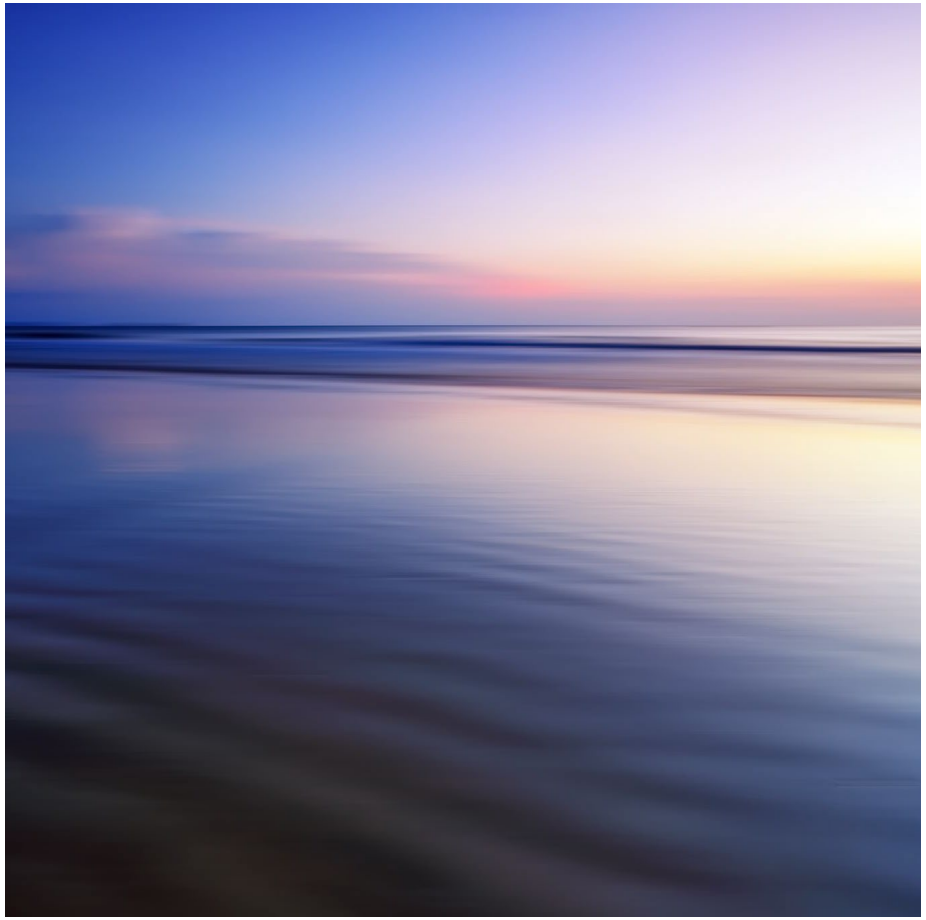
NTACT THE COLLABORATIVE

Innovative Recruitment and Retention Practices to Build Capacity

Libby Stone-Sterling, Joanne Kautzmann Murillo, Alyssa Klein & Matt Luther

Smooth Sailing: Some State's VR Staffing Before 2020

- → Stable staffing levels
- → Low turnover
- → Low vacancy rates



Slide Credit to Minnesota VRS

2020…Alarms Begin Ringing for Youth Serving Agencies/ Organizations (VR & Special Education)

Slide Credit to Minnesota VRS

A ‘Perfect Storm’ of Factors

- Global Pandemic with COVID
- Wave of Retirements
- Hiring Freeze (specific states)
- Overwhelmed and Stressed Staff
- Greater competition for candidates due to increased external job opportunities
- Huge demands on centralized HR function

Slide Credit to Minnesota VRS

Penn State Report on VR Retention Efforts

- National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research (NIDILRR) funded
- Herbert, O'Shea, Joon Yoon, & Al Balushi (2024)
- "Recruitment and Retention of State Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors: A Mixed Methods Analysis"
- Surveys and Interviews with state directors and their designates…

Why do counselors leave?

- Low salaries
- Excessive paperwork
- Insufficient career opportunities

Why do they stay?

- Commitment to the agency's mission
- Inherent reward of the job
- Employment benefits (insurance, leave)

Potential successful retention strategies:

- Benefits beyond salary compensation (e.g., retirement, insurance, tuition support)
- Professional development
- Flexible hours
- Web-based job posting system
- Telecommuting options

Learn more through CSAVR or the lead author jth4@psu.edu

National Picture of Employment In Our Fields

- VR and Education agencies (statewide position changes and vacancies)
- Practitioner level vacancies
- Implications for services and system improvements
- Implications for organizational climate/ culture

What are some VR agencies (and think there solutions for education here, too) doing to address?

