

## TRC Advisory Board Meeting

12/17/20

Attendees:

Thomas Wilson, Mandy Johnson, Martina Stump, Ronnie Gunnels, Selina Kirkland, Jaylene Younge, Stephanie Jones, Mark Liverman, Melinda Bone, Jim Thorpe, and Kristin Viscione

Mr. Wilson:

Call to Order and Approval of Minutes (Ronnie made the motion, Stephanie seconded)

- Susan Arwood has resigned from the board; position will need to be filled.

### **Roll Call:**

- Selina will follow up with DIDD on DIDDs Ex Officio board seat.

Mandy:

Response to Minutes:

- Difficult to respond to a lengthy conversation and presentation that we were not a party to. Read the minutes and is trying to make sure and respond appropriately. Context is important and would like to provide context to response. For the last 3 years has worked with this board to build an open and honest relationship. Has attended every board meeting and has listened and engaged in important conversations in needing to modernize the way services are received. For the last 1.5 years worked with national consultant, SRC, this board, etc., to build a plan together to help transform those services. From the beginning we've said this would be collaborative and each plan would be unique to meet the needs of each community that houses a TRC. Reflective of the needs in each community with no prescribed ending in mind. The only thing we knew for certain was segregated sheltered subminimum wage work would not be an answer. Piecemeal with a workplace setting surrounded only by other individuals with disabilities would not be the answer. We set out to transform. Then enter COVID 19 and everything changed. State buildings and offices all over the state have been largely emptied. Governor Lee charged the state departments to reimagine state government and doors we didn't know were possible are now opening. Our services will be changing forever. Having to travel somewhere to sit in a class is no longer a requirement to participate. When the threat of the pandemic subsides, we aren't just going back to our buildings. The transformation journey we're on prepared us for that. The transformation mindset allowed us to adapt and adjust quickly. We've been able to use the internet and platforms like WebEx and zoom to communicate, including old fashioned porch deliveries when needed. We've transformed face to face meetings to these platforms to continue to work with customers safely where they are. Each option has been tailored to meet individuals where they are in their journey. We've met great success. We've increased Pre-ETS by 30% and the reason for that is Pre-ETS services aren't the building. They're the people involved. TRC's are also not the building they are located in. They're the services they provide. We will have in person services. We don't necessarily have to have a warehouse to provide

those services. We will continue our mission, but we do not have to do that in a segregated environment.

- We have a wonderful relationship with the DOL. They're an invaluable partner and peer in the workforce development system. We don't have to pack up the TRCs and move them to DOL. We have many opportunities to expand and deepen that partnership. We've had two targeted meetings to begin to deepen those relationships and map out who serves who, eligibility requirements, funding sources, etc., to braid and maximize resources for Tennesseans. It's not quick or easy, but the right way to do it and will allow us to work together as best we can.
- We will continue to engage in the board as we have these conversations, but I think the other important piece is as Selina updates you on our transformation and the progress her team is making, I'm hoping that will answer your questions and concerns that created the recommendation to move the TRC's from VR to DOL.

Thomas:

The very last part of your address sounds promising to me.

Mandy:

Great. Selina has updates on the transformation and specific initiatives and lays the groundwork for you to see where we have the opportunities.

Thomas:

First part, some of the things the board recommended was due to conversations with the TRC staff. So maybe communication challenges aren't just between the board and VR, maybe the TRC staff as well.

Mandy:

Communication is always a challenge. But we also have some staff that are actively resisting transformation. They want to continue sheltered work in a segregated environment. We are continuing to deliver our message and show the benefits of transformation, many are seeing that and are beginning to see the fruits of our labor. One of the silver linings of the pandemic was staff realizing they can serve customers outside of the TRC's. We have been successful during this time. I appreciate the boards outreach and listening to staff members, please remember there are going to be those that don't agree. Quite honestly, as a leader trying to lead change, my staff receiving these board minutes with this recommendation to remove the TRC's from my division was unsettling for them and created turmoil as well.

Jaylene:

From the perspective of the TRC's closing, from my perspective, the concern was the individuals being serviced out of the TRC's right now. Virtual works for some, but we didn't want people to get lost in the system. That's two-fold too, there have been conversation on our end, from labor, that we wanted to work more with VR and the TRC's and strike up a different type of partnership. I'm glad the deputies of each dept have met and our conversations have happened out of concern. There was also best interest at heart, it was not to dishearten anyone. My focus was on the clients and participants. Virtual doesn't always work in our world. The TRC's are valuable in each of the community.

