera, Midland

DARS Reps

- David Norman, DRS Liaison
- Jeff Kaufmann, DBS Liaison
- Elizabeth Freaney, DARS RCT Council Staff

DARS Staff

- Alma Cantu
- Cassie Fisher
- Christy Lerche
- Corey Turner
- Don Roy
- Martha Bagley

- Michelle McCall

Guests

- Raul Ortiz (TWIC)
- Sandra Bitter (SILC)
- Craig Davis (SILC)

Welcome and Introductions

- Meeting was called to order at 9:00 a.m. by Martha Garber, Chair.
- Council members and audience members introduced themselves.

Committee Meetings

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

Public Comment

There was no public comment.

Sunset Commission Recommendations and DARS Update

DARS Commissioner Veronda Durden provided this information:

- Scott Bowman is the new Interim Assistant Commissioner for Division for Blind Services (DBS)
- Rebecca Trevino is the new Chief Financial Officer
- DRS Project Search program was expanded to include more young adults with job skills training, in partnership with Paso del Norte University, Burkhardt Center for Autism and others. There was a grant for expansion supported with funding from the Texas Council on Developmental disabilities. This past year 54 students completed Project Search and the goal is that 108 more students complete the program this school year.
- DBS Criss Cole Rehabilitation Center (CCRC) redesign program has changed to include three programs to provide more options for consumers for shorter training, increased consumer choice and higher quality. Referrals have increased to CCRC, and more students have graduated.
- Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) Services program developed an ECI Specialist Registry, an automated system designed to collect information on ECI specialists that have completed training and credentialing.
- Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services staff provided training for over 3,000 individuals on topics ranging from consumers understanding hearing loss, to interpreters improving their abilities by learning legal and medical signing skills. DARS contracted with an outside entity to develop new specialized tests for medical and court interpreters. The STAP (specialized telecommunications assistance program) issued more than 19,000 vouchers to Texans for telephone network services.
- Disability Determination Services (DDS) processes claims for Social Security disability benefits. One program is called Medical Casualty and Wounded Warrior Project. This project was launched by Social Security in 2001 to provide an expedited process for

injured or ill military personnel while on active duty. There are 13 disability specialists in this program, and they have reviewed more than 18,975 pages of medical records and have made determinations on over 23,275 cases.

- In fiscal year 2014 more than 80,475 Texans received DARS services. The number that reached their employment outcome goal was over 13,230, and the number of successful closures was over 11,230.
- Autism spectrum diagnosis affected more than 3,000 consumers. The Texas Council on Autism and Pervasive Developmental Disorders moved from DADS to DARS. The autism program was expanded to include a provider in El Paso and Corpus Christi. Also, DARS began a new pilot program with Texas State University to provide an online parent training model for children with autism spectrum disorder.
- October is National Disability Awareness Month and DARS is involved with statewide activities, such as the White Cane Day walk in Austin.
- Sunset Advisory Commission released their HHSC report. Issues that impact DARS the most are 1, 2, 7, and 12.
 - Issue 1 recommends the eliminations of DARS, DADS, DSHS and DFPS and merging programs and functions into a newly organized Health and Human Services Commission. The Health and Human Services Commission would be consolidated along functional lines. DARS programs would fall under the functional area of Medical and Social Services.
 - RCT is encouraged to review the report. The next step in the process is that on November 12-13 at the public hearing the HHSC report will be presented to the Sunset Advisory Commission, and a final decision will be made December 10th. RCT has the opportunity to provide concerns or recommendations at the public hearing.
 - DARS is moving ahead with implementing Sunset management recommendations for DARS. That includes improving services for consumers with multiple disabilities, and better oversight and accountability for all our programs.

Legislative Appropriations Request

Chief Financial Officer Rebecca Trevino discussed the agency's LAR, the budget request for a two-year cycle, 2016-2017. The DARS base request is \$1.245 billion, which is \$4 million more than the current biennium, and would include \$226.1 million in general revenue. DARS budget is 75% federal funds with most of it being awarded through the Department of Education and from Social Security Administration. DARS is requesting these exceptional items:

- \$50 million to maintain and grow ECI caseloads
- \$7.8 million for autism programs and accountability
- \$5.5 million for independence and blindness prevention
- \$2.1 million to serve people who are deaf and includes STAP
- \$900,000 to reduce the waiting list for the independent living program.
- \$2.7 million to reduce the waiting list for comprehensive rehabilitation services

Ms. Trevino said the BEST (blindness, education and screening treatment) program is a small program that is funded totally by donations when a person gets a driver's license, a renewal

license or a Texas identification card. That program has received about \$400,000 in funding. The automation system for that program is very antiquated. New technology would enable contractors to submit claims, and it will assist with running reports.

