

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

Meeting Minutes – June 1, 2018
Joseph Kohn Training Center - 130 Livingston Avenue - New Brunswick, NJ

Voting Members Present: Jennifer Ekelmann, Rick Fox, Jonathan Goodman, Susan Head, Kelly Reymann, William Robinson, Evangelia Stone, Kris Tucker

Present (pending appointments): Alice Eaddy, Clarke King

Absent: Pamela Aasen, Gary Altman, Ida Behrini, Lisa Killion-Smith, Joan Leonard, Charles McKenna

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

Staff/Members of Public Present: Kerrie Hannen

The meeting was called to order at 9:30 a.m. by Rick Fox, Chairperson. He 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. Rick welcomed and thanked everyone for attending this meeting.

Approval of Meeting Minutes

The meeting minutes of April, 2018 were not voted on at this time, as a quorum was not present.

Business Relations Unit (BRU): Jay Mills, Supervisor of the Business Relations Unit, explained that the BRU was created 2 years ago in response to the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). This 3-staff Unit is an outreach team; with the goal to engage businesses and industries in order to promote awareness and educate them on hiring people with disabilities. One of the things they do to try and achieve this goal is to attend as many job fairs and talent network meetings as possible; to meet and develop partnerships with a variety of businesses. Another goal of this Unit is to initiate awareness of CBVI's existence. The Unit has gone through some growing pains, with ups/downs of staffing, and trying to define, redefine, and institute goals and procedures. The BRU offers many services to businesses; i.e. performing a workplace analysis, providing technical advice or assistance, presenting disability awareness and sensitivity training, or they may have an employee that is starting to lose vision; the BRU can help retain a valued employee. The BRU works collaboratively with CBVI's vocational counselors; meeting with them in the 3 different offices/service centers, bi weekly; sharing contacts and job opportunities. Jay explained that job placement is a very long, slow process. Working with the counselors, the BRU tries to target the types of positions the consumers are looking for.

Jay reviewed a few events and success stories of the BRU:

- In April the BRU co-hosted a business summit. There were a total of 23 company representatives in attendance. They were presented with information; i.e. disability etiquette, the positive effects of inclusive hiring. Also addressed the misconceptions of working with people with disabilities. A few success stories were shared with attendees. At the end, a "no holes barred Q&A" took place. Index

cards and pens were at the tables for anonymous questions; this way they didn't have to worry about being politically correct or any kind of legal ramifications. Since then, two of the companies reached out to us for more information regarding our services. In this way we hope to be able to keep developing and maintaining these contacts for future hiring possibilities. This is just one of the small steps we are taking towards developing larger relationships with major companies. Every person we meet, every business we visit, will help connect our consumers with employment, educate the population, and open the doors for inclusivity.

- In October (Disability Awareness month) the BRU is expecting a number of businesses to schedule events promoting hiring people with disabilities. Last year Port Authority was interested in hiring people with engineering or business backgrounds, and they hosted a disability mentoring day. Six of our consumers went to the event; two were asked to come back for an interview; one was offered a 6-month internship; hopefully a job offer will follow.
- Last year we had a student accepted into the We See Ability Program at JP Morgan; that also led to an internship for this summer.
- Another student was accepted into an internship program at the US Business Leadership Network/ Academy.
- In March, the BRU attended a meeting at Navair. A panel discussion was held, which concentrated on disability etiquette and measures that could help them with diversity hiring. As a result, Navair then hosted a discussion with our EDGE Program; it was very well done. They presented to the students and had them do a very simple engineering exercise, which went over very well. Following the presentation, the people from Navair spoke to the students/parents that were interested in engineering. There was one student who was very excited, and it just solidified her desire and dreams to be able to go ahead and enter into the engineering field.
- Another success story, one of the BRU staff developed a relationship with a Shoprite owner and together they worked on a hiring event. They set up a day and six of our consumers went to the store; they were taken to different departments and given different tasks to do. As a result, one of the consumers was offered a job on the spot; that was last November – still working there. Also, the store owner set up quarterly hiring events for this year; hopefully to employ others.
- In April we were invited to an event at Facebook; it was called a “fireside chat” where they invited agencies from the tri-state area. They are very interested in hiring people with disabilities; they have support systems, and they talked about the different accommodations they have made for people that work there. It was an interesting event.

