

**VRS COMMUNITY REHABILITATION PROGRAM ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

FRIDAY, APRIL 24, 2015 – 9:00 AM – 3:00 PM

VRS WOODBURY OFFICE / HUDSON CONFERENCE ROOM

**SESSION NOTES:**

**Committee Objective**

The purpose of the VRS Community Rehabilitation Program Advisory Committee is to provide strategic advice and consultation to DEED/VRS on topics and issues affecting the mutual provision of DEED/VRS and CRP/LUV services to Minnesotans with disabilities. Our efforts to understand issues and to work collaboratively will build and nurture the capacity of Minnesota's rehabilitation community to advance the employment, independent living and community integration of Minnesotans with disabilities.

Specifically, the VRS Community Rehabilitation Program Advisory Committee will:

- Represent the perspectives and interests of CRP/LUVs in advancing rehabilitation and employment issues while fostering dialogue and engagement on critical issues throughout the greater rehabilitation community
- Promote innovative service practices to accelerate the adoption of best practices at a systems level that fosters equitable access to quality services on a statewide basis
- Provide strategic level advice and consultation to DEED/VRS on matters affecting CRP/LUVs
- Identify key topics and issues affecting CRP/LUVs and DEED/VRS
- Consider input from subject matter experts in issues affecting economic development, state demographics / population trends, and promising practices
- Engage in active reflection, spirited discussion and strategic dialogue on critical topics affecting CRP/LUVs and DEED/VRS services to persons with disabilities in Minnesota
- Provide a forum for the review and discussion of critical VRS and CRP service delivery topics including, but not limited to: current service delivery practices; new and emerging service needs; identifying best practices; and the consideration of statewide service needs and resources

**2015 Community Partner Members** (*listed alphabetically*): Heather Deuschlaender, Wendy DeVore, Kelly Dilger, Jeremy Gurney, Josh Howie, Amanda Jensen-Stahl, Dan Meyers, Nick Monson, Julie Peterschick, Robert Reedy and Lynn Vincent

**VRS Members:** Jay Hancock and Lori Thorpe

**Sponsor:** Kim Peck, VRS Director

**Co-leaders:** Chris McVey and Jan Thompson

**Facilitator:** Holly Johnson

**2015 Schedule:** Feb 27, Mar 27, Apr 24, May 29, Sep 25, Oct 23, and Dec 4.

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**April 24, 2015 Session Objectives:**

- \* Provide a 'reality check' on the growing change forces impacting Vocational Rehabilitation Services including the Minnesota Olmstead Plan and the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) policy and draft regulations.
- \* Discussion on the challenges facing VRS related to increasing service demands and resource constraints available to address the increasing requirements and opportunities.
- \* Gather advisory input and ideas on the best approach for messaging on changes, challenges and current status of the employment services world to the greater vocational rehabilitation community and key stakeholders who can help.
- \* Provide a conduit for sharing relevant, important and timely updates and information for the benefit of vocational rehabilitation community and consumers

**April 24 2015 Attendees** (*listed alphabetically*): Heather Deuschlaender, Wendy DeVore, Kelly Dilger, Jay Hancock, Josh Howie, Amanda Jensen-Stahl, Dan Meyers, Chris McVey, Kim Peck, Julie Peterschick, Robert Reedy, Holly Sunderman, Jan Thompson, Lori Thorpe and Lynn Vincent

**Not in attendance:** Jeremy Gurney

**Facilitator:** Holly Johnson

**Agenda Topics:**

1. Welcome / Overview
2. Understanding the Brutal Reality\*: Identifying the Pressure Points
  - o System demands and increased requirements within the reality of constrained VRS resources: Where things are today and where they appear to be headed
3. Advisory Dialogue: Messaging and Communication during the Transformation of Employment Services
4. Consumer Success Story *April Storyteller - Jan Thompson*
5. Growing Pains: The Challenges with the IPS Pilot Success
6. Advisory Update: Initial VRS Preview of draft WIOA Regulations
7. Vocational Rehabilitation Community Topics
8. Wrap Up/Adjourn @ 3pm

\*"Brutal Reality" is a reference to The Stockdale Paradox which is profiled in the book ["Good to Great" by Jim Collins](#). The full story is found on pages 83–87.

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**Meeting Highlights:**

- DEED VRS Director Kim Peck provided the Advisory Committee with an overview of the current and forecast situation facing VRS and impacting Employment Services and the greater Vocational Rehabilitation community in Minnesota. She reviewed key components of what is known and still yet unknown about significant change forces including the Minnesota Olmstead Plan and the draft WIOA regulations.
- The committee provided input to VRS on how to communicate the current system challenges to other key stakeholders and recommended leveraging the proposed fall regional community partnership meetings as a forum for discussion and working sessions on the topics.
- The committee discussed the challenges with the tremendous success of the IPS projects and the urgent need for a sustainable funding model that includes other sources beyond VRS.