Mandy:

I agree. One of the things we continue to try and understand that we aren't closing. We're moving, collocating, delivering services where they best meet the needs of the individuals. With Williamson Co we didn't have an alternative, the county made the decision to cancel the lease. The situation in Clarksville was similar, the lease was up, and we could collocate with the DHS office. It's on the bus route and a better option. That may not be permanent, but we didn't feel we were in a place with our transformation to provide scope and specifications for new multi-year leases. This allows us more time to clearly identify space needs and to explore these opportunities with Labor and others on ways to collocate in those communities.

Thomas:

Some of the staff who had worked hard to secure those TRCs can remember how hard it was to get those facilities there and get those in the state. If they are able to stay where they are and make the marriage work with labor, and more people could come in and work, they were looking at it that way. I think it's accomplishing the same thing, but a different view. I think just more discussion, a lot more communication, could and maybe should have occurred. But in moving forward, any other questions or statements?

Mandy available until 3:30pm.

Mark: I missed the roll call but am here. What we've learned from the recommendation and Mandy's response, is it's important to have all players present in the board meeting before we make suggestions like that in the future. Mandy could have addressed that in our last meeting and perhaps the board would not have seen the necessity to make that recommendation. It's great that we're all together and as we look at the TRC's being together is really important.

Jim Troupe and Melinda Bone joined.

Selina:

I will email the PowerPoint on the screen to you Thomas to share with the board.

Presentation of PowerPoint.

Thomas questioned role of local board in each location:

Selina – the managers engage their boards during the transformation and when I speak a little bit on some of the pilots, the board has been engaged in business partnerships in that area. We engage them in opportunities to be involved and best serve our population. In Cookeville several of the board members are local businesses and have adopted community-based training. We actually have that business as one of our success stories. Featured in Disability Awareness Month celebrations. Synergy contract ended at the end of September. We worked with them on the individual TRC community plans and it's now up to us to implement the transformation.

Mandy:

To chime in on, again, in thinking about transformation it is a process and a collaborative process. It's not a light switch moment. While we have a framework and are working to implement the process, a

year from now we can look back and see what progress was made, but right now it's partnership and developing phase. We went from a clearly defined "this is what I do every day" but now we're changing it and we're working to figure out what we're changing it to. It's an evolution. Part of it is trusting the process so we can get where we're going and be able to show a finished product.

Thomas:

The three area leaders from the TRC's when they've been engaged, how much input do you get from them?

Selina:

We are walking hand in hand through this entire journey. I wouldn't be where I am without David, Pam, and Ryan. They have done an exceptional job leading their areas as well as helping develop the plan and implement the plan. This is the biggest team I've ever been on with a lot of moving parts, but it's a great team and the area managers are participating and active members.

Thomas:

How can the board assist?

Mandy:

We want and need the support of this board. We would like to update you on the transformation process, the info collected in each area, the ideas being generated, so for example if we need to increase partnerships in certain areas this board could help with furthering those relationships and avenues for the TRC's. Also, just communicating our message of investment in the communities. A challenge we have, part of our name "center" people think building. We want people to understand that the important work we do is the services and support. It's the spokes of the hub. Helping people understand you don't have to go to a place, you can receive services and understanding the important work we do comes from our people. The services they provide, the connections we can help make, in a building OR elsewhere. Encouraging our staff and the community to conceptualize it that way is helpful as well.

Ronnie:

I'm somewhat at a loss, and members are at a loss. Who's working together when we say "we" are working together? The community, VR staff, etc.? If so, how is it sold in the community? I spent many years in the labor field and saw WIOA come along, it's hard because everyone plays a turf game. I still don't know who the clients are, before they had to have a disability, does the staff now deal with anybody that comes in the door? I'm at a loss now of what I should tell people in the community that may need services due to the way it is. I know WIOA deals with people who need physical help, are we saying VR staff will take anyone on and listen to my problems and guide me.

