

# STATEWIDE PROVIDER PARTNERSHIP (SPP)

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## CRP Survey: Feedback for Group and Individual Pre-ETS

Survey issued April 15<sup>th</sup>, 2022, with a deadline for responses on April 19<sup>th</sup>, 2022

Total Responses = 28

### Group Service Questions:

Pre-ETS Providers of **group** services: It is known that there has been a decline in providers available for group presentations and services throughout the State. If you are a provider who has or is thinking about reducing or stopping these services, please explain why:

- (x9) Low attendance in classroom - approved number of students almost never matches the actual attendance - can only bill for those in attendance and must accept the loss.
- (x5) Only paid for class time - travel time is at the expense of the agency. Our staff cannot travel to outlying schools (our staff may travel 1 hour each way to be paid for 45 minutes of work).
- (x3) Cost of billing and administrative side - no compensation for the time to track, bill, report, etc.
- The reimbursement rate makes it difficult to provide the service with staff who are uniquely qualified and have the skill set to work with this population.
- (x3) No referrals received but would participate if referrals were sent.
- (x5) Lack of staffing.
- (x3) It is difficult to schedule group services with local school districts based on their schedule most of the time. They ordinarily have a small window of time when we would be able to provide the service and frequently the slots we have available don't match the schools.
- (x3) The billing has gotten complicated with groups, when new students start and have to have their own authorization, so some groups end up with 4-5 different authorizations in CWDS all with different effective dates for various students.
- While we very much enjoy providing the group service (and believe we do a good job), student engagement was problematic. At times, it seemed that many students were "forced" to participate, but had no real interest in participating. Due to this, our instructors encountered significant problem behaviors that cut into time spent engaging in curriculum delivery. We would regularly hear reports of students who would make statements such as, "Not you again!" and actively try to sleep through the service (which also meant that we wouldn't be able to get reimbursed for the service for that student).
- We hadn't been asked to provide group services for several years as our local OVR office had an Early Reach Counselor. Since they no longer have an ERC, they asked us to start providing group services again. We are currently teaching classes for one area school.
- We submitted a curriculum which wasn't approved. We were invited recently to become involved in group instruction working with a specific population, but we had questions as to location and delivery of service, etc. Eventually we were told the program was re-designed and OVR was going with another partner/provider.
- We have been prevented from providing Mentoring/Transitioning/Voices (MTV) services to the high school students of Philadelphia, b/c of the lack of funding that OVR has. Even when I offered to do it for no cost to the high school, OVR has prevented the service from re-occurring.
- Other invoicing issues: class cancelled due to weather, rescheduled out of authorized timeframe. One authorized student with several non-authorized students.
- Detail required per student in group experiences results in too much admin work.

- We had been an approved Pre-ETS about 4 years ago. We had the curriculum, we had the qualified staff. However, we never, ever received any referrals. So even if I am interested now, I have no staff qualified to provide the service.
- Previous unknown of virtual vs in-person schooling.

How could OVR improve Pre-ETS **group** services?

- (x4) Pay the provider for the number on the contract every time. That is what was accepted, and agencies must base their staffing on it.
- (x3) Higher reimbursement rate. Provide the funding, as a means of Pre-Employment services that they are obliged to provide to youth disabilities, ages 14+, as mandated.
- The rate should increase or there could be a tiered rate (for 1-3 people, 4-6, etc.), so that we can plan for revenue regardless of whether someone misses a day.
- Pay for preparation/admin time and travel time.
- Our OVR program consistently loses thousands of dollars for our agency each year. I believe in helping the students, but nonprofits can't sustain that kind of loss each year.
- (x3) The content and goal of the services is incredibly valuable; however, the structure and roll out of services needs improving. More time is needed to meet with OVR and schools to discuss the needs of the students prior to the school year starting. Trying to organize group classes and plan for staffing needs on the go (especially with the staffing/hiring crisis we are experiencing these days) is not a model that can be sustained long term.
- A few years ago, we were offering a weekly curriculum to approximately 350 students per month. That stopped when OVR took it back over and we then only had a few sessions on occasion. Going back to provider in-school services would help make more students eligible for other OVR services and would allow for more outreach.
- More assistance from OVR Business service staff to identify locations for group work experiences.
- It would be helpful to get student "buy in" prior to starting, instead of just having a release signed. Many students didn't seem to know what they were signing up for, so to speak.
- Service agreements/timelines could be more flexible - many schools changed quarters and therefore students weren't available at the same times that they once were. This made coordination of service delivery very difficult.
- Allow providers to change curriculum - have faith in our ability to meet standards without sending curricula for approval as it delays the process and means we don't get to pivot when we need to.
- OVR could help provide more referrals to groups.
- The billing process was terrible - haven't done it in a long time though so perhaps it changed.
- The process to start group services (classes) between OVR and the schools seemed a bit cumbersome and one of the schools we were in discussions with dropped out because of a lack of communication (or miscommunication) it seemed.
- It is very difficult to get the OVR release/permission slips filled out appropriately. Many students in the first few classes were unfunded since they didn't fill out the form correctly or hadn't turned it in yet. It seemed the burden of that step was all on the school.
- Simplify the program. It's very complicated and easy to mix up the services.
- OVR should plan their referrals a bit better by having all required documents in order prior to referral as well as the identification of those students who are committed to the service and not just those who need to have some kind of intervention before graduation.
- (x2) Use a system like adult services where OVR/Schools choose provider of preference for services, including group presentations. Do not allow for DO to solely choose "favorite" providers for all services.
- Allow providers to market service and quickly provider referrals/authorizations once approved.
- Facilitate monthly meetings with DO and providers, including direct info, such as expected referrals, etc.
- Adding paid development time for groups.

