

The MSRC-DORS 2021 Public Meetings were held via Zoom on September 21<sup>st</sup> at 10:00 AM and 4:00 PM.

Several members of DORS Executive Team presented updates. Additionally, approximately 30 DORS staff members attended and there were 15 attendees from the public, community partners or stakeholders, and consumers. There were not comments and just one question about DORS services post-Pre-ETS.

## DORS Updates

Scott Dennis, Director, Division of Rehabilitation Services, Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE Assistant State Superintendent)

### State of the Division- Performance

- Program Year 2020 has concluded (July 1-June 30)
- 14,746 individuals were served through the VR program
- 6,323 SWD were served through Pre-ETS
- 926 individuals were placed in CIE
- Average wage at exit \$14.91 working on average of 27.3 hours per week
- Avg. wage at 2<sup>nd</sup> qtr. #13.31 working on Avg. 27 hours per week
- A new online referral process was introduced in Dec 2020 and has handled over 9,500.

### Budget

- DORS was funded with State General to meet its Match and Maintenance of Effort requirements for the federal year that ends September 30, 2021. For FY 21, DORS received 46,881,489 in VR Basic Support Funding
- 7,032,000 will be devoted to providing Pre-ETS services.
- FFY 22, most likely will start under a Continuing Resolution until Congress pass a budget. DORS will have sufficient federal funds so services will not be impacted.

### Challenges

- High number of counseling and supervisory vacancies approximately 23% of the positions are vacant. We continue to look at workload levels and move cases to offices and counselors with a lower number of cases to help keep cases moving
- Similar numbers with a number of our providers, the combination of the two has slowed down the delivery of services.
- Will be returning both VR and Pre-ETS dollars from FY 20 due to the inability to expend those funds on services. Estimated to be between six and 7 million.

### New MSDE Superintendent

- Mohammed Choudhury is the new State Superintendent as of July 1, 2021.
- Will be making a number of changes; do not know what the impact on DORS will be at this time.
- Has mandated mask for all MSDE offices, which included all the DORS field offices and WTC.

## MSRC Greeting

MARC Chair, Marsha Legg, brought greetings from the Maryland State Rehabilitation Council (MSRC) and commented on how DORS staff provided excellent services, and transitioned to virtual services quickly, during the COVID-19 pandemic and State of Emergency.

## Office of Field Services Updates

Jody Boone, Director, DORS Office of Field Services

- 1) The Office of Field Staff (OFS) staff worked very hard over the past year while teleworking, and then as they transitioned from telework back into the offices full-time to provide quality customer service to our consumers. Transitioning to and from telework during the pandemic required a lot of creativity, patience, and coordination, but staff worked together to refine processes and systems that not only worked but also permanently changed the way we operate. For example, we moved from a blend of paper and electronic documents and files to nearly all electronic files.
- 2) The biggest challenge that OFS is currently facing is staff vacancies. There are currently 46 vacant positions in OFS: six of which will be filled within the next 30 days. This high vacancy level not only impacts the ability to provide services due to increasingly high caseloads, but it also impacts staff as they work diligently to manage increased responsibilities. For example, along with many of our counseling staff, our district supervisors are covering multiple caseloads while also providing leadership and guidance to their team.
- 2) Consumers currently have the option of meeting in-person with their counselor in one of our field offices or virtually via Google Meets. When in-person meetings are held, the counselor and consumer meet in a conference room that allows them to be socially distant, and all parties wear a facemask during the meeting. Furniture surfaces are sanitized in between meetings.
- 3) Since we are meeting with consumers in the conference rooms, we currently have limited space available for providers and community rehabilitation programs to utilize our offices to provide services, such as career or psychological assessments. Providers were informed of the limited space options prior to our return to in-person services, and they are working with DORS staff to schedule use of the resource rooms and other vacant offices whenever possible.
- 4) The Montgomery County Transitioning Youth Unit, which was created in early 2020, does not have a separate district office. The district staff are currently using offices in Wheaton and Germantown, as well as working from their assigned schools. This unit receives a very large portion of our Pre-ETS and transitioning youth referrals each year.
- 5) Over the past 9 months, OFS has completed 26 Agreements (Memorandum of Understanding/MOU) with community schools and our community partner providers; 21 of these were related to the 2021 Summer Youth Work-Based Learning Experience Programs; hundreds of students participated. The students were able to gain real work experiences and other Pre-Employment Transition Services in order to prepare them for the world of work after school or college.

