**Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities Council Meeting**

**Minutes**

**April 21, 2021**

OOD Council Members In Attendance: Dr. Carolyn Peters, Chair, Tanya George-Olds, Jane Gerhardt, Jo Hannah Ward, Carlo LoParo, Alison McKay, Kevin Miller, Lisa Hickman, John Moore, Peter Moore, jw Smith, and Margie Hegg

OOD Staff In Attendance: Susan Pugh, Erik Williamson, Greg Dormer, Kristen Ballinger, Matt Lampke, Kim Jump, Shirley Marchi, Lindsay Blusiewicz, Eric Muller, and Fern Miele

Interpreters: Greer Davidson, Caroline Browning, and Marlena Smith

Welcome and Introductions

Dr. Carolyn Peters welcomed everyone to the meeting. Everyone introduced themselves.

Approval of January 20, 2021 Meeting Minutes

Council member Moore motioned to approve the minutes, seconded by Council member Gerhardt. Motion carried.

Written Public Comments

There were no written comments.

OOD Council VR Policy Subcommittee Report

Co-chairs Alison McKay and Lisa Hickman reported the VR Policy Subcommittee meeting was held via Microsoft Teams Live on February 10, 2021. A written public comment was received from Emily Turner, Executive Director, Ohio Association of Goodwill Industries and Geoff Collver, Associate Director, The Ohio Council of Behavioral Health Providers, regarding four OOD Administrative Rules: 3304-2-54, Eligibility determination; 3304-2-56, The individualized plan for employment; 3304-2-58, Training; and 3304-2-59, Scope of services. Council member Lisa Hickman read the public comments.

BVR Deputy Director Susan Pugh stated she met with Ms. Turner to simplify and reorganize the rules. OOD is putting information back into the rules to make it easier for the public to read the rules.

*Approval of February 10, 2021 VR Policy Subcommittee Meeting Minutes*

Council member Moore motioned to approve the minutes, seconded by Council member LoParo. Motion carried.

OOD Status Update

OOD Director Kevin Miller reported he presented at the National Governors Association and the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation about best practices Ohio put in place since the pandemic. In addition, he stated OOD is still trying to figure out what does work look like. The Division of Disability Determination staff continue to process claims. Lastly, he reported the Lt. Governor’s media release included OOD’s Employer Toolkit announcement.

Vocational Rehabilitation Program Update

*Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation:* Susan Pugh, Deputy Director, Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation reported due to COVID-19, new applications and plans are down significantly. However, March saw the highest numbers since the start of the federal fiscal year. New placements and closures with employment are currently exceeding FFY 2019 (pre-pandemic) levels. In addition, average wage and hours worked have increased. Ms. Pugh stated outreach continues to be a top priority. OOD has received 1600 new applications in March. Staff continue to do an excellent job moving people through the VR process. Preparations for summer work experiences for students with disabilities are underway. Providers have been working with employers to identify available sites.

In addition, Ms. Pugh reported on the following items:

*Informed Choice Recommendations Report:* OOD has completed several activities to

gather feedback about the current informed choice process with the goal to enhance current practices. The majority of responses indicated that when working with their counselor, they were given information to help them choose a service provider; participants were satisfied with the support, contact, and guidance from their counselor when making decisions about their services. For the full list of themes, please see materials sent to Council members.

Selection *of a Provider Informational Sheet*: Ms. Pugh shared the Provider Information Sheet provides information on how to search for providers, narrow down options by gathering more information, and how to choose your best match and tell the counselor.

*Current Policies Under Review:* Ms. Pugh stated Application and Intake, and Eligibility and Order of Selection policies are under review.

*Administrative Rules Update: Ms. Pugh stated effective April 19, 2021 are* 3304-2-54, Eligibility determination; 3304-2-56, The individualized plan for employment; 3304-2-58, Training; and 3304-2-59, Scope of services. OOD is revising 3304-1-15, Employee access to confidential information; 3304-2-63, Confidentiality of Information; and 3304-5-01, Independent living services for older individuals who are blind. OOD is rescinding 3304-1-03, Open meetings; and 3304-2-55, Vocational rehabilitation counseling and guidance, referral.

*Customer Satisfaction Survey Report:* Ms. Pugh reviewed the report and stated during the second quarter of Federal Fiscal Year 2021 there were 4,542 closure letters generated that included a link to the customer satisfaction survey. Those cases with email addresses (2,927) also received an automated email message with the toll-free number and survey link encouraging participants to share their experiences with receiving Vocational Rehabilitation Services from OOD. OOD received 157 respondents.

*Upcoming Participant Focus Group Topic- College Students with Disabilities:* Ms. Pugh discussed the topic and would like Council members participation.

