

N.J. Commission for the Blind & Visually Impaired (CBVI)
State Rehabilitation Council (SRC)

Meeting Minutes – April 5, 2019

Joseph Kohn Training Center - 130 Livingston Avenue - New Brunswick, NJ

Voting Members Present: Pamela Aasen, Gary Altman, Jennifer Armstrong-Ekelmann, Ida Behreini (call-in), Alice Eaddy, Rick Fox (call-in), Jonathan Goodman, Susan Head, Clarke King, Pat McKenna, Damian Petino, Kelly Reymann, William Robinson, Evangelia Stone, John Tkacz, Kris Tucker

Present (pending appointment): Kathleen Spata

Absent: Lisa Killion-Smith

Ex Officio Present: Bernice Davis, Amanda Gerson, Danielle Licari-Scorzelli

Staff/Members of Public Present: Colleen Faupel, Pam Gaston, Carlos Hemera

The meeting was called to order at 9:30 a.m. by Evangelia Stone, Vice-Chairperson. She announced that 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 meeting minutes of February 1, 2019 were reviewed. A motion was made and seconded to approve these minutes; all were in favor. The minutes were accepted and will be put into the permanent record of the SRC.

Colleen Faupel, Principal Community Program Specialist, who oversees the Agency's Technology Services attended today's meeting to provide an overview of the technology and services this unit provides to the Agency's clients.

Recognition of outgoing SRC member and welcome new member:

Bernice thanked Kelly Reymann for her dedication and contribution as a member of the SRC for the last 6 years. Kelly's wealth of knowledge will be greatly missed. Bernice also pointed out that CBVI has a long history of successful programs with The College of New Jersey (TCNJ) and Kelly has been a huge part of that success also. Bernice presented Kelly with a Certificate of Appreciation for her dedication to CBVI's State Rehabilitation Council.

Kelly commented that when she was asked to be an SRC member she felt it was an overwhelming compliment; she took the challenge and has been proud to serve students, consumers, families, and colleagues. She enjoyed getting to learn more about the intricacies of CBVI, and has been proud to work in so many different ways over the years. She noted that going through various transitions of administration and leadership, and tackling challenges together with this group, has really taught her a lot professionally and personally. She has learned more about State government, policies, statewide needs assessments, and approval processes and systems, and feels proud to stand behind them; it doesn't have to always be so challenging and defensive; there's a reason why there's justification and rationale for things. She said this has helped her a long way in her career; the SRC has given her a perspective. She thanked everyone for the opportunity to dive deeper into her passions.

Kelly introduced Kathleen Spata, her colleague at TCNJ. Kathy is a hard-working, humble person; perfect person to pass the baton to!

Bernice Davis – Executive Director's Report:

Bernice welcomed Evangelia to the co-chair position, and also welcomed Kathleen Spata to the SRC.

Bernice provided an overview of what's been happening at CBVI with regard to Vocational Rehabilitation.

- The federal government is eliminating Supported Employment for persons with significant disabilities between the ages of 16-24 in the new budget. CBVI has been looking at collaboration, possible partnerships, as there's not a lot of providers in the community that are able, or attracted, to working with persons with several challenges. Had a meeting last month with Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD) that went incredibly well; ideas were flowing; several more meetings will be planned. DDD is very excited to develop collaborative programs – more to come on that. In terms of Supported Employment money, it is not expected to be a huge hit for CBVI. Like much of the country (approximately 70%), we were actually returning money because we hadn't spent it.
- Bernice reported that she will be attending the CSAVR/NCSAB conferences in Maryland, April 8-12. This is a national conference; all the VR agencies and agencies for the blind are represented. It's a time where you get to meet everyone face to face; talk about best practices and challenges. There are sub-committees that help focus on problems you may be having. It is also an opportunity to share what has worked for this State, and building bridges. Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) attends and gives presentations; you can ask questions for your agency. It's a very good week.

