

N.J. Commission for the Blind & Visually Impaired State Rehabilitation Council

Meeting Minutes – October 6, 2017
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, Kelly Reymann, Fr. James Warnke

Present (pending appointments): Pat McKenna, William Robinson, Evangelia Stone

Absent: Gary Altman, Joan Leonard, , Kris Tucker

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

Guests: Lauren Callaghan, Ashley Koning, and Debbie Holtz from Eagleton Center for Public Interest Polling

The meeting was called to order at 9:35 a.m. by Fr. James Warnke, 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. Fr. Jim welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Approval of Meeting Minutes

The meeting minutes of June 2, 2017, were reviewed. A motion was made by Rick Fox, and seconded by Fran Leibner, to approve these minutes. All were in favor. The minutes were accepted and will be put into the permanent record of the SRC.

Amanda introduced two new candidates to the SRC (pending Governor approval): Pat McKenna and Evangelia (Lia) Stone. Both candidates shared a little bit about themselves with the group. Dan welcomed Lia and Pat, and noted he is optimistic their contributions will significantly strengthen the work of this organization. He commented that Lia is someone who has made a tremendous social impact in the world already, with her political and social work advocacy, and she will add a degree of dynamism to the Council. Pat also has much to offer. He works with Family Resource network, one of the Agency's rehab council organizational partners, and is in charge of administering the EDGE program.

Dan welcomed the 3 guests from the Eagleton Institute. He noted they were at the meeting to talk to the SRC about the scientifically validated, very comprehensive survey, which was undertaken to assess the work of Advancing Opportunities, our assistive technology vendor at the Commission. He commented that he is hopeful to use the tool and findings to inform progress in terms of providing assistive technology throughout the State.

State/Federal Update

Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA) update: Last week the Agency received the first draft of the assessment from Chip Kinney, Principal Investigator at San Diego State University (SDSU). Dan explained the draft contains seven sections that identify particular areas of strength and weakness. The Agency's executive team is still digesting the feedback; offering reaction to it. It is a robust evaluation of the organization, and will inform much of what we do. A final document should be completed within the next few weeks; Dan noted he would share highlights from it at the December meeting. The CSNA, the Consumer Satisfaction Survey, and the JKTC QA review, all of these assessment documents will be used in completing CBVI's report to the federal government as to how the Agency is doing, and where we might succeed in going forward. The last aspect of the CSNA, the Agency has been working closely with Targeted Communities Technical Assistance Center (TCTAC). TCTAC is the federal government's national technical assistance center for VR agencies. TCTAC is there to make sure we are able to bring our services to members of the community who might otherwise be isolated from us; either due to poverty, cultural exposure, and alike. TCTAC is working both with CBVI and our sister VR agency, DVRS, over the next 2 years, in both Newark and Trenton, to see what we can do to make sure our services are available to everyone. CBVI will provide our counselors with seminars, on ways to be better resources and better resourced to communicate with those who might not be able to find us; giving them information on financial literacy, motivational interviewing, dealing with economically disadvantaged families, and alike.

Dan reported that all Memorandums Of Understanding (MOUs) with our state partners have been moved to a 3-year cycle to provide greater continuity and greater certainty about the strength of the partnerships. It will also mean we don't have to rush every year to revise the MOU; a 3-year cycle will have benefits for all involved. The Agency's long-standing, robust partnership with TCNJ has just been renewed.

Dan noted that at the end of every Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) we have preliminary numbers on how the agency has performed. This year it is significant, in the positive sense, to say that we have invested approximately a half of a million dollars (more than we did in the previous year) on delivering VR services to our consumers, particularly concentrating on helping people acquire recognized industry credentials, going to college or graduate school, and the like. We are working with people to find career oriented, long-term, stable opportunities. CBVI is committed to quality by investing in those things that will enable our consumers to realize their dreams; we are a dream building manufacturer. Dan commented that he always tells the VR counselors, who engage with our consumers first, that they have a great job - although there are a lot of statistics and the like that have to be dealt with, what they get to do at the very beginning of an interview is say - we believe in you, what would you like to do with your life and how can we help you achieve it. What a great opportunity to help facilitate achievement of those goals!

