

N.J. Commission for the Blind & Visually Impaired
State Rehabilitation Council
Meeting Minutes – October 3, 2014
Joseph Kohn Training Center
130 Livingston Avenue - New Brunswick, NJ

Nicole Pratt, Chairperson, called the meeting to order at 9:35 a.m.

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

Everyone present was asked to introduce themselves and note whether or not they were a confirmed member.

Voting Members Present: Jamie Hilton, Otilie Lucas, Rick Fox, Dorothy Doran, Kris Tucker, Susan Head, Fr. Jim Warnke, Fran Leibner, Zoraida Krell, Al Glasgow, Titus Massey, Kelly Reyman

Voting Members Absent: Rocco Fiorentino, Kirk Lew

Ex Officio Present: Dan Frye, Ed Sroczynski

Ex Officio Absent: Danielle Licari-Scorzelli

Staff/Members of Public Present: John Walsh, Robert Paige

Nicole asked for approval of the June 6, 2014 meeting minutes; on a motion made by Dorothy Doran and seconded by Kelly Reyman, the minutes were accepted as received.

Dan Frye began by acknowledging the significant transition currently taking place on the State Rehabilitation Council, and noted the Governor has been responsive in helping keep the council fully constituted. He recognized the newest members of the council. He welcomed Jamie Hilton, former CBVI Director; Rick Fox, National Federation of the Blind of NJ; Otilie Lucas, member of the NJ Council and retired rehabilitation teacher at CBVI; Kris Tucker, NJ Transit representative; and Susan Head, Disability Rights of NJ. Dan commented that he is confident the council will benefit from their expertise, and encouraged that these new members be welcomed and added to the deliberative process as the council moves forward. He acknowledged all of the members for taking on this role of responsibility.

Dan reviewed the primary role of the SRC:

- An active partner, conferring and providing feedback with the agency on matters of significant policy.
- Development of the Annual SRC Report, which goes to the Governor, Rehabilitation Services Administration, US Department of Education, and other political leaders in the State. Dan noted that a subcommittee is currently working with Ed Sroczynski on this report.
- Facilitating close relationships with the community. Dan pointed out that each of the members represent the voice of different constituents, all of whom CBVI needs to know about. Members are encouraged to serve as an ambassador, sharing the concerns of their constituents. Similarly, as CBVI has data to share the agency needs to rely on the SRC to convey that information in a positive, upbeat fashion.

Federal and State Updates:

On the Federal level, Dan reported that Congress has re-authorized the Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973; the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). This law was signed by the President of the United States on July 22, 2014, and is immediately in effect. Dan explained that the Rehabilitation Services Administration will be issuing regulations, and it is expected that we will be given the opportunity to comment on these regulations within the next 12 months. It is expected there will be aspects of the regulatory process that will give greater clarity to some of the vague language in the legislation. As a result of the reauthorization, the climate of Congress suggests that they do not believe the rehabilitation program has fully achieved its potential. New emphasis is expected to be on State performance, as well as gaining employment. The worry is that this does not take into consideration the preparatory work that goes into making sure the blind and visually impaired are prepared for getting a good quality job. Dan ensured the SRC that CBVI will find ways to marry the agency's philosophy with this Act, and not be forced into promoting numbers without concern for quality.

WIOA:

- The Commissioner of Rehabilitation Services Administration remains a presidentially appointed, senate confirmed position.
- Language was put into Section 511, significantly limiting the likelihood of being tracked into sub-minimal wage jobs/non-competitive employment.
- Able to successfully guarantee that the rehabilitation portion of the Federal Act, and the Independent Living Older-Blind, stays under the jurisdiction of the US Department of Education; however, Independent Living aspects of the program were moved to another federal agency.
- Some erosion of the Comprehensive System for Personal Development, allowing greater flexibility now. CBVI was hoping they would continue to insist on Master's level professionals; however, nothing noted that we need to lower our common denominator here.