- The Agency is extremely focused on the data collection that goes into our system. There are two driving forces in terms of us getting our data accurate. One is, in the next year or so, we'll be moving to a new electronic case file management system. It's important that we don't take inaccurate data and dump it into a brand new system; we need to make sure the data is as clean as possible. The other force driving this is the federal government (RSA). Data must be as valid as possible. With the types of questions coming out of RSA, the expectations and demands for reports, we need to take a look, so that we know where we are going and where we need to tweak things. VR has been very busy with taking a look at data; Amanda's been extremely busy leading the agency around VR expectations with data. We are going to start an initiative "spring cleaning" to encourage people/staff to take the time so our system is as clean as possible.
- Update on Rutgers soft skills research initiative: Following the presentation with this SRC, the Department of Human Services (DHS) took a look at the research and liked it; there were some liability issues they were concerned about; made some tweaks/changes. Now the soft skills proposal is back at Rutgers; negotiations ongoing. There is a huge focus on soft skills now, and we want to make sure we're keeping our consumers as competitive as possible.
- Working very closely with Russ Thelin; Institute for Community Inclusion, a technical assistance center. Russ was a great help to the Agency in prepping us for our recent federal audit; he took a look at our policies and procedures. He continues to work with us; we are in the midst of updating our VR Code now. He has also been giving us training around leadership. We are looking into more leadership training for our VR supervisors, and also looking forward to him doing an assessment of JKTC curriculum. Although we do a wonderful job here at JKTC, there is room for improvement; been listening to consumer and staff feedback.
- Received the news from the federal government that JKTC is considered a community rehabilitation provider, and now, just about everything we do here will need prior approval with regard to utilizing VR money. This will affect infrastructure. Now that we know the expectation we will follow suit. This shouldn't affect programming in any way.
- Preparing for our very successful summer program for elementary grade students (SHARP). Drivers still needed in Newark. If anyone knows anyone over the age of 25 looking for summer hours transporting young students to a great summer hands-on experience, please feel free to have them call CBVI and ask for Eva Scott.
- Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) training is taking place in this building today – a lot of supervisors attending; just want to make sure that's at the forefront and we're following the letter of the law and also in terms of accessibility.
- WASP, the electronic inventory system for equipment, still working on the accessibility features.
- The partnership with TCNJ has been a gem! Bernice noted that she recently met with Kelly and Amanda, discussing ways to enhance the transition programs we have.
- Always looking for TVI professionals, O&M professionals, and certified home instructors to come on board.

Bernice introduced Pam Gaston, her Executive Assistance. She invited Pam to today's meeting to review some of the initiatives being worked on. Pam is working closely with the Board of Trustees to plan a CBVI 110-year Anniversary celebration. Pam noted that preliminary discussion as to how we are going to commemorate this anniversary have taken place. So far the idea is to have one large event that will include The Department of Human Services and other divisions, our shareholders, consumers, and staff. For the 100th anniversary we had a similar event at the Hilton Hotel; a resource fair and networking opportunity took place, followed by an awards luncheon. We're looking at sites in central NJ that will be accessible for people who need to use public transportation. A planning committee will be formed, which will also be inclusive; might be tapping into some SRC members and asking you to join in with us to help with this initiative. Pam shared information on another event she is working on again this year – the Blind and Visually Impaired Awareness Night with Trenton Thunder. This year it's going to be on Thursday, June 27; gates open at 6pm. At approximately 6:30 there will be a pre-game ceremony on the ballfield, at which time we recognize the 5 individuals who receive college scholarships from the Board of Trustees. The ceremony is brief, but very nice. During the 7th inning stretch one of our students will be leading the crowd in singing God Bless America/Take me out to the Ballgame. SRC members are invited to attend; Pam noted she will be emailing everyone further information on this event.

Amanda Gerson, VR Update:

One of the many things that WIOA (Workforce Innovation & Opportunity Act) has mandated is for us to go out to the sheltered workshops around the State and provide career counseling and information/referral to blind/vision impaired individuals working at sub-minimum wage employment. Amanda reviewed the comprehensive numbers for 2017 and noted she hasn't analyzed the numbers for 2018 yet. In 2017, which was the first year, 72 individuals were seen statewide and provided counseling in 24 of the 28 workshops around the State. Of the 72 seen, 23 indicated VR interest; 15 wound up applying for VR services; approximately 6-8 of those are actively receiving VR services. Amanda explained that sometimes what happens is they'll express interest, then they talk to their guardians, change mind, or they get to the process and realize it is a lot of work and they are not ready to commit. In addition to the 23 who had indicated VR interest, 15 had also indicated interested in receiving Independent Living (IL) services. So we are not only connecting individuals with VR who want to pursue competitive integrated employment or who want to explore that, we are also connecting individuals who want to work on their independent skills and gain more independence. Amanda noted that the Agency is in the process of hiring a new staff member to do both the 511 compliance, as well as pilot a supported employment caseload. Looking at re-doing our supported employment program and working to identify what vendors very much want to work with us and commit to maintain the skillset. Also piloting a specialized caseload for individuals receiving supported employment services, so that person can get to know the vendors, the system, understand the unique needs and wraparound services and collaboration with guardians and DDD and supported employment vendors.