Jay answered a few questions raised by the members. Jennifer Ekermann commented that she was happy to hear about the work the BRU is doing. The company she works for, Sodexo, struggles for staffing at the TCNJ site. They currently have a staff (former TCNJ student) who is vision impaired. This employee has been with the company for 2-3 years now and is doing a great job. Amanda pointed out that Sodexo is a historical champion for diversity and inclusion in hiring people with disabilities.

Rick thanked Jay for the work the Business Relations Unit is doing. He noted that the National Federation of the Blind (NFBO) has (200) list serves on NFBnet.org; one is called “Blind Jobs”, which provides job postings; might be helpful to the VR counselors and the BRU. Rick also offered to help in any way he can, in terms of speaking and anything else they need; he noted that he has 40 years of experience.

Jay thanked everyone for the opportunity to keep them updated on the BRU.

Contact information: Jay Mills, Principal Community Program Specialist, 153 Halsey Street, Newark, office #973-648-7852. cell #862-373-5371. Janet.mills@dhs.state.nj.us

Federal & State Update by Bernice Davis, Acting Executive Director:

- Preparing for CBVI's federal audit with Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA), which is slated for the week of September 10; calls with RSA begin on June 19. Have been meeting with executive team members to go over different questions/categories we think we'll be asked about. Amanda has been doing a great job preparing for this audit!
- Get well cards were sent to Joan Leonard and Gary Altman from the SRC to wish them well; both absent today due to illness.
- On the State level, as of April 30: Brian Franks joined DHS in the role of Chief Financial Officer; Gerard Hughes is serving as Director of Legal and Regulatory Affairs. Mr. Hughes visited the Agency to meet with Dr. Davis, sharing their goals for the year; he noted they were happy to collaborate with us. Also, Denise Meckel, is now the Director of Human Resources. There are a lot of changes still happening at DHS during this transition period.
- Human Resources (HR) is now centralized; HR used to be what they call "de-centralized", which means each of the divisions had their own HR officer, who would report to the Director of the Agency; that no longer happens. Now all of the HR Directors report to Trenton, to one person who directs all of HR. CBVI is working hand-in-hand with our HR Director; not a problem.
- Last night CBVI held its 13th annual Trenton Thunder Blindness Awareness Night – it was a wonderful event. 5 scholarship winners were awarded and recognized at this event. A lot of families came out for the scholarship winners – good time. The Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner also attended; several DHS staff came too.
- Bernice recently attended CBVI's Senior Hands-On Retreat Experience (SHORE) closing ceremony. This is an Independent Living program for blind/vision impaired senior citizens. The ceremony was great, and Bernice commented she was inspired by all the stories from consumers, their companions, family and friends, on what this one-week program meant to them, and the transformation of the mindset of independence, and just people believing in themselves and what they can do.
- Working on an intra-agency agreement with DVRS and DOE for transition services; still in the creation stages; going well.
- DHS is revising the transportation contract. They received our input, and are going to try and tailor transportation more towards CBVI constituents. If there are challenges, or improvements seen, Bernice welcomed any feedback re transportation.

Rick asked for an update on the status of the new case management system. Bernice noted that we currently use System 7, which we refer to as FACTS. The Agency continues to look forward to getting approval for the purchase and use of Aware, which is manufactured by Alliance. DHS appears to be quite supportive of the Aware system. CBVI's IT Department has to go before panels about the fiscal aspects of the new computer system, the software aspect, the legal and contract aspect – there are several layers to actually find a product and then get approvals. So far, good news. Bernice noted that the new system will be very helpful for us to more readily and easily comply with federal mandates. She explained that we're being required to report more data and run different data reports.

