



Notes from MSRC-DORS 2022 Public Meetings

July 13th, 10:00 AM

&

July 14th, 4:00 PM

(Virtual, via Zoom)

TOTAL ATTENDANCE: 10 DORS Staff, 3 MSRC Members, 10 Members of the Public

The Maryland State Rehabilitation Council (MSRC) and the Maryland State Department of Education's Division of Rehabilitation Services (DORS) continually assess the rehabilitation and career needs of Maryland citizens with disabilities. As part of this assessment, DORS and the MSRC hold annual public meetings.

Topics

- **DORS Updates** - Scott Dennis, DORS Director

MSDE State Superintendent Mohammed Choudhury has completed his first year and has taken a keen interest in the Division of Rehabilitation Services. I have met regularly with the Superintendent to keep him apprised of what has been happening with DORS. The Superintendent is very data driven and reviews DORS production numbers on a regular basis. He is very focused on the DORS waitlist and what can be done to start bringing individual off the Waiting List.

DORS Budget, the Governor, and the Maryland General Assembly continues to support DORS's by providing State funding to meet our Match and Maintenance of Effort requirements in order for Maryland to receive its full allotment of federal funding for the Vocational Rehabilitation Program. DORS will receive approximately \$48 million in federal funding in the current fiscal year.

DORS challenges this past year, like many State agencies, DORS had challenges with the recruitment and retention of staff, due to salary inequities between Federal government jobs and other public and private sector jobs. To help address this issue, the State Superintendent made it his number 1 priority for the DORS was to increase the salaries of the Vocational Counselors, which was accomplished. Beginning July 1, 2022, the starting salary for new VR counselors have become more competitive with other jurisdictions and the private sector.

In addition, our Community Rehabilitation Providers and the local American Job Centers are also faced with the same issue of attaching and retaining qualified staff.

- **Update on DORS' 2022 Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA)** - Brenda Isenock - DORS Workforce & Technology Center (WTC), Program Manager, Rehabilitation Technology, Autism & Blind Services

[Brenda Isenock and WTC's Marcy Roberts DORS were the co-facilitators for the CSNA work group. This work group consisted of 37 DORS staff members and input from members from the MSRC. Ms. Isenock and Ms. Roberts coordinated the process, providing support and guidance, and put together the final report for submission to Scott Dennis.]

The CSNA is required by the Federal Government's Rehabilitation Act, as amended by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. This act requires that a comprehensive statewide needs assessment of the rehabilitation needs of individuals with disabilities be completed every three years. The results of the needs assessment will be included in the MD Combined State Plan and will influence the direction of DORS' Agency's Program Plans for the next three years. The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act requires that certain areas be examined during this process. DORS' executive staff decided that not only will DORS examine the required areas, but DORS would also examine additional areas which would benefit us in planning for the future of our consumers.

There are areas that DORS evaluated to determine the needs of individuals with disabilities in the state of MD are:

1. The Need of Individuals with Most Significant Disabilities
2. The Need of Individuals with Most Significant Disabilities who are in need of Supported Employment Services
3. The Need of Individuals With Disabilities Who Are Minorities – Hispanic and Asian Communities
4. The Need of Individuals with Disabilities Who Have Been Unserved, Or Who Are Underserved By The Vocational Rehabilitation Program
5. The Need of Individuals With Disabilities Served Through Other Components Of The Statewide Workforce Investment System including the Maryland American Job Centers, Maryland Community Colleges, and Apprenticeship
6. The Need of Students and Youth with Disabilities for Transition Services and Pre-Employment Transition Services & the Extent To Which These Services Are Coordinated with Local Education Agencies
7. The Need to Establish, Develop, or Improve Community Rehabilitation Programs including the Workforce & Technology Center
8. Assessment of the utilization of existing education or vocational training programs leading to a recognized postsecondary credential or employment

Each topic area had a work group. These work groups worked to carefully examine these areas assigned and determine agency needs and make recommendations to address those needs based on the research and data they gather.

These work groups used various strategies to gather the data needed. Strategies included: focus groups, individual interviews, surveys with DORS consumers, and community partners; DORS staff and also analyzed current census and agency data.

After the groups have assessed their topics, and completed their data collection and research, they developed a section report. The section report includes an overview of their research, data collected, the needs of our agency and recommendations.

Each group was given a specific timeline for completion of their section report, which has been compiled and submitted to Mr. Dennis, who will review the report with MSRC, before submitting it to the Federal government's Rehabilitation Services Administration.

