



STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES (DHS)

COMMISSION FOR THE BLIND & VISUALLY IMPAIRED (CBVI)

## STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL (SRC)

### MEETING MINUTES

FEBRUARY 7, 2025 - HYBRID MEETING

130 LIVINGSTON AVE | NEW BRUNSWICK, NJ 08901

**Appointed Members Present:** Ronda Williams Banks, Vito DeSantis, Alice Eaddy, James Good, Steven McCoy, Linda Melendez, Nicole Pratt, Gary Robinson, Kathleen Spata, Sarah Spitzmiller, Lauren Weishaar

**Members Awaiting Appointment Present:** Donald Campbell

**Absent:** Breeanna Douglas, Sioban Leahy, Gwen Orlowski, John O'Connell, Wanda Williford, Joseph Zesski

**Ex Officio Present:** Dawn Corbett, Dr. Bernice Davis, Felicia Hopson, Charles Pat McKenna

**CBVI Staff:** Bryan McClain

**Members of Public Present:** Wanda Blann, Susan Head, Rhea Hood, Brianna Murray, Bill Schultz, Janna Sheiman, Braden Flax

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Vito DeSantis, SRC Chairperson, welcomed everyone, calling the meeting to order at 9:34am.

Vito announced that the meeting was being held in compliance with the New Jersey Open Public Meeting Act, NJSA 10:4-6.

After attendance and introductions, Vito reminded members of the public that they are welcome to be at the meeting and if they have questions concerning the meeting, they can wait until after the meeting or send an email to Charles Pat McKenna at [Charles.McKenna@dhs.nj.gov](mailto:Charles.McKenna@dhs.nj.gov). Vito reminded all those participating on Zoom to keep themselves muted until speaking and for all those participating to announce themselves prior to speaking.

### Approval of Meeting Minutes:

The minutes of December 6, 2024 were acknowledged as received and reviewed. Vito asked if there were any comments about them, or corrections to be made. There were none. These minutes will be put into the permanent record of the SRC.

### New Business:

#### Updates Regarding SRC Appointments:

Vito announced that the Governor's Office has designated the Commissioner of DHS to make the appointments of members to the SRC. Vito thought we would have a quorum at this meeting, but as of the meeting there has not been any notice of the appointments. It was also shared that the appointments will start as new, no need to go back to the date each member should have been appointed/reappointed. So, everyone's 2-three-year appointment will start anew.

Dr. Davis confirmed that the Commissioner is doing her final review and approvals on this and is confident that we should see movement on these appointments next week.

Vito then suggested that the SRC could vote and decide on items prior to the next meeting, which is June 6<sup>th</sup>, via email.

#### SRC Goals for 2025

Vito inquired of the SRC if they have viewed the email containing the 2025 Goals and are ok with them. The Council indicated they have received and reviewed. Vito asked that they be read for the benefit of those attending from the public. The 2025 SRC Goals were then read by Bryan McClain for all in attendance. These will be appended at the end of the meeting minutes. Approval will be sought from the SRC Members via email sometime between this meeting and the next.

#### Appropriate Announcements to Share as SRC Members

Vito asked the SRC for their input regarding emails being sent to the body of the SRC. Vito suggested that they could first go through himself or Assistant Division Director McKenna to be approved and then they could be sent out to the SRC.

Vito suggested that the email should be disability related, dealing with employment or even education. There can be no information that could lend to a financial benefit for the individual, for example one would not be able to write a book and send an email asking the SRC to buy the book.

Linda agreed with the suggestion that emails be sent to Vito and Pat and then sent out to the SRC.

Steven commented that previously he sent out an email, which was disability related, but apologized that he distributed himself. Going forward he will pass it through Vito and Pat first.

He clarified that his previous email was a fundraiser, and wanted to make it clear that it wasn't an event to benefit himself personally.

Dr. Davis commented that it may not be clear whether some items are appropriate, noting that a challenge is not just benefiting financially, but any perception of benefit to oneself. Because of that she too agrees that it should be sent to the Chair and also Pat. Everyone agreed to this process.

