



State of Connecticut

Department of Rehabilitation Services

**State Rehabilitation Council (SRC)**

January 18, 2017

Webinar

***Attendance:***

**SRC Members:** Thomas Boudreau; Marisel DeCordova Chair; Jan Hasenjager; Patrick Melfi; David Morgana, Jr.; Gary Prushko; Beth Reel; Bruce Stovall; Kate Travis; Joe Wendover; and Kristen Winkle, Secretary

**Non-Voting Members:** David Doukas, BRS Director

**BRS Staff:** Kerri Fradette; Evelyn Oliver Knight and Arlene Lugo

**Excused:** NA

**Volunteers:** Kim Beckett; Shannon McCann

**Absent:** Ray Oneglia, Jr.; Andrea Richardson; Warren Stamp;

**Guests:** Deborah L. Greene & Chip Kenney: San Diego State University

**1:00-3:30 State Rehabilitation Council Meeting**

Brief Introductions – Everyone

***Bureau of Rehabilitation Services***

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**CSNA Interview (with SRC Members):**

**Deborah L. Greene & Chip Kenney: San Diego State University.** With the exception of Arlene Lugo (serving as the technician for the webinar, no BRS staff was present during this portion of the meeting to enable the SRC to share thoughts openly with surveyors conducting the **Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA)**. The CSNA involves surveys for consumers and staff, business, education, community partners and onsite interviews of these groups and administrators and direct service staff. It helps to identify gaps and barriers for individuals to find employment. The survey is a document for staff to see how they have progressed from the Needs Assessment in 2013 and recommendations from SRC. The CSNA is conducted every three years.

Reviewed the Overview of SRC and how CSNA is reviewed by SRC as a group to come together to address issues and needs. It was noted that Evelyn Oliver Knight assists with the SRC.

*As comments for the CSNA are anonymous, names identifying who made the following statements are not included in these minutes.*

Who are the unserved and under served in CT?:

- People with autism, hearing impaired, those who don't have a formal diagnosis or meet the criteria for one, individuals with intellectual, mental health and DDS disabilities.
- The Latino and Native American populations are unserved and underserved, too.
- BRS is having a difficult time serving those individuals and they are asking MH individuals to go to DMHAS for services/agencies instead of BRS and/or encouraging them to volunteer.
- Over 1,000 families are on waiting list for DDS, there are no funding/voc/services.
- There has been an increase from last year to this year with Native Americans with disabilities and this has had an impact. There is a cultural gap with the individuals. Native Americans are uneasy about obtaining State VR services.
- Ways to make the services more effective and available for Native Americans include an increase presence in the program, regular visits, attendance in events and cultural sensitivity training. This will gain the trust of the individuals.
- Is there data to support cultures being unserved? No specific data was shared, just what had been heard.

- The Latino population worries they aren't understood, due to a possible language barrier and they are private. Ensuring information is given in bi-lingual form would be helpful when working with the Latino population.
- Communication is important, things go smoother and brings more awareness.
- For working with the MH population, it would be helpful to develop protocols to work with BRS, having a MH worker be an advocate for consumers and BRS having provider meetings for the individual.
- One Community Rehabilitation Provider has an issue when individuals are transferred to another agency when they are done with their services and the job typically falls through in three months.
- At some point there will be an order of selection for BRS, those with the most significant disabilities. BRS is struggling with this population. The SRC isn't part of the new initiative for these individuals.

Why are these individuals underserved?

- Reviewed that individuals on the spectrum have a Waiver Program.
- CRP's do not have the knowledge to work with the population.
- Timing for appointments
- Length of time it takes to process
- BRS workers have huge caseloads, all contribute to the underserved.
- Training for BRS workers has lessened and BRS is going to be downsizing CRP's.

How well does the agency work w/ required Workforce System partners (DD, MH, Medicaid, CT Work Centers)?