RCT Request for Information

Mark Schroeder asked about the request that would include funding for a technology piece that would enhance tracking, reporting and oversight of STAP and the Board of Evaluation for Interpreters Registry; and, if funded, would provide the financial resources needed to address an outstanding internal audit finding. Ms. Trevino said she will send that audit document to the council.

Mr. Schroeder asked if there is an exceptional item to expand Center for Independent Living (CIL) services to serve more underserved areas of Texas. The Commissioner responded that DARS does not have a specific funding request for the CILS. She also mentioned that DARS did not request more VR funds in the exceptional items. The majority of DARS funds comes from the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) through the Department of Education and it was felt there was adequate funding. A better job could be done utilizing the funds particularly regarding consumers with multiple disabilities. The Commissioner also noted that the Comprehensive Rehabilitation Services (CRS) program for consumers with traumatic brain injury or spinal cord injury ended the fiscal year with no consumers on the waiting list, a success in that area.

Martha Garber asked if DARS requested enough funds to match all the federal funds we had estimated. Response was: yes.

DARS is undergoing a strategic fiscal review, an initiative taken by Representative and House Speaker Joe Straus. This review is intended to provide strategic analysis of selected agency's budgets. Benefits include systemic collection and analysis of expenditure patterns at the program level; consideration of internal and external factors affecting program effectiveness, return on investment, and potential alternatives and program structure and delivery. DARS is the only health and human services agency going through this exercise, and there are 13 total state agencies participating.

Because DARS is undergoing the Sunset process, leadership decided that it would look only at the GR and GR-related programs, including ECI Respite program, Autism, Blind Children's Vocational Development (BCVD) program, Blindness, Education, Screening and Treatment (BEST) program, Business Enterprise of Texas (BET) program and its corresponding trust fund, the Deaf and Hard of Hearing program education, training and certification, and the Comprehensive Rehabilitation Services (CRS). These programs represent \$82.6 million of the 2016-2017 base request. The agency has been requested to describe operations at three different funding levels: constant level funding, 20% less funding, and enhanced funding. According to the Legislative Budget Board (LBB), this process will be built so that it can be sustained in future bienniums. DARS submitted a huge comprehensive amount of data to them on September 26th and had a hearing on October 6 that went very well. We expect dialogue to continue about this review with the LBB.

Brent Pitt asked about the education certification in the deaf program. For the Deaf and Hard of Hearing program, DARS was asked to provide that single strategy into two separate programs. There's education and training component, and a certification component to help people become certified interpreters, as well as Camp Sign. This program also provides training for public and private entities about hearing loss, effective communication and accessibility with the goal of helping people remain independent in their own homes and communities.

Commissioner Durden noted that exceptional items requests already were submitted for some of these small programs, with the goal of increasing services.

Ms. Durden honored four council members whose 6-year terms have been completed and are leaving the council: Lori Henning, Elizabeth Gentry, Thelma Scott and Rames Gonzalez. Framed certificates of appreciation were given to these members.

Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA)

Dr. Monica Faulkner, Dr. Beth Gerlach and Dr. Jim Schwab from the University of Texas, School of Social Work, discussed the CSNA findings. The objectives were to identify vocational rehabilitation needs and barriers for individuals with disabilities, describe the needs of specific populations that are underserved and unserved, those with the most significant disabilities, and then how DARS can improve services. Surveys were disseminated:

- Town Hall Meetings – Nine were held throughout Texas, advertised to community via listserves, and had over 60 participants. Consumer Satisfaction Survey – Conducted by phone yearly. DRS and DBS have a couple of questions that were different and they were able to capture that. From the 2013 data there were over 3,700 respondents with DRS and over 1,000 with DBS.
- Staff Survey – Consumer Caseload data may not be accurate, and will be clarified in future surveys. About 571 DRS employees and 10 DBS employees responded.
- Stakeholder Survey – Completed by 150 participants.

Things that contribute to successful consumer outcome:

- transportation, child care, modified workplace, job counseling, vr assessment, training, education, employer recruitment and education, technological aids and devices, follow-up services after employment, job placement, connection to community resources, and independent living skills training.

