

N.J. Commission for the Blind & Visually Impaired
State Rehabilitation Council
Meeting Minutes – June 3, 2016
Joseph Kohn Training Center - 130 Livingston Avenue - New Brunswick, NJ

Voting Members Present: Jennifer Armstrong, Rick Fox, Jonathan Goodman, Susan Head, Zoraida Krell, Fran Leibner, Dawn Monaco, Fr. Jim Warnke

Voting Members Absent: Kirk Lew, Kelly Reymann, Kris Tucker

Ex Officio Present: Dan Frye, Amanda Gerson, Danielle Licari-Scorzelli

Staff/Members of Public Present: Robert Paige, Eva Scott

The meeting was called to order at 9:30 a.m., Fr. Jim Warnke, Chairperson, welcomed everyone and thanked them for attending. Chris Cooper announced that the meeting was being held in compliance with Section 105 of the Federal Rehabilitation Act 1973, as amended. It is also in compliance with the New Jersey Open Public Meeting Act, NJSA 10:4-6.

Members were given a few minutes to review the April 15, 2016, Minutes. Fran Leibner pointed out a few corrections: Page 2: "farelawn" was probably referring to the town, which should be Fair Lawn. (It was pointed out that there is a program with that name; Chris to check with John Walsh on the spelling). Page 6: an extra "l" should be taken out. Page 10: Goldman should be changed to Gold.

Hearing no other corrections or additions, a motion to approve these Minutes was requested by Fr. Jim. On a motion made by Rick Fox and seconded by Susan Head the Minutes were accepted as received. Everyone was in favor; no one was opposed. The minutes were approved with the corrections noted.

Federal and State Update

Dan noted that this Council is interactive, informs the policy and decision making at the broadest systemic level of the Agency, and is a vibrant part of the Commission as it moves forward to the future. He thanked everyone for investing their time and energy, particularly outside of the work done at meetings; for their ambassadorship, for their subcommittee work, and for other efforts taken on behalf of the Commission. He pointed out that the SRC has an important role to play and this Council is as vibrant and interactive as any he has seen. He thanked everyone for their commitment to the welfare and mission of this organization.

Dan reported on the following:

- On June 11, in concert with this Council, the Commission is going to convene a listening session at JKTC for anyone in the general public across the State, to provide feedback on the Commission specific portions of the NJ State Plan. Federal partners at the US Department of Education (DOE) have advised that, while the law is silent on the topic, consistent with the spirit of the Act and good public policy, there would be an advantage to holding this type of public hearing. Dan explained that he will be doing a brief introduction to the Commission and an explanation of what the hearing is for, but will not be commenting further at this session; it

will largely be an opportunity for the administration to simply listen to any feedback re Commission specific portions of the combined State Plan. Assuming comments received are inconsistent with, or would supplement in some way what is already published, we will certainly convey those points to the State Employment & Training Commission (SETC), and ask that they be conveyed to the federal officials when the SETC meets on 6/21, and sends any final tweaks to that Plan forward for federal consideration. Jonathan Goodman is scheduled to represent the SRC at this session. If anyone else is interested in participating, they should feel free to attend.