In July the Agency finally adopted NJAC 10:97, our State Administrative Code for the Randolph Sheppard Program. It contains a number of new provisions to stabilize and strengthen our program. We can now establish Randolph Sheppard entrepreneurial opportunities, not only in Federal, State, and local government buildings, but also on private property and in private venues, if the owners of those venues are interested in operating under the terms of our newly branded Business Enterprise NJ Program.

Similarly, on August 7 we formally adopted NJAC 10:92, blindness education regulations at the State level. It contains a number of changes, all of which have been informed by the Education Reform Taskforce. Dan commented that he is pleased to see that the work stemming from that change is underway. CBVI teachers will now be much more engaged in the IEP process and the like. Dan reported that he has required all of the teachers of the vision impaired to take the national certification in Unified English Braille (UEB) and become

certified. This has been met with some resistance; ultimately his goal is to see that all of the teachers have an opportunity to take the test. The Agency will pay for the test; teachers will be given time to study, and should they not pass the test we will pay for them to take it again. Dan's objective is to have a group of teachers, responsible for the education of blind vision impaired and deaf blind children, who we can point to with pride and be confident that they have a rigorous understanding and ability to teach braille in the new UEB code. Dan noted he will give further updates as this progresses.

Dan commented that progress is being made regarding the shortage of home instructors. Earlier in the year the Agency solicited for even part-time home instructors to try and strengthen our staff. We are still a few short, but the situation is not nearly as acute as it was. Home instructors engage in itinerate home instruction to teach people how to live as blind people; teaching skills of daily independence.

The Agency just held the third Senior Hands On Retreat Experience (SHORE). This program brings 9-12 seniors who are blind, vision impaired, and/or deaf-blind together for a week, at a hotel, exposing them to travel instruction, braille or large print, or other communication instruction, and other skills of daily independence, so they can get a real taste of the blindness skills they can experience and use, as they are losing their vision, and they can come to understand that while vision loss represents a change in life, it does not have to represent a tragedy. Generally, after attending the program they ask about having us send out a home instructor to continue working with them. It's a great way to launch them into the opportunity to live comfortably as someone with vision loss. Zoraida asked how participants are chosen for the SHORE Program. Dan noted that Independent Living (IL) supervisors and home instructors are asked to invite and inquire of any of our consumers about their interest in being part of a comprehensive 5-day program. Recommendations are then forward to our statewide IL Consultant and Policy Director, Liz DeShields, and then chosen. We've made a point of making sure the general community is aware of this program also. Fr. Jim commented that he spent part of a day with this program – it was quite extraordinary.

The Agency is also expanding the Library Equal Access Program (LEAP), which provides assistive technology in local libraries; formalized classes on computer usage. A new LEAP location will be added in the Newark Public Library. We'll be working with City Council President, Mildred Crump, who was for many years a Teacher of the Visually Impaired at CBVI, to install accessible technology at a new digital learning center that the community and city of Newark has established. This will be for people who want access to some skills; giving them a credential; allowing them to get a good job. There will also be classes for seniors and others who have no digital skill sets. Initially, the idea was that we would set up a lab for people who are blind/visually impaired to learn some of the basic skills, but since this center is providing the community with a variety of programs, Dan commented he didn't want to set up a segregated classroom that only provides instruction on introductory work. We want to make sure that what we do is put a system in place that makes sure all of the programs offered are accessible. We'll make this community center accessible to anyone who comes in with any skill sets; making sure members of our community are welcome to apply for all of the various programs. They were delighted with that level of interest and are committed to working with us. This promises to be a model, not only for best practice in the city of Newark, but for the country.

Dan reported that he, John Walsh, and Amanda Gerson will be going to the semi-annual meeting of the CSAVR & NCSAB conferences in Greenville, South Carolina in November. He noted that he is president-elect of NCSAB now, and as such, has devoted time to working on pulling this conference together.

Education: CBVI's annual teachers symposium will be held on October 18 and 19, as required under our MOU with the State Department of Education. This symposium brings together teachers in the public schools who have one of our students mainstreamed into their classrooms. The sessions are broken up into age appropriate and level of vision loss sessions.

The teachers talk to our staff so they are better able to deliver general education services to our students who need access to the general curriculum, so they can fully benefit from the public education that is provided.