Populations that are underserved or unserved:

- rural communities, Colonias, areas with limited knowledge of technology access, people with autism, mental illness, youth in transition, older adults, people with criminal history, non-English speaking, immigrants and homeless individuals and those with physical impairments and physical disabilities.

Barriers with DARS: Lack of knowledge and training, lack of comprehensive service provision, issues with consumer access and language, lack of public awareness, lack of time, early case closures, counselors not available and responsive, and failure to coordinate services.

RCT Request

Could the staff from UT attend the RCT quarterly meeting, specifically the needs assessment committee, to receive current information. UT response was if we want them to, they will attend.

RCT Annual Report

Three consumer success stories were presented, and council members' edited biographies. RCT is working with a new graphic designer at DADS Media, and all information submitted went through DARS technical writers. Deadlines are well in advance of our due date of December 31st. Hard copies will be available at the January meeting, and 100 copies will be ordered per RCT request. Like last year, we will be able to upload our report to the National Coalition of State Rehabilitation Councils (NCSRC) website, and once it's made accessible, it will be uploaded to the DARS site.

Planning and Review Committee

Chair Rene Gonzalez – Regarding the CSNA:

There was a comment about looking at unsuccessful closures and analyzing that data to find particular groups that have a higher percentage of unsuccessful closures. David Norman used the example of unsuccessful closures for people with the diagnosis of autism. DRS discovered cases were closed because of behavioral issues that are typical for people with this diagnosis. In other words, DRS was closing people for being who they are. That led to massive training throughout the state, including developing specialists. DRS had a huge turnaround in successful closures in this area. Also, Dr. Gonzalez re-emphasized the need to ensure adequate time to review the state plan for 2016 and stay on target. Action: A meeting will be scheduled with DARS to draft the schedule of review for the state plan.

Consumer Satisfaction & Needs Assessment Committee

Chair Joe Tims – Elizabeth Gentry presented, Joe Tims transitioning into the Chair position. Committee discussed needs assessment, reviewed quarterly surveys for DRS and DBS and looked at areas that improved, with only a very limited number of areas with a drop in scores. Talked about focus groups and the priorities for that, and the WIOA priorities being handed down. New requirements for worker's comp cases to be almost presumed eligible, like Social Security, will need to work on definitions. This is the type of people currently underserved that we'll be looking at again the next statewide assessment. The CSNA will need to get started, a whole year has gone by since the last town hall meetings, and the CSNA needs to be done every three years. The focus of this conversation was that RCT will work on the needs assessment during each year to further understand the results and get a clearer picture of the needs of Texans. Mr. Tims concurred.

Membership & Education Committee

Chair Mark Schroeder – Joyce Taylor presented, Mark Schroeder is transitioning into the Chair position. Seven committee members met and discussed new members coming on the council in January. At that time we will do an orientation for them. Brent Pitt gave an update on transition guide for students. Cassie Fisher, DARS, mentioned the stakeholder position has

been posted and hope to have someone on board end of November. Also, after the November election we may have a new person in charge of council appointments at the governor's office. Mr. Schroeder concurred.

Policy, Procedures & Personnel Development Committee

Chair Karen Stanfill – Martha Garber lead this group for Ms. Stanfill. Discussed federal requirements for the vocational goal. There will be some new policies coming out, about 100 pages. RCT Input: There was concern that we were not involved in the development of policy vs. responding to policy that had already been developed.

DRS Assistant Commissioner Report

DRS Assistant Commissioner Cheryl Fuller provided these updates:

- Sunset – Ms. Fuller is mindful that the legislature will make the decisions and DARS will implement the will of the legislature. All staff are to stay focused on why we are here, our consumers and their needs. Ed West is the DARS - Rehab Services Administration (RSA) liaison, and he has been provided information and been informed of the public hearing dates. RSA has requested to stay informed during this process.
- WIOA – DARS is still reading the WIOA document to ensure good understanding of what the new federal law will require. The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act replaces the Workforce Investment Act of 1998. There are 5 titles to this act. Title I is the workforce development programs, programs that provide employment and training services to adults, dislocated workers and youth, including requirements for state and local planning. Title II is the adult education and family literacy act. Title III is Wagner Peyser employment services, funded by the Department of Labor down to the workforce commission. Title IV is vocational rehabilitation. Title V is general provisions. High point for Title IV:
 - Increased focus on serving transition-age consumers.
 - Pre-employment transition services to all students with disabilities to include job exploration, counseling, workplace learning experiences like internships, counseling on post-secondary opportunities, workplace readiness trainings – DARS is expected to set aside 15% of federal VR program funds for these pre-employment services.
 - Council member expressed concern about the federal acronym called “PETS”, pre-employment transition services, and how it could be seen as offensive to someone with a disability. DARS will call it pre-employment transition services.
 - Increased focus on working with businesses as customers, including measuring outcomes.
 - Core programs in WIOA are the four titles, and programs will work across various state agencies.
 - Unified state plan must be submitted to DOL by March 2016 by governor, describing in detail how core programs will align and work together across business operations.
 - DARS and TWC are the main agencies coordinating the unified plan
 - Federal agencies still have to issue regulations and guidance, possibly by January 18, 2015 with final regulations and rules issued January 22, 2016. Note that the first unified plan is to be submitted two months after the final rules are published.
 - RSA has big challenges working with the other federal agencies (DOL, DOE and HHS) to get proposed rules in place by January 2015. However, their ability to get

the rules out within the proposed timeframe does not affect our legal requirements under the law to keep moving forward.

- Another component of the unified plan is to include negotiated levels of performance for new things called common measures. It's a performance accountability set of measures that is supposed to be consistent across the core programs. They will replace our standards and indicators. DARS does not currently measure any of our outcomes in exactly the same way as these new measure will require us to measure them.
- Some new requirements include educational attainment measures, progress towards an educational outcome, and an additional measure of employer outcomes.
- Another part of WIOA is one-stop infrastructure funding, in Texas called Workforce Solutions offices. The new law requires us to provide funding for this one-stop infrastructure out of our VR funds, the admin portion. There will need to be a memorandum of understanding (MOU) between DARS and TWC, and then update all the MOUs with local workforce boards to provide an allocation methodology to determine how much of that cap we provide to this structure. Some things that will need to be worked out with TWC is having accessibility standards at facilities to include assistive technology and appropriate work equipment for consumers who are blind or have other disabilities.
- Reorganization of federal programs in WIOA – for DARS that would be the independent living program, including centers independent living, have been moved from the DOE to Health and Human Services. HHS have already issued announcements about this transition and RSA will continue to administer until transition complete. There will be additional requirements from HHS to administer this program. The role of SILC has been elevated, they have greater responsibility for development and implementation of the state plan for independent living and now centers for independent living. 51% of the directors of the CILs must sign off on the state plan for independent living. DARS currently also has to sign off on this plan.
- Funding under WIOA has established levels of funding through federal FY20, with no decrease in funds for VR with a possible increase in the future.
- Brent Pitt said the TEA partners with 20 education services centers who are most interested in working with DARS on the BET issues.

DBS Assistant Commissioner Report

DBS Interim Assistant Commissioner Scott Bowman provided these updates:

- Sunset – Mr. Bowman concurred with Ms. Fuller and added the things he tells staff: (1) stay focused on consumers, (2) be aware of what is happening legislatively but don't be too preoccupied, and (3) remember you are a state employee and what you can and can't do in that capacity.
- Research is being done on the new WIOA language regarding the VR agency remaining visible within its organizational structure.
- Also of concern is federal funding. DARS will contact its federal partners, Rehab Services Administration and others, to help advocate for things consistent with the federal law, such as administering programs and organization.