### SRC Chair and Vice Chair Nominations

Vito again reminded the SRC that everyone is starting new with the appointments and so there is a need to have nominations for the Chair and Vice Chair, which is a 2-year position. Vito then asked the SRC if there were any nominations already for either position. There were none.

### Bylaws Amendment for 2-term Members to Return

During the SRC Training by Tom Jennings and Patricia Tomlinson it was suggested that the SRC could allow someone whose second term ends, to come back after a period of 6 months. This would need to be written into the bylaws and approved by the SRC, CBVI, and DHS. Vito asked to confirm if the SRC finds that reasonable to be placed into the bylaws.

Jim commented that it is a good idea.

Vito said this would be sent out to the SRC via email for the vote.

Pat said the idea was already sent through DHS and Legal, and it was already approved. What remains is to write it into the bylaws.

### Review of SRC Members on each Committee

Vito asked that the SRC Members on each Committee be reviewed and then discuss how those meetings will be run. The SRC Committees with associated members were read out to all in attendance by Bryan.

Vito then asked the SRC if any were moved to volunteer for any of the committees at this point. There were no immediate volunteers from the members currently not serving on a committee.

Vito then asked for thoughts on when the committees could meet, explaining that in the past the Chair of the committees would call a meeting in the evening. Vito then suggested doing the meetings during the quarterly SRC meeting without lengthening the time of the meeting, from about 11:45am – 12:30pm.

Pat commented that this could pose some difficulty because of the hybrid format of the meeting. If all members were virtual, or if all were in person, this could work. Pat proposed a suggestion that all committees meet at least once in between SRC meetings, but twice would be better in any format or even using Pat and Bryan to help facilitate a conference line or zoom hosting.

Bryan commented in addition to the logistical difficulty is the fact that some members are on more than one committee and meeting at the same time would make it difficult for them to be a part of both conversations.

Vito added that it would also be helpful if it was known who from the agency would be assigned to each committee and asked if that can be included on the Committee List so that the Chair of the committees can reach out directly to that employee.

Pat and Bryan will reach out to the Chair on each committee to see about getting those committee meetings on the calendar before June 6<sup>th</sup>, and identify which agency representatives would be on each committee.

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

Dr. Davis began her report with State items because NJ is in its budget process and this year there is a very tight budget. All State Departments have been asked for proposed cuts to their budgets. There is also a hiring freeze for all state positions with the ability to request positions only with a written justification to be reviewed by the Governor’s office.

Regarding Federal items, half of the Federal Grant has already been received which is just under \$7 million. It is expected that the remaining portion of the grant would be received for this year. CBVI and other states have not received a Cost of Living Adjustment from the Federal Government over the past few years, but there has been an increase in salaries on the Federal side. Conversations with the Treasury Department are being held to see how gaps can be closed and not just for this year but for what is to come next year.

Besides the Federal budget, there is attention being given for the Case Management System used by CBVI; a new system is continuing to be sought. The Federal Government is requesting detailed information on how the grant monies are being used, and because of the outdated system, not all details are able to be recorded and an entire team of staff is needed to retrieve other information from the current system. A new Case Management System will allow the agency to be more efficient, better able to retrieve data being requested, and working with the system to capture required information easily.

The Randolph Sheppard program which receives Federal monies appears to be ok. There is concern over talk about doing away with or reducing Federal leases. Many Randolph Sheppard Operators are in Federal buildings so there are some uncertainties regarding the future of their business. The Independent Living Older Blind (ILOB) program is also Federally funded and the Federal employee who provides technical assistance for this program nationwide from the US Department of Education (US DOE) has been placed on Administrative Leave by the new Administration.

Dr. Davis also announced that the Spring Conference for the Council of State Agencies for Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) and the National Council of State Agencies of the Blind (NCSAB) is taking place on April 3-11; with April 3 and 4 being for new Directors. Many

national disability organizations and partners are advocating against the dismantling of the US DOE as they do not want the Vocational Rehabilitation Services to leave and be placed under the US Department of Labor (US DOL). CSAVR is taking a balanced approach to that.