Recent VR Hiring:

- VR supervisor for Cherry Hill has been hired; the position was being covered by our Manager Diana Cortez for the last 4 months.
- Re-instituting our statewide unit, inclusive of our transition and deaf blind specialists. They will report directly to Joy Atin-Shark, who will be the supervisor for statewide transition and deaf blind services; Joy will report to Amanda. Amanda noted this is something she's been advocating for a while. Particularly under WIOA, with the requirements for pre-employment transition services, RSA questioned why we didn't have a transition unit; why the VR Coordinator was the direct point of contact for all transition programs. Transition counselors need a little more support to help implement this very unique set of services. Joy has been with the Agency for at least 15 years and has served in the Business Relations Unit, as a college counselor, transition counselor, and miscellaneous projects. Amanda noted she is thrilled to have her in this role.
- Setting up interviews for a third deaf blind specialist. Currently there are 2 statewide, splitting north and south; expecting to have one in each office now. Caseloads have grown even despite closing the homemakers or moving them over to IL. This will bring caseload sizes down to 50-60, which is in alignment with what we are looking for our supported employment caseloads, recognizing some of the caseloads have more unique service needs or sometimes more complex service needs.
- Kevin Harris oversees the I Can Connect grant, OPRA and HIPAA requests, the incident reporting process, and is also responsible for quality assurance (QA). He is now reporting to Amanda, and working with her to develop QA. Will be rolling out regular statistics and performance data to the counselors, supervisors, managers and EMT to really hone in on that data, internal controls, which RSA is encouraging. Will be seeking feedback at next week's VRC meeting to see what information/data would be useful for the counselors to see on a regular basis, and similarly at every level. Our partners at Mathematica have done an amazing job at letting us basically dump our 911 data into multiple Excel spreadsheets with lots of pivot tables and charts and filters – any performance piece we want, they created a tab for us. We're going to strategically identify what information is going out to whom and on what sort of basis. We'll have a lot more flexibility to do some reporting and ad hoc; will get data we haven't had before due to the limitations of our caseload management system.

Amanda commented on the DDD meeting Bernice reported on earlier. The meeting was held to discuss the challenges we are facing with regard to providing supported employment services. Amanda noted she asked Kelly to join in on the follow up meeting being planned. Looking to identify where DDD can provide our consumers more coordinated services; where we can work more collaboratively. If we can make sure we're not duplicating services, and optimizing what each agency can do, it really sets the person up for greater success. Amanda noted that we've been working on a pilot with the YES (youth) program, identifying what we can do to help provide the best supports. Kelly and her team have created a system of doing the customized

employment discovery process, which is really a person centered planning process; getting to know the person, their interests, abilities, network, etc, and recognizing you can take the time to do that through at least the pre-placement activities, and then helping that person develop the skills; finding them the right job; providing the long term supports; always in concert with everyone at the table; making sure if there's questions about benefits, that their getting benefits counseling; questions about DDD services, and the other support services. The guardians are at the table too. We've seen a 50% placement rate, which is out of this world, particularly for those consumers with the most significant disabilities. Kelly is going to be working with CBVI and DDD, hoping to bring in the Boggs Center, to replicate this statewide; to provide that technical assistance, training, and supports, so we can see higher levels of success. Will be sending out a Request For Information (RFI) to the community, providers, and stakeholders to provide that feedback as we develop what the new supported employment system will look like. DDD will be coming to the Agency to provide an updated training on DDD services to our counselors. Amanda noted she will be working with DDD to potentially do a webinar to get information about us out to their support coordinators who are contracted with DDD.

If anyone is interested, the statewide performance report has been published by RSA and is on their website. This is the annual report with performance information for the entire VR program (CBVI and DVR). Will email a copy to everyone. We don't have our baseline data for the employment rates yet, so it's just a lot of demographic data with some of the measurable skill gains built in. Most of our actual performance numbers are not yet in there; when we submitted we hadn't had all the quarters finalized.

RSA has started releasing their monitoring reports from 2018; hopefully we will receive ours soon; will share with everyone.

