**Arkansas State Rehabilitation Council**

**Quarterly Meeting Minutes**

**Conference Call/In-Person**

**September 21, 2023**

**Attendees:**

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

**State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) Members Absent:** Keisha Pilot, Co-Chair; Kobe Roy; Addie Edwards; Leah Garvin; Chris Balos; Matt Sewell.

**Arkansas Rehabilitation Services (ARS), Division of Workforce Services (DWS) Staff:** Dr. Charisse Childers, DWS Director; Nathan Winter, ARS Deputy Commissioner; Carl Daughtery; Robert Trevino; Chip McAfee; Judy Smith; Lisa Kelley; Jim Moreland; Rhonda Young; Gaye Jones-Washington; Valencia Butler.

**Members of the Public:** Bonnie Boaz; Christean Bell; Mollie Hernandez; Dr. FranSha Anderson.

**Call to Order:** Arkansas State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) Chair, Jonathan Taylor, called the meeting conducted both in person and via teleconference to order at 9:32 a.m. Following rollcall, both in-person and for Zoom, a quorum was declared.

**Approval of Minutes:** At the request of Chair Taylor, Council members reviewed the minutes of the June 15, 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 the Council of Dr. Childers appointment to the Workforce Information Advisory Council (WIAC), being one of four state agency representatives to be appointed. Dr. Childers communicated her excitement regarding her involvement with the WIAC and how she would be able to provide input on shaping Federal policy. She indicated one of her first responsibilities would to assist in gathering data on improvement for underserved communities in Arkansas.

**Comments from ARS Commissioner: Joseph Baxter:** Commissioner Baxter began his comments by also welcoming all present and thanking them for their attendance. He introduced Corie Bailey as the new Commissioner’s Executive Assistant and Nathan Winter as ARS’s new Deputy Commissioner. He informed the council that National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM) would be celebrated during the month of October and of various events occurring in recognition of NDEAM. He provided information to the Council regarding a teleconference he and other ARS staff participated in with members of the Employment Committee of the Developmental Disabilities Providers Association indicating committee members were interested in working closer with ARS as it relates to providing employment services to individuals they serve. The Commissioner next provided a brief update regarding the status of the development of the VR state plan indicating additional discussion of the document would follow later in the meeting. He provided the Council an update regarding the agency’s various vacant positions indicating the advertisement and hiring of counselors and area managers had been granted and was ongoing. The Commissioner concluded his comments by assuring the Council that ARS funding would not be immediately impacted by a potential federal government shutdown.

**Review of ARS Portion of WIOA State Plan: Lisa Kelley:** (Prior to the meeting a copy of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) State Plan goals, priorities, and strategies was sent to Council members for review.) Ms. Kelley informed the Council that Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA), ARS’s federal partner, had provided a new state plan format to be used for the next submission that is more streamlined and with less duplication. She informed the Council of the timeline for ARS’s completion of its portion of the State Plan with a projected completion date of mid-October. She reminded members the plan’s goals and priorities were reviewed at the Councils’ June meeting except for an additional goal with strategies required because of the new format. She indicated the Council would have opportunity to review and comment on ARS’s potion of the plan as part of its December meeting or during the plan public comment process. Commissioner Baxter next followed up with an explanation of the plan’s goals, priorities, and strategies with a focus on pre-employment transition services and competitive integrated employment. He concluded by indicating that RSA would be closely monitoring all VR programs regarding their adherence to their plan. Following discussion, a motion was made and seconded signifying Council review. The motion passed.

**RSA Monitoring Update – Joseph Baxter, Lisa Kelley, Nathan Winter:** Commissioner Baxterinformed the Council of the status of the RSA’s previous and most recent monitoring. Mr. Winter provided an update regarding progress on the Corrective Action Plan (CAP) generated from the previous RSA monitoring. He indicated the CAP outlines how ARS will address problems with ARS policies, procedures and practices identified by RSA with projected solutions and timelines for resolution. He related the process included submitting new policies and procedures to RSA for review and responding to questions regarding resolution and progress made on a quarterly basis. He concluded his comments by reviewing issues currently being addressed including grant tracking by grant year and period of performance with ARS waiting on responses from RSA regarding information previously submitted.