Dr. Davis then opened for Questions.

- Don Campbell asked if CBVI usually receives the full grant funding by this time or just half is normal?
  - Dr. Davis explained that it has varied in the past depending on what is happening in Congress regarding the approval of the Federal Budget.

### **Pat McKenna - Assistant Division Director's Report**

#### **Announcements and Updates:**

The SRC Annual Report was submitted on time at the end of 2024. Pat gave thanks to all those that assisted in putting the report together and editing for final submission. Pat also expressed appreciation for those interested in volunteering to help with the Annual Report for 2025.

The SRC will be needing nominations for Chair and Vice Chair. If anyone is interested in volunteering or nominating someone please reach out to Pat or Vito.

Pat will be reaching out to the subcommittee Chair persons to get meetings facilitated and on the calendar. The work of the committees are really valuable, and since the appointment letters are expected any day there is a number of areas that need to be worked on, for example, Annual Report, Bylaw adjustments, etc. and these should be worked on prior to the June 6<sup>th</sup> SRC Meeting.

#### **Joseph Kohn Training Center (JKTC)**

Joy Atin-Shark will be assuming the role of JKTC Manager effective February 22<sup>nd</sup>. Joy is currently the VR Supervisor of JKTC for the past year.

JKTC will be holding the first in-person graduation on Thursday February 13<sup>th</sup>, 2025, which will be for 3 students.

Family Day took place last fall at JKTC, an opportunity for existing students can bring a loved one to the center so they can see the program and the work being done at the center. The next Family Day will be on April 10<sup>th</sup> and Pat's goal is to have 3 Family Days throughout 2025.

There are currently 13 students at JKTC and more referrals are being requested. Pat is interested in getting the number of students active with JKTC higher. There is capacity for 24 students in person, and there are options for hybrid programming. Pat would like to have 18 students total with the current staff at JKTC.

JKTC will be hosting the Braille Challenge on March 1<sup>st</sup>, and hosting the National Federation of the Blind's (NFB) STEM U event for transition students, to take place in early June.

### Agency Updates:

Pat continues to look for training opportunities for CBVI staff. There was a training in January on the I Can Connect (iCC) and Support Service Providers (SSP) programs. There will be a training in April for the delivery of Orientation and Mobility (O&M) services for persons who are deafblind, also working on training for CBVI's blind and visually impaired staff on accessibility features on Android phones. Pat then asked if the SRC is aware of any resources or opportunities for such trainings on Accessibility features for Android devices, please contact Pat.

The next VRC Quarterly Meeting will be taking place on April 14<sup>th</sup> via Zoom. The O&M staffing need continues in other areas of the agency, for example in the NRO the O&M staff is expected to become critical throughout 2025. Work is being done on third-party contracts to help with these needs.

### Independent Living (IL) Updates

There are several new Assistive Support Program for Independence, Renewal, and Education (ASPIRE) network groups that have started, 2 in Ocean County and 1 Spanish speaking group in New Brunswick. The Senior Hands-On Retreat Experience (SHORE) program, an Independent Living Older Blind (ILOB) program for one week, is looking to get dates and locations on the calendar for the fall of 2025.

A Request for Quote (RFQ) is being sought for a weekend ILOB program. Pat is interested in learning if any non-profit organizations would be interested in implementing a weekend program for CBVI's older consumers.

The IL Coordinator has been receiving technical assistance from Mississippi State University (MSU) on ways to improve on the provision of services to ILOB consumers.

The Fellowship Program (a mentoring program between the college unit & ILOB) will be run by Vision Loss Alliance New Jersey (VLANJ) of Denville from February through November. VLANJ have run the program in 2023 and 2024. This year the program will be for 10 months.

### Business Enterprises of New Jersey (BENJ):

BENJ has recently bid out a new location opportunity in Menlo Park. Government Service Administrative (GSA) buildings has ordered individuals to return to in-person work at leased or owned buildings. This has the potential of having a positive impact on BENJ Operators who are currently functioning in these Federal buildings.

