

State Rehabilitation Council (SRC)

Meeting Minutes – February 4, 2022 (virtual meeting)

Voting Members Present: Pamela Aasen, Ida Behreini, Vito DeSantis, Alice Eaddy, Jonathan Goodman, Clarke King, William Robinson, Kathleen Spata, Evangelia Stone

Members Awaiting Appointment Present: John O’Connell, Amanda Philp, Lauren Weishaar, Ronda Williams, Wanda Williford

Absent: Don Campbell, Amanda Gerson, Sheryl Hutchison, Gwen Orłowski

Ex Officio Present: Bernice Davis, Kathleen Donnellon, John Tkacz

Staff/Members of Public Present: Selina Gooden, Pat McKenna, Gary Robinson, Joy Atin-Shark, Dr. Michelle Whitmore, (2) ASL Interpreters

Lia Stone, SRC Chairperson, welcomed everyone, calling the meeting to order at 9:30 a.m. Lia announced the meeting was being held in compliance with Section 105 of the Federal Rehabilitation Act 1973 as amended; also in compliance with the New Jersey Open Public Meeting Act, NJSA 10:4-6.

Approval of Meeting Minutes

The minutes of the December 3, 2021, meeting were reviewed. A motion to accept the minutes was made and seconded; all were in favor. These meeting minutes will be put into the permanent record of the SRC.

Remaining 2022 Meeting Dates: June 10, October 7, and December 9

Presentation of Certificates:

Dr. Davis awarded certificates of appreciation to William Robinson and Jonathan Goodman; for completing their 2nd term of service to the SRC. Today will be their last meeting. The certificates, signed by both Lia Stone and Dr. Davis, express appreciation for William and Jonathan’s outstanding dedication to promoting the advancement of opportunities for the highest level of personal independence, community integration, and employment of NJ residents who are blind and visually impaired. Dr. Davis thanked both Will and Jon for the enthusiasm they brought to the SRC, and she commented that it was nice getting to know and

work with both of them over the course of their membership. Lia echoed the sentiment, and thanked both Jonathan and William for their years of service to the SRC and the blind community of New Jersey. Both gentleman noted that it has been an honor and privilege working with everyone on the Council over the last 6 years.

Dr. Bernice Davis – Executive Director’s Report

Dr. Davis expressed her best wishes to everyone, and also extended appreciation to the members, community partners, consumers, and an extraordinary thank you to the CBVI staff for all the work done throughout the pandemic; for the innovation and dedication to service and making sure that blind people have exactly what they need to live independently and to fulfill their dreams.

CBVI staff are back in the office 5 days a week, again. The last few months have gone from a hybrid schedule, to full-time in the office, and then when the Omicron variant occurred, remote work returned. Staff continue to be out in the field delivering services.

The current focus is on looking at service programs and how to enhance, create, and innovate, to continue to meet consumer needs/trends. There is also a continued focus on the Commission’s budget. Prior to the pandemic, there was incredible focus on the budget and, specifically, not having to go into an Order of Selection (OS). OS refers to the federal monies the Commission receives to support CBVI’s Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program. When there's insufficient resources to support the program, an OS occurs. Federal regulation dictates that you have to provide services for the most significantly disabled; there's a priority system that occurs. As the Commission’s purpose is to serve anybody in the State of New Jersey that needs CBVI’s services, the Commission would never want to be in an OS.

Dr. Davis reported that CBVI is in a good place financially at this time, however, now that we're back in the office, and consumers are starting to get more comfortable with receiving in-home services again, we continue to make sure to be fiscally responsible. The federal budget is obviously impacted by several variables; one is the required 15% set aside for pre-employment transition services. Although the Commission’s budget may seem like a lot of money, when you look at the array of services CBVI provides, and then the variables of setting aside money from that same pool of money, it makes things tighter. The cost of services, tuition, braille books, and transportation, are some of the things that impact the budget, and are some of the areas always being looked at to ensure fiscal responsibility, and to make sure we're delivering the needed services. Also, the Joseph Kohn Training Center (JKTC) is a state owned building; however, it houses a federal program; there's a whole process in regards to repairs, etc.; we're responsible for many of those repairs, some of which are approved and funded by the federal government and some may not be. There's a lot of projection and balancing that goes into making sure that we stay financially healthy. There is a budget process that occurs every year, where the State has to match federal expenditures. Dr. Davis commented that the Commission is lucky to have a Chief Financial Officer that

does an excellent job; he has an awesome understanding of how the federal VR grant works. The SRC will be hearing more about our great programs, where we can enhance partnerships and where we may need to tweak things.

Nationally, with regard to the Randolph Sheppard (RS) program, there is concern and discussion regarding electric chargers for automobiles, which are popping up in many locations, including rest stops. Blind operators have the priority when it comes to the rest stops throughout the State, and want to make sure that RS is kept as the priority.

