**Massachusetts State Rehabilitation Council FY24 Recommendations**

6.22.23 approved by the State Rehabilitation Council

MRC Response 8.1.23

**Recommendation FY24-1: Recommend MRC reach out to the sheriff’s department at the Worcester County Jail & House of Correction to explore outreach to individuals with disabilities using a dog training program and to get inmates’ input on the program.**

Responsible SRC Committee: Customer Satisfaction/Needs Assessment Committee

**MRC Response to FY24-1**

MRC recognizes the importance of engagement with correctional populations, as well as the importance of service animals for many individuals living with disabilities. MRC offices have ongoing outreach to several correctional facilities (e.g., Middleton, Suffolk), and in FY24 we will continue these efforts. MRC’s focus regarding developing and delivering training programs is directed towards career pathways targeted for high growth and sustainability, for example cybersecurity, Pharmacy Technician, Human Services, and more. As such, this recommendation is not in line with the agency’s current strategic priorities. MRC proposes to:

* Not accept this recommendation.

**Recommendation FY24-2: Recommend MRC analyze for accessibility the current ways people with disabilities give input and results from service experience needs survey.**

Responsible SRC Committee: Customer Satisfaction/Needs Assessment Committee

In FY23, in partnership with the Service Recipient (consumer) Satisfaction/Needs Assessment Committee, MRC launched the development and implementation of a new services experience survey for current and former Job Seekers engaged with vocational rehabilitation services. Accessibility of the survey was a high priority for the team. Specifically, the survey is multi-modal (e.g., via email, phone), and is available in multiple languages including Spanish, Haitian Creole, Khmer, Portuguese, and Chinese, as well as American Sign Language. The electronic survey has been remediated for accessibility with screen readers (e.g., JAWS) and tested against plain language principles. Our process of survey development, implementation, and engagement in findings is participatory, and includes active partnership of individuals living with disabilities both being served by MRC, individuals from underrepresented populations, as well as individuals with disabilities employed by the agency. The survey was reviewed by the MRC Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility Council, and all MRC Employee Resource Groups (e.g., LGBTQ+Allies, Bilingual Group, Black Managers Committee), and Disability Inclusion Leaders and Family Inclusion Ambassadors, to maximize accessibility and cultural responsivity. In FY24 we plan to continue to engage the Executive Committee, the Service Recipient Satisfaction/Needs Assessment Committee, and the full SRC with survey findings, to discuss and develop strategies regarding data interpretation and dissemination efforts. Initial data from this survey have only recently been received by the agency. MRC is committed to engaging the SRC in the review and interpretation of findings as this is reflective of our values regarding participatory processes. MRC proposes to:

* Combine recommendations FY24-2 and FY24-5.
* Change recommendation language to state, “SRC will continue to actively partner with the MRC in the interpretation of survey data and strategies regarding dissemination of findings and associated actions taken.”
* Recommend focus include Job Seekers, Employer Partners, and contracted Providers surveys.
* Have the Service Recipient Satisfaction/Needs Assessment Committee and Business and Employment Opportunity Committee jointly hold this recommendation.
* Accept this recommendation (once combined).

**Recommendation FY24-3: Recommend MRC Councilors identify if a consumer is financially struggling and educate the consumer about possible resources and barriers to access these resources.**

Responsible SRC Committee: Customer Satisfaction/Needs Assessment Committee

Part of the counseling and guidance process with MRC Job Seekers includes identifying individual financial circumstances and, when needed, identifying possible resources and barriers to access these resources. MRC contracts with Independent Living Centers across the Commonwealth to provide financial literacy services as an extension of the VR IL contract. In addition, MRC Benefits Specialists are available in key geographic areas to support individuals. VR staff regularly facilitate warm hand-offs to ensure Job Seekers have awareness of and access to fiscal supports. The statewide MRC Connect eligibility unit, the front door to all vocational rehabilitation services, actively provides informational and referral support as Job Seekers begin their relationships with MRC. Additionally, the MRC Ombudsman provides hands on support to individuals who identify a higher need of financial resources beyond the scope of their services. Understanding and delivering resources specific to individuals’ economic sustainability is part of our ongoing work and mission within vocational rehabilitation and is regularly implemented in a variety of ways. MRC proposes to:

* Not accept this recommendation.