The US DOE is currently revising certain Randolph Sheppard program definitions to bring better clarity on topics and terminology, such as vending machine and vending facility. This redefining would help agencies know how they might be able to work with opportunities like an electric charging station for an electric vehicle, clarifying if that could be considered a vending machine covered under the Randolph Sheppard Act.

The BENJ program has been going through a tough time over the last 5 years. Pat reported that there does seem to be a slight improvement trend on earnings through 2024. The Menlo Park

Veterans Home facility is one new opportunity, but the BENJ program is always looking for more. There are locations in Toms River and South Orange that the Manager of BENJ is looking into. Also, John O'Connell sent an email this morning with contact information to the Veterans Affairs (VA) Lyons facility, and Pat will be reaching out personally to see if there can be a BENJ location in that facility.

#### Vocational Rehabilitation:

The process has begun for a training opportunity for interested Community Rehabilitation Providers (CRP) for best practices for working with individuals who are blind, deafblind, or visually impaired in finding employment. This will be in partnership with The College of New Jersey (TCNJ).

Recently, a new Deaf Language Specialist – Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor (VRC) has been brought on to the agency's Deafblind Unit.

LIFE101 and TCNJ Transition Summer Programs held a recent Open House event and referrals have started to come in. The current referrals are: 6 students for STEPS, 16 students for SUCCESS, and 13 students for LIFE101.

Later this month interviews will be held for an ASL Interpreter to bring on staff.

#### Business Relations Unit (BRU):

The BRU continues to reach out to employers, and is planning a Virtual Café Event to occur biannually to feature a number of employers and different types of employers.

The EDGE program which is a year-round Transition Pre-ETS program continues to expand and thrive, having 103 referrals.

Pat concluded his report by encouraging the SRC to feel free to reach out to him regarding any topics, questions, or other items with no need to wait for the next meeting.

Pat then opened for questions.

- Vito asked Pat if a date has been set for a tour of the JKTC facility?
  - Pat confirmed that he is suggesting to do so on a Thursday, he has already spoken to the Supervisors at the facility, and they are all on board with it. A date was not yet determined, but Pat is willing to tailor the tour to the interests of the SRC members.

## **Old Business:**

### **Client Assistance Program (CAP) Report by Disability Rights New Jersey (DRNJ):**

The CAP Report was submitted for inclusion by Janna Sheiman, the CAP Coordinator of Disability Rights New Jersey (DRNJ) and reviewed/read to the SRC by Susan Head. The full report will be appended to the end of these meeting minutes.

## **Committee Reports:**

- **Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA) – Chaired by Vito DeSantis**
  - Vito asked when is the next Needs Assessment?
    - Pat said it was completed about 1.5 years ago and are due every 3 years.
    - It was also Pat's suggestion that work toward the next one should begin now by building the committee and putting ideas on the table to avoid the scramble that happened last time.
- **Business Engagement Committee – Chaired by John O'Connell**
  - John was not present at the meeting but an update sent by John regarding the VA facility in Lyons, NJ was provided earlier.
  - Vito asked if the SRC ever decided on how to measure Business Engagement?
    - Dr. Davis commented that this was not yet decided on and that the RSA have provided a Technical Assistance Center (TAC) around this topic because many agencies were requesting it. She however is not sure about the current status of that, but it was to start in the Spring.
    - Pat suggested for the June 6<sup>th</sup> meeting that the VR Coordinator or someone from the BRU to come and talk about Business Engagement or tracking such. Vito agreed.
- **Policy and Procedures – Chaired by Lauren Weishaar**
  - Lauren had no updates on Policy currently.
- **Quality Assurance Committee – Chaired by Gary Robinson**
  - Gary needed to leave early and did not have any updates to present on Quality Assurance. Other members of the committee were also not present.
- **SRC Annual Report Committee – Chaired by Breeanna Douglas**
  - Breeanna was not present at the meeting and did not submit any updates to be presented on the SRC Annual Report.



## **Member Updates:**

Members were called upon to provide updates to the SRC.