**Next Steps:**

- **DOCUMENT SESSION NOTES:** The facilitator will document the session notes for VRS Co-leadership review and approval for distribution to key audiences including the CRP Advisory Committee, VRS, and CRP/LUV partners.
- **FOLLOWUP INFORMATION FOR COMMITTEE USE AND SHARING:** The facilitator will email the following documents and/or links for information shared during the meeting to the committee members for broader sharing among the vocational rehabilitation community:
  - Document entitled '*Proposed Regulatory Changes for WIOA Implementation*' by VRS Director of Public Affairs John Fisher
  - Presentation entitled '*Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), signed into law on July 22, 2014, Overview: Notice of Proposed Rulemaking*' by Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, Rehabilitation Services Administration
- **NEXT MEETING:** Friday, May 29<sup>th</sup>

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**Welcome and Opening**

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The committee opened with a welcome by co-leads Chris McVey and Jan Thompson. Chris introduced Holly Sunderman of Functional Industries who will be filling the vacancy left by Nick Monson who took another job.

Facilitator Holly Johnson asked advisory committee members to provide any edits for the March 27th session notes by end of the month to finalize for posting.

**Understanding the Brutal Reality\*: Identifying the Pressure Points**

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\*"Brutal Reality" is a reference to The Stockdale Paradox which is profiled in the book ["Good to Great" by Jim Collins](#). The full story is found on pages 83–87 of the book.

VRS State Director Kim Peck introduced the morning topic focused on the increased requirements creating pressure on VRS and the entire system. She spoke about the demands and requirements in the context of constrained VRS resources and funding forecasts.

During the course of the morning, she spoke of the current situation as well as the potential future scenarios given the current realities and forecasts. Kim shared with the advisory that her intentions are to provide an honest and transparent understanding of the challenges VRS is facing so that the CRP/LUV community is aware of the pressures and potential implications for VRS services as well as impacts for employment services system wide.

Kim noted that at various times in history, the VR community has experienced other major times of change and challenge and that she is confident that no matter what happens VRS is committed to rising to the challenges with leadership and support for the shared mission of serving Minnesotans with the most significant disabilities in their efforts for competitive employment, self sufficiency and community integration. She also noted that unlike some other periods in history, the greater VR community is operating with a higher level of trust and collaboration among many of the partners and across much of the state. She stated her belief that as the state designated steward of the federal VR funding, VRS prefers to engage and partner with the system as much as possible to make the most of the dollars entrusted to the state.

There are currently 264 people on the waiting list for services and all categories but category one are currently closed. At the current rate, she estimates that VRS can support another 4,000 plans before current resource levels are exhausted. By law, once an individual is in a plan, VRS must continue to support that individual with services until the plan is closed.

DEED / VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SERVICES

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Kim said that VRS is doing all they can to keep Category One open for as long as possible. Minnesota VRS is fully using the state match dollars and no additional state dollars are forthcoming. While VRS will apply for federal re-allotment dollars if they become available there are no guarantees that Minnesota will be awarded additional dollars.

Given all the fiscal pressures and expanded program requirements/expectations, Kim said that based on their projections, without additional resources, VRS may be forced to close the remaining open category one sometime within the next 12 months. She stated clearly that this was not a certainty but merely a cautious warning based on the service demands to resource burn rate. She assured the advisory that she and her leadership team were monitoring the case services very closely and would continue to make every effort to keep category one open, to inform the advisory of status, and to continue efforts to secure additional resources for system capacity. She shared that her purpose in sharing the information was to keep the advisory informed so they could take it into account in their own organization's planning without being caught by surprise.

Another pressure point on VRS relates to the new WIOA transition youth requirements for pre-employment services. VRS is now required to dedicate 15% of their federal appropriation to support these services. Based on current service delivery strategies, VRS is approximately \$1M short of meeting the new required level. The draft regulation's use of 'potentially eligible' language is broad and potentially opens up the spectrum of transition youth who could be expected to receive services from VRS. While the legislative intent is to open up VR to work with earlier ages and more schools, with no additional resources connected with the new requirements, VRS must redirect existing resources to fund these pre-employment transition youth services whether that's paid working experience while still in school or learning about career exploration in a classroom setting or other services.