Dan reported that CBVI just completed our federal fiscal year (Oct 1 – Sept 30). He was pleased to say that CBVI had 331 successful consumers put to work this year. The agency has not had more than 300 closed cases in one year since 2007. He explained that analysis of these numbers is taking place (i.e. easy closures or genuinely good jobs). Either way, this number signifies significant progress and a lot of hard work by counseling staff. The thought is that this may, in part, be a reflection of an improving economy.

Dan reported:

- The Older Blind Project Director's conference is scheduled for the end of October; CBVI's Independent Living Coordinator will hopefully take part.
- The National Rehabilitation Association (NRA) is holding a conference, at the end of October in Iowa, for individual professionals in the rehabilitation/education field.
- The Rehabilitation Services Association (RSA) has selected a new job-driven voc/rehab technical assistance center to replace the 10-region TACE system – new module to be announced soon.
- CSAVR & NCSAB Fall Conference will be held the week of November 9 in Miami, Florida. The substantial focus is expected to be on the new provisions of WIOA; ensure newest language is clear. It was made clear thus far that 15% of all agency expenditures will be on transition; will now have to determine eligibility (plan) within 90 days (previously had 180 days). Also, homemakers are no longer a legitimate closure; focusing on employed roles. These are just a few of the changes, and a lot of other new things will be featured in Miami. Dan Frye and John Walsh scheduled to attend.

Dan reported on a variety of items on the State level:

- Transition programs: 1) Employment Development Guidance & Engagement Program (EDGE), which will essentially replace the former LEAD program. As previously explained, this program will offer high quality, employment-focused transition services to high school-aged blind and vision-impaired students. This program will be administered by a third-party; deadline for proposals is today. The program is expected to begin December; however, Dan ensured the SRC he will not award to an entity that he does not think can do the job; will RFP if necessary. 2) Student Hands on Alternatives Reinforcement Project (SHARP) – work is underway to introduce this program for students Grades 1-8; teaching blindness skills instruction, and then a weeklong recreational event to apply these skills in the real world. This program is designed to ensure a seamless transition from SHARP to EDGE. 3) Looking at refashioning/relocating our new Life 101 Program for students in 9th and 10th Grades. The goal is to move this program, and our college prep program, from out of the confines of JKTC, so as not to suspend JKTC training to adults over the summer months when these other programs are taking place.
- Working on a variety of Memorandums of Understanding (MOU) throughout the State. Working with colleagues in Central Office, allowing us to be as flexible as possible when entering into agreements. Currently, we are outlining our relationship with The College of New Jersey (TCNJ) on our Work Skills Prep Program (this summer program is for students not likely to be academic in nature, but who go into supportive employment). In addition, we have expanded our relationship with TCNJ, partnering with Kelly and Dr. Petroff, as well as others, to support the I Can Connect Program for the deaf/blind consumers; administered by the Federal Communications Commission. Also, included in the MOU a number of other things to support deaf/blind consumers. Dan noted he is confident we will continue to have a strong relationship with TCNJ on a variety of issues. As noted, looking at moving the College Prep Program, putting students on a real college campus, possibly TCNJ. Also, integrating students with TCNJ through the Bonner Scholars Program. This program, social in nature in terms of it has a social services, community service component, as well as a learning experiential and academic component; an intense 2-week program, quite competitive. Hopefully, we can get this program running by the summer; have received positive responses from the Bonner Scholars Program administration already. If successful, this will truly animate the nature of our college prep program. Also, working on a new MOU with the Library for the Blind to make assistive technology available for the older blind in ways that we have not seen before. We will also continue support of Newsline and other loaner programs in the library.
- Will also be making substantial changes to CBVI's education portfolio. The need to individualize and be attentive to specific needs of each student is important. Entering into conversations with the Department of Education about new approaches in having CBVI continue to take the lead in blindness education. The contract system currently has 4 levels of service; a more accountable system is necessary. Dan explained that this is not an indictment on staff; however, the need to urge onward to a new level of sophistication of services we provide.
- On October 9 (9am-4pm in New Brunswick) CBVI is hosting the first state-wide staff development seminar in almost 14 yrs. Dan explained that he thought it was important to bring the entire staff together, infusing a spirit of unity around the new strategic plan; a day-long conversation about the future of this agency. We will be acknowledging consumers and staff for hard work, and providing training as part of the agenda. 269 of 305 staff scheduled to be in attendance.
- Dan explained that he has been very involved in the re-adoption of 10:94; the Administrative Code for our BEST program, which will be published in the NJ Register. Also, working on 10:99 set aside program; a number of proposed amendments are being made to this antiquated program to try and make sure workshop environments are well treated, good wages earned, and operating with meaningful work.
- Due to the closures of the 2 Developmental Centers, the Department of Human Services (DHS) hiring freeze continues. The NJDC bumping process was completed July 1; we are now involved in the Woodbridge DC bumping process. CBVI is once again relatively insulated because many staff hold

