

Citizens' Advisory Committee for RDO (Berks & Schuylkill Counties) – 9/14/2021

1:00 to 2:30

15 in attendance

Meeting is virtual, occurred over Microsoft Teams.

Meeting began at 1:05.

Attempt was made to review and approve meeting minutes from previous meetings (April 15, 2021 and June 8, 2021) but numerous changes for wording and clarity were suggested. Previous minutes will be revised and presented for approval at next meeting.

- All minutes should note whether meeting took place virtually, in person, or hybrid, in case such information is necessary in the future
- Review of bylaws indicated a quorum is 2 officers and 3 voting members
- Person-first language is preferred while discussing individuals with disabilities

Yvelisse G. presented the OVR report.

- Presented a graph tracking the number of applications received and the number assigned to counselors from July 2020 to present. July 2020 was chosen as the date as it was the start of that fiscal year.
- Graph was sent to attendees for future reference as well
- Yvelisse G. will update the spreadsheet report for the next meeting's OVR report
- Status "-1" cases are those that are new applications
 - Generally OVR is seeing between 50-70 "-1" cases per month
 - This is low compared to previous years
 - OVR is attributing this dip to the unemployment compensation that was offered to eligible persons during COVID and fear of contracting COVID-19
- September, October, and January-May OVR sees higher transition-age referrals (students preparing to exit high school), especially among seniors preparing to graduate
- June, July, and August OVR sees a drop in referrals, possibly due to people going on vacation
- Status "00" cases are those that have been assigned to a counselor
- Discrepancies between number of "-1" and number of "00" cases include:
 - Early Reach Coordinators doing pre-apps that might be assigned directly
 - Residential transfers to and from Berks/Schuylkill
 - Individuals contacting OVR prior to assignment and stating they are no longer interested in receiving services
- Referrals are currently increasing, possibly due to increased referrals from schools as students begin their next terms
- Central Office opened the Order of Selection for individuals determined to be the Most Significantly Disabled (MSD)

- Significantly Disabled (SD) and Not Significantly Disabled (NSD) individuals still remain on the waiting list
- Reading DO currently has a very low complement of VRCs
 - There are 9 VRCs out of a complement of 19
 - Because of this, while it is ideal that counselors are assigned weekly, they are currently being assigned bi-weekly
 - VRCs had been getting 10-15 pre-apps assigned to them per week – Reading DO is trying to stagger the applications to avoid counselor burn-out
 - An intern was hired August 2021, but their internship begins January 2022
 - 5 VRCs are currently working overtime, but they are all working only a few hours each week
- OVR is no longer in a hiring freeze
 - HR does much of the onboarding of new staff and civil service information / postings for the job listings
 - There are many vacancies currently in HR, which leads to delays in processing
 - District Offices are being allowed to hire in order of priority – those with higher openings with respect to complement are being given higher priorities than those with low number of openings regarding the complement
- OVR staff have been approved for part-time telework (2 days per week)
 - Everyone opting in for telework has a different schedule, determined by preference and needed coverage
 - Part-time Telework is NOT the same as shelter-in-place telework (as began 3/17/2020 due to COVID-19), and if the VRC must meet face to face to accommodate the customer or provider's schedules, they will do so
 - VRCs all have cell numbers and “desk” phones (which will ring their laptops), and will be reachable in the office, in the field, and in their home office setting during telework
- Reading DO District Administrator Carole Homolash has announced her upcoming retirement to be on October 15, 2021
 - Yvelisse Gonzalez will become the acting District Administrator, she does not have plans to become the permanent District Administrator

Jackie N. presented a PowerPoint from Abilities in Motion (AIM). AIM's programs listed during the presentation include: Teens Taking Flight, Parent Connection Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS), Supported Living, and Certified Peer Support. A copy of the PowerPoint was included in the invitation to today's meeting.