Another new WIOA draft requirement involves establishing VRS in a "gatekeeper role" for youth with disabilities who are considering work in a subminimum job and adults who are already working in a subminimum job. The draft regulations say VRS must ensure that information is provided to the consumer for 'informed choice'. With adults, this requirement will necessitate creating a VRS infrastructure to conduct conversations/check-in on an annual basis to demonstrate that individuals are making informed choices before choosing to stay in the subminimum wage job. Given the volume of draft regulations (over 2,600 pages) VRS is still in the process of determining what the resource demands will be to fulfill the new regulations.

So far, the new requirements are layered on top of existing services putting additional pressure on the same level of finite funding. Kim reminded the advisory that VR is not an entitlement program but rather, they must work within a set budget regardless of the services demand and costs. VR funding has remained largely constant over the past several years despite the fact that VRS has seen an increase in costs during that same period.

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Kim noted that they are also seeing a significant uptick in referrals to the public VR program that they are calling 'Olmstead' referrals; these are referrals that VR would not have likely seen had the system not been impacted. So far, 82 of these Olmstead referrals have been tracked by staff and it may continue to increase as counties and other entities scramble to find service options for consumers. Once again we see finite resources with more things drawing on those resources. With the increased requirements including pre-employment transition youth services, VRS as 'gatekeeper' and the Olmstead Plan, without any increase in resources, VRS may be forced to close all four service categories at some point in the future.

Currently, VRS must set aside resources to determine eligibility for services and if so what category. VRS is required to have resources to see the existing plans to completion. Staff and partners continue to do good work with outcomes however when it comes to referrals, they may be slowing down. Kim reiterated that VRS is not trying to be "hysterical" and there is no "date" however based on projections and barring something unforeseen, VRS estimates adequate fiscal resources to sustain the program through this fiscal year (end of September).

Last year VRS was able to draw down an additional \$4.8M in re-allotment funds for additional funding capacity. Kim said she is unsure what/if VRS will be able to draw down funds again this year. It is tough to predict based on monies left unused by other states and the re-allotment requests/actions of other states across the country. Regardless of re-allotment dollars, there is finite capacity and there is a point where we'll hit the wall.

In a nutshell, VRS is facing a sobering, stark reality. It's a place we've been before and we believe that having open communication is vital to the entire VR community of CRPs/LUVs. VRS Field Director Jan Thompson and her team are meeting and running projections to track where things are at however we have no way of precise estimation due to all the variables and challenges with reporting systems. VRS is working hard to manage operational costs understanding that the two biggest buckets by far are case services and staff. We are paying close attention and watching the overall capacity very carefully.

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**Messaging and Communication during the Transformation of Employment Services**

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After the discussion on the pressure points and resource constraints, Kim asked the advisory committee for input and suggestions on how best to communicate the difficulty of the current reality and forecast information with the greater VR community. She asked the advisory members what information they needed for their respective agencies in anticipation of the changes being legislated by WIOA and the Minnesota Olmstead Plan. She said that even though the current reality is relatively 'brutal', she remains confident that it will be a temporary situation and not a permanent state. As individuals with plans secure outcomes, monies will be freed up to take people off the waiting list.

Kim noted that part of the challenge at the federal level is the public VR program hasn't been in good position to make the case for higher funding to Congress given that federally allotted monies in some states are being sent back and what doesn't get used reverts to the federal treasury. During the economic downturn over \$100M was returned with over \$60M of that total reverted to the federal treasury when states were unable to draw enough dollars down through re-allotment. This leads to a false impression by some that the funds are not needed rather than the reality that some states are not able and/or willing to fund VR with state dollars which is required to secure federal dollars.

It has been over 10 years since VRS was completely locked down with all service categories closed (~Jan-Aug 2004). Jan Thompson noted that some of the advisory members including Lynn Vincent and Robert Reedy were in VR the last time all categories were closed in 2004. Robert said that in 2004 the awareness of what was happening with VR was very abrupt giving CRPs very little notice. He expressed appreciation to Kim and her team that despite difficult conversations like the morning's conversation on pressure points and resource constraints, it is much better to know for planning purposes. It is helpful to understand that counselors will have less resources available. Robert Reedy, Lynn Vincent and Dan Meyers all noted that they would think twice about expanding or filling open staff positions.

Robert said he greatly appreciated hearing where things are at and the way VRS has provided transparency as the changes have continued to emerge. Lynn agreed that while it 'hurts to hear all this', it does help to know. Kim reiterated her commitment to be transparent about the practical realities of finite resources even as she acknowledged that there can be risks with being transparent. Kim stated that through bodies like the VRS CRP Advisory Committee and others, VRS is committed to working in community to combine heart, minds and hands to address the challenges.