- John provided this update via email: The canteen at the VA Lyons Medical Campus building 6 closed during COVID and never re-opened. I don't think the VA wants to staff it because of budget shortfalls. This is a large medical campus with multiple buildings that is not close to anything. The address is: 151 Knollcroft Road Lyons, NJ 07939 Main Phone # 908-647-0180
- Lauren Weishaar commented that DHS is including one of her agency's new American Creative: Know Your Rights material for Immigrants and Refugees prepared for businesses and organizations to know what to do. This can be found on the DHS website and Lauren is able to provide it as well.
- James Good often calls to a monthly radio show featuring the Governor taking calls from the public. While waiting there was another call that was taken and it was about the same topic of not getting appointments. Also, on BENJ the second micro market was opened at the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) in Trenton. Jim is running the first micro market with over 200 items.
- Sarah Schiffelbein, DOE gave a few updates on the Collaborations In Transitions New Jersey (CITNJ) project. This project is through the Disability Innovation Fund (DIF) from the Federal Government. Work is continuing with the 3 Local Educational Agencies (LEAs) and the Needs Assessment has been completed, now currently being analyzed. The mini website, which is an overview website, is going through the approval process. This mini website is to be housed on the DOE website, is to be released before the Transition Hub, and should be active next week.
- Linda Melendez, NFB was invited to speak to the Central Regional Office staff in February which was informative about the National Center and NFBNJ. Also received an invitation to appear at the Northern Regional Office in March. Linda also noted that at the beginning of the week over 500 Federationsts met with Congressional and Senator Reps asking them to safeguard Laws and Funding for the blind.
- Don Campbell, SILC mentioned they are still waiting for appointments to their council and the Chairperson, Colleen Rhodes, will reach out to Vito to see how they can work together. SILC has been focused on the federal freeze that happened a few weeks ago and are very concerned about what will happen with grants in the future as SILC is federally funded. They have been mobilizing to advocate for their needs.
- Nicole Pratt, SPAN also greatly concerned because SPAN is federally funded. They too are mobilizing and working by sending Impact Statements, to make sure these changes don't go into effect. Two big events are coming up: Transition Health

Conference coming up at the end of February, and the SPAN Conference coming up at the end of September.

- Ronda Banks, NJT – is in the process of onboard two new Transportation Network Companies, UZURV and VIA. This transition will support a renewed pilot program that is fully compliant with FTA and ADA standards. Informational sessions will be held in the coming weeks to address questions and get feedback. Ronda will send the dates to everyone once the dates are known.

**Announcements:**

Vito commented that there is a lot of upheaval and questions coming out of the new Federal Administration changes. The Rehab Act is an Act, it's the law. RSA may look totally different, it may move to a different department, but it's still the law. It will need to be followed, or else the law will need to be changed, which would need to be done through an act of Congress.

**Adjournment:**

The meeting was adjourned at 12:08pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

*Bryan McClain*

Bryan McClain

Executive Secretarial Assistant

## **SRC Proposed Goals for 2025**

Despite the current lack of a quorum, the SRC will meet four times in Federal Fiscal Year 2025, as well as continue ongoing support to foster the goals of CBVI and its commitment to excellent services.

### 2025 Meeting Dates:

- February 7, 2025
- June 6, 2025
- October 3, 2025
- December 5, 2025

Once in compliance with Section 105 of the Rehabilitation Act and CFR 34 361.17 whereby a quorum exists,

- The SRC, by reviewing various reports and current and proposed policies, will:
  - Work with CBVI to enhance and improve competitive integrated employment outcomes across all VR consumer groups being served;
  - Assist CBVI in identifying and partnering with apprenticeship opportunities;
  - Assist CBVI in enhancing partnerships with the local One-Stops and larger workforce system;
  - Assist CBVI in providing services ensuring that Rapid Engagement is utilized, while ensuring Informed Choice to the consumer;
  - Assist CBVI in developing Career Pathways for appropriate consumers who wish to progress from education and training to Competitive Integrated Employment.
- SRC members will continue to participate, as appropriate, in public forums and agency programs for the benefit of consumers.
- SRC will work with CBVI to identify, develop, and provide an on-boarding training for new SRC members, to ensure all members understand the scope and role of SRC membership and the VR program.
- SRC and CBVI will conduct a yearly SRC Purpose and Responsibilities training.
- SRC will work with CBVI to identify topical presentations that can be presented at each SRC meeting, related to agency performance and compliance;
- SRC will enhance and operationalize the role of the subcommittees to align its focus with the core requirements of the SRC, the SRC bylaws, Federal Regulations, and the VR program.