- RCT expressed concerns that the needs prioritized by DRS consumers (transportation and placement) and DBS consumers (technical aid services and independent living), for example, will get lost if the divisions merge, that consumer needs become unimportant.
- Business Enterprise of Texas (BET) is the Randolph-Shepherd vending program, and most state office buildings and some military bases use this program, which has resulted in some lucrative large organizations in Texas, both vending and cafeteria type businesses. DARS trains consumers through the BET program on all details of operating the food service safely and efficiently. The state, through DARS BET, provides initial inventory to get managers started in their operations, and DARS continues to provide support to the managers. It is a huge operation, with about \$12-\$13 million in tax revenue paid back to the state. Vendors themselves earn a really good salary, an average of \$100,000.
- The DARS operational plan requires DBS and DRS to improve collaboration for serving businesses across the state. This includes: (1) Establish cross-divisional work group to develop employer outreach standards and processes, (2) Develop a plan for the establishment and implementation of a coordinated DBS-DRS-DHHS approach to business services and development and consumer placement activities, (3) Establish DARS business relations team to increase business partnerships and consumer placement opportunities, (4) Develop a business outreach plan to implement, monitor and track progress in business partnership activities, (5) Partner with the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC), coordinating services to businesses at the local level and promoting replication of those practices, (6) Develop a schedule and implement regional business relations training for DBS and DRS counselors, (7) Coordinate with TWC to incorporate training and resources on career and labor market information, and (8) collaborate with TWC to develop a memorandum of understanding to expand coordination of services with TWC and local workforce development boards, including a process for tracking consumer referrals.
- Reviewed DBS standards and indicators. DBS did not achieve the minimum performance levels for 3 indicators in FY13 for standard 1. DBS was required to submit a program improvement plan to RSA. Standard 1.1 measures number of successful closures achieved compared to other years, DBS was at 93%. Standard 1.2 is the percentage of employment outcomes, DBS was at 68.68%. Standard 1.5 is the ratio of average hourly earnings of all individuals in competitive employment to the average hourly earnings of all employed individuals in the state, DBS was at 56.8 cents. In federal FY14 DBS exceeded targets, except possibly for 1.5. DARS is waiting for the Bureau of Labor and Statistics to produce the weekly wage data to calculate these measures. Ways to improve this standard include: (1) Strengthening business partnership as mentioned earlier, (2) Maximizing the consumer potential and capabilities for a career rather than just a job, and (3) Increasing effectiveness of job placement vendors to match consumer's abilities with employment opportunities.
- The RSA-911 report captures variety of data on closed cases, such as type of disability, services provided through VR and supported employment, providers and costs of services provided, etc. RehabWorks, the DARS electronic case management system is not currently able to add enhancements that are needed to integrate changes to the RSA-911. It was able to add upgrades for the RSA-2 report, however. There is a

backlog of change requests to RehabWork, but the HHSC procurement consolidation, improvements to the RSA-911 and Sunset recommendations are now being prioritized to be delivered in subsequent RehabWorks releases.

- On target is another IT project to integrate the IL as well as the CRS children's program, to be deployed FY16.
- TXROCS, the Texas Review and Oversight Coaching System, is on schedule to integrate DBS, VR and transition into this case management system by November 2014. Ms. Fuller stated this system was initially developed by DRS several years ago with an outside vendor in partnership with DARS IT. The purpose is to have an automated case review system to ensure requirements are being met in terms of both technical compliance as well as quality. Before TXROCS it was a paper process, which made aggregate analysis challenging across the state, and it continues to evolve. It differs from Mosaic in that TXROCS is case review and Mosaic is a larger framework. It stands for monitoring oversight and internal controls. This framework allows DARS to look at data on the whole to address specific performance questions or specific areas of improvements or do initiatives. The case review system is one part of that which says what we're seeing in our cases, which will feed into the larger framework and allow us a deeper dive into the data. Case reviews are conducted by the area manager or designee for DRS, and it's part of their responsibility of providing oversight, coaching and supervision to their staff. For DBS, case reviews are done by the VR supervisor or the program specialist.

LIAISON REPORTS

Liaison reports are presented by RCT members that represent various agencies and allow the RCT to coordinate activities with those agencies.

DARS Council

- Don Roy said the last council meeting was July 25th.
- Commissioner Durden stated that the Texas Autism Research and Resource Center, the STAR program and administrative support provided to the Texas Council on Autism and Pervasive Developmental Disorders has been transferred from DADS to DARS. Ms. Durden pointed out that consolidating autism services at DARS will increase the visibility of the function and consumer's access to services. DARS will create an office of autism services to bridge the gap between these programs.
- Sonja Gaines, new associate commissioner of mental health for HHSC, made a presentation on her position which creates broad oversight of public mental health policy in Texas. Ms. Gaines will coordinate with other agencies, local governments and other entities to ensure a strategic statewide approach to mental health. In 2013 there were 500,000 adults in Texas living with mental illness. Approximately 20-30% of the population served by DARS has mental health conditions.
- DARS Council had an emergency meeting and drafted a response to the Sunset Commission about their recommendations for HHSC and DARS. That letter was submitted October 17 and their main concerns were that DARS VR programs would get lost in a big bureaucracy, the control and allocation of funds and budgeting in such a large organization, and the abolishment of advisory councils. Mr. Roy read the letter to RCT members.