- **Update and Information on the Maryland State Rehabilitation Council (MSRC) Updates** - Marsha Legg, MSRC Chair

What is the MSRC?

Members appointed by the governor, all with vested interest in the success of DORS in supporting people with disabilities across the state in their employment ventures.

Cross-representative group comprised of education, rehab providers, businesses/employers, industry professionals, consumer advocacy groups & consumers/individuals receiving DORS services.

MSRC meets quarterly, but also has 5 core working committees that members work on, in collaboration with DORS staff, throughout the year.

MSRC has input into policy development, CSNA, Strategic Planning, etc.

MSRC Committees:

- Policy & Quality Assurance – chaired by Tom Laverty
- Blindness & Vision Services – chaired by Penny Reader
- Employment/Career Development – chaired by Michelle Day
- Strategic Planning & Public Relations – chaired by Calvin Doudt
- Membership – chaired by Marsha Legg
- Membership Committee is always seeking individuals who may be interested and appropriate to serve on the SRC in future years; everyone is encouraged to contact the SRC Chair with questions or to refer someone who may be interested.

Question about the MSRC? Contact the at src.dors@maryland.gov, or go the [MSRC website](#) to learn more. Meeting dates and minutes are housed on website.

- **WTC Updates** - Marcy Roberts WTC Assistant Director, Administration

WTC resumed full in-person services for all WTC programs in July of 2021, while continuing to offer some programs in a virtual or hybrid programming depending upon individual needs.

WTC resumed public tours in August 2021. Scheduled tours are provided on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Since resuming the tours, more than 30 have been provided to the public, with over 170 individuals from throughout the state attending. In addition, WTC has provided more than 10 specialized in person tours, and some virtual tours, for high school transitioning youth.

WTC reopened the dormitory in September 2021. To address the concerns regarding COVID, one consumer is assigned per dorm room vs double occupancy. When a consumer presents with COVID-like symptoms, a detailed process for ensuring the health and safety of that consumer as well as all other WTC consumers and staff.

The staff of the WTC Career Assessment Services department transitioned from providing career assessment services to the agency's new Eligibility Determination Unit.

WTC is in the process of developing a new Behavioral Health Services department which will be staffed with two licensed clinical professional counselors and one nurse health educator, who will be available to provide mental health support for consumers during day and evening hours.

WTC Academic Services continues to provide a variety of academic assessments and college assessments, as well as tutoring services both in-person and virtually. During this program year, they began to offer the CASAS which is an assessment that helps to determine the academic levels of consumers related to their vocational goal.

WTC Training programs offered this year included:

- a. Food Service training which now offers an internship opportunity with our business partner Weis Market. Additional partner engagement is being explored with businesses statewide.
- b. WTC has five training programs that are offered in partnership with Community College of Baltimore County. They are:
 - i. Childcare training which was offered twice this year.
 - ii. Professional Animal Worker Services was held 3 times this year.
 - iii. CVS Retail training was held twice.
 - iv. Sephora Warehouse training was held 4 times.
 - v. General Warehouse training was held 3 times
- c. WTC continue to offer Environmental, Auto Detailing, Auto Refinishing, and Auto General Service Technician training programs at WTC. Work Readiness programs ran full classes run throughout the year.

WTC Autism Services expanded its capabilities to serve more consumers with Autism by adding additional staff. New services to be provided will focus on employment-related needs of consumers with Autism.

WTC Rehabilitation Technology Services is partnering with Employment Services and OBVS (DORS' Office for Blindness and Vision Services) to provide a comprehensive training program for consumers who have vision impairments. The overall goal is for the mastery and application of technology, computer skills, and job readiness skills for employment.

WTC is planning an in-person open house for new DORS field counselors which will provide them with an in-depth, hands-on opportunity to learn about the WTC and all the services offered to assist them in helping their consumers develop and obtain their vocational goals.

- **Office of Field Services (OFS) Updates** - Jody Boone, Director, DORS OFS

Staff from OFS currently serve approximately 14,500 consumers throughout the state. OFS staff work in twenty-four field offices, and within several American Job Centers. In program year 2021, OFS staff successfully assisted 932 consumers with obtaining competitive integrated employment.

Over the past year, OFS staff worked hard to manage counselor attrition and vacancies and to streamline internal processes. To better serve consumers, OFS took steps to make workloads more equitable. This involved transferring cases and caseloads within and between regions. For example, OFS now has counselors in western Maryland serving consumers throughout the state. This has provided both challenges and opportunities, as counselors took the time to learn about resources, providers, and programs available in the consumers' local areas. Of course, if a consumer chooses to remain with a counselor in their local district, their case is transferred back to the local district office. All these changes have required a lot of coordination. DORS very much appreciates the efforts of its regional directors, program managers, and district supervisors who oversaw and managed these changes, and took on several vacant caseloads in order to deliver continuous services, while also performing all of their managerial duties.