# DISABILITY RIGHTS NEW JERSEY

ADVANCING JUSTICE. ADVOCATING INCLUSION.

GWEN ORLOWSKI, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

## Disability Rights NJ Report to State Rehabilitation Council

**Client Assistance Program (CAP) Reporting Period:** 10/1/24-12/31/24

**Prepared by:** Janna Sheiman, Managing Attorney – Employment Team and CAP Coordinator

### Brief introduction of CAP

The Client Assistance Program (CAP) at Disability Rights NJ (DRNJ) provides legal advocacy and education to people with disabilities applying for or receiving services funded by the Rehabilitation Act, including vocational rehabilitation. CAP also provides legal advocacy and education about Title I (employment rights) of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

This year we are working to ensure equitable access to Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) services for VR applicants and clients by providing self-advocacy assistance, limited legal assistance, and extended legal assistance as well as education emphasizing individual plan for employment (IPE) development, informed choice, and access to appeal rights. Educate policymakers about access to VR services and engage in systemic advocacy including participation in State Rehabilitation Councils.

**Educating Policy Makers:** Disability Rights NJ has been attending regular meetings with the State Rehabilitation Councils and providing information and updates on activities and systemic concerns that have been identified through our work.

- **Serving individual clients. Number of client cases during DRNJ's 1st fiscal quarter 2025 (October 1-December 31, 2024):**

| Program | Carryover from FY 24 | New Since Oct 1, 2024 | Closed as of December 31, 2024 | Current Active as of January 1, 2025 |
|---------|----------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| CAP     | 14                   | 17                    | 11                             | 20 Total<br>17 DVRS<br>3 CBVI        |

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- Examples of issues in client cases:
  - Communication breakdowns where DVRS clients and DVRS counselors do not have a shared understanding of DVRS client goals and objectives.
  - Clients not getting a timely response from their VR counselors.
  - Clients whose cases were closed without notice to them.
- Number of active appeals (administrative, mediation, and fair hearings)
  - Administrative: 0
  - Mediation: 0
  - Fair Hearing: 1
- Examples of outcomes for clients from the year:
  - **DVRS:** Disability Rights NJ worked with a 28-year-old who was seeking to pursue their law degree at Rutgers University with supports from DVRS. DRNJ assisted client with transferring VR offices after their original office engaged in a pattern of misgendering client, who uses they/them pronouns. After the office transfer, Disability Rights NJ assisted client through the development of an IPE, which covered their law tuition as well as sponsorship for their law prep courses, and client was able to sign and return the IPE for services.
  - **DVRS:** Disability Rights NJ entered into a retainer agreement with a 35-year-old female resident of Passaic County diagnosed with severe hearing impairment concerning access to replacement hearing aids through DVRS. Following an audiological evaluation, DVRS denied the hearing aids citing that the client's current hearing aids were "in working order and adequate for her current needs." Because the evaluation and the audiologist both confirmed that due to severe hearing loss the client needed replacement hearing aids, we requested that DVRS approve the recommended hearing aids. DVRS determined that the hearing aids recommended by the audiology vendor were too expensive and requested the client be evaluated by a different vendor. We reviewed the evaluation report from the second vendor which made identical recommendations in terms of replacement hearing aids. Although DVRS delayed provision of the replacement hearing aids citing a need for the client to submit additional documentation confirming financial eligibility for cost services, DVRS eventually authorized the hearing aids which the client is now utilizing.