Heath Deutschlaender asked about the possibility of using the regional partners meetings to help get the word out to the greater VR community. Chris McVey agreed that would be a good forum and that staff are looking at schedules to see what dates can be worked out. Jan noted that in the meantime, we must continue to meet our

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consumers' needs per the legislative requirement even as it poses the conundrum of how to integrate the new obligations from WIOA and Olmstead.

Wendy DeVore inquired whether consumers in plans will still continue to have resources per required which Kim confirmed. Josh Howie asked if everything closes down and we're serving the folks that we're serving, how would things 'open back up'? Robert Reedy shared that his experience after the 2004 shutdown was that of a slow trickle back to CRPs.

Kim reminded the advisory that last September VRS was able to use federal re-allotment dollars to clear out those on the category 2 and 3 waiting lists. In the past, 60% of those on waiting lists contacted respond when called back. We don't have a good way to know what has happened to the other 40% who do not respond to the callbacks which is why we want to engage people rapidly to increase positive outcomes.

Heather said she thinks it is important that VRS is in earnest conversations with DHS to address the counties and waiver program connections with employment services funding. Kim said that collaboration with other agencies especially those such as DHS and MDE (Minnesota Department of Education) is clearly embedded in WIOA and that there are also expectations around the development of a Memo of Understanding (MOU) to create greater flexibility to use the monies in the system differently. Any proposed changes in the DHS waiver programs will require federal approval.

### **VR Consumer Success Story**

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Jan Thompson, VRS Director of Field Services provided a consumer story about Jake, a 16 year old transition student who, after an accident resulting in quadriplegia, was referred to VRS. Following his initial adjustment to disability services at Courage Center and assistance from an educational tutor, he graduated from High School on time with his classmates. Subsequently, with the assistance of VRS services of counseling and guidance, assistive technology, tuition, books and supplies, he completed his undergraduate college studies at Southwest State University in Marshall, Minnesota. Consistent with his strong academic abilities and interest in becoming an attorney, Jake has been attending Vermont Law School with a major in environmental law. He is scheduled to complete his studies this spring, and has already made contact with one of the VRS Placement Specialists regarding receiving job placement assistance after he passes the bar exam.

An especially fun and personal part of Jake's story is that during his senior year at Southwest State University he was voted Homecoming King... for which he gives credit to his service-dog, Miles! ☺

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**Growing Pains: The Challenges with the IPS Pilot Success**

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Chris McVey, VRS Director of Strategic Initiatives and Partnerships guided the advisory through a conversation on the IPS program (formerly known as EE-SMI). IPS stands for Individual Placement and Support and is an evidence based practice. Chris distributed copies of a report to the Legislature as required by Minnesota Statute 268A.15 which was developed by John Fisher and Claire Courtney.

Chris talked about IPS's model of a three legged stool: VR Counseling and Guidance, Community Employment Services and Mental Health Services. VRS in Minnesota started its IPS program in ~2006 and has a very active IPS model compared to other states. Starting with four projects and then adding two more in the early stages. As of 2013, VRS is supporting 23 projects through former EE-SMI funds and a few grants. In addition, GoodWill has found other sources of funding to support IPS as another way to further expand IPS services in Minnesota. VRS counselors are part of the direct service team which is also not part of the national norm however VRS counselor involvement has been a big part of the higher than average outcomes Minnesota has experienced with IPS.

IPS fits well with the Motivational Interviewing engagement model. Both models are focused on meeting people where they're at and with rapid engagement, employer contact begins rapidly. Within 30 days jobseekers are doing job search activities. Benefits planning is offered to all participants and job supports are continuous. Also key to IPS, a placement coordinator stays with the jobseeker even after they have been employed on a job as needed.

Per the report to the legislature document page 5, Chris reviewed that IPS funding in SFY13 totaled \$755,000 through VR Title 110 grants and SMI grants. In SFY14 funding totals amounted to \$1,700,000 - more than doubled the funding. Funding totals reported do not reflect the investment of VRS staff time nor does it include the PBA investments.

In SFY 14, IPS served 639 number of individuals in integrated competitive employment. She pointed the advisory to page 7 for a visual summary of the penetration of IPS coverage across Minnesota counties. Robert Reedy noted that about 6,000 of the 8,000 people served in Hennepin county are SMI and that they typically experience 50% of that population who want to work. Robert said they currently have about 30 individuals in a caseload at any point in time however they are moving out of IPS into other supports so they can bring in more people and address the increased demand.