The Agency is in the midst of working with the American Printing House for the Blind (APH) to modify how we conduct the federal census of blind, vision impaired, and deaf blind consumers in the State. We now have to get permission from parents to have their children counted in the census; we did a mass-mailing, and are likely to get consent. The incentive to give consent is that with each person we get a designated federal amount of money; failure to give consent will not have personal or negative consequences for any particular student, but will limit the pool of dollars we have for APH spending.

Dan noted that he shared a few policies with the SRC Policy Sub-Committee; i.e. college services, the new 511 rules required under Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA). The Agency also had a conversation with our federal liaison at Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA); they reviewed our policies and are also satisfied. A number of policy changes have been made and will be implemented to make sure we are in compliance with the new WIOA. We now have to report on our progress, as measured by 6 new federal standards, on a quarterly basis. We have implemented a number of quality assurance internal procedures, including data days, to make sure our staff are aware of the new fields. Approximately 400 new fields are required under this new law, per consumer; it does consume a lot of counseling time. We are trying to find ways to minimize that, so they can continue to do the essence of what counselors do, which is work directly with people to help them find work. Also taking steps to make sure the data required under WIOA can be done internally as much as possible, and at the administrative level. All of the work WIOA has required, in the long run, will be important, but it is important to know that it has consumed a lot of time and change is hard; but change is something we will get through. One of goals of congress was to provide additional services to youth, by requiring that we spend 15% of our federal grant on youth related services (pre-employment transition services). At the end of FFY 2016, we did a pretty good job; we were just over 10% of our federal grant and the federal government was happy with that; many states were still at 1. 2%. Dan commented that we are not where we need to be, but we are well on our way; we can feel some justifiable pride that NJ's tradition of providing high quality youth services has left us ahead of the curve in this arena.

Vocational Rehabilitation Update

Amanda Gerson reported on the following.

WIOA reporting: First program quarter just closed. Counselor training has been done over the last few months; supplemental training at each of the regional service centers for data days as well. It was a time consuming and laborious process for everyone. Now that everyone has an idea of how we are going to make this work, it should go more smoothly for the next quarter. Quarterly reporting is a big change from what counselors traditionally had to do. Will also be inviting feedback from counselors/supervisors/managers on what we can do to help support them in this process.

WIOA partners at RSA were happy with the transition services policy we developed; minor inclusion points. Will now focus on re-doing our transition handbook so students/parents/counselors are fully aware of what our processes are.

Summer programs were successful this year! 15 students attended Life 101; 24 students participated in Work Skills Prep (WSP); 15 students attended college prep orientation – 3 continued on and earned 4 credits at TCNJ pre-college program with Bonner. EDGE kept other students busy with fun events; i.e. Governor's Island, beach, gym, demo spin class. We are piloting an EDGE 2.0 this year – which extends the program for full-time

in-state college students (18-21 years old) to continue assisting them with their post high school transition. This program is with our friends and partners at the Family Resource Network. We've also brought in a secondary partner with Learning Ally, utilizing their college success curriculum, which is based on research they did on what makes blind college students successful. Kerrie Hannen, a new member of the EDGE 2.0 team, is dynamite, super enthusiastic. She will be working with each of the students at their college to make sure they have the self-advocacy skills and accommodations they need. She will also be working with them to make sure their resumes are up-to-date; find internships and other work experiences. We have 23 students in this first cohort. The YES program is essentially an alumni extension program for our Work Skills Prep program. We have support specialists at TCNJ who do the discovery approach, person centered planning work with businesses to develop customized employment opportunities. We currently have 4 young adults who have been employed for more than 6 months; 1 additional person employed for over a year; 1 more who has been job shadowing at a business and they are very optimistic that it's going to turn into employment. Amanda explained that 6 people in a year is huge; when we did a review of all the students who had been a part of this program it was really discouraging; they have so much potential, but really unique support needs; a number had been closed due to disengagement/inactivity, or they had chosen to go to a sheltered workshop, or full-time DDD services. So the fact that we were able to get 5.5 young people employed in a year speaks loudly to the amazing team Kelly has at TCNJ, the successes of customized employment, and what it can do for this population of young people to get them motivated and find a good match for them.