- Update on summer programs: SHARP (grades 1-8) will begin soon. On June 11 the concluding ceremonies of the first year of the EDGE program will take place; 20 students will be graduating from high school and will finish this program; the remaining 20 students will be there to cheer them on as they move forward. The second year of EDGE will begin on June 25. Over 100 referrals have been made and an admissions process is underway; the prospect of admitting as many as 45-50 students to join the remaining 20 for the coming year is possible. The Bonner College Program will be getting underway at TCNJ; administered in a slightly different fashion this year with a 2-week component for all college bound participants, to acquire blindness specific instruction. 6 of those 15, who are not on an extremely aggressive academic track, will exit at the end of that 2 weeks, having acquired some good college technique and skill set. The remaining 9 will participate in a further 2-week session of the program, where they will participate in social activism work in the mornings, to complement their academic class instruction in the afternoon. Fr. Jim commented that he is delighted to hear about the social skills aspect of this program; he believes that successfully negotiating the social aspect of college is almost as important as academic competence for a good outcome.
- Last November the Agency was advised that our existing case management service provider, Libera, would be exiting the VR space. We purchased the Libera System 7 software in 2011/2012, and internally renamed it Fully Accessible Client Tracking System (FACTS). Consequently, Libera has developed a strategic relationship with the only other entity in the country that has distinguished itself as being a VR case management service provider and that company is called Alliance; product is called AWARE. There is one other smaller company that has announced it would like to develop a VR case management system, but they are far from being sufficiently grown. Over the next 9-12 months CBVI will be migrating to the AWARE case management system. Upon review of AWARE it is evident, and our sister agency at DVRS already uses aware, it is a more robust intuitive, effective, and flexible system. The Commission had engaged with Libera because it was a less expensive option and seemed to meet all our needs. The Libera and Alliance companies have worked together to offer strategic financial incentives, if we allow Libera to work with us to migrate us to Alliance. We've run this through DHS and treasury and legal feel confident that we are on solid fiscal and legal grounds to make the migration as described; this will be occurring over the next 9-12 months and largely isn't a concern for those internal staff who deal with our case management system. Rick questioned the accessibility to blind friendly software. Dan reported that it is a case management software that is currently used in 37 other state VR agencies. The Agency has thoroughly reviewed accessibility; sat through demo sessions with Alliance and Libera and are confident in the product.
- The Agency is introducing a number of new entities: 1) Welcome & Evaluation Team (WE) will triage all incoming inquiries to the Agency with the goal of making sure every potential person that comes to the Commission receives a more uniform and quality introduction, and a conversation with a professional who can be empathetic and responsive to the concerns and needs expressed by the consumer. The WE Team will be rolled out in 2 phases; Phase 1 will receive the WE team accepting telephone calls and making referrals. We will then evaluate whether or not the team we have constructed is sufficiently large enough to handle the volume

of incoming calls. Phase 2 will be engaging in all eligibility determinations for VR, and a number of other introductory work, before referring incoming candidates to appropriate case service provider supervisors. Once the consumer is passed onto a service provider, the service provider will be able to quickly start the delivery of service. Dan commented that he thinks this initiative promises to truly revolutionize the way we work at the Agency; making it more efficient and responsive. Susan asked what the caller experience will be once the system is up and running. Dan noted that callers will be greeted by a Team consisting of VR Counselors and Social Workers; with this level of professional experience the consumers will have a better experience overall. Dan commented that one's first impression of the Commission colors forever how the Commission is perceived. It is his hope there also will be fewer dropped balls. 2) The Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA) requires that we engage with employers as a customer of our services. Dan relayed his view that while developing a rapport with employers is incredibly important, our primary customer must be the blind, vision impaired, and deaf blind consumers, we serve. The newly developed Business Relations Unit (BRU) will consist of Amanda Gerson as its manager, and a business relations specialist in the north and one on the south. This Unit will have 2 primary goals. First, it will work with employers who are likely to be receiving blind or vision impaired or deaf blind candidates for employment to make sure the transition from not working to working goes well. Second, the BRU will have a more systemic and broader objective; to work with employers to answer general questions about blindness and vision impairment, so that if some day they should get a blind candidate for employment, they will be prepared to receive and engage with them. We will work with employers on questions of general accessibility and other things that develop in terms of courtesy and protocol.

- The Commission Edition is made available to SRC members. Dan commented that it can be used to supplement anything that he might neglect to talk about today.
- Communication: Dan noted that every 6 months he travels the State and speaks to CBVI staff, to give them an in-person update about what is new and happening at the Commission. He also disseminates memos, and of course staff receive the Commission Edition. Staff are also invited to join Dan for learning lunches. These are a monthly affair, organized with up to 5 staff, to have lunch and talk with Dan about any issue of concern to them. Also, every 2 years a Statewide Agency staff development seminar has been arranged; the last one was in the fall of 2014; the next one is scheduled for November 3, 2016. Fr. Jim, if available, will give the closing key note to the 300 or so staff that will assemble for a day of education about the Commission. Dan commented it is his hope that during his tenure, he has been as transparent and available a leader as possible.
- Dan noted that he modified the hiring practices at the Commission. He requires that after initial interviews are done for any professional level position, he has the last interview with the candidate before they are offered an opportunity to work at CBVI. He explained that this is his effort to ensure we employ a high quality candidate to fill the positions we have available. Dan commented that he thinks this practice has resulted in a significant lift in the quality of candidates we have in our Agency today.

Fr. Jim – wonderful to see an executive director who is working to be extremely hands-on without micromanaging – tough balance.