6) The RISE Program, provided by Psychometric Solutions, LLC, recently completed the first year of the 5-year contract. Thus far, four business plans submitted by consumers were approved for DORS funding and the business operations have begun.

### **DORS new Statewide Coordinator for Deaf Services**

Please join us in welcoming Mr. Noe Turcios to DORS, as the new Statewide Coordinator for Deaf Services. This position falls under the OFS Technical Assistance Branch. Noe began working at DORS in June and spoke at the 2021 Public Meetings.

Noe is currently working on helping to make changes to the Services for People Who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing page on the DORS website, including developing several new ASL videos.

Questions about DORS services for people who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing can be directed to Noe at noe.turcios@maryland.gov, or videophone 410-405-7054.

### **Office for Blindness and Vision Services (OBVS)**

Toni March, Director, DORS Office for Blindness and Vision Services

OBVS Includes: Independent Living Older Blind (ILOB), Vocational Rehabilitation (VR), Maryland Business Enterprise for the Blind (BEP) and Blindness services at the Workforce & Technology Center (WTC)

Currently serving 609 people in the ILOB program

Currently serving 898 people in the VR program

VR Program:

Continuing to provide services and move cases along. Taking applications and doing interviews on the phone, determining eligibility and developing plans. We are currently in the office and providing services in person.

Almost fully staffed, we have a new counselor starting in October. We have two secretarial vacancies.

Resumed in person Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre ETs) services through Maryland School for the Blind and Columbia Lighthouse for the Blind. Though the provision virtual services continues

We do have a relatively new and very successful service provided through Blind Industries and Services of Maryland (BISM) that allows individuals who are beginning the job search to trial out their job readiness, and get real feedback on their preparedness, resume, and interview skills.

WTC services is providing both in person and in virtual services. We have found that virtual services allow us to reach many more consumers and to provide training of short duration at the

convenience of the consumer. Center staff are currently developing modules to be provided virtually that will enhance career readiness and job seeking

ILOB: Continuing to take applications, determine eligibility, and develop plans. Providing services in person and in the home.

New Satisfaction survey was developed and implemented for the ILOB program. The first survey is currently being conducted and we do not have results yet.

BEP: 75 % of Blind Vendors shut down their operations. Staff provided information and support for applying for benefits, unemployment, and small business assistance. Working with the vendors to develop re opening plans.

The BEP developed a plan that was approved by the Rehabilitation Services Administration for the distribution of the Federal Financial Relief and Restoration Payments. The plan was approved and the Blind Vendors in the program will receive those funds in the next few weeks.

## **DORS Workforce & Technology Center (WTC)**

Jean Jackson, Director, DORS WTC

WTC is in full operation.

The WTC dorms open with one student per room.

Tuesday A.M. and Thursday, P.M. tours of WTC have resumed, but reservations must be made and COVID-19 safety precautions observed.

Several in-person Training Programs have resumed:

- Environmental Services
- Auto General Services; Detailing and Refinishing
- Warehouse
- Sephora Warehouse running 5th session; next session begins 10/18/21
- Childcare begins 10/4/21 with full class

Work Readiness I & II have begun in person service, no virtual at this time.

Academics continues to provide GED and Pre-GED training both in person and virtually.

Career Assessment Services (CAS) has resumed in person services.

Drivers Ed, Assistive Technology (AT) assessments continues in person, virtually and in the community.

Autism Support Group and Computer Skills Development class are again being held in person.

Pathways programs at AACC, CCBC, Howard County and Montgomery Community College (Rockville) will be provided virtually through the fall semester.

CARF accreditation review completed, results expected in early November.