

N.J. Commission for the Blind & Visually Impaired
State Rehabilitation Council
Meeting Minutes – February 6, 2015
Joseph Kohn Training Center
130 Livingston Avenue - New Brunswick, NJ

Nicole Pratt, Chairperson, called the meeting to order at 9:40 a.m.

Nicole asked if everyone had a chance to review the December 5, 2014 meeting minutes and if any changes were needed. Everyone acknowledged reviewing the minutes and no changes were recommended. On a motion made by Rick Fox, and seconded by Al Glasgow, the minutes were accepted as received.

Nicole announced that the meeting is being held in compliance with Section 105 of the Federal Rehabilitation Act 1973, as amended. She noted that the meeting is also in compliance with the New Jersey Open Public Meeting Act, NJSA 10:4-6.

Voting Members Present: Dorothy Doran, Rick Fox, Al Glasgow, Susan Head, Jamie Hilton, Zoraida Krell, Fran Leibner, Titus Massey, Nicole Pratt, Kelly Reyman, Kris Tucker

Voting Members Absent: Rocco Fiorentino, Kirk Lew, Otilie Lucas, Fr. Jim Warnke,

Ex Officio Present: Dan Frye, Danielle Licari-Scorzelli, Ed Sroczyński

Staff/Members of Public Present: Robert Paige

Staff Absent: John Walsh

Dan welcomed everyone to the meeting. Recognizing the challenges associated with traveling to a winter meeting, he expressed his appreciation to everyone for their continued commitment in this volunteer service.

Dan explained that in keeping with federal law, serving 2 terms/3 years each, Nicole Pratt has reached this stage and will now cycle-off as a Council member; today is her last meeting. Dan presented Nicole with a Certificate of Appreciation for her contributions and service to the CBVI State Rehabilitation Council (2009-2015). He acknowledged her commitment and dedication to promote the independence and well-being of NJ residents who are disabled. He noted his genuine delight to work with Nicole, commenting that she has never allowed her hectic schedule to diminish the quality and commitment of her role on the SRC. Nicole reflected on her path in life, which introduced her to the Commission and her desire to teach individuals with disabilities, and their families, how to advocate for services. She thanked everyone for their support. All the members wished her luck in her future plans. Dan noted that this meeting won't represent the last of Nicole's contributions; "our paths will cross again, and we will be richer for it."

Federal and State Update

Federal Activity

Dan reported that Commissioner Janet LaBreck, Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA), anticipates proposed regulations will be released in early spring. (Dan commented that it may take until summertime.) The proposed regs will then invite an opportunity for constituent comment. Dan explained that at that point the SRC will want to exercise a collective voice; giving feedback to the Rehabilitation Services Administration, Department of Education, and Department of Labor about all of the regulations that will encompass what is now being called Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). Dan commented that there are a lot of changes; many having a lot of promise; some raise serious questions. He noted the importance of being active in the regulatory process at that time.

Dan reported that a White House Summit on disability and employment was held on February 3, to emphasize the relationship between Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) and the business community. This meeting was to be held with Secretary of Labor, Thomas Perez; Assistant Secretary of Education, Michael Yudin; RSA Commissioner, Janet LaBreck; as well as others from the Business Leadership Network and representatives from private industry. The focus was to discuss WIOA and the new strategies for connecting persons with disabilities and employers, to talk about strategies for building relationships between VR and businesses, and to discuss ideas to make the transition from VR to work an easier and seamless exercise. He noted that he was unable to attend this event.

Dan reported that CBVI has received federal dollars through 9/30/15. He commented that reports regarding threatened budgets do not threaten VR dollars.

State Activity

Dan reported on the completion of the Reduction In Force (RIF) process within the Department of Human Services. He noted that we are now at the point where we can lift the rigid freeze that has been in place, and start to do some hiring again. He noted that he met with some of his executive staff to identify a number of strategic positions that need to be backfilled due to retirements and vacancies. Recruitments will be underway shortly, with the goal of having positions filled by late spring. Although some positions are still frozen, Dan noted that it is encouraging we will be able to hire some of the staff we need. He explained that the emphasis on hiring is on blindness professionals that enable us to function efficiently; i.e. teachers, counselors, supervisors, instructors, driver aides, and support staff.

