

N.J. Commission for the Blind & Visually Impaired
State Rehabilitation Council
Meeting Minutes – September 25, 2015
Joseph Kohn Training Center - 130 Livingston Avenue - New Brunswick, NJ

Voting Members Present: Jennifer Armstrong, Rick Fox, Al Glasgow, Susan Head, Zoraida Krell, Fran Leibner, Kirk Lew, Otilie Lucas, Kelly Reymann, Fr. Jim Warnke

Voting Members Absent: Dorothy Doran, Jamie Hilton, Titus Massey, Dawn Monaco, Kris Tucker

Ex Officio Present: Dan Frye, Danielle Licari-Scorzelli, Ed Sroczynski

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

Jim Warnke, Chairperson, welcomed everyone and called the meeting to order at 9:30 a.m. He announced that the meeting was being held in compliance with Section 105 of the Federal Rehabilitation Act 1973, as amended. It is also in compliance with the New Jersey Open Public Meeting Act, NJSA 10:4-6.

After giving members a few minutes to review the June 5, 2015, Minutes, and hearing no corrections or additions, Jim asked for a motion to approve these Minutes. On a motion made by Rick Fox and seconded by Otilie Lucas, the Minutes were accepted as received.

Recommendations for Presentation to State Employment & Training Commission (SETC) - Unified State Plan As part of the recently reauthorized Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Dan noted that states will now be compelled to submit a state plan. Historically, the state plan has been submitted by each VR agency. (In New Jersey the 2 VR agencies are the Commission and the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (DVR)). The new federal law requires that the state plan be submitted through the SETC, including perspective from CBVI as it relates to blindness, and any common comments that our 2 VR agencies would like to make. Dan noted that in November he and Alice Hunnicutt, Director of DVR, will give a 15-20 minute presentation on what VR thinks needs to be included in the document that is ultimately going to be prepared for the state plan. Dan noted that a document had been circulated to the SRC members, which the SETC has asked members read, as well as an excerpt from CBVI's strategic planning document. Dan explained that today's goal was to get a list of ideas, or a couple of principles or themes, from the SRC members. He and Fr. Jim will then confer with Alice and her Council Chair, on October 13, to finalize the comments they will deliver to the SETC in November. Dan noted that he wants to make sure the VR portion of the state plan is at least reflective of what values VR thinks are important; pointing out the distinction that makes blindness specific VR critical. Dan acknowledged Kirk Lew for alerting him to the fact that such an opportunity was going to develop. It is clear that the Commission not being in the Department of Labor, but yet having the same mandate, is going to get overlooked on occasion in terms of invitation and perceived influence. However, Dan noted that we are going to make ourselves known. If our feedback is not well received or sufficiently and prominently promoted within the document that is sent to the SETC, we will send our own supplementary materials to the rehabilitation services administration and to the secretaries of Labor and Education. Dan noted that he is not going to permit this new structure, if it works out this way, to diminish policy makers understanding of, or access to, the unique things that make Vocational Rehabilitation what it is.