Pat McKenna, Assistant Division Director - Vocational Rehabilitation Update:

- The VR counselors are presently functioning virtually, due to schools not wanting unnecessary personnel to come into the facilities; meetings are occurring with the students and families outside of the schools.
- Planning and preparation for summer programs is taking place. Building both models, virtual and hybrid, so we are ready to implement the best model as the summer gets closer. There are various open houses scheduled over the next several weeks for these programs.
- The JKTC program is currently virtual, with 14 consumers participating. The program is scheduled to return to the commuter model on February 14. In the next several months we are expecting to return to residential programming.
- Business Enterprises of NJ (BENJ): The pandemic has been especially hard on this program. The various state/federal facilities, where their businesses are located, have been closed; hopefully now with everyone getting back to the offices things will improve. Currently, working on developing the strategic plan to help grow and market this program moving forward.
- One-stop career centers are mostly virtual at this time; only open by appointment for certain services.
- Looking into the possibility of updating the way college tuition reimbursement is calculated. More to come on this issue at the next meeting.
- Business Relations Unit (BRU): Very busy setting up the next set of virtual cafes; this time with an internship theme. The BRU has several different employers/internship providers who will be present (Amazon is one).
- Corrective Action Plan (CAP): Met with the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) last fall and received great information/guidance to address 6 of the findings; submitted quarterly report on January 31. There is one more finding we are working on to resolve, and it involves setting up a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Department of Labor.

- As suggested at the last meeting, looking into setting up a virtual (Zoom) open-house/orientation on the various VR programs, starting with the JKTC, so people can get information and a better understanding of the programs.

Alice Eaddy asked for an update on how the JKTC program worked out for the deaf person, who recently participated in the program. Pat noted he would look into it and get back to Alice; possibly have someone from JKTC come to the next meeting to speak to everyone about the program.

Vito DeSantis suggested that CBVI's Chief Financial Officer be invited to an upcoming SRC meeting to brief the SRC on the budget process and the match of the federal VR grant; he thought it would be worthwhile, especially for the newer members, to hear how it all works. Lia thought that sounded like a great idea, and also extended the invite to other units in presenting to the SRC.

Employment, Development, Guidance, and Engagement (EDGE) Program Update:

Joy Atin-Shark, CBVI VR Supervisor, attended today's meeting to report on some of the things EDGE has been working on:

- Developing successful partnerships with various companies around the state for possible summer employment.
- Working to establish partnerships with large corporations/foundations, to help with job shadowing and employment opportunities for students.
- Creating new content for the virtual monthly meetings. Working to have more blind/visually impaired role models on the calls; individuals who the consumers never met, in industries the students may not see themselves working in.
- Increased 1:1 meetings with the students; mentors and staff have implemented office hours, so students can drop in for questions/concerns.

Dr. Michelle Whitmore, Assistant Division Director, Quality Assurance (QA):

At the request of the SRC, Dr. Whitmore attended today's meeting to present a Power Point program (Measures that Matter), a data-driven QA tool for evaluating CBVI's VR Program. This engagement process was designed to educate and refresh employees knowledge of applicable state and federal regulations. Updates and training on policies and procedures is recognized, and vital to this process. QA and Internal Control measures have been implemented. A case review process was also developed, which enables both the primary caseworker and the supervisor to review the progression of service delivery. Audits were put in place to address compliance, findings, and resolutions. QA reports are generated and shared with staff. As a result, the VR Program has seen improvements in regards to eligibility, meeting VR deadlines, and being in compliance with federal requirements.

Alice requested that the members receive a copy of the PP presentation.

Lia thanked both Joy Atin-Shark and Dr. Whitmore for attending and presenting at today's meeting.

SRC Members' Reports

Members were reminded that updates (bullet points) are to be e-mailed to Christine Cooper prior to, or immediately following, each meeting, and will be included in the meeting minutes.

The following updates were received:

Pamela Aasen (Parent Training & Information Center Representative):

Pam shared information on the following upcoming SPAN workshops/trainings:

Monday, February 7th at 7:00 PM and/or Wednesday, February 9th at 10:00 AM

Statewide Special Education Parent Leadership Roundtable-Winter 2022

The START- Engaging Parents of Students with Disabilities Project at SPAN invites you to join us at the upcoming Statewide Special Education Parent Leadership Virtual Roundtable. This is an opportunity for parents, Special Education Parent Advisory Group (SEPAG) members, school and district staff, and community members to come together to network and exchange tips, tools, and strategies to build collaborative partnerships that benefit students and their families. Simultaneous interpretation into Spanish is available.

