

CAC Meeting – 3/14/2023 at 1:00 PM held virtually by Microsoft Teams

Meeting called to order at 1:05 PM.

6 in attendance + 3 OVR staff members

Individuals on call introduced themselves.

September 2022 minutes had been revised since last meeting to reflect changes suggested by a member.

- Motion to accept: Andrew
- Seconded: Brian

December 2022 minutes were discovered to have one error that needed to be updated.

- Date was incorrectly listed at 12/6/2023 and must be updated to 12/6/2022.
- Motion made to accept December 2022 minutes after the date is changed: Angel
- Seconded: Andrew

There was some confusion from members on where to find the minutes, as they had been sent separately from the meeting invitation.

- It was agreed through general consensus that going forward all relevant items for the meeting will be attached to the meeting invitation directly, rather than sent in individual emails.
- This is to include pending minutes from the previous meeting(s), agenda, and any other relevant information.

It was also agreed by consensus to send the meeting agenda and any other relevant documents ahead of time to OVR's Jim Whitonis so that it can be uploaded to the PaRC website for the public record.

- Clarification: Pending minutes will not be uploaded to the PaRC website – only accepted minutes will be uploaded on the CAC's behalf.

OVR Report was presented by Acting District Administrator Kim Baskett.

- Statistics on cases from 7/1/2022 through 2/28/2023:
 - 726 referrals received
 - 473 intakes / initial interviews conducted
 - 430 cases determined eligible
 - 457 Individualized Plans for Employment created
 - 279 of this number are initial (new) plans
 - 178 are plan amendments

- 78 cases closed successfully (status 26 closures)
 - Goal by 6/30/2023 is 178 status 26 closures
 - RDO is currently at 43.8% of its goal with 4 months to go
 - At this date, RDO usually has a higher percentage of successful case closures. The shortfall is most likely due to staffing issues at the RDO leading to delay in administrative work necessary to facilitate status 26 closures.
- Breakdown of referral numbers by month since last meeting:
 - December 2022 – 78 referrals received
 - January 2023 – 102 referrals received
 - February 2023 – 87 referrals received
 - March 2023 to-date – 63 referrals received
- New referral process began in October 2022.
 - New process is considered simpler, as the public does not have to fill out the 7 page pre-application for OVR services anymore.
 - The shorter referral process also gives the public easier access to referring themselves or agency partners to referring their customers
- Staffing updates were discussed.
 - 3 new counselors started in February 2023
 - 1 is a returning VRC who had previously left RDO to begin work at a different agency and has returned.
 - As she has not been gone long, she will be able to resume VRC duties quickly.
 - 2 new counselors are in their training period. This lasts approximately 5-6 weeks.
 - Both new counselors are going to be taking on Schuylkill county territories, which have been underserved.
 - Training currently includes topics on policies, procedures, and expected duties.
 - Trainees will begin shadowing customer appointments with existing staff soon.
 - VRC for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing posting just came down and interviews will be held next week.
 - A regular VRC posting has also come down, but the list has not been received to-date. Interviews will be held as soon as possible after the list is received.
 - 1 outstanding VRC position is still waiting to be posted.
 - Total vacancies at RDO, including those posted but not filled:
 - 4 Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors (VRC)
 - 2 Business Services Representatives (BSR)
 - 1 Clerical Assistant (CA2)
 - 1 Assistant District Administrator (ADA)
 - If Kim is made permanent DA of RDO, then there will be 1 Supervisor position made vacant as well.