### Systemic Issues and Concerns observed by DRNJ

- Clients' cases are closed without any notice. In Quarter 1, Disability Rights NJ has still been seeing clients seeking our services after calling DVRS to speak with their counselor and learning that their case had been closed without their knowledge or any written or verbal notice. We know that new notices have been implemented, however not everyone

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receives them when their case is closed or services are suspended.

- Several counties lack vendors to provide Pre-ETS, Customized Employment, and Worked Based Learning Experience services. Availability of vendors in counties continues to be a concern, as it is preventing clients from being able to access approved services and discourages DVRS from approving needed services they know will not be available. Disability Rights NJ is aware that several DVRS counties are operating without vendors to provide services such as Pre-ETS, Customized Employment, and Work-Based Learning Experiences. When we contact these counties to seek services, DVRS offices acknowledge that there are no vendors available to refer clients and that they need permission from the central office to refer to a vendor in another county. We know there are contracts in place, but they are not currently operational for a number of the counties.
- DVRS Case Notes do not reflect all correspondence with client or providers: One trend that Disability Rights NJ has identified is that the case files for DVRS do not contain all correspondence from clients. We have had clients who will send multiple emails that they have provided us, but when we receive the case notes from DVRS, none of the emails are recorded. The case file instead in these matters will reflect that client had not been heard from and the file is being closed for lack of response. In one client's case, approximately 20 emails had been sent to the counselor that were never recorded.

A second objective for the year is to increase awareness of the Client Assistance Program (CAP) and Protection and Advocacy for Beneficiaries of Social Security (PABSS) through outreach about CAP and PABSS to Vocational Rehabilitation constituencies, with a focus in the Black and Latino/a communities, including VR clients and prospective VR clients, VR agencies and staff, and other stakeholders.

**Trainings/Outreaches/Resource Development:** In the first quarter of the fiscal year, the Client Assistance Program provided the following trainings and outreaches.

- **Facing The Future Conference:** Disability Rights NJ ran an information table at the Facing the Future Conference held on October 18, 2024, and presented Alternatives to Guardianship and how it affect individuals who are looking to work. Approximately 275 conference attendees received information about Vocational Rehabilitation Services and the Client Assistance Program.
- **Rancocas Valley Region Special Needs Fair:** Disability Rights NJ ran an information table at the Rancocas Valley Region Special Needs Fair to inform students of their right to Transition Services from the School Districts and the VR agencies and discussed the new ASPYIR tool launched by Disability Rights NJ.

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- **Provided legal education training about VR services and how to access them :** As part of the Disability Employment Awareness Month Session held by the New Jersey State Bar Association, the Employment Team presented legal training on the rights to VR services, how to access them, and information for advocates and attorneys how to help clients navigate through the system.
- **Promoting Self-Advocacy:** Disability Rights NJ presented a webinar designed to help individuals with disabilities and their support personnel with understanding and using their own voice through self-advocacy, including tips for how family and friends can help support and strengthen self-advocacy efforts.
- **Presentation to Rutgers:** Disability Rights NJ staff provided training to Rutgers students in the “Foundations of Counseling” class, introducing them to the Client Assistance Program, VR Services, and how they can help support their future clients with accessing services.

A third objective of CAP team is to advocate for an end to subminimum wage and for equitable access to competitive, integrated employment for people with disabilities, especially people with complex medical, physical, and behavioral needs, through a public report and systemic advocacy.

**Issuance of Public Report:** DRNJ has begun drafting a public report focusing on the segregated nature of Sheltered Workshops and the legal implications that are raised pursuant to the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Supreme Court’s Decision in *Olmstead v. L.C.*, 527 U.S. 581 (1999)

### **Goals and Objectives for Next Quarter (January-March 2025)**

- Disability Rights NJ is in the process of developing informational posters for display at Secondary Schools and Universities and to provide to the VR agencies
- Ensure that CAP information is readily displayed and available in waiting areas of VR agency offices.
- Provide further outreach and training to the CILs and their participants on their employment rights.
- Provide outreach and training to individuals with disabilities about their rights to VR services and the Client Assistance Program

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