VR Unit Report

Amanda reported:

- Satisfaction surveys (re: general services) are about ready to go out – just waiting on the final contact information from the 3 polling entities; should be going out next week.
- Last month, as part of staff development, we partnered with an analyst from the Department of Labor (DOL), as well as our partners from ICI at University of Mass., to do training on Labor Market information for our VR counselor supervisors and managers. DOL presented labor market information, which is information pertaining to current employment opportunities that are available, level of education required, salaries, and the industries and areas in the different part of the State; basically any information that an individual would want in order to make informed choices pertaining to work and job seeking. He also provided information to the counselors on where to go on the DOL website to obtain specific information for NJ and nationally. Our partners at University of Mass. also spoke about labor market information, and how our counselors can use them as a tool to allow consumers to make an informed choice pertaining to their vocational goal. They discussed IPE goals, motivational interviewing, and techniques to help individuals move toward positive change. Finally, we talked about our Business Relations Unit and our relationship with ICI, and the various technical assistance centers funded by RSA around the country on the different topics. This was the first of many trainings to be arranged. With ICI partnership, and the job driven voc rehab tech assistance center, we have decided to enter into a second year of technical assistance. We will continue to work with ICI in focusing on developing our BRU as well as implementing LMI in the longer term for our consumers; being able to measure the impacts of both of these initiatives, and see what we can do to better serve our consumers and get better outcomes.

Strategic Plan Update

Amanda reported that all of the team leaders were brought together for a meeting to update everyone in the group. Every group is on schedule and a lot of the goals from the strategic plan have been accomplished thus far.

Amanda noted that the Communications Committee, previously headed by Ines Matos and Ed Sroczynski, has shifted to Bernice Davis and Amanda. Bernice is going to be facilitating a very comprehensive public relations (PR) program upgrade for the Commission, which will involve public service announcements about the Commission to the general public; the development of the speaker's bureau; working on some branding for the Agency, which might be put up on posters and the like. Once the PR plan is approved at the DHS level with the Deputy Commissioner, Dan noted he will share a written copy of the PR strategy with the Council and perhaps very likely solicit SRC input on how we might most effectively reach constituents that today may not know about us. Dan noted he anticipates having a really robust PR plan to implement for the Agency by October. Amanda noted that in her role as head of the BRU and WE, which will have a large interfacing with the public, it made sense for her also to shift into the Chair of the Communications Committee.

Amanda also reported that Diana Cortez will be joining the Human Resources Committee as she is now back to work. Diana will also be helping with the WE team.

Education Services

Eva Scott, CBVI's Director of Blindness Education, joined today's meeting. Eva shared her work history and philosophy on providing educational services to students who are blind or vision impaired. It is her belief that it is all about skills and tools for all students, particularly for blind or vision impaired. They need a specific set of tools and if they can't access those tools physically or access them through appropriate training in the use of those tools, their outcomes are seriously impaired. It's not blindness that interferes in their success, it's the access, and also the understanding of others in terms of what they need and what should be expected of those students. The expectations for all students should be high, whether they are blind or not; blindness should never be a barrier. She has shared with her staff the importance of promoting students' dreams. She finds it very disturbing to meet a HS student who doesn't have their skill sets; spending HS years in a state of panic, trying to play catch-up is frustrating. When we get them early and think about transition, and think of applying skills and fostering them - it's a lot easier to get a 5-6 year old to accept using a cane or reading braille or large print, or whatever the accommodation is, then to get a 14 year old who doesn't want to do anything different than anyone else.

Eva commented that one of her objectives in coming to CBVI was to get more students using all of the tools; not selecting reading media alone. She has pointed out to her staff that the decision to use braille or print is an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) team decision, including the parents, and when appropriate including the student. She likes to see students who work in both media because they have choices; they can use braille when it suits them one moment and print at the other moment when they need that.

