

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

Meeting Minutes – June 5, 2020  
(Zoom Meeting)

**Voting Members Present:** Pamela Aasen, Gary Altman, Jennifer Armstrong-Ekelmann, Ida Behreini, Alice Eaddy, Rick Fox, Bill Freeman, Jonathan Goodman, Clarke King, Pat McKenna, Charles Ouslander, Kathleen Spata, Evangelia Stone, Kris Tucker, John Tkacz

**Voting Members Absent:** William Robinson

**Present (pending appointment):** Vito DeSantis

**Ex Officio Present:** Bernice Davis, Amanda Gerson

**Guest:** Tahishia McKeithen, Human Resources Manager

The meeting was called to order at 9:30 a.m. by Rick Fox, Chairperson. Due to unpreventable circumstances, the public was not made aware this meeting was taking place; therefore, it is not considered to be a public meeting.

**Dr. Bernice Davis – Executive Director’s Report**

- Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA): The request of a VR grant, general VR Fund, with regard to restocking was disapproved. Other efforts are being worked on to assist restocking in the Randolph Sheppard program.
- Very proud of all the hard work being done by staff on the Corrective Action Plan (CAP). Only a couple of extensions have been necessary, which RSA has approved. Also working on the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA).
- Programming via virtual platforms continues. Have been gathering information requested by the Department of Human Services (DHS), and have also put together re-opening plans/suggestions to review with DHS. Last 2 weeks have noticed an uptick in intakes, as well as eye reports. An internal survey to staff was completed with regard to re-opening concerns and suggestions on what would be needed.
- Joseph Kohn Training Center (JKTC): As a follow up to a question raised at the last meeting regarding leadership, no promotions will occur at this time due to a hiring freeze. Civil Service rules will be followed when a replacement in the manager position does occur. At this time staff continue participating in on-line seminars, as well as remote learning with students. Weekly guest speakers and virtual activities continue.
- The need to have an Order of Selection plan in place is evident; Amanda will discuss further in her report.

**Tahishia McKeithen:** joined the meeting to give a brief overview of the role Human Resources has taken on during the pandemic. Working closely with the Commissioner's office in coordinating employee assistance where needed, and providing DHS with requested information. CBVI drivers have been helping with deliveries across the State, as well as nursing staff assisting at developmental centers. Adjusting to a virtual environment. Working closely with Logistics to supply Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), and formulating a policy on the proper use of PPE. Have been readily available to employees; disseminating information as received.

**Amanda Gerson – Vocational Rehabilitation Report:**

- Amanda explained the 2018 Federal monitoring process and the current status. Work continues on the Corrective Action Plan (CAP). One of the areas cited was counselors using incorrect service codes. Therefore, have worked on updating the service manual to pair-down the number of services listed, making it clear and easy to follow. Training has also been provided to the VR counselors. Also updating policies; i.e. eligibility policy, as well as others. Working to become a signatory for the Memorandum Of Understanding (MOU) and infrastructure program with the one-stops.
- Summer programs: Planning continues for virtual programming; coming along well. As VR money has been saved with all the virtual programming, looking to add on an additional summer program in self-advocacy & leadership.
- Moving ahead on the MOU for the pre-employment transition services, implementation training outreach, with Department of Education (DOE) and Division of VR Services (DVRS).
- Working on re-creating a “job club” in each regional area to supply support in the job service process. The importance of combining solid curriculum with peer support is being discussed. Both Gary and Vito provided Amanda with contacts to consult with.
- VR agencies are required to implement an “Order of Selection” when resources (budget or staff) are very low and they are unable to serve all the people who want services. The plan creates a priority list in serving the most significant disabilities first. Greater than half of the agencies across the country are currently in an Order of Selection. Although CBVI is not, a plan will be created so it could easily be implement if the need arises. Amanda noted that she reached out to WINTAC for some advice. Gary also provided Amanda with a contact to consult with.
- Amanda reported that she has received 15 recommendations so far for success stories that can be included in this year's SRC Annual Report. She asked for volunteers to interview/write these stories. Ida, Jon, Kathleen, Lia, and Pam all volunteered.
- Amanda reminded everyone that every 3 years all VR agencies are required to submit a Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA), which includes information gathered from various stakeholder meetings, data analysis, surveys, and focus groups on improving services. She reviewed the sources that information has been gathered on so far for this cycle's assessment, and asked for volunteers to co-facilitate in some of the focus groups being organized. Amanda thanked the following members who

volunteered, and noted she will facilitate an introduction with the staff they will be co-facilitating with):

- Clarke – northern region
  - Ida – central region
  - Jon – southern region
  - Ida – transition (14-21yo)
  - Kathleen – deaf-blind
  - Lia – IL
  - Vito – ILO
- RSA report changes – testing, training, and implementation to begin on the 400 data points. Expect to rollout by 7/1.

### **Old or New Business/Announcements/Comments:**

Pat provided an update on the EDGE program.

Bernice thanked the SRC for the letter being sent to Governor Murphy urging him to maintain CBVI's current VR funding and staffing levels as he faces difficult decisions due to the State's unprecedented state budget deficits. Rick noted that Bill did a superb job in edits/revisions, and asked if anyone else had suggestions for improvements. Hearing none, Rick noted that he'd be proud to sign this letter and send to the Governor.

As the last 2 meetings were not officially designated as public meetings, the need to add 2 additional meetings to the calendar was discussed (late July/early August and September). Amanda will send an email out to confirm the agreeable (by majority) dates.

Rick announced that his term on the SRC ends September 26, 2020. Everyone was asked to think about who wants to participate as the next chairperson. Nominations and election for new chairperson to be held at the next 2 meetings.

At 2:00 p.m. today, Alice, who is the President of the Deaf-Blind Division of the National Federation of the Blind, will be the guest speaker on Episode #8 of "Feeling Through Live" sponsored by the Helen Keller National Center. She will speak on her personal journey as a deaf-blind black woman, and share her thoughts on race in America today. Amanda will forward the link to everyone for joining the on-line broadcast.

Members discussed how to move forward with the Business Engagement (Chairperson - Jon Goodman) and Quality Assurance (Chairperson - Kris Tucker) sub-committees. It was agreed that each sub-committee will meet once prior to the next SRC meeting, to discuss ideas and set goals. Resources: Vito suggested everyone check out ExploreVR.org, and Amanda offered to e-mail everyone CBVI's Business Engagement policy and WINTAC resources.

Rick will be advised on the meeting dates; if available, he'd like to attend these meetings too. If a conference line is needed, Amanda offered to obtain a number for the sub-committees.

### **Adjournment**

Rick thanked everyone for attending today's meeting. Gary Altman made a motion to adjourn; Evangelia Stone seconded; all were in favor; the meeting was adjourned.

Addendum: The next 2 SRC (virtual) meetings are scheduled for August 7 and September 18.

Respectfully Submitted,

Christine Cooper, CBVI – Administrative Assistant