Kirk explained the policy framework for NJ's Blueprint for Talent Development. He noted that WIOA is now forcing us to think regionally; the state has to designate regions within itself. The goal is to share resources. Looking at some of the same demographics, how can we utilize different vendors, operational activities, and initiatives, and how we can align our services to them. Also, high quality partnerships – defining what they are so everyone understands what that is; defining roles and responsibilities. Looking at comprehensive Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs). Then going further and finding measurable goals for each partner so they have deliverables; they understand what they are and make sure they are employer driven. Dan commented, in terms of regions the Commission has recently divided our work into a broad southern and northern service region, and within those regions we have local service centers. Similarly, CBVI's strategic plan has a component in it for the challenge of viewing all MOUs with our partners; to create a statewide custodian process in a much more centralized means by which our MOUs are managed. Kirk noted that the ultimate goal in WIOA is that there is an outcome to employment. Post-secondary the goal is to get people into a career pathway that will lead to a sustainable wage. So when you think about it broadly, you have to align to what's in the market. We need to understand that the employers are the customer; just as important as the job seeker. Not minimizing the job seeker, but we need to know the needs of our job seekers and of our employer so we can match them, and then facilitate that discussion. The other part is that we need to rebuild and educate employers. John noted that the good news with VR is that we have been outcome driven; we are not just a training program; our statistics and indicators were all based on employment outcomes and the types of outcomes, so there's a big alignment right there. Kirk noted that another area is training; looking at ways to educate alternatively: workplace learning, supported employment. Kirk noted that the shift is from training people and getting them to a job, to now trying to get people to careers of sustainable wages. John pointed out that the Blueprint actually talks about WIOA career pathways funding parameters; it states that NJ requires all WIOA funding training programs incorporate information on career pathways for key industries as developed in the career pathways state policy framework for participants and partners. He thought that this would be something the SRC should look at, and what it will mean for the Agency. He explained that all of the workforce development programs are funded by the WIOA, and it is clearly stating that NJ requires all programs funded under that legislation to incorporate information about career pathways. Kirk noted that with regard to Titles I-IV; i.e. veterans, incarcerated, disabilities, children in DCF and foster care, all these populations are served in those Titles in a variety of different ways, whether it's virtual, libraries, all these different programs and services. Page 9 says it allows more of these programs to start working concurrently. The goal is how to ensure all of these different programs/services run concurrently and make more sense. Rick pointed out that at the Commission we have our own technology trainers. So if there is a way to really do the work and integrate people into some of these programs, it would be a positive step, and more reflective of what it will be like when they get a job, etc. The negative would be if we didn't have the recognition that there are specialized computer skills, braille. He noted that the skills of blindness are quite specific and there is a need to learn them; specialized needs among people with disabilities to learn the skills of adaptation so they can then become integrated. Kirk noted that discussion centers on how do we professionally develop and build internal/external capacity. Also develop new training programs for all staff, focused on those that provide services to job seekers and businesses. There are certain things a frontline person is going to deal with; they need to be able to triage correctly; accessibility is an important issue. A one-stop evaluation and accessibility checklist has been developed. It was felt that the SRCs should be given the opportunity to review these documents and make recommendations.

Jim commented on the importance of this becoming operational; how is it going to happen when a real human being walks into a real place with a real need; how are the people on the ground going to know what to do, so that person can be responded to and brought into the system in a productive way.

Another issue is that training without ongoing coaching and performance metrics becomes a train and hope model. John noted that the Commission has been through this before as part of training the disability navigators around blindness related issues; there was an assigned team always available for questions. The former Chair of the SRC was very involved in setting up training protocols. However, the coaching mechanism was never set up.

Sue commented that she really does see a need for CBVI VR interest to be represented. She noted that in her work she hears from a number of individuals who are either blind from birth or who became blind later on in life. Their needs, training, and employment needs may be very different; therefore, if that point is missed in the overall training approach, some individuals will be disappointed.

Kirk noted that ultimately a goal is for this Commission and DVR to be the policy bodies that will deliver information to the SETC. NJ will develop formal policies, procedures, and processes to ensure youth with significant disabilities are referred effectively and efficiently. (That's a statement that says we are looking for your feedback.)

Representation of both SRCs was discussed. The Commission's SRC is sufficiently different and the issues of blindness are sufficiently distinct. It was pointed out that "representation" tends to be the chairperson. Under the employment first initiative it says there is going to be representation from the SRC; it just mentions 1 SRC though; assuming that means DVR? It seems they will be added to the State Workforce Investment Board. Under WIOA, disabilities in general was represented by the Commissioner of Labor; so the goal was to closely align the SRC to the SETC. The SETC has different commissions that report to them.

A lengthy discussion took place regarding concern of any effort to put people with disabilities into subminimum wage employment. Dan felt that productivity standards should apply to everyone and not just people with disabilities. Ultimately, what is a "reasonable attempt" to offer the "opportunity" of competitive, integrative employment that is referenced in the WIOA Blueprint, i.e., what is the time frame for a reasonable attempt before subminimum wage work is pursued.

Susan noted that everything she has read regarding the WIOA emphasizes that young people should not be placed in a subminimum wage situation, but her concern is that there is nothing in terms of – how much time should be given – how many opportunities should be given. Dan commented that in the WIOA draft, federal regs, there is reference to a 24-month time period as being a reasonable period of time; so there is some language, but we can't rely on those numbers yet, because they are not promulgated.

Reference (pg. 12, item 6) - talks about integration of services for persons with disabilities.