The changes required, out of necessity, during the height of the pandemic have improved many of OFS operations, as services moved to a digital and virtual world. DORS has moved to a mostly paperless case file system which better utilizes the case management system. OFS is continuing to provide an array of virtual services, many of which were introduced during the height of the pandemic, but many of our consumers prefer; most appointments with OFS counselors are now virtual. Transportation, which has long been a challenge for many consumers, is no longer an issue with virtual service delivery options.

One of OFS' biggest accomplishments over the past year, was the creation and implementation of the Eligibility Determination Unit. This was an "all hands-on deck" project that is a work in progress. Special recognition goes to: Derick Serra, Trina Robinson, Remona Phillips, Sonya Tubaya, LaTasha Grant, Bianca Curtis-Sell, Faith Mowl, Curtis Buler, Sheila Bell-Buckner, Jamesa Fossett-Williams, Sam Miller, Samantha DeFranco, and Christofer Conklin for their dedication and work in making the transition a relatively smooth one. Also deserving of recognition are the members of the EDU Implementation Team who worked diligently to create this unit and to provide a 2-day training to the EDU staff. Positive results are already being observed, with several counselors reporting that having the eligibility determination process handled by the EDU staff has given them more time to spend with their consumers.

On July 1st DORS made an internal change to combine the Hagerstown and Cumberland districts into one district, called "Hagerstown West". DORS OFS will still have 2 physical offices, and both will remain under the supervision of one person, Erin Shahan.

OFS is pleased to welcome and introduce the new Statewide Staff Specialist for Students and Transitioning Youth, Jessica Markum. Ms. Markum has a wealth of experience as a DORS counselor and will no doubt have a positive impact on student and youth services!

- **Office for Blindness & Vision Services (OBVS) Updates** - Toni March, Director, DORS OBVS

OBVS continues to provide VR services. Currently OBVS has 903 open cases in the VR program.

OBVS is almost full staffed. All counselor positions are either filled, or in the process of being filled.

OBVS closed 46 cases successfully employed this past year. Twenty-seven of those closed were in full time employment and our average wage was \$20.41 cents an hour.

To facilitate greater employment opportunities for individuals who are blind and vision impaired two new vendors have been approved who provide vocational training specifically for individuals who are blind and vision impaired, World Services for the Blind and NSITE a division of the National Industries for the Blind. Both organizations provide vocational training to prepare individuals for employment.

OBVS has one summer work program for students, provide by the Columbia Lighthouse for the Blind. Other vendors who traditionally also have summer work programs for Pre ETs students, have not been able to prepare their programs for summer 2022. The hope is that these programs will to be ready for a return providing summer programs in 2023.

OBVS WTC services is offering both in person and virtual services, with virtual services allowing OBVS staff to reach many more consumers and to provide training of short duration at the convenience of the consumer. Staff continue to provide training modules virtually; these enhance career readiness and job seeking skills training, and traditional independence training, Braille, and career preparation.

Independent Living Older Blind (ILOB) Program:

ILOB continues to take applications, determine eligibility, and develop plans. Providing services in person and in the home. In program year 2021, ILOB served 685.

OBVS is currently seeking Teachers for the Blind" and Assistive Technology vendors to assist with the provision of services for OBVS consumers in both the ILOB and VR programs.

Business Enterprise Program (BEP):

Many BEP vendors are unable to open their facilities due to a lack of personnel in their locations. The federal government is still teleworking in many instances and therefore the reopening of some facilities is not feasible.

BEP has 32 facilities in operation, with another facility at the IRS opening in 2022.

BEP staff continue to hold town hall meetings for all BEP vendors to keep them involved, updated, and informed. This is one practice that evolved out of the pandemic that will likely continue as it has been beneficial for all.

The Committee of Blind Vendors elected new representatives in June of 2022 at the annual upward mobility conference.

The Financial Relief and Restoration payment plan was approved by RSA and the funds distributed to the blind vendors impacted by the pandemic.

A settlement with Black Tie has been reached and the vendors impacted will be compensated accordingly. An independent auditing firm was contracted to assist in ensuring accurate accounting and 28 vendors will be receiving compensation.

BEP staff will continue to assist the blind vendors in re-imagining and modifying their facilities to maximize profit and maintain facility operations.