specialty positions in the areas of blindness and visual impairment; however, support staff may be impacted. Dan indicated that any new staff are welcomed, oriented, and absorbed into the agency's culture and practices. Hiring freeze expected to continue until January, 2015. Human Resources working with CBVI staff to answer questions and provide support. Mark Stabile, HR Director, is retiring at the end of November; we also will be losing Hugo Ruiz, HR Personnel Officer. These are two high-level vacancies; will be taking contingency steps until a permanent HR Director can be hired.

Dan commented that the Commission Edition, CBVI's bi-monthly newsletter, continues to be published and well received. His learning lunch initiative also continues to operate.

As CBVI is busy and engaged, striving to make improvements, everyone is encouraged to be conscious of the need to continue to serve here-and-now; finding that balance is important.

Strategic Planning Update:

John Walsh noted that work continues on strategic planning. Joe Skiba, consultant recommended by TACE, has been working with CBVI on this process. It was never the intent to develop a strategic planning binder to be put on a shelf; it was really to enable folks to gather skills in the continuous process of planning, implementing, and evaluating how we are doing. The planning began by working with the design team to do a true analysis of the environment. Encouragement was given to teach members how to teach strategically. The team now consists of 26 members; at this point consideration is being given to increase membership to get more people involved in the critical phase we are entering. The focus now is testing, developing, and implementation of the plan, which will bring significant changes to the agency. Areas identified to develop: education, employment, independent living, blindness skills instruction, staff development, communication both internal/external on expressing our mission, and external relation with partners. A huge piece of the puzzle is looking at a service delivery system redesign of the agency. With process mapping, it became clear that we've developed a stovepipe mentality within disciplines; therefore, we are looking at ways that service teams and disciplines can cross with each other, working in a collaborative fashion. There are 6 workgroups tasked to develop concepts and workable plans/activities, to be implemented over an 18-month period. The mindset to instill in staff is that everyone is part of the team that gets results and we need to raise the game in order to stay relevant. Each group is looking at deliverables, and what data will be used to see if the plan is working. They will bring their plan to the administrative team to look at agency-wide implementation. Information on strategic planning will be shared with all staff at the upcoming CBVI staff seminar.

Strategic planning has and will assist the agency in:

- reinvigorating current connections and opportunities for additional services. MOUs need to clearly ID lead person.
- communication and engagement strategies with staff.
- EDGE and SHARP program planning underway.
- looking at how we provide services to the 0-3 population.
- looking at data of population currently serving.
- meetings held to explore connections/external relations (recent meeting with St. Joseph's School for the Blind).
- efforts to outreach to business community; developing business relations unit to interface with business (performance based on # of jobs).
- staff development programs.
- strategies to increase external communication; i.e. social media.
- developing a quality management team.
- exit survey process for programs.

John acknowledged Dorothy Doran and thanked her for her work on the design team as a representative of the Council. Dorothy noted she was very impressed with the enthusiasm of the team. She also congratulated John and Ed on their recent appointments.

