**Arkansas State Rehabilitation Council**

**Quarterly Meeting Minutes**

**Conference Call/Zoom/In-Person**

**June 15, 2023**

**Attendees:**

**State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) Members Present:** Jonathan Taylor, Chair; Kimberly Clayborn; Dr. James Grover; Dr. Charlie Green; Kelly Sharp; Alex Scott; Wensday Kraemer; Ted Scallion; Tom Masseau; Joseph Baxter, ARS Commissioner.

**State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) Members Absent:** Carol McDearmon, Christopher Balos, Matt Sewell. Leigh Garvin, Addie Edwards, Koby Roy, Kesha Pilot

**Arkansas Rehabilitation Services (ARS), Division of Workforce Services (DWS) Staff:** Carl Daughtery; Chip McAfee; Robert Trevino, Gretchen Newton, Nathan Winter; Yvonne Rowland: Lisa Kelley; Jim Moreland; Cynthia Cleghorn; Otis Dixon; Kofi Adzokpa.

**Members of the Public:** Bonnie Boaz; Molly Hernandez; Jen Goodwin; Christine Bell, Eric Treat, Gloria Johnson, Chelsea McClure, Daniel Daley.

**Call to Order:** Arkansas State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) Chair, Jonathan Taylor, called the meeting conducted both in person and via teleconference to order at 9:30 a.m. Following rollcall, a quorum was declared.

**Approval of Minutes:** At the request of Chair Taylor, Council members reviewed the minutes of the March 16, 2023, meeting. A motion to approve the minutes as presented was made and seconded. The motion passed.

**Comments from SRC Chairman Jonathan Taylor:** Chair Taylor expressed his appreciation to everyone for being in attendance either in person or via teleconference. As part of his comments, he informed Council members and others present of him attending the 2023 APSE (Association of People Supporting Employment First) conference in Columbus, Ohio. He indicated he would be sharing information gleaned from the conference at the next SRC meeting. He also updated Council members on the 2023 Legislative Session. He provided information regarding Acts 182 and 214 as well as SB443. Chair Taylor concluded his comments by informing the Council that he is working with the Governor’s Office to make sure vacant positions on the SRC would be filled.

**Comments from ARS Commissioner Joseph Baxter:** Commissioner began his comments by also welcoming all present and thanking them for their attendance. He informed the Council that Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) will again be monitoring ARS this fall, indicating this monitoring will be more technical assistance in nature looking specifically at how ARS operates in various programs and assisting the agency in finding ways to improve outcomes. He indicated RSA will most likely start its review in September and conclude by end of this calendar year. The Commissioner also reported that the agency would be contracting with Dr. Keith Vire to complete a qualitative and quantitative study looking specifically at various ARS program costs and outcomes as well as different aspects of the agency’s culture. He reminded the Council that Dr. Vire was a former member of the SRC. He communicated the expectation that Dr. Vire’s work would be completed by the end of July or early August. Commissioner Baxter next provided information regarding the Spring CSAVR (Council of State Administrators for Vocational Rehabilitation) Conference. He reported both the SRC Chair and Co-Chair as well as he along with several other ARS staff had been in attendance. He updated the Council regarding the state’s current hiring freeze relaying its impact on ARS’s ability to serve clients. He provided information regarding a recent meeting with Secretary McDonald with the Council having much discussion. As part of discussion Mr. Masseau had questions regarding vacant Counselor positions and requested an update on the Client Satisfaction Surveys. The Commissioner informed the Council that this year is the 50th anniversary of the Rehabilitation Act and reminded everyone of Disability Employment Awareness Month in October with this year’s theme being Advancing Access and Equity, with more information to follow. He concluded his remarks by informing the Council of the upcoming retirement of Bernice Gunter.

**RSA Monitoring Update – Joseph Baxter, Lisa Kelley, Nathan Winter:** Commissioner Baxterinformed the Council that ARS is continuing to work within the corrective action plan approved by RSA addressing the four findings identified in FY 2021 monitoring. He indicated that RSA has reviewed our most recent submission and approved ARS’s methodology for rates or payment. Ms. Kelley also updated the Council regarding the corrective action plan indicating that the agency is working on issues related to previous responses from RSA in preparation for the next update submission. She informed the council of a meeting scheduled for June 28th to establish teams who will be assigned the various services that ARS provides and formulating rates for those services. She stated that Dr. Megan Lamb of DSB (Division of Services for the Blind) has agreed to attend the meeting to provide information regarding how DSB has addressed this issue. Commissioner Baxter expressed his appreciation to Ms. Kelly and Mr. Winter for their willingness to assume a lead role in the monitoring response. Discussion followed.