- BRS is collaborating with other agencies. Noted that subminimum wage is a part of that.
- Department of Education and BRS is shared, Level Up (WIOA).
- BRS and American Job Center in the same building is helpful to consumers.
- The challenges for services to Transition Youths are transportation, individuals with disabilities before 18 years old, not getting services until then and WIOA is working on changing that.

- Families aren't knowledgeable about BRS and state services.
- Schools aren't doing enough, they do what they can for the individuals most disabled.
- Students need to build their stamina to work four hours a day, three days a week by their senior year. An example was provided that kids go to work, they get dropped off for an hour for work training and this is not enough time.
- Soft skills should be taught in 10<sup>th</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup> grade for example, answering a phone, different personalities, the way you talk or look.
- Parents need to take a more active part.
- Those who don't have a specific diagnosis, "float around" and parents have a hard time looking at what their kid's life will be after 21 years old.
- Can BRS go to certain areas of the state to provide workshops to parents.
- One person got involved with BRS due to son. The parent was told by the school that there was a meeting with BRS, but the parent had not asked for it. The parent was happy that BRS was going to help son. BRS "saved us." Son received job coaching because, he already had a job.
- Another parent has a son who has Cerebral Palsy and he is working. When he was in school, everyone wanted him to go to college and work, both full-time. For individuals who have disabilities, it takes a lot of energy to get up, get out of the house and then possibly go to a medical appointment and/or then go to work. Working part-time is helpful for individuals with disabilities.
- Unified Sports help to improve their stamina.
- Also, individuals should be given other alternatives then just "going on to school."

Job readiness and soft skills, the question is access?

- There are many different cultures in CT. We need more awareness to have more consistency.
- Agencies have capacity issues. Consistency issues are across districts, regions, throughout BRS.
- Previously, the Transition Counselors with BRS gave consistent information from Central Office. Level Up is worse with information, families are upset about what is going on, with consistency and the message of information. When the

regulations came out from the Feds about the summer is when things fell apart again. People shared misinformation with families.

- The process is very confusing; it goes from that entitlement to the eligibility community.
- Students are not being prepared and they are exiting earlier and earlier. Parents then become case managers and take on that coordination of the services which they aren't prepared to navigate. When a student exits, who should they talk to?
- Government programs have been cut from the state and that is part of the issue.
- Individuals in DCF and Foster Care have surrogate families for support.

Transition to Jobs, Career Pathways, more language in schools?:

- It's making the right assessment for the student and seeing where their skill set is and the opportunities that will enhance them to succeed. Give them the support they need when they need it.

Workforce Investment Opportunity Act: Positive?

- There has been an improvement, impact, with the Coordination of Services. We have started to see that but, it is too soon in the process.
- Having to do so much with less funding and less employees is difficult.
- It has also been difficult for CRP's due to the summer of 2016, the program offered more services, building block, it was more in depth, there were daily changes and CRPs tried to keep up. They were told it was going to be a lot of additional work; more employees were hired, the program then changed in October and that limited services. Now it is all classroom-based for the school year, there is group interactions, OT network and interest area, 5 or more students are in the group at a time.
- Level Up provides vocational skills and summer internships. They aren't sure on how many students it will accommodate.
- There have been unanticipated cuts, previously, they had to spend all the money for the youth and some of the money they had to reserve. Other partners were involved.
- When you have a challenge there are different opportunities.

- Budget cuts and WIOA were rolled out in 2015, the Feds said to the states that they had to do it, then the Feds asked about the regulations after they told them how they were going to do it.
- Parents can communicate with advocates about their BRS concerns and speak to the hierarchy at BRS. CT does a good job for BRS services and we are more fortunate than other states.
- Communication is important with SRC and different agencies. In regards to the recommended BRS timeline process, this could be a document for consumers and parents with the information about it and the information is in The Parents Bill of Rights and the BRS Consumer Handbook.

What do we want to come out of this process?

- Move forward
- More OTJ Trainings offered
- A plan that relates to the gifts or skills that individuals with Autism can give to an employer, the social and communication piece. Having BRS Career Fairs would be helpful. BRS providing workshops and education to employers about assisting individuals succeed and overcome obstacles for individuals with disabilities.