Mandy:

At its very core, VR has not changed. Our mandate and focus is to serve people with disabilities. What's changing is as the workforce system we're trying to do a better job working together. The reality is, it doesn't make good sense in investing in a local community to have two separate locations for people with disabilities to get that help and for people without a disability to get the same help. We're trying to

remove some of the turf barriers. If I'm a citizen, I don't care who's paying for the services, I just want to get help and go to work. Figuring out the funding streams and how to pay for it, that's my job as the assistant commissioner. As a partner in the workforce system we're working behind the scenes to tap into all the available funding sources to assist someone who needs it just like if someone with a disability walks in the door at Labor. It's almost as if who's paying for what becomes invisible.

Ronnie:

That's how it was supposed to work, but it doesn't. If you focus on who gets credit for everything, you'll never function the way you should. I'm 100% behind what you're saying, that's the only way you'll get the bang for the dollars and get people service as needed without jumping through 50 circles to get to what they need. You've got staff out here that I'm not sure need to know what they're supposed to do, I'd be lost.

Mandy:

We're engaging with them to help remove some of that mystery. But I agree, this is going to be hard and difficult and a chance for TN to be a model for other states. It's often federal partners who put up barriers and make this difficult. We know that, we're up to the challenge.

Ronnie:

I'm glad to see it going this way. I'd like to see it go this way.

Jaylene:

With labor we're always looking and developing programs and as the partnership grows, we thought the TRC's would be perfect for the employers who don't have locations for trainings. We're looking from a standpoint from the footprint. We're looking at the TRC's as an extension of AJC's to engage areas that don't have AJC's but maybe look at those as specialized centers or training space. From a partnership standpoint that's what we were hoping to gain from that, but we understand reducing the footprint.

Mandy:

That's a point we embrace, where it makes sense and we have those opportunities and need the space, I'll make that happen. But in that center, we need the right participants and activities. A building doesn't need to drive the business needs, the people we're serving, and the needs of the community drive us. I think there are great opportunities to do that.

Thomas:

To make sure we aren't leaving some ideas behind, the TRC name, I think somewhere we want to make sure that those individuals can be trained/rehabilitated at some point, so they have an equal standing when they go for a job.

Mandy:

Our primary place that's happening is our Pre-ETS services. Assistance provided before students leave high school, we're able to focus on job readiness and independent living skills. We have great partnerships with DOE. That's another piece of WIOA, it took us a while to get here, but now we're delivering Pre-ETS services to thousands of students across the state before they become a VR

customer. That's not going to get everyone, but that's at least one way in which we do that. There are other ways our TRC staff provide those services and provide them in an office setting or in the community. Our staff can do job readiness training anywhere, could be a change for the board to help, within local businesses find out if they'd be willing to be a site for mock interviews, mock first day of work, etc. There are lots of ways to do that in more real life, real work settings.

Stephanie:

I think I need to process my comments, but I have a different perspective. I went through VR, and when I walked into AJC or a TRC, what I'm looking at comes from my perspective as the individual with a disability. So, every time I speak, I work, I play, I am running a dual role as a professional and an individual with disability. I love the message of inclusion. I'm hearing that you want to be able to assist anyone, disability or not. I'm very glad to be hearing that.

1. What is the feedback from your consumers? How are they involved?
2. How or what is the plan for when someone walks in without a disability that they are serviced as well/thoroughly as those with disabilities.
3. Are we going to take this model (I love how it was laid out, life skills, voc training, job) over the rest of the VR, not just these 17 centers?

Mandy:

I love all of those questions.

1. Absolutely we want that feedback. We are working on some new tools across DHS to better engage and get real time feedback from our customers throughout their time with us. Historically we only engaged in customer satisfaction at the end of services. We want that feedback at multiple points. We're working on that within VR as well as across DHS. We want to use tech, tools, we don't want long cumbersome surveys. We want quick and easy. That will be important. We also hope we'll see it in our numbers. We hope to see people want to engage with us. Our decline in numbers sent a message, we want to monitor those numbers and I can give an example. This board may remember, we went through a similar transformation at TRC Smyrna. Changed our delivery model there to move away from program-based model (VIS program for example) to a career/technical model where individuals with disabilities who identified a tech or career goal could pick their path and now can get education and credentials. Our enrollment has skyrocketed. We actually, prior to pandemic, had reached capacity in our dorms. The response to that tells me that the students and our customers that were pursuing that type of support for their career goals, this was meeting their needs. I hope to see the same jump in numbers at our TRC's.
  - a. Stephanie was not on the board and wants to go see Smyrna. Do you think you saw growth across all disabilities at TRC or only growth in attendance from certain disabilities?
  - b. Mandy: I don't have all the data to speak to that definitively. I can share that the TN chapter of Federation for the Blind was concerned. So, I have that information and we actually have seen an increase in student enrollment with visual disabilities since the enrollment. We can certainly share a more diverse update in a future meeting. I'd love for you to visit the campus once that's possible. Training is a big part of our