State Independent Living Council

Sandra Bitter from SILC made the report. SILC last met in September in San Antonio. They also visited the San Antonio CIL and also SAIL. Currently, SILC is reviewing Sunset recommendations and how it will affect the SILC, CILs and their state plan under WIOA. SILC just completed the fourth quarter of the first year of their state plan, full report in January. Other activities:

- Creating an advocacy plan for next legislative session as well as opportunities to talk about independent living
- Working on a state plan project to create an outcomes framework for measuring community impact and value for the services provided through independent living and CILs.

Texas Education Agency

Brent Pitt said TEA will have the Texas Transition and Employment Guide posted by October 31st. RCT members can go to the Region 11 site (www.esc11.net) and see the first round of the guide, version 1.0. You can also find out the name of the school district transition liaison. It will be updated as feedback received. The stakeholders want it to be very friendly to children, students and parents, which can be difficult if the student has a reading disability. The second version will contain some pop-ups, possibly videos. There is also a Transition in Texas website sponsored by Region 11 (www.transitionintexas.org) for more information.

- Mr. Pitt asked if RCT has authority to make comments to the Sunset Commission and feels RCT should do so. Ms. Gentry said the RCT did send information to the legislature last session when the issue of moving DARS under DADS. We can tell them what the impact may be on our consumers with disabilities, and educate them on issues.
- He also noticed some errors in the CSNA report submitted by UT, specifically on page 9, the demographics. It states Hispanic individuals with disabilities in Texas is 30.83%. However, TEA data shows 48.76%.

Texas Workforce Investment Council

Joyce Taylor introduced Raul Ortiz from the TWIC and noted he always attends the RCT meetings with Ms. Taylor.

- TWIC last met September 4 in Austin and that meeting served as a formal launch of the development process for TWIC's fifth workforce system strategic plan. Council received a briefing on agency strategy plans and their alignment with the current workforce system strategic plan entitled "Advancing Texas." The plan is updated over the course of 5 years.
- Council was provided key findings of a research project by the Ray Marshall Center. The purpose of that project was to identify the tools and data approaches used to estimate workforce supply and demand in Texas. Research revealed a significant demand for increased availability of supply and demand data.
- Next meeting December 5th in Austin.

OPEN DISCUSSION

Discussion centered around responding to Sunset Commission recommendations.

ACTION: The chair will draft a letter to the Commission, send it to the council for their feedback, and submit it in early November.

OLD BUSINESS

- September 10, 2014 RCT Minutes – Rene Gonzalez made a motion to approve minutes with correction to members in attendance. Joyce Taylor seconded, approved unanimously. Martha Garber would like to see highlighted in the minutes any **Input and Recommendations** which will be included later in the state plan. Also would like any requests to or from DRS and DBS to be highlighted. The goal is to make communication more clear and trackable.
- DARS-RCT Resource Management Agreement - The resource agreement has been signed by the DARS Commissioner and the previous RCT Chair, Lori Henning, and is effective for five years.
- Consider meeting at college campus – Joyce Taylor will lead a planning group to investigate tying in an RCT quarterly meeting in Houston in FY16 with a CSNA focus group. Expenses would need to be reviewed, accessibility to consumers from the community, availability of DARS staff, and transportation from the airport.
- Meeting dates for 2015 – Dates were discussed. January 26-27 are the dates for the joint meeting with SILC in Austin. The legislature will be in session during the April 20-21 meeting. The remaining dates are July 20-21 and October 19-20, 2015.
- Discussed DARS-DBS Conference that a number of council members attended in San Marcos in September. The speakers were impressive and the entire conference was well done. The staff comradery was impressive and a compliment to the organization. The talent show was great and it was wonderful to see people working together.