Rick asked if the 3 manager system would be in place soon. Bernice reported that approval was received from DHS to go back to having 3 service center managers. Since one of the managers is retiring by September, there will be 2 positions to fill. The positions will be posted shortly, and interviews will take place in the coming months. Bernice noted that the two managers have been doing a phenomenal job in covering all 3 service centers.

Vocational Rehabilitation Update, by Amanda Gerson:

- Preparation for monitoring has been taking up a lot of time; making sure we are in compliance and ready to go when monitoring starts. Currently scheduled to start phone calls with RSA on June 19; five calls scheduled, one every week. On-site scheduled for the week of September 10. First call is on our fiscal and internal control pieces; our chief fiscal person has been doing a great job of getting all that information together. One of the big things that RSA is focused on is our internal controls; i.e. having written policies and procedures on how we go about doing things and ensuring compliance. We are in the process of collecting all the pieces, centralizing our internal controls. RSA just put out a Webinar, which has a lot of helpful fiscal information. In 2014 the Office of Management & Budget (OMB), put out new regulations around compliance with fiscal, called universal guidance. It speaks to the process of prior approval for certain expenditures when using federal money. For certain expenditures we need to submit for prior approval to RSA to spend those monies. For most things the financial threshold is \$5000 per unit price; that pertains to things like equipment and physical purchases. This does not impact our consumers too much; most devices don't have a unit price above 5000 dollars. It would impact the purchase of things like braille notes, which we only purchase about 6-10/year, or fancy CCTVs, of which we haven't purchased anything above that amount in the past 6 months. What they are allowing us to do is take a look at what our average spending is for this kind of device and bulk prior approval it at the beginning of every fiscal year, so we don't have to put in the prior approval request for each individual consumer. They created this process to make it easier and not impact those we serve. The other types of things we are going to need to seek prior approval on are things like improvement projects in our offices. One example is in our Newark offices we are looking to replace the data lines so our internet connection is better; it is currently difficult for our counselors to do work in a timely manner when they are waiting for forms to open and all of that, so that has been a priority and something we were focusing on for a while. The other major area to be impacted is the Business Enterprise Program; purchasing of vending machines often exceeds that \$5000 limit. They are allowing us to submit an annual projected budget for approval.
- Two policies were sent to the SRC subcommittee last week. One is on college services and one is on the Business Relations Unit services. Amanda noted that she is also working on a pre-employment transition services policy, and will get that out to the subcommittee for review. Another policy Amanda is working on is a case review and quality assurance policy. The Agency will be instituting a new VR statewide case review process; where 3 times a year there will be a case review done on each counselor; with monthly supervision as well as an annual field observation of that counselor. This is not new, but something that may have fallen slightly by the waist-side over the years. Part of this is to make sure we are in compliance and providing quality services, and this will also provide the opportunity for supervisors and managers to address problem areas; any issues of compliance or quality; and provide the additional guidance, support, encouragement, and professional growth for those that are doing a fabulous job. Rick asked if any thought has been given for the quality assurance policy to include consumer feedback. He noted that any time he leads/attends a class/training, feedback is always included. He offered the Policy subcommittee's assistance in this regard; offering to provide feedback on survey questions. Amanda noted that there are two parts to the quality case review policy; one is focused on counselor performance; the other is focused on agency/VR Unit performance. Kevin Harris, the Agency's QA Program Improvement person, as well as a QA team, will annually do a case review (120-150 cases), as well as annually identifying areas that we want to do consumer feedback. This will not necessarily replace the larger outreach and survey effort that we undertake every 3 years as part of the Statewide Needs Assessment. It will be on a smaller scale, targeting feedback on consumers who have exited with employment goals/successful employment opportunities/maybe people who haven't; it will target different populations every time, so we are getting a cross section without doing a major undertaking each time. Amanda thanked Rick for the offer and will welcome the feedback.