- **Question:** How many VRCs are currently performing overtime to meet operational needs?
 - **Answer:** 4, though most availability is limited
- **Question:** What is the total case count for the overtime caseloads?
 - **Answer:** Unknown at this time, but Kim will get that number and report back.
- **Concern:** The increase of referrals may lead to VRC / other staff burnout.
 - RDO agrees.
- Regular caseloads are currently large.
 - Expected average for VRC caseload: 120
 - Caseloads will exceed average at this time.
 - Largest known caseload to-date: 245 cases
 - RDO is currently implementing processes to help VRCs prioritize their cases. Clerical support staff help VRCs work to keep caseloads managed.
- Staffing remains a problem as OVR as an agency is still recovering from the 18 month hiring freeze.
- Supervisors are taking a lot of calls for VRCs and doing a lot of case work to keep services up-to-date and working for customers to ensure there is no break in services.
- **Question:** Governor Shapiro recently eliminated the 4 year college degree requirement for most government jobs. How does this affect OVR?
 - **Answer:** To our knowledge, we haven't heard anything. Our rules on hiring requirements are through the RSA (Rehabilitation Services Administration), so they dictate that masters degrees are required for VRC positions.
 - RSA is part of the federal government through the US Department of Education. It provides \$4 for every \$1 provided from PA government. It is the primary funding partner for OVR.
- **Question:** Does OVR have an outreach person for local schools to offer internships?
 - **Answer:** Danielle Frascella is the HR liaison and communicates with local colleges and universities. She is a part of HR at Labor & Industry. All recruiting is handled by L&I staff.
 - VRCs have liaison sites in the community to support any OVR customer that attends the site. They also liaison with site staff so information is shared both ways between OVR and the site in question.
 - The masters degree expansion has helped open staffing positions to more candidates. For example, Spring 2022 posting had one eligible applicant, as no others met the criteria. October 2023 (post degree expansion) had 14 eligible applicants.
 - Discussion was had about why a master's degree is required, as some individuals feel a bachelor's would suffice.
 - CAC will reach out to RSA to raise the question and see if lowered degree requirements will help increase available applicants for the position.

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- OVR is preparing a number of summer programs for high school students.
 - My Work – 6-8 week long, paid work experience (16-35 hours per week) where students work for local municipality or local nonprofit
 - Community Work Assessment – similar to My Work but not at a municipality or nonprofit, pays \$10.35/hour or higher
 - Professional Connections – 60 hours focusing on job readiness, resume building, career exploration, self-advocacy, independent living, and also on tours of workplaces
 - There are also state-wide opportunities to include the summer academies through HGAC, BBVS, and Deaf and Hard of Hearing\
 - Early Reach Coordinators continue to work with students in grades 8, 9, and 10. They help refer students for the summer programs.
- The FNT income limit has been increased from around \$35,000 to \$100,000 has led to an increased funding rate for post-secondary and college tuition.
 - Supported employment is exempt from FNT restrictions. OVR funds supported employment services completely.

The CAC discussed outreach and social media.

- OVR Central Office maintains a Facebook group. Per Central Office’s Social Media Coordinator if the CAC has information / announcements to post, they can send to Kim who will forward it to the Social Media Coordinator for review and posting.
 - **Suggestion:** First posts to the Facebook group would be a good time to introduce the Berks-Schuylkill CAC.
 - Possibly use the opportunity to do a Chair Highlight for Angel, as he has led the Berks-Schuylkill CAC for a long time. Possibly also highlight Brian as well so the public receives a warm introduction to the CAC and its goals.
 - Possibly use this opportunity to invite other chairs of OVR CACs to collaborate, as discussed at previous meeting
- Other opportunities for outreach have been discussed throughout the meeting today and will continue to be part of the discussion going forward.

The CAC email address has changed. The new email address is **CACOVR.ReadingDO@gmail.com**

It had been suggested previously that the meeting day be changed from Tuesdays to Mondays to allow for other members to participate.

- The members requesting the date change were not in attendance at this time, so further consultation was not possible to determine what would be the best date for all members.
- Angel will send the CAC a poll to determine what the best day of the week is for most members to attend.

RDO Clerical team has requested the CAC provide updated documents to include in mailings for successful / status 26 closures.

- Officers will have an interim meeting to revise current letters / inclusions for status 26 closures.
- As with previous documents supplied by CAC to RDO, the original is held by neither the chairpeople or the RDO at this time. New documents may need to be made in order to supply updated documents in question.
- Motion made for active documents to be maintained by RDO staff going forward: Brian
 - Seconded: Angel

Next PaRC date: May 17, 2023 from 9:30 AM to 1:00 PM

Next PA State Board of Vocational Rehabilitation: June 8, 2023 from 10:00 AM to 3:00 PM

Next Berks-Schuylkill CAC meeting: June 13, 2023 at 1:00 PM

Motion to adjourn meeting at 3:10 PM: Brian

- Seconded: Kim