**Recommendation FY24-4: MRC will work with the SRC to develop practical strategies for sharing work incentives information with the business community/employers.**

Responsible SRC Committee: Business and Employment Opportunity Committee

Recognizing the need for improving and expanding inclusive access to economic opportunity, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts launched the Disability Employment Tax Credit (DETC) in October 2022. The DETC is a tax incentive program for employers, developed and implemented by MRC, aimed at increasing employment opportunities for individuals with a disability in the Commonwealth. MRC is currently developing a strategy that includes partnering with a marketing agency to launch a targeted campaign to raise awareness and increase applications for certification. The project will utilize a robust mix of paid, earned, and owned media. MRC would value the engagement of the Business and Employment Opportunity Committee in a participatory and feedback capacity. MRC proposes to:

* Ensure the Business and Employment Committee is integrated into the DETC workplan in the coming year, with a specific focus on supporting opportunities for membership engagement and feedback.
* Ensure the Director of Financial Wellness provides Business and Employment Opportunity Committee members regular updates re: the DETC and supports engagement and feedback.
* Change recommendation language to state, “The SRC will work with the MRC to develop a mechanism and timeline for engagement of Business and Employment Opportunity Committee members during the implementation of the Disability Employment Tax Credit marketing campaign.”
* Accept this recommendation.

**Recommendation FY24-5: MRC will work with the Business and Employment Opportunity Committee of the SRC to analyze results of MRC Consumer, Employer, and Provider survey data to better align SRC Recommendations to relevant findings.**

Responsible SRC Committee: Business and Employment Opportunity Committee

MRC has procured a vendor to develop and implement an innovation data collection platform to assess experience and engagement with MRC services, including MRC Job Seekers, Employer Partners, and contracted Providers. MRC agrees that findings from these surveys could and should support SRC recommendation alignment; we are excited to partner around this work. MRC proposes to:

* Combine recommendations FY24-2 and FY24-5.
* Change recommendation language to state, “SRC will actively partner with the MRC in the interpretation of survey data and strategies regarding dissemination.”
* Recommend focus include Job Seekers, Employer Partners, and contracted Providers surveys.
* Have the Service Recipient Satisfaction/Needs Assessment Committee and Business and Employment Opportunity Committee jointly hold this recommendation.
* Accept this recommendation (once combined).

**Recommendation FY24-6: Develop a Request for Response (RFR) to get three additional business consultants to advise consumers pursuing self-employment to achieve their vocational goal.**

Responsible SRC Committee: Business and Employment Opportunity Committee

MRC continues to recognize that interest in self-employment has increased over the last number of years, and these opportunities are an important part of the MRC portfolio available to Job Seekers. MRC has existing strategies (e.g., the Tutor RFR) for Job Seekers providing consultative support of self-employment vocational goals. MRC welcomes the expertise of Business and Employment Opportunity Committee members to help further explore if current mechanisms are (or are not) meeting existing needs, if there is a gap in supports, and how best address gaps (i.e., is an RFR and/or additional business consultants the right strategy for the identified need, or should other strategies be considered/implemented?). There is a possibility that re-allotment funds could be secured to procure a vendor to assess and enhance current strategies and mechanisms to support Job Seekers in pursuing self-employment goals. MRC proposes to:

* Change recommendation language to state, “The SRC will work with the MRC to assess and potentially enhance current strategies and mechanisms to support Job Seekers in pursuing self-employment vocational goals.”
* Accept this recommendation.

**Recommendation FY24-7: MRC will collaborate with SRC to identify, recruit, and engage more MRC Consumers and stakeholders from specific backgrounds, groups, and organizations required by federal regulations, including Un-served/Under-served communities, individuals with disabilities, and businesses.**

Responsible SRC Committee: Executive Committee

MRC is committed to supporting the SRC to ensure there is diversity among Job Seekers and other MRC stakeholders as SRC members from specific backgrounds, groups, and organizations, including Un-served/Under-served communities, individuals with disabilities, and businesses. MRC proposes to:

* Change recommendation language to state, “The SRC will collaborate with the MRC to identify, recruit, and engage more MRC Job Seekers and other stakeholders for SRC membership from specific backgrounds, groups, and organizations required by federal regulations, including Un-served/Under-served communities, individuals with disabilities, and businesses.”
* Accept this recommendation.