



## Florida Rehabilitation Council

Andy Houghton, Chair

Executive Committee Meeting Minutes-November 15, 2023

### Executive Committee Members:

Andy Houghton, Brent McNeal, Delaina Parrish

### Additional Council Members:

Vicky Gaitanis, Allison Klein, Matti Wieczorek

### VR Staff:

Kim Thomas, Roy Cosgrove, Derrinita Walker, Monica Edwards, Victoria Aguilar, Amanda Freeman, Kathy Davis

**Guests:** Patricia Parrish, Tess Crowder, Jane Johnson, Dan Shorter, Amy Feutz, Maria R., Heather Beaven, Mikey Wiseman, Colette Pearson, Eric Reed, Lesly Quintanilla

The following represents a summary of deliberations, advice, comments and motions that comprise this FRC meeting/Teams call.

### Call to order-Quorum established

The committee approved the agenda, with the addition of VR feedback.

Brent discussed that they are making good progress on ensuring payments are now flowing following the implementation of AWARE in August. They are working with Alliance daily to address system-related issues in payment processing. He said the best way to resolve issues is to contact resources in the local areas, including Area Directors.

Over \$9 million in payments were processed in October; \$5 million in November, so far. Many of the service providers they have worked with have said they are receiving payments. They have met with organizations and individuals, including Kerri Morris from the Association of People Supporting Employment First (APSE), Karen Dunn, CEO of Alliance and Courtney Swilley, Florida Association of Rehabilitation Facilities (FARF). Service providers should reach out and provide specific information. Brent thanked the committee and the council for the willingness to delve into the matter. Brent said he will be leaving VR and moving into the role of attorney on workforce-related matters for the Dept. of Commerce. He thanked all for the privilege to work with them.

Vicky Gaitanis reported that weekly calls are being conducted with providers; special teams have been created to address concerns. She encouraged providers to join the listserv for updated information. Additional training is being conducted for staff. They are moving forward in the right direction. She also encouraged providers to reach out early so they can assist. Andy discussed that, in the partnership with VR, the council's responsibility is to fully understand what is happening in the division. The council was not aware of the issues that were occurring until the October meeting. Vendors on the council could have possibly brought it up earlier. Going forward, he would like to find a way that the council could be more involved and have a better understanding of what's going on so they can understand how it may be affecting customers.

Delaina asked if it would be helpful to ask a provider to attend the quarterly meetings to share the challenges in their area and Andy said it's all on the table.

Andy discussed his communication with Dr. Morris at APSE and APSE's recommendations to address the issues.

Vicky discussed that providers should reach out to Area Directors if they have an issue with payments or referrals. No payments are being processed outside of AWARE. Regarding hiring and retention, VR vacancies are at the lowest they've ever been and incoming referrals are up to date.

**Public Comment:**

Dan Shorter discussed Career Camps and that there is no contact information for the family on the referrals. He shared his belief that the majority of authorizations are being done incorrectly and there is no way to track payments. His organization has not been fully paid yet. Also, there is a finite amount of information that can be viewed in AWARE. Dan said counselors are doing a great job with referrals; theirs are up 65% from last year. Vicky said they will be sharing information in the next 2 week that will address some of his concerns. They are developing additional guidance and asked for his feedback. She said to reach out to her to assist with past payments.

Mikey Wiseman discussed that their payments are now up to date. He has met with area leadership and hopes the systemic issues have been forwarded to leadership. Regarding referrals, their caseload is down 50% so they are concerned that customers are not being served. He indicated that his organization can no longer provide OJT due to their lack of funding. Mikey suggested the council look at number of referrals per quarter, services delivered, benchmark dates and payment dates. Vicky said the data suggests that they are currently delivering services to about 14,000 individuals, a 10% drop in what is typical. Mikey added that their provider liaison, Judith Toussant, has been amazing with her guidance through the issues. Brent thanked Mikey for meeting with him after the last meeting and for his offer to help the division from the service provider perspective. VR Leadership shared their continued willingness to meet with all on issues.

Heather Beaven said she hopes the council will take the opportunity to raise itself to the level of a gubernatorial council. She said there are problems in VR from top to bottom and that someone in leadership needs to be held accountable.

Delaina suggested reviewing matters that came up at the previous public forum at the beginning of the next council meeting.

Delaina discussed the recommendation of holding a more formalized orientation/planning, strategy session because new members are navigating a steep learning curve. Information on core programs would be helpful in order to ask educated questions as they come up. Andy said there would be value in having this type of strategy session with specific areas of focus, as long as it aligns with the council's core purpose. The session, which could be labeled FRC Orientation and Refresher, could be a half day with one of the committees developing recommendations. Members could be polled to ask if they would want to participate to ensure there will be appropriate attendance at the February meeting in Tallahassee. Delaina suggested certain VR staff be present in person. Results of the poll will be discussed at the December meeting. Kim discussed that the council had previously planned on hearing from the different program areas at the February meeting already, similar to Delaina's suggestion; Delaina said some SRCs conduct the orientation at a separate meeting. Vicky discussed that RSA will be coming to Florida in February so she does not know about staff availability to attend yet.

**Adjourned**