

Berks-Schuylkill CAC Meeting

February 10, 2020

Attendees: Angel Torres, Judy Vaskorlis, Helen Denker, Sally Kneipp, Judy Yeasted, Yvelisse Gonzalez, Andrew Pennington and Sarita Battish (call in).

Review and Approval of Minutes: We started by discussing the October 2019 minutes that needed to have some wording corrected. Yvelisse stated she would get these minutes posted on the PaRC website. A motion was made by Andrew and seconded by Judy V. to approve the December minutes.

OVR Report:

- Yvelisse reported that there is some good news; there have been 134 cases released from the order of selection wait list in the Reading and Schuylkill County OVR office about a week ago. Letters have been sent out to inform clients that they need to contact their counselors for a meeting to decide if they can be moved to the plan status. If they do not respond within 15 days, their case may be closed; however, counselors have been given instructions that they should not be too hasty to close these cases without trying to contact the client in any way that they can. OVR personnel are expecting the clients who need help to contact their counselors. The state has implemented a Lean Program to verify that cases are active and the customers need services. Sort, Set in Order, Sign, Standardize, and Sustain are the steps to figure out why cases are open for so long. If a case is over a year old, it will be tagged and the customer will be sent a letter. Sally asked what to do if a customer has had contact with their counselor and things have not progressed (i.e., How can they find out if they are on the waiting or released list?). Yvelisse answered that they would get a letter stating that they have been released from the list and should contact their counselor. The last release occurred in July 2019.

Andrew asked if closing out customers who do not call back is affecting the numbers. Yvelisse replied that there will be a high number of closures because it is a cleanup effort. Angel pointed out that unsuccessful closures occur when clients do not contact their counselors and there is no response to OVR's attempts to contact them. Andrew mentioned that the client has 30 days to appeal a closure. Yvelisse responded that is true, but that it also depends on the reason for not responding (e.g., medical reason); if

not, they have to start over. Andrew stated that some are apprehensive about allowing a successful case closure due to their fear of losing their job or something going wrong and having to start the OVR process all over. Judy Y. mentioned that, once closing the case, customers should be informed about the Ticket to Work Program. There is also the Partnership Plus Program in which OVR hands the case to a Ticket to Work agency. (Ticket to Work is for clients who want to work full-time.) Judy Y. reported that Partnership Plus has a teleconference in about two weeks, and Yvelisse stated that we should try to get someone from Social Security to talk to the group about the Partnership Plus Program. Judy V. stated that one reason people are hesitant to close their case is that it takes so long to reopen the case. Yvelisse emphasized that OVR cannot keep cases open "just in case," since it is not within the budget constraints to do that and is not fair to the customers on the waiting list. Helen mentioned that some employers accept state funding to hire a person with a disability (e.g., for on-the-job training) and then find ways to terminate them when the funding runs out. It was discussed that persons should file a discrimination complaint with EEOC, or call their state representative.

- Yvelisse reported that OVR has six vacancies with one in the process to be hired. There are plans to interview for two RCD positions and OVR is in desperate need of Schuylkill County counselors. Helen suggested checking with the colleges in the area for possible candidates to fill these positions. Andrew added that colleges have job fairs. Yvelisse stated that she will pass these suggestions on to Carol Homolash, OVR district administrator, to contact recruitment specialist (Hattie McCardle) to verify whether they do any recruitment in the Schuylkill County area. Will also email required job qualifications to everyone, just in case they have someone in mind. Yvelisse asked if there were any other questions.
- Sally asked if Andrew could give a recap of the meetings that have taken place concerning Preemployment Transition Services (PETS). Andrew stated that the Provider Work Group met and there were concerns about staffing. He said they are rescheduling some of the meetings and a lot is in play with Preemployment Transition Services across the state. A lot of counselors/providers are apparently having issues getting releases back to provide services (group or individual). OVR is providing most of the group services in the state. Yvelisse stated that there were issues with schools providing group services through providers, which led to a sense of losing control of the PETS program that OVR created.

Other Business:

- Angel stated that the Berks-Schuylkill meeting dates are not correct on the PaRC site. Yvelisse said she would get things corrected.

- We mentioned the idea of sending letters to our state representatives to support OVR. (In December we reviewed the CAC purpose as indicated in the by-laws, to refocus and get back to the goals and mission of the CAC.) Judy Y. said the idea of sending letters is to support any type of legislation that affects OVR and its funding issues. Andrew mentioned that written letters should be backed by solid findings. The majority of OVR funding comes from the federal government and minimal from the state; there is a 80/20 split. Yvelisse emphasized that letters should be encouraged from OVR clients or their parents who are not satisfied with the process or they should be calling their state representatives. Sally suggested that, if there is an issue with OVR and the state budget, we should try to have a letter writing campaign. Yvelisse mentioned that sweep-up funds have been an issue recently.
- Angel reported that he has been unable to get together with Carol to complete plans to post flyers at colleges, etc., concerning recruitment. He has posted the recruitment flyer on AIM's social media. Yvelisse thinks we should have another presentation from the CAC to the OVR counselors, to inform them of the CAC and encourage their help in the recruitment of new CAC members from their caseloads. June 25th may be a possible date for a half-hour presentation. She also expressed the idea of the CAC having a table at the next job fair. Andrew asked about building a Facebook page. Yvelisse said she will contact PaRC to find out which counties have a Facebook page and will inform the CAC.
- The idea was raised of having a CAC meeting in Schuylkill County perhaps twice a year, at the Career Link, library, etc. Helen suggested that Hamburg is an option that is closer than Schuylkill County. Judy Y. suggested we get the members first, then go to Schuylkill County for meetings.
- Angel said he met with Laura about the group picture she took, who said the picture is not of good quality and we should get another. Group decided to wait until more members join before taking a photo.
- The CAC co-chair and secretary positions need to be filled.
- Follow-up is continuing with the individual (Terry Chase) who has expressed interest in joining the CAC.
- Yvelisse will send out the OVR community resource list; members should add their resource information and return it to her, and OVR staff will compile the list. Judy Y said the listing might be a good way to get help from the counselors with identifying new members—if we give them something that is useful to them in a different format.

Agenda for next meeting: Presentation to OVR counselors, Recruitment, Community Resources, Facebook page/ Social Media.

Announcement for general good: Judy V: There was a Braille Challenge at BCIU last Saturday, Reading Hospital has started a Cancer Support Group. Helen: Geisinger – St. Luke is offering \$4 meals for persons 50+; she provided a schedule for STS Route #80 which connects with BARTA in Hamburg.

Adjournment: A motion was made by Andrew and seconded by Sally.

Next Meeting is April 13, 2020, at 4 PM at PA Reading Office of Vocational Rehabilitation