- Salesforce for BRU: Went through the second to final stage of user acceptance testing; identified there were accessibility issues and realized it needed to be navigated a little differently for our JAWS users. Final stamp of approval was given. Office of Information Technology (OIT) is in the process of loading our “sandbox” (practice area) into the full live ap. Hopefully, within the next week or two we can do final user acceptance testing, and start collecting data on business engagement. Exciting – 3year adventure; will enable us to share information with the rest of our workforce partners doing business engagement, as well as being able to meet the reporting requirements for the joint regulations under WIOA. Under the combined state plan update 2 performance indicators for business engagement were identified; there were 3 to choose from. One is retention in a job for a year; the second is penetration, the percentage of businesses in the state that are receiving workforce related business services; the third is repeat customers. Of those businesses served, how many come back for a 2nd, 3rd, 4th service from the workforce team. The workforce partners chose 2nd and 3rd; so the penetration and the repeat customers as our key performance indicators for Business Relations in NJ. Those are going to be reported on for the first time at the end of the program year (end of October).
- The other piece of software acquired is Tableau – allows flexible ad hoc reporting. It allows us to be able to load data sets into it and then, in a much more user friendly way, create ad hoc reports. One of the ways it has been used so far is to take a look at our counselors and caseloads, and use geo mapping to see if the caseload distribution is efficient across the Agency. Will also be able to use it for QA performance related reports for VR; being able to load in some of our quarterly annual reporting data and take a look at some of our performance means, before the final report that we give to the feds. It will give the opportunity to see where our unit needs a little more help; if we need more technical assistance or training, or if we need to develop new procedures, or maybe acknowledge our staff for doing a good job.
- Memorandum Of Agreement (MOA) with Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (DVRS) and Department Of Education (DOE). We are required to have an MOA regarding transition services. It is a formal agreement that identifies what the responsibilities are for the local education authorities/agencies, the school districts or the state DOE, and VR. Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), schools are required to provide transition related services to student with Individual Education Programs (IEPs). WIOA does not diminish that obligation on the part of the schools. Similarly, WIOA has mandated that the VR agencies need to provide transition and pre-employment transition services to students with disabilities, including those who have 504 plans or are just final or 504 eligible, and obviously those with IEPs. What this document does is clarifying everyone’s roles. WIOA kind of muddied the waters a little because we are now legally obligated to provide these services that historically only the school districts provided prior. Also, a lot of other agencies need this agreement to help identify students with disabilities to be able to offer these pre-employment and transition services. We don’t have that issue, so identification of our potentially eligible students is not going to be a major focus of our MOA, but it will be on the DVRS side for a lot of other states. Our students are identified to us because the school districts contract with the Commission for education services; we don’t rely on the DOE for identification for VR referral.
- Summer programs all going well. College Prep – great numbers this year; Work Skills Prep – full, with a waiting list; Life 101 - anticipate meeting target of 15 students and in final stages of getting applications.
- Reallotment dollars – the federal government provides 80% of the VR grant award, and states are required to come up with a 20% match. CBVI has never had an issue making the match. In the event where a state is unable to come up with a 20% match, they are required to return the rest of their grant award to the federal government. The federal government then makes that money available to other states, assuming they are able to provide the match. CBVI has received anywhere from 1.2 to 2 million dollars over the past 6-7 years. This has helped us move towards getting the Aware system. States that have traditionally turned money away are now finding the match and being able to make that match.