The Business Relations Unit (BRU) is fully staffed; a new supervisor was hired for the unit - Jay Mills. Jay comes from our Business Enterprise Unit; she was a field rep. for 15 years. She also worked in the private sector for 20 years prior to CBVI. She has retail management and recruiting experience, which should bring a great perspective to the BRU. This unit also has 3 business relations specialists. Presently, they are evaluating what's been done for the past year, to bring everything together and solidifying it in order to move forward.

Supported employment services: feedback from counselors and consumers indicate that job developers/coaches often don't understand what services our consumers need; how to best support them. Maintaining the appropriate level of training to be able to work with our small population of individuals is challenging. Some supported employment agencies have addressed it by having a smaller targeted sub unit to work specifically with Commission consumers, but that's not always the case. As part of a project this summer, the Agency developed a proposal for a Blindness Learning Community. Request for Letters of Interest were disseminated; 5 applications were accepted. In November CBVI will do a series of trainings for the management and field staff for these supported employment agencies, to give them instruction about person centered planning, about blindness, blindness skills, and accommodations related to what our consumers may need. We will be talking about CBVI services and our philosophy; about customized employment; about the way our BRU is engaging with business so there is a consistent message. The Agency is very optimistic having a closer relationship with our community rehab providers will lead to better services and better successes for consumers.

Rutgers Rehabilitation Counseling Program, which is the only source of training for VR counselors in the State of NJ, reached out to CBVI with a proposal to partner with them. The Agency has worked with them in the past on various projects, beyond just educating our counselors. They developed a curriculum around soft skill development, utilizing motivational interviewing approaches and other related activities. They are doing a study and will largely work with our clients, forming a group that will meet a couple of times a week over the course of a few weeks to be able to implement this curriculum, and follow up to see how it's working. We may then replicate this in other regional service centers, depending on how it works out and logistics. Consumers will have to sign-off to participate in this program. As they work through this curriculum, as they validate the findings and effectiveness, the hope is that they will also train our staff to utilize those workshops.

Consumer Satisfaction Survey

Amanda turned the meeting over to the guests from Rutgers University – Eagleton Center for Public Interest Polling. The Eagleton Center was contracted by the Agency, with the recommendation from the SRC, to do a survey on the services of Advancing Opportunities, the Agency's sole assistive technology training provider.

Ms. Lauren Callaghan, Project Manager, presented the findings of the survey. 235 responses were received out of 510 consumers, which is a 46% response rate, comparable or better than industry standard for such a small population. A copy of the Power Point presentation was e-mailed to the SRC members (Attachment #1), which outline the findings. Overall, survey respondents found instructors to be good or excellent, and they were satisfied with the technology training they received through CBVI. Given the high level of satisfaction, this opens up the opportunity to look at additional ways to improve this program. Identifying new ways to communicate services and alleviate potential participation barriers for underserved populations was suggested. Another suggestion was to look at a way to possibly refine evaluation methodology; to hone in on those individual expectations. One way this might happen would be to survey consumers before and immediately after training sessions. There are also opportunities to look at improving services by tailoring trainings to specific needs related to skill level, related to range of visual impairment. There is a potential opportunity to do more research into the training provider; to look at existing organizational metrics and best practices; to look at ways to continue to further increase the experience of the consumer.

SRC members were pleased with the overall satisfaction that was relayed by the participants of this survey. A few questions were asked and answered by the Eagleton group. As an executive summary of the findings will be sent to the Counsel for their review, Fr. Jim suggested that a portion of the December meeting be dedicated to further discussion in order to make the Agency's next steps as meaningful as possible. Dan and Fr. Jim thanked Ashley, Debbie, and Lauren for their work on this project.

Sub-Committees

Evaluation: Rick commented that this committee is very pleased that the Commission was supportive in having the Consumer Satisfaction Survey completed, and very happy with the overall satisfaction that was relayed by the participants of this Survey. It is felt this evaluation will prove itself to be very valuable. He further noted the sub-committee is very anxious to read the final report. Amanda noted that she'll get the report out right away.

Policy: Fr. Jim reported that he and Susan had spent some time going over policy material Dan had forwarded. They had offered some questions and some critique; all of which was incorporated. Fr. Jim requested that these policies be sent to the SRC members, so they can be aware of the kind of policy shifts that have been happening. Amanda noted that she would follow up on this. Susan commented that the college services policy looked good. Fr. Jim requested that members review the material being sent to them, and if they have anything to add, to please advise.

