Executive Director’s Year in Review 2021-2022

It’s amazing what a year will bring. Rounding into year two, it was sure nice to at least be familiar with everything that needed to be done rather than being constantly surprised like I was in that first year.

a. Check-ins with staff have continued monthly throughout the year. This has been very useful for catching issues before they become problems. I’ve learned if you give enough space, even the strongest nut will crack and out comes everything that’s bugging them! It’s also a chance for me to give praise and express gratitude for jobs well done.

b. Outreach and community development is a never ending, always important task. I have been so pleased with staff member’s efforts to connect with their communities. Many have stretched out of their comfort zones and got out there and networked, did presentations, and pitched in with service projects. As did I. RRCI was named business of the month by the Hurricane Chamber of Commerce, this directly due to our shy IL coordinator in that area pushing through to participate and network in Chamber meetings. We’ve stepped up our service projects and worked hard to create an open, collaborative reputation for RRCI. I make it a motto to never say no when anyone wants to meet with me regardless of what organization they’re from and try to find some way we can work with them. This has brought about some fabulous partnerships and bonded us with other entities. I get a lot of surprising calls now from people who want to connect with us!

c. A challenge with this position is staying connected with the consumers though my every thought and action is for them. I’m so often stuck at my desk in some meeting or another that I miss out on a lot of the fun. Fortunately, I’ve had opportunities to teach a class, join in a few activities and do a bit of driving pick-ups and drop-offs that help keep me in-touch with the wonderful people we serve.

d. This has been a bad year for staff retention. We had turnover in the two youth positions twice. All four left for better paying jobs. That’s a tough hit. It’s hard for any of our consumers to lose their coordinators, but especially the youth. This job is all about building relationships and you lose trust when you go through transitions. We finally have two, (I hope) stable staff members working our youth program now who are already proving to be great assets to the program. We also lost our outreach coordinator in the Millard/Beaver County areas. That position stayed empty for eight months. Two of our St. George staff covered the area along with their other duties for that whole time. They did a great job keeping up on the current cases but were not able to build the area. We now have someone hired there that I’m optimistic about.

The problem was the sudden shift in the employee market after the pandemic. Lots of jobs, not so many people willing to work. The low wages we were offering just weren’t cutting it. Our long-time employees see the other benefits for working for RRCI besides the money, but it was hard to attract and keep new staff at the wages we were offering. So, I managed to arrange the budget so we could increase the starting wages, bring up the current staff who were getting less then the new starting wage, and budget in a much healthier merit increase for the new fiscal year. I’m also submitting proposals with the other directors to increase funding to support higher wages. I feel strongly that independent living staff members deserve to be compensated on the merits of their work and receive livable wages.

e. Speaking of staff, we do have a great team. The stress of the pandemic and the changes it brought on to inflation, the housing market and the economy has sometimes made managing employees a challenge. Everyone is pretty maxed out. I have worked on doing all I can to keep moral up and foster good relationships between staff members. It takes constant vigilance to build a solid team.

f. A major area of focus for me this year was diversity and inclusion. I participated in an intensive course titled Walking the Walk, which was designed for non-profit leaders to learn more about how to create more divers and inclusive environments within their organizations. As a goal for December and January, I tasked all team members to “interview” at least five persons with disabilities. The goal being to get more connected with our consumers and more in tune with the needs and challenges of different types of abilities. Most found this a very rewarding way to educate themselves on how we can best help and advocate for our consumers and the disability community at large. We had a meeting to share what we had learned with one another and set future goals for areas we want to improve and things we want to learn more about. Additionally, the whole RRCI staff received training from Eduardo Ortiz, PhD, senior research associate with Utah State University on the topic of the “Consideration about Intersectionality between Disability and Equity Diversity & Inclusion - Cultural Responsiveness and Mental Health.” This was a most enlightening training where we were able to learn more about health disparities between different cultural sectors, how to reach out to underserved populations in our area and touched on microaggressions and implicit biases. We hope to have Dr. Ortiz back for more in-depth training on these topics later this year.

g. As another piece to inclusion and in the quest to deliver on the mandate to provide accessibility in all aspects of communication, I researched and implemented the Recite Me cloud-based assistive technology toolbar which makes RRCI’s website digitally inclusive by allowing visitors to customize content so that they can consume it in the way that works best for them. Next year I hope to have a working mobile translating system in place.

h. I’ve learned a lot about the budget and crunching numbers this year. I am pleased to report that all state financial, systems, and grant audits came back clear again this year. We already have such great systems in place, so it is only a matter of keeping up the established procedures and assuring that no one gets complacent, and nothing slips through the cracks.

i. I have had the pleasure of making many community connections this year as well as having the opportunity to make plenty of presentations promoting RRCI. I partnered with Memory Matters in a pitch for land donation, made presentations to the Board of Washington County Realtors, the Board of Cedar City Intermountain Healthcare, and provided individual one on one tours for several other entities. I’ve also facilitated teaching connections with the Dove Center and Utah State University. I’m always looking for ways RRCI can partner with other organizations. The more community connections the better!

j. This year I’ve had a crash course on legislative action and advocacy. I have been attending meetings with the Utah Legislative Coalition for People with Disabilities to keep updated on bills going through Legislative committees and working with the other Utah CIL Directors in putting information together for our requests for funding. This year I have sent numerous letters to different representatives seeking their support. It is important to always have an eye on what’s happening in the world of state policy.

k. Greg Bartholomew and I were back to work this year trying to find a permanent home for RRCI. This time we teamed with LuAnn at Memory Matters to put together a pitch for building and land acquisition through the Ted Warthen Foundation. With a lot of networking efforts on Greg’s part, we had the opportunity to do up and present a proposal to their board with the support of the children of Ted Warthen. All our hard work seemed to be well received but ultimately, the board members decided to sell the land and distribute the profits instead. It was a sad pill to swallow.

However, in a bit of good news, our previous efforts to acquire land through IHC did procure RRCI a $15,000 donation, so I still feel like any effort made is worthwhile. You never know what good might come through a different avenue than expected.

l. I enjoy working with the Board and all its members. I’ve spent much time this year working on board recruitment and think those efforts have paid off wonderfully! I apricate all the work and support that this board has given to me and to our RRCI team.