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/statewide-special-education-parent-leadership-roundtable-winter-2022-registration-190606347717?aff=escb&utm-source=cp&utm-term=listing&utm-campaign=social&utm-medium=discovery&utm-content=attendeeshare>

Wednesdays 3:30-4:00

The SPAN Youth Chat, Ages 13 & Up

A community of youth supporting youth. Session begins with information sharing followed by group conversations related to the week's topic. Questions? Contact Johan:

jmora-valverde@spanadvocacy.org

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/the-span-youth-chat-ages-13-up-registration-150980182791?aff=ebdsoporgprofile>

Tue, February 22, 2022 11:00 AM – 12:30 PM EST

REAL Transition Partners: Discussion on VR, Pre-ETS & the IPE

A presentation by NTACTION-The Collaborative where we will discuss:

- How the Individual Education Plan (IEP) and Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) work together
- The role of Vocational Rehabilitation for families and youth/young adults with disabilities
- Pre-Employment Transition Services versus vocational rehabilitation services

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/real-transition-partners-discussion-on-vr-pre-ets-the-ipe-registration-256166188967?aff=ebdsoporgprofile>

Tue, February 22, 2022 6:30 PM – 7:30 PM EST

NJ Resources & Options for Families

This workshop will discuss resources and information SPAN can provide to families as well as various other organizations and agencies to help families.

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/nj-resources-options-for-families-registration-254771036027?aff=ebdsoporgprofile>

Wed, March 23, 2022 6:30 PM – 7:30 PM EDT

Look to the Future: Transition from School to Adult Life

Transition planning is crucial to increasing successful outcomes for life after high school. This workshop will discuss issues related to transitioning from school to adult life. Discussion to help identify interests and future plans will be included.

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/look-to-the-future-transition-from-school-to-adult-life-registration-228982311257?aff=ebdsoporgprofile>

Lia Stone (Current or former VR applicant or recipient):

- I continue working to take advantage of the tight labor market by getting our students into work experiences with an emphasis on competitive employment. Students continue to face the same barriers to employment that Blind people have always faced but I have made progress with a number of our students in find employment opportunities.
- I continue to do contact tracing work, for the immediate future many local health departments are only reaching out to parents of children under 18 and people over 65. This is due to the influx of cases and will not last forever, however this leaves out a number of vulnerable people. Encourage any Blind or otherwise disabled individuals you know with covid who have immediate needs around food or other social supports to contact 211.
- The NFB's Washington seminar begins next week where we will be virtually advocating with legislators on a number of issues impacting the Blind and low vision community. I will be meeting with staff from Rep. Pallone's office as well as staff from Senators Booker and Menendez offices to advocate for passage of the Transition to Competitive Integrated Employment Act.

Ronda Williams (Business & Industry Representative):

- Access Link is mailing out voter registration information to all of our customers- this falls under the National Voters Registration Act of 1993.
- Update on Service Delivery in Northern New Jersey.

Sub-Committees:

Lia encouraged members, and those waiting for official appointment, to take part in chairing/membership of the SRC sub-committees.

- Ad hoc committee for the 2023 Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA) was discussed at the last meeting. Members still needed to assist Amanda in this area. If CBVI is partnering with Mississippi State, and not ICI, this time around, Vito offered again to chair this sub-committee; he commented again that he would not want to pose a conflict of interest. Pat will look into getting an answer for Vito. Katie Donnellon also offered to assist at the last meeting.
- Business Engagement Committee: John O'Connell offered to work on this sub-committee. Chairperson is still needed.
- Policy and Procedure Committee: Ida Behreini will chair this committee. Vito and Pamela Aasen offered to assist.
- Quality Assurance Committee: Clarke King, Chairperson, noted no new updates. Members are needed for this sub-committee. Alice commented that she had offered to work on this committee previously; please keep her updated on any future meetings.
- SRC Annual Report Committee: Pat reported that review/editing of success stories will take place a bit earlier this year; instead of waiting until the fall, will begin the process in June.

Old/New Business

Lia reviewed the 2022 SRC goals and priorities that were decided on at the last meeting, and encouraged members to think about any ideas they may have to work towards these goals, in particular, within the context of the SRC sub-committees. By working on these goals, Lia pointed out, the SRC can fulfill their duty as an advisory council to the Commission.

SRC vice-chairperson: a motion was made and seconded; all were in favor of opening the nomination process for vice chair; vote will take place at the June meeting. At this time, Alice nominated Kathleen Spata; Kathleen accepted the nomination. Members were instructed to submit nominations (could be themselves) to Lia (via e-mail). Must be an appointed member to nominate and vote. Hopefully, before the next meeting, the SRC will hear from the Governor's office regarding the pending appointments, and those waiting on appointment will be able to participate in this voting process too.

Pat noted that any recommendations for SRC membership should be sent to him, as there are 2 new vacancies as of March, 2022.

Lia commented that if anyone needs to get information out to the rest of the Council, they can always email/contact her directly.

Adjournment

Alice Eaddy made a motion to adjourn today's meeting; William Robinson seconded the motion; all were in favor. The meeting was adjourned by 12 noon.

Lia thanked everyone for their participation at today's meeting.

The next SRC meeting is scheduled June 10, 2022.

Respectfully Submitted,

Christine Cooper

Christine Cooper

CBVI – Administrative Assistant