**The surveyors exited the meeting at this time and the SRC meeting continued. Dave, Evelyn and Kerri joined the meeting.**

**Minutes:** November 16, 2016 - Kristen Winkle, Approved

**Budget:** Gary Prushko: Transportation expenses changed to \$61.61, everything is up to date. The budget report was approved

**BRS Update – David Doukas, BRS Director**

- CSAVR Update: April 1-5 in Bethesda, MD.
- Agency Update (Staffing, Offices, Other): Torrington office is being opened within the next month. There is a lease in place, wiring is being done and furniture is being delivered. BRS is closing the Ansonia office by the end of February. Staff will be moving to Bridgeport and New Haven offices, they will continue to serve the community remotely. BRS is looking at another consolidation in South Eastern, CT.

For staffing, BRS continues to look at downsizing staff due to costs and the federal grant. BRS re-posted one position to help them downsize their Supervisors and help to train staffing. This will allow BRS to have two supervisors per

region instead of three. BRS will keep one Supervisor for Level Up for cost-saving reasons. There are currently five counselor vacancies, four are from the Northern area of CT and one is from the Southern. One position is for hearing impaired, bi-lingual, others are for employment counselors.

There will be an Conflict Resolution/ Sensitivity Training for Directors/Supervisors and all Leadership staff on April 22, 2017. Also, Dave has spoken to specific Directors about the concerns brought up previously from the SRC.

**SRC Update - Evelyn Oliver Knight:** Thanked all for attending the CSNA. She reported that the SRC Annual Report is coming along. Also, for the Statewide Needs Assessment, surveys for consumers, businesses and community partners will be posted online when they are ready.

**Arlene Lugo: Program Director CT Tech Act Program:** It is a federally-funded program. WIOA now requires a closer partnership with the SRC. She and a part-time employee run the program. The program offers, assistive technology demonstrations, recycling of used devices, device lending and a financial loan program. They work closely with BRS and Arlene consults with counselors and their consumers to try different devices to achieve employment outcomes. She presented and explained [www.cttechact.com](http://www.cttechact.com) website. Available services are posted on the website. People can apply for a loan to pay back at a monthly rate for assistive technology with a four percent interest rate and they can consider refinancing. The loan application is available for download on the website. Loans for vehicles that need modification, are included. They look at loans on a case by case basis. Noted on the website is trying devices out in the community. Devices may be borrowed to test in the consumer's own environment or at school/work before buying technology. There is equipment recycling through partner agencies where they take used equipment to refurbish and sell at a reasonable price. In 2016, the cost savings to consumers was \$905,971.00. The online website,

[www.getATstuff.com](http://www.getATstuff.com) is a recycling website where individuals can get items for free or for sale, right now there are 111 items listed in New England and New York. There is another federal program through the FCC for individuals that have a combination of are deafness and blindness (or hard of hearing and low vision) and individuals can be provided with smartphones, laptops, tablets and computers at no cost to the individual. Arlene worked with Kerri Fradette on development of the DORS Level Up app for students to use to monitor progress and schedule appointments as well as receive notifications about events. She isn't sure when the Android version will be available; the iOS version is available now. She noted that Tom (from SRC), is on AT Tech Advisory Council. Arlene said that the AT Conference is every other year and it will be next year on April 4, 2018.

**Questions/Comments:** Kristen inquired about any Amazon contacts, Evelyn reported that Mark from BRS reported no contacts. Arlene noted that Amazon was at a training in North Haven, Protection and Advocacy was in the same building at the time, some of the individuals from Amazon visited her area. This was an indirect connection.

3:15 PM – Adjourn

**Next Meeting - March 15, 2017:** Marisel reported that an individual with a disabilities has been invited to attend this meeting.  
Location: TBD

Respectfully Submitted,

Kristen L. Winkle, SRC Secretary