*Bureau of Services for the Visually Impaired:* Greg Dormer, Deputy Director, Bureau of Services for the Visually Impaired reported during reporting period March 31, 2020 through March 31, 2021, eligibility decisions decreased by 20%, plans written decreased by 13%, the combined eligible and served decreased by 1.5%, rehabilitations decreased by 5.5%, the average wage increased by 1% and the average hours decreased by an average of 1 hour per week.

Mr. Dormer further reportedoutreach efforts continue to be a priority for BSVI. While we have seen fewer plans and eligibility decisions as compared with a year ago, the number of applications for BSVI services have increased each month this quarter. January saw 299 new applications, February had 372 and another increase for March to 460 new applications. These are the highest numbers we have seen since last summer. Our successful rehabilitations have increased each month this quarter as well.

Lastly, Mr. Dormer reported Berna King and her staff held meetings with all BSVI counselors and supervisors in each area to provide, celebrate successes and discuss concerns the staff have for their areas.

Employer and Innovation Services Update

Kristen Ballinger, Deputy Director, Division of Employer and Innovation Services reported on the following items:

*Virtual Hiring Events*: A work-from-Home Virtual Hiring Event was held on February 11, 2021. During the event, 40 OOD candidates participated in 46 interviews with six employers. As a result, 11 job offers were extended with several candidates moving forward to second interviews.

OOD, in partnership with local school districts, is hosting transition-focused Virtual Hiring Events for students this month. Events for Southwest City School District were held on April 13 and 16. Other events are planned for students at: Parma City School District and Polaris Career Center on April 21; EHOVE Career Center on April 22; Springfield City School District, Cincinnati Public School District, Dayton Public School District, Lebanon City School District, and Mason City School District on April 27; and Pioneer Career and Technology Center, Knox County Career Center, Mansfield City School District, and Danville Local School District on April 29.

*Inclusive Employer Toolkit:* OOD recently launched the [Inclusive Employer Toolkit](https://ood.ohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/ood/information-for-employers/inclusive-employer-toolkit) to help employers recruit, hire, and retain employees with disabilities and foster an inclusive workplace. The Toolkit includes four main topics: Building the Business Case, Inclusive Workplace, Recruiting, Hiring, and Supporting Employees, and Workplace Accommodations.

*“OOD Level Up” Proposal for the U.S. Department of Education’s Disa*bility Innovation *Fund – Career Advancement Initiative Model Demonstration Project:* OOD recently submitted a proposal for the U.S. Department of Education’s Disability Innovation Fund – Career Advancement Initiative Model Demonstration Project. If selected for funding, OOD will implement OOD Level Up, a program designed to assist 1,000 Ohioans with disabilities to enroll in or successfully complete credential programs needed to secure or advance in careers that are in high demand and pay a sustainable wage. The proposal includes expanded relationships with Ohio’s employers, community colleges, technical centers, and other workforce partners to improve access to career pathways, and the development of an OOD Level Up curriculum with a strong focus on professional skills, financial literacy, and self-advocacy. If awarded, the grant would begin October 1, 2021 and last for five years.

*The Employers’ ADA Handbook Webinar Series:* OOD is hosting The Employers’ ADA Handbook, a free five-part webinar series for employers. All webinars are recorded and archived on the OOD website for on-demand viewing. On January 13, OOD hosted the first session, “[Title I Overview”](https://ood.ohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/ood/information-for-employers/employer-resources/Employers-ADA-Handbook-Title-I-Overview) for 229 attendees; Session Two, “[Reasonable Accommodations and Undue Hardship](https://ood.ohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/ood/information-for-employers/employer-resources/The-Employers-ADA-Handbook-RAs-And-Undue-Hardship)” was hosted live on February 24 for 175 attendees; and Session Three, “[Performance, Conduct, and Safety”](https://ood.ohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/ood/information-for-employers/employer-resources/Employers-ADA-Handbook-Performance-Conduct-Safety) was hosted live on March 23 for 137 attendees. Upcoming webinars, Resources and Funding, and Accessibility Hour with OOD are scheduled April 28 and May 26 respectively.

*Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA):* OOD received more than 1,200 responses to the CSNA Survey of Individuals with Disabilities. Ms. Ballinger thanked the OOD Council members for their assistance in distributing the survey. The EIS team is currently conducting an analysis of the results for inclusion in the 2021 CSNA.

Chair’s Comments

Dr. Carolyn Peters reported her interview with the Ohio Developmental Disabilities Council went well. She further reported Dr. Peters further reported she participated in the Research on the Impact of COVID-19 on VR Services - Request of State Rehabilitation Councils.

**Council Members Discussion/Comments**

There were not additional discussion topics.

**Public Comment**

There were no public comments.

**Adjourn**

Council member Gerhardt moved to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Council Member Hegg. Motion carried­­­­.