transformation, starting with delivering PCT training with all staff statewide to reinforce the person-centered philosophy about meeting people where they are and allowing the person to drive the development and delivery of services. By putting the person at the center, it allows us to create everything based on their circumstances. To add to that though, VR is still focused on individuals with disabilities. The key to this model is our partnerships and serving all of our populations. This will be a collaborative effort. We're starting with the person-centered focus, we've developed our CORE (connecting opportunities resources and education) program to drive home our goal is delivering services, being the connector, delivering services, etc. We may not be the core provider, but we need to be knowledgeable and connect people to services when appropriate. It's an ongoing training process.

2. We are carrying this out across VR. We very quickly learned and realized as part of our journey when working with TRC's we quickly realized that this wasn't just about the 17 TRC's. This is a model for how VR services should be offered across the state. We're focusing on the 17 communities with a TRC with the plan/thought that once this is up and running in those areas that any county or community will be able to take this model/plan and implement these services in this way in their community. We renamed the plan (VR Community plan) to emphasize this isn't just about the TRCs.

Thomas: You're looking to expanding to DHS offices in each county if they need this?

Mandy: That's a possibility. We already service individuals in all 95 counties. The centers were placed where they were due to gaps in service delivery and the communities have changed since then. Gaps will be addressed first, and some communities don't have gaps but we want to do a better job coordinating what's already there.

Thomas:

Goes back to what Ronnie was talking about. Thorough communication with local boards to help to sell this. Smyrna is the same building with same providers, it's a different perspective.

Stephanie:

You mentioned onboarding training and everything you're putting in place, if I was a screen reader can I navigate the onboarding process and training with screen reader?

Mandy:

Training we develop and provide is accessible. As far as applying for and getting a job, that's something we're working with HR to improve that process. Quite honestly, it's cumbersome period and they have not had a focus on making it as accessible as it should be in my opinion. They meet the minimum requirements, and there are ways to request accommodations, but the current app process could be recommended to improve.

Thomas:

Tell us more about the screen reader.

Stephanie:

So when you look at the screen and read the email, I can use a program on top of my email, or a system that is built into the OS (my preference). If it's built correctly with accessibility in mind, I can understand what's going on without having to see it and can interact like anyone else. Inclusive systems are important and some of our clients might make wonderful additions to VR staff so that they can speak to someone with visual impairments about going back to work because they've seen me working, they might think they can do it.

Mandy:

The key to enhancing these presentations, for example with the slide on the screen, the title at the top and in the body of the slide there's a more in-depth explanation. If the program isn't set up correctly, the screen reader can read it out of order (body and then title). This slide also has DHS logo at the bottom, so depending on the screen reader you can actually insert an alternative description that would allow a screen reader user to know that this is the DHS logo rather than just saying a graphic image without a description.

Stephanie:

Even now with smartphones, even if they aren't coded right, the phone itself can try and fill in the blanks. Let's say the graphic was not labeled, I can use my phone to try and get a description of the graphic. That's just how it works.

Mandy:

We're almost out of our time. Selina needs to talk about our 3 pilots before we go.

PowerPoint continued about pilot programs.

Thomas:

Jaylene? At this time, if Selina has finished, we are still going to look forward to having Ms. Lisa.

Jaylene:

Lisa had to drop off the call. I'm sorry. I know you're probably working with Tyra Copas, our apprenticeship director, she's rolling and making great strides across the state. It's day by day, she's always doing something great in that respect. I emailed Lisa back to see if there was anything I could share, but she did not respond and is offline right now.

I would like to tell you a little bit working with Premier Virtual. We have purchased a virtual job fair for all of the local 9 workforce development areas. I wish I could tell you more about it, it will allow each of the local areas to have a virtual site to connect job seekers and local employers. We're benefiting from the Care act funds and this was one of the benefits. With unemployment benefits running out the end of this month, we wanted to try and anticipate people needing help.

We want to make sure the concentration is not on unemployment but rather on jobs. We're excited about the virtual AJC, there's an app for your phone, we're working with Ernst and Young and are excited about working with them. Everything you'd have access to in a physical location we would like to have a virtual option.