**Election Officers**: **Jonathan Taylor:** Chair Taylor reminded the Council of the two officer positions that required annual election with those being Chair and Co-Chair. He stated that if no other Council member was interested, he would be willing to remain as Chair for one more year. A motion to nominate Jonathan Taylor as chair for the next year was made and seconded with the motion passing. Chair Taylor then proceeded with the election of Co-Chair with him indicating that Keshia Pilot has communicated a willingness to remain as Co-Chair. A motion to nominate Ms. Pilot as Co-Chair for the next year was made, seconded, and passed.

**Agency Updates:**

Access & Accommodations (A&A) – Deputy Commissioner Nathan Winter: Mr. Winter provided the Council an update regarding various activities within Access and Accommodations. He indicated the Assistive Technology at Work (AT@Work) and the Stay-at-Work/Return-to-Work (SAW/RTW) programs had recently gathered employer services data providing the opportunity to study and reflect on how they are serving employers, how many employers they are serving, and the services provided. Data indicated that 23 new employers were served in this most recent quarter with them being both large and small. He reported that 53 job retention cases were served during the past 6 months with average monthly earnings of $2,187.85 with these earnings being higher than the typical VR case resulting in an improvement in performance measures. Mr. Winter reported that the A&A medical and psychology programs are attempting to expedite the processing of client referrals to assist Counselors in addressing requirements related to eligibility and plan development. He reported A&A is also dealing with staffing issues just like other ARS sections. Mr. Winter concluded his update by sharing information regarding A&A’s Alternative Financing Program.

Business Engagement: Gretchen Newton: The Business Engagement update was provided by Elizabeth Reed because of Mrs. Newton’s absence. Ms. Reed began her presentation by providing details about underserved populations in Arkansas which includes the Marshallese located in the northwest portion of the state. She indicated that as with many underserved populations, communication is a barrier. She emphasized the importance of establishing and maintaining an open line of communication as it provides information which helps establish trust. Ms. Reed continued her update by discussing the positives of giving felons with disabilities a second chance. Ms. Reed shared a story about a client with a felony who was referred to Business Engagement. After receiving CDL training the client was having difficulty finding work. With the assistance of Business Engagement, he was hired by a construction company. She reported that working with ADWS, Adult Education, and businesses has led to similar positive workforce stories. Ms. Reed concluded her update by sharing information regarding Business Engagement’s efforts with Bank OKZ. Much discussion followed.

Arkansas Career Development Center: Cynthia Cleghorn: Due to car troubles Ms. Cleghorn could not be present to give the Council the Arkansas Career Development Center (ACDC) update. It was indicated that she would email her report at a later date.

Field Services: Carl Daughtery, Chief of Field Services: (Prior to the meeting the Field Services presentation was sent to Council members for review.) A PowerPoint presentation was utilized by Mr. Daughtery to showcase different accomplishments of Field Services. Among those accomplishments include the hiring of 10 new counselors and the hiring of new area manager, Valencia Butler. He indicated that during this quarter Field Service has experienced an increase in competitive employment outcomes as well as timely eligibility determinations and IPE development. He discussed RSA’s suggestions that will lead to revisions/changes in Field Service’s policies including those covering hearing aids, housing, supplies/computers, and financial need. He provided information regarding innovative service delivery programs that Field Services is piloting. The pilot programs contain different marketing strategies and engagement within communities around Arkansas. This included having itinerary points at locations such as Wal-Mart, Kroger’s, and different sporting events. It also included the implementation of “Fast Wednesday” where the timeframe for client eligibility is significantly shortened to increase consistency and efficiency. He provided an example out of the Fayetteville Office where the client application, eligibility determination, and development of the IPE all occurred in the same day. Mr. Daughtery concluded his presentation by informing the Council of the recent colocation of the ARS Russellville Field Office with DWS with it marking the 9th co-location for Field Services in the state. There was much discussion.

**Announcements**

Chairman Jonathan Taylor informed the Council that a program celebrating National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM) would occur on October 5th at 10 a.m. at the Capitol. The program would include the reading of a Governor’s Proclamation recognizing the event. He reported that on the October 21st of October 21st a Business Inclusion Summit would take place at the Graduate Hotel in Fayetteville. He also indicated that a Talent Acquisition event where different disability organizations can connect would occur in March of 2024 with the location yet to be determined. Chair Taylor concluded announcements by indicating that the next scheduled SRC meeting would occur December 21, 2023.

**Adjournment**

With no additional business to conduct, a motion to adjourn was made and seconded. The meeting adjourned.