Chris noted that the 17 additional projects were added through one time dollar grants. Unfortunately, as of June 30<sup>th</sup> if VRS does not get the appropriation, we'll have to go back to the original six projects. It has been a real challenge getting funding from the legislature for IPS in order to continue to support the expansion grants let alone grow the program to meet all the interest and demand. We would like to be able to develop a

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plan for further expansion of IPS by end of June 2015. We have assembled a working team with folks from DHS, DEED, CRPs, mental health providers and a RAM to develop a plan. The hard truth of the matter is that if we do not get additional dollars, VRS alone cannot sustain IPS.

Many other states have multiple sources of funding and Minnesota needs to expand its support for the model. Amanda Jensen Stahl said that Goodwill Industries uses the PBA for IPS. Chris noted that going through PBA for IPS accelerates the strain on VRS resources and contributes to the pressures that could ultimately result in the closing of category one. While VRS cannot just say no more using PBAs because of informed choice, it's just a matter of time before we're maxed out.

Kim said while VRS is having the conversations in earnest with other entities who might be able to secure other funding sources, currently VRS is the only team member contributing funds, PBA and staff investment for IPS. In addition to 'writing the checks', VRS has been actively leveraging the counselors in the process. Julie Peterschick asked what other states are doing for funding. Chris McVey responded that other states use Medicaid and that other states have found ways to control more monies e.g. Maryland's centralized mental health system. Currently Minnesota's county approach has generated 53 different county approaches. To date, DHS has not asked mental health providers and counties to fund IPS. Counties and mental health providers are just starting to become aware of the systems and services impacted but it needs to be accelerated. Robert said they are trying to 'educate up' by helping counties understand the ROI on IPS for serving people with mental illness. As a CRP, they are seeing that it cannot just be VRS that's pushing for IPS support.

Robert noted that CRPs appreciate the VRS counselors impact as part of the IPS team. "We see it every day - people's lives are transformed... it's so frustrating to work so hard to get attention on what's obviously working". He noted that in many cases monies in the counties could be much better invested in IPS rather than other outdated/ineffective methods and approaches. Another advisory member shared that Ramsey County staff weren't even aware that they had a IPS pilot. She noted that they have the numbers and the data that shows it works.

Kim asked the advisory to say more about the role of the VRS counselor in the IPS experience. She shared that VRS can no longer sustain the existing approach and the reality is we can't continue to be as involved as we are without additional resources at the table. Kim asked the advisory for ideas on how to limit/influence the program growth until growth in IPS can be done with integrity to minimize watering down the program process and outcomes when referrals exceed resources and people are placed on waiting lists. Robert shared that he believes continuous teaming works and that the level of expertise that the counselor brings helps with the consultation with the other team members. Additionally, he noted that even if he converted a bunch of the county funding they receive, they would still have to look at their offices' capacity to determine if fidelity can be met.

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Julie noted that starting up IPS without access to experts like Claire Courtney would be very tough. Her organization benefited from Claire's assistance in fidelity and training/technical assistance pieces. Amanda agreed that the VRS counselor role was especially important upfront. They were really instrumental with helping mental health professionals get IPS and their language. Chris said part of the VR community's work is to help the mental illness community understand that employment is part of recovery. After a lot of hard work, Functional Industries in central MN has a successful IPS program and the three VRS counselors involved in IPS are now listed as part of Central Minnesota Health staffing list which is a real reflection of the true teaming approach that has taken root and grown there.

Robert shared that in 2004, Rise was selected to be part of a Social Security funded project for three years as part of a 22 site research project nationwide. He said he's worked with and without VR at the table and that it's better with VRS. He said that counties are spending the monies, we need to get it focused on IPS. We've seen the cost of care go down 20% to 60% for IPS participants. County monies will be spent so let's help more people through IPS. Chris noted that if we talk about the full, actual costs, we need to think beyond the grants - it's the staffing time too. Earlier Sue Aberholden of NAMI has asked for information on the costs per person and we need to get a better handle on that full cost benefit to make the ROI pitch effective.

Wendy DeVore noted that any one of the change forces represented by WIOA, Olmstead, and IPS are significant on their own however having them all hit at the same time really drives home the challenges on capacity this entails for VRS and the greater vocational rehabilitation community throughout Minnesota.

VRS RAM Lori Thorpe shared that her staff sometimes feel that mental health providers look at VRS as the barrier for bringing in more people into IPS. They ask us why aren't you hiring more people which further highlights the lack of understanding of VRS constraints. Because VRS is not an entitlement program, we can't just get more monies if the demand increase. Lori said it's also difficult for VRS staff to answer to other providers who want to tap into IPS. She noted that there is nothing stopping CRPs from hiring the people and then looking to VRS to give a PBA. Lori said that many CRPs are getting great jobs for people and that she wishes there were more funds to grow but right now there are not enough resources to support the demand so VRS counselors are maxed out on their capacity serving the existing IPS cases in her offices.