Kirk pointed out that there is opportunity to create a framework. His thought is that we will ultimately be saying as a State that sub-minimum wage is not acceptable; that every person should be making a competitive and sustainable wage. Then, NJ, this is the framework, regardless of what level you are at, we will recognize that employment is first and we will have a plan or something within a structure to get you there. We need to figure out what services we have and align them so that it makes sense, regardless of the level. The goal – if its employment first – we are going to figure out how to get them there, whether they are in an extended employment program, whether in a day program, the goal should not be to stay there – it should be to train and progressively get better and better. It is a process, and you move up/out, like any person. It's us saying – we are going to create training programs and the purpose is to get that person to create goals/look at their future. People should always be given opportunities to progress; continue to develop themselves. Then, what's nice, we individualize it, but I think we have to make sure we put the system in a framework that makes sense

to people, so as they go along their journey they can access programs that make sense and we can triage them along the way. Dan commented that VR is certainly consistent with that ambition – that’s what we do.

Rick and Otilie stressed the importance of training for people, who in the prime of their adulthood, lose their sight. They have to start over; managing simple tasks are not simple anymore. This is very different from somebody who needs job training; this takes time. It’s really important that whatever changes are being made, that it is recognized this sort of adaptation training is necessary, and is part of VR. Jim commented that a normal adaptive psychological adjustment to a significant vision loss takes 1-5 yrs. Kirk acknowledged their point; commenting on the need to imbed that into programs and make sure it is part of the system. More importantly, that the whole system recognizes it so we are consistent.

Kelly commented on community alliances (B2: Youth Advisory Councils & C5: Capacity Building & Technical Assistance for Youth) - if we can somehow share as a VR entity, perhaps with educators for students ages 14-21, what these policies are, employment first, etc. Students are coming in uninformed; their school districts are so inconsistent with what they know and the opportunities they are giving these students. So by default students and their families are trained to believe they are going to go to these subminimum wage work programs when they graduate. They are in self-contained school settings and not even included in those; not doing the work programs the other students in these self-contained programs are doing. If we can put our voice from CBVI’s perspective to the school districts and start back at the beginning, maybe we’ll see improvements.

Kirk commented that we’re all doing our own thing and it impacts the customer; we are working in silos. Jim commented that one of the things he liked in reading the Commission’s plan was that educators would have some sense of what rehab does, and rehab would have some sense of what the parameters of education are. Dan added that our VR counselors are coaches. VR is not just a pot of money from which people grab it, and go and try to find work. In practice and in theory we have staff in VR well trained in VR to help people in a reasonable, conscientious, and thoughtful way, to identify how to deal with the barriers to employment, and ultimately find it.

Jim commented that he envisions a two-fold process; Intra-agency along with people in the higher level leadership positions. So instead of just competing for resources, people could sit down with a comprehensive plan and say ok, who needs what for what, and how can we make this all work. How could what we’re doing in our house help what you’re doing in your house; this thing in your house would really help the transition program in our house.

Robert commented that he thinks we’re biting off more than we can chew if the thought is that you can get all of these different players to work together collaboratively. He suggested lowering the aim a little bit, and finding something that is actually doable and achievable. He pointed out that It’s not just state government, but we’re talking about the counties as well.

Kirk noted that in this body he thinks we should try and focus on something that we can actually get into the plan that will serve our populations. He pointed out that there are certain things we can do that are consistent. In DVR and Labor they are creating a technical assistance unit that is going to go out and really provide technical assistance throughout the whole system; it’s going be branded across all the 4 titles. That’s an opportunity because now we’re thinking of consolidating; messaging things the same; really being thoughtful and making sure we’re hitting all populations. That’s an opportunity for CBVI to be a part of, to make sure this population is considered when you are thinking about

servicing things. Ultimately it's about communication; about the partnerships; if we are going to deliver information that is going to help the system that's consistent throughout.

John suggested that the SRC's Evaluation for Training subcommittee look at the consumer report card that's being discussed in the WIOA Pathways and Partnerships Blueprint (page 2); talks about how consumer report cards will be developed for training programs. He noted that there may be a point of alignment there for this subcommittee and the broader workforce development system, as it appears that we were on that wavelength anyway.

