

Addressing Recruitment and Retention in VR

Introductions

Narrator: The following is a video symposium that alternates between static shots of participants in their offices.

Liam Kearney (LK): All right. Hello, everyone, and welcome to this amazing webinar CSAVR is doing in collaboration with YesLMS, the VR Development Group, and the VRTAC-QM. My name is Liam with YesLMS. I just wanted to let everyone know that throughout today's presentation, we will be posting some helpful articles in the chat as well as instructions on how to complete your survey and obtain your CRC for this session. We still have folks joining us, so we'll continue periodically throughout this session to post these helpful reminders in the chat. But I just want to thank you all for joining us today, and I'm going to turn things over to the CEO of YesLMS, Linda Hedenblad, for her introduction of today.

Linda Hedenblad (LH): Thank you, Liam, and it's really great that everybody is able to make it today. I am Linda from YesLMS, and we started this learning management system with one goal in mind, and that's to make a dent in digital equality. We really believe in accessibility for everyone, which is why we built YesLMS. We're partnered with our sister agency, which is the VR Development Group, and that's our content creator where we create classes and other content for the field of vocational rehabilitation and others who work with people with disabilities. Today, we're really very excited not only for the subject matter, but to be partnering with CSAVR and the VRTAC-QM through George Washington University. I'm going to turn it over here to Steve Wooderson, who's going to say hello.

Steve Wooderson (SW): Thanks, Linda. Well, I'm really pleased to welcome you to this first of a second series of three free webinars during this program here where Linda, our friends at YesLMS, have partnered with us to develop virtual opportunities for really our profession to rally around a number of national strategic priorities. For those of you who don't know, I'm Steve with the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation, and we're the membership organization for all the public VR agencies across the country. A couple of years ago, we announced three national strategic priorities, recruitment and retention of VR professionals, redesign and streamline internal processes, and increase public awareness of VR services. Today's topic is directly related to the first of those three priorities addressing recruitment and retention in VR. Just for reference, the Technical Assistance Center for Quality Management at San Diego State University pulled data from VR agencies' 2022 state plans, and found then of those reporting, there was a 14.2 percent counselor and a 14.9 support staff vacancy rate nationally. You know, staff retention in our field faces several unique challenges. So in today's session, we'll explore the issues of recruiting and retaining qualified employees, and be sharing some best practices to address this issue.

SW: So leading the discussion today will be John Walsh from George Washington University, Ron Vessell, Special Consultant with CSAVR, and then a great panel of state VR directors who

will share firsthand experiences, highlighting some of the challenges they faced and strategies that have yielded some successes. Theresa Koleszar from Indiana, Dee Torgerson from Minnesota and Melinda Fruendt from Oklahoma. I'll pass this over to our colleague, John Walsh.

John Walsh (JW): All right. Thank you, Steve. And I greatly appreciate the introductory comments by both Linda and Steve to kick this off. We greatly appreciate the opportunity being part of this collaboration with YesLMS and CSAVR, to share relevant training to a really important topic that's impacting our field right now, which is addressing recruitment and retention issues in your organization. So we're going to spend a little time talking about some of the findings that we were able to gather through some national research and some research that was done within our own field. And then as Steve mentioned, we're also going to be chatting with three directors that have implemented some practices that have really turned the corner for recruitment and retention in their organization. Before we get started, let's do some introductions. So my name is John Walsh. My pronouns are he, him. I'm a white male born at the tail end of the baby boomer generation. I'm wearing a lavender dress shirt. I'm also wearing black-rimmed glasses and a bluetooth headset. My Zoom background is virtual, and it is a blue with the George Washington University logo. I'm presenting out of my home office just outside of Philadelphia, PA. As Steve mentioned, I have the privilege of working at The George Washington University and have the pleasure of serving as the project director for the Center for Innovative Training in Vocational Rehabilitation. I'm also part of the VRTAC for quality management, and that's the hat I'm wearing today to talk about some of the work we're doing in this space. Ron and I, and with our colleagues, Carol Pankow, Missy Diehl, and Crystal Garry, have done some work around recruitment and retention to try to develop resources in order to help folks in the public VR sector. So I'm going to turn it over to my partner in crime in this endeavor, Ron, to allow him to introduce himself.

Ron Vessell (RV): Thanks, John. Ron Vessell here. As mentioned, I'm the CSAVR representative to the TAC-QM, and we've been working on this for a while. I suppose I should say I'm an older white guy with a gray beard and a bald head, and a blue shirt. And so, Theresa, would you like to introduce yourself?

Theresa Koleszar (TK): Hello, greetings from Indiana. I'm Theresa Koleszar, Director of the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services here in the Hoosier State. And I am, I guess I'm middle-aged now. So I'm a middle-aged white woman with shorter length brown hair, wearing a blue jacket. And I will go ahead and toss it over to Dee.

Dee Torgerson (DT): Hello, Dee Torgerson. Welcome from Minnesota. And I am a white female with blonde medium-length wavy hair. I was also born, I'm the last of the baby boomers, born in the last year of the baby boomers. And I'm wearing a dark blue shirt with a flower dark blue scarf. And I will send it over to you, Melinda from Oklahoma.

Melinda Fruendt (MF): Hello, I'm Melinda Fruendt from the great state of Oklahoma. And I apologize for my voice today, but we have a lot of tree pollen. So my apologies for that. I am a white woman with blonde, very spiky hair. I have on a pink jacket today. And in my background, you'll notice a sign that says "Farm" because I'm working from my house today. So I'm very happy to be a part of this panel today. Thank you.

JW: And we're just thrilled to have these three leaders join us today to share some of the practical experiences they've gone through in their organization to make a difference around recruitment and retention issues.