Vocational Rehabilitation Unit Report:

Ed Sroczynski commented on the “26” employment outcomes. In reviewing a recent data run, of the 331 successfully closed cases, 168 individuals obtained full-time employment; this is a 51% measure and does meet the Performance Standards Indicator. Since part of the focus is looking at getting full-time employment for individuals, and ultimately getting them off of Social Security Disability benefits, these numbers over the last fiscal year are very positive. The trend of overall closures over the last 3 fiscal years was: 280, 284, and 287 respectively. Ed commented that the agency is looking at the quality of closures, and will be reviewing the factors that resulted in this increase. Ed also reported that he will be meeting with VR supervisors and counselors, working on strategies to help them develop better quality employment and full-time closures. Titus Massey asked what the total number of individuals entered into the program was during the last fiscal year. He also asked if there were statistics on the mix of jobs that were secured during that timeframe. This information will be shared at the next meeting. John Walsh noted that it will also be part of the SRC data in the annual report.

Ed reviewed the following VR summer/transition programs:

- Life 101: day program for 9th-10th grade students; staffed by CBVI; exposing students to 4 basic life areas: career preparation, skills of independence (examples: cooking, community trips, negotiating public transportation), college preparation, and information technology. This year’s program was a huge success; largely due to experiential activities built into this program. 10 students participated this year.
- College Prep Experience: 11th & 12th grade students; resided at JKTC for 7 weeks July/Aug; college classes held at Raritan Valley Community College; leisure activities held in the evenings. 11 students benefited this year.
- Bonner Scholars Program: Kelly Reyman reported on the plans being made to offer the most appropriate supports and choice for students who will be involved in this new program. Community engagement activities will be held in the mornings; classes in the afternoon; evening support, social activities. Ed noted that work is being done to develop an application, which will be sent to students and parents. Sessions will be held to outline the program; looking for students who have certain skills and motivation for college. A selection committee will be formed; inviting 10 students to attend. Dan urged that the community learning experience not be modified; the opportunity will be truly transformative.
- Work Skills Prep Program: Two 2-week learning experience sessions were held this year for students age 16-21, to enhance life skills and enable students to engage in competitive job market. Kelly, overseeing this program at TCNJ for the past 9 years, explained that half-day classroom sessions center around assistive technology, literacy assessments, managing money, soft skills, etc. Evenings are dedicated to activities of daily living; i.e. laundry, cooking, etc. Most favored are the community-based entertainment activities. She commented that the program went very well this year; exciting to see how motivated the students are. She noted that a couple of students aged-out this year; however, always in touch with alumni.
- EDGE: Ed reported that plans for this new program are being worked out. This program will be offered to students ages 14-16; min. 30/ max. 60 per year statewide. Participants will develop and practice skills of independence, advocacy, and self-awareness. They will engage in work activities in the community, becoming aware of volunteering and employment. Mentoring will occur, and counselors will assist in developing goals. The program will also include working with the parents of participants. Milestone measurements will be set up to monitor achievements/benchmarks. Periodic self-assessment surveys will also be developed. Jim Warnke asked if assessments made by others will be shared with the students. The comment was made that self-assessments will be done collaboratively with instructor assessments.

Ed reported that he has been conferencing with SRC members to develop the 2014 SRC Report.

New Business:

Nicole brought up the fact that a new chairperson will need to take over soon; voting to be held in March, 2015. Members were encouraged to think about recommendations. Nicole recommended Jim Warnke to serve as the new SRC chair. Everyone agreed that Fr. Jim would be a good choice due to his background and experiences. Jim noted that he will consider this nomination. Due to the importance of this role, he added the following caveat, if he decides to take on the appointment: if members decide at any point that he was not doing a good enough job, they will say so. Similarly, if he feels he is not doing an adequate job, he will step aside. Dan pointed out that a lot of facets are necessary to function in the role of chairperson and he thanked Fr. Jim for considering this appointment. As a vote will also need to be taken on a vice-chair in March, Kelly nominated Nicole for this position. Dan thanked Nicole for stepping up last year in continuing as chairperson, and also for considering this new nomination as vice-chair. Dan also commented that there are other committees that will need assistance from SRC members so everyone has a hand in doing something; not huge time commitments.