Dan announced that CBVI awarded a contract last week to the Family Resource Network (FRN) to administer the new EDGE program. This program will focus on Employment, Development, Guidance, and Engagement for transition-aged, high school students who are blind or vision impaired. Students will be given the opportunity to have part-time employment. Everyone will have access to good, strong, blind mentors. FRN will reach out to the blind community to seek people who are interested in serving as positive, capable role models; Dan asked for SRC members help in this regard. The program will emphasize provision of blindness skills, and offer some organized training to develop skills of independence. Dan reported that he had chosen Amanda Gerson, CBVI's Assistive Technology Services Supervisor & Principal Community Program Specialist, to be the program manager. He commented that Amanda is a young, dynamic person and he wanted

someone of her caliber to animate EDGE from our side; to be a good ambassador to the Family Resource Network. Timeframe for curriculum to be out is late May, early June.

Dan reported that much work is currently under way to inaugurate the Student Hands-On Alternatives Reinforcement Project (SHARP) 2015 pilot. This is a statewide program, administered at each of the local service centers, for blind and vision-impaired learners in grades 1-8. The program will have some local flavor at each of the centers, but the mantra is that they all have statewide themes and similar information is given out. The program gives students blindness skills they don't have time to acquire during the academic school year. Students are invited to be involved in as many summers as they want.

Dan reported that the Independent Living (IL) program is developing new statewide initiatives with the dollars from the former SCILS (Senior Community Independent Living Services) program. He explained that the SCILS program enabled blind NJ residents (55+) to higher people to help them conduct any type of business they needed, at \$15/hr., 208 hrs./yr. This program had advantages for a number of people, particularly the older community who didn't have the skill set or ability to get out into the community. Dan noted that it was his assessment that we were spending almost ½ million dollars to purchase companions for people, which was not what he wanted CBVI to be known for. He explained that he would rather see the money spent on offering individuals a set of skills that they may learn, so they can do it themselves; that is what an educating agency is all about. CBVI is organizing support groups so individuals can confer, share ideas, and learn together. These groups will be set up in regions that will be accessible to a lot of individuals. There are also plans to expand assistive technology services to the older blind community as I-phones are needed. Dan noted that we will make sure monies are used to offer technology so people can use and read their mail, travel, text, and communicate. In short, Dan explained that we want the money we spend to enable people to be as independent as possible. He noted that if an older individual wants a companion-like service, and meets the criteria, DDS (Division of Disability Services) services are available; Department of Aging also has programs.

Dan reported on two Memorandums of Understanding (MOU): One is to expand the relationship with the Library for the Blind and create more access to assistive technology in local libraries; we will be continuing the loaner programs. Another MOU, competently shepherded by Kelly Reyman TCNJ, is the new College Prep program. Dan commented that it will be exciting to see our students integrated in a real competitive program, run simultaneously with the Bonner Scholars program at the College. He noted that he is thankful for the positive contributions from Raritan Valley College in the 5-6 years we worked with them, but noted the excitement to create a strong, academic opportunity for ambitious, aspiring students. 3 days of orientation (Feb/March/April) have been organized to even get into the summer program; then a week orientation; then the 2-week intensive Bonner program will start. Students will engage in social justice learning, possibly working in soup kitchens, offering support and helping the homeless. Dan noted that he wants the blind students to do the same work the sighted students are expected to do. He commented that since receiving is customary, he wants it to be made clear to the CBVI students the importance of giving back. Students will get a strong, precollege academic experience, and will earn 4 college credits in this program.

Dan reported there were 331 successful closures over the last year.