- Making sure families are on board with groups, especially CWIs... OVR will say they have 4 students and we create a schedule and program then it turns out they have 2. We have actually been yelled at when reaching out to families as they were not told about the program in advance.
- Look at virtual options to live stream to classes that would eliminate travel costs and time for staff.
- OVR needs to communicate with the providers more. It seems that when changes take place we don't seem to find out until we are invoicing and then they tell us that can't be done that way.
- Increase ease in obtaining ROI in order to bill for students.

### Individual Service Questions:

Regarding Pre-ETS ***individual*** services, if you have stopped or are considering stopping individual services, what rate per hour (currently \$50/hour) would need to be in place for your organization to sustain provision of individual paid work or job shadowing experiences?

- (x13) The rate must be equal or higher than adult service rates (i.e. \$63 for OVR, \$71.64 for ODP), which are also challenging at this point. Students often require more significant support, and this must be compensated in the rate. Concept of "Trainers" is flawed, and providers cannot sustain staff at such a low rate. The staff we assign to these services need to be experienced and trustworthy in order to provide appropriate services to youth and to manage the multiple priorities and schedules of a school-aged youth.
- (x3) Minimum \$65/hr.
- +\$65-70/hr. We haven't stopped, but we could not do this work without grant funding to support our losses.
- \$75/hr.
- A provider should not have any out-of-pocket expenses to provide a service.
- (x3) It would also be helpful to return to using some of the PWE hours for transportation instead of the mileage reimbursement. With the wear and tear on vehicles, rising gas costs, plus staff time, the mileage rate does not cover enough expenses to make it worthwhile. Staff are reimbursed for mileage and time, including driving between students.
- We currently work with students who are mostly in our home county, however we serve 6 total counties. On top of the job coach hiring issues we face - it is not always feasible to send a staff member to a distant county without appropriate reimbursement. I think the new SE rate of \$63/hour (for those face-to-face, hour-by-hour billable services) is at least a step in the right direction. That has helped ease the pain of serving our adults who are further out. Matching ODP's hourly rate of \$71.64 for 1:1 services would be great.
- Inconsistency of referrals makes it impossible to sustain revenue to pay costs to sustain staff.

What other issues is your organization facing regarding provision of ***individual*** Pre-ETS?

- (x4) The biggest issue we currently face is hiring staff. We can only pay so much - due to our reimbursement rates. If those rates were higher - I think we could attract more individuals. At least a bigger pool of applicants to choose from.
- (x4) Transportation time/costs should be factored into rates. Not even just for the student, but the staff must travel long distances to get to the locations.
- Meetings required and not funded.
- Additional service provision such as for behavioral health or medical concerns, or financial questions.
- If the rate is not increased, we cannot continue to provide this service.
- Logistical constraints due to school schedules, transportation, and the distance between our location and the students we are serving. Fewer Pre-ETS providers means that those remaining providers are asked to cover a larger region.
- VRCs uncertain of specific rates and expectation of number of hours, not always aware how services work and we need to inform.
- There have been no referrals and when an individual or group looks to obtain services, the situation is not addressed in a timely fashion and goes to the wayside.

