**Arkansas State Rehabilitation Council**

**Quarterly Meeting Minutes**

**Conference Call/In-Person**

**September 15, 2022**

**Attendees:**

**State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) Members:** Jonathan Taylor, Chair; Keshia Pilot, Co-Chair; Kimberly Clayborn; Dr. James Grover; Dr. Charlie Green; Kelly Sharp; Kobe Roy; Addie Edwards; Alex Scott; Tom Masseau; Wensday Kraemer; Joseph Baxter, ARS Commissioner.

**Arkansas Rehabilitation Services (ARS) Division of Workforce Services (DWS) Staff:** Christy Lamas, ARS Deputy Commissioner; Dr. Charisse Childers, DWS Director; Carl Daughtery; Chip McAfee; Robert Trevino; Rodney Chandler; Charles Lyford; Nathan Winter; Lisa Kelley; Jim Moreland; Otis Dixon; April Cooper; Maryanne Caldwell; Kofi Adzokpa; Rhonda Young; Bernice Gunter.

**Members of the Public:** Bonnie Boaz, Dept. of Education; Fannie Scott; Michael Hengan; Jen Goodwin; Mollie Hernandez; Thomas Nichols.

**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 Chairman Taylor, Council members reviewed the minutes of the June 16, 2022, 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. He welcomed new members Mr. Koby Roy and Ms. Wensday Kraemer to the Council. Chair Taylor communicated the ARS mission which is is to prepare Arkansans with disabilities to work and lead productive and independent lives. He also related that purpose of the State Rehabilitation Council is to support ARS as a valued partner consistent with Section 105 of the Rehabilitation Act with responsibilities including reviewing, analyzing, and advising ARS regarding its programs and goals as outlined in its State Plan. Chair Taylor reported that ARS was a major partner with resources, time, and staff at the Arkansas APSE (Association of People Supporting Employment First) Conference held in Hot Springs. He indicated that the APSE mission is to provide competitive, integrated employment opportunities and career advancement for people with significant disabilities. He also related that APSE is a major supporter of the employment first movement. Discussion followed.

**Comments from ARS Commissioner Joseph Baxter:** Commissioner Baxter expressed his appreciation to everyone being in attendance, either in person or via teleconference. He informed the Council of upcoming activities including the recognition of October as National Disability Employment Awareness Month to celebrated at the Capitol Rotunda on October 15th, an Amazon hiring event scheduled for October 10th with a specific focus on individuals with disabilities and a WIOA partners meeting to be held October 19-21 in Little Rock. He reported that ARS Director of Communications, Chip McAfee, and his staff have initiated an advertising campaign including TV and other modes of communication to provide information regarding ARS and its services. He updated the Council regarding ARS’s new case management system. He reported the go-live target date originally scheduled for October 1st has been postponed to January. Council member Mr. Tom Masseau inquired about money ARS returned to RSA wanting to know what was behind the need to return the funds and any impact going forward. As part of the discussion Commissioner Baxter informed the Council of his opinion as to why there was an excess in funds that had to be returned to RSA and that ARS’s having to do so was common amongst most other VR programs nationally. He assured the Council that services to ARS clients would not be interrupted or delayed because of the turn back of VR funds.

**Review of State Plan Goals and Priorities – Deputy Commissioner, Christy Lamas:** Prior to the meeting a copy of ARS’s State Plan goals and priorities was sent to Council members for review. Ms. Lamas reviewed the individual goals and priorities with the SRC providing information regarding how they related to the recently completed Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment. After much discussion, she encouraged Council members to send questions or suggestions to she or the Commissioner as the agency will be updating its strategies to make sure ARS is meeting its responsibilities related to the State Plan goals and priorities.

**Review of Potential Impartial Hearing Officers – Charles Lyford, General Counsel:** Mr. Lyford updated the Council on the applicants who had applied and been vetted to become Impartial Hearing Officers. He indicated that this meeting was to confirm the 3 individuals recommended to become Impartial Hearing Officer. After questions and concerns a motion and a second was made to accept the applicants as presented. The full Council concurred.

**Election of Officers – Jonathan Taylor, Chair:** Mr. Taylor informed the Council that the Chairman and the Co-Chairman positions were up for re-election. After discussion a motion was made to re-elect the current Chairman, Jonathan Taylor and the current Co-Chair, Kesha Pilot to remain in their current roles. The motion was seconded and Council members concurred.

**Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) Monitoring Update – Commissioner Joseph Baxter, Deputy Commissioner Christy Lamas, Charles Lyford**: Commissioner Baxter informed the Council that the end of October will be next due date for ARS’s update to its Corrective Action Plan (CAP) related to RSA’s findings as part of the monitoring completed last year. Deputy Commissioner Lamas reported that ARS Finance has already submitted their first quarterly CAP report related to liquidations and obligations. She indicated there was software in the process of being configured to help answer questions as part of the October report. She indicated the CAP will be an ongoing process working with RSA to address all findings from the monitoring. She related that ARS’s new case management system should help address some of the issues identified in the CAP. Mr. Lyford indicated that as ARS completes corrective action items identified in the CAP the agency will be developing new policies and procedures to address findings once RSA approval has been received. Discussion followed.

**Agency Updates**

Business Engagement – Rodney Chandler: Mr. Chandler updated the Council on Business Engagement activities. He indicated that the section’s main priority was to develop and strengthen partnerships with businesses and to meet their needs. He updated the Council on the 2022 Disability:IN Conference held July 18-21 in Dallas, Texas with over 4,000 individuals in attendance. He reported that a business summit is scheduled to held in Little Rock on October 18th at the Marriott Hotel. He stated that a current effort of the Business Engagement section is focused on strengthening partnerships with one of their corporate partners, Amazon. Some Council members expressed concerns about the production work nature of some of the positions at Amazon and how that might affect the success of ARS clients. Both Mr. Chandler and Chief of Field Services, Carl Daughtery talked about the responsiveness that they have felt from Amazon management regarding those types of concerns and a willingness by Amazon to adapt their work processes to accommodate ARS clients. They related that Nathan Winter was available as part of those interactions to offer the assistance of the Access and Accommodations section. Much discussion followed.

Field Services – Carl Daughtery, Chief of Field Services: Mr. Daughtery provided the Council an update regarding happenings within Field Services. He reported that for Program Year 2021 the Field closing 1,049 clients as successfully employed. He indicated 720 clients were currently employed and 330 clients were ready for employment. He stated the Field was currently serving 10,105 clients with the average Counselor caseload size being 108. Mr. Daughtery reported that Field staff is working diligently to assist with the new case management system including checking all forms and monitoring data migration. He informed the Council of the potential co-location with Workforce Services of the Helena and El Dorado Field offices. He also provided information regarding the Spring into Services events and other upcoming meetings. Mr. Daughtery concluded his presentation by indicating the top priorities for Field Services are the RSA monitoring response, the Informed Case Management System, addressing WIOA performance measures, strategic planning as it relates to goals and priorities, and VR-TAC Training. Much discussion followed.

Access & Accommodations (A&A) – Nathan Winter:Mr. Winter provided Council members an overview of the functions of the various programs within Access and Accommodations. He shared information regarding the numbers of clients seen by the AT@Work, SAW/RTW, RIDAC and LEC programs. He also provided the Council an update regarding the Community Service Programs. He provided information regarding the number of clients served by the ICAN and TAP programs and the amount of savings provided to Arkansans because of services provided by ICAN. He updated the Council regarding the AFP and the work being performed by its committee. He reported the Governor’s Commission on People with Disabilities is prepared to provide 10 $1,000 scholarship awards this year to individuals with disabilities across the state. He related the monies to fund the scholarships came from fines from illegal parking in accessible parking places. Mr. Winter also informed the Council of the Governor’s Commission distributing posters to Arkansas Revenue Offices across the State regarding accessible parking fine legislation and regulations. He thanked ARS Director of Communications, Chip McAfee for his help on the initiative.

Arkansas Career Development Center (ACDC) – Deputy Commissioner Christy Lamas:Ms. Lamas updated the Council on the happenings around ACDC. She reported an Open House was scheduled for October 18th to help introduce the local Community to the new services and programs available at ACDC. She informed the Council that the Welding Shop has been completed. She indicated all the programs at ACDC have a focus on training, certification, and employment. She reported that new classes are scheduled to begin on October 24th.

**Comments from DWS Director, Dr. Charisse Childers:** Dr. Childers addressed the Council communicating her appreciation of the work and support Council members provide. She also expressed her appreciation of the hard work of ARS staff on its various initiatives and her looking forward to a very productive upcoming federal fiscal year.

**Announcements**

Chairman Jonathan Taylor informed the Council that the next scheduled SRC meeting would be Thursday, December 15, 2022.

**Adjournment**

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