In conclusion, Chris asked the advisory for their suggestions and ideas for addressing the challenges of IPS growth as we continue forward:

- Identify and pursue grants to try to control the demand that we can't manage.
- Enforce IPS standards and fidelity for providers to claim IPS as an offering.
- In the interim until more resources can be secured, for CRPs who go ahead and hire staff and expect VRS to provide counselor services, let them know that VRS cannot offer them IPS and that they will receive traditional services leveraging

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our Next Generation Placement teaming which has improved outcomes in the pilot locations. Let them know that VRS would be ready and willing to expand IPS services quickly if more resources are made available to support IPS.

- Leverage the upcoming SGA project (8 treatment teams; 7 control teams) targeted to start end July 2015. Each team will have a financial specialist to assist with DB101, financial literacy work, and rapid engagement with PP/Financial Education Specialist/ Counselor. Once it commences, the SGA project will last for a 12 month period. VRS is working on the curriculum. ICI, combined with a RSA grant, are hoping to move from 9% to ~20% off SSDI. VRS is funded to support the project for the 12 months period after which time the results will be evaluated. There is a goal of serving 500 people with SSDI and in the control group. Treatment Teams include Crookston, Duluth, Anoka, Burnsville, and Mankato.

**Vocational Rehabilitation Community Topics**

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❖ **CRP updates:**

- Heather Deutschlaender:
  - **ProAct Inc.** has completed their CARF survey and received 0 recommendations for programming - great news!
- Lynn Vincent
  - **Courage Kenny Rehabilitation Institute.** Jennifer Bye is leaving Courage Kenny after 7 years to pursue an evaluator position in private sector. She will be greatly missed.
  - CKRI is consumed with launching the software Excellian which is part of EPIC software system consistent with Allina's electronic health records as part of the integration into the overall organization.
  - The Mooty College Scholarships for \$500 or \$1000 provide financial support for students with disabilities. Deadline of mid-May to apply. Lynn encouraged folks to get the word out to anyone who might benefit and will send out a link to CRPs and RAMs with more information.
- Amanda Jensen-Stahl
  - **Goodwill Easter Seals** nominated a participant from their IPS State of Minnesota for a DHS Brass Tacks/DEED/NAMI partnership award who was selected to be in a video. The honoree works in the Ordway and loves being able to wear a tux. He was showcased along with a few other individuals.
  - Mankato location has finished the first year of paid work skills training in high school through the retail services there.

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- Holly Sunderman:
  - **Functional Industries** has hired a placement provider and is looking to hire another sometime later this summer to increase capacity to meet the demands they are experiencing for services.
- Kelly Dilger:
  - **Options, Inc.** is in the process of completing the HCBS survey to determine if they will become a provider. Survey completion entails gathering of a lot of data including outcomes, supports and percentages of vocational cases. The surveys are due end of May and will be used by DHS to develop measurable criteria for the program as well as to identify areas of needs. DHS has said they are using the survey as a starting point to develop new rules for the HCBS program.
  - We're looking at finding new ways to help with greater placement due to the level of stress on existing resources. Staff are working long hours and weekends to help.
  - Options, Inc. sent an application for the 'Nerdery Challenge' and were thrilled to be selected as one of 14 organizations to receive free website development! Each organization receives a designer/developer through a rapid process "speed dating with the designers" to match designers with nonprofits and create their websites.
- Wendy DeVore:
  - **Career Ventures Inc. (CVI)** a team of four people is going to Jamaica in May to work with DHH/low vision youth and adults. During their time in Jamaica they will work with a school for the deaf and 2 CRPs and provide sign language interpreter training.
  - CVI is also exploring an international PSEO option for Transition Students and looking to develop partnerships with other agencies to develop an international work experience program.
- Robert Reedy:
  - **Rise, Inc.** is rolling out a four agency, year-long effort focused on 'person-centered practices' which is designed to look at what we do at every level to build the person centered approach into our entire organization's mindset and approach. Among those involved in the effort are: Hennepin county, the city of Duluth, and Minnesota Association of Centers for Independent Living (MACIL). Participants will take part in a 2-day training conducted by the University of Minnesota's Institute on Community Integration (ICI).

