

CAC MINUTES
Friday, October 14, 2022
10:00 a.m. Elk County Careerlink

In Attendance: Bob Mecca, LIFT; Andrew Pennington, CAP; Chris Palmer, OVR; and Kelly King, The PEAL Center.

Welcome & Introductions: Bob Mecca opened the meeting. There were no questions or changes to July 2022 meeting notes.

OVR Updates

Chris notified the CAC of a new service called WEXA – Work Experience for Adults. The provider agreement is not out yet. Providers are having significant staff shortages for various reasons. We are looking for everyone to consider who might be able to become providers. We do have two providers who are interested once it is available. Chris is open to talk with anyone.

Andrew asked if there was an OT with Acre and SE certifications, is that an ability to be a provider? Chris advised that as long as they are established as a business entity we could consider it. If it is someone with a disability, we may be able to help them get established. Providers have staff shortages and then there can be a lot of travel involved in it as well. Our rates have been increased in the hopes that the providers are passing that along. Andrew added that some jobs like Walmart greeter pay more than some jobs as SE specialist. He does see some where wages are higher which is encouraging but it is not across the board.

Chris talked about OVR's new Rapid Engagement Initiative. OVR is trying to get referrals through the front end of our system quicker and keep them engaged and moving along to plan development sooner. When someone reaches out and is referred, we have 5 days to assign and 5 days for a VRC to reach out and get the 60 day eligibility clock running. It changes the start of the 60 day window for eligibility to the start of application instead of completed application. People are most interested in our services when they reach out initially, so the sooner we can get them started and engaged, the better. Andrew noted that a lot of momentum is also lost when customers are waiting on providers. Lack of communication from the counselor due to caseload sizes or inability to find a provider are the biggest issues he sees in complaints. He appreciates that the referrals will be quicker. Referrals are particularly high this time of year with all the transition referrals that come in. She looked at the stats this week and it doesn't seem to be bombarding any one staff. Chris wants to see that over the weeks and months that the DO is doing better and better with rapid engagement. Some of our staff normally do it this way anyhow. Not everyone needs to have some sort of formal service to be eligible -- most of our people have existing records and our counselors are able to use observation and judgement for some disabilities. That, compiled with the order of selection being open, certainly helps with that timeline. Eligibility to plan still has a 90 day timeline. VRCs need to keep them engaged until the provider is available (to Andrew's comment about waiting for provider).

The district office outreach activities are going well. Staff are getting out there and doing outreach. DO committee is looking to get together again and tweak plans as needed.

Summer work program update: DuBois OVR did My Work in Elk County. Four students from 3 different schools worked at the Boys and Girls Club. Elcam was the provider. Due to the students' interests, a couple of

them worked with kids and a couple did maintenance type work. It was the DuBois DO first time to participate. We also had students working for a couple municipalities as well on OJTs.

NDEAM Events. The flyer for the AT events went out with the CAC agenda. DA Chris Palmer and ADA Chris Roken completed events so far in Jefferson and Clearfield counties. There was not a lot of foot traffic from the community, but all the staff from the CLs came through and got a lot of good information. The Ubi-Duo for communication was demonstrated. Each of the CLs are getting one so that was very interesting for them. Other items included a Sonic Boom alarm, a Rocket Book for note taking and the accessible workstations at the CLs. Tech Owl was highlighted; Kip Stossmeister did a great job. BBVS our sister agency was there and talked through accessibility features with iPhone and Android. Chris advised if Kelly King is available to get to any events going on in McKean, Cameron, DuBois or Elk that she is welcome to attend. Kelly will check her schedule. Bob Mecca noted that the AT events are an awesome opportunity for LIFT and OVR to collaborate. Tech Owl is accessed through LIFT, and he appreciates being able to get the word out.

Andrew asked what the event attendance has been like. Chris informed that the intended audience is anyone -- employers, agency staff and job seekers. Kip did put an ad in the paper since he had some funds from Tech Owl. The Careerlinks have been sharing it with job seekers. Chris is hopeful that since the word is out, the attendance may be better at the other events. Bob noted that the ads went into 3 or 4 papers and went into digital advertising which reaches around 40,000 people. Chris added that staff who did attend seemed to enjoy it and now know more of what we are able to do. It was good for BVRS and BBVS to be at the table together. Andrew asked which BBVS office services our area. Chris noted that Erie BBVS covers our 5 counties as well as Potter. They have staff attending each event. ADA Chris Roken will be doing Cameron and DuBois AT events. DA Chris Palmer will be doing McKean and Elk County events. Our BSR John Benjamin will go up to Potter along with Williamsport OVR staff. Update: HGAC's CART was able to attend in DuBois and Potter, and ODHH information was available at all events.

BSR John Benjamin is also having another NDEAM event on the 26th from 5-7 pm at the St. Marys Library. He is doing a presentation and showing a documentary called "Intelligent Lives" and giving an overview on OVR services.

Member Updates

LIFT: Bob Mecca informed the CAC that LIFT did hire Jessica Erickson as an outreach coordinator/office manager. She is also an LPN. Andrew asked if Jessica would be able to attend one of the CAC meetings to introduce herself. Chris asked if Kip could join in as well to introduce himself. Bob agreed and will arrange for them to speak at the next CAC meeting.

CAP: Andrew Pennington advised that he was recently promoted to Deputy Director of CAP effective 10/1/22, and his job duties have grown. He is still doing outreach. Working closely with Steve has given them the ability to work with Central Office. He is pleased to hear about the referral process and Rapid Engagement and feels they are really exciting things. Chris added that CO is really getting things done; she is pleased.

Andrew stated currently being on 4 policy work groups. It has been great to see how receptive OVR is to CAP recommendations. His relationships have grown with both district offices and CO. Every day is something new. Knowing policy and law very well has helped him with his caseload and advocacy for services as well as understanding the over-arching theme of services. He feels advocacy is so important and he encourages customers to ask their counselor for what they need. It never hurts to ask about anything you need when it comes to obtaining competitive integrated employment. He noted some CILs go above and beyond too.

Individuals need to ask the counselors and staff at CILs when they have questions or needs – they often have creative approaches or can refer them somewhere. Chris reminded that if the VR counselors are unable to answer a customer's question, the customer can always call the DO and ask for the VRC's supervisor. It doesn't mean someone is getting in trouble. Andrew added that when CAP calls the DO, they aren't calling for someone to be in trouble, but rather calling to help the counselor know what is available through the law. He can't expect every counselor to know the ins and outs of each policy. They are not being adversarial; they are saying let's work together to get this person where they need to be. Chris added that she does encourage staff to reach out to CAP if they are having trouble explaining things to a customer if it is something OVR can't do. Andrew agreed that sometimes it is a communication barrier. Something that needs to be addressed by the counselor or the customer. Most things CAP addresses are based on communication; it is easy to misinterpret an email or a phone call.

Andrew commented that BBVS doesn't always know the full gamut of summer programs available to their students. Chris advised that BSRs are charged with working for both bureaus. Andrew noted that not all offices have the same staff, service the same demographics, etc. The important thing is to try to make sure no one falls through the cracks. Chris informed that BVRS and BBVS are doing combined bureau meetings again.

Next Meeting

Next meeting will be held Friday, January 13, 2022, at 10:00 a.m. and will be scheduled virtually or at the DuBois DO with option to join virtually due to winter. LIFT staff will be presenting.