

**Operations Committee**  
**January 27, 2025**

Present: Heather Gleason, Sara Carrigan, Sarah Longtin, Mary Shumski, Christine Hendrickson, LeRoy Kiecker, Margy Hendrickson, Karla Tauer, Sheila Koenig, and Becky Zoubek

**I. Introduction**

- Rebecca (Becky) Zoubek – Workforce Strategy Consultant
- Mary Shumski – Fairmont CareerForce Supervisor
- LeRoy Kiecker – Workforce Development Supervisor with DEED/CareerForce for SW & SC Minnesota
- Margy Hendrickson – Community Services Director at MVAC
- Christine Hendrickson – Rehabilitation Area Manager for VRS (Mankato, New Ulm, and Worthington)
- Karla Tauer – Rehabilitation Area Manager for VRS (Fairmont, Faribault, Austin, and Albert Lea)
- Shelia Koenig - Youth Services Manager with State Services for the Blind
- Heather Gleason - Executive Director at South Central WorkForce Council
- Sara Carrigan – Assistant Director at South Central WorkForce Council
- Sarah Longtin – Regional Career Coordinator at South Central WorkForce Council

**II. Updates**

**Workforce Strategy Consultant**

Rebecca (Becky) Zoubek is the Workforce Strategy Consultant based in Faribault serving south central and southeast Minnesota. She has experience in human resources in addition to her role at the Faribault CareerForce location working with several programs for seven years. New in her role with DEED, she is learning the ropes, meeting stakeholders, and connecting with businesses for retention and recruitment. Priority businesses include those that are receiving the Minnesota Investment Fund (MIF), Job Creation Fund, and those on the Minnesota Job Skills Partnership (MJSP) board.

**MOU/IFA**

Heather Gleason reported that a MOU/IFA meeting is scheduled for January 28<sup>th</sup>. The most recent draft of each of the three locations will be finalized. Any suggested changes should be submitted prior to the meeting.

**Staffing Updates**

Margy Hendrickson shared that MVAC has an intern from Minnesota State University, Mankato for this semester. The intern will rotate to all MVAC departments with Emily Roiger as her mentor. There is an opportunity for the intern to carry a small caseload filling in for a staff going on medical leave.

Karla Tull reported that the VRS hiring freeze is still in place and anticipates that the freeze will be lengthy.

LeRoy Kiecker reported that Sarah McDonald is now off her probation period. LeRoy added that he is still exploring the possibility of an internship or work experience for a pre-social work student at the Mankato CareerForce location.

**Monitoring & Data Validation**

Sara Carrigan shared that the WIOA Youth Programs will be monitored, and data validation will occur this year. LeRoy Kiecker shared that the migrant and seasonal farmworkers (MSFW) program will be monitored in mid-February.

**Area Layoffs**

Mary Shumski reported that area layoffs have added to the heavy traffic at the Fairmont CareerForce. Patrons travel long distances to receive services. One layoff in particular is the Mayo Hospital in Fairmont, which has impacted 12 employees in the surgery, labor, and delivery departments.

**CareerForce Operational Updates**

Mary Shumski reported a water leak in the building housing the CareerForce office in Fairmont. Fortunately, there was no damage to the office itself. Additionally, fire alarms have been sounding in the office.

LeRoy Kiecker informed the group about the upcoming lease end-date for the Mankato CareerForce. While there is an option for renewal, he requested a "wish list" from partners to help in the search for an alternative space.

LeRoy Kiecker mentioned that recent rearrangements at the Mankato location have resulted in some unused furniture, which is now available. Contact LeRoy with any requests.

**VRS Operational Updates**

Christine Hendrickson reported that VRS staff are navigating the new changes regarding the budget. Staff are receiving guidance on language to use with current and future clients and VRS hosts monthly connection meetings for staff and partners.

**VRS Virtual Intake Unit (VIU)**

Christine Hendrickson informed the group about the VRS Virtual Intake Unit (VIU). The Worthington office is part of the VIU trial before using it statewide. There will be six staff supporting the VIU and they will gather all materials and information necessary for eligibility and enrollment of participants 18 years and older. The first meeting with clients can be virtual or in-person, which allows for more opportunities. Christine has developed a handout for offices to connect participants that she will share with the group. An assessment will occur to evaluate the VIU process and feedback is welcome during the trial period. The VRS Interest Form can be found at: <https://mn.gov/deed/job-seekers/disabilities/> under [MORE INFORMATION](#)

**State Services for the Blind (SSB) Youth Programming**

Sheila Koening shared about youth programs across the state. SSB has continued their partnership with Wilderness Inquiry and Sky's the Limit to provide youth programming in the summer and winter. Sheila also mentioned the Peer Ambassadors program where two SSB students are leading peer-to-peer programming across the state to support students with vision loss. The Peer Ambassadors are available for one-on-one peer discussions and they also plan virtual and in-person group activities.

**MVAC Program Updates**

Margy Hendrickson reported that MVAC continues to take referrals for all employment and training programs. There is currently a waitlist for both the senior and young adult work experiences however other services are still being provided.

