

Director's Report

WIOA/PETS

We have been moving ahead with our six point plan to come into compliance on the provision of Pre-Employment Transition Services.

- Field Offices are engaged in caseload scrubbing to make sure we have active cases in our caseloads. We will begin transferring cases so that hopefully by July 1st we will have transition counselors serving in-school youth on IEPs and 504 plans and young adult counselors and adult counselors serving their respective populations.
- In order to accomplish this caseload realignment we in the process of ramping down our GA VR Program. Participants are being informed of the end of the program and their need to get benefits from Economic Services offices and their option if they are interested in pursuing work to work with VR. VABIR is moving along in a parallel process to reassign employment consultants.
- A work group has been formed for the ramp down of the CRT grants and the redefining of the relationship between VR and CRT programs. This process has been very difficult and we are hoping that we will be able to move forward to continue to serve CRT participants in a different way.
- A work group has also been formed to define the new requirement for DS programs to provide vocational services to student with developmental disabilities.
- A work group has been formed to expand the JOBS programs to serve both in-school youth and young adults to age 26.
- We are exploring with VT Youth Conservation Corps the options of having summer internship experiences available for in school youth through that organization. We are also developing options for Youth Employment Specialists to develop summer internship opportunities that would pay minimum wage.
- Benefits counselors are developing strategies for working with in-school youth and their families.
- All of this requires internal administrative supports and changes in the way we collect and track information. We are working on systems to support this new work.

RSA is expected to issue the regulations for the Rehabilitation Act next week. Whether that will actually happen is another question. If it does we will be on a fast track to read, digest, and see if they support our PETS plan or we have to make changes. We fully intend to submit comment on the regulations to RSA.

We have reached out to the new Technical Assistance Center on Transition Aged Youth created and funded by both OSERS (RSA and the Office of Special Education Services). They should be a real

resource for us. Transcen is a partner in this TA center and we have worked with them very successfully over the years.

I have been invited as part of a group of VR directors to a meeting at the White House on April 20th in the afternoon. Paige Shevlin, Special Assistant to the President for Economic Policy, has arranged a meeting at the White House for VR State Directors who have responsibility for the implementation of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) to have a direct conversation with white house staff and other key individuals at the Executive Branch level who will also be involved in the implementation of WIOA. The meeting will take place on Monday, April 20th from 1:00 to 4:00 PM. OMB staff, Domestic Policy Council staff, National Economic Council staff and senior leaders from the Departments of Education and Labor will participate in this meeting. I am excited to be attending.

AWARE Case Management System

A team from Alliance is here with us this week to take a deep dive into the AWARE case management system. A VR team including field staff, members of the Planning and Evaluation Unit, and senior managers are working through the VR case type, non VR case types (i.e. AT, SSI, BC, etc.), fiscal, and reporting modules and identifying what we can use as is, what we wish to adapt, or what we need to customize. We are all very impressed with the system in that it is user friendly, intuitive and comprehensive. We plan to have our request for a final quote to Alliance by the end of next week. If all goes well we would have a contract in place by July of this year and then the real work begins. Our go live date, conservatively speaking would be January 2017. It will finally happen!!! One of the challenges is to manage the cost of AWARE without impacting customer service. We have set aside funds and it will be a shared purchase with DBVI. We will keep the council in the loop as we have a final price and meet the fiscal challenge.

SNAP Employment and Training Pilot Project

As you know, VR was a partner in the development of a proposal to respond to a major grant opportunity from the Federal Department of Agriculture through the SNAP Employment and Training Pilot Projects. We will be part of the implementation team. VR will be members of the community teams and we will be adding clinicians through our EAP program to provide comprehensive psycho social assessments for participants. This is a tremendous opportunity to collaborate across the agency and in the nonprofit sector. See press release below.



VERMONT AWARDED \$9 MILLION TO TRANSITION PEOPLE OFF FOOD ASSISTANCE AND INTO A JOB

BARRE - March 24, 2015 – Gov. Peter Shumlin today announced that Vermont has been awarded an \$8.9 million federal grant to help transition vulnerable Vermonters off food assistance and onto the path to financial independence. Part of a national pilot program including nine other states, the

grant will allow Vermont to develop and test innovative ways to help 3SquaresVT recipients find and keep good jobs, increase their incomes, and reduce their reliance on public assistance.

“We know that most Vermonters on food assistance would rather have a full-time job that will allow them to provide for themselves and their family,” Gov. Shumlin said. “This pilot program will help us help those Vermonters get the support and training they need to make that a reality. That’s good for struggling Vermonters, it’s good for our economy and workforce, and it’s good for taxpayers. Vermont has time and time again shown its ability to out innovate other states to solve tough problems. This is yet another example of our state leading in that regard.”

Vermont’s proposed pilot project, informally titled “Jobs for Independence” (JFI), is a three-year program designed to target Vermonters on food assistance with significant barriers to employment, including those that are homeless, suffering and/or recovering from substance abuse or mental health problems, or with prior criminal convictions. The program aims to enroll at least 3,000 individuals within the first 16 months of the pilot project.

The JFI program will provide individuals with comprehensive employment services to help assess the special needs, interests, skills, and barriers to employment. Based on this assessment, JFI will work with participants to develop a Comprehensive Employment Plan, which will take into account a participant’s changing needs, employment goals, and support services necessary for successful job placement and increased earnings.

The JFI program will use the Progressive Employment approach, which offers a sequence of low-risk opportunities for job seekers to explore and try out prospective types of work before a formal hire. These opportunities include interviewing, company tours, and short-term training placements. These experiences are individually designed to allow the job seeker to understand the work environment and expectations, and most importantly obtain real work experience. Additional supportive services for these individuals will include career readiness certificate training, adult basic education, financial education, transitional housing support, and post-employment job retention support.

“This grant is a true collaborative effort to help Vermonters move out of poverty and become financially independent,” said AHS Secretary Hal Cohen. “The grant application was developed, and the project will be implemented, in partnership with several other state agencies including the Department of Labor, Department of Corrections, and Division of Vocational Rehabilitation as well as community partners such as the Community College of Vermont and Capstone Community Action.”

The JFI program will bring together a number of state agencies, including the Agency of Human Services (AHS), Department of Children and Families (DCF), Department of Labor (DOL), the Department of Corrections (DOC), and the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR), as well as other community partners such as, the Community College of Vermont (CCV), Capstone Community Action, and other community action agencies and non-profit organizations throughout Vermont.

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Other News

Amidst the massive change going on staff seem to be calm and morale seems good. Staff continue serving their customers and assisting them to go to work. Our employment outcomes seem on track for the year. Budget wise we are doing well with higher income from the Ticket to Work and lower case service expenditures. We are unsure of the full impact of the SFY 2016 budget and will remain vigilant with the legislature.