- **Teens Taking Flight** – 14-25 year olds, teen-led program (they determine what they want to focus on / participate in), 12 or less individuals per room to allow for social distancing, 1 meeting per month
 - Pre-COVID would be funded by participants determining what they want to do next and fundraising to get needed monies to achieve goal

- **Parent Connection** – Meetings monthly, hybrid meetings (can participate by Zoom or in-person), is a support group for parents
 - No consistent funding – AIM feels the service is necessary and will sometimes will seek grants to support it
- **Pre-ETS** - Groups services in schools, Professional Connection Experience
 - Funded through OVR
- **Supported Living** – Supports offered for individuals once they have entered the workforce
 - Source of funding was not mentioned
- **Certified Peer Support** – CPS helps individual with a mental health diagnosis reach their goals
 - Funded through CCBH

Mackenzie Hollenbach of Kutztown University’s Disability Service Office presented a PowerPoint regarding KSU’s DSO and My Place program. A copy of the PowerPoint was included in the invitation to today’s meeting.

- DSO provides services and accommodations to ensure support of individuals with disabilities in university spaces to include signage, publications (print and electronic), technology, mobility access (shuttles, walkways, etc)
- Also provides accommodations for testing, note-taking, and other course-work related accommodations
- My Place is the autism-centered college experience through Kutztown University
 - It is funded through OVR (Pre-ETS funding) and financial aid (through students) and grants (awarded to staff)

The Vice Chairperson position has been filled. Sarita Battish and Alli Maille will be dual vice-chairs. Angel T. remains chairperson.

- Some confusion regarding whether the position will be called ‘co-chair’ or ‘vice chair’ occurred. The position will be co-vice-chair, as there are two people serving in capacity of Vice Chairperson.

The Member Directory will be in place by next meeting. Some participants have not been able to participate due to other obligations and have asked to be removed.

The OVR application process was discussed. The CAC was not able to attend the most recent PA Rehabilitation Council (PARC) conference, but is still in communication with them regarding the application process.

- PARC meetings end with public comment, and Chairperson Angel T. may bring concerns about the online pre-application process.

- Prior to Angel bringing a concern to PARC it was determined that discussion will be made at the next CAC meeting whether this is something **everyone** wants to pursue.
 - Difficulties with the current online pre-application include:
 - Clear instructions on how to apply
 - Where to find the application
 - What happens when the application is incomplete
 - How to know everything was submitted correctly
 - The current work-around for OVR is entering a staff-assisted application over the phone (and in-person when COVID mitigation measures allow)
 - This is an adequate work-around as it allows the pre-application to be entered
 - It is cumbersome
 - It uses staff time that might be used in other ways
- Andrew P. and Angel T. will do a presentation at the next meeting to present concerns

Discussion continued from last meeting regarding possible CAC goals.

- Improvement of outreach to the disability community to improve awareness and knowledge of OVR and services received from OVR.
 - Advertisements and postings in public areas were floated as ideas
 - Angel will work with Sarita and Alli to determine a committee and put on the next meeting agenda
- Outreach to youths who may be good candidates to work with OVR to achieve employment goals
 - Youth seem to have more consistent referral numbers when compared with adults
 - Transition coordinators and ERCs handle first outreach to students & youths, even before they are assigned a VRC
 - Angel will reach out to OVR's transition staff to see what is in place already and what are areas that may be expanded on

Next meeting to include:

- Presentation on the OVR application process (Andrew & Angel)
- Youth engagement and barriers (Angel)
- Community outreach and advertising (Angel, Sarita, Alli, and Yvelisse)

Announcements for the general good were made.

- There is a CAP presentation at the State Board Meeting on September 16, 2021 at 9:00 AM. The announcement for the meeting is found on the Labor & Industry website. Andrew will share the link.
- The next PARC meeting is November 16 at 9:30 AM

Motion was made to adjourn by Sally K.
Motion was seconded by Andrew P.

Meeting was adjourned at 2:53 PM.