Amanda continues to work with Russ Thelin on the update to our VR Program Administrative Code (10:95) – we've been notified that it is coming out of the "Red Tape Committee", where it's been for approximately 9 years; when it comes out of red tape it expires. Amanda noted she has 17 of 19 chapters completed and submitted to DHS for review so far; working on the last 2 chapters now. It's very involved getting rules adopted. In case we don't get everything done in time, DHS has prepared the packet, calling it a short form re-adoption, which basically says we are re-adopting the rules as is; it would be a temporary stopgap, just to make sure the rules don't expire while we are actively working on the process. DHS is amazing in working with us to make all the substantive changes, to make sure the code is both in alignment with WIOA, as well as helping us update it to reflect the best practices. When posted, the SRC and stakeholders will be notified, and it will be out for public comment. We will welcome/encourage feedback on the proposed changes.

Follow up regarding post exit information: Management Information Systems (MIS) was able to figure out the issue with getting accurate and complete information back from the UI wage system; turns out their system only reads capital letters; it wasn't recognizing any of the names we were sending over that were in both upper and lower case. MIS ran a program and changed

all the letters to caps; now getting 5 times the amount of UI wage data than what we were getting. The number of post exit matches using UI wage data, which is the gold standard for RSA, has more than quadrupled. Now working with supervisors and managers to make sure it's getting put into the case management system correctly. Still challenging, but coming along.

There has been a change to the definition of competitive integrated employment: some of the previously acceptable placements, employment outcomes, have been removed because they do not meet the definition of "integrated". Now need to go out and evaluate programs, per the federal government, to see whether or not they meet the definition of competitive integrated employment. We are doing our due diligence in individually evaluating these types of places; making sure we are following the regulations and giving opportunities to all of our consumers. If a consumer still chooses to take a position where it has been determined it is not competitive integrated employment, that's fine, that's their choice; however, they must be closed in VR because they are not pursuing competitive integrated employment. This is just like individuals who choose to go into a sheltered workshop and work for sub-minimum wage employment; it is their informed choice to do so; however, they are then opting out of VR services.

With regard to the national trend, moving away from sub-minimum wage, Bernice commented that Ability One - they have many contracts and employ thousands of people with disabilities, they still have sub-minimum wage on the platform - they are taking a look at it. We want everyone to have the opportunity to earn a competitive wage and be integrated wherever they work.

Amanda noted that we are at approximately the halfway point in the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment cycle and similarly as far away from the next State Plan update; both are due in March, 2020. She asked for the SRC members to start thinking about what sort of activities they would suggest; what sort of topics they think we need to deep dive into during this cycle. Amanda reviewed that in the past we've done large group town hall meetings, as well as smaller groups regionally; we've done virtual; we've done pen/paper electronic surveys; stakeholder small groups.

Gary commented that with regard to the Plan, we reached out to the Department of Labor, because that's who we normally work through, they said they have no guidance at this point. So we're anticipating following what came along last time, and much like you just said, we're looking at what we can do to bring this closer to the people who get served.

Amanda noted that if we do something large (statewide), we'll need to find another location, which is challenging.

The **Role of the SRC Member** document was reviewed by the members. Rick pointed out the law mandates each SRC be comprised of the same representation; i.e. business and industry, client assistance, Department of Education, etc. Everyone should be aware of which category they represent. He reviewed the ten areas of responsibility the SRC is charged with; all make it

very clear that the SRC is meant to be a strong advisory council to CBVI's Vocational Rehabilitation Unit. Rick noted that the SRC needs to work with the Agency to provide data to those who need it, such as the State Plan and the Annual Report. The agency also needs to hear from SRC members if there are problems they hear about through their various stakeholder communities.

Kelly pointed out that SRC members have many different perspectives, that's why everyone is selected to participate and to channel that energy. She noted that we all come here because we want to see improvement and make change; we all need to work together to figure out how to address some real relatable issues in our community. Rick agreed; the more active participation we have from our members the better we will be able to implement the rules/responsibilities. Rick encouraged everyone to bring their ideas to these meetings; ask questions. The more we know, the more we can participate.

Rick suggested that everyone read through the Role of the SRC Member, and be prepared to discuss further at the next meeting. Susan suggested 5-10 minutes be set aside at the next meeting for members to brainstorm on this. Amanda noted she will add to the next agenda – how the SRC sees their roles coming into play and also any ideas for the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment and the development of the plan, CBVI's component of the combined state plan.