MVAC is offering their VITA Tax free tax preparation and E-file services program on Thursday evenings and select Saturday mornings from January 30<sup>th</sup> – April 12<sup>th</sup>. Income guidelines are as follows: \$36,000 or less for singles, \$56,000 or less for families. Call MVAC to set up an appointment. Schedules fill up fast!

**Youth at Work (YAW) Competitive Grant**

Sara Carrigan reported that South Central WorkForce Council plans to complete the request for proposal for the YAW grant.

**Employment Transition Model (ETM) Demonstration Grant**

Sara Carrigan shared that our local Workforce Development Area (WDA) is part of the Office of Disability Employment Policy Equitable Transition Model Demonstration (ETM) Grant, a federal grant focused on best practices of serving youth with disabilities. The title has recently shifted to the Employment Transition Model. There will be an SSI Training on February 12<sup>th</sup>, and all are welcome to attend.

**Long-Term Care Grant**

Heather Gleason announced that South Central Service Cooperative was awarded the "Supporting New Americans in the Long-Term Care Workforce" Grant. This grant will support training for 100 individuals. An Adult Basic Education (ABE) class will begin in February focusing on career exploration in healthcare in partnership with Minnesota Council of Churches. The material and VR technology will be presented in English, Spanish, and Somali and aligns with On-Ramp curriculum. All parties will work together to form a pipeline from the long-term care grant to On-Ramp and Bridge.

**Veterans Employment Program**

Heather Gleason shared that during a meeting, Ray Douha, the Director of Veterans Employment Services at DEED, announced a new Veterans Survey process. Training on the process will be provided, and more information will be shared as it becomes available. This led to a discussion about the status and process of current veteran files and referrals, highlighting the need for further guidance.

**Outreach to Schools**

Sara Carrigan shared the Partners in Career Exploration (PICE) interns are continuing their work at schools in addition to receiving training. The next training will be Monday, February 3<sup>rd</sup> from 9-10:30AM with our Regional Analyst, Amanda Blaschko, to provide information on labor market tools. Sara will also connect with MVAC, VRS, and CareerForce staff to provide a session on their resources and programs for the interns.

Sarah Longtin mentioned the numerous career events that will take place this spring. A list is provided below:

## **Upcoming Career Events for High School Students**

### **Local Career Events**

- February 6th – Tri-City United Career Day
- February 12th – Madelia Job and Career Fair
- March 12th – Career Day
- March 26th – New Ulm Career Expo
- April 8th – CRAVE (Culinary Arts Regional Venue in Education)
- April 9th – Area Career Exploration (ACE) Event in Fairmont
- April 16th – Mankato Career Expo
- May 21st – Teen Connect @ West High School
- June 10-12th – Scrubs Camp

### **Career Navigator**

- January 10th
- January 17th
- February 7th
- February 14th
- February 21st
- February 28th
- March 7th

### **South Central Construction Trades Boot Camp**

- April 2nd – Boot Camp with the Carpenters
- April 9th – Training Center Tour
- April 16th – Boot Camp with the Millwrights
- April 30th – Boot Camp with the Electricians
- May 7th – Boot Camp with the Laborers
- May 14th – Boot Camp with the Cement Masons
- May 28th – Boot Camp with Heat & Frost

## **CareerForce Partners' Training Day**

Sara Carrigan shared that the CareerForce Partner's Training Day will take place on April 29<sup>th</sup> from 9AM until 3PM focusing on Artificial Intelligence (AI) and other agency "cool tools." Please connect with your staff to prepare a best practice or "cool tool" to bring to the event. A save the date will be sent out with registration to follow. The cost will be \$45 per person.

## **Upcoming Professional Development and Training Events**

- February 4<sup>th</sup> – 10:30 AM - Noon: VRS + Community Partners Forum - [Forum Registration](#)
- February 12<sup>th</sup> – 1-2:30PM: SSI and Work Incentives Training with PACER Center
- February 13<sup>th</sup> – 3:30-5:30 PM: Building Tomorrow's WorkForce: Local Strategies to Engage Global Talent in MN hosted by Regional Nine Development Commission
- February 21<sup>st</sup> – 7 PM: MVAC Lip Sync Battle: This fundraiser will benefit the Community Services Department's Youth Employment Program. Tickets are \$40.
- April 29<sup>th</sup> – 9AM – 3PM: Career Force Partner's Training Day at the South Central Service Cooperative focusing on AI and sharing Cool Tools hosted by the Training Team
- May 20<sup>th</sup> – 9 AM - 4 PM: South Central Workforce Summit hosted by Greater Mankato Growth in alignment with the Drive for Five Grant

**Upcoming Job Fairs**

- February 5<sup>th</sup> – 10 AM – 1 PM: Job Fair with Jobs HQ at the Mankato Armory
- April 15<sup>th</sup> – TBD: Job Fair with Jobs HQ at South Central College
- July TBD: Job Fair with Job HQ for Veterans

**Next Meeting:** The next meeting will be February 24<sup>th</sup>, 2025.

The meeting adjourned.