Therefore, it is not expected there will be a lot of reallocation dollars available at the end of this year. Because of the increased requirement for pre-employment transition services, and the stresses it has had on various states, many have had to move into an Order of Selection, which means they don't have the resources to serve all of the people that want services, and they need to essentially create a priority list in serving those with the most significant disabilities first. At this time, we are not in danger of going into Order of Selection if we don't get reallocation dollars. However, Amanda noted she will be meeting with the counselors over the summer to reinforce the fact that we need to be more diligent about what we are spending money on; encouraging everyone to make sure they are complying with our financial needs testing; making sure consumers are seeking out all other sources of funding first, as we should be the last dollar spent. We need to make sure that if we are recommending the consumer for a service, i.e. assistive technology or job development, that individual is able and willing to commit to that service. We need to make sure we are being judicious in our spending, so we don't over extend ourselves. Amanda noted that our case review process is going to help be an additional check and balance in that respect. We are preparing and being cautious in the event that we don't get the reallocation dollars this year. Given the number of states that have had to move into Order of Selection, and do so very quickly, CBVI has talked about creating an Order of Selection plan, just to have in the event it is needed. At minimum it is a 3-month process to put a plan in place; i.e. public hearings, etc.. If a plan is there, it could be put into effect immediately. The Agency would like to get a plan approved and have it available. We would need to market it to the community and make people understand that this is just through an abundance of caution; this is just to make sure we have our ducks in a row. An Order of Selection does not impact current consumers; it prioritizes based on categories; who gets services first, going from most significantly disabled to least significantly disabled. You can be on Order of Selection and actually have all of the categories open, but you have that availability to open and close as you wish to different degrees. Amanda explained that if we ever did have to activate a plan, it would be something we would do in conversation with the SRC. The plan is there so the process wouldn't have to be rushed, and to make sure we were thinking through everything in a very cautious and considerate manner. Amanda noted that before the next meeting she'll take a look at the regulations and clarify what the process would be. This topic will be added to the October agenda for further discussion.

Rick thanked Amanda for her thorough and well thought out presentation, which he pointed out occurs at all of the SRC meetings.

Sub-Committees

Annual Report – Amanda, Ida, Jennifer, Kelly, and Pat

Status of the 2017 report: Bernice noted that her office staff checks on the status regularly; as of last month the report was still under review/approval between the Commissioner and the Governor's offices. Amanda noted that hopefully final approval will be given soon and she can distribute to everyone. She noted that she has asked the counselors to give her success stories throughout the year, so she's not trying to get information at the end of each year. As soon as the RSA monitoring is over, Amanda noted that the committee will begin work on the 2018 report.

Resource/Business Relations – Danielle, Kelly, Jon, William, Clarke, and Gary

Nothing new to report. Kelly noted that over the summer this sub-committee will come up with a more solidified draft and ideas on how to categorize the different resources that would benefit the BRU and hopefully get that consistent message out to everyone of resources, so people can locate them.

The Policy & Evaluation sub-committee – Pat, Rick, Susan, Jon, and Lia

Rick noted that he will be in touch with Pat to have him schedule a call with this committee, as there are some policies that need review. Amanda requested that the college policy be made a priority as she needs to get that out to the college counselors/students as soon as possible. She noted that changes have been relatively minor from year to year, and each year expand on whatever issues need clarification. The substantial change this time is clarifying how to calculate tuition that does not go on a traditional semester schedule; more colleges are on trimesters, quarters or accelerated, etc.

Old/New Business:

Susan noted that every 3 years Disability Rights NJ (DRNJ) looks at their own goals and priorities, seeking feedback from a wide range of the people they serve. She noted that some SRC members may have received an email recently requesting input regarding a past survey. Today she asked the members, in terms of individuals with blindness and visual impairment, what they would like to see DRNJ focus on. In particular, any specific barriers they would like DRNJ to address. She reported the 8 goals they currently have: abuse and neglect, discrimination, community based services, healthcare, children, assistive technology, employment, consumer outreach and education. She explained that their feedback does not have to fit into those areas, and it would be welcomed if it didn't, as it allows their Executive Director more information to develop goals and priorities for the next 3 years. She explained that their Executive Director takes the feedback from many stakeholders, including people with mental illness, physical disabilities, and blindness, etc.. Susan noted she would appreciate hearing of the barriers, and any specific issues that anyone would like her to pass on.

