MEETING MINUTES FOR June 7, 2013

N.J. Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (NJCBVI)

State Rehabilitation Council (SRC)

Joseph Kohn Training Center

130 Livingston Avenue

New Brunswick, NJ

**Kathy Wood, Chair**

This meeting is held in compliance with Section 105 of the Federal Rehabilitation Act 1973, as amended. This meeting is also in compliance with the N.J. Public Meeting Act, NJSA 10:4-6.

Present: Kathy Wood, Titus Massey, Alwin Glasgow, Ed Kawalec Chrysoula Fantousakis, Dorothy Doran, Kelly Richards, Rob Paige, Heather Smith-Bermudez, Fran Liebner, Jim Warnke

Ex Officio: John Walsh, Ed Sroczynski, Michael Kosec, Bruce Kastner,

Kathy Wood called the meeting to order at 9:30 a.m. and asked for approval of the minutes of April 5, 2013. Lauren Casey made the motion to approve the minutes which was seconded by Jim Warnke.

**Federal and State Updates, John Walsh**

John reported that Vito DeSantis officially retired as of May 31, 2013. HR Director, Marcus Stabile and Chief Financial Officer, Frank Scheick are serving as Co-interim Directors. The three service coordinators are working with the Co-interim Directors to move forward with agency initiatives. Marcus Stabile and Frank Scheick will be responsible for major decisions and will consult with the DHS Deputy Commissioner, Dawn Apgar, if necessary. This arrangement will be in place until the new Director is selected. The first level of interviews for the Director’s position was conducted by phone. The

second level of in person interviews is projected for some time in July. The new Director will be selected by DHS Commissioner Jennifer Velez and appointed by the Governor’s Office.

John indicated that CBVI is currently at level funding and there are no difficulties anticipated with the State budget. The State budget for FY2014 will be signed in July with no major issues or conflicts.

On the Federal side, the sequester has had virtually no effect on the CBVI VR program. Any possible deficits were offset by carry-over funds from 2012. Moving forward, the sequester could have impact on funding particularly for agencies classified under non for profit. It is projected that CBVI will need to make fiscal adjustments in 2015. Discussion followed and John reported that in recent years critical direct service and field positions such as O/M instructors and VR Counselors have been exempt from the hiring freeze. Administrative positions are not likely to be backfilled.

The Workforce Investment Act, (WIA) is under consideration in Congress but is not likely to be reauthorized and will remain under continuing resolution.

**VR Unit Report, John Walsh**

John reported that the Agency is in the process of developing a five year strategic plan under the guidance of a consultant, Joe Skiba, who was accessed through TACE Region II. Joe is the former Director of Michigan Rehabilitation Services. He has facilitated a number of Rehabilitation Agencies to develop their strategic plans since retiring in 1998. Joe is in the process of consulting with CBVI stakeholders to learn more about the agency. A cross-disciplinary design team was selected comprised of members of the Executive Management Team, supervisors, office managers, field staff and the SRC Chair to work closely with Joe to develop the strategic plan.

A Design Team consisting of six JKTC staff members are working with Joe Skiba to develop a strategic plan for the facility. At the first

meeting, Joe worked with the JKTC Team to evaluate the process from referral to program completion to identify specific areas of improvement for CBVI consumers who participate in the program.

The agency-wide Design Team met with Joe Skiba to evaluate the Agency’s mission, values and examine major environmental factors in developing the strategic plan. A Subcommittee was selected to develop an agency-wide vision statement identifying core values and clarifying the agency’s mission. An additional subcommittee was charged with examining the economic and environmental factors impacting on strategic planning. Focus group sessions will be scheduled to access feedback to engage agency staff and consumers in the development of the strategic plan. Discussion followed and Kathy Wood pointed out that CBVI will benefit from increasing collaboration with other agencies to better serve blind and visually impaired consumers.

John reported that the Agency State Plan is scheduled to be submitted to RSA for review by July 1, 2013. The State Plan incorporates a number of documents including personnel development, feedback from public forums, innovation and expansion projects, and goals and priorities for the next year. Some of the goals and objectives include development of the strategic plan, reorganization of the JKTC and improving the provision of transition services.

One of the major themes during the public forums was to re-establish Access Tech training for individuals under CBVI sponsorship who are not registered for VR services. The SRC will be asked to help with assessing the need for the service and to respond in a way that is sustainable. Another theme focused on improving CBVI public relations, particularly with the business community to improve employment opportunities. The development of a blindness related resource guide was also discussed. John added that DHS is assisting with updating the CBVI Internet.