I'll send some of this out to you. We're excited about multiple efforts we have to assist Tennesseans getting back to work.

Thomas:

Tell us more about Cares act funds.

Jaylene:

We received funds to 1. Work with small business owners throughout the state to try and avoid layoffs and 2. Reemployment services geared toward participants in short term training.

Stephanie:

Did you check Premier platform for accessibility? In the new app your building?

Jaylene:

We were just testing the app out last week, so I don't have a lot of information on that, but I will get her to send that out to you. We're excited about that as well as I'll try to send out the virtual AJC and Premier Job Fair.

Stephanie:

But did you include accessibility?

Jaylene:

Yes.

Thomas:

Mandy, I know you have another appointment. Selina will you be here?

Selina:

Yes.

Thomas:

Let's take a 5-minute break then.

Thomas:

Are there any other questions from the board?

Ronnie: if I was a staff member out here, I don't know how I would feel in limbo, not knowing how everything is going to come into play. I would hate to work under those conditions myself.

Selina:

We definitely don't want that. All the centers have been very engaged. Can you give me an example?

Ronnie:

I'm in Dyersburg. We've spoken openly with staff there. They don't really understand what is going to be a client anymore. They still have all the same goals they had in prior years but without the clients they had anymore because the major client source was that center.

Selina:

We need to do a better job marketing ourselves, making ourselves available, being at the table. That's another goal of our transformation. If you'd asked the question about one of our staff, I really would have liked that question to then come up, up the ladder. That shouldn't be our practice, it's not good customer service. I appreciate your feedback.

Ronnie:

I'm not saying staff will say they don't know. They're just out in limbo land, the clients they really are to service are primarily disabled, and I asked if someone in the community needed help, how do they get referrals now? It doesn't seem to funnel down the same way.

Jim:

The age demographic is a primary focus and if you are going to broaden that scope it's going to broaden your opportunity to assist people. The problem becomes identifying how to access and reach out to those people. To get the involvement there. As far as referral sources, we still have those. We just need to expand our perspective.

Ronnie:

Mandy I will say the manager here in Dyersburg is doing a good job getting out in the field. That has been a problem in the past, but she's really involved in the chamber of commerce. If we can ever determine what we do with the building, we are at a loss as to what we'd get to use the building for. We don't want to lose the building; we want to utilize it.

Mandy:

In terms of referral sources, the other thing this model does and what we've been working on is this really opens up the opportunities for our TRC staff to be more engaged in referral process. They don't have to wait for a VR counselor to recommend someone for services. They can make a referral to VR themselves in the community. They can help initiate that process. We're trying to open more doors rather than closing any.

Ronnie:

So, you're saying they don't have to send me to a VR Counselor?

Mandy:

I'm saying they can help facilitate that conversation. They don't have to wait for a VR counselor to send someone to them. As opposed to waiting for customers, they can be engaging in the community and getting those referrals themselves. Pre-ETS is an exception to that rule.

Thomas:

Are we sure that the TRC are aware of what they can do now? Are they well aware? We need to have some future conversation with them to make sure the communication has been thorough and received very well with the staff, that they know that they can do these and be energized in the future for what they can do throughout the community.

Mandy:

One of the main mechanisms we use are IPPs (annual Individual Performance Plans). Every staff member in state government will get a plan for the next year that starts in January. Some of the things in that plan are goals related to participating in community activities, activities related to increased referrals, a lot of transformation activities that should be a guide to our staff in what they're going to need to focus on.

Thomas:

As we redo our list, we'd like to be able to ask some of those questions with the staff.

Any other questions for Mandy or Selina?

Jim:

I guess I'm email driven to a large extent and tend to wander from time to time. I know y'all talk back and forth, email reports back and forth, and these quarterly meetings are beneficial, but there are so many changes. I wouldn't mind a periodic update on what's changing so we can stay focused on dynamic of change. I would appreciate it. I don't know how appropriate that would be, but I would be interested.

Thomas:

Good observation! I think that would help, Mandy. It would help us reinforce the message sent to the staff.

Mandy:

I think we could explore a monthly message. Rather than a formal newsletter, make a transformation update or something along those lines?

Jim:

That's exactly what I was thinking of, just so we're going in the same direction and conveying the same message.

Mandy:

Selina and I will work on that after the meeting.

Motion and second to adjourn at 3:27pm