- Kelly noted the need to continually get the word out and empower families that their student is entitled to education until the age of 21; to be consistent with the appropriate services students are entitled to.
- Rick shared his thoughts on employment being the key for solving a lot of problems the blind and vision impaired deal with; transportation and getting into the community then becomes less of a problem. It seems that old myths and stereotypes about disabilities continues to crop up with new generations and immigrants. He believes the public needs to be educated on an ongoing basis; public acceptance is important.
- William commented on a recent meeting he attended with legislators in Washington, DC regarding the Business Enterprise of NJ (BENJ), and trying to stop the commercialization of rest stops. If this happens, approximately 1100 Randolph Sheppard managers will be out of business. Another issue discussed is with the Department of Defense and contracts that are passed out. They are supposed to be awarded to small business, which is what Randolph Sheppard is. We are trying to get classified for the next legislation, next year, as AbilityOne. We will continue to fight to make this program happen.
- Danielle commented on a problem she has encountered more than once, where a client applies for social security and gets denied; they immediately get a lawyer and the lawyer stalls in order to get a bigger chunk of money. She is trying to get the word out to clients to stop getting lawyers involved; to reapply/appeal on their own, or to send to the Law Project; it's becoming a bigger problem – hearings can be 2 years out.

Susan thanked everyone for their input. If anyone has any other issues they would like to add, they were encouraged to send Susan an e-mail. Susan promised to send everyone the link to DRNJ's survey. Amanda offered to send the link out via CBVI's list serve. Rick thanked Susan for seeking the SRC's input.

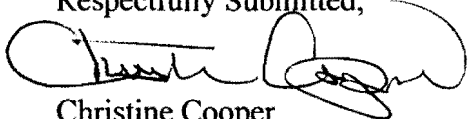
Kris Tucker, Business & Industry member (NJ Transit) reported that a forum was recently held with customers as there are a number of improvements Access Link is bringing to fruition. First priority was to improve communication with customers. A new system has been installed to allow for improved communication with customers. It will offer options, such as, imminent arrive for Access Link; if a customer is using a handheld

device they will have the opportunity to know when the vehicle will arrive (5 or 10-minute threshold). Will also be introducing Easy Wallet, which will give customers the opportunity to go on-line to fund/pay for their fares. Reservations will also be made on-line; customers will be able to make a reservation, pay through Easy Wallet, monitor trips, make updates to their account, and communicate address or email changes. Also, there will be a change in the time-window. When a trip is booked now the customer is told the pick-up could be 20 minutes before or 20 minutes after the requested time. The new system will be that when a customer requests a 9:00 pick up, Access Link will be there at 9:00 or 30 minutes after; they will not be arriving beforehand. Hopefully everything will be in place during the month of June. Amanda asked about testing for accessibility of the new digital ap, and offered CBVI's assistance in this regard. Kris noted they will be working shortly with a select group of customers to start testing. Alice asked if the system will be accessible to deaf blind as well; braille users? Kris noted that it will be accessible to the deaf blind, but not braille. However, with the software you would be able to use JAWS. Kris noted that everything she just reported on will be on NJ Transit's website. Alice expressed the need for someone to explain the new system in detail, so customers can actually utilize it. Kris noted the opportunity is there for NJ Transit to try and make sure that everyone who is willing, and wants to try using the services, that they put plans in place to make sure they are able to do that. Amanda commented that this is also something that CBVI, Orientation & Mobility, can assist with as well. Kris also noted that one of the concerns is that there were customers at the forum, who don't have access to a computer. Unfortunately, this won't help those customers, as this is all technology based. However, individuals who don't have a computer will still be able to pick up the phone for Access Link. The majority of those attending the forum were excited and looking forward to these improvements. Kris reported that brochures are being worked on now; she will forward to Amanda when completed, so information can be shared with the SRC, and the serve list. Rick thanked Kris for sharing this information.

Adjournment

A motion was made by Evangelia and seconded by Jonathan to adjourn the meeting; all were in favor. The meeting was adjourned at 12 noon. The next SRC meeting is scheduled for October 5, 2018.

Respectfully Submitted,



Christine Cooper
CBVI – Administrative Assistant