**Review of Process to Complete State Plan and Review of Goals and Priorities – Lisa Kelley**: Ms. Kelley provided the Council an overview of the process the agency would utilize when completing the ARS portion of the new WIOA (Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act) state plan. She indicated a draft of the state plan would be presented to the Council for review at the September SRC meeting. She expressed the opinion that the draft plan would be provided to Council members the 1st week of September providing sufficient time for review prior to the meeting. She reported that based on timelines provided by DWS the plan must be completed by October 31st to allow for sufficient time for upper management review and public input. Ms. Kelley next reviewed with the Council the proposed goals and priorities for the new plan indicating that the information had been provided to members in advance of the meeting. Following much discussion, Council member Kelley Sharp moved to accept the process as presented to complete the State Plan and the review of goals and priorities as presented. Council member Wensday Kraemer seconded. The motion passed without opposition.

**Agency Updates**

Commissioner Baxter informed the Council that in consultation with SRC Chair Taylor he requested ARS SMT managers to present client success stories demonstrating how they had benefited from the program and its services.

**Field Services-Carl Daughtery, Chief of Field Services**: Prior to the meeting Mr. Daughtery sent a video link to his success story to the Council for review. His presentation utilized a video focusing on Abigail Wells. Ms. Wells described how she became an ARS client served through the Little Rock Field Office. She stated that ARS helped her with college tuition and had also assisted her in obtaining a prosthetic leg so she would be able to walk to her classes and later helped her secure a blade so she would be able to run track. Ms. Well stated that ARS changed her life. Mr. Daughtery also shared information regarding the upcoming Youth Leadership Forum scheduled for June 18th – 20th with 35 students scheduled to participate and the Film Camp scheduled for July 17th – 20th with 30 students expected to attend.

**Access & Accommodation (A&A) – Nathan Winter:** Mr. Winter introduced Ms. Yvonne Rowland who presented the A&A success story. Ms. Roland introduced Chelsea McClure, an individual served through A&A’s Stay-at-Work/Return-to-
Work (SAW/RTW) program and Gloria Johnson, human resources manager for First Arkansas Bank & Trust. Ms. McClure was connected to the meeting via teleconference but because of technical difficulty unable to communicate her story. As a result, Ms. Rowland provided an overview of Ms. McClure’s work responsibilities and how her disability presented problems when completing the essential functions of her job. She informed the Council of the services provided to Ms. McClure and her expressed satisfaction of the experience. Ms. Johnson also communicated that her interactions with SAW/RTW had been positive. She indicated that SAW/RTW staff had been quick to respond and professional in their interactions with employees she had referred to the program. She indicated she has been utilizing the program for several years because of the quality of the service and it making her job easier. Much discussion followed.

**Business Engagement – Gretchen Newton:** Prior to the meeting a PowerPoint presentation was sent to Council members for review. Ms. Newton provided an overview of how Business Engagement has recently provided serves to underserved and unserved populations. She provided information regarding minorities receiving transition services and individuals with mental health and psychiatrically related issues. She also reported on a financial literacy service provided by Simmons Back to Little Rock Central High School transition students. Ms. Newton concluded her presentation with a success story, ARS client De’Arrius Andrews. She related that Mr. Andrews presented with issues around getting and keeping a job and that with the assistance of BER, Jackie Balti, he was able to secure employment at Hay’s Supermarket. She provided an overview of support provided by Ms. Balti and related that Mr. Andrews continues to thrive in his new job. There was much discussion.

**Announcements**

Commissioner Baxter recognized ARS Summer Intern, Daniel Daley, who is working with ARS becoming familiar with the agency and state government in general.

Chairman Jonathan Taylor informed the Council that the next scheduled SRC meeting would be Thursday, September 21, 2023.

**Adjournment**

With no additional business to conduct, the meeting was adjourned.