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- Robert noted that a participant from Rise's IPS project was also recognized for his story and featured in the video Amanda Jensen Stahl referred to in her update. Rise's consumer is a chef at the Science Museum.
- Rise is researching new agency wide software for enterprise management.
- Dan Meyers:
  - **Opportunity Partners** staff are now running the Employment Cooperative collaborative which is based on the success of the Placement Partnerships but focused on DTH waiver placement specialist/job developers. May 12<sup>th</sup> is next meeting. Kim Peck inquired how the population being served with waivers differs from those served by VRS. Dan said that the jobs are typically carved jobs and paid through CADI waivers or DD waivers for DTH. Julie Peterschick noted that they have combined their placement efforts in Productive Alternative's local partnerships. Kim said she would like to envision a system that combines forces for placement of multiple funding sources coming together for Minnesotans with disabilities down the road. Kelly Dilger said that the majority of Options Inc. services are Supported Employment using waiver dollars. Robert Reedy commented that the CRP community would like to see unrestricted dollars so that providers can have greater flexibility in services for consumers.

**Discussion Note:** The advisory committee agrees that waivers are an area we need to understand much better from a system perspective. Per the person-centered philosophy, the advisory believes it would be far better if an individual could select their services without being driven by the available funding source(s). As another process enhancement, the advisory would like to offer consumers simplified consumer information and access for funding. Kim noted that VRS has thus far been unsuccessful in articulating the capacity issues for supporting this type of consumer information and funding migration and transformation work.

- Julie Peterschick:
  - **Productive Alternatives Inc.** has contracted with one of their partnering therapists to provide a two session mental health training course for staff. The sessions, which are open to other IPS partners, are designed to provide tools and new approaches to learning with more human interaction. The second session will be on June 18<sup>th</sup> in Fergus Falls.
  - They are also trying to enhance the organizational work environment to better attract, develop and retain great talent.
  - They have started to take IPS referrals in Morrison County.

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❖ **DEED/VRS updates:**

- Lori Thorpe:
  - **VRS RAM Northern Region** ODC Inc. has closed a site in northern Minnesota so her VRS offices are seeing more DD referrals coming to VRS.
  - They are working with new social workers in Itasca counties.
  - They are looking forward to Next Generation Placement training as part of the statewide launch after the successful pilots.
  
- Jay Hancock:
  - **VRS Regional Manager South/Central Region** VRS is responding to address a number of consumers impacted in New Ulm when a local employer ended their employment contract with MRCl in the area. The employees impacted are going as a cohort to VRS where we'll be working with the group as a test study to help them secure new employment if possible. We see this as a test study because we anticipate that this may be happening more often. Jay is working with local RAM to develop a new practice to address the immediate needs and then evaluate what can be done for future similar situations.
  - Fairmont is expecting 40 workers will be impacted soon due to an employer ending their employment contract. These workers will likely become Olmstead referrals. With all category one consumers, we understand that these individuals with the most significant disabilities are much more challenging to work with. Behaviors in the communities are another factor that must be understood and addressed. Lori added that they are seeing more 'trial work' prior to eligibility.
  - Kim asked the advisory their thoughts on what lessons VRS can learn from the DTH DD program since DTH have a longer history of working with these populations. Kelly Dilger said that there is a need for help with VR goals before doing 'trial work' to try to move forward, provide information and help consumers find jobs more customized to their needs. Kim responded that while VRS does well in those areas of expertise and situations, the funds aren't there to absorb the additional number and intensity of cases that may be requested of VRS due to Olmstead and other federal policies. One of the big barriers is that often when supported employment needs are determined, VR counselors and CRP/LUV partners get stuck at the funding sources issues.
  - Lori stressed that given the dramatic changes and issues, we need to look for new approaches and change the mindsets. Heather noted that PBA doesn't work well with county waiver clients because consumers frequently need a lot of job coaching and PBA does not provide enough to cover all the costs to

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support those consumers. Most DTH consumers require a lot of intensive job coaching up front however often once consumers are successfully established and supported as appropriate in a job, retention is good.

- Wendy said that she believes that WIOA and the Minnesota Olmstead Plan are still needed to more fully integrate people with disabilities into communities. She shared a powerful personal story of her mother being underserved in employment in a rural town. Because her mother was deaf no one would hire her at a competitive wage. Wendy shared how that experience impacted her family dramatically. Her mother was paid 17 cents an hour for the same work being done by nondisabled for competitive wages. It resulted in her family living in poverty despite her mother's skills. She and her siblings had to sell various items to help make ends meet. Over the years, the frustrations of the situation also took a heavy toll on her mother's emotional well being. That experience was a major factor in Wendy's choice of vocational rehabilitation for her own vocation in life. Wendy said we must continue to always focus on how we can better serve people and to understand that the services we provide impact real people's lives.
- Kim sincerely thanked Wendy for sharing her story and said she wished people at our state legislature and with various parent/support groups would have an opportunity to hear stories about experiences like hers.