Some school systems are now beginning to select technology and web based curriculum that may not be, for example, JAWs accessible, and sometimes they are uncomfortable with the notion that we're going to bring in alternate equipment; some districts are beginning to understand. Access to general curriculum leads to those positive outcomes. Many years ago, blind students were discouraged from studying math/science – that's also shifting; people are beginning to understand how to devise equipment (example: litmus paper in chemistry that is audible). All these amazing devices and accommodations emerging are offering so many opportunities for our students. Eva commented on professional development for CBVI educators. Teachers are cultivated in a notion of lifelong love of learning, and this is necessary because the profession changes, technology changes. Professional development has increased over the last 8 months and this will continue. Eva commented on one training in particular, where Dawn Monaco and her colleague at SPAN, Nicole Pratt, provided our teachers with an updated understanding of the IEP process. Teachers are now being asked to participate fully in the IEP process in order to make a decision about learning media, in order to provide input with regard to goals/objectives, and develop an IEP that is truly transition to the future based. The training was fabulous, and very well received. When we find training opportunities to update/boost their skills, we want to provide them with what they need so they can support their students. Dawn commented that she was thrilled to come and do the training for the Teachers at CBVI. She also noted that she totally agrees with regard to educating the student in kindergarten and building their self-advocacy skills at a young age. Try to hone in on parents of the fact that they need to be involved at a young age; they need to understand what their strengths and needs are, and to build self-advocacy skills regardless of what their issue and needs are. Rick asked for an update on the new state regulations under which education is going to operate at the Commission; he noted that at the last meeting we heard it had not yet gone to public comment, so the particulars could not be discussed. Dan reported that further developments have occurred – the plan was to publish the existing set of rules on April 18 for a 60 day comment period – those existing

rules that we published reflected no changes to our policy whatsoever. We did that because the deliberative work of the Education Reform Taskforce (ERT) and amendments we submitted to DHS had not been finished on time to be sent over and published so they would not expire. Consequently, we published the existing set of rules solely as a placeholder so our education rules would not expire. During that 60 day comment period as appropriate people have indicated, they wondered why the work of the ERT and conversations we've been having over the last 9 months were not reflected in that rule; it was a matter simply of serving as a placeholder. It has been helpful to receive consumer input that says we need changes to the education process, and those changes have served as an incentive to have the Governor's office, as of last Thursday, have a conversation with me to say we are prepared to accept the proposed amendments that you gave to us on March 22. Those are now in the Governor's office and close to being approved. I anticipate just as the comment period for 10:92 ends on June 17, or soon thereafter, we will be publishing a new 10:92 that will reflect many changes that are the product of the work from the ERT. Some of the changes to anticipate are:

- The agency is proposing to move away from the level 1-4 contract system and instead adopt an individual analysis approach for the benefit of each student, which will be reached as a result of the IEP conversation that happens with parents, teachers, and other relevant parties. That is a substantial change and promises to ensure that there are not arbitrary limits on what services can be provided based on a level 1-4 system that has existed for the last 20 yrs.
- We are abandoning the requirement for an every 3 yr certification of one's eye condition when it is evident that we have someone who is blind/vision impaired and is qualified for our program.
- We are making it evident that braille and other blindness techniques are going to be critical to helping people achieve their access to general education.

Dan noted that he wouldn't go into every change; some are simply semantic, to update language. The big changes are those that suggest that the Agency is going to adopt an individualized approach consistent with the federal education law and that we will be moving forward to do that. We will also be working in concert with the state Department of Education (DOE). Dan noted that he had a meeting with John Worthington, the new Acting Director of Special Education, to share with him our plan, and talk with him about continuing to cultivate an ongoing relationship.

So progress is being made; optimistic we are going to be publishing a new rule with another 60-day timeframe, and at that point we will be adopting these new rules. As soon as the new rule is published, we will make sure the SRC has it, and has an opportunity to know how to comment on those rules.

Susan Head commented that the initiatives she has heard sound really positive; very client centered. She questioned, bearing in mind there are so many school districts in NJ, what does CBVI have as a goal in terms of the point at which a CBVI counselor will participate in the child's IEP meeting. Eva responded – to the fullest extent possible. Eva acknowledged that we serve about 390 school districts statewide, including charter schools and local education agencies. Caseloads vary in number, but it is not to the degree that they can't participate in the IEP process. In the past, they have gone to meetings and spoke, but never submitted annual goals to the team for approval. CBVI will now require teachers to become better prepared to fully participate in meetings with their assessment data, with their proposed annual goals, with a means of data collection in terms of being able to report progress in the goals. Rob commented that all too often at IEP meetings agencies such as CBVI and DVR are an afterthought, so the counselor who is covering that particular school is given very little notice and might have 6 or 7 people scheduled to come in for interviews that day in their own agency; this is why we run into difficulty in trying to cover all the IEPs we should. Eva agreed. Dawn commented that SPAN is working on their end to make sure parents understand that they can request to have teachers and counselors at these meetings. Fr. Jim commented that child

study teams are trying to juggle funding and are under enormous pressure from school districts to not spend money on special needs; it can be a strategy to keep the people who know the best about these students out of these meetings. Eva noted that the early feedback she's received from teachers regarding IEP participation has been positive. She has also had case managers call her and were apologetic for not inviting the person in the past, but saying they were very helpful when they arrived and provided really good information; they appreciate the submitting of annual goals. Fran Leibner commented that her office does complete complaint investigations when there is non-compliance with Special Ed regulations, so she is aware that there are issues in this regard; however, one suggestion she offered is for the TVIs to keep track of when the annual reviews are for all their students; and then 2 months before, talk to the case manager and/or parents, and remind them to include and invite the key people. If the parent has that heads-up, and the TVI keeps the date in mind, it may solve some issues.