Maine Challenges to Recruitment and Retention of Qualified Youth-Serving Staff

- → Post-pandemic hiring challenges
  - Private sector salary increases
  - Burnout in helping professions
  - Significant increase in demand for work/life balance
  - Multiple postings to get qualified candidates to interview
- → Fewer graduates in Rehab Counseling programs in state
- → Retirements accelerated

Collaborative Maine Strategies to Promote Recruitment and Retention

- **College Interns** – Outreach to local public universities with rehabilitation counseling programs at the undergraduate and graduate level to attract interns who are available for school year and summer internships that are paid by Vocational Rehabilitation.
- **Temporary Hiring through Staffing Agencies** - State of Maine master agreements with selected staffing agencies allow for 1) temp hiring to meet agency need (not for qualified VR counselors) and 2) targeted recruitment of selected positions (job coaches)
- **Family & Friends Approach** – Our staff who like their jobs talk with their family and friends about their work life balance and benefits – this has resulted in a number of applicants – and new hires! This also extends to partner agencies!

Collaborative Maine Strategies to Promote Recruitment and Retention (continued)

- **Investment in Leadership Development** – Career ladder peer panel discussions, access to staff development and training, UA Currents Lead VR cohort
- **New! Part-time hiring opportunities** – Currently launching part-time limited part-time positions to attract new labor pool and retain staff talent
- **Reorganization of Job Duties** – Creation of an intake unit which focuses on rapid engagement and short-term service delivery – allowing VR counselors in the field to focus on quality guidance and counseling.
- **Statewide Virtual staff** – These staff can be based in any VR office and team with VR staff across the state virtually to meet clients and provide services where needs exist

Indiana's Restructured Counselor Roles

→ Joanne Kautzmann Murillo joanne.murillo@fssa.in.gov

NTACT THE COLLABORATIVE

Minnesota's Strategies for Filling Talent Vacancies

→ Alyssa Klein, alyssa.klein@state.mn.us

How We Went from 75% to 94% Staffed in One Year

All Hands (and Ideas) on Deck!
(think back to the perfect storm slide)

- Activated many strategies to address the high and increasing vacancy rate
- Secured RSA approval to fund two HR recruitment and hiring professionals dedicated to VRS who focused on:
- Streamlining communications
- Maintaining the organization chart
- Tracking all positions and vacancies
- Expertly navigating our internal PTR system (personnel transaction record) providing relief for 35 VRS managers who use the system infrequently.

Excelling in HR Processes

- Job posting language
- Continuous posting vs. time limited with batch postings statewide
- HR weekly bulletins of open jobs
- Jobs listed on the DEED agency's landing webpage to stand out from other State of Minnesota jobs
- The "coffee story"

Excelling in HR Processes (continued)

- Streamlined communications between HR and VRS
  - 4-5 Directors vs. 35 Managers
- Reviewed and reconsidered minimum qualifications including degree requirements
  - Improves diversity
  - VRS still requires a Master's degree for Counselors
  - Created a new entry level Counselor role, primarily to serve Pre-ETS, that works as a great entry level into Counselor profession

Caring for Culture

- Strong and effective HR-VRS collaboration
- Weekly mtgs with HR and shared digital workspace (Teams)
- Established telework/hybrid work environment with greater flexibility
- Conducted pay equity reviews
- Union negotiated raises of 5.5% and 4.5%

Incentives with Returns

- Paid graduate level internships
- Hiring incentives: $5,000 total
  - $2,500 after probation period
  - $2,500 after two years
- Referral incentives: $1,000
  - Paid after the referred new employee becomes certified (typically one year post hire)

Financial Incentives

- Relocation expense reimbursement
  - Defined in union contract
- 75% VR graduate school tuition reimbursement by VRS
- Achievement Awards with financial bonuses for managers and staff
  - Terms differ according to contract
  - Staff eligible once per year
  - Committee led by HR

Expert Talent Recruiting

- → LinkedIn, Job Boards, Career Fairs
- → Staying in tune with generations
  - What's important for newer generations
- → Diversity (ODEO) dashboard for data informed decisions
  - Agency leadership and support
- → C700 State of Minnesota program for persons with disabilities

Virginia's Focus on a Culture of Mattering

→ Matt Luther, matt.luther@dars.virginia.gov

Your Ideas and Questions

Contact Us

Libby Stone-Sterling
Maine Department of Labor
libby.stone-sterling@maine.gov

Joanne Kautzmann Murillo
Indiana Family and Social Services Administration
joanne.murillo@fssa.in.gov

Alyssa Klein
Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development
alyssa.klein@state.mn.us

Matt Luther
Virginia Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services
matt.luther@dars.virginia.gov