**Chris McVey, VRS Director of Strategic Initiatives and Partnerships**

- **Next Generation Placement is going statewide!** With our 18 month pilot complete, we are excited to report that we have experienced an average 18.2% increase in outcomes where the Next Generation Placement process was tested. With pilot results in and successful, VRS will be expanding the process statewide over the coming months. Key aspects of the redesigned placement process are a true focus on teaming, collection and sharing of key jobseeker information in advance of the first team meeting, and communication throughout the entire process utilizing a 60 day check-in meeting for all three members of the core team to review who's doing what and how it's all working. VRS will be training everyone on a statewide basis through a series of meetings around the state.
- Robert suggested that when VRS does the rollout, that CRPs who have been part of the pilots, be involved in the training effort e.g. breakout sessions, mentors, training rollout.
- Dates scheduled for Next Generation Placement statewide rollouts so far:
  - June 3 Cambridge
  - June 9 South Metro Partnerships (City of Burnsville)
  - June 10 North Metro Partnership (Anoka)

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- June 11 Brainerd (Northland Arboretum)
- June 16 South Central Partnerships (Mankato WFC)
- June 17 Rochester Community Technical College
- June 23 Monticello St Cloud Partnership (Monticello WFC)
- June 24 Southwest Partnership (Redwood Falls Library)
- June 30 Duluth Partnership (Duluth WFC)

**Jan Thompson, VRS Field Director:**

- Statewide Caseload Data from *10/01/2014 to 04/24/2015*:
  - Open caseload: We are currently working with 12,492 persons with disabilities. 1,782 people have had plans this year so far. 2,933 in training. There are 264 people are on the waiting list due to funding constraints and closed service categories.
  - Olmstead referrals: Except for the spike in the Mankato area, Olmstead referrals have been trickling in. If a referred person might otherwise have gone to a segregated DTH setting, and now the person is being referred to VRS for competitive employment in an integrated setting, VRS is tracking that person as an Olmstead referral. Similarly, if a person who previously would not have been seen as capable of working in a competitive setting, but now is being referred to VR by county social worker because increased information about the MN Olmstead plan, that person is also being considered as an Olmstead referral. VRS Regional Managers are double-checking the numbers tracked in each office to evaluate Olmstead referrals on a manual basis since it is not part of the WF1 system. Field leaders are looking at this weekly.
  - Transition services: 2,232 or 37% of open cases. VRS is looking for more ways to assist in implementing the WIOA requirements through opportunities like paid, integrated work experiences. Additionally, research shows that if youth have paid work experience during school, they experience better outcomes in post secondary and improved parental satisfaction!
  - Employment Outcomes: Last year this time we had 1,833 outcomes. This year we are excited about being at 1,878 outcomes at the same point in the year. Average hourly wage is \$11.39/hr.
  - Great progress towards meeting our goals. These are achievements we can all celebrate thanks to the tremendous vocational rehabilitation community partnership efforts!

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**Important Messages for the Greater Vocational Rehabilitation Community:**

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- As major forces for change on our system such as the Minnesota Olmstead Plan, The Minnesota Employment First Policy, the Extended Employment Rule revision and the new federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) simultaneously are impacting providers, families and individuals with disabilities in Minnesota, VRS remains committed to open, transparent and productive strategic conversations on the important issues that impact our work as a vocational rehabilitation community.
- We also recognize that these changes are impacting not only the work of VRS and CRPs/LUVs but also key system partners including counties, schools and other state agencies such as the Department of Human Services and the Department of Education.
- VRS in its role as convener of Minnesota's vocational rehabilitation community is committed to sharing what we know as we continue to learn more and working with our system partners to figure out how we can make the transformations necessary to meet the combined requirements of key legislation affecting the employment services work we all do on behalf of Minnesotans with disabilities.
- We know that many people and organizations are understandably nervous and/or fearful about what the changes might mean for them. However we also believe that these forces for change have great potential to help bring about positive movement in the behaviors and beliefs people have about the immense human potential that the ADA envisioned back when it was enacted in 1990.
- Through our work together and as individuals committed to Minnesota's vocational rehabilitation community, the VRS CRP Advisory Committee seeks to help reduce the fear and misinformation generated as part of the transition being spurred by the numerous, concurrent policy and regulatory requirements impacting our communities.
- We renew our belief in the benefits of engaging in an ongoing process of open, thoughtful conversations to work through all the legislation and to help build a path to the future where people with disabilities have access to competitive employment in the most integrated settings possible in alignment with their own interests, abilities and choices.