Rick commented that he worked for many years with a CBVI provider of technology instruction in the northern/central part of the State and his observation is that referrals we get for technology instruction are usually centered on getting a person through a particular class; the referrals are fairly small-picture and it occurs because we're trying to get the person to participate fully in the class. Rick's recommendation is that we have a big-picture assessment of technology skills every so often, based on goals. This is missing in the technology arena, big picture assessments (i.e. O.K., now that you are at the end of 2nd grade where are you, and based on the set of goals we already set up, what might we have missed.) Eva agreed; there are big-picture skills that everyone needs to have. Amanda commented that this was something she had been working on with our Technology Services Specialists (TSS). She noted that we are seeing some more changes in that area with the technology assessments, focusing more globally. Yes, obviously being able to meet that individual student's need right then/there, but not waiting until there is an immediate need for a particular class; making sure they are being seen earlier; so by the time they hit 3rd grade, that student is working on competency on a computer in general – even if they are not using it in their schools just yet; making sure by the time they are in 6/7th grade we are looking at what skills they need for high school; by the time they are starting high school, really looking at what they are going to need for post high school goals. Regardless of where they go, technology is going to be how they connect with the world; how they connect with employers, and really everything. With regard to standard benchmarks, Amanda noted that she had started talking about that. She commented that our new tech services supervisor will move in that direction, with the recognition we needed more TSS staff. With Dan's assistance we have brought on a number of staff to be able to meet those needs and start doing more pro-active instead of reactive technology assessment and training.

Eva commented that our teachers are making sure public school personnel understand that while everyone is expected to do something universal by keyboarding, it's even doubly important for our students to do it as early as possible; they have a tremendous access issue when they don't have that skill.

Subcommittee Reports

Resource: Danielle noted that this is a work in progress. She invited anyone that has any resources to add, to forward to her. She wants to find out how to get on to the Agency's intranet and who will have the rights to make edits once the resource guide is posted. Dan suggested a meeting be arranged to discuss, with him and John, the parameters of placing it on the intranet. Zoraida made a suggestion that once this guide is finalized, someone should go through and call each number to make sure it is still accurate. Fr. Jim added that the material should be periodically updated. Dan

explained that the web administrator at CBVI, Ines Matos, and Bernice Davis, who is managing our communications efforts, all inquiries for change to the Commission's website on our intranet and internet go through them, and then Allen Danganan does the actual IT placing.

Evaluations: Rick Fox reported that the bid solicitation letters for the potential providers helping us get the survey done have been released, and we are awaiting the replies of the potential contractors – deadline June 17. When that occurs and a contractor is chosen, we will then have the opportunity to have someone to interact with, to get the surveys together. Dan noted that the bid letter is ready and will go out Monday or Tuesday.

SRC Annual Report: has been approved; sent to printer; should have copies soon. Amanda commented that it has been written in a very general, people-friendly way. Fr. Jim requested that SRC members receive more than 1 copy; they can share with local politicians, local gatekeepers; people into who's hands placing this might be useful and interesting.

Business Relations: See update from Amanda (page 4).

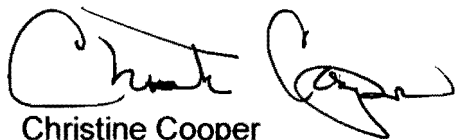
Policy Committee: Fr. Jim asked that members of this sub-committee see him after this meeting, as he needs to consult with them. He noted that he has been working his way through the material; not close to being completed, but will work on it over the summer; trying to get ourselves educated as to what is, so we can begin to imagine what might be.

Adjournment

A motion was made and seconded, to adjourn the meeting. All were in favor, and the meeting was adjourned at 12:00 p.m.

The next SRC meeting is scheduled for Friday, October 7, 2016 at JKTC.

Respectfully Submitted,



Christine Cooper
CBVI – Administrative Assistant