**Role of VR Counselor**:

Joette Dodds indicated that a VR counselor will average 60 consumers on their case load. The counselor’s objective is to provide services which will enable a consumer to access a job or sustain employment. When a case is assigned, the counselor arranges a meeting to learn about the consumer’s life circumstances, goals and eligibility for CBVI VR services. During the face-to-face interview the counselor gains clarity about the consumer’s physical stamina, level of independence, education, work history and ability to access public transportation.

The purpose of the VR program is discussed as well as independent living skills, mobility, eye health services, psychometric testing and assistive technology assessment and training. Once an eye report is accessed verifying eligibility for VR services, the counselor collaborates with the consumer to develop an individualized plan for employment, (IPE.) The plan is based on empirical information and the individual’s informed choice. The plan stipulates the employment goal, lists the required services, the service providers and timelines for meeting the employment objective. A written statement from the consumer is included. The plan is signed by the consumer and counselor and approved by the VR Supervisor. The consumer is then referred for the services listed on the IPE and is prepared to enter college or to access employment.

A consumer may be referred to the 16 week JKTC program to facilitate adjustment to their visual impairment and receive additional evaluation and training to prepare for employment. An assistive technology assessment targets specific training for a consumer to acquire the skills and adaptive tools to meet the technology demands of the work environment. Individuals with multiple disabilities may be referred for supported employment services and work with a job coach to learn to perform their job duties and acclimate to the workplace. Consumers ready for competitive employment receive guidance to develop a resume, negotiate job interviews and access job leads.

Ed Kawalec reported that Vocational Counseling and guidance are provided for individuals attending the JKTC Program. Ed meets with each participant on a weekly basis to clarify vocational interests, work skills and establish an employment goal. Ed employs vocational testing which gages the individual’s communication skills, tactile skills, problem solving ability, physical abilities and work values. Volunteer and job shadowing experiences are arranged for program participants to gain work related experience. The Center for Vocational Rehabilitation, (CVR) is contracted to develop four-week community work experiences for JKTC participants extending the Program from 16 to 20 weeks. Throughout the JKTC Program, a plan is developed with each participant which incorporates action steps for networking and accessing employment upon completion of the program.

**Summer Programs Update:**

Ed Sroczynski announced that there are a total of 19 students accepted for the College Prep Experience, (CPE) Program which will begin on July 8th. The students will participate in college studies at Raritan Valley Community College, (RVCC) with the opportunity to earn up to five college credits. Students will also participate in services offered at the JKTC. SAT Prep instruction will be conducted by Kaplan Testing Services. Informative sessions will be scheduled which will focus on transitioning from high school to college, all aspects of negotiating college life, selecting a college major and career development strategies.

John Walsh reported that applications were sent out for the Life 101 Program which targets freshman and sophomores to develop basic life skills to facilitate the next step of their transitional plan. This new four week program will be in session at the JKTC two days per week concurrently with the CPE program. The program will focus on topics including independent travel, independent living, adaptive technology and career planning. Students will have the option to sign up for their topics of interest.

John announced that there will be 24 students participating in the 8th annual Work Skills Program, (WSP) at the College of New Jersey.

During the program, students with multiple disabilities will engage in basic academics, work sampling and independent skills training. An all-day parent training session is scheduled during the program orientation which will feature speakers covering employment, adult services and planning for the future. Students will have the opportunity to engage in Independent skills in the evenings and volunteer experiences on the weekends. A comprehensive assessment report will be uploaded in the student’s electronic case folder in the FACTS system. The report will include the student’s skill level and a targeted action plan. An employment specialist was recently hired to work with transition counselors to access employment experiences in the community for the program graduates.

**New Business:**

Ed Sroczynski will attend the two day National SRC Forum scheduled for June 24-25 in Washington D.C. Ed will share information derived from the Foryum with SRC members at the meeting scheduled for October fourth.

Kathy Wood asked for volunteers to form a subcommittee to assess the need for Access Tech Training and to evaluate the means and methods for providing assistive technology training for individuals who are not VR consumers but who can benefit from assistive technology to carry out independent living tasks. Lauren Casey and Dorothy Duran agreed to work with Kathy Wood and a member of the CBVI MIS staff. John Walsh agreed to reach out to Amanda Gerson, MIS Supervisor, to identify an assistive technology instructor to serve on the subcommittee.

**Open Forum and Announcements:**

**Kelly Richards announced that her wedding is scheduled for early** July and her contact information will need to be changed. This sparked a celebratory moment for members of the SRC.

**Adjournment**

Lauren Casey made the motion to adjourn, seconded by Jim Warnke at 12:00 noon.

**Next Meeting**

The next SRC meeting is scheduled for **Friday, October 4, 2013,** at the Joseph Kohn Training Center.

Respectfully Submitted,

Ed Sroczynski

CBVI Liaison to the SRC