The SRC made the following recommendations to be presented to the State Employment & Training Commission (SETC) regarding the Combined State Plan:

- The combined state plan must be relevant for all Workforce partners. The state plan needs to detail points of congruence and differences, with the goal of achieving the outcome of competitive, integrated employment.
- The Disability subcommittee of the WIOA Blueprint Team developed an accessibility checklist and training protocols for the One Stop Career Centers. The SRCs should be given the opportunity to review those documents and make recommendations for improvement.
- The state plan development group should include representation from both SRCs, i.e., CBVI and DVRS, preferably the chairs or his/her delegate.
- Training related to better serving individuals with disabilities in the workforce system should also include subject matter experts that are part of a Technical Assistance Unit who can provide coaching to front line staff on disability specific issues, including blindness and vision impairment. Training must be linked with ongoing coaching.
- Concern about any effort to put people with disabilities into subminimum wage employment; productivity standards should apply to everyone and not just people with disabilities. Ultimately, what is a "reasonable attempt" to offer the "opportunity" of competitive, integrative employment that is referenced in the WIOA Blue Print, i.e., what is the time frame for a reasonable attempt before subminimum wage work is pursued.
- Emphasize the blindness specific issues, such as computer and print access issues at One Stop Career Centers. Develop capacity to understand specific needs of various communities that will be using the One Stop Centers or other aspects of the Workforce Development system.
- Points of alignment with the broader workforce development system through inter-agency cooperative agreements to define relationships. This should also include the involvement of local school districts that should be involved in the transition to adult outcomes, including post-secondary education and employment.
- Evaluation for training providers via the consumer report card, the SRC would like to review the document and align the training evaluation at the VR agency.

Fr. Jim thanked everyone for their comments. He commented that he appreciates belonging to a body that brings together such expertise; he thought all the feedback was helpful.

Kirk commented on the importance of making sure both DVRs are aligned during the 10/13 conference call, so that recommendations can be articulated effectively to the SETC in November. Recommendations should be presented as - "we believe" this is what should happen; crafted in a way they will understand. The SETC needs to know what they need to do moving forward, and then it will get implemented into the plan in a meaningful way. John agreed, and commented that he does see points of alignment; i.e. work-based learning, pre apprenticeships, internships, pre-employment training services. Need to be specific; not too broad that it gets lost in the shuffle.

Sub-Committee Status Reports

Evaluation Committee (Rick, Danielle, Kirk, Chris, and Zoraida):

Rick reported that he held a phone conference with Danielle, Chris, and Zoraida on September 23, and then subsequently discussed ideas with John Walsh. The strategic plan makes it clear that the Commission's desire is to evaluate stakeholders on service provision and satisfaction. Apparently, there are 3 universities in the area that provide this type of service. The idea of working with one of the universities to fashion this process was discussed. Once fashioned, the university can handle the ongoing implementation of the process; they can set up the online surveys; they can have people do the phone calling for blind people who can't do on-line surveys or who don't have computers/can't get to them. They can also maintain the data and provide reports to the Commission as often as necessary. If the SRC recommends that this sub-committee put together an RFP (Request For Proposal) to have these organizations submit bids to help institute and maintain this evaluation process, it would be a positive step in keep in-line with strategic planning. A lengthy discussion ensued. Dan explained that the overall purpose is to get feedback on Agency training; make it a better experience. The RFP process was explained. John noted that the 3 universities are: Rutgers, Farleigh Dickenson, and Monmouth University. Because of the typical dollar amount associated with doing these types of surveys, we only have to get bids from these programs; we don't have to do a broad-based RFP. A basic proposal of what we're hoping to accomplish will be put together, along with the population we are looking at. Then we're inviting these programs to put together their proposal for us, and what it would cost to implement that proposal. We've worked with all 3 of these surveying bodies and they understand what we're generally asking for. They understand it would mean helping us craft the questions with our feedback; they would have to figure out ways to get to our population. The goal is to find out how consumers perceive their experience with instruction they are receiving from staff, as well as training with external vendors. John noted that the Agency generally goes with the lowest bid, unless the proposal says something that the other bids cannot provide that is very blindness specific. Most of the university based systems know, as a state entity, we have to look at the lowest bid and justify when we don't take the lowest bid. John noted that if we're going to do this, we may want to look at what is expected in the consumer report card. When we put together that request, it will indicate we may need help from a university based program to decide how we are going to ask these questions, and how we set up a sustainable system for doing that. That doesn't mean the university based program is going to work with us perpetually, but it is something we should consider. John commented that the Agency has used some of the free systems (Survey Monkey) to do short term surveys and they have been pretty effective; even used them for staff as well as clients going through the JKTC program. John noted that it would be a good idea to bring that to the subcommittee for review as well.