Old/New Business:

Pat noted that he is interested in learning more about the 20-week program at JKTC. He wanted to know if there is data on how many clients come through the program; its impact and some of its successes; what successes look like a year later; comparisons to other organizations or similar training facilities. This type of data would be beneficial to look at to better understand the program and its impact. Danielle offered to provide some information re clients she's had. Another member noted he was a graduate of the program and could also provide some information. Bernice noted that all of Pat's questions were good ones; all in alignment with WIOA. She noted that when she talked about data validity and accuracy earlier, it's in alignment with what the Agency's executive team is doing at their operations meetings now. She noted that the federal government is looking at it and is having us take a deeper dive into our data. Del Basha, JKTC's manager, is scheduled to do a presentation at the executive team's operation meeting next month, and we could definitely get something out to our SRC members prior to the October meeting. Pat suggested Del be asked to attend an upcoming SRC meeting to talk about the program, the teachers and different classes, and what's been done and how we can possibly make it better. (Addendum: having Del present at an SRC meeting was previously discussed and has been set up for the October meeting.) Bernice also noted that the Technical Assistance Center, who helped us prepare for our recent federal audit, will be the same people coming to JKTC as an ally, to advise us in making that program more successful.

Rick provided follow up on an issue that began at the last meeting; Evangelia Stone had made a motion to get in touch with Elisa Neira, Department of Human Services Deputy Commissioner, to request her to attend a meeting to answer questions regarding the procedure used to choose

the Executive Director, and why it may have taken as long as it did. Rick noted that he wrote such a letter and did receive a response. A conference call was held with Rick, Lia, and Deputy Commissioner Neira on March 25; they discussed the process of choosing a director why the deadline continued to be moved ahead; she mentioned the fact that there were several other states also looking for an executive director; the high cost of NJ doesn't help; she also commented that the title is unclassified (not guaranteed from administration to administration), which didn't help. Rick noted that both he and Lia were very clear that they are very eager and happy to be working with Dr. Davis, but were interested in understanding the process of why it took so long. Ms. Neira said she'd be eager to come to an upcoming meeting if we wanted to talk with her about any questions and things being planned for the future. She said she couldn't come today, but would look at her calendar to come to another meeting in the future. Lia noted that they made it clear to her that DHS can't forget to consult stakeholders in anything they do regarding CBVI, and that the SRC is eager to work with them on whatever changes or proposals or anything in the future that comes up.

Kris Tucker provided an update regarding Access Link (AL). As previously mentioned, they are offering a number of initiatives to enhance communication with customers. Currently, there are over 1900 customers who are on the user acceptance team, going on-line to make reservations, monitor reservations, canceling reservations. Kris noted that there have been tweaks they needed to make in reference to accessibility for customers that use screen readers. They are still in the process of receiving and evaluating tweaks, and then putting them out so the public can take a look and see if the problems are resolved. Kris reported that the interactive voice response system was launched on Feb 28th; customers are also helping out with testing. This is an automatic notification that their AL vehicle is about to arrive. Once it gets into the vicinity the customer receives a notification that the vehicle is almost there; they can also send text messages to check on the status of their ride. Kris also reported on 2 requests she had from CBVI to check on pick up/drop off locations. One was an employment location in Logan Township where a number of CBVI consumers are employed and there was an issue with the drop off location. A recommendation to change the location was made, and was able to be accommodated - great success! Another location, the Newark Public Library, was a concern; there is no designated pick up/drop off location for a vehicle in front of the Library; nowhere to pull over. Drivers now know that if they receive a pick up/drop off at that location that they are to contact base and work with them on an individual basis to make sure every necessary precaution is taken and the consumer is able to get to the door safely.

With regard to the 110th anniversary and events being planned, when a location is found, Kris offered to assist by seeing if it's in their system for AL customers.

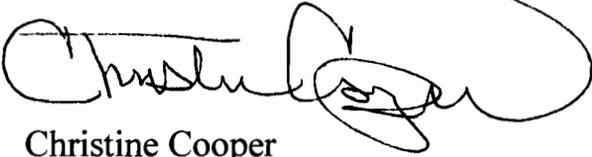
Gary Altman noted that the Office of the Secretary of Higher Education just released a new State Plan. As a result, they are forming work groups. They focus on things like campus safety, affordability, accessibility, and innovation and employment. If interested in being involved in any of the workgroups, they have an application on their website.

Adjournment

A motion was made by Alice Eaddy and seconded by Jonathan Goodman to adjourn the meeting; all were in favor. The meeting was adjourned at 12:00 p.m.

The next SRC meeting is scheduled for Friday, June 7, 2019. Susan Vanino, Support Program Coordinator, will provide an overview of CBVI's support groups.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Christine Cooper", with a large, sweeping flourish that loops back under the name.

Christine Cooper
CBVI – Administrative Assistant