Dan reported that the annual SRC report has been completed; finishing touches are being made. Mock-up copies will be brought to the next meeting. He noted that this year's report changed substantially; the Council can be proud of engaging with the Agency as we completed our Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment, and prepared our State plan.

Dan reported that the Agency is coming to the end of the strategic planning process; last formal meeting is scheduled for March 25-27. He explained that the Agency will work through June with the consultant on this process. 6 major initiatives will be rolled out in order to shape and change the way the Agency operates.

Dan noted that Education is one area that will change substantially, creating an education system that is a lot more accountable. He commented that the Agency will also be changing the structure on how services are delivered Commission wide. The plan is to have an Agency that functions in teams; every consumer will have a team of folks so they don't have to reapply for each service. The team will consist of an anchoring VR counselor and a representative from every other portion of the agency; representing every service offered so they don't have to wait around/shop around to go from one program to another. It will be a team approach to customer service.

Eye Health Services report was postponed as Charlene Good was not in attendance.

WIOA Update: Dan shared two documents with everyone, which outlined many of the changes taking effect in Title IV of WIOA. He noted that they were written by his colleague and peer in the VR community, Alice Hunnicut, who pulled them together for the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation, in her role as a member of its Executive Board. Dan pointed out that Title IV took effect July 22, 2014, so we are working in uncharted waters; expected to comply when not regulated on yet. Copies of the documents were distributed and Dan reviewed the following major changes. He asked everyone to take the documents home to read, and noted that if anyone had any questions, they should feel free to reach out to him

Section 402 - Findings, Purpose, Policy: Meaningful and significant philosophical shift - employers are customers of this program as well as individuals with disabilities. Dan commented that at CBVI the primary customer will continue to be the consumer; employers are secondary. However, the Agency is working to develop an employer business relations liaison unit, which will consist of 2 rehab counselors, who will be responsible for developing relationships with employers, acting as ambassadors, so when consumers are job-ready the employers will be softened up and receptive to receiving candidates. Effectiveness of this unit will need to be measured; we will need to see more jobs as a result. Another advantage to having this unit will be to cultivate businesses so we have summer and year round employment opportunities to incorporate into our existing programs (i.e. EDGE).

Rick Fox suggested that this unit be involved regarding the technology aspect; finding out what programs are used at the business and what we need to do/they need to do to be technology accessible. Dan noted that he concurred, and will make sure there is a close relationship with our IT Department in this regard.

Section 404 – Definitions: Need to look at what competitive integrated employment now means; need to be mindful of new definitions. Real push for customized employment in this new law; the Commission will demonstrate commitment by engaging with company training on customized employment. Often seen as one vehicle for supported employment, but the principals inherent in customized employment are principals that can be universally applied to broader job search and exercise.

Dan noted that he will send members a comprehensive view of the concept of what customized employment is. In short, it is an approach to helping people find/retain work that involves Person-Centered-Planning and working with employers to identify talents.

Other terms – students and youths with disabilities; real distinction; will need to know.

Section 412 – State Plan: Major changes to the State plan; is now mandatory to be part of the unified State plan; still hard to tell how that is going to manifest itself. Other key component, partners in the national workforce program. It is important for VR to retain its own identity when in a unified plan that includes perspectives from folks who do adult literacy and the like. RSA may still require agencies to send their own state plan as well as being part of a unified State plan; unclear at this stage.

Section 458 – Limitations on use of Subminimum Wage: New rules that discourage having consumers in subminimum wage environments; law changed so it is mandatory that people have a reasonable amount of VR opportunity before permitted to be put into sub minimum wage experience. Depends on what regulations say when they come out.

Dan noted that we will see changes in the Independent Living program; leaving RSA and DOE realm and moving to the administration on Community Living, DH&HS. We have a small Independent Living portion, of the full NJ Independent Living portion, that we share with the general agency. It will be up to NJ SILC to determine who they want to serve as the guardian of those dollars; no decision has been made yet. The choices are to leave IL dollars with VR, or the other entity named custodian of dollars could be DDS; they are both courting the council. Dan commented that it is not appropriate for him to articulate a preference since it's a State IL Council choice.