Rick made a motion for the SRC to approve this sub-committee to put together an RFP for these organizations to submit bids to help institute and maintain this evaluation process. The motion was seconded by Zoraida. All SRC members were in agreement and approved this motion with gratitude for the work of this subcommittee. Rick commented that everyone on the committee is emphatic about their interest and willingness to help in doing whatever could be helpful with regard to the RFPs. Fr. Jim noted that this subcommittee is now charged to continue to meet with an eye toward the report card and interfacing with the learning systems.

Resource Committee (Danielle, Zoraida, and AI): The goal of this committee is to put together a comprehensive list of blindness specific resources. Although it was noted there is a list on the CBVI website, and also the Division of Disability Services publishes a yearly resource book, neither is all-inclusive for Agency constituents. Danielle thanked Zoraida and AI for helping her with the

organization of this project. Danielle noted that she had e-mailed everyone a first draft of this listing. Once completed, this guide will be updated and curated on an annual basis. It will be put on the CBVI website. A substantial news-blast will be put out through the new CBVI contact email to those who said they want resource information. Fr. Jim thanked this committee for their work. He asked them to report from meeting to meeting on progress made. Danielle noted that she would welcome feedback from everyone (Danielle.Licari@dhs.state.nj.us). A suggestion was made to include apps in this guide. Applevis.com is a good one. It is a website for blind and low-vision users of Apple's range of Mac computers/iPhones/iPads, etc.

SRC Annual Report Committee: Ed Sroczyński noted that at the end of each calendar year CBVI and the SRC submits a report to the rehab services administration and the governor that documents updates of our Vocational Rehabilitation program. It includes information about our programs, client success stories, and there are resources available in this report too. Another area focused on is CBVI's collaboration with The College of NJ. Goals for the upcoming year are also addressed. Ed commented that he has been responsible for updating this report for the last few years, and setting up a draft for the SRC. He noted that he is in the process of moving along with this fairly well. He is soliciting names of individuals to write success stories, talking to counselors. He requested assistance from SRC members to assist him with updating this report. Fr. Jim offered to help. Dan noted that the Chairperson traditionally writes a paragraph or two as an introductory letter to the report; so that is one specific task. Dan also noted that it might be a good idea for the sub-committee Chairs to outline in a paragraph or two about what their committees are doing. Lastly, he suggested, we might want to talk about what work we are going to undertake and use this as a vehicle to articulate some of our blindness specific recommendations that ought to be picked up by the broader SETC and state plan. There will be a segment that will focus on the inaugural year for both the SHARP and EDGE programs. Also, probably a segment to outline how well we did in terms of closures; comparative chart; how many jobs we've put people in. Fr. Jim asked the sub-committee Chairs to submit their write-ups by October 1. Kelly offered to write up information for the projects TCNJ works with the Commission on. Kirk noted one suggestion he had made last year about including an article about an employer who had worked with the Agency; he thought it would be a powerful article. Dan noted an increasing relationship with Prudential this year. They asked us to engage in education with them about blindness and disability. John will be speaking to a group of Prudential executives next month. Dan noted that often times doing this kind of groundwork is the prerequisite for creating opportunities to help people find employment; so he thought we could probably talk about this emerging relationship. Dan also reported that the Agency has been working on an opportunity for one of our young policy aspirants to create an internship in Senator Cory Booker's office. Also, we are currently soliciting college students, through our college counselors. These would be students interested in public policy who are in the midst of studying and getting ready for school; this might be another example of the partnership with public sector employers that we could outline.

Fr. Jim thanked Ed for his work on this annual report, which becomes part of the historical record. He pointed out that this is a way of keeping track of what we are doing, and it is also of great public relations value.

Dan suggested that a group SRC member photo be taken at the next meeting (December 4).