Announcements/Open Forum:

Rob Paige:

- reported that the Division of Vocational Rehabilitations Services (DVR) is scheduling a hiring event for late November in the Camden office; will confirm date. 10-12 federal agencies expected to be involved. In the past, this type of event has resulted in some high-level, good paying positions. CBVI clients welcome; anyone having constituents in the south Jersey area was asked to contact the Camden office. The only caveat is they need to be willing to relocate, as positions are often in Philadelphia/DC/NY.
- WIOA - assistive technology programs leaving US Department of Education. Disability Rights NJ taken away from RSA; not sure how this will play out; will probably go to US Department of Health & Human Services on a federal level.
- DVR working with CBVI and DDD on a new MOU on a managed care system. DDD in shelter workshops will no longer be funded by DDD (seriously disabled using funding). DVR has taken on that population with some money from DDD transferred to DVR to help manage the shift. Mandate, part of DDD plan, that becoming competitively employed is part of the plan. Want to make sure that people under DDD auspices have options from a competitive employment standpoint. Nicole noted the importance of getting the schools on board with this concept; some school districts not fostering the work idea; training in this transition with coordinators/guidance counselors is needed. Rob noted that DDD support coordinators and staff will be trained.
- acknowledged the excellent business program at TCNJ, and recommended assistance to CBVI consumers in developing business plan for starting home-based/self-employed businesses. Kelly noted that TCNJ does have a relationship with the disability community in this regard, so that wouldn't be a problem. John Walsh also noted that recommendations to TCNJ are noted in the IPEs.

Susan Head:

- noted the cooperation from VR counselors with her colleagues at Disability Rights of NJ; their prompt response is noticed and appreciated.
- promised more information at the next meeting regarding the parent organization, National Disability Rights network, who is focusing on the issue of sub-minimal employee wages. The client assistance program is involved in monitoring this. SRC members noted an interest in this issue, and hope this practice will be abolished as soon as possible.

Fran Leibner: reported that the Department of Education will be holding a training session with the Teachers of the Visually Impaired (TVI) on November 5 regarding the Individualized Plans for Employment (IPE).

Nicole Pratt announced:

- the annual Statewide Parent Advocacy Network (SPAN) conference will be held in April, possibly at Montclair University; more information to follow.
- November 1 will be collaborating with TCNJ, deaf/blind conference.

Dan Frye:

- Looking forward to the opportunity of speaking for the Commission at NJCB Convention on 10/25 in Perth Amboy, and at the NFB Convention in November in Manahawkin. Also, employment skills seminar with NFB affiliate on Friday afternoon at convention.
- Disability pride parade and exposition being held today; 2 CBVI consumers are taking part.
- Disability awareness month: DHS looking at any number of things we can do to promote disability positively in the press and otherwise. CBVI will profile award winners from our upcoming staff seminar.
- American Blindness equality day 10/15; may see press releases related to positive work in blindness/vision impaired field.

Ed Sroczyński:

- In recognition of Disability Awareness month, working with Bank of America in NYC again this year with job seekers. Also, working with City Bank on 10/14 – a disability mentoring day.

Kelly Reyman:

- TCNJ working, in partnership with Bonner Scholars Program, to recognize Disability Awareness Month; several events are scheduled on campus; i.e. band performance, proclamation, walk-in-shoes event, and student run.

As requested, committee member contact information will be distributed to all members.

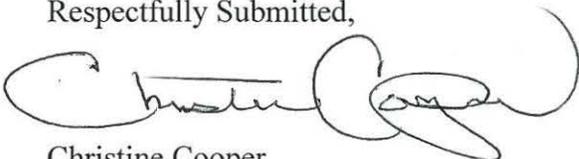
Adjournment:

At 11:55 a.m. a motion was made, and seconded, to adjourn the meeting.

Next Meeting:

The next SRC meeting is scheduled for Friday, December 5, 2014, at the Joseph Kohn Training Center.

Respectfully Submitted,



Christine Cooper
CBVI – Administrative Assistant