



## **OOD Remote Services Review: Customer Response March 2020 to September 2020**

### **Background**

In March 2020, Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities (OOD) transitioned to serving participants remotely as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Essentially, the landscape of counseling and case management activities shifted from the historical “in-person” model of conducting business with OOD participants to a virtual platform for both initiation and delivery of services.

At the same time, many of OOD’s vocational rehabilitation providers also initiated the use of technology to deliver services to OOD participants. While not all services easily translated to a remote model, providers found that many services such as job development, pre-employment transition services and job coaching could be successfully conducted in a virtual setting.

Since transitioning to remote services, OOD recognized the need to do an assessment of this service delivery model to verify that OOD participants were being successfully served. To accomplish this, during August 2020, OOD initiated a more systematic review of remote service delivery to assess customer and stakeholder response to the use of remote service delivery.

This review consisted of the following stakeholder/outreach efforts:

- Telephone/remote outreach to participants statewide to gather their feedback regarding remote services. OOD talked to 150 participants from a variety of caseloads and targeted participants in each region of the state as part of this outreach. Survey questions focused on participant satisfaction of service from OOD staff, service from OOD providers and use of remote service delivery. Participants were also given the opportunity to offer any additional comments or recommendations.
- An OOD provider survey sent to vocational rehabilitation service providers to solicit their feedback regarding remote services. All OOD vocational rehabilitation service providers were invited to participate in this survey through OOD’s public email messaging system. A total of 105 responses from provider organizations across the state were received. Questions in this survey focused on both participant engagement with remote services and provider assessment of delivering services remotely.
- A remote services “think tank” conducted by OOD’s Provider and Contract Management Unit (PCMU) consisting of a statewide cross section of OOD staff (Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors, Account Examiner 2s, Vocational Rehabilitation Supervisors and Area Managers) to solicit feedback regarding the delivery of vocational rehabilitation services.

### **Results**

Review of the results across all three initiatives show a general positive response to remote services.

#### **Participant Response**

Overall, seventy-seven percent (77%) of participant responses indicated that they were “satisfied” or “very satisfied” working with their counselor by phone, computer or tablet. Participants indicated a quick response from counselors, quick access to the counselor and continuity of services as items that were going well with remote



services. Participants also indicated general satisfaction with service from providers in terms of communication, support given and job coaching.

Notable quotes from participants are as follows:

- “Very satisfied, 10 out of 10. I like working remotely better. I don’t have to set formal appointments and I don’t have to drive to the office for in-person appointments. I like to talk with my counselor when I am thinking about something instead of trying to remember to talk about it during a set appointment time.”
- “I would just suggest that fully remote services be offered more often and not only in a pandemic situation. It is so much easier for those of us with physical health issues to not have to arrange/attend in-person services. Or, at least give the option for individuals to choose which type of services (remote vs. in-person) best meets their needs based on their specific situation.”
- “I believe this way is pushing our generation to take work more seriously, and pushes you to excel in other ways”
- “It is going great! I still am able to get a job without worrying about going into an office and getting sick.”
- “Very Satisfied. I’m getting a chance to talk with OOD by conference calls and other types of meetings. I’m getting bus passes. Everything continues to move forward like I thought it would before OOD started remote services. Even though we haven’t met in the office, the team hasn’t missed a beat.”

### Provider Response

The OOD Provider survey yielded results similar to the participant survey. Ninety percent (90%) of providers rated participant outcomes from remote services as acceptable or better, with sixty-six percent (66%) rating outcomes as good to excellent. Eighty-nine percent (89%) of provider responses rated participant engagement as acceptable or better, with fifty percent (50%) of respondents indicating participant engagement was good to excellent. Benefits of remote services reported by providers included decreased travel for participants and staff and decreased “no-show” appointments.

### Staff Response

The remote services think tank also reported benefits from remote service delivery similar to the items noted by participants and providers. For example, staff reported that participants do not have to worry about transportation/travel and can engage in services directly from home when working with OOD remotely. From an overall customer service perspective, vocational rehabilitation counselors reported that remote service delivery resulted in time savings from reduced travel which allowed more time to directly engage with participants.

### Opportunities

Overall, OOD’s review of remote services indicates a positive customer experience when engaging in these services. However, the review also highlighted some areas of opportunity for OOD to further enhance this type of service delivery. These include:

- Across all three stakeholder groups, access to technology was identified as a barrier for some participants.
- Participants with more intensive needs may require an additional level of support to participate in remote services and at times, the in-person service option may be the best alternative for these individuals.
- In terms of the provider community, the review indicated that some providers may benefit from training/information sharing about delivering remote services.



### Next steps

Based on the results of OOD's review of remote service delivery, it is clear that remote services can be a valuable and useful tool in delivering vocational rehabilitation and case management services to participants. To further improve service in this area, OOD should consider the following next steps:

#### **In process as of 10/2020:**

- **Purchase of technology for participants:** OOD began this process in relationship to its Summer Youth Foundations Program and has recently expanded technology purchases for participants who require it to effectively participate in services. OOD's Supported Employment & Transition Unit (SETU) will continue to monitor the purchasing of technology within VR.
- **Inclusion of questions regarding remote services in the general customer service surveys:** OOD's Monitoring and Compliance Unit has drafted questions regarding remote services to be included in surveys effective October 1, 2020. These questions should be included on all future general customer service surveys. OOD's Monitoring and Compliance Unit (MCU) will continue to distribute and analyze these surveys.

#### **By February 2021:**

- **Exploration of mechanisms for providing technology training for participants:** This would benefit participants already familiar with technology by expanding their knowledge of various virtual platforms (Microsoft Teams, Zoom, etc.). For participants unfamiliar with technology, this would provide them with baseline setup of technology, basic use guidance and introduction and practice with various virtual platforms. OOD's Policy and Training Unit (PTU) in coordination with the Provider and Contract Management Unit (PCMU) will explore opportunities related to these trainings.
- **Review of in-person model of service delivery:** Across all three reviews, there was indication that there are some participants for whom remote services may not be a viable option. While in-person delivery of services is currently hampered by the COVID-19 pandemic, OOD should still begin to review in-person models to set internal guidance of when counseling and case management activities should be delivered remotely vs. in-person. Ultimately, OOD should be using the service model (in-person, remote or hybrid) that best meets the participant's needs and choice. Additionally, OOD should begin to consider potential barriers, other than technology, that may limit an individual's ability to successfully participate in remote services. This will help OOD identify supports and tools that could assist those participants who wish to participate in services remotely but may have more intensive and complex needs. Field management staff will be assigned to initiate and complete this review.

#### **By May 2021:**

- **Drafting of clear and definitive remote service definitions for applicable fee schedule services.** Overall, vocational rehabilitation providers smoothly transitioned to providing remote services at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, as OOD considers providing remote services as part of the normal course of business, standard service definitions will support consistency and quality of services on a statewide basis. As part of this, OOD should consider provider training on remote services to assure a robust and qualified statewide provider pool in this area. The Provider and Contract Management Unit will lead this project.
- **Review of employment outcomes for participants who engage in remote services:** Since the initiation of remote services (March 2020), OOD has placed more than 2,300 participants into employment. OOD should review retention and wage data regarding outcomes achieved and consider conducting outreach to a sampling of these participants in three to six months to assess satisfaction with long-term employment outcomes when connected to remote services. Field management staff will work in conjunction with OOD's Data and Reporting Unit (DAR) to complete this review.