John noted that when we issue the report we also include SRC meeting dates for the next year. A list of proposed dates will be forwarded to members for their approval.

Federal and State Update

Dan gave a preliminary report on the number of closures for Federal Fiscal Year 2015, which will end on September 30. Between 285 and 300 people were employed this year. Although that is slightly down from last year, it is still a good number as we have approached employment in a slightly different way over the last year. We've tried to be much more liberal about not closing people out until we know they have everything they need to genuinely be successful. Dan noted that he would much rather closeout confident in the knowledge they have the skill sets, equipment, and the perspective they need, rather than close them just to get a number by a given date. Dan noted that we can take comfort in the knowledge that almost 300 people will be employed this year as a result of CBVI's work.

Dan reported that he is presiding over a substantial reform with regard to Education at the Commission. He noted that substantial progress is being made. On October 5 Eva Scott will be joining the Commission as the Director of Blindness Education. Eva is currently an adjunct professor at TCNJ in the Teacher of the Vision Impaired program. Historically, she used to work for the Commission 20 years ago. She has developed deep roots in the deaf blindness field as the Deaf Blind National Project Coordinator in the State of NJ. Dan noted that he is hopeful that with the restructure of the way the Education Department works, with some additional training we are bringing in for our teachers, and with adding additional staff in the administration unit of the Education Department, that the Commission is seriously going to lift its game and play the partnering teaching role that we should have played, and will continue to play moving forward.

Consistent with education and with the concepts of transition, Dan was delighted to say this was the first summer for the SHARP program. We served 59 consumers (grades 1-8) in the service centers. Students did everything from travel, to braille instruction, to independent cooking; all weaved into the context of a recreational time. \$13,000 was spent on this program, including transportation and the like; we were able to give the children 4 three day weeks of intense service for about \$250 a child. This speaks to the commitment of our teachers and instructors that they were willing to work in an inter-disciplinary fashion to bring a program to educate our youth who are not yet ready for transition.

This weekend the Agency will convene the first EDGE program (45 students). It will be a year round transition program that will incorporate blindness skills instruction; mentorship with older blind mentors; monthly meetings where they talk about different career issues like resume development and interviewing skills. There will be a travel component where they go places together for fun. The jewel in the EDGE crown is that the last 2 years of the program will see each student assigned to be a part of a job experience, be that an afterschool, Saturday, or summer job experience. There will be a parental component to the EDGE program; 5 times during the course of the academic year the parents will meet with a facilitator who will talk about blindness and parenting and issues of that regard. The parenting program will be designed to mirror what the students are learning; they can help take that perspective home and make sure it's taught there. EDGE, SHARP, and the other transitions run at TCNJ; they all speak to our ahead-of-the-curve perspective and devotion to the concept of transition, which we now learn we have to do pursuant to WIOA.

Dan reported on some other hiring decisions being made; looking for O&M instructors and some technology staff. Staffing decisions ultimately will come to Dan's office before the decision to hire is made, in an effort to make sure that as attrition occurs we bring in the caliber of staff that will do a phenomenal job.

Dan noted that copies of the Commission Edition will be posted on Newline now. So he thought he would also share this newsletter with the SRC. His thought is that it will give them a monthly sense of activities occurring within the organization.

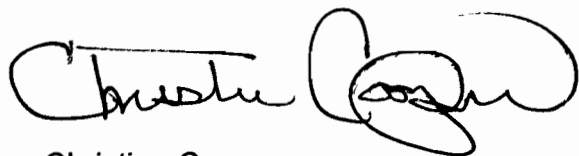
Fr. Jim noted the conclusion of this meeting. The VR Unit Report, to be presented by John Walsh, will be postponed, and rescheduled for the beginning of the 12/4/15 meeting.

Adjournment:

At 12:00 p.m. a motion was made by Rick Fox, and seconded, to adjourn the meeting.

The next SRC meeting is scheduled for Friday, December 4, 2015, at the Joseph Kohn Training Center.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Christine Cooper", written in a cursive style.

Christine Cooper
CBVI – Administrative Assistant

Addendum: The SRC will meet on the following dates in 2016 at the Joseph Kohn Training Center. Please mark your calendars for:

February 5, 2016
April 15, 2016
June 3, 2016
October 7, 2016
December 2, 2016