NEW BUSINESS

- Budget Update – the RCT coordinator reviewed expenses from September 1 to date. The DBS conference paid for CART services in September so we didn't expend that money. The budget is in good standing.
- DARS Commissioner Veronda Durden will be attending every RCT meeting to provide updates on DARS activities.
- Martha Garber will be attending NCSRC as well as the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) conference in November.
- Institute on Rehabilitation Issues Book Review – Mark Schroeder agreed to present a chapter review of the IRI book at each meeting. This continues to be an important function since the council will be adding new members and some chapters will need to be repeated.
- Strategic Planning will be scheduled for July 2015 as part of the July meeting. The council would like to have some pre-meeting activities so that members unable to attend could provide input. Octavius Bonacquisti will facilitate and he suggested members start thinking about what are internal and external factors impacting our ability to accomplish our mission.
- RSA-2 will be presented at the January 2015 meeting. DRS will have someone available to discuss the report.
- Possibly invite Sonja Gaines, Associate Commissioner for Mental Health at HHSC, to speak at a RCT meeting. Brent Pitt mentioned she is very well known in terms of mental health policy and substance abuse policy. Agencies across the Enterprise, as well as

outside the Enterprise, are working on these types of policies and coordination of efforts is promoted.

- Invite Carlene Geiger of DARS to speak about Employment First Legislation at the January meeting with SILC.
- Future discussion regarding blocking hotel rooms for meetings.

Travel and Attendant Care Policy

Octavius Bonacquisti and Chris Giangreco from DARS policy talked about the revised travel policy. Chris was tasked with reviewing the travel policy and making sure it aligned with the Texas Administrative Code (TAC), statutes, appropriations acts and rules and regulations from the comptroller's office that dictate how we're supposed to reimburse folks for travel. The reason was that policy was not the same for all DARS councils and boards and the goal with to align travel policies for all councils. Some key points:

- The only exception is the Early Childhood Intervention or ECI Council. They have specific rules with federal regs that require that they be reimbursed for childcare expenses but no other councils have that provision.
- Childcare expense has been eliminated from RCT (this expense has never been requested by a council member).
 - *Concern was expressed that future council members may have this expense.
- Actual expenses have been eliminated in order to align DARS with the TAC
 - *Concern was expressed that state hotel prices are not always available and that would mean council members, who take time away from their own jobs, would have
 - out-of-pocket expenses to attend a meeting.
- Meal expenses for local meetings have been eliminated in order to align with TAC.
- Attendant care expenses have been changed from \$50 a day to \$10 an hour or \$80 a day max. Chris did a lot of research trying to determine a market rate, what would be the going rate across the state, across the county, anything out there to see whether or not there was some dollar amount he could start with, but there wasn't much. Services that attendants provide are different from other established services. It's not quite home health aide or other types of aides, but just as important. He looked at Bureau of Labor Statistics and tried to find the most comparable title of services, and he found a salary wage of roughly \$10 per hour and DARS used that to determine an \$80 day reimbursement. So that is a \$30 increase from previous policy. There was a lot of discussion across the agency – is that enough? Is it not enough? DARS created a form for council members requesting an exception to that \$80 a day if you need to pay your attendant more. Same as the policy has always been, this exception needs to be made in advance of travel.

After much discussion, some top comments include:

While the council appreciated the research that went into this policy making, DARS is unique. Council members were very clear that DARS should set the standard for other agencies because DARS understands and knows people with disabilities and their needs. DARS is the expert, other agencies are not. Council emphasized that DARS needs to set the standard.

RECOMMENDATION: People using attendant care should be part of the discussion regarding policy for attendant care.

RECOMMENDATION: If an exception is denied, the individual needs to be given an explanation of the reason for the denial.

RECOMMENDATION: The amount for attendant care reimbursement should be a range based on the individual's needs, with the maximum range being higher than \$80, and increased hours for overnight care.

Another comment was if the whole point of travel reimbursement is reimbursement, would it be fiscally responsible to say attendant care will be reimbursed at actual expenses based on the unique needs of the individual, not to exceed cap established by HHSC rate. That would be open-ended but individualized enough for a range, not a hard dollar amount, because of the need for 10 hour-24 hour care.

- Mr. Giangreco responded that a couple of other HHS agencies have something similar to that in their policy, with no dollar amount. They can take this back as well and see if it's acceptable. It's a good idea to make because we get at the range, but don't actually establish a set range because we don't have empirical data to base it on.

Martha Garber clarified that the input provided at this meeting about this policy is the RCT official input, and will be reflected in our minutes.

Mr. Bonacquisti said there is a policy cycle every month and if it's not meeting the needs of either our employees or council members, it can be reviewed again.

January Meeting

First day agenda items include commissioner update, book review, open discussion, RSA-2 report, DRS-DBS reports. Second day SILC meeting with speaker Carline Geiger on Employment First. RCT orientation for new members will be held after the SILC meeting.

Adjournment

Meeting adjourned at 11:55 a.m., October 21, 2014.