Ed Sroczyński reported that **transition planning teams** are being formed for the Agency's transition programs (EDGE, the Bonner Program, Life 101 program). Ed reviewed that the Life 101 program (for freshman and sophomore high school students) includes four major core areas to gain exposure and a bit of training in career planning, skills of independence, information technology, and college prep. Staff from JKTC are very involved in this program, as well as staff from service centers that have expertise in the modules. Ed explained that this year, by virtue of not holding the College Prep program at JKTC, the Life 101 program will be a residential program for 2 weeks. Will also include evening activities to expand on what they are learning. This program will grow in a huge way, and students will benefit tremendously.

Ed also reported on the Work Skills program at TCNJ, directed by Kelly Reyman. He noted that a review of applications for that program was held last week: 30 applications were received; 24 applicants are usually accepted. Also held a review of applications for the Bonner program; 14 students applied for that program.

Kelly Reyman explained that a full day orientation and assessment of applicants for the Bonner program is scheduled for Saturday, February 21. The Office of Disability Services is scheduled to talk to students about the supports that are in place, and to let them know what to advocate for when they come to the College. Also, the Office of Student Council Financial Assistance will be available to parents while the students are participating in interviews. Other interview-like assessments will be planned to get to know the applicants in order to pick qualified students. A mobility assessment (scavenger hunt) is being organized. Another assessment will be a team building type activity, to see who rises as a leader and to identify critical thinkers. Kelly explained that of the 14 applicants, will be looking to choose 10; however, can accommodate up to 15 in this program if warranted. Want to make sure we have qualified group of students. If an applicant is not picked, they will be encouraged to work towards being chosen the following year.

Ed commented that a parent training component will be added to all of the transition programs; want to help parents understand opportunities and to help promote independence in preparing students.

Announcements/Comments:

Dorothy suggested that members could also review the IL research unit website: ilru.org

Dorothy thanked Nicole for her leadership on the SRC; she enjoyed working with her.

Fran Leibner noted that she thought her term on the SRC was coming to an end in April, and wanted to know if there was anything she needed to do, or if she needed to be replaced at that time. Ed Sroczynski noted that she is eligible to continue on the SRC, serving a second term of 3 years, and he would prepare the necessary paperwork if she was agreeable to serve a second term. Fran agreed to serve a second term (3 more years).

Jamie Hilton thanked Dan for their recent get-together. She commented that they have a lot of similar theories, and she feels that wonderful things will come out of his leadership. She offered that Dan contact her if she can be of any help. Dan thanked Jamie, and responded that it was a pleasure to meet with her, noting that he can learn a lot from her. He extended a similar invitation to others on the SRC. He also noted that the reason he changed the date of the next SRC meeting was so that the newly elected, dynamic Chairperson, Father Jim Warnke, could be in attendance. He noted that he looks to the SRC to offer guidance; commenting that you can't be a leader without being a learner!

Rick Fox noted that he was heavily involved in an assistive technology program (1998-2012), supervisor for 6 years, and he offered his assistance with developing the technology program for seniors that Dan was discussing earlier. Dan thanked Rick for this offer.

Adjournment:

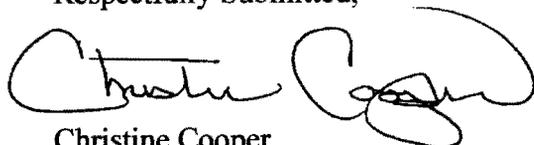
At 11:14 a.m. a motion was made by Rick Fox, and seconded by Jamie Hilton, to adjourn the meeting.

Next Meeting:

The next SRC meeting is scheduled for Friday, March 27, 2015, at the Joseph Kohn Training Center.

In an attempt to attract public involvement, Dan reminded everyone that he will be looking at other venues to hold future SRC meetings.

Respectfully Submitted,



Christine Cooper
CBVI – Administrative Assistant