- (x4) Fluctuation in volume of services from year to year makes it challenging to maintain a full cadre of staff to cover referrals especially in the more rural locations. We cannot assign staff to solely work in Pre-ETS as they would not have a consistent workflow.
- Customers not always clear on the service at time of referral.
- (x3) Challenging to get students into certain fields during pandemic, and employer hesitation overall.
- As with the group referrals, OVR needs to do a better job at ensuring that all required documents are in order prior to referral as well as the identification of those students who are committed to the service and not just those who need to have some kind of intervention.
- (x3) More development hours should be provided for PWEs and job shadowing experiences, unless the OVR counselor has some direct and USEFUL recommendations. It seems that OVR does not fully understand the amount of time that is needed to develop experiences for people, especially when employers are new to the concept or are so busy that significant outreach is required.
- (x2) Most of the students will not miss school and want to work on weekends or after school. This creates a problem as we only have a certain number of staff who can be with the students. So we need to put students on hold since we don't have coverage (keeping in mind we also have people supported by ODP and OVR adult services that need to be supported the same time frames.)
- Also for those students that want to do job shadowing after school and on weekends, it becomes very difficult to find places to take them with their interests during those available times. The amount of time given by OVR to find specific job shadow opportunities is also not enough to reach out and locate those job shadows.
- (x2) PWEs are now for 90 hours. We prefer the 45-hour option. Many of the students choose to end the PWE prior to the 90-hour mark anyway.
- (x3) CWDS with only numbers being assigned to the students and not being able to look them up using their names. Limited information for student – no DOB or home addresses. VRC not known until accepting referral, which prevents discussion of referral when needed.
- Consistency is required between Pre-ETS and SE policy/procedure. The two different systems make the work very difficult, and it is unnecessary. Why, after years of working out the kinks with SE, would OVR develop a very different system for Pre-ETS?
- OVR contracts directly with the student, which is fine, for the service. But a provider should be included in the initial conversation, especially when job preferences are being discussed and the reality of doing the type of job requested. For example, and this is a true experience, OVR encouraged a family that the student could do clothing design with Tommy Hilfiger since we lived close to his hometown of Elmira, New York. While I think aspirations of an ideal job can be good, at some point reality needs to be discussed as well. I have seen many students' dreams busted over the reality vs. fantasy issue.
- For the Paid Work Experiences, there is the understanding with the employer that the student is covered under our liability insurance while they're working. There is the 'admin fee' of a few cents per hour from what I've heard is to help cover the costs of processing the paychecks and any admin services. However, we all know that barely helps providers who are also responsible for covering the general liability costs of each participant in the program.
- OVR should provide a premium to providers who successfully complete a series of Job Shadowing and/or PWE experiences for students.
- We're on a timeline to get student's job shadows completed within the June 30th deadline after their High School Graduation; so we often need to prioritize the job shadowing and PWE over the regular Supported Employment services that are at the higher rate. I think the rates should be the same, so providers who are providing the Pre-ETS service isn't actually at the disadvantage financially.
- We were actively working with a student as the sole provider. We were then told by OVR that another entity would provide primary support during the school day hours and our agency would only be needed for any services after the school day ended or over the summer due to not wanting to supplant the services from this other entity. Our agency felt that there would be extra time and payment needed to coordinate services with the other entity (we were not there when the other entity delivered services and

didn't know what their approach or progress was), but were told that time and resource was not available, that the other agency would be primary, and our agency would essentially "pick up where they left off." (Again, without time going into the coordination of sharing information, no one would know where the other "left off."). This is not how our agency chooses to work with youth or businesses in the community and we ended services in that scenario with the schools/students involved. It put our agency in a negative light because the students chose to work with us, but we were told that avoiding ousting the services from the other entity came before customer choice.

### **Additional Comments:**

- I love the process for group services. The contract procedure works well.
- The OVR staff are wonderful.
- The school staff are wonderful.
- The online system for reporting and invoicing is difficult for individual and group services.
- We need the ability to move within Pre-ETS to allow some flexibility for students to help guide them rather than a set of discrete services... a bit more fluid and open to meet the needs of all.
- The ability to have many of these services offered over the transition years to cue up for adult services.... better offerings will land better opportunities for each student once they leave school.

Respectfully Submitted on Behalf of the Statewide Provider Partnership,

Joe Michener

SPP Facilitator and Director of Employment Services at LVCIL, Inc.

610.770.9781 ext. 131

[joemichener@lvcil.org](mailto:joemichener@lvcil.org)