Resource: Danielle noted that her committee had worked on a list of resources that would be helpful for individuals who are visually impaired/blind. It is a working document; always finding new aps to add to the list. She will circulate the list again to see if anyone has anything to add/subtract, and then work from there. She commented that she believes it is posted on CBVI's intranet, but will check on that. She also noted she would forward it to SRC members periodically, to make sure all information is current. Rick offered that Danielle contact him as a resource regarding aps. Rick asked if there is a policy and method of informing

consumers of the existence of consumer organizations. Dan reported that there is; when a consumer comes in there is an orientation to services and we also provide a list of blindness related resources, including consumer organizations that are active in the State. We try to be transparent and share information provided to us from the consumer organizations through our various networks, list serves, and the like. Amanda noted that consumer groups are also listed on the CBVI website, under helpful links and resources.

SRC Annual Report: Amanda commented that she has been thinking about doing this year's Annual Report a little different; personalizing it a bit by using storytelling to convey the good work that everyone is doing within the systems; still featuring different programs and service areas, but using a consumer feature story that illustrates the way the program has impacted an individual's life, and then a smaller section going into the specific details on the program. Amanda noted she has already reached out to counselors for success stories. Fr. Jim and Rick thought this was a great idea. Fr. Jim suggested to the members, if it would not be a conflict of interest for them, to consider hand delivering a copy of this year's report to their local state/county/federal officials. He noted he had spent some time working on talking points, and could provide to anyone who is interested. He commented that he thinks it's important to make sure the local power holders/policy makers understand the work the Commission is doing.

Business Relations: Kelly had nothing new to report as the Business Relations Unit (BRU) is a new unit; however, she is confident this sub-committee will have news to share in the coming months as the BRU will be hitting the ground running this fall. As previously reported, last spring Danielle and Kelly did supported employment trainings. Another series of trainings have been arranged for November. Kelly shared examples of what these training sessions consist of: overview implications to blindness; everyday questions; try to make them feel more comfortable of what supporting a person who is blind/vision impaired actually looks like. Amanda added that we also need feedback; what is CBVI doing to make their job more difficult. Kelly noted that we want to reiterate targeted technical assistance. Dawn commented that they could probably apply this training to other disabilities. Amanda noted regular follow up will be scheduled, and then we may offer a repeat training in the spring.

Old/New Business:

Rick shared an idea for the SRC, with cooperation from CBVI, to organize a resource fair to highlight new aps. He commented that there is a lot happening in the technology arena and there are resources in multiple areas, i.e. recreation, technology, and employment that could be exposed; could have speakers, vendors, and/or workshops from various areas; could do demos of some of the new aps that enable people to do things for free that they used to have to spend money on; could have someone from the arts attend to talk about accessible theaters in NJ; employment success stories. This would be a tremendous service to the community. Dan noted that the Commission would be delighted to partner in this effort; he pointed out that it would require the significant leadership of the various constituents on the SRC. The Agency could devote some money, some staff to help out, and also find a venue for this event. Fr. Jim, Zoraida, Danielle, Kelly, Dawn, and Jennifer all noted they would be interested in discussing a proposal for this type of event with Rick. He will set up a conference call, so that by the December meeting they could come back with a proposal for a Statewide Resource Event.

Kelly noted that the townhall meeting was held in June; it was well attended (approximately 100). A lot of information was obtained; there were some new concerns raised that sparked good conversation; she helped facilitate some of the questions; breakout groups were also held. Dan commented that Chip and his team took a lot of information away that does appear in the current CSNA draft report. It was a valuable stakeholder receptive tool. However, it did occur the same weekend a number of other events were occurring, which is

something to be mindful of going forward. Kirk Adams, the President of American Foundation for the Blind (AFB) attended the event. He talked about the new strategic direction of AFB. Dan commented that he thought his personal story was compelling. It was a good event. Dan noted that he wanted to acknowledge and thank all of the SRC members who helped make this event a success.

Adjournment

A motion was made by Zoraida Krell, and seconded by Susan Head, 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, December 1, 2017.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Christine Cooper". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Christine Cooper
CBVI – Administrative Assistant

Attachment (#1)